



## West vs Russia: reaching point of no return

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Paul Craig Roberts was the US assistant secretary of the Treasury for economic policy under president Ronald Reagan. He was a driver behind the economic policy of the first term of the Reagan administration and was lauded as the “economic conscience” of the president.

After leaving the government, Roberts held the William E Simon Chair in Political Economy at the Center for Strategic and International Studies between 1983 and 1993, was a distinguished fellow at the Cato Institute between 1993 and 1996, and served on several corporate boards.

A former associate editor at The Wall Street Journal, Roberts is the author of several books including *The Supply Side Revolution: An Insider's Account of Policymaking in Washington* (Harvard University Press, 1984), *The Capitalist Revolution in Latin America* (Oxford University Press, 1997), *The Failure of Laissez Faire Capitalism and Economic Dissolution of the West* (Clarity Press, 2013), and *The Neoconservative Threat to World Order: Washington's Perilous War for Hegemony* (Clarity Press, 2015), to name a few.

Excerpts of an interview with Paul Craig Roberts follow.

**Adriel Kasonta:** It's already more than a month since Russia started its military operation (or, as we say in the West, “invasion”) in Ukraine, which many observers believe could have been prevented if Moscow's security guarantees proposals had been seriously addressed. Is that a valid point or just a repetition of “Kremlin propaganda”? And if it holds some merit, why was nothing done to stop the war from occurring?

**Paul Craig Roberts:** Ukraine is a multi-problem for Russia, partly because that is Washington's intention and partly because of Russian strategic blunders.

Russia became a problem for Washington in 2007 when [President Vladimir] Putin announced at the Munich Security Conference the end of American unipolarity. The return of Russia as a constraint on US unilateralism infuriated the neoconservatives.

Washington's response was to put pressure on Russia. In 2008 a Washington-trained-and-equipped Georgian army was used to invade South Ossetia, a province that broke away from Georgia when Georgia was separated from Russia following the collapse of the Soviet Union. South Ossetia was patrolled by Russian peacekeepers, who were killed during the Georgian invasion.

Putin returned from the Summer Olympics in Beijing, and the Russian army drove the Georgian forces out of South Ossetia and essentially conquered Georgia in four or five days. The Russians had the opportunity to reincorporate Georgia back into Russia and end the prospect of Georgia becoming a NATO member, but instead withdrew, releasing Georgia.

This was a strategic blunder. The Kremlin should at least have established a government that it controlled in place of the one Washington controls. Although a military victory for Russia, it was a propaganda victory for Washington. The Georgian invasion of South Ossetia was turned into the Russian invasion of Georgia.

In 2014 the Kremlin made another strategic blunder when more attention was paid to the Sochi Olympics than to the color revolution Washington was preparing in Ukraine. When Washington launched its overthrow of the Ukrainian government, Russia failed to intervene. A Russian-friendly government was replaced by a Russian-hostile government.

Russia added to this strategic blunder another blunder with the Kremlin's refusal to accept the vote of the breakaway Donbas republics to be reunited with Russia like Crimea. This mistake was followed by yet another.

Russia permitted eight years of shelling by Ukrainian and neo-Nazi Azov militias of Donbas Russians while trying to get Ukraine and the West to support the Minsk Agreement that Ukraine had signed. During these eight years domestic pressure mounted on Putin to protect the Donbas Russians.

[The year] 2022 opened with a large Ukrainian military force assembled on the Donbas border readying an assault to retake the Donbas. Russia responded in February by recognizing the breakaway republics and came to the realization that the likelihood of Ukrainian NATO membership was a major security problem as it would mean US missile bases on Russia's border.

Frustrated by the cold shoulder the West gave Russia's security concerns, Russia intervened militarily in eastern Ukraine, successfully surrounding the Azov neo-Nazis, who [beyond any doubt will be defeated]. Although this limited aim will be successful, it was done in a way that enabled the West to launch a massive psyops campaign, painting Russia and her president in the blackest terms.

As most of the fighting would be in the Russian-populated Donbas, Russia elected to clear out the Azov neo-Nazis without the use of heavy weapons that would also decimate the indigenous Russian population. This constraint meant a long-drawn-out process that the West has exploited.

Washington very much wanted a Russian intervention that could be labeled a "Russian invasion of Ukraine" and used for propaganda purposes to separate Europe from Russia, thus preserving the American Empire and stampeding Finland and Sweden into NATO, thus extending the encirclement of Russia.

**AK: Does sending weapons (the move perceived as one of the ways of putting pressure on Russia) serve to bring peace to Ukraine or, on the contrary, prolong the conflict in Eastern Europe? Why do the US and its allies continue to do this if it's the latter?**

**PCR:** The weapons are the West's method of fighting a proxy war with Russia “to the last Ukrainian.” The weapons will have no impact on the outcome in Donbas. The Ukrainian military and military infrastructure are essentially destroyed. The weapons have seen some use in attacking civilian populations and then turned into false-flag operations blamed on Russians.

**AK: Do you believe that this so far contained conflict can escalate and spread further into Europe, translating into a direct clash between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Russia? After all, Poland pushes the idea of NATO's “peacekeeping mission” to Ukraine.**

**PCR:** The conflict can spread, but there will be no NATO peacekeeping operation. Any NATO force that entered Ukraine would be destroyed. The Russians are not there to conquer Ukraine and have no troops in western Ukraine. In the event Ukraine was able to raise another army in the western Ukraine and attack the Russians in the Donbas area, the war could widen, but this is unlikely.

The danger of a wider war comes from the push by the US/NATO to add Finland and Sweden to NATO and by the placement of a US missile base in Slovakia. The Russians have said that they will not tolerate nearby missile bases, and this includes the existing bases in Romania and Poland.

It is extremely and dangerously provocative for Washington to put its missiles in Slovakia and add more countries to NATO. It amounts to totally ignoring definite warnings by the Kremlin. With Russia's back to the wall, the fate of those missile bases is likely to be destruction, with Russia's nuclear forces on full alert to discourage any NATO response.

**AK: It looks that Washington is determined to “punish” Moscow for its decision to invade Ukraine, even at the expense of its citizens. While President Joe Biden struggles with materializing the “Build Back Better” plan, large sums of money have been allocated for Ukraine by the US and its international financial institutions the IMF and World Bank. Can you expand on that?**

**PCR:** The effect of the sanctions will fall mainly on Europeans, but this is of no concern to the US and its puppet states. Washington's concern is to preserve its empire from erosion due to European dependency on Russian energy and minerals. The costs imposed on Western peoples are just the cost of the kind of war that Washington is conducting. Western people are paying for the war with falling living standards instead of with their lives.

**AK: How do you perceive the European Union's decision to ditch Russian energy and look for other suppliers like the US? How feasible is this plan, and, most important, does it serve Europe's interest?**

**PCR:** It is not feasible. Where does the energy come from and at what expense is it delivered and distributed? What Washington wants to do is to kick Russia out of Europe. The cost will largely fall on others.

**AK: Can you tell us a bit more about the short- and long-term social and economic outcomes of the Russian sanctions? Will they serve its declared purpose of destroying Moscow's economy, or on the contrary, they will hurt the West in a more profound manner? If the latter is the case, what is the purpose of these sanctions?**

**PCR:** The purpose of the sanctions is to separate Europe from Russia. For Russia the sanctions are a godsend. The withdrawn Western companies create import substitution opportunities for Russian companies to take their place. That eliminates foreign companies taking the profits out of Russia, and it eliminates the ability of the West to destabilize the ruble by pulling capital out of the country.

The only countries that need foreign capital are those without natural-resource endowments and scientific and technical knowhow. Russia has everything necessary for self-sufficiency, which is by far the best situation for any country. The US formerly was self-sufficient until it moved its industry to Asia.

**AK: Bearing in mind Russia's broad web of international trade contacts with countries like China, India, Brazil etc, is it possible to unplug Moscow from the world economically and financially ?**

**PCR:** Washington's aim is to unplug Europe from Russia. Washington has no ability to unplug Russia from the world.

**AK: Russia hasn't yet retaliated against the imposed sanctions. What could be Moscow's possible response, and how would it affect people in Europe, the US, and the rest of the world?**

**PCR:** The Kremlin could have achieved its goal in Ukraine simply by turning off the [supply of] energy and minerals to Europe. Germany, dependent on Russia for half of its energy, would likely have demanded accommodation of Russia's security concerns.

However, the Kremlin lacked the wits to use this power, because Russia has an incompetent central-bank director who thinks, erroneously, that Russian economic development depends on earning foreign exchange to finance development. In other words, the central-bank director thinks Russia is a Third World country that can't do for itself.

As far as I can tell Russia continues to supply Germany with energy despite the weapons Germany has sent to Ukraine and the many other policies against Russia that Germany supports. I see this as mindless behavior on the part of Russia. My assumption is that Russia is not sufficiently troubled by the sanctions to bother to apply hard counter-sanctions.

**AK: Have we reached the point of no return, or is there still any chance to bring our relations with Russia back from the brink?**

**PCR:** Who is “we”? The West intentionally ruined its relations with Russia. That is the plan. Exclude Russia from Europe. Surround Russia with missiles that can reach Moscow in four minutes to constrain Russia from constraining US hegemony. The grave danger in the West's policy is that increasingly reckless provocations of Russia will result in nuclear war.