

How the West will be won in Ukraine



Instead of severely defeating the West, Russia has endured a terrible and shameful fiasco

by Conrad Black

When Russia invaded Ukraine seven weeks ago, I wrote in this space that if Russia succeeded in crushing Ukraine as an independent state and strangling it as an aspiring democracy, in addition to a tragedy for Ukraine, it would be a terrible setback for the West. The egregious and vastly over-decorated chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Mark Milley, predicted that Russia would occupy Kiev within three days. If this had occurred, it would have been the first roll-back of western civilization since the early days of the Second World War. And when added to the terrible self-inflicted fiasco of

the economic shutdown of the western world at the start of the pandemic, and the impending surrender of the West to the nuclear military ambitions of Iran, it would have announced a much clearer and stronger trajectory of western decline than global warming (which has contributed to Western decline also, as we inflict terrible economic hardship on ourselves to reduce carbon emissions on the basis of insufficient knowledge of what we are fighting).

The western world, which includes western emulative countries in the East such as Japan and South Korea, steadily expanded with the victories of the western Allied powers in the Second World War, the reorientation of Germany and Japan under Allied occupation, the tremendous economic and political progress of many countries in Latin America, South Asia, Europe, the Middle and the Far East, and the entirely satisfactory and nonviolent conclusion of the Cold War. The western world in Europe advanced eastwards from the border of East Germany to the eastern border of a reunited Germany and on to the eastern border of Poland (875 kilometres). The burning question is whether this steady expansion of the West will take the next step: 1,200 kilometres through Ukraine to the border of Russia. The grand geopolitical prize in the generally peaceable contest for world leadership between the West and China is the status of Russia, the largest component of the great Eurasian landmass. The historic struggle for the heart and soul of Russia between the western emulators led initially by Peter the Great and most recently by Boris Yeltsin, and the Russian nationalists exemplified by Leo Tolstoy and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and, politically, by Vladimir Putin, will have a decisive impact on the comparative influence of the West and China. We must preserve Ukraine for the West and confirm the defeat of the Soviet Union in the Cold War, and then we must set our minds to attracting Russia out of the arms of China, where incompetent western post-Cold War leadership has driven it, and back to the West, where Russia belongs.

It is these geopolitical factors that give the Ukraine War its very high significance, even more than the affront to civilization of a completely unprovoked military assault designed to snuff out a nationality whose sovereignty Russia had officially conceded, and justified only by Putin's incoherent claim that Ukrainians were not a distinct people, the country had no legitimacy and that it was ruled by a cabal of Nazis and drug addicts (led by a duly elected Jewish president). Hitler's charade of a false flag attack on a German border outpost by paid plants in Polish army uniforms to justify his invasion of Poland in 1939 was equally credible.

At the time of the invasion, on the basis of my own research, I wrote that I did not see how the Russians could possibly overwhelm a heavily armed, well-trained Ukrainian army of over 200,000 reinforced by a large contingent of semi-trained reservists who would quickly become highly proficient in combat, and occupy a country of 40 million. I should mention that the most accurate information I received was from my friend of over 60 years, the distinguished CBC News commentator Brian Stewart. Many of his habitual viewers are readers of this column and they will want to join me in wishing him a happy 80th birthday next week. How Brian and I formulated fairly accurate views of what would happen on the ground in Ukraine and the chairman of the U.S. joint chiefs did not (and he last week revised his prediction to say that the war will endure for years), escapes my imagination. The only area, predictably, where the Russians prevail is in high-altitude bombing and missile-fire, which rains terror on the civil population, affronts the sensibilities of the world and achieves no worthwhile military objectives.

The western campaign of sanctions has been seriously overrated. Since China, India, Brazil, South Africa, Saudi Arabia and many other large countries are ignoring the sanctions, they will be substantially ineffectual. U.S.

President Joe Biden's claim of having gone to great lengths to secure world opprobrium for Russia is as irrelevant as his claim to be protecting "every square inch of NATO territory," as the Kremlin doesn't care what the world thinks and no NATO country is under threat. Because of Russian oil and gas sales to the West, and because the Americans have inexplicably engaged the Russians and not their British, French or German allies to fumble through the insane effort to patch back together the Iranian nuclear military agreement, NATO is trying to suck and blow at the same time by helping the Ukrainians without offending the Russians, even as Biden denounces Putin as a war criminal. The U.S. secretary of state had declared that he favoured advancing Polish warplanes to Ukraine and was quickly contradicted by a Pentagon press spokesman.

Despite the thoroughly unprofessional, frequently implausible, American babel, where the right is claiming that Washington is full of neocon warmongers who want to exchange live fire with the Russians, and the left is wailing that a third world war is imminent, it seems that this war will end soon with Russia gaining those in eastern Ukraine who would rather be Russian, but the bulk of Ukraine continuing to be universally recognized and guaranteed as a sovereign state, though deferring NATO membership. (It already had Russian and American guarantees, but they weren't trustworthy.)

Instead of severely defeating the West, Russia has endured a terrible and shameful fiasco. And its Chinese big brother is back to welding closed the doors of people in Shanghai, having failed to learn the lesson of the public health crisis it inflicted upon us. China's attempt at puppeteering in Europe has been a disaster, and is a cautionary tale about Taiwan. The West has been greatly strengthened by the imminent applications for NATO membership by Sweden and Finland and the statement that Germany, the most powerful European country since Otto von Bismarck unified it 150 years ago, will finally

pull its weight in NATO and begin with a 100-billion euro rearmament plan.

Believing Christians reckon Easter was the greatest miracle of all; we can all celebrate the much less astounding current revival in the fortunes of the West, which is due to the comparative merits of democratic society more than to the talents of our current leaders. A happy Easter and Passover to all.

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