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## War and peace...and truth?

23 MARCH, 2022

Is it possible to judge the war in Ukraine with equanimity? The unanimous daily and unidirectional media bombardment (as with covid), designed to provoke emotional reactions that override our capacity for reasoning, has led to a extreme partiality in Western public opinion, although that's certainly not the case in the rest of the world. "The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing" said Pascal, and it is true. All of us feel moved and outraged by the appalling images caused by the horror of war. However, we cannot stop there, nor can we reduce a complex reality to a Manichean and puerile simplism.

There are undoubtedly objective reasons to be biased on this conflict. In an interview in French newspaper *Le Figaro*, a French general rightly pointed out that we are "culturally more sensitive to the weak, to David versus Goliath" and also "to the historical and psychological heritage of the Soviet threat in Cold War times", which distorts our perception of Russia. The general insisted that it was difficult to form a balanced opinion given the propaganda coming "from both sides" and seemed to envy "the prudence shown by the rest of the world (...), which has not supported the West without taking sides with Russia<sup>1</sup>".

### The war is between the US and Russia

Indeed, if we believe (wrongly) that the conflict is between Russia and Ukraine, it is inevitable to identify Russia with the bully Goliath. However, we know that Ukraine, being a victim, is not the main actor, since its government is a US puppet. And if the war is therefore between the US and Russia, who is the strong and who is the weak? Because in the world there is only one waning Goliath, which is the US, and one rising Goliath, which is China, and the rest of us are all Davids of greater or lesser size, including Russia (despite Putin's wishful thinking). From this more realistic perspective, the poor Ukrainian people would be the unacceptable and completely innocent (unlike their government) collateral damage of a US-Russian conflict caused by NATO's eastward expansion, a move forced by the US, which ignored Russian warnings for 15 years and disregarded the reservations shown by a reluctant France and Germany. Therefore, the slogan (repeated *ad nauseam*) that the Russian aggression is unprovoked is simply a lie – the provocateur being the US.

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<sup>1</sup> [Ukraine : sous-estime-t-on la puissance de l'armée russe à cause de la guerre de l'information ? \(lefigaro.fr\)](https://www.lefigaro.fr)



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Acknowledging that there is a cause for this US-provoked conflict does not imply justifying the disproportionate, brutal and unjustifiable Russian reaction that has killed 925 civilians, according to provisional UN data<sup>2</sup>. These are issues that deserve independent judgments, and this is the assessment of South Africa's even-handed President, a former visiting professor of Law at Stanford University<sup>3</sup> and a potential mediator: "Analysis of the causes of this conflict, a view shared both by many leading scholars in international relations and politicians, indicates that this war could have been avoided if NATO had heeded the warnings from amongst its own leaders and officials over the years that its eastward expansion would lead to greater, not less, instability in the region. While it is important to understand the causes of the conflict, we cannot however condone the use of force or the violation of international law<sup>4</sup>". It is difficult to put it better.

### **Is Putin the problem?**

The central objective of the Western propaganda campaign has been the personal demonization of Putin in such a way that has not been done with any of the numerous dictators swarming our planet, including some good friends of the US government. This portrait would paint Putin today - not before February 2022 - as an expansionist madman nostalgic for the Soviet empire. However, such supposed expansionism is questioned by many insiders of Russian reality. Harvard Kennedy School Intelligence Project Director Paul Kolbe, with a 25-year career at the CIA, clarified in 2019 that Putin "is not trying to rebuild the Soviet Union in its form, but they do want solid neighbors, they do want to have accepted spheres of influence and they do want to be able to ensure that threats don't come close<sup>5</sup>".

I think it is important to emphasize that the rest of the world watches with growing resentment that a country like the US, which maintains 750 military bases in 80 different countries regardless of whether they are democratic or not<sup>6</sup>, accuses another one of expansionism. This double standard openly advocated by the US ("rules for thee, not for me") was ironically criticized by Putin in an article signed by himself in 2013. In those days Putin could still write (and get published, of all places, in the New York Times,) that his relationship with Obama was marked "by growing trust." The article, intended to arouse sympathy in the non-Western world, read: "It is extremely dangerous to encourage people to see themselves as exceptional, whatever the motivation. There are big countries and small countries, rich and poor, those with long democratic traditions and those still finding their way to democracy. Their policies differ, too. We are all different, but when we ask for the Lord's

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<sup>2</sup> [UN human rights office reports 925 civilian deaths in Ukraine - JURIST - News](#)

<sup>3</sup> [President Cyril Ramaphosa: Profile \(dpme.gov.za\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Cyril Ramaphosa responds to Russia-Ukraine war questions in Parliament - YouTube](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Analysts discuss the 20-year rule of Vladimir Putin - Harvard Gazette](#)

<sup>6</sup> [750 Bases in 80 Countries Is Too Many for Any Nation: Time for the US to Bring Its Troops Home | Cato Institute](#)

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blessings, we must not forget that God created us equal<sup>7</sup>". If Putin is an expansionist, where is the historical evidence after 22 years in absolute power? And why wasn't he accused of it earlier? The most likely explanation is that the narrative that wants to explain the invasion of Ukraine as a sudden imperialist fever of a crazed individual has been subsequently fabricated to conceal that the main responsible for this crisis "is the West, and in particular America<sup>8</sup>", according to John Mearsheimer, professor of International Relations at the University of Chicago, in an article published in *The Economist*.

There is no doubt that an authoritarian power junkie like Putin has all the traits of the [pathology of power](#), but is Ukraine just a personal obsession? It doesn't seem so, since Ukraine's NATO membership is considered by Russia - and not only by Putin - an "existential threat". William Burns, current CIA Director and former US Ambassador to Russia, made it clear in his memoirs (published in 2019) that "Ukraine's entry into NATO is the brightest of red lines for the Russian elite (not just for Putin)", adding: "In more than two and a half years of conversations with key Russian players, from knuckle-draggers in the dark recesses of the Kremlin to Putin's sharpest liberal critics, I have yet to find anyone who views Ukraine in NATO as anything other than a direct challenge to Russia's interests<sup>9</sup>". Likewise, the expert Alexandra Vacroux claimed at a meeting held at Harvard in 2019 that "it is a mistake to think that Putin is the problem<sup>10</sup>".

## Propaganda

The war propaganda coming from both sides of a conflict always makes it difficult to get a glimpse of the progress of any war. In fact, it requires a constant exercise of skepticism regardless of the sympathy generated by one of the contenders. In the case of Ukraine, and without independent observers on the ground, we are experiencing a surprising informative blackout, since the Russian side remains hermetic (except for its icy war reports, censored by the "free" West) and the Ukrainian side is immersed in such a strident propaganda campaign that it has unfortunately lost all credibility, even though it is the only source of "information" for Western media (which take for granted, without further verification, everything they are told). In the words of a former military advisor to the US Secretary of Defense, "most of the information coming out of Ukraine is discredited as a lie within 24/48 hours<sup>11</sup>".

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<sup>7</sup> [Opinion | What Putin Has to Say to Americans About Syria - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](#)

<sup>8</sup> [John Mearsheimer on why the West is principally responsible for the Ukrainian crisis | The Economist](#)

<sup>9</sup> *The Back Channel*, by William J. Burns, Random House 2020

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> [Macgregor: Zelensky Is No Hero. He's A Puppet That Is Putting His Own Population At Unnecessary Risk | Video | RealClearPolitics](#)

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The canonization of the Ukrainian president by the Western media as a "hero" in the eyes of an ignorant public opinion is yet another propagandistic move. This characterization causes perplexity to anyone knowledgeable about the reality of Ukraine. Should we forget that it is one of the most corrupt countries in the world<sup>12</sup> and that, already in 2019, 12% of its population (more than the case of Venezuela) had had to emigrate<sup>13</sup>? Should we forget that one of its oligarchs, accused of asset seizure, was a supporter of Zelensky<sup>14</sup> and that in May 2021 the very Zelensky had the leader of the pro-Russian democratic parliamentary opposition arrested and closed all its media<sup>15</sup> with the approval of the Americans? Of course, the leader of the pro-Russian opposition is as much a puppet of the Russians as Zelensky is of the Americans, but the Zelensky/US coup was another direct provocation to Russia, and a very undemocratic one indeed. And to make matters worse, just a few days ago Zelensky ordered the suspension of activities of eleven opposition parties<sup>16</sup>. How do these facts fit with the image of a champion of freedom of a free and democratic state?

## What does Russia want?

It appears that Russia invaded Ukraine with a military objective, a territorial objective, a "police" objective and a political objective. The military objective was to destroy the military capability of the Ukrainian army, and it has achieved that in a few days. Thus, it enjoys almost absolute air superiority, as demonstrated by the fruitless Ukrainian requests for the creation of a no-fly zone, and overwhelming ground superiority. The initial Russian advantage, however, has been temporarily curbed by the unexpectedly massive arrival of effective NATO-provided offensive weapons, which have boosted Ukrainian morale: Starstreak and Stinger surface-to-air missiles, capable of shooting down fighter jets at low altitude, NLAW and Javelin anti-tank missiles, light, fast, operated by one or two people and capable of neutralizing a tank at a 4 km range, Turkish TB2 combat drones armed with MAM missiles, whose effectiveness was proven in the recent Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, and cheap and efficient kamikaze drones (loitering munition) like Israeli's Harpy (from Turkey) or American Switchblades. Drones are vulnerable to advanced Russian electronic warfare systems such as Pole-21 or Krasukha mobile units, but missiles can prolong the conflict, which is what the US intends.

The territorial objective of the Russian invasion seems to be to secure the independence of the Russophile Donbass region in eastern Ukraine and the consolidation of Crimea as part of Russia. Hence the importance of Mariupol, the battered port city on the Sea of Azov. The following map, which you will have seen in many media, is very eloquent (source: BBC):

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<sup>12</sup> [Ukraine - Transparency.org](https://www.transparency.org)

<sup>13</sup> [wmr 2020.pdf \(iom.int\)](https://www.iom.int/wmr-2020.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> [Ukraine Corruption Concerns Stall IMF Bailout - WSJ](https://www.wsj.com/news/ukraine-corruption-concerns-stall-imf-bailout)

<sup>15</sup> [Inside the Power Struggle Breaking up Russia and Ukraine | Time](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/21/europe/ukraine-zelensky-parliament.html)

<sup>16</sup> [Zelensky suspends 11 Ukrainian political parties with Russian ties | The Times of Israel](https://www.timesofisrael.com/zelensky-suspends-11-ukrainian-political-parties-with-russian-ties/)

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Russian positions, in red, have hardly changed in weeks and indicate that in the vast majority of Ukrainian territory there is not a single Russian soldier (nor will there be). Western media attribute this to the Ukrainian resistance, taking for granted that the Russian objective is the complete occupation of the country. Beyond the fact that annexing Ukraine would imply precisely what Russia wants to avoid, i.e. having more common border with NATO and not a neutral buffer state, this theory has weak flanks.

With 150,000 men the Russian objective can hardly be the occupation of a country the size and population of Ukraine. To give you an idea, in World War II Nazi Germany mustered 1.5 million troops to take half of Poland, and in the first Gulf War the US and its allies gathered nearly 900,000 men to enter Iraq. Thus, the Russian contingent was clearly designed to destroy the combat capability and, above all, the will to fight of the Ukrainian side and the achievement of its other objectives, including territorial objectives limited to the East and South of the country where the population is more sympathetic to Russia. Note that in a 2015 poll only 20% of Odessa citizens supported joining NATO<sup>17</sup>. The encirclement of Kiev, in the north, does not seem to be aimed, for now, at taking the city, but to tighten the grip in order to force negotiation. Every war is, above all, a confrontation of wills, but particularly this conflict is not so much a military confrontation (lost in advance by Ukraine) as a test of endurance in which each side wants the other to arrive as weakened as possible at the inexorable negotiation table.

<sup>17</sup> [Why is Ukraine the West's Fault? Featuring John Mearsheimer - YouTube](#)



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On the other hand, it seems evident that Russia did not count on European support, which has encouraged Zelensky to postpone the inevitable (even at the expense of putting his own civilians at increased risk). Accordingly, Russia has lost the initiative that sought a quick Ukrainian capitulation, but that does not mean that the Ukrainian army has not been completely defeated and that, regardless of Ukrainian courage, there is no possible guerrilla warfare in a country without jungles or mountains, unless it occupies the cities using de facto its own civilian population as a human shield.

### **Denazify Ukraine?**

The "police" objective of the invasion is the elimination of Ukrainian elements that the Russians label as neo-Nazis. In fact, the most extravagant justification put forward by Putin for invading Ukraine - Zelensky being of Jewish origin - has been to seek its "denazification". This terminology has a clear propagandistic value in the face of Russian public opinion, as it is reminiscent of the Great Patriotic War (World War II) whose victory is commemorated in Russia as its National Holiday. However, it has a plausible, if obsolete, background.

A 2014 Foreign Policy article acknowledged "the uncomfortable truth" that "a significant part of the Kiev government and the protesters who brought it to power are, in fact, fascists<sup>18</sup>". Please bear in mind that this was the government resulting from the 2014 US-backed coup that overthrew a democratically elected president. Foreign Policy mentions the Svoboda party, founded as the Ukrainian Social-National Party ("a name deliberately redolent of the National Socialist Party" or Nazi), which imposed Ukrainian as the sole language of the administration "instantly marginalizing the one-third of Ukraine's (and 60% of Crimea's) Russian-speaking population." According to Foreign Policy, one of its parliamentarians reportedly founded the Joseph Goebbels Political Research Center and called the Holocaust a "bright period" in history<sup>19</sup>. The creation of "neo-Nazi" armed militias (such as the Azov Battalion, headquartered precisely in Mariupol, by the Azov Sea) has also caused concern in recent years<sup>20</sup> and even today<sup>21</sup>. Although this "neo-Nazism" is today politically residual in Ukraine, perhaps it helps explain Israel's lukewarm and prudent position in this conflict, beyond the fact that its real concern is the new nuclear agreement with Iran (where Russia has a role to play).

Finally, the political objective of the violent Russian invasion is to definitively secure a neutral non-NATO Ukraine, an "eminently reasonable" request (in the words of a

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<sup>18</sup> [Yes, There Are Bad Guys in the Ukrainian Government – Foreign Policy](#)

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> [Commentary: Ukraine's neo-Nazi problem | Reuters](#)

<sup>21</sup> [Allan Ripp: Ukraine has a Nazi problem, but Vladimir Putin's 'denazification' claim for war is a lie. \(nbcnews.com\)](#)



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former US ambassador to the USSR<sup>22</sup>) whose acceptance, had the US acted in good faith, would have prevented what has probably been the most avoidable conflict in history.

In the face of this invasion, the US (and many of its “partners”, read lackeys) has imposed an unprecedented series of punitive economic sanctions. Who will become the big losers of these sanctions, the Americans who gave the orders or the Europeans who obeyed them? I guess you know the answer, dear reader, which we will analyze in the following article.

**Fernando del Pino Calvo-Sotelo**

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<sup>22</sup> [I was there: NATO and the origins of the Ukraine crisis - Responsible Statecraft](#)