

ÉDITORIAL N°62***AS THE FOG OF WAR LIFTS ...*****Dr Eric Denécé**

In late July 2022, when speaking¹ on the matter of how, in time of war, information is 'massaged', I noted that producing a fine-tuned analysis of the conflict in the Ukraine was no easy thing, whether in ascertaining the true reasons for the conflict, or formally identifying the perpetrators of war-crimes; in my experience as an (ex-) intelligence-analyst, whatever facts the mass-media and most observers report in real-time are invariably lacunary, slap-dash or slanted; as adversaries up the ante on disinformation, truthful explanations appear only once the conflict draws to an end - and sometimes never. One finds this illustrated today as new facts - generally invisible to analysts in real-time, although, it may well be, visible to some amongst the belligerents - come to our knowledge little by little, a full year after the outbreak of this deplorable struggle.

Now, even where credible sources, partly borne out by other evidence, are to hand, caution will always be in order. That said, the latest revelations strike us as sufficiently solid to be taken seriously. On that basis, a fresh view of events appears, making sense of facts and decisions, the logic of which was not, up to that point in time, fully clear.

What has served to substantially alter one's view, are these two revelations:

- a series of statements by former Israeli PM Naftali Bennett, by Prof. Jeffrey Sachs² and by the Turkish mediators³, all of which are congruent: in late March 2022, the Ukrainian Government was on the verge of signing an agreement with Russia that would have ended the conflict;
- Seymour Hersh's piece⁴ setting out the US modus operandi for the attack on Nord Stream 1 and 2, and the German Prosecutor's conclusions from the enquiry into the matter.

¹ <https://dialoguefrancorusse.com/medias/guerre-en-ukraine-information-et-realite-avec-eric-denece-et-pierre-conesa/>

² Special advisor to UN Sec. Gen. Antonio Guterres, Professor Sachs has appeared on the "world's most influential" *Time Magazine* list.

³ <https://www.middleeasteye.net/fr/actu-et-enquetes/ukraine-turquie-israel-russie-guerre-efforts-diplomatie-mediation-negociations>

⁴ <https://seymourhersh.substack.com/p/how-america-took-out-the-nord-stream>

Disrupted Negotiations

Further to Israeli initiatives, negotiations began in March 2022, shortly after the Russian offensive against the Ukraine. In a lengthy interview to *Channel 12* on 4th February 2023¹, Naftali Bennett² revealed many details of the goings-on during mediation.

Bennett explained that both Moscow and Kiev had been inclined to make major concessions and that a truce had seemed feasible: *“I would suggest that there was a good chance of reaching a cease-fire”*, he said, adding that President Putin was disposed to drop the demand that the Ukraine be denazified and disarmed, while President Zelensky would refrain from all further attempt to join NATO. Whilst meeting with Vladimir Putin, Bennett asked him whether he planned to have Zelensky assassinated, and Putin undertook not to do so.

“Everything I did was coordinated with the USA, Germany and France”, said Bennett. Before involving himself in negotiations, he had spoken with President Biden, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, National Security advisor Jake Sullivan and with Chancellor Scholz and proposed to act as a channel between the two warring Presidents.

Bennett added that Israel’s role was *“coordinated with the USA, France and Germany right down to fine detail”*; it was those nations which actually took the final decisions, and which decided, he says, to have the talks broken off. It was they which blocked the process, whereas, Bennett had *“the impression that both [Zelensky and Putin] hoped for a cease-fire”*.

The above statements are of special significance, revealing as they do, that President Zelensky lacked all decisional powers, that he bowed to the West, which was dealing his hand of cards, and that it was actually the West which objected to the signing of a cease fire agreement. Here, my sole reservation, is that Bennett would appear to assign France and Germany greater importance than they likely wield in a conflict³, where all momentum and directives come from the USA.

Now, the British did play a role in the decision. According to Bennett, *“Boris Johnson wanted more radical measures, while Macron and Scholz were more pragmatic. Biden supported both approaches”*⁴. At the end of the day, he says, they opted for the radical, British, position.

And so, there was no exit-strategy reached, says Bennett, the West having decided to *“keep on slugging away at Putin”* and bin the negotiations, while conveying the appropriate message to other “rogue States” such as China, purportedly ogling Taiwan.

Israel is not alone in having attempted to mediate; Turkey too made a stab at keeping the lines of dialogue open between Moscow and Kiev. Although the latter negotiations got off to a rocky start⁵, here again, success may not have been not far off.

¹ <https://www.i24news.tv/fr/actu/conflit-en-ukraine/1675587804-je-ne-tuerai-pas-zelenski-avait-promis-vladimir-poutine-a-naftali-bennett>

<https://fr.timesofisrael.com/bennett-assure-que-poutine-lui-a-promis-de-ne-pas-tuer-zelensky>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qK9tLDeWBzs>

² Like many of his predecessors in the job, Naftali Bennett is a former special forces commander, having served in the *sayeret* Matkal and Maglan.

³ from ex-Chancellor Merkel’s statements in December 2022, corroborated by former President François Hollande, we know that at Washington’s behest, the Europeans had no intention of ensuring that the Minsk agreements, signed in June 2014, be enforced.

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qK9tLDeWBzs3>

⁵ <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1867918/guerre-ukraine-rencontre-diplomatique-turque-negociations>.

On 20th March 2022, the Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu stated that the two belligerents were “*close to reaching an agreement*”, while the Presidency’s spokesman Ibrahim Kalin, reported that six points were being negotiated: Ukrainian neutrality, disarmament and denazification, security, right to freely use the Russian language in the Ukraine, status of the Donbass and Crimea¹.

On 29th March, the Russian and Ukrainian delegations met for a further round of talks at Istanbul², described as “*significant*” by the Kremlin³.

That same day, Alexander Fomin, Russian Vice-Minister of Defence, announced that as of 1st April, his country’s armed forces would withdraw from the Kiev area and from Northern Ukraine, a move Moscow presented as a sign of good will. Again, that very day, though acknowledging “*positive signals*”, President Zelensky stated that the Ukraine’s military effort would nevertheless not be slackening⁴.

On 30th March, notwithstanding the Western bloc’s reservations, the Ukraine’s chief negotiator opined that the prerequisites were in place for a Putin/Zelensky summit⁵.

The Ukraine’s status would be that of neutrality, in exchange for security guarantees, which proposal seems to have met with Moscow’s approval; a cut-back in Russian activity around Kiev was confirmed. But on the evening of 30th March, the wind suddenly shifted, as the Russian President’s spokesman Dmitri Peskov announced that “no progress had been made”⁶, without, however, it being clear at the time which party was behind the impasse.

Very recently, Professor Jeffrey Sachs⁷ has pointed to the critical role played by President Biden and the tiny Neo-Con cell around him (essentially Under-Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, Jake Sullivan and Anthony Blinken) in making a decision which would bring down such heavy consequences upon the Ukrainian people.

Professor Sachs stated that Russians and Ukrainians had worked out the seventh or eighth version of a final document to be signed by both parties, when out of the blue, Zelensky about-faced, and negotiations were broken off. According to Professor Sachs, it was President Biden’s trip to Europe on 23rd March, in the course of which he attended three summits (NATO, G7, EU) before travelling on to Poland on 26th March⁸, which torpedoed the negotiations and explains Zelensky’s about-face.

¹ <https://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/pourparlers-la-turquie-assure-que-la-russie-et-l-ukraine-sont-proches-d-un-accord-20220320>

² <https://www.lavoixdunord.fr/1159206/article/2022-03-29/direct-ukraine-nouveau-round-de-negociations-istanbul-entre-moscou-et-kiev>

<https://www.leparisien.fr/international/negociations-entre-lukraine-et-la-russie-un-premier-pas-diplomatique-mais-29-03-2022-LPQFQOSECJEXHK4M6SLU25AJ2I.php>

<https://www.leprogres.fr/defense-guerre-conflit/2022/03/29/guerre-en-ukraine-la-nouvelle-session-de-pourparlers-devrait-debuter-a-istanbul>

³ <https://information.tv5monde.com/info/negociations-entre-l-ukraine-et-la-russie-moscou-souffle-le-chaud-et-le-froid-450818>

⁴ AFP, 29 mars 2022.

⁵ <https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1295195/negociations-substantielles-entre-moscou-et-kiev-en-turquie.html>

⁶ https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2022/03/30/guerre-en-ukraine-dans-les-negociations-comme-sur-le-terrain-kiev-tente-de-reprendre-la-main_6119733_3210.html

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ySNyAaw4VE4>

⁸ <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/amériques/20220323-le-président-américain-joe-biden-en-europe-pour-une-série-de-sommets-internationaux>.

At Warsaw, President Biden took a hard-line against Russia, portraying President Putin¹ as a “*butcher*”, and stating that Putin could not be allowed to remain in power. American support for the Ukraine would, he said, be steadfast².

At that point, it must have become clear to Russia that the West would not allow her to enjoy a victory then within her grasp, but would rather dig in its heels for a long war – a war that had not, perhaps, been part of the original game-plan. Is that why Russia withdrew from Northern Ukraine and redeployed to the Donbass, or was it really a good-will gesture to further the talks? Unclear. However, once the West had frozen the Russo-Ukrainian talks held under Israeli and Turkish auspices, all dialogue ceased when Kiev charged Moscow – rightly or wrongly – with the crimes at Butcha³.

Nord Stream sabotaged

Indisputably, Seymour Hersh, who was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1970, is top of the totem pole when it comes to US investigative journalism. Having uncovered major scandals over a long career, from the killings at My Lai in 1968, to the actual modus operandi employed in “liquidating” Ben Laden, or the true motives for the war in Syria⁴, Hersh has always enjoyed great respect from his colleagues in journalism, and from the political class. Seymour Hersh’s sources have invariably been players in the know, whether at the hard core of a conflict or directly involved in decision-making; serious, well-documented, he is not given to wild conjecture.

Accordingly, his recent article on Nord Stream repays close scrutiny⁵. Blow by blow, Hersh describes how the CIA, aided by Norway⁶ undertook to sabotage Nord Stream 1 and 2. In June 2022, piggy-backing a NATO naval exercise in the Baltic Sea, Norwegian divers placed onto the pipelines, explosives to be remotely detonated. Three months later, on 26th September, a Norwegian patrol aircraft set off the explosion via acoustic buoy.

According to Seymour Hersh, the decision to sabotage Nord Stream was taken in secret by President Biden and his circle, without consulting Congress and in order to prevent Moscow from selling billions of dollars worth of natural gas to Europe.

It goes without saying that the US authorities have criticised Hersh’s piece, and vehemently. To the NSC’s spokesman, Miss Adrienne Watson, it’s utter “*fiction*”, and to the CIA, completely and utterly false. As for the Norwegian Foreign Minister, well, “these allegations are false.” What might one expect, from those sources⁷? However, such denial is scarcely persuasive, Hersh’s article being both precise and plausible. Who but those at Washington would have cared to sabotage Nord Stream? In the interval, a German

¹ https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2022/03/26/guerre-en-ukraine-joe-biden-reaffirme-en-pologne-que-l-accord-de-defense-collective-de-l-otan-est-un-devoir-sacre_6119294_3210.html

² <https://www.midilibre.fr/2022/03/26/en-visite-en-pologne-joe-biden-qualifie-poutine-de-boucher-et-reitere-son-soutien-indefectible-a-lukraine-10196320.php>

³ Notwithstanding categorical statements in the mass media, never have the conclusions been made public, following international enquiries into the ghastly events at Butcha (the French Institut de recherche criminelle de la Gendarmerie nationale or IRCGN, also took part).

⁴ *The Killing of Osama Bin Laden*, Verso, 2016.

⁵ <https://seymourhersh.substack.com/p/how-america-took-out-the-nord-stream>

⁶ One should recall both that NATO’s current Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, is Norway’s former Prime Minister and that Norway is Russia’s main competitor on the European gas market.

⁷ As one would anticipate on Wikipedia, some hand promptly scribbled “conspiracy theorist” on the entry for Seymour Hersh.

Prosecutor has come forward to state that no evidence has turned up implicating Russia in the sabotage¹.

“And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales” ...

Assuming, as we now believe to be the case, that Hersh’s information does indeed correspond to reality, it sheds fresh light not only upon the past, but upon the respective responsibility of the players in this conflict.

Allow us then to put forward the following hypotheses, that remain either to be confirmed – or overturned.

- From the standpoint of the initial objective, namely to get Kiev to call off the dogs, the SMO was in fact succeeding. Despite certain geographically-limited setbacks and relatively significant casualties, the first five weeks of the SMO may be viewed as a success: the Ukrainians were brought to the negotiating table, and talks very nearly came to a felicitous end. That state of affairs tallies only faintly with the view defended by Western experts and journalists, who from the outset announced that the SMO was failing. And then there were those - notably in Poland - who attempted to persuade us that the Ukraine was under full-scale invasion, and that Western Europe would be next on Russia’s chopping block.

In late March 2022, with President Biden’s trip to Europe, it all went bottom-up. The West, i.e. the US and the UK, got Zelensky to press on with a war that would otherwise have rapidly ground to a halt. Admittedly, a halt on Russia’s conditions, which then involved only neutral status for the Ukraine, plus her claim on the Donbass and Crimea. At the time, Kharkov, Kherson and Zaporozhye were not at issue – that is, until the Ukrainian side changed tack.

- Beyond all shadow of doubt, all the above lays responsibility for the continued prosecution of this war squarely at the USA’s door, with the Zelensky Government acting both as pawn and accomplice. In cosyng up to their string-pullers in the West, the so-called “Heroes” of Kiev, backed by its régime’s ultranationalist fringe, entertain no qualms as the Ukraine’s people and all her prospects evaporate.

Since April 2022, therefore, we are dealing with a war between Russia and the USA, with the Ukraine used as a plaything; the USA stokes the fires of war, vainly striving to bring down Russia. As for the European states, here they go and sing along with Mitch, whether by Russophobia, bleating herd-instinct or sheer, gob-smacking stupidity.

- Here we have yet another example of the milquetoast, or if you prefer, Nothing-Burger role played by the Europeans, cravenly smoothing Washington’s path whilst strewing our own with thorns. Despite her President’s wild-eyed posturing, France is just a bit player in the crisis: it’s on Germany that the boom has been lowered. With the destruction of Nord Stream, an Act of War has been perpetrated against Germany, an Act of War at the hands of her purported ally and protector.

Notwithstanding the dire effects on her economy, neither her Government, nor her MPs, mass-media nor even her people, have jumped to their feet to fight back. Germany, virtually writhing and crawling before Washington. Bull’s Eye for Washington! Finally,

¹ <https://www.francesoir.fr/politique-monde/aucune-preuve-ne-lie-la-russie-au-sabotage-des-gazoducs-nord-stream-selon-le>

Germany has been cut off from Russia, nor will the two States now be reconciled. A side-benefit, is that as her economic might in the West dwindles, Germany's influence too in Europe will fade.

“The best laid schemes o' mice an' men /Gang aft a-gley” ?

All this serves to substantially alter one's view of the conflict and of those responsible. A trap, twofold and Machiavellian, has been set for Russia by the US Neo-Cons: - turn the screws on the Donbass to a degree, that Russia would have no option but to intervene militarily¹; cast aspersion on her throughout the world, and cut her off from Western Europe; - head off a Russian victory that would otherwise have been attendant on her initial military success, and drag her into a protracted war, so as to leach out her substance for the long haul.

By rejecting a negotiated settlement that would have favoured Russia in March 2022, the USA both intensified and protracted the struggle.

That said, events have taken a turn the USA would never have predicted, certain as it was that Russia's economy would crumble. That never happened, neither has the Russian army been defeated in the Ukraine, nor has Russia been shut up and shut out by the rest of the world. “Awfuller still” from the US standpoint, before our eyes there arises a new economic and financial system, one which will undermine US political and monetary hegemony.

Yet again, the USA has displayed to the world its strategists' scant worth - save perhaps as sorcerer's apprentice. Their scheming to bring down Russia has mutated into an existential war, as they lash and flail to keep a stranglehold on the world. *“The best laid schemes o' mice an' men / Gang aft a-gley” ?*

Éric Denécé

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(Translation : Mendelssohn Moses)

¹ Eric Denécé, « Ukraine : la guerre des Spin Doctors américains », Éditorial n°58, février 2022 (<https://cf2r.org/editorial/ukraine-la-guerre-des-spin-doctors-americaains>).