

INTERVIEW: Prof. Richard Sakwa

# We Must Mobilize the World To Stop the War Drive

*This is the edited transcript of an exclusive interview with Prof. Richard Sakwa, conducted for EIR and the Schiller Institute by Mike Billington, Feb. 20, 2023. Prof. Sakwa is a Russia scholar and prolific writer who has written extensively on Russia, Ukraine, and world affairs. Subheads and embedded links have been added.*



## The Real Story of the Ukraine Government Since 2014

**Billington:** Professor Sakwa, you became very well known most recently with the publication of a book called *Frontline Ukraine*, published just months after the 2014 coup against the elected government in Ukraine, the Maidan color revolution. Your book played a significant role in exposing the fake news about the so called “heroic democratic people’s

**Mike Billington:** Hi, Professor Richard Sakwa! This is the second time we’ve had the opportunity to interview you. In the course of this interview, we’ll be mentioning several of the books that you’ve written over the years.

Until recently you were a Professor of Russian and European Politics and then Head of the School of Politics and International Relations at the University of Kent in Canterbury, England. You are now retired and devoting your time to writing, which we’ll discuss in the context of the interview. Do you want to say anything else about your history?

**Prof. Richard Sakwa:** No, that’s the main thing in many ways. But just to say that, yes, I focused on Russian politics, but by force of necessity, over the last decade or so, I’ve been working on international politics and international affairs bouncing between Russia and international affairs, given the developments in world politics. In my view, you couldn’t understand one in many ways without the other. So that’s the only gloss I’d add to what you said.

*Richard Sakwa, British scholar of Russia.*

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revolt,” which is still the myth peddled in the West about what the Ukraine government is, which was actually imposed on the country by the Obama administration, with Vice President Joe Biden and State Department official Victoria Nuland leading the way. These two are in fact still running Ukraine policy, now from within the Biden administration.



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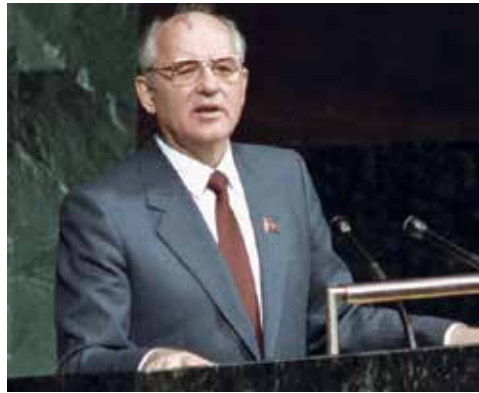
*The “heroic democratic people’s revolt,” a myth peddled in the West about the Ukrainian government imposed by the U.S. in the Maidan coup. Here, regime-change demonstrators attack the police in Kiev, Feb. 18, 2014.*

In your view, sir, what is the real story of the Ukraine government since the 2014 Maidan coup?

**Prof. Sakwa:** There's two things to say. First, the actual events of from 2013 into 2014, which ended up with a change of regime in February 2014. I think a lot of evidence has come out, even more than when I first finally revised the book, 2015-2016, about the actual events on the Maidan. Excellent scholars—Ivan Katchanovski, Gordon Hahn, and others—have forensically identified the actual sequence of events, including the shooting in the days up to the 20th, 21st of February that year. They demonstrated that the shooting came from parts of the square and buildings around it which were occupied by the demonstrators, the insurgents, call them what you like. In other words, it was a type of “false flag” event, and that's quite enormous.

We have not only the evidence of these scholars, but also the fact that the Ukrainian government has not proceeded in all these years, even before the war, with prosecutions about who was responsible amongst the Berkut [Ukrainian Special Police] allegedly. That is implicit evidence, to say that these scholars who argue that it was a false flag are correct.

This doesn't deny the fact that the Maidan itself was a complex event. Many layers were involved, and one of them, which one has to give recognition to, was the aspiration for a cleaner and better government, one which I fully endorse. I don't think that was a way of going about it, but it was certainly that aspiration and need, because then and, of course, before the war, Ukraine had become the poorest country in Europe. The standards of living—perhaps the figures don't reflect the reality, but nevertheless its



UN/John Isaac

*Mikhail Gorbachov was lied to by U.S. Secretary of State James Baker III that NATO would not expand “one inch” further East, upon Germany’s reunification in 1991.*



Kremlin.ru

*When Vladimir Putin was asked by BBC’s David Frost, March 5, 2000, “Can Russia join NATO?” Putin replied: “And why not?”*

GDP per capita was remarkably low. That's the first thing to say, that it was a complex event. I think that the Western vision of the “Euromaidan Revolution of Dignity” presents a distorted picture of what happened.

Second, what did happen was that the balance within Ukraine shifted dramatically. I don't know whether you've had a chance to look at a book by Nicolai Petro called *The Tragedy of Ukraine*. He puts it, building on and developing our work, [in terms of] the division within Ukraine between,

on the one side, the Galician nationalist vision of Ukrainian development, compared to what he calls the Maloros [“Little Russian”] vision. That is the Russophone vision—a multicultural, inclusive, tolerant, generous vision. Yes, I will accept that the Galician version, at times, at best, does have a civic vision of Ukraine developing, but it's always based on exclusion, partiality, division, whereas the Maloros idea, at best, is just to take pride in the character of the Ukrainian state, made up of many different parts, different peoples. I've always argued that this vision, a pluralistic vision of a multicultural, multi-dimensional Ukraine, including in foreign policy, would have been far better.

Since 2014, we've had a single, one dimensional... The Galicians won, and they've been consolidating their victory ever since. It's been a catastrophe for Ukraine, for Europe, for Russia and the world.

## Who is Vladimir Putin and What Does He Want?

**Billington:** You've written several books on Vladimir Putin personally. He is now portrayed in the West as the epitome of evil and the head of a dictatorial government committed to reviving the Soviet Union. Who is

the real character of the man, and what does Putin aspire to?

**Prof. Sakwa:** I think he is a complex political phenomenon. But I will immediately argue that the idea that Putin is intent today on re-establishing some sort of Soviet empire is completely mistaken. My understanding of this war—and I'm willing to openly debate many aspects of it—is that it was provoked by an intensifying security dilemma. It's been one which was already identified by Gorbachov and then Yeltsin in the 1990s—



U.S. Marine Corps/Paul Peterson

*Lithuanian, Portuguese, and U.S. forces on maneuvers in Exercise Saber Strike in Lithuania, June 11, 2015.*

the expanding NATO is only one part of it—but an expansive political West against Russia.

Putin himself began as perhaps the most pro-Western leader Russia has ever had. Some of your viewers and listeners may have watched a marvelous video by Vladimir Pozner. He was a very well-known broadcaster in the late Soviet years, during *perestroika*. This was in his speech to Yale University in 2018, “How the United States Created Vladimir Putin,” in which he argues that this pro-Western person who understood the security dilemma of NATO’s enlargement.... In a famous interview with David Frost, Putin was asked, in the year 2000: Can Russia join NATO? And Putin said, “And why not?”—the idea being that if NATO enlarges, there would inevitably be, sooner or later, a new type of iron curtain between its leading edge and those excluded, obviously, Russia itself. So, Putin has a com-

plex political mentality.

I will say that since 2012, when Putin came back for the third term, domestic politics has clearly taken quite a sharp authoritarian turn. In part this was provoked by the growing complexity and contradictions with the political West, but not entirely. In fact, the two fed on each other: the political West expanding, Russia becoming more authoritarian. It led to what I argue, certainly in the political West, is a hermetic type of politics closure. The inability to listen—not even any more talking about empathy, let alone sympathy—but an inability to listen to the concerns of others.

You don’t even necessarily have to agree with Russia’s view that NATO enlargement was a danger. I think it was perceived as a threat. And as any realist scholar of international politics will say, it’s perceptions that matter as much as fact.

I also think that in factual terms, there was an implicit threat. In other words, Moscow has to be responsible for its own actions. But for us as scholars and as observers, it’s the situation which we analyze, neither to endorse nor to condemn, but to understand how we got into this extraordinary mess and how we basically forced or made Putin into an enemy

where he could have been a good ally and a good friend.

### **What Is the Character of the Russia-China Relationship?**

**Billington:** The greatest fear amongst the Anglo-American oligarchy is that Russia and China will fully join forces and, as they often say, take away the nations of the Global South “from us.” Their view is that these countries belong “to us”—the former colonies are again being treated as colonies.

What is the character of the growing cooperation between Russia and China? And what do you see as the role of the Belt and Road Initiative within that cooperation?

**Prof. Sakwa:** Well, certainly to start with, the Belt and Road Initiative: Already, some \$100 billion has

been dedicated to it in various schemes. It's a transformative vision of development, of global development with China at the center. Of course, these things have a geopolitical edge to them, but above all it's a sign of China becoming a mature power and with the resources to provide development aid to the rest of the world.

Some of it may have been ill advised investments, like the ports in Sri Lanka. But above all, I think much Western criticism of "debt trap diplomacy" is way off. It's potentially a huge boon to development, global development, to alleviate poverty, to support education, and so on.

But of course, it's embedded in that larger dysfunction, which is, we are seeing the emergence of a new pattern in global politics. On the one side, we have—I use this term, the "political West." I don't mean the cultural West, the West with its roots back in Greece, in Greek tragedy even, Greek culture, Roman law and Christendom and so on; or even the civilizational West, which is that 500 years of Western colonialism, imperialism, occupation in Latin America, North America, etc. The political West is a function, a political body, a political entity that took shape during the Cold War. It's the Trumanite state. It's militaristic; it's expansionist; it's hermetic. As I said, it cannot listen to views from outside. There's plenty of good things in it—you could say Wilsonian idealism at its best—but at its worst, we've seen a succession of wars from Vietnam onwards, and earlier interventions.

This political West is now balanced by what we could see as the embryonic emergence of a "political East," that is, Russia and China together, also certain allies in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, also the BRICS—Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. There are tensions between them all, yet this political East is beginning to emerge not simply as the analog of the political West. That's quite important, because the political East precisely repudiates the "bloc" politics, the militarism and so on of the political West. It offers with the Belt and Road Initiative and the like, an alternative model of global politics.



National Archives/Republic of Indonesia

*"The political East is informed by certain fundamental principles—including the Bandung Declaration of 1955." Pictured: The Asian-African Conference in session in Bandung, Indonesia, April 24, 1955.*

I'm not saying that the political East is without blemish and without sin, but I am saying that potentially within the framework of the political East, which includes for example, certain fundamental principles—I have in mind the Bandung Declaration of 1955 as developed in 1960 with the Non-Aligned Movement. It also has a strong developmental edge. Again, we don't have to fully buy into [everything]. Some of the slogans—"win-win," the "community of common destiny,"—these Chinese foreign policy slogans, I think they are important; I think they do mean something. They offer an alternative to that political West. It's not simply a question of authoritarianism versus democracy.

Another principle in the political East is the ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) tradition of non-bloc politics, of sovereign internationalism: "Sovereignty will develop in our own pace, our own way, but we're internationalists at the same time"—as opposed to the political West, which is developing what I nowadays call a type of "democratic internationalism"—the view that if you're not a democracy, you are an outsider. And at worst, you are ready for regime change.

Now, I'll condemn many of the authoritarian systems across the world, but I think that the way to work with them is within the framework of the UN Charter, as I think we talked about in our earlier interview, that [Joint Statement](#) of February 4, 2021, where Russia and China vigorously restated the fundamental principles

of the Charter international system, of the UN system, and the centrality of the UN. Now that's the political East and the political West.

There's also the Global South, which of course is now becoming a subject, as you suggested, for struggle between the two emerging "entities." I won't call them blocs because the political East isn't quite analogous to the political West, yet there is a tussle. We see it with the strong-arm tactics by the U.S. in voting patterns in the UN, in international organizations and even the OSCE (the Organization for Security and Economic Cooperation in Europe), which of course is a European body, but we see it everywhere. So that, in my view, is the big picture at the moment.

### What Is the Theme and Intention of Your Latest Book?

**Billington:** You are currently finishing a book, I understand, called *The Lost Peace*, and one can speculate fairly easily on what that subject will be. But could you give us a sense of the theme and the intention of this new book?

**Prof. Sakwa:** Yes, it's called *The Lost Peace*, how we basically lost and squandered the opportunity at the end of the first Cold War, 1989–91, to establish a positive peace order. This is, in a sense, also underlying some of the talk in the political East.

A positive peace order is more than just simply the absence of war. It's based on development, and not a negative peace, merely the absence of war. Quite clearly in 1989–91, with Gorbachov and his various ideas, with his appeal to the United Nations, again that Charter international system, we did have this moment, this opportunity, which in my view was mismanaged by the West, by its intention to expand its influence. Some of the normative underpinnings of the political West are those I will fully support, insofar as they are in conformity with the United Nations and the Charter international system, but that Charter system is also based on Soviet internationalism.

In short, we did have an opportunity. In part, the mistake from the West, in my view, was that they mis-

understood Gorbachov's and the Soviet Union's—and indeed Russian foreign policy, which was until 2012 basically within the framework of the Gorbachovian agenda, of positive peace. Yeltsin's and Putin's foreign policy, until that time, was basically still in the belief that some sort of common European home could be established, that Europe could emerge from Vladivostok to Lisbon as an entity, with challenges to overcome, with developmental issues to deal with, with all sorts of governance issues. But it could be done in that framework, instead of which Atlanticism won out, quite explicitly to undermine any neo-Gaullist ideas of a pan-European and global peace order.

We squandered that opportunity. In many ways it was quite clear that the political West after 1989 was not going to cede positions. We know about the Wolfowitz Doctrine of 1992, the doctrine of U.S. supremacy, all of that. And so ultimately it skewed everything toward, once again, a negative peace and indeed war today.

### Why a World War Aimed at Russia and China?

**Billington:** You published another book in 2021 titled *Deception: Russiagate and the New Cold War*, which appears to be about the so-called political West, using

your term. Our *EIR* has published extensively on the role of British and American intelligence in setting up the lies about Russian subversion of the U.S. elections and of their control over Donald Trump.

What was your conclusion and what was the "deception" that you refer to, and how do you think this contributed to the extreme danger of not just the new Cold War, but a full-scale new U.S./NATO world war against Russia and China today?

**Prof. Sakwa:** I think *EIR* is absolutely spot on in identifying Russiagate for those two elements you mentioned. First, that it was a massive act of deception. There's been no evidence—in fact, it is more and more that we understand and have more data, we can see that, for example, Trump did not collude with Putin. There's no evidence to this day, any proof that Russia was responsible for the hack of the Democratic National



Cancillería del Ecuador/David G. Silvers  
*WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange: Russia didn't hack the DNC computers.*

Committee; that the goal of WikiLeaks and Julian Assange and all of that was literally as publisher. And Assange himself says it wasn't the Russians who gave it to him or an intermediary. The Christopher Steele dossier has been demonstrated to be completely false, both in its form and in its sources. The [George] Papadopoulos case, which EIR and your colleagues have looked at quite intensively.

So, it's quite clear it was a massive act of deception. But this wasn't just a deception on the American people. What it's actually done is poisoned and stymied and closed opportunities to shift out of the Cold War mentality. And in fact, it intensified it. The first result, of course, of Russiagate was that it constrained Trump's opportunity for diplomatic maneuver, and in fact, he



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*"Many of the actors involved in the Russiagate deception are also involved in the anti-diplomacy which led to the war" in Ukraine. Here, U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan leads the pack, followed by Secretary of State Antony Blinken, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, and U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, at the U.S. State Department, Feb. 8, 2023.*

had to prove how tough he was against Russia. Of course, he did that, upping offensive arms sales to Ukraine and all the rest.

So, Russiagate is still the underlying refrain which got us into this war. It was the Democratic Party, quite explicitly. Interestingly, many of the actors involved in that Russiagate deception are also involved in the anti-diplomacy which has led to this war. Above all, Jake Sullivan, Biden himself, and Victoria Nuland. Jake Sullivan, in particular, was quite explicit in propounding the Russiagate falsehoods as a way, an instrument, of beating Trump, forcing him back into his corner and quite explicitly used this as a political tool, hopefully to the Democrats' advantage. But what it has done, it has

shown that particular elite constellation at the top of the Democratic Party today was so vested in militarism and NATO enlargement that once they took office, despite the talk of trying to balance relations and indeed much talk about focusing on China rather than Russia, the Russiagate legacy blends directly into this war.

### **What Is Required To Break Through the Media Control?**

**Billington:** On the war, the greater war in the making, which is now openly discussed everywhere, I think there is finally emerging a realization of the danger of a global war, potentially nuclear war. The Washington, D.C. event yesterday [Feb. 19]—I hope you had a chance to watch some of what took place at the Lincoln Memorial yesterday on the "Rage Against the War Machine"—demonstrates the emergence of a peace orientation, and more important even than the pro-peace orientation is the explicit denunciation of the right versus left, blue versus red, the divisions that are the core used by the oligarchy, keeping the population quarreling among itself rather than uniting against either the economic disintegration that's taking place across the Western world nor against these wars, and especially the potential of a full scale nuclear war.

This event yesterday had several thousand people and thousands more watching online. Several similar events are planned for next weekend across Europe, in Germany and France. And then you have the UK. Now, the UK, as everybody knows, is now watching strike after strike, almost the whole population is revolting against the extreme inflationary destruction of the standard of living across the country.

How much popular opposition like we saw yesterday do you believe is required in order to break through the media control in shaping the acceptance of this division of the world into warring blocs? What's required?

**Prof. Sakwa:** I must say I very much laud the demonstrations yesterday in the U.S., and the whole peace movement. As you say, it's more than just peace movements; it did attempt to reset the terms of the debate. And we do know, what I've admired from a distance, is the beginning of a mobilization in the U.S. against militarism. It's not just this war, but the very factors which led to this war being possible—a totally unnecessary, avoidable conflict. So that's very good. And as you



EIRNS/Stuart Lewis

*“[The recent peace] demonstrations are more than a peace movement; they are the beginning of a mobilization in the U.S. against militarism—not just this war, but the factors which led to this war.”*

mentioned, Germany. Yes, a few weeks ago, 10,000 protested. We have those marvelous speeches from Die Linke in the German parliament condemning this war, for example, calling for an investigation into the blowing up of the Nord Stream gas pipelines last September.

But in the UK, popular or organized resistance is minimal. We know that next week, the 25th of February, there was a plan—well, it is still a plan—for an antiwar meeting. But the venue in which it was due to take place, the second one, Conway Hall, refused to allow them to meet there. So the actual venue of this meeting will only be announced on the eve of the meeting, so that they won’t be able to have an injunction or some way or other to stop this meeting taking place.

This is absolutely astonishing, far worse than anything that was seen in the first Cold War. The fact that they’re physically now blocking meetings of antiwar or peace meetings in the UK. Of course, in part, that is the policy of the leadership of the Labour Party today, which, as you know, is going to prevent Jeremy Corbyn standing as a Labour candidate in the next general election here.

At the same time, as I’ve been up and down the land talking to people, giving talks, there is a deep undercurrent of dissatisfaction against the militaristic language, and looking for a way out of the war instead of just escalating, piling in the arms, etc. But how to organize this? That’s the great problem for us. It’s rather minimal. Yes, there is still the CND—the Campaign for Nu-

clear Disarmament, European nuclear disarmament—but it’s just a shadow of what it was in the 1980s. The fact that the Labour Party is not supporting it, and therefore, by extension, the trade unions are not providing a venue. We had meetings before in Congress House, which is the headquarters of the Trades Union Congress, years back, but that is no longer totally available.

So your question is a fundamental one. And one could say that like the opposition to the Vietnam War, it will take quite a time before the antiwar movement in the U.S. and elsewhere really gains momentum. So we

are in the early stages, I think at this moment. It will build, it will develop. And I think that is in part determined by events on the battlefield, but also in a general sense, the futility of escalation in this very dangerous context.

### **Will There Be a Russian Offensive in Ukraine in the Spring?**

**Billington:** On the question of the battlefield. What’s your reading on the often-discussed offensive from Russia, which was at first talked about to come in the winter when the ground was frozen and so on, and now is often discussed as something coming in the Spring. Do you have a reading on that?

**Prof. Sakwa:** Well, I’ve been reading contradictory information, but I think the general consensus amongst those who really know what they’re talking about, rather than propagandists from one side or the other, is that Russia is quite clearly—the Russian forces, the Russian army today—is very different from the one that launched the invasion in February last year. It’s now mobilized far more effectively. It’s organized, it’s armed, it’s now got the reserves and adequate forces.

And whether this offensive takes place sooner or later, it’s poised. It’s very different from what it was. I don’t want to go into all the details; I’ve been looking at this from various perspectives. It also is inflicting massive damage on Ukrainian forces, its artillery and infan-

try. Russia does have air dominance, air force dominance, largely. So the way almost certainly will be either a continuing war of attrition... At the moment it's quite clear that Ukraine, in its defense of Bakhmut, pursued from Kiev, is a type of Stalingrad. If they lose Bakhmut, they lose the whole defensive key on the Donetsk front, and that may lead to a very swift unraveling.

The talk of the Russian army losing and failing, I think is overdrawn. Yes, they've had enormous difficulties. Many questions. For example, why they use the Wagner forces, rather than the regular military, in Bakhmut. The tactic seems to be—there was a mini-offensive on the Zaporozhye [Zaporizhzhia] front a few weeks ago—testing the forces. They're sending them forwards, getting a bit of battle-hardening, then taking them back. And then they're rotating the forces, as well, towards Sumy and Kharkov.

Everything is saying that Russia is not even planning, perhaps, an immediate full-scale offensive, but a gradual war of attrition. And Russia can see this through the long term. They're talking about a long war. And even if the West sends its Leopard tanks and even the F-16s, Russia has the ability: it spent the last 20 years preparing how to destroy Challenger tanks, how to destroy Abrams tanks, Leopard-2 tanks, how to destroy Leclerc tanks. They've got the technology. It's a dreadful situation, but—who can tell on the battlefield—it's extremely unlikely that Russia will lose the battle. It will advance incrementally. Ultimately, this is a war that Ukraine and the West cannot win, and we will quite likely sooner or later, see an Afghan-, Vietnam-style debacle.

### How Did Khrushchov Deal with Soviet Warhawks?

**Billington:** Let me switch gears a bit and ask an historical question, if I may, going back to the era of Khrushchov. As you know, as is well known, JFK and his brother Bobby were able to rein in the war hawks, first on the Bay of Pigs, but then with the Cuban Missile

Crisis [in 1962], he was able to rein in the war hawks, but also carry out a secret backchannel negotiation with the Soviet Union, with the assistance from the Vatican, to prevent that incident from turning into what could very well have been a global nuclear war.

How did Khrushchov deal with the war hawks on the Soviet side at that time? Do you think that has any implications for the current situation?

**Prof. Sakwa:** Certainly on the U.S. side, there was a far more dynamic situation than there is today. Kennedy also had a representative in the United Nations who was working and talking with the Russians.

He was also visiting the Russian Embassy. Can you believe it? [Anatoly] Dobrynin was the Soviet ambassador. So there were all sorts of things going on. And, of course, Kennedy was chastened by the failure of the Bay of Pigs, and all the excessive promises the military had told him about this planned invasion of Cuba.

As for the Soviet Union, clearly a different position, because the Politburo system—we do know that there had been voices who had raised concern about it in the first place. This is in the context of the Berlin Wall having gone up the previous year [1961], the U-2 crisis the year before. The Soviet Union knew perfectly well that it didn't have what Kennedy said was a missile advantage. It didn't have many

missiles. We know this from the Penkovsky Papers [Lt. Col. Oleg Penkovsky], the spy who gave a lot of information to the West. And the West knew also, by the way, that Russia was much weaker in terms of nuclear forces.

The idea of any American official today visiting the Russian Embassy in Washington, D.C., with Anatoly Antonov [Russian Federation Ambassador to the U.S.], is just simply out of the question. Even during Russiagate, the Russian Ambassador was talking to [U.S. National Security Advisor-designate] Michael Flynn and others. Russiagate has closed those diplomatic options and those backchannels. So the legacy, the awful, dangerous legacy of Russiagate impinges and affects a whole spectrum of behaviors, and of course has led to



*Nikita Khrushchov put Soviet missiles in Cuba to counter U.S. missiles in Turkey.*



the demonization of Russia. Clearly if Russia had done what it was accused of doing—no country likes another power intervening in their elections. (Of course, the U.S. does it quite normally!) So it's poisoned everything. Indeed, in my view, this is a slow-motion Cuban missile crisis without the adroit leadership of some of your Kennedy brothers, as you said. And, indeed, Khrushchov, who was using this as a bargaining counter. The Soviets felt if the U.S. could put missiles in Turkey, the Jupiter missiles, well, they should do this in response. It was a sign of weakness, of course, which was exposed. Khrushchov was ousted a couple of years later.

### **The Role of Poland as a Leader in the War Party**

**Billington:** The introduction to your book *Frontline Ukraine* has a very interesting discussion about your Polish heritage and the fact that your father was a participant in World War II in the Polish army, including some time serving in what is now part of Ukraine, but which at the time was under Polish control. With that in mind, how do you look at the current role of Poland, which is in the lead of the War Party crowd and the anti-Russia war mobilization? And how do you think the Polish people see that policy, which is now being carried out by [Polish President Andrzej] Duda and his government?

**Prof. Sakwa:** I'll start on that second point because it helps a lot. I received, when this war began, many messages from Polish friends and even people whom I didn't know but who knew I was interested in this. They were saying, "What to do?" Of course I said, "Well, support Ukrainian refugees. They're as innocent as anyone else. And so obviously you should." There is this undercurrent within Poland which is resistant to that militarism. But the leadership now in Poland has clearly gone on a very dangerous loop back to the 1930s and the mismanagement of Polish security concerns way back then. [Józef] Beck, then the Foreign Minister, who made agreements with Nazi Germany, believing that Nazi Germany was going to be a better security option than the Soviet Union. Well, you can understand why they had concerns about the Soviet Union, especially after the military purges and, of course, the Polish-Soviet war of 1920.

But today, the extremism of the Polish elite is so beyond the pale. For example, in private conversation a former Polish defense minister not long after the 2014

events in Ukraine argued that "Putin was worse than Hitler." For a Pole to argue that, from a country that had suffered so horrifically under Nazi occupation, was astonishing. Any statesman who could make that sort of statement cannot be treated with respect or any sense of measure whatsoever. And it was those attitudes, this failure for Poland and the Baltic republics to overcome their historic grievances.

They've got legitimate grievances. You talk about my father. My father nearly was captured by the Soviet forces when they invaded on the 17th of September 1939. A Polish Army reservist; my father was an agronomist when he was called up. He fought in the reserve, and that's what he was doing in Grodno [a city now in Belarus] and Lvov [Lviv, now in Ukraine] before the war. He was nearly captured and, of course, murdered. It was his colleagues who were murdered at Katyn and the other death sites. So he, if anyone, had a grievance, yet he never was virulently anti-Soviet; he always spoke for reconciliation and overcoming these historic divisions. The tragedy of our time is that the European Union ended up *amplifying* these genuine grievances rather than overcoming them.

And this is why the European Commission today, under Ursula von der Leyen, is taking the lead. Now we're talking about a tenth package of sanctions on Russia. At no point are they saying, "Look, these sanctions are against the elite." There's no sense of "We're trying to avoid the Russian people suffering." This language, again, has disappeared. It's the degradation and the coarsening of discourse, and much of this has come from Poland and the Baltic republics, right from the beginning, who take an essentialist view of Russia. You began with the question about Russia trying to reestablish its empire. They assume there's endless continuity. And they're simply not taking into account the contingency, the genuine dynamics within Russian society, the changes that have taken place, even within the elite itself.

### **What is the Impact of Western Sanctions on Russia and Europe?**

**Billington:** We are also waging a fight over the sanctions against Syria, which we've been battling since they were implemented over a decade ago, but especially since the earthquake; the fact that the U.S. has refused to lift the sanctions, which is preventing a huge portion of what would be coming into the country to deal with this absolute disaster. Among other things, it demonstrates what we've always known, which is that the sanctions are not, as the U.S. government

claims, to be aimed against the policies of governments, but they're aimed directly against the populations. It's the populations that get stricken by these sanctions policies. And in the case of the earthquake, it could very well cost thousands of innocent lives.

So, that then begs the question of the sanctions "regime," the thousands of sanctions being imposed throughout the world by the U.S., with the Europeans basically going along with most of that.

What's your reading on the impact of the massive sanctions against Russia, both on Russia itself, but also the impact upon Europe especially, but really the whole world?

**Prof. Sakwa:** I'll just say a word about the Syrian sanctions, the so-called Caesar sanctions are intensifying; as you mentioned, they've been going on for a long time. But 2020: these absolutely punitive sanctions were effectively directed against the Syrian people, who had suffered already nearly a decade of war and suffering. It was one of the cruelest acts in my life. It was just piling on. It was equivalent to the sanctions imposed on Vietnam, after Vietnam had invaded Cambodia to get rid of that monstrous Pol Pot regime. Again, pure geopolitics, pure vindictiveness.

And again, this is being shown *vis-à-vis* Russia. For example, the fact that flights are banned from Russia for most destinations is just, again, absolutely astonishing. The elite, the top people, the so-called oligarchs, Putin's cronies, have private jet planes. They could go anywhere they like, if anybody is going to take them. But a ban on commercial flights has never been done on a major country before. It means that a grandmother can't see a grandchild, that families can't go back, and so on. This is absolutely an attack on the population. What the effect has been is a realization by Russia that this is a war not just against the Putin regime; it's a war against the Russian people. Like the sanctions on Syria, they are totally counterproductive, vindictive, punitive.

And, of course, the sanctions against Russia are not going to work. Russia is a far bigger country and it's got its own resources. It also has friends. I actually think it's not excluded (you asked about China), we have already seen indications, that China may—so far it's given diplomatic cover under the guise of neutrality—actually support [Russia against Kiev], because Russia's defeat by the West—especially after the shooting down of those balloons and that extraordinary rhetoric against China: it's almost forcing Russia and China together at the moment, and of course, Iran and some other countries.

The effect of the sanctions, of course, has been devastating. I mentioned the explosions, the destruction of Nord Stream pipelines, the natural gas pipelines, which of course, was effectively a massive blow against Germany. The United States has been opposed to the energy relationship between Russia and Western Europe since the 1960s when it was first mooted. Astonishing. So many of us would argue, well, what's the United States got to do with it? You know, you deal with your energy issues, we'll deal with ours. But of course, it means that the United States can now sell its LNG (liquefied natural gas) for four times the price, if not more, of what used to be cheap natural gas from Russia.

So its effect has been devastating. I've just had a workman in today who was complaining about a four-fold increase in his energy costs. It's been absolutely devastating. We've had a relatively mild winter in Western Europe this year. I don't know how it's been in the U.S., but it means the energy crisis is far from over. I think many people anticipate next year is going to be the crunch time, so we're headed perhaps for even worse times, in terms of energy costs, than we have today.

## **Policies Toward a New International Trade & Development Structure**

**Billington:** The Russians and the Chinese together are also putting together a new financial structure. The Russians were forced to do so when they were thrown out of the SWIFT [Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications] system, and their reserves were stolen outright, and so forth. But Russia and China together, expanding their collaboration with almost all the BRICS countries, are talking about putting together a new trade currency, a currency based, in fact, on policies presented by Lyndon LaRouche to his friend Sergei Glazyev in Russia way back in the year 2000, to have a basket of commodities as a basis for valuing the trade between countries—not replacing their national currencies for internal use, but only for international trade relations. Almost all the Global South nations and others are trying to get out from under the use of the dollar, since the U.S. uses the fact that the dollar is used in trade as their justification for their sanctions. So everybody is sort of bolting to get out.

Have you followed this development, of the Glazyev policies toward some sort of a new structure for international trade and development?

**Prof. Sakwa:** Oh, indeed, yes. There's an accelerating process of de-dollarization because the United States,

as you suggest, has weaponized the dollar. This is a double-edged sword because it means that the dollar, then, if it's an instrument of pressure of one form or another, then obviously countries will learn. And this has now accelerated since the impounding (so far they haven't quite yet stolen them) of the Russian reserves. The headline figure is \$300 billion of the Central Bank of Russia's reserves held in the West. I think that the figure probably, because Russia has managed to do all sorts of things, may turn out to be only \$35 billion. Nevertheless, the principle is the same. The West feels that it could perhaps take this money, as they did with the reserves of Afghanistan's central bank, held in the United States.

Indeed, I think there is de-dollarization going on, the establishment of alternatives, as you say, the yuan-trade and rupee-trade. There's also talk of joint work on some sort of digital currency. Now, that's more complex because it's difficult to know the value of a digital currency and whether it can hold its value because of the enormous volatility. But they are talking—the Central Bank of Russia and the Chinese central bank [People's Bank of China] are just working parties on that.

Absolutely, the dollar won't be displaced any time soon. However, it's the direction of movement which is important and the fact that China is alarmed by the extraordinary ineptitude of U.S. policymakers vis-à-vis Taiwan: clearly the provocative acts—Nancy Pelosi visiting last summer and then a congressional delegation soon afterwards. The various talk means that if a crisis did get sharpened, then China and the rest of the world are looking at what the political West has done to Russia, and they're obviously going to take counter-action. This new trading currency is one of those very important developments.

### What is Your View of the Schiller Institute and Its Work?

**Billington:** To conclude, let me ask specifically: I believe you have followed the work of *Executive Intelligence*



Office of the President of Taiwan/Simon Liu

*“China is alarmed by the extraordinary ineptitude of U.S. policymakers vis-à-vis Taiwan: clearly the provocative visit by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.”*

*Review (EIR)* for many years. You may or may not have seen Helga Zepp-LaRouche's recent call for what she called [\*Ten Principles of a New International Security and Development Architecture\*](#). The idea is to address the lack of thinking about fundamental principles in our thinking, to stop accepting a defined, controlled debate between left, right or red, blue or whatever, and instead, to discuss the principles needed to eliminate global poverty, for instance, and to provide global education. The last principle, the 10th principle in her list, is to return to the classical principle that man is fundamentally good, and doing away with the tendency of demonizing the people you have differences

with, which of course is central to Russiagate and to all the other regime-change operations.

So I wonder if you could comment on that—your view of the work that we've accomplished over these years and the principles that we're fighting for?

**Prof. Sakwa:** One of the things which I like about the Schiller Institute and your general position, in addition to a consistent anti-militarist and developmental stance, is the view that technology can be a fantastic tool in the service of humanity, and that we shouldn't be frightened of, for example, nuclear power used in an effective and intelligent manner. Small modular reactors have the potential to supply power in harsh climates far from the conventional grid. Technology can be damaging and exploitative, but I do think that the development of infrastructure is beneficial, as long as environmental concerns are respected. High speed railways, communications technology, developments in the health sciences and much more are the result of admirable human ingenuity, some of which can be used to help deal with climate change. Climate change is a major threat. I'm not sure that this is a position that is shared. But irrespective of that, even though it's difficult to put that to one side, I agree completely that we do need—and this is where I do agree with *EIR* and the Schiller Institute—a new peace agenda; that this is

possible, and that we really do have to have this optimism that humans can do better, instead of which we've become locked in this Cold War mentality, this Manichaeian mentality.

Much of it is driven by our failure to overcome that first Cold War. We have in the United States the Trumanite state militarism, which is simply out of control. It's stopping investment in U.S. infrastructure and all of those social developmental needs. And too often even U.S. foreign aid, though much of it is good, so much is tied to geopolitical objectives.

Today, our most urgent necessity is peace. And that's why I'm very happy to work with the Schiller Institute, with you, with our colleagues in Australia, with *EIR*, because you have a consistent position: for peace. And that really is important. It's not just an abstract. It's grounded on very carefully considered anti-militaristic positions. It isn't just a vague desire, but it's a thought-out principled position. And it's, in most respects—of development, using science for human progress—one that I share.

### 'World Citizens Unite!'

**Billington:** Well, I think the 10,000 in Munich and the several thousand yesterday in Washington are at

least a hopeful sign that that idea is taking hold and that people are recognizing that they have to—in Helga Zepp-LaRouche's term, that every single person on Earth is challenged by the threat of a nuclear war, and therefore every single person has to see themselves as a "world citizen." She comes from Trier, the hometown of Karl Marx—so she says, "World Citizens Unite!"

**Prof. Sakwa:** Absolutely. I agree with that. Let's do it!

**Billington:** Do you have any last thoughts?

**Prof. Sakwa:** No, I think that's a very important point, because clearly the Ukraine war is in danger of escalating. So we all have a responsibility to try to halt the march to madness.

**Billington:** I thank you very much. This will have a good impact globally, I'm sure. And I appreciate your input.

**Prof. Sakwa:** My pleasure. Thank you.

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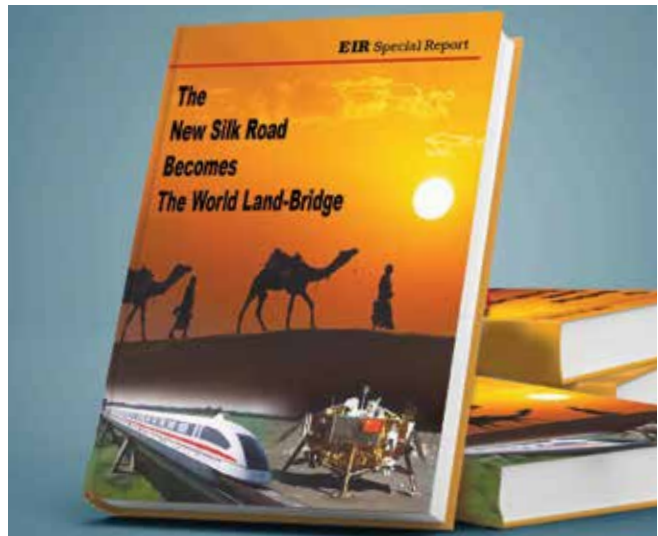
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