

The Russo-Ukrainian War from a Historical Perspective

by [Armando Simón](#) (March 2023)



The Dream and Lie of Franco (sheet 1), Pablo Picasso, 1937

It is very queer that the unhappiness in the world is so often brought on by small men. –Erich Remarque

The war began a year ago. Russia's attack on Ukraine brought many surprises. Foremost was how miserably bad the Russian military has performed and how determined has been the Ukrainian defense, since Ukrainians have always been seen as

the more laid-back people while the Russians have been seen as more ruthless (the training of Russian soldiers is sadistic). Russian reputation as ferocious fighters began in the Second World War. Indeed, [Ukraine](#) was written off by many people in the very beginning of the war in the West and, undoubtedly, Putin shared this view of Ukrainians being pushovers.

However, in retrospect, this should not have come as a surprise to a student of history. Russian military performance in wars prior to Operation Barbarossa had usually been noted for being incompetent and corrupt, and these wars occurred usually when Russia invaded other countries. It is when Russia/Ukraine itself was invaded (Napoleon, Hitler) that Russia acquitted itself admirably. In those instances, the troops were highly motivated.

In the past four centuries, Ukraine as a political entity has been nothing other than a footnote of history. It briefly gained independence right after WWI, only to serve as the battlefield between the Whites, the Reds, and Makhno's Anarchists, before falling under the Russian heel again. In the 1930s, millions of Ukrainians [starved](#) to death under orders of Stalin so that when the Germans invaded, Ukrainians welcomed them with open arms and the traditional bread and salt. Over a quarter of a million actively helped the Nazis against the Communists; a very similar scenario played in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia (see the films *1944*, *Ashes in the Snow* and *Kruty 1918*). In fact, there are monuments in those countries honoring the participants. Some Jewish groups in the West are scandalized by that fact, insisting that the Nazis were more evil than the Communists, while the Baltic people insist that the Communists (who had killed tens of thousands of their citizens) were a more dangerous evil than the Nazis—as personally experienced. To a certain degree, the same occurred in [Finland](#).

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Ukraine became independent in 1991. Since then, one of Putin's goals was to

reincorporate Ukraine through political/diplomatic machinations and selective poisoning. He also had hopes of reincorporating Belarus, Crimea, Kazakhstan and Estonia into a Russian empire since they all have substantial number of Russians.

Until the 2022 invasion, in spite of Russian annexation of Crimea and support for separatists in eastern Ukraine, Ukrainians and Russians saw each other as cousins, even though a lot of Russian propaganda attempted to arouse hatred because of friction among Ukrainians who insisted that the Russian language should be excluded. Ukrainians saw Putin as the enemy, not Russians. [Now](#), Ukrainians [hate](#) Russians.

And Ukrainians are not strange foreigners; Russians have always seen them as family, as good people. They have relatives across both borders. It would be like Americans being told to hate Canadians in order to invade Canada. This explains why Russian [troops have](#) had [low](#) motivation for the war, almost to the [point](#) of mutiny. Inside [Russia](#), the [war against Ukraine](#) has not [proven](#) to be [popular](#) with [many](#), and [opposition](#) was [evident until repression](#) was [imposed](#). Whether the explosions inside Russia have been carried out by dissidents or by Ukrainian infiltrators remains to be seen. Unfortunately, in the [West](#), the overreaction against individual Russian citizens has often [been](#) very unfair.

The other reason for the stiff [resistance](#) is that whereas Ukrainians are [fighting](#) for [their](#) country (a lot of history is being remembered), Russians are not. The deliberate killing of [civilians](#) and destruction of nonmilitary "targets" such as infrastructure has not served to demoralize the Ukrainians; quite the contrary, as a study of WWII history could have predicted. The Kremlin actually believed that their troops would be welcomed as liberators. Instead, they [rallied](#) behind their country, with civilians offering information on the [enemy](#), verbally harassing [them](#), and working to create equipment for Ukrainian [troops](#).

And, of course, there is the fact that the Russian [troops](#) were lied to and were [poorly trained](#) and [supplied](#). Russian command has traditionally seen their soldiers as [cannon](#) fodder.

Their [morale](#) has plummeted.

Aside from the military aspects, another surprise has been the near unanimous worldwide hostility and [disgust](#) towards [Russia](#). This repugnance was even [voiced](#) by Sweden, Finland and Switzerland.

Switzerland!

Putin had hoped for support from [China](#), the West's actual [danger](#). Both countries had engaged in joint war games and we know for a fact that China's military, unlike Russia's, is itching to pulverize America's military. Some claimed that the Americans had ineptly pushed [Russia](#) into China's arms. When Putin went to the opening day of the Beijing Olympics, he and Xi issued a [joint](#) declaration stating that both countries oppose the expansion of NATO; China also asked Putin to postpone the invasion of Ukraine until after the Olympics. Yet, in the end, China's unqualified support did not [come](#).

January 2022 saw a series of media articles warning that [Russia](#) was going to [invade](#) Ukraine. The following articles were typical: "[U.S.](#) accuses Russia of planning to film false attack as pretext for Ukraine invasion," "[How](#) a Russian invasion of Ukraine might go down," "The United [States](#) Doesn't Have To Go To War With Russia To Prevent A Russian War With Ukraine." The vast majority of people dismissed this as typical gibberish from the chattering classes.

Even Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy himself was skeptical of the advanced warnings, and [asked](#) for solid evidence that Russia is going to invade his country.

When invasion materialized, it came as a [shock](#) to those outside the intelligence community (and even to others within

the intelligence community). For the public, that a European country would invade and try to absorb another European country in this day and age, in this century, was seen as an immoral atavism, a deliberate return to a more barbaric period, a time that had been thankfully left behind. Putin's attack infuriated millions of people worldwide ([even in friendly countries](#)) and this, in turn, surprised the Russians (one Russian officer [broke](#) through the media censorship to reveal on Russian television that "the entire world is against us").

Since then, the Kremlin has attempted to turn Western public opinion by first, pointing out the [chronic](#) corruption in [Ukraine](#) and secondly, by bringing up the [Nazi](#) scare knowing full well that a lot of people have a knee-jerk reaction to the [mythical](#) "neo-Nazi" threat (the "Nazi" excuse is [also](#) useful inside Russia after decades of propaganda). In this latter, they have [shown](#) pictures of Nazi-like [insignia](#). The propaganda has been typically [crude](#) and [made](#) little impression, unlike pictures of Ukrainian civilians dead, and hospitals and apartment buildings destroyed by the Russians (besides, President Zelensky is a Jew), although there have been some converts among those who have a Pavlovian reaction to the [word](#) "Nazi."

The third attack has been on [Zelensky](#) himself by highlighting the fact that he has banned pro-Russian political parties and [churches](#), and imposed [censorship](#). Some have [come](#) to his defense, justifying his actions because of circumstances. Nonetheless, some Westerners (as is inevitably the case) are [Putin](#) apologists.

The Ukrainians, on the other hand, have been [masters](#) of propaganda, constantly bringing to the attention of the [world](#) the destruction and [civilian deaths](#) and suffering. They have [shown](#) the captured Russians [being](#) allowed to call their families assuring them of [being](#) alive while condemning the invasion and the lies of their commanders. They have posted

videos on social [media](#) showing destruction of Russian armored vehicles and aircraft—along [with](#) background [music](#). Humor has also [helped](#) their cause (Westerners have also used [humor](#), even in diplomatic circles). The Russian invaders are referred to as “orcs” by Ukrainian soldiers. [Films](#) have shown farmers with their tractors towing abandoned Russian tanks towards Ukrainian forces. The Russians stole zoo animals from Kherson, including an American racoon; a “Saving Private Racoon” [meme](#) went viral. When Moskva, a Russian ship, ordered the men on Snake Island to surrender, the [latter](#) responded, “Russian warship, go fuck yourself.” [Stamps](#) were issued showing a soldier at water’s edge giving the finger to a warship in the distance (the stamps sold out immediately and are still in demand).

The Moskva was later sunk.

What brought about this disaster?

Elsewhere, I [have](#) written that, in history, tragedies of crucial events have clearly occurred because of the stupidity of individuals in positions of responsibility; I cited numerous historical examples of undisputed stupidity. If the reader is skeptical of my assertion as being counterintuitive or absurd, I only need to point to the dementia patient currently occupying the [White House](#), the [imbecilic Vice President](#) [with](#) her hyena laugh erupting at inopportune moments, the two top generals of the Pentagon, and various [other American](#) politicians.

The present tragedy of the Russian invasion of the Ukraine by a megalomaniac thug is one such instance indirectly caused by stupid Western leaders. The following thesis is not going to be welcomed by many, but it needs to be said.

With the defeat of *Das Dritte Reich* in 1945, European democracies and the United States were now faced with another

totalitarian power occupying half the continent. Influenced by what had transpired in the last few years, the idea naturally came up to form a formal military alliance that would deter the Soviet Union should it decide to expand westward. Thus, NATO was born. George F. Kennan opposed the creation of NATO because the Warsaw Pact was an inevitable reaction and, furthermore, there would now be a reason for the Soviets to stamp out any popular uprising against the Communist dictatorships outside the Soviet Union. Both sides can make a good argument to support their opposite views regarding the formation of NATO.

Regardless, the creation of NATO has had one unquestionable benefit: it has kept the peace in a continent that periodically engaged in mutual bloodletting. Nowadays, the idea of France going to war against Britain or Italy, or Germany against France or Poland is anathema (in fact, one could argue that Europeans' revulsion against the Russian invasion is due to this change of mentality). That, alone, justifies its continuance.

NATO's *raison d'être* was to prevent Soviet expansionism. As such, the alliance was an anti-Soviet one. Then, to almost everyone's surprise, the people of the Eastern Bloc overthrew their Communist regimes. A new era dawned. Boris Yeltsin came over and repeatedly asked that Russia be allowed into NATO. Since the organization had been anti-Soviet, and the Soviet Union was no more, Yeltsin asked that Russia be welcomed into the fraternity of democratic countries. It was logical. It was reasonable. It made perfect sense.

But Western leaders, with their fossilized brains could not comprehend something so simple, so obvious, yet so revolutionary, and the imbeciles repeatedly ignored the request. A golden opportunity for perpetual peace and European unity was, thereby, lost. This snub was an act of criminal stupidity, pure and simple, and led to Putin's rise to power and, ultimately, to the [death](#) of Russian democracy at the

hands of this ex-KGB officer. [Kennan](#) stated before his death in 2005, "I was particularly bothered by the references to Russia as a country dying to attack Western Europe. Don't people understand? Our differences in the cold war were with the Soviet Communist regime. And now we are turning our backs on the very people who mounted the greatest bloodless revolution in history to remove that Soviet regime."

[NATO](#) was stupidly transformed from an anti-Soviet mutual defense organization into an anti-Russian club.

No historian denies the fact that the Versailles Treaty was the major cause for Hitler's rise to power.

To make things worse, NATO started to expand. Contrary to verbal [assurances](#) made to Russia. Basically, the Western powers spit in the face of Russia. Fifteen [Cold](#) War-era diplomats signed an open letter in *The New York Review of Books* arguing that NATO expansion was a horrible mistake.

They were ignored.

NATO is a bureaucracy, and ALL bureaucracies are cancerous by their very nature in that they tend to get bigger. And bigger. And bigger. The expansion went out of control: Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Czechia, Croatia, Macedonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Montenegro, Albania (Finland and Sweden now want membership in NATO); [there](#) has [been](#) opposition against [further](#) expansion. What can Albania or Montenegro bring to the table in case of a war, anyway? Together, they may be able to scrape up a truck (perhaps Vatican City can be persuaded to join NATO. Hey, those Swiss guards with their halberds are tough!).

Needless to say, Russian paranoia went through the roof.

Notice also that NATO's expansion has been eastward, that is, towards Russia. Now, it is understandable that Poland and the [Baltic](#) States would like to be protected by NATO because of

past history (which is to say, [America](#); it is doubtful that the Europeans will do much fighting in case of a war; as one [Italian](#) put it, “Perhaps it is forgotten that, from the end of the Second World War onwards, Europe has in practice outsourced all defense problems to the United States”). The same is true of Ukraine, Georgia, [Moldova](#), and Armenia.

But look at it from Russia’s point of view. NATO may claim to be a defensive organization, but let’s be honest, that could always change, considering some of the imbeciles—like Joe Biden and George W. Bush—that have occupied the White House. *And it does begin to look like Russia is being encircled* (Estonia is practically a stone’s throw from St. Petersburg). One has only to look at a map.

Russia has been invaded several times in its history. The Second World War was the most devastating.

Americans were traumatized on 9/11 because a mere *two buildings* were destroyed?

During WWII, dozens of Russian *cities* were destroyed and millions of its citizens were killed. Those wounds are still fresh.

Americans freaked out when the Soviet Union installed nuclear rockets in Cuba. Russians were frantic over the idea of installing nuclear rockets in a NATO Ukraine. It repeatedly demanded that Ukraine be a buffer state, that is, that it did not become part of NATO, but Americans simply ignored and trivialized their distraught requests.

Again, look at the map!

It would be stupid to conclude now that NATO’s fossilized attitude of continued antagonism towards Russia after it became democratic during the 1990s has proven to be correct, considering Putin’s action this year.

Rather, it is the reverse.

And the conclusion is obvious: this was [preventable](#) in any number of ways.

Poison Putin

Had Russia been admitted into NATO as a democratic partner, Putin might not have come into power and the borders would have solidified.

But, once in power, Putin hoped that the countries of Belarus and Ukraine would go back into Russian arms, since they are both Slavs and since he has a sentimental view of the Soviet Union, with its gulag. But Belarus has a dictator of its own and Lukashenko prefers to be a big fish in a smaller pond. On the other hand, Ukraine has had, by comparison, a weaker government and for years there has been local exasperation over the out-of-control corruption.

In the Ukraine, pro-Russian Prime Minister Yanukovich won through elections as fraudulent as the 2020 American elections. The opposition candidate, Viktor Yushchenko, almost died when poisoned by Putin's agents. A pro-Western revolution took place (named Revolution of Dignity or the Maidan Revolution, partly through the machination of Western powers, and Yanukovich had to flee to Russia. The Donbas and Luhansk oblasts, whose population, most of whom spoke Russian, and had predominantly voted for Yanukovich revolted, partly through the machination of the Kremlin.

Putin's subsequent gas shutdown into Ukraine, naval incidents, cyberwarfare, the seizure of Crimea, as well as the *de facto* seizure of Donetsk and Luhansk through puppets, with the subsequent hostilities, have by now justifiably and decisively turned most Ukrainians hostile towards Russians. It was a blunder on Poison Putin's part, who obviously had deluded

himself.

And here we must stop to examine Putin's worldview (which is [shared](#) by many Russians), since it is always dangerous to assume that one's partner, or worse, opponent's outlook is based on the same premises. For centuries, many prominent Russians have adhered to the dream of a Pan-Slav country that would incorporate all the Slavic people (Bulgarians, Poles, Ukrainians, Belarusians). Not to cast aspersions, but Germans had the same dream with Germanic peoples. On numerous occasions, Putin bewailed the fact that the "tragedy" of the dissolution of the Soviet Union resulted in many Russians being left behind in distant and not so distant lands (Kaliningrad, [Estonia](#), Latvia, Lithuania, [Crimea](#), Ukraine, Transnistria, Kazakhstan, etc.). His is a Sudetenland mentality.

It hadn't crossed his mind that Soviet imperialism was to blame, nor that those peoples may not share the same nostalgia. As for Ukraine, he has [written](#) that it is an illegitimate, artificial creation (this is a common tactic when one people wants to subjugate another one) and he reiterated this point in a lengthy [television](#) broadcast on the eve of the invasion. The goal, therefore, is not only to acquire the territory, but to eradicate Ukrainian identity. He is in his 70s and reputedly in ill health so he may have wanted to resolve the Ukrainian question before his death, thusly receiving iconic status in Russian history. Incidentally, Putin is said to have offered to partition Ukraine between Russia and Poland, thereby imitating Stalin's (his idol) Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939; Poland declined.

The case of Transnistria is interesting because it is part of another country and it is a strip of land. Exactly like the Sudetenland. If Russia would continue its western drive along the Black Sea, it would connect with Russia (to Putin's surprise, Transnistria has not supported the invasion either). Nevertheless, if successful in Ukraine, Russia's foreign

minister has hinted that it [would](#) not stop [there](#), but continue on to [Moldova](#).

There is another element in [Putin's](#) outlook and here I grudgingly admit that I agree. It is that [arrogant](#) American governments—with the exception of Trump—are constantly sticking their noses into other countries' business “for their own good” going from one war to another, “armored in their good intentions and ignorance” to borrow Graham Greene's apt phrase, constantly causing [chaos](#) more often than not *without knowing the slightest thing about the region that they are meddling in*, assuring the locals that Americans know what's best for them, all the while egged on by the media hivemind (with its “while the world watches and does nothing”), the Max Boots and the [military-industrial](#) complex. Look at the mess they left behind in Iraq, in Syria, in Libya, in the Balkans.

I distinctly remember that in the Syrian civil war, the American officials admitted they *did not have the slightest idea what was going on in the ground*, but the media and politicians (like Senator McCain) demanded that we send [troops](#) there anyway to fight somebody, anybody.

Said [Putin](#) at the UN in 2015, over America's latest chaos, “Instead of the triumph of democracy and progress, we got violence, poverty and social disaster—and nobody cares a bit about human rights, including the right to life. I cannot help asking those who have forced that situation: Do you realize what you have done?”

There is one other [element](#) that resonates with many in Russia and that is the undisputed [moral](#) degeneracy [that](#) has befallen the West, particularly in America. Not having endured decades of indoctrination to believe that sexual perversions should not only be tolerated as in America but welcomed with open arms, most persons abroad see with justifiable horror the attempts to turn American schoolchildren into homosexuals or transgenders, as their parents do nothing except whine.

And this, in turn, ties in with Russia's struggle with self-identity, a struggle which has been ongoing for two centuries, superbly explained by Vlad [Vexler](#) (my own interpretation is that the Russian character is a schizoid one: on the one hand, Peter the Great wanted Russia to become like the rest of Europe with its "liberal" values and abandon its pervasive backwardness and this goal has remained to this day. On the other hand, Russian character was molded by the effects of being for centuries under the heel of the genocidal Mongols, since it was the only European culture to be conquered. The latter accounts for many Russians' yearning for an autocratic ruler and the brutality inherent inside the Russian military, from top to bottom, as well as the brutality against enemy civilians).

What now?

It is always risky to predict what will happen in the future. As with countless others, I too was certain that Putin's military buildup at Ukraine's borders was a bluff, and he would not invade. So did most Westerners. So did [most](#) Russians.

At this point, it is expected (another word for "predicted") that another offensive by Ukraine (after it gets a handful of better weapons and the men are trained), or Russia (after logistics problems are solved and new recruits are trained), will occur in the months to come. One may remember that in the Winter War, when Finland was invaded and gave the Russians a bloody nose, the latter paused, regrouped, rearmed and recalculated and won the war by overwhelming the Finns. That is probably what is going on now. I believe that Putin is sure that the longer the conflict lasts, the cracks ([Hungary](#), [Austria](#), [Germany](#), [Croatia](#)) in NATO and internally in [America](#) will widen even [more](#).

At any rate, these gee-whiz weapons that Western military are so fond of may simply turn out to be helpless against mass attacks. Mass attacks is a basic tenet of Russian military thinking: so what if a million soldiers die in order to achieve a victory? There's plenty more! Send another wave of men! And another! There is a mine field in the way? Send in troops on foot to clear it! Then another wave of men! Then another! Which is why Russian casualties in WWII were so high.

Regardless, expectations are that war is going to continue for at least another year. This makes the military-industrial complex in America salivate in anticipation.

Unfortunately, there are stupid people in the [West](#) that are setting Putin's removal of [power](#) as a [goal](#). Other equally stupid people are hoping that this war will usher in the [breakup](#) of [Russia](#). Be careful of what you wish for: you might get it.

Other equally [stupid](#) people are advocating a "no-fly [zone](#)" and/or American troops inside Ukraine.

As to the first, through wishful thinking, these stupid people are assuming that a better leader will inevitably emerge; as usual, they ignore recent history in Iraq and Libya, where once the dictator was removed, things went from bad to worse, much worse. If one listens to Russian media, there are many individuals foaming at the mouth who want to use nuclear weapons against the West. Full blown [paranoia](#) is also evident in governmental circles and that is not good.

In 1939, only ONE person wanted war. It took only ONE person to start the six-year carnage. [Hitler](#) himself said it, he acknowledged that only one political leader had the "vision" to start a war and it was him, no one else. His bureaucratic subordinates did as they were told. Think about what that means.

As to the second, these stupid people should remember the

history of WWII, when the words “unconditional surrender” were set as the goal. How did that work out?

The one bright aspect of this war is that Russia itself has not been attacked. Rather, its military inside another country has been chewed up.

NATO’S continued and increased support for Ukraine against Russia is [seen](#) by [many](#) as an escalation of confrontation between Russia and, not Ukraine, but [NATO](#), with a [real](#) possibility, albeit remote at this point, of a nuclear exchange. “The history of the [world](#) is lit with examples of smaller states dragging great powers to catastrophic, civilization-ending wars.”

What, then, is the solution?

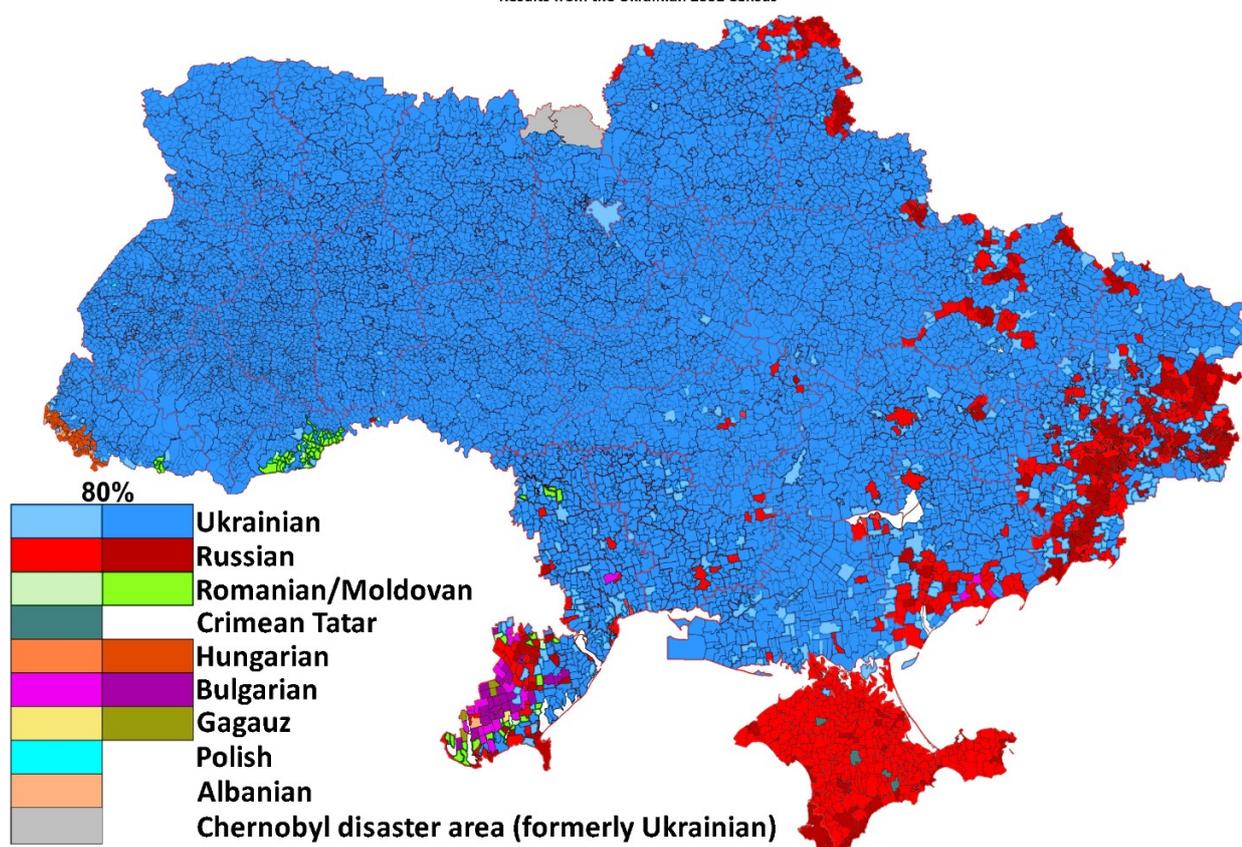
The solution may simply lie in a *formal treaty*, as opposed to a verbal agreement, which states that the Russian military will evacuate Ukraine, including the Donbass, Crimea and Luhansk territories in return for a formal declaration that Ukraine will not join NATO nor allow NATO missiles or forces in its territory. Should either party violate its part of the treaty, the other party will automatically negate its part. Russia may lease its important naval base of Sevastopol (alternatively, the Russian-speaking Crimea is sold to Russia, said money to be used to reconstruct Ukraine if, and only IF, the money is kept out of reach of the oligarch pigs). Ukraine will, therefore, become a mutually beneficial buffer state. A prisoner exchange will occur, of course, and Ukrainian children who [were](#) kidnapped to be raised as Russians will be returned. Obviously, each side will attempt to incorporate into the treaty extraneous demands, all of which should be rejected at the start.

The beauty of this treaty is that both sides can claim victory, and, it is similar to a previous Russian proposal. Ukraine can boast that it held off the world’s second largest

army and retained its independence. Putin can appear on TV bare chested once again and claim that he achieved the overriding goal of Russian security by guaranteeing that Ukraine would not join NATO and NATO would not be at its border, that Russian forces were not expelled from the conquered territories, that he fought NATO to a standstill, and he can also say that if the treaty is negated, Russian tanks will return.

As Sun Tzu wrote, "Build your opponent a golden bridge to retreat across."

The majority language by city, town, and village councils
Results from the Ukrainian 2001 Census



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