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BY AMB. VALERIY CHALY, CONTRIBUTOR - 08/04/16 01:30 PM EDT

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The U.S. presidential race has captured attention of the world, sometimes posing serious challenges for foreign diplomats when they find their country in the campaign's spotlight. Ukraine, which came to the world's attention two years with its Revolution of Dignity and then worked to remain on the world's radar after Russian aggression, has found itself in the spotlight once again.

Recent comments by Republican nominee Donald Trump about the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea — occupied by Russia since March 2014 — have raised serious concerns in Kyiv and beyond Ukraine. Many in Ukraine are unsure what to think, since Trump's comments stand in sharp contrast to the Republican party platform. Since the Russian aggression, there has been bipartisan support for U.S. sanctions against Russia, and for such sanctions to remain in place until the territorial integrity of Ukraine is restored. Efforts to enhance Ukraine's defense capacity are supported across the aisle, as well, to ensure that Ukraine becomes strong enough to deter Russia's aggression.

Even if Trump's comments are only speculative, and do not really reflect a future foreign policy, they call for appeasement of an aggressor and support the violation of a sovereign country's territorial integrity and another's breach of international law. In the eyes of the world, such comments seem alien to a country seen by partners as a strong defender of democracy and international order. The United States was among the

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100 nations which supported the U.N. resolution "Territorial Integrity of Ukraine" not recognizing Russia's attempt to annex Crimea.

A candidate for the presidency in any country ought to realize the challenges he or she will face to ensure consistency in foreign policy and uphold his or her country's international commitments. Ukraine — a strategic partner of the United States — entered the 1994 Budapest multilateral commitment, giving away the world's third largest nuclear arsenal in return for security assurances to its territorial integrity from three nuclear powers: the United States, the United Kingdom and Russia.

This commitment has been broken by one signatory country, which attempted to annex Crimea and invaded Ukraine's Donbas region. While Ukraine was recovering from the bloodshed in Maidan orchestrated by then-President Viktor Yanukovich, Russia seized control over Crimea's Supreme Council and its security infrastructure. The sham referendum carried out at a gunpoint had nothing to do with a free and fair expression of the people's will and ignored the choice of the indigenous people of Crimea, the Crimean Tatars.

Russia has unleashed its repressive machine against those who protest against the occupation. Censorship, arrests, assassinations, abductions, the banning of the Crimean Tatars' representative body — the Mejlis — all threaten another tragedy and ethnic cleansing.

The attempted annexation of Crimea has also posed new threats to nuclear safety. International institutions like the U.N. and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) do not recognize the annexation and, from a jurisdictional standpoint, cannot control nuclear facilities and radiation security in those areas. Moreover, Russia has already threatened to deploy nuclear weapons in Crimea in direct vicinity of NATO and EU states. Russia is restoring Soviet-era nuclear storage facilities and has already deployed the means for carrying the weapons, including warships and combat aircrafts.

Russia did enter Ukraine in 2014 and would undoubtedly keep on invading should the position of the most important global actors be favorable or neutral, or one of appeasement, and should Ukraine not continue enhancing its defense potential. Right now, Russia is flexing its muscles, building military capacity and testing state-of-the-art weapons in the Ukrainian Donbas. In numbers, Russia's presence in Ukraine means on average 400 shells a week.

Last week, Ukraine's Ministry of Defense identified and reported 22 flights of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) operated by Russia-backed militants. Russia continues to pour its weapons and military equipment to Donbas: For instance, from July 22 to July 28, nearly 6,000 tons of fuel, 80 tons of ammunition and 120 tons of military cargo (including repair parts for military vehicles) were delivered through an uncontrolled part of the Ukrainian-Russian border. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's monitoring mission has reported that Russian-backed militants have used a wide array of heavy weapons, including mortars, high-caliber artillery and tanks.

This bloody war, which has already taken more than 10,000 Ukrainian lives and internally displaced almost 2 million, is a fight of a young democracy for independence and its choice to be part of the West and embrace Western values. Neglecting or trading the cause of a nation inspired by those values — cemented by Americans in their fight for independence and civil rights — would send a wrong message to the people of Ukraine

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and many others in the world who look to the U.S. as to a beacon of
freedom and democracy.

Chaly is Ukraine's ambassador to the United States.

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