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RUSSIAN MILITARY BUILD-UP AROUND UKRAINE – PART 2

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INTRODUCTION

Russian Military Build-Up around Ukraine – Part 2

The recent months have been dominated by a military and diplomatic crisis centred on fears about a Russian military attack on Ukraine and the Russian government's demands for diplomatic negotiations to address its long-standing grievances with regard to prevailing European security arrangements. Against this backdrop, the Russian Analytical Digest (RAD) invited a range of scholars and commentators to write short comments. The first set of comments were published in the [preceding issue](#).

The submission dates for the comments in this edition are indicated at the end of each contribution. Obviously comments reflect the authors' perspectives at that time. The views outlined in these comments are those of the named authors and not the RAD editorial board. The intention is that the comments cover a wide range of prevalent opinions, perspectives and thematic foci of relevance to the ongoing crisis. They are presented here in alphabetical order of authors' surnames.

COMMENTARY

What Makes a Citizen? Russia's Passportization of the Donbas

By Fabian Burkhardt, Cindy Wittke, Elia Bescotti (all Leibniz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies, Regensburg, Germany), and Maryna Rabinovych (University of Agder, Norway)

DOI: 10.3929/ethz-b-000533782

Why Does the Passportization of the Donbas Matter?

Passportization—the securitized, fast-track extraterritorial naturalization of Donbas residents en masse since April 2019—demonstrates that the Russian invasion of Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty is a gradual process and does not relate only to the use of force.

According to the figures of the self-proclaimed “Donetsk People's Republic” (“DPR”) and “Luhansk People's Republic” (“LPR”), 635,000 residents of these areas had received Russian passports by the end of January 2022. Depending on the population size one takes as a baseline, that amounts to between 22 and 35 percent of residents of the “People's Republics.”

Currently, the military aspect of passportization seems to be of utmost salience: According to its constitution, the Russian Federation has the obligation to protect its citizens, including those outside the territory of its state. The federal law “On Defense” authorizes the President to send troops abroad to protect Russian citizens from an armed attack. Russia has used this legislation to justify military intervention in Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014.

“DPR” and “LPR” representatives, as well as Russian officials, have repeatedly warned about “provocations” from Ukraine or plans to retake the non-government-controlled territories in the Donbas by force, which they

claim would lead to a “genocide” of Russian citizens. For their part, U.S. government officials have indicated that Russia might engage in a false-flag operation to create a pretext for an intervention.

While international negotiations are ongoing and a military escalation could still be prevented, Russia continues to deepen the status quo in the “People's Republics” by handing out passports and extending social benefits to Donbas residents. Russia has already granted them the right to take part in the 2020 constitutional plebiscite and the 2021 State Duma elections.

Passportization is clearly an instrument of extraterritorial governance that deepens the integration of the “People's Republics” with Russia. Nevertheless, passportization is not a “creeping annexation.” Even though Russia's frustration with the Minsk Agreements has been growing, Moscow still envisions the Donbas remaining outside of Russia as a means of pressure on Ukraine.

Russian citizenship is not granted for a limited period. Passportization will thus remain a feature of any future scenario, with long-term implications for Ukraine's sovereignty.

Russia Enhances Citizen Rights of Donbas Residents as the Conflict Drags On

The passportization of the Donbas started in April 2019 to put pressure on the newly elected Ukrainian presi-

dent, Volodymyr Zelenskyi. The United States and the European Union do not recognize these passports and consider passportization to be a violation of the Minsk Agreements. Ukraine does not permit dual citizenship and considers these passportized Donbas residents to be Ukrainian citizens only.

Over time, passportization has added a bottom-up dynamic to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Donbas residents did not become full members of the Russian state. Instead, they were what we call “diminished citizens” because a lot of citizenship rights and social benefits are tied to residency on Russian territory. But for most of the Donbas residents, their place of residence is within the “People’s Republics”. Hence, passportized Donbas residents were not entitled to receive Russian social benefits. As we show in “Passportization, Diminished Citizenship Rights, and the Donbas Vote in Russia’s 2021 Duma Elections,” diminished citizenship also affected voting rights during the Duma elections. Donbas residents had to commute to the Rostov region of Russia to cast their ballot and they were only allowed to vote for parties, not for individual candidates in single-mandate districts. To boost turnout among Donbas residents, Russia organized electronic voting in the Rostov region.

Our analysis offered several insights into the political preferences of Donbas residents. With around 200,000 votes cast, Duma election turnout among passportized Donbas residents was slightly above 40 percent (a significant increase from just over 10 percent for the 2020 constitutional referendum). Depending on the assumptions one makes about the remaining population in the “People’s Republics,” turnout among the overall Donbas population aged above 18 was thus between 8 and 14 percent. United Russia won a landslide victory among Donbas voters. Polling stations and electoral districts where Rostov residents and Donbas residents cast their ballot on average saw 25 percent higher support for United Russia than those without Donbas residents on their voting lists. Even taking into account electoral falsification and workplace mobilization, this suggests that Donbas voters are largely pro-Kremlin and are likely to have voted for integration with Russia.

However, the results also demonstrate that a majority of residents of the “People’s Republics” did not express their explicit political will at the Duma elections, and therefore for closer integration with Russia. This finding suggests that Ukraine could potentially still have some leverage to counter passportization in the territories outside government control. But beyond the non-recognition of Russian passports, Ukraine lacks a coherent

strategy. Proposed policies oscillate between “building a wall” between the “DPR” and “LPR”, on the one hand, and the rest of Ukraine, on the other hand; and “convalediation,” or the partial recognition of some of the documents issued by the administrations in the “temporarily occupied territories” on the grounds that it might facilitate reintegration in the future. But the duration of the conflict, the Covid-19 pandemic, and Russia’s military build-ups in spring 2021 and winter 2021–2022 have all contributed to the estrangement of the Ukrainian government from its citizens in the “People’s Republics.”

Russia now strives to enhance the presently diminished rights of passportized Donbas residents. Following Putin’s meeting with the country’s Human Rights Council in December 2021, several directives (<http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/assignments/orders/67660>) were issued in January 2022. Soon, Donbas residents will be able to receive Russian pensions and social benefits such as “Mother’s Capital,” one-off Covid-19 payments, or health care via Russia’s *Gosuslugi* e-government platform irrespective of their residency outside of Russia proper. Even border crossings between the “People’s Republics” and Russia might be facilitated with *Gosuslugi*. Putin’s directives also envision an expansion of electoral rights that would enable Donbas residents to vote for candidates in single-mandate districts at the next Duma elections without commuting to Rostov. These enhanced rights provisions should increase the incentives for Donbas residents to apply for Russian citizenship.

Passportization Creates Options for Russia

Passportization is part of an ongoing Russian strategy to hamper Ukraine’s sovereignty. It has short-term implications for conflict resolution within the framework of the Minsk Process and long-term implications for Ukrainian statehood in post-conflict scenarios. Through passportization, Russia creates multiple options for a conflict settlement on its own terms: It can choose to abuse its obligation to protect its citizens as a pretext for another military intervention; or to exert pressure on Ukraine to implement the Minsk Agreements on Russian terms, primarily through the threat of military action. In sum, passportization has set in motion dynamics that will have long-term effects on political preferences in the Donbas, with local leaders becoming members of United Russia and a large proportion of residents holding Russian passports and having access to Russian social benefits.

Submitted on 17 February 2022

Please see overleaf for information about the authors and further reading.

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COMMENTARY

Would Putin’s Own People Punish Him for Invading Ukraine?

By Henry E. Hale (George Washington University, Washington, DC)

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Many now believe Russia will launch a major new invasion of Ukraine, dramatically expanding the war that has been raging (largely behind Western headlines) since 2014. Western leaders want to ensure Russia’s president, Vladimir Putin, pays a price if it does. Recent studies suggest that Russia’s own people could also make him pay, though exactly when or how is less clear.

There is good reason to worry that Putin may be putting the squeeze on Ukraine, possibly to the point of attempting to conquer most if not all of the country, in partial response to his own flagging domestic support. Even if domestic politics is not his central concern, he

may still hope his people would reward him for a new invasion. Populations frequently “rally around the flag” for a while when their countries go to war. Putin himself was one of history’s biggest beneficiaries of such rallying in 2014, when his approval ratings shot through the roof after Russia swiftly seized and annexed Ukraine’s Crimean peninsula. The lure of rallying may be motivating Putin to try it again. He may also be attempting to distract an increasingly unhappy public from problems they blame him for, like corruption and a stagnating economy.

Recent studies, however, reveal that there is also the potential for a new invasion to backfire on Putin

domestically, and that this potential is greater than we often think in the West. It may even be greater than Putin himself thinks.

For Russians, Crimea Is Not the Rest of Ukraine

For Russians, the rest of Ukraine is not Crimea. Clear majorities had supported “returning” Crimea to Russia prior to 2014, but Russians feel no such attachment to other Ukrainian lands. Swayed by derisive coverage on Putin’s state-controlled media, Russians have also long seen Ukraine as a basket case of a state that is riddled with corruption. This does not exactly make it an object of desire in their eyes.

Polls in recent years indicate that if Putin could unite Ukraine with Russia peacefully and voluntarily, this might get the support of something like two-fifths of Russia’s population. This is far fewer than Putin wants for his domestic base of support, where supermajorities are the goal. And Russians have never shown strong support for active Kremlin efforts to break up Ukraine, much less take it over militarily.

A Militarily Overrun Ukraine as a Time Bomb for Putin

If Putin does plot an invasion, another big problem he faces is that this will cost Russian lives. And the prospect of their sons and daughters dying in combat does not sell well in Russia. Surely this is why Russia has criminalized publishing any information about Russian war dead in Ukraine.

But information has a way of getting out even in dictatorships like Russia’s, and risks for the Kremlin are already evident in the hot war Moscow has been waging in eastern Ukraine since 2014. One recently published study found that Russians with private information about what was really going on in Ukraine through direct contact with war refugees were significantly less likely to feign support for Putin in 2015. That Russian military operation is far smaller than what Putin is believed to be contemplating now, and casualties from much larger conflicts will be much harder to hide.

In this light, a militarily overrun Ukraine could become a time bomb within Russia itself, much like the Baltic states were within the USSR, which had much greater control over its population than today’s regime in Moscow has ever had. Polling in Ukraine makes clear that the Kremlin has consistently misunderstood Ukraine, failing to recognize (or at least take seriously) its citizens’ support for independence and the fact that this support is strong even among people who primarily speak Russian.

Even if Russia’s military victory is overwhelming and swift, a possibility on which Moscow cannot count

given Ukraine’s own military buildup in recent years, it has been reported that some Ukrainians are preparing to fight a guerrilla war. Russian casualties thus appear quite likely should Russia invade, and over time this could significantly erode the Kremlin’s support.

Butter Over Guns

Russians are also well known these days for supporting “butter” over “guns,” to borrow the terms used in a recently published study by Maria Snegovaya. Her clever survey experiment confirms Russians become much less supportive of assertive foreign policy when exposed to economic costs.

Because Western leaders have made clear that strong economic sanctions would likely be the immediate response to any Russian action, and because research has found that even the much more limited sanctions imposed on entities within Russia since 2014 have damaged Russia’s economy, it seems clear Putin would also bear political costs stemming from the economy should he invade. Putin did not mind as much in 2014 because the “rally effect” of Crimea was so powerful. But if the rally-around-the-flag effect from the currently contemplated invasion were to be smaller, as many expect, the sanctions’ hit on Putin’s support over time could be much greater.

Pyrrhic Victory

If he is thinking long-run, however, perhaps most worrying for Putin should be findings from a recent study of mine: As many as three-quarters of the new supporters he gained from the Crimea annexation were likely faking it as of 2015, cowed into professing public support in the face of great social pressures to appear patriotic.

To be sure, autocrats may not mind much whether people are faking it so long as they abstain from outright opposition, as many Russians appear to have done for several years after 2014. Hollow political structures can survive for a long time when media control is tight, levels of repression are high, and the issue of succession is not acute.

But when they collapse, the end can come unexpectedly, quickly, and spectacularly. Just ask the dictators who fell during the 1989 collapse of communism and the 2011 Arab Spring, nearly all aging and concomitantly facing increasing speculation about succession like Putin. In this light, recent large-scale unrest in Belarus and Kazakhstan—countries with political systems very similar to Putin’s and leaders getting on in years like he is—should be cause for serious concern in the Kremlin. Not to mention persistent outbreaks of protest in Russia itself despite the regime’s growing crack-down on opposition.

Blame-Shifting

If Putin is determined to invade despite the risks to his own stability, we can expect him to do everything he can to minimize these risks by making it look like he is not the one who “started it.” While he could try to claim Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky attacked first, much as Russia blamed Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili for striking first in the August 2008 war, this is quite unlikely to be credible, in part because Zelensky is best known in Russia as a Russian-language comedy actor rather than a hot-headed Ukrainian nationalist.

More consistent with resonant narratives in Russia today would be for Russian forces to “support” some kind of force claiming to be “restoring constitutional order” in Ukraine after what Russia has called the fascist “coup” of 2014. This is because this line would be consistent with Putin’s longstanding self-presentation in Russia as a cooperation-supporting moderate rather than a hardline invader. There is still little reason to believe that ordinary Russians would be very happy to spill their own children’s blood or sacrifice their own

standards of living for the sake of Ukraine’s “constitutional order.” But the US and its partners should nevertheless be careful to avoid actions that would help make this scenario more credible within Russia. Unfortunately, the movement of U.S. troops closer to Ukraine but (crucially) still not actually into Ukraine might actually help Putin in this way, without providing any significant deterrent effect.

Conclusion

If Putin understands all this, as one hopes he does, perhaps he will not invade after all. He could easily back down and lose little in domestic political standing even without a deal, perhaps coming out stronger for having shown the West how serious he is about Russia’s concerns. So he may very well be bluffing. But it remains possible he does not understand. Leaders frequently take actions that undercut their own support in the longer run. In that case, he may yet pay a price.

Submitted on 15 February 2022

About the Author

Henry E. Hale is a leading specialist on Russian public opinion, the author of the book *Patronal Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), and the recipient of two prizes from the American Political Science Association for his research. He is Professor of Political Science and International Affairs at George Washington University’s Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies (IERES) and co-director of PONARS Eurasia.

Further Reading

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COMMENTARY

War Optimism in the Russia–Ukraine Conflict: A Cause for Pessimism?

By Olena Lennon (University of New Haven)

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Russia’s military buildup around Ukraine—which has triggered the most serious tensions between Russia and the West since the end of the Cold War—has moved to a critical phase in recent days. Citing new intelligence, the White House warned that Russia was preparing to “mount a major military action in Ukraine any day.” While the Ukrainian leaders have finally acknowledged the threat of a large-scale offen-

sive, they have continued to downplay its imminence, appealing for calm even after the U.S. government and other countries ordered most of their personnel to leave Ukraine immediately.

Since the start of the escalation, the Ukrainian leadership’s calm disposition has been simultaneously lauded and criticized: lauded for preventing a (costly) premature mobilization and attempting to protect Ukraine’s

national currency and markets; criticized for wasting critical time that could have been used to prepare for war and facilitate civilian evacuations. Facing a formidable aggressor, Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, has seemed unfazed by the ominous signs of potential bloodshed—as has Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, who is considered the aggressor. In their own ways, both leaders seem to be suffering from war optimism—a form of self-deception that leads an individual to make overly optimistic judgments about their chances of achieving their objectives by inflating gains and downplaying risks. And while Zelensky's war optimism may be desperate and rooted in survival, in combination with Putin's belligerent and neo-imperial war optimism, it is highly flammable.

Zelensky's optimism is undoubtedly justifiable, as it may serve to facilitate the psychological and physical resilience of the struggling nation. But if optimism hinges on delusion, especially in life-or-death situations, it can lead to devastating consequences. One need look no further than Armenia's recent defeat in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, which could, in no small measure, be attributed to its leaders' simultaneous overestimation of their strengths and underestimation of their opponent.

Zelensky's war optimism comes primarily from three sources: Ukraine's improved military capabilities, international support, and high levels of national patriotism and mobilization.

Ukraine's combat readiness and effectiveness have indeed improved since 2014. Ukraine's modernized military equipment, produced both domestically and internationally, combined with better-trained troops—as a result of both battlefield experience and NATO-led tactical training—have elevated Ukraine's armed forces to one of the best militaries in Europe. The West's continued diplomatic, economic, and military support has also reassured and uplifted the Zelensky administration. Both the US and NATO have maintained their support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, massively increasing shipments of defensive weapons and equipment in recent weeks.

No less clear has been the renewed sense of patriotism and resilience among the Ukrainian people. In a February 2022 poll, approximately 57 percent of Ukrainians said they would put up armed resistance in the event of a new Russian invasion. (Regional differences are noteworthy: readiness to resist varies from 72 percent in the West to 30 percent in the East.) Ukraine has also restructured its Territorial Defense Force—originally designed as a separate professional military branch—to recruit as many as two million citizens to help defend their homes and protect key civilian infrastructure. In a poll conducted in January of this year, 56 percent of Ukrainians said they would join the new force.

These developments can certainly boost morale and foster optimism, but, on close examination, may not be sufficient to counter Russian aggression at this time. First, Ukraine's defensive potential, while improved, stands a poor chance against Russia, due not least to gaps in Ukraine's air defense and electronic warfare capabilities. Next, Ukraine's current armed forces, at approximately 250,000 people, are only about a quarter as numerous as Russia's active-duty troops, not counting reserves, and will be hard pressed to sustain a ground invasion. Ukraine's national resistance movement, while inspiring, may not be helpful against Russia's well-armed conventional forces poised for a swift invasion and a potentially protracted occupation. Besides, as Dara Massicot, a senior policy researcher at the RAND Corporation, has noted, Russian strategy emphasizes a “short and intense ‘initial period of war’ that may produce decisive effects even before ground forces are fully committed.” Last, despite the West's support, fissures between European nations on issues of weapons transfers to Ukraine and sanctions against Russia have poured cold water on expectations of a unified Western front.

Zelensky's war optimism may be costly, but it is still a far cry from the devastating effects of Putin's war optimism. Traditionally, the majority of the Russian leadership's overconfidence has been rooted in Russia's military strength, especially since its recent modernization. Russia has also been able to sanction-proof its economy thanks to a conservative fiscal policy that has included weaning itself off the dollar and reducing the share of its debt held by foreign investors. In addition, the Kremlin optimistically believes that Europeans will make a rational choice in favor of stable and affordable Russian energy supplies and thus concede to some of Russia's geopolitical demands (such as blocking Ukraine's NATO membership).

The Kremlin's overconfidence has produced some blind spots as well. While the larger and more technologically advanced Russian force could overwhelm Ukraine's military and seize swaths of Ukrainian territory relatively quickly, with a possible goal of regime change in Kyiv, experts estimate that over time, manpower-intensive urban warfare would present a real challenge for the Kremlin. Additionally, while the Russians have the capabilities to defeat Ukrainian resistance movements, they might be underestimating the extent of the irreversible change Ukrainian society has undergone in terms of its pro-Western aspirations. In a February 2022 poll, the majority of Ukrainians said they were in favor of joining both the European Union and NATO (68 percent and 62 percent, respectively). Several studies have also shown that most Ukrainians reflect rather critically on the Soviet past and its legacy, especially compared to Russians. In other words, Putin may

not find the captive audience he is counting on for a pro-Russia regime to last. Besides, post-war reconstruction would put an enormous strain on Russia's budget, especially in the face of severe sanctions.

While it is true that so far Western sanctions have not succeeded in forcing the Kremlin to end aggression in Ukraine and prevent further escalation, the more punishing sanctions that the US and its European allies and partners have threatened to impose on Russia could cripple the Russian economy and inflict pain on its billionaires, government officials, and ordinary citizens alike.

Considering the many blind spots of war optimism, it is important that both Zelensky and Putin, as well as other political leaders, at a minimum take a pause to recognize their own and other actors' delusions and seek

to mitigate their effects by soliciting alternative sources of information and interpretations. Leaders should also ensure not only that the people around them feel comfortable reporting bad news, but also that the incentives for reporting factually accurate information are stronger than the incentives for "maintaining organizational silence."

As a flurry of diplomatic talks between Western leaders, Moscow, and Kyiv continues, all parties involved should consider very seriously the sources of their optimism about whether further violence will change the inevitability of political negotiations and concessions.

Submitted on 16 February 2022

About the Author

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COMMENTARY

Global Security and the Ukrainian Crisis

By Dmitry Stefanovich (IMEMO, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow)

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The dramatic recognition of the DNR and LNR as sovereign states will affect the developing security trends in Europe, Asia, and elsewhere. However, it should not be seen as some sort of a 'grand finale' and 'full stop' signal to the ongoing process of re-shaping the international security order.

While highly symbolic, such a move by Russia seems to be only tactical, or operational at the most, intended to limit the military escalation scenarios around Donetsk and Lugansk. Strangely enough, during the emergency meeting of the UN Security Council, the Ambassadors of both Russia and Ukraine stated that the Minsk Agreements are still relevant. Of course, to keep the situation contained, or 'frozen' (who could have thought that this word can have a positive connotation), the hostilities along the contact line should cease, and, hopefully, it will happen as soon as the Russian Armed Forces are deployed in these Republics according to the relevant Agreements. The status of such deployment will remain contested for years to come, but this is a reality we will have to deal with. At the moment the situation is still developing, but the current crisis is not about Ukraine.

It is rooted in far greater issues of a European security architecture—or the absence of such.

Thus, the Russian strategic effort to negotiate so-called 'security guarantees', or rather re-negotiating the written and perceived 'terms' under which the Cold War ended, remains on the table. So far there has been some progress with the so-called 'secondary agenda', which includes very serious issues of arms control, transparency and confidence-building measures. If implemented, those can stabilize the situation in Europe, with a positive spill over to other regions of the world. Credit where credit is due, the US response to the Russian original proposal demonstrated that people in Washington properly tried to do their homework in that part. However, it is linked to broader issues of a political nature, the 'primary agenda'. The most crucial of those are the binding commitment by NATO to non-extension into the post-Soviet space and the degrading of NATO military infrastructure in the new member states to the status it had in 1997, as well as the withdrawal of foreign troops from those member states. All of these are heavily flavoured with the concept of indivisible secu-

rity, which is contested from all directions. Diving deep into these discussions is not a goal of this essay. However, this process can help to find a mutually acceptable solution for the ‘primary agenda’, as the current non-flexible attitude of the US and NATO is not helpful.

Still, the ‘secondary agenda’, based on long-standing Russian proposals addressing the post-INF situation, restraint on military exercises and limits on deployments of some long-range strike platforms can be used to continue the engagement and develop solutions that will be implemented once there is some progress on the ‘primary’ one. Moreover, such a process will affect the attitude of the parties involved. After all, now there are extremely limited domains where Russia and the US, or Russia and NATO, are looking for solutions—instead we are too busy ‘standing up’ to each other.

All these ideas are obviously affected by the actual military deployments, with no major ‘de-escalation’ in sight. On that, there are two points that should be considered. First, it is a fact that somewhat proper engagement on the issues listed in the previous paragraph started only when coupled with ‘pressure’ from the Russian side—and there is a genuine concern that without such pressure the process will halt. Second, both general purpose forces deployed to the Western borders of Russia, the Union State of Russia and Belarus, and other regions (most importantly the Mediterranean) and the

strategic deterrence forces (which were demonstrated in a major exercise over the weekend) continue to send a signal that the US and NATO will not be able to ensure their military security through unilateral measures in this sphere. Under any circumstances Russia will be able to impose military costs in case of a conflict—thus it is necessary to look for collective, ‘indivisible’ security solutions. And such solutions remain possible—as long as they will address the long-term security concerns of the parties involved based on reciprocity.

There is a Russian saying—“a terrible end is better than terror without end”, however this seems hardly applicable to international security. Scholars, experts, politicians, diplomats, servicemen and the general public are obviously tired of the ongoing crisis, but it remains contained. Full-scale conflict (and it does not really matter whether it will take the form of military action or apocalyptic sanctions) will hardly pave a road to immediate solutions, and there is still room to develop a more stable international security arrangement based on what we already have. Destroying everything pre-existing will not help in this endeavour, and we in Russia know only too well that a ‘new world’ built on ruins and debris does not become a better one.

Submitted on 22 February 2022

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COMMENTARY

Russia Crisis 2022: A Truth Moment for Germany

By Kateryna Zarembo and Marianna Fakhurdinova (New Europe Center, Kyiv)

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Since the Second World War, Germany has pursued a pacifist foreign policy, driven by the ideas of non-violence and dialog, with a view to promoting peace on the European continent. This is especially true regarding German policy toward Russia, where the German position is reinforced by a sense of historical guilt and responsibility on the one hand and business interests on the other.

This moment in history, when Russia is demanding a revision of the Euro-Atlantic security architecture,

threatening Ukraine by force, is a test for Germany of whether it has actually learned the lessons of the past and can play a leading and uniting role in the European Union. This peculiar German mixture of pacifism, anti-Americanism, (selective) historical guilt and desire for dialog with Russia no matter how autocratic, can work against German intentions. The German position is all the more outstanding since it stands in stark contrast to those of the US, Great Britain and other Ukraine allies.

It is significant that such a deviation is generally characteristic not only of politicians but also of scholars and policy analysts. This is indicated by the research on how Western representatives of academia and the think-tank community in seven countries name, interpret and suggest resolving the conflict in and around Ukraine (Koval et al. 2022). Conducted by a group of Ukrainian authors who closely examined approximately a thousand publications over a six-year period, the research shows that while scholars and policy analysts from Poland, the US and Great Britain hold Russia responsible for its aggression against Ukraine and call for deterrence (more aid to Ukraine, tougher sanctions on Russia, etc.), those from Germany (and France) advocate for dialog with Moscow and appeasement.

However, the time for “dialog only” is up. Dialog and appeasement of Russia have not worked: after eight years of hybrid aggression, on 21 February 2022 Russia openly and blatantly recognized the puppet “republics” in Ukraine’s East, which it itself created in 2014, and stationed its regular armed forces in the sovereign parts of Ukraine—territory of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. There is a high probability that very soon Russia will try to expand the occupied territories by force, with its army encircling roughly three quarters of Ukraine’s border. Any compromises with Russia at the cost of Ukraine’s sovereignty will only signal to Putin that he can ask for more. By taking a tepid stance on the Russian aggression, Germany is breaking European unity and denying Ukraine’s right to self-defense, granted by the UN Charter. How else can one characterize Berlin’s veto of Ukraine’s purchases through a NATO procurement agency and its ban on Estonia’s (or any other third state’s) provision of weapons produced in Germany to Ukraine, while it has been supplying dual-use goods to Russia despite (!) the EU sanctions?

It is time for the Scholz administration to live up to the German value of peacemaking—only in this case pacifism means action in defense of peace and democracy. First, Germany should consider Ukraine an equal and a partner; our research showed that a number of scholars and policy analysts, not to mention particular

politicians and high-ranking military officials, frame Ukraine “indefinitely” in their papers, i.e., as in the background of relations between Russia and the West rather than as a subject of international relations. In addition, no academic or policy paper of those analyzed frames Ukraine as a partner of Germany or the West, which illustrates its objectification in the German discourse. Shifts have been apparent, however, in the array of recent publications in prominent German media calling for Germany’s military support for Ukraine and a more proactive role in deterring Russia.

Nevertheless, the deeds and rhetoric of policy-makers remain paramount. In our view, some of the following measures could work: Germany should firmly side with Ukraine in the Minsk process, where any political steps can only take place after a stable security environment is established. Tough new EU sanctions on Russia should be introduced. Germany should also unblock arms sales to Ukraine through the NATO procurement agency, since Ukraine needs these weapons for defense, not for an offensive. The Nord Stream-2 pipeline should be shelved. Finally, a support fund for German investors in Ukraine should be established, which would make Ukraine safer and more attractive in the eyes of German entrepreneurs. Ukraine’s economy badly needs support in view of the continuous Russian threat, which Russia will always use to blackmail Ukraine and the West.

When our research was conducted two years ago, one of the top recommendations by German policy analysts—to have a balanced position toward Russia and keep the door open for dialog with it—could have been understandable. At present, however, maintaining “dialog and business as usual” with Russia is unacceptable. If Germany continues to do so, it may well end up with yet another migrant crisis at its borders, made up of Ukrainians fleeing Russian aggression, yet another war in the heart of Europe and its own “Srebrenica” moment, when it could have averted a catastrophe but failed.

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CHRONOLOGY

High-Level International Talks and Meetings with Russia and/or Ukraine

Table 1: High-Level International Talks and Meetings with Russia and/or Ukraine from 01 December 2021 to 19 February 2022

Date	Participants	Countries involved	Format	Location
01 December 2021	Kuleba – Liimets	Ukraine, Estonia	bilateral	Riga
01 December 2021	Kuleba – NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs	Ukraine, NATO	NATO	Riga
01 December 2021	Kuleba – Knapen	Ukraine, Netherlands	bilateral	Riga
01 December 2021	Kuleba – Truss	Ukraine, United Kingdom	bilateral	Riga
02 December 2021	OSCE Ministers of Foreign Affairs	OSCE participating states	28 th OSCE Ministerial Council	Stockholm
02 December 2021	Lavrov – Linhart	Russia, Austria	bilateral	Stockholm
02 December 2021	Lavrov – Albares	Russia, Spain	bilateral	Stockholm
02 December 2021	Lavrov – Truss	Russia, United Kingdom	bilateral	Stockholm
02 December 2021	Lavrov – Blinken	Russia, USA	bilateral	Stockholm
02 December 2021	Kuleba – Blinken	Ukraine, USA	bilateral	Stockholm
06 December 2021	Zelensky – Blinken	Ukraine, USA	bilateral	Phone call
07 December 2021	Putin – Biden	Russia, USA	bilateral	Video call
08 December 2021	Putin – Mitsotakis	Russia, Greece	bilateral	Sochi
08 December 2021	Kuleba – Truss	Ukraine, United Kingdom	bilateral	Phone call
09 December 2021	Zelensky – Biden	Ukraine, USA	bilateral	Phone call
13 December 2021	Putin – Johnson	Russia, United Kingdom	bilateral	Phone call
14 December 2021	Putin – Niinistö	Russia, Finland	bilateral	Phone call
14 December 2021	Putin – Macron	Russia, France	bilateral	Phone call
14 December 2021	Lavrov – Baerbock	Ukraine, Germany	bilateral	Phone call
15 December 2021	Leaders of the EU, EU member states and of countries of the Eastern Partnership	Ukraine, EU	EU Eastern Partnership Summit	Brussels
16 December 2021	Zelensky – Stoltenberg	Ukraine, NATO	NATO–Ukraine	Brussels
17 December 2021	Zelensky – Johnson	Ukraine, United Kingdom	bilateral	Phone call
20 December 2021	Zelensky – Duda – Nausėda	Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania	Lublin Triangle	Ivano–Frankivsk
21 December 2021	Putin – Scholz	Russia, Germany	bilateral	Phone call
21 December 2021	Putin – Macron	Russia, France	bilateral	Phone call
21 December 2021	Reznikov – Benko	Ukraine, Hungary	bilateral	Budapest
22 December 2021	Putin – Bettel	Russia, Luxembourg	bilateral	Phone call
23 December 2021	Kuleba – Borell	Ukraine, EU	EU–Ukraine	Phone call
29 December 2021	Zelensky – Blinken	Ukraine, USA	bilateral	Phone call
30 December 2021	Putin – Biden	Russia, USA	bilateral	Phone call
02 January 2022	Zelensky – Biden	Ukraine, USA	bilateral	Phone call
04 January 2022	Kuleba – Lipavský	Ukraine, Czech Republic	bilateral	Phone call
05 January 2022	Kuleba – Borell	Ukraine, EU	EU–Ukraine	Kyiv

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Table 1: High-Level International Talks and Meetings with Russia and/or Ukraine from 01 December 2021 to 19 February 2022

Date	Participants	Countries involved	Format	Location
06 January 2022	Lavrov – Çavuşoğlu	Russia, Turkey	bilateral	Phone call
06 January 2022	Shoygu – Austin	Russia, USA	bilateral	Phone call
06 January 2022	Shmyhal – Borell	Ukraine, EU	EU-Ukraine	Kyiv
07 January 2022	Kuleba – Blinken	Ukraine, USA	bilateral	Phone call
10 January 2022	Ryabkov – Sherman	Russia, USA	bilateral	Geneva
11 January 2022	Kuleba – Blinken	Ukraine, USA	bilateral	Phone call
12 January 2022	Lavrov – Dendias	Russia, Greece	bilateral	Phone call
12 January 2022	Fomin, Grushko – Stoltenberg, representatives of NATO member states	Russia, NATO	NATO-Russia Council	Brussels
13 January 2022	Lukashevich – Carpenter, representatives of OSCE member states	OSCE participating states	OSCE meeting	Vienna
13 January 2022	Zelensky – Johnson	Ukraine, United Kingdom	bilateral	Phone call
13 January 2022	Reznikov – Austin	Ukraine, USA	bilateral	Phone call
17 January 2022	Lavrov – Grlić Radman	Russia, Croatia	bilateral	Moscow
17 January 2022	Kuleba – Baerbock	Ukraine, Germany	bilateral	Kyiv
18 January 2022	Lavrov – Baerbock	Russia, Germany	bilateral	Moscow
18 January 2022	Lavrov – Blinken	Russia, USA	bilateral	Phone call
18 January 2022	Zelensky, Shmyhal, Kuleba, Yermak – Joly	Ukraine, Canada	bilateral	Kyiv
19 January 2022	Zelensky – Blinken	Ukraine, USA	bilateral	Kyiv
19 January 2022	Kuleba – Blinken	Ukraine, USA	bilateral	Kyiv
20 January 2022	Zelensky – Duda	Ukraine, Poland	bilateral	Wisla
21 January 2022	Putin – Niinistö	Russia, Finland	bilateral	Phone call
21 January 2022	Lavrov – Blinken	Russia, USA	bilateral	Geneva
21 January 2022	Kuleba – Blinken	Ukraine, USA	bilateral	Phone call
26 January 2022	Political Advisors (Yermak, Kozak)	Russia, Ukraine, France, Germany	Normandy	Paris
27 January 2022	Kuleba – Kofod	Ukraine, Denmark	bilateral	Copenhagen
27 January 2022	Zelensky – Biden	Ukraine, USA	bilateral	Phone call
28 January 2022	Lavrov – Baerbock	Russia, Germany	bilateral	Phone call
30 January 2022	Reznikov – Anand	Ukraine, Canada	bilateral	Kyiv
31 January 2022	Kuleba – Linde	Ukraine, Sweden	bilateral	Phone call
31 January 2022	Permanent representative to the UN of members of the UN Security Council (UNSC) and Ukraine	Ukraine, UNSC members	UNSC meeting	New York
01 February 2022	Putin – Orban	Russia, Hungary	bilateral	Moscow
01 February 2022	Putin – Draghi	Russia, Italy	bilateral	Phone call
01 February 2022	Lavrov – Blinken	Russia, USA	bilateral	Phone call
01 February 2022	Kuleba – Albares	Ukraine, Spain	bilateral	Phone call
01 February 2022	Zelensky – Johnson	Ukraine, United Kingdom	bilateral	Kyiv
02 February 2022	Putin – Johnson	Russia, United Kingdom	bilateral	Phone call
02 February 2022	Zelensky – Rutte	Ukraine, Netherlands	bilateral	Kyiv

Continued overleaf

Table 1: High-Level International Talks and Meetings with Russia and/or Ukraine from 01 December 2021 to 19 February 2022

Date	Participants	Countries involved	Format	Location
02 February 2022	Kuleba – Truss	Ukraine, United Kingdom	bilateral	Phone call
04 February 2022	Zelensky – Erdoğan	Ukraine, Turkey	bilateral	Kyiv
04 February 2022	Kuleba – Blinken	Ukraine, USA	bilateral	Phone call
07 February 2022	Putin – Macron	Russia, France	bilateral	Moscow
07 February 2022	Kuleba – Baerbock	Ukraine, Germany	bilateral	Kyiv
08 February 2022	Zelensky, Kuleba – Lipavský – Schallenberg – Korčok	Ukraine, Czech Republic, Austria, Slovakia	Slavkov	Kyiv
08 February 2022	Zelensky – Macron	Ukraine, France	bilateral	Kyiv
09 February 2022	Kuleba – Albares	Ukraine, Spain	bilateral	Kyiv
10 February 2022	Lavrov – Di Maio	Russia, Italy	bilateral	Phone call
10 February 2022	Political Advisors (Yermak – Kozak – Plötner – Bonne)	Russia, Ukraine, France, Germany	Normandy	Berlin
10 February 2022	Lavrov – Truss	Russia, United Kingdom	bilateral	Moscow
11 February 2022	Shoygu – Wallace	Russia, United Kingdom	bilateral	Moscow
11 February 2022	Kuleba – Blinken	Ukraine, USA	bilateral	Phone call
12 February 2022	Putin – Macron	Russia, France	bilateral	Phone call
12 February 2022	Lavrov – Blinken	Russia, USA	bilateral	Phone call
12 February 2022	Putin – Biden	Russia, USA	bilateral	Phone call
12 February 2022	Shoygu – Austin	Russia, USA	bilateral	Phone call
13 February 2022	Zelensky – Biden	Ukraine, USA	bilateral	Phone call
14 February 2022	Zelensky – Scholz	Ukraine, Germany	bilateral	Kyiv
14 February 2022	Kuleba – Blinken	Ukraine, USA	bilateral	Phone call
15 February 2022	Putin – Scholz	Russia, Germany	bilateral	Moscow
15 February 2022	Lavrov – Rau	Russia, Poland	bilateral	Moscow
15 February 2022	Lavrov – Blinken	Russia, USA	bilateral	Phone call
17 February 2022	Lavrov – Di Maio	Russia, Italy	bilateral	Moscow
17 February 2022	Blinken – Permanent representatives to the UN of UNSC members and Ukraine	Ukraine, UNSC members	UNSC meeting	New York
18 February 2022	Lavrov – Dendias	Russia, Greece	bilateral	Moscow
19 February 2022	Zelensky – Scholz	Ukraine, Germany	bilateral	Munich
19 February 2022	Zelensky – Johnson	Ukraine, United Kingdom	bilateral	Munich
19 February 2022	Zelensky – Harris	Ukraine, USA	bilateral	Munich
19 February 2022	Zelensky – Petkov	Ukraine, Bulgaria	bilateral	Munich
19 February 2022	Zelensky – von der Leyen	Ukraine, EU	EU–Ukraine	Munich
19 February 2022	Zelensky – Macron	Ukraine, France	bilateral	Phone call

Compiled by Oliva Faust and Isaac Holmberg (Research Centre for East European Studies at the University of Bremen) on 19 February 2022

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