

Biden Set to Inflict Wounds on Eurasia

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Mikhail Gorbachev in a special [interview](#) to the Tass news agency on Monday gave a poignant message to the Kremlin by calling for the strengthening of the Eurasian Economic Union and the Collective Security treaty Organization and for mending relations with those former Soviet republics which are “at odds” with Moscow.

Gorbachev recalled he had stated many times in the past that the Soviet Union could have been preserved “provided it was modernised and reformed and the republics were granted broad rights and real sovereignty.” He stressed that a programme of regeneration is “vitally needed” today.

Indeed, at no time since the birth of the Russian Federation, the Eurasian landscape looked so dark and foreboding as at present. Russia’s western periphery is in a state of high turbulence.

Ukraine never really stabilised after the regime change in 2014. Things have become much worse in many ways — rampant corruption, venality, dysfunctional political system and poverty. What used to be one of the most prosperous regions of the former USSR is in decay. The charioteers of the 2014 colour revolution from the US and Europe have no interest in nation-building. All that matters to them is that Ukraine has turned into an American colony, driven by animus against Russia.

Transparent conversations between Washington and Moscow are needed over Ukraine’s viable future as a neutral turf where Western and Russian interests can co-habit. Moscow is open to a modus vivendii but Washington’s interest lies in the opposite direction, as evident from the role Kiev played in instigating the current turmoil in next-door Belarus.

Things can only get worse under President Joe Biden’s watch. The Pentagon [announced on Monday](#) a new \$125 million package for supply of “defensive lethal weapons to enable Ukraine to more effectively defend itself against Russian aggression” on top of the remaining unutilised \$150 million in the current budget appropriated by the Congress. The US has so far provided \$2 billion “security assistance” to Ukraine since 2014 to promote that country’s “Euro-Atlantic aspirations.” Clearly, a neutral Ukraine in the eastern fringes of Eurasia does not suit the US’ geopolitical agenda.

The story of Georgia, where the US’ regime change project in the post-Soviet period was first successfully staged, is even more tragic. As in Ukraine, in Georgia too, Russia was

willing to work with the US for a democratic transition. But the US agenda narrowly focused on installing a virulently anti-Russian government in Tbilisi and a brash, US-educated lawyer named Mikheil Saakashvili — with an American wife — was brought in to serve that purpose.

Again, as in Ukraine's Donbas and Crimea, a highly charged issue of "territorial sovereignty" was subtly brought in when Washington encouraged Saakashvili to stage an attack on Russian peacekeepers in South Ossetia in 2008, which in turn led to the loss of two breakaway regions. Georgia could never quite establish itself as a democracy, either.

Even by the ranking of American think tanks, Georgia has been steadily slipping in the [democracy ratings](#). Then came a curious twist to the tale when the free and fair presidential election last October, threw up as winner a Georgian billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili (estimated by Forbes to be worth \$5 billion).

Washington suspects that Ivanishvili who made his vast fortunes in Russia as a Russian citizen once — in metals, real estate, and banking — may be beholden to Moscow. Thus, a whispering campaign began insinuating about the Russian roots of his business empire, which has snowballed into protests demanding snap elections despite President Ivanishvili's insistence that his loyalty to his country is not to be doubted.

Washington is mulling its options, caught between the rock and a hard place, as turmoil and uncertainty grips Georgian politics. In a bizarre turn of events, do not rule out Biden Administration [soliciting Mikheil Saakashvili's services](#) once again as Georgia spins out of control. (Saakashvili had fled Georgia in 2013 and is wanted on multiple criminal charges.)

The Biden administration is expected to encourage Georgia's further NATO integration. Antony Blinken, Biden's state secretary, has voiced support for keeping the NATO's door open for Georgia. The point is, a new configuration of balance is taking shape in the region and Georgia is located at a strategically important crossroads in the Caucasian region between Russian and Turkey, the Caspian and the Black Sea.

While Ukraine and Belarus are Russia's buffer zones historically, the West is interested in Georgia because it is vital to the security in the South Caucasus and could limit Russia's influence, apart from being relevant to the transportation of oil and gas from the Caspian and Central Asia to world markets.

Yet, the crux of the matter is that Ukraine and Georgia inextricably tied to the Russian market. If Ukraine critically depends on Russian energy and was historically an inalienable part of the Soviet production chain, Georgia has long been reliant on Russia as its largest export market for its agriculture products and its famed wines and mineral waters.

Geoeconomics ought to have been the best prescription for the revival of Ukraine and Georgia and the consolidation of their democratic foundations, but Washington instead prioritises its geopolitical agenda. (See opinion piece in Guardian titled [Why Ukraine needs Russia more than ever.](#))

Clearly, when it came to Belarus, Moscow didn't have to be convinced anymore that the US was trying to incorporate yet another country ("buffer") on Russia's periphery into its sphere of influence. The Kremlin decided wisely not to interfere but instead created space for President Alexander Lukashenko to weather the storm.

Unlike Georgia or Ukraine, Belarus has a functioning economy and unemployment is virtually non-existent while its Soviet era welfare system ensured social security for the masses. Thus, the colour revolution, stirred up via the social media by the CIA could only rally a section of the population. Lukashenko resorted to deploy “smart power”, outwitting the western countries.

Russia’s growing confrontation with the US and Europe elevates Belarus to a [special status in Moscow’s security calculus](#). The timing of the “Navalny case” alerted Moscow that the game plan is to entrap it in a quagmire. The Kremlin doubled down to prevent the overthrow of Lukashenko while also squashing the Navalny case.

Having successfully weathered the western assault, Lukashenko travelled to Sochi on Feb. 22 and held a six-hour meeting with President Vladimir Putin to discuss an integration model with Russia while preserving Belarus’ sovereignty. Putin and Lukashenko stated that the instruments of cooperation between Moscow and Minsk are working well.

Alarmed by the prospect of a Russian-Belorussian integration, the US is planning a counter attack by rekindling the protests in Minsk. Mass protests are planned to [restart on March 25](#). This time around, the objective will be to whip up xenophobia to create a groundswell of anti-Russian public mood.

Suffice to say, Gorbachev’s remarks are predicated on an assumption that Ukraine or Georgia are free agents to conduct their relations with Russia. Whereas, both are de facto western colonies and Washington will not allow them to pursue an independent policy toward Moscow.

In a forceful [speech on February 24](#) while addressing top officials of Russian Federal Security Bureau (KGB), Putin lashed out at the “consistent and highly aggressive policy aimed at disrupting our [Russia’s] development, at slowing it down and creating problems along our external perimeter and contour, provoking internal instability, undermining the values that unite Russian society, and ultimately, at weakening Russia and forcing it to accept external management, just as this is happening in some post-Soviet states.”

Putin anticipates that the US’ confrontation with Russia will escalate under Biden’s watch. Simply put, the future of Russia’s relations with the former Soviet republics on its western periphery are [largely America’s choice](#). And that choice, unfortunately, is being exercised to create bleeding wounds to weaken Russia.

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