

Russia's "Western Border" Returned to the Center of World Geopolitics in 2021

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The last days of December 2021 were marked, on the one hand, by the scheduling of a summit between Moscow and NATO to discuss the Ukrainian issue, and, on the other, by a statement by the Ukrainian ambassador in Washington, alleging that her country has a plan B for dealing with Russia, suggesting a possible military confrontation. In fact, these two events explain in short what was the Russian-Ukrainian issue in 2021: NATO spreading rumors of invasion but willing to negotiate, while Ukraine takes such rumors as absolute truth and plans a war it obviously could not win.

2021 presented a series of moves in the Ukrainian issue. Indeed, since the height of the crisis at the border, between 2014 and 2015, perhaps this year's tensions have been the most significant. The West has endorsed the narrative of an alleged Russian invasion plan like never before. From January to December, Washington spread in the western media rumors of a Russian interest in attacking Ukraine, presenting as "evidence" only inconclusive data with no scientific validity.

As a result, the Ukrainian government has reached incalculable levels in its anti-Russian paranoia, tightening its policies of ethnic persecution. Terrorist attacks, mass executions, torture, assaults and kidnappings reached a new height in the Donbass region. In Crimea Ukrainian forces have constantly tried to boycott the Russian presence through sabotage. The situation reached unacceptable levels and led Moscow to seek a judicial solution to the topic.

In August, the Russian government filed a lawsuit at the European Court of Human Rights, with the aim of seeking legal punishment for Kiev due to its crimes against the fundamental rights of the Russian population in its territory. A number of irrefutable evidence of the veracity of the allegations, including testimonies and images of crimes committed by Kiev's official forces against Russian-speaking citizens, was attached to the court case. However, so far no change has occurred in the status of the case and, unfortunately, it is unlikely that there is actually a legal solution, considering that the European Court is largely influenced

by the EU's pro-Western mentality - which includes an anti-Russian geopolitical stance.

In the military sphere, the situation has also deteriorated a lot over the year, with Ukraine allowing NATO military maneuvers at increasingly aggressive levels. Not only did annual exercises such as Defender Europe take place, but there were also several extraordinary drills involving NATO forces and the Ukrainian military. Russia obviously felt threatened by the escalation of maneuvers in its strategic environment, which in many occasions resulted in some troop movements within the Russian territory, in order to maintain readiness for any emergency case. Ironically, the West reacted to each Russian maneuver as further "evidence" of the alleged invasion plans against Ukraine.

It is also necessary to remember that new pro-Western agents started to play a destabilizing role in the Ukrainian crisis this year, mainly UK and Turkey. The UK has sought to develop a post-Brexit geopolitical strategy and has been committed to an automatic alignment with the US, investing in greater participation in NATO's main conflict zones. Ankara, in turn, has an interest in weakening Moscow as much as possible in order to lessen the country's international influence over the post-Soviet Central Asian space, which is encompassed by Erdogan's neo-Ottoman geopolitics. Although Turkey has no direct interests in Ukraine, any form of destabilization of Russia looks interesting to Ankara, which explains its recent sending of arms and money to Kiev.

However, no aspect of the Ukrainian topic was more striking this year than the gradual distance between the West and Kiev. The constant corruption scandals in the Ukrainian political scenario - especially aggravated by the Hunter Biden case - have started to generate suspicion in the Western public opinion about the destination of American and European taxpayers' money when their governments send large amounts to Kiev. As a result, an atmosphere of tension began to emerge between NATO and Ukraine. Zelensky tried to remedy the situation in his talks with Biden, but the situation seems widespread among Western governments.

Obviously, this western "tiredness" towards Ukraine has not resulted in any misalignment. NATO continues to use Kiev as a destabilization tool against Russia, but a less aggressive stance has been witnessed. Biden talked about the Ukrainian issue with Putin and now there is a summit between Moscow and NATO scheduled for the next year. For the western alliance, solving the Ukrainian case by peaceful means has gradually become an interesting possibility, considering that Kiev is acting in a truly irrational way, planning a military confrontation against Russia - which NATO obviously wants to avoid. In the current situation, sending money and weapons to the Ukrainians has become an attitude less and less strategic, motivating the Western interest in dialoguing with Russia and ignoring Kiev.

The current scenario is complex, opening the door to several possibilities in the coming months. Throughout 2021, NATO spread rumors of a Russian invasion to increase instability in Eastern Europe, but the situation got out of control as Kiev adopted the narrative as a dogma (while NATO's great leaders know it is fake news). Now, Kiev seems to want a war and NATO wants dialogue. This became fully apparent in the events of December - the summit schedule for January and the Ukrainian speech about a "plan B".

The most curious thing about this case is that Kiev, which is obviously militarily weaker than Moscow, only feels safe to consider a war with Russia because it believes that NATO would intervene in a possible conflict scenario. But, of course, this would never happen. Currently, there is no unity of thought in NATO. The organization is polarized and its members

constantly abandon each other, just as happened in Afghanistan. Certainly, NATO would not intervene to help Ukraine, considering that Kiev is not even part of the alliance and that such conflict could escalate to the nuclear level – something that is not in the interest of any state. The problem is that Kiev still does not understand this.

The confidence in a NATO aid in the event of war allows Kiev to act as aggressively as possible against Russia. The Ukrainian government intensifies ethnic persecution day after day and this is reaching intolerable levels for Moscow. In fact, the Russian strategy for the Donbass has been so far based on non-intervention and the search for a peaceful solution. The Russian government filed the lawsuit at the European Court and has acted as an observer of the Minsk Accords – which are constantly violated by Kiev – but refuses to intervene militarily in the region, fearing a possible war in Eastern Europe and the consequent unnecessary death of thousands of people.

Moscow, wants Kiev to fulfill the Minsk Accords, respect the Russian population. However, if Kiev continues to constantly promote aggressive incursions into the Donbass, perpetrating crimes against humanity and making the situation unsustainable, it is possible that in the near future Moscow will change its strategy and begin to consider a possible intervention – a situation in which there would certainly be no Western help, resulting in the defeat of the Ukrainian forces. Kiev does not seem to understand this reality.

In fact, the Ukrainian situation seems to have deteriorated significantly in every way possible. Kiev has taken autonomous steps to push forward its war plans against Russia, even without NATO authorization. For example, the Ukrainian parliament recently passed a law to facilitate the citizenship acquisition process for mercenaries and foreign militants who fought on Kiev's side in the Donbass civil war. Clearly, the country has an interest in strengthening its military and paramilitary forces (such as neo-Nazi militias that support the government) in the short term – which appears to be an urgent measure in the face of an imminent conflict.

Luckily for the Ukrainians, the Russians do not want war and will continue to try to resolve the situation peacefully in the short term – even though the possibility of a change in strategy becomes more and more viable. What Kiev should do is to pay attention to how it has been constantly used by the West and abandon the role of destabilizing agent, focusing on promoting internal improvements such as fighting corruption and establishing a proper economic project – in addition to a policy of respect for human rights and international agreements. This would be the best scenario for all sides.

Something that can be said about Ukraine this year is that tensions and conflicts in the Russian Western border have returned to the center of world geopolitics. Currently, the Ukrainian-Russian crisis is the thermometer of global geopolitics and any change in the region could have catastrophic effects worldwide. The year ends inconclusive but hopeful. The Moscow-NATO summit could be the key to starting an era of stability, even though Kiev is boycotting the event.

So, anything is possible for 2022, but one thing seems inevitable: either Ukraine will abdicate its unrealistic war plans, or the situation will soon become insupportable for Kiev, which would have no foreign support in the face of a possible Russian reaction.

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