

Flight MH17, Ukraine and the New Cold War. Prism of Disaster.

Excerpt from Chapter 1, 'The global gamble of a new Cold War'

By [Prof. Kees van der Pijl](#)

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Region: [Europe](#), [Russia and FSU](#)

Theme: [Economy](#), [History](#)

In-depth Report: [UKRAINE REPORT](#)

'Based on wide-ranging meticulous research, van der Pijl utilises the case of the downing of MH17 as a prism to refract the political corruption of state-directed oligarchic capitalism in Ukraine coupled to the self-interest of a neo-liberal driven European Union. He offers a masterly analysis of the complex domestic personal relationships and class forces involved in the breakup of Ukraine and the wider Soviet bloc, and concurrently the clash by foreign interests for material assets. The discussion of the downing of MH17 is based on a wide range of sources and provides the best available case study of the topic. Van der Pijl's research raises controversial conclusions both about the validity of the process, the conclusions of the investigation of the crash and the wider motivations of the principal interests.

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This is a book which can be recommended to students of contemporary capitalism, of the transformation of the socialist block as well as to those concerned with contemporary international affairs.

It builds a convincing case of instances of collusion, misrepresentation, 'fake news' and lying underpinning the actions and policies of Ukrainian leaders and Western interests. There is a chilling message in the book - the propensity to resort to force and military action - which should worry all citizens. This is a book which deserves to be widely read and its uncomfortable conclusions will be intensely debated by students.'

David Lane, Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences and Emeritus Fellow of Emmanuel College, Cambridge University

'Providing an essential counterpoint to the dominant post-Soviet narrative - that neoliberal capitalism brings democracy and prosperity - Kees van der Pijl blasts his way through decades of western myth-making to expose the brutal reality: that America's drive for global domination continues. And as the US falters economically it uses its raw military power to enforce an unchallenged unipolar world - its goal is neoliberal global governance backed by full spectrum military dominance and US nuclear primacy. But powerful political and economic forces are working to resist this never-ending US expansionism. Van der Pijl reveals the latest stages in this global struggle, this new cold war, in a forensic and captivating account, centred on the conflict in Ukraine - a microcosm of the current global crisis.'

Kate Hudson, General Secretary of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), Media Officer of Left Unity and Visiting Research Fellow at London South Bank University

'This book successfully combines top-down and bottom-up approaches to the evolution of EU-US confrontation with Russia from the key year 2008, when Russia turned from hopeful member of the US-led global alliance to a "contender," challenging that hegemony in what is now a new Cold War. Van der Pijl applies penetrating analysis from political economy, showing how the latest crises of global capitalism play out in the fault lines of Ukraine. As for the bottom-up narratives, we find here clear delineation of the intersection of oligarchs and political fractions dating from Ukraine's independence to time present. The narrative on the ground slows to detailed accounting for every historic turn directly leading up to and following the coup d'état of February 2014, providing the full context for the MH17 air catastrophe. Easily readable, but with full scholarly attributes of Notes, extensive bibliography and index.'

Dr Gilbert Doctorow, Russia specialist and journalist

'A must for anyone studying the origins of the new Cold War. A profound analysis of the geopolitical context of the Ukrainian civil war. The book is well written and highly accessible. It contains a lot of material that did not find its way to the Western main-stream press. Van der Pijl shows how especially Western involvement transformed Ukrainian internal struggles into a conflict between NATO and Russia. The book is a valuable contribution to the debate about the recent history of Ukraine.'

Hans van Zon, Professor Emeritus, Central and Eastern European Studies, University of Sunderland, author of *The Political Economy of Independent Ukraine*

'Kees van der Pijl has succeeded once again. Revisiting the downing of Flight MH17 in order to develop a macro-analysis of the contemporary global political economy, *Flight MH17, Ukraine and the new Cold War* is a magisterial work that demystifies the contemporary discussions on Russia and East-West relations. Rich in insight and information - bringing together history, political economy and geopolitics - it will certainly impact current debates on international politics.'

Professor Leonardo César Souza Ramos, Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brazil

'Kees van der Pijl is both an eagle and a truffle hunter. Like a truffle hunter he reconstructs in great detail the downing on 17 July 2014 of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over eastern Ukraine, killing 296 passengers and crew. Like an eagle he situates this catastrophe in the much broader picture of the Soviet Union's disintegration and the concurrent NATO and EU expansion. Van der Pijl's well-written study does not give a definitive answer to the question "who did it?", but helps us immensely to understand the context of this tragic event.'

Dr Marcel van der Linden, International Institute of Social History, Professor Emeritus, University of Amsterdam

Excerpt from Chapter 1

The Global Gamble of a New Cold War

Eastern Partnership Versus Eurasian Union

Meanwhile, Washington and a bloc of Baltic states led by Poland and Sweden were crafting a comprehensive Cold War response to Russia's new contender posture, the Eastern Partnership. Although nominally an EU venture, it was actually an Atlantic undertaking of which Europe was only the subcontractor: the EU would be unceremoniously sidelined when the going got tough—in February 2014.

Well before the Georgian debacle, the Bush administration had become sceptical about the outcomes of the Rose and Orange Revolutions. The incoming rulers in Tbilisi and Kiev and the oligarchs seemed interested only in private enrichment. American planners therefore began to devise ways of constitutionalising 'market democracy' in post-regime-change states. Dissatisfied with the timid proposals of her initial policy planning director, **Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice** brought Stanford International Relations scholar, **Stephen Krasner**, to the State Department in 2005. In his new role, Krasner collaborated with **Carlos Pascual**, a former director in the National Security Council responsible for Russia, Ukraine and Eurasia, and appointed US ambassador in Kiev in 2000. Pascual was credited with having convinced Kiev to join in the Iraq invasion, amidst general approval for that criminal adventure among governments in 'the new Europe'.

After his return in late 2003, Pascual became Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization in the State Department and, with Krasner, devised a strategy for preventive intervention in weak states ('weakness' including ethnic or religious divisions) and a stabilization and reconstruction rulebook listing the measures by which 'market democracy' was to be established. On this basis, a list of countries liable to 'collapse in conflict' was drawn up, for which 'reconstruction blueprints' were to be prepared even if they had not yet in fact collapsed. In a talk at Georgetown University in October 2004, Pascual explained that this would not only allow intervention by rapid-response teams composed of private companies, NGOs and think tanks (saving 'three to six months in response time'), but also enable them to 'change the very social fabric of a nation' on the basis of the said contracts. As Naomi Klein reported,

The office's mandate is not to rebuild any old states... but to create "democratic and market-oriented" ones. So, for instance ..., [Pascual's] fast-acting reconstructors might help sell off "state-owned enterprises that created a nonviable economy." Sometimes rebuilding, he explained, means "tearing apart the old".

In this strategy, Ukraine's Naftogaz, the gas and oil holding, was such a 'state-owned enterprise' in 'a nonviable economy', although, as we will see in chapter 5, the attempt to privatise it would eventually run aground in the face of oligarch resistance. Generally, however, governments in collapsed countries 'take orders well'. This would apply to all the successor states of the Soviet Union, including Russia under Yeltsin. Given Pascual's CV and the anti-Russian tendency in Washington, his reasoning also served as a blueprint for intervention in Ukraine to weld democracy promotion, economic warfare and the application of military force into a 'new art of military intervention premised on the temporary occupation and technocratic reconstruction-reconstitution of illiberal societies'. A state benefiting from this would also find its sovereignty limited, or as Krasner calls it, be assigned 'shared sovereignty', 'a voluntary agreement between recognized national political authorities and an external actor such as another state or a regional or international

organization’.

The limited sovereignty contract for Ukraine, which its president would step back from signing in 2013, would take the form, paradoxically given its elaboration in Washington, of an EU Association Agreement in combination with a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA). It was inscribed in the Eastern Partnership, initiated by the Baltic bloc. The Partnership, an offshoot of the European Neighbourhood Policy of 2004, was added to the ‘multi-layered drive to expand so-called European institutions such as NATO, the European Union, and all the organizations complementing them’. This drive increasingly focused on thwarting the Eurasian Economic Community of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, in which Ukraine had obtained observer status in 2002. Its first concrete instalment, a Customs Union, was planned to come into effect in 2009.

The Eastern Partnership was proposed by the Polish foreign minister, **Radoslaw Sikorski**. A British citizen since his studies in Oxford, he only gave up his UK passport in 2006 when he was appointed Minister for Defence. His attitude toward Russia was revealed when he likened the Nordstream project with Gazprom to the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Via his wife, the author and US citizen, **Anne Applebaum**, Sikorski is part of a neoconservative coterie which also includes the co-founder of the *Project for a New American Century*, **Robert Kagan**, and his wife, Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland. Nuland was on Cheney’s staff in the Bush years and was kept on under Obama; she eventually became the stage manager of the coup d’état in Kiev in February 2014. Sikorski drafted the Eastern Partnership proposal with Sweden’s foreign minister, Carl Bildt, the neoliberal nemesis of prime minister Olaf Palme in the 1980s, to give it more traction in the EU and dissimulate its Atlantic signature. It was Bildt who identified the EU Association Agreement as a market democracy contract when he characterised it as requiring a complete make-over of the country’s rules on property and competition, which in turn ‘will provoke *really fundamental transformations in the long run.*’

In May 2008, the Eastern Partnership was offered to six former Soviet republics, Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova (the four GUAM states), Belarus (which briefly before had still been branded ‘Europe’s last dictatorship’) and Armenia. It was formally launched at the Prague EU Summit of 2009. Sensing that Ukraine and the Black Sea were key targets in the envisaged Partnership, from which Russia was to be excluded, Moscow countered by proposing a tripartite structure with the EU and Ukraine to modernise the country’s gas pipeline grid and prevent future disruptions of the supply to Europe (as had happened again in January of that year), but this was dismissed. Likewise, Russian proposals floated to investigate the compatibility of the Eurasian customs union and the DCFTA were judged inadmissible from the EU perspective. After the Georgia conflict, Germany and France gave up their opposition to that country’s association with NATO, against a backdrop of urgent expert advice to work for closer ties with Ukraine.

The EU became the executor of this essentially Atlantic project at a time when American forward pressure towards Eastern Europe had slackened due to the financial crisis and the US presidential elections and when it was expected that the Bush-era enthusiasm for regime change would be scaled back. The EU had, moreover, abandoned its consensual approach in its drive for a European Constitution. Though it was voted down in referendums in France and the Netherlands in 2005, the EU rammed it through as the Lisbon Treaty without alterations (apart from trivia such as the ‘European anthem’) in 2007. Coming into force in 2009, it required accession countries not only to open their economies but also align their defence and security policies with those of NATO. As we will see in chapter 3, the Baltic bloc

would lead the effort of convincing other EU states of the need to draw in Ukraine, whilst the Obama administration was 'leading from behind' until it shifted gear following Putin's return to the Russian presidency in 2012, and actually directed the regime change in Kiev.

From 2010, then, the EU began binding invitees to the Eastern Partnership to the Western camp through a limited sovereignty contract including key defence provisions. However, as Richard Sakwa noted, this was bound to have grave consequences, particularly where Ukraine was concerned: 'the effective merger of EU security integration with the Atlantic security community^m meant that [Ukraine's] association with the EU... took on dangerous security connotations [for Russia], as well as challenging Moscow's own plans for economic integration in Eurasia.'

The EU was launched on the path of geopolitical competition, something for which it was neither institutionally nor intellectually ready. Not only was the Association Agreement incompatible with Ukraine's existing free-trade agreements with Russia, but there was also the Lisbon [Treaty] requirement for Ukraine to align its defence and security policy with the EU. This was an extraordinary inversion: instead of overcoming the logic of conflict, the EU became an instrument for its reproduction in new forms.

Since the US's aim in this new, third Cold War, like the second, was regime change in Moscow, whilst reining in any independent European posture, it relied on the armour of coercion in every domain, including nuclear weapons.

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