

The War Between Russia and Ukraine Has Been Brewing Since 1991

By [Prof Rodrigue Tremblay](#)

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Today, the dangers of military escalation are beyond description.

What is now happening in Ukraine has serious geopolitical implications. It could lead us into a World War III scenario.

It is important that a peace process be initiated with a view to preventing escalation.

Global Research condemns Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

A Bilateral Peace Agreement is required.

“I think it is the beginning of a new Cold War... I think the Russians will gradually react quite adversely and it will affect their policies. I think it is a tragic mistake. There was no reason for this whatsoever. No one was threatening anybody else. This expansion would make the Founding Fathers of this country turn over in their graves. We have signed up to protect a whole series of countries, even though we have neither the resources nor the intention to do so in any serious way.” **George F. Kennan** (1904-2005), American diplomat and historian, (in an interview with Thomas L. Friedman in the New York Times, May 2, 1998, about the U.S. expansion of NATO)

[NATO’s goal is] “to keep the Russians out [of Europe], the Americans in and the Germans down.” **Hastings L. Ismay** (1887-1965), first NATO Secretary-General (1952-1957)

“We [the State Department] have invested over \$5 billion to assist Ukraine in these

and other goals that will ensure a secure and prosperous and democratic Ukraine.” **Victoria Nuland** (1961-), Under Secretary at the State Department, in a speech, Dec. 13, 2013.

“The North Atlantic Alliance continues to expand, despite all our protests and concerns... Despite all that, in December 2021, we made yet another attempt to reach agreement with the United States and its allies on the principles of European security and NATO’s non-expansion. Our efforts were in vain... For the United States and its allies, it is a policy of containing Russia, with obvious geopolitical dividends. For our country, it is a matter of life and death, a matter of our historical future as a nation.” **Vladimir Putin** (1952-), Speech to the Nation, Wednesday, Feb. 23, 2022.

The tragic and [illegal war of aggression](#) launched by Russia (pop. 146 million) against Ukraine (pop. 44 million), its neighbor, on Thurs. February 24, 2022, has raised much emotion and many reactions in the West, and for good reasons.

Most people would much prefer that international conflicts between states be settled through diplomacy, or at the very least, through peaceful arbitration. Unfortunately for humanity, this is not yet the case. It is inadmissible that wars of aggression still rage today. In the end, it is ordinary people, the poor and the young, in particular, who end up paying, often with their lives, for the mistakes and failings of so called ‘leaders’.

At a time when weapons are increasingly lethal and destructive, it would appear that there is no longer any credible arbiter in the world to avoid military conflicts. This makes for dangerous times.

Therefore, several questions come to mind.

Will Europe, which was a large battlefield in the first half of the 20th Century, become embroiled in military conflicts again, in the 21st Century? Has the United States, which controls NATO, pushed that alliance’s expansion into Eastern Europe and Russia too far? Why do the institutions of peace that the world created after World War II seem to have withered away to the point of being incapable of preventing wars? Is it still possible to reform these institutions in order to prevent the world from falling back into the practices of past centuries?

Considering the complexity of today’s world and the divergent interests involved, it could be useful to identify the main reasons for the deterioration of international order over more than the last quarter of a century, especially since the [collapse of the Soviet Union](#), in December 1991.

- There is a clear danger of repeating the mistakes of the past in isolating countries from international life

The brinkmanship policy of isolating, humiliating and threatening foreign countries is a very dangerous approach in international relations. Such a policy, pursued against Germany by the French and other allied powers after World War I (1914-1918), through the imposition of heavy [war reparation payments](#) on Germany, is credited with having created the conditions that ultimately led to World War II (1939-1945).

Today, the world is again facing a European war between Russia and Ukraine, a war that should have been avoided, with a little more goodwill, leadership and perspicacity. Also,

such a war of aggression illustrates very clearly how humanity risks returning to the geopolitical situation that prevailed before the Second World War.

It was a time when the [League of Nations](#) was paralyzed; much like the United Nations is today. It was also a time when major nations had been humiliated during the aftermath of World War I. They harbored resentment towards the victorious countries, which, in their eyes, only looked after their own narrow interests.

Let us remember that the [United Nations](#) was created in 1945 to prevent wars. But in the 21st Century, wars of aggression are still with us. Only during the past twenty years, the world has seen two major wars of aggression, both illegal under the U.N. Charter: the invasion of Iraq on March 20, 2003, by the United States and the invasion of Ukraine by Russia on February 24 of this year.

This may be an indication that the politico-legal system put in place in 1945 to prevent war is not working, at a time in human history when a war involving nuclear weapons could be more than catastrophic.

- The dangerous mentality prevailing today at the State and Defense Departments in the U.S.

Analysts and decision makers at the U.S. State Department and at the Pentagon rely on [war games](#) with simulations of military strategies of action-reaction, using computers, as if foreign policy were a kind of video game. That leaves little space for rational thinking, human feelings and imagination.

Relying on such 'games' is very dangerous because such a use of programmed computers could lead to huge mistakes in real life, and because they can make destructive military hostilities seem trivial and inconsequential.

- NATO as a substitute to the United Nations

After the fall of the USSR, in 1991, some so-called 'planners' in the American government saw an opportunity to place the U.S. government as the sole arbiter of international foreign relations in the post-Cold War world. They viewed the United Nations as a cumbersome body where five countries (USA, Russia, China, U.K. and France) held sway over the U.N. Security Council with their veto.

The idea was to rely on the 'defensive' [NATO](#), created in 1949 to secure peace in Europe, with the goal of countering the threat posed then by the Soviet Union. It was believed, no doubt rightly, that NATO would be more favorable than the U.N. to [U.S. interventions](#) in the world. However, contrary to the U.N., NATO is a war machine, which has no legitimate mechanism to bring about peace.

Even though in the past the U.S. government has often had the backing of the United Nations for its interventions abroad, humanitarian as well as military—the [Korean War](#) (1950-1953) was a good example of the latter—things changed in 1999. Then, under President Bill Clinton, U.S. Armed Forces started a bombing campaign against Yugoslavia, under the [NATO](#) flag, but without the authorization of the U.N. Security Council. This was a precedent.

Since that questionable decision, all U.S. military interventions abroad have been conducted under the cover of NATO, and not under the [U.N. Charter](#). And that is where the world stands today.

- Why the beleaguered Russia is in a position similar to defeated Germany in the 1930's

The shock of the fall of the Soviet Union was to Russia what the shock suffered after its defeat in the First World War was for Germany. In both cases, these involved large populations subjected to foreign interference, lasting several years. The interests of these two countries were ignored in the new international order.

The fall of the Soviet Union raised two fundamental questions. The first: What would become of the two military defense alliances, the [Warsaw Pact](#) of 1955 and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) of 1949? Both were organizations of mutual assistance, mainly military, against each other during a period of [Cold War](#) (1945-1989). The second: How to achieve the reunification of West Germany and the German Democratic Republic (GDR)?

From a geopolitical standpoint, these two questions were interrelated, especially from a Russian point of view. Russia conserves the historical memory of having been invaded by two great armies, by [France](#) under Napoleon, in 1812, and by [Germany](#) under Hitler, in 1941.

The fall of the Soviet Union meant the automatic dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. Would the same be true of NATO? Not necessarily.

Indeed, for the U.S. government, NATO was its main source of influence in Western Europe. Containing the Soviet Union was not the only objective in creating NATO. Therefore, the George H.W. Bush administration and its Secretary of State, James Baker, had no intention of dismantling NATO.

On the Russian side, the position was that if NATO continued to exist, either as a defensive or an offensive military alliance, it was essential that it commit to not expanding into Eastern Europe and not threaten Russia.

[Declassified documents](#) show that the government of George H.W. Bush, through his Secretary of State James Baker, and the governments of major member nations of the alliance, were willing to promise the Russian government that NATO would not expand into Eastern Europe, as long as the Russian government accepted the reunification of the two Germanys (1990-1991). History has recorded the colorful expression of James Baker, on February 9, 1990, to the effect that NATO would not expand "*one inch Eastward*".

- The growing influence of neoconservatives (neocons) in U.S. foreign policy

American foreign policy changed dramatically in the 1990's, notably under the Democratic administration of Bill Clinton (1993-2001), and even more so under the Republican administration of George W. Bush (2001-2009).

Even though President George H.W. Bush used to dismiss the neocons, at least those working in the U.S. government, as "[the crazies in the basement](#)" a small group of them did succeed in dominating American foreign policy later on. Their ideas provided the

foundations of [‘The New American Empire’](#), (which is also the title of a book I wrote in 2004).

The [neocon hegemonic mantra](#) was very simple: The United States should take advantage of the demise of the Soviet Union and of its unparalleled military power to impose a “Pax Americana” similar to the Pax Romana during the Roman Empire.

In short, the United States must take advantage of its status as the undisputed military superpower in a unipolar world and adopt a very interventionist foreign policy, while putting emphasis on “national greatness”. And above all, they rejected any policy of accommodation or détente with Russia, just as they had done toward the USSR.

Armed with this doctrine, subsequent U.S. administrations, from the Bill Clinton administration on, have more or less followed its dictates. In particular, they have *de facto* abandoned the U.N. as the arbiter of world peace, and instead have increasingly relied on NATO to impose a Pax Americana.

- The coup that overthrew the Ukrainian government in 2014

There is an important event not to forget. In 2014, there was a [coup in Ukraine](#) that overthrew the pro-Russian government of President Viktor Yanukovich, elected four years earlier, with strong support from the Russian-speaking population in the eastern part of the country.

The above quote of American Under Secretary of State for European Affairs, Victoria Nuland, would indicate that the U.S. government had spent billions of dollars to support various organizations in Ukraine.

In the fall of 2013, a protest movement called the [‘Maidan Revolution’](#) began peacefully in Kiev, the country’s capital. The protestations were directed against the Ukrainian government and its refusal to sign a bilateral commercial trade agreement with the European Union. However, things escalated when initially peaceful protests turned violent, in February 2014. Then, despite elections being scheduled for May of the same year, the Ukrainian parliament summarily dismissed the incumbent president and formed a new government.

That episode may help in understanding the future turn of events in Ukraine.

- The war between Russia and Ukraine is to a large extent a response to the progressive military encirclement of Russia by NATO

Since 1991, Russia has opposed [NATO’s eastward expansion](#) and has many times requested security guarantees that this would not happen.

Nevertheless, in spite of promises made by the George H.W. Bush administration and other governments, some subsequent U.S. administrations did go ahead and expand NATO eastward.

For instance, in 1999, the Clinton administration accepted that Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic join NATO. In 2002, George W. Bush accepted seven more eastern countries (Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia) into NATO. In 2009, it was Albania and Croatia’s turn to join. The most recent adhesions to NATO are Montenegro,

in 2017, and North Macedonia, in 2020.

Things went even further when, in December 2014, the Ukrainian parliament voted to renounce its non-aligned status, a step harshly condemned by its neighbor Russia. Ukraine—a former Soviet republic, which became independent in 1991—has made it clear that it wishes to join NATO. And more recently, in 2021, [Ukraine](#) became an official candidate for NATO membership. The rest is history.

Conclusion

In these troubled times, an outside and independent moral authority should perhaps intervene to prevent the world from falling into the abyss of military conflicts. Possibly, an invitation could be made to either the Secretary General of the United Nations, António Guterres, or to Pope Francis, to serve as conciliator, in order to stop the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine, before the Ukrainian people suffer irreparable losses, and before other countries intervene and turn the conflict into a world war.

And afterwards, the world had better recapture the spirit of 1945 and set about reforming its international institutions so that they are truly capable of preventing destructive wars, not in theory but in practice.

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International economist Dr. Rodrigue Tremblay is the author of the book about morals "[The code for Global Ethics, Ten Humanist Principles](#)" of the book about geopolitics "[The New American Empire](#)", and the recent book, in French, "[La régression tranquille du Québec, 1980-2018](#)". He holds a Ph.D. in international finance from Stanford University.

He is a Research Associate of the Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG)

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