

A. Kevin¹**'TOWARDS HOBARYCB'**

During most of the Gorbachev years, from 1985 to 1990, I headed the Australian Foreign Ministry's Policy Planning Branch in Canberra. One of my jobs was to try to make best-information analyses and predictions of global politics. (Like most others working in the field, I did not predict the break-up of the Soviet Union).

Let me modestly try my hand, one month ahead of the 9–10 June 2022 20th Likhachov Scientific Conference, to set the present Ukraine conflict in context and to predict its most likely political outcome.

The future of Ukraine is being decided on the battlefield because Kiev has not (indeed, has not since 2014) been a serious agreement-capable negotiating partner for Moscow. This became tragically clear after Kiev's rejection of the 29 March, *ad referendum* to governments, peace agreement reached in Istanbul. Kiev backed away from the Istanbul peace framework under covert pressure from the United States and UK, who were and remain keen for Ukraine to continue the conflict, and probably also from the extreme nationalists around Zelensky.

I say 'tragically' because so many soldiers and civilians have continued to die needlessly in the Ukraine and Donbass People's Republics fighting since 29 March, and so much of Ukraine's national public wealth continues to be squandered and destroyed in this lethal quarrel between brothers. Meanwhile, Kiev's stated conditions for peace become increasingly far-fetched and impossible.

This conflict, now over three months old, has already had world-changing consequences. A massive decoupling of the world economy is taking place. But that is not the subject of this paper – I am sure others are writing on it. I am interested to explore here the most relevant past, present and future for Ukraine.

The two protagonists – Russia and ally Belarus. versus a *de facto* coalition of Ukraine, US and NATO – have different war aims and different rules of engagement. We are seeing a uniquely murderous interaction between the real military conflict in Ukraine, and a surrounding cynical information war run by the West.

Russia could decisively destroy the Kiev regime tomorrow, if it chose to unleash on the capital city its full non-nuclear military superiority (it won't). Kiev and its allies already lost the war in its first few weeks but are so convinced by their own false propaganda that they refuse to see this fact. Nor does the West seem to care much whether they are winning or not, so long as they can keep the war going for as long as possible, in the hope of some collateral political gain from the huge misery the war is bringing to the people of Ukraine. And for Biden and his party, there are huge arms sales profits to be made – ironically, for weapons that Russia is safely blowing up in targeted missile attacks as they pass through Ukraine on their way to the battlefield.

Putin's hand was forced on 24 February by Kiev's continued shelling of Donbass cities, after the 21 February Russian recognition of Donbass sovereignty and the announced

Russia-Donbass mutual security treaties. Russia fired the first shot on 24 February, but the United States had loaded and primed the gun.

Going back to 2014, after the Maidan coup, when an anxious Donbass appealed to Russia for security on the Crimea model from invasion and genocide, Moscow for years tried for peaceful solutions to enable Donetsk and Lugansk provinces (oblasts) to stay within a new federal Ukraine with guaranteed constitutional protections for Russian language and cultural rights.

The word 'Novorossiya' was briefly revived in 2014 as a proposed confederation of these two oblasts. The term is the historic 'New Russia', a geographical term for this area in which Russian settlers were encouraged to live after it was conquered from the Ottoman Empire 300 years ago.

As Kiev's shelling continued and as the Minsk peace talks bogged down in 2014, some people in Donbass began to talk of building an expanded Novorossiyan political confederation: perhaps extending all the way westwards to the Transnistria border, and taking in the eight oblasts of Odessa, Nikolaev, Kherson, Zaporozhia, Donetsk, Lugansk, Kharkov and Dnipropetrovsk (including the important cities of Krivoy Rog and Dnipro). The project evoked controversy and was politically frozen in May 2015. There is an interesting background essay on this in Wikipedia, 'Novorossiya (confederation)'.

Wars end in one of two ways; either by total capitulation of the defeated side as by the Confederacy in the US Civil War or by Nazi Germany in Berlin in 1945, or in negotiated peace settlements as in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1918 or the Treaty of Versailles in 1919.

Looking at the way the conflict in and around Ukraine seems to be heading now, the indications point to the latter outcome. I don't think Russia is strong enough to achieve full Kiev regime capitulation across Ukraine – or that Russia even wants to.

Historical and geographical overview

Looking at the strategic map of NATO Europe and Russia, there have been important changes in recent years. Finland and Sweden are close to joining NATO. NATO now represents most of Europe: hardly any European countries remain non-aligned. Russia and its ally Belarus will soon face on their borders a long front of hostile NATO countries from the Arctic to the Black Sea.

From Russia's strategic perspective, she is pretty much back to where she was when Napoleon's united Europe attacked Russia in 1812, or when Hitler's united Europe attacked Russia in 1941; but with less strategic depth now than she had in 1812 or 1941.

But there are global strategic changes too that advantage Russia. Europe no longer leads the world. Now, the US leads a Western bloc of adversaries of Russia; about 15% by population of the UN membership. China is a world power and Russia's firm ally. Russia is the world's leading nuclear weapons power. Much of the world outside Europe is non-aligned and refusing to join any NATO-Russia fight.

For at least the past 300 years, Ukraine sat at the centre of this European strategic geography. Since 1991 it has

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become increasingly aligned to US and NATO; dangerously so since 2014. It is now receiving huge military and intelligence help and political support from US and NATO.

Ukraine has become the flashpoint in a major deterioration in Russia-West relations that goes back at least to early 2014, the months of Maidan and post-Maidan, and I would argue back even further to 1991, the year Russia and Ukraine came into existence as the first and second-ranking successor nations to the Soviet Union.

Ukraine, like Russia, had a violent and conflicted 20th century history. By 1890, the Russian Empire's strategic imperative of deep borderlands had been achieved. Finland, the Baltic states, Belarus and Ukraine and even eastern Poland, Crimea, and the Caucasus, were all by now securely incorporated within the Russian Empire. Towards the end of World War One, German armies briefly occupied Ukraine and southern Russia. Ukraine was torn between local communists loyal to Moscow, and local nationalists who tried to set up an independent Ukrainian state. The communists prevailed. Ukraine suffered hugely in the 1930s under Stalin's policy-forced famines. When Hitler's European armies invaded in 1941, a revived Ukrainian nationalist movement led by Stepan Bandera welcomed them. Many other Ukrainians, identifying with Russia, had fled eastwards with the retreating Red Army. The Battle of Stalingrad turned the tide. Ukraine was devastated by the Nazi invasion and the Red Army rollback.

After the Great Patriotic War, the Soviet leadership gave priority to rebuilding Ukraine's ruined cities and industrial strength. Ukraine and Belarus were treated by Moscow with great respect and kindness. The troubled history of Ukrainian wartime collaboration with Nazis was buried. Ukraine again became a powerhouse of Soviet industry and agriculture as it had been in the 1920s and 1930s. Ukrainian Communists enjoyed great power in the postwar Soviet Union. Khrushchev – himself part-Ukrainian by birth – in 1954 transferred Crimea which had for 300 years been an integral part of Russia, to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. He naively believed that these two neighbouring Soviet socialist republics would always be close brothers.

After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine, a large and resource-rich sovereign state of nearly 50 million people, sadly never found a strong patriotic post-communist leadership. It staggered on for 23 years to 2014 under weak mostly corrupt governments in thrall to immensely rich post-Soviet oligarchs. The economy languished, while Russia after 2000 under Putin's leadership quickly recovered its national morale and strength.

But in Ukraine, under pressure of unemployment, corruption, and chronic economic depression, long-buried fascist movements began to revive. As the best young Ukrainians emigrated to Russia or the West, some who were left turned in desperation to their fathers' and grandfathers' fond memories of fascism. A fiercely committed new ideology developed – of hatred for non-native cultures and especially for anything Russian. Never more than 5% of the Ukrainian population, these young men and women learned how to exercise political leverage through a combination of extreme violence and guile. Rich oligarchs used them as private armies, but the Ukronazis – for this is what they are – had the last laugh. They penetrated the essential organs of society – the military, the police, the public administration at all levels, using the old Communist political

commissar model. They killed those who seriously resisted them. Intimidation ruled.

Some Western media initially tried to report these dangerous trends accurately. But those voices have fallen silent now. Ukronazi power in Ukraine is just not mentioned at all. The Ukronazi movement has been whitewashed by the West, and is thus all the more dangerous now.

Meanwhile, Russians continued until very recently to think sentimentally of Ukrainians as their 'little brothers.' After centuries as neighbours in one empire, there had been extensive cultural and economic integration, reciprocal tourism, and intermarriage. Kiev, Kharkov and Odessa were proud Russian-speaking ethnically multicultural cities, and very much part of the Russian cultural and artistic world. Ukrainian urban elites spoke Russian and thought in Russian.

The Donbass region in the east was almost entirely Russian-speaking. Ukrainian was a rural dialect there. The Ukrainian language and national culture were strongest in Western Ukraine. Until 2014, all Ukraine's languages and ethnicities enjoyed equal protection under the law.

Some Ukrainians, influenced by extreme nationalist ideologies, did not reciprocate Russians' affectionate feeling of close affinity. But many Russians and Ukrainians felt very close. Their destinies had been intertwined for centuries. This shared close history doesn't sit easily with principles of national sovereignty and sovereign equality of all states, on which the United Nations international order rests. There is a tension between this universal doctrine, and the historical reality that large states inevitably influence their smaller neighbours. Putin and Lavrov have spent much time trying to explain these complexities. It is commonsense realism that large and small neighbouring states ought to treat one another with courtesy and mutual respect. The challenge for diplomacy is to manage such potential conflicts and thus keep the peace among nations large and small., within a framework of rules set by the UN Charter.

The avoidable rise of Ukronazism 1991–2022

US and NATO diplomacy in eastern Europe, and in particular Ukraine since 1991, deliberately failed this challenge. The US through its expansion of NATO to Russia's borders since 1996 knowingly encouraged virulent anti-Russian nationalism in the smaller countries to the West and south of Russia. It did this as part of a continuing undeclared policy of trying to weaken and subvert Russia – even after the fall of Communism. The more that Russia's self-esteem and strength was rebuilt under Putin since about 2007, the more aggressive and overt the reality of anti-Russian policy in the West became. The mask of friendship towards Russia was shed. The current conflict has exposed US enmity towards Russia in all its raw intensity.

United States policy towards Ukraine was on its face ambivalent in the first 23 years since 1991. The US claimed to support democracy in Ukraine. But there was always a darker, undeclared strand of US policy in Ukraine: of encouragement for Ukraine's extreme nationalist parties, successors to the World War Two Nazi parties, with their visceral hatred of all things Russian. The US wanted to foster and to use these parties to recreate Ukraine as a weapon against Russia: to create a Frankenstein monster, an 'anti-Russia.'

The February 2014 Maidan Square coup was a violent overthrow of the non-aligned Yanukovich government. Since this US-supported coup, the US has taken an overt role in Ukrainian politics in support of the anti-Russian extremist ideologies which had by now entered the Ukrainian political mainstream. The small Ukrainian democracy movement was sidelined.

Extreme nationalists moved into key positions of control throughout the Ukrainian political parties, civic administration and military forces. They formed their own elite military battalions, like the Azov and Aidar Battalions. These new political army units were equipped and trained by US and NATO instructors to be the most expert and fanatical Ukrainian Army battalions.

The significance of the years 2014–2022

It should be clear to any fairminded person that the present war in Ukraine actually began not in February 2022 but eight years previously in 2014, after the Maidan Square coup brought to power a strongly nationalist and anti-Russian government that immediately began to enforce new discriminatory anti-Russian laws. The frightened majority- Russian population in Crimea begged Russia to correct Khrushchev's foolish 1954 decision, by accepting Crimea back into Russia. The Russian Parliament agreed.

Donbass tried to do the same, as it was already experiencing severe ethnic discrimination and language suppression. Donetsk and Lugansk are rich industrial densely populated provinces, centred around the large Russian-speaking cities of the same name, and the major port city of Mariupol in the south. They demanded equal language rights and appealed for Russian help. But Putin was trying still for a federal political solution within Ukraine.

However in May 2014, the Ukrainian president Poroshenko ordered a brutal full military assault on Donbass. Two-thirds of the rebel provinces' territories, including the port city of Mariupol, were captured by Kiev. The two main rebel cities were mercilessly shelled. France and Germany and the UN in late 2014 brokered a fragile ceasefire, but the war dragged on, with Kiev never honouring the ceasefire. Civilian deaths in rebel Donbass over the eight years have been estimated at up to 14,000. Hundreds of thousands of families were made homeless refugees. The Western media rarely if ever reported these inconvenient truths. For Russians they have been a constant source of pain, anxiety and anger.

Things came to a climax in February this year. For months the Biden administration had started to send to Kiev powerful city-destroying weapons – something the Obama and Trump administrations had both previously refused to do. Russian intelligence learned that Kiev extreme nationalists were now planning finally to invade Donbass by force and to expel surviving Russian speakers to neighbouring Russia. In other words, ethnic cleansing.

Kiev had concentrated its best and most fanatical anti-Russian forces – 60,000 strong – in heavily fortified Western Donbass. As a deterrent, Moscow had massed over 100,000 Russian troops on Ukraine's borders.

On 17 February, the two rebel cities seceded from Ukraine and begged Russia for protection. On 21 February Russia finally recognised their independence and signed mutual defence treaties with them. Many observers hoped

this would ease the military tension but they were wrong. Ukrainian shelling of the Donbass cities intensified.

Finally on 24 February Putin announced a special military operation *to demilitarise and denazify Ukraine*. He announced *limited rules of engagement*: Russian forces would not attack Ukrainian civilians, or even Ukrainian soldiers in barracks. He refused to call it a war, because for him it was the wrong word for a quarrel between brothers.

Did the Kiev extreme nationalists and the US deliberately provoke Russia into starting this war? Did they deliberately put Russia in a position where it had *no choice but to go to war*? I think serious historians will accept this verdict.

The war's first phase, and the importance of Bucha

It is important to stress – because Western mainstream media still do not report this – that in the first weeks of the war, Russian air power and missiles destroyed the Ukrainian armed forces as an integrated mobile modern force: by destroying the Ukrainian airforce and airfields and by crippling Ukrainian army mobility and military secure communications.

I think Russia may have initially expected a quick and easy victory. They thought the people would welcome them. Their intelligence under-estimated the strength and persuasive power of extreme Ukrainian nationalism, backed by public fear of lethal regime punishment of dissenting civilians, and by US and NATO full-on diplomatic support for the Kiev regime.

Eight years of Ukronazi power had bitten deeply into Ukrainian people's minds. Hence Putin's purge of 150 Russian intelligence professionals: it seems they got it wrong, telling their government what they thought it wanted to hear. Ironically, US and NATO intelligence services may be making the same professional error now, overstating to their governments the resilience and staying power of the Kiev regime; either this, or their governments are not heeding them.

When Russian forces encountered stiff Ukrainian armed resistance in Kiev and Kharkov – using residential city areas as human shields – the Russian tanks and armoured vehicle columns, unable under their Rules of Engagement to shell residential areas withdrew: initially to the surrounding countryside, and a month later in late March almost back to the Russian border.

They left behind many vulnerable people who had welcomed or accepted their arrival. The murderous vengeance of the returning Ukrainian nationalists in places like Bucha was terrible indeed [1]. REF ONE Russia looked on appalled as Ukrainian extremist nationalists killed hundreds of their own Ukrainian compatriots as props, to stage false-flag alleged Russian atrocity scenarios, which Western media and politicians like Ursula von der Leyen and Josef Borrell lapped up without question and continue to their shame to do so.

I think that after Bucha, Russians finally saw the utter evil they were confronting in trying to deal respectfully with the Ukronazi-dominated Zelensky administration. They saw clearly at last that Ukronazis regard Russians, and Ukrainians who are friendly or civil towards them, as cockroaches – *untermenschen* – to be lied to, abused, and even killed without humanity or compunction. This has profoundly affected Russian military and diplomatic strategy from April onwards.

During the first month of the war, Ukrainian artillery shelled Russian-occupied areas from positions in Ukrainian residential city blocks in Kiev and Kharkov, where Russian artillery could not safely return fire without risking civilian lives and homes. Most of Kiev is still intact. The Kiev regime represent this as a victory. It was not.

In that first month of the war, Russian forces took heavy casualties. As noted, Russia could at any time have used air and missile power to flatten Kiev and Kharkov but chose not to do this, out of consideration for their Ukrainian brother nation. This fact is key to understanding this strange war.

Russia has continued its precision-targeted missile destruction of military targets from the air all over Ukraine. It has taken out Ukrainian fuel depots, weapons stores and arms factories, airfields, foreign fighter training bases, and electric railway traction stations throughout Ukraine and as far away from the Donbass front line as Odessa and Lvov. The option is open to strike key diesel railway junctions, even diesel train and truck convoys, as necessary to halt the flow of western weapons, missiles and fuel to the West Donbass cauldron.

The Donbass cauldron

In early April, Russia's strategy changed to a concentrated military focus against the strong Ukrainian extreme nationalist army in West Donbass: that same highly motivated army which had been preparing in February to overrun the rebel Donbass cities. In this West Donbass region, the war bloodily grinds on. Russian military superiority on the ground and control of the air space above means that the Ukrainian troop concentrations in the cauldron are effectively immobilised and taking disproportionate casualties. Russian commanders advance slowly, to husband their men's lives.

But the end result is not in any doubt. According to military experts like Scott Ritter, Alexander Mercouris, Andrey Martyanov, or Jacques Baud, the brave but heavily outgunned and immobilised Ukrainian soldiers in the Western Donbass cauldron are all doomed to surrender or die in combat. I take no joy in this prediction because Kiev still insists on no surrender. So any surrenders are risky local affairs – most soldiers will stoically fight to the death as long as ordered to. The Donbass cauldron garrison has not yet found, and may never find, its General von Paulus.

We do not know when this will end. But it can only end in one of these ways. There will be no relief columns to the rescue, because these were Ukraine's best soldiers.

Mariupol

A word on Mariupol. A proud Donbass city, it unwillingly fell to Kiev Azov Battalion forces in 2014, and they garrisoned it harshly ever since. Mariupol was surrounded by Russian and Donbass forces early in the present war. There followed weeks of bitter and destructive fighting as the Azovs retreated towards their last stand in the Azovstal steelworks. As they retreated, their artillery fire reduced much of the city to rubble and their snipers vengefully killed thousands of civilians in the streets for sport. They destroyed Mariupol's beloved Drama Theatre in a planned false flag explosion from within, intended to kill 300 hostages, which they tried clumsily to blame on an alleged Russian missile strike [2]. REFERENCE TWO. The Azov's gross cruelty towards the people of Mariupol, as in Bucha,

has steeled the determination of Russian-speaking people in the Donbass region and beyond never to trust Kiev again.

The information war

A few quick words on this. Very little of what I have said so far in this paper is known to Western audiences, who are sheltered in a false propaganda narrative that Kiev is 'holding its own' militarily in a noble war against a brutal aggressive Russia which launched an unprovoked attack on Ukraine 10 weeks ago and has been committing great war crimes against Ukraine ever since. Nobody challenges this false narrative in the West, except for a few isolated contrarian websites and authors like me.

There is mainstream Western media agreement to stop referring to Ukrainian Nazis or their cruelties against Ukrainian citizens and Russian prisoners of war. There is silence on the facts that President Zelensky was elected originally as a peace candidate, but that he is controlled now by ruthless Ukrainian Nazis who would shoot him if he tried to make peace with Russia. And silence on the facts that most of the civilian war deaths so far have been caused by Ukrainian shellings from human shield areas, by sniper killings, and by punitive murders of alleged pro-Russian collaborators as in Bucha. False flag atrocity stories, prepared and carried out by Kiev extremists, have been rapidly reported around the world using all the resources of Western media. Civilian deaths in places like Bucha, Mariupol and Kramatorsk have been totally misrepresented in the West and Western media have knowingly collaborated in these lies. The purpose has been to paint Russia as a brutal aggressor and to fuel anti-Russian hatred in western circles. It all makes the task of peacemakers harder, which is part of the reason why the information war is being pursued so enthusiastically in the West. As in Orwell's '1984,' it is intended to keep up public support for the war. It is succeeding in this.

I believe the Russian forces continue to observe the Geneva Conventions of humanitarian warfare. The Ukrainian side clearly does not, and this is having a huge effect on the possibilities for peace and settlement of disputes.

The now unashamed United States admission of helping Kiev with real-time military targeting intelligence – which helped the Ukrainian side to sink the cruiser *Moskva* – would have left in the Russian military command a cold rage and determination to seize the maximum military and political advantage from here on in this war.

When the Donbass cauldron falls or surrenders, Russian forces will resume their slow but sure advances westwards: through Nikolayev oblast towards Odessa and the Transnistrian border, and through northern Zaporozhnoye oblast into Dnipropetrovsk oblast. I think Kharkov will finally fall to Russian encirclement.

At some point, Kiev's political nerve will crack and it will sue for peace. In the end, no quantities of delivered US and NATO weapons will compensate for the loss of trained fighting men through death, injury or surrender. In what is left of the fighting Ukrainian Army, officers' fear of being shot in the back by Ukronazi commanders if they surrender will I hope finally give way to a determination to end their men's pointless suffering. Whenever the fighting ends, the end could come quickly and dramatically.

The geography of a postwar outcome is becoming clearer. There is just too much Ukronazi power now solidly en-

trenched in Kiev and Lvov for Russia to gain the upper hand in these cities. They would be hotbeds of sabotage and terrorism. On the other hand, Odessa once liberated will in all probability, after a tentative period of testing the water, joyfully welcome the new order, as has happened in cities like Mariupol, Kherson and Melitopol. Whatever Ukrainians may be left in Odessa, and their power to intimidate local populations, will melt away.

I see emerging in the closing weeks or months of this conflict a partition solution. There will be two new demilitarised states in place of the present Ukraine, one in the north-west and the other in the south-east. Both will be neutral and non-aligned between Russia and the West, on the Austrian or Swiss model. Neither will join NATO or be militarily protected by NATO.

Russian military power on the ground will determine the final boundary between these two new states. I predict the new south-eastern state will include the eight southern and eastern oblasts of Odessa, Nikolaev, Kherson, Zaporozhzhia, Donetsk, Lugansk, Kharkov, and Dnipropetrovsk including its important industrial cities of Krivoy Rog and Dnipro.

This new, politically friendly to Russia, multicultural and tolerant state will be mostly Russian-speaking but with full language rights for other language communities. It will be richer, because of its access to the industrial wealth of Krivoy Rog and Donbass, the rich wheatlands of the black earth steppes, and its control of access to bulk global exports through many ports. Postwar reconstruction will be swift, aided by Russia and by its own people's liberated native energies and resources.

The residual Ukrainian state with its capital Kiev will be larger but poorer because it will be landlocked and weaker in natural resources. Its people will initially be psychologically more depressed because of losing the war, as Germany was depressed for several years after 1945. The west will aid the new state to rebuild its infrastructure and economy. Western propaganda will work to keep morale as high as possible by praising the heroism of the defenders. Hollywood will make movies with Ukrainian soldiers as heroes. There will still be Ukrainians around, they will not go to trial, but their political agendas will have to moderate, and

their capacity to harm Russia and Russians even in their own state will be sharply curtailed. Many might give up in disgust and emigrate to the US or to Canada.

Could such a peace be negotiated diplomatically and enshrined in elegant signed treaties between the parties, internationally guaranteed by major European powers or by the UN Security Council? This would obviously be the best solution but I doubt it will be achievable for many years. There is too much entrenched hostility towards the Russian state now in Kiev, Washington, London and Brussels, and too many vested interests (e.g., Western armaments industries) wishing to maintain a political climate of bitter conflict.

I think the more likely outcome is a frozen conflict, as in the India-Pakistan conflict in Kashmir or the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict.

Anti-Russian revanchism will linger on in the Kiev state, encouraged by the West. But Russian power will nurture the new state and protect it from harm, as Russia has nurtured and protected the state and people of Belarus.

The question arises what the new state might choose to call itself? I would modestly propose a new name. The name 'Novorossiya' carries too much historical and colonial baggage now and means too many different things to so many different people.

I vote for Новарусь.

Like Belarus, it has its roots in the old sacred word for Russia, Rus' (русь). Thus it would nicely encapsulate the message that these three friendly nations – Russia, Belarus and Novarus – are all part of the great Русь family. It would be a hopeful and forward-looking new name for a new nation that had left the cruelty and anti-Russian racism of the Kiev regime decisively behind it. It would symbolize a new start.

References

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