

Why Putin and the West Misunderstood Ukraine

I bought my copy of Samuel P. Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* soon after the September 11 attack on the Twin Towers in New York City. It contained only three maps: the world as he divided it among "nine civilisations"; the United States, which he saw as a potentially "cleft country" (that is, straddling two civilisations) owing to its European population becoming a minority by 2050; and Ukraine, which he saw as a cleft country in 1995—its central and western lands belonging to the West, and its east and south belonging to the "Orthodox civilisation", whose core state in Huntington's view was Russia.

Russia's current brutal invasion of Ukraine, as well as recent references to Huntington's book in connection with the rising tensions over the past year, caused me to take another look. I found that the picture Huntington provided of Ukraine in the mid-1990s was flawed, and that his thesis proved to be a poor predictor of subsequent events. It struck me that Huntington's influential book probably contributed to inaccurate perceptions of Ukraine that have populated later writings of US academics like John Mearsheimer, Stephen F. Cohen and Henry Kissinger, the inaccurate views of some authors based in some think-tanks, and the far Left and far Right pundits who have been wholly captured by the Kremlin's narrative.

Huntington's understanding of the underlying history was very basic, and Moscow-centric, but history was and is fundamental to understanding that the civilisational split between Ukraine and Russia has nothing to do with the Orthodox and Catholic religions and far more to do with the unique early historical development of these two nations within two separate civilisations: Ukraine in the West and Russia in the East.

In 1240, when the Mongol Golden Horde sacked Kyiv, "Ukraine" was the land upon which the Rus, the people who later came to be called Ukrainians, lived. The name "Ukraine" is documented in the

chronicles from the twelfth century and has nothing to do with the notion of "borderland", as Russian mythology chooses to present it. Ukraine was the centre of a vast empire, and while a similar sounding word, *okraina*, means "border" in Russian, the Ukrainian word for border is *kordon*. In Ukrainian, the word *kraina* means "country".

Whilst the Rus-Ukraine empire used Church Slavonic as a *lingua franca*, just as the Holy Roman Empire used Medieval Latin, there were many separate languages and dialects spoken throughout. The colloquial language spoken in Ukraine was Ruski, which appears in 7000 examples of medieval graffiti scratched on the walls of Kyiv's thousand-year-old St Sophia Cathedral. The graffiti refers to Prince "Volodymyr" (like Zelenskyy, in Ukrainian) not Vladimir (like Putin, in Russian). Kyiv was integrated with European kingdoms through aristocratic inter-marriage.

Weakened after a period of close to a century of struggle against the Golden Horde, the Rus-Ukrainians were subsumed into the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and later still into the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth. As noted by Yale historian Timothy Snyder, all of this was a normal European experience, and for many years the Poles, Lithuanians and Ukrainians together fought the expanding Grand Duchy of Muscovy.

Founded in 1147, Moscow was a small and peripheral region of the Kyiv-Rus empire, and its population included Slavs (Vyatichi) and Finno-Ugric peoples. The Muscovite language that developed there was based on Church Slavonic and local languages including Finno-Ugric. For 240 years as Muscovy grew, it remained a vassal of the Golden Horde, which became more Turkic than Mongol. The Muscovite (later called Russian) nation and its culture developed during a period of brutal conquest of territory (including the massacre of Novgorod in 1570).

Huntington's reference to the 1654 Treaty of Pereyaslav as Ukrainians "swearing allegiance to

the tsar in return for protection from the Poles” is both inaccurate and simplistic. Ukrainian Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky did not see it that way, but rather as an equal partnership—a treaty between Rus and Muscovy—and very soon the Ukrainians could see the treaty being abused by Moscow. Khmelnytsky died in 1657, but in opposition to the Pereyaslav treaty, a year later his successor Hetman Vyhovsky concluded the Treaty of Hadiach with Poland and Lithuania which was to establish a tripartite kingdom with the Grand Duchy of Rus (that is, Ukraine) as an equal partner. In 1659 Vyhovsky’s 60,000 Ukrainian Cossacks, allied with 40,000 Crimean Tatars, defeated a 100,000-strong Muscovite army at the Battle of Konotop, located in the Sumy oblast north-east of Kyiv, which was invaded again by Russians in late February 2022.

While he won that battle, Vyhovsky was undone by internal politics and lost the war. The Muscovites later concluded a separate treaty with Poland that split Ukrainian lands between them. A century later the Polish kingdom itself was partitioned, with Warsaw coming under Moscow’s control for 125 years up to 1920. However, southern Poland and western Ukraine were incorporated into the Austrian-Hungarian empire that dissolved in 1918. After the wars that followed the Russian Revolution, western Ukraine fell within the inter-war “Greater Poland” where it stayed until the Second World War.

Putin’s 5000-word essay of June 2021 titled “The Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians” demonstrated to Timothy Snyder that “Russians don’t know who they are”. I had thought that for a long time. That Kyiv is the capital of Ukraine is inconvenient for the Russian myth that “Russians were converted to Christianity in 988”. In reality, the Muscovites (who later came to be called Russians) were almost a thousand kilometres from Kyiv when the acceptance of Christianity took place. In 1114, 126 years later, Saint Kuksha and another Kyivan monk who travelled to the Moscow region to convert the then pagan Vyatichi tribe to Christianity were beheaded.

Patriarch Kirrill has declared Russia’s current war against Ukraine to be a “holy war” that is critical to Russia’s existence as a state. Both Kirrill and Putin know that who controls Kyiv controls history. It is only by controlling Kyiv and eradicating nationally-conscious Ukrainians that the myth of “Kievan Russia” can be restored. That myth was initiated by Peter the Great in 1721, when after Muscovy had secured control of Kyiv, he rebranded the Muscovites as “Russians”, appropriating the “Rus” name from Ukrainians.

In effect, Tsar Peter refused to accept that the

Muscovite (from then called the “Russian”) state and nation had merely been an outlying region of the Kyiv Rus empire, had accepted Christianity late, and had developed its statehood and fundamental national characteristics under 240 years of vassalage to the Golden Horde. Instead, a myth was created, naming Muscovites the “Great Russians” who were the “older brothers” of “Little Russians” (Ukrainians), who had all developed from a common core of “Kievan Russians”. For 270 years the Muscovite myth of “Kievan Russia” was successfully propagated in the West. That myth came to a grinding halt in 1991, when independent Ukraine arose out of the ashes of the Soviet Union.

Extreme Russian nationalists like Putin and Patriarch Kirrill have realised that in order to claim a direct Russian line to the conversion to Christianity in 988 they must demonstrate that Muscovites (Russians) are and always were the same people as the inhabitants of Kyiv, the Rus (Ukrainians). Otherwise, the Russians would look like the “younger brother” or just a “cousin”, which would constitute an intolerable insult to the Russian national myth.

The Russian crisis of identity referred to by Snyder was made even more acute in 2018 when Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople granted the Tomos of Autocephaly to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. In effect the Patriarch recognised the Ukrainian Orthodox Church as custodian of the unbroken line from the acceptance of Christianity in 988, implying that it is the senior Orthodox Church relative to the Russian Orthodox Church. This decision promptly precipitated the Moscow–Constantinople Schism.

At the Munich Security Conference in 2007 Putin openly declared that “Ukraine is not a real country”. In his mind Ukraine had no right to exist and he had already decided to destroy the Ukrainian state and the Ukrainian nation, which he also considered “not a real nation”. In hindsight, he was giving notice to that effect. It had nothing to do with “NATO expansion” or the “protection of Russian speakers” who constitute the majority of Ukrainians, who are bilingual in Ukrainian and Russian. These would later provide convenient covers for Putin’s true aim, as they would resonate with Western audiences that had little knowledge of Ukraine, Ukrainians, or Putin’s true aims.

During the current invasion the aim of eliminating the Ukrainian nation has been openly declared by Putin, Russian politicians, academics and television anchors. A recent op-ed in RIA Novosti has called for a genocide of Ukrainians, stating, “The name Ukraine can seemingly not be retained as

the title of any fully denazified state formation on the territory liberated from the Nazi regime.” This next level of absurd Orwellian “doublethink” is the culmination of the two-decade rise of the fascist Russian dictatorship, where every semblance of political opposition or political plurality has been extinguished. Putin’s favourite author during this time has been Ivan Ilyin, a Russian fascist philosopher who lived in Germany and Switzerland from the 1920s to 1950s, and who, incidentally, was patronised by the exiled Russian composer Sergei Rachmaninoff.

Why did Putin choose this time for a full-scale invasion of Ukraine? Rumours of Putin’s thyroid cancer notwithstanding, this was probably the optimal timing. Putin understood that with each passing year of Ukrainian sovereignty and independence the Russian “creation myth” was becoming more and more unsustainable.

For eight years Russia’s war of attrition against Ukraine in the Donbas had ground on. Putin had hoped that Western powers would exert pressure on Ukraine to implement the Minsk Agreements in a manner favourable to Russia. That would have seen the fake “republics” incorporated into Ukraine with veto rights that would block its westward march. It had become obvious that this strategy had failed. In the meantime, Russia built up its capital reserves via sales of oil and gas, and purportedly modernised its armed forces.

Since Russia’s invasions of 2014 its soft-power influences in Ukraine had severely eroded. The Tomos undermined the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church there. Putin had perhaps hoped that President Zelenskyy would be easier to deal with than President Poroshenko, but Zelenskyy was constrained by the Ukrainian Constitution, which enshrines the twin goals of joining the EU and NATO. After winning 73 per cent of the vote in 2019, Zelenskyy’s popularity had slumped to the low 20s; however, GDP growth was riding close to 4 per cent despite the drag of the war and its negative effect on foreign investment. While Putin liked to publicly portray Ukraine as a “failed state”, it clearly was not.

Zelenskyy crossed Putin’s red line when he placed Putin’s agent Victor Medvedchuk under house arrest and closed down his television stations that were spreading Kremlin propaganda. In response Fox News anchor Tucker Carlson recently described Zelenskyy as a “corrupt dicta-

tor who imprisoned his opposition”. That is not true. Medvedchuk is a traitor to Ukraine, while the actual parliamentary opposition is alive and well and fully aligned with Zelenskyy in this time of war. Perhaps Carlson has never heard of how, when Britain faced an existential threat during the Second World War, Sir Oswald Mosley, the leader of Britain’s fascists, was arrested by Churchill, or how Lord Haw Haw was executed afterwards for spreading German propaganda?

No doubt Putin and his military advisers were observing the growth of Ukraine’s Armed Forces, which for years received training from US, UK and Canadian specialists. This hard-power vector was becoming increasingly sophisticated. The Ukrainians had commissioned new warships that were to be built by the UK and Turkey. Dozens of Turkish high-altitude Bayraktar drones powered by Ukrainian motors were arriving, and there were plans to establish a factory in Ukraine to manufacture the drones. Ukraine also developed and commenced production of its own “Neptune” cruise missile capable of accurately striking a target 300 kilometres away. These are to become the chief armaments of the warships that are being built.

Putin must have reasoned that now is the optimal time for a large-scale invasion of Ukraine, and that waiting would only make that task more difficult. He would have

assessed Western leaders to be weak and accommodating. France had always been pro-Russian, and Germany under Angela Merkel had long acted like a Russian hostage suffering from Stockholm Syndrome. Hungary and Germany had for more than a decade blocked Ukraine’s NATO ambitions. President Joe Biden’s release of sanctions on the Nordstream 2 gas pipeline, and the granting of the Biden-Putin summit would have been interpreted as US weakness.

Putin also assumed that an invasion now would create material fissures among Western countries, that the Ukrainian Army was still weak, and that Ukrainians would welcome his troops with flowers. So far, he has been proved wrong on all counts.

This brings me back to Huntington’s thesis of a “cleft Ukraine”, which was largely based on the results of the 1994 Ukrainian presidential election, where the west and centre of the country were won by Leonid Kravchuk and the east and south were won by Leonid Kuchma. Thinking that it neatly

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supported his “Orthodox Civilisation” hypothesis, Huntington assumed that the region won by Kuchma was populated by Russian-speaking Orthodox worshippers who were therefore “pro-Russian”, while the Kravchuk voting region was composed of Ukrainian-speaking Catholic worshippers who were “pro-Ukrainian”. That is, Kravchuk was pro-Ukrainian, and Kuchma was pro-Russian. Rejecting the idea of a war with Russia, Huntington prognosticated there might be a split of the country along the geographical voting lines, but that it was more likely the country would remain independent, and “cleft”.

However, the reality was then, and is now, that on both sides of the alleged “Ukrainian-Russian civilisational divide” the Ukrainian population is largely Russian-speaking, largely nominally Orthodox (nominally because religiosity was pummelled by communism) and overwhelmingly pro-Ukrainian. The last point is supported by the fact that on both sides of that line the vast majority of the population voted for Ukrainian independence in 1991. For example, in Cherkasy oblast Kravchuk won with 51 per cent while in Poltava oblast Kuchma won with 58 per cent, but in the independence referendum these region’s respective votes were 96 per cent and 94 per cent.

As for Kuchma’s alleged “pro-Russian stance”, it is true that he talked about maintaining trade links with Russia, but he also introduced the aim of joining the EU (which aim was also a central plank of Victor Yanukovich’s 2010 election campaign). Kuchma wrote a book titled *Ukraine is not Russia*, and although he signed the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, whereby Ukraine relinquished the world’s third-largest stockpile of nuclear weapons in exchange for vague US, UK and Russian “security assurances”, Kuchma urged that Ukraine should retain forty nuclear weapons as insurance (obviously as a security precaution against Russia). No one listened. In that context, Kuchma was less pro-Russian than the US and UK, who succeeded in pressuring Ukraine to give up its nuclear arsenal.

Finally, how would Huntington have interpreted the 1999 election in Ukraine, where Kuchma received his strongest votes in the western Ukrainian oblasts? The reason was that Kuchma was running against a Socialist Party candidate (a party that subsequently withered). The alleged “civilisational divide” was not at all visible then.

Another map that misled Western opinion during the 2014-15 Russian invasions of Ukraine was the erroneously titled “Russian language map of Ukraine”. It was widely taken up by Western media, for example forming the core of Bloomberg’s “Quick Take” about Ukraine. It shows differing

levels of acknowledgment of Russian or Ukrainian as people’s “mother tongue”. What it fails to show is how widespread everyday usage of Russian is throughout most of Ukraine. Nor does it show levels of Ukrainian patriotism; the vast majority of Ukrainian citizens in the Russian-speaking regions voted for independence in 1991.

It is not unusual for countries to exhibit regional differences in voting patterns that have no bearing on the loyalty of the populations of those regions to the state. US politics is divided geographically, with the wealthier coastal states on both sides of the country voting Democrat and the south and centre voting Republican. Poland is another case in point, where voting for the right-wing PiS Party is split very sharply on an east-west divide, with the Polish liberals winning the west and Warsaw city.

Russian-speakers (including ethnic Russian Ukrainian citizens) provided the vast majority of the forty-five volunteer battalions that in 2014 helped Ukraine prevent Russia establishing a land bridge to the occupied Crimean peninsula. It made a mockery of Putin’s claim that he was acting to “protect Russian-speakers”. While various academics in the West have often focused on the language issue, surveys in Ukraine found that only 5 per cent thought it was important.

Some Western academic commentators, like Professor John T. Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago, have alleged that the “crusading US” has been pushing Ukrainians to adopt the democratic values of the West, implying that this is just as unnatural and futile as trying to push Iraqis and Afghans towards democracy over a couple of decades. But Ukraine has an earlier tradition of democracy than the US. In the seventeenth century Ukrainian Cossack leaders were elected, and the Hetman Pylyp Orlyk Constitution of 1710, now held in Sweden, predates US efforts in that direction.

As an aside on the nuclear issue, in a *Foreign Affairs* article published in 1993, which was long before “expansion of NATO” became a thing, Mearsheimer argued that war between Russia and Ukraine was inevitable and would have devastating outcomes. Ukraine could not win a conventional war against Russia, and consequently there was a strong case for Ukraine to remain a nuclear power as a deterrent against Russian invasion. In a recent issue of the *Economist*, this same gentleman has argued that the war is the West’s fault. Both articles betray a “desktop analyst’s” level of understanding of Ukraine.

Surveys illustrate the gaping divide in attitudes of Russians and Ukrainians towards democracy and the worth of private enterprise, with Ukrainians

being far more favourably disposed to these ideas. A problem that has beset both US and Russian policy is that both countries did not bother to seriously study Ukraine and Ukrainians, as both assumed they were essentially the same as Russians (although Huntington and others have erroneously viewed Ukraine as “cleft”). This failure in perceptions is why the current Russian invasion has faltered and explains why the US waited until the last minute to provide Ukrainians with Javelins and Stingers for an assumed insurgency, instead of supplying heavy weapons over a longer period for a potential army-on-army clash, which would have reduced the probability of an invasion actually occurring.

Among Western commentators it is still common (and consistent with the Kremlin playbook) to see the Maidan Revolution of 2013-14 as a CIA plot that happened because of “encouragement from the US”. Geoffrey Pyatt, the US ambassador in Ukraine, would naturally have approved, but this and the fact that Senator John McCain spoke to demonstrators had no practical influence on the causes, course or consequences of the revolution. It was caused by Victor Yanukovich reneging on his election promise to seek EU membership and instead pivoting to Putin and his corrupt crony kleptocracy model. Much more significant for outcomes was President Obama’s weak response to Russia’s 2014 invasions and his refusal to provide lethal weapons to Ukraine.

The day that a hundred demonstrators were shot in the Maidan Square changed everything. Yanukovich fled, but it was not because one of the young demonstrators called on him to resign by the morning or he and his friends “would arm themselves”. Rather, Yanukovich correctly read that the Rada (Parliament) would meet the next day, and that due to the massacre his parliamentary majority would dissolve and a new parliamentary majority would form. He correctly foreshadowed that he would be impeached by the Rada. In Yanukovich’s absence, the new parliamentary majority appointed an interim (wholly uncharismatic and purely administrative) “acting president” and began organising a new and highly transparent presidential election.

That was neither “US backed” nor a coup. It was a process that would have been achieved in a matter of minutes in a Westminster system, without blood, by a simple crossing of the floor.

The awesome power of Russian propaganda’s ability to project an “alternative reality” that Westerners would believe became apparent to me as I closely observed the Russian invasion of eastern Ukraine during 2014-15. However, Russian propaganda was less successful in influencing the reality in eastern Ukraine.

During the Maidan Revolution, Russian attempts to whip up crowds of anti-Maidan (that is, pro-Russian) demonstrators failed miserably, even in the east of the country, even with agents and activists bused in from Russia, and even bribing people to participate to give the “alternative reality” impression of anti-Kyiv sentiment. After all of that, the pro-Russia camp could not attract more than

1000 to 2000 demonstrators in most towns and cities in eastern Ukraine. In Kharkiv, with its 1.5 million population, only 5000 people could be cobbled together. They looked lost as they huddled in the corner of a square that can hold a million.

It was clear that eastern Ukrainians had no appetite for war, civil or otherwise, and that nothing would have happened there in the absence of the Russian invasion. Yet Moscow managed to impose its false narrative of “civil war” in the Donbas onto the West’s mainstream media, which spoke of a “rebellion” that had been “stoked”, “precipitated” or “provoked” by Russia supplying weapons. For the past eight years this “civil war paradigm” has been reflected in the terminology used by the world’s media. We are

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The Russian invasion of 2014-15 was led by volunteer veterans such as Colonel Igor Girkin’s (“Strelkov”) Spetsnaz Group, Kadyrov’s Chechens, the Vostok Battalion, and various Cossack Battalions or serving Russian soldiers who were variously described as “off duty” or “lost” if they were captured.

The lack of support for Russia and the “civil war paradigm” in that eastern region was clearly illustrated by Colonel Girkin’s occupation of the town of Sloviansk, halfway between Donetsk and Kharkiv. Of the town’s population of 125,000, during the two-month Russian occupation no one in it flocked to Russia’s banner. Girkin is a war criminal who executed a group of evangelicals in the town merely for being the wrong religion and buried

them in a mass pit with a number of others. He left the scene soon after he was forced from Sloviansk by Ukrainian Army forces.

Girkin still lives in Moscow and now openly admits that without the Russian invasion that he spearheaded in 2014, nothing would have happened in eastern Ukraine. He has for years noted that without the full-scale Russian invasion that we are now witnessing, it would be impossible for Russia to conquer Ukraine. That was true for the same reasons that Huntington and Putin were both wrong, yet the world's media continues to deny that a Russian invasion took place during 2014-15.

Over time the Russian occupation force in the occupied Donbas region introduced more local collaborators/traitors into their army, which is now led by 800 Russian officers and includes thousands of other Russian soldiers. When it conquered a region, the Mongol Golden Horde used to force the surviving men into its own army and push them forward as the fodder of their next battle. In the occupied Donbas region, the Russians have now conscripted Ukrainians who with very little training are being thrown into the battle against the Ukrainian Army.

Perhaps the success that Moscow had in controlling the false "civil war" narrative of the eight-year war in the Donbas through compliant Western media gave the Kremlin the notion that it could continue to control the narrative. Hence, Moscow's use of the term "special military operation" and its insistence that the aim was to "liberate the independent republics from a genocide being perpetrated by drug addicted neo-nazis in Kyiv". However, the brazenness and barbarity of the current full-scale invasion undermined any attempt by Moscow to control the narrative in the West, even though the "Kremlin's narrative" has had greater success in South America, Africa and Asia (especially in China).

This time everything is plain to see, including Russia's genocidal brutality in Bucha, the levelling of Russian-speaking Mariupol and the large-scale destruction of Russian-speaking Kharkiv. This time the Western media has not deemed it wise to publish the "language map" that the Kremlin distributed in 2014 and the media had dutifully reproduced. Huntington's "cleft country" map should similarly be consigned.

During the first month of the war the Ukrainian Army performed beyond all expectations held in the West, while the Russian Army performed and behaved extraordinarily poorly. The Battle of Kyiv was won by Ukraine, but now the battles of the Donbas and for the south are under way. Russia still has a vast stock of military equipment, although not sufficient missiles it would seem, and

has approached North Korea and China. Given the apparent support of the Russian people for the war it is likely to drag on with even more catastrophic consequences than we have seen to date.

While more than 90 per cent of Ukrainians think they can win, that will be determined by the West's humanitarian support, but even more importantly by sanctions on Russia and the amount and type of weapons that are supplied to the Ukrainian Armed Forces. More vital than a tightening of sanctions is the need to boycott Russian oil and gas exports. In the first month of the war the EU provided close to \$2 billion in aid to Ukraine, while at the same time it paid close to \$60 billion to Russia for energy. The US has sent weapons to Ukraine valued at less than half of the cost of a single Virginia Class submarine, and a tiny fraction of what it spent in Afghanistan. The level of commitment by the US and most other NATO allies does not match the rhetoric about the importance of this war to the security of Europe and the US.

Those Western observers who characterise this war as "really between the West/NATO and Russia" or who "urge negotiations with Putin" fail to grasp that Ukrainians have no choice but to win or die trying. "Ukrainian neutrality" has never been the issue. Ukraine was neutral in 2014 when Russia first invaded and was still neutral on February 24 this year. Russia insists on Ukraine's neutrality only because it provides the option to invade and destroy the Ukrainian state and national identity. Only Ukraine's membership of NATO, or as Mearsheimer argued in 1993 its own nuclear deterrent, could have avoided this invasion. It would likely have occurred sooner if NATO never existed.

Putin's aim, which has been echoed very publicly in the Russian media and by the Russian Orthodox Church, is to wipe Ukraine and Ukrainians from the face of the earth. Those Ukrainians not killed or forced to flee would be subjected to a brutally enforced Russification process that would include executions, mass arrests and "re-education camps". Immediately after the February invasion Putin's popularity with the Russian people jumped from 60 per cent to 71 per cent. It is now in the 80s. According to surveys most Russians are said to be proud of what their forces are doing in Ukraine.

Veteran American Putin watcher Masha Gessen has cautioned about taking at face value the results of surveys undertaken "in a totalitarian state like Russia", but she also cautions that we should not fantasise that Putin might soon be toppled by internal forces. However, we have seen numerous instances of conversations between Ukrainian and Russian family members where the latter cannot accept that the former's apartment has been destroyed by the

Russian Army. We also observe support for Russia's imperial project among Russian emigres, where it is not a function of information control. On the very weekend that images of the Bucha massacre were released in the West, Russian emigres held a 5000-car pro-Russia rally in Berlin.

In recent negotiations Ukrainians have stated that they require security guarantees from nuclear powers like the US and UK, but also other countries. These countries have thus far declined to provide guarantees and such an arrangement could, depending on the details, be almost indistinguishable from Ukraine being a member of NATO. Russia would never agree to effective security guarantees for Ukraine because it would close off the option to invade Ukraine in the future. As noted by

President Zelenskyy, it seems that in order to survive, Ukraine will need to adopt the Israeli model of total militarisation of the population. Since it is being excluded from the joint arrangements that underpin Europe's security, Ukraine cannot be like other European countries.

But for Ukraine even to have that option, it would first need to defeat Russia at a catastrophic cost to its people and its infrastructure.

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A rare moment

with Ornithorhynchus anatinus

Incongruous creature—part bird
part mammal, reptile and frog—
you allow very few sightings.

By the Hobart Rivulet
my reverie is broken
by an elderly couple pointing
and whispering. Taking photos

of you, platypus, swimming:
beaver-tail steering you
away from the rush of current
into a glass-smooth rock-pool

rolling over and over
feeling the sun on your fur
within a kilometre
of the city's CBD.

Diving, you disappear
below the spreading ripples.
A string of pearly bubbles
shows me where you are

and up you come for air
roll again and vanish
into your cave of twigs—
unlikely urban dweller.

Once a day

The dogs are restless, ready to have their say.
Our canine chorus is primed for the one-act show
when the postman on his beat arrives midday.

A curtain is pushed aside and straight away
Lucky, the Jack Russell, appears—aglow
with vigour and willpower, eager to have her say.

Persistent bass from Iris, the poodle, can sway
the meekest of men to rage, it's touch-and-go
when the postman on his beat arrives midday.

One-eyed Rufus puts in his all, midway
up the hill, and rouses Roy who'd show
God Himself that he will have his say.

A crescendo of barking and bluster is underway.
Birds are silenced, the wind forgets to blow
when the postman on his beat arrives midday.

The day shrinks to a single yap, astray
in our street—it's business as usual. Even so,
the dogs were restless, ready to have their say
when the postman on his beat arrived midday.

Liz McQuilkin