

K. F. Zatulin¹UKRAINIAN ISSUE²

People of the older generation probably remember the basic dilemma of writing a scientific degree thesis in the Soviet era. “Should I write what I think or what I should?,” the applicant asks his academic supervisor. The correct answer is, “You have to write what you think. And you have to think what you should.”

For me there is no point or possibility to pretend. I have been into the “Ukrainian” issue for too long. There are certain citizens, both here and in Ukraine, who think I and others like me are to be blamed for everything. At any rate, in Ukraine I have long been sentenced by the courts and by all presidents except Kravchuk and Yanukovich. “It all goes exactly according to your script,” they say.

Too much honor. Not according to the script, but according to the forecast. Two big differences, as they say in Odessa.

What happens to Russia and Ukraine after the Ukrainian campaign depends on how and at what it ends. Therefore, I would like to share a few confessional words about the past and present before I start to speak about the future.

Have I considered and do I consider Ukraine the main problem and threat to Russia in the version of its existence and development that has taken place since 1991? Yes, absolutely. Were there any chances and opportunities to push it off the anti-Russian path without resorting to war or a special military operation? Certainly there were. Whose fault is it that it didn’t happen? Ukraine itself, the West interested in the conflict, and all of us in Russia, of course. To varying degrees, as in the case of the collapse of the USSR.

The timer for the conflict with Ukraine was set in motion from the very beginning, in 1991. Many didn’t understand this or didn’t want to. But the speed of the time countdown before the collision was changing. As I see it, the first acceleration happened in 1999, as a result of the ratification in Russia of the Grand Treaty On Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership with Ukraine, signed in 1997: we gave up on the opportunity to keep Ukraine on the legal hook by recognizing the former administrative borders between the Ukrainian SSR and the RSFSR as state borders. We recog-

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nized Crimea and Sevastopol as Ukrainian without sufficient guarantees and conditions. And did a disservice to the future leaders of the country who found themselves in the position of having to break the commitments made by Russia in 2014.

We were interested in the wrong things in Ukraine in the 1990s: not in the Russian language and education, not in the rights of the Russian-speaking regions, not in the fate of our common church, but in the plants, factories, and gas pipelines. And we were even more preoccupied with ourselves. With privatization (that is authority and business) and pursuit of the dream of a return to the Soviet reign of people simultaneously in Moscow and Kiev (that is the opposition in the Duma, CPRF). Personally, I was expelled from the People’s Patriotic Union of Russia for fighting against the ratification of the Grand Treaty. It happened at the meeting chaired by Gennady Zyuganov.

Under Putin, the situation began to change – but from the certainty that everything could be solved at the “upper level,” through inter-elite agreements with the presidents and oligarchs in Ukraine, we were too slowly moving to the need to mobilize ourselves for fighting for the minds and hearts of our yesterday’s compatriots across the border. Our government looked at many things through the eyes of its Ukrainian favorites.

I confess that I have never spoken to or met Viktor Medvedchuk in person: there has never been such an initiative on his part or mine. On his part, it is quite understandable: who is this Zatulin? To me, it was obvious from the very beginning that with Medvedchuk we were pulling a blank, like in dominoes. Unfortunately, our decision makers persisted in their stake, distracting themselves from the real needs. One delay in the distribution of Russian passports in Ukraine has played its fatal role in tempting the active minority to dare to take part in the Maidans and coups d’état. Would they risk it if a third or, even better, half of the citizens of Ukraine had a Russian passport in their pockets, in addition to the Ukrainian one? We did not overdo but underdid the competent, intelligent, and broad interference in these so-called “internal Ukrainian affairs.”

The new, significant acceleration of the timer happened in 2014. The consequences of the coup d’état, of the collapse of our illusions and our attempts to seduce the corrupt Ukrainian elite were the Crimea and then Donbass. The Russian government stopped viewing two million Crimeans, and then Russians in Ukraine in general, as hostages of the fake Russian–Ukrainian “friendship, cooperation and partnership.” The train of conflict was set on the track. But having said “A,” they did not say “B” in 2014, stopping at the gates of the abandoned Mariupol. Few people now are not strong in hindsight, regretting about it.

In the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, the West saw a chance to teach Russia a lesson, to inflict preventive damage on it as a potential ally of China. Blinded by hatred of Russia, Ukraine has gone along with it, refusing to comply with the Minsk agreements. The time was working against us now: having taken actual responsibility for Donbass, we were unable to establish a normal life there under the bullets and shelling and to succeed in an unspoken but obvi-

ous contest: where is life better – in Donbass or in the rest of Ukraine, encouraged by the West?

For eight years, Ukraine and Russia have been in a trackstand, like in a bicycle vertical race. I am no cyclist, but people who know better say that the chance of losing is greater for the one who first breaks the pause by moving off. The fact that we “crossed the border by the river” on February 24, no matter what we say afterwards, has had and continues to have a huge impact on the global public opinion, and indeed on ourselves. And we should not be indifferent to it. We did not make that mistake with Georgia in 2008.

But now we have a “one way ticket.” It seems that the West has moved from the idea of weakening and preventive damage to the plan of inflicting life-incompatible damage on us. The temptation is too great and it grows as the special operation drags on. The worst is the ghost of the Soviet–Finnish War. As we know, Hitler drew a false conclusion from it – that the Soviet Union was a giant on clay feet – but the price of his miscalculation gives no reason to rejoice.

There should be no illusions – we are all in the same boat, and the defeat of Putin’s government is a prologue to the collapse of the country along the lines of 1917 or 1991. We must win at all costs.

Vyacheslav Nikonov in his “Big Game” is repeating his grandfather’s words: “Our cause is right. The victory will be ours.” But what is a victory? What does it consist in for us in today’s situation? The known formulated goal was neutrality and non-accession of Ukraine to NATO, demilitarization, denazification, recognition of the return of Crimea and the independence of the Donbass republics. I don’t believe in achievement of these goals as long as Ukraine retains its current government and the territories under its control.

Are we capable of overthrowing Zelensky and/or depriving him of the ground under his feet? We have plenty of outstanding experts and analysts who insist that in the course of the special military operation, we need to go all the way, to the border with Poland. Otherwise, the Ukraine that is hostile to us will keep existing. On my part it would be absurd to fight for preserving the hostile Ukraine. But can we count on success of the “Red Army’s liberating campaign” to the Western Ukraine? And, most importantly, will it not result in the re-launch of the Trojan horse into our historic space? Minister of the Interior Durnovo warned the Tsar against this danger back in 1904 in relation to Galicia.

The answer to the question of limits of what is possible in a military operation is up to our military and political leadership. As for neutrality, demilitarization and denazification, I do not believe in this in the territories that will remain under control of the Ukrainian government. Thus, to limit ourselves to recognition of Crimea and the republics of Donbass, which also cannot be achieved through ne-

gotiations, would be a defeat in the long term. Not to mention that it would call into question all the achievements in Kherson, Zaporozhye, and other regions of Ukraine.

We need to take our own, Novorossiia, to weaken the hostile Ukraine as much as possible and continue the inevitable fight against it in other forms. Saparmurat Turkmenbashi, explaining the ban on ballet in Turkmenistan, once said, “There is no ballet in the blood of Turkmen.” We have the right to decide that there is no sea in the blood of West adherents and Banderites. The return of Ukraine to the status of a non-seagoing country will temper the ambitions of all sorts of Johnsons to build naval bases on the Ukrainian coast, to supply Ukraine with arms by sea, and to consider the imperial shipyard in Nikolaev as British Crown property. Without access to the Transnistrian–Moldovan border, we encourage ideas of reprisals against Transnistria, which are already being prepared for implementation. I am convinced that strategically the hero city of Odessa is much more important than the hero city of Kiev. If you have to choose.

The question of how power should be organized and what form it should take in the liberated territories belongs to the near future: incorporation into the Russian Federation, accession to the DNR and LNR, formation of new republics, like the Kherson Republic, or after their model, or even “Ukraine 2.0.” The main thing about the issue of post-war arrangement must be its guarantees for Russia and for well-being of the local population. Especially since, as I said, there is no hope for enduring peace.

What is much more concerning now is the question of how to achieve a decisive turning point in the war, in spite of all the King’s Men of the West. How to organize the unity of the front and the rear to minimize today’s disconnection? Some of the people that I respect draw optimism from the fact that Ukraine, by definition, is more of a mess than we are. While I agree with this, I can’t help arguing that Ukraine now has people in the West supervising it. In World War II, they supplied us with Studebakers; now they send something more lethal and modern to Ukraine. I’ve been saying for a long time that we can hardly do without a new edition of the State Defense Committee. It’s not about restricting democratic rights and freedoms, it’s about building a shared will for victory. Didn’t Stalin have enough power in 1941? An emergency situation, a war requires extraordinary solutions and structures.

After the West has so blatantly intervened in the struggle in Ukraine, the special military operation is becoming more and more of a Patriotic war for us, day after day. This needs to be understood. And people, for the most part, understand that. Leave it to the narrow subject matter experts to talk about “proxy war,” “hybrid war,” etc. This is a Patriotic war, because the fate of Russia depends on its outcome.