

U.S.-Russia Conflict Would Inevitably Turn 'Nuclear'

Jan. 11—Mikhail Gorbachov, the last leader of the Soviet Union, warned, in an interview published by Germany's *Der Spiegel*, on Jan. 9, that the U.S.-Russia confrontation over Ukraine could lead to a major war. "Such a war today would inevitably turn into a nuclear war. If someone loses their nerve because of the acrimonious atmosphere, we will not survive the coming year," he said. "I do not say this lightly. This is of truly the utmost concern to me."

This is just the latest of Gorbachov's high-profile warnings of the potential consequences of British/NATO policy toward Russia—which have been echoed recently by top members of the political class in Germany, France, and Italy.

Gorbachov decried the "loss of trust" between Russia and the West as "catastrophic," and said ties must be "defrosted." Gorbachov accused the West and NATO of destroying the structure of European security by expanding its alliance. "No head of the Kremlin can ignore such a thing," he said, adding that the U.S. was unfortunately starting to establish a "mega-empire."

Gorbachov also blasted the role of Germany in the current crisis and, in doing so, reminded it of its own history. "The new Germany wants its hands in every pie. There seem to be a lot of people who want to be involved in a new division of Europe," he said. "Germany has already tried to expand its influence of power towards the East—in World War II. Does it really need another lesson?"

Gorbachov also denounced the U.S. sanctions against Russia as "damn stupid and highly dangerous."

Gorbachov, who has been viewed inside post-Soviet Russia as an asset of European financial factions more than a Russian patriot, was not alone in his warnings about a potential global catastrophe if the West does not back off from its blatant regime-change drive against Russian President Vladimir Putin.

A 'Warning Shot at Hollande's Head'

French President François Hollande delivered several pointed warnings last week to the effect that the continuation of Western sanctions against Russia was a grave error and should be abandoned immediately. On Jan. 4, Hollande gave an interview to a French TV network, in which he warned that the Russian crisis is not good for Europe. "Sanctions must be stopped now," he told the nationwide network. Two days later, he repeated the same call for an end to the anti-Russia antics and specifically, an end to the economic sanctions that have are at least as devastating for Europe as they are for Russia.

The fact that terrorists attacked the Paris offices of *Charlie Hebdo* just three days later, was a "warning shot at Hollande's head," according to one former cabinet-level official.

A week ago Sunday, German SPD national chairman—who is also deputy chancellor and minister of economics in the Merkel government—gave an interview to *Bild am Sonntag*, demanding an end to the Russian sanctions, declaring that "we should solve the Ukraine crisis and not force Russia to its knees."

Even the foreign minister of Latvia, who is now the rotating president of the European Union, was adamant against further provocations against Moscow. Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevics reported that Russia was perfectly willing to hold talks on Ukraine to bring the sanctions to an end. He urged European leaders to come together later in the month in Astana with President Putin and Ukrainian President Poroshenko, to finalize a working agreement.

Political directors of the foreign ministries of Russia, Ukraine, Germany, and France met in Berlin on Jan. 5, followed by a phone call reviewing the progress of the talks, between Russia's Sergei Lavrov and his German counterpart Frank-Walter Steinmeier. A meeting of the four ministers is scheduled for Jan. 12 in



Presidential Press and Information Office

Former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachov pulled no punches in his warning that a U.S.-Russia confrontation over Ukraine could lead to a nuclear war. He is shown here with President Putin in September 2000.

Berlin, and there are still plans for a summit of the four heads of state of Germany, France, Russia, and Ukraine in Astana, Kazakhstan sometime in January. On Jan. 9, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev was in Berlin, meeting with Chancellor Angela Merkel, to work out final plans for the summit, among other pressing matters.

Even NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg noted, following the Jan. 7 terrorist attack in Paris, that NATO and Russia have a common interest in defeating the scourge of global terrorism. Speaking in Bavaria just before meeting with the leadership of the German coalition partner Christian Socialist Union (CSU), Stoltenberg too called for cooperation with Moscow. This was in stark contrast to the bellicose anti-Putin rhetoric of his predecessor as NATO chief, Anders Fogh Rasmussen.

Former Czech President Vaclav Klaus added his voice to those pushing back against the war danger by declaring that it would be a “major unforgiveable risk” to blame Russia for the Ukraine crisis.

War Party Not Backing Down

Despite this resistance against the growing danger of general war, the war party was by no means silent.

On Jan. 9, Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk (U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland’s “our man Yats”) visited Chancellor Merkel in Berlin. In a

joint press conference with Merkel, Yatsenyuk delivered a series of personal accusations against Russian President Putin without a shred of evidence—including that Putin had ordered the hacking of German government computers, and that he was behind sending “bandits” into eastern Ukraine to fight against the Kiev government forces.

During that press conference, Yatsenyuk appeared to be directly apologizing for Hitler, by referring to the liberation of Ukraine and Germany at the close of World War II as a Soviet “invasion.” Efforts to “clarify” the remarks (which appeared in the world media via translation from Ukrainian to German) largely fell on deaf ears, as genuine statesmen came out strongly against the Yats comments. Czech

President Milos Zeman blasted Yatsenyuk as the “prime minister of war,” and delivered a sophisticated distinction between Yatsenyuk and Ukrainian President Poroshenko, who has called for the convening of the Astana heads of state meeting to settle the Ukraine crisis. German sources believe that Yats’ deployment was specifically directed at breaking up any progress in the ongoing talks between Lavrov and Steinmeier.

In a related development, the Pentagon announced last week the planned closing of 15 U.S. military bases in Europe—at a time when the actual size of the American military force in Europe is on the rise. The target list of closed bases is centered in the United Kingdom and Western Europe, while the growth factor is all in the East, including the planned deployment of a tank brigade to some as-yet-undisclosed locations further East.

The gravest danger is that the widening gap between Moscow and Washington’s narrative of the Ukraine crisis is a driver for war, and that President Obama’s continuing venom against Putin is a crucial factor pushing confrontation.

Russia has made clear that its own buildup of its strategic force is aimed at deterring a Western attack. Pentagon planners now see the Russian buildup in the past year as creating a dangerous gap at the level of European security and strategic deterrence. Not since the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 has the world been so close to global thermonuclear confrontation.