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New Challenges for European Security.

The Security Dialogue with Ukraine and the Russian Federation

How should the West speak to in the East and what about?

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In the beginning of the decade the future of European security seemed to be assured. A growing political consensus on security matters between East and West had led to several extraordinary security breakthroughs: the Treaty to eliminate land-based intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) was signed, ratified and fully implemented; U.S. and Soviet land-based intermediate-range nuclear missiles were withdrawn from Europe and destroyed; the START I strategic arms limitation treaty was signed and ratified; and, in 1990, for the first time in two millennia a treaty to limit conventional forces in Europe (CFE) was signed in Paris.

In 1991, during the Gulf War against Iraq, the U.S., Britain and France moved large contingents of ground troops and air force units out of Europe—a thing unthinkable during the Cold War. On the other hand, for some time the Soviet forces in Central Europe had been enjoying a total superiority, but no one considered this a threat.

Many U.S. army units were not moved back to Europe after victory in the Gulf—they were actually disbanded on spot. Soviet tank divisions were also preparing to

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move out of Central Europe—also to disband. As the greatest armored armies the world had ever known were withdrawn from the line of potential confrontation in Central Europe, a lasting security pattern in Europe was seemingly being established. It was hoped that mutual trust and cooperation could help build a security consensus that would eliminate forever the possibility of future wars in Europe.

However, today we are still only talking about how to establish a meaningful security dialogue between East and West, of how to create an effective, lasting security system in Europe. Instead of being united in trust, Europe is again being divided by suspicion and hatred. Instead of eternal peace, Europe has experienced this decade the bloodiest armed conflicts since the end of World War II. And there is a distinct possibility that these conflicts are only a prelude to a much worse thing: the simultaneous proliferation of instability and weapons of mass destruction that could facilitate regional nuclear (chemical/biological) wars in and around Europe.

The past decade has witnessed the most dramatic failure system, since the end of World War I, of European political and military leaders to use a golden opportunity to establish a mutually acceptable all-European security system. This fiasco obviously is first of all—a failure to establish mutually acceptable rules of dialogue and decision-making, a failure to understand each other and act together in cohesion. Today, when the glamorous hopes of the early 90s have been ruined, apparently beyond repair, the time has come to finger-point the guilty and to analyse why, instead of establishing lasting peace, European statesmen have once again, in almost the same pattern as after the end of World War I, created the framework of future devastating wars.

Ten years ago in November 1989 the world was changing dramatically. Old evils were disappearing and the future seemed bright. The Cold War in Europe was decisively over. The Warsaw pact was crumbling apart. On November 9, 1989 the Berlin Wall fell. Germany was on the road to unification. In the Soviet Union democracy was on the rise and the people seemed increasingly dissatisfied with Communist rule. The East was in general opening to the West. It had become obvious that decades of anti-Western propaganda were spent in vain—from the highest Communist party committee levels down to the peasants in the fields everybody in the former "Socialist camp" seemed to believe that everything Western was good: democracy, market economy, freedom of speech and so on. Even NATO, the old enemy, seemed to be a good thing.

In Moscow at the time such attitudes were overwhelming. It was from Moscow, not from former Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe, that the impulse of change came in the mid-80s that ended the Cold War and destroyed the Warsaw Pact. For seventy years Russians had been force-fed by Soviet propaganda that the West was evil, but an increasing number of people were coming not to believe the dope. In the mid-80s a critical mass of public opinion formed in Moscow, especially inside the educated classes—and even more important, inside the ruling Communist elite—that wanted drastic
change and also wanted to have very good relations with the West as well. The Soviet propaganda was lambasting the West in vain. The more the propaganda machine insisted that the West was very bad, the more people in Russia actually believed the opposite.

In the late 80s and early 90s, Russia enthusiastically disbanded the Warsaw Pact, disarmed and withdrew from the front line of confrontation in Europe. The vast majority of Russians genuinely believed that they would soon fully embrace their former enemies and that everyone would be happy and wealthy from thereafter in what the former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev pompously called "the all-European house". In 1991 and 1992 several leading Russian officials, including President Boris Yeltsin, actually said in public that they wanted Russia to join NATO. Of course these daydreams never came true.

In less than ten years Western actions managed to do what 70 years of Soviet indoctrination did not manage despite all the coercive powers of a closed totalitarian state – to make the majority of Russians genuinely fear and hate the West and, even more so – NATO – the military arm of the West. Polls taken during the latest NATO war against Yugoslavia showed that 98% of Russians disapprove of NATO actions.

After NATO’s Balkan war ended, acute public anger in Russia against the West subsided, but the overall shift in public opinion did not disappear. Polls taken last summer, after the Kosovo war ended, showed that 66% of Russians believed NATO enlargement to the east was a threat to Russia and only 14% held the opposite opinion. In spring 1997, before the signing of the Russia-NATO Founding Act, 51% of Russians showed concern about NATO, and 34% saw no threat.

This anti-Western shift in public opinion did not happen overnight. When NATO bombers attacked Yugoslavia, completely disregarding international law and Russian opinions, the Russian public was, of course, already well prepared to turn against the West.

Since 1991, the West has closed its eyes and heart to the suffering of the great majority of the Russian people, whose fate it so much lamented when they were the Soviet people. Russia’s gross domestic product fell about 45% from 1989 to 1997. Real capital investment plunged by 92% over the same period, and net productive investment has turned negative as aging equipment has become unusable, [according to political economist Stephen D. Shenfield of Brown University.]

Output of oil is down 50% from its peak and continues to fall in the absence of needed investment. Much of the nation’s infrastructure –electric power generators, railroads and so on– continues to deteriorate.

Real wages fell 78% from 1991 to 1997, and surveys indicate that two-thirds of those nominally employed are not being paid fully or on time. According to polls and official statistics at least 40% of the population is in serious distress and suffers from
chronic malnutrition. Life expectancy has plummeted as the Soviet medical care system has disintegrated. Monetary policies that the West and its henchmen – the so called “reformers” – introduced helped bring about the worst economic and social devastation ever suffered by a modern country in peacetime.

Using Western advice and support Russian "reformers" created a liberal financial system that fed on itself with virtually no investment into the real economy – a paradise for international money speculators. Enormous sums of money – in some estimates hundreds of billions of dollars – were looted and taken out of Russia to safe havens in the West. In August 1998 Russia’s corrupt financial system went bust, the sham and its Western connection were exposed and Russian public opinion began decisively to turn against everything Western – against liberal economic and political ideas, against market economy and representative democracy, against further cooperation with the West on defense and security issues.

While the "reformers" were destroying Russia, helped by Western money and advice, the West was busy expanding NATO, to capitalize on its presumed victory in the Cold War.

Of course, NATO is not a genuine evil in itself. NATO is only the projection of evil, of massive Western fear, mistrust and hate aimed at Russians and other bad ("rogue") guys in the East. A Harris Poll conducted in August 1999 showed that fifty-four percent of Americans surveyed said Russia "is an enemy of the U.S". Actually, during all the presumed "honeymoon" between Russia and the West in the 90s, there never existed at any time in any Western nation a majority of public opinion that was well-disposed towards Russia. In the beginning of the decade Russians opened their hearts and minds to the West, but the West did not do anything of the sort in response.

Precisely because of these widespread feelings NATO was not disbanded after the end of the Cold War. East and Central European elites are yearning to become NATO members also because of their own mistrust, fear and hate of Russia. Of course, the official NATO PR mantra says that Russia-hating has nothing to do with today’s NATO, Western politics or NATO expansion. But time and again the real feelings do break through into the open. Less than a year ago the Czech president Vatslav Gavel summarized this hate and mistrust very nicely when on an official visit in Washington he predicted that Russia would be in turmoil for a hundred years or more, but that this was OK, since "its better to have a sick Russia, than a healthy Soviet Union". Needless to say that these downgrading remarks were warmly greeted and widely quoted by Gavel’s American hosts.

As soon as NATO’s expansion plans were first made public in 1994, Russian politicians, journalists and political scientists were insisting that expansion was dangerous, that it would destabilize Europe and may even bring war. Of course, these predictions were dismissed in the West. However, less than two weeks from the day NATO was
actually expanded, war did begin in Europe. Moreover—the expanded NATO was the perpetrator of this military action—the aggressor attacking a neutral sovereign state that did not threaten any other nation.

Of course, NATO’s aggression in the Balkans was portrayed as a purely humanitarian action. But after the war ended and Kosovo was occupied by NATO-lead forces, the true extent of the falsehoods circulated by official Western propaganda slowly began to come to light. The West had been claiming from the very beginning of the bombing that the aggression was committed to prevent a “genocide” of Kosovar Albanians by Serb forces. But during the war critics of NATO action pointed out that ethnic cleansing in Kosovo actually began after NATO’s air-raids had commenced, and that the ethnic cleansing was a direct Serb reaction to NATO bombings. Western officials rejected such arguments out of hand, alleging that a genocidal Serbian plan was prepared in advance, that up to 100,000 Albanians were already massacred and that only immediate military action could stop the outrage. Western leaders also implied that there was no time left to seek UN Security Council authorization for an attack against Yugoslavia.

Now it turns out that most Western justifications for an aggression against Yugoslavia were either grossly exaggerated, or totally false. In October the Spanish newspaper El País reported the findings of a Spanish forensic team in northern Kosovo. The UN figures, said Perez Pujol, director of the Instituto Anatomico Forense de Cartagena, began with 44,000 dead, dropped to 22,000 and now stand at 11,000. He and his fellow investigators were prepared to perform at least 2,000 autopsies in their zone. So far, they’ve found 187 corpses.

Many other Western researchers were sent to Kosovo after the Serbian withdrawal precisely to seek out evidence of Serbian atrocities that could in retrospect legitimate NATO’s aggression. Evidence of massacres was found, but the number of confirmed civilian deaths from the hands of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic’s thugs is still in the hundreds.

There is evidence that NATO not only exaggerated, but also deliberately lied about alleged Serbian atrocities. In Pusto Selo, Albanian villagers said 106 civilians had been killed by the Serbs and NATO rushed out satellite photos of mass graves. It seems these photos have been forged, since an on-site inspection revealed no graves at that location.

As time passes, it becomes clear that during the recent Balkan war NATO bombs in fact killed as many or maybe even more civilians in Kosovo and in Serbia than did Milosevic’s thugs during the same time period. Its also clear that Western elected officials have committed war crimes during the Balkan war by authorizing attacks against civilians and civilian targets like the TV station in Belgrade or the bridges in Novi Sad in northern Serbia.

At the same time NATO’s air war did not seriously hinder the Yugoslav army.
NATO bombs actually killed more civilians than Serbs in uniform. After the occupation of Kosovo, NATO forces presided over massive ethnic cleansing of the Serbian and Gypsy population. Hundreds of thousands have been cleansed and the West has done virtually nothing to reverse this cleansing or to adequately protect the ethnic minorities.

NATO’s war in the Balkans has forced down standards of public morality in Europe to an all-time low, and this prevailing amorality will obviously hinder prospects of any meaningful security dialogue between East and West.

Former Secretary General of NATO Javier Solana today coordinates European foreign and security policies. But vast numbers of ordinary Russians and Ukrainians believe Solana to be a war criminal. This public opinion will, of course, be of no help in facilitating any meaningful dialogue.

Today in Chechnya the Russian military is using its vast air and artillery firepower superiority to pound Chechen towns so as to minimize Russian army casualties. Such attacks against civilian targets are obviously war crimes that are committed constantly and are authorized by the highest Russian authorities, both military and political. As in NATO’s war in Kosovo—the innocent suffer more than the fighters. But Western moral protestations against the killings in Chechnya sound hollow to most Russian ears.

Privately many Russian military officers acknowledge that innocent civilians are being killed in Chechnya, but they also claim that “we are just doing what NATO was doing in the Balkans —no more, no less”. Of course, someone else’s crime is not a legal excuse for one to commit a felony. But in Russia such legalistic arguments do not convince many. The Americans do it, the British do it, the French do it, even German "green" pacifists do it. So lets also do it —say Russian officials— let’s kill innocent civilians if its politically expedient.

Of course, its still possible to have a pragmatic, though cynical, political/security dialogue between East and West even at the lowest possible moral level. For years to come the West will continue to occupy and impose overall imperial rule in different parts of the Balkans. It is also possible the West will be in the future forced to fight again in petty wars in the Balkans or in other "out of area" locations. At the same time Russia will most likely continue fighting its own small dirty wars in the Caucasus and, possibly, other parts of its periphery. We can be friends, if some kind of mutually agreed division of spheres of influence can be worked out. But such a security architecture for Europe will hardly be anything like the dream that many Europeans (including Russians) had a decade ago.

The wars that followed the disintegration of Yugoslavia have produced millions of innocent victims, but not a single innocent party. Milosevic is a butcher, but the Croatian leader Franjo Tudjman and the leaders of the Kosovo Liberation Army are of the same stock. Why is the West attacking Milosevic, while fully embracing Tudjman...
and the Kosovo liberation thugs? Why has the mass ethnic cleansing of Serbs by Croatian authorities, Bosniak Muslims and Albanian thugs been tacitly accepted and indeed encouraged by the West? Making villains of the Serbs, while encouraging others to violate human rights, making the Serbs an exception, a pariah, is not simply immoral, it’s politically stupid, since this will only prolong the ex-Yugoslavia succession wars.

In Russia many see NATO’s action against Yugoslavia as a terrifying forecast of what may happen with our own country if NATO continues to expand in the same aggressive fashion. Many Russians, including Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, see the situation in Europe being the same as before World War II, when German and Italian warplanes bombed Spanish towns in the first test of strength to impose a new order in Europe. We, Russians, did not manage to stop the Nazis in Spain, and later they invaded our country. So it is widely believed in Russia that after a trial run in the Balkans NATO aggressors may come for us.

Of course, Yeltsin and his administration did their best to minimize the damage and keep at least some semblance of “partnership” with the West. During the war in Yugoslavia the Kremlin made a lot of noise over the war in Yugoslavia but did little to stop it. In the end the Kremlin actually helped the West to undermine Yugoslavia and force Milosevic to capitulate. But the desire to keep fences mended with the West at almost any cost reflects the opinions of the Russian oligarchy, pro-Western “liberal reformers” and kleptocrats that control the Kremlin—not the opinions of the vast majority of the Russian people.

The anti-Western change in Russian public opinion, caused by the total collapse of market reform, NATO expansion and aggression in the Balkans, is fundamental. It will take at least a generation before Russians may once again become as friendly inclined towards the West as they were in the late 80s and early 90s. But the West seems not to notice this profound change in Russia, neglecting the country’s long-lasting importance. In Russia, in Ukraine, in many other former Communist, Soviet republics the West still continues its failed policy of deliberately choosing privileged partners for dialogue and cooperation, while completely disregarding the opinion of the people.

Quite often these selected Western dialogue partners are corrupt, vastly unpopular regimes that represent a tiny portion of society. Often these privileged dialogue partners in the East are actually bloody authoritarian thugs, like the regimes in former Soviet Central Asia, in Azerbaijan, in Croatia. It does not matter: In the former Soviet Union the main criteria to qualify for Western friendship and aid is to be anti-Russian; in the former Yugoslavia – to be anti-Serbian. Being a dictator is O.K. if your foreign policy and rhetoric coincides with what the West wants to hear. The West has selected for dialogue the totally corrupt and inefficient regime of Leonid Kuchma in Ukraine, the corrupt and inefficient regime of Eduard Shevardnadze in Georgia and so on. It seems the main reason the West had in the past such an affectionate relationship with Yeltsin’s
Kremlin and continues to be civil even today, despite Chechnya and widespread corruption allegations—is because the Yeltsin regime is in essence anti-Russian.

At the same time as the West was having an affair with Yeltsin and his corrupt "reformers," Western policy during the last decade was to build up Ukraine as a buffer against Russia, which is a policy opposed by most Ukrainians. For a decade now, the Western policy of "dialogue" with former Communist states has been mostly aimed at creating corrupt pro-Western elites, at rolling back Russian influence in the Caucasus and Central Asia, at enhancing divisions between nations.

In many cases this policy has actually worked well in helping to accomplish short-term political goals, but in the long-term it may become self-defeating. In Belarus a corrupt pro-Western regime was replaced by a savage anti-Western semi-dictatorship of President Alexander Lukashenko. In Russia and in Ukraine pro-Western kleptocrats still rule, but their power-base is constantly shrinking.

In Ukraine the incumbent Kuchma has run a very heavy-handed presidential election campaign in which the media has faced heavy pressure and opposition candidates have been harassed. In the end Kuchma may scrape through into power, but this will take place in essence via electoral fraud, fraud that the West will do its best not to notice at all. However, how long will Kuchma last? And how efficient will any future security dialogue be with such a regime? Kuchma’s second term in Ukraine may turn out to be even worse than Yeltsin’s second presidential term in Russia.

The Western practice of supporting proxy regimes in the East is not only immoral, it is increasingly counterproductive. In Russia the ruling kleptocracy is acting in an increasingly desperate manner to stay in power. The same can also happen in Ukraine. The present corrupt pro-Western regimes in the East are increasingly not only a menace for their own citizens, but they also represent threats to other nations and to regional stability.

The present Russian prime minister, Vladimir Putin, is a long-time associate of Russia’s most known pro-Western liberal Anatoly Chubais—the man probably most responsible for Putin’s rise to power. The current war in Chechnya, in which Russian troops flagrantly violate the 1949 Geneva Convention and adjunct protocols, is fully supported by Russian pro-Western liberals and by media moguls that also actively promote capitalist ideas.

It has been alleged that pro-Western "reformers" are supporting the current war in Chechnya to enhance Putin’s chances of winning Russia’s coming presidential elections. But in fact the calculations of Russian "reformers" may be much more sinister.

The most radical wing of Russia’s market reformers has for many years expressed admiration of General Augusto Pinochet’s military-backed liberal reforms in Chile. The coming parliamentary and, especially presidential elections in Russia may deal a death blow to Russia’s crony capitalism. Finding sufficient public support for further
"reforms" seems impossible today. In Moscow, since last spring, there have been rumours of some kind of immanent military coup or the imposition of martial law in Russia. Such as coup, it is alleged, could be used to prevent free elections, perpetuate the current regime and, in theory, give impetus to a new wave of radical market reforms.

However, a pro-Western oligarchy-led military dictatorship in Russia would seem to be impossible, since the Russian military has been up to now as anti-governmentally inclined as the general Russian public.

Today things may be changing as the cruel and senseless war in Chechnya goes on. Present Russian tactics in Chechnya—a slow methodical advance of Russian forces into Chechnya, with bombers and heavy guns demolishing all obstacles before the infantry moves forward, imply that war crimes—deliberate attacks on civilians and civilian targets—are committed on a daily basis. The Russian army in Chechnya is rapidly becoming an army of war criminals—like the Yugoslav army of President Milosevic.

The main purpose of the latest war in Chechnya—provoked and authorized by "liberal," pro-Western political forces—is most likely to create a blood bond, a connection through war crimes committed together between the Russian military and the present regime. An army of war criminals could help ensure the continuous hold on power in Russia by the present ruling kleptocracy, despite any elections and public dissatisfaction. The Kremlin may be using Milosevic as a model and the West, as always, is looking the other direction.

For a decade the West has supported increasingly corrupt, unpopular, authoritarian regimes in the East. It is high time for the West to dissociate itself from these self-proclaimed "reformers." In the eyes of many Russians and Ukrainians the West is fully responsible for all the outrages of "reforms" in their countries. If the West wants to save any shreds of moral authority in Russia, Ukraine and many other Eastern countries, if the West genuinely wants any meaningful dialogue, it should first of all dialogue in earnest with those political forces that today clearly represent the majority of Russians and Ukrainians. If not, the West may find itself in the same position it was in twenty years ago in Iran, where it supported the pro-Western regime of the Shah to the hilt, but then did not have anyone to "dialogue" seriously with for decades once the Shah left the scene.

It is plainly obvious that any lasting security architecture in Europe has to be acceptable to all, that important security decisions should be taken in concert by all major powers and that all provisions of international law should be fully observed. In word all nations in Europe and North America adhere to these principals, but morally self-indulgent European and North American policy-makers, who continually dress up in moralizing rhetoric, constantly and flagrantly abuse them. Western self-righteousness has been the main cause of many a war in this century and those before.
Of course, present European and North American leaders constantly and pompously pronounce that today all is totally different, that any analogies with previous 19th and 20th century policies are simply absurd. But looking out from Moscow, Europe is today more insecure than it ever was during the Cold War, and from the point of view of many in Russia, Western leaders have not changed significantly nor learned anything more than their predecessors.