

# From War to Peace in the Balkans, Middle East, and Ukraine

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[www.peacefare.net](http://www.peacefare.net)  
[daniel@serwer.org](mailto:daniel@serwer.org)

# This trio isn't far fetched:



# The relationship is not just geographical

- The Middle East and Balkans share a history in the Ottoman Empire, which was patriarchal and exploitative but did not make the efforts Western Europe indulged in to homogenize populations.
- So too does Crimea and part of southern Ukraine, which was a Khanate of the Ottoman Empire from 1441-1783.
- The result is a similar hodge-podge of non nation-states:
- In the Balkans, Muslims, Serbs, Croats, and Albanians, not to mention Macedonians, Vlachs, Turks, Ashkali, Jews and others.
- In the Middle East, Sunni, Shia, Kurds, and Christians of many kinds, not to mention Jews, Mandaean, Yezidis, Shabak, and others.
- In southern Ukraine, Tatars, Russians, and Ukrainians.
- The Russians and Soviets tried and failed to extirpate Ukrainian identity, which coexists and competes with Russian ethnic identity.

# This history has political implications

- The concept of group rights, which exists in the Balkans, Ukraine, and the Middle East, is in part an Ottoman legacy.
- This assigns to some sectarian or ethnic groups veto power over key issues and some measure of self-governance.
- The most important group right is the right to form the state and to claim privileges in it that others do not share.
- We see that claim asserted by Jews in Israel, Turks in Turkey, Arabs in Syria, and Kurds in Kurdistan. And some Ukrainians in Ukraine.
- The problem of course is that the borders of states do not correspond to the distribution of populations.
- This leads to the classic issue: why should I be a minority in your country when you can be a minority in mine?

# Who is included?

- Where rights are *not* attached to the group but to individuals, there are fewer problems, *provided minorities receive equal protection*.
- But that proviso is hard to fulfill in the Balkans, the Middle East, and Ukraine, where autocratic claims to do so were rarely fulfilled, liberal democracies and independent judiciaries are nonexistent.
- Tatars and Ukrainians in the Soviet Union had little reason to believe promises of equal treatment any more than some Russians believe those promises in independent Ukraine.
- If memory serves, it was a language bill depriving Russian of its status as an official language that helped to trigger rebellion in Donbas.

# The consequences of exclusion

- Exclusion in weak states can result in rebellion or challenges to borders, or both: that's what we saw with the Islamic State insurgency, which sought to erase the border between Iraq and Syria.
- States that exclude part of their population from political power, economic benefits, or social privilege tend to fail, as Acemoglu and Robinson have shown.
- A good deal of what we've seen in the Middle East in recent years fits this pattern: certainly Assad's Syria, Saddam's and Maliki's Iraq, Saleh and Hadi's Yemen, Qaddafi's Libya.
- Ukraine faces that kind of challenge: how to include people whose loyalties are at best unclear.

# Teleology matters

- You need to know where you are going in order to get there.
- The Middle East has only the Tunisian example, which is too fragile and far from the center of gravity and too small to drag anyone else in its wake.
- The Balkans region has had a preferred direction—Europe and NATO—and some examples to follow: Slovenia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania.
- The importance of the EU promise is all too clear now that it is becoming uncertain. Maintaining it for Ukraine is vital but will not be easy.
- Ukraine has both the EU and NATO, but like Bosnia and Iraq its population is torn between two poles of attraction: Brussels and Moscow, which is determined to block new NATO memberships, especially for Ukraine.

# Other lessons learned

- Leadership is key to starting, preventing, and ending wars: Milosevic and Tudjman in the Balkans set a pattern of exclusion also seen in Syria, Yemen, Libya, and Ukraine.
- Early prevention can work, with adequate resources: was it tried in Ukraine?
- Ethnic partition will not: people agree to separate, but not the border.
- International contributions can be vital: US never cared about Syria, but Russia, Turkey, and Iran did; nor Libya, but UAE did.
- Germany and France have been helpful on Ukraine, even if Minsk has not been implemented.
- Neighborhood counts: Ukraine is an excellent case in point.
- Power sharing and decentralization can help: Minsk 2 has the right idea.



# Prospects are *relatively* good

- Peace agreements in the Balkans were all between two sides: Bosnian Federation, Dayton, Ahtisaari, Ohrid, Prespa.
- Middle Eastern conflicts are often multi-polar.
- In Syria, it is hard to even count the “sides”: Assad, supported by Russia and Iran, Islamic State, HTS/AlQaeda, Arab insurgents supported by Turkey, Kurds supported by the US.
- Where they were not, as in Bosnia, we reduced them to bipolarity.
- Ukraine is bipolar: the major obstacle to the Minsk 2 agreement is political will.

# Is there a deal?

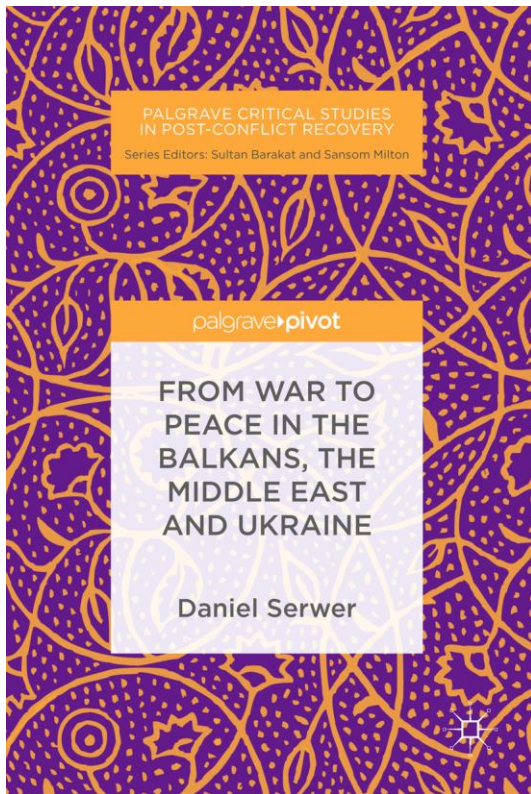
- It is hard to picture an end to the conflict in Ukraine without a deal with Moscow.
- On Crimea, I expect the Russians to be implacable. It will take regime change in Moscow to return it to Ukraine.
- On Donbas, I expect the Russians to offer a deal: Ukraine can have it back, provided it implements Minsk 2; and the West accepts the annexation of Crimea.
- It will also want power-sharing in Kiev, maybe even using Bosnia as a prototype.
- Moscow might throw in a sweetener or two, like recognition of Kosovo if it gives the north back to Serbia.
- Any better deal than that from the West's perspective will require a change in the balance of power: either a much stronger Ukraine or a much weaker Russia.

# The alternative is no deal

- This will allow Moscow to continue to consolidate control over both Crimea and Donbas.
- But it also saddles the Russians with big burdens, including the burden of sanctions.
- And it frees Ukraine to pursue its EU and NATO objectives, strengthening its position while weakening its adversary.
- Economic and military support for Ukraine is vital.
- But reintegrating Donbas right now would be a major undertaking.
- Bottom line: no deal is not a bad “alternative to a negotiated agreement,” provided Ukraine uses the opportunity to strengthen itself.

# What to do in the meanwhile?

- Try to keep governing systems, taxes, administrative procedures similar if not identical across the contact line.
- Try to ensure that property rights are protected and property records are maintained.
- Ease cross-line travel and trade.
- Promote cross-line contacts between willing municipal officials, physicians, farmers, businessmen, even border guards on both sides.
- If possible, form epistemic groups of professionals who have common values, even if different politics.
- Keep relations between IDPs from Donbas and the Ukrainian population as positive as possible.



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