

# “Putin Has Misread the West (And) if He Doesn’t Wake Up Soon, Armageddon Is Upon Us”

Interview with Paul Craig Roberts

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*Mike Whitney: You think that Putin should have acted more forcefully from the beginning in order to end the war quickly. Is that an accurate assessment of your view on the war? And—if it is—then what do you think is the downside of allowing the conflict to drag on with no end in sight?*

Paul Craig Roberts: Yes, you have correctly stated my position. But as my position can seem “unAmerican” to the indoctrinated and brainwashed many, those who watch CNN, listen to NPR, and read the New York Times, I am going to provide some of my background before going on with my answer.

I was involved in the 20th century Cold War in many ways: As a Wall Street Journal editor; as an appointee to an endowed chair in the Center for Strategic and International Studies, part of Georgetown University at the time of my appointment, where my colleagues were Henry Kissinger, National Security Advisor and Secretary of State, Zbigniew Brzezinski, National Security Advisor, and James Schlesinger, a Secretary of Defense and CIA director who was one of my professors in graduate school at the University of Virginia; as a member of the Cold War Committee on the Present Danger; and as a member of a secret presidential committee with power to investigate the CIA’s opposition to President Reagan’s plan to end the Cold War.

With a history such as mine, I was surprised when I took an objective position on Russian President Putin’s disavowal of US hegemony, and found myself labeled a “Russian dupe/agent” on a website, “PropOrNot,” which may have been financed by the US Department of State, the National Endowment for Democracy, or the CIA itself, still harboring old resentments against me for helping President Reagan end the Cold War, which had the potential of reducing the CIA’s budget and power. I still wonder what the CIA might do to me, despite the agency inviting me to address the agency, which I did, and explain

why they went wrong in their reasoning.

I will also say that in my articles I am defending truth, not Putin, although Putin is, in my considered opinion, the most honest player, and perhaps the most naive, in the current game that could end in nuclear Armageddon. My purpose is to prevent nuclear Armageddon, not to take sides. I remember well President Reagan's hatred of "those godawful nuclear weapons" and his directive that the purpose was not to win the Cold War but to *end* it.

Now to Mike's question, which is to the point. Perhaps to understand Putin we need to remember life, or how it was presented by the West to the Soviet Union and the American broadcasts into the Soviet Union of the freedom of life in the West where streets were paved with gold and food markets had every conceivable delicacy.

Possibly this created in the minds of many Soviets, not all, that life in the Western world was heavenly compared to the hell in which Russians existed. I still remember being on a bus in Uzbekistan in 1961 when a meat delivery truck appeared on the street. All traffic followed the truck to the delivery store where a several block long line already waited. When you compare this life with a visit to an American supermarket, Western superiority stands out. Russian hankerings toward the West have little doubt constrained Putin, but Putin himself has been affected by the differences in life between the US in those times and the Soviet Union.

Putin is a good leader, a human person, perhaps too human for the evil he faces. One way to look at my position that Putin does too little instead of too much is to remember the World War II era when British Prime Minister Chamberlin was accused of encouraging Hitler by accepting provocation after provocation. My own view of this history is that it is false, but it remains widely believed. Putin accepts provocations despite having declared red lines that he does not enforce. Consequently, his red lines are not believed. Here is one report:

RT reported on December 10 that "The US has quietly given Ukraine the go-ahead to launch long-range strikes against targets inside Russian territory, the *Times* reported on Friday, citing sources. The Pentagon has apparently changed its stance on the matter as it has become less concerned that such attacks could escalate the conflict."

In other words, by his inaction Putin has convinced Washington and its European puppet states that he doesn't mean what he says and will endlessly accept ever worsening provocations, which have gone from sanctions to Western financial help to Ukraine, weapons supply, training and targeting information, provision of missiles capable of attacking internal Russia, attack on the Crimea bridge, destruction of the Nord Stream pipelines, torture of Russian POWs, attacks on Russian parts of Ukraine reincorporated into the Russian Federation, and attacks on internal Russia.

At some point there will be a provocation that is too much. That's when the SHTF.

Putin's goal has been to avoid war. Thus, his limited military objective in Ukraine to throw the Ukrainian forces out of Donbass meant a limited operation that left Ukrainian war infrastructure intact, able to receive and deploy advanced weapons from the West, and to force Russian withdrawals to lines more defensible with the very limited forces Putin committed to the conflict. The Ukrainian offensives convinced the West that Russia could be defeated, thus making the war a primary way of undermining Russia as an obstacle to

Washington's hegemony. The British press proclaimed that the Ukrainian Army would be in Crimea by Christmas.

What Putin needed was a quick victory that made it completely clear that Russia had enforceable red lines that Ukraine had violated. A show of Russian military force would have stopped all provocations. The decadent West would have learned that it must leave the bear alone. Instead the Kremlin, misreading the West, wasted eight years on the Minsk Agreement that former German Chancellor Merkel said was a deception to keep Russia from acting when Russia could have easily succeeded. Putin now agrees with me that it was his mistake not to have intervened in Donbass before the US created a Ukrainian army.

My last word to Mike's question is that Putin has misread the West. He still thinks the West has in its "leadership" reasonable people, who no doubt act the role for Putin's benefit, with whom he can have negotiations. Putin should go read the Wolfowitz Doctrine. If Putin doesn't soon wake up, Armageddon is upon us, unless Russia surrenders.



MW: I agree with much of what you say here, particularly this: "Putin's inaction has convinced Washington... that he doesn't mean what he says and will endlessly accept ever worsening provocations."

You're right, this is a problem. But I'm not sure what Putin can do about it. Take, for example, the drone attacks on airfields on Russian territory. Should Putin have responded tit-for-tat by bombing supplylines in Poland? That seems like a fair response but it also risks NATO retaliation and a broader war which is definitely not in Russia's interests.

Now, perhaps, Putin would not have faced these flashpoints had he deployed 500,000

combat troops to begin and leveled a number of cities on his way to Kiev, but keep in mind, Russian public opinion about the war was mixed at the beginning, and only grew more supportive as it became apparent that Washington was determined to defeat Russia, topple its government, and weaken it to the point where it could not project power beyond its borders. The vast majority of the Russian people now understand what the US is up-to which explains why Putin's public approval ratings are presently at 79.4% while support for the war is nearly universal. In my opinion, Putin needs this level of support to sustain the war effort; so, postponing the mobilization of additional troops has actually worked to his benefit.

More importantly, Putin must be perceived to be the rational player in this conflict. This is absolutely essential. He must be seen as a cautious and reasonable actor who operates with restraint and within the confines of international law. This is the only way he will be able to win the continued support of China, India etc. We must not forget that the effort to build a multipolar world order requires coalition building which is undermined by impulsive, violent behavior. In short, I think Putin's "go-slow" approach (your words) is actually the correct course of action. I think if he had run roughshod across Ukraine like Sherman on his way to the sea, he would have lost critical allies that will help him establish the institutions and economic infrastructure he needs to create a new order.

So, my question to you is this: What does a Russian victory look like? Is it just a matter of pushing the Ukrainian army out of the Donbas or should Russian forces clear the entire region east of the Dnieper River? And what about the west of Ukraine? What if the western region is reduced to rubble but the US and NATO continue to use it as a launching pad for their war against Russia?

I can imagine many scenarios in which the fighting continues for years to come, but hardly any that end in either a diplomatic settlement or an armistice. Your thoughts?

**Paul Craig Roberts:** I think, Mike, that you have identified the reasoning that explains Putin's approach to the conflict in Ukraine. But I think Putin is losing confidence in his approach. Caution about approaching war is imperative. But when war begins it must be won quickly, especially if the enemy has prospects of gaining allies and their support. Putin's caution delayed Russia's rescue of Donbass for eight years, during which Washington created and equipped an Ukrainian army that turned what would have been an easy rescue in 2014 like Crimea into the current war approaching a year in duration. Putin's caution in waging the war has given Washington and the Western media plenty of time to create and control the narrative, which is unfavorable to Putin, and to widen the war with US and NATO direct participation, now admitted by Foreign Minister Lavrov. The war has widened into direct attacks on Russia herself.

These attacks on Russia might bring the pro-Western Russian liberals into alignment with Putin, but the ability of a corrupt third world US puppet state to attack Russia is anathema to Russian patriots. The Russians who will do the fighting see in the ability of Ukraine to attack Mother Russia the failure of the Putin government.

As for China and India, the two countries with the largest populations, they have witnessed Washington's indiscriminate use of force without domestic or international consequence to Washington. They don't want to ally with a weak-kneed Russia.

I will also say that as Washington and NATO were not constrained by public opinion in their

two decades of wars in the Middle East and North Africa, based entirely on lies and secret agendas, what reason does Putin have to fear a lack of Russian public support for rescuing Donbass, formerly a part of Russia, from neo-Nazi persecution? If Putin must fear this, it shows his mistake in tolerating US-financed NGOs at work in Russia brainwashing Russians.

No, Putin should not engage in tit-for-tat. There is no need for him to send missiles into Poland, Germany, the UK, or the US. All Putin needs to do is to close down Ukrainian infrastructure so that Ukraine, despite Western help, cannot carry on the war. Putin is starting to do this, but not on a total basis.

The fact of the matter is that Putin never needed to send any troops to the rescue of Donbass. All he needed to do was to send the American puppet, Zelensky, a one hour ultimatum and if surrender was not forthcoming shut down with conventional precision missiles, and air attacks if necessary, the entirety of the power, water, and transportation infrastructure of Ukraine, and send special forces into Kiev to make a public hanging of Zelensky and the US puppet government.

The effect on the degenerate Woke West, which teaches in its own universities and public schools hatred of itself, would have been electric. The cost of messing with Russia would have been clear to all the morons who talk about Ukraine being in Crimea by Christmas. NATO would have dissolved. Washington would have removed all sanctions and shut up the stupid, war-crazy neoconservatives. The world would be at peace.

The question you have asked is, after all of Putin's mistakes, what does a Russian victory look like? First of all, we don't know if there is going to be a Russian victory. The cautious way that Putin reasons and acts, as you explained, is likely to deny Russia a victory. Instead, there could be a negotiated demilitarized zone and the conflict will be set on simmer, like the unresolved conflict in Korea.

On the other hand, if Putin is waiting the full deployment of Russia's hypersonic nuclear missiles that no defense system can intercept and, following Washington, moves to first use of nuclear weapons, Putin will have the power to put the West on notice and be able to use the power of Russian military force to instantly end the conflict.

MW: You make some very good points, but I still think that Putin's slower approach has helped to build public support at home and abroad. But, of course, I could be wrong. I do disagree strongly with your assertion that China and India "don't want to ally with weak-kneed Russia". In my opinion, both leaders see Putin as a bright and reliable statesman who is perhaps the greatest defender of sovereign rights in the last century. Both India and China are all-too-familiar with Washington's coercive diplomacy and I'm sure they appreciate the efforts of a leader who has become the world's biggest proponent of self-determination and independence. I'm sure the last thing they want, is to become cowering houseboys like the leaders in Europe who are, apparently, unable to decide anything without a 'nod' from Washington. (Note: Earlier today Putin said that EU leaders were allowing themselves to be treated like a doormat. Putin: "Today, the EU's main partner, the US, is pursuing policies leading directly to the de-industrialization of Europe. They even try to complain about that to their American overlord. Sometimes even with resentment they ask 'Why are you doing this to us?' I want to ask: 'What did you expect?' What else happens to those who allow feet to be wiped on them?")

Paul Craig Roberts: Mike, I agree that Russia for the reasons you provide is the choice



partner of China and India. What I meant is that China and India want to see a powerful Russia that shields them from Washington's interference. China and India are not reassured by what at times seems to be Putin's irresolution and hesitancy. The rules that Putin plays by are no longer respected in the West.

Putin is correct that all European, and the Canadian, Australian, Japanese, and New Zealand governments, are doormats for Washington. What escapes Putin is that Washington's puppets are comfortable in this role. Therefore, how much chance does he have in scolding them for their subservience and promising them independence? A reader recently reminded me about the Asch experiment in the 1950s, which found that people tended to conform to the prevalent narratives, and of the use to which Edward Bernays analysis of propaganda is put. And there is the information given me in the 1970s by a high government official that European governments do what we want because we "give the leaders bags of money. We own them. They report to us."

In other words, our puppets live in a comfort zone. Putin will have a hard time breaking into this with merely exemplary behavior.



MW: For my final question, I'd like to tap into your broader knowledge of the US economy and how economic weakness might be a factor in Washington's decision to provoke Russia. Over the last 10 months, we've heard numerous pundits say that NATO's expansion to Ukraine creates an "existential crisis" for Russia. I just wonder if the same could be said about the United States? It seems like everyone from Jamie Diamond to Nouriel Roubini has been predicting a bigger financial cataclysm than the full-system meltdown of 2008. In your opinion, is this the reason why the media and virtually the entire political establishment are pushing so hard for a confrontation with Russia? Do they see war as the only way the US can preserve its exalted position in the global order?

Paul Craig Roberts: The idea that governments turn to war to focus attention away from a failing economy is popular, but my answer to your question is that the operating motive is US hegemony. The Wolfowitz Doctrine states it clearly. The doctrine says the principal goal of US foreign policy is to prevent the rise of any country that could serve as a constraint on US unilateralism. At the 2007 Munich security conference Putin made it clear that Russia will not subordinate its interest to the interest of the US.

There are some crazed neoconservatives in Washington who believe nuclear war can be won and who have shaped US nuclear weapons policy into a pre-emptive attack mode focused on reducing the ability of the recipient of a first strike to retaliate. The US is not seeking a war with Russia, but might blunder into one. The operative neoconservative policy is to cause problems for Russia that can cause internal problems, distract the Kremlin from Washington's power moves, isolate Russia with propaganda, and even possibly pull off a color revolution inside Russia or in a former Russian province, such as Belarus, as was done in Georgia and Ukraine. People have forgot the US-instigated invasion of South Ossetia by the Georgian army that Putin sent in Russian forces to stop, and they have forgot the recent disturbances in Kazakhstan that were calmed by the arrival of Russian troops. The plan is to keep picking away at the Kremlin. Even if Washington doesn't meet in every case with the success enjoyed in the Maidan Revolution in Ukraine, the incidents succeed as distractions that use up Kremlin time and energy, result in dissenting opinions within the government, and that require military contingency planning. As Washington controls the narratives, the incidents also serve to blacken Russia as an aggressor and portray Putin as "the new Hitler." The propaganda successes are considerable—the exclusion of Russian athletes from competitions, refusals of orchestras to play music of Russian composers, exclusion of Russian literature, and a general refusal to cooperate with Russia in any way. This has a humiliating effect on Russians and might be corrosive of public support for the government. It has to be highly frustrating for Russian athletes, ice skaters, entertainers, and their fans.

Nevertheless, the conflict in Ukraine can turn into a general war intended or not. This is my concern and is the reason I think the Kremlin's limited go-slow operation is a mistake. It offers too many opportunities for Washington's provocations to go too far.

There is an economic element. Washington is determined to prevent its European empire from being drawn into closer relations with Russia from energy dependence and business relationships. Indeed, some explain the economic sanctions as de-industrializing Europe in behalf of Washington's economic and financial hegemony. See [this](#).

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