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THE RESPONSE OF THE POST-COMMUNIST STATES TO THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE

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INTRODUCTION

'Fine', posted Mustafa Nayyem, a Ukrainian journalist on his Facebook account. 'Let's be serious. Who is ready to show up on the Maidan by midnight tonight? "Likes" will be ignored. Only comment on this post with the words "I'm ready"'. It was 21 November 2013, and Nayyem, then aged 32, was upset at President Viktor Yanukovich's refusal to sign an Association Agreement, long promised, with the European Union (EU, see p. 689), which would provide for enhanced trading arrangements, the reform of Ukrainian laws, the promotion of democracy, and the enforcement of internationally accepted business practices. Within hours, Nayyem had received 600 responses stating 'I'm ready' to his Facebook post. By midnight, at least 1,000 people had gathered at Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) in the centre of Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital, where they stayed, erecting an encampment. On 30 November, in an attempt to disperse them, the police began to beat demonstrators, the footage of which was posted online. This led not to the dispersion of the protesters, but to an influx of further demonstrators. The next day, as many as 350,000 people arrived in central Kyiv no longer merely to demand that Ukraine sign the Association Agreement with the EU, but also to protest against police brutality. So began the Euromaidan Uprising, also known as the 'Revolution of Dignity', which eventually, in February 2014, led not only to the fleeing and removal of office from President Yanukovich and the formation of a new Government, but also to unrest, the annexation of the Crimean peninsula by the Russian Federation in March, followed by an armed conflict between the Ukrainian military and Russian-backed rebels in the eastern Donbas region. Eight years later and with 14,000 lives already lost in the fighting (according to the International Crisis Group), the Ukraine crisis became a full-blown international conflict, as Russian forces invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022—the largest military mobilization in Europe since the Second World War, creating what *The New York Times* described as the 'fastest growing refugee crisis' in Europe since then.

While few observers would justify the brutality and illegality of the Russian aggression, most would agree that the key reason behind Russian President Vladimir Putin ordering the invasion was the expansion of what can be termed liberal Western institutions—in particular the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO, see p. 694) and the EU—in regions ever closer to Russia's borders, something that had been a political grievance of Russian nationalists since the late 1990s, around a decade after the cold war (1947–89) ended. By the mid-1990s, the US Administration of President Bill Clinton had decided to champion the accession to membership of NATO of countries from among the former communist and post-Soviet states. In 1996 the so-called architect of America's cold war strategy of 'containment', George F. Kennan, had opposed the enlargement of NATO, arguing that it would be 'the most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-cold-war era'. His main reasoning was that such a move would 'incline the nationalistic, anti-Western and militaristic tendencies in Russian opinion' in addition to having 'an adverse effect on the development of Russian democracy' and that expansion would result in a new cold war, and perhaps most prophetic of all, that NATO expansion would 'impel Russian foreign policy in directions decidedly not to [US and Western] liking'.

Kennan's seemingly accurate prophecy aside, there is no doubt that nations and peoples have the rights to aspire to self-determination, freedom, better standards of living, justice, and opportunities for personal and societal growth. For many in the former eastern bloc, including Ukraine and other post-Soviet republics, for example, Russia is perceived as the 'former imperial master' while the EU is viewed as 'an international center of gravity' (as noted by Plokhyy). If the decision to expand NATO may have been hasty, at mid-2022 Russia's invasion of

Ukraine already seemed to have been a grave miscalculation. Six months into the war, at late August 2022, although Russia and its allied militias in eastern Ukraine occupy one-fifth of the territory of Ukraine, the loss of lives among the Russian military, according to US Department of Defense may be as high as roughly 20,000 (according to Yuhas). The civilian death toll in Ukraine, according to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, had reached an estimated 5,600 by that time; according to Ukrainian Gen. Valeriy Zaluzhny, the Ukraine military had lost a total of 9,000 soldiers in the same period. Meanwhile, of a pre-war population of 44m. Ukrainians, over 13m. have been displaced, around one-half as refugees in other parts of Europe, around one-half as internally displaced persons in Ukraine.

BACKGROUND

The Russian Federation, following the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in late 1991, had difficulties recognizing the sovereign statehood of the then 'newly independent states' that succeeded the latter. Russia's influence in the post-Soviet space was, in effect, assumed thanks to the long history of Russian rule over these areas. Russian media and state agencies began using a new term—*blizhneye zarubezhye* ('near abroad')—when referring to these countries. Still, in light of its own political and economic turmoil, Russia did not pay much attention to its 'near abroad' during 1992–95 and was unable and unwilling to extend material support to any of the former Soviet republics, being of the view that such an act would hold Russia back from its own intended path of Westernization. Russia had also aspired to be more than *primus inter pares*, without taking responsibility for the problems of its former territories and accepting their sovereignty. As it soon turned out, this was somewhat similar to the limited sovereignty of the socialist countries of East-Central Europe (comprising Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia—now the Czech Republic—Czechia—and Slovakia, Hungary, Poland and Romania) during the cold war period. This had been formulated in the so-called 'Brezhnev Doctrine' enunciated by the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR Leonid Brezhnev in a November 1968 speech in Warsaw, Poland, three months after Soviet-led Warsaw Pact forces had invaded Czechoslovakia to crush the so called 'Prague Spring'—the short period of political liberalization under Alexander Dubček, First Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (January 1968–April 1969) that had sought to create 'socialism with a human face'.

When considering the impacts of the February 2022 Russian aggression against Ukraine, on the one hand, the states of East-Central Europe that were former members of the Warsaw Pact and, on the other hand, the countries that formerly constituted the USSR, a difference between the two groups of countries, observed by the historian Jenő Szűcs in the early-1980s, remains evident. This sharp differentiation is problematic, however, with regard to the Baltic states—Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia—that were annexed by the USSR during the Second World War, and which since independence in the early 1990s have integrated into Western institutions and groupings. The other 12 post-Soviet republics belong neither to the EU nor to NATO, whereas many countries of formerly communist East-Central Europe now belong to both organizations and shape and adhere to their common policies. Consequently, it is essential to note that in spite of the partial alignment of some of the post-Soviet countries (notably Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) with those countries formerly in the Warsaw Pact, and attempts among some of those latter countries (notably Hungary) to distance themselves from the policies of their peers, the fundamental division between these two sets of states remains pertinent.

In his 1968 speech, Brezhnev had said: ‘The socialist states stand for strict respect for the sovereignty of all countries. We emphatically oppose interference in the affairs of any state [or] violations of its sovereignty’. Brezhnev, however, had included qualifiers by way of the presence of ‘forces of imperialism and reaction’ or conditions whereby ‘the internal and external forces hostile to socialism seek to halt the development of any socialist country and restore the capitalist order’. Countering such threats, according to Brezhnev, would ‘no longer only [be] a problem of the people of that country but also . . . a concern for all socialist countries’ and would require ‘such an action as military aid to a fraternal country to cut short the threat to the socialist order’ (quoted in Glazer). Thus, the socialist countries only had ‘limited sovereignty’ that was subordinated to their political ‘common cause’. The Brezhnev Doctrine was subsequently enforced in the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan, and indirectly, in 1981, by Soviet backing of the imposition of martial law in Poland as means of crushing the anti-communist *Solidarność* (Solidarity) Movement.

Mutatis mutandis, 40 years later, a remarkably similar, if unspoken, doctrine appeared to be held by the Russian state, if not towards all the post-socialist states, then at the minimum, towards most of the former Soviet republics. Such ‘sovereign’ states, it seems, should choose either to be allies of the Russian Federation or stay neutral, but their choices were limited to these two options and did not extend to consideration of joining Western institutions. The signals and verbal discouragement not to do so became louder in April 2005 when President Putin expressed his view that ‘the demise of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the [20th] century’. When Georgia demonstrated its interest in joining NATO, first Russia upgraded its verbal opposition at the NATO summit meeting in Bucharest, Romania, in April 2008 and then, in August, fought a five-day war in support of two separatist territories in Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the statehood of which Russia subsequently recognized. Despite such aggression, the West returned to some kind of ‘reduced’ normality in its relations with Russia following the publication of the so-called Tagliavini Report (officially, the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia, commissioned by the EU) that divided the responsibility for the war between Georgia and Russia. The war, which resulted in over 1,500 deaths (mostly on the Georgian side), was a strong signal to both Russia’s ‘near abroad’ and to the West that Russia did not tolerate the NATO accession aspirations of a former Soviet republic. Over five years later, when domestic political processes in Ukraine brought about a new leadership in Ukraine with a pro-Western orientation, Russia also rejected such a political tilt. There was an important difference between the two cases, however. Namely, whereas in the case of Georgia, it was specifically its NATO aspiration that was found objectionable, in 2014, it was the Western orientation of Ukraine more broadly that was found unacceptable to Russia. What is essential to notice is that Russia’s expectations towards the former Soviet republics changed, became more constraining, more radicalized, less tolerant, and more assertive.

By 2014 Russia had occupied and annexed from Ukraine the Crimean peninsula, including the Black Sea port of Sevastopol, and backed its allies in the Donbas region who had formed so-called ‘People’s Republics’ based in Donetsk and Luhansk (Lugansk)—the DNR and LNR—which could exist only through Russian military and economic assistance. The West introduced counter-measures, including economic sanctions that were reciprocated by Russia. However, they were not particularly threatening. What made the situation different in 2014 as compared with that after the war with Georgia in 2008 is that in the earlier case the West had reluctantly and de facto accepted the new political and territorial status quo (albeit not recognizing the independent statehood of the breakaway regions in Georgia), and after some time relations between the West and Russia returned to something close to normality. After the 2014 Crimean annexation and intervention in Donbas, however, there was no return to the *status quo ante* and the West maintained pressure on Russia, seemingly with little effect upon Russia’s behaviour.

Since 1994 (along with a number of other post-Soviet states) Russia had participated in the ‘Partnership for Peace’ programme of NATO. In 1997 it had signed the NATO-Russia Founding Act, and from 2002–08 participated co-operatively in the NATO-Russia Council, which dealt with such issues as ‘peacekeeping, arms control, counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics and theatre missile defence’. After 2014, NATO foreign ministers decided to cease cooperation with Russia. In 2016 NATO leaders emphasized that any improvement in relations would be ‘contingent on a clear and constructive change in Russia’s actions—one that demonstrates compliance with international law and Russia’s international commitments’ and that until such time, ‘NATO and Russia cannot return to “business as usual”’. NATO gradually downsized the staff of the Russian mission at its headquarters, following revelations of Russian official involvement in the attempted murder in 2018 of former Russian intelligence officer Sergey Skripal and his daughter Yuliya in the United Kingdom with use of the novichok nerve agent. In 2021 the relationship took a further downturn.

As Russian relations with the West worsened, on 18 November 2021, President Putin addressed his Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergei Lavrov, stating that ‘it is imperative to push for serious long-term guarantees that ensure Russia’s security . . . because Russia cannot constantly be thinking about what could happen there tomorrow’. The Ministry, in turn, worked on and presented two drafts of a proposed treaty with the USA and a proposed agreement between Russia and NATO, both on guaranteeing Russian security; these were presented to the US Department of State and made public on 17 December. The Western states, however, decided that the proposals were a sort of trap, in that if the West decided to accept any of their important elements Russia would achieve a major political victory. If it rejected them, Russia could argue the West was not co-operating with it, and was not ready to consider its security concerns.

In return for its 2021 draft treaties, Russia was insisting upon Western concessions and, at the minimum, the acceptance of some of its proposals. The most important Russian demands put forth to the USA were as follows: The USA would veto ‘further eastward expansion’ of NATO; it would ‘deny accession to the Alliance to the States of the former [USSR]’; it ‘shall not establish military bases in the territory of the States of the former [USSR] that are not [NATO] members’; and that the USA would not ‘use [the] infrastructure [of these countries] for any military activities or develop bilateral military cooperation with them’. In the proposed agreement with NATO, Russia demanded that NATO member states commit ‘to refrain from any further enlargement of NATO, including the accession of Ukraine as well as other States’. Furthermore, NATO member states, together with Russia and ‘all the Parties that were member States of [NATO] as of 27 May 1997 [the date of signing of the NATO-Russia Founding Act—thus excluding those countries of East-Central Europe that had joined NATO subsequently], respectively, shall not deploy military forces and weaponry on the territory of any of the other States in Europe in addition to the forces stationed on that territory as of 27 May 1997’.

The two proposed documents taken together were intended to allow Russia the benefit of a ‘double buffer zone’. The first layer would be formed by the former Soviet republics that would not be permitted to join NATO, and the second would be established by banning those states that were already members of NATO before 1997 from deploying military forces and weaponry on the territory of those members that joined after that date, such as Estonia, Poland, or Romania, nor could they reinforce them. The most important consideration of Russia appears to have been to separate the security of the USA from that of East-Central Europe. The Russian Federation’s ambassador to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE, see p. 699) stated that its terms were ‘not a menu from which you can pick and choose’, but were rather ‘a package deal’. They were also supposedly ‘not an ultimatum but an invitation to professional, substantive discussions on issues of war and peace’. The West, in turn, was of the view that if it were to concede to these demands, it would not only undermine NATO’s long established policy of welcome towards

potential new members, but that it would also be contradicting the OSCE's reaffirmation of 'the inherent right of each and every participating State to be free to choose or change its security arrangements, including treaties of alliance, as they evolve', as stated in its 1996 *Lisbon Document on a Common and Comprehensive Security Model for Europe for the 21st Century*.

It is open to question, whether Russia precisely wanted to achieve such a rejection in order to have an excuse to justify its intent of abolishing the political independence of its neighbour, Ukraine. It is known from Russian premier Mikhail Mishustin that the Government had months to prepare for the economic consequences of Western coercive measures apparently to be introduced in reaction to what Russia would officially term its 'special military operation' in Ukraine. It meant that the Russian leadership knew well that its proposals would not be accepted, and if it used force against Ukraine, that the West would react first of all by non-military means. It therefore appeared probable that the decision to use force against Ukraine had been taken by Russia already before the launch of the process of requesting security guarantees, i.e. before November 2021.

It may also be fair to posit that Russia did not want to abolish the statehood of Ukraine as such, given the impossibility of it occupying and controlling a country of nearly 44m. people possessing a territory of over 600,000 sq. km. Its intention was rather to abolish the political independence of Ukraine and install a 'puppet regime' there. Had this aspiration been successful it would have been difficult to define where Russia's sovereign control would end.

Although the US military intelligence were aware of the likelihood of an impending Russian invasion of Ukraine and US leaders having had informed European allies in November 2021 about their suspicions, there remained overwhelming hope that war could be avoided. Russia's grand strategy was based on the assumption that Ukraine would not resist, and that within a few days of invasion Russia would prevail and a pro-Russian regime would be installed in Kyiv. This view was also shared by some in the West. However, it turned out soon that Ukraine as a country and the Ukrainians as a nation, often irrespective of ethnicity and/or mother tongue, were ready to fight to retain their independence. It appeared that the senior Russian leadership, including Putin, fundamentally misunderstood the situation. They were unaware of the public mood in Ukraine and of how it had changed, particularly since 2014. This highlighted a more fundamental problem: either the Russian intelligence services were unaware of the public mood in Ukraine or they were afraid of reporting the reality. The former would demonstrate incompetence, the latter a flawed information system that often characterizes centralized, dictatorial regimes.

THE POST-COMMUNIST STATES AND THE UN VOTE ON UKRAINE

On the day of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz referred to Russia's aggression as a 'reckless act by President Putin', a 'terrible day for Ukraine' and 'a dark day for Europe', while EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen called the invasion a 'barbaric attack'. For his part, the UN Secretary General António Guterres, a month after the invasion, referred to the continuation of the war by Russia as 'morally unacceptable, politically indefensible and militarily nonsensical'.

The world at large condemned the Russian aggression, as irrespective of the pronouncements of its leadership, it could not be interpreted other than as a brutal violation of the UN Charter, including the prohibition of the use of force. On 2 March 2022, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution entitled 'Aggression against Ukraine', '[deploring] in the strongest terms the aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine' and demanding that Russia 'immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders'. A similar resolution had failed to pass in the UN Security Council on 25 February when Russia had used its veto power and cast the sole vote against it.

Perhaps the most accurate reflection of the position of the 193 UN member states on the Ukraine invasion was expressed at the UN General Assembly where an emergency special session was convened after Russia vetoed a resolution in the Security Council condemning the invasion of Ukraine. The condemnation of the General Assembly was overwhelming and demonstrated both an objective and a subjective element. It was the objective factor that UN member states noticed how severe the violation was, whereas the subjective factor reflected the diplomatic efforts of those countries that wanted to achieve an overwhelming condemnation of Russia's aggression. The result was clear: 141 members supported the motion to condemn Russia's actions, while only five states voted against it—Belarus, Eritrea, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), Russia and the Syrian Arab Republic, while 35 abstained and 12 did not participate in the vote. When taking a closer look, it is clear that various regions of the world voted somewhat differently. Whereas all the NATO and EU member states, including the post-communist member states of East-Central Europe, and the three Baltic states, unequivocally voted with the majority, the votes of the former Soviet republics were far more divided. This indicated that not many of these countries wanted to challenge Russia directly. As mentioned, two former Soviet states, Russia and Belarus, opposed the condemnation. Three Western-orientated post-Soviet republics (six, if we count Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), including the victim of the aggression, Ukraine (together with Georgia and Moldova) voted with the majority. The remaining seven countries expressed their position as follows: Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan abstained, whereas Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan did not participate in the vote.

National statements on the Ukraine invasion were made by: (i) those countries of East-Central Europe that perceived a security deficit and were directly concerned by the invasion; (ii) other EU and NATO member states in East-Central Europe; (iii) former Soviet republics that aligned their position with the West; and (iv) other former Soviet republics. There are a number of factors that have to be taken into account in order to gain a clear picture, such as: Who made the statement? When (how fast after the event) was the statement made? Were additional measures announced? And was the Russian aggression followed by public rallies and demonstrations of protest?

The Countries of East-Central Europe

In some countries of East-Central Europe, the country's leading politician (typically the President) made a substantive statement on the day the invasion occurred. Polish President Andrzej Duda used the first opportunity to condemn the attack in the morning of 24 February 2022, identifying it as a 'brutal, unprovoked and unjustified attack'. He also used the meeting of the so-called Bucharest Nine (comprising Bulgaria, the Czech Republic—Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia) in the following days to amplify his message in a multilateral framework that compelled other participants to join the host. Duda's words were unambiguous when he met Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky along with leaders of the Baltic States in April, stating: 'We know this history. We know what Russian occupation means. We know what Russian terrorism means'.

The President of Estonia, Alar Karis, also speaking on the day of the invasion, stated that the 'absurd excuses of Russia's leadership to attack Ukraine are false, groundless and criminal. They have been dreamed up so that President Putin can justify aggression against a nation who has never threatened Russia. This is how the Soviet Union attacked Finland in 1939, Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968'. The President of Romania, Klaus Johannis, in a Twitter message at 5 a.m. on 24 February, around one hour after Putin had announced the invasion, said: 'I strongly condemn on behalf of Romania the military aggression against Ukraine, another very grave breach of international law, of Ukraine's sovereignty and integrity'. In Bulgaria, Prime Minister Kiril Petkov dismissed the Minister of Defence, Stefan Yanev, on 28 February after he had posted on social media urging people 'not to use lightly the term "war" and to refer to the Ukraine invasion as a 'military operation' (similar to Russia's preferred terminology), instead.

In some cases the reaction was unexpected. Namely, the usually pro-Russian Czech President Miloš Zeman identified Russia's action as a 'crime'.

There was only one country among the EU and NATO member states of East-Central Europe that formulated its position in a more nuanced manner: Hungary. If one presents the position of the country's three highest public authorities, the President (effectively a ceremonial role), the Prime Minister, and the Speaker of the Parliament the picture is intriguing: The (outgoing) President, János Áder, who participated at the Bucharest Nine group meeting in Warsaw joined the condemnation there. The Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, who exercises very extensive powers, remained silent, whereas the Speaker of the Parliament László Kövér blamed the war on the reluctance of the West to listen to Russian claims and of a 'strategy of excluding Russia from Europe'. Such a variation of views demonstrated continuing public policy manipulation in advance of legislative elections in Hungary. Everybody could find the text he or she wanted to read from the Government. This was complemented by a simple juxtaposition of approach of the right-wing populist Government with that of the opposition. The message was clear: If Orbán's Government remained in power after the elections, Hungary would remain at peace and would not supply weapons to Ukraine, would not 'sleep-walk' into armed conflict, and would not allow the country's energy supply to be at risk.

The sharply contrasted positions of Poland and Hungary and the middle ground position (in reality, closer to that of Poland) taken by the Czech Republic and Slovakia, including the supply of armaments and equipment to Ukraine, resulted in a divide inside the four-member Visegrád Group. While Hungary and Poland are allies in fighting the EU for funds despite their poor delivery on rule of law and judicial independence, and in Hungary's case also on addressing corruption, they have been brought apart by their differing stances on the war in Ukraine. The longer the war lasts the more difficult it may be to return to a close relationship between Hungary and Poland, and indeed the war may threaten the future of the Visegrád Group itself.

The Post-Soviet Countries

Belarus

The positions in the post-Soviet states were far more divided, ranging from full-fledged backing to full rejection of the Russian aggression. According to international law, Russia was not the only aggressor. It shared responsibility with Belarus, notably inasmuch as Belarus made its territory available for the aggressor. This was clear in the early phase of the war when Russian troops entered Ukraine from Belarus and attacked Kyiv, approximately 400 km south of the border. Much later Belarus supplied Russia with materiel as Russia was running out of spare parts (an act which, by itself, would have made Belarus an aggressor). Meanwhile, Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka attempted some verbal distancing and expressed hope that the war would not last long. Belarus did not offer troops to support the Russian invasion, neither did Russia find such an act necessary, in large part because of domestic conditions and sentiment within Belarus. According to a survey by the Belarusian Analytical Workroom (BAW), only 11% of Belarusians would support 'the involvement of Belarusian troops' in Ukraine. At the same time, Belarusian society appeared to be equally divided in supporting and opposing 'the presence of Russian troops in Belarus'—an indication of substantial pro-Russia sympathies. In this context, any deaths in battle of Belarusian soldiers could threaten a destabilization of Lukashenka's regime. Widely reported cases of the sabotage of railway tracks in order to interrupt military deliveries also indicated the volatile nature of calm in the country. It was thus rational for Lukashenka to stay out of the war, not least as it permitted him to continue his long-standing approach of presenting Belarus as the most loyal ally of Russia, albeit one that had other foreign policy vectors, too.

At the other end of the spectrum was the position of the victim of the aggression, Ukraine, that had a sustained policy of demanding the support of other post-Soviet states, ranging from their staying out of the military conflict, providing verbal

reassurance, diplomatic support and, if possible more. However, Ukraine had to understand the limits of its post-Soviet partners. None wanted to openly challenge Russia, not even the most Western-leaning—other than the Baltic states.

Georgia

In Georgia, with its fresh and living memories of facing a Russian aggression, government declarations were careful and cautious, while civil society was engaged and people actively debated what the Ukraine invasion meant for their country. Georgia also readily accepted up to 50,000 de facto asylum seekers and migrants from Russia—representing about 25% of the total who left Russia, while others left for Türkiye (Turkey), Armenia and Israel. Although the overwhelming majority of Russian migrants to Georgia (mostly young, highly educated people) were intending to stay for a short time, the hospitality and the material support of the people indicated the public mood. Meanwhile, senior government officials 'declared their solidarity with Ukraine'. Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili 'condemned Moscow's actions and called for de-escalation', while President Salome Zurbishvili called Russia's invasion 'a joint tragedy for Ukraine and Georgia'. For some it was sufficient knowing that the troubled relations between Russia and Georgia and the economic dependence of Georgia on Russian imports (of energy and wheat), and on Russia as a recipient of Georgian exports (of wine and remittance-sending migrants), not to mention the popularity of the country among Russian tourists, meant that it made sense not to escalate any conflict with Russia. However, radical and progressive voices expressed dissatisfaction and were of the view that the supposed pragmatic position of the Government constituted a form of 'benevolent neutrality' that in effect favoured the aggressor. While the Government experimented with a balancing game, Zurbishvili kept emphasizing the close association the country had with Ukraine. Others claimed that expressions of open support for Ukraine would serve to strengthen westernizing tendencies in Georgia and to increase tensions with Russia.

Moldova

Despite the country's orientation of 'permanent neutrality' (under its 1994 Constitution), Moldova's worries about the Russia-Ukraine war eventually spilling over to its territory left no doubt about its alignment with the West. However, except for a few days when there were imminent concerns about a potential escalation of the conflict into Moldova (potentially commencing with the Russian annexation of the secessionist territory of Transnistria), the pro-EU Moldovan President Maia Sandu practised restraint in order not to provoke Russia, while still alluding to Russian threats of extending its war to Moldova's eastern border with Ukraine as constituting 'the most dangerous moment in Moldova's history' since the early 1990s. Russia exercises great power over Moldova by its supply of energy, including not only natural gas exports, but also the gas-produced electricity originating in Transnistria which supplies 80% of Moldova's electricity needs; within six months of the start of the war, energy prices had nearly quadrupled. Meanwhile, despite Transnistria's pro-Russian political leadership, it also has a business elite that takes full advantage of the increasing economic integration of Moldova (including Transnistria) into the EU market. At the same time, Moldova has accepted around 100,000 Ukrainian refugees, equivalent to around 3.5% of its own population. Despite the official position of neutrality, the current Government of Moldova and by many accounts the majority of its population would ultimately like to join the EU.

Armenia and Azerbaijan

These two countries, defined by their own conflictual history, have above all prioritized the factor of their bilateral relationship into account when considering their positions concerning the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The concerns related to eventual spill-over effects were running high. Armenia and Azerbaijan had fought their own wars (in 1988–94 and 2020) over the disputed territory of Nagorno Karabakh (Artsakh), located within Azerbaijan's internationally recognized borders, but inhabited by an ethnic Armenian majority population. Concerning Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Armenia expressed fears that Azerbaijan would take advantage of

global attention being focused on Ukraine in order to seize further territory of Nagornyi Karabakh (Armenian forces having already lost much of the territory they had gained in the 1988–94 conflict in that of 2020), eventually even ‘completing the job’ of regaining it in full. Azerbaijan, meanwhile, was reportedly unhappy with the presence of Russian peacekeepers in Nagornyi Karabakh (as noted by the International Crisis Group), as provided for by the 2020 ceasefire agreement. While neither Armenia nor Azerbaijan was ready to condone the Russian aggression in Ukraine, both, principally, monitor it through the prism of their own unresolved bilateral conflict.

Central Asia

The leaderships of the post-Soviet Central Asian states have had their fears of the negative impacts of the Ukraine war on their politics and economies. Given the close geographic, historical, and economic ties, the wellbeing of relations among Central Asian states and with Russia are inter-linked, but at times of trouble, the weaker and smaller states will bear a higher negative impact. It was clear that an event of the magnitude of the war in Ukraine would have substantial repercussions for the countries of the region.

Despite their vulnerabilities, Central Asian states have had generally good relations both with Russia and Ukraine and did not wish either of these relationships to be threatened, politically or economically, as a consequence of the war. Furthermore, the situation of individual countries differed and in some cases brought somewhat unexpected results. One commonality shared by all five countries of post-Soviet Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) is that their external relations have two strong vectors: Russia and the People’s Republic of China. The Russia vector has gained in strength since 2021, perhaps above all because of developments in Afghanistan. The entire region has perceived a deterioration of its security situation due to the de facto takeover of that country by the militant Islamist Taliban in August 2021. As Russia has been the main external security provider for the post-Soviet Central Asian states, so the increase in perceived threat from the Taliban has increased their reliance on Russia, in particular for the three Central Asian members of the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Uzbekistan, too, has developed strong bilateral military connections with Russia since President Shavkat Mirziyoyev came to power in 2016. In addition, Kazakhstan faced domestic disturbances (presented as having an international element) in January 2022 when the CSTO helped the Kazakhstani leadership to restore peace and stability by the dispatch of 3,600 troops, of which around 75% were Russian. None the less, not one of the five states supported Russia with its vote in the UN Security Council. Each abstained or was absent.

Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan continued with its introverted political course, something that was accentuated by the de facto dynastic change of leadership that occurred in March 2022, when President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov left office, and his son, Serdar was elected, as planned, as his successor. The new leader made his first international trip as President to Russia, and while in Moscow was given a medal of ‘Order of Friendship’ by President Putin. Unlike the Kazakhstani, Uzbekistani (and to a lesser extent, Kyrgyzstani) stances on the war—promoting peace, not recognizing the DNR and LNR, and showing some solidarity with Ukraine—Turkmenistan (like Tajikistan) remained strictly taciturn upon the outbreak of the war and avoided making statements for fear of undermining relations with Russia. This resulted in President Putin’s first foreign travel since the start of the Ukraine War taking place in late June, with visits to both Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, where the topics of discussion were broadly described as trade, security, and Afghanistan.

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the two smallest countries as far as territory, total and per capita GDP in the region, are heavily reliant upon the support and military assistance of Russia. Russia had held counter-terrorism exercises with the two countries (and Uzbekistan) after the regime change in

Afghanistan in 2021 and before the outbreak of the Ukraine war. Moreover, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan together have around 2m. migrant workers in Russia, and the contributions to their respective economies from remittances sent from abroad (based on 2020 World Bank data) were equivalent to 31% of GDP for Kyrgyzstan and 27% for Tajikistan—among the highest proportions globally. Furthermore, as Kyrgyzstan was trying to establish some domestic stability in the aftermath of a ‘revolutionary’ leadership change in late 2020, it did not want to challenge Russia in any manner, not least because of the belief that Russia had been implicated in a previous incident of ‘revolutionary’ regime change in Kyrgyzstan, in 2010. Periodic surveys have also shown that the populations of both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are among the most pro-Russia publics in the world. Based on survey data from a 2014 Canada-based M-Vector, 90% of Kyrgyzstanis and 85% of Tajikistanis surveyed had a ‘great deal’ or a ‘fair amount’ of confidence in the person of Russian President Putin.

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan deserve most attention among others due to their weight in the region, representing, according to World Bank data, over two-thirds of the 77m. inhabitants of post-Soviet Central Asia and over 81% of the region’s total GDP. Uzbekistan’s early communications on the Russia–Ukraine war showed both understanding of Russia’s motivations and its wish to restore peace as soon as possible. However, on 17 March 2022 when the country’s longstanding foreign minister, Abdulziz Kamilov, boldly stated to the country’s Senate: ‘the military actions and violence must be stopped right away. The Republic of Uzbekistan recognises Ukraine’s independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity . . . We do not recognise the Luhansk and Donetsk republics’. Two days later it was reported that Kamilov had fallen ill; he subsequently sought medical treatment abroad, and on 27 April was formally reported to have resigned as minister. More generally, the position of Uzbekistan has been based on the words of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who during his meeting with Putin on 21 March expressed his ‘understanding of the Russian side’s position and activities’ in Ukraine. As the position of Uzbekistan was one of attempting to keep some balance between the parties, its trajectory was rather narrow. It was for that reason that the Uzbekistani authorities used the term ‘military operation’ and thoroughly avoided the terms ‘invasion’ and ‘aggression’, in full accordance with Russian preferences, and enforced this carefully crafted terminology in the Uzbekistani media. Those who condemned Russia’s war of aggression were summoned by the state security services and briefed about the position to be followed. This is certainly a softer approach than the one that would have been applied in the earlier history of independent Uzbekistan. Foreign countries showed understanding of Uzbekistan’s approach, with the US Ambassador to the country noting that ‘Uzbekistan has to balance a lot of interests’.

Kazakhstan took a similar position to that expressed by Kamilov, but at a higher profile venue. Comments made by President Qasim-Jomart Toqayev in Russia, at meetings in Moscow with President Putin on 16 May 2022, and at the St Petersburg International Economic Forum one day later, left no doubt about Kazakhstan’s stance. In St Petersburg, while referring to the UN Charter as the basis of international law, Toqayev said: ‘It has been calculated that if the right of nations to self-determination was realized in reality on the entire globe, over 500 or 600 states would emerge on Earth, instead of the 193 states that are currently part of the UN. Of course that would be chaos. For this reason we do not recognize Taiwan, or Kosovo, or South Ossetia, or Abkhazia. And in all likelihood, this principle will be applied to quasi-state entities, which, in our opinion, Luhansk and Donetsk are’ (quoted in Lillis).

Aside from the worries that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine might have caused a precedent that could pose a threat to the territorial integrity of Kazakhstan—which shares a 7,500-km long border with the Russia and which counts 3.5m. ethnic Russians among its own citizens (second only to Ukraine among the post-communist states)—Kazakhstan’s relative assertiveness on the Ukraine war as compared to its

neighbours may reflect the memory of remarks made by Putin in 2014, when he had stated that ‘the Kazakhs never had any statehood’, and while giving credit to Kazakhstani leadership for ‘[creating] a state in a territory that had never had a state before’, he also said that it is to the Kazakhstani public’s benefit to ‘remain in the greater Russian world’—remarks that were not well received by the Kazakhstani public and Government. In March, Kazakhstan had allowed a rare expression of public protest, in the form of an anti-Ukraine war demonstration of 3,000 participants in Almaty. Toqaev has also been one of the few post-Soviet leaders to have spoken with Ukrainian President Zelensky and offered to mediate between him and Putin.

Despite its negative impacts, the war in Ukraine also presents some opportunities for countries that are capable of supplying those strategic commodities of which Russia has significantly reduced its overall exports due to Western sanctions, such as grain, cooking oil, natural gas and crude oil. It is, however, necessary to be cognizant of the fact that Russia does not welcome such an approach. This was indicated by the Russian reaction when in July 2022 Kazakhstan offered to increase its exports of oil via the Russian Black Sea port of Novorossiysk, through which it had been exporting the bulk (two-thirds) of its total oil exports. A court in Russia imposed a one-month ban on Kazakhstan’s plans, having determined that the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (made up of eight European, Russian and Kazakhstani oil companies) had allegedly ‘committed environmental violations’. The ban had come only a day after President Toqaev had offered to increase oil exports to the EU as a means of ‘stabilizing the global energy market’. One analyst estimated the ensuing financial loss to the Kazakhstani economy at around US \$500m.

As the war has continued with no end in sight, the Central Asian states have drawn several conclusions: that Russia will be more than ever absorbed in Ukraine (and its broader rivalry with the political West), and may possibly supply less energy, and due to the direct costs of the military conflict and the contraction of the Russian economy, provide fewer resources overall, to Central Asia. This was reflected at the summit meeting of the five Central Asian Presidents held in Cholpon Ata, Kyrgyzstan, in July 2022. Their considerations reflected changing economic and geopolitical realities that would provide other players with more active involvement in the region. As the West has weakened its engagement in Central Asia since the mid-2010s, thus a rebalancing of relations offers strong opportunities for China, which it can be expected to take, its mounting domestic economic problems notwithstanding.

SECURITY ASSISTANCE TO UKRAINE BY THE POST-COMMUNIST STATES

Although the armed forces of Ukraine have become far more modern, better trained, organized, motivated and better equipped since the high intensity phase of the war in the Donbas of 2014–15, the asymmetry between the Russian and Ukrainian armed forces—simply due to the disparity in their numbers (of approximately 4.5 to 1 in personnel) had initially led to a shared conclusion that Ukraine could only temporarily resist the Russian onslaught that commenced in February 2022. Two factors fundamentally changed this assumption: First, Russia’s grand strategic misjudgment of expecting an ‘easy ride’ and an absence of resistance; and second, the external support and sustained high-technology military assistance provided to Ukraine by the West, including Türkiye. The greater share of this assistance came from the militarily strongest and best performing Western states by way of armaments and equipment, financial resources, training, etc. Some of those countries, such as Canada and the UK, had already been involved in providing military training to Ukraine since 2014. When the war broke out in February 2022 Putin was apparently well aware of the danger that Ukraine would be backed by the West. In his televised address announcing the invasion he said: ‘I would now like to say something very important for those who may be tempted to interfere in these developments from the outside. No matter who tries to stand in our way or all the more so create threats for our country and our

people, they must know that Russia will respond immediately’. This warning did not, however, deter the West from helping Ukraine, which has been fighting an aggression against which the UN Charter provides solid grounds of collective self-defence.

The countries we have addressed in this chapter can be clearly divided into two groups. The post-Soviet states, understandably, did not provide weapons and ammunition to Ukraine—albeit, when it comes to ‘human security’, early in the war, Kazakhstan reportedly delivered 100 metric tons of humanitarian goods, mainly food, to Ukraine, while Georgia, in turn, served as the post-communist country hosting the greatest quantity of anti-war activists in the post-Soviet region, intellectuals, and professionals fleeing Russia. The post-communist countries of East-Central Europe, on the contrary, did provide military support. Many, including Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia supported Ukraine in either or both of two ways—either by serving as a transit bridgehead from which Western military assistance entered Ukraine (Poland, above all others, served this role)—or by supplying Soviet-made weapons and ammunition from their reserves. This helped in the early phase of the war as the Ukrainian armed forces were trained on identical equipment and hence they did not require retraining. This also permitted a gradual modernization of the arsenals of the East-Central European countries that could finally phase out their Soviet-era equipment. Later, some of these countries started to supply modern Western weaponry to Ukraine, as a major, if at times uncertain, modernization of East-Central European arsenals ensued. Of the EU and NATO member states in East-Central Europe, Hungary was the only country that neither provided Ukraine with armaments and ammunition from its own reserves, nor allowed military transit through its territory.

As far as transit of military items to Ukraine via East-Central Europe is concerned, Russia has had to accept the Western interpretation of NATO’s founding Washington Treaty that was not formally declared, but which has certainly been communicated to the Russian authorities: Namely, that if Western military assistance is destroyed by Russia inside Ukraine it would not bring about a NATO Article 5 contingency that would initiate a response on the basis of ‘collective defence’—when ‘an attack against one Ally is considered as an attack against all Allies’. However, were military facilities to be attacked inside NATO territory (e.g. at a transit airport within Poland), such a development would legitimize NATO’s collective defence response. It appears that the Russian administration has respected this interpretation.

CONCLUSIONS

The launching of the war by Russia contradicted elementary logic and was based on miscalculations by President Putin and some of his immediate proxies. It was surprising despite the predictions of its coming a few months earlier. Six months after the invasion, no end to the conflict was in sight. For Russia, the termination of the war would be conditional on a military victory that resulted in occupying a territory larger than that which it (de facto) controlled since 2014 (i.e. incorporating Ukrainian territories beyond the Crimean peninsula and those areas of the Donbas under DNR and LNR control prior to the new conflict). By late August 2022 Russia controlled over 20% of Ukraine, including Crimea, almost the entire territory of Luhansk Oblast and a large portion of Donetsk Oblast. In addition, it has occupied numerous southern regions, including Zaporizhzhya and Kherson. If these territories were to remain under Russian control, their extent and strategic value could be sufficient to permit a Russian victory to be declared. However, none of the territories were firmly in Russian hands, as Ukraine was determined to fight and regain control over them.

Ukraine’s position was firm in its resolve at the beginning of the war, that only the full re-establishment of the territorial integrity of Ukraine would be acceptable—including over those territories that were declared as constitutional entities of the Russian Federation in 2014 (Crimea and Sevastopol) or that were de facto Russian controlled, as in the Donbas. However, at a later stage President Zelensky contemplated holding a

referendum on ceding part of the territory of Ukraine and seeking a compromise on that basis with Russia. Subsequently, Ukraine returned to its original position of seeking to restore its full territorial integrity, a position clearly unacceptable to Russia. As there is no overlap between the positions of the two countries, no ceasefire, let alone restoration of peace, can be expected to result. Ukraine is fighting for its freedom, independence and national identity, and this is unlikely to change in a way acceptable to Russia in the near future.

It is the expectation of many in the West that Russia will massively weaken, contract economically and then in the end a change of leadership may result, either by a 'palace coup' or a *putsch*, which could be a precursor to peace. It was thought that a public mobilization demanding such an outcome could result from a combination of economic hardship and massive casualties. By August 2022 severe hardship was not yet present, and the Russian media were successfully hiding the realities of the conflict from the people as far as losses and human suffering are concerned. National television channels do not report on casualties, whereas local channels report individual cases in the region from which soldiers originate, typically of one or two persons a day. However, it is often forgotten from abroad that the war is relatively popular in Russia and as long as this underlying fact does not change another Russian leader may not represent a new policy, even if the coming to power of a new leader might make brokering a deal easier. At present, it is impossible to imagine more than a *modus vivendi* with Putin. In particular, as Russia definitely has not lost the war of aggression it started.

The West, as well, appears not too eager to end this war and has rallied its publics to ensure continued military and economic aid to Ukraine. The war appears to be serving an opportunity for the West to weaken Russia, a once-leading rival, and that too without the direct involvement of Western militaries. The Western powers appear to have calculated that time may be on their side and in the end both Ukraine and its Western benefactors will be victorious. But at whose cost? This important point was posed, ironically, by the Russian ambassador Vasilii Nebenzya at the UN Security Council in August 2022 when he stated: 'The West is ready to do anything to preserve its hegemony. For the sake of this, Ukraine was sacrificed, turned into a training ground for a proxy war with Russia until the last Ukrainian'. But Russia was also playing for time and hoped that Ukrainians would be ready for compromise due to the substantial human suffering that Russia was inflicting; it also hoped that the West would get tired of supporting Ukraine and would not be ready to accept further sacrifices when inflation rises, and winter (and the prospect of energy shortages or rationing) arrives. In sum, at August 2022 it would be an illusion to expect a sudden change favourable to Russia or to the West.

Professor Barry Posen of Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the USA has argued that pro-Ukrainians envision 'two pathways to victory': One is Russia's outright military defeat, and the other is a 'path run[ning] through Moscow', in that a combination of 'economic pressure' and Russian battlefield losses would either convince Putin to end the war, himself, or force him out of power in favour of a new leader willing to do so. Posen argues, however, that such scenarios are based on 'shaky foundations', given that as it stands, despite its losses, the Russian army remained 'strong enough', its economy 'autonomous enough' and Putin's political grip 'tight enough'. Thus, the most likely outcome of the conflict, if it were to continue, was: 'not a Ukrainian triumph but a long, bloody, and ultimately indecisive war', that could potentially escalate further, with not only massive human and economic losses but

even the 'potential use of nuclear weapons'. For both political realists, such as Posen, and left-wing critics of status quo politics, 'there is only one responsible thing to do: seek a diplomatic end to the war now'. As Kazakhstan's President Toqayev had remarked, one week after hostilities had broken out in February, 'A bad peace is better than a good war'.

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