



CURB THE ATTACK! SPECIAL EDITION

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EDITOR'S FOREWORD


As we approach the Christmas holiday season, families in Europe plan holiday gatherings, schools come to winter break and the focus naturally tends to shift towards happy celebrations. This year is different. But it is not the COVID pandemic that Europeans should be afraid of. Instead, listen to the east. Do you hear that? It's the sound of tanks, airplanes and hundreds of thousands of Russian troops massing at the border with Ukraine. This is not a "winter exercise". This is the beginning of the next phase in Putin's war against Ukraine. And Europe needs to pay attention to the imminent invasion.

We are dedicating a special edition of our quarterly journal entirely to covering the growing signs that Russia is planning to invade Ukraine and to give a present to Putin dedicated to the 100-year anniversary of the establishment of the USSR. This can no longer be ignored.

Europe needs to wake up and listen to the sounds coming from our Eastern Border. Those are the sounds that could soon be rolling across the Dnipro river.

Marta Barandiy



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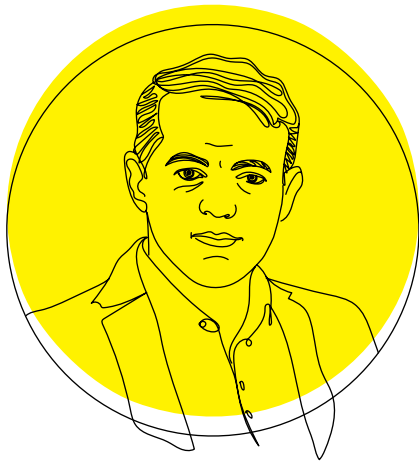
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WEST COULD SIGNIFICANTLY RAISE COST OF RUSSIAN ATTACK

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RAISE COST OF
RUSSIAN ATTACK



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Ukkraine is once again facing a serious threat of a large-scale Russian invasion. Its high probability is reasonably described by journalists, anxiously stated by politicians, and assessed by military experts. In recent months, everyone has been observing the proactive actions of Russian special services and special forces, which are working out scenarios for providing offensive operations of regular military units with a new quality.

Moscow has expanded its strike force along the perimeter of Ukraine's southeastern border and in the occupied Crimea. According to the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine, Russian paratroopers, reinforced by groups of ships of the Black Sea, Northern and Baltic Fleets and the Caspian Flotilla, are ready to operate from the south. The ground component in eastern and northern Ukraine is made up of almost 40 battalion tactical groups. In total, almost 100,000 personnel, 1,200 tanks, 1,600 guns and missile systems, 330 aircraft, and 240 helicopters are concentrated near the borders.

PROMOTE THOUGHTS
FROM SUSHCHENKO

Recently, there has been active reconnaissance of the territory of Ukraine with the use of aircraft and technical intelligence. In particular, Russian reconnaissance planes, mobile groups of electronic intelligence, reconnaissance satellites and ships are widely used. During the exercises, of which about 90 took place in the occupied Crimea alone, powerful military command systems were deployed. The issue of deploying additional divisions of territorial troops was worked out, and an operational reserve was involved. All military events had a single offensive scenario.

This year, Russia is actively developing the territory and military infrastructure of neighbouring Belarus. Bilateral exercises of ground, air and airborne troops in the neighbouring territory have become commonplace. Operational and tactical air defence missiles have been moved to the Belarusian forests, and Russian Air Force planes are on combat duty at airfields. Russia has resumed strategic aviation flights in the airspace of Belarus. Moscow has artificially created and aggravated the emigration crisis by directing flows of migrants to the EU's eastern border. In fact, the Kremlin controls the territory of Belarus.

Provocations against Ukrainian troops in the area of hostilities in the east are carried out daily. The goal is obvious - to accuse Kyiv of violating the ceasefire. In violation of the Minsk agreements, the occupiers are amassing heavy weapons near the contact line in Donbas; constantly flying drones over Ukrainian positions; waging a sniper war; providing the front lines with ammunition, fuel, weapons and equipment; and blocking the work of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. Moscow forcibly issued passports to citizens of the occupied territories of Ukraine.

Almost 650,000 Russian-speaking people received Russian passports. The presence of Russian citizens in the Ukrainian territory will be used to destabilise the situation in the east as a pretext for a large-scale invasion to protect the "Russians."

The current situation shows that the Kremlin has chosen a strategy of escalation, with a periodic decrease in tensions. Initially, Moscow significantly increased the number of troops near Ukraine and over time partially reduced it. At the same time, the total number of troops is constantly growing. The Kremlin does not consider the intention to stop the armed aggression against Ukraine, but seeks to destroy its sovereignty, deprive it of the prospects for integration into European security structures and NATO.

According to experts, Putin is preparing large-scale provocations and will resort to them in two months. To destroy stability within Ukraine, the Kremlin will actively use the internal political and energy crisis, launch sabotage mechanisms, intensify propaganda, and systematically disseminate fake news.

All this is eloquently described in the KGB [Committee for State Security] textbooks published in the last century. The Five D's are Disinformation, Discredit, Disorientation, Destabilisation, and Disintegration.

Ukraine is seriously preparing for a possible attack. The Ukrainian army and its security services have strong capabilities and are ready to act against the aggressor. However, consolidated actions of the West should help Kyiv enhance its effectiveness and effi-

ciency in resisting Moscow's aggressive plans. Such interaction will significantly increase the cost of the Russian attack.

Western aid should focus on the following four tracks:

First, the decision to provide Ukraine with a NATO Membership Action Plan. The plan is not yet a full membership. This is a roadmap for reforms that Kyiv will implement, given the real threat from the east.

Second, new sanctions. Public disclosure of the list of sanctions awaiting Russia in case of a military escalation or attack.

Third, strengthening energy security, including effective sanctions against Nord Stream 2.

And finally, the supply of defensive weapons, which will critically alter the balance of power on the battlefield in favour of Ukraine. Starting from counter-battery stations to increase the effectiveness of Ukrainian guns, electronic warfare stations, ammunition, equipment, and to air and missile defence systems, and the deployment of allied units and military bases in Ukraine, for example, near Kyiv, Odesa, or Sumy.

As a signal for coordinated actions by Ukraine and the Western coalition, diplomats from NATO, the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the EU should start visiting Kyiv in January.

RUSSIA'S WAR AGAINST UKRAINE IS IN ITS EIGHTH YEAR



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Hostilities in Donbas have not abated since 2014. Meanwhile, in recent days, information about a possible large-scale intrusion of Russian troops into the territory of Ukraine has been circulating actively, followed by Russia's build-up of tens of thousands of troops in its western regions and the occupied Crimea.

Preparations for invasion?

Of course, no one but Putin's generals are aware of the Kremlin's plans. At the same time, such influential Western media as The New York Times and Bloomberg, citing their sources in intelligence, warn of the possibility of Russia's winter offensive. Currently, according to U.S. intelligence and Ukrainian military leadership, about 92,000 Russian troops are concentrated in the north and east of Ukraine. An increase in the number of troops is recorded in Crimea and near the city of Yel'nia, near the Russia-Belarus border. Moreover, tens of thousands of reservists are being mobilised in Russia to support the occupation regime in the seized territories.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken even said that, given the recent build-up of Russian troops, an invasion may be prepared.

At a news conference ahead of the meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers in Riga, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg delivered a warning to Moscow.

"We are, of course, concerned about what we see in and around Ukraine. NATO is closely following the situation around Ukraine and sharing data with the Allies. There is no certainty about the intentions of Russia. But what we do know is that they have concentrated forces close to Ukraine's borders. And we also know that Russia has used military force against Ukraine before. So, if putting all this together, of course, there are reasons to be deeply concerned," Stoltenberg said.

At the same time, he added that Russia maintains the illegal annexation of Crimea, destabilises the situation in eastern Ukraine, and continues to carry out cyber attacks against the country. All of these are reasons for serious concern.

"Therefore, we call on Russia to de-escalate, and to reduce tensions. It is also clear that if Russia uses force against Ukraine that will have costs," the NATO Secretary General stressed.

Chief of the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine Kyrylo Budanov said that the invasion could take place in January-February 2022.

Instead, Russia blames everyone but itself for everything that is happening in its trademark manner. Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov tries to convince the world that it is Ukraine that plans aggressive actions against Donbas, "DPR," "LPR" and accepts military instructors from NATO Member States. However, apart from these words, the Kremlin cannot provide any other proof of its authenticity.

The amassed troops near the Ukrainian border is not the only fact raising concern. After all, over the past six months, the Kremlin leader and several other high-ranking Russian officials have published articles in which they speak aggressively about Ukraine. In these articles, they question the right of Ukraine to exist as a state. They also refuse to recognise the democratically elected Ukrainian authorities.

In particular, Putin's proxy and Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolay Patrushev expressed the opinion that Ukraine will face an "Afghan scenario," thus pointing to the danger of the country's disintegration.

Putin is pressing for solutions beneficial for Russia

Director of the Institute of World Policy Yevhen Magda emphasises that Russia's war against Ukraine has been in its eighth year already, and more than 14,000 people have fallen victim to it.

"Unfortunately, the hostilities in Donbas have not subsided since 2014, the truces are more of a formal nature. So, I can say that the invasion scale is likely to expand. It is about this scenario that the Western media started to write in early November. Official Kyiv shares this opinion. At the same time, it is necessary to understand that hybrid warfare is not only a combat operation, it also implies an economic and information component, and Russia's information troops are very well trained and deployed around the world, mostly in Europe. That is why Russia seeks to level Ukraine's independence in the international arena in various ways as much as possible, using elements of blackmail and pressure," says Yevhen Magda.

The expert also does not see an opportunity for Russia to retain a significant part of Ukrainian territories. According to him, Russians would seek to devastate the Ukrainian military infrastructure, but in this case, the format of air strikes is more plausible. It is difficult to predict the effectiveness of the repulse as Ukraine has not had an opportunity to test the efficiency of its air defence forces. We can hope for the help of the Western allies, but we must understand that it is impossible to deploy a large number of air defence systems in a short time, even if the West delivers them.

According to Yevhen Magda, Putin is currently pursuing several goals with such actions. "I think that now he is inflating the situation to press for solutions necessary and beneficial for Russia. I mean Ukraine's readiness to sit down at the negotiation table with militants, launch of Nord Stream 2, and recognition of Vladimir Putin's parity with the G7 leaders (say, through an informal UN Security Council summit)," Magda explains.

In its desire to make Europe agree to the launch of Nord Stream 2, the Putin regime skates on thin ice. And if they start even a heavily disguised military operation, it will eventually mean the end of Nord Stream 2. In addition, Russia has already lost the element of surprise. After all, the world is aware of a possible military escalation by the Kremlin.

At the same time, Magda draws attention to the fact that American missile destroyers often stay in the Black Sea. Indeed, they were stationed there in the spring and are back now. They have very powerful air defence systems capable of covering the territory of Ukraine almost completely. Of course, not in full, but this is an important factor. It is one thing when pilots feel safe, and another when they can get a missile under their wing.

Moreover, we should not forget about the sanctions that the United States may impose on Russia in case of open aggression. They can also provide military and technical support to Ukraine, but they will not fight for us. Europe also does not sit idle in this situation. Unfortunately, there is no desire inside the EU to actively respond

to Russia's apparent involvement in the migrant crisis on the Belarus-Poland border. It is clear that the European Union has already bumped up against a glass ceiling of sanctions against Russia, which can only be destroyed by an open invasion. However, a clear political statement by the Council of the EU on the possibility of the operation of Nord Stream 2, exclusively in accordance with the norms of the Third Energy Package, could have a sobering effect on the Kremlin. In case of a real invasion, the West could disconnect Russia from the SWIFT payment system and declare the airspace an area closed to military aircraft.

Instead, Russia wants to step up its influence on Ukraine and act not only through its spies, many of whom are currently staying in our territory. After all, the Kremlin considers the seizure of part of Donbas, i.e., a relatively small territory of Ukraine, as an instrument of influence on the whole country, in particular its foreign policy and accession to NATO.

One can assume that Putin fears that this goal will not be achieved. Russia will control a part of Ukraine but will not implement its main plan – the utmost control over the country.

Therefore, a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine is possible but hardly probable. Most analysts believe so. At the same time, we must remember that if the Kremlin is up to something, it has several plans to achieve its goal. Such plans of the Kremlin must be opposed systematically and aggressively, using all possible tools.



We are, of course, concerned about what we see in and around Ukraine. NATO is closely following the situation around Ukraine and sharing data with the Allies. There is no certainty about the intentions of Russia. But what we do know is that they have concentrated forces close to Ukraine's borders. And we also know that Russia has used military force against Ukraine before. So, if putting all this together, of course, there are reasons to be deeply concerned.

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and civil society hub for the
exchange of expertise between
Ukraine and the EU**

IT'S TIME TO
FINALLY **FINALLY** OPEN YOUR
YOUR EYES AND. **EYES AND...**



**VOLODYMYR OGRYZKO,
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Europe is in turmoil again. The Kremlin's gas blackmail has not subsided as the migrant crisis on the border with Belarus and the Baltic states began to unfold. Only very naive people could believe that it was provoked by raving Lukashenka. In fact, it is directed by Putin. Ask why? Because the Kremlin's cherished dream has been and still is to split the EU and NATO, to set off some European countries against others. The formula is everlasting: divide and rule.

It is sad to say that sometimes the Kremlin succeeds. Generous financial injections into right-wing radicals in Germany or Italy, bribery of current and former politicians in France or Austria, "special relations" with Hungary or Serbia, an active anti-vaccination campaign through Russia Today and Sputnik propaganda mouthpieces, Nord Stream 2 are yielding fruit: it becomes increasingly difficult for Europe to stay unanimous. As we can see, the forms are different, but the essence is the same.

But, perhaps, the most convenient tool for the stratification of the collective West is the so-called "Ukrainian crisis" as some continue to refer to the Kremlin's aggression for some reason. The fact that this is aggression will become clear to anyone who reads the text of UN General Assembly Resolution No. 3314 of 14 December 1974 [1] and will compare the characteristics of aggression defined there with Russia's actions in Ukraine from 2014 up to the present day. However, it is hoped that those in the capitals of European countries and at EU and NATO headquarters will also read this resolution one day.

Having occupied the Ukrainian Crimea and started a hot war in Donbas, the Kremlin presented the West with a dilemma: either to accept the fact that totalitarian and aggressive regimes can, at their own discretion, redraw the borders of European states and call into question the entire system of global security in the 21st century, or give them a proper rebuff. It still seemed that liberal Europe did not want one or the other, but at the same time hoped that its policy of mollifying the aggressor at the expense of its victim would somehow allow it to come out dry. The overt complaisance policy of the Obama and Trump administrations also contributed to this.

The strategic mistake of the "policy of pacification" was to hope that the problem of Russia's attack on the collective West could be solved in this way. Instead, the Kremlin perceived it as a weakness and an invitation to new acts of aggression against the West itself, not only against Ukraine.

However, the situation is changing. The internal situation in Russia has also prompted the West to rethink its policy towards this country. Assaults on human rights, assassinations and poisonings of opposition leaders, torture in prisons, total censorship, outright anti-Western propaganda, rewriting the constitution in favour of Putin, rigging parliamentary elections, etc. have become commonplace in the Russian regime. It was already too much even for a very liberal and very patient West.

Russia's playing with edge-tools on Ukraine's borders became a serious catalyst for the process of finding answers to Moscow's

challenges. April force majeure, and the then very conciliatory reaction, strengthened the Kremlin's view that pressure on the West "could be repeated." This is exactly the situation we see today. However, unlike spring, the reaction of the West is much tougher. It bothers but does not stop Moscow so far.

In its calculations, the Kremlin assumes that the collective West is unlikely to fight for Ukraine. I suppose that it is unlikely to fight for, say, Narva [third largest city of Estonia located at the border with Russia] either. The reason is clear: the Europeans have long had no vestiges of militant revanchism, and all-encompassing pacifism has become the ideology of the EU and NATO, even when it is necessary to clearly distinguish between the aggressor and its victim. "Anything to avoid shooting": this humanistic approach has frozen many European conflicts for decades without resolving them in principle.

Instead, Europeans recalled another form of influence on violators of international law – sanctions. Although they are only aimed at changing behaviour, not changing the regime, they still produce some deterrent effect. But is it enough? The decision to seize Crimea and start the war in Donbas was initially made by the RUSSIAN STATE in the person of its highest political institutions. And specific legal entities or individuals only carried out its orders. Therefore, focusing sanctions on the latter is practically a way not to punish the main perpetrators and unwillingness to put the aggressor in its proper place.

[1] [https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/3314\(XXIX\)&Lang=E](https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/3314(XXIX)&Lang=E)

How will the situation unfold now?

It can be assumed that right now, with its liberal eyes slightly open, the collective West has seen that the immediate threat to its vital interests is greater than ever. The loss of Ukraine will mean the loss of strategic initiative and Moscow's further offensive. Its new victims could first be Moldova, Georgia, the Baltic states, then followed by Poland or Romania and Bulgaria. So, there is a need to act. The question arises: when and how?

It is necessary to take very concrete measures to support Ukraine immediately, against the clock. The statements like "If Moscow attacks, then we ..." are, first of all, inhumane because they mean that thousands or tens of thousands of military and civilians on both sides will die, and the infrastructure of many regions in both Ukraine and Russia will be destroyed. The question of whether the conflict will be localised or will escalate into a full-scale war remains open. Is such a situation in the interests of the West? I will take the courage to say no.

Therefore, Ukraine needs immediate and large-scale military assistance. I would talk about something like a World War II land lease. First of all, these are air defence systems, anti-tank and anti-ship weapons, medium-range missiles, reconnaissance equipment, and many other things well known to specialists. We have to thank our American, British, Canadian, Polish, Lithuanian, Turkish, and some other allies who are not just "very concerned" but have already given Ukrainian soldiers an opportunity to feel much more confident. The readiness of some NATO countries to redeploy

not only certain types of military equipment to the Ukrainian territory but also to send small contingents of their troops is of fundamental importance. We hope that such examples encourage other NATO countries to change their position and stop playing "equidistance" and "non-supply of weapons to conflict zones," which means de facto indirect support for Moscow. Ukraine ultimately has the right to self-defence (those who have forgotten this, should re-read Article 51 of the UN Charter and not just repeat that "there is no alternative to the Minsk agreements").

Conclusion: a powerful Ukrainian army capable of inflicting tangible and painful losses on the Russian aggressor is the best guarantee against the inadequate behaviour of the Kremlin regime and meets the security interests of both Ukraine and the West.

This is only one aspect of deterring Russia. Another one already mentioned is sanctions. But they should be imposed "before", not "after". There are more than enough reasons for this. And they have to focus on those key areas that could cause serious economic damage to Moscow. These are tough industry sanctions. In the U.S., they are called "hellish": imposing oil and gas embargo, disconnecting Russia from the financial system of the West, freezing assets of Russian legal entities and famous individuals in banks of Europe and North America, banning Aeroflot and other Russian airlines from flying to airports in Europe and North America, banning Russian vessels from entering European and American ports, etc. The list has long been known. Economic sanctions must be coordinated primarily between the United States and Europe, followed by the political will to apply them.

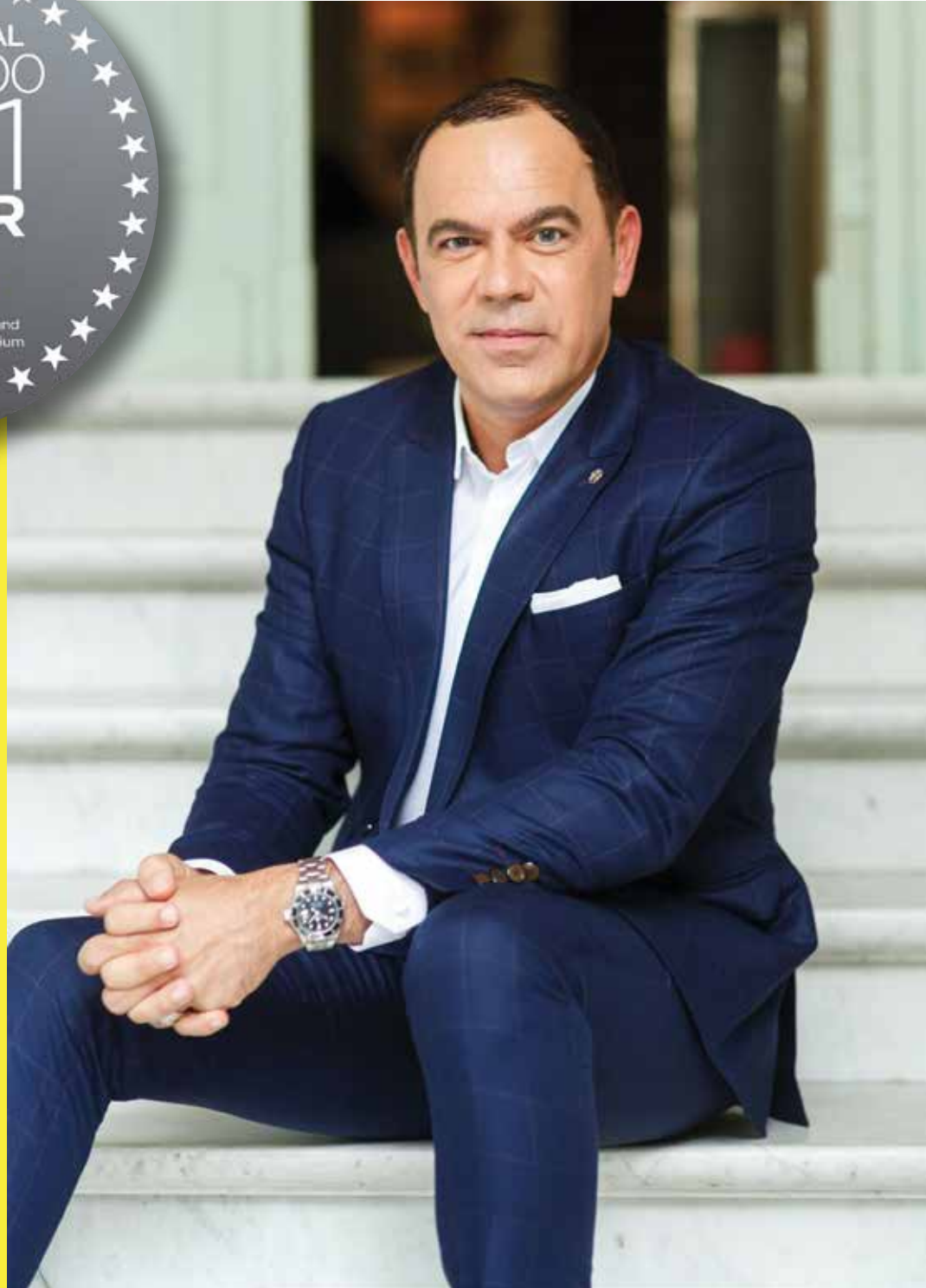
Not to mention political and diplomatic measures, for example: lowering the level of diplomatic relations, limiting all types of official contacts to the working level, depriving Russia of the right to vote or expelling it from the Council of Europe. The aggressor country must understand that the time for persuasion is over. Then it must either return to compliance with the international law, withdraw troops from Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, give up meddling in the internal affairs of post-Soviet countries and the EU and NATO, cease cyber crime, respect human rights inside the country, or be ready for international isolation and subsequent collapse. And not only of the Putin regime, but Russia itself. Because this structure will collapse even faster than the former Soviet Union, once it suffers the first serious blow. There is no room left for "dialogue" with international criminals.

It so happened that Ukraine has become a kind of outpost of Western civilisation, a watershed between democracy and totalitarianism. The latter, by virtue of its nature, understands only force. Ukraine and the collective West can and must finally demonstrate it.

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PUTIN SEEKS TO "FINLANDIZE" UKRAINE



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Almost in all recent weeks, we have been trying to understand what exactly the Kremlin's goals are. Reports from the leading Western publications on the concentration of the troops at the Ukrainian borders were initially skeptically perceived by the Ukrainian government. In Kyiv, they were even surprised with this information, mentioning that they did not understand why the leading American media were taking part in Russia's "propaganda campaign." The tone did not change even after the US officials, including US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin, expressed concern about the concentration of Russian troops. President Volodymyr Zelensky noted that Russian forces are constantly at the Ukraine's borders, and the West is noticing this only now. Other Ukrainian government officials spoke in a similar tone.

However, gradually the tone of the Ukrainian leadership has changed. The head of the main Intelligence Directorate of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, Kirill Budanov, acknowledged the possibility of a Russian invasion next winter. Now, American, Ukrainian and European politicians speak with one voice.

Moscow, for its part, accuses American politicians and the media of propaganda campaigning against Russia and claims that Russia is not going to attack anyone unless... Ukraine provokes it. The fact that the Russian capital often emphasises that the West is "pumping Ukraine with weapons" and that Kyiv is "carrying out aggressive plans" is also alarming. After all, when Russia accuses others of provocations, it usually prepares these provocations itself.

That is why the statements of Russian officials and propagandists should be carefully analysed. Russia's Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev, one of Vladimir Putin's closest advisers, has frightened the West into "flare up" at any moment in Ukraine and destabilise millions of Ukrainian refu-

gees. Patrushev's deputy Oleksandr Hrebенkin claims that Ukrainian special services are preparing sabotage actions in Crimea. The so-called "head of the Donetsk People's Republic" Denis Pushylin says that Kyiv wants to solve the problem of Donbas by military means according to the "Croatian scenario." Moreover, Belarusian ruler Alexander Lukashenka, who is increasingly fulfilling Moscow's political wishes, accuses Ukraine of trying to destabilise the situation in Belarus.

All these statements allow us to conclude that Russian aggression can advance from several directions at once – the occupied territories of Donbas and Crimea, as well as from the border of Belarus, where it is the easiest to attack Kyiv. The Kremlin seems to be demonstrating to the Ukrainian leadership and the West that it is ready to take decisive action to dismantle Ukrainian statehood. But the West says it will not leave Ukraine alone in the face of a Russian attack. The United States is considering new arms supplies to Ukraine. The United Kingdom has promised to send special forces to Ukraine in the event of a Russian attack. Lastly, Sweden is ready to send military instructors to the country. The tone of the "Normandy format" mediators, the leaders of Germany

and France, has become much tougher on Russia, especially after Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov published his official correspondence with colleagues from Berlin and Paris, violating diplomatic etiquette. It turned out that the foreign ministers of France and Germany are not going to consider Russia as a "mediator" in the conflict in Donbas and agree to the possibility of direct talks between Kyiv and the "puppet" government of the so-called "people's republics."

All this, of course, on the one hand, can inspire optimism, and, on the other, create an atmosphere of anticipation of a real military conflict, not just between Russia and Ukraine, but between Russia and the West – at the Ukrainian territory.

Vladimir Putin seems to like it very much. During the board meeting of the Russian Foreign Ministry, Putin said that such strong tension is even useful. In this way Russia makes it clear to the civilised world what price one would have to pay for Ukraine's European and Euro-Atlantic integration. These statements suggest that so far it is not that much about war as it is about creating an atmosphere of the anticipation of war.

Why does the Kremlin need such an atmosphere? Probably, the desire to demonstrate the full-potential escalation is connected to the preparation of a possible new meeting of the presidents of Russia and the United States. It is no secret that Ukraine may become the main topic of the talks between the presidents. By the way, the desire to discuss the situation with the American president is one of the reasons why

the Kremlin refused to negotiate in the "Normandy format" and ignored Angela Merkel's offer to hold a summit of leaders of France, Germany, Ukraine, and Russia before her retirement.

What does Putin want to offer Biden? The sketch of Russia's intentions was presented by an expert close to the Kremlin, Chairman of the Presidium of the Council on Foreign and Defence Policy Fedor Lukyanov. In the article published by Russia in Global Politics, Lukyanov argues that to ease tensions over Ukraine, the United States and Russia must return to a situation where other states do not have to decide for themselves which economic and military alliances they have to join. Simply put, Ukraine's European and Euro-Atlantic integration must be put to an end. But not only that. The expert suggests returning to the model of "Finlandization". Let me remind you that after the Second World War, Finland avoided occupation by the Soviet Union and the establishment of a communist regime. However, Finland has virtually lost the opportunity to pursue an independent foreign policy. Finland got a chance to enter the international arena only after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Moscow would like to give such a status to Ukraine – with the only difference that in the Ukrainian case it may be just one of the stages of Russia's liquidation of Ukrainian statehood.

Will the US President agree with such proposals? It is hard to believe, but it is obvious that Joseph Biden will look for ways to prevent a military conflict, a way to compromise. Thus, the Ukrainian leadership will need to make serious efforts to ensure that this compromise is not reached at the expense of Ukraine.



Moscow, for its part, accuses American politicians and the media of propaganda campaigning against Russia and claims that Russia is not going to attack anyone unless... Ukraine provokes it.

Here we return to the issue of trust, which we have had to talk about many times. To what extent does the current Ukrainian leadership enjoy the confidence of the White House, and can they influence the position of the President of the United States and other American leaders? To what extent do they manage to convey their opinion to the US administration during the preparations for the Putin-Biden summit? These are not simple questions. If we remember that the President of Ukraine was invited to Washington after the meeting of the American and Russian presidents and after the administration decided not to interfere with the completion of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline. After all, today, the launch of this pipeline is considered by many experts to be a possible stage that will facilitate the Russian attack. Has Washington drawn the right conclusions from the consequences of the Nord Stream 2 story? Do they understand what the real intentions of Vladimir Putin are?



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may become the
main topic of the
talks between
the presidents.
By the way, the
desire to discuss
the situation with
the American
president is one
of the reasons
why the Kremlin
refused to
negotiate in
the "Normandy
format".*



**CROSS-BORDER BUSINESS POLITICAL
MEDIA CONSULTING**

CHAOS AS PREREQUISITE FOR AGGRESSION

Information waves about the powerful build-up of Russian military groups around Ukraine have been rising and abating periodically in the global media landscape in recent years since the onset of the Russian occupation of Crimea and parts of Donbas. Sometimes these waves are linked with Russia's real preparations, sometimes they turn out to be purposeful information and psychological operations to create an unstable situation in Ukraine and destroy European and Euro-Atlantic solidarity in the face of Russian aggression.





**MYKHAILO SAMUS,
DIRECTOR, NEW
GEOPOLITICS
RESEARCH NETWORK**

However, in contrast to the information waves, the real military threat from the Russian Federation has remained consistently high since 2014. Moreover, since 2017, after Russia created new military units around Ukraine – the 1st Tank Army near Moscow, 20th Combined Arms Army near Voronezh, and 8th Combined Arms Army headquartered in Novochoerkassk – the Kremlin has prepared sufficient forces to conduct a strategic offensive operation against Ukraine, as well as against Poland and the Baltic states. I would like to note that the 8th Combined Arms Army in Novochoerkassk was created specifically to manage and provide comprehensive support for the Russian occupation contingent in the Ukrainian Donbas. It is the 8th Combined Arms Army that includes the 1st (Donetsk) and the 2nd (Luhansk) army corps in the occupied Donbas.

Already at the Zapad-2017 strategic exercises, the new group around Ukraine tested its capabilities to carry out offensive operations in the three abovementioned directions. At the same time, the

territory of Belarus was used for the rapid redeployment of Russian troops into the depths of the battleground and the creation of a bridgehead for combined military operations against Poland and the Baltic states, as well as Ukraine. By the way, the latest migrant attack through the territory of Belarus is carried out by Russia (I have no doubt that this attack was planned and organised by Moscow) according to a very similar scheme and, as well as the Zapad-2017 scenario, is aimed at aggression against the Baltic states, Poland (including through the so-called Suwalki Corridor), and Ukraine.

Subsequently, the Russian military infrastructure around Ukraine was enhanced and built up. Regular military exercises were conducted with the participation of formations and units that are constantly stationed in the immediate vicinity of the Ukrainian border, as well as units redeployed from the depths of Russian territory, apparently to increase the offensive potential in the western direction.

In parallel, Russia maximised the joint force grouping (Navy, Air Force, Land Forces) in the occupied Crimea, which ensures Russia's dominance in the Black Sea (by increasing the number of surface vessels and submarines), the establishment of a total zone A2AD (Anti-Access / Area Denial) both in the sea (surface and underwater) and airspace around Crimea (due to the deployment of a powerful aviation group and modern air defence systems in the occupied Crimea). The total missile volley of submarines, surface vessels, and surface missile systems of the Russian Black Sea Fleet currently reaches 200 missiles (including Kalibr long-range cruise missiles), posing a threat not only to the entire territory of Ukraine but also much of Europe.

In 2021, Russia's preparations for large-scale aggression against Ukraine reached its apogee. First, in April-May this year, Russia conducted unplanned strategic manoeuvres, involving up to 110,000 troops, both from the permanent deployment units and those redeployed from the depths of the Russian Federation. Then, in September, Russia conducted Zapad-2021 strategic exercises (including in the territory of Belarus), which actually repeated the scale of the April manoeuvres. In November, Russia again began an intensive operation, which was noticed by Ukrainian and Western intelligence and provoked a stormy reaction in the media.

The main question that arises in this situation: is Russia really getting ready for a large-scale military operation against Ukraine and what is the probability of its conduct, based on data available from open sources?

According to my estimates, from a purely military perspective, Russia is fully prepared for a strategic offensive against Ukraine in several directions, both from the territory of Russia and the territory of Belarus, the occupied Crimea, the occupied part of Donbas, and Transnistria (occupied part of Moldova).

At the same time, unlike in 2014, when Ukraine was in a difficult situation of "strategic embarrassment," when the systems of state and military administration were disrupted, and the level of combat capability of the Armed Forces was low, now Russia will find it difficult to implement its plan successfully. In any case, in the current circumstances, a large-scale military conflict between Russia and Ukraine will have catastrophic consequences not only for Ukraine and Europe but also for Russia itself. Although

Russian politicians and the military are often influenced by propaganda euphoria, it is hoped that Russian intelligence reports objective information to the Kremlin about Ukraine's real readiness to counter military aggression.

Thereby, it is likely that Russia's constant military manoeuvres near Ukraine are part of a broader Kremlin's plan based on Putin's geopolitical efforts to return the role of Major Power to the "new Russian empire" and occupy a prominent place in the new, so-called orchestra of nations (group of leading world countries) that is to address issues of global development and division of the spheres of influence.

In this regard, elements of this plan, apart from military preparations near Ukraine, may include Russia's migrant attack against Europe through Belarus, an artificial energy crisis caused by the reduced Russian gas supplies to Europe, participation in armed conflicts in the Middle East and Africa, constant disinformation campaigns, and demonstration of the latest military technologies that could threaten the security of the United States and other NATO countries (in particular, the recent demonstrative destruction of a satellite by a new, anti-missile and anti-satellite system).

The tactical tasks of this complex "hybrid" offensive may be to obtain the consent of the U.S. President for another meeting with Putin to negotiate new concessions in the international arena, inter alia, launching the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline as soon as possible, forcing Ukraine to make concessions on Minsk agreements implementation under the Russian scenario, ensuring the final "Anschluss" of Belarus.

Possible strategic objectives of Russia's complex attack are: geopolitical breakthrough into the orchestra of nations, full control over the post-Soviet space, the so-called Finlandization of Ukraine (i.e., Ukraine's official declaration of neutrality, ban on NATO membership, slowdown of accession to EU), long-term dominance in the European energy market, consolidation in the regions of interest for the Russian Federation (Africa, the Middle East). In fact, it is Putin's dream – revenge for "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century – the collapse of the Soviet Union," that is, the restoration of "Russia's global leadership."

Meanwhile, it is the military instrument of pressure that is key in this Russian hybrid geopolitical operation. If Russia fails to achieve these goals, the Kremlin will become increasingly aggressive in demonstrating its readiness to attack Ukraine again. At the same time, the likelihood that Russia will implement its threats directly depends on Ukraine's ability to effectively counter Russian aggression.

According to my estimates, the most probable developments at this time may be Russia's attempt to conduct a rapid (I would say lightning) operation with air and sea landings from the occupied Crimea to occupy territories in southern Ukraine to create a land corridor from Russia to Crimea, capture the infrastructure for water supplies to the occupied peninsula, as well as, if possible, closure of Ukraine's access

to the sea. Such an operation can be successful only if the top military and political leadership are unable to respond immediately to the actions of the Russian Federation. If Ukraine does not launch a defensive operation in response to Russian aggression within hours of landing, Russia will occupy new territories and issue an ultimatum to Ukraine: if Ukraine dares to counter, Moscow will launch large-scale aggression in all directions.

That's why, in my opinion, the resilience and capacity of the Ukrainian nation to respond immediately to a military attack by the Russian Federation is a key aspect. The situation in February-March 2014, when the state lost its ability to make decisions in the field of defence and security, was ideal for Russia's attack. This is exactly the situation that Russia would like to repeat. This is possible, for example, in case of an outbreak of radical protests in Ukraine (sparked by the deteriorated socio-economic situation, escalated political confrontation, or as a result of a targeted operation by Russian intelligence), which would lead to the inability of the military-political leadership to perform its functions and the loss of control over the security and defence sector. In this case, Russia could once again take advantage of favourable conditions and conduct several rapid tactical operations, and then – as the situation develops – try to expand the zone of occupation with the parallel destruction of Ukraine as a state.

Therefore, my conclusion and forecast for the further development of the situation: Russia will constantly increase the level of military threat against Ukraine, daring to conduct the operation

only in case of internal destabilisation of Ukraine and the inability of the defence system to respond quickly to new Kremlin aggression. Based on this, it is most likely that Russia will use the military threat as an instrument of pressure, along with other hybrid means. With a parallel effort to kick off chaos in Ukraine, using any problems and contradictions that exist in the political, social, or other spheres. We will see soon how successful this strategy will be because time is playing against Russia – the Ukrainian army is getting stronger every day and the Kremlin's efforts to consider military options for settling the "Ukrainian issue" will fade away after a while.



According to my estimates, the most probable developments at this time may be Russia's attempt to conduct a rapid (I would say lightning) operation with air and sea landings from the occupied Crimea to occupy territories in southern Ukraine to create a land corridor from Russia to Crimea, capture the infrastructure for water supplies to the occupied peninsula, as well as, if possible, closure of Ukraine's access to the sea.

"HOT" WINTER 2022: GASOCRACY VS "HOT" WINTER 2022: DEMOCRACY GASOCRACY VS DEMOCRACY

Joe Biden convenes the Summit for Democracy on 9-10 December. Meanwhile, Putin demonstrates the success of his gasocracy. The construction of Nord Stream 2, despite a two-year delay due to U.S. Congress sanctions, active opposition from Poland and Ukraine, and criticism from the European Parliament, has been completed. Russia is now stepping up pressure on Germany and the EU to put the pipeline into operation as soon as possible under the terms of Gazprom. The gas and political pressure is growing along with the simultaneous projection of a military threat to Europe. Russia has long been on the path of war, although Berlin prefers not to notice that.





**MYKHAILO GONCHAR,
PRESIDENT,
CGS STRATEGY XXI**

Escalation for sake of de-escalation

The events unfolding in the European gas market, where Gazprom is the dominant supplier, need to be assessed not so much in the market coordinate system as in the system of military strategy and hybrid special operations of the Putin regime. Over the past seven years, after the beginning of the aggression against Ukraine, Russia has honed them to a new level of perfection.

Russia's doctrine, known in the West as "escalation for sake of de-escalation" and which is tied to the limited use of tactical nuclear weapons, is now being demonstrated in Europe's gas battle-ground in a hybrid way.

The price escalation gradually took place after Biden and Merkel had concluded in July an agreement on Nord Stream 2 beneficial for the Kremlin, reaching the peak values of gas spot price at \$2,000 per 1,000 cubic metres in early October. At the end of October, Russia "suddenly" began to show "care" for Europe. An assertion that Russia wants to reduce gas prices in Europe by 60% was thrown into the

Western media. The beginning of the stage of gas de-escalation took place on the air, in the form of a public order from Putin to the head of Gazprom to start pumping gas to the underground storage facilities in Europe after 8 November. Agree, it looks weird. But it was a show element of the de-escalation algorithm. In fact, the following days proved that was rather an imitation as objective data indicated that Gazprom does not reserve the available free capacities of Ukraine's GTS and the Yamal-Europe route for supplies to the EU. This means that growing seasonal demand in the EU market is not met.

To meet European demand, Gazprom offers more than just price discounts. It proposes a return to the practice of long-term contracts with certain terms. In fact, it is about a mechanism for further market capture. This is done demonstratively, using the example of some Russian satellite countries in Europe – Hungary and Serbia. They have already received cheap gas under new contracts in exchange for refusing transit through Ukraine and switching to the use of TurkStream infrastructure. Russia once again helps Orbán and Vučić to win the upcoming election in exchange for their further services as Russia's "Trojan horses" in Europe. And the Kremlin wants to get more such "Trojan horse

Therefore, Gazprom negotiates with major players in the EU market – Germany's Verbundnetz Gas, Italy's ENI, France's ENGIE – on new, long-term contracts with attractive prices. Thus, by offering European majors cheaper gas than they would receive paying spot price, Gazprom will further expand its presence, which will deepen the EU's dependence on Russia and not only in the energy sector. Russia's share in gas imports to the EU has already hit a record 46.8% in the first half of 2021. After price de-escalation while imposing new long-term contracts with lower prices on European customers, it may turn out that Gazprom's share in gas imports to the EU reaches well over 50%.

Moreover, Russia is rapidly increasing LNG production in the Arctic, which is accompanied by high methane emissions and runs counter to climate policy goals. Already now, Russia's LNG exports exceed 30 million tonnes per year (42 bcma). Most of it goes to the EU market. By 2030, this figure will be over 100 bcma.

Given the natural decline in gas production in Europe, the lack of technical capacity of Norway and Algeria to significantly increase gas supplies to the EU in the next 10 years, and uncertainty with LNG supplies from the US, the EU will become extremely dependent on Russia's supplies.

Geopolitical contours of gasocracy

Russia's growing dependence on China and the kinship of authoritarian regimes in Moscow and Beijing, plans for geopolitical and geoeconomic expansion, lead to a synergy between Russia and China. The bare-bones geopolitical agenda is to get done with transatlantism through Europe's energy separation from the United States and its final switch to Russia. This was greatly facilitated by Merkel-era Germany with her active support for and protection of Nord Stream 2. Even now, when the examples of Moldova and Ukraine make it clear to many in Europe and the United States that Russia uses gas as a weapon, Berlin keeps repeating the opposite and threatens the United States with cooling in relations if sanctions against Nord Stream 2 are renewed.

We should take note of Gazprom's new megaproject Power of Siberia 2, which combines Russia's eastern and western gas transmission systems. So far, Moscow does not have the technical capacity to reorient gas flows from Europe to China, although Russian propaganda assures from time to time that it is possible. But as soon

as the Yamal and East Siberian gas fields are interconnected, such an opportunity will arise. And Russia will take full advantage of this.

Europe will become a target of Russia's constant blackmail due to the threat of export flows to China. Given that China is the largest foreign investor in Russian LNG projects in the Arctic, a joint Russia-China gas dictatorship will actually emerge in Europe.

If Russia, with German assistance, succeeds in commissioning Nord Stream 2, it may resort to unexpected covert actions to make the EU stop resisting Russian gas expansion and, moreover, to make Europe believe that Russian gas is the only option. Russia could make a part of the North Sea offshore gas infrastructure, through which Norwegian gas is supplied to the EU, partly functional or dysfunctional through covert means (either cyber interference or sabotage by the Russian Ministry of Defence's Main Directorate of Deep-Sea Research).

Ultimatum of gasocracy

The gas front is just one of the fronts of Russia's multifrontal offensive against the West. There are several other fronts where Putin is moving quite successfully in the western direction. New fronts have been opened on the eastern flank of NATO and the EU from Belarus direction and in the soft underbelly in the south – the Balkans. The creeping Anschluss of Belarus, with the help of the Minsk proxy regime, the opening of a migrant front against the EU, and the turmoil in BiH with the help of Serbian proxies, all that destabilises Europe by changing the balance of power in favour of Russian gasocracy.

Already this winter, Russia will try to throw Europe into a dilemma. The essence is Russia's maximum assistance in the settlement of Europe's energy and climate problems

along with the launch of a new policy of "relief," revival of the "spirit of Helsinki" in exchange for agreeing to the Anschluss of Belarus, de-sovereignising Ukraine, recognising Crimea as Russian territory, terminating NATO and EU enlargement, and lifting sanctions.

This is what fits into Yalta 2, which the Kremlin wanted to implement quickly back in 2014. In fact, the Putin regime no longer conceals its intentions. The leading mastermind of Putinism, Vladislav Surkov, openly points out that "yet another division of spheres of influence is needed ... And it will definitely take place (sooner or later, formally or informally, secretly or openly)."

The year 2022 is significant for Russia as it will mark the 100th anniversary of the creation of the USSR, the collapse of which was defined by Putin as the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century. Obviously, he longs for the reincarnation of the USSR in a new form. Ukraine, with its revived statehood and albeit imperfect democracy, stands in the way. Ukraine's transformation into a non-aligned (con) federal (quasi) state as part of the new Union State of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus – this is what the Putin regime wants to get in 2022. In practice, this means the destruction of Ukraine. First, they will try to do that through energy blackmail and blockade, forcing us to surrender. If this plan fails, then through separate agreements with the United States on the sale of Ukraine through "coercion to the Minsk agreements" with the tacit consent of gas-deficient Europe. If this fails, then through armed intervention, perhaps, disguised as a peacekeeping operation.

If to put Russia's gas, military, and political preparations together, the message from the Kremlin to the West is deciphered as follows: "We intend to gather the lost territories of Russia. Ukraine is not Europe. Winter war is not your war. Just watch. You may express

concern. Do not interfere, otherwise, you will end up without gas or there will be little and it will be expensive. You have already seen how we can do this. But we make sure that Europe feels warm and comfortable. We are ready for more after launching Nord Stream 2. Do not hinder us. Biden will not help you. Be pragmatic. Russian gas in the European house is better than American LNG with the summit for democracy."

Termination of Nord Stream 2 through the toughest U.S. sanctions will not persuade Russia to abandon its aggressive policy, but it will slow down its further expansion by demonstrating transatlantic solidarity and U.S. leadership not only at the Summit for Democracy. Moreover, in addition to the summit, Transatlantic LNG-Bridge is needed this winter in the form of LNG supplies to Europe. Otherwise, the EU will not survive, Member States will surrender one-by-one to the Kremlin's gasocracy. The fate of Europe and the transatlantic world is now again in the hands of the United States and the non-Schröderised part of European political class. The cold winter of 2022 has every reason to become hot and decisive in the struggle of Putin's corruptogenic, aggressive gasocracy against the divided Western democracy. Solidarity with Ukraine is needed not only for the sake of Ukraine, it is first and foremost a test for the United States and Europe on whether they can defend their principles.



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1922-2022



**EX-HEAD
OF FOREIGN
INTELLIGENCE
SERVICE OF
UKRAINE,
ARMY GENERAL**

**MYKOLA MALOMUZH:
"PUTIN CAN LAY
CLAIM TO ALL
OF UKRAINE"**

EX-HEAD OF FOREIGN
INTELLIGENCE SERVICE
OF UKRAINE, ARMY
GENERAL MYKOLA
MALOMUZH: "PUTIN
CAN LAY CLAIM TO ALL
OF UKRAINE"

INTERVIEW



**KATERYNA BRATKO,
FREELANCE
JOURNALIST, OBSERVER,
INTERVIEWER WITH
MORE THAN 15 YEARS
OF EXPERIENCE IN
JOURNALISM. AREA OF
EXPERTISE: INTERVIEWS
WITH POLITICIANS,
HIGH-RANKING
OFFICIALS, OPINION
LEADERS, EXPERTS,
ATHLETES**

Since 2014, a new era of the struggle for Ukraine's independence has begun. With arms in hand, Ukrainians conquer back their territories, the right to live independently and associate their future with the European Union. The last days have been extremely tense for our country: according to intelligence sources in different countries, Russia is considering a scenario of a rapid, large-scale offensive operation against Ukraine in several directions.

Mykola Malomuzh, Former Head of the Foreign Intelligence Service of Ukraine, General of the Army of Ukraine, Adviser to the President (2010-2014), has repeatedly participated in talks with Putin. In an interview with Kateryna Bratko, he told how to properly and convincingly defend Ukraine's position in difficult and tense situations.

Mr. Malomuzh, recently Bloomberg, citing its own sources, reported an increase in Russian troops and artillery for a rapid invasion of Ukraine from various locations. In your opinion, why is the Kremlin taking such steps?

The Kremlin has chosen a new strategic position: today, it is a powerful global player. According to it, Russia has the right to control certain territories - Ukraine, Belarus and the former CIS countries, as well as the Middle East, such as Syria and Iraq. That is, Russia and Putin are trying to follow the model of restoring power that existed in the USSR. Therefore, the countries that were members of the Union, according to their version, should be under their control.

But Ukraine has chosen the path of European integration - by the way, it is enshrined in our Constitution - and not a return to the USSR?

According to Russia, the United States, the European Union, Turkey, China, Japan, Brazil, NATO and other international players must agree with their desire to control Ukraine. To achieve this, the Kremlin is building up its military resources, especially nuclear ones, which are commensurate with the U.S. ones. In this situation, Russia is betting on them, openly demonstrating its possibilities. First of all, not so much at the border, but the fact that they have a powerful military potential, and that they are ready for large-scale military operations and already have hyper-nuclear weapons, which are now available only in Russia and the United States. The Kremlin speculates on the availability of such weapons and makes strong messages, especially in meetings with Trump, Biden, and other world leaders. That is why Americans and Europeans reckon with it.



The Russians also have a lot of leverage over Europeans. In particular, gas and oil. The strategic raw material is titanium. It is needed by giants, including arms manufacturers. That is, Russia has a strong strategic position. However, in this situation, we see that Russia violates international law and human rights. The Kremlin is cynical about Ukraine; it is conducting military operations, annexing territories, and so on. But Russia would like the United States and NATO to agree to a certain status quo, that Crimea belongs to them, and there is a civil war in Donbas. In general, the Kremlin uses the east of our country as a format for destabilising Ukraine and threatening the stability of Europe. For this, information wars are being waged.

Russia likes to flirt with military muscles, demonstrating its power to the world...

The Kremlin is acting in a complex manner. They see that Europe and America are reacting sharply on military operations, so they are actively conducting exercises in Russia, as well as in Belarus and Crimea. Russia flirted with muscles last year, but the U.S. president warned against such a scenario and talked to Putin. At the same time, Putin also needs such negotiations, since they are very important for Russia. I think the Kremlin leader is showing strength to force us and the partners on whom this depends not to form a position on European integration and joining NATO.

Could Putin resort to open military conflict over Russia's reluctance for Ukraine to integrate into Europe?

One of Russia's scenarios for destabilising the situation in Ukraine is a military one. Their troops can enter either a separate region, such as the southeast one, or the entire territory of Ukraine. This is possible if they see that the situation here is unbalanced and the country is unmanageable. In this regard, our political leadership must harmonise society by uniting it, and, together with European partners, clearly defend our positions, including diplomatic, economic, energy, financial, and defence ones.

We see how Russia is manipulating the world, creating frozen conflicts in Ukraine and Abkhazia. In which European country do you think Putin can escalate the conflict?

At the moment, I see that Putin can lay claim to all of Ukraine due to a change in political leadership. This is one of the scenarios they are actively working on.

The Kremlin has long said that they have a scenario according to which they can enter not only the southeast region, but also Halychyna. But we have strong support from NATO and a number of powerful countries in this bloc. In the event of open military aggression, they will no longer behave neutrally and will not be limited to expressing concern.

Do you think that Russian society is mentally ready for an open war with Ukraine?

Most of the Russian society and representatives of different regions will be extremely concerned about such developments. This will be negatively perceived by their citizens and they may rise up against Putin, who has a maximum of 56% support. Not everything is calm there. There are also many negative scenarios in politics. Even in the large oligarchic sector, there are many disaffected.

After all, large sums of money are under the control of Western intelligence services and major financial intelligence. And this is more than 1 trillion 250 billion Russian Rubles controlled by the intelligence services of the United States, the United Kingdom, and other countries. This is another lever of influence on Russia that can be used as an argument in negotiations. Together with our European partners, we must work out a scenario for the defence of Ukraine. Of course, the consolidation of our allies is needed.

We can even give Putin scenarios for getting out of the current situation, so that it takes into account, first of all, the interests of Ukraine. To some extent, this will coincide with Russia's interests. We need to convey to them that war is a disastrous situation for everyone.

You have already mentioned such an effective tool of Russia as information wars. These troops morally "prepare" society, in particular the European one, for the Kremlin's illegal actions...

First, the Russian Federation has a very powerful model of information hybrid warfare. Russian information troops have chosen an



at-
tack
position.
Their con-
cept is to fight,
accusing all other
countries of being aggres-
sive towards Russia, lthough it is
not true. But the Kremlin is using
this paradigm, blaming everyone
but itself. We and the Europeans
have chosen a position when in-
formation resources should con-
sult on the prospects for the de-
velopment of a peaceful world,
not war.

Still, why don't Ukraine and Eu- rope oppose these information wars?

Russia finances its information
resources much better than the
Europeans. No one in Europe in-
vests public resources in advoca-
cy campaigns, especially against
other countries. Russia is doing
so. They have a powerful free re-
source at the expense of oil dollars,
gas schemes, minerals, and so on.
These are all millions of dollars.

All Russian media outlets are
funded by huge corporations, for
example, Rosneft, Gazprom. It is
extremely difficult to win a war in
such competition. Russia is filling

Eu-
rope,
and not
only Europe,
with the informa-
tion it needs. Recently I was
in France and Germany, and there
were no Ukrainian channels, but
there were three Russian ones. In
fact, the Ukrainian position is not
represented in these countries.

The enormous financial and
information power, the work of
special services of the Russian
Federation, which have exten-
sive experience in waging wars,
including information ones, are
yielding results.

The Russians not only openly
use their information resources,
but open many of them where
foreign capital is involved, some-
times even democratically, but
they form a position of support
for the Kremlin. It may also be the
presentation of Russia not as an
aggressor, but as a country ready
to take constructive actions. So it
is difficult to resist them, but it is
necessary!



*The Kremlin has
chosen a new
strategic position:
today, it is a
powerful global
player. According
to it, Russia has
the right to control
certain territories
- Ukraine, Belarus
and the former CIS
countries, as well
as the Middle East,
such as Syria and
Iraq.*

ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST: IS RUSSIA REALLY PREPARING TO INVADE UKRAINE?

The first serious build-up of Russian troops along Ukraine's eastern borders took place in March 2014. "In connection with the destabilisation in Ukraine," the Russian Federation conducted urgent exercises in the Kursk, Belgorod, Rostov, and Bryansk regions, while the occupation of Crimea was going on in parallel. After these manoeuvres held in the regions bordering Ukraine, they began to reactivate military bases, which had been abandoned since Soviet times. Thus, the contingent on the potential "Ukrainian front" began to grow (three new, motorised infantry divisions with a permanent location near Ukraine were deployed in three border regions). In the summer of 2014, these troops were partially used during the hostilities in Donbas. Their warehouses became a resource for arming the "militia" of the self-proclaimed republics.

In 2014 and all subsequent years, NATO intelligence and Ukrainian special services warned of a possible Russian invasion of areas outside Donbas. Different directions of the attack were named. The first one was the southern "corridor" from Mariupol to Odesa, which would deprive Ukraine of access to the sea and solve the issue of providing Crimea with fresh water. The

second was a march on Kharkiv, Dnipro, and Zaporizhzhia, which would take away a significant part of Ukraine's scientific and industrial potential. And finally, the invasion from the northern Chernihiv direction (and with it from Belarus) - the shortest way to Kyiv and the key to the occupation, if not all, then at least the Left-Bank Ukraine and a return to the map of the 18th century.

According to Lieutenant General Mykhailo Zabrodsky, a former airborne commander and now an MP from the European Solidarity party, four components - informational, political, economic, and military - are important to modern warfare. If you look at the current situation on the Russian-Ukrainian border, the most noticeable are two components - military (build-up of troops) and informational. After the victory of Volodymyr Zelensky in the presidential election, there was a slight decrease in the level of propaganda on Russian TV channels; however, as he began to move away from pacifist rhetoric, calls for "Ukraine's liberation from the fascist regime" intensified significantly. If we watch some of the most popular Russian TV shows, there is no doubt that Russian citizens are morally prepared for the need for war against Ukraine. The motives remain the same: to prevent NATO enlargement, to protect the Russian-speaking population, and to establish his-



**STEPAN NAZARENKO,
A UKRAINIAN
JOURNALIST,
PUBLICIST,
VOLUNTEER**

torical justice in relation to "one people." If we imagine a situation where Russian troops are ordered to cross the Ukrainian border, public opinion in Russia will be ready for it, and the majority of the population will approve such a decision by the authorities (as it was during the occupation of Crimea or the war against Georgia in 2008).

As for the military component, there are about 100,000 Russian troops near the Ukrainian border. This is about the same number that was concentrated during the previous aggravation in April 2021. Both then and now, Moscow's explanations were of the same type: we are sending troops across our territory, where we consider it necessary; we are not preparing an invasion of Ukraine. Of course, such assurances do not reassure anyone. Western intelligence, independent think tanks and media outlets have repeatedly warned of the possibility of a new wave of Russian aggression against Ukraine. A recent study by the Conflict Intelligence Team found that this time Russia is withdrawing troops slowly but more covertly (most movements occur at night), and the military build-up is difficult to explain by the rearmament of troops stationed there. Analysts said Russia could accumulate enough troops to invade Ukraine early next year.

Kyrylo Budanov, head of the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, shares the same opinion. According to him, Russia may go on the offensive in January-February 2022. The military component will be ready by then. "Russia is preparing an attack, preceded by a series of psychological operations already underway in order to destabilise Ukraine and undermine its ability to defend itself, including protests against COVID-19 vaccination and "Wagnergate." They want to stir up riots with protests and rallies that show that people are against the government," Budanov said in an interview with Military Times.

For the invasion, a certain number of troops is not enough (in this sense, Russia always has a significant advantage). The important thing is casus belli. Russian officials such as Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and others

often repeat the thesis of "NATO provocations" in Ukraine. By this, the Kremlin understands joint exercises in the Black Sea or the use of Bayraktar drones by the Ukrainian military. It follows that any joint manoeuvres, acquisition and use of weapons made in NATO countries can be regarded by Russia as "aggression of the West," and then the invasion will be conditioned by "the prevention of NATO insidious plans." In fact, this happened in recent Soviet history: the introduction of troops into Afghanistan in 1979 was justified by the need to "get ahead of the Americans." However, a more convincing argument for a new phase of the war could still be the destabilisation within Ukraine itself, which Kyrylo Budanov speaks of. Serious street riots can create a convenient information pretext - another political crisis occurs in Ukraine, so Moscow is going to "save" it. But protests or Wagnergate are insufficient reasons. Full-fledged separatist uprisings of the 2014 model are also unlikely to happen, because the Ukrainian special services learned to counteract such insidious scenarios at the "embryonic" stage.

The economic argument for aggression may be based on the fact that the Ukrainian gas transportation system is no longer playing a strategic role in Russia's energy exports. Consequently, another obstacle to invasion is removed. However, the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline remains uncommissioned. Military aggression against Ukraine is unlikely to accelerate the start of this project, so the build-up of troops may be just a "muscle game" in the bidding for gas exports to Europe.

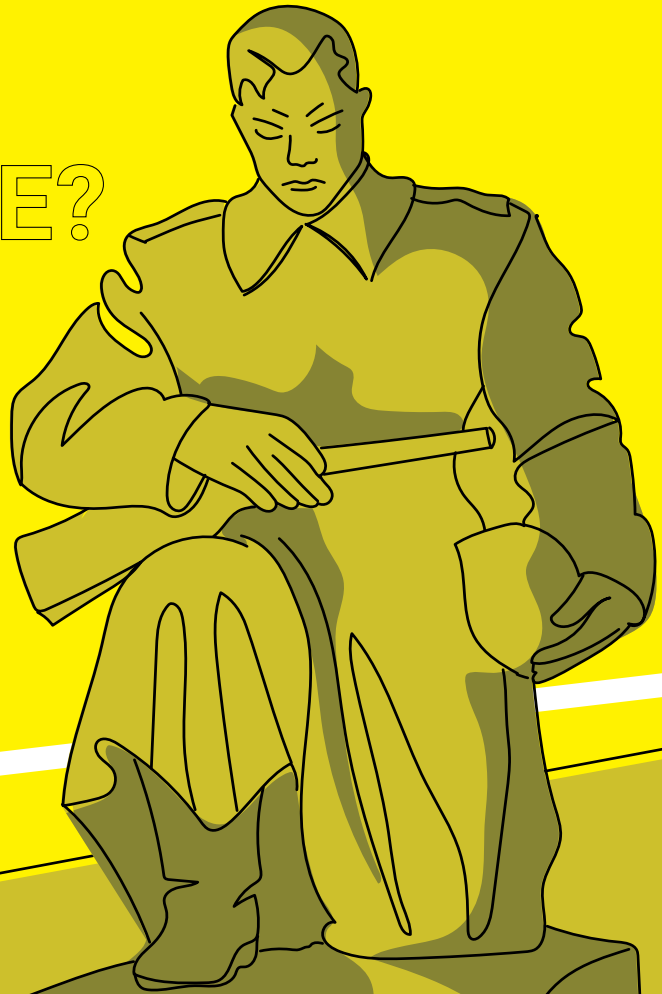
Thus, it can be stated that among the four components of invasion, the Russians have prepared only two well: military and informational. Political and economic ones remain insufficiently rolled out. At the same time, the build-up of troops and weapons near Ukraine's borders is also a test of the readiness of Ukrainian partners to help it in the event of Russian aggression. The reaction of the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom demonstrate that these countries have drawn conclusions since 2014 and are ready to act more decisively and strengthen Ukraine's defence capabilities. Paris and Berlin remain more moderate in their assessments and actions, but they also speak of the inadmissibility of further aggression and new sanctions if it increases.

If the concentration of Russian troops turns out to be another attempt "to play on nerves" and a mobilisation measure of the BARS (combat army reserve) system, then this will become the next stage of a new Cold War, which may be periodically accompanied by provocations and low-intensity conflicts such as the current hostilities in Donbas.

PLAN OR
COINCIDENCE?

**PLAN OR
COINCIDENCE?**

PLAN OR
COINCIDENCE?



Russia has a history of considering anyone who does not support Russian views and actions as enemies of Russia. The Kremlin is known to back the murder of journalists, businessmen, and activists who speak out against the Russian government. If Moscow treats Russian citizens this way, who won't Moscow consider an enemy once it invades Ukraine? And what will the Kremlin do with those, whom it has probably already identified as "enemies" in Ukraine?

Recently, organisation **StopFake** reminded in one of its pieces that Putin can arrange a "Ukrainian Srebrenica massacre" in Donbas. "The Kremlin organised a search for 'killed civilians' to stage a show about 'ethnic cleansing'," says StopFake[1].

In 2014, so-called Latvian human rights activist Einars Graudins showed the OSCE group a mass burial of 400 civilians and rebels from Donetsk who had been allegedly killed by "Ukrainian hit squads." [2] The Kremlin further used that fake story in its propaganda to demonise Ukrainians. Thus, in April 2021, Dmitry Peskov stated that "a situation similar to the tragedy of Bosnian Srebrenica may take place in Donbas." [3]

In 2017 and 2019, the Kremlin stated that the control of the border must not be returned to Ukraine to prevent Kyiv from ethnic cleansing in Donbas.

However, it is the Kremlin that prepares for mass burials in mass graves.

On 13 September 2021, GOSTR 42.7.01 – 2021 "Civil Defense. Immediate burial of corpses in wartime and peacetime" Russian national standard was introduced. This standard should come into force on 1 February 2022 [4] (according to some data, on 2 January 2022). [5] Interestingly, this is not the first document instructing how to arrange "mass graves." For example, on 31 March 2021, Resolution No. 0495/18-03 on the urgent burial of corpses in wartime and large-scale emergencies was issued by the Chekhovsk municipal district of the Moscow region. In addition, the Resolution on the urgent burial of corpses in wartime in the territory of the Vorobyovsk rural settlement of the Saki district of the Republic of Crimea was issued in Crimea in 2016. [6] These resolutions established special funeral commissions.

But the decisive thing is that now that the "commissions" are established and the first steps towards the practical implementation of mass burials in several cities are taken, the Russian national standard is being introduced. One could assume that the pandemic prompted the Kremlin to do so. But the pandemic has already lasted for two years and does not require digging mass graves.

So, what exactly is the Kremlin preparing for?

[1] <https://twitter.com/StopFakingNews/status/1464670358657650697>

[2] <https://maxpark.com/community/5512/content/3020837>

[3] <https://ria.ru/20210409/donbass-1727519101.html>

[4] <https://www.mchs.gov.ru/uploads/document/2021-11-24/e0da15f4ca7e5cf789ccdb0ca7fb4952.pdf>

[5] https://allgosts.ru/13/200/gost_r_42.7.01-2021

[6] https://rk.gov.ru/file/pub/pub_320474.pdf?1.0.41

ФЕДЕРАЛЬНОЕ АГЕНТСТВО
ПО ТЕХНИЧЕСКОМУ РЕГУЛИРОВАНИЮ И МЕТРОЛОГИИ



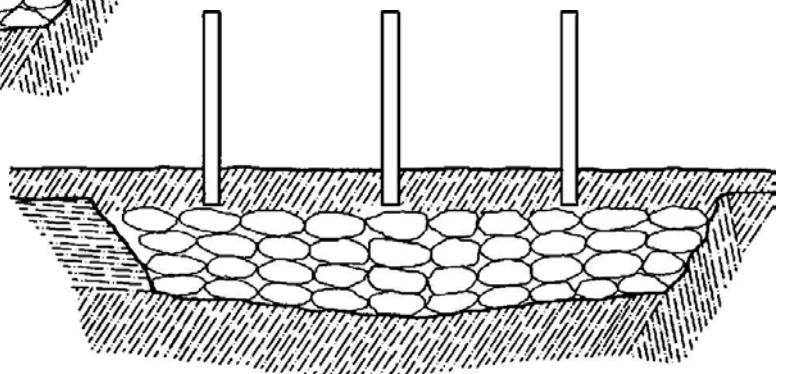
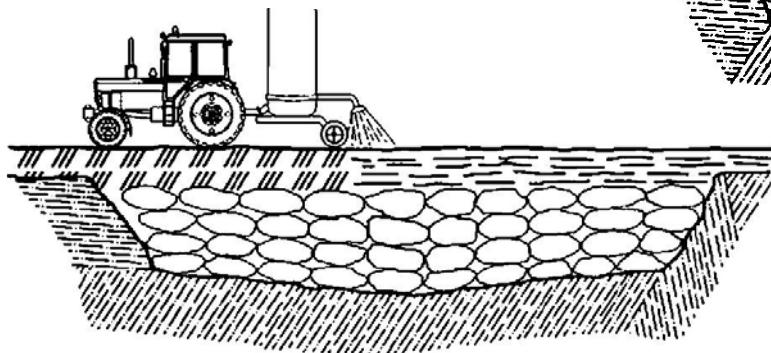
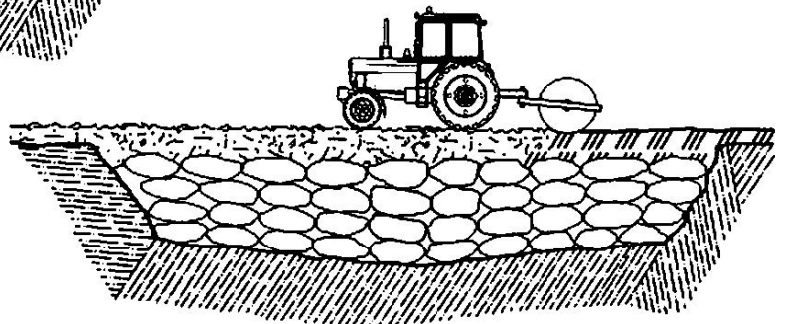
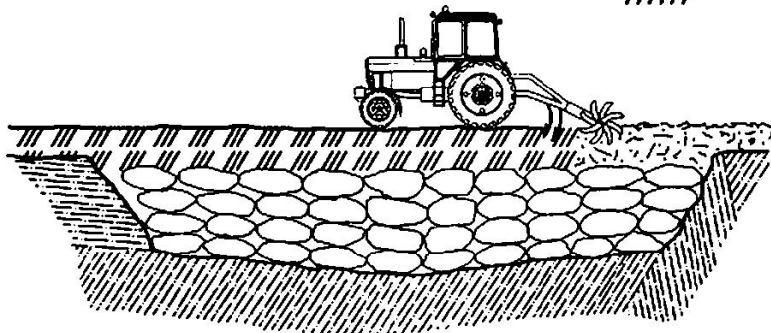
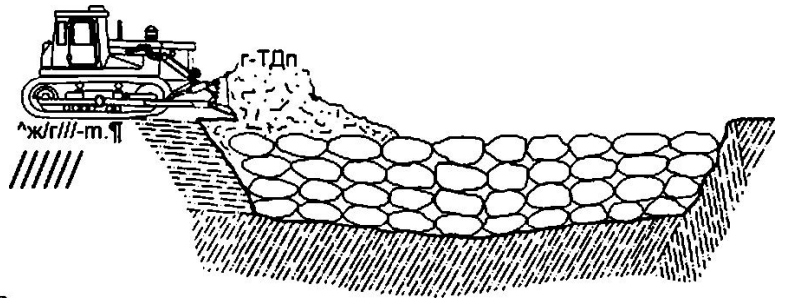
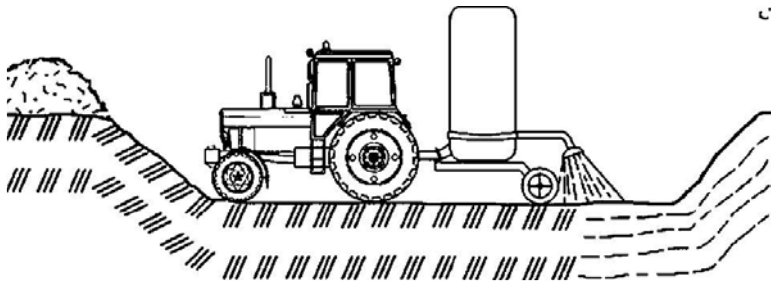
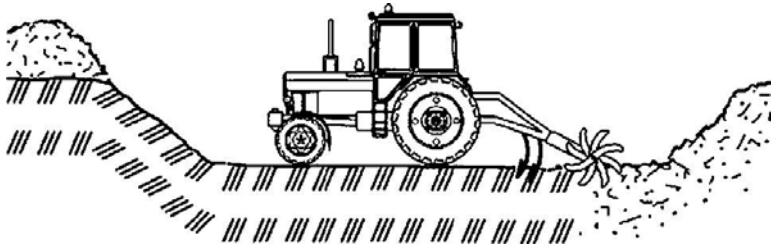
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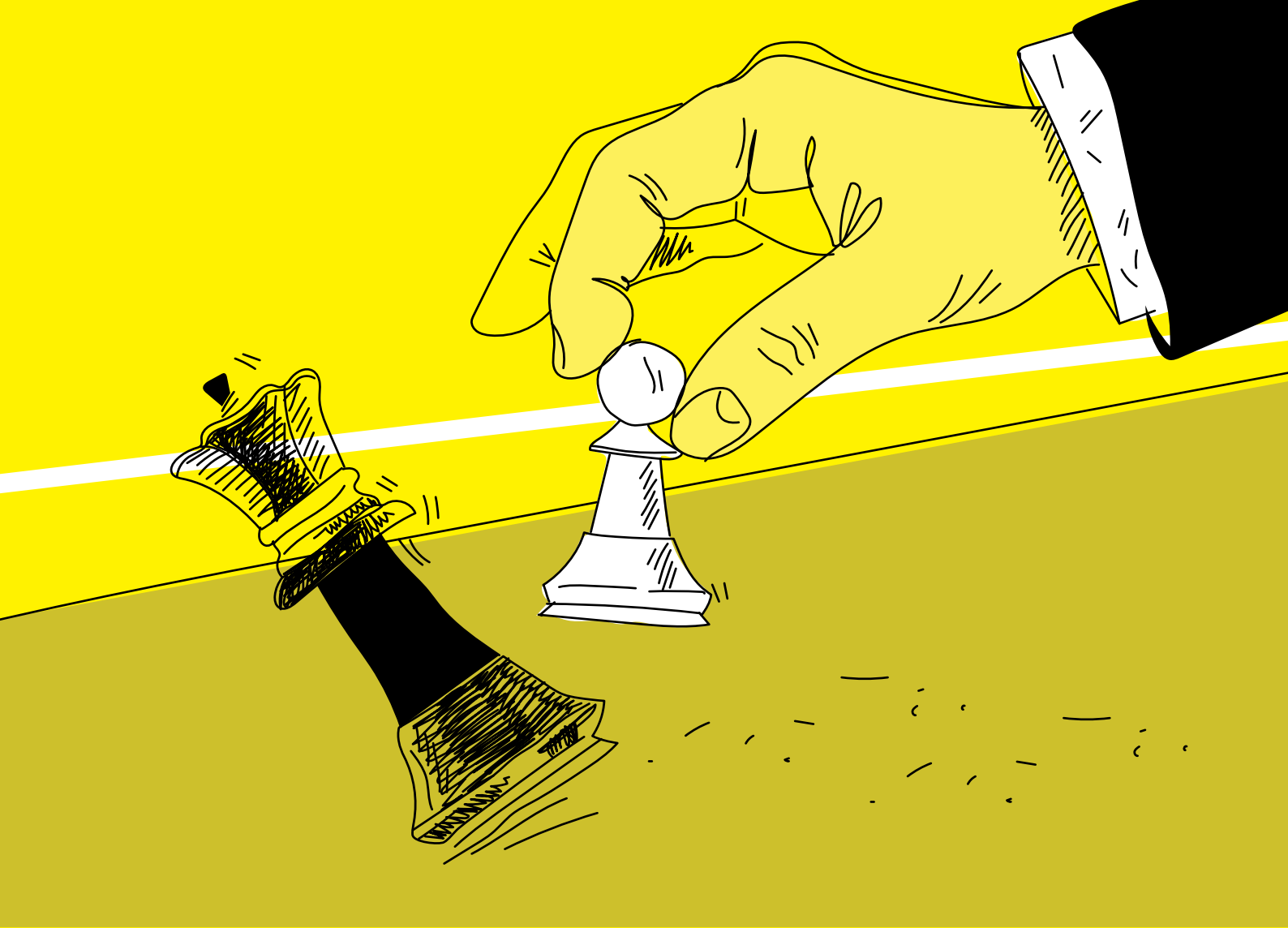
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В ВОЕННОЕ И МИРНОЕ ВРЕМЯ**
Общие требования

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2021





SIMULTANEOUS PLAY

SIMULTANEOUS PLAY

**OLEKSANDR KRAIEV,
DIRECTOR OF NORTH
AMERICA PROGRAM
IN FOREIGN POLICY
COUNCIL
"UKRAINIAN
PRISM"**



The Russian Federation continues to put pressure on Ukraine and the West. Its goals have long been known – the creation of permanent controlled chaos, which would be convenient and understandable only to itself. Although we understand the goals, we are still trying to "read" Moscow's strategy and understand the key – how to respond effectively to this new reality of confrontation.

Chess with new rules

It has been popular since the Middle Ages to compare political and military strategy with chess. Back then you could really find a lot in common – gradual and slow moves, a common set of rules for players, open battlefield. Chess, of course, mimicked such a comparison, and pieces were called "knights," "bishops," "kings," and "queens."

But both technology and politics have undergone some changes since ancient times. And today, if we want to follow the analogy with chess, we must look at politics as a simultaneous play. The boards not only lie in front of the international grandmasters on the tables but are also placed in all available dimensions, both real and conditional. And if we talk about the game against Moscow, while we consider the next move with a chess piece, the Kremlin begins to handle cards.

Simultaneous threats in many thematic and narrative areas underpin the current strategy of the Russian Federation. The multi-vector nature of the created threats must not make it possible to respond to each individual threat without the risk of provoking an escalation in other threats. The diversity of threats, in turn, prevents the unification of response and makes opponents disperse their resources. Each individual threat can be used at any given time as a decoy for another threat – in a way it is convenient for the organiser of this game of chaos.

The main problem with such a geopolitical game is simultaneously the main advantage of such an approach: the rule is the absence of rules. The rules are flexible and offer various approaches to the use of tools; they are shaped according to the situation in each individual context. Let's then try to discuss the strategy of the Kremlin trickster and discover what rules he outlined for this crisis.

Queen up the sleeve

The build-up of troops at the border with Ukraine has been hitting the headlines of the world media over the past month. Although the first reports on aggressive overtones from the U.S. and British intelligence have been ignored by the Ukrainian political elite, full internal and external preparations for a potential winter invasion are already underway.

In parallel, another situation developed, which at one point attracted the attention of both Western politicians and journalists – the crisis with Middle Eastern migrants on the Belarus–Poland border. The issue of migrants and responsibility for their humanitarian situation has become a sort of stigma of European space. In many respects, the Russian Federation contributed to this, by inflating the negative situation with migrants in information and economic terms, focusing on the negative narratives it needed.

It soon became clear that the creation of this situation was an element of distraction from the build-up of troops on the border with Ukraine. But these are just two games out of a whole bulk of political combinations. At that time, namely on 15 November 2021, the Russian military destroyed the old Soviet Tselina-D type satellite on orbit with their latest anti-satellite missile (it could be the s-500 system or the A-235 Nudol strategic missile system – Russians did not disclose all the details of the test). The destruction of the satellite on orbit creates a real space shrapnel-type projectile: every fragment of a satellite that travels in Earth orbit becomes a kind of kinetic projectile capable of hitting other space objects, including the International Space Station, where the American crew stays currently.

Just two days later, on 18 November, a new escalation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict began, in which Armenia tried its best to involve Russia (which, in turn, ignored its CSTO commitments). Azerbaijan and Armenia accused each other of provocations, but it was the Azerbaijanis who immediately gained the tactical initiative and managed to expand the sphere of their influence and gain control in the Armenian-occupied parts of Nagorno-Karabakh area.

Today, we have two situations that need to be covered up and two situations that are informationally covered. The first case is the build-up of troops on the border with Ukraine and the refusal to help its ally. The second, provocative and popular in the media, is the destruction of the satellite and the sufferings of migrants on the Polish border. First case issues require Moscow's strategic approach to implement them, second ones though are aimed solely at the information agenda and attracting attention to the provocative and sensitive topics for the Western media landscape. Pushing for one of the narratives – for example, the strengthening of the Ukrainian armed forces in the face of the threat of Russian invasion – provoked increasing pressure on migrants and the flow of counter-accusations of creating a humanitarian crisis. In this move, Russia got considerable support from the already vassal regime of self-proclaimed president of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko, who allowed the blurring of the subjective field of conflict and thus took a part of the reputational and informational brunt.

How to drive the Kremlin into a stalemate?

Unfortunately, we can't talk right now about driving the Putin regime into a stalemate. This is a matter of strategic prospect and many separate games have yet to take place on all possible platforms. What we can do for now, is to rely on the termination of Moscow's hybrid strategy with a series of counterattacks and deterrents that will create conditions under which the continuation of such a strategy will not bring the desired result and its maintenance will be unreasonably expensive.

What steps need to be taken? First, we need to learn to respond flexibly and outside of the box. Present-day problems require new solutions. Standard measures in the form of sanctions, entry bans, political restrictions on contacts and new projects are basic tools that should undoubtedly remain the basis of the deterrence. However, at a time when our opponent is changing tactics, we cannot rely on old measures alone. Why not, for example, try to support the repressed national movements inside Russia? Or would it be superfluous to consider the environmental component of Russia's energy projects – not only the notorious Nord Stream 2, but also that of Nord Stream, Yamal-Europe, and South Stream? How would Moscow react to the West's attempt to codify and shed light on all the war crimes of the Russian regime and to compile a list of war criminals? All these steps may seem small but when taken in a system they can reproduce the level and nature of the attack itself and, therefore, give it a decent response.

Second, we have to regain the initiative. Certain rules of conduct of a battle are transposed at all levels – from the usual duel of two angry fighters to a hybrid confrontation of world powers. One of these rules teaches us that to win you need to keep the initiative in your hands and make the enemy react to your actions. In this way, the opponent will do what you need and will not have time to strategise. In early 2021, the West, through the active geopolitical movements, new exercises, and increased cooperation with non-NATO and EU allies, was able to seize the strategic initiative and force Russia to respond to new circumstances rather than create them.

Third, we should be united. This is a superpower that the West and its partners can set against almost any threat. Much of Russia's aggressive action is aimed at destroying a united position and creating an alternative within the West – Russian, ultra-conservative and anti-Western alternative. Therefore, political cooperation, unity in strategic issues, and a coordinated position in conflict situations is the basis for response to the current hybrid threats.

In the situation of modern conflicts, the most important thing to gain victory is to maintain our understanding of reality. The versatility of understanding the reality is used by autocrats and opponents of democracies to distort the essence of concepts and to uphold their aggression. Similar tactic is used in the current aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and its Western partners. We will be able to win this modern war only by understanding a genuine reality of what is happening and having the courage and coordination to respond to these threats.



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PROACTIVITY AND SWITCHING THE MINDSET FOR UKRAINE

**OLEVS NIKERS,
BAL TIC SECURITY
FOUNDATION,
PRESIDENT [1]**



Russia must face real consequences if it directs its forces against Ukraine. Concentration of the Russian army on the border is a very strong cause for deep concern for the international community and NATO. This is the second time this year that Russia has carried out a large and unusual concentration of troops in the region. We observe Russian tanks, artillery armed units, drones and electronic armament systems, as well as combat-ready units. The current concentration of Russian troops is similar to that experienced in April, when Russia concentrated around 100,000 troops on the Ukrainian border.

Ukraine is not a member of NATO and is not covered by the Collective Defense arrangements, but the Alliance should send a clear message to Russia that NATO is here to defend and protect its partners. There are also some strong messages that Ukraine can send to Russia.

In February 2014, Russia occupied the Ukrainian Crimean peninsula. Since April 2014, Moscow-backed and armed militants, saboteurs and soldiers of Russia's regular units have occupied large areas in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions in eastern Ukraine. In the war in eastern Ukraine, already more than 13,000 people have been killed and almost three million have fled.

Punishing Russia for annexing Crimea and destabilising Eastern Ukraine, the EU, the US and other Western countries have imposed sanctions on many of Russia's top officials, people of the Kremlin's immediate circle, and Russia's financial, defence, energy and other sectors.

Already in the first months of the conflict, when the Russian invasion of the Crimean peninsula spread to mainland Ukraine, the international community was convinced enough of the Kremlin's engagement and they imposed sanctions on Moscow. Meanwhile, the International Criminal Court in The Hague recognized Russia's involvement in hostilities in eastern Ukraine in 2016. Consequently, Russia withdrew from the International Criminal Court. As D. Peskov has pointed out, even a simple dialogue between Russian and Ukrainian officials is problematic when the positions of the two sides on the nature of the conflict are so different. It seems that Putin is not

at all interested in finding a compromise and a settlement with Ukraine, but is wholeheartedly committed to subjugating it. This is clearly confirmed by Putin himself and other leading Russian officials.

How does Ukraine defend itself from someone who refuses to reach peace? Many commentators and analysts say that with the current escalation of the conflict, Putin wants to secure all the options available in his confrontation games with the West. These options, among others, must include a major conventional war in Europe. What are the options for Ukraine and Europe? Eventual responses include "do nothing", respecting "Russia's rights" to prevail in its "back yard"; demonstrate "severe consequences" for Russia; and strengthen the regime of the sanctions against Moscow. Lately, the potential usage of the NATO's Response Force is also mentioned, if Russia would launch a military attack against Ukraine.

All these opportunities basically mean sitting down and doing nothing or waiting calmly for Russia's future behaviour. Is it not too much of a luxury when Ukraine's statehood and regional security and peace in Europe are at stake? Let us not talk now about the revolutionary new plan of action, but let us imagine the theoretical possibilities, which, at least conceptually and strategically, would allow Ukraine to keep up with "options" for Russia.

Let's be honest about the fact that the Russian leader counts with the only and most credible actor that has serious warfighting capability in Europe – the United States. It must be a great temptation to challenge this power on the current grounds,

[1] www.balticsecurity.eu

especially taking into account all the relative successes in the conflict with Georgia (2008) and everything that has been “accomplished” so far in Ukraine since 2014. All the steps that would require “imminent” response and “devastating” consequences to Russia from the European and Transatlantic body, actually, are already being conducted by Russia brilliantly. In return, Russia has received only “peanuts” being thrown at Putin’s face with some economic sanctions and “hard talk” by major western leaders, who at the same time proceed with abundant gas arrangements and other contracts for Western Europe. It pushes Putin to think that in real life there will be no consequences, no real and forcible push-back, no real action that would stop the aggression. The European and NATO’s military is much stronger and more capable than Russia’s army. Yet, the weakness of the European and American collectivity comes in the form of political disagreement, weakly centralised and rather fragmented command and control, economic interests that prevail over ideological values. These are just some of the evidence, which would let Putin through the second or the third stages of his aggressive policies in Eastern Europe. It would be really hard to say when and where his appetite would stop. Major war in Ukraine would be something that Russian army generals would be extremely interested in, in order to boost their combat experience, considering that the Ukrainian army is a very equal opponent, taking into account operations in Eastern Ukraine.

Let us ask ourselves whether it is possible to pass something to Russia, an idea that would make it seriously rethink or completely abandon the threat of military intrusion into Ukraine. One such proactive option is to show the nation's ability to be ready on everything to defend its country. It should show a credible readiness, cohesiveness and capability to act not only in a reaction mode, but to be more proactive in thinking and

doing more than anyone could expect. In this respect, one of the best examples in recent history is the state of Israel, whose nation’s heroism and leadership in the Six Day War of 1967 laid a solid ground for Israeli statehood. In international relations, a pre-emptive strike is a military action taken by a country in response to a threat from another country - the purpose of this is to stop the threatening country from carrying out its threat. Before this military attack by Israel, Egypt announced a policy of hostility towards Israel. It put its military forces on maximum alert, expelled the UN Emergency force from the Sinai border area, strengthened its forces on the border with Israel, announced the closure of the Straits of Tiran to Israeli ships, and formed mutual support treaties with Iraq, Jordan and Syria.

Theoretically, and in practice, we may observe many parallels, which may be attributed to the situation of the Russian and Ukrainian conflict. Not as a plan of an action in the first place, but as a switch in the mindset. That is foremost how the concept and the meaning of the “preemptive war” can be utilised in the case of Ukraine. It should be said, if not really done in terms of military operation, something should be really done in terms of strengthening Ukraine’s ability to resist.

The ongoing situation of Russia’s pressure on Ukraine reminded me of a conversation in Washington, D.C., a few years ago. I discussed with a representative of the think tank community, what the options for the Baltic countries and Latvia would be in case of Russia’s military buildup and imminent threat to Ukraine’s national security, considering that all the Russia troops are stationed in Pskov, the Russian Western military district. “Why not strike the units in Pskov preemptively if you see that they are about to come?” – I was asked. My reaction to this question was a little giggle. This is,

so to say, a very extreme approach, especially, considering the size of the Latvian army, or all of the Baltic armies combined. Let’s say that from the perspective of the military operation that would sound like a “little unrealistic” option for now, but there is something compelling about the concept and the way of thinking that this strategy would require. It makes you think differently, and somehow you find yourself out of the “trap” set by the adversary when you begin to take it proactively. And this is how the small and young state of Israel did it in 1967. It came up with a rather “absurd” idea of a military operation against Egypt at that time, considering how imminent the threat to Israeli national security was, based on the evidence available. As a result Israel struck first against a much stronger adversary and all of its allies. It was not to show that they would certainly succeed, but it was a clear message to the world that this nation is going to do everything to survive.

In modern Ukraine, and in the present situation that Ukraine is facing, the concept of “preemptiveness” should be considered as a broader concept. Ukrainian military strategy, planning and operations, command and control, political leadership and societal resilience should “preempt” anything that Russian planners would consider as weak links of the chain. Europe and the United states are there to help to fulfil this mission with advice and necessary resources. If it comes to a military operation – Russia should consider the war on its territory as a real option if it launches a full-scale, conventional military invasion of Ukraine.

PUTIN'S SINISTER PLOT AGAINST UKRAINE: ENABLERS AND DISABLERS

There is little doubt among security, political and economic (more precisely energy) experts that the recent Russian buildup of military forces on the border with Ukraine is geared to advance the Kremlin's sinister agenda. The difference of opinions boils down to scale, means, timing and geography. To strike when the international community and Ukraine itself are the most vulnerable, and the least ready to retaliate, is Putin's matter-of-course intent. However, the timing of when this "perfect storm" will be at its peak to enable Russia to act on the offensive – depends on multiple factors. What follows below is a short review of key domestic and international developments that can either untie Putin's hands or hamper his "blitzkrieg," at least in the foreseeable future.





**MARYNA YAROSHEVYCH,
MEMBER OF PROMOTE
UKRAINE, EDITOR OF
THE BRUSSELS UKRAÏNA
REVIEW**

Ukraine's internal developments and external support

Ukraine's economy is struggling hard to keep afloat and carry its citizens through the increscent economic meltdown. Necessity to revert resources to military preparedness and looming political instability on top of healthcare system challenges add up to citizens' impoverishment, disorientation and fears of the future. Evidently, Russia is standing behind, if not with the inception of all these processes, then at least with pressing on sore spots and misrepresenting the severity of the situation, thus making Ukraine deteriorate even further. Ukraine, weakened internally, is less likely to effectively counteract the enemy externally. This is the reason for Ukrainian authorities to actively seek commitment to all encompassing assistance from foreign states and international organisations. Nonetheless, NATO's military presence on its eastern flank, as well as allies' training and arming of Ukrainian armed forces instead of making Ukrainian stand firmer and ready to deter Russia, lead to the opposite: lately Putin has pronounced

those as being unacceptable, as he perceives it as Ukraine's de facto military integration into the Alliance structures. Such uncompromising rhetoric disincentivises the West to make stronger and concrete commitments because more than helping out Ukraine, it is not willing to fight Russia, even indirectly through merely equipping Ukraine. NATO SG Stoltenberg's declaration affirming that the Alliance has no obligation to defend Ukraine is one in a series of statements to the same effect. As a result, Ukraine's internal developments, as well as insecure support by international partners, embolden Moscow's daring behaviour.

Nord Stream 2 saga on the verge of being a done deal

The Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline is certainly one of the if not THE major factor affecting Putin's plans on invasion. The pipeline's main objective has been to bypass Ukraine in gas transit to the EU, notwithstanding its economic and logistical redundancy. Its construction was completed in September 2021, and if certified by the regulators, it will not only cause billions of dollars worth of losses for Kyiv, but will also remove the last "stumbling block" for Moscow in attacking Ukraine. The hope that the international community won't let it happen has not died yet, but fades away by day.

The Biden administration, which took office when NS2 was 95% complete, has substituted its efforts to cancel the project with endeavours to mitigate the risks should Putin continue to weaponise gas supply. The matter rests now with the Congress that retains sanctions as an amendment to the annual National Defence Authorisation Act. If they are scrapped, then all decision power will bounce back to Europe.

In Germany, the outgoing Merkel administration makes efforts to bring the NS2 pipeline to fruition, while MFA-to-be Baerbock sends signals that her cabinet won't give in to Russia's demands. However, the issue is still unsettled and much will depend on Germany's internal political dynamics as well as any developments around Russia's obligation to comply with the European Union's anti-trust laws and regulatory restrictions. If no concessions are made on part of the EU regulator and no satisfactory Gazprom unbundling (decoupling the owner of pipeline and the owner of gas it transports) is made on part of the Kremlin, then we might evidence temporary hold-backs in Russia's offensive. However, should Putin cunningly find ways to overcome the NS2 certification hurdles, then alerts about Moscow's flexing of the muscles will cease being a political threat only and will most likely transform into military intervention.

New wave of migration crisis and Russia's crippling anschluss of Belarus

Self-proclaimed President Lukashenka has been giving headaches to the EU for a number of years already. His recent Russia-backed "escorting" of African and Middle East migrants who flew into Belarus directly to the EU external land borders, however, presents a new level of hazard. Unfortunately, as experience has shown, the EU member states have still not come to a common understanding on how to deal with illegal migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and organise burden sharing fairly, effectively and efficiently. Therefore, even the relatively low numbers of migrants (compared to 2014-2015) cause a lot of tension not only among the states under pressure, but also to the rest of the EU bloc.

First and foremost, the EU's hitches scatter its attention; secondly, they point to disunity, which plays into Putin's hands, and thirdly, they allow Lukashenka to shamelessly show his true allegiance. Seemingly being his own man for a long time, now he appears to be progressively shifting to becoming Putin's puppet and accepting Russia's crippling Anschluss of Belarus. Case in point is numerous bilateral military drills and merging the two armed forces' capabilities. On top of that, Lukashenka has recently declared de facto and de jure recognition of Crimea as Russian territory and made it clear that he will fight on the Russian side in a potential war with Ukraine. All these developments point to the fact that Russia has been opening a second front in fighting Ukraine with Belarus' help while the EU is struggling to get its act together faced with recurring migration challenges.

US weakening foreign policy which Russia takes advantage of

Long gone are the days when the international community was raising glasses of champagne celebrating Biden's instalment in the presidential office. From the get go it became quite apparent that the number, scale and geographic diversity of challenges disable the US to properly tackle them all. Biden's willingness to establish "predictable adversarial relations" with Putin to clear the way for dealing with emerging geopolitical threats from China proved to be both a hasty and

a wrong move. His further miscalculations on the Afghanistan withdrawal, attempts to re-engage with Iran to prevent it from acquiring a nuclear bomb, as well as unhealthy obsession with a two-state Israeli-Palestine solution, all contribute to Putin rubbing his hands. For Moscow, actions definitely speak louder than words. Therefore, neither the dispatching of CIA Director Burns to Moscow, aimed at cautioning Russia against invasion of Ukraine, nor public rumbling of Secretary of State Blinken on the margins of the NATO summit, achieve their intended goal thus far. On the contrary, planning for a second US-Russia Summit will likely serve as a "green light" for Putin to move on with his agenda among the West's, and foremost the US, "deep concerns." Should the US be serious about deterring Russia, it needs to act preventively and not merely talk harsh language to Russia's authoritarian leader while he is plotting a massive attack in plain sight.

Other international events of major concern

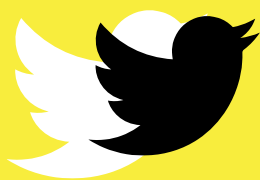
If only it was possible to limit challenges and threats to manageable numbers and scale. Alas, it is not the case. China threatening to take over Taiwan (where most of the semiconductors are produced for worldwide usage), Israel preparing to either preventively strike its enemies seeking its destruction or at least retaliate and defend itself against its aggressors in the Middle East and beyond, as well as persisting instability corroding a growing number of states in the Middle East, Northern Africa, Latin America etc., all contribute to making the situation precarious worldwide. And while no single occurrence is a sufficient enabler

and excuse for Putin to invade Ukraine, the combination of at least a few detrimental developments are capable of knocking off the collective West.

The only conclusion is that any and every deteriorating situation is playing into Putin's hands and enabling him to advance politically, economically and militarily in undermining western democracies with Ukraine on its forefront. To prevent the worst from happening it is necessary to act while it is not too late, namely to put an end to NS2, to provide Ukraine preemptively with military assistance on top of additional financial and technical resources and to take more resolute measures in regard to other crises, at least in the EU neighbourhood, to exclude a possibility for Kremlin to attack from a few flanks at once.

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ROLAND FREUDENSTEIN: "PUTIN FEELS THE WEAKNESS OF THE WEST"

INTERVIEW

*Roland Freudenstein, vice president of the **Globsek** think tank, says that this is a psychological maneuver rather than a preparation for the war. In an interview with Sofia Shevchuk for **Brussels Ukraïna Review**, he shared his thoughts on what sanctions would be more painful for Russia and what else the European Union and NATO could do to better support Ukraine in the current situation.*



Washington and Kyiv say that Russia is building capacity to attack Ukraine, and Moscow denies that it plans an invasion. Do you think that this time the situation is getting dangerous?

It has been dangerous since spring. Many say that this time it is even more dangerous because in spring Russia put the infrastructure at the border; now it just has to move the troops. The fact that Russia denies the attack, this is what attackers do. I am not sure if Putin is going to attack. It will also depend on the behaviour of Ukraine and the West, mainly the EU, the US and NATO. Personally, I have the feeling that this is not preparation for war. It is more of a psychological manoeuvre, which does not mean that Putin will never attack. His immediate plan is to increase the military pressure, to achieve a political goal. This is divided into several aspects:

- guarantee that Ukraine never joins the EU and NATO;
- force the West to exert pressure on Ukraine to fulfil the Minsk II Agreement, as Russia interprets it (federalisation, holding elections in the so-called Republics), without Russia fulfilling its part
- psychological goal, identical to what happened in spring: the more often Russia concentrates troops and then nothing happens, the less likely someone in future will feel obliged to raise the alarm.

Now, the Kremlin obviously sees a window of opportunity: the US deals with its internal issues, Biden is, in Putin's eyes, a weak leader because of Afghanistan; the new, incoming German government already signalled that it is going to be more critical of Russia, but not ready for military action, such a redeployment of troops. We call it speak loudly and carry a small stick. That's a dangerous combination. I think Putin smells Western weakness.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said: "We call on Russia to be transparent, reduce tensions and de-escalate. NATO remains vigilant, and we continue to provide Ukraine with political and practical support." Is this statement strong enough in such a situation? Should/ can NATO demonstrate bigger efforts to defend its partner Ukraine?

NATO is a collection of member states; it is an intergovernmental organisation. I think that the West and NATO Allies should immediately respond to Russian threats with military deployments in Poland and the Black Sea. This already happened in spring, when the US deployed nuclear-capable fighters in Poland as a reaction to the Russian concentration of troops in April. A couple of days later, the Russian troops started to withdraw. However, this was a bilateral measure - the American decision but not NATO's. NATO is

slower in such cases to make decisions. Moreover, some Allies do not want any further military deployments to the East: that's the so-called White Flag Coalition (Italy, France, and Germany). So, the US has to take responsibility to carry on with an initiative on its own.

Additionally, Ukraine is not a NATO member, thus is also not under Article 5. So, NATO does not have to defend Ukraine. Ukraine does not even have a Membership Action Plan, because in the eyes of some, that could have caused an even stronger Russian reaction, in military terms. However, there are things to be done below the membership threshold and Article 5, such as arms deliveries, (NATO) military exercises, training missions. This is all happening in Ukraine and has a deterring effect. One can argue that Western sanctions stopped further escalations in 2014. The fact that Mariupol is still a free city is most likely because of the sanctions imposed then – and the threat of worse to come.

Lastly, Stoltenberg has to talk the language of de-escalation (as indicated by the Allies), but it is wrong to constantly emphasise it. Let's remember that approach of the West in the Cold War and today has been a strong defence, strong deterrence and offer for dialogue with the Soviet Union in the past and today with Russia. The point is, if you want to deter, you need to be able to escalate in certain moments and in a targeted manner. You have to also communicate this to the other side. The problem with 'de-escalation ueber alles' is that your own deterrence then becomes weaker. Then Russia might think that NATO is not capable of deterrence. So, if I were in Stoltenberg's shoes, I would present a carefully

balanced blend of willingness to defend ourselves militarily and Ukraine's independence politically (i.e. escalate, if necessary), and readiness for dialogue (that's the de-escalation part).

Back in 2014, the European Union condemned the annexation of Crimea and introduced sanctions against certain Russian citizens and companies. Can the European Union do more than that when there is a real danger that Russian will attack Ukraine?

The EU can do a lot more painful things than just sanctioning oligarchs, a list of around 300 citizens today. For example, cut Russia from the SWIFT system, together with the US. Secondly, the personal sanctions against the whole Russian power elite can be significantly enhanced, for example, no more visas to those in power structures and their families, also freezing their assets in Western banks. Whenever Russian democrats are being sentenced for their human and civic actions, the person who judges should go on the list, under the EU version of the so-called Magnitsky Act.

When it comes to Nord Stream 2, the suspension of the certificate by the German Network Agency is treated as a political statement. I am not sure there is political argument there. It was a legal technical mistake made by the Russian side. There are also still some possibilities on the EU side to stop the use of the NS2 pipeline. I could see the German government agreeing to make the flow of gas through NS2 a subject to sanctions if something dramatic happens in Ukraine. Gas through NS2 can be used as a tool for political considerations.

The United Kingdom, France, Germany and other EU countries made statements about serious consequences for Russia if it invades Ukraine. But we already saw in the past that Moscow did not listen to these statements. Should European diplomacy become more, let's say, aggressive towards such countries as Russia?

Russia listened to the EU's language on sanctions in 2014, as I already mentioned before - stopped in front of Mariupol due to sanctions against the elite, companies, government officials. There is no proof or disproof of this, but it is reasonable to assume that Russia was worried about further sanctions and, therefore, stopped. I reject that several member states and the EU institutions' leaders are constantly talking that we have to re-set relations with Russia. President Macron and former HRVP Mogherini had such language. I think this is counterproductive. If we constantly only talk about dialogue - we weaken our deterrence.

WAR OR ANOTHER MANOEUVRE? WHAT THREATENS UKRAINE?

What does the increase in Russian troops on the Ukrainian border indicate? What will war look like if it happens? What is behind the Polish border crisis and how ready is the West to help Ukraine? Can the EU support Ukraine in the face of an escalating energy crisis? The "Brussels Ukraine Review" journal asked these very difficult questions MEPs, politicians of Ukraine and Belarus, as well as Western and Ukrainian experts.





**WITOLD WASZCZYKOWSKI,
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CONSERVATIVES AND
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TO THE EUROPEAN
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Thousands of migrants near the Polish border with Belarus is not a Polish border crisis. This is a hybrid attack of Lukashenka at the EU's border, not only the Polish border but also the ones of Lithuania and Latvia. Moreover, these are not only EU borders but also NATO ones. Lukashenka uses migrants and misleads them, mentioning that through Poland they can have access to Germany or farther West, where they can legally move and enjoy the social benefits. They are not told that the border crossing is conducted illegally. Without Polish visas - the border-cross is illegal. Thus, they would have to ask for asylum, and stay at the refugee camp, which is not what they want.

Everyone in Europe is now wondering what is behind these actions of Lukashenka. We assume that it is a scenario of Putin. One reason is that Putin is using migrants to start negotiating this case with Europe – if the negotiations start between Belarus and the EU, then Lukashenka will have to be officially recognised as the president of Belarus. Following this, the sanctions imposed on Lukashenka will also be lifted.

Secondly, it could be a so-called "maskirovka" to cover the actions taking place in Ukraine: the concentration of Russian troops at the Ukrainian border. While we are busy with Belarus, Putin will start an attack in Ukraine. Both scenarios could be true and happen simultaneously.

The current timing is perfect, the EU is busy internally, the Americans are also busy with domestic policies, so there is a vacuum at the international arena, which Putin might fill in with his actions.

There is a pattern that Russians are using current timing – when the other part of the world is busy with winter holidays. It is good timing. I do not think that Putin needs a major war. He cannot afford to occupy the whole of Ukraine and justify it to the world. What he wants is anti-Maidan. He wants to force Ukraine to spend money on security and defence, instead of internal reforms that are needed for the people and are very costly – to make Ukrainians sick and tired of the current government that focuses on defence instead of the domestic reforms. So, that Ukrainians change the government in the end.

This does not mean that some type of a low-scale conflict will not happen. Putin wants a land corridor to connect Donbas and Crimea, so some cities like Mariupol might be in danger. Another possibility is cutting off

Ukraine from the Black Sea. Here Odesa is in danger. Ukrainians might become unhappy with the government that did nothing to protect Ukrainian territories, if such actions do take place. Then, Ukrainians again would get disappointed with the Euro-Atlantic integration, lack of support and assistance from the EU and NATO, and, thus, might change the course from Eurointegration towards Russia.

Russia's media and the propaganda machine is already preparing the narrative for an invasion. This is a typical pattern for Russia to turn things upside down. They like to accuse others, instead of explaining their own actions, such as the concentration of troops. They will accuse Ukrainian security leaders and government, as well as NATO and the EU member states for their deterrence actions, and explain that Russia was just reacting and protecting the Russian minority in Ukraine – if it happens.





**RASA JUKNEVIČIENĖ,
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DEFENSE, MINISTER
OF DEFENSE OF
LITHUANIA
IN 2008-2012**

I take this situation very seriously. Of course, nobody knows what Putin is thinking. But for me it is hard to believe that he could commit such insanity as to start another full-blown war in Ukraine.

While we do not know how the current tensions will end, we do know that Russia has used military build-up as a tool to exert pressure on Ukraine and on Europe in the past. And it is likely that Russia will try to use the build-up and the fear as a bargaining chip to advance its geopolitical and economic interests again.

Based on Russia's disinformation channels, the Kremlin's main purpose is to make sure that Ukraine is not invited to join NATO. This is their biggest fear. Putin is

frantically trying to bring Ukraine back into Russia's orbit because he understands that there will be no Kremlin empire without Ukraine. But to think that the Ukrainians can be "brought back" under Russia's rule by force - that is Putin's biggest mistake.

Seeing a strong, pro-Western orientation in Ukraine, Putin feels he needs more leverage to prevent us from even considering Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine as a real option. Now is a convenient time to create such leverage: the world is full of uncertainty due to the COVID-19 pandemic, growing prices, high inflation, economic instability... Russia's actions aim to actively contribute to the existing tension, to instil a sense of fear and uncertainty. It is not just the military build-up that is used. Today, we heard the news about increased shelling across the front line in Donbas. In the last months, we have been under Lukashenka's hybrid attack on the Lithuania-Poland border.

All of those actions are aimed at increasing pressure on the EU, NATO and Ukraine. And we have to take them seriously. As the EU, we have to remain united in our position in order not to give into such blackmail. We must be proactive and enhance our cooperation with our partners in Ukraine. One of the concrete things we can do is prepare our homework and be ready to offer tangible tools of support at the upcoming Eastern Partnership Summit this December.

I cannot speak on behalf of all of the EU or NATO, but the European Parliament has expressed a very clear stance on Russia's aggression and interference. We have no illusions about the intentions of Putin's regime. This can also be seen in the most recent report on the direction of EU-Russia political relations adopted with overwhelming support across different political groups in September this year.

The EU has also taken preventative steps by strengthening the sanctions against Russia's

elites associated with the Kremlin and by offering deeper support to the democratic opposition in Russia. The recent decision to award Navalny the Sakharov prize is a case in point.

In addition to concrete steps taken to prevent aggressive action from Russia, the EU continues to provide support to Ukraine in providing capacity building assistance, enhancing economic cooperation, establishing information exchange mechanisms, learning from each other to counter Russia's disinformation, etc.

Even more support has come from national governments. One of the most significant examples is the U.S.-Ukraine Strategic Partnership agreement that was signed this September. It is an impressive agreement encompassing broad measures of support across all key sectors, from security and defence, to democracy and human rights reforms, to economic development. National support is evident within the EU as well. For instance, Lithuania has consistently advocated for Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine, has been providing military support and institutional assistance to implement needed reforms, etc.

Finally, the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen and the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg met recently in a joint visit to Lithuania. It was the first such meeting ever. Choosing to hold it in Lithuania is a strong signal in itself, showing that both the EU and NATO take the situation in the region very seriously. At the same time, holding a joint meeting in Lithuania demonstrated that the EU and NATO stand firmly together in light of security challenges coming from Russia. The NATO Secretary General explicitly commented on the situation at the Russia-Ukraine border, reiterating NATO support for Ukraine.

If we look at the European Parliament, a clear position has already been defined. This can be seen from the overwhelming support for the report on the direction of EU-Russia relations. The statement by Boris Johnson comes at the right time with a clear call to action, which can be further advanced within the existing EU-UK cooperation frameworks.

Annexation of Crimea and the start of a war in Donbas are fundamental breaches of international law. Looking at the EU's reaction, it is crucial that we did not give up. We must maintain the policy of non-recognition when it comes to Crimea, regardless of how long the annexation lasts.

One of the things we learned from Russia's aggression in Crimea and Donbas is that you cannot negotiate with autocrats. The only language they understand is power. Europe should not have illusions that another round of discussions would improve the situation.

Instead, we need to be more geopolitical, in all senses of the word. It is time the EU assumed geopolitical responsibility and demonstrated leadership in its Eastern neighbourhood. While it is crucial to further advance existing support and cooperation frameworks, real EU leadership in the region is impossible without a strong and clear call for integration. This is the only new meaningful addition that we could bring into the EU's toolbox.

I understand that full Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine might still take some time. But we must not be afraid. The West has given into fear in the past, but it is only Putin who benefits from it. He exploits intimidation tactics knowing that fear is a powerful weapon.

We should be brave and offer a clear path of EU integration for Ukraine. The European integration of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia – the so-called EU Associated Trio – is the only way to ensure democratic development, prosperity and long-term stability of those countries. There is no other viable alternative to the benefits EU integration can bring. Moreover, their success on the path of European integration is something that can also positively affect the Russian people's will that their country would also turn towards more open and more democratic development.

There are growing discussions of truly novel mechanisms for gradual integration, such as the so-called Prodi's formula: Everything but the institutions. This is something we need to advocate for now, not just for the sake of Ukraine, but for our own security as well. The less room we leave for the malign influence of dictatorships around our borders, the safer we will be within the EU as well [1].

As for the energy crisis, currently, not all EU member states recognise the full extent of energy insecurity that comes from our dependence on Russia. Nord Stream 2 (NSII) is a perfect example of that. But the pipeline still needs to be certified, which means that we still have a choice. The EU has certain tools at its disposal; it is the obligation of Member States to ensure that energy projects fully comply with EU law. This applies also to the NSII. The certification of NSII by German institutions is now suspended, but even once completed it will have to be double checked by the European Commission. Also, the European Commission can launch an investigation into Gazprom's actions of manipulating the EU energy market, which MEPs have urged the Commission to do.

But in order to take effective action, we must fully understand that launching Nord Stream 2 will not increase our energy security. To the contrary: increased dependency will put us at risk of continued dirty blackmailing from Russia. Ongoing price manipulation that has led to the surge of energy prices across Europe illustrates this well. It has been a wake-up call to many: our allies start realising that Russia is not a reliable partner in securing our energy needs.

In this context, statements like that of Boris Johnson are very welcome. He is right. We cannot have both meaningful support for stability and democracy in our neighbourhood and business as usual with Russia, especially in critically important sectors like energy.

This is true for Europe as well as for Ukraine. Ukraine needs to diversify its energy supply and reduce dependence on Russian gas transit as much as possible. Dependence on Russia is a vulnerability that none of us can afford, particularly in light of increasing attempts to threaten us through hybrid attacks, military build-up, political interference, etc.

All I can hope for is that this energy crisis will be a wake-up call for all of Europe to reassert its geopolitical responsibility and leadership.

[1] More on the idea here: <https://elpnariai.lt/en/eap-beyond-westlessness>



**ROBERT BIEDROŃ,
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The gathering of Russian troops on the borders with Ukraine is not training. In the case of standard military exercises, certain rules and procedures apply, such as informing partners well in advance. It did not happen in this case. If Russia uses force against Ukraine, the EU and NATO would need to answer quickly and consequently. We cannot become a puppet in the hands of Putin, who is blackmailing Europe by interrupting gas supplies. We can also assume that Lukashenko's last hybrid war on the border with Poland was just the beginning of something much bigger in Putin's mind. We need to always stress that NATO's support for Ukraine is not a threat to Russia.

Russia is using the classic intimidation tactic here, which was also frequently used by the Soviet Union. This tactic is relatively "low-cost" and aims to test the West. We already had a similar situation in April 2021, when Russia mobilised as many as 120,000 soldiers near the Ukrainian border and at the same time significantly increased the number of weapons and other military equipment in the occupied part of Donbas. This time, however, the situation is even more complex, as the Belarusian dimension is added and Russian control there increases. One consideration, therefore, is that Russia could be betting that some kind of "wear and tear" will occur as a result of the frequent military deployments, thus decreasing attention in the West to such manoeuvres and theoretically allowing the Kremlin to continue occupying Ukraine with minimal international outcry and consequences.

At this stage, developments on Ukraine's eastern border should be closely monitored and the potentially serious threat should not be ignored. Transatlantic coordination is of utmost importance. Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, EU Council President Charles Michel and the heads of state and government must make personal representations to Putin and make it clear that such games are dangerous and extremely counterproductive. Cacophony within the EU institutions should be avoided at all costs. Meanwhile, the EU should use all diplomatic means, such as summoning the Russian ambassador or, if necessary, announcing tighter sanctions against Russia.

An integration of Ukraine into the transatlantic security structures is considered by Ukraine itself to be the only true solution, but here various questions remain open within NATO, so that this solution is certainly not practicable.



**ROMAN LOZYSKY,
MEMBER OF
PARLIAMENT OF
UKRAINE**

First of all, it must be understood that Russian troops have always been stationed in the east in greater or lesser numbers. And the reports on their build-up are either the result of intelligence information of our special services or partners, or sometimes deliberate provocations from the Russian Federation in order to strengthen its negotiating position. This often happens before international forums or decision-making. Now it concerns Nord Stream 2 and, in my opinion, the negotiating position of the United States that calls on Germany not to certify Nord Stream 2 (as it is an aggressor's weapon, not an economic tool), is one of the reasons for the amassed Russian troops at the Ukrainian border. We can never really know what Putin has in store. But we must remember that Russia can attack again, at any time, on a large scale.

Talking to our military, whom I visit several times a year in the east, I understand that they are ready: fighting spirit, morale, modernised weapons and equipment. However, the Russian army is one of the most powerful. So, let's be realistic: Ukraine will not be able to stand on its own, or it will suffer great losses. Therefore, of course, we need to rely on the help of partners: some have already expressed support, including military, and some use only diplomatic tools. It seems to me that the EU does not learn any lessons – it reacts situationally. At some point, there is interest: today it is Nord Stream 2. There are also the interests of states, economic, "behind the scenes" – those that we do not know. Russia's annexation of parts of Abk-

hazia and South Ossetia in Georgia in 2008 did not teach anyone in the context of Russian aggression in 2013-2014. So, my point is not to wait for lessons of history but to take a strong position at a particular point in time.

Speaking of the energy crisis, in fact, neither Ukraine nor Europe is ready for it. First of all, our energy crisis is a crisis of utility bills, rising prices and, consequently, a decline in public support for the current government. After all, raising the cost of utilities adversely impacts support for the government. Therefore, it destabilises the situation everywhere.



ALIAKSANDR MILINKEVICH, CHANCELLOR OF THE BELARUSIAN FREE UNIVERSITY, THE JOINT CANDIDATE FOR THE PRESIDENCY OF BELARUS FROM THE UNITED OPPOSITION IN 2006, WINNER OF THE SAKHAROV PRIZE "FOR FREEDOM OF THOUGHT" OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Russia is doing everything to destabilise Ukraine and to impose itself as an inevitable hegemon in resolving issues of European and world politics. Another saber-rattling is a new attempt to apply pressure and to draw attention to their agenda. The energy and military spheres are the main instruments of Russia's influence on the outside world. By raising the stakes, Russia is also seeking to block any positive agenda in the EU-Ukraine and NATO-Ukraine relations.

Ukraine is obviously ready for the full-scale invasion, morally and militarily. The most pessimistic scenario cannot be ruled out. The willingness of the collective West to die for Kharkiv is very conditional. That is why Russia can afford to raise the stakes in order to achieve concessions in the non-military sphere: the definitive putting into operation of the Nord Stream 2, etc. The West seems now unconsolidated and preoccupied with internal problems.

The EU talks a lot about its strategic autonomy. However, the EU's policy towards Ukraine and Russia demonstrates its weakness and inconsistency. The restrictive measures against Russia for the annexation and occupation of Ukrainian territories were insufficient. Germany, as a key country in the EU, acts sometimes at the expense of the general policy. The EU is unable to provide security guarantees for Ukraine. The West remains poorly aware of the Kremlin's way of thinking, which respects strength and considers compromise and diplomacy a weakness.

In terms of energy situation, I think that the Ukrainian leaders are well aware of the kind of support they can count on. It is unlikely that the EU as such is ready to deal with a full-scale energy crisis.



ANDREAS UMLAND, AN ANALYST AT THE SWEDISH INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

The increase in Russian troops on the Ukrainian border is a form of political pressure so far. Whether this is a serious preparation for war, start of minor escalation, or a way to merely scare Ukraine and the West, we will come to know only later. The Kremlin might also not know yet what exactly it will do and may only decide as things develop.

The West is clearly not going to assist Ukraine directly, i.e. with troops. Yet that may also not be necessary. Ukraine has been preparing for such a scenario for more than seven years now. Thus, there is better preparedness than there was in 2014. The situation is also clearer than it was in 2014. How far the West will go in terms of imposing sanctions on Russia remains to be seen.

Rhetorically, the West is taking a sharper position today. When it comes to the policy choices, this will be clear once they happen. The impression in the West is that previous sanctions were a partial success. They did not solve the situation but they contained Russia. So, if escalation happens - there may be new sectoral and individual sanctions. On the other hand, there are also currently discussions in the West about new concessions concerning the Ukrainian implementation of the Minsk Agreements, in accordance with its Russian interpretation.

Concerning Nord Stream 2, there is a sense of solidarity in the West towards Ukraine. However, in Germany there are various groups that profit from the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, and which are less interested in political consequences. The US, though, can still stop the project with sanctions.



**YAROSLAV CHORNOHOR,
BOARD MEMBER OF
NGO "FOREIGN POLICY
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PRISM"**

The build-up of Russian troops is a signal to NATO countries that the Russian Federation "ups the stakes" by threatening to start a full-scale war in the territory of Ukraine. In this way, Russia seeks the attention of the world's leading powers, especially the United States. This is done to make others reckon with Russia in the "big" policy.

Russia uses the threat of war as a method of pressure on Ukraine and its partners.

In his speech, Boris Johnson outlined the problems in the international system and urged that they be confronted. The United Kingdom is doing a lot to strengthen Ukraine's defence and resilience. However, significant support from other European countries is highly questionable because: first, Britain withdrew from the EU, and, second, the EU itself has many serious problems of both an internal and external nature.

The EU has not learned any lessons from the past. This organisation strives for the lowest possible level of conflict intensity and internal stability, respectively. All efforts are aimed at this, hence the attempts to reach an agreement with the Russian aggressor.

Regarding the gaspipe, the level of dependence on Russian energy among European countries varies, so the willingness to support Ukraine and, at the same time, oppose Russia is different. We should not rely on the united front of support because each country will first and foremost defend its interests. The matter of defending Ukraine is a matter of the Ukrainians themselves, it is necessary to realise this and plan protection from this perspective. International support can only be an additional factor, although it is certainly important.



**DAVID STULIK, SENIOR
ANALYST AT THE
EUROPEAN VALUES
CENTER FOR SECURITY
POLICY (PRAGUE)**

Indeed, all of these destabilising efforts made either by Russia (increase of its army at the borders with Ukraine, unstable deliveries of gas to Europe, engagement in Western Balkans, Central Africa, etc.) or by Belarus (artificially instigated migrants' crisis), which under self-declared "president" Lukashenko turned to be the puppet in the hands of the Kremlin in its operations against the West, are part of one larger game: the Kremlin's challenge of the West. However, one should overestimate the possibility that the West (or Poland) would be distracted by the situation at the border with Belarus and be less prepared for other aggressive behaviour and steps of the duo of Lukashenko/Putin.

I personally do not believe that Putin would be able to start a full-scale war in and against Ukraine. He will face a severe resistance, which would result in significant casualties also on the side of the Russian army. This could then backfire against him back home, in Russia. Instead, he might be determined to lead a short and fast military operation(s) against Ukraine, which could provide

him with immediate gains. One could think about the entry of Russian troops on the territory of occupied parts of Donbas, where these troops could stay as "peace-keepers" (like in Transnistria). Of course, Putin would need a reason for that so he might instigate some provocations on these occupied territories and use them as a formal reason to step in.

Always when Russian media, which are under a strong control and scrutiny of the Kremlin, start these information campaigns, they are conducted with a concrete purpose. One can be sure that there nothing "sudden" in their timing. To the contrary, these information operations are a signal that the Kremlin has launched another hybrid operation against its "enemies" - the West and Ukraine.

I also cannot exclude the possibility that Putin, by taking all these destabilising steps, is just testing again the red lines of the Western defense and reactions. He might be also bluffing and rising stakes in his relations with the West/Ukraine and, thus, also preparing better negotiating positions using the hybrid and military threats.



**ILLIA PONOMARENKO,
UKRAINIAN
JOURNALIST
AND MILITARY
CORRESPONDENT**

In my opinion, the build-up of Russian troops near the Ukrainian borders indicates the intention of the Russian leadership to once again use military and political tensions in the region as a lever of political pressure on European countries, including Germany and France. Probably, this is related to Nord Stream 2 certification.

As the crisis of April 2021 showed, blackmail with very demonstrative military manoeuvres near the borders of Ukraine is an effective tool. At the same time, I believe that Russia is economically, militarily, and politically incapable of fulfilling such tasks as full-scale invasion, defeat of the Ukrainian army, destruction of resistance centres, and imposition of a peace agreement on Ukraine's political leadership. The extremely high price and questionable results of such an operation make such a scenario unlikely.

I think that none of the parties, including the Russian Federation itself, is 100% politically, economically, or militarily ready for such a scenario. The EU cannot allow a major war of Vietnam scale to start and millions of Ukrainian refugees to flee from the attacked

cities. NATO will also suffer devastating political losses due to the failure to contain Russia on its eastern flank. Ukraine, given the systemic problems of its defence sector, also does not have a 100% chance of repelling a full-scale, multi-layered operation. But the large territory, motivated army, and significant ability of the population to mobilise independently (as shown by 2014) make the cost of invasion and occupation certainly too high.

As for Boris Johnson's statement, in my opinion, this is a combination of a declaration and a call for Western Europe to take up an appropriate position. The British elites have historically understood very well when there is a need for a tough approach to the containment of Russia, and the UK's claim to political leadership in the Western world has recently strengthened seriously. Recent political steps, leaked to the media, such as reports of readiness to send 600 troops, show London's willingness to at least take a tough and decisive stance, which is already a major factor for the Kremlin, which respects only the language of force.

As for levers of influence, I believe that the EU, despite its weak political will, still has serious levers – first of all, the ability to freeze billions of Russian elites, as well as other severe economic sanctions that serve as the most effective deterrent.

A full-scale invasion and attempted occupation of Ukraine with a population of 40 million, in any case, mean an operation on the scale of Iraq in 2003 and, consequently, unprecedented human losses and material damage. In case of a truly full-scale invasion, I believe that new challenges, such as the unprecedented migrant crisis on the EU's western borders, will be far more dangerous than the energy crisis, so Europe is likely to do much more to prevent an invasion rather than to seek new reconciliation after Ukraine is captured.



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The basic scenario is that Russia is raising stakes and preparing the ground for negotiations with the United States on the future of security architecture in Europe. From a Russian perspective, such a new arrangement should provide for, on one hand, a Russian so-called sphere of privileged interests, part of which should be Ukraine. On the other it's the creation of a buffer zone in Central Europe, where Russia would like to see limited NATO military presence.

There is also a scenario of possible military intervention in Ukraine - the threat is there. However, this will ultimately depend on the reaction of the West. If there is no response to the Russian military posturing, then a second scenario is also possible.

The EU is not a point of reference here. For Russia, it is all about NATO and the US. Therefore it depends primarily on the American readiness to support Ukraine and react firmly. In the US there has been a discussion between those ready to counteract Russia, and those ready to sacrifice Ukraine. The outcome of this discussion is still unclear. Normally, I would say that the US would not support a bargain with Russia to the detriment of Ukraine, but, by means of amassing its troops around Ukraine, the Kremlin makes it easier for Washington to make such a decision and justify it as being "for the sake of peace."

The EU's leverage towards Russia lies in the economic sphere: sanctions, energy policy and trade. Foreign and security policy are still in the hands of the member states, despite their coordination. There will be no joint military response from the EU side; this is up to NATO. What we have learned is that Russia does not shy away from using military

force if the cost is relatively modest and the West is not ready to act decisively. Also, we should not rely on Russia's good faith. Still, I believe not everyone in the EU understands that yet.

The key question is whether the gas transit would still be conducted through Ukraine. There should have been negotiations between the EU, Russia and Ukraine on that matter. Of course, it would be much easier if there was no alternative - such as Nord Stream 2. The gas that goes through Ukraine could soon be redirected to Nord Stream 2, and the Ukrainian gas infrastructure could become largely redundant. NS2 gives Russia huge leverage over Germany and the EU as a whole. In fact, NS2 proves that Germans were right and change could indeed come through trade. However, they believed it would work the other way since it allows for transfer of autocratic norms and corruption into democracies. Putin will use NS2 to make it harder for the EU to come up with strong response to his adventurism.

Speaking about the migrants on the border, the question is who is behind the crisis - Lukashenka or Putin? I would not go as far as to say that Putin orchestrated the whole crisis from the beginning. I guess it is Lukashenka's revenge - to punish Poland and Lithuania for their support for Belarusian opposition and EU sanctions towards Belarus earlier this year. Besides, Lukashenka created a crisis to offer a solution, and would be ready to take a step back if he is rewarded with lifting of the sanctions. But the EU is not ready for such a solution at this point. If we assume that Putin is behind this, though, I think we can also consider that this conflict is a distraction from the Russian actions at the Ukrainian borders.



The threat of a military solution is the highest since 2015. There are several arguments towards this. On the one hand, COVID pandemic forces the West to focus internally, the Polish-Belarus crisis absorbs NATO attention, and the US withdrawal from Afghanistan makes Russia think that American power is in decline. On the other hand, Russia accumulated the highest international reserves in its history, so if Putin was to risk incurring additional costs, then it is now. All that taken together means that, from a Russian perspective, there is a window of opportunity to make a step ahead. Still, I do not think it would be a full-scale war, most likely an escalation in Donbas or a small-scale attack to see what would be the Western response. But again, if there is no response, then Russia could go further.

Information warfare could be part of Russian attempts to scare off the West – to create an impression that this time Russia really means business. It's sort of encouragement for the US to sit behind the table with Russia. But if Russians seriously consider a military operation, they need an excuse – not necessarily for themselves, but for those in the West who are in constant search of a pretext to turn a blind eye to

what Russia is doing, so that, after all, there were still those justifying Russian aggression and claiming that Russia was forced or provoked to do that.

The build-up of Russian troops is a signal to NATO countries that the Russian Federation "ups the stakes" by threatening to start a full-scale war in the territory of Ukraine. In this way, Russia seeks the attention of the world's leading powers, especially the United States. This is done to make others reckon with Russia in the "big" policy.



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