



The Case for a Security Guarantee for Ukraine

Description

All wars end. Eventually, the war between Russia and Ukraine will, too. The time to begin preparing for peace is not after the last gun falls silent but now, as the conflict rages. Long before they had triumphed in World War II, Allied leaders began to contemplate the shape of the future peace. At conferences in Tehran, Yalta, Potsdam, and elsewhere, they discussed proposals and made plans to create international institutions that could prevent another war. Today, a similar effort is needed. Western leaders must develop security mechanisms and consider strategies to assist Ukraine and manage future relations with Russia.

Ukraine must be brought into the democratic world and strengthened so that it can resist future Russian aggression. It also needs some type of Western military protection. But policymakers need to think more broadly about Russia's role in the postwar order, as well. The nation needs a constructive vision, not just a plan to rein in its worst impulses. If after the war ends Russia is permanently banished from the international community, it will emerge, furious and humiliated, as a renewed threat. [Putin](#), his war machine, and his imperial mindset must be defeated, and Ukraine must be hardened against any possible future aggression. At the same time, however, the West must also try to secure a long-term peace with Moscow.

Such an outcome will require both deterring Russia and simultaneously offering it a path to redemption—or at least to peaceful coexistence. One way to do so would be to create a new security community—call it the Atlantic-Asian Security Community—composed of many NATO members, as well as Ukraine, its allies, and any neutral states that wished to join. Once Putin's regime falls and is replaced by a government committed to peace, Russia should be eligible to join, as well.

The AASC could have a long-term purpose similar to NATO's, but in the short term its main task would be to supervise and legitimize the indefinite presence of Western military troops on Ukrainian soil. These troops—from NATO and non-NATO countries alike—would monitor Russian troop activity, help train Ukraine's armed forces, assist with demobilization, monitor any future peace deal, and act as a tripwire to prevent fresh Russian aggression. This mission could be led by a non-NATO officer, perhaps from India or another country seen as neutral, but it must include U.S. troops. Nothing short of American boots on the ground can ensure Ukraine's democratic future.

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

An end to the war is likely a long way off, in large part because both Russia and Ukraine are confident that victory is still possible. Russia believes that the resolve of Ukraine's Western backers will break before its own, which will deprive Kyiv of the materiel and money that it needs to continue the conflict. Ukraine disagrees, believing that the steadfastness of its citizens and its partners in the West—combined with the popularity and persuasiveness of President Volodymyr Zelensky—will enable it to retake the land that Russia illegally seized. With neither side ready to compromise, the fighting is likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

But things can change fast, and the world needs to be ready. To the extent that Western policymakers are discussing a strategy for ending the war, they are largely focused on NATO expansion, as well as Russian containment through economic isolation. The former is wrongheaded and the latter is insufficient. Further extending NATO would virtually guarantee an antagonistic relationship not just with Putin but with all plausible future Russian leaders. Both the pro-NATO diplomat George Kennan and the pro-Western Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev warned against expanding the alliance when new countries began joining in the 1990s. CIA Director William Burns gave a similar warning about Ukraine in particular in 2008, when he was serving as the U.S. ambassador to Russia, writing in a diplomatic cable that "Ukrainian entry into NATO is the brightest of all redlines for the Russian elite (not just Putin). I have yet to find anyone who views Ukraine in NATO as anything other than a direct challenge to Russian interests." A stable peace in which Moscow is truly invested cannot be built on this option.

The United States and its allies and partners need to think creatively about how to guarantee Ukraine's security beyond the paper promises that have been made in the past and trashed by Moscow, and beyond proposals to turn Ukraine into a "porcupine" by arming it to the teeth. Some type of Western and non-Western military presence on Ukrainian soil is needed to ensure the nation's defense. The question is how to structure it, embed it within existing or new security organizations, and ensure its efficacy.

NATO's original purposes were summarized by its first secretary-general, Lord Hastings Ismay, in the alliance's early days. It was designed, he said in 1949, "to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down." The world now needs an agile body that keeps Putin out—but that can eventually draw reform-minded Russians in, alongside the Americans, to keep Ukraine and its neighbors safe. To clearly distinguish it from NATO, the AASC should not be called a treaty organization and should not obligate members to come to one another's defense in case of attack. Yet it should still strive to deter Russian aggression by deploying international military personnel to Ukraine as long as Moscow remains hostile.

The AASC would need to carry out strategic planning, conduct regular military exercises, and share classified materials among its members. In addition to safeguarding Ukraine in the event of renewed war, it could be tasked with other missions, should its members elect to do so. For instance, it might help enforce a future peace deal between Armenia and Azerbaijan, assist with migrant crises, or address terrorist threats.

In time, the AASC could perhaps even come to exceed NATO's importance for European security.

But in the near term, the AASC's main purpose should be to supervise and coordinate the deployment of at least several thousand international troops as trainers and monitors on Ukrainian soil. These troops would hail from the United States and other European and Asian AASC members. The presence of Western military personnel in Ukraine is essential for deterrence. Troops from the United States and other NATO countries should deploy as a part of the international force, and the United States should be prepared to come to their—and thus Ukraine's—defense in the event of attack.

Two approaches to forming such a force might be considered. One would be to create a peace implementation force, approved by the UN General Assembly rather than the UN Security Council, that Moscow could neither veto nor stonewall. The force might be given a multiyear mandate to assist with demobilization, to patrol the Russian-Ukrainian border, and perhaps to monitor the fair treatment of minorities on Ukrainian soil to reassure Moscow and prevent conflict.

An alternative approach would be to place the international force directly under the AASC. The force would deploy only with the approval of the Ukrainian government, and its day-to-day tasks would be training Ukraine's military and police. It should be deployed throughout much of the country so as to deter Russia from encroaching on Ukrainian territory. The training forces should also be in regular contact with NATO combat forces based in the eastern regions of member states' territory. This would ensure that rapid-reaction forces could be sent to protect trainers if need be. Any probing attacks against training personnel would be investigated and, if Moscow was complicit, punished either with economic measures or potentially by stationing Western combat forces in Ukraine until tensions subside. This force would ideally be headed by a general from a nation such as India that has managed to maintain passable relations with Western countries as well as with Russia.

As soon as Putin departs the Kremlin and is replaced by a nonthreatening leader, Russia would become eligible to join the AASC. NATO's eastern members might be skeptical of Russia and seek to block an invitation. But the United States has often had to convince reticent allies to accept more members—for instance, during the rounds of expansion to eastern Europe under U.S. Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. Notable exceptions to this rule include France's and the United Kingdom's opposition to accepting Ukraine and Georgia in 2008 and Turkey's current objection to Sweden's membership. But the Baltic states and Poland, which are highly dependent on U.S. security guarantees and interested in good relations with the United States, would be unlikely to take a page from Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's playbook, especially since they would be consulted

about the purpose of the AASC at its creation.

Should Moscow apply for membership, AASC countries should consider Russia's military posture near Ukraine's borders, its willingness to recognize unconditionally the sovereignty of Ukraine, and its territorial disputes with other countries when making a decision. The AASC would not replace or weaken NATO, even if Russia ultimately joined. Moscow would have to understand that reality. Its aggression against Ukraine and recent history of violent behavior make NATO's continued existence in its current form nonnegotiable. That said, if Russia is on the road to postimperial rule, the AASC would take pains not to exclude the country's new leadership or to reopen old wounds. In time, the AASC could perhaps even come to exceed NATO's importance for European security. But that day would have to be seen as decades off.

WAR WITH RUSSIA

An AASC-led international force would both harden Ukraine's defenses and seek to deter any revival of Russian imperial aggression. The force's mission would not be to defeat Russia militarily but to uphold the sanctity of international borders. If necessary, reinforcements from NATO members could help to defend Ukraine. By dint of its makeup—composed of U.S. and other Western troops—the training force would virtually guarantee that the United States and the rest of NATO would enter any future war if Russia were to renew its attacks on Ukraine or its other neighbors. It would thus be a highly credible tripwire.

At some point later in 2023, or perhaps 2024, war may begin to seem futile to Moscow and Kyiv, as some variant of a stalemate settles in. Or Ukraine might succeed in pushing Russian forces out of its territory. In either case, Western policymakers need to be ready with a new security vision for the region. The issues are too complex to be improvised on the spot if and when peace talks begin. Moreover, a new security vision may improve the prospects for peace by showing how both Ukraine and post-Putin Russia can see their core interests protected and upheld. Debates must begin now, so that concepts can be discussed and developed before negotiations begin. Otherwise, they will have little chance of success. Ending this war will require a clear and cogent vision for a new security architecture for the region. It must be ready for when the opportunity to end the shooting arises.

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