

# The Real Threat in the Ukraine Conflict: Crossing the “Red Line” Towards Nuclear War? “The Russians Have Never Read Machiavelli”

By [Dr. Paul Craig Roberts](#)

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*I still have forebodings about the manner in which the Kremlin is conducting the Ukrainian operation. There is no doubt that the Russians had to come to the defense of the Donbass republics. Having done little other than to provide the republics with some weapons and intelligence, for eight years the Kremlin allowed the Ukrainian shelling of Donbass and the occupation of large areas of the Donbass by Nazi militias, while the US and NATO trained and equipped a large Ukrainian army to subdue the republics.*

*As the year 2022 opened, the republics were faced with an invasion by 100,000 Ukrainian soldiers. The atrocities committed on the population by the Nazi militias would have been severe. The internal sense of shame in Russia could have eroded the ability of Putin’s government to govern effectively.*

As the Kremlin had tolerated so much for eight years with no response other than a fruitless and pointless Minsk Agreement, it is possible that Washington was relying on Putin bringing about his own downfall by accepting yet another provocation, this time a highly shameful one. It seems that Putin himself understood this as he has said repeatedly that he had no alternative but to intervene to prevent the Ukrainian invasion of the Donbass republics.

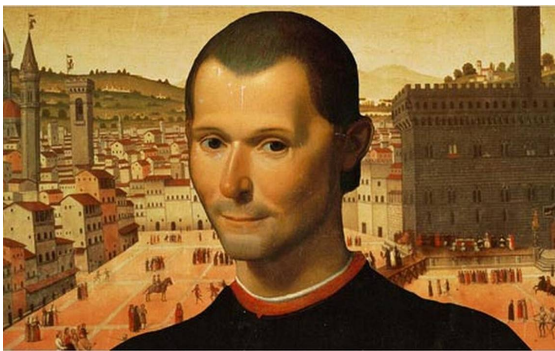
That Donbass was the only target of the limited military operation is clear from the fact that Donbass is where the Russian forces and fighting are. The Ukrainian army and Nazi militias have been surrounded in Donbass. There are no Russian troops operating in Western Ukraine.

Despite Kremlin warnings that countries that hindered its limited military operation would be treated as combatants, the Russians have taken no steps against the NATO countries that have hindered its operation by imposing sanctions and sending weapons to Ukraine.

According to some reports, there are even US and NATO military officers and intelligence services helping the Ukrainian forces. The inflows of weapons have forced Russia to widen its limited military operation to Western Ukraine where Russia has used precision weapons to destroy the weapon stockpiles and the means of transporting them. Thus, by sending weapons to Western Ukraine, NATO has forced Russia to expand its operations, thus widening the war.

The Western weapons come into Ukraine mainly from Poland, and Poland has been in the forefront of those demanding harsher measures, even military intervention, against Russia. Yet Russia has continued to deliver gas to Poland and her other NATO enemies and only cuts them off if they refuse to pay in rubles. Far from treating Poland as a combatant, the Kremlin treats Poland and the rest of her enemies as allies and business partners. It is the confused message that Russia sends, threatening one thing, but doing another, that is rife with peril.

Such a confused message, like acceptance of provocations, creates opportunity for miscalculation. My concern remains that Russia's limited, weak or non-existent responses to provocations invites more and worst provocations until a red line is crossed that results in nuclear war.



Apparently, the Russians have never read Machiavelli. They had rather be loved than feared.

The long drawn-out process of flushing out and destroying the Ukrainian forces in Donbass has created the opportunity for mounting provocations of Russia, supported by Western populations under the influence of war propaganda. These provocations can easily result in a widening of the conflict, resulting in more forceful actions against Russia until the situation explodes.

To prevent a drawn-out process rife with opportunities to pile provocation on provocation is the reason I have thought that Russia needed to act decisively and quickly bring the conflict to an end. It is this failure that is the real threat in the Ukraine conflict. By trying to save a few Ukrainian lives, Russia might be endangering the lives of hundreds of millions.

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*Dr. Paul Craig Roberts writes on his blog site, PCR Institute for Political Economy, where [this article](#) was originally published. He is a regular contributor to Global Research.*

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