The Russia-Ukraine War and
The Sediments of Time

Siobhan Kattago

Department of Philosophy, University of Tartu

The fragility of the post-war international order is threatened not only by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, but even more tellingly, by the decisions that Western nations, the European Union, and NATO make in response to Russian aggression. This paper frames Western responses to Russia's invasion of Ukraine within what Reinhart Koselleck calls "the sediments of time" or *Zeitschichten* that contain different temporalities, speeds, and directions. Koselleck's approach of parsing the "sediments of time" is a heuristic device for understanding how Western responses to the war in Ukraine are framed by very different historical markers. Just as one might parse the grammatical components of a sentence in order to understand its meaning, so one might parse Western responses within different historical timescales that include *Zeitenwende*, *déjà vu*, *interregnum*, and Never Again.

Keywords: déjà vu, *Zeitenwende*, Ukraine, Koselleck, Arendt, *interregnum*, human rights

In February 2022, time seemed to freeze in an eerie *déjà vu* as Russian tanks gathered at the Ukrainian border and then advanced in ominous columns towards Kyiv. Two years later, the fragility of the post-war international order is threatened not only by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, but even more tellingly, by the decisions that Western nations, the European Union, and NATO make in response to Russian aggression. Continued US assistance to Ukraine is caught within the acrimony of presidential elections, an increasingly polarized electorate, and the war in Gaza (Haass and Klein 2024). Likewise, long-term EU funding for Ukraine is subject to conflicting national interests and populism (Krastev and Leonard 2024). Given the post-war architecture of international law and human rights, are Western responses to the Russia-Ukraine war at a historical turning point, as Scholz's *Zeitenwende* suggests, or a form of *déjà vu* recalling policies of appeasement after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the Anschluss in 1938?

Corresponding author's address: Siobhan Kattago, email: siobhan.kattago@ut.ee.

This paper frames Western responses to Russia's invasion of Ukraine within what Reinhart Koselleck calls "the sediments of time" or *Zeitschichten* that contain different temporalities, speeds, and directions. As he writes: "The notion of sediments of time" helps one "to parse historical findings and circumvent the linear-cyclical dichotomy" (Koselleck 2018, 4). If *déjà vu* indicates the sense that one has been somewhere before, a historical turning point indicates a change in direction. Given that Russia's invasion of Ukraine contains aspects of circularity, as in *déjà vu*, and aspects of linear change, like *Zeitenwende*, Koselleck's approach of parsing the "sediments of time" is a heuristic device for understanding how Western responses to the war in Ukraine are framed by different historical markers. Just as one might parse the grammatical components of a sentence in order to understand its meaning, so one might parse Western responses within different historical timescales. Hence, Western responses to the war in Ukraine contain aspects of a turning point, *déjà vu*, *interregnum*, and new beginning that point back to the end of communism, the Cold War, World War II and its aftermath. Section 1 examines *Zeitenwende* within the trajectory of *die Wende* in 1989 and *Stunde Null* in 1945 and contrasts these with the *déjà vu* of the Russian belief in repeating their victory in the Great Patriotic War. Section 2 contrasts *Zeitenwende* with political crisis as *interregnum* and links the Russia-Ukraine war with the complex legacy and afterlife of the USSR. Section 3 argues that, in addition to *Zeitenwende*, *déjà vu*, and *interregnum*, Russia's invasion of Ukraine returns Western nations to the moral imperative of Never Again after World War II. Finally, section 4 considers the challenges that Russia's attack on Ukraine pose to the postwar international institutions that were inspired by Never Again and constructed to prevent further war and genocide.

1. Between *Zeitenwende* and *déjà vu*

Despite Russia's annexation of Crimea and heavy fighting in the Donbas since 2014, those battles were not perceived as turning points for European and international security. It wasn't until 24 February 2022 that the Russia-Ukraine war became the central issue for Europe, the West and, above all, for NATO. Chancellor Olaf Scholz described Russia's full-scale invasion as a *Zeitenwende* that would fundamentally shift German defence policy enabling it to become "the guarantor of European security that our allies expect us to be, a bridge builder within the European Union and an advocate for multilateral solutions to global problems" (Scholz 2023, 22). Although *Zeitenwende* refers explicitly to German defence policy, the idea of a historical turning point has been extended to the Western alliance. By combining *die Zeit* with *die Wende*, the word, *Zeitenwende* recalls the previous *Wende*,

or time of change, which signified the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the end of the GDR, German reunification in 1990, the collapse of the USSR in 1991, the end of the cold war, and the "end of history."

As a compound word, *Zeitenwende* is polysemic because it does not indicate the direction of change towards the open future or back to a previous past. As a bifurcation in time, *Zeitenwende* indicates changes that may not yet be visible. Most importantly, in referring to the war as "the global *Zeitenwende*," Scholz underscored its relevance beyond Ukraine and Russia, and beyond Europe. In comparing the war to an "epochal tectonic shift", he combined historical periodisation with the geological metaphor of an earthquake. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 thus triggered seismic changes below the political surface and sent shockwaves beyond the epicentre. Indeed, it is precisely the metaphor of changes below the earth's surface that resonates with Koselleck's sediments of time. As Scholz stated: "The *Zeitenwende* goes beyond the war in Ukraine and beyond the issue of European security"—it is "an end of an era" and end of "relative peace and prosperity" (Scholz 2023, 24).

Understanding the Russia-Ukraine war as a European or even "global *Zeitenwende*" raises important questions about the different paths of transformation after communism—towards open or closed societies, liberal or illiberal democracies, the rule of law or state of exception, right to national sovereignty or prerogative of empire. What is more, it raises questions about how the past is remembered, mis-remembered, embellished, or forgotten. If 1989 was a turn towards democratization, national sovereignty, and freedom in the West; the break-up of the USSR in 1991, for Vladimir Putin, was a disaster that threatened the country's geopolitical position and situation of Russians abroad. As he stated in a speech from 2005, the collapse of the Soviet Union was "…a major geopolitical disaster of the century. As for the Russian nation, it became a genuine drama. Tens of millions of our co-citizens and compatriots found themselves outside Russian territory. Moreover, the epidemic of disintegration infected Russia itself" (Putin 2005). However, if one considers historical periodisation before *die Wende* of 1989, and before the break-up, collapse, or "disaster" of 1991, the most important historical turning point is arguably *Stunde Null* or "zero hour", when World War II ended with German capitulation in 1945. On the one hand, *Stunde Null* is when time stops. On the other hand, zero hour denotes a new time and a new beginning. In addition to the end of World War II, zero hour signified the time before postwar political and legal institutions were designed to prevent national aggression and genocide. Zero hour is thus associated with catastrophe and collapse, as well as with the moral renewal of Never Again.

Although the end of World War II is broadly understood as zero hour, the war is remembered differently on the continent. If Europeans officially refer to World War II as lasting between 1939–1945, the Russian Federation venerates the Great Patriotic War within the timeframe of 1941–1945, thereby omitting the years of Nazi and Soviet alliance during 1939–1941 and Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe until 1991. Oleksii Polegkyi from the Centre for Public Diplomacy claims that two different temporalities or moral frameworks clash in Ukraine. "One of the key watersheds between Ukraine and Russia is manifested in their relationship to World War II. In short, between the slogans 'Never Again' vs. 'we can repeat it' there is an abyss" (Polegkyi 2022). The postwar imperative of Never Again promises not to repeat national aggression, war, and genocide, whereas Russia's "special military operation" against Ukraine and the West glorifies the victory of the Great Patriotic War and is a *déjà vu* of sorts. As Polegkyi indicates, the Russian veneration of the Great Patriotic War is one of nationalization that equates Soviet with Russian death, while omitting war crimes by the Red Army. In addition, as Volodymyr Yermolenko underscores, "we can repeat it" also signals a return to the crimes perpetrated in the name of Hitler and Stalin (Yermolenko 2023).

It is not only the naming of World War II and its timeframe that differs in Europe but, more importantly, the lessons which have been learned. Western support for Ukraine, as political scientist Maria Mälksoo argues, is combined with "some long and unprocessed legacies of Russian imperialism," as well as "West-centrism and a very short memory, bordering on presentism" (Mälksoo 2022, 4). Moreover, fear of military escalation may unwittingly continue the "old idea for an East European buffer zone to keep the Russian menace at bay from the West" (Mälksoo 2022, 5). Russia's annexation of Crimea, and its invasion of the Donbas in 2014, were according to Chancellor Scholz, a time when Western leaders were intent on "preventing further escalation by Russia and restoring and preserving peace in Europe" (Scholz 2023, 26). However, as he admitted, when looking back, Europe and NATO were unsuccessful in preventing Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which as Scholz underscored, "ushered in a fundamentally new reality—imperialism had returned to Europe" (Scholz 2023, 26).

Although Russia's invasion of Ukraine is an epochal tectonic shift and a turning point in European security, it is influenced by historical events that preceded the invasion—namely, the largely peaceful revolutions in Eastern Europe that precipitated the break-up of the Soviet Union, and the subsequent Orange Revolution (2004) and Euromaidan (2014) in Ukraine. In 2018, well before the full-scale invasion, historian Timothy Snyder argued that "Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014 was a reality test for the European

Union and the United States" (Snyder 2018, 9). As he wrote, two political conceptions of time emerged after the Cold War: a politics of inevitability in the west and politics of eternity in Russia. "Inevitability and eternity translate facts into narratives. Those swayed by inevitability see every fact as a blip that does not alter the overall story of progress; those who shift to eternity classify every new event as just one more instance of a timeless threat" (Snyder 2018, 8). If the American narrative of inevitability was associated with the free market; for Snyder, the European narrative focussed on the nation-state after empire. "When the Soviet Union collapsed, American politicians of inevitability proclaimed the end of history, while some Russians sought new authorities in an imperial past" (Snyder 2018, 17).

With respect to Western *déjà vu*, for historian, Serhii Plokhy, there are "unmistakable parallels" between Old Europe's response to the rise of Nazi Germany with its "wishful thinking," and belief that "appeasement is the solution" and Western responses to Russian aggression since the invasion of Georgia in 2008. Furthermore, there are "striking similarities" between reactions to the Anschluss of Austria in 1938 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Plohky 2023a). Western responses to the war are thus caught between two sediments of time: *Zeitenwende* as a time of linear change and *déjà vu* that looks back to previous policies of appeasement towards Russia. If *Zeitenwende* indicates a watershed moment in time, *déjà vu* denotes the cyclical repetition of time.

2.   Interregnum

Scholz's *Zeitenwende* shares certain insights with Zygmunt Bauman's reading of Antonio Gramsci's definition of political crisis as an "*interregnum*." If war means armed conflict, the word "crisis" is applied to numerous situations: from climate crisis to economic, migrant, health, humanitarian, identity, and existential crisis. The word "crisis" is synonymous with upheaval, change, breakdown, and the need for change. In its root meaning, crisis or *krísis* stems from the verb *krinein*, which means to cut, judge, separate, and choose. The situation of a crisis demands a decision. As Koselleck points out, the concept of crisis, "potentially registered all the decision situations of inner and outer life, of individual humans and their communities" (Koselleck 2002, 237). Whether used in a medical or political context, crisis indicates a turning point in the individual and political body. What is more, crisis is "a concept that always posited a temporal dimension, which parsed in modern terms, actually implied a theory of time" (Koselleck 2002, 237).

When applied to politics, crisis as turning point, denotes the disruption of ordinary time. Politically, a crisis is linked to regime change, war, economic collapse, and revolution. At both the individual level of illness and

political level of crisis, everyday life and familiar social patterns are thrown out of balance. As Gramsci famously wrote in his *Prison Notebooks*: "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this *interregnum* a great variety of morbid symptoms appear" (Gramsci quoted in Bauman 2012, 49). Both Gramsci and Bauman combine the medical and temporal aspects of crisis as an *interregnum* between two political regimes. Bauman underscores how the Latin word "*interregnum*" denotes a period between (*inter*) one sovereign (*regnum*) and another. An *interregnum* thus refers to a suspension of political and legal order, as well as a "time-lag" or "a rupture" (Bauman 2012, 49).

Although crisis, *interregnum* and *Zeitenwende* refer to ruptures in time and political regimes, it is Gramsci who emphasises that an *interregnum* is accompanied by "a great variety of morbid symptoms." By qualifying symptoms with the adjective, "morbid," Gramsci underscores how crisis creates a period of time during which the old regime will not return to health. Because the new political regime is unclear, *interregnum* denotes the feverish instability that occurs between regime change. If one were to apply Gramsci's *interregnum* to the Russia-Ukraine war, the crisis arguably occurred much earlier when Ukraine gave up its nuclear weapons in 1994. As Serhii Plohky argues, the Budapest Memorandum created a "security vacuum" in Europe. Like an *interregnum*, a security vacuum is one of uncertainty and instability. Although signed by the Russian Federation, United Kingdom and the United States, the Budapest Memorandum was unable to guarantee Ukrainian national security. Indeed, as Plohky contends: "One of the key preconditions for the current war was the fact that a security vacuum emerged in Ukraine, and that security vacuum emerged back in the 1990s. European security was a wall with a big hole in it, a wall that was waiting to collapse" (Plohky 2023b).

What happens if one combines the metaphor of a *Zeitenwende* as tectonic shift with the morbid symptoms accompanying *interregnum* to the collapse of the Soviet Union? Can one understand Russia's invasion of Ukraine as one of the "great variety of morbid symptoms" caused by the protracted collapse of the USSR? After all, Gramsci's metaphor of morbid symptoms that exhibit strange and phantasmagorical forms complements Alexander Etkind's argument that due to its lack of official reckoning with the past, post-Soviet Russia exhibits pathologies of magical historicism, "warped mourning", and post-Soviet hauntology (Etkind 2013).

An *interregnum*, like *Zeitenwende*, indicates the suspension of time and indeterminate condition of regime change. For Bauman, *interregnum* is, above all, characterised by uncertainty and instability. Moreover, it indicates the poor health of the body politic. However, an *interregnum* does not address the depth of political change that Reinhart Koselleck and Hannah

Arendt's generation witnessed in the first half of the 20th century. Totalitarianism, as Arendt contended, was a new political phenomenon based on the superfluousness of human beings and the corresponding tenet that everything is possible. Hence, crisis, *Zeitenwende*, and *interregnum* are rooted not only in World War II but in the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century.

3.   Never Again?

Given Scholz's emphasis on the return of imperialism and increasing authoritarianism of contemporary Russia, Arendt's analysis of totalitarianism and its legacy is relevant today. Throughout her life, she was preoccupied with the question of how to understand totalitarianism as the central event of the 20th century. As she wrote in *Between Past and Future*: "A crisis forces us back to the questions themselves and requires from us either new or old answers, but in any case direct judgments" (Arendt 1993, 174). Arendt's predicament, like ours today, was how to understand the present. She sought to comprehend the "interval in time which is altogether determined by things that are no longer and by things that are not yet" (Arendt 1993, 9). Most importantly, Arendt wrote about unprecedented events of her generation with the plea not to remove oneself from reality. Indeed, the original title for *The Origins of Totalitarianism* was "The Burden of Our Time." Arendt's depiction of her generation was one of "dark times", a burden to be confronted, and a gap between past and future. As she wrote in the Preface to its First Edition: "It means, rather, examining and bearing consciously the burden which our century has placed on us—neither denying its existence nor submitting to its weight. Comprehension, in short, means the unpremeditated, attentive facing up to, and resisting of, reality—whatever it may be" (Arendt 2017, x). Just as Arendt focussed on individuals who illuminated the darkness, so Volodymyr Yermolenko's *Ukraine World* podcast, "Thinking in Dark Times", provides philosophical reflection on the war in Ukraine and counters indifference with the question of how to deal with the reality of Russian aggression in Europe.

Arendt characterised the break in tradition during her lifetime as one which cast a heavy weight on the present. Totalitarianism meant a fundamental break in traditional understanding of politics, morality, and law. Rather than resist the reality of this new political phenomenon, she argued for the necessity to confront and take responsibility for it. As she wrote: "To the extent that the rise of totalitarian governments is the central event of our world, to understand totalitarianism is not to condone anything, but to reconcile ourselves to a world in which such things are possible at all" (Arendt 1994, 308). In Arendt's case, the event that was "decisive" was when she learned about the camps in 1943 (Arendt 2000, 13). She asked how turn-

ing points of history are related to the continuity of time within the "heights of crisis" (Arendt 1994, 158). For those who "feel catastrophe in their bones or have already grown up with it, the chain is broken and an "empty space," a kind of historical no man's land, comes to the surface which can be described only in terms of "no longer and not yet."" (Arendt 1994, 158). Arendt's "empty space," like an *interregnum*, is similar to the medieval *nunc stans*, standstill, or *Jetztzeit*—all of which indicate the "opening of an abyss of empty space and empty time" (Arendt 1994, 159).

Zeitenwende may indeed be the dawning of a new era; however, in thinking comparatively about the camps and their place within totalitarian bureaucratic policies of extermination, Arendt was confronted with a moral vacuum and a political void. She examined totalitarianism from the perspective of questions that plagued her generation. "*What happened? Why did it happen? How could it have happened?*" (Arendt 2017, xxix). Like the Reckoning Project which documents war crimes and crimes against civilians in Ukraine, Arendt's goal was to understand the reality of political events for the sake of justice, criminal accountability, and collective responsibility. As she wrote with respect to questions of collective responsibility, one can be liable for things that one has not done. Indeed, her idea of "vicarious responsibility" is remarkably close to the promise of Never Again.

> This vicarious responsibility for things we have not done, this taking upon ourselves the consequences for things we are entirely innocent of, is the price we pay for the fact that we live our lives not by ourselves but among our fellow men, and that the faculty of action, which, after all, is the political faculty par excellence, can be actualized only in one of the many and manifold forms of human community. (Arendt 2003, 157–158)

Arendt's shock at the brutality of Nazi and Soviet soldiers and prison guards is comparable to the international shock at Russia's war in Ukraine. Likewise, a similar sense of shock is evident in the ICC's issuing of a warrant for Vladimir Putin and Maria Lovova-Belova "for the war crimes of unlawful deportation of population (children) and that of unlawful transfer of population (children) from occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation (under articles 8(2)(1)(vii) and 8(2)(b)(viii) of the Rome Statute" (ICC 2023). Yet while the ICC demands criminal accountability, Never Again operates predominantly at the level of collective responsibility.

Complementing Arendt's insight that imperialism is a subterranean element of totalitarianism, its legacy continues at the institutional level in Russia as these institutions continue to be populated by individuals who worked for the KGB, Soviet army, and its immense prison system. Russia's seat at the

Security Council also reflects the aftermath of World War II, and the publication of Russian schoolbooks justifying the war in Ukraine and downplaying of the repression in the USSR testifies to the long legacy of totalitarianism. Lastly, the lack of trials for the crimes of communism, glorification of the Great Patriotic War, closing of organisations such as Memorial dedicated to human rights and the documentation of Soviet repression, denial of Ukraine's right to nationhood, ban on naming the "special military operation" as a "war", targeted attacks on civilians, and brutality of Russian soldiers in Ukraine, are some of the "morbid symptoms" of this *interregnum*.

In his powerful speech commemorating the end of World War II on May 8, 2022, President Zelensky referred to "never again" as "the anthem of the civilized world". As he stated: "This year we say "never again" differently. We hear "never again" differently. It sounds painful, cruel. Without an exclamation, *but with a question mark*. You say never again? Tell Ukraine about it." (Zelensky 2022, my emphasis). As Zelensky pointed out, although Never Again is an imperative, Russia's invasion of Ukraine places a question mark behind the words and invokes the circular return of time. If the adverb, "never" means "at no time" or "not ever", "again" denotes "one more" or the return to a previous condition. Indeed, Zelensky asked whether "never" has been replaced by "we can repeat" and "evil has returned." There is "a terrible *déjà vu*" at the centre of Europe, he said while standing in front of recently bombed residential buildings. As Zelensky underscored in 2022, and continues to argue in 2024, remembrance of 20th century atrocity is insufficient for preventing its recurrence. Instead, what is required is the political will to truly adhere to international law and human rights.

4.   The sediments of time and the postwar international order

The legacies of the Cold War and totalitarianism are a central part of the post-war architecture of international law and human rights, which are, in turn, built upon the moral imperative of Never Again—or in Arendt's words, the sentiment that "this ought not to have happened" (Arendt 2000, 13–14). If the immediate postwar years were distinguished by the creation of new institutions to curb the excesses of the nation-state, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine confronts the blind spots of the postwar international order.

Specifically, the Russia-Ukraine war challenges the post-war legal and political structure of international institutions and humanitarian law based on the promise of Never Again, most notably in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948), Genocide Convention (1948), International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg (1945–1946), United Nations (1945), NATO (1949), Geneva Convention on Refugees (1951) and foundation of the European Coal and Steel Community (1951). Indeed, the war in Ukraine reveals the weak-

ness of the very organisations designed to guarantee peace and security among member states. The veto power of permanent members of the Security Council hinders the stated purpose of the United Nations. In a video address to Security Council members in April 2022, President Zelensky criticised the postwar institutional structure of the Security Council that prevents the United Nations from acting against Russian aggression. "Please show how we can reform or change and work for peace" (Zelensky quoted in Collinson 2022). In order to fulfil the promise of Never Again, institutional reform of international organisations is needed, as well as mechanisms to hold signatory nations to account for violations of international law.

While the promise of Never Again was weakened by wars in Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Afghanistan and Syria, Russia's invasion of Ukraine challenges Western resolve to act against the aggression of a nuclear power and a member of the UN Security Council. The postwar international order is based on promise not to repeat the atrocities of the 20th century. Most importantly, Never Again, *nie wieder*, *nunc mas*, *plus jamais* warns of future war, crimes against humanity, and genocide if governments and international organisations stand silent. As Alejandro Baer and Natan Sznaider argue, human rights emerged from the historical experience of world war, the atom bomb and genocide. "Human rights are grounded in the dystopian consciousness of a fragile world" (Baer and Sznaider 2017, 1). Russia's invasion of Ukraine reveals the fragility of the postwar international order within the sediments of time.

As international jurist Philippe Sands underscores, Russia's invasion of Ukraine returns politicians and lawyers to the legal, political, and moral timeframe of 1945 when the international legal framework was created in the aftermath of World War II. If the legal ideas of genocide and crimes against humanity had their early germination at the University of Lemberg in today's Lviv, they were ratified in Paris in 1948. The war in Ukraine thus recalls the sediments of time rooted in World War II, *Stunde Null*, and the early post-war years when the international legal order was created. For Sands, the Russia-Ukraine war challenges the revolutionary time and place of two cities that were pivotal for the creation of the postwar political and legal framework under question: Lviv and Paris. As, he argues, during the early 20th century, it was in the city of Lviv, a "microcosm of Europe's turbulent twentieth century," where two extraordinary legal minds studied at the University of Lemberg/ Lviv/ Lwów, and later argued for the codification of genocide and crimes against humanity (Sands 2016, xxvi). If Rafael Lemkin argued for the prosecution and prevention of genocide, Hersch Lauterpacht argued for the specificity of crimes against humanity. Whilst Lemkin argued that "attacks upon national, religious and ethnic groups would be made inter-

national crimes," for Hersch Lauterpacht, "the individual human being…is the ultimate unit of all law" (Lemkin quoted in Sands 2016, 137; Lauterpacht quoted in Sands 2016, 57).

As Sands reminds us, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide were adopted in December 1948. Evoking the revolutionary spirit of the Rights of Man and Citizen in 1789, the Declaration of Human Rights seeks to protect individuals, while the Convention of Genocide aims to protect groups. "That moment in Paris was revolutionary: a recognition that the rights of the state are not unlimited and that the days of being allowed as a matter of law to trample over human lives was over" (Sands 2023). In trying to imagine how Lemkin and Lauterpacht might respond to Western responses to war in Ukraine, Sands writes: "This is not a moment of celebration, but of recognition, of how much remains to be done, and also of what is different today and what we have" (Sands 2023).

Like Philippe Sands, historian Sergei Medvedev looks back to 1945 and the immediate post-war years which laid the foundation for de-Nazification, occupation and division of Germany, as well as the international order determined to prevent genocide and war. If Sands acknowledges "how much remains to be done," Medvedev contends that Western nations need to continue the "unfinished work of 1945". In fact, he argues that Russia's invasion of Ukraine is not "a temporary aberration" but rather "the protracted decay of a huge Eurasian empire" (Medvedev 2023, 32). One cannot go back to the geopolitical world before 24 February 2022. Instead, one needs to recognise, as Medvedev contends, that the work of 1945 was "only half-finished: of the two bloody dictatorships that were throwing out a challenge to the liberal world order, only one was defeated" (Medvedev 2023, 164). If Western nations do not find the political will to fully support Ukraine against Russian aggression, proclamations of *Zeitenwende* and Never Again may unwittingly fade into the *déjà vu* of appeasement.

5.   Conclusion

Western responses to Russian's full-scale invasion of Ukraine reveal different timescales and sediments of time. Following Koselleck, different sediments of time can be parsed from Western responses to Russia's invasion of Ukraine that contain aspects of *déjà vu* and *Zeitenwende*, as well as morbid symptoms of an *interregnum*, and the instability of political crisis. *Zeitenwende* is based on the recognition that policies of indifference, appeasement, and "wishful thinking" did not prevent Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Hence, the commitment to an historical turning point in the Western alliance. Likewise, the imperative of Never Again promises to remember and learn from

past mistakes in order to prevent making similar ones in the future. The postwar architecture of 1945, based on Never Again, promised a new beginning of international law and human rights to restrain the excesses of the nation-state. It is precisely the promise of this transformative time during the immediate postwar years that Philippe Sands recalls with the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine poses a profound challenge to the postwar architecture of international law, human rights, and democratic peace. Hence, the necessity to acknowledge the urgent reality of the present and to act accordingly. The extraordinary dedication of Ukrainians to defend their right to freedom and national sovereignty places European freedom and security, as well as the moral foundation of the European Union, the United Nations, and NATO, into question. Despite polarizing domestic politics and conflicting national interests, the moral imperative of Never Again obliges signatory nations not only to remember the horrific events of the 20th century, but even more importantly, to actively uphold the 1948 international framework of human rights and the rule of law.

Acknowledgements

Bibliography

Arendt, H. (1993). Preface, the concept of history, and the crisis in education, *Between Past and Future*.

Arendt, H. (1994). Understanding and politics, *in* J. Kohn (ed.), *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954*, Harcourt Brace & Co, New York.

Arendt, H. (2000). What remains? The language remains: A conversation with Günter Gaus, *in* P. Baehr (ed.), *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, Penguin, New York & London, pp. 1–23.

Arendt, H. (2003). *Responsibility and Judgment*, Schocken Books, New York.

Arendt, H. (2017). *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Penguin, New York and London.

Baer, A. and Sznaider, N. (2017). *Memory and Forgetting in the Post-Holocaust Era. The Ethics of Never Again*, Routledge, Abingdon.

Bauman, Z. (2012). Times of interregnum, *Ethics & Global Politics* **5**(1): 49–56.

Collinson, S. (2022). Zelensky's compelling question: What is the UN for?, *CNN World*. 6 April 2022.
URL: *https://edition.cnn.com/2022/04/06/world/meanwhile-zelensky-un-intl/index.html*

Etkind, A. (2013). *Warped Mourning. Stories of the Undead in the Land of the Unburied*, Stanford University Press, Stanford.

Haass, R. and Klein, E. (2024). The wars in Ukraine and Gaza have changed. America's policy hasn't, *The Ezra Klein Show*. 1 March 2024.
URL: *https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/01/opinion/ezra-klein-podcast-richard-haass.html*

ICC (2023). Situation in Ukraine: ICC judges issue arrest warrants against Vladimir Putin and Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova. 17 March 2023.
URL: *https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-ukraine-icc-judges-issue-arrest-warrants-against-vladimir-vladimirovich-putin-and*

Koselleck, R. (2002). *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, Stanford University Press, Stanford. Trans. Todd Samuel Presner et al.

Koselleck, R. (2018). *Sediments of Time: On Possible Histories*, Stanford University Press, Stanford. Trans Sean Franzel and Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann.

Krastev, I. and Leonard, M. (2024). Wars and elections: How European leaders can maintain public support for Ukraine, *European Council on Foreign Relations*. 21 February 2024.
URL: *https://ecfr.eu/publication/wars-and-elections-how-european-leaders-can-maintain-public-support-for-ukraine/*

Mälksoo, M. (2022). The postcolonial moment in Russia's war against Ukraine, *Journal of Genocide Research* **25**: 471–481.

Medvedev, S. (2023). *A War Made in Russia*, Polity Press, Cambridge.

Plohky, S. (2023a). Lessons from history with Serhii Plokhy. Ukraine: The latest podcast, *The Telegraph*. Interview with David Knowles, 9 August 2023.

URL: *https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2023/08/09/serhii-plokhy-russia-ukraine-war-vladimir-putin-europe*

Plohky, S. (2023b). A savage war of Russian decline: Serhii Plokhy discusses the Russo-Ukrainian War, *The Review of Democracy.* 30 June 2023.
URL: *https://revdem.ceu.edu/2023/06/30/a-savage-war-of-russian-decline-serhii-plokhy-discusses-the-russo-ukrainian-war/*

Polegkyi, O. (2022). "'Never Again" vs "We can Repeat It": Russia will pay any price to restore the story of Soviet victory on WWII, *Forum for Ukrainian Studies.* 11 June 2022.
URL: *https://ukrainian-studies.ca/2022/06/11/never-again-vs-we-can-repeat-it-russians-will-pay-any-price-to-restore-the-glory-of-soviet-victory-in-wwii*

Putin, V. (2005). Annual address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation. 25 April 2005.
URL: *http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22931*

Sands, P. (2016). *East West Street. On the Origins of Genocide and Crimes against Humanity*, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London.

Sands, P. (2023). From Gaza to Ukraine, what would pioneers of human rights think of our world today?, *The Guardian.* 12 December 2023.
URL: *https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/dec/12/gaza-ukraine-universal-declaration-of-human-rights*

Scholz, O. (2023). The global Zeitenwende. How to avoid a new Cold War in a multipolar era, *Foreign Affairs.* **102**(1): 22–38.

Snyder, T. (2018). *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America*, Vintage Books, New York.

Yermolenko, V. (2023). "We can Repeat It" Putin's evil harkens to Stalinist past, *Visegrad Insight.*
URL: *https://visegradinsight.eu/we-can-repeat-it-putins-evil-harkens-to-stalinist-past/*

Zelensky, V. (2022). Address by the President of Ukraine on the Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation. 8 May 2022.
URL: *https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/zvernennya-prezidenta-ukrayini-z-nagodi-dnya-pamyati-ta-prim-74885*