

Ukraine's fate rests with friends, old and new

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Ending the bloodshed in Ukraine without turning that brave country into a Russian colony is among the very greatest challenges of contemporary statecraft.

The only truly just result – the expulsion of every last Russian soldier from every inch of Ukrainian territory – is unlikely to eventuate because Ukraine's allies, from fear of nuclear escalation, won't provide the beleaguered country with sufficient quantities of the sophisticated weapons needed to overcome Russia's weight of numbers and materiel.

Despite its remarkable and ingenious advances in drone technology and production, on its own it's probably impossible for Ukraine to win, especially with the nuclear sword of Damocles dangling over it – an option a dictator on the verge of defeat might readily deploy.

It's becoming obvious that even the limited supply of weaponry, not enough to win but enough not to lose, that hitherto has been available could be cut off by a US President craving a deal, any deal, regardless of its longterm consequences for Ukraine's freedom and independence.

Britain and Europe say they are prepared to step into the breach to keep supporting Ukraine, but allies that have long

surrendered the ability on their own to wage war are unlikely to risk it without the American backup that Donald Trump is unlikely to give.

Vladimir Putin's demands, which the US President seems inclined to accept, are that he keeps the Ukrainian territory already conquered, that Ukraine becomes neutral and never joins NATO, and that there are no European troops on Ukraine's soil. The pity of this is that Ukraine would end up dismembered without, in the process, achieving the right to forge the same future of freedom and opportunity that Poland, for instance, has managed once free from Russian overlordship.

To Putin's mind, the moment Ukraine succeeds beyond Russia, via creating a vigorous democracy, a vibrant civil society or a liberal competitive economy free of cronyism, it would be at the mercy of a further invasion.

The brutal truth is that without meaningful security guarantees, any ceasefire would not be peace; just a pause before the next Russian invasion or a coerced lapse into Russian satellite status such as Belarus.

Any Russian promise to respect Ukrainian independence made to the current US President would be as insubstantial as the 1994 Budapest Memorandum: where Russia, the US and Britain guaranteed Ukrainian territorial integrity in return for Ukraine surrendering its share of the old Soviet nuclear arsenal; a deal that turned out not to be worth the paper it was written on.

At best it would last for the 3¹/₂ years remaining to the Trump presidency. The Budapest deal meant nothing in 2014 when Russia seized the Crimea and engineered a quisling uprising in the Donbas, because Ukraine's foreign

guarantors simply looked the other way, as – in the real world – countries without skin in the game are inclined to do.

Hence there can be no lasting peace or freedom for Ukraine without a meaningful security guarantee – and in the absence of NATO membership or the presence of British and French troops to secure the peace that means the presence near the ceasefire line of troops from some other serious country, sufficient to deter Russia from future adventurism. Not, presumably, the European troops that the Russian leader objects to and that the US won't support.

So enter India.

India is a nuclear power with a million-plus strong standing army. India has a long and close relationship with Russia, dating to the Cold War when America's unwise tilt to Pakistan made the old Soviet Union India's principal arms supplier.

Out of respect for past friendship, India has carefully avoided taking sides in the current conflict – although Prime Minister Narendra Modi has openly chastised Putin for using war as an instrument of national policy.

Through all the vicissitudes of the past eight decades, the challenges of development and keeping together a vast and diverse subcontinent, India has remained a vigorous democracy under the rule of law.

What's more, while the undoubted superpower of the subcontinent, India invariably has shown restraint and mostly benevolence in all its dealings with sometimes difficult neighbours.

Like America pre-Trump, whatever issues there might be with specific Indian actions, no one could doubt its essential goodwill.

Nor its capacity to fight, should that prove necessary, honed in two world wars and subsequent defensive wars against Pakistan and border skirmishes with China.

Why shouldn't it be India that offers a division of troops to police any ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine that might be created by US pressure? Russia could hardly accuse India of aggressive intent.

Ukraine could hardly object to 15,000 Indian peacekeepers that gave it the chance to become the South Korea of eastern Europe.

The Europeans could hardly fail to support financially a serious contribution to peace and security on their continent.

And it would be entirely consistent with India's philosophy of seeing the world as "one family". If any support were needed to get the Indian force and its heavy equipment to Odesa, the Royal Australian Navy's amphibious ships could readily help.

If there is to be a leader of the free world 50 years hence, I've long maintained, it's as likely to be the Indian prime minister as the US president. Now that the current leader of the free world seems more interested in stopping the war than in keeping Ukraine free, here's India's chance to step up and to transform any Trump deal from a sellout into a fresh start.

Why shouldn't India finally take the place in the

management of the world's affairs that's commensurate with its size and its strength? Here's a moment for India to declare itself as the world's other democratic superpower and to offer its services in the cause of peace with freedom.

Tony Abbott was prime minister from 2013 to 2015. He raised the option of Indian peacekeepers in Ukraine at the Raisina Dialogue in New Delhi last week.