

Thousand Balls of Flame: A Whiff of World War III Hangs in the Air. Cold War 2.0 is On...

A Russian Perspective: Russia is ready to respond to any provocation, but the last thing the Russians want is another war

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Russia is ready to respond to any provocation, but the last thing the Russians want is another war. And that, if you like good news, is the best news you are going to hear."

A whiff of World War III hangs in the air. In the US, Cold War 2.0 is on, and the anti-Russian rhetoric emanating from the Clinton campaign, echoed by the mass media, hearkens back to McCarthyism and the red scare. In response, many people are starting to think that Armageddon might be nigh—an all-out nuclear exchange, followed by nuclear winter and human extinction. It seems that many people in the US like to think that way. Goodness gracious!

But, you know, this is hardly unreasonable of them. The US is spiraling down into financial, economic and political collapse, losing its standing in the world and turning into a continent-sized ghetto full of drug abuse, violence and decaying infrastructure, its population vice-ridden, poisoned with genetically modified food, morbidly obese, exploited by predatory police departments and city halls, plus a wide assortment of rackets, from medicine to education to real estate... That we know.

We also know how painful it is to realize that the US is damaged beyond repair, or to acquiesce to the fact that most of the damage is self-inflicted: the endless, useless wars, the limitless corruption of money politics, the toxic culture and gender wars, and the imperial hubris and willful ignorance that underlies it all... This level of disconnect between the expected and the observed certainly hurts, but the pain can be avoided, for a time, through mass delusion.

This sort of downward spiral does not automatically spell "Apocalypse," but the specifics of the state cult of the US—an old-time religiosity overlaid with the secular religion of progress—are such that there can be no other options: either we are on our way up to build colonies on Mars, or we perish in a ball of flame. Since the humiliation of having to ask the Russians for permission to fly the Soyuz to the International Space Station makes the prospect of American space colonies seem dubious, it's Plan B: balls of flame here we come!

And so, most of the recent American warmongering toward Russia can be explained by the desire to find anyone but oneself to blame for one's unfolding demise. This is a well-understood psychological move—projecting the shadow—where one takes everything one hates but can't admit to about oneself and projects it onto another. On a subconscious level

(and, in the case of some very stupid people, even a conscious one) the Americans would like to nuke Russia until it glows, but can't do so because Russia would nuke them right back. But the Americans can project that same desire onto Russia, and since they have to believe that they are good while Russia is evil, this makes the Armageddon scenario appear much more likely.

But this way of thinking involves a break with reality. There is exactly one nation in the world that nukes other countries, and that would be the United States. It gratuitously nuked Japan, which was ready to surrender anyway, just because it could. It prepared to nuke Russia at the start of the Cold War, but was prevented from doing so by a lack of a sufficiently large number of nuclear bombs at the time. And it attempted to render Russia defenseless against nuclear attack, abandoning the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2002, but has been prevented from doing so by Russia's new weapons. These include, among others, long-range supersonic cruise missiles (Kalibr), and suborbital intercontinental missiles carrying multiple nuclear payloads capable of evasive maneuvers as they approach their targets (Sarmat). All of these new weapons are impossible to intercept using any conceivable defensive technology. At the same time, Russia has also developed its own defensive capabilities, and its latest S-500 system will effectively seal off Russia's airspace, being able to intercept targets both close to the ground and in low Earth orbit.

In the meantime, the US has squandered a fantastic sum of money fattening up its notoriously corrupt defense establishment with various versions of "Star Wars," but none of that money has been particularly well spent. The two installations in Europe of Aegis Ashore (completed in Romania, planned in Poland) won't help against Kalibr missiles launched from submarines or small ships in the Pacific or the Atlantic, close to US shores, or against intercontinental missiles that can fly around them. The THAAD installation currently going into South Korea (which the locals are currently protesting by shaving their heads) won't change the picture either.

There is exactly one nuclear aggressor nation on the planet, and it isn't Russia. But this shouldn't matter. In spite of American efforts to undermine it, the logic of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) remains in effect. The probability of a nuclear exchange is determined not by anyone's policy but by the likelihood of it happening by accident. Since there is no winning strategy in a nuclear war, nobody has any reason to try to start one. Under no circumstances is the US ever going to be able to dictate its terms to Russia by threatening it with nuclear annihilation.

If a nuclear war is not in the cards, how about a conventional one? The US has been sabre-rattling by stationing troops and holding drills in the Baltics, right on Russia's western border, installing ABM systems in Romania, Poland and South Korea, supporting anti-Russian Ukrainian Nazis, etc. All of this seems quite provocative; can it result in a war? And what would that war look like?

Here, we have to look at how Russia has responded to previous provocations. These are all the facts that we know, and can use to predict what will happen, as opposed to purely fictional, conjectural statements unrelated to known facts.

When the US or its proxies attack an enclave of Russian citizens outside of Russia's borders, here are the types of responses that we have been able to observe so far:

1. The example of Georgia. During the Summer Olympics in Beijing (a traditional time of

peace), the Georgian military, armed and trained by the US and Israel, invaded South Ossetia. This region was part of Georgia in name only, being mostly inhabited by Russian speakers and passport-holders. Georgian troops started shelling its capital, Tskhinval, killing some Russian peacekeeping troops stationed in the region and causing civilian casualties. In response, Russian troops rolled into Georgia, within hours completely eliminating Georgia's war-making capability. They announced that South Ossetia was de facto no longer part of Georgia, throwing in Abkhazia (another disputed Russian enclave) for good measure, and withdrew. Georgia's warmongering president Saakashvili was pronounced a "political corpse" and left to molder in place. Eventually he was forced to flee Georgia, where he has been declared a fugitive from justice. The US State Department recently gave him a new job, as Governor of Odessa in the Ukraine. Recently, Russian-Georgian relations have been on the mend.

2. The example of Crimea. During the Winter Olympics in Sochi, in Russia (a traditional time of peace) there occurred an illegal, violent overthrow of the elected, constitutional government of the Ukraine, followed by the installation of a US-picked puppet administration. In response, the overwhelmingly Russian population of the autonomous region of Crimea held a referendum. Some 95% of them voted to secede from the Ukraine and to once again become part of Russia, which they had been for centuries and until very recently. The Russians then used their troops already stationed in the region under an international agreement to make sure that the results of the referendum were duly enacted. Not a single shot was fired during this perfectly peaceful exercise in direct democracy.

3. The example of Crimea again. During the Summer Olympics in Rio (a traditional time of peace) a number of Ukrainian operatives stormed the Crimean border and were swiftly apprehended by Russia's Federal Security Service, together with a cache of weapons and explosives. A number of them were killed in the process, along with two Russians. The survivors immediately confessed to planning to organize terrorist attacks at the ferry terminal that links Crimea with the Russian mainland and a railway station. The ringleader of the group confessed to being promised the princely sum of \$140 for carrying out these attacks. All of them are very much looking forward to a warm, dry bunk and three square meals of day, care of the Russian government, which must seem like a slice of heaven compared to the violence, chaos, destitution and desolation that characterizes life in present-day Ukraine. In response, the government in Kiev protested against "Russian provocation," and put its troops on alert to prepare against "Russian invasion." Perhaps the next shipment of US aid to the Ukraine should include a supply of chlorpromazine or some other high-potency antipsychotic medication.

Note the constant refrain of "during the Olympics." This is not a coincidence but is indicative of a certain American modus operandi. Yes, waging war during a traditional time of peace is both cynical and stupid. But the American motto seems to be "If we try something repeatedly and it still doesn't work, then we just aren't trying hard enough." In the minds of those who plan these events, the reason they never work right can't possibly have anything to do with it being stupid. This is known as "Level III Stupid": stupidity so profound that it is unable to comprehend its own stupidity.

4. The example of Donbass. After the events described in point 2 above, this populous, industrialized region, which was part of Russia until well into the 20th century and is linguistically and culturally Russian, went into political turmoil, because most of the locals wanted nothing to do with the government that had been installed in Kiev, which they saw as illegitimate. The Kiev government proceeded to make things worse, first by enacting laws

infringing on the rights of Russian-speakers, then by actually attacking the region with the army, which they continue to do to this day, with three unsuccessful invasions and continuous shelling of both residential and industrial areas, in the course of which over ten thousand civilians have been murdered and many more wounded. In response, Russia assisted with establishing a local resistance movement supported by a capable military contingent formed of local volunteers. This was done by Russian volunteers, acting in an unofficial capacity, and by Russian private citizens donating money to the cause. In spite of Western hysteria over “Russian invasion” and “Russian aggression,” no evidence of it exists. Instead, the Russian government has done just three things: it refused to interfere with the work of its citizens coming to the aid of Donbass; it pursued a diplomatic strategy for resolving the conflict; and it has provided numerous convoys of humanitarian aid to the residents of Donbass. Russia’s diplomatic initiative resulted in two international agreements—Minsk I and Minsk II—which compelled both Kiev and Donbass to pursue a strategy of political resolution of the conflict through cessation of hostilities and the granting to Donbass of full autonomy. Kiev has steadfastly refused to fulfill its obligations under these agreements. The conflict is now frozen, but continuing to bleed because of Ukrainian shelling, waiting for the Ukrainian puppet government to collapse.

To complete the picture, let us include Russia’s recent military action in Syria, where it came to the defense of the embattled Syrian government and quickly demolished a large part of ISIS/ISIL/Daesh/Islamic Caliphate, along with various other terrorist organizations active in the region. The rationale for this action is that Russia saw a foreign-funded terrorist nest in Syria as a direct threat to Russia’s security. Two other notable facts here are that Russia acted in accordance with international law, having been invited by Syria’s legitimate, internationally recognized government and that the military action was scaled back as soon as it seemed possible for all of the legitimate (non-terrorist) parties to the conflict to return to the negotiating table. These three elements—using military force as a reactive security measure, scrupulous adherence to international law, and seeing military action as being in the service of diplomacy—are very important to understanding Russia’s methods and ambitions.

Turning now to US military/diplomatic adventures, we see a situation that is quite different. US military spending is responsible for over half of all federal discretionary spending, dwarfing most other vitally important sectors, such as infrastructure, public medicine and public education. It serves several objectives. Most importantly, it is a public jobs program: a way of employing people who are not employable in any actually productive capacity due to lack of intelligence, education and training. Second, it is a way for politicians and defense contractors to synergistically enrich themselves and each other at the public’s expense. Third, it is an advertising program for weapons sales, the US being the top purveyor of lethal technology in the world. Last of all, it is a way of projecting force around the world, bombing into submission any country that dares oppose Washington’s global hegemonic ambitions, often in total disregard of international law. Nowhere on this list is the actual goal of defending the US.

None of these justifications works vis-à-vis Russia. In dollar terms, the US outspends Russia on defense hands down. However, viewed in terms of purchasing parity, Russia manages to buy as much as ten times more defensive capability per unit national wealth than the US, largely negating this advantage. Also, what the US gets for its money is inferior: the Russian military gets the weapons it wants; the US military gets what the corrupt political establishment and their accomplices in the military-industrial complex want in order to

enrich themselves. In terms of being an advertising campaign for weapons sales, watching Russian weaponry in action in Syria, effectively wiping out terrorists in short order through a relentless bombing campaign using scant resources, then seeing US weaponry used by the Saudis in Yemen, with much support and advice from the US, being continuously defeated by lightly armed insurgents, is unlikely to generate too many additional sales leads. Lastly, the project of maintaining US global hegemony seems to be on the rocks as well. Russia and China are now in a de facto military union. Russia's superior weaponry, coupled with China's almost infinitely huge infantry, make it an undefeatable combination. Russia now has a permanent air base in Syria, has made a deal with Iran to use Iranian military bases, and is in the process of prying Turkey away from NATO. As the US military, with its numerous useless bases around the world and piles of useless gadgets, turns into an international embarrassment, it remains, for the time being, a public jobs program for employing incompetents, and a rich source of graft.

In all, it is important to understand how actually circumscribed American military capabilities are. The US is very good at attacking vastly inferior adversaries. The action against Nazi Germany only succeeded because it was by then effectively defeated by the Red Army—all except for the final mop-up, which is when the US came out of its timid isolation and joined the fray. Even North Korea and Vietnam proved too tough for it, and even there its poor performance would have been much poorer were it not for the draft, which had the effect of adding non-incompetents to the ranks, but produced the unpleasant side-effect of enlisted men shooting their incompetent officers—a much underreported chapter of American military history. And now, with the addition of LGBTQ people to the ranks, the US military is on its way to becoming an international laughing stock. Previously, terms like “faggot” and “pussy” were in widespread use in the US military's basic training. Drill sergeants used such terminology to exhort the “numb-nuts” placed in their charge to start acting like men. I wonder what words drill sergeants use now that they've been tasked with training those they previously referred to as “faggots” and “pussies”? The comedic potential of this nuance isn't lost on Russia's military men.

This comedy can continue as long as the US military continues to shy away from attacking any serious adversary, because if it did, comedy would turn to tragedy rather quickly.

- If, for instance, US forces tried to attack Russian territory by lobbing missiles across the border, they would be neutralized in instantaneous retaliation by Russia's vastly superior artillery.
- If Americans or their proxies provoked Russians living outside of Russia (and there are millions of them) to the point of open rebellion, Russian volunteers, acting in an unofficial capacity and using private funds, would quickly train, outfit and arm them, creating a popular insurgency that would continue for years, if necessary, until Americans and their proxies capitulate.
- If the Americans do the ultimately foolish thing and invade Russian territory, they would be kettled and annihilated, as repeatedly happened to the Ukrainian forces in Donbass.
- Any attempt to attack Russia using the US aircraft carrier fleet would result in its instantaneous sinking using any of several weapons: ballistic anti-ship missiles, supercavitating torpedos or supersonic cruise missiles.
- Strategic bombers, cruise missiles and ballistic missiles would be eliminated by Russia's advanced new air defense systems.

So much for attack; but what about defense? Well it turns out that there is an entire separate dimension to engaging Russia militarily. You see, Russia lost a huge number of civilian lives while fighting off Nazi Germany. Many people, including old people, women and children, died of starvation and disease, or from German shelling, or from the abuse they suffered at the hands of German soldiers. On the other hand, Soviet military casualties were on par with those of the Germans. This incredible calamity befell Russia because it had been invaded, and it has conditioned Russian military thinking ever since. The next large-scale war, if there ever is one, will be fought on enemy territory. Thus, if the US attacks Russia, Russia will counterattack the US mainland. Keeping in mind that the US hasn't fought a war on its own territory in over 150 years, this would come as quite a shock.

Of course, this would be done in ways that are consistent with Russian military thinking. Most importantly, the attack must be such that the possibility of triggering a nuclear exchange remains minimized. Second, the use of force would be kept to the minimum required to secure a cessation of hostilities and a return to the negotiating table on terms favorable to Russia. Third, every effort would be made to make good use of internal popular revolts to create long-lasting insurgencies, letting volunteers provide the necessary arms and training. Lastly, winning the peace is just as important as winning the war, and every effort would be made to inform the American public that what they are experiencing is just retribution for certain illegal acts. From a diplomatic perspective, it would be much more tidy to treat the problem of war criminals running the US as an internal, American political problem, to be solved by Americans themselves, with an absolute minimum of outside help. This would best be accomplished through a bit of friendly, neighborly intelligence-sharing, letting all interested parties within the US know who exactly should be held responsible for these war crimes, what they and their family members look like, and where they live.

The question then is, What is the absolute minimum of military action—what I am calling “a thousand balls of fire,” named after George Bush Senior’s “a thousand points of light”—to restore peace on terms favorable to Russia? It seems to me that 1000 “balls of fire” is just about the right number. These would be smallish explosions—enough to demolish a building or an industrial installation, with almost no casualties. This last point is extremely important, because the goal is to destroy the system without actually directly hurting any of the people. It wouldn't be anyone else's fault if people in the US suffer because they refuse to do as their own FEMA asks them to do: stockpile a month's worth of food and water and put together an emergency evacuation plan. In addition, given the direction in which the US is heading, getting a second passport, expatriating your savings, and getting some firearms training just in case you end up sticking around are all good ideas.

The reason it is very important for this military action to not kill anyone is this: there are some three million Russians currently residing in the US, and killing any of them is definitely not on strategy. There is an even larger number of people from populous countries friendly to Russia, such as China and India, who should also remain unharmed. Thus, a strategy that would result in massive loss of life would simply not be acceptable. A much better scenario would involve producing a crisis that would quickly convince the Russians living in the US (along with all the other foreign nationals and first-generation immigrants, and quite a few of the second-generation immigrants too) that the US is no longer a good place to live. Then all of these people could be repatriated—a process that would no doubt take a few years. Currently, Russia is the number three destination worldwide for people looking for a better place to live, after the US and Germany. Germany is now on the verge of open revolt against Angela Merkel's insane pro-immigration policies. The US is not far behind, and won't remain

an attractive destination for much longer. And that leaves Russia as the number one go-to place on the whole planet. That's a lot of pressure, even for a country that is 11 time zones wide and has plenty of everything except tropical fruit and people.

We must also keep in mind that Israel—which is, let's face it, a US protectorate temporarily parked on Palestinian land—wouldn't last long without massive US support. Fully a third of Israeli population happens to be Russian. The moment Project Israel starts looking defunct, most of these Russian Jews, clever people that they are, will no doubt decide to stage an exodus and go right back to Russia, as is their right. This will create quite a headache for Russia's Federal Migration Service, because it will have to sift through them all, letting in all the normal Russian Jews while keeping out the Zionist zealots, the war criminals and the ultra-religious nutcases. This will also take considerable time.

But actions that risk major loss of life also turn out to be entirely unnecessary, because an effective alternative strategy is available: destroy key pieces of government and corporate infrastructure, then fold your arms and wait for the other side to crawl back to the negotiating table waving a white rag. You see, there are just a few magic ingredients that allow the US to continue to exist as a stable, developed country capable of projecting military force overseas. They are: the electric grid; the financial system; the interstate highway system; rail and ocean freight; the airlines; and oil and gas pipelines. Disable all of the above, and it's pretty much game over. How many "balls of flame" would that take? Probably well under a thousand.

Disabling the electric grid is almost ridiculously easy, because the system is very highly integrated and interdependent, consisting of just three sub-grids, called "interconnects": western, eastern and Texas. The most vulnerable parts of the system are the Large Power Transformers (LPTs) which step up voltages to millions of volts for transmission, and step them down again for distribution. These units are big as houses, custom-built, cost millions of dollars and a few years to replace, and are mostly manufactured outside the US. Also, along with the rest of the infrastructure in the US, most of them are quite old and prone to failure. There are several thousand of these key pieces of equipment, but because the electric grid in the US is working at close to capacity, with several critical choke points, it would be completely disabled if even a handful of the particularly strategic LPTs were destroyed. In the US, any extended power outage in any of the larger urban centers automatically triggers large-scale looting and mayhem. Some estimate that just a two week long outage would push the situation to a point of no return, where the damage would become too extensive to ever be repaired.

Disabling the financial system is likewise relatively trivial. There are just a few choke points, including the Federal Reserve, a few major banks, debit and credit card company data centers, etc. They can be disabled using a variety of methods, such as a cruise missile strike, a cyberattack, electric supply disruption or even civil unrest. It bears noting that the financial system in the US is rigged to blow even without foreign intervention. The combination of runaway debt, a gigantic bond bubble, the Federal Reserve trapped into ever-lower interest rates, underfunded pensions and other obligations, hugely overpriced real estate and a ridiculously frothy stock market will eventually detonate it from the inside.

A few more surgical strikes can take out the oil and gas pipelines, import terminals, highway bridges and tunnels, railroads and airlines. A few months without access to money and financial services, electricity, gasoline, diesel, natural gas, air transport or imported spare parts needed to repair the damage should be enough to force the US to capitulate. If it

makes any efforts to restore any of these services, an additional strike or two would quickly negate them.

The number of “balls of flame” can be optimized by taking advantage of destructive synergies: a GPS jammer deployed near the site of an attack can prevent responders from navigating to it; taking out a supply depot together with the facility it serves, coupled with transportation system disruptions, can delay repairs by many months; a simple bomb threat can immobilize a transportation hub, making it a sitting duck instead of a large number of moving targets; etc.

You may think that executing such a fine-tuned attack would require a great deal of intelligence, which would be difficult to gather, but this is not the case. First, a great deal of tactically useful information is constantly being leaked by insiders, who often consider themselves “patriots.” Second, what hasn’t been leaked can be hacked, because of the pitiable state of cybersecurity in the US. Remember, Russia is where anti-virus software is made—and a few of the viruses too. The National Security Agency was recently hacked, and its crown jewels stolen; if it can be hacked, what about all those whose security it supposedly protects?

You might also think that the US, if attacked in this manner, could effectively retaliate in kind, but this scenario is rather difficult to imagine. Many Russians don’t find English too difficult, are generally familiar with the US through exposure to US media, and the specialists among them, especially those who have studied or taught at universities in the US, can navigate their field of expertise in the US almost as easily as in Russia. Most Americans, on the other hand, can barely find Russia on a map, can’t get past the Cyrillic alphabet and find Russian utterly incomprehensible.

Also consider that Russia’s defense establishment is mainly focused on... defense. Offending people in foreign lands is not generally seen as strategically important. “A hundred friends is better than a hundred rubles” is a popular saying. And so Russia manages to be friends with India and Pakistan at the same time, and with China and Vietnam. In the Middle East, it maintains cordial relations with Turkey, Syria, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Egypt and Iran, also all at the same time. Russian diplomats are required to keep channels of communication open with friends and adversaries alike, at all times. Yes, being inexplicably adversarial toward Russia can be excruciatingly painful, but you can make it stop any time! All it takes is a phone call.

Add to this the fact that the vicissitudes of Russian history have conditioned Russia’s population to expect the worst, and simply deal with it. “They can’t kill us all!” is another favorite saying. If Americans manage to make them suffer, the Russian people would no doubt find great solace in the fact they are making the Americans suffer even worse, and many among them would think that this achievement, in itself, is already a victory. Nor will they remain without help; it is no accident that Russia’s Minister of Defense, Sergei Shoigu, previously ran the Emergencies Ministry, and his performance at his job there won him much adulation and praise. In short, if attacked, the Russians will simply take their lumps—as they always have—and then go on to conquer and win, as they always have.

It doesn’t help matters that most of what little Americans have been told about Russia by their political leaders and mass media is almost entirely wrong. They keep hearing about Putin and the “Russian bear,” and so they are probably imagining Russia to be a vast wasteland where Vladimir Putin keeps company with a chess-playing, internet server-

hacking, nuclear physicist, rocket scientist, Ebola vaccine-inventing, polyglot, polymath bear. Bears are wonderful, Russians love bears, but let's not overstate things. Yes, Russian bears can ride bicycles and are sometimes even good with children, but they are still just wild animals and/or pets (many Russians can't draw that distinction). And so when the Americans growl about the "Russian bear," the Russians wonder, Which one?

In short, Russia is to most Americans a mystery wrapped in an enigma, and there simply isn't a large enough pool of intelligent Americans with good knowledge of Russia to draw upon, whereas to many Russians the US is an open book. As far as the actual American "intelligence" and "security" services, they are all bloated bureaucratic boondoggles mired in political opportunism and groupthink that excel at just two things: unquestioningly following idiotic procedures, and creatively fitting the facts to the politics du jour. "Proving" that Iraq has "weapons of mass destruction"—no problem! Telling Islamist terrorists apart from elderly midwestern grandmothers at an airport security checkpoint—no can do!

Russia will not resort to military measures against the US unless sorely provoked. Time and patience are on Russia's side. With each passing year, the US grows weaker and loses friends and allies, while Russia grows stronger and gains friends and allies. The US, with its political dysfunction, runaway debt, decaying infrastructure and spreading civil unrest, is a dead nation walking. It will take time for each of the United States to neatly demolish themselves into their own footprints, like those three New York skyscrapers did on 9/11 (WTC #1, #2 and #7) but Russia is very patient. Russia is ready to respond to any provocation, but the last thing the Russians want is another war. And that, if you like good news, is the best news you are going to hear. But if you still think that there is going to be a war with Russia, don't think "Armageddon"; think "a thousand balls of flame," and then—crickets!

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