

INDIAN PUNCHLINE

JULY 25, 2023 BY M. K. BHADRAKUMAR

Glimpses of an endgame in Ukraine



Russian President Vladimir Putin (R) met Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko, St. Petersburg, July 23, 2023

The problem with the war in Ukraine is that it has been all smoke and mirrors. The Russian objectives of “demilitarisation” and “de-Nazification” of Ukraine wore a surreal look. The western narrative that the war is between Russia and Ukraine, where central issue is the Westphalian principle of national sovereignty, wore thin progressively leaving a void.

There is a realisation today that the war is actually between Russia and NATO and that Ukraine had ceased to be a sovereign country since 2014 when the CIA and sister western agencies — Germany, the UK, France, Sweden, etc.— installed a puppet regime in Kiev.

The fog of war is lifting and the battle lines are becoming visible. At an authoritative level, a candid discussion is beginning as regards the endgame.

Certainly, Russian President Vladimir Putin's videoconference with the permanent members of the Security Council in Moscow last Friday and his meeting with Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko in St. Petersburg on Sunday become the defining moment. The two transcripts stand back-to-back and need to be read together. ([here](#) and [here](#))

There is no question that the two events were carefully choreographed by the Kremlin officials and intended to convey multiple messages. Russia exudes confidence that it has achieved dominance on the battle front — having thrashed the Ukrainian military and Kiev's "counteroffensive" moving into the rear view mirror. But Moscow anticipates that the Biden administration may be having an even bigger war plan in mind.

At the Security council meeting, Putin "de-classified" the intelligence reports reaching Moscow from various sources indicative of moves to insert into Western Ukraine a Polish expeditionary force. Putin called it "a well-organised, equipped regular military unit to be used for operations" in Western Ukraine "for the subsequent occupation of these territories."

Indeed, there is a long history of Polish revanchism. Putin, himself a keen student of history, talked at some length about it. He sounded stoical that if the Kiev authorities were to acquiesce with this Polish-American plan, "as traitors usually do, that's their business. We will not interfere."

But, Putin added, "Belarus is part of the Union State, and launching an aggression against Belarus would mean launching an aggression against the Russian Federation. We will respond to that with all the resources available to us." Putin warned that what is afoot "is an extremely dangerous game, and the authors of such plans should think about the consequences."

On Sunday, at the meeting with Putin in St. Petersburg, Lukashenko picked up the thread of discussion. He briefed Putin about new Polish deployments close to Belarus border — just 40 kms from Brest — and other preparations under way — the opening of a repair shop for Leopard tanks in Poland, activation of an airfield in Rzeszow on Ukrainian border (about 100 kms from Lvov) for use of Americans transferring weaponry, mercenaries, etc.

Lukashenko said: “This is unacceptable to us. The alienation of western Ukraine, the dismemberment of Ukraine and the transfer of its lands to Poland are unacceptable. Should people in Western Ukraine ask us then we will provide support to them. I ask you [Putin] to discuss and think about this issue. Naturally, I would like you to support us in this regard. If the need in such support arises, if Western Ukraine asks us for help, then we will provide assistance and support to people in western Ukraine. If this happens, we will support them in every possible way.”

Lukashenko continued, “I am asking you to discuss this issue and think it through. Obviously, I would like you to support us in this regard. With this support, and if western Ukraine asks for this help, we will definitely provide assistance and support to the western population of Ukraine.”

As could be expected, Putin didn’t respond — at least, not publicly. Lukashenko characterised the Polish intervention as tantamount to the dismemberment of Ukraine and its “piece meal” absorption into NATO. Lukashenko was upfront: “This is supported by the Americans.” Interestingly, he also sought the deployment of Wagner fighters to counter the threat to Belarus.

The bottom line is that Putin and Lukashenko held such a discussion publicly at all. Clearly, both spoke on the basis of intelligence inputs. They anticipate an inflection point ahead.

It is one thing that the Russian people are well aware that their country is de facto fighting the NATO in Ukraine. But it is an entirely different matter that the war may dramatically escalate to a war with Poland, a NATO army that the US regards as its most important partner in continental Europe.

By dwelling at some length on Polish revanchism, which has a controversial record in modern European history, Putin probably calculated that in Europe, including in Poland, there could be resistance to the machinations that might drag NATO into a continental war with Russia.

Equally, Poland must be dithering too. According to Politico, Poland’s military is about 150,000 strong, out of which 30,000 belong to a new territorial defence force who are “weekend soldiers who undergo 16 days of training followed up by refresher courses.”

Again, Poland’s military might doesn’t translate into political influence in Europe because the centrist forces that dominate the EU distrust Warsaw, which is controlled

by the nationalist Law and Justice Party whose disregard for democratic norms and the rule of law has damaged Poland's reputation across the bloc.

Above all, Poland has reason to be worried about the reliability of Washington. Going forward, Polish leadership's concern, paradoxically, will be that Donald Trump may not return as president in 2024. Despite the cooperation with the Pentagon over the Ukraine war, Poland's current leadership remains distrustful of President Joe Biden — much like Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban.

On balance, therefore, it stands to reason that the sabre-rattling by Lukashenko and Putin's lesson on European history can be taken as more of a forewarning to the West with a view to modulate an endgame in Ukraine that is optimal for Russian interests. A dismemberment of Ukraine or an uncontrollable expansion of the war beyond its borders will not be in the Russian interests.

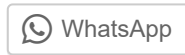
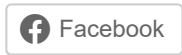
But the Kremlin leadership will factor in the contingency that Washington's follies stemming out of its desperate need to save face from a humiliating defeat in the proxy war, may leave no choice to the Russian forces but to cross the Dnieper and advance all the way to Poland's border to prevent an occupation of Western Ukraine by the so-called Lublin Triangle, a regional alliance with virulent anti-Russian orientation comprising Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine, formed in July 2020 and promoted by Washington.

Putin's back-to-back meetings in Moscow and St. Petersburg throw light on the Russian thinking as to three key elements of the endgame in Ukraine. First, Russia has no intentions of territorial conquest of Western Ukraine but will insist on having a say on how the new boundaries of the country and the future regime will look and act like, which means that an anti-Russian state will not be allowed.

Second, the Biden administration's plan to snatch victory out of the jaws of defeat in the war is a non-starter, as Russia will not hesitate to counter any continued attempt by the US and NATO to use Ukrainian territory as a springboard to wage a renewed proxy war, which means that Ukraine's "piece meal" absorption into NATO will remain a fantasy.

Third, most important, the battle-hardened Russian army backed by a powerful defence industry and a robust economy will not hesitate to confront NATO member countries bordering Ukraine if they trespass on Russia's core interests, which means that Russia's core interests will not be held hostage to Article 5 of the NATO Charter.

Share this:



ALEXANDER LUKASHENKO, NATO, POLAND, VLADIMIR PUTIN, WESTERN UKRAINE