Ukrainian history goes back a long way. The ancient Greek writer, Herodotus, who is considered the first historian, wrote a series of nine books starting in 500 BC. His "Histories" focused on the wars between Greece and Persia but included references to "barbarian" tribes to the north of the Black Sea called Scythians. Jeremiah, in the Old Testament of the bible also makes reference to the Scythians and describes them as being "armed with bow and spear; they are cruel and show no mercy". (Source 1: P.5) It turns out that the Scythians were from the region we now call Ukraine.

This area was called the Pontic steppes and the people were nomadic tribes of horsemen that occasionally attacked and pillaged some of the settled Greek communities around the Black Sea. Darius, the great Persian king also ran into these mobile tribes and tried to conquer them but was not able to do so. Stories of the legendary horsemen of the steppes include accounts of fierce fighting women who were called Amazons.

Current archaeology has shown human occupation of the region as far back as 45,000 years. It shows that Neanderthal mammoth hunters lived in the area. By about 3500 BC the people of the steppes had domesticated horses and established basic settlements. In 1971 archaeologists uncovered fine pieces of gold jewellery buried with a Scythian king. A gold pictorial piece was found which showed men using sheepskins to find gold in a stream. The sheepskin would be placed in a stream and as the water ran over, the heavier gold pieces would get caught in the fleece. This apparently gave rise to the Greek legend of Jason and the Argonauts who went out searching for the golden fleece. The picture also shows images of domesticated sheep, cattle and horses. These artifacts and many others are now housed in the Ukrainian Museum of Historical Treasures in Kiev.

Agriculture flourished in the plains around the Dnieper River and trade with Greek settlements to the south and others developed. This region of Ukraine with its legendary rich black soil called Chernozem, (from the words "chorny zemla" or black earth) was officially identified by a Russian geologist, Vasily Dokuchaev in 1883. This area became known as the bread basket of Europe from ancient times and still is. The rich black soil in Ukraine is considered the best in the world. The

Canadian prairies have similar soil but not as rich and deep. While six inches to a foot of black soil here is considered very good, the soil in some areas of the Ukraine is up to sixty inches deep.

The Vikings

The Vikings, sometimes called Norsemen, became a significant force in Europe around 750 AD as the various northern groups began to expand. The Vikings came from areas now known as Denmark, Sweden and Norway. These Norsemen used their fast well-built ships to trade, pillage and occupy some of the coastal areas of modern-day Ireland, Britain and France. They were after precious metals such as gold and silver hidden away in castles and monasteries. But of most importance was the capture of slaves. They went on exploration and settlement expeditions as far west as Greenland and Newfoundland where they settled for a while around the year 1000. A settlement has been discovered on the northern tip of Newfoundland called L'Anse aux Meadows. The Vikings also found their way south and east up the mighty rivers into central Europe.

In the 800's Vikings established a major base at Lake Ladoga, in present day Russia, where they developed markets for slaves, silver and the fur trade. By 860 they had crossed over to the Dnieper River and followed it south into modern day Ukraine. Their goal was to find an easy way to the trading areas on the Black Sea and all the way to the rich international markets of Constantinople. Along the way, they established a number of settlements and trading posts.

The Vikings were considered "barbarian invaders" who used force and diplomacy to conquer local people such as the Poles, Ukrainians and Lithuanians. One of the outposts for the Vikings was the town of Kiev which became a major trading centre. There they established the House of Rus, accepting a Viking prince called Rurik, to rule over the local Slavs and collect tribute payments. They gradually expanded their conquests and trade south to Constantinople and east into modern day Russia. In the late 10th century Vladimir, a Rus war leader in Kiev, married a princess from the Byzantine royal family. He was baptised and adopted Byzantine Christianity as the official religion of the state.

The Vikings were fierce worriers and great boat builders. Their boats were small enough to portage around rapids and able to travel easily over shallow lakes and rivers. They also built large ships that could carry up to 100 men plus cargo

for ocean travel. The Vikings and their Slavic allies developed a robust trade in fur, minerals and slaves. Men, women and children were captured by the Vikings and used as slave labour at home. The rest were sold in various slave markets.

By the 11ᵗʰ Century, the Vikings were a spent force. In the west, the English and French kings were able to organize large armies to defeat the Viking raiders. Then through diplomacy they agreed to live in peace with their new rulers and became assimilated into the local cultures. For example, many Norsemen and their families settled in the western part of France to create the large and powerful region of Normandy.

In a similar way, they were assimilated in the east into the local emerging nations such as Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine and Russia. It is interesting to note that the name Russia comes from the House of Rus in Kiev and that Russia was ruled from Kiev until the about the 15ᵗʰ century. By then, Poland and other emerging states were threatening the Ukraine region so the Royal family moved further east to Moscow and made it the new capital of Russia.

Christianity and St. Cyril

One of the background forces on Ukrainian history was the great schism in 1077 between the Roman Catholic church in the west and the Byzantine Orthodox church in the east. The Byzantine church with headquarters in Constantinople was dominant for centuries but with the rise of the Germanic and French European nations in the 9ᵗʰ century, the Pope in Rome gained considerable power and influence. The two churches competed for converts for hundreds of years until they finally excommunicated each other and thus began the great schism that continues to this day.

The Byzantine church had established a foothold in Ukraine in 862 when the missionary brothers, Cyril, who lived from 826 to 869, and Methodius were sent to the region to convert the pagan tribes. They set about translating the bible into the local Slavic languages but first they had to create an alphabet! They created the Slavonic text which we now call the Cyrillic alphabet. This language was used with all kinds of groups in the area and was a powerful tool in converting the people to the Byzantine church. This Old Church Slavonic language eventually became the official language of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

St. Cyril, who became known as the "Apostle of the Slavs", and his brother Methodius were very successful in their missionary work. So much so that the Frankish Kings put pressure on the Pope to recall them and send Roman Catholic missionaries instead. However, the missionaries continued their work in Moravia, Bulgaria and eventually Ukraine. Thus, the region we now call Ukraine uses the Cyrillic alphabet and is still largely Greek Orthodox while their neighbouring countries such as Poland and most of Europe were Christianize as Roman Catholics and use the Latin alphabet.

Between Empires

For about 500 years after the Middle Ages Europe underwent a huge period of nation building. By the 13th century all the major emerging countries such as France, Spain and Germany began to assert their sovereignty and control over adjacent areas. The same was true of Eastern Europe with the formation of Poland, Lithuania, Hungary and Russia. Caught in the middle of these clusters of nations were many other less powerful and less organized groups pulled in different directions by their neighbours. Such was the case for the Ukrainian people. They shared a boundary in the west with Poland, Hungary and Lithuanian. In the East there was Russia and to the south, the Byzantine and Muslim Empires.

By 1500 the Ukraine region was surrounded by strong and unified countries namely Poland, Austria, Lithuania and Russia. Ukrainians were most strongly affected by their nearest border states of Poland and Russia. Poland expanded into the Ukraine as far as they could but there were major differences in culture and religion. Poland, like most of Europe was staunchly Roman Catholic and used the Latin alphabet while the Ukrainians were mostly Greek Orthodox and used the Greek alphabet. Joining Poland meant joining the Roman church. Russia was more attractive because they shared a similar Slavic language and the leadership of the Greek Orthodox church which had moved from Kiev to Moscow.

The Ukrainian people worshiped three major religions: Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic and Greek Orthodox. Needless to say, this made the unification of a single Ukrainian nation rather difficult. To some extent, these religious differences continue to this day. In the town of Wynyard, Saskatchewan, where I grew up in the 1950's, there were about 1500 people and all three religions had their own church.

In the 17th century there was a major attempt by the Cossacks to establish an independent Ukrainian state. In the 1750's a strong and semi-independent Hetmanate was established in the steppes with Kiev at the centre. In the Cossack culture, the Hetman was the leader of the local group and these groups coalesced around a powerful Hetman to form a Hetmanate. This leader then made various peace treaties with Poland, Lithuania and Russia and tried to maintain a semi-independent state. If anyone has seen the movie "Taras Bulba" starring Yul Bruner you would see an example of a Hetmanate leader trying to deal with the occupying Poles.

Unfortunately for Ukrainian independence, this Cossack experiment ended in defeat and failure. The combined forces of Poland, Lithuania and Russia were too powerful. The Muslim Tatars in the south in what was to become the Ottoman Empire also posed a threat. After several major defeats, the Hetmanate disintegrated into a number of factions each supported by the various powers.

Throughout the 18th and 19th century, the people of Ukraine were pulled in different directions. As usual, the Russians expanded from the east while the Austrians and Prussians chipped away from the west. With the complete partition of Poland from 1772-1795, the Ukraine was up for grabs. Austria, Prussia and Russia occupied all of Poland and most of Ukraine with Russia taking the largest share. The effect on Ukraine was both positive and negative. Poland, their constant enemy was suddenly gone. But now they still faced the same old problem of being in the middle of three rival powers eager to acquire more territory to their growing empires.

The Ukrainian people were stuck between two very different options. Some were attracted to the western powers and preferred joining with Austria and Prussia while others favoured aligning more closely with their Slavic brothers – the Russians. Religion remained a major factor with many Ukrainian Roman Catholics favouring Poland and the west while the Greek Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches favouring closer ties to Russia. Moscow became the head of the Orthodox church with the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 by the Ottoman Empire Muslims. Constantinople was renamed Istanbul and is now part of Turkey. The Patriarch, or head, of the Orthodox church resides in Russia.

At this time, Russians coined the phrase "little Russians" to describe the Ukrainian people. Also, Russia began to see itself as the big brother of all Slavs and promoted a Pan-Slavic movement to encourage Slavic people to consider Russia as their mother country. In the midst of this turmoil there remained a small but dedicated group that wanted an independent Ukrainian nation. This uncertain state of affairs remained until the next major political upheaval caused by the outbreak of World War I in 1914. By 1914 the Prussian Empire had morphed in the mighty German Empire. The Austrian Empire became the Austro-Hungarian Empire which included most of present-day Poland and Ukraine.

World War I: 1914-1919

The war spread around the world because there were two major alliances. The Triple Axis with Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy versus the Triple Entente made up of England, France and Russia. When Archduke Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary was assassinated by a Serbian terrorist, they decided to punish Serbia. However, Russia offered support to Serbia partly because they were Slavic people but mainly to prevent the expansion of Austria-Hungary in the Balkans. When the Austrians declared war on Serbia, Russia countered by declaring war on Austria-Hungary. Once that happened, both alliances were drawn into the war and just like that, powerful Germany and her allies were at war with powerful Britain and her allies including Canada.

WWI started in 1914 and by the time it ended in 1918 the world was totally changed. The Austrian-Hungarian, Russian, German and Ottoman Empires all disintegrated into a number of smaller states and nations roughly based on national identities. The only monarchy to survive intact was the King of England simply because England won the war. In 1919, the victorious Allies hammered out the Treaty of Paris under the leadership of the United States, England and France which officially created a whole host of new nations from the ashes of the empires that had lost the war.

One of these was the re-creation of Poland. After over 100 years, Poland again became an independent nation. But the struggle for independence was not easy because the borders of the new nation were not clear. Where were the Allies to draw the line between Poland and the new Soviet Union (the old Russia)? And most importantly, the border between Poland and Ukraine was in dispute. In the

end, the Allies took a practical approach to the establishment of these boundaries – if you held the territory in question, you had a strong case to keep it. So, as the peacemakers in Paris struggled to create a new map of Europe, the small nations on the ground went to war with each other to gain the most territory possible. In the case of Poland and the Ukraine, there was an intense and bitter war that revived old rivalries.

For the Ukrainians after WWI, the picture remained complex. The old divisions were still there. Some favoured independence, some for closer relations with Poland and the west while others wanted union with the new Russian Union of Soviet Republics (USSR). Union with Poland was a hard sell since they were historic enemies. Union with the USSR was more tempting. The Soviets offered semi-autonomous relations as a member of the new Soviet Union. Ukraine became the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic (USSR) as the second most important republic after the Russian RSSR within the overall umbrella of the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics). The Soviets even granted Soviet Ukraine independent status as a member of the newly formed United Nations. And, after all, they were fellow Slavs.

Having made their choice, the Ukrainians now had the full support of the Soviet Union against any threats from Poland or other western nations such as Germany, Austria or Hungary. However, the hope of many Ukrainians for nationhood was dashed again. The new map of Eastern Europe was set without an independent Ukraine.

The Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic: 1921-1991

The integration of Soviet Ukraine with Soviet Russia was cemented during the long period of time when it was an integral part of the Soviet Union (USSR). It was a difficult marriage. Ukraine had a home with one the most powerful nations in the world and after WWII, as one of only two superpowers. But along with the benefits and there were many drawbacks.

After the Ukrainian-Polish war in 1921 Poland incorporated Galicia with a population of about 5 million people. Of these, 4.54 million, were Ukrainian. Many of these people were not happy to be part of Poland. There were bitter memories of the recent war on both sides. Added to their frustration was the policy by Poland to assimilate all the new regions and nationalities. This included

restrictions on culture, language and religion. Poland also encouraged Poles to move into the newly acquired areas. Given these changes, it's no wonder that many Ukrainians decided to leave for Canada and the United States.

While Ukrainians in Poland were pressured to assimilate, the situation in the new USSR was not any better. Stalin had taken charge of the Soviet Union and clamped down hard on any opposition or dissent. Stalin's goal was to quickly industrialize the Soviet Union and build a powerful military force. To do that, everyone had to make sacrifices. For the Ukrainian Soviet this meant contributing wheat and other farm products to the government. Stalin sold the grain from Ukraine to make money to build huge industrial projects and infrastructure.

In keeping with the philosophy of communism, Stalin ordered the collectivization of Ukraine's farmers. The farmers were forced to sign over their land and join collectives which took most of the harvest for the state. Meanwhile the locals faced starvation. This caused the great famine of 1932-33 (the Holodomor) which resulted in the death of 3 to 4 million Ukrainians. (1. P.253) This is one of three great genocides in the 20th century along with the Armenian Genocide in WWI by the Ottoman Turks and of course, the Jewish Holocaust of WWII which was the worst of all.

World War II: 1939-1945

During WWII, the Ukrainians were the first to be hit when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union in 1941. Millions were captured and killed as the German army steamrolled to Moscow. Some Ukrainians hoped that the Germans would bring a better deal for them than the Russians but that was not to be. Hitler was the ultimate racist of all time. He thought of all Slavs as an inferior race that should serve the superior German master race basically as slaves. All Jews, regardless of nationality were to be exterminated. So, the Ukrainians went from hard times under the Russians to really bad times under the Germans. However, the Russians came back with a vengeance and with the help of their British and American Allies won the war. Ukraine was once again under Soviet control only this time they had plenty of company in Eastern Europe.

Russian forces occupied all of Eastern Europe to the middle of Germany and forced them to accept Soviet control. Poland, Hungary, Romania and others up to and including East Germany were now under the Soviets. They created the

Warsaw Pact to counter the development of NATO lead by the United States. Thus, after WWII, the world was divided in two: NATO in the west and the Warsaw Pact in the east. Each side dominated by a superpower. This state of affairs lasted until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989.

Ukrainian Nationhood: 1991-2022

"Ukraine Has Not Yet Perished". These words are in the new Ukrainian national anthem and they say a lot about the past and present history of Ukraine. In spite of their turbulent history, they are still here. And, they are here now as a new nation prepared to fight for their survival.

With the collapse of the USSR Ukraine was once again thrown into an uncertain future. The Russians under Yeltsin and President Gorbachev, offered a partnership with Ukraine as part of a new Commonwealth of Independent States. However, this sounded too much like the old USSR arrangement with Russia as the dominant power. Most Ukrainians now saw a great opportunity to finally assert outright independence. While negotiations with Russia went on for a few years it was clear that Ukraine was looking for full independence as a nation for the first time in its history. On December 1, 1991 they voted overwhelmingly for an independent Ukrainian state.

Gaining independence is one thing but keeping it is another. Ukraine was now a nation but it was still locked in the middle between Russia to the east and Poland and Europe to the west. The problem was to choose sides: Europe or Russia. Poland made its choice early by joining the European Union (EU) and NATO. This put Poland clearly within the Western sphere of influence and protection. Ukraine was cautious about completely joining the west because of its many links to Russia. There were huge military and economic ties that had to be considered. Also, Russia was very concerned about losing Ukraine to the west for security reasons. Russia always had some buffer states on their long western border. When Germany attacked in 1941, they had to go through Poland and the Ukraine before getting into Russia. Now, NATO troops could easily move from Poland and threaten Russia. For Russia, if Ukraine joined NATO, that would be a major setback.

Many in Ukraine wanted to follow Poland and other East European nations by joint the west but others had strong ties to their Slavic brothers to the east.

About 30% of the population of Ukraine were Russian speaking. However, they were still Ukrainian Russians not Russian nationals. Many people think that Ukrainian and Russian are pretty well the same languages but there is a difference of about 38% which is quite substantial (3. P. 147). Also, at present some 76% of the population of the 40 million people in Ukraine speak Ukrainian as their first language and only 18% Russian (3, p.127). Most speak both languages. Ukraine is trying to assert her sovereignty and uniqueness while the Russian propaganda machine under Putin is trying to convince the world that Ukrainians are really just "little Russians" and belong to their sphere of influence.

Ukraine now had to deal with the demands of Russians living near the Russian border regions. These demands were backed by Russian propaganda, resources and troops. Russia then put pressure on Ukraine to accommodate these demands. They want a puppet government in Ukraine such as the one they installed in Byelorussia. Some of the Ukrainian government leaders and most of the oligarchs were prepared to give in to Russian demands but the people were not. They began a number of mass movements such as the Orange Revolution and the Revolution of Dignity to move the country towards an open democracy and closer ties to the west. When Ukraine resisted, Putin took direct action.

In 2014 Putin, now firmly installed as the Russian dictator, annexed the Crimea with little protest from the west. Then he set his eyes on forcing Ukraine to fall in line with Russia or lose its eastern provinces and maybe even all of Ukraine. Putin sees Ukraine as belonging to Russia and he wants it back. The Russians encouraged the separatists on their border and supplied them with troops and arms. The Ukrainian army found itself in a major civil war. By 2020 over 14,000 lives were lost in the war against the Russians in the Donbas region. (1. P. 355)

When Russia lost control of the Soviet Empire the country went through a major upheaval. The people of Russia had never tasted freedom and democracy. Their entire history was one of dictatorships in the form of one Tsar after another. Their best hope was for a benevolent dictatorship. The vast majority of people were peasants who were ruled by nobles under the Tsar. By 1900 there were small step made to create a real parliament (Duma) but it was always under the

full control of the Tsar. Then in the middle of WWI in 1917 the radical Bolsheviks took power and created a communist dictatorship.

In the 1990's with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russians were finally free but also completely unprepared for democracy. In the chaos of the 1990's it was a political and economic free for all. Everyone grabbed what they could for themselves. Dozens of political parties sprang up leading to completely disorganized governments. The economy was in ruins and the law was in the hands of criminal mobsters. This led to the emergence of the oligarchs.

The oligarchs were essentially business tycoons who gradually gained control of key segments of the Russian economy. They used a primitive stock market to "buy" companies for next to nothing then run them for their own gain while the Russian people starved. Economic control led to political control. By early 2000 Putin, a former officer in the Soviet KGB police force, became the biggest and most powerful oligarch and had seized political power in Russia. Thus, after a very brief experiment with the chaos of democracy Russia was back in the hands of a dictator – a new Tsar. Having gained complete control of Russia, Putin now turned his attention to expanding the Russian empire to its former glory and the border states such as Ukraine were the on the list.

Unfortunately for Ukraine, their experiment with freedom and democracy was much like that of Russia. And like Russia, the Ukrainian oligarchs quickly gained control of the Ukrainian economy and politics. Corrupt political leaders were quite prepared to live under the Russian umbrella as long as they could continue to prosper. In 2013 the richest 100 Ukrainians owned 53% of the total Ukrainian GDP! However, by 2018 that number was down to 20%. The wealth of the 10 richest oligarchs dropped from 29% to 10%. (1. P.352)

Unlike the Russians, the Ukrainian people began fighting back to gain control of their nation. They started a large grass roots movement to restore democracy and fair elections. Out of this political turmoil an unlikely leader emerged. In 2019 Ukrainians elected President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, a young energetic comedian and businessman with a law degree. He won on a promise to control the oligarchs and put an end to corruption, poverty and the war with Russia. He was the people's choice winning a huge majority of 73% of the vote

and became the symbol of a new and united Ukraine. And he was not afraid to stand up to Putin.

Putin's response was to label Zelenskyy and his government as Nazis bent on harming the poor Ukrainian Russians in the eastern provinces. For Putin, if propaganda and diplomatic pressure don't work, you go to the military option. The Russians assembled a large army on the Ukrainian border and began their invasion in what Putin called a "special military operation" to free the Russian people from the Ukrainian Nazis. This claim is almost as bad as the claim by Hitler in 1939 that Germany was forced into war with Poland because the Polish army invaded Germany. In fact, German soldiers were dressed in Polish uniforms and pretended to invade Germany while the movie cameras filmed the event for propaganda purposes.

In 2014 Putin had annexed the Crimea from Ukraine and got away with it. The west was slow and hesitant to react. This time however, he overplayed his hand. The blatant Russian invasion of Ukraine in February, 2022 was too much for the west and they condemned it with severe sanctions and military aid. The time for diplomacy was past and an all-out war began. Putin had assumed a quick and easy victory like he got in the Crimea. However, this time the Ukrainians fought back and a year later they continue to fight and are actually doing quite well.

What now?

There are some obvious lessons to learn from this war. The first is the same old lesson about appeasement. Bullies like Putin gain confidence through easy victories. He gained power in Russia through violence, intimidation and the destruction of democracy while the west stood by and watched. He took a gamble to annex the Crimea and got away with it. Then he invaded Ukraine. Hitler could have been stopped at Czechoslovakia. Instead, England mildly slapped his hand and signed the Munich agreement which gave Hitler everything he wanted. Finally, after he blatantly invaded Poland, the Allies were forced to act. By then it was too late. Dictators, like all bullies, don't know when to stop and will continue their aggression until they meet determined resistance.

When Putin gained power in Russia the western nations were actually quite pleased because he brought stability and order where there was chaos. Sure, he destroyed the free press, held fake elections and jailed or killed any rivals but his

many sins were ignored in the name of stability and peace. US President Trump clearly admired Putin and no doubt wished he could pull off the same kind of dictatorship in his country.

Dictators provide stability because dissent is not allowed. Dissent is a hallmark of democracy which means you must have a free press, fair and open elections and the freedom to protest. Its messy but that's the only way democracy works. The west praised Putin for stability but ignored his repression of the Russian people. Now, there are few left in Russia to effectively oppose the war in Ukraine. Opposition is severely punished. In fact, it is against to law to even call the "conflict" in Ukraine a war.

So, the lesson of history is to stop dictators early or face the consequences. Theoretically that should be the job for the UN. The problem is that Russia is one of five nations with a veto in the Security Council. This is like putting the fox in charge of the chickens! The other option is for NATO to act on behalf of Ukraine. The only problem here is the real possibility of turning a local conflict into a major world war and even possibly a nuclear war.

The most reasonable option now is that of a proxy war. With the backing of the EU and USA, Ukraine might become Russia's Vietnam. In the 1960's the US decided to stop communism in Asia by supporting the South Vietnamese against the communist North. However, the North got full support from China and the USSR equally determined to spread communism around the world. So, while American troops poured into Vietnam, the Chinese and Soviets poured in supplies and arms to the North Vietnamese. The Americans finally gave up and left Vietnam. In the 1980's the Soviets also lost a similar war in Afghanistan.

A proxy war in Ukraine is not a pleasant picture. It means a long and brutal war with no end in sight. The only ones suffering at present are the Ukrainian people and some Russian troops. The Russian troops took a beating with their invasion so they are now trying to win the war by shooting missiles at Ukrainian cities. The American military are quite happy to send Ukraine weapons as long as they don't have to send any troops. The arms manufacturers will get even richer and the military could try out some killer equipment in a real war situation. In my view, this is probably where this war will remain for quite a while.

Another realistic option is for the two nations to make a peace treaty. The problem here is what happens to Crimea and the Eastern provinces annexed by Russia? Would Ukraine give up about a chunk of its territory to the Russians? Not likely. What happens to Russians currently living in Ukraine if there was a peace treaty? Would they be forced to move out back to Russia? The Ukrainians may be persuaded to lose the Crimea but not the Eastern provinces on the border with Russia. This kind of solution did occur in 1952 when North and South Korea was divided in half and remains so to this day. American troops face North Korean troops across the border with no end in sight. The UN might broker a cease-fire agreement to end hostilities while the peace talks continue. This is probably the best option for now however that would clearly be a defeat for Putin.

Another possibility is for the Russian people to remove Putin and establish a new leadership. The new leader might simply stop the war. Whether the new leader would actually move Russia towards true democracy is a wonderful dream – but not that likely. History shows that dictators who lose power are usually replaced by another dictator.

The Future

The reality of the situation in Ukraine is actually quite common in the world today. Many nations live with questionable neighbours and have to make accommodations. Many people in Scotland and Wales would like to separate from England. Separatists in Quebec want to leave Canada but where would they go? The problem is geography. As an old Newfoundland joke goes: "I wish Quebec would separate already, that way we would be a lot closer to Toronto"! If only things were that simple. Quebec is forced to live with Canada and Canada is forced to live with Quebec and the USA because of geography. In the same way, in the end, Ukraine will have to learn to live with Russia.

As always, Ukraine is in the middle of two major competing forces. One from the west and one from the east. If Ukraine joins NATO that will be seen as a major threat to Russia. If Ukraine loses the war and joins Russia, that will signal a major threat to other east European states such as Romania, Poland, Hungary and others in the region. Putin has made it clear that he wants the old Soviet Empire back under Russian control. The fight over Ukraine has broad international implications. If Putin gets his way in Ukraine why stop there?

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Note: As far as I know, I am not related to Volodymyr Zelenskyy although that would be nice! My name is Polish on my dad's side and originally spelled Zielinski. It seems that Polish "ski's" use the "i" while Ukrainians and Russians tend to use "y" in their surnames. I have no idea why Zelenskyy's name has two y's. It must be a Ukrainian thing?