

# STRATEGIKA

Conflicts Of The Past As Lessons For The Present

ISSUE 97

APRIL 2025



## PEACE IN UKRAINE

IN THIS ISSUE

JAKUB GRYGIEL • RALPH PETERS • BARRY STRAUSS

## EDITORIAL BOARD

Victor Davis Hanson, Chair  
Bruce Thornton  
David Berkey

## CONTRIBUTING MEMBERS

Peter Berkowitz  
Josiah Bunting III  
Gordon G. Chang  
Admiral James O. Ellis Jr.  
Niall Ferguson  
Chris Gibson  
Jakub Grygiel  
Josef Joffe  
Robert G. Kaufman  
Edward N. Luttwak  
Peter R. Mansoor  
Mark Moyar  
Williamson Murray  
Ralph Peters  
Paul A. Rahe  
Andrew Roberts  
Admiral Gary Roughead  
Kiron K. Skinner  
Barry Strauss  
Bing West  
Miles Maochun Yu

# CONTENTS

April 2025 • Issue 97

## BACKGROUND ESSAY

**The Strategic and Military Pathways  
to a Peaceful Ukrainian Settlement**  
by Jakub Grygiel

## FEATURED COMMENTARY

**Peace in Ukraine . . . or Ukraine in Pieces?**  
by Ralph Peters

**The Prospects for Peace in Ukraine**  
by Barry Strauss

## EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

Discussion Questions



## ABOUT THE POSTERS IN THIS ISSUE

Documenting the wartime viewpoints and diverse political sentiments of the twentieth century, the Hoover Institution Library & Archives Poster Collection has more than one hundred thousand posters from around the world and continues to grow. Thirty-three thousand are available online. Posters from the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia/Soviet Union, and France predominate, though posters from more than eighty countries are included.



# The Strategic and Military Pathways to a Peaceful Ukrainian Settlement

By Jakub Grygiel

All wars must end, and the Russo-Ukrainian war is not an exception to the rule. In fact, there is growing interest, most visibly in the United States, to see an end to this conflict, which started in 2014 with Russia's annexation of Crimea and parts of Eastern Ukraine, and then escalated further in 2022 with a Russian attempt to conquer Kyiv and end Ukraine's independence. Given that neither Russia nor Ukraine can break the other's lines, the conflict has turned into a war of attrition that is not in the long-term interest of Ukraine and is not sustainable, at least politically, in the U.S. and Europe. We can surmise that Russia, or at least Putin, is more capable of withstanding the attrition of Russian manpower and resources, but even Moscow has limits and may be interested in a ceasefire to regroup and refit.

The American and European goal cannot be to sustain Ukraine "as long as it takes"—a phrase used by President Biden as well as by many European leaders. This is a murky definition of victory that has no metrics according to which one can measure success or failure. Moreover, time is not on Ukraine's side. Wars of attrition are wars of destruction and civilian devastation. A long war of attrition will only destroy Ukraine's already fragile economy and bleed it of men in a demographic situation that has been well below replacement for decades (add to this also the high number of Ukrainians who emigrated since the 2022 Russian attack). Ukraine's loss of land is also damaging, as the amount of harvested land decreased by about a third for some crops. Its energy grid is unstable and under frequent Russian attacks. And the rebuilding of Ukraine's housing, infrastructure, and industry will probably cost more than half a trillion dollars. A continued war of attrition will not improve this situation and is simply not sustainable for Kyiv.

Ukraine's Western friends also do not have time on their side. The United States is clearly not interested in a forever war on Europe's eastern frontline. Weapons are being consumed at a rapid pace that will require months, if not years, to replace, and this creates worries in Washington as China insists on a more expansive role in the Pacific. And Europeans, despite their claim that the war in Ukraine is existential to the continent (and it may be), have not ramped up their defense spending nor increased their warfighting capabilities. The rhetoric in most European capitals is bellicose and increases as the Trump administration appears to be less



Image credit: Poster Collection, 00244.14, Hoover Institution Archives.

interested in an open-ended support of Ukraine. But the rhetoric remains unmatched by actions because few European nations are willing to incur the large costs needed to rearm in a serious way and to supply Ukraine with continued and abundant weapons and ammunition. The longer this war lasts, the smaller the Western support will be.

The question is how the war can end—both in the sense of what the outcome may be and how to achieve it.

Let's look first at the possible outcomes. Historically, it is exceedingly difficult to have a neutral state in this region. Europe's borderlands are uncomfortably located between centers of power—Russia, Turkey, and Europe's core—that have engaged in a continued struggle for mastery. Hence, for Ukraine there is no neutral, non-aligned option. This does not mean necessarily that a formal alliance is necessary. That is, Ukraine can be Western without NATO membership, or it can fall within Moscow's influence without turning into a Russian republic. But it cannot be just a neutral Ukraine, peacefully living in the borderlands between Russia, Turkey, and Europe.

Ukraine, thus, has three geopolitical choices: Moscow, Istanbul, or Warsaw.

Let's eliminate the Muscovite and Turkish options. The latter is not feasible simply because Turkey is not yet a great power capable of projecting its influence on the northern shores of the Black Sea, effectively inserting itself between Eurasia's West and East. It has certainly played a role in the war, supplying Ukraine with drones and some diplomatic mediation, but Istanbul is not ready for a prime geopolitical role. The former—Muscovite—option is possible and even likely but not desirable. A Ukraine under Russian domination inserts Moscow into the heart of Europe, turning Russia from a peripheral Asiatic state into a crucial determinant of the continent's balance of power. Such a geopolitical map is not beneficial for Ukraine, for Europe and, as the ultimate guarantor of European security, for the United States.

The best outcome is an independent, sovereign, militarily strong and economically growing Ukraine. This would allow Ukraine to remain geopolitically separate from Russia, preserving its democratic aspirations and preventing a westward expansion of Russian power. But Ukraine can't achieve this outcome without being tied to the West. This is the third historical geopolitical choice of Ukraine: Warsaw or, more broadly and more reflective of current politics, the West.

To be anchored in the West, Ukraine does not need to be a member of NATO. In any case, neither Washington nor many other European allies support Ukraine's membership in NATO, despite the persistent requests by Kyiv. Few Western states are willing to accept the security commitment to Ukraine that would come with NATO membership. If Germany, for instance, is reluctant to arm Ukraine now, it will certainly not be eager to defend it in the future as a formal ally.

There are other ways of anchoring Ukraine in the West. A Western commitment to arm Ukraine in the future, even after a ceasefire with Russia is established, is indispensable. This can mean not just a continued supply of Western arms, but various business arrangements to allow Ukraine to produce some weapons, expanded training of Ukrainians in the West (for instance, a program to rebuild Ukraine's air force on Western platforms and with Western standards; and a plan to conscript and train Ukrainian men who emigrated to Europe), and arrangements to surge weapons and ammunition into Ukraine in case of another Russian attack (e.g., by stockpiling ready-to-access ammunition in Poland or Romania, out of reach from a preventive Russian attack but close to Ukraine's border for quick delivery).

Furthermore, Ukraine will have to be linked economically with the West. The so called "minerals deal" proposed by the Trump administration is valuable exactly because it develops American business interests in Ukrainian lands, giving the United States a stake in Ukraine's natural resources—access to which would be

threatened by Russian control. It is not a security guarantee akin to a military alliance, but it is an economic commitment that creates interests that did not exist before. Such an agreement can also serve as a model for other arrangements with European countries, developing economic and business links that would tilt Ukraine's geopolitical outlook toward the West.

Finally, it is not necessary to draw new, final territorial contours of Ukraine at this stage. It is evident that Ukraine cannot militarily reconquer Crimea, which it lost to Russia in 2014, even though it can hold it at risk by demonstrating the capacity to sever the land connection between this peninsula and the Russian mainland (especially through the bridge on the Kerch Strait). Similarly, Ukraine has not been able to regain lands lost in 2014 and since 2022 in the Donbas, and the loss of manpower that would be incurred in a push in that direction may not be worth the benefit of those territories. But the inability or difficulty of restoring Ukraine's original territorial integrity does not mean that Kyiv must recognize Russian control over these conquered territories. A final territorial settlement can be postponed.

The key for Ukraine is to maintain unimpeded access to the sea through Odessa, its only port left, as well as to limit Russian naval capabilities in the Black Sea. The maritime situation should allow the unopposed navigation of commercial vessels carrying agricultural products from Ukraine to the global markets. It would be, of course, very beneficial for Ukraine to regain its littoral over the Sea of Azov (e.g., in Mariupol) and this should be part of the negotiations with Moscow. But, short of the exercise of some serious leverage (e.g., the United States' threats of more sanctions on Russia, or American promises to arm Ukraine with medium-range missiles with no strings attached), it is unlikely that the ceasefire line of demarcation will move the existing frontline in any meaningful way.

Let's now return to the question of how—that is, in what way—the war may end.

In brief, the likely scenario is that war will simply be interrupted, rather than reach a long-term settlement removing the initial causes of the conflict. No matter what the official term of the outcome will be—a *de facto* ceasefire, a formal armistice, a peace treaty, or a more generic plan of action—the reality is that the interests of the two sides are fundamentally opposed and nonnegotiable: Ukraine wants to be independent, Russia wants her empire in Europe. Whether under Putin or his successor, Russia will not abandon her imperial aspirations to become a key European power through a full control of Kyiv. And the stronger China becomes on Eurasia's eastern side, the greater Moscow's need will be to maintain great power status by reentering Europe through Ukraine. This basic geostrategic interest will not change with a cessation of fighting in Ukraine.

The best-case scenario is that active fighting ends along the current line of contact, without a grand political settlement. There will be a recognition of *de facto* realities on the ground without the need to establish new—and for both Ukraine and Russia difficult to accept—*de iure* maps. After years of fighting and a large loss of blood, Kyiv cannot accept having lost forever large swaths of sovereign territories. And Russia cannot accept limiting her grand imperial scheme to slivers of new lands instead of a grand historic reentry into Kyiv. For Kyiv this would be too much; for Moscow this would be too little.

Both sides must recognize that at this moment their ultimate objectives—for Kyiv, the restoration of territorial integrity, and for Moscow, the conquest and annexation of Ukraine—cannot be achieved militarily. Ukraine must be convinced by its supporters that their help is not eternal and infinite. Moscow must be convinced by the West that Russian military might has limits and will be contained. This requires a delicate game of diplomacy and military support on the part of the United States and the Western supporters of Ukraine.

In the end, whatever agreement is reached in the near future, the conflict on Europe's eastern frontier will not be resolved. The pause will be welcomed by both belligerents, but mostly because it will be considered an opportunity to regain strength, refit their military forces, and prepare for another round of war. The West should therefore use this moment to rebuild its defense capabilities, restart its weapons production, and shore up Ukraine as an Eastern rampart. If it does not, the next decade will be a dark one for Europe.



**JAKUB GRYGIEL** is a professor of politics at the Catholic University of America (Washington, DC), a senior advisor at the Marathon Initiative, and a visiting fellow at Hoover. In 2017–18 he was a senior advisor in the Office of Policy Planning at the Department of State. Previously, he was a senior fellow at the Center for European Policy Analysis and a professor at Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, DC. He is the author of *Classics and Strategy* (The Marathon Initiative, 2022), *Return of the Barbarians* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), and *Great Powers and Geopolitical Change* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006) and coauthor, with Wess Mitchell, of *The Unquiet Frontier* (Princeton University Press, 2016). His writings have appeared in *Foreign Affairs*, the *American Interest*, *Security Studies*, the *Journal of Strategic Studies*, the *National Interest*, the *Claremont Review of Books*, *Orbis*, *Commentary*, and *Parameters*, as well as several U.S. and foreign newspapers. He earned a PhD, an MA, and an MPA from Princeton University and a BSFS summa cum laude from Georgetown University.



# Peace in Ukraine . . . or Ukraine in Pieces?

By Ralph Peters

Russian president and aspiring czar Vladimir Putin has lost his war of aggression against Ukraine. Even should a bizarrely pro-Russian U.S. president force Ukraine to accept virtually all of Putin's demands, the Russian dictator lost this war. Ukraine certainly hasn't won by conventional measurements, despite over three years of heroic struggle: Stunned by the American betrayal of Kyiv's freedom fighters, the world will judge Ukraine to be the clear loser. Indeed, there is now no possibility that the Ukrainian territory occupied by Putin's inept-but-tenacious military will all be returned to Kyiv's control—and perhaps none of it will.

Yet, should we strive to be objective, briefly suspending our natural sympathy with Kyiv, Putin's territorial gains suddenly look like poison pills: Russian troops have destroyed much of Donetsk and Luhansk—the Russian-speaking eastern frontier provinces of Ukraine now largely in Moscow's possession—and Putin lacks the money to rebuild more than a few showcase sites. Russian occupiers will also face decades of guerilla warfare and assassinations. Meanwhile, rump Ukraine—where the destruction has been milder (if grim enough)—will benefit from international largess to construct a prosperous, Western-oriented object of jealousy for Russian citizens condemned to drab lives beyond Ukraine's revised borders.

So . . . might it be a blessing, if in an ugly guise, that Crimea and those eastern provinces will not return to Kyiv's control? Strategic wisdom would see Ukraine's negotiators concentrating on terms such as security guarantees and substantial peacekeeping forces from the free world (if not from the USA), along with the acknowledged right of Ukraine to determine its own future—including European Union membership and eventual affiliation with NATO, or with a new European defense league (if American treachery and tantrums invalidate NATO). A smaller, more-agile Ukraine could prove more prosperous as well as more viable.

None of this is meant to excuse Russian barbarism and aggression, which merit total defeat. Rather, it seeks to see beyond today's blinding passions—the initial reaction to any truce or treaty will be one of rage, shame, and hysteria . . . and the instant analysis will be wrong.

To determine who really wins or loses, consider what Putin needed so desperately from Ukraine that he launched a war—one that now has devoured Russian budgets and blood, exposed Moscow's many weaknesses, triggered the emigration of Russia's highest-skilled youth, excited fresh antipathy toward Russia globally—and worsened the Russian demographic decline that worries Putin above all else. Russia today has a fading, aging, unskilled population concentrated in that vast country's west. The Russian far east is increasingly indefensible, and, unlike Putin, China's leadership is patient.

Putin did not order the kidnapping of tens of thousands of Ukrainian children out of sheer nastiness (although he's capable thereof). Russia needs bodies—white bodies, in the program of Russian nationalists—to retain



Image credit: Poster Collection, 02219, Hoover Institution Archives.

its long-since-compromised identity and slow its demographic bleed-out. Racial fears and hatreds haunt Russians. Hence Putin's initial deployments of military units were composed of Asian ethnicities: They were brown-skinned and expendable.

The Russian czar/president also sincerely believes that Ukraine is Russian property, that the (relatively) peaceful dissolution of the Soviet Union did Russia a terrible injustice when the world recognized an independent Ukraine. Yet, thanks to the repeated redrawing of borders over the centuries, Ukraine contains territories that never belonged to czarist Russia. Indeed, Warsaw would have a far better historical claim to western Ukraine than would Moscow. And now-obscure regions, such as Ruthenia, Galicia (not the Spanish one), or tiny Bukovina, were Austro-Hungarian properties by and large. Turks and Tartars have a far longer history with Crimea than Russia (or Ukraine).

Leaping from bad to worse, Stalin and his successors made a dreadful mess of internal boundaries, attaching Donetsk and Luhansk to Soviet Ukraine to dilute Ukraine's ever-restive non-Russian majority. Crimea was tacked onto Ukraine in the 1950s, a gift from half-Ukrainian party boss Nikita Khrushchev. The point is that citing historical territorial rights may be vital to Putin, but Russia's case is the region's weakest . . . not to mention the hatred its neighbors have felt, feel, and will feel toward the over-inflated Grand Duchy of Muscovy in any pompous guise. Putin is captivated by a resentfully rewritten past. Ukraine, for all its current agony, has a future.

Despite American perfidy toward Ukraine's heroes and the near inevitability that the American president will advance Putin's case, Ukraine has gained an even more profound sense of national identity than it had when it first escaped the Soviet grip. Putin's lucky his forces were unable to thrust deeper into Ukraine, beyond the Russian-speaking zones. A conquered Ukraine would not have been a vanquished Ukraine; rather, it would have continued to bleed Moscow for decades. Even Stalin could not extinguish Ukrainian identity, despite starving as many as four million Ukrainians to death.

And Putin's a punk compared to Stalin.

The coming weeks and months will be horribly painful and unjust for the Ukrainian people. But a generation from now, it will be recognized that Putin brought disaster upon Russia with his ill-judged invasion three years ago. And Ukraine will shine.



**RALPH PETERS** is the author of thirty-four books, including works on strategy and security affairs, as well as bestselling, prize-winning novels. He has published more than a thousand columns, articles, and essays in the United States and abroad. As a U.S. Army enlisted man and career officer, he served in infantry and military intelligence units before becoming a foreign area officer for the dying Soviet Union and the new Russia. As a soldier, journalist, and researcher, he has experience covering various wars and trouble spots in more than seventy countries. His historical fiction won the American Library Association's Boyd Award for Literary Excellence an unprecedented four times and also received the Herodotus Award and the Hammett Prize. Additionally, he was the 2015 recipient of the Goodpaster Award, presented each year to a distinguished American soldier-scholar. In 2017, he was selected for the U.S. Army's Officer Candidate School Hall of Fame. He has retired from public life and dedicates his time to music.



# The Prospects for Peace in Ukraine

By Barry Strauss

As of this writing, the United States government is trying to negotiate a peace settlement in Ukraine, three years after Russia invaded. Although some progress has been made, it's been a rocky road, marked by verbal tussles and continued bloodshed. Probably more obstacles lay ahead. After all, it took two years of negotiations before the armistice was agreed on that ended the Korean War in 1953. Still, it is now possible to imagine the shape of a negotiated settlement.

Observers of the Russo-Ukrainian War have long expected a Korean solution, as my colleague Stephen Kotkin notes. That is, an agreement like the armistice that ended the Korean War in 1953, which divided the peninsula into two states, North and South Korea, with a demilitarized zone (DMZ) running between them. That division continues to exist today, over 70 years later. In Ukraine, it is hoped that, while Russia will keep some of its conquests, most of Ukraine will be free and independent.

Armistices are not self-enforcing, however. Neither are treaties. The ancient Greeks were realists about treaties and often put a time limit on them, e.g., the Thirty Years' Peace or the Ten Years' Peace. Armistices and treaties depend on the willingness of the participants to enforce them. American experience with treaties in the twentieth century has been mixed. In Korea, peace has survived but only with the continued presence of American combat troops in South Korea—today about 25,000 soldiers. Both sides remain committed to reunification, the North much more aggressively so. North Korea is a nuclear state, constantly threatening reunification by force and continually engaging in intimidation, espionage, and small-scale violent incidents. No peace treaty to end the Korean War was ever formally signed. Still, the armistice holds.

America's experience after World War I was less successful. An armistice ended the war on November 11, 1918. There followed a series of pacts among the belligerents, most famously the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, the result of that year's Paris Peace Conference, a gathering in which the United States played a prominent role. Its delegation was led by President Woodrow Wilson, the first sitting American president to travel to Europe. Wilson left his stamp on the peace conference, whose treaties carved up part of Germany and most of the Austro-Hungarian empire in the name of national self-determination. Yet the U.S. Senate, abhorring entangling alliances, refused to ratify it. Nor did the United States join the capstone of Wilson's work, the League of Nations. Wilson hoped that the League would resolve international disagreements by negotiation. Without America, however, its efforts were stillborn. Had the U.S. remained engaged in Europe, it could have stopped any German attempt at revenge, but the two leading European Allied powers, Britain and France, emerged wounded from the slaughter on the Western Front. They folded in the face of renewed and repeated German expansion in the 1930s until finally drawing a line in the sand, too late. The result was World War II, which began on September 1, 1939, and did not end until the United States was drawn in.



Image credit: Poster Collection, 02315.3, Hoover Institution Archives.

## POLL: What are the strategic and military pathways, if any, to a peaceful Ukrainian settlement?

- ☐ There are none. Ukraine must be supplied sufficiently by the United States to militarily defeat Russia.
- ☐ If Ukraine is in NATO, Russia will never again invade.
- ☐ Everyone just returns to the status before February 2024, and peace will follow.
- ☐ Ukraine must not be in NATO and Russia must return to its February 2024 borders.
- ☐ The United States can let Ukraine and its European neighbors decide how to end the war while America stays out of it.

long-running war in eastern Ukraine, supposedly an indigenous effort by Russian-speaking Ukrainians but really a Russian-directed operation. Finally, there came the out-and-out Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Putin won a swathe of territory in that invasion but at a huge cost in blood and treasure. Heroic resistance on the part of Ukraine, whose civilians and civilian infrastructure have been mercilessly attacked by Russia, in violation of the laws of war, has prevented further Russian gains.

As in Korea, so in Ukraine the United States can negotiate a compromise solution. Trump's clever plan to force Ukraine to share its mineral resources with the United States would lead to the placing of American workers in that country. (The United States exacted much greater tribute from Britain as the price of American support in WWII: gold, scientific know-how, military bases, and the beginning of the end of the British Empire.) As part of the deal with Ukraine, European troops, say, British and French, would patrol a DMZ. There is still a large presence of U.S. troops in NATO countries bordering Ukraine, including over 10,000 in Poland. Together, these soldiers represent an adequate presence to deter further Russian aggression in Ukraine.

They are enough to deter aggression, that is, if the United States continues to remain engaged in Europe. But will it? There is war in the Middle East too, affecting American interests. Meanwhile, the rise of China is the most significant geopolitical fact of our lifetime. China is a global economic rival and a geopolitical threat to American power not only in East Asia but also in Latin America. The United States needs to respond but it faces domestic problems. These include political division, unabsorbed immigration, the decay of civic education, a decline in industry, a surplus of aged population, and booming health care costs. Above all, there is the out-of-control national debt of \$36 trillion. The debt-to-GDP ratio was 98 percent in 2024, almost as much as the high of over 100 percent at the end of World War II. Today's U.S. simply doesn't have the resources to fight everywhere in the world where trouble breaks out.

The United States and the Soviet Union played the leading roles in winning the war in Europe, with significant help from Britain, Canada, and others. Afterwards the United States conceded much of Europe to the Soviet Union, including part of Germany, but it also forged a powerful new order in Western Europe. Its finishing touch was NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the alliance that emerged victorious from the Cold War after 1989. The USSR lost its allies (the former members of the Warsaw Pact) and much of its territory and population. Russia emerged diminished, divided, and dispirited. NATO was triumphant; Germany was reunited. Now, nearly 35 years later, NATO continues to exist, but it depends on American funding and American arms. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, most of the European members of NATO have come close to disarming themselves.

Not so Russia. Like Germany after the First World War, Russia is bent on regaining at least some of its lost empire. Vladimir Putin has been in effect the dictator of Russia throughout the twenty-first century. Thanks to cunning strategy, a taste for bloodshed, a military buildup, and a ruthless policy of subversion and aggression, Putin has managed to wrest back small pieces of the former Soviet empire. His greatest success was the bloodless conquest of Crimea in 2014, followed by a

To make things worse, there have been long-simmering disputes between the Americans and Europeans. The latter, along with Canadians, concede that they don't pay their fair share of the cost of defense, but they long since decided to prioritize butter (the welfare state) over guns (NATO), while indulging, at least in the elites, in the delights of anti-Americanism. Since Trump and Vice President Vance have made noises about pulling back American commitments to Europe, several European states have promised to increase military spending. Promises, promises.

Putin knows all this. The Americans will entice him with offers of support against China, which covets the Russian Far East. They will promise to lift sanctions or, as needed, threaten to strengthen them or to rearm Ukraine. In the end, Putin will agree to terms, because of the burden of the war on Russia. But Putin and his successors will scrutinize the DMZ with patience, ready to attack Ukraine again at the first sign of Western weakness. Meanwhile, Russia will engage in subversion within Ukraine to try to get a more pliant regime in power.

Can a negotiated peace in Ukraine survive? Yes, but it will be up to the Ukrainian people, and to the West.



**BARRY STRAUSS**, Bryce and Edith M. Bowmar Professor in Humanistic Studies, Cornell University, is a military historian with a focus on ancient Greece and Rome and their legacy. His books have been translated into twenty languages. In March 2022 he published *The War That*

*Made the Roman Empire: Antony, Cleopatra, and Octavian at Actium*, which has been acclaimed as a "splendid book" (*Wall Street Journal*), "a gripping account" (*Publishers Weekly*) and a work by "a master historian" (*Kirkus Reviews*). The Bradley Foundation, *First Things*, and the *Octavian Report*, named it on their lists of best books of the year. His *Ten Caesars: Roman Emperors from Augustus to Constantine* (2018) has been hailed as a "superb summation of four centuries of Roman history, a masterpiece of compression" (*Wall Street Journal*). Amazon.com and *National Review* named it one of the best books of the year. His *Battle of Salamis: The Naval Encounter That Saved Greece—and Western Civilization* was named one of the best books of 2004 by the *Washington Post*. His *Masters of Command: Alexander, Hannibal, Caesar, and the Genius of Leadership* was named one of the best books of 2012 by *Bloomberg*. He is currently writing *REBELS: The Jews and Rome*. Strauss is director of Cornell's Program in Freedom and Free Societies. He is Corliss Page Dean Visiting Fellow at the Hoover Institution. He is an honorary citizen of Salamis, Greece. His op-eds have appeared in such venues as the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and *Atlantic Monthly*. Strauss's regular blogs and podcasts are available at [barrystrauss.com](http://barrystrauss.com).

## Discussion Questions

1. What are the historical claims to the Donbas and Crimea by both Russia and Ukraine?
2. Are there any accurate assessments of the total aggregate casualties of Ukrainians and Russians?
3. Militarily, what was learned from the three-year war in Ukraine?
4. How radically did the borders of Ukraine change from 1939 to 2022?
5. Would Ukrainian NATO membership increase or decrease NATO security?



IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Are Total Wars Obsolete?



## Military History in Contemporary Conflict

As the very name of Hoover Institution attests, military history lies at the very core of our dedication to the study of “War, Revolution, and Peace.” Indeed, the precise mission statement of the Hoover Institution includes the following promise: “The overall mission of this Institution is, from its records, to recall the voice of experience against the making of war, and by the study of these records and their publication, to recall man’s endeavors to make and preserve peace, and to sustain for America the safeguards of the American way of life.” From its origins as a library and archive, the Hoover Institution has evolved into one of the foremost research centers in the world for policy formation and pragmatic analysis. It is with this tradition in mind, that the “Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict” has set its agenda—reaffirming the Hoover Institution’s dedication to historical research in light of contemporary challenges, and in particular, reinvigorating the national study of military history as an asset to foster and enhance our national security. By bringing together a diverse group of distinguished military historians, security analysts, and military veterans and practitioners, the working group seeks to examine the conflicts of the past as critical lessons for the present.

## Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict

The Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict examines how knowledge of past military operations can influence contemporary public policy decisions concerning current conflicts. The careful study of military history offers a way of analyzing modern war and peace that is often underappreciated in this age of technological determinism. Yet the result leads to a more in-depth and dispassionate understanding of contemporary wars, one that explains how particular military successes and failures of the past can be often germane, sometimes misunderstood, or occasionally irrelevant in the context of the present.

## Strategika

*Strategika* is a journal that analyzes ongoing issues of national security in light of conflicts of the past—the efforts of the Military History Working Group of historians, analysts, and military personnel focusing on military history and contemporary conflict. Our board of scholars shares no ideological consensus other than a general acknowledgment that human nature is largely unchanging. Consequently, the study of past wars can offer us tragic guidance about present conflicts—a preferable approach to the more popular therapeutic assumption that contemporary efforts to ensure the perfectibility of mankind eventually will lead to eternal peace. New technologies, methodologies, and protocols come and go; the larger tactical and strategic assumptions that guide them remain mostly the same—a fact discernable only through the study of history.



The publisher has made this work available under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial license 4.0.

To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0>.

Efforts have been made to locate the original sources, determine the current rights holders, and, if needed, obtain reproduction permissions. On verification of any such claims to rights in the articles or images reproduced in this publication, any required corrections or clarifications will be made in subsequent printings/editions. The views expressed in this publication are entirely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the staff, officers, or Board of Overseers of the Hoover Institution.

Copyright © 2025 by the Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior University

Hoover Institution, Stanford University  
434 Galvez Mall  
Stanford, CA 94305-6003  
650-723-1754

Hoover Institution in Washington  
1399 New York Avenue NW, Suite 500  
Washington, DC 20005  
202-760-3200

