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Finland and the future of Ukraine, or about the war and peace that will one day come

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Abstract

The idea that NATO troops could be sent to Ukraine presented by Emanuel Macron was widely commented around the globe by scholars, political scientists and journalists. They often compared the situation of Ukraine with the situation of Finland on the eve of the conclusion of the Soviet-Finnish peace in March 1940. The most important question, in this context, is how Ukrainian leaders should prepare themselves for peace talks with Russia, which one day come. An example of Finland's approach towards the negotiations with the Soviets, not only in 1940, but also 1944 and 1948, can be instructive for Ukraine. The matter does not relate to any theoretically possible Ukrainian capitulation or concessions, but it's about how to prepare for talks with the Russians and how to achieve own goals during them. The Finnish leaders, whose negotiation position at the end of the Winter War, but also in the last weeks of the Continuation War as well as in 1948 was rather weak, showed that realism, correct assessment and of the situation and awareness of own possibilities allowed them to ensure Finland's survival and, later, security. Therefore, it seems that conclusions from Finnish lesson can help the Ukrainian leadership to estimate realistically what and how it want to achieve, so that tough resistance, which the enemy cannot break so far, becomes the foundation of a credible Ukrainian vision of future relations with Russia.

Keywords: Finland, Ukraine, Second World War, war of Russia with Ukraine, peace

Introduction

The recent proposal of French President Emanuel Macron about sending NATO troops to Ukraine (made in April 2024) was met with a number of statements from politicians, political scientists and journalists. Some of these commentators (for example Witold Jurasz, a former Polish diplomat, an expert dealing with Russian and Belarusian issues, and currently a well-

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known, respected journalist[1]) believe that Macron's proposal should be considered as a peace offer addressed to Vladimir V. Putin. In the way that authors' of this opinion or political hypothesis propose, it can be described, as a vision of concluding an agreement between Russia, Ukraine and the supporting North Atlantic Alliance – one based on the principle of land for peace.[2]

The current situation in Ukraine is willingly compared with the situation in Finland in 1940, that is, the situation of this northern European country on the eve of the conclusion of the Soviet-Finnish peace treaty in Moscow on 13 March 1940. That treaty ended the so-called Winter War, i.e. Stalin's attempted conquest of Finland by the Red Army, which began on 30 November 1939. In doing so, the attention is drawn to the rationalism of the then Finnish leaders. It is maintained that they concluded peace in the period of growing Soviet supremacy on the warfront in order to avoid the subordination of the homeland to its eastern neighbor, or even loss of independence. Instead – at the price of painful territorial losses and consent to the construction of a Soviet Baltic Fleet base on their own territory – they obtained security guarantees for Finland in the form of a peace treaty.[3] Although credibility and intention of the Soviet Union was doubtful, it allowed Finland to catch its breath after the exhausting Winter War.

The aim of this paper is primarily to explain why comparisons regarding Finland in 1940 and Ukraine in 2024, without an in-depth analysis and understanding of the overall situation of the former in the initial phase of World War II, carry the risk of being too superficial or misleading.

Therefore, this text will mainly present the situation of Finland in 1940. It focuses on the consequences of concluding peace with the Soviet Union, how the leaders of the USSR saw the continuation of relations with its Finnish neighbor, and what happened in 1944 when representatives of both countries sat at the negotiation table to reach an armistice (*de facto* peace) agreement and also later, when, in 1948, they worked out a durable *modus vivendi* in mutual relations.

Inevitably, references to Ukraine will provide the background, but they will also appear frequently in this text many times in order to mainly show differences, but also some

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[1] Witold Jurasz, „Francja, mówiąc o siłach NATO w Ukrainie, składa Rosji ofertę pokojową [France, talking about NATO forces in Ukraine, is making a peace offer to Russia]," *Onet. Wiadomości* (published on 11 April 2024), https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/witold-jurasz-francja-mowiac-o-silach-nato-w-ukrainie-sklada-rosji-oferte-pokojowa/3q62vwm (accessed on 27 May 2024).

[2] Ibid.

[3] 'The Treaty of Peace between The Republic of Finland and The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,' *heninen.net*, http://heninen.net/sopimus/1940_e.htm (accessed on 27 May 2024).

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similarities, in the situation of the two countries that became the object of Soviet / Russian aggression. They are also intended to facilitate reflection on whether the Soviet-Finnish peace of 1940, the armistice concluded by these countries in 1944 (the Paris Peace Treaty with Finland signed on 10 February 1947 confirmed its terms) and this, what happened later, in 1948, may become an indication for the political leadership of modern Ukraine how to end the 10-year-long war with Russia, which culminated in the invasion that began on 22 February 2022.

Finnish-Soviet Relations before the Second World War

Before discussing the significance of the peace treaty concluded by Finland and the USSR in 1940, it is worth dwelling on the issue of Finnish-Soviet relations in the interwar years, with particular emphasis on the period immediately preceding the outbreak of World War II and, above all, the beginning of the Winter War. Almost from the very beginning of Finnish independence, official contacts between Helsinki and Moscow were characterized by suspicion and reluctance bordering on hostility. This was the result of events related to the civil war, which in 1918 divided Finland between supporters of its legal government, supported by Germany, and supporters of the radical, revolutionary left, receiving help from the Lenin's regime.[4] The Soviet side failed to comply with some provisions of the bilateral peace treaty concluded on 14 October 1920 in the Estonian Dorpat (Tartu). These were important for the Finns. They mainly concerned the situation in Eastern Karelia located within the borders of Soviet Russia.[5] In addition, neither assistance provided by Soviet Russia to Finnish communists operating on both sides of the common border, nor the ideological gap between the political elites ruling Finland and the Bolsheviks stabilizing their power in Russia, favored the development of good-neighborly relations.

However, both countries were connected by several agreements concluded every few years, these were intended to guarantee the normalization of bilateral relations and peace along the border stretching from the Arctic Sea to the Baltic. In addition to the already mentioned peace treaty, there were two other documents. The first of them was the agreement signed on 1 June 1922 in the Finnish capital about the measures of maintaining the

[4] See, for example Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1980).

[5] 'Declaration of the Russian Delegation with regard to the Autonomy of Eastern Carelia (as attached to the Peace Treaty between the Republic of Finland and the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic, signed at Dorpat, October 14th, 1920),' in: *League of Nations Treaty Series Publication of Treaties and International Engagements Registered with the Secretariat of the League of Nations*, Vol. III, No. 91, 1921, 76-77.

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inviolability of the Soviet–Finnish border.[6] The second agreement was the non-aggression pact of 21 January 1932 (it is worth adding that it was the first non-aggression pact concluded by the USSR with any country).[7] It should also be mentioned that in 1928 both countries joined a multilateral treaty – the Kellogg-Briand or the Paris Pact – establishing the renunciation of war as an instrument of national policy.[8] At a time when the importance and prestige of the League of Nations was already declining, the 1934 accession of the Soviet Union to this organization was less important.[9] However, it cannot be overlooked considering the hopes that smaller countries – such as Finland – had throughout the 1920s and the early 1930s been associated with the League and the idea of collective security. Therefore, when the USSR joined the League this had to be perceived positively in Finland, a member from 1920, primarily in the context of bilateral relations with the Soviet Union. This was seen by the Finns as the only real threat to their independence.

Before the Guns Roared

The increased international tension caused by the expansionist policy of the Hitler's Third Reich had already impacted on Finland's relations with the USSR in 1938. In April, just after Germany's annexation of Austria, the Soviet Union proposed a military alliance to Finland. On one hand, it would give Finland a sense of security in the dynamically changing international situation, and on the other, prevent the Germans from attacking Leningrad through Finnish territory. According to the Soviet emissary, Boris Yartsev (Boris A. Rybkin), this was planned in Berlin.[10] However, the Finnish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Rudolf W. Holsti, rejected the Soviet proposal, claiming that Finland itself was able to defend its territory against the attempts of any third country which might violate its territory. Finland

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[6] «Соглашение между Россией и Финляндией о мероприятиях обеспечивающих неприкосновенность границы,» *heninen.net*, http://heninen.net/sopimus/1922.htm (accessed on 27 May 2024).
[7] 'Treaty of Non-Aggression and Pacific Settlement of Disputes between the Soviet Union and Finland, concluded on January 21, 1932,' *histdoc.net*, https://www.histdoc.net/history/nonagen1.html (accessed on 10 March 2022).
[8] 'General Treaty for Renunciation of War as an Instrument of National Policy. Signed at Paris, August 27, 1928,' in: *League of Nations Treaty Series Publication of Treaties and International Engagements Registered with the Secretariat of the League of Nations*, Vol. XCIV, No. 2137, 1929, 59-64.
[9] Anique H.M. van Ginneken, *Historical Dictionary of the League of Nations* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006), XXVII.
[10] Osmo Jussila, Seppo Hentilä, Jukka Nevakivi, *From Grand Duchy to a Modern State: A Political History of Finland since 1809* (London: Hurst, 1999), 175-176; Edward E. Murphy, *What Stalin knew: the enigma of Barbarossa* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 47-48; Claes Johansen, *Hitler's Nordic Ally?Finland and the Toral War 1939-1945* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2016), 3-4.

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intended to continue its policy of neutrality, which would be contradicted by forming an alliance with the USSR.[11]

Although Soviet diplomats repeated their proposals in various configurations during many following months, the Finns consistently refused to enter into an alliance with the Soviet Union. They certainly did not want to agree to hand several strategically located islands in the Gulf of Finland to Soviet control, even though they were tempted by the prospect of the USSR handing over the vast, although basically empty, border areas of Eastern Karelia to Finland.[12] Significantly, as a mean of putting pressure on Finland, the Soviets tried to use ongoing trade agreement negotiations in Moscow since the fall of 1938. These were broken off in April 1939, when Moscow stopped trying to conclude a general agreement with small Finland.[13] In the same month Estonia and Latvia, also rejected the Soviet proposal to conclude bilateral agreements on mutual assistance. Moscow then focused on the possibility of dividing spheres of influence in the Baltic region based on arrangements made among the great powers over the heads of the Finns, Estonians and Latvians. This was comparable to the 1938 Munich agreement, when the fate of Czechoslovakia was decided without its participation in talks between the leaders of France, Germany, Great Britain and Italy.

We can only assume, and it was indicated by the further course of events in Finnish-Soviet relations and the development of events in the eastern part of the Baltic Sea region, that the real goal of the leaders of the Soviet Union, the heirs of the Russian tsars, was to return to the times when Russia reigned supreme over this region. Their proposal to conclude an alliance with Finland was an attempt to peacefully achieve this goal with respect to the northern shores of the Gulf of Finland and the territory of the former autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland, which was united with Russia by a personal union (1809-1917).[14] When this failed, however, they tried to involve France and Great Britain in their plans, and when that also failed, by establishing cooperation with Germany, the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, and moving to implement their plans from a position of strength.[15]

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[11] Ibid., 4.
[12] See for example Derek W. Spring, 'The Soviet Decision for War against Finland, 30 November 1939,' *Soviet Studies* 38, 2 (1986): 212.
[13] Jarosław Suchoples, 'The Storm Gathers in the North. Finland and the Soviet Union in 1938 and 1939. From the Soviet April Proposals to the Outbreak of the Winter War,' in: *World War* II Re-explored. *Some New Millenium Studies in the History of the Global Conflict*, ed. by Jarosław Suchoples, Stephanie James, Barbara Törnquist-Plewa (Berlin et al.: Peter Lang, 2019), 460, 462.
[14] Jusila, Hentilä, Nevakivi, *From Grand Duchy to a Modern State*, 3-100.
[15] Spring, 'The Soviet Decision for War,' 212-215; Malcolm L.G. Spencer, *Stalinism and the Soviet-Finnish War, 1939-1940. Crisis Management, Censorship and Control* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 40-66.

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In the case of Finland, this meant presenting the country with demands to conclude a treaty similar to those imposed on Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. After the outbreak of World War II, the joint German-Soviet attack on Poland, the Baltic States were forced to conclude mutual assistance treaties, giving the Soviet side the right to introduce Red Army troops to their territories and create their bases there.[16] Soviet demands included: the right to establish a Soviet military base on the Hanko Peninsula, to move westwards the border from Leningrad on the Karelian Isthmus by kilometers including Viipuri (rus. Vyborg), the second biggest city of Finland, and to annex the western part of the Arctic Rybachi Peninsula as well as four islands in the Gulf of Finland to the USSR.[17] As compensation, Finland would receive the vast areas of the Karelian forest wasteland located on the eastern side of the border.[18]

The Finnish government, led by Prime Minister Aimo K. Cajander, an idealistic politician who believed in the power of international rules and law, backed by the Finnish parliament, agreed to give up the islands in the Gulf of Finland, and negotiate the moving the border on the Karelian Isthmus westwards, but firmly rejected the remaining demands.[19] Eventually, no agreement was reached and the invasion began in the night of 30 November 1939.[20]

Year 1939, year 2022

If we compare Finnish-Soviet relations in the interwar period with Ukrainian-Russian relations in the years 1991-2024, a number of similarities are striking. In both cases, the situation involved the emergence of new states that had never enjoyed independence before. Both countries were part of the state of the Russian Tsardom / Soviet Union, but found themselves in a state of decline and transformation. This did not mean, however, that there was a break in the continuity of Russian / Soviet thinking about the foreign policy and security policy of the empire.

The best example of this was the perception of Finland by the leaders of Russia and the USSR – since Peter the Great and his Baltic plans and ambitions – as an indispensable part of the sphere of influence of the power they led, its obvious zone of security, something to be created and maintained at all costs. The country itself could be ruled by Finns, but on

[16] Carl van Dyke, *The Soviet Invasion of Finland, 1939-40* (Abingdon: Frank Cass, 2013), 16-18.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid., 18-19.
[19] Ibid., Mikko Uola, "Cajander, Aimo (1879-1943). Statsminister, generaldirektör, botanist," *Biografiskt lexikon för Finland*, https://blf.fi/artikel.php?id=727 (accessed on 29 May 2024); Harold Shukhman, 'Introduction,' in: *Stalin and the Soviet-Finnish War 1939-40* ed. by Alexander O. Chubaryan, Harold Shukhman (Abingdon – New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2013), 2-3.
[20] van Dyke, *The Soviet Invasion of Finland*, 35.

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condition of their recognition of certain realities – Russia's interests in the eastern part of the Baltic Sea region, and that foreign policy was to be guided primarily by the conditions of Russia's *raison d'état*.[21]

Meanwhile, Ukraine has been simply considered by them to be one of the most important historical parts of the Russian state. According to them, control over its natural and human resources is a condition for Russia to maintain its superpower position.[22] In other words, the Kremlin elites and the intellectuals associated with them believe that without Ukraine, Russia loses its position as a state predestined to decide the fate of the world. This was based on its right to act on the belief in the civilizational superiority of Russians (including Ukrainians and Belarusians as branches of the Russian people) over all other nations.

Both interwar Finland and post-Cold War Ukraine concluded treaties with their eastern neighbor aimed at stabilizing mutual relations. For Ukraine, it was the Agreement on Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation, concluded on 31 May 1997;[23] both countries were also bound by the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe regarding mutual respect for territorial integrity.[24] However, in Moscow it was maintained that neither agreement provided a sufficient guarantee of Soviet / Russian interests. This belief ultimately led to the military attacks on neighbouring countries in 1939, and 2014 in the first, 'informal' invasion of Ukraine and later in 2022. Both acts of Russian aggression were preceded by attempts to draw Finland and Ukraine into the sphere of Russia's political and economic interests.[25] When these moves were unsuccessful – they were arguably attempts to take control of both of these countries peacefully – the Russian tanks moved in.

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[21] Jarosław Suchoples, 'In the Shadow of the Eastern Neighbour. Finland in the Security Policy of Russia and the Soviet Union from Peter the Great to Contemporary Times,' "Studia Europejskie – Studies in European Affairs" 26, 4 (2022): 13-27.

[22] See for example Serhii Plokhy, *Lost Kingdom. A History of Russian Nationalism from Ivan the Great to Vladimir Putin* (London: Allen Lane, 2017).

[23] Andrew D. Sorokowski, 'Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation,' *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 20 (1996): 291-296.

[24] Tarja Långström, *Transformation in Russia an International Law* (Leiden – Boston, MA: Martinus Nijhoff, 2003), 200; Konrad G. Bühler, *State Succession and Membership in International Organizations* (The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 2001), 171-176.

[25] Regarding Ukraine see for example: Sophie Lambroschini, 'Is Ukraine falling victim to Russian economic "colonization"?,' *Fondation Robert Schumann. The Research and Studies Centre on Europe* (published on 17 October 2011), https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/217-is-ukraine-falling-victim-to-russian-economic-colonisation (accessed on 29 May 2024) or Fazle Chowdhury, *Why Ukraine Matters* (Bethesda, MD: Fabrezan & Phillipe, 2022), 77-100, 133-154.

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What did Stalin want, what does Putin want?

However, the periods immediately preceding the outbreak of hostilities in Finland and Ukraine were different. In the first case, in the fall of 1939, the Soviet Union, seeking to subjugate Finland, defined in advance its terms of a possible agreement. Their most important elements were already mentioned territorial concessions to the USSR and the creation of a Soviet military base on the Hanko Peninsula. Therefore, when peace was concluded after three and a half months of extremely bloody fighting in the Winter War, the Soviet side could present the situation in such a way that the complete conquest of Finland and its sovietization was never its real goal – the establishment of the puppet government of the so-called Finnish Democratic Republic, 'led' by Otto V. Kuusinen, leader of the Soviet Finnish Communist Party established in 1918 in Russia disproved this – the Soviets only wanted to gain on the battlefield what could not be achieved at the negotiation table.[26] This presentation of Stalin's goals was facilitated by a following sequence of events: unsuccessful negotiations regarding Soviet demands, war, negotiations ending with the conclusion of a USSR dictated peace, and referring to Soviet demands from before the outbreak of hostilities. Kuusinen's government was simply forgotten. Despite the colossal losses suffered by the Red Army, the Soviet leaders could therefore present the result of war with Finland as a success both to their citizens – we had achieved what we wanted to achieve from the very beginning – and in the international arena. If the Finnish government had immediately agreed to meet our demands, there would have been no war, which – although it was a clash with the fascist regime ruling in Helsinki – was not an attack on Finnish independence, and we only wanted to increase the security of Leningrad, which we ultimately managed to achieve.

In the case of the war with Ukraine, however, we are dealing with a completely different situation. Before the outbreak of its first phase in 2014, there were no negotiations between the two countries. But in the Ukraine, there was already a leader subordinate to Russia. In response to the overthrow of the pro-Russian president Yanukovich in what could be called a popular uprising directed against the idea of making the Ukraine part of the Russian sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, and protest against the former government's refusal to sign an association agreement with the European Union (Maidan),[27] Russia acted. It simply sent its little green men to Crimea, as well as to the Donetsk and

[26] Allen F. Chew, *The White Death: The Epic of the Soviet-Finnish Winter War* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1971), 20-21.
[27] David R. Marples, Frederick V. Mills (eds.), *Ukraine's Euromaidan. Analyses of a Civil Revolution* (Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2015).

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Luhansk regions, where it also organized separatist troops.[28] This was reminiscent of the army formation in Kuusinen's Finnish Democratic Republic, with the reservation that its soldiers were mainly Finns or Karelians;[29] in the eastern Ukraine however, members of the pro-Russian armed forces considered themselves Russian regardless who they really were. In the earlier case of Finland, the government dependent on Moscow was yet to be installed in Helsinki, as a result of a short and, as was widely expected, victorious campaign of the Red Army.

There were no pre-war negotiations during which, for one reason or another, Russia could present the Ukrainians with conditions to avoid the conflict were held before its escalation in February 2022. Russian military units simply entered Ukraine, but this time their soldiers were identified in accordance with international law. Their goal was simply to destroy the Ukrainian state and its authorities. Russia has made no secret of the fact that the minimum goal of its actions was close, if not identical, to the maximum goal that could be achieved, i.e. changing the Ukrainian authorities (president, members of the government and parliament) to ones obediently carrying out the will of Russia's leaders, i.e. indirect or direct (as a result of a military operation) submission of Ukrainian territory to full Russian control. It is true that Stalin had the same goal when he ordered the1939 attack on Finland, but at that time, the conditions already articulated during earlier negotiations automatically created room for maneuver if something went wrong on the war front.

The trap of having no alternatives

Meanwhile, in Ukraine, the scale of the failure of the Russian troops (which according to Putin and his entourage, in what was only a police operation, although with means reminiscent of regular war) was greater than the Red Army's experienced in Finland in 1939 and 1940.[30] The fact that, according to the Russians, they were not fighting a war, but

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[28] Oleg Nashchubskiy, *Russia is the bloody enemy of Ukraine. The true history of Ukraine and Russia from the 2nd Century BC. Not distortet by Russian propaganda* (Oleg Nashchubskiy, 2024), 590-591; Martin Sixsmith with Daniel Sixsmith, *Putin and the Return of History. How The Kremlin Rekindled the Cold War* (London – Dublin: Bloomsbury, 2024), 189-190; David R. Marples (ed)., *The War in Ukraine's Donbas. Origins, Context, and the Future* (Budapest: Central Europe University Press, 2022).

[29] Chew, *The White Death*, 78-79; Stephen Kotkin, *Stalin: Waiting for Hitler, 1929–1941* (New York, N.Y.: Penguin Books, 2018), 724; Kimmo Rentola, *How Finland survived Stalin. From Winter War to Cold War*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2023), 33.

[30] See for example ibid., 39, 56-57; Nico Lange, 'Russia Reinforces Bloody Failurein Ukraine's East, *CEPA* (published on 19 January 2024), https://cepa.org/article/russia-reinforces-bloody-failure-in-ukraines-east/, (accessed on 30 May 2024); C. Todd Lopez, 'Two Years in, Russia's War on Ukraine Continues to Pose Threat to Global Security,' *U.S. Department of Defense* (published on 24 February 2024), https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3686148/two-years-in-russias-war-on-ukraine-continues-to-pose-threat-to-global-security/ (accessed on 30 May 2024).

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restoring order in a country allegedly taken over by local fascists and nationalists, was intended to demonstrate that Ukraine was in fact a rebellious province of Russia lost in 1991.[31] From the Russian point of view, that loss was only due to a combination of unfavorable circumstances (especially collapse and dismemberment of the Soviet Union),[32] but this was even worse proof of the military skills of the attackers who were unable to cope with their enemy. Heavy fighting in Ukraine has been going on for more than two years and several months; Russia cannot simply withdraw because it has not achieved its sole goal, which was not to have its troops reach a specific line, unless that line was the western border of Ukraine, but its annihilation and actual annexation to the Russian Federation. Therefore, if the Russian army left Ukraine now, Putin would lose face both in front of Russian public opinion (for a dictator who flaunts his agency and, until recently, vitality, this is always a big image problem) and internationally.

Stalin was therefore a much smarter player than Putin, who was probably weakened in 2022 by too much self-confidence and obvious disregard for his opponent. Even though Stalin seemed to be acting according to the all-or-nothing principle towards Finland in 1939, he still had a lot of room for manoeuvre. In other words, even if it resulted from an unexpected development of events, he could, forced by various unforeseen circumstances, move away from implementing plan A and start implementing its variant. These circumstances could include: firm resistance from the Finns, expected change in the situation in the region of northern Europe resulting from other power's desire to control at least part of it – Great Britain and Germany, international interest in the Winter War and international pressure directed against the USSR. This, however, did not rule out a later return to trying to implement his original intentions when conditions became favorable again. When in November 1940, eight months after the end of the war with Finland, Molotov came to Berlin for talks on the future of Soviet-German relations, he told Hitler that the Soviet Union did not consider the Finnish issue to be finally settled and would strive to take control of that country in accordance with as recorded in the secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.[33] The

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[31] See for example Greg Myre, 'How the Soviet Union's collapse explains the current Russia-Ukraine tension,' *npr* (published on 24 December 2021), https://www.npr.org/2021/12/24/1066861022/how-the-soviet-unions-collapse-explains-the-current-russia-ukraine-tension (accessed on 30 May 2024); Roman Szporluk, 'Russia, Ukraine and the Breakup of the Soviet Union,' *Hoover Institution* (published on 19 April 2000), https://www.hoover.org/research/russia-ukraine-and-breakup-soviet-union (accessed on 30 May 2024).

[32] See for example Billy Perrigo, 'How Putin's Denial of Ukraine's Statehood Rewrites History,' *Time* (published on 22 February 2022), https://time.com/6150046/ukraine-statehood-russia-history-putin/ (accessed on 30 May 2024).

[33] 'Memorandum of the Conversation Between the Führer and the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars Molotov in the Presence of the Reich Foreign Minuter and the Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Dekanosov, as Well as of Counselor of Embassy Hilger and Herr Pavlov, Who Acted as

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dictator of the Third Reich did not object. On the contrary, he stated that Germany had no interests in Finland.[34]

From the Soviet point of view, the Moscow Treaty of March 1940 was not a land for peace deal, but only a kind of an operational pause like that used to deal with the Baltic States and Romania, from which Bessarabia was taken. The Finns were also aware that ending the Soviet invasion, in exchange for accepting conditions that were difficult to accept, would allow them in the short term to survive the crisis that occurred on the front in February and March 1940.[35] Although the Red Army did not destroy the Finnish troops, it penetrated their defensive positions on the Karelian Isthmus, the so-called Mannerheim Line, so deeply that the road to Helsinki became almost open to the Soviets.[36] That crisis gave them a little time to recreate their weak defensive potential and, perhaps, to look around for more serious foreign support (alliance?) than they had obtained during the fifteen war weeks on the turn of 1939 and 1940. However, they knew that there was no guarantee that the USSR would not strive to change the status quo established after the Winter War.[37]

Fight not until the end, but as long as necessary

In 1944, Finland was once again forced to ask the Soviet Union for peace. This time it was under different circumstances from 1940. In June 1941, in a *de facto* but not formal alliance with Germany, the Finnish army attacked the Soviet Union, regaining areas lost 15 months earlier, and also occupied certain areas of East Karelia, which had never been a part of Finland (Petrozavodsk).[38] Later, for over two years, trench warfare continued in the northern wastelands until 10 June 1944, when four days after the western allies landed in Normandy, a powerful offensive was launched on Finland, the so-called Vyborg-Petrozavodsk operation of Soviet troops in Karelia.[39] The front began to crack, and the Finns had to turn to the Germans for urgent help. The Germans had long suspected that Finland was planning to withdraw from the war against the USSR and, perhaps, even change sides, which was true. Therefore, they made the provision of support conditional on a clear written commitment that such a thing

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Interpreters, in Berlin on November 13th, 1940,' *histdoc.net*, https://histdoc.net/history/NaSo1940-11-13.html (accessed on 29 May 2024).
[34] Ibid.
[35] Rentola, *How Finland survived Stalin*, 54, 56.
[36] Ibid., 54; Barin Irincheev, *War of the White Death. Finland against the Soviet Union, 1939-40* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2012), 124-191.
[37] Rentola, *How Finland survived Stalin*, 56.
[38] Henrik O. Lunde, *Finland's War of Choice. The Troubled German-Finnish Coalition in WWII* (Philadelphia, PA – Newbury: Casemate, 2011); Vesa Nenye et al., *Finland at War. The Continuoation and Lapland Wars, 1941-45* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 26-157.
[39] Ibid., 198-269.

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would not happen. The President of Finland, Risto H. Ryti, signed the relevant document, but it was not binding for the Finnish parliament.[40] With the help of German assault guns a fighter-bomber aviation group and one division of German infantry, the Finnish troops inflicted such heavy losses on the Red Army that in effect they stopped the Russians beyond the 1940 border.[41] On August 4, Ryti resigned and Mannerheim, who enjoyed enormous prestige in his country, was appointed President of Republic.[42] Armistice talks took place in Moscow for two weeks. They occurred at the most appropriate moment from the Finnish point of view, that is, when the Germans were no longer able to take revenge on Finland for withdrawing from the war, and the Russians would need to organize a new offensive to break the Finnish defense.

February 1947, were difficult and even humiliating to some extent. The Finns had to agree to restore the border from 1940, and also give up the territory of Petsamo in the far north, where there were nickel deposits, and thanks to which they had access to the Arctic Sea.[43] They also had to agree to the establishment of a Soviet base on the Porkkala Peninsula near Helsinki, declare war on the Germans, who still had significant forces in the north of the country, and prosecute the politicians who led the country during the war, who were considered war criminals in the USSR.[44] Finland was also obliged to pay gigantic reparations to the Soviets.[45] The Allied Control Commission, completely dominated by Soviet representatives, arrived in the country on 22 September 1944, headed by one of Stalin's closest associates, Andrei A. Zhdanov (he led the Sovietization of the annexed Baltic states in 1940), which did not indicate anything positive.[46]

The most important task - to keep the enemy at a distance

Despite this, the Finns managed to survive and maintain their independence and democratic system politically and economically. Their country did not become one of the communist

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[40] Ibid., 198-228; Max Jacobson, 'Defensive Victory Led the Way to Peace. As the Second World War wound down, Finland found its way out from between the superpowers,' *this is Finland* (published in September 2004), https://finland.fi/life-society/defensive-victory-led-the-way-to-peace/ (accessed on 31 May 2024).
[41] Ibid.; Nenye et al., *Finland at War*, 227-249.
[42] Jacobson, 'Defensive Victory Led the Way to Peace.'
[43] 'Armistice Agreement between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, on the one hand, and Finland on the other,' *heninen.net*, http://heninen.net/sopimus/1944_e.htm (accessed on 31 May 2024), articles 1, 7.
[44] Ibid., articles 2, 5, 8, 13.
[45] Ibid, article 11; Jouko Sere, 'Finland's War Reparations Deliveries to the Soviet Union 1944-1952,' *Vega-Stiftelsen/Vega-Säätiö*, https://www.gamla-hamn.fi/en/vega/krigsskadestandet (accessed on 1 June 2024).
[46] 'Allied Control Commission,' in: *Historical Dictionary of Finland* 3rd edition, ed. by Titus Hjelm, George Maude (Lanham, MD: et al.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), 28. See also Alfred J. Rieber, *Zhdanov in Finland* (Pittsburgh: Center for Russian and East European Studies, University of Pittsburgh, 1995).

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satellites of the Soviet Union, like Poland, Hungary or Bulgaria. So, what conclusions can be drawn from what happened in 1939-1940 and later, at the end of World War II and peace in Soviet-Finnish relations, for modern Ukraine, which is fighting a just defensive war against the Russian aggression? How can a possible hypothesis regarding President Macron's peace proposal to Putin be placed in such a context? The condition for the success of any peace talks with Stalin was the tough resistance of the Finnish troops, the only army during World War II able to fight on their own territory with the Red Army on equal terms. It was Finnish soldiers who ensured that negotiations in Moscow were held twice (in 1940 and 1944) in a situation when the Red Army occupied only a small piece of Finnish territory. Moreover, the Finns were already mentally reconciled with the need to agree to a number of concessions, and not only territorial ones. What's more, they accepted it with the feeling that no one would come to their aid. In 1940, it was simply unrealistic for logistical reasons, and in 1944, as Hitler's allies, they were left at the mercy of Stalin. They saved what was most important – independence. Its difficulty was proven by the fact that Prime Minister Antti V. Hackzell, the head of the Finnish peace delegation, suffered a stroke during the Moscow negotiations, this ended his political career and participation in Finnish public life, he died in January 1946.[47]

However, it was particularly important that the Finns immediately began to pursue a policy of ruthlessly fulfilling even the most painful truce / peace obligations they had accepted. They even agreed to organize a trial of politicians, widely considered heroes in Finland, President Ryti, two heads of wartime cabinets, Johan W. Rangell and Edwin J. Linkomies, the former envoy in Berlin Toivo M. Kivimäki (prime minister in 1932-1936) and the leader of the Finnish Social Democratic Party, Väinö A. Tanner, who was particularly hated in Moscow.[48] His anticipated imprisonment was intended by Zhdanov to destroy the non-communist Finnish left and become one of the factors paving the way for communists to power in Finland.[49]

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[47] Rentola, *How Finland survived Stalin*, 131. See also 'Antti Hackzell,' *Wikipedia. The Free Encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antti_Hackzell (accessed 31 May 2024).

[48] Immi Talgren, 'The Finnish War-Responsibility Trial 1945-6: The Limits of ad hoc Criminal Justice?,' in: *The Hidden Histories of War Crimes Trials*, ed. by Kevin Jon Heller and Gerry Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 430-454; Norman M. Naimark, *Stalin and the Fate of Europe. The Postwar Struggle for Sovereignty* (Cambridge, MA – London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019), 109-113; Aappo Kähönen, *The Soviet Union, Finland and the Cold War The Finnish Card in Soviet Foreign Policy, 1956–1959* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2006), 79.

[49] 'War-responsibility trials in Finland,' *Wikipedia. The Free Encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War-responsibility_trials_in_Finland (accessed on 31 May 2024).

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The Finns were also very lucky that their country was located far from the main direction of Soviet offensives at the end of the war, and the Finnish communists, who were no better than their Central European comrades, could not receive immediate support from Soviet bayonets. In the difficult conditions of post-war poverty and enormous pressure from the Soviet Union, the institutions of a democratic state continued to function and again become stronger. Although the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the police were taken over by communists, the army and a significant part of regular police forces remained outside their influence and maintained order in the country.[50] Although the Finnish armed forces were significantly reduced at Moscow's demand, they remained the mainstay of Finnish independence.[51] Its collapse was, of course, possible, but it would probably have to take place as a result of another war, costly for the USSR, which Stalin, consistently convinced by representatives of the Finnish political elites that their international politics would be guided by the Soviet / Russian *raison d'état*, did not choose.[52] Thanks to this, Finland survived the most difficult years.

Another Finnish lesson

In 1948, Finland concluded with the Soviet Union's demand, an Agreement on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance.[53] Its meaning of which can be briefly summarized as follows: Finland will respect the security requirements of its eastern neighbor, will not allow its territory to be used to attack the Soviet Union, will maintain neutrality and will not allow the government. In return, its leaders received an assurance that the Soviet side would not interfere in Finnish internal affairs unless they tried to break the framework set by the above-mentioned agreement. This is what the so-called Finlandization covered. Finns do not like this term, coined by the West German political scientist and journalist Richard Löwenthal,

[50] Hans P. Krosby, 'The Communist Bid for Power in Finland in 1948,'*Political Science Quarterely* 75, 2 (1960): 236-237; Risto E. Penttilä, *Finland's Search for Security through Defence, 1944-89* (New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 6-7, 23-24.
[51] 'Armistice Agreement between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,' article 4; 'The Treaty of Peace with Finland,' *heninen.net*, http://heninen.net/sopimus/1947_e.htm (accessed on 1 June 2024), Part III. Military, naval and air clauses (articles 13-22); Pekka Visuri, *Evolution of the Finnish Military Doctrine 1945-1985* (Helsinki: War College, 1990), 15, 17-18, 21-22.
[52] See for example Naimark, *Stalin and the Fate of Europe*, 97-98; Roy Allison, *Finland's Relations with the Soviet Union*, 1944-84 (London and Basignstoke: Macmillan, 1985), 16-42.
[53] 'The Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance between The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and The Republic of Finland,' *heninen.net*, http://heninen.net/sopimus/1948_e.htm (accessed on 29 May 2024).

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because it reminds them of times of their dependence on the Soviet Union.[54] The existence of a neutral and democratic Finland, but located in the Soviet sphere of influence, was quickly recognized as a permanent element of the post-Second World War status quo by both sides of the Cold War

The 1948 agreement is considered the cornerstone of Finland's neutrality policy, which remained in force at least until the end of the USSR.[55] Thanks to its observance by both sides, Finland was able to develop and become a rich country during the Cold War. However, its significance also lies elsewhere. In 1940 and 1944, peace negotiations for Finland were painful but short. In Helsinki, people knew more or less what to expect from the Soviet Union. The harsh conditions of the agreements imposed by Moscow were difficult to accept, but expected and, as it turned out, acceptable.

However, the demand to conclude an Agreement on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance, which came from the USSR shortly after the communist coup in Czechoslovakia at the end of February 1948, was both a surprise and a mystery.[56] What did Stalin want, people wondered in Helsinki? Is Finland about to become another completely vassalized European country? Will Stalin, for example, want to use the provisions contained in this document to introduce Soviet troops into Finnish territory? This was not known in Finland and it was feared that signing the agreement might be a prelude to the Sovietization of the country. So, what did the Finns do? In fact, they wrote its text themselves –the role of President Juho K. Paasikivi and the inner ring of his advisers cannot be overestimated – and presented it to the Soviet leader for approval.[57] They included everything he wanted to achieve and nothing that would jeopardize Finland's independence. During the negotiations they did everything to ensure that the document formulated in this way would be accepted by the Kremlin.[58] This was probably their greatest success in relations with a powerful and dangerous neighbor, and, perhaps, this is the most important lesson for Ukraine understood not as any suggestion of capitulation, but the art of achieving own goals.

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[54] 'Finlandization,' in: *Historical Dictionary of Finland* 3rd edition, ed. by Titus Hjelm, George Maude (Lanham, MD: et al.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), 105.
[55] John Lukacs, 'Finland Vindicated,' *Foreign Affairs* 71, 4 (1992): 50.
[56] Johanna Rainio-Niemi, *The Ideological Cold War. The Politics of Neutrality in Austria and Finland* (New York, N.Y – London: Routledge, 2014), 33.
[57] Anthony F. Upton, *The Communist Parties of Scandinavia and Finland* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), 287-288.
[58] Ibid.; Jussi M. Hanhimäki, *Containing Coexistence. America, Russia, and the "Finnish Solution," 1945-1956* (Kent, OH – London: Kent State University Press, 1997), 23-54, 165; Rainio-Niemi, *The Ideological Cold War*, 33-34.

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Does Finnish history teach us anything? How to deal with Russia?

Ukraine's current situation is both worse and better than Finland's situation in 1940 and 1944. Worse because, for Putin, domination over Ukraine is not a problem related to controlling a non-Russian country important from the Russian point of view, but is nevertheless peripherally located. On the contrary, it is an issue that for centuries, not only Putin, but also all his predecessors considered and presented to Russian public opinion as a question of existential importance for Russia.[59] But neither the tsars nor the leaders of the USSR had to face the challenges resulting from the loss of Ukrainian lands. For them, it wasn't even a theoretical possibility. Therefore, for Putin this is an almost metaphysical problem. How can he now, without achieving complete victory and re-drawing Ukraine into Russia, sit down at the negotiating table with the 'Nazis' from Kiyv and talk about the very essence of the existence of his own state? Meanwhile, the inability to talk to the enemy is bad news for both Russians and Ukrainians.

There are also no prospects for entering into peace talks with Russia because its leaders would have to say clearly what they want and in such a way that a conversation with their negotiators would be possible for the Ukrainian side. Only if it was to be land for peace deal (Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk or even Mariupol captured by the Russians in 2022), why did Russian soldiers die in 2022-2024? No one will give Kherson or Kharkov to Russia, and it is doubtful whether it will be able to seize these cities and regions, although what will happen on the front can never be fully predicted. However, the topic of neutralization or some other form of Finlandization of Ukraine, not to mention its subordination to Moscow or changing the government to a 'friendly' (read: submissive) one towards Russia, cannot be considered in Kiyv, because the issue, especially in the context of not recognizing Ukraine as a state in

[59] Emily Ferries, 'How Russia's Narratives on Ukraine Reflect its Existential Crisis,' *RUSI* (Publisher on 27 July 2022), https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/how-russias-narratives-ukraine-reflect-its-existential-crisis (accessed on 1 June 2024); Riley Bailey et al., 'The Russian Orthodox Church Declares "Holy War" Against Ukraine and Articulates Tenets of Russia's Emerging Official Nationalist Ideology,' *Institute for the Study of War* (Publisher on 30 March 2024), https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-orthodox-church-declares-%E2%80%9Choly-war%E2%80%9D-against-ukraine-and-articulates-tenets (Accessed on 1 June 2024); Andrew F. Acland, *Religious Hatred and Human Conflict. Psychodynamic Approaches to Insight and Intervention* (Abingdon and New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2024), 61-62.

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Moscow and Russian war crimes, have simply gone too far. What negotiable conditions, not only from the Ukrainian but also from the Russian point of view, could Russia present to Ukraine?

In the case of Finland, it was not so bad, despite a deep gap between Moscow and Helsinki. The conclusion of peace was an existential matter only for Finland, but it was the conclusion of an agreement ending the war. The Russians had actually presented terms in the fall of 1939 and, with some modifications, also stuck to them in 1944. Of course, it would be different if the front had broken down, the Finnish army been defeated and Soviet troops marched into the interior of the country, but this did not happen. Firm resistance enabled the Finns to enter negotiations, during which they demonstrated political realism, which meant that, in a sense, the peace conditions in 1940 and the 1944 armistice dictated by Stalin, were also their conditions.

Finland could therefore conclude peace twice. It does not matter that at the time of signing these documents, Stalin was a dishonest partner, a tactician who in 1940 immediately thought about the next invasion, and in 1944 he sent to Helsinki someone like Zhdanov as a *de facto* governor of the country and, at best, he was wondering what to do with Finland, and when. The most important thing was to gain a pause and some room to maneuver. And this is what the Finns achieved. Defeated, somehow humiliated, angry and disappointed that they had to stop shooting enemy soldiers – especially in 1940 – but still free, having their own independent country.

Currently, Putin's terms are still undefined, unless we assume that they may be other than the complete takeover of Ukraine and the destruction of it as an independent state. Ukraine must therefore show not only itself and the coalition of Western countries supporting it, but also Russia that it has a plan not only for war, but above all for peace. However, the compromise will, perhaps, not be fully satisfactory, although it will probably be less painful than what Finland was forced to accept in 1940 and 1944. Then this northern country did not have time for long negotiations. Twice quickly its leaders had to decide not so much about peace for land, but was faced with an alternative: a hard peace or – literally – death. Studying what happened to the local political, military and cultural elites in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania after the Soviet Union took them over is instructive here.[60]

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[60] See Toomas Hiio, Meelis Maripuu, and Indrek Paavle (eds.), *Estonia, 1940-1945. Reports of the Estonian International Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity* (Tallin: Estonian Foundation for the Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity, 2006); Vladyslav Havrylov, 'Deportations from the Baltic Countries in 1940-1941,' *WAOP*, https://deportation.org.ua/deportations-from-the-baltic-countries-in-1940-1941/ (accessed on 2 June 2024); Dainis Vairogs, Martins T. Hildebrants, *Latvian Deportations, 1940-present* (Rockville, MD:

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However, in 1948, three and a half years of difficult experiences, but also a favorable coincidence meant that Finland was able to 'dictate' the content of the agreement, the conclusion of which – as it later turned out – brought it a strategic, lasting solution in bilateral relations with the USSR. Remembering what happened in the 1940s in relations between Helsinki and Moscow, we should perhaps consider whether President Zelensky should not 'help' Putin by formulating, not necessarily publicly, the terms of a future final Ukrainian-Russian agreement.

Russia is a difficult partner, even for itself

Whether Putin wants such help is another matter. Accepting Macron's proposal (if we are really dealing with a peace proposal) would require him to approach it in a Bismarckian way. The Russian president would have to behave like a statesman, having primarily in mind the interests of his country, and not the interests of the clique he heads. Explaining to the Russian public the reasons for abandoning the idea of total victory over Ukraine might turn out to be easier than one might expect. He could, after all, follow the Iron Chancellor, who in international politics focused on the self-limitation of the Hohenzollern Empire, the most powerful state in Europe after the unification in 1871, due to the desire to avoid forming an anti-German coalition with which even such a giant as the Second Reich would not be able to win in an open conflict.[61] Putin could therefore say that although Russia is powerful and has the world's second largest army, it is forced to fight the collective West, a coalition that includes, among others, the United States, which has the world's first army, and must – for the good of all humanity – be satisfied with his hitherto achievements and make peace. So maybe it would not be a Russian victory on such a scale and with such consequences as over the Nazis in 1945, but at least a valuable winning draw in the war against the entire NATO – the collective West – supporting the Ukraine, as the war in Ukraine is presented to the Russian public by Putin and Russian media.[62] However, it must be doubted whether the leader

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The World Federation of Free Latvians, 1986); Dalia Kuodytė, Rokas Tracevskis (eds.), *Siberia. Mass Deportations from Lithuania to the USSR* (Vilnius: Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, 2004).

61 Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York, N.Y.: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 165-166; idem, 'Otto von Bismarck. Master Statesman,' *The New York Times* (published on 31 March 2011), https://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/03/books/review/book-review-bismarck-by-jonathan-steinberg.html (accessed on 3 June 2024).

62 'Collective West unleashed war in Ukraine, culprit of current events – Putin,' *TASS. Russian New Agency* (published 8 July 2022), https://tass.com/politics/1477149 (accessed on 2 June 2024); Eva Hartog, 'How Vladimir Putin sells his war against "the West",' *Politico* (published on 21 February 2023), https://www.politico.eu/article/siege-stalingrad-battle-bucha-vladimir-putin-russia-war-against-west/ (accessed on 2 June 2024); 'Kremlin says Russia 'in a state of war' in Ukraine for first time,' *France 24* (published on 22

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of a nuclear power, guided by the interests of the ruling group, and which apparently has borders with whoever it pleases (as it is imagined in Moscow)[63], can afford such an approach and, above all, the reflection that precedes it, without a real threat of losing his personal position.

Conclusion: constructive reflection on the future is always needed

However, Ukraine's current situation is also better than Finland's situation years ago. This is even though the Budapest and Minsk agreements, which were supposed to guarantee its security and territorial integrity, have long been thrown out. In its position the West (NATO and the European Union) did not turn out to be unfaithful, but supported it in an unprecedented way when in 2022 it turned out that Russia was striving to subordinate the Ukraine unconditionally. This is one of the reasons why, in future peace talks, the Ukrainians will not have to convince the Russians, as Stalin's Finns did, starting in 1944, that in exchange for peace they would be guided by the Russian rationale, because such an approach cannot be possible at all. This does not mean that it is not worth discussing Russian demands / proposals and perhaps accepting some of them, because that is what compromise is all about. The Finns could not even dream of assistance on such a scale, neither during the Winter War, nor during the last months of the Continuation War. Ukrainians, if they would like to follow Finland's example, especially in 1944, should at least consider what it would mean for them to join peace talks at the right moment – neither too early nor too late.

If we assume that Macron's proposal is in fact a peace proposal addressed to Putin worth considering by both sides of the ongoing war, then Kiyv should determine, of course after consulting the matter with the coalition of countries supporting Ukraine, what it can realistically do to achieve, so that tough resistance, which the enemy cannot break so far, becomes the foundation of a credible vision of its leaders for relations with Russia in the future.

March 2024), https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20240322-kremlin-says-russia-says-in-a-state-of-war-in-ukraine (accessed on 2 June 2024).

[63] It is a quotation after the Poland's Foreign Minister, Radosław Sikorski ('With whom does Russia have borders? With whoever it pleases. And with whom does it please. With nobody'. See https://x.com/radeksikorski/status/1564181656004698113?mx=2 (accessed on 4 June 2024).

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