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UKRAINE: A WAR THAT RUSSIA IS INEVITABLY WINNING

The Russian special military operation in Ukraine – I will call it the Ukraine war for convenience – began on 24 February, 2022, nearly 14 months ago as I write this essay in Canberra, Australia. It falls into two distinct phases, pre- and post- September 2022, when the whole character of the war sharpened and hardened.

For Russia, this war really began nine years ago – with the violent overthrow in February 2014 by a US-supported coup d'état in Maidan Square in Kiev of the elected (in 2010) Yanukovich government of Ukraine. The Maidan coup upset the delicate post-Soviet political balance of the multi-cultural multi-lingual Ukrainian post-Soviet state.

It brought to power fanatical extreme Ukrainian nationalists – sometimes called Ukrainian Nazis, or less provocatively Banderists, after their leader in World War Two, Stefan Bandera. These people's grandparents worked in partnership with German Nazis during the German occupation of Ukraine to try to eliminate non – Ukrainian racial or cultural elements in the population: particularly Jews but also Poles and Russians.

The hard core of Banderists – those who did not flee as displaced persons to US and Canada, and a few to my country Australia – never went away after the second world war. They silently bided their time in Soviet Ukraine until 1991. They became politically active after 1991 in post-Soviet independent Ukraine setting up newspapers, universities like Kiev Mohyla, youth programs etc., to disseminate their nationalist Russia-hating ideology. They are numerically strongest in Western Ukraine, and their cultural capital is the city once known as Lemberg (in German, from the time when it was a major multicultural city in Austro-Hungarian Galicia), or Lvov (as it was known in Russian), or Lvoov (as it was known in Polish) or Lviv as it is known now in Ukrainian. This attractive wealthy city escaped physical damage from bombing during WW2. But its inhabitants suffered violent Banderist purges and pogroms of Jews, Russians and Poles during that war. In its aftermath, the city and region were repopulated with Ukrainians, who were generally Ukrainian speakers.

Stalin prudently left Ukraine to its own devices, hoping that time and postwar reconstruction and prosperity in the greatly enlarged Soviet Ukraine would heal old wounds. This did not happen: the old Banderist ideology sputtered on undercover, carried from generation to generation. The United States and Canada continued to encourage these elements throughout the Soviet and post-Soviet postwar years, through covert action and support of Ukrainian diaspora communities, seeing them as a potential Cold War weapon

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against the Soviet Union and then against the Russian Federation and its friends within Ukraine.

Ukraine has historically been the Russian Empire's soft strategic underbelly. Fertile and rich in minerals, with prosperous trading ports on the warm Black Sea, many invaders have coveted its wealth. Kiev in the 10th and 11th centuries was the main centre of Russian Orthodox Christian civilization, until sacked by the Mongols in 1240. Charles XII of Sweden mounted his failed European coalition invasion of Russia in the early C18 through Ukraine, accepting as an ally the nationalist Hetman Ivan Mazepa. The decisive battle in which Tsar Peter's forces defeated the enemy was fought in 1709 at Poltava, southwest of Kharkov. In the 1850s, British French and Turkish forces successfully captured Sevastopol, Russia's key warmwater naval base, after a hard-fought naval and on-land siege. Crimea was allowed to return to Russia, but as a demilitarised port for the next twenty years.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the Russian Empire developed and russified the wide rich lands of Ukraine. Kiev, Kharkov, Odessa, Dnipropetrovsk, and Sevastopol became proud Russian cities. Cities like Krivoi Rog, Zaporizhie, Luhansk, Donetsk and Mariupol were important centres of mining, industry and commerce, down through Soviet times.

Imperial Germany recognized the resources and strategic potential of Ukraine. In both world wars, German-led European armies invaded and occupied the whole of Ukraine. In WW1, they encouraged anti-Russian Ukrainian nationalism. After WW1, the Communist-led Soviet Union suppressed this movement. Ukraine became a rich agricultural and industrial heartland of the Soviet Union. Many Soviet Communist leaders were Ukrainian.

Hitler in WW2, after failing to take Moscow by the northern Napoleonic invasion route, mounted successful blitzkrieg warfare across Ukraine and well beyond, as far as Stalingrad on the lower Volga, where his armies were turned back after a horrendous siege. But all of Ukraine suffered under Nazi occupation for at least two years. There was immense physical and social destruction in Ukraine from the Nazi invasion, occupation and Red Army rollback.

The Banderists had collaborated enthusiastically with the Nazis in cruel genocidal crimes against Jews, Russians and Poles, seeing this as their historic opportunity to build a Ukrainian monocultural nation. Despite American CIA covert support to them after the war ended, as a violent resistance movement they petered out.

Ukraine never found post-communist national leaders of real worth after the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. Its industrial assets were corruptly privatized by rich oligarchs who controlled the national parliament through bribed politicians. Its political leaders – people like Krav-

chuk, Kuchma, Tymoshenko, Yushchenko, Yanukovich – were unimpressive. However, there was a kind of rough democracy in Kiev. The economy languished for 23 years and its old Soviet heavy industry base stagnated. There was largescale emigration.

By 2010, the two largest party groupings were the Fatherland Party representing the largely rural and Ukrainian-speaking countryside in the west and northwest: and the Party of Regions led by President Yanukovich, representing the more developed and largely Russian-speaking mining, industrial and commercial south and east of the country.

Native Russian speakers were around half of the population. The East and South were the Party of Regions' voting base. Russian was the language used by educated and cultured people. The constitution guaranteed equal language rights to all groups. Most Ukrainian citizens whatever their native language knew some Ukrainian.

Russians thought kindly and in retrospect naively of Ukrainians as their 'little brothers'. There was a lot of tourism and educational and economic exchange and intermarriage. Essentially the two republics were becoming one country, or so the Russians fondly thought. I would compare Scotland in the UK after 1745 or Ireland after the Act of Union in 1801.

All this changed for the worse after the 2014 Maidan coup. American anti-Soviet ideologues like Polish-American Zbigniew Brzezinski and Madeline Albright had seen years earlier the potential for the US to weaken Russia through destabilising Ukraine, drawing on the hateful energies of the Banderist movement. They encouraged these Russia-hating fanatics, in the pre-Maidan period never more than 6% of the Ukrainian population, to infiltrate their nationalist ideas into Ukrainian culture and into major Ukrainian parties and institutions. They plotted and triggered the criminal violence at Maidan that overthrew the elected President Yanukovich who fled the country, narrowly avoiding Banderist death squads who pursued him. The Americans then installed pro-American puppet nationalist leaders: first Yatsenyuk, then Poroshenko, then Zelensky.

Immediately after the Maidan coup, a terrified Russian Crimea seceded from Ukraine by overwhelming popular referendum and rejoined Russia. The referendum was protected by unofficial Russian forces from the Sevastopol naval base and was never recognised by the West. In 1954, sixty years earlier, Soviet leader Khrushchev had foolishly given Crimea to Ukraine, thinking this would bind the two Soviet republics closer together. But Crimea had always resisted Ukrainisation and remained firmly Russian in culture and spirit. I know this from my visit there in 2018. It will never return to Ukraine.

Immediately after the Maidan coup in Feb 2014, the Ukrainian Rada (Parliament) enacted harsh anti-Russian language laws in early 2014, in its bid to reshape Ukraine as a monolingual Ukrainian-speaking nation. There was violent suppression of Russian speakers' language rights in Odessa. 48 demonstrators who took refuge in a trade union building were burnt to death by Banderists as police looked on, an atrocious crime that was never punished.

Two key Eastern provinces, Donetsk and Lugansk, hereinafter referred to collectively as Donbass, rebelled against Kiev and appealed to Moscow for protection as it had protected Crimea. President Poroshenko in May 2014 angrily ordered full-scale military assault against rebel Don-

bass, causing immense suffering there over the next eight years: 14000 dead including many civilians as documented by OSCE observers: 100,000 refugees bombed out of their homes. This major civil war was ignored by the West but not in Russia where it caused public grief and anger.

Putin tried for eight years 2014–2021 through the Minsk diplomatic process to protect the Donbass communities' human rights as Russian speakers while leaving these oblasts within a democratic multicultural Ukraine. The West and Kiev cynically pretended to take these Minsk negotiations seriously. But they never intended to honour them, they were only buying time to rearm Ukraine against Russia.

Meanwhile, the US and NATO trained and equipped the Ukrainian Army and helped Banderists to take control of it, reshaping it as a fanatical anti-Russian army. When Biden came to power in US in 2021, he took the fatal decision to give powerful long-range precision-targeted artillery weapons to Kiev. This meant that by late 2021, Kiev at last had the military means to invade the rebel Donetsk and Lugansk lands. Kiev had heavily fortified the post-2015 frontline just west of Donetsk City and had put its best and most fanatical anti-Russian troops there.

Putin did his best to deter this imminent invasion. He massed over 100,000 Russian forces along the northern Ukraine border, as a deterrent. He made a last-ditch attempt at diplomacy, proposing in late 2021 Ukrainian neutrality and a new all-Europe security settlement based on NATO permanently withdrawing from Russian borders. US and NATO and Kiev sneeringly rejected this out of hand.

Finally, as pre-invasion Ukrainian Army shelling of Donbass cities sharply intensified, Putin on 21 February, 2022 accepted the Donbass republics' desperate declaration of secession from Ukraine and offered them an immediate mutual security treaty with Russia, hoping this would deter Kiev from further attacks on Donbass. It did not. Russian intelligence reported imminent preparations for mass invasion of Russian-protected Donbass. Russia was forced to move pre-emptively, on 24 February, 2022.

It is clear now that US and NATO had manoeuvred Russia into a no-win situation. If Russia had let its allied Donbass fall to Kiev after guaranteeing its security, this would have broken faith, led to mass genocide there, and humiliated and possibly destabilised Putin at home. If Russia used force against Ukraine to defend Donbass, Russia would have to violate Ukrainian national sovereignty: which the West would hypocritically condemn as a so-called 'unprovoked' invasion of a sovereign country.

The Russian government chose the latter, lesser evil. On 24 February, Russia invaded Ukraine on three fronts from north, east and south. With the best Ukrainian forces concentrated just west of Donetsk, Russia initially made large territorial gains elsewhere. Russia came close to taking the cities of Kiev and Kharkov, it retook some of Kiev-occupied Donbass, and it took most of Zaporizhie and Kherson oblasts in the south. By 30 March 2022 Russia occupied almost one fifth of Ukrainian territory. Putin through Israel and Turkey attempted peace talks with Kiev, but US and Britain vetoed this.

Putin's stated war aims were to protect the now independent Donbass provinces and Crimea, and to denazify and demilitarise Ukraine and ensure its future neutrality. For the first six months of the war, Russia fought it very gently. They did not destroy infrastructure or civilian prop-

erty. The Ukrainians took advantage of this restraint by firing from civilian locations. After a month, Russia retreated in March 2022 from areas north of Kiev: the returning Ukrainians wreaked murderous vengeance on local civilian people whom they suspected had collaborated with the Russians. The Bucha massacre was a deliberate mass execution blamed on the retreating Russians. No evidence was ever produced, and circumstantial evidence points to Ukrainian murders of pro-Russian civilians. A few months later, Ukraine retook quite large areas in Kharkov province in the north-east: their only military victory in this war.

In the south, in September 2022, Russia withdrew from Kherson City and areas west of the Dnieper River, to create a shorter more defensible line east of the Dnieper. This time they evacuated most local civilians with them, to avoid more Bucha-style false flag massacres.

In September-October 2022, the character of Russia's war changed completely. By now, large numbers of NATO forces were openly embedded as fighters and advisers in the Ukraine Army. It had become a full-on NATO proxy war, heavily assisted by US satellite surveillance. Ukrainians were now using drone-assisted precision long-range NATO artillery weapons to attack well behind the Russian frontline.

US and UK special services were now assisting Ukraine special services to carry out terrorist sabotage operations in Russian – held parts of Ukraine, in metropolitan Russia, and beyond. Drone attacks, and sabotage or terrorism groups, struck deep into Russian territory.

The many reports of Ukrainian torture and murder of Russian prisoners of war; the Western-assisted sinking by attack drones of the Russian Navy flagship in the Black Sea, the 'Moskva', on 14 April 2022; the audacious murder of daughter Darya of philosopher Alexander Dugin near Moscow on 20 August; the successful sabotage of the Russian-German Nordstream Baltic gas pipelines on 26 September; the terrorist attack on the Kerch Bridge on 8 October – all these events fomented urgent Russian public demands on Putin to take the gloves off, to prosecute the war harder.

In September 2022, Putin responded. A tough new frontline commander, General Surovikin, shortened and stabilised the front. Russia began a sustained campaign of precision missile attacks on Ukraine's key energy infrastructure installations. These have over the past seven months' time reduced the Ukrainian energy grid by an amazing 90%. Key electric transport nodes have been destroyed. The Ukraine economy is essentially crippled. Ukraine survives now on Western life support.

Much happened in Russia in September 2022. A mass mobilisation of 300,000 new forces began, as began a full scale military mass production of tanks, guns, missiles, ammunition and drones. The four partly Russian-occupied oblasts Donetsk, Lugansk, Zaporizhie and Kherson held referendums which voted overwhelmingly to join Russia. They were accepted into the Russian Federation as full new members.

In the central war theatre, Russian technical war-fighting superiority has gradually turned the balance since October 2022. The heavily fortified Ukrainian citadels of Bakhmut and Avdiivka, just west of Donetsk city, became huge killing fields. In battles reminiscent of WW1, Ukrainian forces were ordered by Kiev to cling tenaciously to ground, at huge cost in lives. Most of the initial well-trained

and motivated Ukrainian soldiers there in February 2022 have been killed or wounded. Their ill-trained conscripted replacements are being sent forward and slaughtered in terrible numbers.

Ukraine has since Feb 2022 lost, according to estimates by independent military commentator, retired US Colonel Douglas MacGregor, whose analysis I trust, an estimated 200,000 soldiers killed in action and about 300,000 more permanently incapacitated. Russia – which guards its soldiers' lives more carefully – has taken heavy losses too but nothing like on this scale.

The broad consensus now of informed military observers in the West as well as the East is that Kiev can no longer hope to prevail in this clearly unequal war. The war is draining Ukraine's remaining manpower in Bakhmut despite savage forced conscription. Kiev does not have the strength left to mount viable offensives anywhere else along the front. No amount of re-supply of equipment by US and NATO could change this outcome now. Ukraine has lost the war: the question is only when Kiev and Biden might accept this, and what the final political and territorial outcome might then be?

Ukraine now exists only on Western money and support. Civil society is unravelling. Biden and the war-mongers around him in Washington live in a fantasy world. They want Kiev to keep fighting "to the last Ukrainian" (US Senator Lindsay Graham's words), they hope until the US presidential election in November 2024, a long eighteen months from now. But it is hard to see the Kiev regime surviving militarily or politically until then.

There is in Ukraine a growing despair and a desperate desire just below the surface to end the war which Ukrainians know is draining their lifeblood away. Only ruthless enforced Banderist suppression is holding Ukraine together. Russia just has to maintain its steady offensive pressure along the present frontline, to go on bleeding Ukrainian lives and Western-supplied weaponry, and it will sooner or later prevail. It may or may not mount a spring offensive when the winter mud dries out.

There are increasingly strong voices from the Pope, from China and from leading nations in the global south like India, calling for an immediate ceasefire on the front line as it stands, and Kiev-Moscow negotiations thereafter for a realistic permanent peace. Washington has so far rejected these appeals, but how much longer can it go on exploiting Ukraine's suffering in this unwinnable war? A war that Russia can obviously sustain indefinitely.

China has proposed general principles for peace in accordance with the UN Charter and China has offered to chair direct peace talks between Kiev and Moscow. The US and Kiev will have to accept that Kiev has lost, at the minimum, all those parts of former Ukraine now east of the front line. It may have to give up more territory, depending on when a ceasefire comes. Certainly, Donbass and Lugansk which have suffered so much in these past nine years of war will plead to Moscow to regain their original pre-2014 oblast boundaries.

If Kiev moves early enough towards ceasefire and realistic peace, it might hope to retain Kherson City, Zaporizhie City, and Odessa. It has permanently lost Crimea and all the Azov Sea coast and hinterland.

The Kiev regime may still be too blinded by fanatical anti-Russian hatred yet to see and act on these harsh mili-

tary truths. So this tragic war could continue for some time yet. It has truly taken on the character of a civil war. In the US Civil War, the US South was no less brave and patriotic than the US North. But in the end the South lost because it was outmanned and outgunned by the North. So it will be in the Ukraine war. The US and NATO are getting tired of the war, and tired of Zelensky. The recent whistleblower leaks out of the US indicate that the US military wants the US to stop propping up the Zelensky regime. They will not wait eighteen months for a new President. Will Biden and his cronies listen? Will the Houses of Congress finally show some courage to say No?

Within Russia the war has caused a great simplification and clarification in Russian society, accompanied by and assisted by mass emigration of numbers of Western-influenced liberal intelligentsia. This is comparable in scale to the emigration of intelligentsia after the Russian civil war: it represents a real loss of national talent, but Russia will survive. The technical and business intelligentsia on the whole did not emigrate. They have become more resolute. Even many of the cultural intelligentsia – people like Netrebko and Gergiev – remain resolutely patriotic. Russian morale, social cohesion and military industrial capacity remain strong, and this will continue for as long as is necessary.

Russia will not trust the West again, perhaps for decades. It will be a very cold new Cold War. Military confidence-building contacts will continue out of prudent necessity, but much diplomacy, cultural and sporting contacts will continue to be handicapped by Western political elites' indoctrinated and now ingrained Russophobia.

The impact on Russian relations with China and on Russian foreign policy in general towards the West and global South has been profound especially since September 2022. Russia's relations with China and other key BRICS countries, and with Africa and the Middle East and Asia, continue to grow and prosper as parts of a new UN-based multilateral global economic system. Not good news for US, Europe or Australia which still cling to the familiar but declining US-dominated rules-based trade and currency order. Russia has proved that it has survived futile Western sanctions, through import substitution, and rapidly growing trading and banking relations with China and the global south. Countries like India and in the Middle East are unafraid to defy US secondary sanctions. They are acting as sovereign trading intermediaries. The EU economies are staggering under self-inflicted energy cost wounds. The US dollar is rapidly weakening as a former global reserve currency and the impact on a weakening US economy is starting to show.

I don't see any risk of the war being extended to Poland or to the rest of NATO. Russia will not extend the Ukraine war to these countries. A basic prudence is telling Washington and London that NATO cannot now credibly by conventional warfare oppose determined Russian military pressure if they should widen the war, unless they threaten nuclear war. Fortunately, NATO governments are not ready for such an act of desperation.

In this war, Western information warfare has been massively employed to present false pro-Kiev narratives of this war, which have until recently convinced Western public opinion audiences in general, thereby delaying and impeding a ceasefire and a peaceful final settlement on realistic terms. They have indefinitely extended Ukraine's agony, the ongoing sacrifice of Ukrainian lives and national wealth.

This phase is now drawing towards an end. The Western information war is now so far divorced from reality that even heavily indoctrinated Western elites are starting to question its claims. In Ukraine, the heroic defense by babushkas, young mothers and widows, and invalids, of canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church monasteries and churches, passively resisting intimidation by Banderist thugs, shows the real courage of decent Ukrainians starting to re-emerge. I pray for a Von Stauffenberg style internal regime coup in Kiev – but successful – before more Ukrainian and Russian lives are lost. But with US and UK covert intelligence continuing to deter organised resistance to the Zelensky puppet regime, the people of Ukraine may continue to suffer under their present violent and cruel regime for a while yet.

The negative impact on Australian foreign and strategic policy over the past fifteen months of war has also been profound. Australia's retreat from Asia to the 'white' Anglo-American laager is being cemented by the bipartisan strengthening of the new AUKUS alliance. Our Asian neighbours are keen to cooperate with China and Russia, the emerging Asian regional great powers, and are bemused at Australia's retreat from Asia. But we stubbornly acquiesce in America shaping Australia as its proxy warrior against China, as a new Ukraine in the Asia-Pacific region: a compliant and trusting ally that can be used, abused and if necessary sacrificed in a possible US war on China. Some in the US seem to be trying to provoke such a war sooner rather than later, as the balance of economic and military power continues to slide away from the US in favour of China.

These are dangerous times.