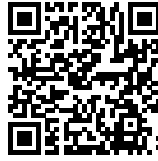




AS THE FOG OF WAR LIFTS...

Posted on March 1, 2023 by Éric Denécé



In late July 2022, [when speaking](#) on the matter of how, in time of war, information is “massaged,” I noted that producing a fine-tuned analysis of the conflict in the Ukraine was no easy thing, whether in ascertaining the true reasons for the conflict, or formally identifying the perpetrators of war-crimes; in my experience as an (ex-) intelligence analyst, whatever facts the mass-media and most observers report in real-time are invariably lacunary, slap-dash or slanted; as adversaries up the ante on disinformation, truthful explanations appear only once the conflict draws to an end—and sometimes never.

One finds this illustrated today as new facts—generally invisible to analysts in real-time, although, it may well be, visible to some amongst the belligerents—come to our knowledge little by little, a full year after the outbreak of this deplorable struggle.

Now, even where credible sources, partly borne out by other evidence, are to hand, caution will always be in order. That said, the latest revelations strike us as sufficiently solid to be taken seriously. On that basis, a fresh view of events appears, making sense of facts and decisions, the logic of which was not, up to that point in time, fully clear.

What has served to substantially alter one's view, are these two revelations:

- a series of statements by former Israeli PM Naftali Bennett, by Professor [Jeffrey Sachs](#) and by the [Turkish mediators](#) , all of which are congruent: in late March 2022, the Ukrainian Government was on the verge of signing an agreement with Russia that would have ended the conflict;
- Seymour Hersh's [piece setting out](#) the US *modus operandi* for the attack on Nord Stream 1 and 2, and the German Prosecutor's conclusions from the enquiry into the matter.

Disrupted Negotiations

Further to Israeli initiatives, negotiations began in March 2022, shortly after the Russian offensive against the Ukraine. In a [lengthy interview](#) to *Channel 12* on 4th February 2023 , Naftali Bennett [revealed many details](#) of the goings-on during mediation. .

Bennett explained that both Moscow and Kiev had been inclined to make major concessions and that a truce had seemed feasible: "I would suggest that there was a good chance of reaching a cease-fire," he said, adding that President Putin was disposed to drop the demand that the Ukraine be denazified and disarmed, while President Zelensky would refrain from all further attempt to join NATO. Whilst meeting with Vladimir Putin, Bennett asked him whether he planned to have Zelensky assassinated, and Putin undertook not to do so.

"Everything I did was coordinated with the USA, Germany and France," said Bennett. Before involving himself in negotiations, he had spoken with President Biden, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, National Security advisor Jake Sullivan and with Chancellor Scholz and proposed to act as a channel between the two warring Presidents.

Bennett added that Israel's role was "coordinated with the USA, France and Germany right down to fine detail" ; it was those nations which actually took the final decisions, and which decided, he says, to have the talks broken off. It was they which blocked the process, whereas, Bennett had "the impression that both hoped for a cease-fire."

The above statements are of special significance, revealing as they do, that President Zelensky lacked all decisional powers, that he bowed to the West, which was dealing his hand of cards, and that it was actually the West which objected to the signing of a cease fire agreement. Here, my sole reservation, is that Bennett would appear to assign France and Germany greater importance than they likely wield in a conflict , where all momentum and directives come from the USA.

Now, the British did play a role in the decision. [According to Bennett](#), "Boris Johnson wanted more radical measures, while Macron and Scholz were more pragmatic. Biden supported both approaches. " At the end of the day, he says, they opted for the radical, British, position.

And so, there was no exit-strategy reached, says Bennett, the West having decided to "keep on slugging away at Putin" and bin the negotiations, while conveying the appropriate message to other "rogue States" such as China, purportedly ogling Taiwan.

Israel is not alone in having attempted to mediate; Turkey too made a stab at keeping the lines of dialogue open between Moscow and Kiev. Although the latter negotiations [got off to a rocky start](#), here again, success may not have been not far off.

On March 20, 2022, the Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu stated that the two belligerents were "close to reaching an agreement," while the Presidency's spokesman [Ibrahim Kalin, reported](#) that six points were being negotiated: Ukrainian neutrality, disarmament and denazification, security, right to freely use the Russian language in the Ukraine, status of the Donbass and Crimea.

On [March 29th](#) the Russian and Ukrainian delegations met for a further round of talks at Istanbul, [described as](#) "significant" by the Kremlin.

That same day, Alexander Fomin, Russian Vice-Minister of Defence, announced that as of April 1st, his country's armed forces would withdraw from the Kiev area and from Northern Ukraine, a move Moscow presented as a sign of good will. Again, that very day, though acknowledging "positive signals," President Zelensky stated that the Ukraine's military effort would nevertheless [not be slackening](#).

On March 30th, notwithstanding the Western bloc's reservations, the Ukraine's [chief negotiator opined](#) that the prerequisites were in place for a Putin/Zelensky summit.

The Ukraine's status would be that of neutrality, in exchange for security guarantees, which proposal seems to have met with Moscow's approval; a cut-back in Russian activity around Kiev was confirmed. But on the evening of March 30th, the wind suddenly shifted, as the Russian President's spokesman [Dmitri Peskov announced](#) that "[no progress had been made](#)," without, however, it being clear at the time which party was behind the impasse.

Very recently, Professor Jeffrey Sachs [has pointed](#) to the critical role played by President Biden and the tiny neocon clique around him (essentially Under-Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, Jake Sullivan and Anthony Blinken) in making a decision which would bring down such heavy consequences upon the Ukrainian people.

Professor Sachs stated that Russians and Ukrainians had worked out the seventh or eighth version of a final document to be signed by both parties, when out of the blue, Zelensky about-faced, and

negotiations were broken off. According to Professor Sachs, it was President [Biden's trip to Europe](#) on March 23rd, in the course of which [he attended three summits](#) (NATO, G7, EU) before travelling on to Poland on March 26th, which torpedoed the negotiations and explains Zelensky's about-face.

At Warsaw, President Biden took a hard-line against Russia, portraying President Putin [as a "butcher,"](#) and stating that Putin could not be allowed to [remain in power](#). American support for the Ukraine would, he said, be steadfast.

At that point, it must have become clear to Russia that the West would not allow her to enjoy a victory then within her grasp, but would rather dig in its heels for a long war—a war that had not, perhaps, been part of the original game-plan. Is that why Russia withdrew from Northern Ukraine and redeployed to the Donbass, or was it really a good-will gesture to further the talks? Unclear. However, once the West had frozen the Russo-Ukrainian talks held under Israeli and Turkish auspices, all dialogue ceased when Kiev charged Moscow—rightly or wrongly—with the crimes at Bucha. .

Nord Stream Sabotaged

Indisputably, Seymour Hersh, who was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1970, is top of the totem pole when it comes to US investigative journalism. Having uncovered major scandals over a long career, from the killings at [Mỹ Lai](#) in 1968, to the actual *modus operandi* employed in ["liquidating" Bin Laden](#), or the true motives for the war in Syria, Hersh has always enjoyed great respect from his colleagues in journalism, and from the political class. Seymour Hersh's sources have invariably been players in the know, whether at the hard core of a conflict or directly involved in decision-making; serious, well-documented, he is not given to wild conjecture.

Accordingly, [his recent article](#) on Nord Stream repays close scrutiny. Blow by blow, Hersh describes how the CIA, aided by Norway undertook to sabotage Nord Stream 1 and 2. .

In June 2022, piggy-backing a NATO naval exercise in the Baltic Sea, Norwegian divers placed onto the pipelines, explosives to be remotely detonated. Three months later, on 26th September, a Norwegian patrol aircraft set off the explosion via acoustic buoy.

According to Seymour Hersh, the decision to sabotage Nord Stream was taken in secret by President

Biden and his circle, without consulting Congress and in order to prevent Moscow from selling billions of dollars' worth of natural gas to Europe.

It goes without saying that the US authorities have criticised Hersh's piece, and vehemently. To the NSC's spokesman, Miss Adrienne Watson, it's complete "fiction." and to the CIA, completely and utterly false. As for the Norwegian Foreign Minister, well, "these allegations are false." What might one expect, from those sources? . However, such denial is scarcely persuasive, Hersh's article being both precise and plausible. Who but those at Washington would have cared to sabotage Nord Stream? In the interval, a German Prosecutor has come forward to state that no evidence has turned up implicating Russia in the sabotage.

"And Immediately There Fell from his Eyes as It had been Scales"

Assuming, as we now believe to be the case, that Hersh's information does indeed correspond to reality, it sheds fresh light not only upon the past, but upon the respective responsibility of the players in this conflict.

Allow us then to put forward the following hypotheses, that remain either to be confirmed—or overturned.

- From the standpoint of the initial objective, namely to get Kiev to call off the dogs, the SMO was in fact succeeding. Despite certain geographically-limited setbacks and relatively significant casualties, the first five weeks of the SMO may be viewed as a success: the Ukrainians were brought to the negotiating table, and talks very nearly came to a felicitous end. That state of affairs tallies only faintly with the view defended by Western experts and journalists, who from the outset announced that the SMO was failing. And then there were those - notably in Poland - who attempted to persuade us that the Ukraine was under full-scale invasion, and that Western Europe would be next on Russia's chopping block.
- In late March 2022, with President Biden's trip to Europe, it all went bottom-up. The West, i.e., the US and the UK, got Zelensky to press on with a war that would otherwise have rapidly ground to a halt. Admittedly, a halt on Russia's conditions, which then involved only neutral status for the Ukraine, plus her claim on the Donbass and Crimea. At the time, Kharkov, Kherson and

Zaporozhye were not at issue—that is, until the Ukrainian side changed tack.

- Beyond all shadow of doubt, all the above lays responsibility for the continued prosecution of this war squarely at the USA's door, with the Zelensky Government acting both as pawn and accomplice. In cosying up to their string-pullers in the West, the so-called "Heroes" of Kiev, backed by its regime's ultranationalist fringe, entertain no qualms as the Ukraine's people and all her prospects evaporate.
- Since April 2022, therefore, we are dealing with a war between Russia and the USA, with the Ukraine used as a plaything; the USA stokes the fires of war, vainly striving to bring down Russia. As for the European states, here they go and sing along with Mitch, whether by Russophobia, bleating herd-instinct or sheer, gob-smacking stupidity.
- Here we have yet another example of the milquetoast, or if you prefer, Nothing-Burger role played by the Europeans, cravenly smoothing Washington's path whilst strewing our own with thorns. Despite her President's wild-eyed posturing, France is just a bit player in the crisis: it's on Germany that the boom has been lowered. With the destruction of Nord Stream, an Act of War has been perpetrated against Germany, an Act of War at the hands of her purported ally and protector.

Notwithstanding the dire effects on her economy, neither her government, nor her MPs, mass-media nor even her people, have jumped to their feet to fight back. Germany, virtually writhing and crawling before Washington. Bull's Eye for Washington! Finally, Germany has been cut off from Russia, nor will the two States now be reconciled. A side-benefit, is that as her economic might in the West dwindles, Germany's influence too in Europe will fade.

"The Best Laid Schemes o' Mice an' Men /Gang Aft A-gley?"

All this serves to substantially alter one's view of the conflict and of those responsible. A trap, twofold and Machiavellian, has been set for Russia by the US Neo-Cons:

- turn the screws on the Donbass to a degree, that Russia would have no option but to intervene militarily ; cast aspersion on her throughout the world, and cut her off from Western Europe;

- head off a Russian victory that would otherwise have been attendant on her initial military success, and drag her into a protracted war, so as to leach out her substance for the long haul.

By rejecting a negotiated settlement that would have favoured Russia in March 2022, the USA both intensified and protracted the struggle.

That said, events have taken a turn the USA would never have predicted, certain as it was that Russia's economy would crumble. That never happened, neither has the Russian army been defeated in the Ukraine, nor has Russia been shut up and shut out by the rest of the world. "Awfuller still" from the US standpoint, before our eyes there arises a new economic and financial system, one which will undermine US political and monetary hegemony.

Yet again, the USA has displayed to the world its strategists' scant worth - save perhaps as sorcerer's apprentice. Their scheming to bring down Russia has mutated into an existential war, as they lash and flail to keep a stranglehold on the world.

The best laid schemes o' mice an' men, Gang aft a-gley?"

Eric Denécé, PhD (Sorbonne), is the Director and Founder of the French Centre for Intelligence Studies (CF2R). He has lectured on intelligence for the Ecole Nationale d'Administration, the National Defence College, the Air Force College and the Military School for Overseas and Foreign Assignments. His publications include 29 books, more than 200 articles and 40 research projects in Geopolitics, Intelligence and on Special Forces, for which he was awarded the 2009 Akropolis Prize (Institute for Homeland Security Studies) and the 1996 Foundation for Defence Studies' Prize. He is widely consulted by French and international media on terrorism and intelligence issues. This article appears through the kind courtesy of CF2R and is translated by Mendelssohn Moses.

Featured: A detail from the cyclorama, *The Battle of Stalingrad*, in the Museum of the Battle of

Stalingrad, Volgograd. The cyclorama was begun in 1980 and completed in 1982. The paintings are the work of Marat Ivanovich Samsonov, Nikolai Yakovlevich, Victor Konstantinovich Dmitrievsky, Peter Ivanovich Zhigimont, Pyotr Maltsev, Georgy Ivanovich Marchenko, and Fyodor Pavlovich Usypenko, all painters from the Moscow military painters of the studio of Mitrofan Borisovich Grekov.

