# Why Ukraine Fights

## Proceedings of a Panel Discussion at Dickinson College

Edited by Piero Maria Pedone and Michele Chiaruzzi

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Photo by Korina Dordević Chiaruzzi, 25 March 2026

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## Preface

On 25 March 2026, Dickinson College hosted Professor Michele Chiaruzzi of the University of Bologna for a faculty panel on "Why Ukraine Fights" as its war with Russia enters its fifth year. Sponsored by the Departments of Political Science, International Studies, Italian Studies, and History, and by the Center for Global Study and Engagement, the panel started with a presentation by Professor Chiaruzzi, who is also the Sammarinese ambassador to Ukraine, having previously held the same position for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Other participants in the panel included Professors Andy Wolff, chair of International Studies and a renowned expert on NATO and on US foreign policy, Russell Bova, who is working on a book on the implications of the Ukraine War for theorizing about international relations and who teaches a class on the same topic, and R. Craig Nation, who between 1996 and 2017 was the Director of Russian and Eurasian Studies at the U.S. Army War College in Carlisle. The panel concluded with a lively, interactive back-and-forth between the panelists, as they responded to questions from students, faculty members, and several non-Dickinson affiliated audience members. The event made for a timely, insightful, and often inspiring set of reflections on the purposes and goals of the conflict, as well as somber reflections on the difficulties of reaching a settlement.

Our guest, Professor Chiaruzzi, opened the discussion by arguing that Ukraine's war is not merely in Europe, but of Europe. That is, his central argument was that defending Ukrainian sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity is crucial if Europe is to maintain its self-understanding as bastion

of freedom and democracy in the contemporary world. Moreover, the project of supranational and perhaps even continental integration cannot proceed if the EU, and Europe as a whole, permits the annexation of a nation-state as the result of a war of aggression. Thus, Professor Chiaruzzi notes that the war is constitutive of a new European space, understood in both spatial and institutional terms. As he puts it, "Ukraine defends its political space in order to embrace a wider one: the European space of cooperation and freedom." As Professor Chiaruzzi argues, this space includes the European common market, as well as cultural production and law. Professor Chiaruzzi also noted the long friendship between his country, the Republic of San Marino, and the United States, displaying both a letter written by Abraham Lincoln to the Captain's Regent of San Marino in 1861, and the Sammarinese Statue of Liberty, located in Liberty Square in San Marino in inaugurated in 1876, ten years earlier than its larger American counterpart. The longstanding friendship between these two nations served to underscore Professor Chiaruzzi's theme of the importance of international cooperation.

Following this, Professor Wolff reflected on many of the accomplishments of the European defense of Ukraine, notably the remarkable degree of military and financial support offered, and the rapid escalation in military spending that this has necessitated. Andy calls these changes "truly transformational," and notes that they sit alongside new security-focused institutions and decision-making structures. However, he also strikes a note of caution, especially because of the current rift in transatlantic relations during the second Trump Administration. He adds that Europe is not fully cohesive politically and that there are important unanswered questions about the sustainability of its financial support for Ukraine at a time of declining budget

revenues. Professor Bova continued this more somber note, focusing especial attention on the challenges involved in reaching a post-war settlement. Applying the lens of both international relations theory and conflict studies, Bova notes that wars tend to terminate in either decisive victory or negotiated settlement (or temporary ceasefire), and shows that the former appears unlikely, while the latter faces several stumbling blocks. In particular, he focuses on how war termination is a two-level game in which negotiations occur simultaneously between the respective governments and between each government and its domestic constituencies. This raises tricky challenges, especially with regard to any territorial settlement of the dispute. Also important is the challenge of showing that any commitments made in the settlement are credible ones that each government will keep to.

Finally, Professor Nation examines the conflict from the Russian perspective, arguing that any peace agreement is impossible without taking its security concerns seriously. He dates the start of the fighting to 2014, following the Maidan Uprising, which raised concerns in Russia about the possibility of a Western-allied Ukraine positioning armed forces and missiles along its border just 250 miles from Moscow. Professor Nation echoes the concerns that territorial disputes make any resolution of the conflict difficult. He concludes that both strategic fear and cultural resentment of Ukrainian nationalism motivate Russia to continue the conflict, despite its cost in human, financial, and military terms. Whether one views these fears as justified or not, Nation argues, any long-term resolution of the war is impossible if we do not understand why Russia fights.

*Toby Reiner*

## Introduction

Putting together these proceedings has been, to be honest, one of the most demanding and rewarding things I have ever done as a student. Organizing a panel of this kind, identifying the right scholars, coordinating across institutions and schedules, moderating a live discussion, and then working to transform spoken remarks into a written publication that does justice to what was said is a different kind of intellectual labor than writing a paper or preparing for an exam. It asks for something else: sustained attention, organizational patience, and a real responsibility toward the people whose words you are handling. I hope the result reflects the seriousness with which I have tried to approach that responsibility.

The panel that gave rise to these proceedings took place at Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, on Wednesday, March 25, 2026, from 5 to 7 p.m. It was convened and moderated by Piero Maria Pedone, with the participation of Russell Bova, Michele Chiaruzzi, Craig Nation, and Andrew Wolff. It grew out of the academic relationship between Dickinson and the University of Bologna, two institutions with a long-standing tradition of collaboration. As an overseas teaching assistant from Bologna spending the year at Dickinson, I found myself in an unusual position: neither fully an outsider nor fully an insider to either institution, but perhaps for that reason well placed to see what a conversation between them might look like. This panel was my attempt to create that conversation, and to do so around one of the most consequential questions of our time.

The question is not a simple one. The war in Ukraine is now in its fourth year since Russia's full-scale invasion of February 2022, and in its eleventh since the fighting first began in Donbas in 2014 and it has generated an enormous volume of commentary, analysis, and debate. And yet, despite the quantity of words written and spoken about it, certain fundamental questions remain genuinely open and genuinely difficult. Why is Ukraine fighting, and what exactly is it fighting for? Why is Russia fighting, and what does it want? What would it take to bring this war to an end, and what are the obstacles that stand in the way? And what has this war already done to Europe in terms of its institutions, its security architecture, its self-understanding, and what might it yet do?

These were the questions I put to the panel. They are not questions with easy answers. The scholars assembled here approach them from different disciplinary traditions, different methodological commitments, and in at least one case, from direct practical experience in the field. What emerged from the discussion was not a single unified argument but something more valuable: a set of carefully reasoned, sometimes complementary, sometimes contending perspectives that together illuminate the full complexity of the conflict.

It is worth pausing, before introducing the contributions themselves, to say something about why this particular set of questions matters and why it is not self-evident how to answer them, despite the apparent clarity of the facts on the ground. Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 was, in the most immediate sense, a military event: an army crossed an international border and began attacking a sovereign state. But it was also, from the first, something more than that. It was a

challenge to the post-Cold War order in Europe, to the principle of territorial integrity that had underwritten that order, and to the idea that the continent had moved beyond the era of major war. Within days of the invasion, it was clear that what was happening in Ukraine was not only Ukraine's problem. Europe as a whole was implicated, both practically and symbolically making it Europe's war, a concept I will say more about below and that Michele Chiaruzzi elaborates in his contribution.

The response that followed, such as sanctions of unprecedented scope and scale, massive financial and military support for Ukraine, the rearmament of European states, the historic decision of Sweden and Finland to abandon their long traditions of neutrality and join NATO, confirmed that something genuinely transformative was underway. But transformation is not the same as resolution. The war continues. Its outcome remains uncertain. The questions of how it might end, on what terms, and at what further cost, are as live today as they were in the weeks after the invasion. These proceedings do not claim to answer those questions definitively. What they offer, instead, is a rigorous and multi-perspectival engagement with them.

## Structure of the Discussion

The panel was structured to open with the deepest political question and move progressively toward the strategic and analytical. The discussion began with the question of what Ukraine is actually fighting for: not simply survival, but something more specific and more far-reaching, bound up with the meaning of European integration itself. From there, the discussion moved

to the question of Russian motivation by telling not simply what Russia is doing, but why, and what that implies for the prospects of peace. It then turned to the transformation that the war has already produced in European security: the concrete, measurable changes in defense spending, alliance membership, institutional design, and political will that have occurred since 2022. It concluded with a rigorous examination of the theoretical and practical challenges of ending the war, drawing on concepts from the study of war termination to explain why a settlement has so far proved elusive despite the evident costs of continuing to fight.

The panel was preceded by a brief interactive exercise in which the audience was invited to share, in real time, the words and images that came to mind when they thought of the war in Ukraine. The responses, displayed collectively and anonymously, served as a kind of collective baseline, a snapshot of how the conflict registers in the minds of people who are engaged with it but are not specialists. At the end of the session, the audience returned to those initial responses and reflected on them again. This was a small exercise in what it might mean to think more carefully about something that is easy to feel strongly about.

A note on these proceedings as a document: the texts published here are edited versions of spoken remarks. The panelists spoke from notes, from prepared texts, or from a combination of the two, and the resulting transcripts carried all the features of live speech such as digressions, repetitions, asides, technical difficulties with presentation equipment, and the natural rhythm of people thinking aloud in front of an audience. The editorial work involved in producing this publication has consisted primarily in removing those features while leaving the substance of each contribution entirely intact. No argument has

been altered, no terminology changed, no position softened or sharpened. What appears here is what was said, rendered into prose suitable for reading rather than listening.

## The Contributions

Michele Chiaruzzi opens the discussion with what is in many ways its most ambitious contribution: an argument that Ukraine's war is not merely a war in Europe but, in a precise and analytically defensible sense, Europe's war. He claims that this is a war of national independence pursued through the logic of supranational integration, and one that is already redrawing the political and institutional map of the continent. Drawing on European treaty law, constitutional history, and political theory, Chiaruzzi traces the deep roots of Ukraine's European vocation and argues that any adequate understanding of the conflict must engage with what Ukraine is fighting for, not only what it is fighting against.

Craig Nation turns the lens toward Russia, pressing the question that is at once the most important and the most consistently underexamined in Western discourse about the war: not what Russia is doing, but why. Tracing the evolution of Russian war aims from the Maidan through the Minsk Agreements to the full-scale invasion of 2022 and the failed negotiations since, Nation argues that any path toward peace will require a serious engagement with Russian motivations, the strategic fear of NATO enlargement, the cultural resentments stoked by Ukrainian ultranationalism, whether or not one finds those motivations legitimate. His is a deliberately uncomfortable argument, offered in the conviction that discomfort is sometimes the price of clarity.

Andrew Wolff follows with a systematic account of what the war has already produced on the European side: the unprecedented sanctions regime imposed on Russia, the historic levels of financial and military support for Ukraine, the surge in NATO defense spending that has, for the first time in the alliance's history, brought nearly every member state to or above the two-percent GDP target, and the institutional innovations including new security councils, new debt mechanisms, new nuclear sharing arrangements that would have seemed unthinkable a decade ago. Wolff is careful to balance this picture of transformation with an honest account of the tensions and uncertainties that remain: political divisions within Europe, the fracturing of the transatlantic relationship, the shadow war Russia is conducting on European soil, and the unresolved question of Europe's vision for how the war should end.

Russell Bova concludes the formal presentations with a contribution that is, in some respects, the most technically precise of the four: an application of concepts from international relations theory and the study of war termination to the question of why peace has so far proved elusive. Working through the concepts of informational asymmetry, the two-level game, and credible commitment, Bova shows that the obstacles to a settlement are not simply a matter of political will or bad faith, but reflect structural features of the conflict that would make agreement difficult even if both sides wanted it. He concludes with a discussion of the porcupine strategy, the argument that the surest guarantee of Ukraine's long-term security may lie not in formal security commitments but in making the cost of future aggression prohibitive.

**Acknowledgments**

The idea for this panel originated on a summer day on the Italian Adriatic coast in the mind of Angelo Pedone, my father, and was immediately endorsed by my mother, Vincenzina. I therefore wish to thank my parents for their inspiration. This panel would not have been possible without the support of several departments and institutions at Dickinson College. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Center for Global Studies and Engagement, the Department of Political Science, the Department of International Studies, the Department of History, and the Italian Department, whose backing made the event possible and gave it the institutional grounding it deserved. The interdisciplinary character of this discussion is in no small part a reflection of that collective support. I am grateful above all to the four scholars who accepted my invitation and brought to the discussion the full weight of their expertise, their experience, and their intellectual honesty.

Finally, I would like to thank the audience that afternoon, whose questions and reflections reminded me, once again, that the best reason to organize a conversation like this one is not to produce answers, but to make the questions harder to avoid.

*Piero Maria Pedone*

Carlisle, 21 April, 2026

## Why Ukraine Fights

*Michele Chiaruzzi*

Please allow me to thank our convener and moderator, Piero Maria Pedone, all the participants, Professors Bova, Wolff, and Nation, the Center for Global Studies and Engagement, and the Department of History, Italian, International Studies, and Political Science. It is a great honor to be part of your community today. By way of introduction, as a sign of gratitude to Dickinson College, and to begin on a lighter note of peace allowed me to present two historical symbols of friendship linking my country, the Republic of San Marino, and the United States of America. The first is the letter from President Abraham Lincoln to the Captain's Regent of San Marino. It was sent on May 7th, 1861, in response to the offer of Sammarinese citizenship. Its most striking lines read: "Although your dominion is small, your state is nevertheless one of the most honored in all history"[1]. The second is the Statue of Liberty, located in Liberty Square in San Marino, inaugurated in 1876[2], 10 years before the more famous and bigger one in New York. Therefore, if you ever feel overwhelmed by the size of the Statue of Liberty in New York, you are always welcome to visit our– same ideals, shorter waiting lines. So, why is Ukraine fighting?

[1] For visual reference, see Image 1 included in the appendix.
[2] For visual reference, see Image 2 included in the appendix.

## I. Ukraine's War of Defense and Resistance

Ukraine fights because it is defending its political space from a great aggressive power. It therefore resists the war of conquest launched by President Vladimir Putin on February 24, 2022, to subjugate Ukraine and to impose a new Russian sphere of influence. The problem since then, requiring a political-military solution, is that Ukraine — a founding state of the United Nations, the largest European country associated with and a candidate for the European Union — has been attacked by the largest state in the world and dismembered by forces bent on imposing their own dominion. Since 2022, Ukraine is fighting a war of defense and resistance to repel Russia.

Yet Ukraine's war is also something else, and much more. It is a war of independence through integration with the European Union. In other words, it is a war for national survival that is to be achieved through supranational integration. It is not just a war in Europe — it is Europe's war.

## II. Why This Is Europe's War: An Analytical Framework

If the Yugoslav wars of disintegration (1991–1999) were the last wars in Europe, marked by division and rupture among European states and the total irrelevance of the European Union, then Ukraine's war of European integration is, in a specific political sense, Europe's war. This claim rests on a clearly defined analytical framework.

It is European because Ukraine is fighting for its national identity understood as a European identity, asserting its political subjecthood as part of a shared political subjecthood — the

European Union. It is Europe's war because, for the first time in history, a European state is fighting with the essential support of the European Union and the collective assistance of European states variously linked to it, including through the European Political Community. They are all committed to sustaining Ukraine across cultural, political, economic, diplomatic, and military domains. It is European because, for the first time in history, European Union enlargement involves a state at war that is both associated with and a candidate for membership in the Union. It is Europe's war because, in European political perception, Ukraine is Europe's first line of defense against Russia. Two weeks ago, addressing the European Union Ambassadors Conference in Brussels, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, described Ukraine as "a proud European nation that continues to fight for our freedoms, both as a future member of our Union and as Europe's first line of defense."

Ukraine is therefore fighting for its sovereignty and, at the same time, to share that sovereignty within European integration. It fights in order to belong to a united Europe and to share within the European political space its renewed sovereignty, rather than claiming the old national 'absolute sovereignty'. This is moreover a sovereignty already shared in practice with the European Union, forged in war as a claim of present belonging and as an ultimate purpose of peace.

## III. The Historical and Constitutional Roots of Ukraine's European Vocation

Two foundational facts bear recalling. First, Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity in 2014 was sparked by then-President Viktor Yanukovych's refusal, under Russian pressure, to conclude an association agreement with the European Union. Since then, the revolution has been known as the Euromaidan — 'maidan' meaning 'square' in Ukrainian. Second, Ukraine has enshrined in the preamble of its constitution "the European identity of the Ukrainian people and the irreversibility of the European and Euro-Atlantic course of Ukraine." EU member states recognize Ukraine's claim and embrace that purpose by providing it with the means at their disposal, including support for its eventual accession to NATO, as almost all Eastern European states have already done.

On closer inspection, European policy toward Ukraine appears in practice as a kind of first application, ante litteram, of Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union, which states: "If a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter […] Commitments and cooperation in this area shall be consistent with commitments under the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which, for those States which are members of it, remains the foundation of their collective defense and the forum for its implementation." European financial support to Ukraine is similarly grounded in Article 122 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union—quoting: "Where a Member State is in difficulties or is seriously threatened with severe difficulties caused by natural

disasters or exceptional occurrences beyond its control, the Council, on a proposal from the Commission, may grant, under certain conditions, Union financial assistance to the Member State concerned. The President of the Council shall inform the European Parliament of the decision taken".

In this regard, we should note that, to support Ukraine's resistance, Europe has for the first time established a common debt mechanism, whose latest tranche amounts to more than 100 billion dollars (90 billion euros).

All this implies that Ukraine is already treated de facto as a political member of the European Union, both by the Union and its member states. Its political leadership is considered part of Europe's political leadership and regularly participates in European forums. The Council of Europe has established a Register of Damage Caused by Russian Aggression against Ukraine and a Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine — both of which constitute a remarkable institutional innovation in international relations, the latter being wholly unprecedented.

## IV. The War as Constitutive of a New European Political Space

The European Union was created from the need for unity and security among European states within a common space. Space constitutes the field in which politics operates, and politics cannot be understood without considering the space in which it takes place. Ukraine, the largest European country, today expresses the same need, which it seeks to fulfill by entering the Union and participating in systems of collective defense, including NATO.

Today, Ukraine defends its political space in order to embrace a wider one: the European space of cooperation and freedom, which encompasses the economic space of the European market, the social space of European culture and public opinion, and the juridical space of European law — in short, the united European system of integration.

Europe's war brings to an end the vision of the European Union as a pacified political space. It marks the death of an old European order, but not yet the birth of a new one. Those uncertain forms remain in the shadow of the war now unfolding in Eastern Europe. Russia's invasion and occupation put Ukrainian and European borders at stake — both material and immaterial, beginning with geographical ones. Such a war appears to be constitutive of a new European political space, because it will mark, through blood, the eastern border of the European Union. That border will be established, for better or worse, by the outcome of the war in Ukraine — Europe's war.

## V. Russia's Strategic Miscalculation

This remains, first and foremost, Russia's war against Ukraine. By attacking a state associated with and a candidate for membership in the European Union, Russia has also chosen to strike at Ukraine's new political communities of reference — the EU and NATO, communities founded on shared values and interests. These are communities founded on shared values and interests. The implication is clear: Russia's will to power entails a will to suppress Ukraine's European identity, to undermine the political union that embodies it, and if possible, to weaken or even fracture the security community dedicated to transatlantic defense

— the Atlantic Alliance, NATO. This was the Kremlin's initial political calculus.

Yet Russia failed to consider what the Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz observed: 'The defensive form of warfare is intrinsically stronger than the offensive.' Above all, President Putin ignored the fact that where there is a will to power, there is also a will to resist. By choosing war, he has placed at risk not only the lives and property of others, but Russia itself. In this self-inflicted calamity, Russia is therefore not only a player in this war but also one of its stakes — because great power status is lost as it is won, through war.

## VI. Toward a "Peace of Dignity"

For their part, Ukrainian and European leaders have articulated a concept of future peace settlement: a "peace of dignity". This is President Volodymyr Zelensky's concept, and it warrants clarification. Dignity is the moral condition in which a person is placed by their very nature as a human being, along with the respect owed to that condition by others and by oneself. As a moral concept, dignity extends far beyond territory. Political leaders act under various pressures and appeal with varying degrees of sincerity to various principles. It is for those who study international relations to judge their actions — which means judging the validity of their ethical principles. This is not a process of scientific analysis; it is more akin to literary criticism. It involves developing a sensitive awareness of the intractability of all political situations and the moral quandary in which all statecraft operates, requiring a sympathetic perception that offers insight into moral tensions.

Above all, as we have seen dignity is the name associated with the Euromaidan protests in Ukraine — the 'Revolution of Dignity' — which marked a new beginning of Ukraine's resistance to what might have been its fatal destiny of submission to external autocracy. Thus, in a striking twist of history, the aspiration to a "peace of dignity" brings us back to the very root of this war and of the argument advanced here: a struggle for liberty. If this view is correct, then this seemingly ironic conclusion is not surprising. The sense of irony at its simplest is aroused by the recognition that in politics intentions are seldom fulfilled, and consequences elude reckoning. At a deeper level, it is an intimation that there may be a kind of rough justice and unforeseen harmony in the way things work out.

## Why Russia Fights

*R. Craig Nation*

Professor Chiaruzzi mentioned to me that he had once been my student, which I had sort of forgotten about. I note that I don't agree with him about a lot of things but this is a great triumph for a professor. My students have independent minds and are challenging me. As a counterpart to the analysis of why Ukraine fights, the question addressed here is why Russia is fighting. Russia is waging a long war that carries a significant price tag. Every long war becomes a drain on resources — human and material — and Russia is bearing that cost. The question is: why? The answer cannot be reduced to the simple assertion that Russia wants to conquer Ukraine and absorb it into its sphere of influence. That may well be true, but it prompts a deeper question: why? For its own sake, or for more substantial strategic reasons? Russia has war aims. Those war aims have been evolving through distinct phases and continue to change.

### I. The Origins: Maidan and the First Phase of the War (2014–2015)

The first phase began with the Maidan and Russia's decision to react forcefully — annexing Crimea and supporting secessionists in Donetsk and Luhansk. Russia's response was driven by a specific fear: what it perceived as a coup sponsored by a hostile power, the United States. The outcome of the Maidan, from Moscow's perspective, was a Ukraine — a country that had been part of the Russian Empire for over 300 years, sharing deep historical and cultural ties, and hosting the Russian Black Sea

Fleet at Sevastopol — now likely to align with the West, with armed forces and missiles positioned along a border only 250 miles from Moscow. Whether one considers this reaction right or wrong, wise or unwise, it was felt as a strategic compulsion.

It is important to recall that active fighting in Ukraine began in 2014, not 2022. This was a war — not a noble or glorifying event, but a brutal conflict in which people were dying from the very beginning. Between 2014 and 2022, an estimated 14,000 people were killed. Despite an in-principle ceasefire, the reality on the ground was a bleeding war, with trench lines around the occupied areas of Luhansk and Donetsk and constant shelling of Donetsk city. The conditions were, by any measure, quite ugly.

## II. The Minsk Agreements and Russia's Initial War Aims

Russia's initial attempt at shock and awe — rolling tanks into the northern districts of Kyiv as a probe intended to frighten Ukraine into coming to terms — nearly succeeded. What emerged were the Minsk Agreements, which represent the first articulation of Russia's war aims. The Minsk framework called for a ceasefire, a rewriting of Ukraine's constitution to grant autonomy to the rebel provinces of Luhansk and Donetsk, and a recommitment to Ukraine's original post-Soviet constitutional principle of non-alignment — meaning no NATO membership. Ukraine's then-former President Kuchma signed the Minsk II agreement on Ukraine's behalf. It was an agreed-upon ceasefire with more to be negotiated.

Ukraine was subsequently persuaded to step back from that framework, with the assurance of full Western backing and the

prospect of outright victory. That ended the first phase of Russia's pursuit of its war aims.

## III. The Escalation to Full-Scale War (2022) and Evolving Demands

In the period leading up to February 2022, there were two mobilizations of forces along the line of separation, with each side blaming the other for provocation. The background is confused and contested. What is clear is that by December 2021 through February 2022, Russia escalated to full-scale invasion, bringing a new and far more severe set of negotiating positions to the table.

These demands included: a categorical prohibition on NATO membership for Ukraine; territorial concessions expanded beyond Luhansk and Donetsk to encompass four additional Ukrainian provinces; and what Russia termed "denazification" and "demilitarization" of Ukraine, whose army by this point was being substantially built up with Western support.

There were negotiations underway in Istanbul at this stage, but the accounts of what was discussed or agreed upon differ significantly between the parties, and no agreement was reached. With President Zelensky in office and backed by European and American support, Ukraine adopted a diametrically opposed position. The conflict had, in effect, taken on the character of a proxy war.

## IV. The Current Deadlock: Incompatible Positions

The two parties have arrived at diametrically opposed positions that cannot be reconciled as they currently stand.

Ukraine's position is: no territorial concessions; Russia must end the war on Ukraine's terms; pay reparations for war damages; and submit its leadership to prosecution for war crimes. These conditions are obviously unacceptable to Russia. Russia's position demands full accession to the contested provinces and a categorical exclusion of NATO — a demand that has appeared at every stage of negotiations and has consistently not been placed on the table as a negotiating counter by the Western side.

The second Trump administration has put forward proposals for a ceasefire in place with no conditions. Russia has not been willing to accept this, viewing it as a replay of the rejection of the Minsk Accords — a ceasefire with no conditions that would simply provide time to rebuild and prepare for a larger war. Russia's stated position is that the underlying causes of the conflict must be addressed.

## V. Why Russia Fights: Strategic Fear and Cultural Resentment

How can one explain the relatively strong — if somewhat wavering — popular support within Russia for this war? Two main factors appear to be at work.

The first is *strategic fear*. The prospect of NATO enlargement encompassing Ukraine is viewed as strategically unacceptable in Moscow. This fear is not a fabrication; it reflects a genuine assessment of what such a development would mean for Russia's strategic position.

The second factor is *cultural resentment*, promoted in part by Ukrainian ultranationalism. Ukraine is the largest country in Europe by territory, and Russia perceives a deep cultural

antagonism directed at it. The Russian language has been effectively banned in Ukraine — an extraordinary step, given that it was President Zelensky's own native language. Russian books cannot be brought into Ukraine. Russian cinema and television broadcasting is prohibited. The Russian Orthodox Church has been outlawed. Russian culture is systematically demeaned. This is deeply resented within Russia and forms part of the motivational landscape for the war, regardless of how one judges the legitimacy of that resentment.

## VI. Conclusion: The Necessity of Understanding Russia's Position

All wars must end. Whether the conclusion of this war takes the form of victory, defeat, compromise, retributive justice, or restorative justice, any durable settlement will have to take Russia's position and concerns into account. That is not an endorsement of those concerns, but a recognition of a basic reality of conflict resolution. Understanding why Russia is fighting is not a matter of sympathy — it is a prerequisite for finding a way beyond the war.

## Europe Rearmed

*Andrew Wolff*

The themes about Europe — that this is Europe's war, that it involves the European Union and Europe as a whole, and that it is not just an attack on Ukraine — will be taken up here, focusing on the impact the war has had on Europe and the revolution that Russia's invasion in 2022 has sparked in European institutions and European security in general. The developments and policies instituted over the last four to five years are ones that, five or six years ago, would have seemed unimaginable. What is happening is truly transformative.

These transformations will be discussed under four broad themes. The first theme is Europe's support for Ukraine in its struggle against Russia. The second is Europe rearming and particularly increasing its defense expenditures. The third concerns new security relationships within Europe between European countries, which is a quite significant development. The fourth addresses new institutions and decision-making structures dealing with security on the European continent. Following that, the discussion will turn to some of the problems, tensions, and cleavages that remain within Europe in confronting what is happening on its eastern border.

### I. European Support for Ukraine

European countries and the EU in general, along with countries such as Canada and the United States, have imposed

unprecedented sanctions on Russia for its aggressive behavior in Ukraine. There have been 19 rounds of sanctions — sanctions of a kind never before imposed on another country by European countries. This includes banning imports of gold, diamonds, crude oil, and coal; excluding Russian financial institutions from the SWIFT bank messaging system; imposing travel bans; seizing Russian assets such as oligarch-owned yachts in European ports; and banning Russian state propaganda outlets RT and Sputnik from broadcasting television and radio into Europe. This represents a significant and extraordinary show of support for Ukraine.

Furthermore, almost every country in Europe has taken in Ukrainian war refugees — some more than others. Poland, for example, has taken in over one million refugees. This has been an incredible form of support, shielding a significant portion of Ukraine's population from the horrors of the ongoing conflict. These personal stories are being documented and told, illustrating how individual lives are being impacted and reflecting the compassion of European countries and governments in responding to this crisis. There has also been enormous financial and military support for Ukraine from Europe. European countries are spending approximately 50 to 60 billion euros a year to support Ukraine — a figure that would have seemed unthinkable just five years ago. It is also notable that, following the withdrawal of U.S. aid to Ukraine, Europe has been able to step up and maintain a very significant level of support on both the civilian and military sides.

## II. Europe Rearming

There has been a massive increase in Europe's defense spending since 2022, with the trend beginning even earlier. Looking back almost eleven years, in 2014–2015 only three NATO member countries met the alliance's general guideline of spending 2% of GDP on defense: the United States, the United Kingdom, and Greece. As of last year, almost every NATO member has met that target — the first time in NATO's history that this has been the case. This represents a truly stunning revolution. Germany alone is set to spend 3.5% of GDP on defense within the next four years, nearly doubling its defense expenditures to 160 billion euros per year. At the EU level, budget deficit spending rules have been eased to allow member states to borrow money for defense rearmament, to the tune of approximately 650 billion euros over the next four years. NATO itself, as of last summer, set a new target of 3.5% to be met within the next ten years. While there is still considerable distance to go, this represents a genuine revolution — moving from decades of European under-investment and military insufficiency to now being at the forefront of rearmament.

## III. New Security Relationships

A central development in this area is the admission of Sweden and Finland into NATO following Russia's invasion in 2022. This is truly a revolutionary shift. Sweden in particular had based its national identity on neutrality since the Napoleonic Wars, remaining outside both World War I and World War II. Yet when Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, Sweden decided to abandon over 200 years of that self-defined identity and formally join a military

alliance. This enlargement has significantly extended NATO's perimeter, forcing Russia to consider the defense of a much larger Arctic border with the alliance.

Russia has made many arguments that its invasion of Ukraine was partly driven by NATO enlargement. However, the admission of Finland and Sweden offers a counter-case: it is Russia's own invasion and aggression that has driven countries to join NATO and seek collective defense.

## IV. New Institutions and Decision-Making

At the EU level, there are ongoing debates about the creation of an EU Security Council (ESC). It has not yet been established, but the prospect appears increasingly likely. A number of member states have also moved at the national level: Germany, for example, has created a National Security Council — something it did not have throughout the entire Cold War — reflecting an effort to consolidate national decision-making on security matters, with the possibility of similar consolidation at the continental level.

France is also a significant part of this transformation. At the beginning of March, France announced a nuclear planning and sharing agreement under which it will extend its independent nuclear umbrella to a number of other European countries, particularly Poland and Germany.

Taken together — the rearming, the support for Ukraine, the refashioning of alliances and institutions — this represents a truly revolutionary moment for Europe, all in service of supporting Ukraine's fight against Russia.

## V. Challenges and Tensions

Turning to the challenges, several thorny and difficult problems remain.

First, despite the picture of transformation outlined above, all is not well politically within Europe. There is not full political cohesion. A number of outlier states — such as Hungary and Slovakia — hold different views toward Russia, have called for the war to end as quickly as possible, and have even called for the lifting of sanctions.

Second, there is a significant rift in transatlantic relations, primarily sparked by the second Trump administration. Europeans no longer have full confidence that the United States will support Europe in the event of a security crisis. The United States has clearly signaled a desire to disengage from and deprioritize the war in Ukraine, to halt further financial support, and to see the war ended as quickly as possible. This is placing enormous pressure on Europe as a whole.

Third, there is what might be called a hesitant reaction to Russia's shadow war. Russia has been conducting assassinations, attacking infrastructure, carrying out arson attacks, destroying undersea cables in the Baltic Sea, and flying drones over European airspace. Europe's response has been lackluster, marked by confusion about how to respond. For example, in October 2025, the Munich airport was shut down on multiple occasions over a single weekend due to Russian drones operating in Bavarian airspace. Similar incursions occurred in Norway, Sweden, Belgium, Denmark, Poland, and Romania. The response

to these air incursions was not robust. Poland, for instance, requested that a no-fly zone be established over western Ukraine, but that proposal was never adopted. This reflects a general reluctance on Europe's part to become more directly involved in the conflict.

Fourth, there are serious doubts about the sustainability of financial support for Ukraine, and military aid in particular. This is evident in the debates over whether to use frozen Russian assets to fund the continued armament of Ukraine. In December, the EU decided against that approach, opting instead for a loan mechanism of 90 billion euros — a second-best solution that is itself being held up by Hungary. The sustainability and durability of financial flows to Ukraine is very much in question, given the unwillingness to commit real assets and to return to taxpayers to request additional funding.

## VI. Conclusion

Finally, there are significant questions about Europe's vision for an endgame. There does not appear to be a clear or unified vision among European countries about how this war should end. If the goal is a Ukrainian victory, what more should Europe do to help enable it? If the goal is a ceasefire, what would constitute a just and feasible one? These questions remain unresolved. There are also open questions about what happens once a ceasefire is reached with respect to Russia: whether European countries will return to purchasing Russian natural gas and oil, and whether Russia's actions will effectively be forgiven within months of a ceasefire. Once a ceasefire is reached, it will be difficult to sustain

the intense unified pressure currently being placed on Russia, as well as the dramatic rearmament effort now underway

## The Ukraine Endgame

Russell Bova

There are, essentially, three ways in which wars come to an end. The first is a decisive military victory, in which one side imposes its version of a settlement on the other. The second is a negotiated settlement, in which the issues — or at least the major issues — that led to the war in the first place reach some resolution through a process of negotiation and compromise. The third is a ceasefire. A ceasefire does not necessarily resolve the underlying issues that led to the war, but it gives both sides, perhaps exhausted by fighting, an opportunity to recover.

### I. The Stalemate in Ukraine

In the case of Ukraine, a decisive military victory by either side does not appear likely. Ukraine has been unable to stop Russian territorial advances; while those advances have slowed in recent years, and while Ukraine, in early 2026, has successfully pushed back in certain areas including the Zaporizhzhia region, the ability to halt — let alone significantly roll back — Russian control of the roughly 20% of Ukrainian territory it currently occupies is not in prospect. On the Russian side, territorial gains over the last year have been slow, incremental, and achieved at very high cost. Neither side appears poised to attain its maximalist objectives or to achieve a decisive victory.

After four years of fighting, given the essential stalemate in this war of attrition and the enormous economic and human costs

involved, conditions would seem ripe for a settlement or, at the very least, a ceasefire. And yet, the negotiations that have taken place in 2025 during the Trump administration have not produced meaningful progress. What follows is an analytical framework, drawing on three concepts from international relations theory and war termination theory, to explain why that is the case.

## II. Informational Asymmetry

The first concept, *informational asymmetry*, refers to a situation in which the belligerents in a war hold fundamentally different understandings of how the war is going. Both sides tend to overestimate their own strength and underestimate that of their opponent. Both sides tend to believe that time is on their side and that a little more fighting will bring them victory.

From Russia's perspective, the war is evolving in its favor. Though slow and costly, the Russian military is making territorial gains. Ukraine is on its back foot and faces a severe manpower shortage. Morale on the Ukrainian front is declining, with AWOL rates beginning to rival combat deaths as a threat to battlefield strength. Defensive lines in some areas have only a handful of Ukrainian soldiers per kilometer. Nightly Russian drone and missile attacks have devastated Ukraine's civilian infrastructure: the past winter was severe, and the population of Kyiv spent much of it without heat, which, in turn, led to pipes freezing and many residents losing access to plumbing. American support for Ukraine is in serious doubt under the Trump administration, and while Europeans have attempted to step forward, their efforts face significant challenges. The war in Iran also plays to Russia's

advantage, diverting Western time, attention, and resources from Ukraine, while the resulting rise in global oil prices benefits Russia's budget. From Moscow's vantage point, time is on Russia's side.

From Ukraine's perspective, Russia is paying an enormous and unsustainable price. Credible Western estimates suggest that as many as 300,000 Russian soldiers have been killed, with over one million total casualties — more than in all the wars fought by Russia and the Soviet Union since World War II combined, including the decade-long war in Afghanistan and the two wars in Chechnya, and more than the total casualties suffered by the United States in all of World War II. The Russian economy, which weathered the first years of war and sanctions better than expected, is now showing signs of serious strain. To meet recruitment goals of approximately 35,000 new soldiers per month, men must be paid salaries many times their civilian wages. Combined with the military's material needs, this has driven approximately 50% of the Russian federal budget toward financing the war. The civilian economy is suffering from a labor shortage, and the long-term future of the Russian economy is being mortgaged. Russia has had to seek North Korean troops and to lean on China for material support, in a relationship in which Russia is clearly the junior partner. From Kyiv's vantage point, time is on Ukraine's side.

As long as this informational asymmetry persists — with each side holding a fundamentally different reading of the war's trajectory — reaching a negotiated settlement or even a ceasefire will remain extremely difficult.

## III. The Two-Level Game

A second key concept is the idea that international relations, and war termination in particular, can be understood as a *two-level game*. Negotiations occur simultaneously at two levels: between the belligerents themselves and between each government and domestic constituencies, who have an interest or stake in the outcome of the war.

A concrete illustration of this dynamic is Russia's demand that Ukraine, as a requirement of any negotiated settlement, cede the 20% of Donetsk Oblast that Russia has thus far been unable to capture by military means. President Zelensky has rejected this categorically for reasons that operate at both levels of the game. At the military-strategic level, this territory contains what is known as the fortress belt — a chain of towns and cities that Ukraine has used to defend itself against further Russian advances. At the domestic political level, Ukrainians have shed enormous quantities of blood defending this land. Furthermore, ceding territory is not only a geographic concession; it means ceding the people who live on that land. Estimates suggest that approximately 200,000 Ukrainians currently reside in that 20% of Donetsk, the vast majority of whom are unlikely to want to be transferred to Russian sovereignty. To do so would likely generate domestic political challenges for the Zelensky government. Domestic political constraints similarly limit the concessions Russia can credibly make in response to Ukrainian demands — the two-level game operates on both sides.

## IV. The Problem of Credible Commitment, Security Guarantees and Porcupine Strategy

But let's assume that both Moscow and Kyiv were to conclude that their maximalist objectives cannot be attained and that the war has become too costly to continue. Furthermore, assume that both Zelensky and Putin believed they could manage their respective domestic constituencies. Even in those circumstances a further obstacle would remain: the problem of *credible commitment*. Credible commitment refers to a situation in which neither side can be assured that the other will honor whatever commitments it has made as part of a ceasefire or settlement.

Both Russia and Ukraine have legitimate credible commitment concerns, but to illustrate let's focus on this problem from the Ukrainian perspective. Kyiv legitimately worries that Russia will use a ceasefire to recover, reconstitute its military forces, and launch yet another attack on Ukraine in a few years' time — ultimately seeking to achieve its stated goals of denazification and demilitarization. What mechanisms exist to address this concern?

NATO membership for Ukraine is effectively off the table at this point, and even Zelensky seems to accept that reality. A second option that has been discussed is a so-called "Article 5-like" guarantee — a commitment analogous to Article 5 of the NATO Treaty, which holds that an attack on one member is an attack on all, and which can be extended to Ukraine without formal NATO membership. However, it is worth recalling that Article 5 does not automatically generate a military response. What it only requires is that NATO members take "such actions as they deem necessary" in the event of an attack on a member

state, and which may include a military response but does not mandate one. What has made the NATO deterrent effective for 75 years is not the words on the page. It is 75 years of meetings in Brussels, 75 years of NATO war games, 75 years of military forces working to achieve interoperability, and — most critically — the sustained presence of American troops on European soil. It is those actions and behaviors, not the treaty text itself, that have made the Article 5 commitment credible throughout NATO's history. Whether those conditions can be replicated in the case of Ukraine — and particularly whether the United States or European allies would be willing to station forces in Ukraine as a tripwire deterrent — is highly questionable.

In the absence of reliable security guarantees, the most viable path to deterring a future Russian attack may be what is sometimes called the porcupine strategy: continuing to arm Ukraine so heavily that any future invasion would be simply too costly for Russia to contemplate. Russia's economy is approximately ten times the size of Ukraine's, and its population roughly five times larger. However, if the cost of another invasion can be made prohibitive, that may represent the most effective means of protecting Ukraine and deterring future aggression.

The capacity of Ukraine to mount the resistance it has over four years of war — with substantial Western support, but with Ukrainians themselves doing the fighting — is itself evidence of this potential. Ukraine has demonstrated significant military innovation and adaptability, particularly in its response to drone warfare, developing approaches that are now being studied by the United States and other Western militaries as they confront the challenge of drones in other theaters of conflict.

## Notes on the Contributors

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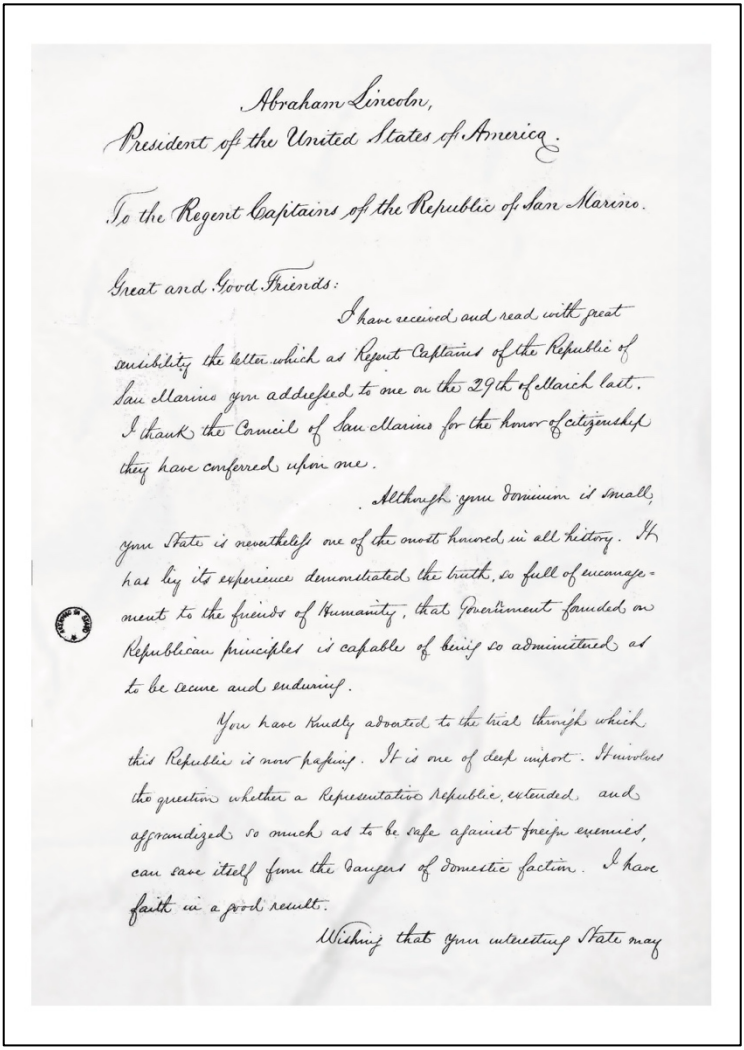
## Appendix



Abraham Lincoln,
President of the United States of America.

To the Regent Captains of the Republic of San Marino.

Great and Good Friends:

I have received and read with great cordiality the letter which as Regent Captains of the Republic of San Marino you addressed to me on the 29th of March last. I thank the Council of San Marino for the honor of citizenship they have conferred upon me.

Although your dominion is small, your State is nevertheless one of the most honored in all history. It has by its experience demonstrated the truth, so full of encouragement to the friends of Humanity, that Government founded on Republican principles is capable of being so administered as to be secure and enduring.

You have kindly adverted to the trial through which this Republic is now passing. It is one of deep import. It involves the question whether a Representative Republic, extended and aggrandized so much as to be safe against foreign enemies, can save itself from the dangers of domestic faction. I have faith in a good result.

Wishing that your interesting State may

Image 1: Letter of Abraham Lincoln to the Regent Captains of the Republic of San Marino.

On May 7, 1861, President Abraham Lincoln wrote to the Regent Captains of the Republic of San Marino in response to a letter he had received weeks earlier. The Regent Captains, the joint heads of state of the world's oldest republic, had expressed their "mark of high consideration and sincere fraternity" for the United States and conferred honorary citizenship upon Lincoln. Writing at a moment when the American Civil War was raising doubts around the world about the viability of democratic republics, Lincoln accepted the honor graciously, acknowledging the symbolic power of San Marino's centuries-long endurance as proof that a government founded on republican principles is capable of being secure and enduring. As a lasting tribute, a bust of Lincoln was later placed inside the *Palazzo Pubblico*, the seat of San Marino's government, inscribed with some of the most powerful passages from his letter.


Image 2: Statue of Liberty, San Marino, 1876.

Standing at the center of Liberty Square (*Piazza della Libertà*), in front of the *Palazzo Pubblico*, is San Marino's own Statue of Liberty, a neoclassical marble sculpture inaugurated on September 30, 1876, a full ten years before its more famous counterpart in New York Harbor. The statue was a gift to the Republic from a German noblewoman, Otilia Heyroth Wagener, who commissioned sculptor Stefano Galletti to create it in the finest white Carrara marble. The statue represents liberty as a warrior woman advancing proudly toward the future, her right hand extended forward and her left hand holding a flag, with a crown resembling city walls from which rise the three towers — San Marino's enduring symbol. At its inauguration, San Marino politician and historian Marino Fattori declared: "The cult of liberty must be alive in our hearts." Today, the statue remains one of the most iconic landmarks of the Republic and is even depicted on San Marino's 2-cent euro coin.


Piero Maria Pedone, Michele Chiaruzzi, R. Craig. Nation.

Next page: Andrew Wolff on the left. On the right Professor Russell Bova.


An Enduring Resolution?

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