



UKRAINE CONFLICT EXPLAINED

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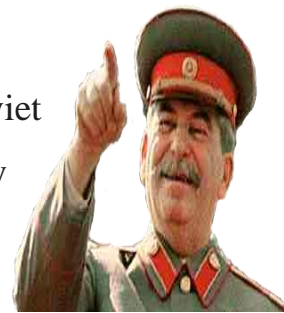
On February 24, 2022, Vladimir Putin launched a military offensive against Ukraine. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine manifests itself at individual, societal and international levels. It evokes a resurgence of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)¹. If it reveals an ethnic

malaise, it ultimately reveals the turmoil of peoples thirsty for democracy but still captive to dictatorships. The purpose of this article is to explain the conflict between Russia and Ukraine that turned into open war in 2022.

At the individual level , Vladimir Putin is 70 years old in 2022. The question of his mental health arises. But his career makes him rather an intelligent man who is nevertheless nostalgic for the former USSR. His style of management is dictatorial but on this chessboard, he is not alone in his kind.

At the societal level , the former USSR emerged from the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917. It existed for 69 years from 1922 to 1991. The USSR was then made up of Russia, Ukraine, Biolorussia, Moldova and the states of Transcaucasia, namely Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. In addition, the states of Central Asia are Kazakstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan . And as if all this were not enough, taking advantage of the 1939-45 war from which he emerged, with the allies, victorious; Joseph Stalin annexes the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia .

Led with an iron fist by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, this heterogeneous group of countries with very diverse cultures, described by the West as the Iron Curtain, will give birth to a bipolar world, either on the one hand, the dictatorship represented by the



Joseph Staline dirige l'URSS de 1920 à 1953

USSR and on the other hand, democracy represented by North America and Western Europe. This new reality will produce the so-called Cold War period from 1945 to 1991 .

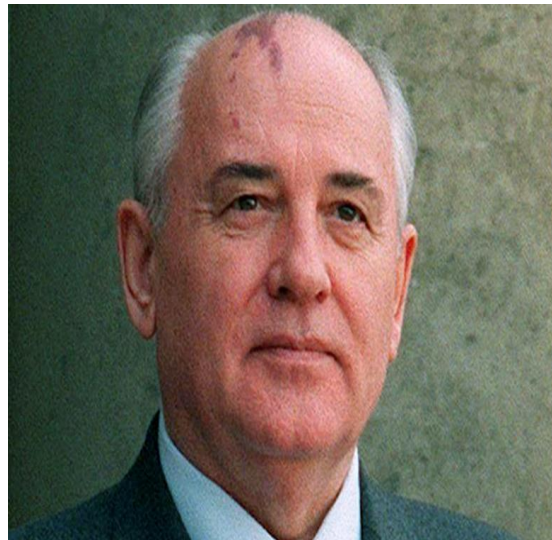
At the international level , the contingency measures taken by member countries of *the North Atlantic Treaty Organization* “NATO” or *the European Union* against Russian assets are not without collateral damage in terms of trade. They boost the price of certain products such as metals or oil in an economy already damaged by a pandemic. Certainly, the West could not let the invasion of Ukraine pass like a letter in the post, even if it is not in NATO. Basically, these coercive measures against Russia only have value if they ultimately result in a peace dialogue.



Réunion des 30 membres pays de l’OTAN à Bruxelles

The Gorbachev Reform

After the Stalinist dictatorship, came to power Mikhail Gorbachev who was a promoter of democracy. It sometimes happens that leaders offer the best of themselves. This was the case for Gorbachev.



Mikhail Gorbatchev dirige l’URSS de 1985 à 1991

The dislocation of the former USSR occurred on December 25, 1991 under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev. Unlike his predecessors, he came from the great schools. Furthermore, his grandfather had been martyred by the Stalinist regime.

His reform was a major one. It demonstrated Gorbachev's sensitivity to individual freedoms. This created a community of independent states, including Ukraine, with the 14 republics of the former USSR of which it sounded the death knell.

Arcs of tension arise

But right from the start arcs of tension arise. Some states like Ukraine find themselves with internal dissidents, the result of a prolonged occupation. Then in 2004, NATO integrated certain Baltic countries of the former USSR, namely Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia ². These three countries have Russian-speaking minorities, especially in Latvia and Estonia. This Russophile context, close to Russia, makes the presence of NATO sensitive in this region of the world. Consequently, after the Ukraine crisis, the three Baltic countries mentioned above risk being the second source of possible tension between NATO and Russia, taking into account Vladimir Putin's ultranationalist tendencies.



Ukraine has failed to calm the autonomist intentions of two regions on its territory. This was the case for Dunbass and Crimea. Dunbass includes two coal- mining provinces where Russian is the dominant language. As for the Crimea, whose Russian language is spoken by 90% of its population, which was integrated into Russia by Catherine II in 1783. Nikita Khrushchev, ceded

it to Ukraine in 1954, then part of the USSR. For Russia, the Crimea is an azure coast which gives access to natural resources and to the southern seas.

A search for freedom

This desire of former USSR countries to join NATO reflects a search for freedom. But this much desired freedom is in short supply in the world. Indeed, according to the NGO Freedom House³, of the 193 member countries of the UN, 50 are dictatorships and 54 are semi-dictatorships. Thus, less than half of the countries of the world are managed in a democratic way. Admittedly, the peoples who are victims of a dictatorship dream of our way of life, but at the same time, their leaders see us as decadent. Therefore, democracies in the world are abused, even threatened. As for Ukraine, it had been under Soviet dictatorship since 1922.

A violation of international law

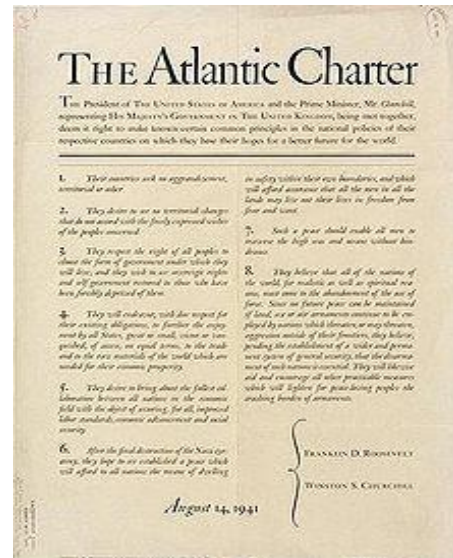
There is reason to be offended by the Russian attack in Ukraine because it violates our democratic principles. For Vladimir Putin, it is the revenge of a humiliated Russia even if international law takes it for his cold. The *Charter of the United Nations*, in its preamble, establishes the objective of “*creating the conditions necessary for the maintenance of justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law*”⁴. Nevertheless, in this tormented region of the world, the fate of freedom was probably worse during the time of the Iron Curtain (1945-1991), a period when the West nevertheless prospered abundantly⁵. Therefore, the Ukraine crisis is important but it must be placed in a historical context. Leaders pass but people remain.

One for all and all for one

The *NATO Charter* was adopted in 1949 in Washington. Its Article 5 is especially enticing for small demilitarized nations: “*The parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them occurring in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack directed against all parties... »* ⁶.

But each of the 30 member countries of NATO does not have the same strategic importance. For example, in the event of a threat, Estonia with 1.3 million inhabitants becomes as large as the USA with 330 million citizens, which country used the aforementioned Charter following the attack on the *World Trade Center* in September 2001. Consequently, the principle of “*one for all and all for one*” has a protective advantage but it also carries an implicit risk, that of generalizing a local conflict through a phenomenon of alliance, as was the case for the world war 1914-18.

By way of conclusion , it is necessary to rebuild peace in Ukraine by inferring, on the one hand, from the relevant historical beacons and, on the other hand, from the fundamental needs of the 14 ethnic groups who live there, although the Ukrainians are clearly in the majority. Vladimir Putin will probably win his war in Ukraine like President George Bush won his war in Iraq. Consequently, the ball is in the court of *the United Nations Organization*



La Charte de l'OTAN est adoptée le 4 avril 1949 à Washington

“UNO”, and all the intervening parties of goodwill, to build a lasting peace there. After all, peace is peace whether Eastern or Western.

¹See: Perspectives Monde, School of Applied Politics, Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, University of Sherbrooke, Sherbrooke, Quebec

<https://perspective.usherbrooke.ca/bilan/servlet/BMDictionnaire?iddictionnaire=1549#:~:text=This%20ensemble%20a%20exist%C3%A9%20de,%3A%20Azerba%C3%AFdjan%2C%20Arm%C3%A9nie%20and%20G%C3%A9orgie>.

²Episodes of linguistic tensions have arisen in the Baltic countries, since their exit from the former USSR, between the country's historical ethnic group and the inclined Russian minority.

³Information available on the subject on the Freedom House website: <https://freedomhouse.org/>

⁴See the United Nations website in this regard: <https://www.un.org/fr/our-work/uphold-international-law>

⁵On post-war prosperity, see: Linteau Paul-André, (2014) Chapter VII, *History of Canada*, pp.85-98

⁶Information available on the *North Atlantic Treaty Organization website* https://www.nato.int/cps/fr/natohq/topics_67656.htm