Nuclear Deterrence Failed in Ukraine: Now What?
Background and Implications for European Security*

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In July 2017, meeting at United Nations headquarters in New York, 122 countries voted in favor of a legally binding treaty to ban nuclear weapons. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons entered into force in January 2021. The nuclear-armed states refused to join and the nuclear-armed members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) went one step further: In a joint press statement, the United States, United Kingdom and France vowed never "to sign, ratify or ever become party to" the nuclear ban treaty. What reasons did they offer to oppose the overwhelming majority of the world's countries who consider their security better served by the abolition of nuclear weapons than their possession? "This initiative clearly disregards the realities of the international security environment," they intoned. "Accession to the ban treaty is incompatible with the policy of nuclear deterrence, which has been essential to keeping the peace in Europe and North Asia for over 70 years."[1] In November 2020, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg claimed that the alliance's "ultimate goal is a world free of nuclear weapons," but insisted that "in an uncertain world, these weapons continue to play a vital role in preserving peace" and the NATO countries would be the last to give them up.[2]

The claim that nuclear weapons kept the peace by preventing "conventional" war served to justify a forty-year nuclear arms race during the Cold War and unrelenting opposition from nuclear-armed states to demands for disarmament since then. The claim that nuclear weapons preserved the peace was never true in places like Vietnam and Afghanistan, where the United States and Soviet Union fought devastating wars, or the many other countries in the so-called Third World where the so-called superpowers intervened militarily. Now the claim is no longer tenable for Europe either. It exploded with Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. Paradoxically the threat of a wider war that could escalate into a nuclear holocaust constitutes the main barrier to aiding the Ukrainian defenders—and the primary motive that prominent "realists" put forward for pressuring Ukraine to make territorial concessions to Russia. Nuclear deterrence is working for Vladimir Putin.

There is little doubt that the "realities of the international security environment" changed irrevocably with the Russian invasion. To set the stage for discussions of a future security arrangement, particularly in Europe, this paper provides some background on the role

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[1] https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/07/561122-un-conference-adopts-treaty-banning-nuclear-weapons.

[2] "NATO Secretary General stresses importance of nuclear disarmament," speech at NATO's annual Weapons of Mass Destruction conference, 10 November 2020. Also quoting these remarks (and making some points similar to mine) in a trenchant analysis and critique is Ulrich Kühn, "War, peace, and (in)justice in the Nuclear Age," *Transatlantic Policy Quarterly*, 7 June 2022.

nuclear weapons played in European security, how rethinking the connection between nuclear deterrence and conventional defense provided ideas for ending the Cold War, and what went wrong in the implementation of the agreements founded on those ideas. The paper concludes with a brief discussion of what might be salvaged to provide for security in a Europe threatened by Russian expansion.

What did nuclear weapons deter during the Cold War?

Confidence in the deterrent power of nuclear weapons was always misplaced. Some of the most dangerous crises of the early Cold War—the communist coup in Prague in March 1948 or the Berlin Blockade three months later—took place under conditions of US nuclear monopoly. Even at the time of the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 the Soviet Union had tested only one atomic bomb, would not test more until 1951, and would not develop the capability reliably to retaliate with nuclear weapons against the United States until the 1960s.[3] The US nuclear monopoly failed to intimidate Iosif Stalin, but fortunately neither the Soviet dictator nor his successors harbored intentions to advance militarily against the western democracies. In the wake of the defeat of Nazi Germany, Soviet army war plans called for a strictly *defensive* reaction to an invasion from the West, a fact that no analysts seem to have known before the plans were declassified as part of Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost*' in the late 1980s.[4]

The later, offensively-oriented strategy for the Soviet ground forces emerged only in response to the formation of NATO in 1949 and the deployment of US nuclear weapons on European soil. The rearmament and entry of the Federal Republic of Germany into NATO in 1955 provoked the formation of the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) or Warsaw Pact. Subsequent offensive use of the Warsaw Pact armies came in invasions of fellow alliance members—Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968—and in menacing military exercises directed against Poland in the wake of the Solidarity trade-union movement in the early 1980s. Nuclear deterrence worked again: fear of escalation to nuclear war limited Western aid for the victims of Soviet aggression to mainly rhetorical support and helped bolster a system of "spheres of influence" that disinclined the two alliance leaders to intervene in any case.

The claim that nuclear weapons preserve the peace date to the very beginning of the nuclear age, when the United States held a monopoly on the bomb. In 1946 Bernard Baruch presented a US proposal for control of atomic weapons before the first session of the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission, but he made clear US reluctance to give up its advantage.

> [B]efore a country is ready to relinquish any winning weapons it must have more than words to reassure it. It must have a guarantee of safety, not only

[3] David Holloway, *Stalin and the Bomb* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994).

[4] "Operativnyi plan deistvii gruppy Sovetskikh okkupatsionnykh voisk v Germanii, 5 noiabria 1946 goda" *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal* 2 (February 1989): 26-31; "Plan komandirskikh zaniatii po operativno-takticheskoi podgotovke v polevom upravlenii gruppy Sovetskikh okkupatsionnykh voisk v Germanii na 1948 god," Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal 8 (August 1989): 24-26. For discussions of these materials see Gilberto Villahermosa, "Stalin's Postwar Army Reappraised: Déja Vu All Over Again," *Soviet Observer* [Columbia University] 2 (September 1990): 1-5; and Matthew Evangelista, "The 'Soviet Threat': Intentions, Capabilities, and Context," *Diplomatic History*, vol. 22, no. 3 (Summer 1998).

> against the offenders in the atomic area but against the illegal users of other weapons -- bacteriological, biological, gas, perhaps -- why not! -- against war itself.[5]

That nuclear weapons could prevent "war itself," or at least war among the major military powers, became an act of faith during the Cold War. One can doubt whether a period that entailed such suffering among victims of major-power wars against smaller states deserves the moniker, the "long peace." But the belief in the power of nuclear weapons to deter war was strong enough that proponents of nuclear disarmament had to take it into account. One such figure was Randall Forsberg, the scholar-activist who helped found the Nuclear Freeze Movement and addressed a demonstration of nearly a million supporters in New York's Central Park in June 1982. Forsberg recognized that if governments and "defense intellectuals" believed their own rhetoric that nuclear weapons were required to deter conventional war, then dealing with the threat of war constituted a prerequisite for nuclear disarmament. Since the late 1970s Forsberg had been promoting an analysis that linked the abolition of nuclear weapons not only to the Cold War military confrontation in Europe, but to great-power military interventions against weaker countries throughout the world. She and a number of other activists sought to mobilize a movement that would simultaneously oppose interventionist wars and pursue nuclear disarmament.[6]

Alternatives to nuclear deterrence

European peace research scholars and US activists found common cause in seeking a link between nuclear weapons and the prevention of conventional war. Less sanguine about nuclear deterrence than representatives of the foreign-policy establishment were, peace researchers argued that providing a means to reduce the risk of conventional war could undermine the case for nuclear weapons. If alternative means of deterring or preventing war were available, nuclear weapons would appear unnecessary—and unnecessarily risky.[7] After all, most states avoid war most of the time without possessing nuclear weapons. Why could not the members of NATO and the Warsaw Pact put some creative effort into figuring out how to do so?

Alternatives to the nuclear-armed standoff in Central Europe appeared already in the 1950s, in the wake of West German remilitarization and entry into NATO. They were put forward by such disparate figures as George F. Kennan, former US State Department official and

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[5] Bernard Baruch, Speech before the first session of the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission, New York, 14 June 1946, http://www.plosin.com/BeatBegins/archive/BaruchPlan.htm.

[6] Randall Forsberg, "Building a Social Movement for Disarmament," presentation to the Institute for World Order, New York, 6 June 1979; Randall Forsberg, "Confining the Military to Defense as a Route to Disarmament," *World Policy Journal*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Winter 1984); Joseph Gerson, ed., *The Deadly Connection: Nuclear War and US intervention* (Philadelphia: New Society, 1986); and Gerson, "Randall Forsberg: Ignition of the Freeze Movement and the Deadly Connection," paper presented at Cornell University, 13 September 2018. For an analysis that explicitly links US nuclear strategy to intervention in the Middle East, see Christopher Paine, "On the Beach: The Rapid Deployment Force and the Nuclear Arms Race," *MERIP Reports* #111 (January 1983).

[7] On the role that luck has played in avoiding nuclear war, see Benoît Pelopidas, "A bet portrayed as a certainty: reassessing the added deterrent value of nuclear weapons," in G. P. Shultz and J.E. Goodby, eds., *The War that Must Never Be Fought* (Stanford: Hoover Press, 2015).

ambassador to Moscow and Colonel Bolislaw von Bonin, a *Wehrmacht* veteran and adviser to the *Amt Blank*, predecessor to the Federal German Ministry of Defense. The proposals shared a focus on nonnuclear, defensively-oriented militia-based ground forces intended for territorial defense and unsuited for offensive operations. The common goal was to provide reliable, nonprovocative defensive forces that would not depend on nuclear deterrence. Related proposals emerged in the late 1950s, associated with former British foreign secretary Anthony Eden and Polish foreign minister Adam Rapacki. The proposals' political prospects were poor, as they flew in the face of the nuclear emphasis of Dwight Eisenhower's "New Look" and the plan to integrate the emerging *Bundeswehr* into NATO's nuclear strategy. [8]

Had NATO put forward proposals for denuclearization and defensive restructuring in the 1950s, the Soviet side might have responded favorably. Nikita Khrushchev had floated ideas of militia-based territorial forces as part of a largescale reduction in the Soviet army starting in the mid-1950s, yet he sold the troop cuts to a reluctant military leadership by touting nuclear deterrence as a panacea for preventing war. The Cuban Missile Crisis, which brought his country to the brink of nuclear war with the United States, put paid to that wishful thinking. Khrushchev's successors embarked on a two-decade buildup of conventional and nuclear forces and a process of negotiations with the United States that codified, rather than halted, the nuclear arms race.

Alternatives to the nuclear status quo reappeared with the emergence of peace research institutes in Germany and Scandinavia in the 1970s.[9] Researchers, including some retired military officers, began studying ways of reconfiguring conventional military forces to provide reliable defense without including offensively-oriented configurations of weapons that would pose a risk of escalation to war during a crisis. The underlying premise was that neither of the two military alliances in Europe sought aggressive war, so nonoffensive strategies would provide reassurance and stability without provoking an arms race. In the wake of the Euromissile crisis of the late 1970s and the deployment of new US cruise and Pershing II missiles and the Soviet SS-20 (RSD-10), the longstanding skepticism of the peace researchers about nuclear deterrence spread to the broader society. Many European citizens—as well as politicians from the Social Democratic and Green parties—favored a principled antinuclear position. Their views found expression in *Defence without the Bomb*, a study by the British Alternative Defence Commission, and *Common Security*, the report of the Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues, chaired by former Swedish prime minister Olaf Palme.[10] The recommendations of the Palme Commission report, published in 1982, became known in the highest political circles of the Soviet Union

[8] George F. Kennan, *Russia, the Atom, and the West* (New York: Harper, 1958); Heinz Brill, *Bogislaw von Bonin im Spannungsfeld zwischen Wiederbewaffnung, Westintegration, Wiedervereinigung: ein Beitrag zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Bundeswehr 1952-1955*, vol. 2 (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 1989). For further discussion see Matthew Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), ch. 5.

[9] For a discussion of one leading figure's critique of nuclear deterrence, see Lukas Mengelkamp, "Organisierte Friedlosigkeit – Dieter Senghaas' Abschreckungskritik," in *Die Friedens-Warte, Journal of International Peace and Organization*, vols. 1 – 2 (2021), 45 - 49.

[10] Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues, *Common Security: A Blueprint for Survival* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982). For a review of Defense without the Bomb, see Matthew Evangelista, "Offense or Defense: A Tale of Two Commissions," *World Policy Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Fall 1983).

thanks to participation by Soviet researchers in the commission's work and personal briefings by Palme to General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev.[11]

Gorbachev's initiatives

With the passing of the Brezhnev generation and the advent to power of a reformist coalition led by Mikhail Gorbachev, the proposals of the peace researchers received a serious hearing.[12] Gorbachev and the members of his brain trust felt considerable affinity for Social Democratic politicians such as Palme in Sweden and Egon Bahr in West Germany, two of the main promoters of "common security." Endorsement of the notion made it possible for Soviet civilian and military reformers to promote nonoffensive defense as a path to reducing nuclear weapons. The United States and NATO, increasingly orienting their own strategy for war in Europe in an offensive direction with initiatives such as Follow-On Forces Attack, resisted proposals for defensive restructuring. They took Soviet interest seriously only after Gorbachev announced a dramatic unilateral reduction and restructuring of Soviet conventional forces at the United Nations in December 1988. He explained that the army would be reduced by 500,000 troops and that six tank divisions would be withdrawn from Eastern Europe and disbanded. Soviet troops stationed in Warsaw Pact countries would be reduced by 50,000. Reductions in equipment focused on those intended for offensive use, as Gorbachev described: "assault landing formations and units," "assault river-crossing forces, with their armaments and combat equipment" and 5000 tanks. "All remaining Soviet divisions on the territory of our allies will be reorganized," Gorbachev proclaimed. "They will be given a different structure from today's, which will become unambiguously defensive, after the removal of a large number of their tanks."[13]

The Soviet unilateral initiatives paved the way for agreements reducing both conventional and nuclear forces—much as disarmament activists such as Forsberg had advocated and as Gorbachev himself had envisioned early in his term as Soviet leader.[14] Another element of Gorbachev's UN speech revealed its significance mainly in retrospect: his commitment to "freedom of choice" for any country to determine its own political system, including the members of the Soviet bloc. No longer would Soviet allies be required to adhere to monopoly rule by a communist party receiving its orders from Moscow. The unilateral military restructuring and reductions and the political proclamation were linked: In the past, ideological conformity was enforced by the menace and practice of Soviet military intervention against its allies. Now the political threat and the military capability would both be eliminated. For these reasons, Gorbachev's speech can be understood as a key turning

[11] "Ob itogakh besedy L.I. Brezhneva (12 iiunia) s predsedatelem Mezhdunarodnoi komissii po razoruzheniiu i bezopasnosti U. Pal'me," from the transcript of a Politburo session, 18 June 1981, f. 89, op. 42, doc. 44, Russian State Archive for Modern History (RGANI), the former Communist Party Central Committee archive. G. Arbatov,"Otchetobuchastiivzasedanii Mezhdunarodnoi komissii po razoruzheniiu i bezopasnosti ('Komissiia Pal'me') sostoiavsheisia v Vene v period s 13 po 15 dekabria 1980 g.," f. 89, op. 46, doc. 63, and other reports in the same folder, RGANI. "Common security" is discussed in the report on the eighth meeting of the commission, 28 December 1981, 2–3.

[12] Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces*, 184-192, 305-321.

[13] Excerpts of Gorbachev's address to the 43rd United National General Assembly session, 7 December 1988.

[14] Randall Forsberg, "Parallel cuts in nuclear and conventional forces," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (August 1985); for a detailed analysis of Gorbachev's early proposals, see Matthew Evangelista, "The New Soviet Approach to Security," *World Policy Journal*, vol. 3, no. 4 (Fall 1986).

point signaling the end of the Cold War in Europe and the opportunity to replace the nuclear confrontation there with an alternative security system.[15] At least in Europe, the "deadly connection" between nuclear deterrence and military intervention was broken.

Agreements unravel

The Soviet unilateral initiatives provided impetus to the negotiations on conventional and nuclear forces and resulted in the first treaties that actually reduced US and Soviet nuclear arsenals, including the entire category of intermediate-range nuclear missiles. The Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) entailed extensive reductions in forces and equipment. It was signed in Paris in November 1990 by members of NATO and the Warsaw Pact the day before a summit meeting convened the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and issued the Charter of Paris for a New Europe—effectively a declaration of the end of the Cold War.[16] In place of the deadly connection, a more hopeful one beckoned. As the peoples of Eastern Europe heeded Gorbachev's call to exercise their freedom of choice, they chose the (mostly) peaceful rejection of communist rule, without fear of military intervention. The connection between demilitarization and democratization seemed to fulfill the program advocated by many peace researchers and the activists of the European Nuclear Disarmament movement and their East European counterparts, a continent-wide effort to support human rights and peace.[17]

Except for those hopeful visionaries, few could have anticipated the peaceful fall of communist regimes and the demilitarization and reunification of Europe even a half dozen years before. By the same token, only the most pessimistic prognosticators, looking into the future from the vantage point of 1990, could have foreseen the events of February 2022 and after. The brutal Russian offensive against Ukraine, the deliberate destruction of civilian property and life, the war crimes, rapes, and Nazi-style atrocities—all led by a nuclear saber-rattling former KGB agent, were inconceivable at the time. A brief review of how we got from the hopeful vision to the horrendous reality might provide some guidance about what plausible options remain for "postwar" Europe.

Some features of the settlement that ended the Cold War promised more than they delivered. Consider the CFE Treaty. Negotiated by the two Cold War alliances, it allocated restrictions on a bilateral basis, with overall limits on weapons and personnel and regional ceilings within those limits. Its main achievement was the verified destruction of tens of thousands of tanks, armored combat vehicles, attack helicopters, aircraft, and the like (typically states destroyed their oldest equipment). Contrary to the expectations of many peace activists and Russian officials, the disarmament and reduction of conventional armed forces did not portend the dissolution of the bloc system in favor of a continent-wide security organization. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

[15] Matthew Evangelista, "Explaining the Cold War's end: process tracing all the way down?" in Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel, eds., *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[16] R.W. Apple, Jr., "Summit in Europe; 34 Leaders Adopt Pact Proclaiming a United Europe," *New York Times*, 22 November 1990.

[17] E. P. Thompson, *Beyond the Cold War* (New York: Pantheon, 1982); Ferenc Köszegi and E. P. Thompson, *The New Hungarian Peace Movement* (London: Merlin Press, 1982); Jean Stead and Danielle Grünberg, *Moscow Independent Peace Group* (London: Merlin Press, 1982).

replaced the CSCE in November 1994, but it did not provide the means to maintain either security or cooperation. Nor did it supersede the alliance system, as many of its proponents had hoped. Instead, only the Warsaw Pact dissolved. NATO expanded, both geographically within Europe, and in terms of its military missions as far afield as Afghanistan, Libya, Somalia, and Yemen.

The combination of WTO dissolution, NATO enlargement, and Russia's military ambitions in the former Soviet space produced serious problems for the CFE Treaty. The military structure of the Warsaw Pact was formally dismantled in April 1991. By the time the CFE Treaty went into effect in November 1992, only one of the alliance parties that negotiated it—NATO—still existed. The six former WTO states that ratified the treaty—Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and the successor states to Czechoslovakia (Slovakia and the Czech Republic)—became members of NATO between 1999 and 2004. In the later year, the three former Baltic republics of the USSR—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—also joined.

Even before the dissolution of the USSR, the country's military command had attempted to evade some of the CFE limitations—by, for example, moving massive amounts of equipment to the east, beyond the treaty's geographic sweep from "the Atlantic to the Urals." In the early 1990s Russian President Boris Yeltsin pushed to revise the treaty to allow deployment of military forces beyond the regional limits, particularly in the North Caucasus military district. The objective was apparently for military forces stationed there to put pressure on the breakaway republic of Chechnya and eventually to carry out a brutal invasion without violating the treaty. Eager to gain Yeltsin's acquiescence to NATO expansion, the US administration under Bill Clinton approved a revision of the treaty and generally averted its eyes to the Russian massacres of Chechen civilians.[18] The Adapted CFE Treaty, as it was called, was signed in 1999, but NATO members never ratified it. They insisted that Russia remove its troops from Moldova and Georgia, where Russian military interference propped up separatist regions of Transdniestria, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia. Russian military interventions in the "near abroad" were arguably inconsistent with the spirit of the treaty, if not the letter.[19] In retrospect, imposing such conditions might have been a mistake: Had the ACFE Treaty been implemented, with its provisions for regular reporting and inspections, it could have hindered Russia's preparations for military intervention in Ukraine.[20]

Russia, in turn, harbored plenty of objections to NATO's compliance with the treaty, including the basing of NATO troops on the territory of its new members, Romania and Bulgaria, and the fact that Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were not covered under the original CFE Treaty, had not ratified the adapted one, and were therefore unconstrained in hosting NATO troops on their territory that bordered Russia. NATO would have been willing to include the Baltic states in the ACFE Treaty, but Russia insisted that the members ratify it

[18] For a detailed chronology of negotiations up to 1997, see Federation of Americans Scientists, CFE Chronology : Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty; for Clinton's position on Chechnya, see "Chechnya, Yeltsin, and Clinton: The Massacre at Samashki in April 1995 and the US Response to Russia's War in Chechnya," introductory essay and summary of declassified documents, National Security Archive Briefing Book #702, edited with Svetlana Savranskaya, 15 April 2020.

[19] Matthew Evangelista, "Historical Legacies and the Politics of Intervention in the Former Soviet Union," in Michael E. Brown, ed., *The International Dimensions of Internal Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).

[20] I owe this point to Pavel Podvig in email correspondence, 4 September 2022.

first and they refused. In 2007 Putin suspended Russia's participation in the treaty, a move supported even by Mikhail Gorbachev at the time.[21]

In June 2008, Russia raised the possibility of negotiating a revised "security architecture" for Europe when then-President Dmitrii Medvedev made a speech in Berlin calling for a "Euro-Atlantic security system that is equal for all states – without isolating anyone and without different levels of security." But even when the Russians submitted a draft treaty to that end, it remained thin on substance and seemed oriented primarily to sideline NATO and the OSCE and to contain further NATO expansion, following the alliance's overtures to Georgia and Ukraine.[22] Commitments to human rights, freedom of choice of political system and security alliance, and reorientation of military forces toward defense—the hallmarks of the agreements that ended the Cold War—were noticeably absent.

If there remained any doubt, the Russo-Georgian war of August 2008 made clear that the notion of "nonoffensive defense" that motivated many proponents of the CFE Treaty no longer held any interest for the Kremlin. Russian forces launched offensives to seize and occupy several Georgian cities, and its missile and aircraft bombed the capital city of Tbilisi. Russia's invasion led to its recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, just six months after Kosovo had declared its independence from Serbia—the result of Serb repression of Kosovar Albanians and NATO's decision to respond with a 78-day bombing offensive in March 1999. Thus, Russia was not the only country intent on maintaining offensive capabilities.

Nuclear backsliding

In the nuclear domain, as well, the promises of the Cold War's end remained unfulfilled. The successful implementation of the INF Treaty, negotiated under the Reagan administration, marked the high point of bilateral nuclear disarmament. The administration of George H.W. Bush, Reagan's successor, reduced US tactical nuclear weapons, including sea-based ones, unilaterally, rather than pursue an agreement with post-Soviet Russia. Its main accomplishments in the nuclear sphere entailed cuts in strategic forces in the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties (START), and convincing Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine to return the Soviet nuclear weapons deployed there to Russia. Bolstered by a grassroots transnational antinuclear movement in Kazakhstan, Gorbachev's government had agreed to shut down the nuclear test range there and push for a Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban, which its Russian successor government negotiated and signed in 1996 and ratified in 2000.[23] In return for reluctant support from the US nuclear weapons laboratories for the treaty, the Clinton administration paid them off with annual budgets for "stockpile stewardship" of more money than they had received when they were producing nuclear weapons at the

[21] "Gorbachev backs Putin's move to suspend CFE Treaty," Gorbachev Foundation website, 15 July 2007.

[22] Medvedev quoted in Agnieszka Nowak, "A New European Security Architecture?" *Opinión Seguridad*, no. 41 (July 2009), Centro de Estudios y Documentación Internacionales de Barcelona; see also Ulrich Kühn, "Medvedev's Proposals for a New European Security Order: A Starting Point or the End of the Story?" *Connections*, vol. 9, no. 2 (Spring 2010); Matthew Evangelista, "Revisiting the Helsinki Principles: Are They Still Relevant to European Security?" in Simona Beretta and Roberto Zoboli, eds., *Crisis and Change: The Geopolitics of Global Governance* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2012).

[23] Togzhan Kassenova, *Atomic Steppe: How Kazakhstan Gave Up the Bomb* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2022).

height of the Cold War. Although the United States signed the treaty, the US Senate voted against ratification in 1999.

Not surprisingly, as the process of nuclear disarmament stalled in the 1990s and the political relationship between the United States and Russia deteriorated, both countries reverted to Cold-War thinking about nuclear weapons—or worse. Ronald Reagan's pursuit of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) to build weapons banned by Antiballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty of 1972 had nearly derailed Gorbachev's efforts to achieve a substantial reduction of nuclear weapons. The Soviet leader chose to go ahead and sign the INF Treaty with Reagan in 1987 and the START I Treaty with G.H.W. Bush in 1991. The successor Clinton administration closed the SDI Office but continued to pursue ballistic missile defense (BMD) technology; the George W. Bush administration stepped up the effort, formally withdrew the United States from the ABM Treaty, and announced plans to install BMD radars on the territory of new east European members of NATO. Barack Obama revised and expanded plans for European missile defense, and ultimately authorized nearly $64 billion for BMD programs.[24] Each of these steps met with criticism from the Russian side and helped bring the cooperative "end of the Cold War" era to an end.[25]

Disarmament proponents had long hoped that the antinuclear efforts initiated by Gorbachev and Reagan would serve to stigmatize nuclear weapons. The 122 countries that signed the Nuclear Ban Treaty sought the same end.[26] The actions of the United States and Russia instead demonstrated the two countries' unwillingness to do what nearly every other country in the world tries to do: provide for their security without threatening mass murder of other countries' civilians. Their behavior over the last decades, and especially since the first Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014, portend grave consequences for European security.

Barack Obama, who advocated a world without nuclear weapons in a speech in Prague in 2009, left office after approving a nuclear "modernization" program estimated to cost $348 billion by 2024. It included funding for a modification and upgrade of the B61 nuclear bomb, intended for deployment with aircraft in five NATO countries. The weapon's yield can reportedly vary from 0.3 kilotons or 300 tons (the biggest "blockbuster" bombs of World War II were 6 tons) up to 10 kilotons (just slightly less powerful than the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima). That it is intended for both strategic and non-strategic purposes seems an invitation to escalation, as an adversary would not know which version is employed and might assume the worst.[27] With lower yields of the nuclear explosives, and the potential to limit radioactive fallout, the new weapons could be seen as more "usable," thereby lowering the nuclear threshold and increasing the risk of escalation to all-out war.

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[24] See the laudatory review of Obama's efforts by a major lobbying group on the website of the Missile Defense Advocacy Alliance: "President Obama's Legacy in Missile Defense," 17 January 2017.

[25] Matthew Evangelista, "How the 'end of the Cold War' ended," in *Uses of 'the West': Security and the Politics of Order*, Gunther Hellman and Benjamin Herborth, eds. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[26] Tom Sauer and Mathias Reveraert, "The potential stigmatizing effect of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons," *The Nonproliferation Review*, vol. 25 (2018).

[27] Hans M. Kristensen, "B61 LEP: Increasing NATO Nuclear Capability and Precision Low-Yield Strikes," Federation of Americans Scientists, 15 June 2011; William Burr, ed., "NATO's European Nuclear Deterrent: The B61 Bomb," Briefing Book #790, National Security Archive, Washington, DC, 28 March 2022.

The centerpiece of US-Soviet initiatives for European nuclear disarmament ended in August 2019, when the United States withdrew from the INF Treaty and Russia followed suit. The treaty had led to the elimination of 2,692 US and Soviet nuclear and conventional ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges between 500 and 5,500 kilometers, along with unprecedented measures of onsite inspection. The Obama administration's State Department had accused Russia of violating the treaty by testing a ground-launched cruise missile with a range in excess of the treaty's maximum. In February 2017, Donald Trump's administration accused Russia of secretly deploying an operational unit of the missile, known as 9M729. [28] Two years later, the US suspended its obligations and announced the intention to withdraw if Russia did not come into compliance in six months. Putin denied the charges and vowed to match any new intermediate-range missile that the United States might deploy—a clear reversion to the tit-for-tat pattern of the Cold War nuclear arms race that Gorbachev's "new thinking" had rejected. [29]

In addition to its treaty violations, Russia's contributions to raising the danger of nuclear war are many: new hypersonic weapons, maintenance of a large arsenal of naval and ground-based tactical nuclear weapons unregulated by any treaty, explicit nuclear threats, and a statement of circumstances under which nuclear weapons might be used that goes well beyond the Cold War policies of the USSR. According to the "Basic Principles of the Russian Federation's State Policy in the Domain of Nuclear Deterrence," a document Putin signed in June 2020, Russia reserves the right to initiate use of nuclear weapons "in the case of aggression against the Russian Federation with the use of conventional weapons, when the very existence of the state is put under threat." In justifying Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Vladimir Putin used precisely this language. He claimed in his speech of 24 February 2022 that US actions in Ukraine—whose basic legitimacy as an independent state Putin disputes—constitute "not only a very real threat to our interests but to the very existence of our state and to its sovereignty."[30] In other words, Putin has already presented the *casus belli* for initiating nuclear war, whenever he chooses to characterize Ukraine's actions or NATO support of the country's defense as "aggression."

What the failure of nuclear deterrence portends

One consequence of the failure of nuclear deterrence to have prevented war in Europe might be that advocates of nuclear weapons would scale back their claims and ambitions. Are nuclear weapons still "essential to keeping the peace in Europe and North Asia" or are they inadequate to the task? Do they continue "to play a vital role in preserving peace," or only under rather circumscribed and uncertain conditions? Perhaps peace can be preserved and wars prevented only for some states, those sheltered under so-called nuclear umbrella of the United States—members of the NATO alliance, and, perhaps, South Korea and Japan. Nicholas Rostow, a former legal adviser to the US National Security Council, focused on precisely this concern in suggesting what was at stake in Russia's war against Ukraine: "Do we want a world in which the possession of nuclear weapons grants a license to commit

[28] Michael R. Gordon, "Russia Deploys Missile, Violating Treaty and Challenging Trump," *New York Times*, 14 February 2017; Pavel Podvig, "Nuclear Weapons in Europe after the INF Treaty," Deep Cuts Issue Brief #10, June 2020.

[29] Shannon Bugos, "US Completes INF Treaty Withdrawal," *Arms Control Today* (September 2019).

[30] David Holloway, "Read the fine print: Russia's nuclear weapon use policy," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 10 March 2022.

aggression? Do we want a world where only formal allies of the United States may feel safe from aggression (if in fact they may)?"[31] Cold War-era critics of the "deadly connection," would maintain that we are already living in the world described in the first rhetorical question and they would cite the many military aggressions carried out by nuclear-armed states without fear of direct intervention by a great-power rival.[32] The war in Ukraine is hardly the first such instance.

As to the second rhetorical question, it is doubtful that even US allies can feel safe. Here the Russian invasion of Ukraine goes beyond the precedents set by earlier interventions. Putin's explicit threats to use nuclear weapons (albeit in response to whatever he considers aggression against Russia) and the dangerous attacks in, around, and from Ukraine's civilian nuclear installations indicate a level of recklessness not seen since the Cuban Missile Crisis. The nuclear disaster at Chernobyl in April 1986 had served as a wake-up call for many in the Soviet foreign and military establishment and provided an impetus to Gorbachev's anti-nuclear initiatives, such as the unilateral Soviet moratorium on nuclear testing and the offers of disproportionate reductions in Soviet nuclear forces. Marshal Sergei Akhromeev, chief of the General Staff at the time, wrote that the first day of the Chernobyl meltdown was "imprinted in my memory like the start of the war with fascist Germany on 22 June 1941." "After Chernobyl," Akhromeev recalled, "the nuclear danger for our people ceased to be something abstract. It became tangible, concrete. People began to regard all problems connected with nuclear weapons much differently."[33] Not all people, evidently. The Chernobyl disaster—and its implications for the risk of nuclear war—seem to have made little lasting impression on the second-rate KGB agent stationed in Dresden at the time. Russia's military actions around the major nuclear complex at Zaporizhzhia, and earlier around Chernobyl itself, demonstrate a reckless disregard for the dangers posed by a nuclear meltdown or explosion.

The Narva nightmare

It is difficult to assess the risk-taking propensities of Putin. Some would argue that the decision to invade Ukraine indicates a high degree of recklessness, given how poorly the "special operation" went. Others would point to the faulty intelligence and exaggerated assessments of Russian military capability that might have led anyone who believed them to anticipate a relatively easy success.[34] The risks inherent in the Russian behavior around Zaporizhzhia might incline us toward the first interpretation—Putin as a reckless gambler. It gives rise to the concern about what he might do next. What if Putin, who seems preoccupied with his role in history (as the successor to Peter the Great in one speech), decided on a high-stakes gamble, a military initiative that could plunge the world into nuclear war if it failed, but could destroy the NATO alliance if it succeeded?

[31] Nicholas Rostow, "Ukraine: The Stakes Can Not Be Higher," Jewish Policy Center, 20 April 2022.

[32] On the fundamental injustice of this situation, see Kühn, "War, peace, and (in)justice in the Nuclear Age."

[33] Sergei Akhromeev and Georgii Kornienko, *Glazami marshala i diplomata* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodye otnosheniia, 1992), 98-99.

[34] Greg Miller and Catherine Belton, "Russia's spies misread Ukraine and misled Kremlin as war loomed," *Washington Post*, 19 August 2022.

In his speech of 9 June 2022 Putin gave a pretty clear hint of a suitable target: the Estonian city of Narva. Addressing a group of young scientists and engineers, as the war in Ukraine dragged on longer that he had presumably expected, Putin praised Peter the Great for waging "the Great Northern War for 21 years" and establishing the city of St. Petersburg as a second capital to complement Moscow.

> When he founded the new capital, none of the European countries recognised this territory as part of Russia; everyone recognised it as part of Sweden. However, from time immemorial, the Slavs lived there along with the Finno-Ugric peoples, and this territory was under Russia's control. The same is true of the western direction, Narva and his first campaigns. Why would he go there? He was returning and reinforcing, that is what he was doing.[35]

Here Putin echoes one of his longstanding themes and aspirations—the "in-gathering of Russian lands" (*sobiranie Rusi*)—whose practical consequences included the annexation of Crimea and creation of pro-Russian protectorates in the Donbas, as well as repression of critics at home.[36]

When Putin launched his first military operations against Ukraine in 2014 and annexed Crimea, the people of Narva—closer geographically to St. Petersburg than to the Estonian capital of Tallinn—had good reason to worry that they might be next. In fact, some analysts had called attention to Narva's predicament earlier, in the wake of Russia's 2008 war with Georgia.[37] Putin's justification for intervention in Ukraine, however, raised concerns to a higher level, because one could imagine a similar justification applied to aggression against Estonia. Taking a page from the dictator who vowed to bring all of the German-speaking peoples together under one *Reich*, Putin had posed as the protector of Russian-speaking Ukrainians purportedly suffering genocidal discrimination at the hands of the Ukrainian government. The Ukrainian linguistic situation was far more complex than Putin suggested, however, with millions of residents speaking a mix of Russian and Ukrainian, known as *Surzhyk*, and numerous minority languages ranging from Hungarian and Romanian/Moldovan to Gagauz and Crimean Tatar.[38]

In Narva, however, more than 95 percent of the population are native speakers of Russian. Nearly 88 percent are ethnic Russians.[39] If Putin claimed that the Estonian government were committing cultural genocide against fellow Russians, it would not be hard for him to create an incident to justify Russian military intervention on "humanitarian" grounds. The military effort itself would be far less taxing than seizing Ukraine's cities. Russian soldiers would simply walk across the bridge or wade through the Narva River. Narva is located directly across that river from its sister city in Russia—Ivangorod. The two cities' medieval fortresses

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[35] Transcript of Putin's speech at meeting with young entrepreneurs, engineers and scientists, 9 June 2022, on the Kremlin website.

[36] Historically these consequences were evident as far back as the Muscovite conquest of the independent republican city-state of Novgorod in the late 15th century, according to Oleg Noskov, 'Sviashchennaia voina' so svoim narodom: teoriia i praktika 'sobiraniia Rusi," *Rufabula*, 18 April 2014.

[37] Alexander Motyl, "Would NATO Defend Narva?" *New Atlanticist*, 8 September 2008.

[38] Matthew Evangelista, "Crisi Ucraina, tra cause e possibili soluzioni, *Vita e Pensiero*, no. 1 (January-February) 2015.

[39] Daniel Boffey, "'I'm always looking over my shoulder': anxiety among Estonia's Russians," *The Guardian*, 22 August 2022.

are visible from each other. Narva's Hermann Castle is literally a stone's throw away from Ivangorod.

To make the action seem less like an invasion, to forestall a robust NATO reaction and seek to divide the alliance, Russia might foster a "Russian popular front," infiltrate "little green men," and stage a referendum for union with Russia, as in Crimea.[40] But what if NATO did respond by invoking Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty? It proclaims that "an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all" and that measures "including the use of armed force" would be forthcoming.[41] But what feasible defense would be possible for a town so vulnerable to overwhelming Russian force?

The Berlin analogy

Perhaps the closest analogy to Narva's predicament was the status of West Berlin during the Cold War. The product of a four-power occupation following World War II, Berlin remained divided between the Soviet sector in the east and a union of the French, British, and US sectors in the west, politically affiliated with the (West) German Federal Republic—a member of NATO from 1955. The (East) German Democratic Republic, the communist-ruled Soviet ally, claimed Berlin as its capital. The city was located deep within East German territory, with several hundred thousand troops of the Soviet armed forces deployed nearby.

In 1961, NATO developed a plan called Live Oak to respond to Soviet encroachment on West Berlin. The relevant documents, originally classified as "Cosmic Top Secret" (*sic*) were declassified and posted on a NATO website in 2011, with a brief introductory essay available in English, French, Russian, and Ukrainian.[42] The plan, outlined in a document of 27 September 1961, signed by NATO Secretary General Dirk Strikker, called for up to a division of NATO's forces and three fighter squadrons to confront Soviet forces if air and ground access to the city were cut off. The Allies intended a series of selected and graduated escalatory moves to arrive "at a settlement of the problem of Berlin while progressively making the Soviets aware of the danger of general war." General war in those days was a euphemism for nuclear war, and the document declared explicitly that "the Alliance will stand ready for nuclear action at all times." It specified the conditions under which NATO would use its nuclear weapons:

> (1) prior use by the enemy,
>
> (2) the necessity to avoid defeat of major military operations, or
>
> (3) a specific political decision to employ nuclear weapons selectively in order to demonstrate the will and ability of the Alliance to use them.[43]

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[40] Paul Goble, "Refusing to 'die for Narva' would be the end of NATO and the West, Piontkovsky says," *The Interpreter*, 29 April 2014.

[41] The North Atlantic Treaty, Washington DC, 4 April 1949.

[42] "NATO marks 50 years since the 1961 Berlin Crisis," 13 August 2011, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_77213.htm.

[43] NATO Planning for Berlin Emergency, from Secretary General D.U. Stikker to Permanent Representatives, 27 September 1961.

At the time NATO's plans for using nuclear weapons relied on the notion of "extended deterrence"—that the United States could threaten a retaliatory strike for actions short of a nuclear attack on its own territory and thereby prevent those actions. Such a policy, combined with risky deployments of tactical nuclear weapons interspersed with conventional forces and strategic nuclear weapons on hair-trigger alert, always posed the prospect of catastrophic consequences. Despite the NATO secretary general's mention of a possible decision "to employ nuclear weapons selectively," back in Washington President John F. Kennedy had received a report the previous week with a plan for launching a massive nuclear attack to decimate Soviet nuclear capability—a disarming counterforce first strike, in the jargon. Recent intelligence had indicated that despite Khrushchev's boasts of Soviet missile superiority, the USSR possessed only four operational intercontinental ballistic missiles (along with many long-range bombers and shorter-range missiles armed with nuclear weapons). Under those conditions, the report "concluded that a counterforce first-strike was indeed very feasible, that we could pull it off with high confidence" – although surviving Soviet nuclear weapons could still kill millions of Americans in retaliation. Some Kennedy advisers, such as Ted Sorenson and Marcus Raskin, reacted with horror that such a study had even been undertaken.[44] The prospect of a US first strike was thus taken off the table. Unfortunately, however, NATO's preferred alternative—a gradual escalation of US nuclear attacks intended to coerce the Soviet side to back down—could also result in a nuclear holocaust. If the USSR chose not to adhere to the arcane scenarios of controlled response devised by US nuclear strategists, the situation could easily spiral out of control.

In sum, a plausible paraphrase of the NATO plan for defense of West Berlin, had it been conveyed to the Soviet leaders as a deterrent threat, might be: "If you seize the city, we will blow up the world." NATO's plan to defend Narva by offering the protection of the US "nuclear umbrella" of extended deterrence amounts to the same threat—one that Putin might well consider a bluff.[45]

Nuclear and conventional strategies for the future

That Putin or anyone else might call NATO's bluff and expose the fragility of nuclear deterrence should lead to a rethinking of reliance on such strategies. Some analysts—and, presumably, state leaders—nevertheless have redoubled their commitment to nuclear weapons, seemingly embracing the views of Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer that every state can achieve security by obtaining nuclear weapons. They point to Ukraine as an example: if only the country had kept its Soviet-era arsenal, the argument goes, Russia would never have invaded. Aside from the fact that the weapons' technical configurations and targeting capabilities would not have suited them for attacking Russia, without considerable time and effort of Ukrainian specialists, Ukraine's insistence on keeping the Soviet nuclear weapons would not have magically produced an instant deterrent. It would

[44] Fred Kaplan, *The Wizards of Armageddon* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 298-300.

[45] For all NATO's rhetorical commitment to defending Narva, there is no public evidence of an effective strategy for doing so. On NATO's longstanding awareness of the threat to Narva, see Josh Rubin, "NATO fears that this town will be the epicenter of conflict with Russia," *The Atlantic*, 24 January 2019.

more likely have led to a prolonged period of instability and conflict with Russia, even under Yeltsin's government.[46]

Rather than advocate nuclear proliferation as the solution to the failure of nuclear deterrence, some have suggested a return to proposals that date to the Cold War. These range from strategies and weapons to make nuclear deterrence more "credible" by lowering the threshold for their use to what has variously been called minimum, minimal, or finite deterrence. The former approach would constitute a more dangerous version of the status quo, where Russia and the United States already hold many of their strategic weapons on high alert. Deploying "tactical" nuclear weapons on the frontlines of potential European battlefields is more likely to lead to unintended nuclear escalation rather than reliable deterrence.[47]

Proponents of minimal deterrence are less enthusiastic about nuclear weapons than those preoccupied with enhancing credibility by making nuclear use more likely. Their proposals usually entail limiting use of nuclear weapons to a retaliatory strike against a country that has already attacked one's own country with nuclear weapons. Minimum deterrence would, in that respect, seem incompatible with the "extended" deterrence that the United States promises to its allies and would not offer the solution to a Europe facing an aggressive Russia.[48] Moreover, as the widespread support for the Nuclear Ban Treaty indicated, many countries and people reject a policy that relies on the threat of indiscriminate slaughter of civilians as a means to security. Not surprisingly, for people who hold that view, the Russian aggression against Ukraine, Putin's nuclear threats, and the reckless pursuit of military operations around vulnerable nuclear-power facilities have redoubled their advocacy for a nuclear-free world. Their understanding of nuclear deterrence echoes the "deadly connections" critique of the Cold War. As Rebecca Johnson put it, "far from deterring war, nuclear possession encourages reckless military behaviour that ignores real-world dangers and enables certain leaders to believe they can deter others while enjoying freedom of action and impunity for themselves."[49]

There is no obvious way for nuclear deterrence to prevent Russian encroachments on nearby territories, whether or not members of the NATO alliance. Newt Gingrich, former speaker of the US House of Representatives, put the problem in typical fashion in 2016 regarding the "nuclear umbrella" of US extended deterrence: "Estonia is in the suburbs of St. Petersburg … I'm not sure I would risk a nuclear war over some place which is the

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[46] Mariana Budjeryn, "Was Ukraine Wrong to Give Up Its Nukes?" *Foreign Affairs*, 8 April 2022; Budjeryn, *Inheriting the Bomb: The Collapse of the USSR and the Nuclear Disarmament of Ukraine* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2022).

[47] For an overview of the dangers of tactical nuclear weapons, see Union of Concerned Scientists, "What are Tactical Nuclear Weapons?" 1 June 2022; and Podvig, "Nuclear Weapons in Europe after the INF Treaty." For application to the situation in Ukraine, see Christopher S. Chivvis, "How does this end?" Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 3 March 2022.

[48] Tytti Erästö, "Revisiting 'minimal nuclear deterrence': laying the ground for multilateral nuclear disarmament," *SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security*, no. 2022/6 (June 2022).

[49] Rebecca Johnson, "Ukraine war shows 'nuclear deterrence' doesn't work. We need disarmament," *openDemocracy*, 24 March 2022.

suburbs of St. Petersburg."[50] A careful analysis by two Baltic security specialists, published in 2017, also drew the conclusion that a policy founded on "deterrence by punishment" of Russian aggression would likely fail and divide the alliance. They favor "deterrence by denial" – relying not only on the military capabilities entailed in deployment of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) multinational combat groups, but less tangible factors, such as "political and societal readiness and resilience." They argue that "NATO eFP units stationed in the Baltics can be a 'speedbump,' but their value is largely political, acting as a tripwire that would ensure a larger response from NATO should they be attacked."[51] The key is not to have that "larger response" look like the one NATO envisioned to "defend" West Berlin in 1961—a major nuclear war.

The most reliable way to prevent the Ukrainian war from escalating to a nuclear holocaust is for the states armed with nuclear weapons to commit not to use them. Putin obviously has done the opposite with his reckless nuclear threats. The United States and its NATO allies, still beholden to extended nuclear deterrence in their own security policies, missed an opportunity to stigmatize his actions as illegal. The Nuclear Ban Treaty (Article 1d), criminalizes not only the possession of nuclear weapons but also the threat of their use. The UN Charter (Article 2.4) itself requires that states refrain from "the threat or use of force" against the territory of other member states. As Pavel Podvig has argued, "politicians, experts, journalists, and citizens should not get into discussions about what kind of nuclear weapons could be more or less effective from a military or political point of view" in countering Putin's nuclear threats. "The very thought of nuclear weapon use should be condemned as irresponsible and criminal."[52] Keeping nuclear weapons off the table, in compliance with international law, is essential to preventing a nuclear holocaust. As Ukraine has demonstrated, defense against even a nuclear-armed aggressor is possible. The Ukrainian example should stimulate serious thinking about non-nuclear alternatives for defense.

In the wake of Russia's invasion, some European specialists have returned to the ideas that animated peace researchers' efforts during the 1980s to go beyond nuclear deterrence as a source of security. To provide defense and lower the risk of nuclear escalation, they propose "confidence-building defense," consisting of local defensively-oriented forces that would be backed up by mobile units located behind the front lines. The approach is known as "spider in the web."

> The web would be made up of a network of dispersed infantry units, equipped with modern weaponry like light artillery and shoulder-mounted anti-armor rockets capable of delaying and progressively wearing down invading forces. The spider would be composed of mobile combined-arms armored units, providing the strike and shock to destroy the enemy's momentum and confidence while preventing them from achieving strategic objectives. Yet, the armored component would not be large enough, nor

[50] Quoted in Jüri Luik and Tomas Jermalavičius, "A plausible scenario of nuclear war in Europe, and how to deter it: A perspective from Estonia," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, vol. 73, no. 4 (2017) 233–239 at 235.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Pavel Podvig, "Why—and how—the world should condemn Putin for waving the nuclear saber," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 29 March 2022.

would it have the logistical capabilities, to conduct offensive operations outside the web.[53]

Such an approach does seem more promising than one that relies on a trip-wire to nuclear destruction. It would not provide a panacea for the hardest security challenge of a case such as Narva, but it seems superior to the alternatives.

One should also emphasize the importance of non-military means of defense, what the Baltic authors called "political and societal readiness and resilience." Research on civilian-based resistance to invasion and occupation, dating to the work of Gene Sharp in the 1970s, and reflected in the proposals of the British Alternative Defence Commission and others in the 1980s, has expanded considerably owing to the work of Erica Chenoweth and colleagues.[54] Scholars have described the role that civilian resistance played in overthrowing the regime of Viktor Yanukovych in 2014 and its potential for thwarting Russian war aims by undermining the occupation of Ukrainian territory.[55] Such strategies are demanding, and require a high level of societal commitment and solidarity. They would be harder to carry out in regions where people might not trust each other or their government—a plausible description of areas of the Donbas and Crimea before the Russian interventions of 2014, and the reason the governments of the Baltic states, Moldova, and Kazakhstan should be giving high priority to making their Russian-speaking populations feel fully accepted as citizens. If the kind of resources devoted to military spending could be put to fostering the level of self-reliance and social trust necessary to underpin civilian resistance, even such authoritarian figures as Putin might think twice before undertaking aggressive military action.

Conclusion

The period since February 2022 has witnessed such unexpected developments that one would be foolish to make confident predictions about the future. The brazen Russian attack, although intelligence reports accurately predicted its preparations, still seems incredible. The degree of coherence and commitment of the Ukrainian nation's response, the military effectiveness of Ukraine's defense, and the solidarity offered by NATO members surprised most observers. The brutal Russian methods of deliberate destruction of civilian property and life were less of a surprise.[56] That the historically neutral Nordic countries of Sweden and Finland would react with decisions to join NATO was, however, unexpected. Their involvement in the alliance could bolster the alternative policies described here. Both

[53] Lukas Mengelkamp, Alexander Graef, Ulrich Kühn, "A Confidence-Building Defense for NATO," *War on the Rocks*, 27 June 2022.

[54] *Defence without the Bomb*, Report of the Alternative Defence Commission (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1983). For Sharp's work, see http://www.aeinstein.org. He once published a book, now out of print, called *Making Europe Unconquerable: The Potential of Civilian-Based Deterrence and Defence* (New York: HarperCollins, 1983). For Chenoweth's work see: https://www.ericachenoweth.com.

[55] Maciej Bartkowski and Maria J. Stepan, "How Ukraine Ousted an Autocrat: The Logic of Civil Resistance," Atlantic Council, 1 June 2014; Alexandre Christoyannopoulos, "Ukraine: nonviolent resistance is a brave and often effective response to aggression," *The Conversation*, 4 March 2022; Maciej Bartkowski, "Ukrainians vs. Putin: Potential for nonviolent, civilian-based defense," *Minds of the Movement* blog, 27 December 2021.

[56] Matthew Evangelista, "Russia's Warfare by War Crime and US Responsibility," *H-Diplo* Essay 425, Commentary Series on Putin's War, 29 March 2022.

countries have eschewed pursuit of nuclear weapons and both have relied on systems of territorial defense with limited offensive capabilities to provide security.[57] States such as Poland and Romania that joined NATO after the Cold War had earlier pursued interests in territorial defense as part of their military traditions, but the alliance had discouraged it in favor of military specialization by country.[58] Perhaps with support of the new Nordic members, such interests might attract the attention of NATO as it seeks to contend with Russia's potentially aggressive designs on its members.

This paper has sought to review the nuclear and conventional dimensions of European security policies during the Cold War, the alternative proposals that helped end the militarized division of the continent in the 1980s, how that hopeful moment dissipated, and how some of the ideas of that era might still be relevant for the future. European security in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine is more perilous now that at the end of the Cold War. Debates are likely to continue over whether NATO's expansion created a self-fulfilling prophecy of Russian aggression or rather anticipated the inevitable. In any case the security threat from Russia is now indisputable and how to counter it should demand increasing attention from scholars and practitioners.

[57] On Sweden's decision against nuclear weapons, see Thomas Jonter, *The Key to Nuclear Restraint: The Swedish Plans to Acquire Nuclear Weapons During the Cold War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

[58] Rachel A. Epstein, "When legacies meet policies: NATO and the refashioning of Polish military tradition," *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 20, no. 2 (May 2006).