

Biden's Reality Check in Europe

By [M. K. Bhadrakumar](#)

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The takeaway from the US President Joe Biden's European tour on March 25-26 is measly. Dissenting voices are rising in Europe as western sanctions against Russia start backfiring with price hikes and shortages of fuel and electricity. And this is only the beginning, as Moscow is yet to announce any retaliatory measures as such.

The unkindest cut of it all is that the Russian Defence Ministry chose Biden's trip as the perfect backdrop to frame the true proportions of success of its special operation in Ukraine. The US and NATO's credibility is perilously close to being irreparably damaged, as the Russian juggernaut rolls across Ukraine with the twin objectives of 'demilitarisation' and 'denazification' in its sights.

The [Russian General Staff disclosed](#) on Friday that the hyped up Ukrainian Armed Forces, trained by the NATO and the US, have sustained crippling losses: Ukrainian air force and air defence is almost completely destroyed, while the country's Navy no longer exists and about 11.5% of the entire military personnel have been put out of action. (Ukraine doesn't have organised reserves.)

According to the Russian General Staff's deputy head Colonel General Sergey Rudskoy, Ukraine has lost much of its combat vehicles (tanks, armoured vehicles, etc.), one-third of its multiple launch rocket systems, and well over three-fourths of its missile air defence systems and Tochka-U tactical missile systems.

Sixteen main military airfields in Ukraine have been put out of action, 39 storage bases and arsenals destroyed (which contained up to 70% of all stocks of military equipment, materiel and fuel, and more than 1 million 54000 tons of ammunition.)

Interestingly, following the intense high-precision strikes on the bases and training camps, foreign mercenaries are leaving Ukraine. During the past week, 285 mercenaries escaped into Poland, Hungary and Romania. Russian forces are systematically destroying the Western shipment of weapons.

Most important, the mission to liberate Donbass is about to be accomplished. Simply put, the main objectives of the first phase of the operation have been achieved.

Apart from Kiev, Russian troops have blocked the northern and eastern cities of Chernigov, Sumy, Kharkov and Nikolaev, while in the south, Kherson and most of Zaporozhye region are under full control — the intention being to not only to shackle Ukrainian forces but to prevent their grouping in Donbass region. (See my article [Dissecting Ukraine imbroglio](#), Tribune, March 21, 2022)

“We did not plan to storm these cities from the start, in order to prevent destruction and minimise losses among personnel and civilians,” Rudskoy said. But, he added, such an option is not ruled out either in the period ahead.

It stands to reason that Washington and European capitals are well aware that the Russian operation is proceeding as scheduled and there is no stopping it. Thus, the NATO’s extraordinary summit on March 24 confirmed that the alliance is unwilling to get into a military confrontation with the Russian Army.

Instead, the summit decided to strengthen the defence of its own territories! Four additional multinational NATO combat groups of 40,000 troops will be deployed in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia on a permanent basis. Poland’s proposal to deploy NATO military units in Ukraine was outright rejected.

However, Poland has certain other plans, namely, to deploy contingents to the western regions of Ukraine to support the ‘fraternal Ukrainian people’ with the unspoken agenda of reclaiming control over the historically disputed territories in the those regions. What Faustian deal has been struck in Warsaw on March 25 between Biden and his Polish counterpart Duda remains unclear. Clearly, vultures are circling Ukraine’s skies. (See my blog [Biden wings his way to the borderlands of Ukraine](#), March 24, 2022)

Indeed, if Poland makes a bid for Ukrainian territory (with Biden’s tacit support), would Belarus be far behind to take control of the regions of Polesie and Volyn in Ukraine? Possibly not. Suffice to say, in the period since the CIA-backed coup in Kiev in 2014 when the US moved into the driving seat, Ukraine has lost its sovereignty and is now perilously close to vanishing altogether from Europe’s map!

Washington — Biden personally, having been the Obama administration’s point person in Kiev in 2014 — should carry this heavy cross in history books.

As for European leaders, they find themselves in a surreal world, out of touch with the stunning realities of a new world order. Eighty-year old Biden with limited grasp of the torrential flow of events, made an astounding proposal in his press conference in Brussels on Thursday that Ukraine should replace Russia in the G20!

But Biden has a soulmate in the European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen whose latest threat is that Russian oil and gas companies “will not be allowed to demand payment for fuel in rubles.” She is blissfully unaware that the EU has no more effective means to pressure Russian companies!

Russian President Vladimir Putin caught the western leaders huddled in Brussels by surprise with his announcement that Russia will promptly start charging “unfriendly” countries in

rubles for gas supplies. There are over 45 unfriendly countries on the list — the US and EU members plus the UK, Australia, Canada, Singapore, Montenegro and Switzerland. (See the RT's explainer [What buying gas in rubles means for Russia and the West.](#))

Effectively, Moscow is on the one hand strengthening the weakened ruble, while on the other hand, messaging that it is pioneering a new wave internationally to bypass the dollar as commodity currency.

Yet, Moscow is also continuing to routinely supply Russian gas for transit to Europe through Ukraine to meet the requests of European consumers (109.5 mln cubic meters as of March 26!) The point is, despite rhetoric and grandstanding, Europe recently increased its gas purchases from Russia significantly against the backdrop of astronomically high spot prices!

The European Council meet at Brussels on March 25 with Biden in attendance failed to adopt any concrete measures to address the energy price growth, and could not come up with a unified approach to Russia's decision to receive payments for its gas only in rubles.

Apropos the European Commission's proposal to establish a new system of common purchase of gas to prevent outbidding, the final statement of the European Council merely says that the leaders agreed to "work together on **voluntary** common purchase of gas, LNG and hydrogen," meaning that common purchases may be carried out only by those EU countries who are willing to unite. [Emphasis added.]

It is a long haul for Europe to dispense with Russian gas. Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said yesterday:

"There are gas shortages, and that is why we need to talk to Russians. Europe will move towards reducing its dependence on the Russian gas, but can this happen in the coming years? This is very difficult."

"Europe consumes 500 billion cubic meters of gas, while America and Qatar can offer 15 billion, up to the last molecule... That is why German and Austrian politicians told me: "We cannot just destroy ourselves. If we impose sanctions on Russia in the oil and gas domain, we will destroy ourselves. It's like shooting yourself in the foot before rushing into a fight." This is how certain rational people in the West see it today."

With the doomsday predictions of Russian military failure in Ukraine coming unstuck and the blowback from Russia sanctions beginning to bite, Europeans are caught in a bind. They will be resentful as time passes.

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Articles by: [M. K. Bhadrakumar](#)

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