

The War in Ukraine

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 **What Makes Ukraine Different** — JOHN CONNELLY

A New Europe? — JAMES J. SHEEHAN

Putin's Apocalyptic Goals — PIOTR H. KOSICKI

The Value of 'Whataboutism' — ANDREW BACEVICH

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. John Connelly writes that Vladimir Putin has an “imperial mindset” in the same way that Adolf Hitler did. What is an “imperial mindset,” and how does it develop in an individual or a group of people? Do you agree with Connelly that a pluralistic country like Ukraine is a counterexample to this mindset, with the possibility to “redefine nationhood”? What is the relationship between ethnicity, nationhood, and imperialism?

2. Have you found yourself reacting differently to the war in Ukraine than to other conflicts? Is the Ukraine war, as Connelly argues, different from other Cold War conflicts because it is a “democracy fighting for its life”? Is the global response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, as Andrew Bacevich writes, a double standard when compared to our lack of reaction to crises in Afghanistan and elsewhere?

3. Do you agree with James J. Sheehan and Piotr Kosicki that the post-1945 system of civilian states is over? What system should replace it, and how do we build it? Or, as Sheehan puts it, what kind of country is the war in Ukraine going to create?

4. There are countless inspiring examples of people and nations uniting to support Ukraine and its people. But as Sheehan points out, we are still in the early days of the conflict, and cracks in this initial unity are bound to emerge. How should people and countries settle differences when there is a bigger problem at hand? Is it true, as Bacevich writes, that we’ll inevitably lose our enthusiasm for supporting Ukraine when the next headline takes over the news?

5. In some ways, it’s easier to believe Putin is crazy than to accept that he is “a realist and a bringer of apocalypse,” as Kosicki writes. Doing so would require acknowledging Putin’s “world-historical mission,” taking it seriously, and acting to counter it. How is this mindset different from the post-Cold War mindset that we’ve become used to—that war in Europe, or even nuclear war, is unlikely?

6. Do you agree with Kosicki that the realist tradition has lessons for us? If realists are right, and conflict is intrinsic to the human condition, how can we manage that conflict to limit its destructiveness? Or is war something that “resists mastery,” as Bacevich writes, and managing its effects is impossible?

7. Do you agree with Bacevich that there is a connection between Russia’s folly in Ukraine and the United States’ folly in places like Afghanistan and elsewhere? What lessons should we learn from these past conflicts and how should we apply them to the situation in Ukraine?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

The Editors, “Clarity and Consequences,” March 2022: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/clarity-consequences>

Susan Bigelow Reynolds, “Never Again, Again,” April 2022: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/never-again-again>

Carrie Frederick Frost, “Christians First,” April 2022: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/christians-first>

George E. Demacopoulos, “The Orthodox Response to Putin’s Invasion,” February 2022: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/orthodox-response-putin-invasion>

The Editors, “An Unwinnable War,” September 2021: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/unwinnable-war>

Phil Klay, “Sops to Humanity,” October 2021: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/sops-humanity>