
III. International

INTERVIEW: Lt. Col. Ralph Bosshard (ret.)

An Expert Military View of Why NATO and Russia Are at War

Swiss Lt. Col. Ralph Bosshard (ret.), during the years 2014-2017, served in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) peacekeeping mission in Ukraine, where in 2014 he served as Senior Planning Officer in the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, which brought him to Kiev, Mariupol, and Dnepropetrovsk. Until 2017 he served as the Special Military Adviser to the Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the OSCE and to the Swiss Ambassador to Kiev. From 2017 to 2020 he served as Operations Officer in the OSCE High-Level Planning Group, planning for a military peacekeeping operation in the South Caucasus.



Courtesy of Ralph Bosshard
Lt. Col. Ralph Bosshard (ret.)

Colonel Bosshard was interviewed in writing in the third week of May 2022 by Dean Andromidas for EIR. Subheads and embedded links have been added.

EIR: Is NATO at war with Russia? The United States, along with almost all member countries of NATO, as well as several non-members, are supplying weapons to Ukraine. Does this constitute the United States and other countries as co-belligerents in this war?

Lt. Col. Bosshard: The Russian public firmly believes that Russia is in conflict with the West in gen-

eral. NATO has gone to a red line by continuously submitting intelligence of strategic importance to Ukraine. The German parliament's scientific service has stated that supplying arms to a belligerent state does not mean participation in an armed conflict yet. On the other hand, the use of military bases would be tantamount to entering the war, as would providing training on supplied weapons. It is not officially known whether Western instructors train Ukrainian soldiers on the anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons supplied, but it is hard to imagine that Ukrainian soldiers would be able to operate such equipment without training.

In the case of the field howitzers supplied by the U.S.A., it is even official.

There are good reasons for the Russian opinion of being engaged in a conflict with the entire West.

EIR: Is this really a war between Russia and Ukraine, or between Russia and the United States? The U.S. Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin, has made a [statement](#) that, in effect, the United States is not interested in a negotiated ceasefire or agreement, but wants Ukraine to “win” the war in order to “weaken” Russia. While it can be said the United States will support Ukraine to the last Ukrainian, do you see the possibility of the situation escalating to a superpower confrontation and World War III?



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Ralph Bosshard: “The Russians know that all the economic and political sanctions imposed on Russia ... are aimed at eliminating the country’s political leadership....” Shown: President Vladimir Putin, May 20, 2022.

Lt. Col. Bosshard: From the Russian point of view, the U.S.A. is using Ukraine to wage war on Russia. The real enemy in this war is clear to the Russians. The Russians also know that all the economic and political sanctions imposed on Russia so far are not a consequence of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, but part of a geo-economic campaign against Russia. They are seen to be aimed at eliminating the country’s current political leadership, replacing it with a pro-Western one and ultimately splitting the country up.

If the Western sanctions do indeed lead to internal fighting in Russia, then Russia’s fight for survival will begin. The Russian nuclear doctrine states that nuclear weapons may only be used if Russia’s existence is threatened. Whether the Russian government judges externally initiated unrest as an external attack is currently unclear, but I would not try to find it out.

Origin and Motivation for Ukraine War

EIR: As everyone should know, wars do not start with the firing of the first shot, but either with the intent to use force to achieve dominance, or a reaction to a strategic threat. The Western narrative seems to assert that Russian President Vladimir Putin is a

madman hell-bent on global domination. Russia on the other hand made clear that it could not accept NATO military infrastructure right on its borders in a way that clearly defined Russia as a potential enemy. It also pointed to the earlier announcement by Ukrainian President Zelenskyy that Ukraine intended to retake Crimea, which was said to be followed by a military build-up opposite Crimea. There was also the declaration that the Minsk Agreement was null and void. How do you see the background to the outbreak of this war?

Lt. Col. Bosshard: From my training at the Military Academy of the Russian General Staff, I know of no doctrine that would call for world domination by Russia or a Russian-led alliance. In contrast to information that was being circulated in the Western media, the theories of Euro-

Asianism, such as [Russian political analyst—ed.] Alexander Dugin’s, did not play any role in our training. On the other hand, we studied the geopolitical theories of [British Empire geopoliticians—ed.] Halford Mackinder, Alfred Thayer Mahan, and others.

It sometimes seems to me that the drive to the warm seas that Russia has had since the time of Tsar Peter the Great is sometimes misinterpreted as an attempt to take over world domination. It was clear for us, that Russia’s resources do not allow something like world domination.

From my point of view, there would have been no reason for Russia to react with an invasion of Ukraine had the latter really tried to reconquer the self-proclaimed People’s Republics of Lugansk and Donetsk. However, I consider Ukrainian statements saying that the Minsk Agreements are null and void as an open breach of international law. I would have preferred Russia and the People’s Republics it recognizes to conduct an operation that forces Ukraine to comply with the Minsk Agreements.

From the daily reports of the OSCE observer mission in Ukraine, I too concluded that Ukraine was possibly deploying troops for an attack on the self-proclaimed People’s Republics. Pre-emptive strikes are always tricky from the perspective of international law.



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War in the Donbass, 2014. Both Donbass separatists and Ukrainian troops became “very experienced, professional soldiers in eight years of war,” says Lt. Col. Bosshard.

However, in his speech on 24 February, Russia’s President Putin made it clear that he saw a NATO war against Russia as imminent, by recalling the situation on 22 June 1941. The invasion of Nazi Germany and its European allies on that day is the equivalent [for Russia—ed.] of the Japanese raid on Pearl Harbor [for America—ed.]. The West’s massive support for Ukraine confirms this narrative.

EIR: What do you see as the objectives of Russia in this conflict, and how are they carrying out this war?

Lt. Col. Bosshard: Russia encouraged, or fueled, if you will, the insurgency of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions against the central government in Kiev, because it believed that these two regions would permanently prevent Ukraine from joining

NATO. The accession of Europe’s second strongest army to NATO would have massively changed the balance of power in Eastern Europe to Russia’s disadvantage.

Moreover, Ukraine’s eastern border is roughly where the German Wehrmacht and its European allies stood in the Autumn of 1941, when the Red Army was on the verge of collapse. Last Autumn the Kremlin may have come to the conclusion that Ukraine’s accession to NATO could no longer be prevented. When it became clear that the West was not prepared to make any concessions or provide guarantees to Russia in the area of security, the counter-strategy was chosen quickly: Dismantling the Ukrainian army and arms industry; weakening its human, economic and other potential; and creating a buffer zone between NATO and Russia. The term demilitarization, which President Putin used in his speech of 24 February, is for me an indication of this.

Nazis and Ukraine ‘Volunteer’ Units

EIR: The West has tried to play down the fact that the Ukrainian forces include so-called volunteer regiments which openly demonstrate a Nazi ideology, so much so, that Russia announced denazification as one of its main goals. On the other hand, the West openly supports the sending of mercenaries and “volunteers” to support Ukraine, some of whom had been fighting in Syria. Some sources claim their numbers could reach 100,000. What is your understanding of this situation?

Lt. Col. Bosshard: The figure of 100,000 is certainly exaggerated. In connection with the war in Syria, the Russian public remembers the wars in the North Caucasus, namely in Chechnya, and a traumatic decade in the 1990s when the disintegration of Russia into constituent states was a real danger. Russia sees itself in a struggle for survival. Indeed, there is a supposedly patriotic—I would rather say nationalist—current in Ukrainian society that has trouble distinguishing itself from the ideology of National Socialism. The fact that old and young Nazis in Ukraine—and unfortunately in some Western countries—can wallow undisturbed in their memories, is interpreted in Russia to mean that Russia is once again in a fight for survival against National Socialism.



Azov Battalion's VK page

Azov Battalion members, “the first to participate in counter-insurgency operations against the Russian-speaking inhabitants in eastern Ukraine.” —Ralph Bosshard

On my numerous trips to Ukraine and especially to the crisis region of eastern Ukraine, I was confronted with fighters who in no way concealed their neo-Nazi convictions. It did not come as a surprise that these people were the first ones to participate in a counter-insurgency operation against the Russian-speaking inhabitants of the East. In Russia, people fear that these extremists, thanks to their armament and internal organization, could continue to determine Ukrainian politics in the future and make the fight against everything Russian a permanent state of affairs. That is why President Putin spoke of denazification as a wartime objective on 24 February.

EIR: The military picture received by the public through the media and NATO public sources, including the U.S. Department of Defense, appears to be misleading to say the least. What is your assessment of the situation on the ground? What are the Russian

strategy and tactics? It has been pointed out by some observers that it is very different from the so-called “shock and awe” tactics the United States used in Iraq or Syria, where attacks were carried out throughout the targeted country.

Lt. Col. Bosshard: During my work in the OSCE environment, I often felt that the picture of the situation in Ukraine that my Western colleagues had was very much based on Ukrainian information. Of course, Ukraine has every interest in spreading its view of things in order to influence other states in its favor. When it comes to concrete military information, however, I find that the professionals in the armed forces and intelligence services in East and West largely agree. Ukraine—and with it, large parts of the Western press—rejoiced over every tactical success of the Ukrainian armed forces in the past three months. And indeed, there was such success in the initial phase.



March to celebrate the birthday of World War II Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera, who is pictured on the black and red flag, Kyiv, 2015.

Even before the war began, I had great respect for the Ukrainian army, which was the second largest in Europe, with a vast experience of war.

Nevertheless, the armed formations of the self-proclaimed People's Republics of Donetsk and Lugansk have also become very experienced, professional soldiers in eight years of war. My impression is that the armed forces of Russia and its allies, or proxies, as you like, are striving to bring territories under their control in order to subsequently establish further republics. As a second goal, they seek to destroy the Ukrainian professional army and the country's arms industry. I interpret President Putin's statement about demilitarizing Ukraine in this direction. The Russian approach differs substantially from that of the West in other wars of the past thirty years, and I have the impression that many people in the West still have not understood this.

Can Ukraine 'Win' as We Are Told?

EIR: NATO seems to think Ukraine is winning and can win this war. What is your assessment?

Lt. Col. Bosshard: In my view, the Ukrainian army has had no operational freedom of action for quite some time. The furious counterattacks in the Kiev, Kharkov and Nikolaev areas have exhausted their professional formations. Even the arms supplies from the West now, will not quickly restore operational freedom of action. If Russian troops can now divide the main group of the Ukrainian army in the Donbass into several cauldrons and annihilate the troops inside, it means that operational cohesion has also been lost. The Ukrainian government of President Zelenskyy has hardly any military options for action left.

Whether Russia still has the forces to exploit this situation is unknown. However, bringing about a victory that includes the expulsion of Russian troops from Ukraine and the elimination of the self-proclaimed Republics of Lugansk and Donetsk is beyond the capabilities of the Ukrainian army.

EIR: The Schiller Institute has called for a cease-fire and a negotiated settlement, but more broadly, the convening of a [conference](#) to establish an agreement for security and economic development of all countries, based on the principles that led to the Treaty of

Westphalia which ended the Thirty Years' War. Would you agree with that approach?

Lt. Col. Bosshard: The current conflict is based on contradictions between principles of international law: while Ukraine accuses Russia of violating the ban on the use of force, Russia in turn criticizes Ukraine for violating the Minsk Agreements. Ukraine justifies its desire to join NATO with the freedom to choose its alliance in order to guarantee its security. Russia counters this with the principle of the indivisibility of security, according to which the security of one partner may not be pursued at the expense of another. Ukraine demands its territorial integrity. Russia responds by pointing to the violation of the rights of the Russian-speaking population in Ukraine.

Although I consider the term genocide used by the Russian side in this context to be exaggerated, I think ethnic cleansing by nationalist fanatics to be quite possible should Ukraine regain control of its territories in the East. Due to the wars waged by the West in the course of the last thirty years, Russia keeps making massive accusations against NATO.

I fear it will be easier for all parties to live with a new Cold War than to face up to the mistakes and failures of the last thirty years. The big loser will be Ukraine, which will not get back the territories Russia took from it since 2014.

I always had the impression that the U.S. was the driving force demanding Ukraine's accession to NATO. The reason for this may have been geopolitical concepts directed against Russia. For me, a defensive alliance of all Russia's neighbors would be a feasible solution. Such an alliance would have comparable resources to Russia, which for geographical reasons alone, would have the greatest difficulty in attacking Finland, Poland, Ukraine, and Romania simultaneously.

The prerequisite for an agreement on security in Europe would be a realistic assessment of Russia's legitimate security interests and convincing arguments in the event that certain Russian demands needed to be rejected. At the time being, I see neither the willingness to talk on both sides nor the ability of the West to assess Russia in a realistic manner. What we need is a military-strategic dialogue that identifies the possibilities and limits of collective security in Europe.