The maxim ”know your adversary” should be one of the core principles of US foreign policy. It should be the founding principle of US-Russia relations. Stop mirror-imaging and stop assuming that Russia is behaving as we would. Russia is not a part of the West—it never was.

Russia is not a nation-state; it is an empire that expanded from a tiny Duchy of Muscovy into a tsarist domain spanning eleven time zones. After 1917 Stalin continued in the same vein, pushing deep into Europe. And now Putin and his cronies are having yet another go at it.

The expectation that one can have a lasting negotiated peace deal with Russia is not borne by facts. In the Russian imperial tradition what matters is only power—both in the country’s internal governance and in foreign affair. The Leninist “kto-kogo” (who beats whom) is key.

A Russian once told me that if American analysts want to understand how Putin thinks/operates they should stop building rational choice models, and instead ask a Russian cop about what drives a street-smart thug from Leningrad as he fights to become the king of his street.

Understand how Putin’s formative KGB experience shaped him. Watch his swagger as he walks. Pay attention to how he talks, not what he says. He isn’t interested in a deal. He is the sworn enemy of everything Western civilization holds dear—determined to rebuild the RUS empire.

It’s time to understand that the war in #Ukraine will end only when Putin realizes that continuing it threatens his regime’s power base at home. This is not a war over territory. It’s his war to overthrow the existing order in Europe, to bring Russia back as a great power.

Russia is not an”acute threat,” as it is described in the last US National Security Strategy; rather, it is and will remain a chronic threat as long as aggressive imperialism remains the defining policy driver of the Russian state. It’s time to recognize this grim reality.

You can’t negotiate with imperial aggression-you can only confront it, and if you

want to eliminate it, you have to defeat it. This is where we are today re: Russian imperialism. It'll not stop until it's blocked. George Kennan understood this because he understood Russia.

So it's time to deal with Russia as it is, not as we imagine it should be. Recognize what it stands for and what it wants to achieve.

It's time for understanding what drives Russia. It's time for a reality check.