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Timeline to the War in Ukraine



By Robbin Laird
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June 2021

March 3, 2022

Earlier today, I had a chance to talk with a German friend about the current Ukraine War and its consequences.

In particular, we were discussing the German reactions and what they mean in the short and mid-term.

And in the course of the discussion, he noted that the war was a shock, and that as recently as the Munich Security Conference, the consensus was that a major war in Ukraine was not likely to happen.

Putin was not considered this irrational.

But the signs were clearly there that President Putin had turned a corner with regard to the West, and was focusing on a more direct approach towards confrontation with the West.

He had steered the country towards greater economic independence and had already learned to live with sanctions.

He had made it very clear that Russia was at war with the West, hybrid and otherwise, and this level of conflict could be a surprise, but not his underlying approach.

And no amount of rhetorical support for freedom, and failure directly to confront the 21st century authoritarianism will stop their efforts to change significantly the course of world history and the new rules for global governance.

So let me put together a timeline starting in 2021 where Putin and his regime have made clear their intentions.

I was in Hawaii in August 2021 to talk with the U.S. military commands and learned of a major event that had occurred in the Pacific generated by the Russians.

There is oft repeated statement from the Obama years, credited to John Kerry, that Russia is only a regional power.

The question though is what region are they focused upon — Europe, Asia or the Middle East/North Africa?

Of course, one can go back to the collapse of the Soviet Union to start the narrative, and I have already done that in an earlier article, cited at the end of this one.

But for the Ukraine War of 2022, let us start with June 2021.

In June 2021, the Russian Ministry of Defense highlighted that they had exercised off Hawaii and practiced “destroying the aircraft carrier strike group of the mock enemy” and delivering a simulated strike with cruise missiles against “critically important” military infrastructure.

“To create the situation as close as possible to the real one, the grouping of the forces of the Pacific Fleet was divided into two tactical groups, one of which played the role of a conditional enemy and opposed the main forces of the grouping of the fleet in the far sea zone.”

The Ministry said that “two detachments of ships, which were operating about 2,500 miles southeast of the Kuril Islands, “worked out the tasks of detecting, countering and delivering missile strikes against an aircraft carrier strike group of a mock enemy.”

This was of course of direct use to its deepening working relationship with China who would have to be concerned about what the U.S. Navy might or might do when the Chinese would prepare their invasion of Taiwan.

And there can be little question that the two authoritarian powers are playing off of each other with the perceived weakening of the liberal democratic system, with the perceived cultural weakness of the system as perceived by Putin and Xi, about which I will much more later in this series.

Notably, the Russians came as close to 20-30 nautical miles off of the coast of Hawaii. Russian bombers participated in the exercise and conducted simulated missile strikes. According to the Russian Ministry of Defence: “The planes spent more than 14 hours in the air, having covered about 10,000 kilometers during this time. The Tu-142M3 in the near zone was escorted by the MiG-31BM high-altitude interceptor fighters of the Pacific Fleet.

“During the exercise, the naval aviation of the Pacific Fleet also solved the problems of searching for and tracking submarines of the imaginary enemy. To this end, over the waters of the Sea of Okhotsk and the Pacific Ocean, six Il-38 and Il-38N anti-submarine aircraft” were involved in pairs, the press release said.

For the U.S. forces in Hawaii, this is a manageable threat, but the political signal was very clear, very clear indeed.

The political signaling piece is what I am highlighting here

In his article on the exercise by Thomas Newdick he puzzles over the absence of a U.S. response:

“Meanwhile, a senior U.S. Navy officer warned last year that his service no longer considers the East Coast of the United States as an “uncontested” area or an automatic “safe haven” for its ships and submarines as a result of increased Russian Navy underwater activity in that area. It was only a matter of time until a similar reality came into play in the central Pacific.

“As the Russian Navy increasingly ventures further afield with long-range exercises of this kind, it could be that the service’s warships, submarines, and aircraft become a more common sight close to Hawaii’s shores, too. Still, clear communications, or a total lack thereof, by the Pentagon in relation to this ongoing situation in the Pacific is what is most puzzling. It is possible that the Navy did whatever it could to make it a non-issue prior to the meeting between Biden and Putin, but now, after that meeting has occurred, the service’s lack of candor regarding what is a fairly unprecedented threat, at least in recent years, near Hawaii is baffling.”

Indeed, but not so when you consider the atrophy of U.S. nuclear warfighting and crisis management skills, up to and including how to talk with authoritarian regimes.

July 2021

March 4, 2022

In July 2021, Putin and his Administration made their position with regard to the West and Ukraine very clear.

The Russians were on a permanent war footing with the West, understood as cultural and political permanent conflict, and Ukraine and Belarus were part of the unified Slavic empire.

While this did not mean that a full scale invasion of Ukraine was to be projected from this, the end of any compromise with the West on values, and shaping a global way ahead was clearly not in the cards.

The first clear manifestation of this was the publication of the new Russian military doctrine on July 2, 2021.

If one reads through the document in Russian, it is not the clearest of statements about the operational approach of the Russian forces, but it is a clear statement of the superiority of Russian values and way of life and how those values and way of life are under brutal attack by Western multinationals and states.

It is about conflict with the entire Western system, not just states which is described in some detail throughout the document.

The document is a clear statement that Russia and the West are engaged in conflict and that it was a new era.

The fact that this was issued in the midst of the global pandemic is no surprise, for the authoritarian powers are launching their global altering agendas in a world still reeling from how to recover from a global pandemic that in any case originated from China.

But these dots seem to still baffle Western leaders.

In comparison with the 2015 national security strategy document, this one is a call to return to traditional Russian values which are morally superior to a decaying West (after all they can not even know the difference between men and women, a frequent point which Putin underscores in what he characterizes as the morally decaying West) and growing confrontation with the Western governments, economy and cultural and information institutions, within which the unbridled power of multinational information firms is a key threat.

And after reading the document carefully, I asked around among Western decision makers and their support systems whether folks had read this documents, something that would have been mandatory when I was in the government in the early 1980s, and the answer was usually what document do you mean?

Well if that seems too obscure for you, try reading through Putin's very clear statement on the future of Ukraine, Belarus and Russia as part of historic Rus.

Not quite liebestraum for the Russians, but no far off.

In his July 2021 essay (nothing more dangerous than leaders telling us what history inevitably means with the world as their classroom) on “the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians,” the visionary Russian leader tells us:

“Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians are all descendants of Ancient Rus, which was the largest state in Europe. Slavic and other tribes across the vast territory – from Ladoga, Novgorod, and Pskov to Kiev and Chernigov – were bound together by one language (which we now refer to as Old Russian), economic ties, the rule of the princes of the Rurik dynasty, and – after the baptism of Rus – the Orthodox faith. The spiritual choice made by St. Vladimir, who was both Prince of Novgorod and Grand Prince of Kiev, still largely determines our affinity today.

“The throne of Kiev held a dominant position in Ancient Rus. This had been the custom since the late 9th century. The Tale of Bygone Years captured for posterity the words of Oleg the Prophet about Kiev, ”Let it be the mother of all Russian cities.“

I think you get the point but the essay goes on

“I recall that long ago, well before 2014, the U.S. and EU countries systematically and consistently pushed Ukraine to curtail and limit economic cooperation with Russia. We, as the largest trade and economic partner of Ukraine, suggested discussing the emerging problems in the Ukraine-Russia-EU format. But every time we were told that Russia had nothing to do with it and that the issue concerned only the EU and Ukraine. De facto Western countries rejected Russia’s repeated calls for dialogue.

“Step by step, Ukraine was dragged into a dangerous geopolitical game aimed at turning Ukraine into a barrier between Europe and Russia, a springboard against Russia. Inevitably, there came a time when the concept of ”Ukraine is not Russia“ was no longer an option. There was a need for the ”anti-Russia“ concept which we will never accept.”

I think the July national strategy document and Putin’s historical essay should have sent significant alarm bells in the West, but what happened in August was an actual war in the Black Sea as the authoritarians play it although not to the West.

Exercises, Conflict and Information War in the Black Sea, Summer 2021

March 5, 2022

Moving from the Pacific or from Moscow, we enter the Black Sea region from June through August, as the Western forces exercise in the region, and the Russians make clear that they are focused on disrupting Western military capabilities to support Ukraine from the sea.

Ranging from allegedly firing warning shots at a British destroyer to working S-400 tests in Crimea, the Russians were making it very clear that the Black Sea was a core area of operation for them in any future repelling of Western military action or support for Ukraine.

The Sea Breeze exercise has taken place 21 times since 1997 and in the past the Russians themselves have participated.

At the opening ceremony in Odessa for the exercise, Ukrainian navy commander Olesiy Neizhpapa said that the exercise would send “a powerful message to maintain stability and peace in our nation.”

We learn from a U.S. Navy video on the conclusion of the exercise released on July 10, 2021 that” “Exercise Sea Breeze is a multinational maritime exercise cohosted by the U.S. Sixth Fleet and the Ukrainian Navy in the Black Sea since 1997. Sea Breeze 2021 is designed to enhance interoperability of participating nations and strengthens maritime security and peace in the region.”

Apparently not. and the Russians have operated from the Black Sea with impunity in the deadly assaults on Ukraine, including amphibious assault, a skill set which remains relevant in 21st century military operations it seems.

On November 16, 2021, we published an article on the exercise and labelled information war at sea.

If one would read the latest version of Russian military doctrine published this July, one would learn that information war is a key part of the overall Russian engagement with the West, and not merely in terms of direct military operations.

The Sea Breeze 2021 exercise highlighted how the Russians are engaging in widespread information war, and one to which the United States and its allies responded.

But one would find with difficulty either a translation of the Russian July publication or discussion by the United States of the information warfare which went on at Sea Breeze 2021.

The current conflict between Belarus/Russia and Poland is part of the same tissue of how the Russians engage in conflict with the West, although one would struggle to find much analysis which would connect up Sea Breeze 2021 with the current “border” crisis facing the Poles and Europe.

A rare exception with regard to coverage of Sea Breeze 2021 is an article by Liubov Tsybulska, head of the Ukraine Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security.

That article was published by the Ukrainian website EUROMAIDAN Press.

In the article, the author focuses on Russian actions during Sea Breeze 21, earlier iterations of the exercise saw Russian participation. But with the seizure of Crimea, and the wider Putin agenda with regard to Ukraine, these exercises are now treated by him as training grounds for military confrontation, 21st century style.

The author noted that the Russian operation to undercut Sea Breeze 21 followed the by now well established information war model evolved and perfected by the Kremlin.

“Such Russian operations are usually quite complex. They involve all major Russian intelligence agencies, target several audiences at once, all messages are consistent, well-tested, and communication channels cover several levels – the high official, media, social networks, and the highest official – the Russian president himself. The stages are usually as follows:

- Gradual suspense;
- Then escalation, aggressive attacks through the media and social networks;
- And finally normalization through pushing to accept their conditions at the highest political level.”

During Sea Breeze 21 there was a clear incident to which the campaign was then anchored, namely, the Russian attack on a British destroyer. Russia claimed that it fired warning shots and dropped bombs to deter HMS Defender operating in international waters off of Cape Fiolent on Crimea.

The Ukrainian author highlighted how the Russians then built that into their information war campaign.

“The day before the incident with the British destroyer, Putin says that NATO is expanding, breaking its promise not to do so. Another Putin’s return to the thesis of “red lines that Russia will define for itself.”

“The next day, just hours after the British destroyer’s innocent passage 12 miles from Crimea, the Russian embassy in the United States literally explodes with a tweet about the “aggressive character of the exercises” and calls on the US and NATO to stop them.

“From this moment, a massive information bombardment begins.

“Usually, the mechanism of this wave is quite simple: Russian intelligence sends “their” media, bloggers, and “experts” special “playbooks” with the main narratives that need to be actively disseminated.”

She concluded by this warning: “At a time when Russia still seeks to divide the world into zones of influence and argues that it has the right to decide our fate for us and without us, such actions of our partners seriously warn those who began to give in to Russia’s ambitions regarding Crimea and the surrounding waters.”

And an article published on July 1, 2021 and written by Pavel Felgenhauer highlighted the Russian approach evident during the exercise:

This year’s Sea Breeze maneuvers began on June 28, and they are planned to last for about two weeks. Before that, on June 23, the United Kingdom’s destroyer HMS Defender sailed from Odesa, Ukraine, to Batumi, Georgia. Passing the Crimean Cape Fiolent, close to Sevastopol (the main Russian naval base in the region), HMS Defender cut a corner by entering and then leaving the 12-mile territorial zone around occupied Crimea, in what is known as “innocent passage” under the 1982 United Nations Law of the Sea Convention (UNCLOS).

Since 2014, Moscow considers Crimean territorial waters to be Russian, but the international community recognizes them as Ukrainian. The Brits had a number of journalists onboard, and the decision to spook the Russians by a freedom of navigation operation was taken by the UK Cabinet. Two Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) Border Guard patrol boats and naval jet bombers intercepted the Defender. The Russians warned the British vessel to leave the area and eventually fired some warning shots—out of range and not directly aimed at the Defender. Both sides garnered lots of PR material, but the incident concluded without any injuries or damage (see EDM, June 24).

During the phone-in, Putin was asked about the HMS Defender: “Could the incident spook a world war?” He reassured his audience, “The threat was not real. This was a US and UK joint [sic] provocation to make us [the Russian military] open up while the Americans would be recording our response. We fed them [the Americans] false intel... But even if we would have sunk that ship [HMS Defender], this would not have provoked a world war, because the other side knows they cannot win such a war” (Kremlin.ru, June 30).

In March and April 2021, in a nation-wide mass mobilization of forces under the pretext of a “test of battle readiness,” over 300,000 soldiers and immense amounts of heavy weaponry were deployed in the field—at least half of them close to the Ukrainian border. The Russian military demonstrated its ability to fight and win a large conventional regional war (with Ukraine) while prepared to take on the US and its allies in a global (nuclear) conflict in case of an uncontrolled escalation (Militarynews.ru, April 29).

According to Putin, the Russian exercises caused distress in the West: “I ordered the defense ministry to slowly curtail the exercise and withdraw from Ukraine. But now, they reply by coming to our borders with Sea Breeze 2021” (Kremlin.ru, June 30).

And a Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty article published on July 9, 2021 highlighted Russian actions in the information domain against Ukraine.

Ukraine’s Defense Ministry said Russian government hackers attacked the website of the Ukrainian Navy to spread disinformation about the ongoing multinational Sea Breeze military exercises in the Black Sea.

In a July 9 statement, the Defense Ministry said the “entire Kremlin propaganda machine” was involved in the hacking operation, which published false documents and fake news on the Navy’s website related to the Sea Breeze drills.

“The threat has now been eliminated and the Navy’s website will be restored in the near future,” it said, adding that there have also been unsuccessful denial-of-service attacks (DDoS) on the Defense Ministry portal.

That article published in mid-November provided a clear statement of Russian behavior which was clearly more than just mildly belligerent.

If one combined those actions with the July doctrinal statement plus Historian Putin’s essay on the future of Ukraine, their actions in the exercise were simply part of the evolving narrative.

Rather than focusing on hybrid war and gray zone operations, we are talking about ongoing political-military operations by the 21st century authoritarian powers which are characterized by escalation and de-escalation to get tactical and strategic advantage.

And to put it bluntly: Russian actions surrounding Sea Breeze 21 should have made it very clear that some sort of action against Ukraine was in the cards.

The Impact of the Biden Administration's Fall, 2021

March 7, 2022

By July the Russians had stated their policy in dealing with the West and Putin's aspiration for the new Rus led Slavic empire.

The limited war in the Black Sea was became a backdrop to Sea Breeze 2021.

And then we enter the period from the late summer through the Fall and what the Biden Administration did which contributed to Putin's risk calculations which would lead to the invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

To date, Putin's risk calculations have been reduced to nibbles and chomps into the European territorial landscape, but by the time he addressed Ukraine again he had ramped up his ambitions and determined the risks of invasion were manageable.

The actions of the Biden Administration in the late summer to Fall were important inputs to his risk calculus.

The most important of which clearly was the unilateral decision by President Biden to pull the plug on a NATO mission but there is more than simply this and I will address what else transpired in the Biden Administration's Fall activities which fed into Putin calculating that the time was right for an invasion of Ukraine.

We have written extensively about what I call the blitzkrieg withdrawal strategy in Afghanistan, but in one swoop the credibility of U.S. intelligence and political military leadership hit the same level as the rouble after the sanctions imposed in March 2022 against the Russians.

We were told by the Administration that this decision would better prepare us for dealing with the bigger foreign policy challenges, although in reality it only accelerated them

In a policy world which is measured in a CNN day, the events of July, August and September 2021 are too far ago to remember but for any one doing a strategic timeline on the war. they are much more than a CNN day.

Following the Blitzkrieg withdrawal, the Russians moved into the Central Asian states and re-engaged in the wake of the American pull out, not withdrawal. but pull out.

For someone interested in shaping a new Russian empire, the Central Asian state re-opening facilitated by the Biden Administration was a step which accelerated the Putin imperial appetite.

Richard Weitz wrote a wide range of articles during the U.S. engagement in Central Asia associated with the Afghan operations, and highlighted how Western engagement was being facilitated.

This phase of history was ended by the blitzkrieg withdrawal and continuing to believe that Putin was a best the tsar of a decaying state, a view often voiced by members of the Biden Administration.

Who can forget the wonderful performance by then Secretary of State John Kerry that Russia was behaving like a 19th century power by its seizure of Crimea. Of course, later now Climate Czar in the Biden Administration, Kerry was very concerned about the climate change impacts of the invasion.

I will close this piece by providing the front end of the piece by James Durso entitled “Central Asia on the Front Lines,” which clearly captures a key aftermath of the Blitzkrieg withdrawal which fed into the Kremlin’s calculations about U.S. resolve in the “build back better” era.

The U.S. retreat from Afghanistan puts Central Asia on the front lines against the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

The Central Asian republics – old cultures but young countries – are still competing the process of state formation started thirty years ago with the fall of the Soviet Union, so this is a challenging time to be on the doorstep of a threatening Afghanistan.

Central Asia aided the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) during the war in Afghanistan by providing access to airfields (Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan), allowing aircraft overflights, and facilitating the resupply of NATO via the Northern Distribution Network (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan).

Among the states on Afghanistan’s border, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan previously met Taliban delegations, recognizing the movement would be a force regardless of the final outcome in Afghanistan. This was in line with Turkmenistan’s principle of “positive neutrality” and, despite its aversion to Islamists, the government hosted a Taliban delegation in July. Uzbekistan hosted a Taliban delegation in 2018 and encouraged peace talks between the Taliban and the Kabul government, continuing the country’s pragmatic approach to Afghanistan. (The former president, Islam Karimov, said “Tashkent is ready to recognize any government in Afghanistan, even if it is the Taliban government. It doesn’t matter whether we like that government or not.”) Tajikistan will likely continue its policy of opposition to the Taliban and has said it will not recognize a Taliban government that does not include all the country’s ethnic groups.

These differences may make it hard to forge a common regional approach to Afghanistan that must also include Kazakhstan, the largest economy and Uzbekistan’s rival for regional leadership, and Kyrgyzstan. Complicating that process is that Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan are members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a Russia-led security alliance.

The rapid collapse of the U.S. client government in Kabul caught the local capitals – and Washington – by surprise. They had earlier told the U.S. they would not welcome thousands of Afghan refugees, likely because they remember it took Washington up to eight years to find new homes for Uighur detainees at the Guantanamo Bay detention camp after they were declared “No longer enemy combatants.” Regardless, refugees have fled to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan which are accepting them only if they promptly continue onwards to places of permanent resettlement.

The Central Asian capitals want a prompt resolution of the refugee situation and the recognition of a government in Kabul so they can focus on the regional connectivity projects they need to grow and diversify their economies.

They will look over their shoulder at Moscow and Beijing, but their policy priority will be the economy, which may give less weight to what Washington and Brussels want, especially as Washington vacated the area so fast it left several planeloads of its citizens stranded in Afghanistan. Though the long-term consideration is economic, in the near term the Central Asians will have to shape the security environment as a prelude to future economic growth.

Washington 's distance from the region, which previously allowed the U.S. to be the regional balancer as it had no local territorial aspirations, will now work against it as it has nothing at risk – unlike neighboring Russia, as Moscow will remind local capitals.

The readiness of the U.S. to walk away from an investment of \$2.3 trillion and over 2,300 deaths – unimaginable sums – will cause a loss of confidence in U.S. assurances of fidelity as its local investment relatively negligible.

Instead, Russia's menacing embrace of the locals will be rebranded to “standing shoulder to shoulder against instability and extremism” (don't call it a “buffer zone!”), and an opportunity to draw all five countries into the CSTO and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU).

AUKUS and Fractioning NATO

March 8, 2022

On September 15, 2021, President Biden hosted a video event announcing an agreement with Australia to build a nuclear submarine, which would replace their current Collins class submarines.

I have spent a good deal of time in the UK, and Australia and in France, and was in Paris at the time of the announcement.

The UK is also involved but exactly how will be sorted out.

But what struck me as odd at the time was why Biden was hosting the “AUKUS show.”

This should have been the PM of Australia's event with the other two leaders in supporting roles, as this was a sovereign Australian decision.

The original replacement submarine was to be a Australian-French-U.S.. effort.

There have been challenges since the original agreement between Australia and France was signed in 2016 followed by a production contract signed in 2019.

I have written extensively about these issues since 2016, but when the Trump Administration began to suggest a nuclear submarine option was available, the Aussies took whatever there concerns were with France and rethought their options.

The growing desire to have long range weapons systems which could operate against the Chinese military provided the intellectual framework into which this fit.

Australia certainly could make a different decision but it was up to the Australian government to announce it and to deal with its French partner.

Biden hosted the show largely for political reasons — his Afghan withdrawal was a disaster.

Allowing the British PM anywhere near the conversation was a very bad U.S. decision as the UK and France remain the two key European NATO military powers.

The way the announcement was handled drove an immediate further wedge in the relationship between the United States and France.

The French government was legitimately concerned with this decision undercutting their Pacific strategy and their contributions to alliance defense.

It was an instant Biden Administration action which drove wedges between the “Anglo-Saxons” and the French and anyone who knows anything about French defense and foreign policy knows how deadly such a phrase is within French politics.

The French government was going to head both the European Union and the NATO rapid reaction force starting in January 2022.

If there had been any real concern with Russia and its potential actions, humiliating France at this point simply weakened allied relationships.

Given that France is a nuclear power, and with the prospect of open conflict with a nuclear armed power which had already been evident in the Black Sea in the summer, one simply might note that there clearly was no connecting of the dots by the Biden Administration with regard to the global situation or the close connection between anything done against the interests the evolving authoritarian power coalition in China with any possible actions by its Russian partner.

All we later heard from President Biden was that the way it was handled was “clumsy.”

The way it was handled by the U.S. President had strategic consequences for President Putin could only look at this as further strategic myopia and providing an opportunity for his own strategic moves.

And before I leave this subject, the Russians know the British government very well and Russian oligarchs have allegedly had special relationships with members of the government.

But what is not controversial is that London has become Londongrad in terms of Russian oligarch money in the country.

This certainly shapes a certain understanding of the PM’s global Britain argument.

And as the Biden Administration leads the sanction surge, even more important would be doing a forensic analysis of the kinds of relationships which our societies and elites have forged with Russia and China. And how one could continue to important Russian energy supplies is simply beyond amazing.

While we pursue a course that allows “globalization” to permit the expansion of authoritarian power WITHIN our societies, we need to deal with that more urgently than finding another item for the sanction list.

The Biden Administration Embraces Ukraine But Without a Strategic Plan

March 9, 2022

In a piece in *The Wall Street Journal* published on March 4, 2022 by Tunku Varadarajan, the historian Robert Service is quoted with regard to what he considers the two key blunders that caused the Ukraine War.

“The first came on Nov. 10, when the U.S. and Ukraine signed a Charter on Strategic Partnership, which asserted America’s support for Kyiv’s right to pursue membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The pact made it likelier than ever that Ukraine would eventually join NATO—an intolerable prospect for Vladimir Putin. “It was the last straw,” Mr. Service says. Preparations immediately began for Russia’s so-called special military operation in Ukraine.”

And the article goes on to say: “Mr. Service characterizes these moves as “shambolic mismanagement” by the West, which offered Ukraine encouragement on the NATO question but gave no apparent thought to how such a tectonic move away from Moscow would go down with Mr. Putin. “Nothing was done to prepare the Ukrainians for the kind of negative response that they would get.”

But it is actually must worse that this.

Ukraine was not going to get membership in NATO and even joining the EU was a clear reach.

There is no way that Ukraine was going to see the basing of NATO forces, nor in the face of the U.S. military collapse in Afghanistan, it is still not clear what kind of U.S. military will emerge from the deserts and mountains from years of fighting fighting Jihadists.

The Russians are a nuclear armed brutal power.

That is a league all of its own.

The delusional globalization thinking that conflicts are resolved by trade and supporting the “global commons” still is very strong in the West.

Whether geopolitical thinking on energy can trump the climate change focus is an open question.

If you can not prepare your own country for conflict with a nuclear power, tell me how you are going to back one that is not even in your alliance structure, and, even more decisively, what are really going to do for your alliance structure with regard to nuclear weapons use, not some abstract deterrence puts them into never never land stance or tell us that Russia is so “19th century” or that they are a “regional power” or that Putin is delusional.

The Ukraine dynamic affecting the war started with the September visit to the White House with the Ukrainian president.

And let me highlight this event — Biden is pulling the plug on the NATO operation in Afghanistan UNILATERALLY while he is embracing Ukraine who is desperately hoping that the same Administration that was defeated by the Taliban is going to take on a nuclear power!

If we look back to September 1, 2021, this is what the Biden Administration said with regard to Ukraine:

In the 21st century, nations cannot be allowed to redraw borders by force. Russia violated this ground rule in Ukraine. Sovereign states have the right to make their own decisions and choose their own alliances. The United States stands with Ukraine and will continue to work to hold Russia accountable for its aggression. America's support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity is unwavering.

Standing up to Russian Aggression: Russia's aggression, including the war in eastern Ukraine and its seizure of Crimea, has claimed more than 14,000 Ukrainian lives, destabilized Europe and the Black Sea region, and threatened the global rules-based order.

The United States does not and will never recognize Russia's purported annexation of Crimea and reaffirms its full support for international efforts, including in the Normandy Format, aimed at negotiating a diplomatic resolution to the Russian-led conflict in eastern Ukraine on the basis of international law, including the UN Charter.

The United States supports Ukraine's efforts to use the Crimea Platform to focus international attention and action on the humanitarian and security costs of Russia's occupation of Crimea with the aim of peacefully restoring Ukraine's control over this territory in accordance with international law. Together, we call on Russia to recommit to the ceasefire in eastern Ukraine and engage genuinely in conflict resolution efforts to end the war.

Deepening Strategic Defense Cooperation: The United States and Ukraine have finalized a Strategic Defense Framework that creates a foundation for the enhancement of U.S.-Ukraine strategic defense and security cooperation and the advancement of shared priorities, including implementing defense and defense industry reforms, deepening cooperation in areas such as Black Sea security, cyber defense, and intelligence sharing, and countering Russian aggression.

Supporting Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic Aspirations: As the United States and Allies reaffirmed in the June 2021 NATO Summit Communiqué, the United States supports Ukraine's right to decide its own future foreign policy course free from outside interference, including with respect to Ukraine's aspirations to join NATO. We also remain committed to assisting Ukraine with ongoing reforms.

Providing Ukraine with Security Assistance: The United States is announcing a new \$60 million security assistance package, including additional Javelin anti-armor systems and other defensive lethal and non-lethal capabilities, to enable Ukraine to more effectively defend itself against Russian aggression. The United States has committed \$2.5 billion in support of Ukraine's forces since 2014, including more than \$400 million this year alone.

Cooperating on R&D: The United States and Ukraine have finalized a Research, Development, Test, and Evaluation Agreement that provides a framework for pursuing bilateral armaments and military-technical cooperation.

Enacting Defense and Security Sector Reforms: The United States welcomes Ukraine's continued progress on defense and defense industry reforms, including the adoption of a new defense industry strategy. We intend to continue our robust training and exercise program in keeping with Ukraine's status as a NATO Enhanced Opportunities Partner.

Ukraine plans to continue taking steps to enhance democratic civilian control of the military, reform the security services, and modernize its defense acquisition process to advance its Euro-Atlantic aspirations. The United States supports Ukraine's plan to reform the Security Service of Ukraine by streamlining and clearly defining its authorities and strengthening regulations that protect human rights and provide for effective public oversight.

If we move forward to November 10, 2021, this is what the Biden Administration said with regard to Ukraine:

The United States and Ukraine share a vital national interest in a strong, independent, and democratic Ukraine. Bolstering Ukraine's ability to defend itself against threats to its territorial integrity and deepening Ukraine's integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions are concurrent priorities.

The United States recognizes Ukraine's unique contribution to nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament and reaffirms its commitments under the "Memorandum on Security Assurances in Connection with Ukraine's Accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons" (the Budapest Memorandum) of December 5, 1994.

Guided by the April 3, 2008 Bucharest Summit Declaration of the NATO North Atlantic Council and as reaffirmed in the June 14, 2021 Brussels Summit Communiqué of the NATO North Atlantic Council, the United States supports Ukraine's right to decide its own future foreign policy course free from outside interference, including with respect to Ukraine's aspirations to join NATO.

The United States and Ukraine intend to continue a range of substantive measures to prevent external direct and hybrid aggression against Ukraine and hold Russia accountable for such aggression and violations of international law, including the seizure and attempted annexation of Crimea and the Russia-led armed conflict in parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine, as well as its continuing malign behavior.

The United States intends to support Ukraine's efforts to counter armed aggression, economic and energy disruptions, and malicious cyber activity by Russia, including by maintaining sanctions against or related to Russia and applying other relevant measures until restoration of the territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

The United States does not and will never recognize Russia's attempted annexation of Crimea and reaffirms its full support for international efforts, including in the Normandy Format, aimed at negotiating a diplomatic resolution to the Russia-led armed conflict in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine on the basis of respect for international law, including the UN Charter.

The United States supports Ukraine's efforts to use the Crimea Platform to coordinate international efforts to address the humanitarian and security costs of Russia's occupation of Crimea, consistent with the Platform's Joint Declaration.

The United States and Ukraine endorse the 2021 Strategic Defense Framework as the foundation of enhanced Ukraine-U.S. defense and security cooperation and intend to work to advance shared priorities, including implementing defense and defense industry reforms, deepening cooperation in areas such as Black Sea security, cyber defense, and intelligence sharing, and countering Russia's aggression.

The United States and Ukraine are key partners in the broader Black Sea region and will seek to deepen cooperation with Black Sea Allies and partners to ensure freedom of navigation and effectively counter external threats and challenges in all domains.

The United States remains committed to assisting Ukraine with ongoing defense and security reforms and to continuing its robust training and exercises. The United States supports Ukraine's efforts to maximize its status as a NATO Enhanced Opportunities Partner to promote interoperability.

Ukraine intends to continue to enhance democratic civilian control of the military, reform its security service, and modernize its defense acquisition processes to advance its Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

The United States and Ukraine underline the importance of close cooperation within international institutions, including the United Nations, the OSCE and the Council of Europe, and intend to multiply efforts in finding new approaches and developing joint actions in preventing individual states from trying to destroy the rule-based international order and forcefully to revise internationally recognized state borders.

The United States and Ukraine intend to support accountability for those responsible for abuses of human rights in the territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied by Russia, and to support the release of political prisoners and hostages held in these territories. The United States intends to continue to support impartial criminal investigations conducted by war crimes units under the Office of the General Prosecutor.

The United States intends to continue assisting Ukraine in providing humanitarian support to people affected or displaced by the Russia-led armed conflict in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions as the government of Ukraine increases its provision of life-saving assistance in the form of food, shelter, safe drinking water, and protection for the most vulnerable, including the elderly.

The United States remains committed to enhancing Ukraine's ability to secure and police its borders, and to pursuing greater information sharing and law enforcement cooperation to counter international criminal and terrorist activity, including the trafficking of people, weapons, and narcotics.

The United States and Ukraine pledge to combat the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and secure advanced technologies by adhering to international nonproliferation standards, strengthening, and effectively implementing export control regimes, and partnering to manage emerging technology risks.

The United States and Ukraine are committed to further developing their partnership in cyber security, countering hybrid threats, combating the spread of disinformation while upholding freedom of expression, and strengthening Ukraine's cyber security infrastructure.

Ok we don't have to be rocket scientists to compare what the Russians we saying in July with these statements to see that their might be a predictable collision course here.

There is a major question of whether the United States and NATO really are practitioners of the art of peer warfare, notably nuclear armed powers willing to use their weapons as part of their arsenal of promoting a new authoritarian led global order.

A pandemic led American and a military defeated by the Taliban is a work in progress to restore credibility.

And even more important is what is the strategy of the liberal democracies to support states that are not going to be part of an allied structure, but whose independence is crucial to their fate and future?

This is a major question and my answer for some time has been to focus on who to create hedgehog states with significant enough military and defense capability to be desirable prizes for the autocrats.

But this requires modern air defense and counter-air capabilities, not just javelins to hand out to civilians in a crisis.

In a 2019 presentation to the International Fighter Conference, a senior Ukrainian military officer laid out what he thought they needed to become a credible hedgehog state:

Commander of the Air Command "South" of the Ukrainian Air Force, Lt. General Vasyl Chernenko presented a briefing entitled, Peculiarities of Employment Fighter Aviation and Development of its Future Capabilities According to Ukrainian Air Force Experience of Participation in Joint Forces Operation at the East of Ukraine."

Ukraine of course has experienced war first hand in the 21st century with the Russian seizure of Crimea, and with continued engagement in the rest of Ukraine with the goal of shaping Ukraine's future.

Russia used what analysts referred to as hybrid war as the means both to seize Crimea and to engage in destabilization efforts within the rest of Ukraine.

But what can be forgotten is the nature of the Russian military incursion which was much more similar to the means used by insurgency forces, which, of course, from a military point of view would require Ukraine to have the kind of counter-insurgency capabilities honed by the West over the past two decades in the Middle East.

Put bluntly, Ukraine does not have such capabilities, which poses the question of whether and how the West might provide such capabilities?

Notably, the West would not do counter-insurgency in the Middle East without airpower, and the question is how Ukraine might obtain or develop such capabilities?

According to the presentation, the Ukrainian Air Force is in the process of transition with increased but still very limited pilot training and enhanced readiness for their legacy fighter fleet of MiG-29s and Su-27s.

The speaker highlighted what he labelled “the sabotage-terrorist nature of the enemy’s actions,” which he argued required the use of fighter aircraft as part of the strike and defense force needed by Ukraine.

And these fighters would need to confront the Russian air defense system moved forward into the areas of interest as well.

He argued that Ukraine was focused on the upgrades of its current fighter force either by indigenous developments or by working with partner nations.

Obviously, the partner nation bit is the challenging part, as the West needs to sort out how to provide military aid to Ukraine but in such a way that it reinforces the defense capabilities of Ukraine without justifying the undoubted claims Russia would make that such efforts are designed to threaten Russian territory.

Putin’s Valdai Discussion Club, October 2021

March 10, 2022

The 18th annual meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club, held in Sochi, saw President Putin give his address on October 22, 2021.

At these meetings, Putin provides his view of the world and of current events.

The narrative he has crafted and delivered during these events has been quite clear.

The message: The collapse of the Soviet Union was a global catastrophe and setback. The Americans took advantage of this collapse to try and become a hegemonic power. But their efforts have failed and the world is in the process of transition to a new balance of power, one in which Russia has its rightful place.

As Putin commented about these developments:

A search for a new balance, sustainable relations in the social, political, economic, cultural and military areas and support for the world system was launched at that time. We were looking for this support but must say that we did not find it, at least so far. Meanwhile, those who felt like the winners after the end of the Cold War (we have also spoken about this many times) and thought they climbed Mount Olympus soon discovered that the ground was falling away underneath even there, and this time it was their turn, and nobody could “stop this fleeting moment” no matter how fair it seemed.

In general, it must have seemed that we adjusted to this continuous inconstancy, unpredictability and permanent state of transition, but this did not happen either.

I would like to add that the transformation that we are seeing and are part of is of a different calibre than the changes that repeatedly occurred in human history, at least those we know about. This is not simply a shift in the balance of forces or scientific and technological breakthroughs, though both are also taking place. Today, we are facing systemic changes in all directions – from the increasingly complicated geophysical condition of our planet to a more paradoxical interpretation of what a human is and what the reasons for his existence are.

At this session, he underscored the continuing conflict within the United States over basic values, up to and including the various conflicts involving sexuality, social justice and national legacies.

These crises were leading to internal contradictions in Western societies and, although he did not put it this way, there is little question that his judgement was the United States was being weakened by deep moral divisions and social conflict. The “progressives” in the United States were likened in their destructive behavior to that of the impact of the Bolsheviks on Russian culture.

The title of the session was the “global shake-up in the 21st century” but the subtitle to this was to be written not in 2021 but in 2022 by Putin.

Putin underscore his perspective as follows:

“We look in amazement at the processes underway in the countries which have been traditionally looked at as the standard-bearers of progress. Of course, the social and cultural shocks that are taking place in the United States and Western Europe are none of our business; we are keeping out of this.

“Some people in the West believe that an aggressive elimination of entire pages from their own history, “reverse discrimination” against the majority in the interests of a minority, and the demand to give up the traditional notions of mother, father, family and even gender, they believe that all of these are the mileposts on the path towards social renewal.

“Listen, I would like to point out once again that they have a right to do this, we are keeping out of this.

“But we would like to ask them to keep out of our business as well. We have a different viewpoint, at least the overwhelming majority of Russian society – it would be more correct to put it this way – has a different opinion on this matter. We believe that we must rely on our own spiritual values, our historical tradition and the culture of our multiethnic nation.....

“The advocates of so-called ‘social progress’ believe they are introducing humanity to some kind of a new and better consciousness. Godspeed, hoist the flags as we say, go right ahead. The only thing that I want to say now is that their prescriptions are not new at all. It may come as a surprise to some people, but Russia has been there already.

“After the 1917 revolution, the Bolsheviks, relying on the dogmas of Marx and Engels, also said that they would change existing ways and customs and not just political and economic ones, but the very notion of human morality and the foundations of a healthy society.

“The destruction of age-old values, religion and relations between people, up to and including the total rejection of family (we had that, too), encouragement to inform on loved ones – all this was proclaimed progress and, by the way, was widely supported around the world back then and was quite fashionable, same as today. By the way, the Bolsheviks were absolutely intolerant of opinions other than theirs.

The Afghan war and its outcome further weakened the United States.

This is how Putin put it: “To put it bluntly, the Western domination of international affairs, which began several centuries ago and, for a short period, was almost absolute in the late 20th century, is giving way to a much more diverse system.

“The attempt after the end of the Cold War to create a global order on the basis of Western domination failed, as we see. The current state of international affairs is a product of that very failure, and we must learn from this.

“Some may wonder, what have we arrived at?

“We have arrived somewhere paradoxical. Just an example: for two decades, the most powerful nation in the world has been conducting military campaigns in two countries that it cannot be compared to by any standard.

“But in the end, it had to wind down operations without achieving a single goal that it had set for itself going in 20 years ago, and to withdraw from these countries causing considerable damage to others and itself. In fact, the situation has worsened dramatically.”

For Putin, Russian values are crucial to protect and enhance in the evolving global situation, one which is shaped by nation states.

And protecting Russian values and protecting the Russian nation state also requires vigilance, such as in the case of the threats posed from Ukraine by the government in Ukraine.

One of the participants in the conference asked Putin this question about Ukraine:

“You mentioned a Chinese proverb about living in a time of change. Our country has been living like that for almost 30 years now, and the situation is becoming more difficult in anticipation of winter, amid the pandemic, and, I would say, the situation with the Americans.

“A couple of days ago, we had Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin visit our country. He brought \$60 million worth of weapons and promised us a bright future as a NATO member, figuratively speaking.

“I will note right away that any allegations that NATO is irrelevant because Europe does not agree, are prevarication. One does not need to be a NATO member to have US or British military infrastructure deployed in Ukraine. I believe this process is already underway.

“In your July article on historical unity, you wrote that transforming Ukraine into an anti-Russia country is unacceptable for millions of people. This is true, and opinion polls confirm it. Over 40 percent have good or very good thoughts about Russia. However, this transformation has, in fact, started.

“A rather long and very dangerous, in my opinion, distance in this direction may have already been covered. I think that if this idea with a para-NATO infrastructure continues to be implemented, the process to form what is now a not so stable anti-Russia Ukraine will be cemented for many years to come.

“You wrote in your article that if the process continues unabated, it will pose a serious threat to the Russian state, and this may be fraught with Ukraine losing its statehood. People who oppose this movement are facing reprisals. You are aware that they are trying to put Viktor Medvedchuk in prison based on some outlandish charges.

“How, in your opinion, can this process be stopped? Maybe, you have a timeline for when it might happen? What can be done in this regard at all?”

Putin answered this question about Ukraine in the following manner:

“Consider what happened in the late 1980s – early 1990s (I will not tell the whole story now, although you just made me think about talking more about it), when everyone assured us that an eastward expansion of NATO infrastructure after the unification of Germany was totally out of the question.

“Russia could be absolutely sure of this, at the very least, so they said. But those were public statements. What happened in reality? They lied. And now they challenge us to produce a document that actually said that.

“They expanded NATO once, and then expanded it twice. What are the military-strategic consequences? Their infrastructure is getting closer. What kind of infrastructure? They deployed ABM (anti-missile) systems in Poland and Romania, using Aegis launchers, where Tomahawks can be loaded, strike systems.

“This can be done easily, with the click of a button. Just change the software – and that is it, no one will even notice. Medium and short-range missiles can also be deployed there. Why not? Has anyone even reacted to our statement that we will not deploy this kind of missile in the European part if we produce them, if they tell us that no one will do so from the United States or Europe? No. They never responded.

“But we are adults, we are all adults here. What should we do in this situation?

“The Minister of Defence arrives, who, in fact, opens the doors for Ukraine to NATO. In fact, his statement must and can be interpreted in this way. He says every country has the right to choose. And nobody says no, nobody. Even those Europeans you mentioned. I know, I spoke to them personally.

“But one official is not a security guarantee for Russia – he may be here one day and he might be replaced the next. What will happen then? This is not a security guarantee; it is just a conversation on a given topic. And we are naturally concerned.”

Clearly, Putin was driving towards what he thought was the solution set to the problem as described.

Over the years, we have covered the Valdai meetings and have seen them as good indicators of the evolving situation domestically and globally as seen by Putin and his Administration. Those articles can be found on our companions site, *Second Line of Defense*.

For example, here is an article written by Richard Weitz and published on SLD on November 23, 2015:

Second Line of Defense had the opportunity to attend this year's 12th annual meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club in Sochi, where more than one hundred foreign and Russian participants heard President Vladimir Putin and other senior Russian officials and various international experts discussed recent international developments.

Some of the prominent foreign guests included Iranian parliamentary speaker Ali Larijani, former Czech President Vaclav Klaus, and several ex-Western ambassadors to Russia.

Unsurprisingly, the other Russian government speakers at this week-long conference in late October did not substantially differ in their remarks from those of President Putin. In turn, Putin's comments this year did not vary in theme from those the Russian president delivered in previous years, though some details were new to address the Russian military intervention in Syria and other recent developments.

Revealingly, Putin described “The global information space” as a battlefield in which views and interpretations are “aggressively imposed on people [and] certain facts are either concealed or manipulated” with enemy imagery common.

Alluding to Western governments, Putin said that, “The authorities in countries that seemed to have always appealed to such values as freedom of speech and the free dissemination of information ... are now trying to prevent the spreading of objective information and any opinion that differs from their own.”

In this light, Putin and other Russian government officials use the Valdai Conference and other fora to engage in this information battle.

According to Putin, history shows that peace requires “securing and maintaining” a balance of power, whereas striving for “unilateral domination” lead to international conflict, arms races, and war.

In Moscow's view, the current international system is unbalanced due to the superior power of the United States, which allegedly has sought to exploit the Soviet Union's collapse and other developments to expand U.S. power and influence throughout the world in partnership with a few favored allies.

In this characterization, U.S. policies have tried to maintain this favorable balance by preventing the rise of potentially balancing power blocs and forcing foreign governments to follow Washington's leadership or suffer U.S. efforts to replace them with more pliable regimes.

Putin sees this supposed U.S. strategy as unsuccessful.

He and other Russian government representatives say that U.S. leaders exaggerated their post-Cold War preeminence and, though able to undermining existing global institutions, have proven unable to erect effective security architecture in its place.

Though they tried to remake the world by imposing global rules more favorable to Washington, U.S. policies have mostly produced disorder and instability, to everyone's detriment, including that of the United States.

Washington will allegedly “use force on any pretext, even just to remind the world who is boss here, without giving a thought about the legitimacy of the use of force and its consequences [and] without solving problems, but only multiplying them.”

At Sochi, Putin reaffirmed his controversial view that the Soviet Union's collapse represented one of the world's great tragedies because the disintegration forced millions of Russians to live in a foreign country without their consent (“the Russian people became the world's biggest divided nation”) and by degrading their socioeconomic and geopolitical status. He also indicated that another regrettable consequence was that the collapse opened the former Soviet states to Western interference in their internal affairs.

Putin blamed the West, especially the United States, for the resulting crises in the region, most recently in Ukraine, which the Russian president saw as a U.S.-led “coup d'état”, Western bankrolling of the regime's opponents, and the disregard for the country's constitution and legitimate government as spurring a popular revolt in eastern Ukraine against the new government.

Recalling some of his derogatory remarks about Kazakhstan, Putin warned that further Western interference would be “completely unacceptable in the post-Soviet region, where, to be frank, many former Soviet republics do not yet have traditions of statehood and have not yet developed stable political systems.” Putin was explicit in including Russia in this category.

“The United States has a law [whose] goal is democratisation of the Russian Federation. Just imagine if we were to write into Russian law that our goal is to democratise the United States, though in principle we could do this,” citing cases when the winner of the most popular votes in a U.S. presidential election failed to capture enough electoral votes to gain a majority in the electoral college, due to what Putin termed a defect in the U.S. Constitution.

According to Putin, the United States cannot succeed in promoting its version of liberal democracy since it has features unique to the American experience.

U.S. visions and values may appeal to Americans, but trying to impose them on other civilizations heedless of national traditions or the right of national sovereignty invariably produces a counter reaction, sometimes a militaristic one in the form of terrorism.

Rather than acknowledge their country's many defects and show more humility in their actions and modesty in their goals, U.S. leaders, according to Putin, simply adopt a “double standard” that skirts around the defects of the United States and the regimes Washington controls but highlights the faults of Russia and other regimes that Washington dislikes.

Putin attempted to exploit what he saw as gaps between the opinions and values of Americans and those of foreign audiences. This line of argument has made some progress in the case of China and in some developing countries, but now the focus of the Russian information campaign has shifted towards Europe.

For example, Putin expressed understanding for those Europeans alarmed by foreign immigration by enumerating the burdens of the refugees on the receiving countries, including the financial costs of integrating them, and how their presence can provoke “a massive uncontrolled shocking clash of different lifestyles... growing nationalism and intolerance... [and] a permanent conflict in society.”

The Migrant Battering Ram, Fall 2021

March 11, 2022

The migrant pressures on Europe have been a key policy tool for Putin for some time.

Driving people from Syria out into the Middle East and Europe is a clearly disruptive element.

And the operational takeover of Belarus’s territory in the run up to the Ukrainian crisis of 2022 was clearly evident in the Fall of 2021.

And the outpouring of migrants from Ukraine is almost as useful to the Putin agenda as an actual military invasion.

Now a European economy which has not recovered from the pandemic shutdown, has become a low growth economy, has significant tensions caused by migration, is now facing as a result of the war in Ukraine migrations on the level of the end of World War II.

During my visit to Poland in the Fall of 2021, the Poles clearly understood that the kind of “migrant” crisis being created by the Belarus-Russian dyad was about hybrid war, it was not a “migrant” crisis.

This is what I wrote in an article published on November 15, 2021 entitled “Poland Faces the Belarus/Russia Migrant Battering Ram.”

I have visited Belarus in the past and have very clear memories of my time there. And with my recent visit to Poland, was reminded again of how Belarus is a border country in many respects, but one dominated by Russia.

The use of migrants by the Russians through the Belarus conduit operating as a battering ram against Poland, particularly, and Europe more generally, is something which the Poles have clearly focused upon and see as a direct threat to them and to Europe.

When I attended the Defence 24 Conference held in Warsaw in September, the topic of the “hybrid war” character of what was happening on the Polish border was discussed frequently throughout the conference. And when the Commanding General of the territorial forces discussed the formation of a new brigade to support border security, there was a clear sense of a direct threat to Polish security which had to be dealt with. When a humanitarian crisis is actually hybrid war then simply treating in the former terms misses the point.

It should be remembered that in the past border incursions have been used by authoritarian leaders to breach Polish territory and to ramp up conflict against Poland itself. It should therefore be no surprise that Poles are deeply concerned with these events, which have little to do

with migrants but everything to do with the state of permanent war with the West that is described in the July 2, 2021 version of Russian military doctrine.

For those who don't remember, this is how the German attack on Poland began in 1939. In an article by Wojciech Zurawski published on August 29, 2014, this is how the prelude was highlighted:

Joachim Fulczyk still remembers the fateful radio broadcast 75 years ago this weekend that provided Adolf Hitler with a pretext to launch his invasion of Poland that sparked World War Two.

Now 83, Fulczyk listened with his mother and aunt to a brief address supposedly given by Polish saboteurs who had seized the local radio station in Gleiwitz, then located inside Nazi Germany, a few km from the Polish border.

“My mother, hearing the news (that Poles had taken the radio station), told her sister ‘this can’t be true’,” said Fulczyk, who still lives in Gleiwitz, now known by its Polish name Gliwice. The town became part of Poland after border changes following the 1945 defeat of Hitler’s Third Reich.

As Poles and Germans prepare to mark the 75th anniversary on Monday of Hitler’s invasion of Poland, historians and residents of Gliwice recalled the seizure of the radio station – still today Europe’s tallest wooden structure – and drew parallels with the role of media in modern conflicts such as Ukraine.

Andrzej Jarczewski, director of the museum now at the site of the radio station, recounted how Germans posing as Poles staged the attack on the evening of August 31, 1939, with the aim of providing justification for a German invasion of Poland.

The seven-strong band, led by SS officer Alfred Helmut Naujocks, broadcast a short anti-German message in Polish.

Hitler made a speech in Berlin the next day citing the Gliwice attack and other similarly orchestrated incidents to justify his decision to storm Poland. World War Two began two days later when Britain and France declared war on Germany.

“The provocations in Gliwice and in some other places too were necessary to allow Hitler to make his speech, to say ‘we are innocent, the Poles started this war’,” said Jarczewski.

The Russian/Belarusian provocations that for the Poles defending their border against authoritarian states is not just important in itself but recalls a history which they have no intention of repeating.

I am going to stop the series at this point but I think the point is clear – action by Putin against Ukraine was increasingly clear, but what he would actually do was a future question. When perhaps; what perhaps; but not that something would happen, at least along the lines of 2014.

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