

The Unz Review • An Alternative Media Selection

A Collection of Interesting, Important, and Controversial Perspectives Largely Excluded from the American Mainstream Media

'Russia Started the War' and Other Fallacies

MIKE WHITNEY • MAY 10, 2022 • 2,100 WORDS • 323 COMMENTS



On Monday, Putin delivered the annual “[Victory Day](#)” speech celebrating Russia’s victory over Nazi Germany in 1945. The Russian president made none of the hyperbolic pronouncements the media had predicted but, instead, gave a brief recap of the events leading up to the war in Ukraine. There was none of the bravado you’d expect from a leader trying to gin up support for the ongoing war. Putin simply reminded the crowd that he had done everything he could to avoid the bloody conflict in which Russia is currently embroiled. Here’s part of what he said:

“Last December we proposed signing a treaty on security guarantees. Russia urged the West to hold an honest dialogue in search for meaningful and compromising solutions, and to take account of each other’s interests. All in vain. NATO countries did not want to heed us, which means they had totally different plans. And we saw it.”

This is an accurate account of what took place in the months preceding the war. Putin tried to avoid a confrontation by repeatedly asking the US to address Russia’s reasonable security concerns. Unfortunately, the Biden administration brushed off Putin’s demands without even providing a response. **The US and NATO insist that Ukraine has every right to choose whatever security arrangement it wants. But that’s clearly not the case.** The United States and every nation in NATO have signed treaties (Istanbul in 1999, and Astana in 2010) that stipulate they cannot improve their own security at the expense of others.

The principle underlying these agreements is called “**the indivisibility of security**”, which means that the security of one state can’t be separated from the security of the others. In practical terms, that means that signatories to these treaties are not free to develop their own military capability to the point where it poses a danger to their neighbors. These terms are especially applicable to Ukraine which is seeking

membership in a military alliance that is openly hostile to Russia. NATO membership has always been a “red line” for Putin who has stated repeatedly that he will not allow NATO bases, combat troops and missile sites to be located on Ukrainian soil where they’d be just a stone’s throw from Moscow. As one critic from Texas put it, **“You wouldn’t let a rattlesnake make its home on your front porch, would you?”** No, you wouldn’t, and neither would Putin. Here’s more from a speech Putin gave in 2007:

“I’m convinced that we have reached the decisive moment when we must seriously think about the architecture of global security. And we must proceed by searching for a reasonable balance between the interests of all participants in the international dialogue.” Munich Security Conference, 2007

For Putin, security has always been the paramount issue. How do we create a world in which ordinary people can feel safe in their homes, their communities and their countries? **How do we protect the weaker countries from the constant threat of intervention, invasion or regime change by an impulsive superpower whose behavior is guided by its own material interests and its own insatiable geopolitical ambitions?** Concepts like the “indivisibility of security” might appeal to the sensibilities of idealists, but where’s the enforcement mechanism? And, how do we use these grand ideas to rein in an intractable hegemon rampaging across the planet?

These are questions that need to be answered, after all, if the United Nations actually worked the way it is supposed to work, Russia’s demands would have been thoroughly debated at emergency meetings before the first shot was ever fired. But that didn’t happen. International law and global institutions failed again. As everyone knows, most of these institutions have been hijacked by Washington which now uses them to provide a fig leaf of legitimacy for its serial depredations. That’s certainly how they are being used in the current war against Russia.

The western media is also being used as a weapon against Russia. For example, Russia has been universally blamed for starting the war, but Russia did not start the war and everyone on the Security Council knows it. Ukraine started the war, and the Observer Mission of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has collected evidence to prove it. Check out this excerpt from an interview at the Grayzone with Swiss Intelligence officer and NATO advisor, Jacques Baud:

JACQUES BAUD: “I think we have to understand, as you know, that **the war in fact hasn’t started on 24 February this year... what led to the decision to launch an offensive in the Donbas was not what happened since 2014.** There was a trigger for that...

The first is the decision and the law adopted by Volodymyr Zelensky in March 2021—that means last year—to reconquer Crimea by force...

(And,also,) **the intensification of the artillery shelling of the Donbas starting on the 16th of February, and this increase in the shelling was observed, in fact, by the Observer Mission of the OSCE [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe], and they recorded this increase of**

violation, and it's a massive violation. I mean, we are talking about something that is about 30 times more than what it used to be... On the 16th of February you had a massive increase of violation on the Ukrainian side. So, for the Russians, Vladimir Putin in particular, that was the sign that the operation—the Ukrainian operation—was about to start.

And then everything started; I mean, all the events came very quickly. That means that if we look at the figures, you can see that **there's.... a massive increase from the 16th-17th, and then it reached kind of a maximum on the 18th of February**, and that was continuing.

... And that's why, on the 24th of February when Vladimir Putin decided to launch the offensive, it could invoke Article 51 of the UN Charter that provides for assistance in case of attack." (["US, EU sacrificing Ukraine to 'weaken Russia': fmr. NATO adviser"](#), The Grayzone)

You can see that **by the time Putin invaded Ukraine, the war had already begun**. The shelling of ethnic Russians had already intensified by many orders of magnitude. People were being slaughtered in droves, and tens of thousands of refugees were fleeing across the border into Russia. And, all of this had been going on since the 16th of February, a full week before Russia crossed the border. ([Moon of Alabama](#) has compiled the data on the bombardment that took place in the Donbas preceding the invasion: "The February 15 report of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine recorded some 41 explosions in the ceasefire areas. This increased to 76 explosions on Feb 16, 316 on Feb 17, 654 on Feb 18, 1413 on Feb 19, a total of 2026 of Feb 20 and 21 and 1484 on Feb 22.")

So, why does the media keep repeating the lie that Russia started the war when it is clearly false?

The fact is, Putin sent in the troops to put out a fire not to start one. If ever there was a situation where the Responsibility To Protect (R2P) could be justified, it's in east Ukraine prior to the invasion. 14,000 ethnic Russians had been killed before the shelling began. Should Putin have looked the other way and allowed another 14,000-or-so to be slaughtered without lifting a finger?

No, Putin did what he had to do to save lives and defend Russia's national security. Even so, he has no territorial ambitions and no desire to recreate the Soviet Empire. **His "special military operation" is, in fact, a defensive operation designed to remove emerging threats that could no longer be ignored**. Putin's 83% public approval rating proves that the Russian people understand what he is doing and fully support him. (A political leader would never garner that level of support if the people thought he had launched a war of aggression.)

Some readers might remember that –before sending in the tanks– Putin invoked United Nations Article 51 which provides a legal justification for military intervention. Here's an excerpt from an article by former weapons inspector Scott Ritter who defended the Russian action like this:

"Russian President Vladimir Putin, citing Article 51 as his authority, ordered what

he called a “special military operation”....

under Article 51, there can be no doubt as to the legitimacy of Russia’s contention that the Russian-speaking population of the Donbass had been subjected to a brutal eight-year-long bombardment that had killed thousands of people.... Moreover, Russia claims to have **documentary proof that the Ukrainian Army was preparing for a massive military incursion into the Donbass** which was pre-empted by the Russian-led “special military operation.” [OSCE figures show an increase of government shelling of the area in the days before Russia moved in.]

..

The bottom line is that **Russia has set forth a cognizable claim under the doctrine of anticipatory collective self-defense, devised originally by the U.S. and NATO, as it applies to Article 51 which is predicated on fact, not fiction.**

While it might be in vogue for people, organizations, and governments in the West to embrace the knee-jerk conclusion that Russia’s military intervention constitutes a wanton violation of the United Nations Charter and, as such, constitutes an illegal war of aggression, **the uncomfortable truth is that, of all the claims made regarding the legality of pre-emption under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, Russia’s justification for invading Ukraine is on solid legal ground.** (“[Russia, Ukraine & the Law of War: Crime of Aggression](#)”, Consortium News)

And here’s more on the topic from author Danial Kovalik in his article titled “Why Russia’s intervention in Ukraine is legal under international law”:

“One must begin this discussion by accepting the fact that there was already a war happening in Ukraine for the eight years preceding the Russian military incursion in February 2022. And, this war by the government in Kiev... claimed the lives of around 14,000 people, many of them children, and displaced around 1.5 million more ... The government in Kiev, and especially its neo-Nazi battalions, carried out attacks against these peoples ... precisely because of their ethnicity. ..

To remove any doubt that the destabilization of Russia itself has been the goal of the US in these efforts, one should examine the very telling 2019 report of the Rand Corporation... entitled, ‘Overextending and Unbalancing Russia, Assessing the Impact of Cost-Imposing Options’, one of the many tactics listed is “Providing lethal aid to Ukraine” in order to “exploit Russia’s greatest point of external vulnerability.”...

In short, **there is no doubt that Russia has been threatened**, and in a quite profound way, with concrete destabilizing efforts by the US, NATO and their extremist surrogates in Ukraine....

It is hard to conceive of a more pressing case for the need to act in defense of the

nation. While the UN Charter prohibits unilateral acts of war, it also provides, in **Article 51**, that “nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense...” **And this right of self-defense has been interpreted to permit countries to respond, not only to actual armed attacks, but also to the threat of imminent attack.**

In light of the above, it is my assessment.. that **Russia had a right to act in its own self-defense by intervening in Ukraine, which had become a proxy of the US and NATO for an assault – not only on Russian ethnics within Ukraine – but also upon Russia itself.** A contrary conclusion would simply ignore the dire realities facing Russia.” ([Why Russia’s intervention in Ukraine is legal under international law](#)”, RT)

Assigning blame for the current conflict is more than just an academic exercise. It is the way that reasonable people weigh the evidence to determine accountability. That might be a way-off, but it’s a goal worth pursuing all the same.

Finally, it should be clear by now, that the war in Ukraine was planned long before the Russian invasion. At every turn, Washington has orchestrated the provocations that were designed to lure Russia into Ukraine, drain its resources and, thus, remove a major obstacle to US strategic objectives in Central Asia. The ultimate goal– as US war planners have candidly admitted– is to “break Russia’s back”, splinter the country into smaller pieces, topple the government, seize its vast energy resources, and reduce the population to a permanent state of colonial dependency. Washington knows that it will not be able to encircle and control China’s explosive growth, unless it crushes Russia first. That is why it has embarked on such a reckless strategy that could end in an unprecedented catastrophe. Our miscreant leaders believe that preserving their grip on global power is worth the risk of nuclear annihilation.