

statistics. The best tribute the statisticians could pay him is to perpetuate his memory by exploring the evergrowing applications of his ideas and results. May his soul rest in eternal peace and may the statisticians all over the world join me and his family in celebrating Rao and his path-breaking contributions to statistics.

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## Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: A Response

I am much obliged to Anuradha M Chenoy for her detailed response (*EPW*, 4 November 2023) to my comments (*EPW*, 28 October 2023) on her article (*EPW*, 9 September 2023) on Russia's invasion of Ukraine. I address her points in the reverse order.

Chenoy briefly attempts to show that Russia's security concerns were not merely "imagined," by asking a question: Why should "a nuclear-powered us [need] to continuously" (p 5) enlarge the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to reach Russia's borders? One obvious distinction is that NATO accession is voluntary, but invasion is typically not. Mexico has the right to seek admission to Russia's Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO); Ukraine has the right to seek admission to NATO; and nobody has the right to invade on such a basis. Moreover, I hardly claim that, for example, the admission of Estonia was essential to United States (us) security; at most, following Estonia's accession to NATO, the us credibility relies on coming to its defence, if necessary. Unless Chenoy disagrees, it is she, not I, who risks inconsistency.

The principal dispute concerns the origins of Russia's 2022 invasion. According to Chenoy, some sort of Banderite Western-organised coup led to the suppression of Crimean demands for autonomy and secession, restrictions on the usage of Russian language, and the severance of ties with the Russian state, with a view to "punishing the citizens of the east" (p 5). I, instead, emphasise Russia's inflated fears of a security threat from Ukraine and the hardening of its

position following the Ukrainian backlash to its 2014 invasion.

Chenoy accuses my argument of incompleteness (though not, I take it, inaccuracy) of failing to mention the history of Banderite nationalism. The historical argument generally omits potentially relevant facts and focuses on others; that I do so is not to make the absurd claim that "differences between Ukraine and Russia started [only] after 2014" (p 5). Our omissions should be compared by their explanatory deficiencies. Chenoy does not allege any such deficiencies in mine; as I explain in my first letter and below, her omissions do. Seventy percent of a previously pro-Yanukovych Parliament voted to remove him after he disappeared, following a European Union (EU)-brokered agreement for fresh elections. Chenoy sees a Western-backed Banderite coup here. There is no doubt that his removal was the West's preferred outcome, but it is more plausible that Ukrainian choices were decisive. Relatedly, the us Congress repeatedly banned assistance of any kind to the Azov Brigade. Chenoy alleges the us support for ultra-rightist forces; how does she explain the ban? The supposed *golpistas* lost the 2019 elections to Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and Banderites remained numerically insignificant in state institutions. Why would notorious antisemites and ultranationalists allow the election of a liberal Jew favouring negotiations? Why give up such power? Who are these "disproportionate[ly] influen[tial]" (p 5) Banderites in the Rada and the executive? My answer is simple: Ukraine remained a competitive democracy; Banderites had little power and no veto.

Many policies Chenoy cites as evidence of Banderism post-date the 2014 invasion, including the severance of ties with Russia and restrictions on the non-official use of the Russian language. Given Banderism's long history, what changed? On my account, Russia's 2014 invasion alienated the Ukrainian electorate—people do not like being bombed, and often

sever ties with those responsible. Such sentiment is natural, not Banderite.

I suspect that Chenoy overstates other policies. When was a Ukrainian ban on Russian-language conversation instituted? It is true that Ukrainian began to replace Russian in official use in 1989, but Banderism is an implausible explanation for a process initiated by communist officials. What autonomy was Crimea denied? After voting to join Ukraine in 1991, it was made an autonomous republic. To Chenoy, Banderite policy ultimately clashed with "the resolve for secession and the search for autonomy" by Russophone regions "embedded in Russian cultural [*sic*] traditions" (p 5). That explanation is compatible with my claim that Russia had no reasonable argument for its security needs, given its vast size and nuclear arsenal. It hardly justifies blaming NATO. And it ignores the difficulty that Russia's war was obviously counterproductive. Ukrainians displayed that peculiar trait of objecting to being murdered and invaded in 2014; there was no reason to think otherwise in 2022. Russia's invasion not only disproportionately kills Russophones (how many Banderites are there in Kharkiv?) but, like all wars, empowers reactionary forces (so far to a mercifully limited extent).

Chenoy rightly concludes that "there were ways out if both sides used diplomacy" (p 5). The same naïve positivism that obliges me to deny that concordance with what "Putin said" or discordance with "NATO/Western media narrative[s]" are truth conditions that oblige me to remind her that Zelenskyy sought such negotiations; Putin rejected the olive branch.

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### Corrigendum

In the book review titled "The Historical Trajectory of Modern Assam" (*EPW*, 11 and 18 November 2023) by Madhumita Sengupta, "pp 852" on p 36 should have read as "pp 896." The error has been corrected on the *EPW* website.

### EPW Engage

The following article has been published in the past week in the *EPW* Engage section ([www.epw.in/engage](http://www.epw.in/engage)).

(1) Ramanuja's Battle for Bhaktas — *R Srivatsan*