

The War Inevitable or Starting A New Page

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Today Ukraine is stirring up information hysteria around the relations with Russia to shape national identity and seek economic and military assistance as victims, while the West turns a blind eye to Ukraine's internal management issues, and clumsy actions of Russian propaganda only serve to strengthen anti-Russian sentiments across Ukraine. In fact, however, Russia's launch of this special military operation is related to the invasion of Yugoslavia by the NATO in 1998, the withdrawal of the United States from the ABM Treaty in 2002, its aggression against Iraq in 2003 and its continuous approach to Russia's borders. As a result of the short-sighted policies of Western countries, the United States and Europe are now facing the most serious and dangerous security crisis in decades, but the situation is now more complex than it was in the 1990s, and the feelings of mistrust, suspicion and confrontation will continue. And Moscow's recognition of the independence of the republics of Donbass will bring Russia to a new stage of confrontation with the West, which will last a long time in the international political and economic sphere.

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Is War Inevitable?

Over the past days and weeks, media outlets have been proliferating all kinds of apocalyptic predictions and scenarios on the immediate prospects of the Ukrainian crisis. Journalists, experts, and politicians claim — with all seriousness — that a Russian-Ukrainian war can hardly be thwarted, not to mention article that seek to explore a purported coup in Kiev, the crushing response of the West, or even the looming nuclear conflict of global dimensions.

We shall try to find an answer to a number of interwoven questions, which might arise in the minds of those who face this wave of dire prophecies and predictions. Why has this information attack been unleashed? Who is behind this and who is deriving profit from it? What is really going on and what could happen to the Ukrainian issue in the near future?

Starting off with Moscow's plans and intentions. Anyone who is slightly familiar with the structure of power in Russia knows well that it is few people who are especially close to the power circles that are aware of the true plans and the motives of the Russian authorities. As a rule, these people tend to avoid showing up in the media. Strong statements are usually made by those tasked by their superiors to attract a lot of exposure or by those who act at their own discretion to be noticed and appreciated by their top management. Obviously, none of these talking heads are privy to any of the Kremlin's plans, which means they are simply working out their tasks at a higher or lower professional level. Regrettably, being baseless and of no practical value, the campaign —

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launched by such “concerned” people about the allegedly impending war in Ukraine — invariably affects the public sentiment in our country, causing either panic or warmongering. This bellicose campaign, coupled with its dire consequences, has the potential to seriously demoralize and traumatize Russian society. Time will tell what repercussions this may bring about; still, nothing good can obviously be expected from this wave of hysteria.

It can be assumed that some in Russia need another anti-Ukrainian campaign to deflect attention from the country’s severe socio-economic and political problems, to raise the population’s patriotic spirit, or to unite the country. If one thinks so, one is likely to be seriously disappointed over time. The very idea of war against Ukraine or in Ukraine is insufficient for a new national idea; it is not even close to a platform on which Russian society could be consolidated.

Now let’s take a look at this problem from Ukraine’s perspective. We have to admit that there are many in the country who are interested in stirring up information hysteria around the relations with Russia, and for various reasons. They assume that playing the role of an innocent victim of the bloodthirsty Russia can only bring benefits to Ukraine.

First, they believe that this way it would be easier to implement a plan in order to shape a new national identity. Second, the West might be willing to turn a blind eye to Ukraine’s domestic scandals, corruption cases and other issues. Third, one can count on increased economic and military aid by playing the victim. Fourth, numerous clumsy actions of Russian propaganda only serve to strengthen anti-Russian sentiments across Ukraine. Therefore, it is logical to assume that Kiev will go on with doing everything it can to heat up tensions in the media environment.

The campaign around Russia’s alleged imminent aggression in Ukraine is also good for Washington and its Euro-Atlantic allies. It provides a distraction from their own domestic problems, allowing for cohesion within the archaic NATO and diverting attention from the ignominious flight of the Western troops from Afghanistan. By focusing on what is going on around Ukraine, the White House is trying to counter the Europe-wide perceptions that the Atlantic string of U.S. foreign policy is finally receding into the background of U.S. priorities, giving way to the Indo-Pacific, which is more important to Washington.

Long Story Short, Everyone Is Minding Their Own Business, Spinning A Propaganda War Around Ukraine

Are there any forces that might actually be interested in a full-blown rather than a propaganda war in Ukraine? The situation looks different here. If one puts aside the opinions of fierce fanatics and professional instigators, it turns out that no one needs an actual war with the use of modern weapons, countless casualties and immense destruction. Everyone would lose from such a war, be it Russia, the West, or Ukraine. This would entail such political, military, and economic costs for everyone that it would not be easy to recover for decades, not merely years. The repercussions of a major war at the center of Europe would be no less lasting than the ramifications triggered by the Chernobyl disaster, which have persisted for almost forty years. Who would be willing to take such a risk?

We allow ourselves to draw a relevant, if not too original, conclusion, leaving all the forecasts and scenarios of a military conflict at the heart of Europe to the conscience of numerous slacktivists. The only decent way out of the current situation is for all sides to immediately meet at the negotiating table on mutual security guarantees. Russia, the United States, and NATO have all presented their proposals on this matter. The positions of the parties are known. Now we must come to agreement.

Russia-NATO: On the History of the Current Crisis

To produce an adequate analysis of a particular complex international issue — and even more so to try to resolve it if necessary — it is imperative to have complete objective information on this topic. This information should include both the background of the problem and possible scenarios for its future development. It is the foundation of the foreign policy stance, and specific actions are taken within the framework of this position, taking into account the reactions of other actors of world politics.

Recently, in Russian and foreign media as well as among experts there has been a heated debate on Russia-NATO relations and on numerous security issues in the Euro-Atlantic. The opinions couldn't have been more divergent. One narrative is that Russia has officially considered joining the Alliance; another is that there were verbal or other types of agreements of non-expansion to the East; and a whole host of other viewpoints.

I served as First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia from 1994 to 1998, and I was Head of the Ministry from 1998 to 2004. That is why I am privy to some information about those aspects of Russia-NATO relations that have been my scope of responsibility. I would like to share several facts that — in my opinion — have a direct bearing on the current Moscow-Brussels interaction.

First, I have never heard of Russia ever officially requesting membership in NATO. There may have been some talk about it in a personal capacity, but not much else.

Second, in the post-Cold War era, Russia has always firmly opposed to NATO expansion, to the East in particular. Moscow's arguments have long been well-known, and Russian representatives have repeatedly expounded them at all levels, all negotiations and all meetings.

The first round of NATO enlargement, namely the accession of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, was the subject of serious discussions in Moscow with the participation of the relevant ministries and agencies. In a nutshell, it can be stated that Russia did not have many response options to the enlargement. Moscow had two options: to lead a difficult political struggle to assure nations of the West of the advantages of the then unique opportunity to build a single security space in Europe with no dividing lines, or to opt for rigid ultimatums and unilateral measures with a focus on military and technical means of response to any undesirable actions of the Alliance.

I vividly remember our lengthy meetings with Yevgeny Primakov, which resulted in a preference for a political-diplomatic tool. At that time, it was generally agreed that Russia was not ready to resort to the military-technical option either politically or economically as well as militarily, and an attempt at its implementation could have had dire consequences for the country, which was then undergoing a deep internal political and social crisis.

Russia's consolidated position was to launch negotiations on a new European security architecture that were to run in parallel to the ongoing process of NATO enlargement, which Russia could not stop at that time. This architecture could replace the military-political confrontation in the Euro-Atlantic that took shape during the Cold War. The talks culminated in the signing of the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation in Paris on May 27, 1997. As an aside, neither party — to the present day — has expressed its wish to withdraw from this agreement, signed almost a quarter of a century ago.

At the same time, intensive negotiations were underway to adapt the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE Treaty) concluded in Paris in 1990 to the new realities in Europe after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. The Agreement on Adaptation of the CFE Treaty and the Charter for European Security were signed in Istanbul in November 1999 during the OSCE Summit. All these documents, which practically recognized the

new political and military reality in Europe, created a legal framework for substantive negotiations on the establishment of a “common and comprehensive security model for Europe for the 21st century” based on the principle that “the security of all states in the Euro-Atlantic community is indivisible”.

In 1998, NATO committed an act of aggression against Yugoslavia. It was NATO’s first unambiguous attempt to assume the role of the world’s policeman, which was to be reinforced by the United States’ policy of imposing a unipolar world order model in which Washington and its allies could decide the destinies of the world and other nations at their own discretion.

NATO’s aggression in Yugoslavia was a heavy blow to Russia-NATO relations, and all contacts between Moscow and Brussels were suspended for some time. Many European capitals saw a massive wave of demonstrations, condemning the military actions of the Alliance and demanding an end to the senseless bombing of Yugoslav cities. The war was eventually stopped, but NATO’s international standing was seriously undermined.

Russia most vigorously condemned NATO’s unlawful aggression in Yugoslavia. Our country made tremendous efforts to stop it and reach a political settlement of the conflict.

In this environment, contacts between Russia and NATO to develop a framework for further cooperation between the parties in the interests of European security were renewed. On May 22, 2002, the leaders of Russia and nineteen NATO member states signed the Rome Declaration, intended to “turn over a new leaf” in their relations in order to strengthen cooperation to collectively address common threats and security risks. The NATO-Russia Council was established for consultations and joint actions on a wide range of security issues in the Euro-Atlantic area. The Council, which included both political and military structures, was to become “the principal structure and venue for advancing the relationship between NATO and Russia”. It was hoped that the NRC would become a forum for discussing and agreeing on all European security issues that could either way affect the fundamental interests of both NATO countries and Russia.

The facts outlined above are only the general framework within which relations between Russia and NATO developed in the 1990s and at the beginning of this century. I can solemnly state that Russia has not taken any actions that threaten or could be interpreted as a threat to the security interests of the United States and its allies in Europe over these years. On the contrary, the Russian Federation has been invariably open to cooperation with Western partners, as it demonstrated, *inter alia*, after 9/11.

Unfortunately, this constructive line of interaction assumed by Moscow was apparently perceived as a manifestation of weakness by Western countries. Without any sensible explanations, the U.S. unilaterally withdrew from the ABM Treaty in 2002, waged — together with its allies — a bloody war in Iraq in 2003, expanded provocative actions along the perimeter of the Russian borders. Russian representatives have consistently pointed to all these facts, calling on Western partners for a meaningful dialogue.

It should be noted that Russia’s constructive policy has not received a proper response, which required Moscow to take the necessary measures to ensure the security of the country. Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke frankly about all this in his Munich speech of 2007.

History cannot be written from an event that benefits one. Western experts often try to make it look like all the problems in Russia-NATO relations began solely after the military conflict in South Ossetia in 2008 and the political crisis in Ukraine in 2014.

I can reasonably argue that if these events had not been preceded by the deliberate policy of the United States and its allies to destroy the emerging fragile foundations of Russia-NATO relations, the conflicts in the South Caucasus and around Ukraine could have been avoided or at least their transition to the military phase

could have been prevented. The U.S. and Europe are well aware of the fact that it was not Russia who provoked these conflicts, that in both cases they tried to present Moscow with a *fait accompli*, causing severe damage to its security interests.

As a result of Washington's and its allies' myopic policy, the U.S. and Europe are now facing the most acute and dangerous security crisis in decades, whereas Russia is again confronted with the same question it encountered in the mid-1990s, i.e., how to respond to NATO's aggressive and wholly unilateral policy. Unfortunately, like almost three decades ago, the choice of options is still narrow, and one has to choose between a political-diplomatic and a military-technical response.

I do not feel in position to give any specific advice, especially since I do not have all the information necessary to do so. I am fully aware of the fact that critics of a political-diplomatic settlement can rightly say that previously such attempts have failed, and that the West understands only the language of *Machtpolitik*. There is no point in entering the disputes with such reasoning.

However, logic suggests that if a country strives for a long-term system of European security, its establishment should be accompanied by political agreements. These will be very difficult to achieve in the short term. The situation in Europe is even more complicated now than it was in the 1990s, and many things have to be started from scratch. Mutual distrust and suspicion, as well as the inertia of confrontation, will not be quick to overcome.

But nothing is impossible if there is a political will to move forward, thinking about long-term interests rather than immediate gains. Russia's bargaining power is stronger today than it was 30 years ago, because unlike in the 1990s, our country has everything it needs to ensure its own security. It would be better for all if Russia's national security eventually became an integral part of Europe's comprehensive security in the 21st century.

Starting A New Page

The decision has been taken, with Russia officially recognizing sovereignty and independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics. The establishment of diplomatic relations is followed by economic, humanitarian and military aid, as well as other measures necessary to formalize the statehood of the new subjects of international life.

This is an important decision that will undoubtedly have far-reaching ramifications — for the Russian-Ukrainian relations and, more broadly, for security in Europe and globally. It's no exaggeration to say that another page of history, which began during the acute crisis in and around Ukraine in late 2013 and early 2014, has been turned.

If one speaks directly about the citizens of the DNR and the LNR, the ongoing turnaround offers them new hope for a peaceful life. Lack of confidence in the future prevented people from planning ahead, working properly, building families, and raising children for more than eight years. In the meantime, the prospect of stability and predictability opens up for the Donbass, the absence of which makes sustained development hardly possible. If diplomatic recognition from Moscow is backed by rapid and considerable progress on acute economic and social problems, which is what the inhabitants are counting on, their support for such a development will be maintained.

The Minsk agreements, designed to resolve the perennial crisis over "specific districts of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts of Ukraine" through negotiations, are rendered meaningless under these conditions. The much-hoped-for accords, around which such passions were running high, will now merely remain in the textbooks of modern history. Most likely, the same fate will befall the Normandy format, established to implement the

agreements to include representatives of Russia, Ukraine, France, and Germany. This does not mean that the negotiations around Ukraine should essentially be put paid. But if they are resumed under certain circumstances, they will most probably be held in a different format, with other actors involved, and with a different agenda.

Kiev's reaction to the events is what has been "expected". Ukraine is well aware that it is effectively unable to prevent Moscow's decision from being implemented. Therefore, the Ukrainian leadership has set a course to derive the maximum benefit of this defeat in the long term. Politically, it is important now for Ukraine to enlist the support of as many states as possible for its sovereignty and territorial integrity. This explains Kiev's increased activity at the UN and other international organizations. Accordingly, one should not expect any succession of diplomatic recognition of the new states by the international community. In this respect, the DNR and LNR are unlikely to be more successful than Abkhazia and South Ossetia, recognized by Russia in 2008.

It is easy to predict that Ukraine will accord a particular focus on capitalizing on its image as a "victim of aggression" in order to increase economic aid from the West. And here Kiev may well succeed, since Western countries, which cannot stick up for Ukraine militarily, will be willing to make serious economic injections to demonstrate their solidarity with the Ukrainian leadership. It is still an open question how effectively this aid will be used, and to what extent it will be used to modernize the Ukrainian economy and social sphere.

As for the military aspects, Kiev and Western countries are likely to drown out the issue of NATO membership, as well as to rush the rebuilding of the entire military machine of Ukraine to the standards of the alliance. One can expect increased military and technical assistance to Kiev from certain NATO countries, including supply of modern weapons. The calculation of this whole policy is simple, which is to show the people of Ukraine — and not only them — the advantages of "friendship" with the West. However, Western countries will continue to have significant discrepancies over the specific formats and the level of military support for Kiev.

Obviously, Moscow's recognition of the DNR and LNR will be used to the maximum extent possible by the West for its information war against Russia. Our country will face difficulties in many multilateral forums and international organizations, from the UN to the OSCE and the Council of Europe. The issues of Ukraine's "territorial integrity" will inevitably be raised in bilateral talks between Russia and its Western partners.

Speaking of the international consequences of Moscow's decision, we should assume that we are entering a new phase of confrontation with the West because of the diplomatic recognition of the Donbass Republics. The scale and the specifics of this confrontation are yet to be assessed, but it is already clear that it will drag on for a long time and will encompass various areas of international politics and economy. One should hardly expect that in the foreseeable future such forces will prevail in the West that are disposed to a fundamental reappraisal of the current policy of "containing" Moscow and are ready to offer Russia some new option of détente or reset.

Western states are more "prepared" than they were in 2014 for this stage of confrontation with Moscow. In recent days, weeks and months, an unprecedented information attack on Russia has been conducted, all possible means and methods to manipulate public opinion are being used. This campaign, whose target audience is not only Russian citizens but also their own, is becoming protracted. In practical terms, we should expect a gradual introduction of the already announced sanctions, designed to affect the most sensitive areas of the Russian economy. Sanctions pressure is coming to be one of the main instruments of Western foreign policy, and this pressure is becoming more sophisticated and more focused over time.

It is likely that recent developments around Ukraine will have longer-term strategic implications, including in the area of security. Western states have long ago abandoned the idea of establishing an indivisible security system in the Euro-Atlantic, which was much discussed at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. Now we can

expect them to speed up the strengthening of their own security, relying on NATO, which will be announced at the upcoming summit of the alliance to be held in Madrid this June.

Although the rhetoric of many Western leaders still contains the thesis that security in Europe cannot be built without, much less against Russia, NATO has — in fact — consistently moved to make “containing” Moscow the main goal and the main justification for maintaining NATO in the 21st century. Ukraine may be assigned the role of a shield against the “Russian threat” in these plans.

Today opens a new chapter of modern European history, with its challenges and opportunities, hopes and disappointments, victories and defeats, gains and losses. A lot of unexpected and unexplored things lie ahead, so one should not count on a quiet life in any case.

When Persisting Delusions Vanish

The day of February 16, 2022 will come to be a remarkable moment for the history of contemporary international relations. Scrutinized by some Western politicians and proliferated in the media, the news that Russia will certainly attack Ukraine on this very day has not been confirmed, which is to say the least.

What happened then? Was it another slip-up of the Western special services or was it the treachery of an unpredictable Moscow? There is more than ample room for every possible guesswork and speculation on this topic.

However, professional diplomats, like any other people, can naturally make mistakes, but as a rule, they draw their conclusions based on a grasp of history, individual facts of the emerging situation, an in-depth analysis of the problem underlying the crisis and everything that surrounds it. That is, from the very beginning of this propaganda coup around Russia’s allegedly aggressive plans for Ukraine, IR experts realized that there won’t be a real war. Either way, there will be no war in its classic sense with the large-scale use of all types of weapons, decisive offensive operations, the seizure of enemy territories, etc. This was well known in Washington, Paris, London and other European capitals. Obviously, it was also known in Kiev.

Then why is Europe experiencing one of the worst crises in recent years? Why is it now, at the beginning of the 2022, that one started talking about the possibility of a new big war in Europe?

It should be noted that this whole campaign about allegedly forthcoming aggression began at exactly the time when a serious talk about security guarantees in the Euro-Atlantic, initiated by Russia, was beginning to take place, albeit not without difficulties. Moscow has made ambitious proposals with its vision of the problem. The proposals were formulated in a tough, but accessible-to-all way. Their essence was that Russia is not satisfied with the current state of European security and therefore it cannot be maintained.

The West could choose from two possible options. Either the Atlantic partners take into account Russian legitimate interests and all together fight against common security threats, as it was enshrined in many joint documents, or each party ensures its own security, without regard to the concerns of others. In that way, the future of Ukraine and its place in European structures is only one element of a more general issue of Euro-Atlantic security, albeit a very important one.

Washington and its allies have proven reluctant to such an open and fundamental conversation. This became evident from the official responses received from the US and NATO. Obviously, there are some positive elements in these answers, but there is still no willingness to talk about key security issues. If one steps back from the intricate diplomatic wording, it is very clear that the central component of the Russian proposals is the assurance of each side that the other party’s military capabilities will not pose a threat to its own security, which the Western

countries are trying to avoid discussing. For this purpose, the relevant mechanisms of interaction between military and diplomats are jointly established, and control procedures, verification, etc. are agreed upon.

All these fundamental principles have been developed and enshrined in many joint documents, but have gradually become more blurred by Washington and its allies in an undisguised manner. As a result, we have witnessed the retreat from the noble idea of forming a “common security space in the Euro-Atlantic” to such security situation, which today looks much more alarming than even that of the Cold War.

Against this backdrop, NATO strategists have decided to resort to the methods they repeatedly used to manipulate public opinion that were aimed at justifying their policies. That were the cases of NATO’s aggression in Yugoslavia, preparations, and then the Iraq War itself. There are many examples of such manipulations. The toolkit is changing, methods and forms are being improved, new faces are being involved, but the essence remains the same, which is to present their policies in the best possible light and to denigrate in every way those who do not agree with it or who are willing to suggest alternative options.

This time a similar scenario was used towards Ukraine. A substitution of concepts typical of the West has taken place, whereby Moscow’s mythical aggression against Ukraine became the center of the discussion, instead of Russian proposals for a new security architecture in Europe to be accepted. In the meantime, the long-term interests of Ukraine itself were, of course, not taken into account.

Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that times are changing. Today it is becoming increasingly difficult to mislead public opinion even with the use of massive and deliberate propaganda. First, the memory of the many “former merits” of most of these propagandists is still fresh. Let us recall, for example, the inability of many Western experts and many politicians to predict the developments in Afghanistan last summer and fall. Second, now one can use a variety of sources of information and form one’s own opinion instead of blindly keeping up with the popular schemes of biased propagandists.

It was hoped that right lessons will be drawn from this sad story. Long past the time when one could whistle past the graveyard with impunity, instigating international crises. Now it is time to sit at the negotiating table and begin serious substantive conversations about the whole complex set of Euro-Atlantic security problems that has accumulated over the past decades. Setting it aside until better times means multiplying risks of repeated acute political crises with no winners.

I happened to take part in such negotiations and edit the final documents. When I read them now, I have mixed feelings. On the one hand, I realize how much potential for common security these documents had. On the other, I see that eloquence can lose its meaning if it is not supplemented with the appropriate tools for implementation. I keenly hope that this time it would not be the same.

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