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The Incredible Shrinking NATO

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Submitted by Dmitry Orlov,

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I've been waiting for the hubbub to die down since the NATO conference in Vilnius, Lithuania, on 11-12 July 2023, waiting for someone — anyone — to point out **the obvious reason for why the Ukraine's cocaine-sniffing mascot-president Zelensky, having been lionized only a year ago, has suddenly fallen into disfavor with this organization**.

Yes, the Ukraine might still some day be invited to start the long and arduous process of joining NATO, but only after some undefined number of NATO members decide that it has done enough to comply with "NATO standards" (I'll explain what those are later) and various other vague things. Keeping in mind that back on 20 September 2018 the Ukrainian parliament approved amendments to the constitution that would make the accession of the country to NATO and the EU a central goal and the main foreign policy objective, **such a turn of events is most embarrassing for the mascot president and his backers and handlers.**

Oh, the vicissitudes of fortune! Lots of analysis and commentators offered ready explanations for this turn of events. Yet not a single one of them saw it fit to dig just the tiniest bit and discover the **glaringly obvious reason for this momentous shift.**

Perhaps all of them, for a variety of reasons, loathe to admit the reality of what NATO is, what it does, and why the **Ukraine is suddenly a threat rather than a boon to its core mission.**

You may want to read all of that commentary at your leisure — if you have trouble falling asleep. [The official NATO Summit Communiqué, fantastically verbose and filled with irrelevancies, makes for particularly somniferous reading.](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_217320.htm)

**So, what did the Ukraine do to fall into such disfavor?** Perhaps it did something that jeopardized NATO's core mission? That seems like a good guess. But then what is NATO's core mission?

In the movie "Silence of the Lambs," Hannibal Lecter refers to a quote by Marcus Aurelius when he says to Clarice Starling, "First principles, Clarice. Simplicity. Read Marcus Aurelius. Of each particular thing ask: what is it in itself? What is its nature?" The quote is from Book Three of "Meditations" by Marcus Aurelius, and it emphasizes the importance of understanding the essence of things.

NATO was formed on 4 April 1949 with the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty, more popularly known as the Washington Treaty, supposedly for the purpose of thwarting the Soviet Union in Europe. The USSR responded by forming the Warsaw Treaty Organization (also known as the Warsaw Pact) — a political and military alliance established on May 14, 1955 between the Soviet Union and several Eastern European countries for the express purpose of defending them from NATO. The Warsaw Pact was dissolved on 1 July 1991 and, shortly thereafter, on 26 December 1991, the USSR itself followed suit, but NATO continues to exist. By this point, the Warsaw Pact had existed for slightly less than NATO has existed, and the USSR had existed for only slightly more than that. Clearly, the communist threat as a rationale for NATO's existence was but a ruse, a smokescreen... a red herring.

**So, what was NATO's real purpose?**There are many ways to answer this question, but the Ukraine's sudden fall from grace offers what is perhaps the most graphic explanation.

* Was it that the war there was dragging on? No, a slow burn would be exactly what the Pentagon ordered, so that it would have a chance to keep up with Russia's hectic pace of weapons and ammunition deliveries.
* Was it that the Ukraine was losing the war? No, the Ukraine wasn't losing; it just wasn't winning. In particular, its attacks on Russia's defensive lines, which the Russian troops termed "meat attacks" because of the huge and useless losses they incurred on the Ukrainian side, seemed rather futile.
* Was it that the Ukraine was about to be defeated? Again, no, the Russians were happy to advance a few kilometers here and there, with their main objective the establishment of a buffer zone wide enough so that Ukrainian artillery would stop shelling what are now Russian civilian districts.
* Was it that NATO ran out of weapons and ammo to give to the Ukrainians? Again, no, there is still quite a lot of semi-obsolete junk that could be handed over to the Ukrainians.

***So, what did the Ukrainians do to raise the ire of the Pentagon so suddenly, and as a direct consequence, fall into disfavor with NATO?***

***In short, the Ukrainians demonstrated that NATO's weapons are crap.***

Evidence of this built up slowly over time.

First, it turned out that various bits of **US-made shoulder-fired junk** — anti-aircraft Stingers, anti-tank Javelins, etc — are rather worse than useless in modern combat.

Next, it turned out that the M777 howitzer and the **HIMARS rocket complex are rather fragile** and aren't field-maintainable.

The next wonder-weapon thrown at the Ukrainian problem was the **Patriot missile battery**. It was deployed near Kiev and the Russians quickly made a joke of it. They attacked it with their super-cheap Geranium 5 "flying moped" drones, causing it to turn on its active radar, thereby unmasking its position, and then fire off its entire load of rockets — a million dollars' worth! — after which point it just sat there, unmasked and defenseless, and was taken out by a single Russian precision rocket strike.

**This was sure to have seriously pissed off US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, whose major personal cash cow happens to be Raytheon, the maker of the Patriot.**Yes, the Patriot proved useless using the First Gulf War, where it failed to protect Israel against ancient Iraqi Scud missiles; and it proved useless later on when it failed to protect Saudi oil installation against ancient Yemeni Scud missiles... but you aren't supposed to advertise that fact. And now this!

**And to top it all off, the German-donated Leopard 2 tanks and the US-donated Bradley infantry vehicles, not to mention the silly French wheeled non-tanks, performed absolutely miserably during the recent Ukrainian efforts to approach, never mind penetrate, Russia's first line of defense.** Rubbing salt into the wounds, Putin remarked off-the-cuff that Western armor burns rather more easily than the old Soviet-made stuff.

**The latest desperate move would be to give the Ukrainian air force (which, by the way, no longer exists) some older F-16 fighter jets.** These can be anywhere up to 50 years old and are peculiar in having an air intake that's very close to the ground, making them very effective as runway vacuum cleaners during takeoff. They cannot operate from the dirty and pitted runways that are typical in the Ukraine because the debris would get sucked into the engine and destroy it. If the Ukrainians attempt to pave new runways for them, the Russians would instantly spot this from the geosynchronous satellite that is permanently pointed at Ukrainian territory. Rather than put some fresh bomb craters on these new runways, they could do something more subtle: use one of their super-cheap Geranium 2's to spread metal shaving for the F-16's engines to vacuum up... and burn up in flight. And since these are single-engine planes, there is no possibility of limping home on the remaining engine: the pilot would have to catapult and the plane would crash. But there is an even more important reason why the idea of giving F-16's for the Ukraine is unworkable: these planes are able to carry nuclear bombs and Russia has already announced that it would see this step as a nuclear escalation. But provoking a nuclear conflict with Russia is verboten, so F-16's are a no-go.

***Why is the failure of relentlessly propagandized Western weaponry more important than just about anything else, including the increasingly dire state of Western finances, the ridiculous failure of anti-Russian sanctions, the obscenely huge numbers of Ukrainian casualties or the general Western fatigue with all things Ukrainian and especially with the flood of Ukrainian refugees that the West can no longer cope with?***

The reason is simple: NATO is not a defensive organization (remember, USSR has been gone for over 30 years); nor is it an offensive organization (well, it did bomb Serbia and a few other relatively defenseless countries, but it can't possibly think about facing off against Russia or any other well-armed nation).

**Rather, NATO is a captive buyers' club for US-made weapons.**That is what vaunted NATO standards, with which the Ukraine must comply before it is deemed worthy to be invited to join NATO, are all about: to comply with these standards, your weapons have to be mostly US-made. That is also the reason for all of the various wars of choice, from

* Serbia to
* Iraq to
* Afghanistan to
* Libya and
* Syria:

these were demonstration projects for US weapons, with the additional goal of using up the weapons and the munitions so that the Pentagon and the rest of NATO would have to reorder them. **The geopolitical rationales for these military conflicts are mere rationalizations.**

For instance, between 1964 and 1973, the U.S. dropped more than 2.5 million tons of bombs on Laos during 580,000 bombing sorties—equal to a planeload of bombs every eight minutes, 24 hours a day, for nine years. What was the geopolitical rationale? Nobody can even remember if there ever was one. But those bombs were about to expire and needed to be used up and reordered to keep the money flowing.

In response to such strange inducements, US-made weapons tend to be

1. overly complex (so that their makers can charge more for the useless extra features) and
2. rather fragile (never tested against a peer adversary like Russia or China, or even against Iran),
3. developed slowly (to clean up on R&D funding),
4. built slowly (because what's the rush?) and
5. very high-maintenance (so that US defense contractors can get even richer delivering spare parts and service).

These weapons were supposed to be tested ever so gently by giving hell to backward tribesmen armed with old Kalashnikovs and RPGs.

**Ukraine is a different story altogether.** There, the Ukrainians, with their mismatched hand-me-down Western armor, are being asked to **penetrate three lines of hardened Russian defenses**.**After about a month of effort and staggering losses of men and equipment, they haven't yet been able to reach the first defensive line.** The sight of Western armor ablaze does not make good advertising. Consequently, the US defense contractors must be very eager to stop this steady stream of negative advertising for their products to stop right this second — before their reputations end up completely ruined; **hence the unseemly haste with which the entire Ukrainian project is being orphaned.**

The alternative to active warfare, now that that's failed, is what in the West is usually called "negotiation" but in reality would involve acceding to Russian demands made in November of 2021 (which include

1. NATO rolling back its weapons to where they were in 1997), plus more recent requirements, such as
2. denazification,
3. demilitarization and neutrality for what remains of the Ukraine,
4. recognition of Russia's new borders (which include Crimea, Kherson, Zaporozhye, Donetsk and Lugansk regions) and
5. prosecution for all of the Ukrainian war criminals, including all the ones that have been torturing prisoners of war and shelling civilians since 2014.
6. Oh, and the lifting of all the insipid sanctions would be required as well.

**But this is rather a lot to take in at a single sitting, and so NATO has decided to take lots of bite-sized pieces.**The official NATO document linked above is maximally verbose and full of fluff, but a close reading of its turgid bureaucratese will reveal quite a number of concessions, or at least hints at concessions:

* "We will be in a position to extend an invitation to Ukraine to join the Alliance when Allies agree and conditions are met." To use a vernacular Russian saying, this will happen "when a crawfish up on a mountain whistles" — i.e., never. That is, the Ukraine will never become part of NATO.
* "The circumstances in which NATO might have to use nuclear weapons are extremely remote." Translation: We're standing down! Please don't kill us! Apparently, NATO heads have been briefed on the capabilities of Russia's new strategic weapons, both offensive and defensive, and don't want to even consider any sort of direct military confrontation with Russia.
* "We urge all countries not to provide any kind of assistance to Russia’s aggression..." Translation: we wish they would stop, although we've asked enough times already and they haven't listened and so we aren't holding out much hope that they will listen now.
* "The deepening strategic partnership between the PRC and Russia and their mutually reinforcing attempts to undercut the rules-based international order run counter to our values and interests." But the deepening strategic partnership is entirely congruent with both Russia's and China's values and interests and they aren't about to ask anyone for permission. Yammering on about the "rules-based international order," even though it no longer exists, is a bit pathetic, but what else is there left for them to do? Boo-hoo!
* "Russia’s deepening military integration with Belarus, including the deployment of advanced Russian military capabilities and military personnel in Belarus, has implications for regional stability and the defence of the Alliance." Well, that's exactly what that military integration was designed to accomplish and it's good that they've noticed. The implication is that NATO will never mess with Belarus again.
* "We remain willing to keep open channels of communication with Moscow to manage and mitigate risks, prevent escalation, and increase transparency." That's welcome news indeed! Phone the Kremlin any time you want to hear a recitation of Russia's security demands, to refresh your memory.
* "The People’s Republic of China’s stated ambitions and coercive policies challenge our interests, security and values." And NATO's interests and values challenge the PRC and its security, so we're at an impasse. In other news, Russia just passed a law banning all sex change operations; how does that comply with "Western values"? Come on, shake your tiny fists in impotent rage!
* "NATO does not seek confrontation and poses no threat to Russia.  In light of its hostile policies and actions, we cannot consider Russia to be our partner." And in light of NATO's hostile policies and actions, Russia considers NATO countries to be hostile nations (and certainly not partners). How does giving weapons to Ukrainian Nazis not pose a threat to Russia?
* "We reiterate our clear determination that Iran must never develop a nuclear weapon.  We remain deeply concerned about Iran’s escalation of its nuclear programme." So, Iran is the only country that toothless old NATO can still find the courage to bark at. That seems safe, since by now Iran can't even hear them.

**And that's where it stands.**

Europe looks in horror at the US, which is still its weapons purveyor and security guarantor, but is headed by a barely functioning senile old man whose furious outbursts are causing his cabinet members to shy away from the Oval Office, and whose only possible replacement — the imbecilic, cackling Kamala — would hardly be any better.

**It may be slowly dawning on some of the more lucid European leaders that a way of backing out of the Russophobic cul-de-sac, of their own creation, in which they now find themselves, must somehow be found,** but they see no way of achieving that without a massive loss of face.

Let's give it another year and see whether by then they still have a face to save.