



WHAT UKRAINE TELLS US ABOUT THE COMING WAR... CONTINUED

Posted on February 1, 2023 by Bernard Wicht



"The Braudelian conception of time is fundamental to the student of war because it allows him to inscribe his vision as well as his theoretical reflection over the long duration, that which helps to access the time of war. The latter is opposed to the Man of the 21st century, a man in a hurry whose mental and temporal horizon is subject to the diktat of the instantaneousness of journalistic analyses, mass media and social networks" (Olivier Enraygues, [*Regards sur la guerre: l'école de la défaite*](#) [A Look at the War: The School of Defeat]).

After the acclamation of President Zelensky by the US Congress, the British Prime Minister's public promise of an uninterrupted flow of ammunition to Ukraine in 2023, and, last but not least, Ukraine's request to exclude Russia from the UN, the media is now talking about a great Ukrainian victory, a turning point in the war and a probable Russian defeat.

Faced with this media overkill, it is more important than ever to put into practice the principle of analysis elaborated by Fernand Braudel: *"Events are only dust; they only make sense when they are placed in the rhythms and cycles of the conjuncture and the long duration."* By this, Braudel means that it is important first to understand the macro-social-economic and political framework as well as the major trends of the historical long term in which the events take shape, only then to be able to grasp their significance or, on the contrary, their marginality. *Mutatis mutandis*, we join the approach of the prospectivist Thierry Gaudin for whom, *"recognition precedes knowledge."*

In the case of the war in Ukraine, we must keep in mind the following parameters in terms of long duration, if we want to take a somewhat relevant look at the events:

- a. We are dealing with a confrontation between a declining hegemonic power (the United States) and an emerging regional power (Russia).
- b. Following Paul Kennedy's [*masterful study*](#), we know that hegemonies in decline are particularly bellicose, seeking to compensate for their gradual collapse through war;
- c. As far as Europe is concerned, since 1945 it has become a dependency of the American empire (Marshall Plan, OEEC/OECD, NATO, and today the EU), and therefore shares the fate of its guardian—minus the military force;

- d. Symptomatically, Saudi Arabia (a faithful ally of the United States, a great oil power and protector of the holy places of Islam) is now distancing itself from the empire.

Consequently, rather than asking ourselves, as in a good old Western, "Who are the good guys and who are the bad guys," we should take advantage of this Ukrainian moment to try to decipher what is happening to us and, if possible, to plan an appropriate response. For there is every reason to believe that it is in the matrix of this war that the world of tomorrow is being born.

It is with this in mind that I offer the following reflections:

- 1)** Ukraine is on the brink of collapse. Since the end of the 1990's, emigration has cost it more than 20 million inhabitants (out of the 51 it had when it became independent). With the war, its economy and its infrastructures are destroyed, the generation of men between 18 and 35 years old has been bled dry in the fighting (more than 500 killed and wounded per day since May 2022). Ukraine has been sacrificed by its mentors—it is now a failed state at the gates of Europe, an ideal platform for all mafia trafficking and the grey economy.
- 2)** Russia, on the other hand, has time. Its economy is industrial and, unlike China's, it is not financialized. It is therefore relatively solid because it is not very dependent on fluctuations in the dollar and is not a party to the abysmal American debt. It is based on the sale of products (gas, oil, cereals, etc.) to very large countries (China, India, Pakistan, to name but a few). This element is very important, especially if we admit that the Russian war aim is not mainly Ukraine, but the Western system and its destabilization. Therefore, the economic strength of Russia explains why it has time, why for it the territorial gains in Ukraine remain secondary. Moreover, concerning the fact of "having time," let us also recall that Russian strategic thinking is accustomed, since the Napoleonic wars, to cede ground in order to gain time and, in the long run, to exhaust the opponent. Under these conditions, I would like to make the following points:
 - Given the hemorrhaging of manpower, there are not many Ukrainians in the Ukrainian forces anymore. Most of them are mercenaries (Poles, Slovaks and Germans for the most part), who are apparently now in charge.
 - On the Russian side, there should be no major offensive on Kiev. Why put yourself inside immense

ravaged territories whose populations are hostile to you?

- For the Western bloc, the exit from the war is becoming more and more urgent, given Ukrainian exhaustion and the increasing cost of the war for its arsenals (not to mention the financing of the mercenaries). Let's not forget that, on the one hand, the United States cannot afford to disarm at a time of rising tensions between China and Taiwan, and, on the other hand, the frenzied printing of money since 2020 suggests that the dollar is its last instrument of power—namely, to finance proxy wars.
- The main obstacle to getting out of the war—it is President Zelensky who, with his incredible political acumen, has undoubtedly understood that his mentors were manipulating him and who, in return, is raising the stakes by demanding hundreds of billions of dollars. So, his removal from the picture becomes crucial—but highly problematic. It is interesting to note in this regard that for some time now, the Russian and Ukrainian press have been buzzing (each in its own way, of course) about the hypothesis of a military coup in Kiev.

3) Europe is defenseless. Both because of its disarmament (abolition of conscription, professional armies with low numbers oriented towards external operations, recourse to mercenarism, dismantling of logistical infrastructures) and because of the suppression of borders between nation-states (the Single Market, the Schengen Area, the Frontex system)—its geographical space is once again open to the "great raids" (understand great invasions).

Let's go back in history to understand the meaning of such a statement. The last waves of invasion took place in the 9th—10th century. Viking, Saracen and Magyar raids caused the collapse of the Carolingian Empire. Then, from the 11th century onwards, with the advent of feudalism, and later of territorial states, Western Europe was covered with a thick network of fortifications (castles, fortresses, garrison towns), making it almost impossible for barbarian raids to take place. The more the territorial powers are strengthened, the less possible the rides become. Today, this protective glacis no longer exists, the European territory has become an "open city" again. In this respect, we can readily mention the migratory flows, the drug and human trafficking that cross Europe from one side to the other, all of which constitute a conglomerate of mafias, gangs and the grey economy. The Ukrainian failed state will play a multiplier role in this respect with the extravagant quantity of arms dumped in the country and which are beginning to find their way into the parallel markets.

4) From then on, we are heading for a new war. But which one? Everything leads us to say so, and yet this is the most difficult question to answer. Indeed, we must not forget two essential lessons in this respect. On the one hand, history does not repeat itself; each era gives birth to its own conflict-situation; and on the other hand, a common mistake consists in considering the next war in terms of the previous one. Recently, the recurrent evocation of a Third World War is a characteristic example of this type of error.

We must therefore ask ourselves what are the main axes of confrontation that are emerging. In the current context, it is obviously tempting to evoke the hypothesis of an attack by Russia against its immediate neighbors (Poland, Baltic States) degenerating into a wider conflict. While it is obvious that NATO staff cannot ignore such an eventuality, it nevertheless seems very unlikely: Russia has neither the military means nor the logistics for such an ambition. Let us recall, moreover, that the end of the Cold War saw the scheme of inter-state war replaced by that of the empire/barbarian dialectic: namely, the American wars of globalization and the concomitant rise of Islamism-jihadism. This confrontation stretches from the first Iraq War (1991) to the catastrophic evacuation of Kabul in 2021. More than 30 years of war or, in other words, a "Thirty Years' War" that definitively has exhausted the Western nation-state, transforming it into a penal-prison state controlled by global finance. Today, the war in Ukraine reveals a new pattern that does not cancel the previous one, but supplants it in the order of priorities—the dialectic between a disarmed Europe and the return of the great raids.

5) Disarmed Europe vs. the return of the great raids? With regard to the new axes of confrontation, for Europe it is this one that must first be taken into consideration. And I would like to add that it is not necessary to "stir up the Russian scarecrow" to imagine a war in Europe; armed violence is already very much present there with the actors of the mafia economy and the lawless zones whose trafficking of all kinds acts as a post-modern great battle. The state apparatus is struggling more and more to cope with it, as indicated by the narco-threats currently affecting Belgium and the Netherlands, which are themselves becoming narco-states.

On this subject, let us take the comparison with the last wave of invasions of the 9th— 10th centuries. The raids that precipitated the fall of the Carolingian Empire did not have a political objective. Their goal was the large-scale brigandage of territories and populations, in order to bring back slaves and booty. It was the intensity of these attacks, their repetitive nature over time, and their ability to strike anywhere and at any time that caused the collapse of Carolingian societies. The peasantry in particular (the backbone of the social structures of the time) found itself defenseless in the face of these plunders. For

fear of revolt, the Carolingian nobility was more concerned with disarming its peasants than with protecting them. The local populations left the most threatened regions where churches, monasteries and villages were sacked (a bit like the European working classes who today live in precariousness and insecurity).

6) Carolingian collapse—EU collapse? Of course, comparison is not reason, and yet one cannot help but draw a parallel between the fate of the peasantry of that time and the slow destruction today of the middle and working classes of Western Europe, in the triple turmoil of precariousness, inequality and insecurity, abandoned by their political elites and disarmed by a state fearing riots. *Mutatis mutandis*, we find the type of situation that presided over the fall of the Carolingian Empire. A cycle of more than a thousand years has come to an end—Europe is defenseless and the migratory raids are on their way!

Bernard Wicht is a lecturer at the University of Lausanne, where he teaches strategy. He is a regular speaker at military institutions, including the Ecole de Guerre, and think-tanks abroad. He is the author of several books, including [*Vers l'autodéfense: Le défi des guerres internes*](#) (Towards Self-Defense: The Challenge of Internal Wars), [*Les loups et l'agneau-citoyen. Gangs militarisés, Etat policier et désarmement du peuple*](#) (The Wolves and the Citizen-Lamb: Militarized Gangs, the Police State and the Disarmament of the People); [*Citoyen-soldat 2.0, Mode d'emploi*](#) (Citizen-Soldier 2.0: A User's Guide); [*Europe Mad Max demain ? retour à la défense citoyenne*](#) (Mad Max Europe Tomorrow? A Return to Citizen Defense); [*Une nouvelle Guerre de Trente Ans ? Réflexion et hypothèse sur la crise actuelle*](#) (A New Thirty Years War: Reflections and Hypothesis on the Current Crisis); [*L'OTAN attaque : la nouvelle donne stratégique*](#) (NATO Attacks: the New Strategic Order); [*L'Idée de milice et le modèle suisse dans la pensée de Machiavel*](#) (The Idea of the Militia and the Swiss Model in Machiavelli's Thought).

Featured: "Attila and the Huns," by Georges Rochegrosse; painted pre-1938.

