OUR INTERVIEW WITH JACQUES BAUD

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In this penetrating interview, Jacques Baud delves into geopolitics to help us better understand what is actually taking place in the Ukraine, in that it is ultimately the larger struggle for global dominance, led by the United States, NATO and the political leaders of the West and against Russia.

As always, Colonel Baud brings to bear his well-informed analysis, which is unique for its depth and gravity. We are sure that you will find this conservation informative, insightful and crucial in connecting the dots.

The Postil (TP): We are so very pleased to have you join us for this conversation. Would you please tell us a little about yourself, about your background?

Jacques Baud (JB): Thank you for inviting me! As to my education, I have a master's degree in Econometrics and postgraduate diplomas in International Relations and in International Security from the Graduate Institute for International relations in Geneva (Switzerland). I worked as strategic intelligence officer in the Swiss Department of Defense, and was in charge of the Warsaw Pact armed forces, including those deployed abroad (such as Afghanistan, Cuba, Angola, etc.) I attended intelligence training in the UK and in the US. Just after the end of the Cold War, I headed for a few years a unit in the Swiss Defense Research and Procurement Agency. During the Rwanda War, because of my military and intelligence background, I was sent to the Democratic Republic of Congo as security adviser to prevent ethnic cleansing in the Rwandan refugee camps.

During my time in the intelligence service, I was in touch with the Afghan resistance movement of Ahmed Shah Masood, and I wrote a small handbook to help Afghans in demining and neutralizing Soviet bomblets. In the mid-1990, the struggle against antipersonnel mines became a foreign policy priority of Switzerland. I proposed to create a center that would collect information about landmines and demining technologies for the UN. This led to the creation of the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining in Geneva. I was later offered to head the Policy and Doctrine Unit of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations. After two years in New York, I went to Nairobi to perform a similar job for the African Union.

Jacques Baud, Darfour.

Then I was assigned to NATO to counter the proliferation of small arms. Switzerland is not a member of the Alliance, but this particular position had been negotiated as a Swiss contribution to the Partnership for Peace with NATO. In 2014, as the Ukraine crisis unfolded, I monitored the flow of small arms in the Donbass. Later, in the same year I was involved in a NATO program to assist the Ukrainian armed forces in restoring their capacities and improving personnel management, with the aim of restoring trust in them.

TP: You have written two insightful articles about the current conflict in the Ukraine, which we had the great privilege to translate and publish (here and here). Was there a particular event or an instance which led you to formulate this much-needed perspective?

JB: As a strategic intelligence officer, I always advocated providing to the political or military decision-makers the most accurate and the most objective intelligence. This is the kind of job where you need to keep you prejudice and your feelings to yourself, in order to come up with an intelligence that reflects as much as possible the reality on the ground rather than your own emotions or beliefs. I also assume that in a modern democratic State decision must be fact-based. This is the difference with autocratic political systems where decision-making is ideology-based (such as in the Marxist States) or religion-based (such as in the French pre-revolutionary monarchy).

Jacques Baud with the New Sudan Brigade.

Thanks to my various assignments, I was able to have an insider view in most recent conflicts (such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Sudan, Syria and, of course, Ukraine). The main common aspect between all these conflicts is that we tend to have a totally distorted understanding of them. We do not understand our enemies, their rationale, their way of thinking and their real objectives. Hence, we are not even able to articulate sound strategies to fight them. This is especially true with Russia. Most people, including the top brass, tend to confuse "Russia" and "USSR." As I was in NATO, I could hardly find someone who could explain what Russia's vision of the world is or even its political doctrine. Lot of people think Vladimir Putin is a communist. We like to call him a "dictator," but we have a hard time to explain what we mean by that. As examples, people come up invariably with the assassination of such and such

journalist or former FSB or GRU agents, although evidence is extremely debatable. In other words, even if it is true, we are not able to articulate exactly the nature of the problem. As a result, we tend to portray the enemy as we wished him to be, rather than as he actually is. This is the ultimate recipe for failure. This explains why, after five years spent within NATO, I am more concerned about Western strategic and military capabilities than before.

Jacques Baud.

In 2014, during the Maidan revolution in Kiev, I was in NATO in Brussels. I noticed that people didn't

assess the situation as it was, but as they wished it would be. This is exactly what Sun Tzu describes as the first step towards failure. In fact, it appeared clear to me that nobody in NATO had the slightest interest in Ukraine. The main goal was to destabilize Russia.

TP: How do you perceive Volodymyr Zelensky? Who is he, really? What is his role in this conflict? It seems he wants to have a "forever war," since he must know he cannot win? Why does he want to prolong this conflict?

JB: Volodymyr Zelensky was elected on the promise he would make peace with Russia, which I think is a noble objective. The problem is that no Western country, nor the European Union managed to help him realize this objective. After the Maidan revolution, the emerging force in the political landscape was the far-right movement. I do not like to call it "neo-Nazi" because "Nazism" was a clearly defined political doctrine, while in Ukraine, we are talking about a variety of movements that combine all the features of Nazism (such as antisemitism, extreme nationalism, violence, etc.), without being unified into a single doctrine. They are more like a gathering of fanatics.

After 2014, Ukrainian armed forces' command & control was extremely poor and was the cause of their inability to handle the rebellion in Donbass. Suicide, alcohol incidents, and murder surged, pushing young soldiers to defect. Even the British government noted that young male individuals preferred to emigrate rather than to join the armed forces. As a result, Ukraine started to recruit volunteers to enforce Kiev's authority in the Russian speaking part of the country. These volunteers ere (and still are) recruited among European far-right extremists. According to Reuters, their number amounts to 102,000. They have become a sizeable and influential political force in the country.

The problem here is that these far-right fanatics threatened to kill Zelensky were he to try to make peace with Russia. As a result, Zelensky found himself sitting between his promises and the violent opposition of an increasingly powerful far-right movement. In May 2019, on the Ukrainian media Obozrevatel, Dmytro Yarosh, head of the "Pravy Sektor" militia and adviser to the Army Commander in Chief, openly threatened Zelensky with death, if he came to an agreement with Russia. In other words, Zelensky appears to be blackmailed by forces he is probably not in full control of.

In October 2021, the *Jerusalem Post* published a disturbing report on the training of Ukrainian far-right militias by American, British, French and Canadian armed forces. The problem is that the "collective West" tends to turn a blind eye to these incestuous and perverse relationships in order to achieve its

own geopolitical goals. It is supported by unscrupulous far-right biased medias against Israel, which tend to approve the criminal behavior of these militias. This situation has repeatedly raised Israel's concerns. This explains why Zelensky's demands to the Israeli parliament in March 2022 were not well received and have not been successful.

So, despite his probable willingness to achieve a political settlement for the crisis with Russia, Zelensky is not allowed to do so. Just after he indicated his readiness to talk with Russia, on 25 February, the European Union decided two days later to provide €450M in arms to Ukraine. The same happened in March. As soon as Zelensky indicated he wanted to have talks with Vladimir Putin on 21 March, the European Union decided to double its military aid to €1 billion on 23 March. End of March, Zelensky made an interesting offer that was retracted shortly after.

Apparently, Zelensky is trying to navigate between Western pressure and his far right on the one hand and his concern to find a solution on the other, and is forced into a " back-and-forth," which discourages the Russian negotiators.

In fact, I think Zelensky is in an extreme uncomfortable position, which reminds me of Soviet Marshal Konstantin Rokossovsky's during WWII. Rokossovsky had been imprisoned in 1937 for treason and sentenced to death by Stalin. In 1941, he got out of prison on Stalin's orders and was given a command. He was eventually promoted to Marshall of the Soviet Union in 1944, but his death sentence was not lifted until 1956.

Today, Zelensky must lead his country under the sword of Damocles, with the blessing of Western politicians and unethical media. His lack of political experience made him an easy prey for those who were trying to exploit Ukraine against Russia, and in the hands of extreme right-wing movements. As he acknowledges in an interview with CNN, he was obviously lured into believing that Ukraine would enter NATO more easily after an open conflict with Russia, as Oleksey Arestovich, his adviser, confirmed in 2019.

TP: What do you think will be the fate of the Ukraine? Will it be like all the other experiments in “spreading democracy” (Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, etc.)? Or is Ukraine a special case?

JB: I have definitely no crystal ball… At this stage, we can only guess what Vladimir Putin wants. He

probably wants to achieve two main goals. The first one is to secure the situation of the Russian-speaking minority in Ukraine. How, remains an open question. Does he want to re-create the "Novorossiya" that tried to emerge from the 2014 unrests? This "entity" that never really existed, and it consisted of the short-lived Republics of Odessa, Donetsk, Dnepropetrovsk, Kharkov and Lugansk, of which only the Republics of Donetsk and Lugansk "survived." The autonomy referendum planned for early May in the city of Kherson might be an indication for this option. Another option would be to negotiate an autonomous status for these areas, and to return them to Ukraine in exchange of its neutrality.
The second goal is to have a neutral Ukraine (some will say a "Finlandized Ukraine"). That is—without NATO. It could be some kind of Swiss "armed neutrality." As you know, in the early 19th century, Switzerland had a neutral status imposed on it by the European powers, as well as the obligation to prevent any misuse of its territory against one of these powers. This explains the strong military tradition we have in Switzerland and the main rationale for its armed forces today. Something similar could probably be considered for Ukraine.

An internationally recognized neutral status would grant Ukraine a high degree of security. This status prevented Switzerland from being attacked during the two world wars. The often-mentioned example of Belgium is misleading, because during both world wars, its neutrality was declared unilaterally and was not recognized by the belligerents. In the case of Ukraine, it would have its own armed forces, but would be free from any foreign military presence: neither NATO, nor Russia. This is just my guess, and I have no clue about how this could be feasible and accepted in the current polarized international climate.

I am not sure about the so-called "color-revolutions" aim at spreading democracy. My take is that it is just a way to weaponize human rights, the rule of law or democracy in order to achieve geo-strategic objectives. In fact, this was clearly spelled out in a memo to Rex Tillerson, Donald Trump's Secretary of State, in 2017. Ukraine is a case in point. After 2014, despite Western influence, it has never been a democracy: corruption soared between 2014 and 2020; in 2021, it banned opposition media and jailed the leader of the main parliamentary opposition party. As some international organizations have reported, torture is a common practice, and opposition leaders as well as journalists are chased by the Ukrainian Security Service.

TP: Why is the West only interested in drawing a simplistic image of the Ukraine conflict? That of "good guys" and the "bad guys?" Is the Western public really now that dumbed down?

JB: I think this is inherent to any conflict. Each side tends to portray itself as the "good guy." This is obviously the main reason.

Besides this, other factors come into play. First, most people, including politicians and journalists, still confuse Russia and the USSR. For instance, they don't understand why the communist party is the main opposition party in Russia.

Second, since 2007, Putin was systematically demonized in the West. Whether or not he is a "dictator" Is a matter of discussion; but it is worth noting that his approval rate in Russia never fell below 59 % in the last 20 years. I take my figures from the Levada Center, which is labeled as "foreign agent" in Russia, and hence doesn't reflect the Kremlin's views. It is also interesting to see that in France, some of the most influential so-called "experts" on Russia are in fact working for the British MI-6's "Integrity Initiative."

Third, in the West, there is a sense that you can do whatever you want if it is in the name of western values. This is why the Russian offensive in Ukraine is passionately sanctioned, while FUKUS (France, UK, US) wars get strong political support, even if they are notoriously based on lies. "Do what I say, not what I do!" One could ask what makes the conflict in Ukraine worse than other wars. In fact, each new sanction we apply to Russia highlights the sanctions we haven't applied earlier to the US, the UK or France.

The purpose of this incredible polarization is to prevent any dialogue or negotiation with Russia. We are back to what happened in 1914, just before the start of WWI…

TP: What will Russia gain or lose with this involvement in the Ukraine (which is likely to be long-term)? Russia is facing a conflict on "two fronts," it would seem: a military one and an economic one (with the endless sanctions and "canceling" of Russia).

JB: With the end of the Cold War, Russia expected being able to develop closer relations with its Western neighbors. It even considered joining NATO. But the US resisted every attempt of rapprochement. NATO structure does not allow for the coexistence of two nuclear superpowers. The US wanted to keep its supremacy.

Since 2002, the quality of the relations with Russia decayed slowly, but steadily. It reached a first negative “peak” in 2014 after the Maidan coup. The sanctions have become US and EU primary foreign policy tool. The Western narrative of a Russian intervention in Ukraine got traction, although it was never substantiated. Since 2014, I haven’t met any intelligence professional who could confirm any Russian military presence in the Donbass. In fact, Crimea became the main “evidence” of Russian “intervention.” Of course, Western historians ignore superbly that Crimea was separated from Ukraine by referendum in January 1991, six months before Ukrainian independence and under Soviet rule. In fact, it’s Ukraine that illegally annexed Crimea in 1995. Yet, western countries sanctioned Russia for that…

Since 2014 sanctions severely affected east-west relations. After the signature of the Minsk Agreements in September 2014 and February 2015, the West—namely France, Germany as guarantors for Ukraine, and the US—made no effort whatsoever to make Kiev comply, despite repeated requests from Moscow.

Russia’s perception is that whatever it will do, it will face an irrational response from the West. This is why, in February 2022, Vladimir Putin realized he would gain nothing in doing nothing. If you take into account his mounting approval rate in the country, the resilience of the Russian economy after the sanctions, the loss of trust in the US dollar, the threatening inflation in the West, the consolidation of the Moscow-Beijing axis with the support of India (which the US has failed to keep in the "Quad"), Putin’s calculation was unfortunately not wrong.

Regardless of what Russia does, US and western strategy is to weaken it. From that point on, Russia has no real stake in its relations with us. Again, the US objective is not to have a “better” Ukraine or a “better” Russia, but a weaker Russia. But it also shows that the United States is not able to rise higher than Russia and that the only way to overcome it is to weaken it. This should ring an alarm bell in our countries…

TP: You have written a very interesting book on Putin. Please tell us a little about it.

JB: In fact, I started my book in October 2021, after a show on French state TV about Vladimir Putin. I am definitely not an admirer of Vladimir Putin, nor of any Western leader, by the way. But the so-called experts had so little understanding of Russia, international security and even of simple plain facts, that I decided to write a book. Later, as the situation around Ukraine developed, I adjusted my approach to

cover this mounting conflict.
The idea was definitely not to relay Russian propaganda. In fact, my book is based exclusively on western sources, official reports, declassified intelligence reports, Ukrainian official medias, and reports provided by the Russian opposition. The approach was to demonstrate that we can have a sound and factual alternative understanding of the situation just with accessible information and without relying on what we call “Russian propaganda.”

The underlying thinking is that we can only achieve peace if we have a more balanced view of the situation. To achieve this, we have to go back to the facts. Now, these facts exist and are abundantly available and accessible. The problem is that some individuals make every effort to prevent this and tend to hide the facts that disturb them. This is exemplified by some so-called journalist who dubbed me “The spy who loved Putin!” This is the kind of “journalists” who live from stirring tensions and extremism. All figures and data provided by our media about the conflict come from Ukraine, and those coming from Russia are automatically dismissed as propaganda. My view is that both are propaganda. But as soon as you come up with western data that do not fit into the mainstream narrative, you have extremists claiming you “love Putin.”

Our media are so worried about finding rationality in Putin's actions that they turn a blind eye to the crimes committed by Ukraine, thus generating a feeling of impunity for which Ukrainians are paying the price. This is the case of the attack on civilians by a missile in Kramatorsk—we no longer talk about it because the responsibility of Ukraine is very likely, but this means that the Ukrainians could do it again with impunity.

On the contrary, my book aims at reducing the current hysteria that prevent any political solution. I do not want to deny the Ukrainians the right to resist the invasion with arms. If I were Ukrainian, I would probably take the arms to defend my land. The issue here is that it must be their decision. The role of the international community should not be to add fuel to the fire by supplying arms but to promote a negotiated solution.

To move in this direction, we must make the conflict dispassionate and bring it back into the realm of rationality. In any conflict the problems come from both sides; but here, strangely, our media show us that they all come from one side only. This is obviously not true; and, in the end, it is the Ukrainian people who pay the price of our policy against Vladimir Putin.

TP: Why is Putin hated so much by the Western elite?

JB: Putin became Western elite's "bête noire" in 2007 with his famous speech in Munich. Until then, Russia had only moderately reacted to NATO expansion. But as the US withdrew from the ABM Treaty in 2002 and started negotiations with some East European countries to deploy anti-ballistic missiles, Russia felt the heat and Putin virulently criticized the US and NATO.

This was the start of a relentless effort to demonize Vladimir Putin and to weaken Russia. The problem was definitely not human rights or democracy, but the fact that Putin dared to challenge the western approach. The Russians have in common with the Swiss the fact that they are very legalistic. They try to strictly follow the rules of international law. They tend to follow "law-based International order." Of course, this is not the image we have, because we are used to hiding certain facts. Crimea is a case in point.

In the West, since the early 2000s, the US has started to impose a "rules-based international order." As an example, although the US officially recognizes that there is only one China and that Taiwan is only a part of it, it maintains a military presence on the island and supplies weapons. Imagine if China would supply weapons to Hawaii (which was illegally annexed in the 19th century)!

What the West is promoting is an international order based on the "law of the strongest." As long as the US was the sole superpower, everything was fine. But as soon as China and Russia started to emerge as world powers, the US tried to contain them. This is exactly what Joe Biden said in March 2021, shortly after taking office: "The rest of the world is closing in and closing in fast. We can't allow this to continue."

As Henry Kissinger said in the *Washington Post*: "For the West, the demonization of Vladimir Putin is not a policy; it is an alibi for the absence of one." This is why I felt we need to have a more factual approach to this conflict.

TP: Do you know who was involved and when it was decided by the US and NATO that regime change in Russia was a primary geopolitical objective?

JB: I think everything started in the early 2000s. I am not sure the objective was a regime change in Moscow, but it was certainly to contain Russia. This is what we have witnessed since then. The 2014

events in Kiev have boosted US efforts.

These were clearly defined in 2019, in two publications of the RAND Corporation [James Dobbins, Raphael S. Cohen, Nathan Chandler, Bryan Frederick, Edward Geist, Paul DeLuca, Forrest E. Morgan, Howard J. Shatz, Brent Williams, "Extending Russia : Competing from Advantageous Ground," RAND Corporation, 2019; James Dobbins & al., "Overextending and Unbalancing Russia," RAND Corporation, (Doc Nr. RB-10014-A), 2019]. .This has nothing to do with the rule of law, democracy or human rights, but only with maintaining US supremacy in the world. In other words, nobody cares about Ukraine. This is why the international community (that is, Western countries) make every effort to prolong the conflict.

Since 2014, this is exactly what happened. Everything the West did was to fulfill US strategic objectives.

TP: In this regard, you have also written another interesting book, on Alexei Navalny. Please tell us about what you have found out about Navalny.

JB: What disturbed me about the Navalny case was the haste with which Western governments condemned Russia and applied sanctions, even before knowing the results of an impartial investigation. So, my point in the book is not "to tell truth," because we do not know exactly what the truth is, even if we have consistent indications that the official narrative is wrong.
The interesting aspect is that the German doctors in the Charité Hospital in Berlin, were not able to identify any nerve agent in Navalny's body. Surprisingly, they published their findings in the respected medical review *The Lancet*, showing that Navalny probably experienced a bad combination of medicine and other substances.

The Swedish military lab that analyzed Navalny's blood—redacted the name of the substance they discovered, which is odd since everybody expected "Novichok" to be mentioned.

The bottom line is that we don't know exactly what happened, but the nature of the symptoms, the reports of the German doctors, the answers provided by the German government to the Parliament, and the puzzling Swedish document tend to exclude a criminal poisoning, and therefore, a fortiori, poisoning by the Russian government.

The main point of my book is that international relations cannot be "Twitter-driven." We need to use

appropriately our intelligence resources, not as a propaganda instrument, as we tend to do these days, but as an instrument for smart and fact-based decision-making.

TP: You have much experience within NATO. What do you think is the primary role of NATO now?

JB: This is an essential question. In fact, NATO hasn't really evolved since the end of the Cold War. This is interesting because in 1969, there was the "Harmel Report" that was ahead of its time and could be the fundament of a new definition of NATO's role. Instead, NATO tried to find new missions, such as in Afghanistan, for which the Alliance was not prepared, neither intellectually, nor doctrinally, nor from a strategic point of view.

Having a collective defense system in Europe is necessary, but the nuclear dimension of NATO tends to restrict its ability to engage a conventional conflict with a nuclear power. This is the problem we are witnessing in Ukraine. This is why Russia strives having a "glacis" between NATO and its territory. This would probably not prevent conflicts but would help keep them as long as possible in a conventional phase. This is why I think a non-nuclear European defense organization would be a good solution.

TP: Do you think that NATO's proxy war with Russia serves to placate internal EU tensions, between conservative Central/Eastern Europe and the more progressive West?

JB: Some will certainly see it that way, but I think this is only a by-product of the US strategy to isolate Russia.

TP: Can you say something about how Turkey has positioned itself, between NATO and Russia?

JB: I have worked quite extensively with Turkey as I was in NATO. I think Turkey is a very committed member of the Alliance. What we tend to forget is that Turkey is at the crossroads between the "Christian World" and the "Islamic World;" it sits between two civilizations and in a key region of the Mediterranean zone. It has its own regional stakes.

The conflicts waged by the West in the Middle East significantly impacted Turkey, by promoting Islamism and stimulating tensions, in particular with the Kurds. Turkey has always tried to maintain a

balance between its desire for Western-style modernization and the very strong traditionalist tendencies of its population. Turkey's opposition to the Iraq War due to domestic security concerns was totally ignored and dismissed by the US and its NATO Allies.

Interestingly, when Zelensky sought a country to mediate the conflict, he turned to China, Israel and Turkey, but didn't address any EU country.

TP: If you were to predict, what do you think the geopolitical situation of Europe and the world will look like 25 years from now?

JB: Who would have predicted the fall of the Berlin Wall? The day it happened, I was in the office of a National Security Adviser in Washington DC, but he had no clue about the importance of the event!

I think the decay of US hegemony will be the main feature of the next decades. At the same time, we will see a fast-growing importance of Asia led by China and India. But I am not sure Asia will "replace" the US strictly speaking. While US worldwide hegemony was driven by its military-industrial complex, Asia's dominance will be in the research and technology area.

The loss of confidence in the US dollar may have significant impact on the US economy at large. I don't want to speculate on future developments in the West, but a significant deterioration could lead the United States to engage in more conflicts around the world. This is something that we are seeing today, but it could become more important.

TP: What advice would you give people trying to get a clearer picture of what is really driving competing regional/national and global interests?

JB: I think the situation is slightly different in Europe than in North America.

In Europe, the lack of quality alternative media and real investigative journalism makes it difficult to find balanced information. The situation is different in North America where alternative journalism is more developed and constitutes an indispensable analytical tool. In the United States, the intelligence community is more present in the media than in Europe.

I probably could not have written my book based only on the European media. At the end of the day, the advice I would give is a fundamental one of intelligence work:

Be curious!

TP: Thank you so very much for your time—and for all your great work.

Featured image: Detail from the "Siege of Sevastopol," by Franz Roubaud; painted 1902-1904.