

Judgment Day Is Fast Approaching

By [Dr. Gilbert Doctorow](#)

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[Gilbert Doctorow](#) 26 October 2022

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I am once again duty bound to walk the streets bearing the sign 'The End of the World is Nigh'.

I watched the news digest program *Sixty Minutes* yesterday on Russian state television's smotrim.ru platform. Before turning the microphone over to the panelists in talk show format, the first 30 minutes of the show presented a hair-raising video montage of excerpts from US, German, European, British news reporting about dirty bomb accusations, about the current exercises of the aircraft carrier George Bush Sr. in the Eastern Med and its loud message to Mr Putin about nuclear attack capabilities, about the 2400 American ground assault troops just delivered to Romania and placed at the border with Moldova, ready to move in there and, one may safely assume, to continue up into Ukraine to face off with Russians around Odessa - Nikolaev at a moment's notice. Well, the impression of this pending escalation was overwhelmingly that we are on the cusp of the war to end all wars. The US is game for it, whatever Biden mutters to the contrary reading from his teleprompter. The Russians are game for it. And so here we go!

On a less dramatic note but one from the same musical composition, I have just felt obliged to add a Postscript to my last essay on Rushi Sunak, noting that I was wrong about the kind of marching orders he has from the City of London: while he replaced most of the Truss cabinet ministers, he has retained Ben Wallace at Defense. Note that Wallace is calling for large increases in defense spending to support Britain's contribution to the Ukrainian armed forces at the same time that Sunak is about to wield the knife on social services in the name of a balanced budget and austerity in times of inflation. The Sunak premiership will not last a year, assuming we have a year ahead of us before all hell breaks loose. He shares with Macron a background in working for US international bankers and the fact of being the youngest head of government in his respective country in two centuries. He also apparently shares the status of political lightweight, but unlike Macron, his position is very fragile because of British constitutional practices. I say that these developments fall in line with the general musical composition, because they show that the marching orders he had received

from those who installed him in power, the City of London, are as ideologically driven as the newspaper they all read daily, the viciously anti-Russian *Financial Times*. And so I conclude that in the U.K., too, Capital is as removed from the real world as the lightweight and incompetent politicians who rule over us on the Continent.

What I cannot understand is how India, China and other big, serious players on the world stage do not take note that the rising escalation in the Russia-NATO confrontation and the lurch towards nuclear exchange will mean the end of life on the planet, their lives as well as ours. Why are they all silent? And where is the United Nations before the looming Armageddon? When General Assembly votes are dictated by one global hegemon and its lackeys, the U.N.'s relevance to keeping the peace is vitiated.

The avoidable tragedy of WWI is something that is foremost in my thoughts every time I stay in my Pushkin apartment outside Petersburg. We live 200 meters away from an entrance to the Catherine Palace park and less than a kilometer from the separate palace which Nicholas II used as a family home. Each time there I wonder to myself how they could have been so foolish as to throw European civilization to the winds, and, as regards the tsarist family, to throw away their own lives. Now I see similar foolishness daily watching the news, whether it is Russian news or Western mainstream broadcasters. I see the growing likelihood of our collective suicide in the weeks if not months before us.

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Among patriotic Russians, there has long been a lot of criticism about the way the 'special military operation' in Ukraine has been waged. People say that Putin has been too soft on the Ukrainians, that he should have destroyed the energy infrastructure in the first days of March, without waiting seven months and allowing the escalation to reach its present critical point. However, that is to ignore the political dimension of war making. And it is to ignore the reality that public opinion is a major restraint on what its President can or cannot do, irrespective of constitutional provisions and supposed authoritarianism at the top.

The Russian public was not ready to accept an all-out war on Ukraine in February. The personal, familial and historic ties binding the Russian and Ukrainian peoples together were simply too strong. Russians, including those in power, could hold out the hope that once the campaign ended, the sides would kiss and make up. It took all this time, it took the crossing of all Russian red lines in terms of attacks on the Russian homeland by artillery and rockets from across the border with Ukraine, it took the destruction of the Nord Stream pipelines and the terrorist attack on the Kerch bridge for the Russian people to be psychologically prepared to murder Ukrainians by the tens of thousands of soldiers on the battlefield as you do in any normal war and to inflict great hardships on the civilian population.

However, the Kremlin cannot be let off so easily for its share of the blame as the world teeters towards nuclear war. I find it incredible that the professional intelligence analyst Vladimir Putin, whom all of our biographers describe only in relation to his KGB career, could have allowed himself to be so misled by his own intelligence advisers about Ukrainian capabilities and intentions before he decided to go in and denazify, demilitarize Ukraine on 24 February. That was a miscalculation of colossal proportions that resulted in serious military setbacks in the opening weeks of the war, which in turn emboldened United States and NATO decision-makers to go for the jugular and finally 'take out' Russia. I will say no more.

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