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THE “WAR ON DRUGS” BECAME A PRETEXT FOR GEOPOLITICAL COMPETITION

The contradictions of US policy towards Venezuela

For over a decade, the United States has framed its escalating sanctions and political pressure on Venezuela as a moral and legal campaign against a “narcoterrorist” state. The official narrative is clear: the government of Nicolás Maduro is an illegitimate regime that sponsors drug trafficking, represses democracy, and creates humanitarian suffering, thus justifying not only targeted economic sanctions to force political change, but even the kidnapping of Maduro himself. Yet a closer examination of policy effects, regional dynamics, and strategic interests reveals a profound disconnect between stated goals and observable outcomes. **The U.S. drug trafficking accusation serves primarily as a legitimizing pretext. The true drivers of Washington’s approach are rooted in historical hemispheric hegemony, energy security interests linked to Venezuela’s vast oil reserves, and a desire to prevent the emergence of a multipolar world.** Above all this includes depriving China’s access to Venezuelan oil. Of particular interest is the very nature of the sanctions themselves, and the manner by which they contributed to state collapse, indirectly fostering the very criminalization they claim to combat.

Selective Logic

U.S. indictments against Venezuelan officials for state-sponsored drug trafficking provide a compelling legal basis for sanctions and isolation. However, placing Venezuela’s role in context reveals the selectivity of this focus. Venezuela is not a significant producer of coca, cocaine or indeed other psycho-tropic substances ; it is primarily a transit country. The primary sources remain Colombia, Peru, Mexico and Bolivia. The dominant

trafficking threat to the United States itself is orchestrated not from Caracas but from Mexican transnational criminal organizations, which control wholesale distribution into the U.S. market.

Venezuela is one of many transit hubs in the hemisphere, alongside countries in Central America and the Caribbean. Indeed Venezuela is merely one stepping stone among many, with shipments that pass through the country, subsequently then preceding through Trinidad. Yet it alone faces comprehensive sanctions and an oil embargo. This suggests the determining factor is not the scale of its trafficking but its status as a geopolitical adversary. The “narcostate” framing, while not entirely without evidentiary basis, is leveraged with disproportionate intensity, serving as a politically useful narrative within the established “War on Drugs” paradigm—a paradigm that has long provided moral cover for U.S. intervention in Latin America. To underscore the point **neither the CIA or DEA country reports on Venezuela for 2025 explicitly mentions Maduro as being linked to the drug trade. The annual United Nations drug report equally does not link the captured leader to this illicit industry, rather these reports.**

Sanctions and Crime

The comprehensive financial sanctions and oil embargo imposed from 2017 onward were designed to deprive the Maduro government of revenue. Their impact, however, extended catastrophically beyond the state apparatus. By crippling Venezuela’s ability to earn foreign currency through oil exports, sanctions effectively collapsed the formal economy, triggering hyperinflation and decimating the capacity to import essential goods such

as food, medicine, and medical supplies. Independent analyses, including a 2021 report by the UN Special Rapporteur on unilateral coercive measures, concluded that U.S. sanctions have directly exacerbated the humanitarian crisis and violated international human rights law.

More critically from a security perspective, this economic strangulation created a vacuum filled by illicit actors. As the legitimate economy evaporated, the survival logic of both the state and the population shifted. Colombian armed groups—the ELN and FARC dissidents—expanded their territorial control within Venezuela’s borders. Corrupt elements of the Venezuelan state, facing a collapsed treasury, increasingly turned to trafficking and other illicit economies as a revenue source. Thus, U.S. policy inadvertently accelerated the criminalization of the Venezuelan state it sought to punish, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy: sanctions fostered conditions for greater trafficking, which was then cited as a new justification for further pressure and the eventual kidnapping of Maduro.

Oil and Hegemony

Beneath the drug war rhetoric lie enduring geopolitical and economic interests. First, Venezuela possesses one of the world’s largest proven oil reserves. The specialized refineries on the US Gulf Coast are engineered to process Venezuela’s heavy crude. A hostile government in Caracas thus represents a dual threat: the denial of a strategically proximate resource and the ceding of control over that resource to global rivals. US policy appears strategically aimed at triggering a political reset that would return Vene-

zuelan oil to the U.S.-dominated market. As an adjunct several analysts have highlighted that the US also seeks to ensure that Venezuelas vast oil reserves are sold in dollars as opposed to being traded in alternative currencies. In this way US dollar hegemony is not threatened.

Furthermore, Venezuela’s political project under Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro — a blend of resource nationalism, anti-American rhetoric, and regional alliances — posed a direct challenge to historical U.S. hegemony in Latin America. Washington has long interpreted the Monroe Doctrine as justifying opposition to leftist, anti-American governments in its “backyard.” Undermining the Venezuelan model serves to deter similar movements regionally.

Critically, Venezuela’s alliances with China and Russia are viewed by contemporary US strategists as a direct threat. China provided billions in loans-for-oil, gaining a strategic economic foothold. Russia offers military, political, and economic support. Removing the Maduro government constituted a significant setback for both rivals’ influence in the Western Hemisphere, a core U.S. strategic objective.

Hypocrisy

A stark hypocrisy structures the U.S. approach, creating a closed loop of justification. The United States imposes sanctions that deliberately collapse Venezuela’s formal economy. The resulting state failure and corruption expand opportunities for drug trafficking and other illicit economies.

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UNEXPECTED WARRIORS

Scandinavia's New Assertive Posture

The Nordic countries' role in the Ukraine war has been overlooked. Generally regarded as harmonious and peaceful nations, they were all too eager to join the party of war instead, in the name of a feeling of moral superiority that rejected any compromise with Russia.

On November 21 former Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin, with reference to the newly proposed 28 points peace plan for Ukraine, wrote on X (the spelling has been preserved as in the original):

"The "peace plan" for Ukraine is a catastrophe not only for Ukraine and its citizens but for all of democratic world. If we repeat the mistakes from the past such as showing weakness and ignorance in 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea, we will find only more aggression and conflicts ahead of us. The authoritarian mindset understands only strength and deterrence."

The uncompromising posture expressed by the former Finnish Prime Minister, who left office in 2023, well summarises the attitude adopted by Finland and other Nordic countries in the context of the Ukraine war.

Marin had enjoyed striking a tough posture before. "The way out of the conflict is for Russia to leave Ukraine. That's the way out of the conflict", Marin told journalists in 2022.

Finland ended eight decades of neutrality when it joined NATO in the spring of 2023. NATO rejoiced at Finland joining NATO in 2023 and NATO social media channels regularly post ecstatic content on the mythical Finnish quality of *sisu*, a particular Finnish word that could be translated as toughness or endurance, always in the context of an existential fight against Russia. Sweden too abandoned neutrality, a foreign policy posture it had adopted for two centuries, to join NATO in 2024.

In February this year the newly reelected US President Donald Trump reached out to Russia's President Vladimir Putin in the first of several bilateral talks between the US and Russia. For many the rekindling of diplomacy seemed to offer the prospect of peace for Ukraine. However, Europe felt snubbed and reacted furiously, rejecting diplomacy as capitulation to Russia. The Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, in a striking statement, said that "for Ukraine peace may be more dangerous than war". Denmark has been one of the largest providers of military aid to Ukraine, with 10.5 billion dollars, just after Germany and the United Kingdom, a massive contribution considering the size of the Danish economy.

From peaceniks to warriors

For decades the countries of Scandinavia were regarded as stable, peaceful states. Sweden maintained a centuries-long tradition of neutrality. Denmark and Norway were two of the 12 founding members of NATO in 1949 but still projected an image of restrained foreign posture and a capacity for diplomatic balancing. "Norway previously had (until 2022) a policy of not sending weapons to countries at war (as it escalates and can make us a participant), and our country used to advocate for diplomacy and negotiations as the path to peace", pointed out Norwegian professor and political scientist Glenn Diesen in an illuminating analysis published under the title "How Peace-Oriented Norway Learned to Stop Worrying and Love War". Norway has contributed 5 billion dollars in military aid to Ukraine, more than Poland, a country with a much larger population and a much stronger tradition of anti-Russian sentiment. "Norway has abandoned these policies and unified under the new mantra that "weapons are the path to peace", and we have boycotted basic diplomacy with Russia for more than three years at a time when hundreds of thousands of young men died in the trenches", observed Diesen, who has been much ostracised in his home country in recent years for allegedly promoting "Russian propaganda".

Finland is not technically part of Scandinavia but due to its history, its cultural proximity and geographical continuity it is often included in the broader Nordic Scandinavian cultural and political area. The war in Ukraine has led to the re-emergence

of a strong anti-Russian collective mood that latently permeated Finnish society at least since the Soviet-Finnish war of 1939. Stalin wanted to secure the border next to Saint Petersburg and demanded territorial concessions from Finland in November 1939, almost three months after the world had been shocked by Germany's brutal attack on Poland that ignited World War II. In the end Finland lost 10% of its territory to the Soviet Union, but it proved a hard opponent for the Red Army. The memory and the mythology of the Winter War is still very present in Finland.

Ironically, until recently Finland was considered a viable model for the solution of the Ukraine problem, a model that Russia considered acceptable. Finland had allied with Nazi Germany and after the war instead of joining one of the two blocks in the Cold War it remained formally neutral. "Finlandisation" meant that Finland maintained autonomy while making concessions to Soviet interests in foreign policy, especially concerning its geopolitical and security decisions. In the context of Ukraine, some analysts suggested that a "Finlandisation" of Ukraine could have been a way forward — a neutral status between Russia and the West that would keep Russia satisfied while allowing Ukraine to preserve its sovereignty. For a time, this seemed a plausible compromise. But after February 2022 Finland, like much of Europe, rejected every sort of diplomacy with Russia and insisted that the solution to the Ukraine war would come from the battlefield in Ukraine. Finland sent Ukraine 3 billion dollars of military aid.

Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland combined contributed 26 billion dollars in military aid to Ukraine, more than Germany, Europe's largest contributor (roughly 20 billion dollars), in spite of having a combined population of 27.6 million people, less than one third of Germany's. The Nordic countries' huge share of the bill is often overlooked in other Western countries but it has not gone unnoticed in Scandinavia. In a recent interview, Sweden's foreign minister warned that Nordic countries can't keep taking on a disproportionate share of supporting Ukraine. "A few countries take almost all of the burden. That is not fair and it's not sustainable in the long run.", she said, adding: "The fact that the Nordic countries, with less than 30 million people, provide for one-third of the military support that the NATO countries, with almost 1 billion people, provide this year... This is not sustainable. It's not reasonable in any way. And it says a lot about what the Nordics do — but it says even more about what the others don't do."

Stenergard argued that using frozen Russian assets would be the only realistic way to secure long-term, more even burden-sharing. She also noted that the EU has spent more on Russian energy imports since the full-scale invasion than on helping Ukraine.

Scandinavia's shift was perhaps most clearly captured in the latest Nordic-Ukrainian Summit held in Iceland in October this year. Nordic leaders issued a joint declaration affirming their "unwavering commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity and security. Our comprehensive support for Ukraine is steadfast and will continue for as long as it is necessary". Nordic leaders also insisted, rather ominously, that "Ukraine's future place is in NATO. We will continue to support Ukraine on its irreversible path to full Euro-Atlantic integration, including NATO membership. We support a greater role for NATO in the coordination of security assistance and training and welcome the establishment of NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine. We are convinced that Ukraine's future membership will be of significant added value to the European Union and contribute to peace, stability and prosperity in Europe".

The leaders of Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark and Iceland showed thereby a shocking lack of understanding of the

structural geopolitical causes that led to the fratricidal war in Ukraine.

The Geopolitical Aspect

Geopolitics is not only about abstract alliances and diplomatic treaties. As the etymology of the word suggests geopolitics must take into careful consideration the hard realities of physical geography and natural resources too.

In the case of Russia and Europe, few geographic realities are as strategically consequential as the Danish Straits. Roughly 40 percent of Russian seaborne oil exports must pass through this narrow maritime corridor connecting the Baltic Sea to the North Sea and global markets. Geography has given Denmark an influence far beyond the size of its territory or population: whoever effectively regulates the straits holds a lever over Baltic maritime security. The 1857 Treaty of Copenhagen abolished the old Sound Dues and guaranteed tariff-free transit through Danish waters, effectively internationalising the straits for commercial navigation.

Relations between Russia and Denmark stretch back a millennium, shaped by a mix of rivalry, commerce, dynastic ties, and mutual strategic calculation. During the medieval period, Danish kings and Novgorod princes engaged in intermittent conflict over Baltic trade routes and influence among the Finnic peoples, but they also maintained periods of pragmatic cooperation. Denmark's role as both a Baltic and North Sea power made it a natural interlocutor for Russia, whose access to the Baltic was historically fragile and often contested.

In the early modern era, Russia's geopolitical trajectory inevitably collided with Scandinavian interests. The Great Northern War (1700–1721) fundamentally reshaped the region: Russia's victory dismantled Sweden's imperial status and established Saint Petersburg as a Baltic capital. Denmark remained formally an ally of Russia against Sweden. In the 19th century, Russia provided diplomatic support to Denmark during the Schleswig-Holstein question, valuing Denmark as a conservative monarchy and a potential counterweight to Prussia.

The broader Scandinavian world showed a similar ambivalence. Sweden's historical rivalry with Russia was intense, but after 1809, and especially after 1814, Scandinavia gradually internalised a concept of "Nordic neutrality," a balancing posture designed to avoid entanglement with great-power conflicts emanating from the East or West.

The Cold War era was a continuation of this balancing act, although Scandinavia was clearly more oriented towards the West. The era of Prime Minister Olaf Palme, who was Prime Minister in Sweden between 1969 and 1986, before being killed

on a winter night in February 1986, was a classic example of attempts to normalise relations with both the West and the Soviet Union. Finland maintained pragmatic relations with the Soviet Union too.

But with the end of the Cold War came an era of intensified cooperation between NATO and the Nordic countries that had stayed neutral, even if this did not lead to immediate NATO membership. This historical trajectory matters because it sets the stage for one of the most puzzling and controversial episodes in contemporary Nordic geopolitics: the 2022 Nord Stream explosions. Here, the long history of Scandinavian caution, legalism, and strategic ambiguity suddenly confronts a high-stakes, modern security dilemma.

The Nord Stream pipelines — a critical conduit for transporting Russian gas to Germany under the Baltic Sea — were severely damaged in what most observers consider deliberate sabotage. The consequences were immediate and profound: Europe's energy architecture was shaken; environmental risks surged; and speculation intensified over which state or proxy might have carried out such an audacious attack.

Yet the Nordic reaction has been strikingly muted. Sweden closed its investigation in early 2024, declaring that it lacked clear jurisdiction and could not prove Swedish territory or nationals were involved. Denmark soon followed, acknowledging that the explosions were "deliberate sabotage" but claiming insufficient evidence to proceed with criminal charges.

This collective reticence is difficult to square with the gravity of the incident. The blasts occurred in international waters, but within the economic zones of Denmark and Sweden. They targeted a major piece of European energy infrastructure. And they unfolded at a moment when the Nordic countries were dramatically redefining their security posture, supporting Ukraine, arming themselves, and positioning Russia as a principal strategic adversary.

The result is a paradox at the heart of Nordic security policy. These states are willing to rearm, to assume greater military responsibility, even to risk escalation with Russia — but they hesitate when confronted with a sabotage event that occurred in their own maritime backyard. The Nord Stream episode exposes a limit to the region's new warrior posture: an unwillingness to confront certain politically sensitive questions when they cut too close to one's own putative allies.

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This increase in criminal activity is then cited as fresh evidence of the regime's criminal nature, justifying further sanctions and pressure. This circular logic allows drug trafficking to be framed as the cause of U.S. policy rather than, in significant part, a consequence of it. It sanitizes a regime-change agenda under the morally unambiguous banner of combating narcotics.

Pretext and Strategy

The evidence indicates that the U.S. focus on Venezuelan drug trafficking is disproportionate to its actual role in the global narcotics supply chain and selective in its application. The severe humanitarian and destabilizing effects of sanctions contradict stated goals of promoting democracy and human rights. A more coherent explanation for US actions is its desire to control strategic resources, maintain regional dominance, and wage war in multipolarity.

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The "narco-state" label functions as a moral and legal pretext, providing a basis from which US intervention appears legitimate to some sections of the public. However, this obscures the policy's counterproductive outcomes and its role in perpetuating the very crises—authoritarian resilience, criminality, and human suffering—it claims to resolve. Until this fundamental contradiction is acknowledged, U.S. policy toward Venezuela will remain strategically incoherent, harming the Venezuelan populace while failing to achieve its unstated, yet transparent, geopolitical ends. The Venezuelan case stands as a stark lesson in how the "War on Drugs" continues to provide a versatile narrative for the pursuit of power, often at the expense of the populations it purports to save.

Cim Fez

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<https://substack.com/@cimfez>

NOW MORE THAN EVER WESTERN EUROPE NEEDS ITS 1989 MOMENT

In 1989, Eastern Europe freed itself from an exhausted empire. The collapse of one tutelary order—the Soviet system—was celebrated as the triumph of sovereignty, pluralism, and political adulthood. Yet more than three decades later, it is Western Europe that remains locked in a different, more discreet form of subordination. The language is friendlier, the symbols more seductive, but the structure is unmistakable: strategic dependence, military reliance, and ideological alignment under American leadership.

If 1989 marked the end of one empire's control over Europe, the 2020s should mark the end of another's guardianship. The problem is not hostility toward the United States. But Europeans have to recognise that they have outgrown the geopolitical arrangements imposed by the ruins of 1945.

The Origins of Subordination

American dominance over Western Europe was not the result of conquest. After World War II, Europe was shattered — economically ruined, politically fragmented, and psychologically traumatized. An external stabilizer was required. The presence of US troops and the creation of NATO provided a security umbrella under which Western Europe could rebuild.

For decades, this arrangement may have made sense. Europe had demonstrated, twice in one generation, its inability to manage internal rivalries peacefully. Germany's centrality, unresolved nationalisms, and ideological extremism made external supervision appear not only prudent but indispensable. The Cold War froze European conflicts under American protection, while economic integration proceeded under U.S. strategic oversight.

The Soviet Union functioned as both threat and glue. **As long as an external enemy existed, American leadership felt natural, even benevolent.** Western Europe prospered materially, constructed

welfare states, and internalized a liberal democratic consensus — largely without having to think seriously about power politics.

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A World That No Longer Exists

That world ended long ago. The Warsaw Pact dissolved. Soviet troops withdrew. Germany reunified peacefully and became a commercial rather than military hegemon. The European Union expanded eastward and institutionalized conflict resolution through law, bureaucracy, and compromise rather than force.

Nothing illustrates Europe's loss of agency more starkly than the destruction of the Nord Stream pipelines. Regardless of responsibility the political reaction was revealing. A direct attack on critical European infrastructure occurred, and Europe responded with silence. This was not prudence; it was submission.

Yet the security architecture never adjusted. Instead of emancipation, Europe doubled down on dependence. NATO did not dissolve after its adversary vanished; it expanded. Military alignment hardened precisely as the original justification disappeared.

The argument that Europe remains too unstable to manage its own security is no longer credible. For eighty years, Western European states have resolved disputes without war. Borders have changed through negotiation, not violence. Political crises have been absorbed institutionally. To claim that European democracies still require American supervision is to deny their historical maturation.

Strategic Infantilization

What replaced necessity was habit—and eventually, convenience. American leadership relieved European elites of responsibility. Defense spending could be minimized. Strategic thinking could be outsourced. Moral posturing could replace hard choices. This arrangement has now become actively harmful.

The war in Ukraine exposed the limits of Europe's subordinate posture. European states became parties to a major continental war without possessing either strategic autonomy or diplomatic initiative. Policy was reactive, not sovereign — shaped in Washington and implemented in European capitals. Europe absorbed the economic shock: energy inflation, industrial disruption, social discontent. Yet it exercised little control over escalation management, negotiation channels, or end-state objectives. Supporting Ukraine became a moral imperative detached from any clearly articulated European interest or realistic political outcome.

The result is paralysis: too committed to disengage, too dependent to lead.

The Nord Stream Lesson

Nothing illustrates Europe's loss of agency more starkly than the destruction of the Nord Stream pipelines. Regardless of responsibility—a question that remains diplomatically unspoken—the political reaction was revealing. A direct attack on critical European infrastructure occurred, and Europe responded with silence. This was not prudence; it was submission.

Years earlier, Washington had openly opposed Nord Stream 2, asserting that it conflicted with European “security.” That a non-European power could so casually define European interests—and later see the infrastructure disappear without consequence—should have triggered a profound reckoning. It did not.

Ideology and Strategy

American influence today is less about orders than about frameworks. Europe increasingly imports US ideological conflicts wholesale: racial discourse, identity politics, culture-war polarization. These debates, born of America's unique history, are treated as universal moral litmus tests.

This ideological synchronization distorts European politics. Issues marginal to European social reality are elevated, while structural problems — industrial decline, demographic imbalance, infrastructure decay — receive less attention. Political energy is consumed by symbolic alignment rather than material governance.

The irony is stark. Europe, with its long tradition of social democracy, collective bargaining, and welfare states, still feels compelled to justify itself against American ideological reflexes. Policies that are mainstream in Europe remain suspect in US discourse — and yet European elites continue to seek American moral validation.

Economic Subordination

Strategic dependence now extends to economics. US industrial policy — most notably the Inflation Reduction Act — openly subsidized American industry at Europe's

expense. European firms relocated production. European leaders protested politely, then adapted. There was no retaliation, no strategic counterweight, no assertion of symmetry. This is not alliance; it is hierarchy. A Europe that cannot protect its industrial base, energy security, or diplomatic autonomy is not a partner but a client.

Eastern European Paradoxes

Some European states remain deeply invested in American protection, particularly those with historical trauma tied to Russian power. Their fears are understandable. But allowing the most anxious members to dictate the strategic posture of the entire continent is unsustainable.

The war in Ukraine exposed the limits of Europe's subordinate posture. European states became parties to a major continental war without possessing either strategic autonomy or diplomatic initiative. Policy was reactive, not sovereign—shaped in Washington and implemented in European capitals.

European security cannot be built exclusively around worst-case scenarios inherited from the twentieth century. A continent of 450 million people cannot outsource its long-term future to the domestic politics of another state — especially one increasingly unstable and polarized.

The return of Donald Trump only underscores the danger. European security should not fluctuate with US electoral cycles.

A Western European 1989

Emancipation does not mean hostility. It means responsibility. Europe must become a subject of history again, not merely its moral commentator. That requires: First, strategic autonomy in defense, not rhetorical commitments without capacity. Secondly, independent diplomatic channels, including with adversaries. Thirdly, energy and industrial policy driven by European interests, not transatlantic loyalty tests. Fourthly, a political culture rooted in European realities rather than imported American conflicts. In 1989, Eastern Europe reclaimed sovereignty by recognizing that the empire governing it had lost legitimacy. Western Europe faces a subtler task: recognizing that tutelage, even benevolent, is no longer justified.

The American moment in Europe was historically necessary. It is now historically obsolete.

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Intellectuals and war — A diagnosis

This analysis does not necessarily seek to consider specific intellectuals, but rather to provide a portrait of the currently dominant discourse on the war in Ukraine and the vast caste of intellectual workers who tirelessly labour every day to construct and disseminate this discourse.

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As a rule, we are accustomed to thinking of the intellectual as the antithesis of the man of action, the man who is actively involved in politics, advertising, business or his own garden. In a world that very often does not correspond in its crudeness to the high ideals conceived by intellectuals, the pure intellectuality of the noble principles of intellectuals has been considered infinitely superior to the baseness of worldly things as this world was created.

But intellectuals do not exist in a vacuum. Today, being an intellectual means having a public function and responsibilities before the society to which one speaks. The thinker in the ivory tower who is disinterested in the world and despises it is not an intellectual. A thinker who exists in his ivory tower does not exist for the world, and an intellectual is only such when recognised as such by other intellectuals.

Theoretically, intellectuals should represent a superior type of humanity that believes in progress and civilisation. As a rule, a self-respecting intellectual is firmly convinced that this is exactly the case. Theoretically, such people, the best of humanity, should reject war as something monstrous and deeply antithetical to the culture and civilisation they claim to love.

Intellectuals are well aware that their role as intellectuals and their public function as aristocrats of thought are rather precarious: they may have them today, but if the intellectual community withdraws

its recognition, tomorrow their reputation will be lost. An intellectual who has lost their reputation is an intellectual who has lost everything. The value of the intellectual lies in his moral integrity and reputation, in the recognition he enjoys in an intellectual community that conceives itself and is conceived as an intellectual elite by a society of citizens who accept the domination of this intellectual elite.

For this reason, in order to survive, the skilled intellectual must be able to grasp the *Zeitgeist* and, with infallible instinct, guess what can be said and what is not acceptable to say at a given time and in a given society. A public intellectual who says the wrong things at a particular moment understands very well that he will be disqualified very quickly. The public figure of the intellectual will be forgotten.

It is true that perhaps the most famous and most public intellectuals are not the best intellectuals, the most gifted intellectuals, but they are the intellectuals who are talked about and who set the tone for public discussion.

* * *

Today, intellectuals who love peace, prosperity, progress, justice and all these good things are fighting wholeheartedly (with words) for the **great cause of our time**, Ukraine's war against Russia, the West's war to defend its values against Russian tyranny. How many of these intellectuals knew anything about Ukraine before February last year? How many of them have visited Ukraine? How many of them knew a single word of Ukrainian? How many of them had paid any attention to Ukraine's existence before 2014?

But intellectuals, like good schoolchildren, have learned to recite by heart the creed of our

time, the creed of democracy. We do not know if they really believe in it, but that is not the most important thing. Just as the priests of the Renaissance or of *The Red and the Black* did not really believe in the Trinity or in the divine nature of Christ, today's intellectuals do not believe in democracy as the sovereignty of the people. On the contrary, they never tire of violently denouncing it as populism, the true antithesis of democracy and the prelude to fascism.

Yet these intellectuals declare themselves in favour of all-out war "in defence of our values and our civilisation" and violently denounce as stupid or, worse, complicit, any attempt at compromise and peaceful resolution of the conflict. If they say the right things, intellectuals will not lose their jobs. And jobs, as we know, are everything in today's world! A man without a job is a man who has lost all respect from society. Let us not compromise with the high ideals of humanity!

Harmony and concord are among those happy accidents of life that are too rare not to be appreciated when, as if by divine grace, they present themselves to man. However, this universal principle does not apply to a particular type of man, the intellectual. In theory, intellectual circles should be territories of absolute freedom where everything is discussed openly and without prejudice. Animated by the infinite intellectual vivacity of the most brilliant minds that a society can produce, in the spectacle of an intellectual dispute, we should be able to find confirmation, as the ancient philosopher Heraclitus said, that war, obviously understood in a metaphorical sense, is the mother of all things, both good and bad.

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For this reason, the suspicious harmony we see today in

intellectual circles in Europe and America regarding what many see as the great cause of our time, Ukraine's war against aggressor Russia, has a strange effect. The conflict in Ukraine is reduced to a global battle between Good and Evil, between democracies, the only forms of government that have true legitimacy, and tyrannies, rogue countries led by inhuman psychopaths who, if they could, would enslave the whole of humanity. And it is precisely for this reason, we are constantly warned, that it is impossible to opt out of this universal war between Good and Evil.

People who until the day before yesterday knew nothing about Ukraine and had barely heard of it suddenly declare themselves great lovers of Ukraine and of the universal and eternal values that Ukraine would defend against the attack of tyrannies. **Ukraine no longer exists as a real country, but becomes the symbol of the modern and democratic world that the systemic intellectual pretends to support with all his being. Ukraine becomes a projection.** Of course, much of the intellectual's task is to explain the world, to offer captivating interpretations of a myriad of complex events that at first glance may not even seem connected. But the danger of these captivating grand narratives lies precisely in the fact that they oversimplify reality, seduce too easily, and their very authors can fall madly in love with their own creations.

The danger of these captivating grand narratives lies precisely in the fact that they oversimplify reality, seduce too easily, and their very authors can fall madly in love with their own creations.

And love, as we know, make you blind. Instead of seeking a practical solution to what was an avoidable conflict, today's Western intellectuals are competing to see who can be more heroic than the other: here they are, all fighting against Putin with words and denouncing any attempt at compromise with violence and deep contempt.

While war is heroic and carefully worded phrases in newspaper columns or television broadcasts, for others, especially Ukrainians, war means above all death, destruction and ruined lives. *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*, especially when it is others who are doing the actual dying and the homeland is not even yours.

For the Western collective consciousness, it is as if history had stopped in 1939: either Chamberlain or Hitler, there are no alternatives, it is as if that were the only war and the only dualism in history and all wars had to be interpreted according to this pattern. There are dissenting voices, even among intellectuals, but they are few and far between and are promptly ostracised, at best as useful idiots, at worst as accomplices to evil.

How, after all, can one compromise with evil when, on the one hand, the ideals that have made the Western world great, such as democracy, freedom, law, rules, reason, human dignity and truth,

are at stake, and on the other, there are dark forces that detest these principles and seem determined to plunge the world into chaos? Yet, once again, wanting to apply these facile interpretative schemes to a complex situation is not evidence of great intellectual honesty. Explaining intricate matters and events such as those involving Russia and Ukraine over the last 10, 20, 30 years without providing the historical and political context in which these events took place is a serious blasphemy against the cult of absolute and indisputable truth to which today's great European and American intellectuals profess their faith.

Only if blinded by fantasies of grand ideals too noble to compromise with anyone can one see a just war in Ukraine's sacred battle to liberate its territory, including Crimea, for example. In reality, of course, almost no one in Crimea is waiting to be "liberated" by Ukraine. Being able to recognise this should be proof of intellectual honesty and the ability to recognise reality in its objectivity.

Not that these insignificant details concern our great intellectual. After all, bloody massacres have been committed in the name of liberty, equality and fraternity throughout European history. But in the intellectual's ideal world, ideals are too pure to be tainted by the rivers of blood of history. It is a paradox that is not easy to resolve, that of wanting to continue to propose war in the name of humanity and humanism. But it is not an impossible paradox for Western intellectuals: while war is heroic and carefully worded phrases in newspaper columns or television broadcasts, for others, especially Ukrainians, war means above all death, destruction and ruined lives. *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*, especially when it is others who are doing the actual dying and the homeland is not even yours.

The Dialogue

A tale

Jean-Paul arrived early, as he often did. The classroom was still half empty, the air quiet, unclaimed. In Russia, he had learned, mornings belonged to those who wanted them. Friendships, though, seemed easier here. Students lingered together, talked, argued, smoked, went home together. In Paris, he remembered corridors full of familiar strangers—faces seen a hundred times, never greeted.

He was the only foreigner in his class, which made him visible. Curiosity followed him everywhere: sometimes clumsy, sometimes shallow, but warmer than indifference. He disliked, though, being reduced to a symbol—*the Frenchman*—expected to perform a handful of predictable gestures. Still, there were worse fates.

“Salut,” someone said behind him.

Jean-Paul turned. It was David.

“You speak French?” Jean-Paul asked, surprised.

“I studied in France for a year, back in school.”

“You could have mentioned it.”

“I never had the chance.”

David had a broad forehead and wire-rim glasses. He looked like someone who could read a book once and remember it forever. He dressed without concern: plain clothes, heavy boots better suited to street cleaners than students. But in St. Petersburg’s northern damp, elegance surrendered quickly to survival.

Before the lecture began, David leaned closer. “I’ve written an article. Could you look it over?”

“Of course.”

David pulled four sheets from his backpack. The title read: “Russia Within the European Family of Nations”.

“Interesting,” Jean-Paul said.

“I hope so.”

That was how their friendship began.

David embodied everything Jean-Paul admired and doubted he possessed: speed of thought, tireless clarity, an almost reckless confidence in ideas. He could write an article in an hour, debate anything, summon anecdotes and quotations without effort. At the same time, he seemed oddly naïve—overread, underworldly. Jean-Paul couldn’t imagine him in a polished intellectual salon except as a curious, slightly comic presence.

Yet the idea itself captivated him. Russia and Europe, not opposed but joined—like after Napoleon, like before the First World War. Together they would be formidable. To Jean-Paul it seemed obvious: Russians were Europeans. Old quarrels were relics. The future pointed toward harmony.

“Who do you write for?” Jean-Paul asked one day. “You should publish this.”

“I don’t know anyone. I’ve sent pieces to newspapers. No replies.”

“Then we’ll make our own paper,” Jean-Paul said, half joking.

“That’s difficult.”

“I know.”

Jean-Paul felt he had something to say, though he didn’t yet know how. Poetry had repelled him—too self-absorbed, too indulgent, unworthy of the stern ideal of manhood he

secretly admired and clearly failed to embody. The novel seemed nobler, but invention was not his gift. His ideas came in sudden flashes, attached to concrete things.

So he began to write essays instead: one on Freemasonry in Russia, another on the French community in St. Petersburg. He wrote them in Russian and gave them to David to correct. Journalism, perhaps, was the form of a mature intellect. A strange thought, considering how much contempt the great writers he loved—Balzac, Maupassant—had shown for journalists.

Jean-Paul had never possessed the certainty of true genius. But life felt too short for endless hesitation.

One evening, returning home after hours of grand conversations with David, he opened his laptop and began to design a modest paper. He titled it “The Dialogue”. Europe and Russia, together, as friends—now and forever. An optimistic vision, possible only at twenty. Yet without such optimism, he thought, nothing in the world would ever move forward.

He typed the headline of his first article:

“Finally, Together.”

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