



**Lord Owen**

Independent social democrat peer, former foreign secretary

## Nato must meet Russian aggression with determination – and meaningful sanctions

**P**resident Vladimir Putin's encirclement of Ukraine has re-established the unity of Nato and brought the people of Ukraine far closer than ever before. It could well have been otherwise and we should not assume that either of these achievements will last. For President Putin has assembled in recent years an impressive modernised military force that will probe and test Nato's resolve and try to fracture and divide Ukraine.

There is nothing new about Russia's wish to be an imperial power. When I met president Leonid Brezhnev and foreign minister Andrei Gromyko in Moscow in 1977 they made it abun-

new treaty with Russia that engenders no institutional hostility and would cover the verifiable withdrawal of nuclear-capable missiles; detailed military confidence-building measures limiting numbers and demarcating deployment; and international agreement on presently contested borders between Russia and Ukraine.

That negotiating agenda is being pursued by Nato and the Russian foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, and in my view should continue to be pursued even if Russia invades Ukraine. But from that moment Nato countries will also hit the Russian economy hard. None of this can be done without the power and strength of the United States but it must also involve every Nato country taking economic measures that inevitably will be painful for them.

**“There is nothing new about Russia's wish to be an imperial power”**

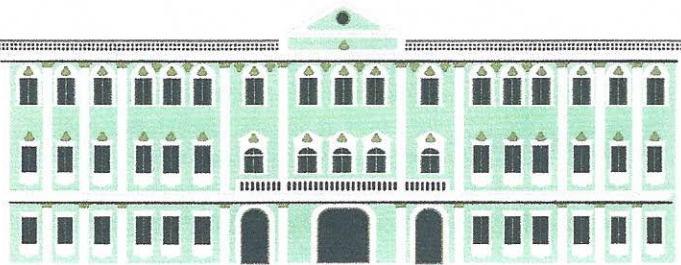
The sanctions that were applied when Russia first invaded Ukraine and occupied Crimea in 2014 and sustained the fighting in the mainly Russian-speaking parts of Ukraine were lamentably

weak. Nato has always been about the containment of Russia. It never militarily attacked Russia even when provoked by their invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Nato is in that sense a defensive organisation and must remain so. But it has never been neutral and we will not be neutral about any invasion of Ukraine.

It was former Russian president Boris Yeltsin who agreed that Ukraine, Belarus and the Russian Federation should be independent nations and together he, then-prime minister John Major and president Bill Clinton signed the Budapest Memorandum 1994 guaranteeing the integrity of Ukraine's national borders. China and France gave somewhat weaker individual assurances in separate documents.

By threatening to invade Ukraine, President Putin is disowning his own claims that Russia has historically a special relationship with Ukraine. He will be setting families against families and where that will lead no one knows, but it will not be surprising if Putin was sowing the seeds of his own destruction. ■

*Lord Owen is the author of Riddle, Mystery, Enigma: Two Hundred Years of British-Russian Relations*



dantly clear that they considered that under the Helsinki Final Act, Russia was entitled to keep Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania within the Russian sphere of influence. I flatly rejected that position but Gromyko came back and back again to assert their right. Within Nato now, the three Baltic States have been the most vigilant in ensuring that Nato take no steps that would lead to the undermining of Ukraine's determination to be an independent sovereign state. That vigilance has been the hallmark of President Joe Biden and his excellent secretary of state Antony Blinken as well as Jens Stoltenberg, Nato secretary-general.

Nato was right to be prepared and still to be prepared to enter into serious negotiations while at the same time buttressing the defence of some of its vulnerable countries. The allegation by French President Emmanuel Macron that Nato had become "brain dead" has been shown up for what it was. In a recent letter to the *Financial Times* five of us from senior academic and diplomatic backgrounds spelt out how Nato, in close association with Ukraine, could put forward detailed proposals to negotiate a