

In the Wake of the Ukraine Cease Fire. The Road Map to War with Russia?

Guns of August. Part II

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Cease-fire and its reasons

The piping-hot stage of the Ukraine crisis was over with signing of Minsk cease-fire agreement. It is far from clear how long the cease-fire will last, and whether it will morph into stable peace; still this pause provides a chance to review policies and strategies of the sides. The first part of this essay dealt with the Ukrainian crisis up to the Boeing incident. I wrote there of lacklustre achievements of the rebels and concluded that "without direct Russian involvement, a separatist movement in Novorussia was doomed to fail."

After the Boeing disaster, the Russians have made peace in Ukraine their priority. Paradoxically, this called for more Russian involvement. From the beginning, State Department claims notwithstanding, Putin did not want the war in the Ukraine, and still less he wanted a war with Ukraine. He would prefer the Ukraine remain neutral and friendly. This dish was not on the menu as the US intended to fight Russia by Ukrainian hands, or at least, to strengthen its hold over Europe by using Russian scarecrow. Still Putin procrastinated hoping things will sort out.

He miscalculated: he did not count on Poroshenko's military ardour, on the new Kiev ruler's readiness to inflict huge civilian casualties and to sacrifice his own army. This was unexpected development – after peaceful transition of Crimea, Putin could expect Kiev will honour Donbass desires. Putin could not leave Donbass in flames and forget about it. One million refugees from Ukraine already crossed into Russia; continuation of Kiev's war in Donbass could dislodge up to five million refugees, too much for Russia to swallow.

Putin was ready to negotiate with Poroshenko and achieve a peaceful settlement; Poroshenko refused. The low-level support for Donbass rebels was not sufficient to change the rules of the game and force Poroshenko to negotiate. This called for a limited victory, at the price of some Russian involvement.

It appears that the "involvement" rapidly changed the situation. Facing defeat at seaport city of Mariupol, Kiev accepted Putin's proposals. Did the involvement amount to invasion? I have no access to the secrets of state, but I'll share with you what I have heard and seen and understood.

First, compare Russia to Vietnam of fifty years ago.

- Vietnam was divided into North and South by the West, like the USSR was

divided into Ukraine and Russia by the West.

- North Vietnam became independent; Russia became independent;
- South Vietnam remained under occupation, Ukraine remained under Western occupation.
- People of South Vietnam rose against their US-installed government and North Vietnam certainly supported their struggle.
- The US presented the war as “North Vietnamese aggression”, but North and South Vietnam weren’t two independent states; this was one state artificially separated by the West.
- Likewise, the US presents now the war in Ukraine as “Russian intervention”, but Russia and Ukraine aren’t two fully independent countries; they are rather two halves of one country, in the eyes of Russians and Ukrainians. In their view, people of the Ukraine rose against the US-installed government, and independent Russia had to support their struggle.

People of my generation remember as the US killed millions of Vietnamese people, bombed their cities and ruined their nature – under the banner of “resisting North Vietnamese aggression” but it ended by unification of Vietnam. Poroshenko is a Ngo Dinh Diem of the Ukraine, Putin is an unlikely Ho Chi Minh of Russia.

Actual Russian involvement took form of (1) providing equipment and training for the Novorussia forces, like the US trained the Syrian rebels in Jordan, and (2) allowing some Russian officers to take leave from their duties and join the rebel forces on the voluntary basis. The Russia-trained and equipped rebel units fortified by some Russian officers, weren’t quite up to scratch as regular army goes; their enthusiasm made up for the lack of skill. Kiev regime estimated the whole Russian military presence in the Ukraine at one thousand men; a negligible amount in comparison with 50,000 troops of Kiev regime and 30,000 of the main rebel forces, but it made the difference. Even more important was (3) strategic command and advice provided by retired planners of the Russian General Staff.

I’ve been told by people on the ground that the Novorussian military leader Colonel Strelkov (I described him in Part One) had no previous experience of commanding big-scale operations, and despite his personal courage he could not successfully lead a force of 30 thousand men. Apparently he was asked to leave the command to more experienced professionals. These first-class military planners rapidly improved the situation by stabilizing the link between Russia and the rebel-held enclave. The Kiev army has been pushed away from the cities of Donetsk and Lugansk.

An additional rebel force crossed the old Russian-Ukrainian border far to the south of Donetsk and closed on Mariupol, an important city and port on the Sea of Azov. The lightening speed of the Mariupol attack changed the equilibrium on the ground. Now the rebels could proceed for Melitopol, eventually heading for Kakhovka, a place of ferocious battles of the Civil war in 1919. If they were to take Kakhovka, they would be able to secure the whole of Novorussia or even retake Kiev. This development proved to Poroshenko that he needs a cease fire. He agreed to the Minsk formula and the armistice took place. The rebels were upset by the armistice as they felt their victory was stolen from them, but they were convinced by the Russians that it would be better to safeguard Donbass.

The sanctions

For the main antagonist of Russia, the US, the cease-fire was a minor setback. Washington would prefer the Russians of Russia and Ukraine to fight each other to death, but it had to consider the weakness of Kiev forces. In 1991, at the break-up of the USSR, the Ukraine has got a much better equipped and much stronger army than Russia had, but twenty years of embezzlement turned it into a feeble pushover. When the Kiev army will be beefed up by Western mercenaries and by NATO soldiers, the war is likely to renew, unless there will be a political settlement.

Meanwhile, the US applied various means of economic warfare against Russia. These means are called “sanctions”, though this word is misleading. “Sanctions” are acts of a legitimate authority towards its subjects; such are Security Council sanctions. The US and EU’s measures against Russia aren’t “sanctions” but acts of war on Russia by economic means.

Some “sanctions” were aimed against most powerful Russians in Putin’s inner circle. The idea was to cause these strongmen to plot and get rid of the popular president. This circle of sanctioned persons grew to include many parliamentarians and businessmen, while the ordinary Russians took the sanctions in their stride, or even enjoyed the discomfort they caused to the wealthy of the land. Putin joked that EU travel bans on top legislators would leave them more time to spend with their constituents. “The less time officials and business leaders spend overseas and the more time they spend dealing with current issues the better”, he said.

Other sanctions were aimed at Russian economy: banks, credits were hit; the US allies were forbidden to transfer advanced technology to Russia. Russians were used to this treatment: in the Soviet days, it was called CoCom (Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls), an embargo on advanced technology supplies to the socialist countries. It was a powerful obstacle to their development; if other countries could buy advanced technology from, say, Japan, the Russians and Chinese had to steal it or reinvent it. CoCom is one of the reasons for Soviets after WWII being rather behind-the-times, in comparison with 1930s, when the Soviets could and did buy the most advanced technology of its time. Apparently, Obama resurrected CoCom; and this is the most serious threat to Russia until now.

This will have a strong effect in many ways, not only on Russia’s profits but on Russia’s thinking as well. After 1991, Russia gave up many of its own industries, notably aircraft and switched to buy Boeing or Airbus. Now they have to build their own planes. Russia is fully integrated in Western banking and it has billions of US securities at its account. Russia used its oil profits to buy Dutch cheese, Polish apples, Italian wine, while neglecting its own food production. Under Western sanctions, the Russians are likely to back out of international cooperation and begin to develop or resurrect their own industries and agriculture. This will cost money; the social projects will suffer. The prosperity of the last ten years is likely to vanish.

Russia sparingly applied counter-sanctions. It discontinued importing foods from sanctioning countries, thus applying pressure on European farmers. This measure is likely to influence Europe. In France, for the first time ever, it can bring Mme Le Pen of the Front National into the Palais de l’Élysée, as both mainstream parties are equally beholden to the US. Finland, Slovakia, Greece will ponder leaving the EU altogether. In Russia, its pro-Western glittering and chattering class was quite upset with the disappearance of oysters and parmesan cheese; the food prices rose all over but slightly.

Sanctions after cease-fire

The Russians were bewildered by the Western response of applying more sanctions despite the cease fire in the Ukraine. Apparently, they thought and hoped to restore the ante-bellum friendly co-existence with the US by giving up on the bulk of Novorussia. The Russian ruling elites were ready to accept their heavy strategic losses in the Ukraine and to live with it. But they counted without the US, as Washington pushed for more sanctions.

Slowly, it transpires that for the US administration, the Ukraine crisis just supplied a plausible explanation and a trigger to attack Russia. To be on the safe side, Obama has opened the Second Front against Russia in the Middle East; ostensibly against the chimera of Caliphate, but it has another target.

ISIS (or ISIL, or IS, or Daish, or Caliphate) is a neo-colonisation project for Syria and Iraq. The technique is familiar: Anglo-Americans create a demon, nurture it to its fullness and then destroy and take over the land. They created Hitler, supported him, then demonised and destroyed him by Russian hands. Germany remains an occupied country to this very day. Al-Qaeda was created in 1980s to fight Russians in Afghanistan and later on it was used to create the *casus belli* in 2001. Afghanistan is still occupied. ISIS was created to fight Russians in Syria, and now it is being used to bomb Iraq and Syria. At the end, the US will occupy and control the whole Fertile Crescent, with Israel as its centrepiece. Some religiously inclined persons may see it as fulfilment of the prophesy of [Greater Israel](#) from the Nile to the Euphrates.

The Russians, like the Middle Easterners, do not believe in the official story of saving the world from the threat of ISIS. They remember that quite recently ISIS was supposed to be a moderate force fighting for democracy against the bloody tyrant. They think that the US uses its own toy monster to break up Iraq, to create “independent” Kurdistan, to bomb Syria, to remove Bashar al-Assad from power and lay a new gas pipeline from Qatar via Kurdistan and Syria to Turkey and Europe, thus pushing Russia out of European gas market altogether, to ensure Russia’s income dwindles and the dangerous liaisons of Europeans with Russia are terminated.

Russians do not care for Islamic *takfiri* extremists like everybody else, so they were surprised that in the US pundits’ minds, there is a connection between ISIS and Russia. Robert Whitcomb, the *Wall Street Journal* editor, [says](#) in an essay called *Wishful thinking about Putin and the Islamic State* that these two are somehow equal in their sheer wickedness. “We might make fun of those Renaissance paintings in which little devils skitter around. We don’t like to accept that there’s something like evil in the world. But you look at something like the Islamic State and the Putin regime and you realize that those people in 1500 were on to something.” (You won’t be surprised that Whitcomb hates Islam and loves Israel, would you?)

Anne-Marie Slaughter, an ex-State Department and a Professor at Princeton, [called](#) for intervention in Syria to teach Russians a lesson. “The solution to the crisis in Ukraine lies in part in Syria. Obama’s climb-down from his threatened missile strikes against Syria last August emboldened Russian President Vladimir Putin to annex Crimea. It is time to change Putin’s calculations, and Syria is the place to do it. A US strike against the Syrian government now would change the entire dynamic. After the strike, the US, France, and Britain should ask for the Security Council’s approval of the action taken, as they did after NATO’s intervention in Kosovo in 1999. Equally important, shots fired by the US in Syria will echo loudly in Russia.”

In Russia, there are some voices calling to support the US strikes in Syria. Important politicians and parliamentarians propose to repeat 2001, when Russians supported the US war on terror, despite its grim consequences. (Since 2001, Afghanistan has been occupied by the US, and the traffic of drugs to Russia and Europe increased twenty-fold). Actually, there are many pro-western politicians in power in Russia, and especially in Russian media. Once, the West had freedom of expression, while Soviet Russia spoke in one voice. Now the positions has been reversed: Russia enjoys pluralism of views and freedom of expression, while in the West, alternative views exist on the margins of the public discourse.

Why the US is so keen on subjugating Russia, provided that Russia is not punching above its weight and is generally accommodating to the US demands? The US is special, as this heir to the British Empire guided by Jewish spirit is the only country ever possessing the unique, expensive and uncomfortable desire to rule the whole of planet Earth. They view every independent force in the universe as a challenge they can't tolerate. They think that Russia with its nuclear weapons and educated people can become too strong and disobedient. Russia is a bad example for Europe, Japan, China, India as these powers could strive for independence, as well. Russia with its oil and gas can attempt to undermine the dollar status as the world currency. Russian weapons could protect Iran and Syria from American anger.

For these reasons, a war between the US and its proxies and Russia seems very probable. Syria and Ukraine are two perspective battlefields where the battle of will precedes the battle of steel. The war may be conventional or nuclear, regional or world-embracing. The alternative is the US's full spectrum global domination. Many Russians would prefer a war to this grim prospect.

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