



United States Mission to the OSCE

**U.S. Statement for the
Forum for Security Cooperation:
General Statements**

As delivered by Daniel Wartko Chief Arms Control Delegate
May 10, 2023

Thank you, Madam Chair,

Last week, we heard the Russian delegation accuse Ukraine of being “revanchist.” This is an interesting phrase coming from a delegation that claimed the right to “historic lands” in Ukraine at least twice in this forum in this year alone. Today I would like to take wider view of Russia’s war against Ukraine to challenge that particular assertion – a claim that was also made by the Russian President himself just a few weeks ago – to justify invading its neighbor and seizing its territory. And this is the TASS report. A three-paragraph report that mentioned “historic lands” three times. It is apparently very important to them.

And when the Russian delegate used the phrase “historic lands” earlier this year, our Latvian colleague responded with an insightful question: “Which century does Russia want to live in?” And that question is quite incisive when we consider it from two different perspectives. And the first is general: “Do you want to go back to the time to when Europe’s borders were constantly changing due to perpetual war and conquest?”

The history of conflict in Europe is, tragically, quite long. And since the 14th Century alone, Europe has suffered the Seven Years War, the Thirteen Years War, the Thirty Years War, the Eighty Years War, and the Hundred Years War (which actually lasted 116 years). Europe also suffered the Napoleonic Wars, the Balkan Wars, and World War I. And this bloodshed culminated most horrifically in World War II, the end of which we commemorated this week. Do any of us want Russia to drag us back to this time?

The second perspective on Latvia’s question, “Which century does Russia want to live in?” is more specific. And when Russia says, “historic lands,” exactly which year is the reference point? Perhaps later the Russian Delegation could dispel the mystery and share with the rest of us the year in which history began –

or stopped – and which it uses as the basis for its “historic lands” and its claims to Ukrainian territory.

But since we don’t know Russia’s thinking, we can consider some options: Russia’s so-called “golden year” might be 1667, when it first occupied Kyiv. But I’ll remind the Russian delegation that at that time the Kingdom of Sweden stretched to the western shore of Lake Ladoga and included the territory of today’s St. Petersburg. Vladimir Putin’s hometown. So, I guess that won’t do.

Maybe Russia prefers 1783, the year Catherine the Great seized Crimea, as the zero milestone for measuring our maps. But if Russia were to claim 1783 as somehow sacrosanct, would that mean it was relinquishing claims on any and all subsequent territorial acquisitions, including for example, Sochi and Chechnya? One need only look at the First and Second Chechen Wars to know Russia’s true stance on that question.

So, perhaps we need a later date. How about 1914? On the eve of The Great War, the Russian Empire had seized almost all the land within Ukraine’s modern, internationally recognized borders. While that date might suit Russia to make “historic lands” claims on Ukraine, this would also directly threaten many other participating States represented in this room — namely (working counter-clockwise) Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Moldova, Türkiye, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan.

I invite any of the delegations from those participating states to share their opinions on returning to the so-called “golden age” of Tsarist domination. Or maybe Russia could reassure us all by declaring, quote “This is the last territorial demand we have to make in Europe!” As we heard in 1938.

Of course, all this is absurd. This argument of “historic lands” has already been settled -- for all time. Following the complete devastation and the horrors of World War II and the deaths of tens of millions, the great powers met, first in Moscow, then in Washington, and finally in San Francisco, to create through the United Nations a new international order that wisely renounced the “Rule of the Strongest” and replaced it with a rules-based order that recognized and respected the sovereign equality of all members.

Article II of the UN Charter delegitimized the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any other state. Later, in 1975, in the midst of the Cold War, the United States, the Soviet Union and most of the other participating States in this room came together at the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe and signed the Helsinki Final Act, which included this clear dictum: quote, “The participating States regard as inviolable all one another's frontiers as well as the frontiers of all States in Europe [so that includes States that did not exist at that time but might exist in the future] and therefore they will refrain now and in the future from assaulting these frontiers. Accordingly, they will also refrain from any demand for, or act of, seizure and usurpation of part or all of the territory of any participating State.” End quote. No exception was made for “historic lands” or any other reason.

Madam Chair,

What Russia is actually saying when it uses its “historic lands” argument is simply, “That used to be mine, and I want it back.” It is up to all participating States to resolutely reject that argument and that behavior as relics of a primitive era to which we shall not return.

I would like to emphasize that the United States fully supports the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of all participating States, including the Russian Federation, within their internationally recognized borders, and so, I will close with a note of caution: Of all the participating States in this forum, the one that has the single greatest territorial interest in rejecting the “historic lands” argument is... Russia itself. If you look at this map of the “Manchuria-USSR Boundary,” you’ll see that a territory of some 875,000 square kilometers – a territory larger than all of Ukraine – belonged to China as recently as 1858. Would Russia welcome the PRC to apply the “historic lands” argument to this region?

And lest anyone think I’m just inventing scenarios for dramatic effect, I’ll bring to your attention an official directive discretely issued by the PRC’s Ministry of Natural Resources in February of this year. It required that all official maps use the former Chinese names for certain locations beyond China’s (current) borders. Russia should take note at how “Friendship without limits” is being implemented.

Atop this map of the former Chinese territory just described, those places include Khabarovsk, the Stanov mountain range, Sakhalin Island, Vladivostok, and others. I don't read Chinese, but these are the names that they are required to use now on those maps.

Madam Chair,

“Historic lands” is a Pandora’s box that should remain sealed for the good of every participating State in his forum.

Thank you.



RUSSIAN NEWS AGENCY

28 APR, 17:35

Putin dubs new regions as Russia's historic lands, their inhabitants as family to Russians

Today, according to the Russian leader, it is necessary "to defend their (new regions' residents - TASS) clear choice to return to Russia"

ST. PETERSBURG, April 28. /TASS/. The four new Russian regions are Russia's historic lands and people living there are the kinsfolk to the Russians, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Friday.

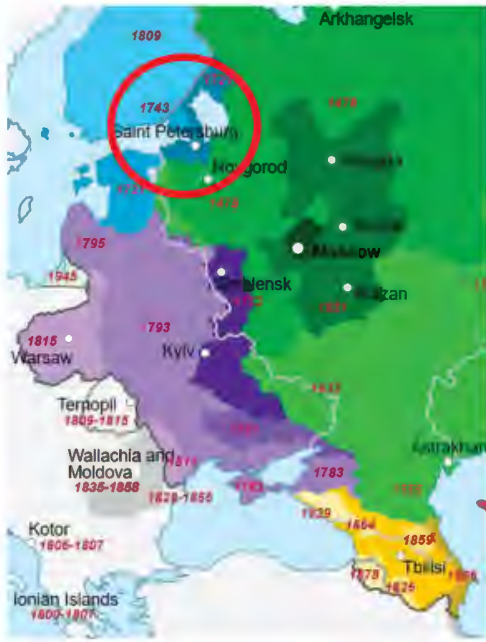
"These are our historic lands and our kinsfolk. Many of you have been there and how do they differ from the other part of our people? No way, this is part of our people," he said at a meeting with the Council of Legislators.

Today, according to Putin, it is necessary "to defend their (new regions' residents - TASS) clear choice to return to Russia."

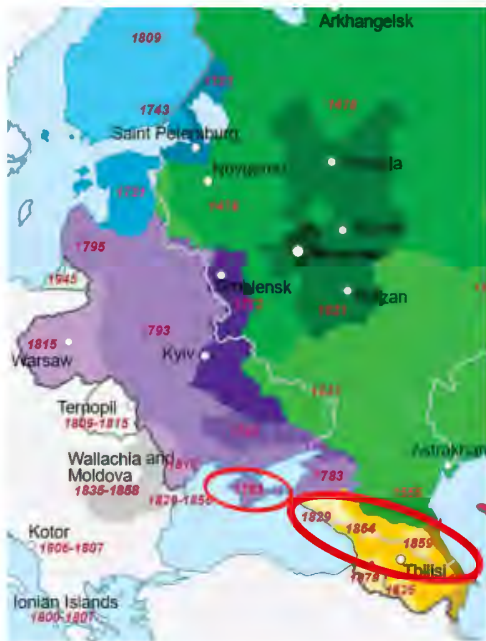




When did history start? (or stop?)



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UN Charter – Article 2

Article 2

The Organization and its Members, in pursuit of the Purposes stated in Article 1, shall act in accordance with the following Principles.

1. The Organization is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its Members.
2. All Members, in order to ensure to all of them the rights and benefits resulting from membership, shall fulfill in good faith the obligations assumed by them in accordance with the present Charter.
3. All Members shall settle their international disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security, and justice, are not endangered.
4. All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.
5. All Members shall give the United Nations every assistance in any action it takes in accordance with the present Charter, and shall refrain from giving assistance to any state against which the United Nations is taking preventive or enforcement action.
6. The Organization shall ensure that states which are not Members of the United Nations act in accordance with these Principles so far as may be necessary for the maintenance of international peace and security.
7. Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state or shall require the Members to submit such matters to settlement under the present Charter; but this principle shall not prejudice the application of enforcement measures under Chapter VII.



Helsinki Final Act

III. Inviolability of frontiers

The participating States regard as inviolable all one another's frontiers as well as the frontiers of all States in Europe and therefore they will refrain now and in the future from assaulting these frontiers. Accordingly, they will also refrain from any demand for, or act of, seizure and usurpation of part or all of the territory of any participating State.

IV. Territorial integrity of States

The participating States will respect the territorial integrity of each of the participating States. Accordingly, they will refrain from any action inconsistent with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations against the territorial integrity, political independence or the unity of any participating State, and in particular from any such action constituting a threat or use of force.

The participating States will likewise refrain from making each other's territory the object of military occupation or other direct or indirect measures of force in contravention of international law, or the object of acquisition by means of such measures or the threat of them. No such occupation or acquisition will be recognized as legal.

V. Peaceful settlement of disputes

