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A Short-Term Geopolitical Forecast | The Vineyard of the Saker

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12-15 minutes

By Dmitry Orlov and posted with the author's permission

Ever since Putin announced his demands for security guarantees from the US and NATO (in brief, stop NATO's eastward expansion, have NATO retreat to its positions of 1997 and remove offensive weapons from Russia's immediate vicinity) we have been subjected to a barrage of irrelevancies from Western press:

- Are these security guarantees an ultimatum or a negotiating tool?
- Will the US and NATO agree to them or reject them?
- Will Putin invade the Ukraine or will he be stopped in his tracks through the judicious and timely use of frowning, head-shaking, finger-wagging and tisk-tisking by sundry and assorted Western luminaries?
- If Putin does invade the Ukraine, does this mean that World War III is finally upon us and we shall all surely die?

I hope that I am not alone in being sick and tired of this pathetic, tiresome attempt to throw up a smokescreen and hide the inevitable reality of what is about to unfold. In case it isn't

completely clear to you yet, I would like to spell it all out. I am normally more cautious when making specific predictions, but in this case our immediate future has been carefully plotted out for us by Russia and China, with the US and its assorted puppets reduced to the status of non-playable characters in a video game who can only do one thing: hide behind a dense smokescreen of risible lies.

First, Russian security guarantee demands are not ultimatums. An ultimatum is an “or else” sort of thing, offering a choice between compliance and consequences, whereas in this case both the noncompliance and the consequences will follow automatically. The West and NATO are, for well understood internal political reasons, unable to sign these guarantees; therefore, the consequences will unfold in due course.

Russia has demanded that both the US and NATO put their refusal to agree to the security guarantees in writing; these pieces of paper will be important moving forward. To understand why, we need to take on board the fact that everything within these security guarantees has already been agreed to by the West; namely, the “not an inch to the east” guarantee given to the Russians by the US 30 years ago and the collective security principle agreed to by all members of the OSCE. By signing a document in which they declare their refusal to abide by what they previously agreed to, the US and NATO would essentially declare themselves to be apostates from international law and order. This, in turn, would imply that their own security needs can be disregarded and that instead they deserve to be humiliated and punished.

Further, by putting their refusal in writing, the US and NATO would declare the collective security principle itself—specifically with respect to the US and NATO—to be null and void, meaning

that if, for instance, the Bahamas, a sovereign nation since July 10, 1973, decides to reinforce its sovereignty by hosting a Russian missile battery pointed across the Gulf Stream at Miami and Fort Lauderdale, Florida, the US would have no say in the matter, and if the US did try to speak up, they'd get beat up with this very piece of paper they signed. "Do you feel threatened now?" the Russians would ask; "Well, maybe you should have thought of that when you threatened us by putting your missiles in Poland and Romania."

The initial stated purpose of the two installations of Aegis Ashore in Poland and Romania was to shoot down Iranian missiles, which didn't exist then, don't exist now, and never would have taken a giant detour and fly over Poland or Romania in any case. Although the stated purpose of these systems was for missile defense, their launch platforms can also be used to launch offensive strategic weapons: Tomahawk cruise missiles with nuclear payloads. These Tomahawks are obsolete and the Russians know how to shoot them down extremely well (as they demonstrated in Syria) but this is still very annoying, plus seeding the Russian countryside with pulverized American plutonium would not be good for anyone's health.

Thus, we should expect bad things to happen to these installations, but we should expect to remain rather ill-informed about the details. While the non-negotiations over the Russian security guarantee demands will be as public as possible (in spite of Western plaintive cries asking that they be held in private) the "technical-military means" which Russia will use to deal with Western noncompliance will not be widely publicized. The Romanian installation might become inoperative due to a newly discovered small volcano nearby; the Polish one might succumb of a freak swamp gas explosion.

A further series of unfortunate accidents may cause the US and NATO to become shy and reticent about encroaching on Russia's borders. NATO troops stationed in the Baltics, a stone's throw from St. Petersburg, which is Russia's second-largest city, might complain of repeatedly hearing the word "Thud!" clearly and loudly announced, causing them all to be diagnosed with schizophrenia and evacuated. A US spy plane might experience a slight GPS malfunction causing it to blunder into Russian airspace, get shot down, and have its catapulted pilot sentenced to many years of teaching English to kindergarteners in Syktyvkar or Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky. US Navy and NATO vessels, already prone to collisions with each other, underwater mountains and barges, might suffer an unusually large number of such mishaps in proximity to the Russian coastline, causing them to shy away from it. A large number of such events, most out of them transpiring out of sight of the public, news of them suppressed in Western press and social media, would force the mighty US military to confront an uncomfortable existential question: "Are the Russians still afraid of us, or are we just jerking each other off here?" Their response will be to go into denial and to jerk each other off harder and faster than ever before.

But if they are indeed just jerking each other off, then what about their policy of containment? What's to contain Russia and keep it from recreating USSR 2.0?—other than the fact that the Russians aren't stupid, learned their lesson the first time around, and Mother Russia will no longer allow a bunch of useless non-Russian ingrates to suckle at her ample bosom. "But when is Russia going to invade the Ukraine?" inquiring minds demand to know, especially those who have been paying attention to Western news sources claiming that Russia has amassed

100090 troops on the Ukrainian border (it hasn't).

The latest theory is that what is preventing Russia from invading is the warm weather. Apparently, it has been unusually warm since 2014, which is why Russian troops haven't rolled across the Ukrainian border yet. What have they been waiting for? The next ice age that's due any millennium now? Instead, Russia just got the bits of the Ukraine it wanted—Crimea, the Donbass and a couple of millions of highly trained Russian-speaking professionals—all without staging an invasion, and is now waiting for the rest of the Ukraine to degenerate into its end state as an ethnic theme park and nature preserve. The only thing that's not going well with this plan is that the Ukraine needs to be demilitarized, as required by Russia's recent security guarantee demands.

But what if Russia's security guarantees aren't met and US/NATO continue stuffing the Ukraine full of weapons, sending in trainers and establishing bases? Well, then, those will need to be destroyed. This can be done by launching some rockets from small ships sailing around in the Caspian Sea, as was done to destroy ISIS bases in Syria; no ground force invasion needed. It won't take much to prompt US/NATO to evacuate the Ukraine in a panic, seeing as they have already worked out plans for doing so and have announced that they won't fight to defend it.

If that's what unfolds, what do you think will happen next? Will the US start a nuclear war over the Ukraine? Umm... how about "NO!!!" Will the US impose "sanctions from hell"? Perhaps, but you have to understand that at this point in time the US and other Western economies can be accurately caricatured as a crystal vase full of excrement parked on the very edge of a high shelf over a hard marble floor. The hope is that nobody is going to sneeze because the sound pressure might cause it to go over

the edge. Sanctions from hell do sound like they could cause a bit of a sneeze. Needless to say, the US will continue to talk about sanctions from hell and maybe even pass some legislation so titled, and claim to have sent “a strong message,” but to no effect.

Will Russia act immediately upon acceptance in writing the West’s refusal to provide it with the requested security guarantees? No, there is bound to be a delay. You see, February 4th is barely two weeks away, and that’s just not enough time to start and finish a military action. What’s on February 4th? Why, the opening ceremony at the Beijing Olympics, of course, at which Putin will be the guest of honor while US dignitaries weren’t even invited.

At the Olympics Putin and Xi will be signing a raft of major agreements, one of which may transform the already very strong relationship between China and Russia into an actual military alliance. The tripartite world order announced by Gen. Milley, in which the US, Russia and China figure as equals, will have lasted all of three months. With Russia and China acting as a unit, the SCO, which by now includes almost all of Eurasia, becomes more than just a geopolitical pole. In comparison, the US and the 29 dwarves of NATO do not quite add up to a geopolitical pole and the world once again becomes unipolar but with the polarity flipped.

And so we should not expect any military action to take place between February 4th and February 20th. Should any military mischief occur during the Olympics, which is traditionally a time of peace in the world, it is sure to be a Western provocation, since the Olympics are a traditional time of Western provocations (Georgia during the Beijing Olympics in 2008; the Ukraine during the Russian Olympics in Sochi in 2014). We can

be sure that everyone is very much prepared for this provocation and that it will be dealt with very harshly.

The worst kind of provocation would be if NATO advisers actually succeed in goading the hapless and demoralized Ukrainian troops into invading the Donbass. If that happens, there will be two steps to that operation. The first will involve confusing the Ukrainians into walking into a trap. The second will be to threaten to destroy them using Russian long-range artillery from across the Russian border. When that happened previously, the Ukrainian government in Kiev was forced to sign the Minsk agreements that required the Ukrainian military to pull back and the Kiev government to grant autonomy to the Donbass by amending the Ukraine's constitution.

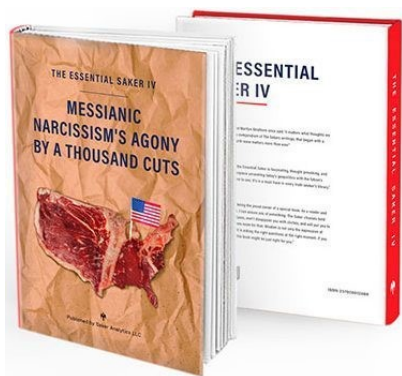
But since the government in Kiev has shown no intention of fulfilling the terms of these agreements during the intervening years and instead has done its utmost to sabotage them, there is no reason to expect a new round of Minsk agreements to be signed. Instead, it will be the end of the road for Ukrainian statehood. Putin has promised exactly that. NATO advisers are likely to be frustrated in their efforts to cause the Ukrainians to attack: it is preferable for them to sit there being poked and prodded by their NATO handlers and nagged by US/EU officials and spies than to have their best and brightest obliterated by Russian artillery or to face a final round of national humiliation.

After February 20th, however, we should expect some new and interesting domestic distraction. It could have to do with Western financial house of cards/pyramid scheme finally pancaking, or it could be a fun new virus, or natural gas running out and causing a huge humanitarian emergency. Or it could be a combination of these: the virus can be blamed on China, the gas emergency on Russia, and the financial collapse on both. While everyone is

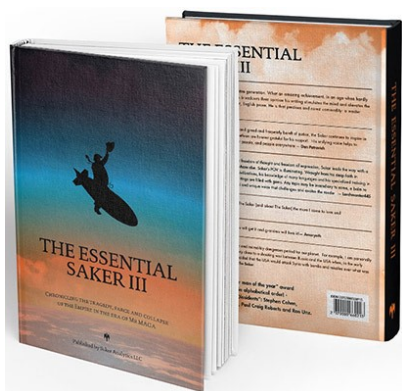
distracted, an aircraft carrier or two might go missing, the Aegis Ashore installation in Poland might get totaled by freak swamp gas explosion and so on and so forth. But then nobody would take notice.

There will still be the major existential question nagging the US military/industrial complex: “Are Russia and China still afraid of us or are we just jerking each other off?” I think I know what answer Russia and China would offer: “Don’t worry about us. Just go on jerking each other off.”

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