

Anglo-American war hawks push showdown with Russia

By Rachel Douglas

On 2 January 2022 the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (the P5) greeted the New Year with a promising, but stark joint statement. All five of these nations—China, France, Russia, the UK and the USA—are nuclear-weapons powers. They proclaimed:

“We affirm that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. As nuclear use would have far-reaching consequences, we also affirm that nuclear weapons—for as long as they continue to exist—should serve defensive purposes, deter aggression, and prevent war. We believe strongly that the further spread of such weapons must be prevented. ...

“We intend to continue seeking bilateral and multilateral diplomatic approaches to avoid military confrontations, strengthen stability and predictability, increase mutual understanding and confidence, and prevent an arms race that would benefit none and endanger all. We are resolved to pursue constructive dialogue with mutual respect and acknowledgment of each other’s security interests and concerns.”¹

The language about the unacceptability of ever fighting nuclear war originated with US President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachov in 1985, and was used again in a Joint Statement on Strategic Stability, issued by Presidents Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin after their first summit in June 2021. Russian and Chinese diplomats stated that they have been pushing for its reiteration by the P5 in negotiations over two years. That timeline takes the origin of the declaration back to January 2020, when Putin called for a P5 summit to address the world’s major problems. The pandemic and American political turmoil in 2020 prevented that meeting from taking place around the September 2020 annual UN session, but preparations quietly went forward for declarations and policies it might agree on.

Individual diplomats, especially from China and Russia, voiced hope that the P5 would grapple not only with war-prevention, but also other common problems of mankind. For example Prof. Georgi Toloraya, head of the Russian National Committee for BRICS Research, suggested in November 2020 that a joint summit of the P5 and BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) could convene to address the pandemic and launch the kind of cooperation needed on other pressing world problems.² The need for such cooperation is more urgent than ever, as the world witnesses a looming famine of Biblical proportions in Afghanistan and many economic disruptions from the pandemic and pre-existing economic policies.

But the new P5 statement is, above all, welcome in its immediate context: a blistering surge at the end of 2021 of military-strategic tensions and the danger of a large-scale, even nuclear war. This article, the background history that follows it (pp. 9-13) and our Washington Insider (p. 14) report the most important events of this crisis, since the last issue of the AAS on 15 December.

Sen. Roger Wicker, the second-ranking Republican on the US Senate Armed Services Committee, in a 7 December Fox

News interview volunteered the following scenario for action against Russia: “Military action could mean that we stand off with our ships in the Black Sea, and we rain destruction on Russian military capability. ... It could mean that we participate, and I would not rule that out, I would not rule out American troops on the ground [in Ukraine]. *We don’t rule out first use nuclear action.*” (Emphasis added.)

The pretext for such a threat was an allegedly imminent Russian invasion of Ukraine (on which more below). But Russian officials, speaking on various occasions throughout December, posed the showdown more broadly: the “red line” about which Putin has talked many times has been reached. The approach of “threatening weapons systems” to Russia’s borders has come too close and shows no sign of abating.

“Unfortunately, we see that our warnings are ignored and NATO’s military infrastructure is getting as close to us as possible”, said Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov at the Russian Parliament on 9 December. “That’s why Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered our diplomats to seek long-term security guarantees for Russia’s western borders—and they should be based on law and be legally binding. The point is to rule out any further NATO expansion eastward and the deployment of threatening weapons systems in close proximity to Russian territory. We aren’t giving up on this issue and will insist that our demands are met.”

On 13 December Ryabkov warned that if these demands were not taken seriously, Russia would be forced to deploy intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe, in response to its conviction that NATO will soon do the same in Ukraine. “It will be a confrontation, this will be the next round, the appearance of such resources on our side” he told RIA Novosti news agency. Ryabkov cited “indirect indications” that NATO was closing in on re-deployment of intermediate-range missile nukes for the first time since the 1980s, including NATO’s restoration in November of the 56th Artillery Command, which operated nuclear-capable Pershing missiles in Europe during the Cold War.

Following a phone call between Biden and Putin on 7 December, Ryabkov on 15 December handed to State Department official Karen Donfried two draft treaties that would formalise such guarantees (p. 9, Note 1 provides links to the texts). They are the subject of the Russian American talks beginning 10 January (see Washington Insider, p. 14).

Alexander Grushko, another deputy foreign minister and Russia’s former permanent representative to NATO, said on the 18 December Solovyov Live program via YouTube, “The moment of truth has come. ... We have reached a red line and our proposals aim to pull us away from this red line and start a normal dialogue”. If NATO turns down Russia’s proposals for mutual security guarantees, however, “We will also move over to creating counter threats, but it will then be too late to ask us why we made these decisions and why we deployed these systems.” He said that NATO has been living in a fantasy world, with its continual talk about a threat from the East, and urged that Europeans must think about whether they mean to turn the continent into a field of military confrontation.

Putin speaks

Not only diplomats from the Foreign Ministry, but top military brass and Putin himself spoke bluntly last month.

1. “[Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapon States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races](#)”, online at [whitehouse.gov](https://www.whitehouse.gov).

2. “BRICS helps forge new paradigm for world in crisis”, AAS, 11 Nov. 2020.



Russian military leaders Gen. Sergei Shoygu and Gen. Valery Gerasimov with President Putin (centre) at an expanded 21 Dec. Defence Ministry Board meeting. Photo: Kremlin

Gen. Valery Gerasimov, chief of the Russian Defence Ministry's General Staff, detailed to foreign military

attachés in Moscow on 9 December the drastic increase of NATO activity near Russia's borders in recent years, increased strategic aircraft flights along the borders, and an upsurge of US Navy activity on the Black Sea.

On 21 December Putin presided over an expanded meeting of the Defence Ministry Board, during which he reported on the strategic situation facing Russia. He particularly warned against the NATO exercises and the further development of NATO infrastructure, including missile defences, near Russia's borders. "If this infrastructure continues to move forward, and if US and NATO missile systems are deployed in Ukraine, their flight time to Moscow will be only 7 to 10 minutes, or even five minutes for hypersonic systems. This is a huge challenge for us, for our security", said Putin.

The reason for Russia's demanding legally binding guarantees, Putin explained, is that the United States has reneged on verbal assurances for three decades. He reviewed this history (related in greater detail, beginning on p. 9) as follows: "Take the recent past, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when we were told that our concerns about NATO's potential expansion eastwards were absolutely groundless. And then we saw five waves of the bloc's eastward expansion. Do you remember how it happened? ... It happened at a time when Russia's relations with the United States and main member states of NATO were cloudless, if not completely allied. I have already said this in public and will remind you of this again: American specialists were permanently present at the nuclear arms facilities of the Russian Federation. They went to their office there every day, had desks and an American flag. Wasn't this enough? What else is required? US advisors worked in the Russian government—career CIA officers, [who] gave their advice. What else did they want? What was the point of supporting separatism in the North Caucasus, with the help of even ISIS—well, if not ISIS, there were other terrorist groups. They obviously supported terrorists. What for? What was the point of expanding NATO and withdrawing from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty?"

In a 13 December phone call with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Putin said that that NATO was directly threatening Russia with potential war by expanding military activity in Ukraine.

What about Ukraine?

From a superficial look, without any sources but the major Anglo-American media, one would think that the only cause for the hot exchanges of words reported above were an impending "Russian invasion" of Ukraine. A frenzy over that scenario was touched off on 3 December, when the *Washington Post* breathlessly reported that US intelligence had discovered a Kremlin plan for a multi-front offensive into Ukraine in early 2022. The alleged plan would involve "100 battalion tactical groups with an estimated 175,000 personnel, along with armour, artillery and equipment."

As we reported last month, however, there were serious signs in November that a mega-provocation by the Kiev government is possible. This might be an attempt to retake the

Donbass region in eastern Ukraine, which declared independence in 2014 (see "Ukraine" section of the next article) by force. President Volodymyr Zelensky, whose popularity has sunk through the floor under worsening economic conditions and continued civil strife around the Donbass, talked in ever more militant terms about "taking back" the region, and even Crimea.

Russian Defence Minister Gen. Sergei Shoygu, at the same 21 December Defence Ministry Board meeting Putin addressed, suggested that a specific type of provocation could be in the works: a chemical weapons attack that would be blamed on Russia or the anti-Kiev Donbass militias. He claimed that American private military companies were stockpiling "reservoirs of an unknown substance" near the Donbass border with the rest of Ukraine, possibly "preparing the way for Ukrainian Special Ops forces and armed units of radicals".

Shoygu's report was immediately pooh-poohed in Western media as grasping for an excuse to "invade" Ukraine, but anyone familiar with the faked chemical weapons attacks used by the UK-based White Helmets group for provocations in Syria knows not to dismiss such a possibility. If a chemical provocation occurred as part of a Ukrainian offensive into the Donbass or Crimea, then it is by no means excluded that Russian troops would deploy in response. In that context, some Russian commentators have called the buildup of Russia's forces on its side of the border a deterrent action against such an adventure by Kiev.

For US Secretary of State Blinken and UK Foreign Secretary Truss, the only reason for Russia's troop movements on its own territory is to "invade Ukraine". Their posture is that Russia must "de-escalate" *vis a vis* Ukraine, before any progress is made in talks on the overall security concerns Russia has raised.

Blinken has brandished dire economic warfare threats against Russia, in the event of an "invasion". "There would be high impact economic consequences", Blinken told Euronews on 4 December. On 6 December, the day before the Biden-Putin video conference, an anonymous senior White House official briefed the press that all NATO allies had agreed on a package of "financial sanctions that would impose significant and severe economic harm on the Russian economy" should Russia invade Ukraine. CNN elaborated, "Officials have also been weighing disconnecting Russia from the SWIFT international payment system, upon which Russia remains heavily reliant".

Against the backdrop of such threats, Putin on 15 December held a virtual summit with President Xi Jinping of China, discussing "the development of Russian-Chinese comprehensive strategic partnership". Putin's foreign policy aide Yuri Ushakov briefed the press that the two Presidents paid special attention to "the need to intensify efforts to form an independent financial infrastructure to service trade operations between Russia and China. We mean creating an infrastructure that cannot be influenced by third countries".

A new hot spot of concern to both China and Russia emerged in the first week of January when Kazakhstan, the large country in the middle of Eurasia, was swept by violent demonstrations that forced the government to resign. There are signs of an attempted Western-backed "colour revolution" to push Kazakhstan out of its economic cooperation with both its big neighbours, but there also are other factors in the crisis, on which we will report in a future issue. For now, it is important to know that the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation has sent troops to Kazakhstan at President Tokayev's request—the first live deployment of the CSTO in any of its member states.