

# The March to the Third World War Continues. Dr. Paul C. Roberts

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*I admire Putin, but I am his critic. I think he is unintentionally leading us into World War 3.*

*Putin's limited military operation in Ukraine confined to clearing Ukrainian Nazi militias and Ukrainian military forces out of Donbas, a Russian speaking province attached to Ukraine by Soviet leaders as was Russian Crimea, was a strategic blunder.*

It was a strategic blunder that followed four or five previous strategic blunders within the Ukraine context. There were others outside the Ukraine context.



Donbas formed into two independent republics in response to the anti-Russian coup orchestrated by the United States that overthrew the elected Ukrainian government. Putin's first strategic blunder was in permitting Washington's overthrow of the democratically elected Ukrainian government.

In 2014 after the overthrow of the Ukrainian government the two independent Donbas republics voted overwhelmingly, as did Crimea, to be reincorporated into Russia. Putin accepted Crimea's request, as otherwise Russia would lose its Black Sea naval base, but

rejected the request of the Donetsk and Luhansk republics.

This was Putin's second strategic blunder. If Putin or the Kremlin or the Russian government had given equal treatment to Donetsk and Luhansk a decade ago in 2014, there would have been no limited military operation with Ukraine. Neither Ukraine, NATO, nor Washington would dare to have attacked Russian territory in order to "recover Donbass."

If the US persisted in bringing Ukraine into NATO, Putin would have been forced to recognize that he was at war with the West and that he had no alternative but to reestablish Ukraine to its many centuries existence as a part of Russia. Ukraine's "independence" is an American creation 30 years old. Every Western analyst has overlooked, or kept silent about, the fact that the dismemberment of Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union is like the dismemberment of Germany after World War I, the difference being that Hitler was determined to put Germany back together but Putin has no such ambition. If truth be known, Putin is essentially a 20th century Western liberal, and this is why he is failing as a war leader of Russia in the 21st century.

Instead of accepting the Donbas vote, Putin elected to leave Donbas in Ukraine, but he tried to protect the Russian population there with the Minsk Agreement sometimes called the Minsk Protocol. Briefly, under the Minsk Agreement, Donbas remained in Ukraine but was granted some forms of autonomy, such as its own police force in order to protect the Russian population from being persecuted by the Ukrainian government. Putin secured the signatures of Ukraine and the two independent republics to the agreement, and he secured the agreement of Germany and France to enforce the agreement. Quite clearly, despite the obvious lies of Washington, EU governments, and the Western press, Putin intended no "invasion of Ukraine" or even a limited military operation. He wanted to avoid military conflict

During the next eight years from 2014-2022 we witnessed extraordinary diplomatic efforts by Putin and Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, the two most capable diplomats of our time, to work out a mutual security agreement between the West and Russia, even including Russia as a member of NATO.

For eight years Russia got the West's cold shoulder. In December of 2021 and January of 2022 Putin and Lavrov worked hard to secure a mutual defense agreement with the West in order to defuse the military action that Washington was forcing on Russia to defend the Donbas Russians from the large Ukrainian army Washington had built while Putin for eight years had his hopes on the Minsk Protocol. In the past year or two both the German Chancellor Merkel and the French President admitted that the Minsk Protocol was used to deceive Putin while the West built up the Ukrainian military. You can find these admissions online. Here, for example, is Merkel:

According to former German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the Minsk agreement served to buy time to arm Ukraine. "The 2014 Minsk agreement was an attempt to give Ukraine time," Merkel told the weekly Die Zeit. "It also used this time to become stronger, as you can see today (December 21, 2022)."

Putin expressed his disappointment in Merkel's confession:

Vladimir Putin, the President of Russia, has been disappointed by the statement of German ex-Chancellor Angela Merkel, where she claimed that the Minsk agreements of

2014 enabled Ukraine to prepare for the war with Russia. “For me, it was completely unexpected. It is disappointing. I did not expect to hear something like that from the ex-Chancellor. I always hoped that the German leadership was genuine. Yes, she was on Ukraine’s side, supporting it. But nevertheless, I genuinely hoped that German leadership expected a settlement based on the principles achieved, among other things, during the Minsk negotiations.”



The leaders of Belarus, Russia, Germany, France, and Ukraine at the 11-12 February 2015 summit in Minsk, Belarus (Licensed under CC BY 4.0)

The naivety Putin reveals is extraordinary. He is a babe in the woods having to contend with Satan.

Faced with an Ukrainian invasion of the Donbas republics, Putin was forced to intervene. But having foolishly trusted the West to abide by the Minsk agreement, Putin was not prepared for military action. He had to rely on a private military unit, whose professionalism embarrassed the Russian generals who came to see Yevgeny Prigozhin and the Wagner Group as the enemy instead of the West.

When a few of Prigozhin’s men marched on Moscow in protest of the high casualty manner in which the conflict was being managed and demanded the use of force to get the war over, the jealous Russian generals told Putin it was a coup attempt and by deceiving Putin achieved their aims of banning Prigozhin, latter killed in a mysterious airplane crash, and incorporating the Wagner Group into the Russian army. Like generals the world over, their last concern was the conflict. Generals use wars to build empires.

The “limited military operation” was one of the worst strategic blunders in world history. It was a blunder because Putin failed to perceive that he was at war with the West and that the most desperate need was to win the war immediately before the West could get

involved and step by step escalate and widen the war.

This is precisely what has happened. Everything the West affirmed would not be sent to Ukraine has been sent. The West is fully at war with Russia in Ukraine. US and NATO troops are present on the scene, providing intelligence, targeting information, battle plans. French President Macron and now other European politicians are talking about deploying NATO troops on the front lines. They argue that Russia, confronted with NATO and US troops will stop its advance in order to avoid a wider war. In other words, the argument is that introducing NATO soldiers into the conflict will lead to peace.

But peace is not what the West desires. The West has blocked every effort that Putin has made with Zelensky. The only purpose of the NATO troops is to widen the war or to intimidate Putin into withdrawing from the conflict.

This is obvious to everyone but the Russian government.

What is it that prevent's the Kremlin's recognition of reality? I can only speculate. Perhaps communist rule left Russians suspicious of their government. It was the US and not the USSR that was successful. The Soviet system was repressive, but the Americans were believed to be free. Radio Free Europe and Voice of America painted a rosy picture of Western life, a dream for Russians experiencing Soviet deprivation.

Among the Russian intellectual class the West, not Russia, was the future. The pro-Western Russian elites are known as the Atlanticist-Integrationists, a term that reflects their desire to be part of the West. I know from personal experience with them that it took events and a long time for these Atlanticist-Integrationists to wake up and realize their delusion. But for years they were a constraint on Putin, if one was needed, as Putin himself was initially besotted with the West. Putin even fell for "globalism," a means of Western control. So did his stupid central bank director.

From the standpoint of the Atlanticist-Integrationists, the point is to avoid justifying Western suspicions of Russia caused by Putin defending Russian interests. The West would interpret decisive Russian actions in defense of Russia as "Russia rebuilding its empire." Consequently, the Russian liberals and the youth cultivated by foreign NGO money operating in Russia unregulated imposed constraints on Putin's ability to defend his country, even if he understood the problem, which is not clear.

Considering the vast disproportion in the military power of Russia and Ukraine even with Western armaments and untold billions of dollars, the continuation of the conflict into a third year has created the image of an irresolute Russian leadership, afraid to win in case it provokes a wider conflict. Putin and his government and his military, unlike Prigozhin, have made the strategic blunder of failing to understand that letting the conflict drag on permits the West to get increasingly involved. Whether NATO troops appear or not, the West has other means of escalating the conflict until it spins out of control.

UK defense chief, **Admiral Sir Tony Radakin**, told the Financial Times that the latest delivery of long-range missiles to Ukraine allows Ukraine to "increase long-range attacks inside Russia" and helps Kyiv shape the war in much stronger ways.

So that you understand, the long-range missiles, which President Biden denied would ever be given to Ukraine, have been given. They are not battlefield weapons. Their use is to

further embarrass Putin with inability to protect Russian civilians and infrastructure from Ukrainian attacks inside mother Russia. Clearly, Washington is doing everything it can to embarrass Putin with Russians, and Putin is playing into Washington's hands.

Putin's limited military operation is a total failure. Yes, Russia dominates the battle front. But by restraining the use of force Putin has created the impression that he is irresolute and an inconsequential military opponent. Even the president of France, hardly a military power, is unafraid of Russia under Putin and is willing to send French troops to fight for Ukraine against Russia.

Initially the French president was ridiculed for suggesting NATO troops be sent to Ukraine. Now others are warming to the idea.

The American president declared never would long range missiles be delivered to Ukraine, and now they have been.

As I warned, Putin's failure to put down a heavy foot has encouraged provocation after worsening provocation, and **these provocations invited by Putin's non-response are leading to a provocation the Putin will not be able to ignore, and then the world blows up.**

When will Putin understand that all he has gained from his limited military operation is a wider war, two new NATO members—Finland and Sweden—that greatly expand (more than Ukraine) Russia's borders with NATO, and deliveries to the anti-Russian government in Ukraine of weapons unintended for the battlefield but for long distance strikes into Russia, which will make Russia look weak and Putin a failure as a war leader who is unable to protect his country?

The US Secretary of State, Blinken, was recently in China doing his best to unwind the Russian-Chinese relationship. Putin's inability to deal with such a minor military adversary as Ukraine must make China wonder. Clearly Putin's failure to win a war, now in its third year which he should have won in 3 weeks, provided Blinken with the opportunity to pressure China. Blinken saw the opportunity and used it. Blinken gained the support of a Chinese "Russian expert" and the ear of the Chinese government.

China itself is an ineffectual defender of its interest. Chinese thinking teaches the long run perspective. China simply waits out its opponents, but the West is immediate, which is something China doesn't understand.

There is still no Russian-Chinese-Iranian Mutual Defense Treaty that would put a halt to Western provocations and war-making. No doubt the Russians and Chinese don't want to be provocative. *This indicates that they are incapable of realizing that they are at war.*

To sum up: Putin thinks Russia has won the conflict because, despite \$200 billion in US aid, Russia dominates the battlefield. Ukrainian casualties are 10 or more times Russian casualties, and the Western weapons are vastly inferior to the Russian ones. Putin thinks it is only a matter of time before the West comes to its senses and realizes it has lost and agrees to Russia's conditions for ending the conflict. Why does Putin think that the West has any sense to come to? Putin is deceiving himself.

Putin should read Mike Whitney's latest. Whitney has an independent uncompromised mind concerned only with the truth. Whitney says, backed with the evidence, that the US,

understanding that it has lost the battlefield war, nevertheless still intends to win the real war and has moved to Plan B. Plan B is to prolong the conflict with aid not for the lost battlefield but for long distant strikes into Russia against civilian centers and essential social and economic infrastructure. The success of these strikes will show Putin to be a failure, a leader unable to protect mother Russia from a non-existent military power-Ukraine.

Will the pro-Western Russian intellectuals seize on “Putin’s failure to protect Russia” by pushing for a peace accord that results in Ukraine’s admission to NATO?

In other words, Putin’s timidity, restraint, and miscalculations have defeated him. [Here is Whitney’s analysis of the US Plan B.](#)

Putin has been seriously damaged by the incomprehensible failure of Russian intelligence. Where, for example, was Putin when the US/Israeli trained and armed Georgian Army attacked the Russian protectorate of South Ossetia killing Russian troops serving as peace keepers? Putin was at the Chinese olympics unaware that he was faced with a dangerous crisis. Putin was recalled from his fun and games and had to use an unprepared Russian Army to repel the American/Israeli trained Georgian army. Then when he again had Georgia in Russian hands, he left, apparently leaving in exchange for a less hostile government toward Russia. Now there are reports, true or false, of another Georgian color revolution against the Georgian government that is not sufficiently hostile to Russia.

Do we have here a second war front opening against Russia in addition to Ukraine? And what about the [reports that NATO is focusing on Belarus](#) where Russian nuclear weapons are stationed if not deployed? Will a third war front open?

Russian intelligence also failed Putin when the Washington orchestrated Maiden Revolution occurred. Putin had no warning of what was happening on his doorstep. He was away, again, enjoying the Sochi olympics while Washington took possession of Ukraine, a part of Russia for centuries.

What explains these massive total failures of Russian intelligence? Are the Russian intelligence services so pro-Western that they are incapable of seeing reality? Or are the intelligence agencies operating under a protocol in which only a happy agreement can be the result of the US orchestrated conflict between Russia and the West?

If Putin continues to deny reality, he risks losing his alliance with China. This will end dollar replacement in the settlement of international balances and leave the entirety of the dissenting world at the mercy of US financial sanctions. [Can even this report from RT](#) bring Putin to confront reality?

“Specifically, an article in The Economist by Feng Yujun, a professor at Peking University, has caused a stir. This methodical, official expert on Russia and the Ukraine conflict speaks very much in the spirit of Western political thought: he criticizes Moscow, predicts its defeat, praises Kiev for its ‘strength and unity of its resistance,’ and even suggests that if Russia doesn’t change its power structure, it will continue to threaten international security by provoking wars.

“Knowing how Chinese society is organized, it’s hard to imagine that the professor who penned this article was acting at his own risk without the support of responsible comrades in Beijing. The recent refusal of four major Chinese banks to accept payments

from Russia, even in yuan, can also be seen as an alarming signal to Moscow. In other words, it may turn out that the Russian-Chinese alliance, so strong in words, is far from being effective and trouble-free in practice. And Blinken would certainly have tried to consolidate this trend.”

Clearly, Putin has no economic and political advisers with sufficient intelligence and awareness to tell him the dangerous situation he has created for himself and for Russia. And for the world, as the consequence will be nuclear war.

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**Paul Craig Roberts** is a renowned author and academic, chairman of The Institute for Political Economy where [this article](#) was originally published. Dr. Roberts was previously associate editor and columnist for The Wall Street Journal. He was Assistant Secretary of the Treasury for Economic Policy during the Reagan Administration. He is a regular contributor to Global Research.

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