

Thomas E. Ricks

Gen. McChrystal is right — in fact, Russian leaders think they already are at war

Генерал Маккрістал правий – фактично російські лідери думають, що вже знаходяться в стані війни

Американський генерал Стенлі Маккрістал недавно заявив: «Війна в Європі – подія зовсім не немислима. Ті, кому хочеться вірити, що в Європі війна неможлива, можуть нарватися на сюрприз». Він абсолютно правий, а ця війна – війна з Росією.

Панує думка, що війна з Росією неможлива, адже більш інтенсивна військова діяльність може спричинити за собою інциденти і ненавмисну ескалацію. Але прихована проблема в тому, що Росія вважає, ніби знаходиться в стані війни з Заходом, правда, поки війни «невійськової». Економічні санкції, накладені на Росію після вторгнення в Україну, сприймаються не як стримана реакція Заходу на порушення міжнародного права. Навпаки, як заявив глава МЗС РФ Лавров, вони розглядаються як спроба спровокувати зміну режиму в Росії. Російський режим переконаний, що Захід, оволодівши методом «кольорових революцій», в силах спровокувати зміну режимів де завгодно.

<http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/01/30/gen-mcchrystal-is-right-in-fact-russian-leaders-think-they-already-are-at-war/>

General Stanley McChrystal perhaps shocked many when he spoke out on the chance of a war in Europe — aside from the continuing conflict in Ukraine. He stated that “A European war is not unthinkable. People who want to believe a war in Europe is not possible might be in for a surprise.” He is absolutely correct, and it is with Russia.

The common idea on how this will happen is that increased activity can lead to incidents and unintentional escalation. That is, however, only focusing on the direct issues. The underlying issue is that Russia believes itself to be in a war with the West, albeit, for now, a non-military one (coincidentally the topic of my PhD).

The economic sanctions imposed on Russia following the invasion of Ukraine are not perceived as a moderate response from the West to a breach of international law. Rather, as the Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov stated, they are seen as an attempt to provoke regime change in Russia. Moreover, this perception has a longer story than economic sanctions.

The Russian regime is convinced that the West has become so good at mastering the technique of “Color Revolutions” that they can induce regime change where it suits their geopolitical interests. The technique includes an enormous informational offensive, funding NGOs, using special services, and diplomatic pressure — all in the name of democracy.

This was seen to be the case in the Color Revolutions, the Arab Spring, and in Ukraine 2014, when citizens revolted against with pro-Western and democratic ambitions (even if did not turn out that well). This was also seen to be the case in the protests over the Russian elections in 2011-2012, when Putin stated that the protesters were paid from abroad, and that the Color Revolutions were a tested scheme for destabilizing a society.

The regime is thus convinced that the West is after them, albeit with non-military means. This does have a logic for the regime though, Western democracy’s support has often gone to the regime’s biggest internal threats — the opposition and civil society. The fear is strengthened by recalling that the

26 years of Russian independence were full of state weakness, with financial and social crises and Russia *de facto* not controlling its territory between 1991-1999 (Chechnya).

Any reasonable strategy strikes where the adversary is weak and where you are strong; that's the foundation of asymmetry. In the Russian eyes, they believe that the West is after them by targeting their state weakness with non-military means. Conversely, asymmetry in the Russian eyes could well be conventional military means.

Even if the results from RAND's wargaming that NATO would be overrun in 36-72 hours in the Baltic States can be questioned, the overall conclusion holds fairly well. Russia has a strong conventional military advantage around the Baltic Sea, and will either aim to strike a bargain with the Trump-administration, or test their commitments to NATO as strongly as possible.

Since the Russian regime believes themselves to be in a war and builds their legitimacy on a siege mentality from the Western threat, a war is definitely thinkable. One could also end by asking if any national security analyst would dare to declare that a war in Europe is unthinkable. If it truly was unthinkable, we could cancel a lot of exercises, reinforcements, and acquisition in Europe.