



The 'Constructive Destruction' of Russia's Model of Relations with the West

Description

RUSSIA: Putin means what he says: Russia's back is to the wall, and there is nowhere to which Russia can now retreat – for them it is existential.

The collective West *was* already angry. And it is *apoplectic* after President Putin shocked western leaders by ordering a special military operation in Ukraine, which is being widely described (and perceived in the West) as a declaration of war: 'a shock and awe assault affecting cities widely across Ukraine'. So angry in fact is the West that the information space has literally bifurcated into two:

It is all [black and white](#), with no greys. For the West, Putin has comprehensively defied Biden; he has unilaterally and illegally 'changed the borders' of Europe and acted as a 'revisionist power', attempting to change not just the borders of Ukraine, but the current world order.

"Thirty years after the end of the Cold War, we are facing a determined effort to redefine the multilateral order," the EU High Representative, Josep Borell, [warned](#). *"It's an act of defiance. It's a revisionist manifesto, the manifesto to review the world order"*.

Putin is characterised as a new Hitler, and his acts asserted to be 'illegal'. It is claimed that it was he who tore up the Minsk II Accord (yet the Republics declared their independence in 2014, signed Minsk in 2015, and it was Russia who never signed the accord – and therefore cannot be in breach of it).

Indeed, it is the US effectively that has vetoed the Minsk process since 2014, and Russia's publication of diplomatic correspondence in November 2021 exposed that France and Germany too, had little intention of pressurising Kiev on any meaningful implementation.

And so, having concluded that a negotiated settlement – as stipulated in the Minsk Accords – would simply not happen, Putin determined that there was no point in waiting any longer before implementing Russia's red line.

The late Stephen Cohen [wrote](#) of the dangers of such unqualified Manichaeism — how the spectre

of an evil-doing Putin had so overwhelmed and toxified the US image of him that Washington has been unable to think straight – not just about Putin – but *about Russia per se*. Cohen's point was that such utter demonisation undercuts diplomacy.

How does one split the difference with evil? Cohen asks, how did this happen? He suggests that in 2004, the *NY Times* columnist, Nicholas Kristof, inadvertently explained, at least partially, Putin's demonisation. Kristof complained bitterly of having been “suckered by Mr. Putin. He is not a sober version of Boris Yeltsin”.

Most Russians however, are behind Putin with the recognition of the Donbas Republics, which he then followed up by obtaining the authorisation of Russia's upper parliament house for the use of armed forces outside Russia (as required under the constitution). The resolution by the Federation Council was unanimously supported by all the 153 senators at an extraordinary session on Tuesday.

In his national address, Putin spoke with a bitterness that is reflected by many Russians. He views the post-2014 political developments in Ukraine as having been engineered to create an anti-Russian regime in Kiev nurtured by the West, and with hostile intentions towards Russia. Putin illustrated this point by explaining that

“The Ukrainian troop control system has already been integrated into NATO. This means that NATO headquarters can issue direct commands to the Ukrainian armed forces, even to their separate units and squads”.

Putin also noted that the Russian constitution stipulates the borders of Donetsk and Lugansk regions to be as they were “at the time when they were part of Ukraine”. This is a carefully worded formulation — the borders of the two republics underwent significant changes in the aftermath of the Maidan coup. (At issue here is Donetsk's historic claim to coastal Mariupol).

Putin's recognition statement was accompanied by an ultimatum to the Kiev forces to cease their artillery bombardment across the Line of Control or face military consequences. Throughout Wednesday evening however, the situation on the Contact Line was heating up, with heavy artillery fire; but early Thursday morning, for the first time, multiple rocket-fire was used by the Kiev forces across the Control Line.

(Someone from the Kiev side clearly wanted escalation – perhaps to put pressure on Washington).

Putin immediately ordered what was evidently a pre-prepared Special Operation ‘to de-militarise and de-nazify Ukraine’. Russia's military announced within a couple hours of the offensive that all of Ukraine's air defense systems had been taken out. A massive Russian aerial presence, including fighter jets and helicopters, has been confirmed over much of the country.

Possibly this operation (which Putin said is not about occupying Ukraine), will follow the pattern of Georgia in 2018, when Russian forces withdrew after a few days. This was the pattern too, in Kazakhstan. We simply do not know whether this will be the case in Ukraine — very possibly not.

When Putin spoke of ‘de-nazification’ he was referring to the US co-option of a [neo-Nazi formation](#) in Ukraine's armed forces [to help mount](#) the 2014 Maidan coup. The so-called Azov Brigade of neo-

Nazis had proved to be the most effective fighting force in pushing back the DLR militia in the Donbass region. (Ukraine is the world's only nation to have a [neo-Nazi formation in its armed forces](#) and there will be scores to be settled).

Nonetheless, Putin's Special Order has, as no doubt he foresaw, shocked the West deeply with its decisive military reaction. It has set the world – and its financial and [energy markets](#) – on edge.

Indeed, the latter aspect may become the more salient. In 1979, upheavals in the Middle East sent energy prices soaring (just as is occurring today), and western economies tumbling. Wherever the next days bring, it must be plain that Putin's short press conference on 22 February is acting as intended, as a powerful accelerant.

The “[constructive destruction](#)” of the old Global Order will proceed faster than many of us had imagined. It marks an End to Illusions — an end to [the notion](#) that the US imposed, rules-based order remains an option.

How then to interpret the extreme anger in the West? Simply this: In the end, there is reality. And that reality – i.e. what the West can do about it – is all that matters — which is ... little.

The brutal first realisation underlying the anger is that the West has no intention – and critically, no ability – to counter Russia's moves militarily. Biden has repeated the ‘no boots on the ground mantra’ again in the wake of Russian military operations. And for Europe, the imposition of a sanctions regime on Russia *could not* have come at a worse moment.

Europe is facing recession and a pre-existing energy crisis (which will be hugely aggravated by Germany's offering up Nordstream 2 to the hungry gods of vengeance). And spiking inflation (worsened with oil at \$100) is causing interest rate and sovereign bond nerves to rattle. Now the pressure will be on Europe to find additional sanctions.

Sanctions there will be – and they will hurt Europeans directly in their pockets. Some European states are putting up a rear-guard action to limit sanctions that might worsen the coming European recession. However, in a very real sense, the fact is that Europe is effectively sanctioning itself (it will sustain the bigger hurt from its own sanctions), and Moscow has promised to reciprocate any sanctions in a way that will hurt the US and Europe. We are in a new era. This prospect and impotence in the face of it, must account for a large portion of European frustration and anger.

Washington professes to have a ‘killer weapon’ targeted at Moscow: sanctioning semi-conductor chips. “This would be the modern equivalent of a 20th century oil embargo, since chips are the critical fuel of the electronic economy”, Ambrose Evans Pritchard [argues](#) in the *Telegraph*:

“But this too, is a dangerous game. Putin has the means to cut off critical minerals and gases needed to sustain the West's supply chain for semiconductor chips”. In short, Moscow's control over key strategic minerals could give Russia leverage, akin to Opec's energy stranglehold in 1973.

Here lies the second strand to Europe's outpouring of frustration: the unspoken recognition that Biden's Ukraine policy; the west's failure of diplomacy (all process and no substantive addressing of the underlying issues); plus Germany's cack-handed handling of the Nordstream 2 question, have doomed the EU to years of economic decline and suffering.

The third strand is more complex and is reflected in Josep Borell's indignant cry that Russia and China are two "revisionist" powers attempting to change the current world order. The European 'fear' is grounded not only in the content of the Beijing joint declaration, but likely also that not in his entire life has President Putin before [made a speech like Monday's address](#) to the Russian people.

Nor has he ever named the Americans to be Russia's national enemy in such unequivocal Russian terms – American promises: worthless; American intentions: deadly; American speeches: lies; American actions: intimidation, extortion and blackmail.

Putin's speech portends a great fracture. It seems to be just dawning on Europeans (such as Borrell) just how much of an inflection point Putin's address represents. It was framed around Ukraine, yet the latter issue – though compelling – is incidental to the decision by Russia and China to change forever the geo-political balance and the security architecture of the globe.

What the recognition of the Donbas republics represented was the manifestation of this earlier geo-strategic decision. It is the first practical unfolding of that break with the West (never absolute, of course), and the unveiling of Russia's compilation of 'technical-military' measures designed to force a separation of the globe into two distinct spheres. The first was the republics' recognition; the second military-technical measure was Putin's address; and the third, his subsequent 'Special Operations' order.

They – the Russia-China Axis – want *separation*. This is to come about either through dialogue, (which is unlikely, since the core principle of today's geo-politics is defined by the deliberate non-comprehending of 'otherness'), or it must be achieved by a contest of escalating pain (defined in terms of red lines) until one side, or the other, buckles. Of course, Washington does not believe Presidents' Xi and Putin possibly can mean what they say – and they believe that, anyway, the West has escalatory dominance in the field of imposing pain.

Less diplomatically put, Russia and China have concluded that sharing a global society with an America set on enforcing a hegemonic global order crafted to 'resemble Arizona' is no longer possible. Putin means what he says: Russia's back is to the wall, and there is nowhere to which Russia can now retreat — for them it is existential.

The West's denial that Putin 'means it' (thus ensuring the consequent failure of diplomacy) suggests that this crisis will be with us for at least the next two years. It is the start of a drawn-out, high-stakes phase of a Russian-led effort to change the European security architecture into a new form, which the West presently rejects.

The Russian aim will be to keep the pressures – and even the latency of war ever-present – in order to harass war-averse Western leaders to make the necessary shift.

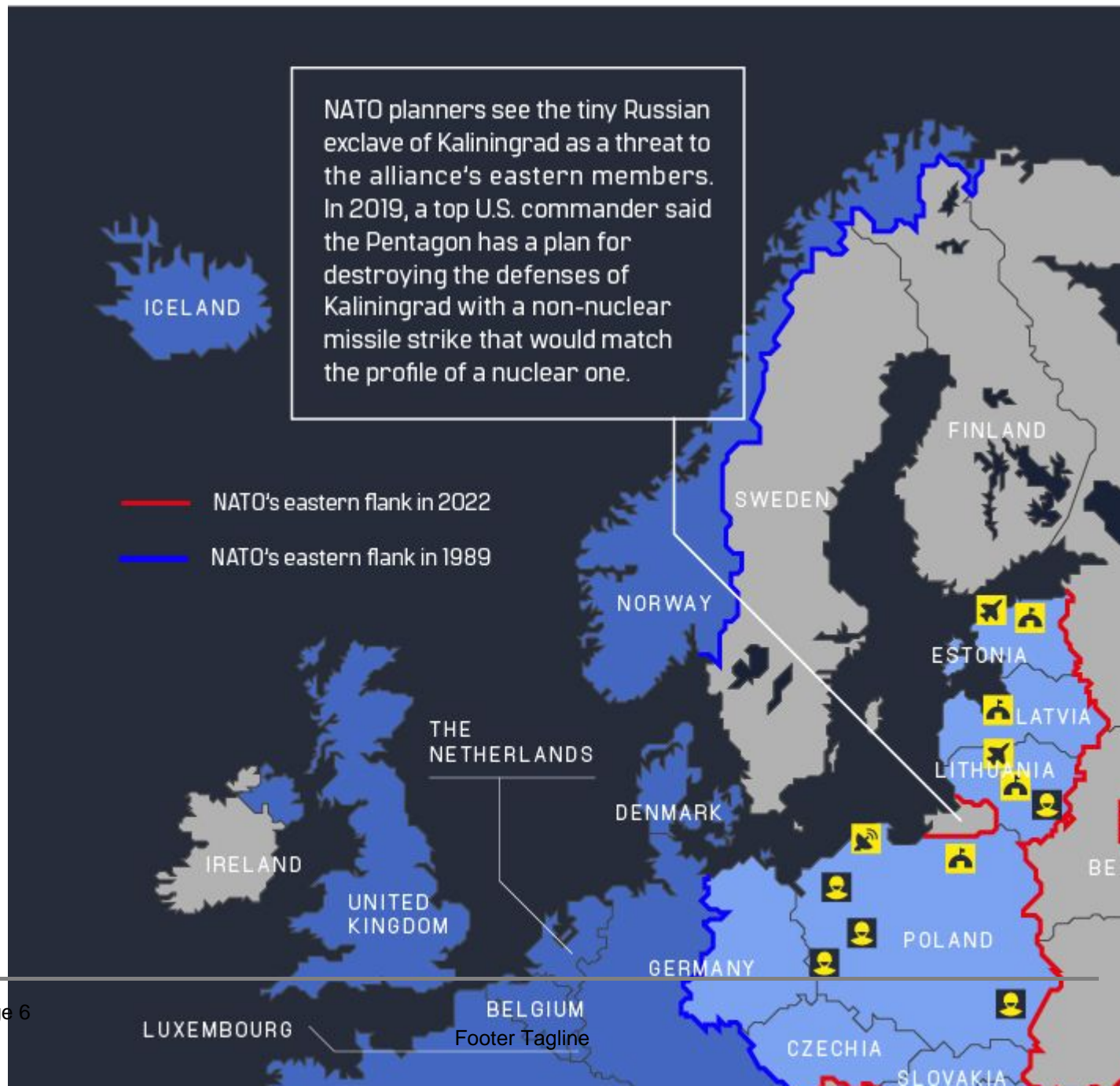
Ultimately – after a painful struggle – Europe will seek reconciliation. America will be slower: the

Beltway hawks will try to double-down. And it will be the western economic and market situation that may ultimately determine the 'when'.

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WHY RUSSIA WANTED SECURITY GU

Despite promises made to Gorbachev at the end of the Cold War, the Soviet Union established its military facilities along Russia's border with NATO. The Russian enclave of Kaliningrad, home to Russia's only ice-free port on the Baltic Sea, has been a source of tension. "color revolutions" in the former Soviet republics targeting Russia have further fueled concerns. Russia recognizes its security concerns as legitimate.



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