

Review of: "Russian Military Renaissance: An Unnecessary War"

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Before proceeding with this review of Ivanov's own useful review of Russian foreign policy and thinking behind its invasion of Ukraine, I must ask him to reconsider the first half of his title and also the first sentence of his Introduction. I question the proposition of a Russian military renaissance or rebirth in the face of the failings in Ukraine of a poorly trained regular army and the reliance on irregulars recruited with no training to the Wagner group. Perhaps "The Russian Military Option" would fit better with the emphasis on policy and purpose rather than the expansion and improvement implied by a renaissance. The reference to a "firm US conviction" that Ukraine should become a NATO member is not supported in the subsection on misjudgements of US policy on Russia. From my own knowledge, Washington consistently held back from advancing Ukraine's candidacy. Advancing the candidacy of other East European states, albeit at their urging, is another matter. Ivanov might look at the Financial Times article of February 19 by Mary Elise Sarotte on Putin's sense of history and also her 2021 book *Not one Inch. America, Russia, and the making of the Postwar Stalemate* (Yale University Press). She traces US policy's previously broken promises about NATO expansion, making Russian suspicions about a Ukrainian candidacy understandable.

From his other subtitle, *An Unnecessary War*, Ivanov provides a well-documented critique of the Russian turn to the hard power of its military reputation from World War II. Failing to attract its former East European satellite states away from as a better protector than the NATO alliance, the Putin regime turned first to a sort of hybrid alliance with local forces that worked well enough in Crimea, Georgia and Syria. Ivanov then sees Russia's policy as abandoning the *realpolitik* of reestablishing its position as a Great Power and then simply preserving its position against the US and China. Putin is fairly criticized for having an unrealistic view of Ukraine and its vulnerability to a bloodless Russian takeover. Ivanov calls the subsequent invasion "a caprice rather than a necessity". His argument would be stronger here if he acknowledged the US reluctance to promote NATO membership for Ukraine.

Ivanov's section on Russian foreign policy makes a major contribution to understanding that beyond Putin's personal desire to avenge the breakup of the Soviet Union is a long-standing Russian resistance to Westernization and a reliance instead on what Ivanov calls "neo- Eurasianism". Its principal exponent has been Aleksandra Dugin. Although losing official favour in recent years, Ivanov calls Dugin's worldview virtually identical to Russian foreign policy. Dugin favoured a multipolar world in which the land base of Eurasia would compete with the West's sea-based power center. While this land-based empire smacks of Nazi geopolitics, the better parallel in Russian history is with the Slavophiles who opposed the Westernizers Lenin included, before the First World War. Putin often criticizes Lenin for having made Ukraine a

separate Soviet republic. Ivanov identifies Putin's pre-invasion demands for Ukraine's "demilitarization and denazification" as a prelude for fully incorporating Ukrainians. But for the neo-Eurasian bloc to compete with the West, Ivanov points out that China must join Russia to complete the land-based Great Power complex.

Ivanov's final section concentrates on Russian domestic policy under Putin and the prospects for success or failure in Ukraine. Its subtitle, 'A War of Russian Roulette without no Bullets' is a catchy phrase but it stands up only if Putin resists what Ivanov rightly calls the dangerous temptation of using tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine. The continued failure of conventional Russian forces would raise that temptation, a threat that Putin has already used to discourage Central European support for Ukraine. Domestically, Putin's resort to Stalinist repression would give him that option. Ivanov has no confidence in the Russian public capacity to replace him with anything but chaos. For now, he seems to be pursuing the rational option of closer ties with China. Against the grain of the most recent Chinese connection to Russia, Ivanov concludes with the hope for a US connection with China. It would leave Putin without a victory in Ukraine and --China prospects aside, I would like to disagree with Ivanov's unlikely prospects for any liberal democratic reversal in Russia. But I cannot.

I close with some good words for Ivanov's exposition and generally clear line of argument. Let me however mention that on his last page, it is doubtful or debatable, not "arguable", that Russia will prefer to endorse the Western...and in his last sentence...policymakers should have learned, not "endorsed", an important lesson...a couple of definite articles are missing along the way and "scorch war" should be a policy in retreat of scorched earth.