

The Guns of August, Duel of Nerves Between Russia and America. McDonald's at Moscow's Pushkin Square Has Closed its Doors

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On the Pushkin square in central Moscow, McDonald's, this symbol of Pax Americana, has been shut down this week. It was opened 23 years ago, as the USSR collapsed, and the unipolar world of One *Superpower* came into being. Soviet people queued for hours to get in and try this divine foreign food. They were so innocent, so inexperienced, the Russians of yesteryear! For 23 long years, the US has ruled the world alone, while McDonald's served its burgers. Meanwhile Russia has changed. McDonalds is no longer an attraction for world-weary Muscovites. Across the Pushkin square, there is now another fashionable eatery, Café Pouchkine, serving the best Russian haute cuisine. In a tit-for-tat, the cheeky Russians had established a new Café Pouchkine in Paris, on Boulevard St Germain, teaching the French the joys of Russian cooking.

The Americans did not accept the challenge lightly. Kill Putin, [called American pundits](#). They proposed to strike against Russian forces from the NATO bases in the Baltics. Pentagon extolled advantages of the first nuclear strike. The Russians gloomily prepared for the worst. In a quiet *dacha* summer-house to the west of Moscow, my Russian scientist friends discussed Andrey Sakharov's plan codenamed [The Wave](#) to wash away the entire Eastern seaboard of the US by means of a giant tsunami (yes, it is the same Sakharov). They lauded the [Perimeter](#), the Doomsday weapon system Russia inherited from the USSR ensuring total destruction of the US even if Russia were erased. New and secret weapon systems were mentioned. August 2014 increasingly reminded of August 1914 or August 1939, the countdown to a Great War. At that time, conciliatory tone of President Putin's [Crimea speech](#) signalled that the danger of general conflagration abated somewhat. Russia stepped back from abyss.

Ostensibly this is a duel of nerves between Russia and the US; though many states, great and small, from China to Bolivia, are interested in dismantling the US hegemony, meanwhile Russia is the only one with political will, military clout and economical stamina to mess with the bully.

In order to preserve its place of the ultimate consumer at the top of food chain, the US wants to cut Russia down to size; publicly humiliate Putin and remove him; to assert its superiority; to harm European economies and strengthen their submission to Washington; to stop loose talk of its decline, to eliminate opposition; to turn treatment of Russia into a case study for all possible challengers.

Russia's aims are not so grand: the country wants to live peacefully its own way and to be

respected. This desire has been summed up by its [opponents](#) as “challenging the architecture of the post-cold-war order”, and it is probably true, for “the order” denies countries’ right for peace and independence.

Americans do not mind a war. They gained in every war: they had sustainable losses, they preserved their industrial base and they profited by their victories. Their world wars and their recent wars: Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria were profitable. A war between Russia and Europe with some American support has attractive sides, for them.

Russians want to avoid war. They had hard and bad experience in world wars: Russia collapsed in the course of the First world war, and suffered a lot in the Second one. In both cases, their development was retarded, a lot of human misery and economical disaster befell them. They did not enjoy their smaller wars: none gave them an advantage or profit of any kind.

Paradoxically, Russian desire to avoid war brings war closer home. The US military and politicians do not mind to play chicken with Russia, as they are sure: Russians will chicken out. This false certainty makes them more daring and fearless with each round.

Russia is not alone. China usually supports its moves, India under Modi gets closer, Latin America builds its alliance with Russia, Iran looks for friendship in Moscow. Equally important, in every state there are people who are dissatisfied with the existing post-cold-war set-up of diminished sovereignty. They are not too far from power in France, where Marine Le Pen makes gains in elections. Americans who prefer to live their own way, just like the US did before the WWII, a normal country, not the world sheriff are potential Russian allies, as well.

The US is not alone. It has its faithful allies, England the devoted, Saudi Arabia the wealthy, Israel the cunning, – and a plethora of important politicians in all countries on the globe that were supported and promoted by various US agencies. There is probably no country without the US agents near power: Karl Bildt of Sweden, Tony Blair of the UK... In Russia they occupy many positions around pinnacle of power, as they were installed during Dark years of Yeltsin’s rule. Whoever wants his country to serve the Empire is an American ally.

This is not only the US vs Russia, but Machine vs Man, as well. In plotting its foreign policy, the US increasingly relies upon the computer-driven game theory using its formidable data resources, while Russians prefer manual human control. Modern super-computers and surveillance techniques give the US an edge over Russia’s decision-making. Increasingly, President Obama appears to be a perfect cyborg of right appearance who says the right things in the right time and right place, but whose actions bear no relation to the words. I wouldn’t be amazed if in a length of time we shall learn that Obama has been the first humanoid robot in the helm of power. And if he is human, he is truly wonderful actor at pretending he is a robot. Even his wife Michelle and girls seem to be well-chosen movie props rather than live partner and children.

Putin is undoubtedly human and manly. One may dislike him, and a lot of people do, but there is no doubt about his belonging to human race. This makes the chicken game less predictable than the US leadership considers. After Saddam Hussein and Qaddafi’s horrible executions, much can be said in favour of an all-out nuclear war in comparison with defeat and surrender. And the young Russian generation does not share their fathers’ fear of war, and they do not mind to try some of better toys their country has. [Satan](#), anyone?

Moreover, the game theory (partly declassified in the last decade) is not perfect yet in cross-cultural conflicts, where antagonists may play different games. For instance, you play chess, but your opponent is kickboxing. This seems to be the case here. The US plays chicken with Russia, while Russia skilfully evades the horns of charging American bull.

The US considers itself the exceptional city on the hill, the God's Chosen, predestined to rule the world now and forever. History is over. They want to lecture and impose their rules upon the world. Amusingly, the Soviets had similar ideas of Communism being predestined to complete History, so the Cold War between two predestined states was a natural thing. Nowadays Russians do not believe in predestination. Countries rise, and go down, and form alliances, and there is no End of History in sight. The unipolar world is a fluke, now reverting to its normal multipolar state. The best and most comfortable arrangement is each country lives the way it likes. *Leben und leben lassen*.

For a long while the US was itching to teach Russia a lesson. Russia was not in full rebellion: it sold its oil and gas for US greenbacks, it kept profits in the US Treasury papers, it observed the sanctions on Iran, it did not interfere with despoiling of Libya. Still it was not sufficiently obedient. Russia blocked destruction of Syria; it toyed with de-dollarisation of oil trade; it was for Christ and against gay marriages; cunningly it tried to undermine the Western unity by building pipelines and bridges and bribing Europeans. In short, Russia forgot its collapse of 1991.

The Ukraine was chosen by the US as a suitable place to ignite a war, or at least to put Russia a couple of notches down and to get rid of Putin who became by far too independent.

The Ukraine

The US is winning ground while Russia loses ground in the Ukraine. Putin stubbornly refuses to send his troops in; he strains to come to terms with the US and the West over future of Ukraine. Russia has been humiliated while proposing humanitarian aid to the besieged cities of Donbass: its loaded lorries are still delayed at the border, waiting for Kiev regime permission to move forward. Half a million Ukrainian refugees crossed the Russian border, a few thousand civilians, militia and army personnel were killed in the confrontation.

The war for Donbass was not especially successful for the Russians. Though the military reports are exceedingly obscure and conflicting, it seems the rebels are losing the battle against the Ukrainian army, as they have no external support. While the US claimed that the conflict is caused by Russian intervention, Russia tried to stay out of this conflict. Russia did not interfere in Kiev, when all Western ambassadors and ministers encouraged the revolt against the legitimate president. When Donbass flared up, Russia did not support it.

Putin did not want to take Donbass, in the first place, he did not want to take the Ukraine, secondly, and he did not want to resurrect the USSR, thirdly. He was forced to take the Crimea, the home base of Russian fleet, an old part of Russia, populated by Russians, willing to join Russia, as otherwise Crimea would become a NATO navy base, but he did not want to proceed anywhere else. It did not help him: Putin is blamed internationally for the conflict and internally, for non-involvement and the subsequent defeat.

The revolt in Novorossia (the Russian-speaking half of the Ukraine) was a popular response to the West-inspired coup in Kiev, as this coup had a strong nationalist anti-Russian flavour. People of Novorossia would not try to secede if their language and culture weren't

persecuted, and if their ties to neighbouring Russia weren't endangered. But they would not be able to proceed far, unless their revolt attracted some rebels looking for a cause, first of all – the military genius and a great romantic figure, Colonel Igor Strelkov, a “Russian Lawrence”.

Igor Strelkov read history in Moscow U, but he decided (like T.E. Lawrence) that it is more fun to make history. He fought in Transnistria, a small sliver of land between Moldova and Ukraine, defending local people from the onslaught of Moldavian nationalists. He volunteered to a Serb militia in Yugoslavia; he forced the indifferent Russian Army command to take him as an officer to the First Chechen war; he served in the Second Chechen war, and as a volunteer, he served in Syria and Dagestan. He writes beautifully, he is a superb tactician, able to lead soldiers by the strength of his charisma. His acquaintances describe him as a daredevil who does not care about money, comfort, family life or pleasures.

For Strelkov, the campaign in Novorossia had a taste of destiny. Like many Russians of his generation, he dreamed of resurrecting Russia as it was, whether the Soviet Union or pre-revolutionary Russian Empire (his preference). Like many Russians of his generation, he considered the Ukraine – a natural part of Russia, and an independent Ukrainian state – a misnomer. Despite his military rank, Strelkov was a free agent; he came to Novorossia without Putin's blessing and he would come and stay against Putin's will, too. We shall probably hear more about this remarkable man.

Strelkov was not alone: quite a few brave fighters from Ukraine and Russia came to join the rebels. Their initial success was a surprise for Putin's administration. But the rebellion failed to take over other provinces. In Odessa, the private army of Kolomoysky the ruthless oligarch burned some fifty unarmed rebel sympathisers alive in a grisly autodafe, and this cruel act scared the timid and jovial Odessites. In Kharkov, the governor made a deal with Kiev regime and the rising miscarried. It seems that Strelkov, though a military prodigy, was less than a wonderful demagogue. His dream of Great Russia did not make sense to the people of Novorossia. Yes, they spoke Russian, yes, they hated Kiev and Lvov neo-nazi gangs, but they did not understand Strelkov's Russian nationalism.

Without direct Russian involvement, a separatist movement in Novorossia was doomed to fail. There was a way to win: to conquer the whole of Ukraine, perhaps barring its far-west, and afterwards to make arrangements for federalisation or even for break-up. It could be done by using an inclusive ideology, acceptable for Donetsk, Odessa, Kiev, Poltava. Perhaps some neo-Soviet ideas could be employed; dissatisfaction with the oligarchs could be used. But Strelkov and other rebels with their firm rejection of Ukraine per se could not sweep the masses, and they did not even try to move towards Kiev or Kharkov.

Putin minimised Russia's involvement in the Donbass war. He supported it much less than the United States supported the Texas revolution of 1835. His government tried to patch up with Kiev regime, but its 'president' steadfastly refused, under American orders. In Kiev, far-right radicals attacked the Russian embassy; and the regime's armed forces began indiscriminate shelling and bombing of rebel cities. This was a great humiliation for Putin who promised to defend the Russians in failing Ukraine. His advisers, notably Sergey Glazyev, an expert on Ukraine, called to take a leaf from the Western book on Libya and impose a no-fly zone over Donbass. (In March 2011, as a rebellion flared up in Benghazi, the US and its allies imposed no-fly zone over parts of Libya [professing horror](#) of Qaddafi's ruthless shelling of the rebels. Russia and China abstained, and the French-British draft became the Security Council resolution authorising not only no-fly zone but “all necessary

measures” to protect civilians from harm.) Kiev regime certainly killed more civilians than Qaddafi did; but Putin did not declare a no-fly zone, he did not use his firepower to suppress Kiev artillery shelling civilians.

Russia did very little for Donbass. Now, the Russians try to negotiate a conclusion to the Donbass war. The reports predict some autonomy for Donbass within Ukraine.

Many Russians are likely to be greatly disappointed. But some enterprises – worthy and unworthy – fail. Life is full of disappointments. I remember Ibo separatists of Biafra, who were eventually defeated by the central government. Separatists of Iranian Azerbaijan were defeated, though Josef Stalin supported them. The US failed to re-conquer Cuba. Argentines failed to liberate Malvinas. This list is endless. Perhaps Russians have to wait for a better opportunity.

Did Putin chickened out?

Why did Putin gave up on Novorossia? There is no doubt, Novorossia is extremely important for Russia. NATO troops and US missiles in Donetsk and Lugansk would endanger Russia. Its loss would threaten Russian defence industry as this part of Ukraine was fully integrated with Russia since Tsar’s days. Was it fear of an all-out war? Did President Putin consider intervention of R2P mode a too dangerous step for his country?

In Putin’s view, Europe is more important than Ukraine. He is willing to sacrifice Donbass in hope to gain Berlin. For years, he courted old Europe. Even his Olympic games with its expensive show aimed at Europe: he wanted to tell the Europeans that Russia is part and parcel of Europe. Putin speaks German, he served in Germany as KGB operative in the last years of the USSR, and he has a soft spot for Germany.

The US propaganda machine called upon Europeans to defend Ukraine from the Russian bear, claiming the Russians will not stop in the Ukraine but continue to the Atlantic. This claim was quite successful; especially as it came after the very long anti-Russian media campaign (gays, orphans, toilets in Sochi etc.). Putin was afraid that by taking Ukraine he will alienate European public opinion. So he procrastinated, until the Malaysian liner disaster struck.

The liner

The Malaysian liner crash was a terrible disaster in many ways. Not so much per se: three hundred people are being killed each day in Gaza, Iraq, Donbass. Europeans and Americans forgot the Cuban air liner [flight 455](#), or Iranian liner [flight 655](#), or Libyan liner [flight 114](#), as these liners were downed by “our side”. But this was a chance for the Western media machine to unleash its dreadful might. This machine is as powerful as nuclear weapons; when in full blast, it incapacitates leaders and countries. Thousands of TV channels, newspapers, radio programs, bloggers, internet sites, experts, ministers, presidents united in one single message, terrifying as *vox Dei*, though it’s not even a *vox populi*, just a device of Masters of Discourse, akin to big trumpets used by Romans to scare the barbarians.

All British newspapers ran photos of dead children with captions like “He was murdered by Putin”. Russians were overwhelmed by the furious blast of propaganda. People wept; some weak and emotional personalities admitted their guilt and lit candles in front of Netherlands embassy in Moscow. Why Netherlands, if the liner was Malaysian? (Because Netherlands is a

European “white” country, while Malays are not?) Why guilt, if nothing was known yet? Why did not we see pictures of slaughtered Gaza kids with caption “murdered by Netanyahu”, killed Iraqi kids “murdered by Blair”, murdered Afghani babies “murdered by Obama”? This is the incredible power of the Masters of Discourse: when they go full blast, people lose mind and panic.

I welcomed every conspiratorial scheme in this case, as well as in 9/11 case. Not because I believe or even prefer this or other scheme. I see it as a useful device to release minds from the holding power of mass hysteria induced by mass media. It is necessary to sow doubt in order to release minds and regain sanity.

A successful 9/11 conspiracy theory could have saved lives of thousands of Muslims killed in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere. Recently Israeli Jews were induced with mass hysteria as three young settlers disappeared. This mass hysteria resulted in half a million refugees and two thousand dead of Gaza. An attempt to sow doubt regarding the official story (claiming they were stolen by Mossad etc.) was an attempt to save lives. Likewise, every way to sow doubt regarding the Malaysian plane was a way to save lives.

Now, one month later, we know that there was no evidence of Russian involvement in the tragedy. There are strong pieces of evidence suggesting Kiev and US involvement, the best of them is a negative one: if Kiev and Washington would have a proof of Russian and/or rebels’ guilt we would hear of it day and night. If you are interested in detailed analysis of the disaster, you can read [this one](#), recommended by our friends. I must admit I am not interested in details, for the reasons similar to those of Noam Chomsky regarding 9/11. While every explanation that differs from one promoted by Masters of Discourse is good because it breaks their hold on minds, importance of such an event is greatly overblown by media. Anyway, the air liner is out of news and out of mind by now, and this means it was an accident or a failed provocation by Kiev or Washington, for otherwise we would hear about it.

However, in real time the air liner disaster made a huge impact on Russian minds. For a while, I feared Putin would retire or be retired or removed from power, and Russia would fall apart. The US wanted to get rid of Putin and place a more pliable figure on the Russian throne, preferably an oligarch like Poroshenko.

Their thinking was summed up by Herbert E. Meyer, a spook (“an ex- Special Assistant to the Director of Central Intelligence and Vice Chairman of the CIA’s National Intelligence Council”). He [wrote](#): “Since subtlety doesn’t work with Russians, the president and his European counterparts should also make absolutely clear that we have no interest whatever in how these people solve their Putin problem. If [the oligarchs] can talk good old Vladimir into leaving the Kremlin with full military honors and a 21-gun salute — that would be fine with us. If Putin is too stubborn to acknowledge that his career is over, and the only way to get him out of the Kremlin is feet-first, with a bullet hole in the back of his head — that would also be okay with us.”

Tension peaked at the most dramatic night between Sunday, July 20 and Monday, July 21, when Putin delivered a short message to the nation – at 01.40 am. For such an unusual time, it was quite a tame message. Putin said nothing of importance. Next day, he was supposed to make a major speech at his own security cabinet. Again, he said nothing of importance. In my view, President Putin wanted to show he is still alive and well and still in command. Apparently this was not obvious for some persons, in Russia or abroad, at that

fateful night.

(to be continued)

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