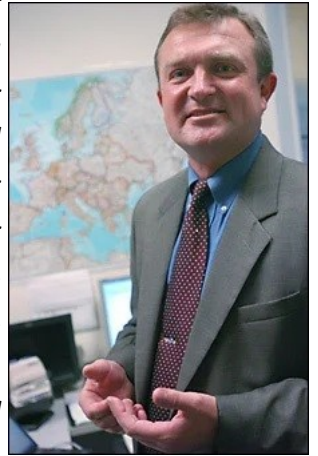


THE WAR IN UKRAINE IS ALREADY RESHAPING GLOBAL ORDER

Interview with dr. Sergei KONOPLYOV – former Director of the Harvard Black Sea Regional Security Program initiated by the US, Harvard University -Kennedy School of Government

Dr. Sergei Konoplyov was Director of the Harvard Black Sea Regional Security Program (BSRSP) initiated by Harvard University - Kennedy School of Government since its inception till 2017 when the US ceased to fund the Program as a result of shifting the strategic orientation towards Asia-Pacific. It brought together political, diplomatic and military personalities through annual lectures and conferences for the coastal states of the Black Sea, and not only, and sought to create a better knowledge and rapprochement among the participants of the respective countries for enhancing the security situation in the area. As of 2010, the Russian Federation discontinued its participation to the Program. Dr. Konoplyov is an American citizen of Ukrainian descent who has been honoured with numerous awards and medals from the participant states to BSRSP for his contribution to the development of the relations among the respective states.



Question (Corneliu Pivariu): *Dr. Konoplyov, we have known each other for over 20 years beginning with 2001 with my first participation to BSRSP at Harvard and from that time we have met almost every year at the programs organized for the alumni in different capitals of the world from Moscow, Erevan and Kyiv to Istanbul and Paris, and of course several times in Bucharest. Although the Russian Federation tried to stand out as a different entity compared to the rest of the participants, and after 2010 it discontinued its participation, I do appreciate that the Program was extremely useful and interesting especially the way the US conceived and built it – including through your contribution but also that of other important personalities, and I make a single mention - Samuel Huntington – and, in general, it was extremely useful for the region. I had a deep regret when the US decided to withdraw from the Program and I shared with you my opinion. Don't you think that under the current circumstances in the region it would be of great use whether the US Administration reconsider its decision and resume the Program in a new formula taking account of the present geopolitical realities?*

Answer (Sergei Konoplyov): Yes, you are absolutely right. The program was unique in its nature because it was conceived as a clearinghouse for high-level security managers of the countries of a wider Black Sea region and the US general officers.

The main idea was to provide a neutral place to exchange freely views which many times were contradictory. This place was Harvard Kennedy School of Government and I am very proud that in many years of the program existence hundreds of military officers and security officers of Eastern Europe and the United States had the possibility to meet face-to-face. Many of them still hold important positions in their countries and communicate among

themselves not only professionally but on a personal level, too. In early 2000 The United States never considered the Black Sea region as important as for instance the former Yugoslavia or the Baltic countries. Despite the presence of the frozen conflicts in the Black Sea area, the United States considered that overall, the region would not require any special attention because the probability of any military conflicts was minimal. They concentrated their efforts to help countries which decided to join NATO and the European Union. Indeed, Romania and Bulgaria became members of both organizations. Ukraine and Georgia also had aspirations to become members. However, as you correctly noted, Russia always had a separate position even when the Russian delegations took part in the program sessions both at Harvard and in the capitals of Eastern European countries. Russia had serious concerns that both Ukraine and Georgia- which were part of the Soviet Union before and part of the Warsaw Pact- would become members of NATO. At the Bucharest NATO summit in 2008 these two countries were denied the Membership Action Plan that would open the doors to the Alliance. Russia was pleased with that decision and there were no indications at that time of any aggressive Russian attempts toward the regional countries. At the same time the EU started to institutionalize its policy toward the region, establishing such initiatives as Black Sea Synergy and Eastern European Neighborhood program. The US decided that Europe could efficiently deal with Eastern European problems without American involvement. Romania took the lead in continuing the Harvard Black Sea program under the auspices of the Administration of the President and held regional events for many years. It is possible that in some future the US would like to establish a similar program due to unprecedented changes in the security architecture of Europe. In any case, the successful experience of the program proves the importance of informal dialogue between the decision makers from the different countries.

Q.C.P.: *How does the American society see/perceive the conflict between Russia and Ukraine? I mean its duration (where the opinions expressed by experts and opinion shapers are vastly different, starting with four months – Ukraine, two years – Gen. Michael Repass – former Commander of the US Special Forces in Europe and after that military adviser in Kyiv for six years, to five-ten years – other opinions in Western Europe).*

A.S.K.: The Russian aggression toward Ukraine in February 2022 was unexpected but inevitable, as we can see now looking at the evidence which we always had before but refused to believe. Russia never considered Ukraine as an independent state. President Putin warned the West in 2008 - when Ukraine officially applied to receive MAP - that Russia would protect the Russian speaking population in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, few people paid attention to that statement. However, many years earlier, after the breakdown of the Soviet Union, the leading US political thinkers like Samuel Huntington and Zbigniew Brzezinski (both were

Russia never considered Ukraine as an independent state

speakers at Harvard program) warned that Russia would never let Ukraine out of its orbit of influence. Since its independence Ukraine has been a recipient of US financial aid and politi-

cal support. The annexation of Crimea and the attempts to occupy the Eastern Ukraine (Donbass) took the world by surprise. International reactions have largely been condemnatory of Russia's actions, supportive of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and supportive of finding a quick end to the crisis.

The United States and the European Union threatened and later enacted sanctions against Russia for its role in the crisis, and urged Russia to withdraw. Putin has accused the United States and the EU of funding and directing the Ukrainian revolution to destabilize Russia. He called it a coup d'état using this as a pretext to invasion. Despite the Western economic sanction Russia was practically unpunished for violation of international law and illegal occupation of other country's territory. The current Russian attack on Ukraine was a thoroughly calculated plan. There are two major mistakes that Russia made in planning the so called "special operation". First, they underestimated the resistance from Ukraine, both military and political. Second, they thought that the US and EU sanctions would be the same as in 2014, that means acceptable by Russia. The US besides its political support has also a moral responsibility to provide Ukraine with all possible assistance. This is because the US was attempting to turn Ukraine into a Western stronghold on Russia's border, ignoring the perils of retaliation, according to John Mearsheimer, a well-respected expert on Eurasia from Chicago University. Another factor to consider is that the war in Ukraine could become a European or even a global conflict and the US might be directly involved in it. Besides the financial and military help, the whole US nation is extremely supportive of Ukraine at the community level. For example, in my small town I see many Ukrainian flags at people's houses. I can definitely see the consolidated opinion of both politicians (republicans and Democrats) and experts about the situation in Ukraine.

Q.C.P.: *Do you consider that the exceedingly high level of the Ukraine's public debt and its implications (aside from the other known considerations) played a role in Putin's making the decision of triggering the aggression against Ukraine?*

A.S.K.: I don't think that any economic factors including Ukrainian dependency from IMF loans were considered when the Russia war plans were designed. It was a political decision and also personal decision based on "we can do it" egoistic thinking rather on a rational calculation of potential benefits and risks.

Q.C.P.: *After the Sea Breeze 2021 military application, V.Zelenski replaced the operative command of the army (the Chief of defense, the Commander of the Operational Command, the Chief of Staff of the Operational Command, the Commander of the Military Air Forces) and, in the fall of the same year, he sacked the minister of Defense A. Taran, too. What could have been the reasons the Ukrainian president took into account?*

A.S.K.: There were many changes in the whole government in the last two years. As to the Ministry of Defense, first of all Ukrainian President had to put the end of the ongoing conflict

between the Minister of Defense and the Head of the General Staff. It was a paradoxical situation when two main figures in the Ukrainian Armed Forces were not communicating among themselves mostly due to personal reasons. It was a very dangerous situation. That's why the decision was made to change the leadership in the Ministry of Defense especially when the Russian troops buildup was becoming a real threat. Another factor – the Ukrainian President wanted to have more loyal people in the military who would not question his orders when the war would start and tough decisions would have to be made. I also think that he listened to the advice from the US experts who know very well the situation in the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Besides those officials, V. Zelenski fired three deputy ministers of defense and two first deputy ministers of Ukrainian Security Service.

Q.C.P.: *How do you assess the performance of Ukraine's foreign intelligence and of the counterintelligence agencies during the most important kinetic confrontation unfolding in Europe after WWII? Do you consider that the tragic death in Egypt, in May 2021, of the retired General Victor Hvozd, former Director of the Directorate of Military Intelligence and then of Ukraine's Foreign Intelligence Service, known to be an Ukrainian patriot and an advocate of the country's democratic development, could be connected to Moscow's preparation of the aggression against Kyiv?*

A.S.K.: All Ukrainian special services deserve a credit for their performance. Even before the Military Directorate of Intelligence planned a unique operation to capture Russian mercenaries from Wagner group who committed crimes in Eastern Ukraine. The main problem in the intelligence community in Ukraine was the infiltration of Russian agents in its structures even at the top. I am not sure if they are completely removed now but, in any case, their damage is minimum. Recently the budget for the intelligence services were increased, they get modern equipment and training. Also, the United States has increased the flow of intelligence to Ukraine about Russian forces in the Donbas and Crimea. The information could allow the Ukrainians to conduct more effective counterattacks against Russian forces in the Donbas or Crimea, or better predict the movement of Russian troops from those areas against Ukrainian forces.

As to the death of Lieutenant General Victor Hvozd, I think it happened due to tragic circumstances. At least there are no indications that it could be conceded to Russia. Victor was a good friend for many years and several times took part in Harvard Black Sea program as a participant as a speaker. After his successful career in the Ukrainian intelligence community, he established a thinktank that provided very professional analysis about security and defense affairs. I keep his book about history of Ukrainian intelligence services on my bookshelf.

Q.C.P.: *During the first three months of military confrontations, Kyiv proved its ability to strongly resist and thwart Moscow's initial plan of getting rapidly the Ukraine's full control, yet it won another extremely important battle, the one of the public domestic and international*

communication. The Kremlin was not able to counter effectively on the international level the Ukrainian activity in this field. How do you think this conflict will continue from the standpoint of public communication, who would be the winner?

A.S.K.: A lot has been written about Russia's disinformation campaigns and efforts to spread fake news, which flooded western countries in the past decade and had different effects around the globe. Russia has also worked to discredit the image of Ukraine among its western partners. Special vocabulary was even promoted to portray Ukraine negatively. One of the decisions for the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia was a belief that its propaganda had succeeded in building a base of supporters in Ukraine. Nonetheless, Russian troops aren't welcome in Ukraine and have faced fearless resistance from ordinary citizens in every corner of the country. Both NATO and Ukraine have been depicted as aggressive foes that want to destroy Russia. On the other hand, Russia positioned itself as the last bastion and defender of the true pure values of Orthodoxy and the Ruskiy mir (Russian world), which are threatened by the corrupt liberal West. Russian propaganda has grown bolder and unanswered for years, leading to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine while serving to mislead and deceive Russians. The governmental funding for propaganda in Russia was tripled since the Russian invasion. Unfortunately, it made many Russians to believe that the war against Ukraine was inevitable. The number of supporters in Russia grew in last three months. Ukraine has no recourses that could match the Russian funding for its government-controlled media. However, I can definitely see the international coverage of Russian aggression in the leading Western media. Unfortunately, Russian citizens have no access to free media – Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and all Russian independent media were banned in Russia. A short answer to your question – Russia wins information war within Russia but loses it globally.

Q.C.P.: *How do you assess the evolution of the military conflict on the ground? The Russian army experienced a lot of malfunctions from instruction, equipment, the use of forces and the way the cooperation among the categories of forces worked. At the same time, the seven years from the invasion of Crimea seemed to have been well spent by the Ukrainian army, benefitting from an important military support from the democratic states and especially from the USA. How do you see, in this framework, the outcome of the conflict and the time horizon or the situation that will emerge and will determine the end?*

A.S.K.: It is absolutely clear that so called Russian "special operation" is not going according the plan. Russia thought it would be a blitzkrieg which would allow them to put a Russia-friendly president. They were not prepared for a long war and colossal losses in personal and military equipment. They underestimated the reparation of Ukrainian armed forces and the resistance of Ukrainian citizens. Their second mistake – Russia thought that the international response would be similar to the previous economic sanctions. All this makes Russia to change its propagandistic narrative. To justify the loss the lives of Russian soldiers they claim that now Russia has to fight against all NATO countries since they provide military assistance to Ukraine. This is the indication that they are losing in Ukraine and frantically looking for any

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solution to end the war on their conditions. Otherwise, Russia will have only two choices: to capitulate and admit they lost the war or to convert the current “special operation” in a full fledge European war. In any case Russia is already a loser. It became a pariah state, every day western companies are leaving Russia. Europe made an unpresidential decision to stop using Russian gas – the main revenue of Western currency to Kremlin. The recent decision of Finland and Sweden to join NATO is a powerful blow to Putin. Russia is a strong country but its recourses are getting low. I believe that Russia will soon proclaim the “victory” and sell this to the Russian public. However, the future of Russia is dark. Putin became the liability for the Russian elites.

Q.C.P.: *What are the chances of Russia’s moving toward widening the conflict, especially in the Republic of Moldova?*

A. S.K.: Russia has demonstrated an inability to take and hold territory more than two hundred kilometers from its territory. So far it sounds not realistic that Russia would send troops to Moldova since it had to be by airlift only. Even that Russia has 1500 “peacekeepers” in Transnistria those soldiers and officers are not combat ready. I believe that initially Russia wanted to establish a land bridge connecting Transnistria to Crimea. In that case Russia would proclaim the re-establishment of so called 'Novorossiya'. There were a series of explosions in Transnistria at the end of April. Also -according to some reliable sources – Russians planned to have a referendum during which the population (half of them have Russian passports) would vote in favor to become part of Russian Federation. However, Moldova is a neutral country and such a move would definitely get a strong international reaction making Russia political and economic position even worse.

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Q.C.P.: *The war shattered all the economic plans of Ukraine. Recent data (end of April) showed that the Russian army destroyed around 30% of the country’s infrastructure and that the direct and indirect damages reached, according to the president V.Zelensky’s Office head, to more than \$560 billion. The World Bank estimates that Ukraine’s economy will shrink by 45% in 2022 while around 60% of the SMEs are closed or have suspended their activities. Under such circumstances, how and how long will take for Ukraine to recover economically and socially?*

A.S.K.:As an advisor to the Minister of Finance of Ukraine, I can tell that it is impossible to have precise estimates of current economic loss in Ukraine. According to international financial agencies, between 500 billion and 1 trillion dollars of capital stock has been destroyed, after two months of war in Ukraine. In the future this number will only grow. To rebuild Ukraine, a consolidated international effort is needed like US Marshall Plan in the 1945 to

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help rebuild Europe after the Second World War. The common opinion is that the Russian government should pay for damages, using Russian assets that were seized or frozen by the U.S. and European Union. Those assets are around 1 trillion US dollars. Revenues from Russian oil imports could also be used in the same way that Iraq's oil revenues were used for nearly 30 years to pay reparations to Kuwait, which was invaded in 1990. Depending on the scale of the international effort the rebuilding of Ukraine would take at least five years or more.

Q.C.P.: *A timeless dictum says that "there's nothing like peace without victory". What kind of victory and what kind of peace is it all about? What will happen with the Crimea Peninsula, the Donbass region and the Snake Island? What are the compromises Kyiv is ready to make and, at the same time, what are the compromises Moscow would make?*

A.S.K.: Two months ago, I would say that Kyiv could consider making compromises since the common opinion was that victory of Russia would be a matter of weeks. However, now it became obvious that Russian military is not that good as it was generally thought and Ukrainian armed forces inflict Russia unprecedented damages. Russia become politically isolated and its economy is going down due to the several packages of really strong sanctions. Moreover, Finland and Sweden announced their plans to join NATO. At the beginning of the war western countries were reluctant to give too many advanced weapons to the Ukrainians. But by seeing the destruction of Ukrainian cities and the crimes committed by Russian forces – NATO countries have significantly increased the amount of modern heavy weapons. All that means that the situation at the negotiations has changed – Ukraine actually can win without losing its territories. On the other hand, Russia also is not ready for any compromises just because it considers itself a global superpower. Making any concession to Ukraine would be the end of Putin autocratic regime.

Q.C.P.: *China has its own interests in what concern both its relation with Ukraine and the Russian Federation. How do you see China's getting involved in the "2022 Ukraine File"?*

A.S.K.: The position of China about Russian aggression in Ukraine are multifaceted and reflects most of all Chinese national interests in many spheres. The official statements from Beijing have significantly changed since the first weeks of the war. If previously the China author-

ities were calling to protect the Russian interests, arguing that the US is responsible for the conflict by pushing Ukraine toward NATO, now their statements are more neutral. Now China is calling for the negotiations between the US (NATO) with Russia and propose to be a mediator. China doesn't want to become a target for the Western sanctions especially when the perspectives of Chinese economic growth are not very bright. Especially when the main megapolis Shanghai is closed due to COVID outbreak. Also, Beijing is learning from Russian mis-

consider that China still thinks that 1,5 million square kilometers of its territory were taken by Russia a hundred years ago

takes about what might happen if China decides to take over Taiwan. Another factor to consider that China still thinks that 1,5 million square kilometers of its territory were taken by Russia a hundred years ago, including Siberia and Far East. That means that China would prefer to see a weaker Russia as a neighbor with a debt to pay.

Q.C.P.: In the situation of possible negotiations between the two parties, who could qualify as mediators and who can be the possible guarantors of the understandings which will be eventually reached?

A.S.K.: Many countries offered to be a mediator, among them China and Turkey. France also could play this role as it did during the Russia war with Georgia in 2008. Technically, the EU was the mediator but under the French presidency. I believe it should be a special group under the UN auspices if the negotiations would take place. However, there is a possibility that if Putin is taken out power, Russia might admit that it lost the war. A similar outcome was during Algeria's 1954–62 war against France.

Q.C.P.: What are the possible post-conflict adjustments in Kyiv's official policy after the Russian Invasion? Joining the EU, joining NATO or neutrality?

Ukraine is very firm to join the NATO Alliance and will be its member if Russia loses the war

A.S.K.: The European Union has reacted positively to the EU membership application that V. Zelensky submitted on Feb. 28, 2022. Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission told that "Ukraine belongs to our European family." The EU will announce its decision in June 2022. As to NATO, Ukraine is very firm to join the Alliance and will be its member if Russia loses the war.

Q.C.P.: There are assessments that after this conflict ends we will witness gradually the setting up of a new international order. Do you think that this is a possibility and, if yes, what

kind of a new order will it be?

The war in Ukraine is already reshaping global order

A.S.K.: The war in Ukraine is already reshaping global order. NATO became more united and soon it will welcome two new members – Sweden and Finland – countries that used to have neutrality for decades. The European countries decided to end their energy dependence on Russia. These factors would not lead to major changes in the world order – just the Western countries would become even a stronger player in international affairs and with the leadership of the United States would like to maintain the unipolar dominance based on economic and military power.

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