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**Studying War and Migration: A
Knotty Causality Approach, The
Case of Ukraine**

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Abstract

This essay performs two chores. The first is formulation of an approach, that of knotty causality, of utility for the analysis of the relationship between warfare and migration. The argument develops as follows: first there is presentation of the knotty causality approach; then application of it to the current war in the Ukraine, which has provoked massive migration; and, finally, specification of an explanatory virtue of knotty causality.

The knotty causality approach is formulated as a 'fastener' solution to the problem of 'constant conjunction' arising from David Hume's understanding of causality. The analysis of the Ukraine war deals with a controversy in current geopolitical politics regarding competition between the US and Russian informal imperial powers. On the one hand, the war is condemned as an utterly 'unprovoked' act of imperial aggression by Russia against Ukraine. On the other hand, it is judged to be an understandable response to decades long implementation of a US imperial policy of 'NATO-to-the-Border'. A virtue of examining this controversy in knotty causality terms is that it allows one to speak truth to power -a bit more truthfully- and to understand the migratory immiseration of millions of Ukrainians as the implementation of imperial design.

Key Words: war, migration, causality, Hume, imperial geopolitics, NATO, US, Russia, Ukraine.

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Let's begin with two truths and a conclusion. It is true that wars can produce migration. It is equally true that, though some have declared warfare is in decline (Pinker 2011), the evidence suggests otherwise. According to the Global Peace Index-2025, 'The world is facing a violent conflict crisis. There were 59 state-based conflicts in 2023, the highest number since the end of World War II' (GPI 2025:3). The Global Peace Index for that year estimates that over 122 million people were 'forcibly displaced into migration by war- at a cost of \$19.97 trillion (Ibid.: 3). Consequently, understanding of why so much migration currently occurs depends on knowing how warfare brings it about.

This talk suggests that a knotty causality approach can be a useful way of investigating the relationship between war and migration. Why knotty? Because 'knots' it is argued are at the conceptual heart of understanding human social causality and so, it would be naughty to ignore them.

KNOTTY CAUSALITY¹

"...if there be any relation among objects ..., it is that of cause and effect. On this are found all our reasonings concerning ...existence." (David Hume. 1748. *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*.)

Causation is a fundamental ontological concept, being, as David Hume suggests, at the heart of all thought 'concerning ...existence.' Fundamental it is. Difficult to study, because it is contested as to what it might be. Knotty causality derives from one line of argument in this contest. The argument begins with David Hume, who might be called a cementer; leads to a group of scholars in the late 19th and early 20th century, who were eliminators; and, finally, proceeds to another scholarly gaggle in the latter part of the 20th century, the fasteners. Hume believed causality was the 'cement of the universe' (1739: 662). What did the cementing was cause and effect; which were deployed in space over time, with cause prior in time to effect, so the two cemented together as they were 'constantly conjoined' (Ibid: 657).

Debate arose over the way Hume understood constant conjunction. He called it a habit of 'the mind to conjoin' (Ibid: 662). According to Salmon (1998: 15), Hume's constant conjunction is a mental state that 'does not exist in the physical world outside of our own minds.' One implication of such a view is that constant conjunction is a purely mental phenomena, reducing causality to a figment of the imagination. Following Hume, there emerged a school of the eliminationists, who were for jettisoning the concept. The pioneer of mathematical statistics Karl Pearson (1892); the philosopher Bertrand Russell, and the formulator of the uncertainty principle Werner Heisenberg were all for eliminating causality. Pearson condemned it as a 'fetish (in Pearl 2000: 340). Russell demanded its 'complete extrusion' from philosophy. The crux of their arguments against the notion was that when the most advanced science was examined, by which they meant physics, what was observed were equations that presented relations between variables, with no mention of causality. Hence, there was no need for the concept.

A fasteners' position emerged to eliminate the eliminationists.² Their critique was that if advanced science was *only* equations stating relationships between variables, then lost was knowledge about what brought about the relationships. The existence of relationships was, Hume's terms,

¹ The notion of knotty causality was first broached in Reyna (2002).

² Important fasteners have included Trimmer (1950), Bunge (1963), Dowe (1972, 1995), and Salmon (1984, 1998).

the actuality of constant conjunction, and the 'extrusion' of causality, eliminated the concept needed to understand how constant conjunction occurred. The fasteners' approach was to search for what in the material world connected variables in relationships, i.e., created constant conjunction. Trimmer (1950) suggested that there was something that existed *between* cause and effect, which he called a 'forcing.' This focused attention upon the between; that is whatever there was that 'forced' fixture between cause and effect. Salmon argued forcings were 'Physical connections' (1998: 17). Physical connections were material ones, of which he gave the following example:

[W]hen I arrive home ... I press a button on my electronic door opener [cause] to open the door [effect]. First, there is the interaction between my finger and the control device, then an electromagnetic signal transmits a causal influence from the control device to the device that raises the garage door and, finally, there is an interaction between the signal and the mechanism' (ibid: 17-18).

Salmon's door opener and door are a cause and its effect. The physical connection is the electric signal running from door opener to door. The cause is depressing the button on the door opener that transmits the electric message to the door, which message opens the door, the effect. In our terms, the physical connection is a fastener that materially connects cause with effect. Something is a fastener if three conditions are met: 1. Actions of the cause connect with, and initiate; 2. operation of what it is that performs the effecting; which operations 3. connect with the effect. If a sniper kills somebody, the sniper is the cause, the victim is the effect, the bullet's trajectory is the fastener putting a bullet in the person's brain. When the sniper pulls the trigger this action initiates operation of the bullet that connects with the victim, with horrible effect. A 'causal event' is said to occur when a particular cause has a fastener to a particular effect. Causality, then, isn't cement. It is fasteners that tie antecedent causes to subsequent effects; and, as it is knots that tie something to something else, it is appropriate to think of fasteners as knots, and causality as knotty, with the universe a knotty place.

Different domains of being may be heuristically said to have their distinctive sorts of causal events. When investigating warfare and migration, the observational lens is upon causal events occurring within, and between, social groups, hence such a study is one of social causality. There is a considerable social causality literature, of which a fair amount is quantitative.³ The knotty causality approach is explicitly qualitative. Its focus is upon verbal re-presentation of observation of the actualities that are knots fastening cause with effect.

Basic knots, strings, and string being can be identified. A 'basic knot' is one that fastens particular causes with particular effects creating 'causal events.' The notion of events has a number evocations and hence has its ambiguities. Causal events may include a lot of actualities, among both the causes, the knots, and the effects. When causal events are knotted with other causal events structures called 'strings' arise.⁴ Strings are fastened to other strings when a causal event in one string is knotted with a causal event in another string. Strings may be said to have final and antecedent causal events. The 'final causal event' is simply the last event in a string under observation. 'Antecedent causal events' are those that precede and are knotted to the final event.

³ Hage and Meeker (2025) introduce social causality. Hong (2015) offers an interesting quantitative approach to it. King et. al. (2021) offer a classic qualitative alternative.

⁴ Sometimes there is talk of causal 'chains' or 'paths' instead of strings. Paths, however, just go along without any connectors, and causality is about the connecting of things. Frankly, I would prefer not to imagine reality as clanking along in chains.

One can distinguish convergent, iterative, and divergent strings. 'Convergent string structures' are those where different strings are knotted to converge upon a particular string leading to a final causal event. It is also the case that some strings may not be directly knotted but have common antecedent events that converge on a final causal event. Such strings are 'iterative convergent' ones. 'Divergent string structures' are those where different strings originally knotted to a particular string go off in different directions to different final causal events.

The key methodological practice here is *look to the knots in the strings*. This begins with selecting a final causal event; which might be thought of as the explanandum, the thing to be explained. Then observe how other, antecedent causal events are knotted into strings that ultimately are knotted to, and thereby create, the final event. These are the explanans, the things that do the explaining. Once one has verbal representation of the strings and knots of antecedent causal events that bring about some final causal event, then more abstract theoretical statements of the causal situations may be inferred. This knotty causality approach is illustrated by applying it to the warfare that provoked the migration currently depopulating Ukraine, a war said to be 'without provocation.'

'WITHOUT PROVOCATION?'

On February 22, 2022, Russian troops invaded Ukraine. The resulting war provoked 3.7 million internally displaced persons and 6.9 million transnationally displaced persons (IOM 2025). This is the largest migratory movement in Europe since World War II. Why did it occur? According to President Joe Biden, the war occurred because of an 'unjustified' Russian invasion that was a 'brutal' act, 'without provocation', of 'naked aggression.'⁵ Thereafter, his principal spokespersons -echoed by the mass media- hammered home this message to everybody listening throughout the world. Russia certainly did invade with about 190,000 troops along multiple axes -from north towards Kiev, from east into the Donbas, and from the south into Kherson. However, the political scientist John Mearsheimer, among others, has argued Russia's invasion was provoked, and that the provocation resulted from US support of 'NATO enlargement' (2014: 7). What follows is analysis of what knots in what strings have led to the invasion in order to evaluate the validity of Mearsheimer's claim. Analysis begins by examining the context of US-Russian geopolitics- out of which the conflict arose.

Context

During the Cold War (1950-1991) the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the US had been empires -informal ones- locked in global geopolitical competition for imperial prevalence. Fidel Castro at one point said, 'The Soviet Union's existence was as sure as the sun rising in the morning' (in Keeran and Kenny 2010:1). The sun didn't rise on December 26, 1991 as the Supreme Soviet, the legislative body, formally dissolved the USSR? Only the Russian Soviet Republic remained to become the Russian Federation. The new Russian Federation had lost roughly a third of its territory and a half of its population (Suny 2022: 6). It experienced (Goldgeier 1999: 4) 'economic and military collapse'. It dissolved the Warsaw Pact, its potent military alliance. President George H. W. Bush, at the beginning of the USSR's dissolution, famously mused (1990), 'Out of these troubled times ... a new world order can emerge'. The early 1990s were as

⁵ Biden made these comments at the White House immediately following the Russian invasion (2022) and a year later (2023) at a meeting of the UN General Assembly.

close as the world came to having a US unipolar imperial moment. A strategic question for Washington at this time regarding realizing its unipolar moment was: What to do about Russia?

The answer to this question was let the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) deal with the Russian Bear. Created in 1949, NATO was an intergovernmental military alliance. By 2022, it consisted of 30 members, 28 of whom were in Europe. Alliance members curtsy to the canons of the American world order. NATO military spending was roughly 57% of the global nominal total in the early 2021. In principle, it could mobilize 3.5 million military personnel. Three of its members -the US, France, and the UK- possessed nuclear weapons. NATO was an intimidating killing machine. President Biden (2024) called it on its 75th anniversary, 'the single greatest ... defensive alliance in the history of the world.' Though as Truman's powerful Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, and one of NATO's founders let slip, it fancies itself as, '...far more than a defensive arrangement...' (in Jackson 2003: 224).⁶ Clearly, NATO was by far the single greatest military threat to the Russian Federation's security.

With the fall of the USSR, a huge buffer territory in central and eastern Europe disappeared that had protected it from Western invasion.⁷ One Russian general is said to have worried that five-hundred air bases would become NATO's if eastern Europe passed into NATO hands. Moscow 'repeatedly warned' that placing NATO on its borders was 'intolerable' (Hoh 2023). Senior US security elites responded -don't worry.

In February 1990, Gorbachev, then leader of Russia, and James Baker, then Secretary of State, discussed the former East Germany's joining of West Germany. Baker told Gorbachev that if Russia let East Germany merge with West Germany, then NATO would '...not shift one inch eastward from its present position' (in Sarotte 2021: 1). This is what Washington's security officials told the Russians. What they did was something else.

They changed their minds. In 1992, a consensus emerged in the Bush administration that NATO enlargement to the east was a sensible *realpolitik* measure (Shiffrinson 2020). When it was suggested to Bush I that Russia might be concerned about NATO expansion, he replied, '...to hell with that' (in Sarotte 2021: 3). Officials in the Clinton administration 'showed contempt for Russian interests' (Carpenter 2021). Clinton himself exemplified this, remarking of US relations with Boris Yeltsin, 'We keep telling Ol'Boris, "Okay, now here's what you do next -here's some more shit for your face"' (in Likhotal 2022:4). Imbued with its imperial unipolarity, in 1994 the Clinton administration explicitly decided: we're moving NATO eastward to Russia's border. This was a 'NATO-to-the Border'. It was an initial cause in four iterative strings that result in a final event- the war in Ukraine. Let's examine evidence supportive of this assertion.

⁶ Since the end of the Cold War NATO is said to adopted a more 'interventionist' stance. Intervention had taken the form of warring in Kosovo (1999), Libya (2011), and Afghanistan (2001-2021); none of which either threatened or attacked a NATO member. NATO was not formally involved in the 2003 invasion of Iraq. However, thereafter it ran a training and mentoring mission for Iraqi security forces (2004-2011), which forces were used by the US to defeat resistance to its occupation.

⁷ Russia's need for a buffer zone to protect against Western invasion was prudent. It had been invaded by Napoleon (1812). Austro-Hungarian and German armies invaded Russia during World War I (1915). US, Britain, France, and Japan invaded during the Russian Revolution (1918-1920). Germany invaded the USSR with the largest most powerful military force up to that time during World War II (1941-1944).

Four Iterative Strings

The four strings ran between 1994 and 2022, with each succeeding string a slightly altered iteration of the preceding one. The causes, knots, and effects of the causal events in each string are presented. Attention turns to the first string and the Clinton presidency.

String 1

Cause: In the early 1990s, eastern and central European countries, fearful that Russia would turn on them, clamored for NATO admittance. Anthony Lake, Clinton's National Security Advisor (1993-1997), formulated the Clinton administration version of the NATO-to-the-Border policy. There was debate over its wisdom. William Burns, then a young foreign service officer in Russia, advised Washington that an attempt to bring eastern and central Europe into NATO would be 'premature at best, and needlessly provocative at worst' (in Suny 2022: 4). Lake created what came to be known as the NSC Troika, three officers in the National Security Council (NSC), who argued the case for a NATO-to-the-Border policy. The Troika drafted for Lake in October 1994 a working paper entitled 'Moving Toward NATO Expansion;' whose rationale for the expansion was to '...project stability eastward and to underpin the democratic reform process in CEE' (Vershbow et. al. 1994; CEE is the abbreviation for 'central and eastern Europe'). Lake sent the document on to the State and Defense Departments, who approved it, the latter grudgingly. Clinton wrote on the front page of the document 'looks good' and emphasized keeping the 'membership door open' for Ukraine. Lake had won. NATO expansion was authorized. It was the first authorization of this policy, and so is termed NATO-to-the-Border₁. It was a cause.

Knot: NATO decided upon its implementation in 1994. Implementation began with negotiation with Central European countries in the Visegrad Group -Poland, Hungary and, the Czech Republic (Czechoslovakia had split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia, January 1, 1993)- to defend their interests in the post-Soviet world. Negotiations were over the conditions of accession of these countries to NATO and took place over a number of years in the mid-1990s. These negotiations were successfully completed towards the end of 1997, resulting in authorization of their NATO membership. The negotiations ran from the negotiators in Washington to those in the Visegrad Group connecting the cause, the NATO-to-the-Border₁ policy, with the effect, eastward expansion.

Effect: On March 12, 1999, Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic joined NATO. All three states had been members of the Warsaw Pact. By joining NATO the three former allies reversed their guns, now training them on Russia. This effect was the cause of putting the Russian Bear at greater militarily at risk than had previously been the case.

Knot: News of the of the accession the Visegrad group to NATO and the heightened military threat was transmitted to the various principal officers in the Russian security apparatus.⁸

Effect: The response to this information by Russian political elites was near unanimously objection to NATO. Igor Ivanov, Foreign Minister at the time, announced diplomatically that the Visegrad Group's NATO accession was 'movement in the wrong direction' (in Frost 1999). The effect of

⁸ Important institutions in the security apparatus of the Russian Federation including the Defense Ministry, the Foreign Ministry, the National Security Council in the Presidential Administration, and the Federal Security Service, successor to the KGB, and also part of the Presidential Administration.

increased military threat to Moscow was relatively mild -official objection taking the form declaring that NATO expansion was 'wrong'. This effect might be termed official kvetching. It is time to move on to String 2.

String 2

Cause: During a 1998 ceremony announcing the Baltic Charter, ⁹Washington presented its post-Soviet policy toward the former Soviet Baltic republics (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania). Here Pres. Clinton announced (in Mayer 2000), 'America is determined to create the conditions under which Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia can one day walk through (NATO's) door'. In effect, Clinton was announcing a further iteration of NATO-to-the-Border₂, this time to the Baltic states. George W Bush, son of George H. W. Bush, took office on January 6, 2001. His security principals were hardcore neoconservatives -Dick Cheney, Vice-President; Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of State; Donald Rumsfeld, Defense Secretary. They were disposed to even more aggressive positions vis-à-vis Russia than had been the case in the Clinton administration. The Visegrad states had not been Russia's direct neighbors. The Baltic states were former republics of the Soviet Union located directly on Russia's northwestern border. Here was an iteration, a more aggressive one, of the original NATO-to-the-Border policy. It's NATO-to-the-Border₂ was authorized by George W. Bush's neo-conservatives, and was the initial cause of the second string

Knot: As was the case following the accession of the Visegrad group, a period of protracted negotiations took place between the individual Baltic states, the US, and NATO, with the former said to be 'desperate to join' NATO (Hyde-Price 2000: 5). In the late 1990s, Washington had been hesitant about the Baltic states joining NATO. However, on 9/11/2001 the twin towers of the World Trade Center were destroyed by 'terrorists' in Manhattan, provoking a security crisis for the Bush regime. The following day, 9/12, the Vilnius 10 -a group of countries including the Baltic states- issued a statement pledging assistance to the US in the fight against terrorism. Thereafter, Bush's officials grateful of their Baltic counterpart's support, labored as 'coaches' and 'babysitters' (Piirimäe 2024: 651), which led by the end of 2001 to an agreement for the Baltic states to join NATO. The coaching and babysitting were negotiations running from actors in Washington to those in the Baltic States that knotted the cause to its effect, discussed next.

Effect: At a ceremony presided over by Colin Powell, Secretary of State on March 29, 2004, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia officially joined NATO. The accession of the Baltic states rushed nuclear armed alliance of potentially of 3.5 million soldiers directly to the Bear's northwest border. The Bear experienced a further elevated military threat, which threat became a cause of a subsequent response by Moscow.

Knot: Information of the accession ceremony quickly passed along diplomatic channels and through mass media news broadcasting to all Russians. It was news attended to closely by those in Moscow's security apparatus.

Effect: The effect upon 'Russian leaders' was to raise a loud 'chorus opposing NATO growth' (Boese 2004). Ivanov, still Foreign Minister, less diplomatically than in the case of the Visegrad Group's NATO accession, said Moscow had '...no illusions about the reasons Baltic states were admitted into NATO and why NATO airplanes are being deployed there' (in Boese 2004).

⁹ The Baltic Charter was a diplomatic agreement between three former Soviet republics (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) and the US to integrate them into the US 'world order.'

Moreover, Radio Free Europe reported in the late 1990s (Frost: 1999), 'Moscow has consistently said that a "red line" would be crossed if Ukraine, or any of the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, were to join the alliance.' The 'red line' had been crossed, and 'Many prominent elites in Russia' now '...called for demonstrable military activities to coerce the Baltic states' (Blank 2011). The effect of the increased military threat to Russia extended beyond kvetching. Rather, Russia responded by announcing its own threat of 'demonstrable military activities'. It is time to move on to the third string.

String 3

In the years following the Baltic states' accession, the Bush II administration debated admission of the Ukraine and Georgia to NATO. There was opposition to this possibility. Cheney, Bush II's powerful Vice-President, recognized that Russian rearmament had been ongoing, and that Russia, '...now had the forces and the wealth -primarily from oil- to be able to re-exert Russian influence not just in Georgia, but across the 'near abroad'....' (Cheney 2011: 513). Nevertheless, the neo-conservative threesome -Cheney, Rumsfeld, and Rice- supported NATO accession for the two countries.

Fiona Hill - at the National Intelligence Council- opposed the policy. She was supported by the same Burns, then US Ambassador to Moscow, who had advised the Clinton administration against NATO's eastward expansion. She warned Rice that 'Ukrainian entry into NATO is the brightest of all redlines for the Russian elites...' (in Suny 2022: 5). Hill and Burns were ignored. George W. Bush following a 2008 Bucharest NATO Summit, sent a public message declaring that Georgia and Ukraine '...will become members of' NATO (in Mearsheimer 2014: 79). While Bush's announcement was not an official authorization of Ukrainian and Georgian accession proceedings to NATO, it was a pronouncement that such an authorization was forthcoming. This was yet another iteration -NATO-to-the-Border₃. If implemented, it placed NATO on Russia's western frontier in the center (Ukraine) and the south (Georgia).

Knot: Bush's Bucharest Summit announcement that Ukraine and Georgia would be allowed to join NATO became big foreign policy news. News that was immediately conveyed to President Putin. Permit a word about how Putin understood what was happening to Russia as the Americans moved NATO eastward. Madeleine Albright, Clinton's second Secretary of State, recalled (2018: 165) that Putin once confided to her that some folk supposed the Russian Bear should '... start picking berries and eating honey. Maybe then he will be left alone. But no, he won't be! Because someone will always try to chain him up. As soon as he's chained, they will tear out his teeth and claws'. Putin got it. NATO-to-the-Border₃ was about tearing out 'teeth and claws' of the Russian state. Under Putin, the Bear was not for chaining.

Consequently, immediately following the Bucharest Summit, a presidential decision was taken to oppose Georgia's NATO membership with violence. 'Demonstrable military activities' had already been planned for Russian invasion of Georgia. In the early days of August 2008 these preparations began implementation.

Effect: Russian troops invaded Georgia on August 7, 2008. The conflict only lasted for five days, but it prevented Georgia 'from joining NATO' (Cohen and Hamilton 2011: viii). Bush's NATO-to-the-Border₃ policy pronouncement was a cause. The Georgian War was an effect, with the latter knotted to the former by Putin's decision based on the news of the Bucharest Summit. These

preparations and their operation connected Bush II NATO-to-the Border₃ policy, a cause, with its effect.

However, from the perspective of Washington imperial elites, there was still the possibility that Ukraine might join NATO, and Ukraine was an economically and politically a far greater prize for NATO membership than Georgia. This leads us to a fourth, more complex, iterative string. It is a string that begins with Ukrainian presidential politics and ends on February 22, 2022 and the invasion.

String 4

Cause: Germany and France responded to Moscow's Georgian invasion by dropping their support for Ukraine's NATO membership. Bush II's presidency ended in 2008, and that of Barack Obama began in 2009. Obama had been blasted by neoconservatives for being weak in responding to Russian aggression. One does not win a US presidency by being weak on anything. Unsurprisingly, as a candidate in 2008 Obama supported Ukraine's joining NATO. Moreover, once in office his '...administration continued a campaign to admit Ukraine to the [NATO] alliance...' (Carpenter 2021, insert added for clarity). President Trump, who followed Obama, equally 'officially committed' to this policy, which was the NATO-to-the Border₄.

There was now a double hitch in implementing this policy. The first problem, of course, was that Russia had indicated it would fight to prevent its implementation. The second problem was that Ukraine had to ask to join NATO, which was not a sure thing. A fair number of the political elite in Kiev and ordinary folk in eastern Ukraine in the Donbas had ties with, and sympathies for, Moscow. Realization of the NATO-to-the Border₄ policy in Ukraine had to deal with these two problems.

In 2010, Victor Yanukovich, Russia's candidate, won a national election -judged free and fair by external observers- defeating Yulia Tymoshenko, the US candidate for the presidency. At the Kremlin's urging, Yanukovich cancelled the offer of an EU association agreement, and accepted a loan bailout, and closer ties with Russia. Bad news for the US. However, anti-Yanukovich elites -including far-right, fascist parties such the Svoboda and Right Sector- in the three years following his election organized anti-Yanukovich demonstrations aimed at regime change. These culminated in the 2014 Euromaiden Uprisings, which succeeded. In fear for his life, Yanukovich fled the country on February 22, 2014. An anti-Russian, pro-Western government was immediately installed.¹⁰ According to one account, Victoria Nuland, then Assistant Secretary of State, was on hand handing out sandwiches (probably baloney) to Euromaiden demonstrators. The role of the US in the Euromaidan Uprising, if murky, was in the service of NATO-to-the Border₄. It was to cause largely unintended consequences for American implementation of NATO-to-the Border₄ policy.

Knot: News of the success of the Euromaiden Uprising travelled to Moscow immediately. It probably came to Putin directly from Yanukovich as he was escaping via Crimea by Russia and was by follow up reports from the FSB. It was clear to Putin and his security principals that it would lead to Ukrainian accession to NATO. This was unacceptable. The decision was made, and orders sent, to the armed forces to invade Crimea and support armed separatists in the Donetsk

¹⁰ The role of fascists in the immediate post- Yanukovich government appears to have been real. Mearsheimer (2014:80) claimed it included 'four high-ranking ...neofascists.'

and Luhansk *oblasts* (provinces) in the Donbas, who had seized government buildings proclaiming themselves Peoples' Republics, aligned with Russia.

Effect: War occurred in Crimea and Donbass, with the Ukrainian military vigorously counter-attacking Russian forces. Russia was successful in the Crimea, which was formally annexed to Russia on March 18, 2014. It would not join NATO. Fighting, however, raged on in the Donbas becoming largely a stalemate in the years following 2014.

Knot: Russian aggression in Crimea and the Donbas 'shocked Western governments' (Lavrynovskiy 2020: 1), which suggested it was an unintended consequence of their support for Nation to the Border₄ policy. Shock was news that travelled from the fighting in Crimea and the Donbas to security principals in Washington.

Effect: Receipt of this information had the effect of Ukraine's military receiving considerable assistance from the US and its allies, especially the UK. Between 2014 and 2021, Ukraine received from the US \$2.7 billion in military assistance (Darden 2022). Between 2022 and 2025, the Biden and Trump administrations provided an additional \$134 billion security package to Kiev (Duggal 2025). Implementation of NATO-to-the Border₄ was now a matter of US warring to support its favored Ukrainian government.

Knot: Moscow, well aware of US and its clients' military support of Ukraine, transmitted to the West four 'demands' that it declared needed to be met for it to cease hostilities against Kiev. These were: Ukraine would not enter NATO; would pullback from other 'frontline', eastern European countries; Kiev would accept the loss of Crimea and the Donbas; and European security architecture would be re-designed to respect Russian interests in eastern Europe.

Effect: If Washington accepted Moscow's demands it meant the failure of NATO-to-the-Border₄. The Biden administration said, 'No'.

Knot: Putin, explaining why Russia warred in Ukraine said (in Lauria 2022), 'For our country,' invading Ukraine '...is a matter of life and death, a matter of our historical future as a nation. This is not an exaggeration; this is a fact. It is not only a very real threat to our interests but to the very existence of our state...'. There might be a tendency to dismiss this statement as propaganda. But, with NATO directly located on its northwestern and west central border, Russia faced an opposing empire's military that was built upon 57% of the world's military spending. This was a military juggernaut. Enemy military juggernauts on your border *are* an existential threat. Consequently, on receipt of the negative response to its demand that the US cease attempting to implement NATO-to-the-Border₄, Putin ordered a full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Effect: Moscow invaded Ukraine on February 22, 2022. It was 'brutal' (invasions are). It was 'aggression' (Moscow attacked).

Knot: The aggressive brutality of the invasion was experienced as horror and terror by ordinary Ukrainians.

Effect: Horror and terror drove Ukrainians to migrate away from homes in their millions. On the day that Russia invaded Ukraine, President Biden spoke in the East Room of the White House declaring (2022) the attack was 'without provocation.' Was it?

UNPROVOKED?

Nothing is ever 'unprovoked'. The universe is a highly provocative place, where the provocations are those of knotty causality. The knotty causality analysis suggests Mearsheimer had a point. Movement of NATO to the Russian border was provocative. The preceding knotty causality analysis has identified four strings, iterative in the sense that all involved implementation of the US NATO-to-the-Border policy. Each string involved attempts of US security principals to implement NATO-to-the-Border and, in so doing, increased the military threat to Russia. This was a cause, which had the effect of increasing the violence of the Russian response to the threat. The US threat was knotted to the Russian effect by communication of the security implications of the cause to Russian security principals. Abstractly put: increasing threat of violence by one empire upon another was a cause which had the effect of reducing the threat with violence. Cause being knotted to effect by communication of increasing threat. The play that security principals in empires indulge in with violence caused the Ukraine war, whose horrors became the everyday lives of those dying in, and fleeing from, imperial games. In the end, the second Trump arrived with other wars, other horrors, other millions dying in, and fleeing from, other imperial games. Allow a conclusion celebrating a virtue of knotty causality.

Virtue

Biden was correct! Russia did invade Ukraine. He told the truth. However, it was a partial truth. The knotty causality analysis of the Ukraine war allowed a fuller discovery of the truth, because it revealed iterative strings of causes knotted to effects; in this case of the effects of implementation of a policy that caused increased military threats to a country, which, in turn, caused the country to respond to militarily to the threat. A knotty causality by knotting events together in strings is an approach detailing *how* things happen. As such, its virtue is in helping construction of more complete truths about the world.¹¹ How is it that millions of Ukrainians endure migration not because of 'unprovoked' attack, but because of four iterative strings implementing the US's NATO-to-the-Border policy.

¹¹ Reyna (ND) discusses knotty causality's utility in examining partial truths in light of more complete ones.

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