



Peter Hanseler – Interview to Felix Abt – Part 1: Insights from an Insider

Everything about Russia you've always wanted to know but can't learn from the mainstream media.

Peter Hanseler

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Introduction

I was interviewed by Mr. [Felix Abt](#), Publisher of [easternangle.com](#). It was a long interview and Mr. Abt decided to break it up in two parts - we did the same.

Felix Abt: Dr. Hanseler, the Ukraine conflict is highly controversial and one party, Russia, bears all the blame, if Western politicians and media are to be believed. Let's take a closer look without ideological blinkers: What are the motives for Russia's

invasion of Ukraine, and what are the motives of its opponents in the Ukraine conflict?

Dr. Hanseler: Motives date back 30 years. The military conflict in the Ukraine did neither start in February 2022 nor in 2014; the seeds for this conflict were planted in the 1990-ies.

German Unification

In 1990 when the German unification was negotiated, the formula was clear. The USSR agreed to the German unification in NATO, as long as NATO would not expand to the east. There were many discussions among all parties involved: The Germans, the Russians, the British, the Americans and the French.

For example, on February 6, 1990, the German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher told his British Counterpart Douglas Hurd: *"The Russians must have some assurance that if, for example, the Polish Government left the Warsaw Pact one day, they would not join NATO the next."*

United States Secretary of State James Baker assured the Russians several times that a NATO east expansion was unacceptable and stated his famous formula *"not one inch eastward"*.

A lot of people in Russia blame the last President of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev of having acted naively by believing the statements of the Western powers, especially the Americans. History shows that such blame was not without merit.

NATO East Expansion

The Americans did not keep their word and expanded NATO from 1999 onwards – 14 countries: NATO troops and installations moved 1,600 km closer to Moscow.

Interestingly enough, there were several voices in the US, which warned the respective administrations that this breach of word would eventually lead to war.

Bill Perry, who served as Secretary of Defense under President Clinton between 1994 and 1997, warned that the NATO eastern expansion would force Russia into a war.

George Kennan one of the foremost American diplomats ever was an absolute expert for Russia. He called NATO's east expansion a "*strategic blunder of potentially epic proportions*". In a 1998 New York Times interview he stated that "*there was no reason for this whatsoever*", referring to NATO's eastern expansion.

From these facts we can conclude, that (1) the US broke a clear agreement and that (2) foremost US experts criticized NATO's expansion to the east and rightly foresaw a military conflict – over 25 years before the war became kinetic.

President Putin – Munich Speech

In 2007 President Putin held his famous speech at the Munich Security Conference. He was very clear with his statements regarding NATO's expansion eastwards and drew red lines – unfortunately the West did not take him seriously.

Maidan

After the Maidan coup in 2014, Crimea came to Russia – to speak of a coup is factually not a correct description of what happened, but pure propaganda. 96% of the inhabitants wanted to be part of Russia – that is legally justified already based on the principle of the peoples' right to self-determination. I was in Crimea before the war and talked to a lot of people – not one wanted that Crimea belonged to Ukraine; I talked to young people and grandmothers – not a single exception.

Minsk Agreements

Then came the Minsk agreements, which provided that Lugansk and Donetsk would remain with Ukraine, but would be given some autonomy. President Zelensky – a comedian – was elected with a large majority in 2019 because of his promise to the Ukrainian people to make peace with Russia and the Donbass and to implement the Minsk agreements. The people of Ukraine wanted peace with the Donbass and with the Russians.

Shortly after his election, he broke his campaign promise and the Western countries – including former Chancellor Merkel – admitted in 2022 that the Minsk agreements were concluded for the sole purpose of stalling the Russians and arming and training Ukraine for war against Russia.

Ukrainian Terror on the Population of the Donbass

Between 2014 and 2022, Ukrainian troops shelled the Donbass daily – they did not target military installations, but civilians. The result was about 16,000 dead, many of whom were women, children, and elderly people on their way to school or shopping. The West did not care and looked away.

Russian Special Operation – Boris Johnson killed Peace

The Russian special operation served the sole purpose of pre-empting a Ukrainian invasion of the Donbass and force the Ukrainians to the negotiation table. This worked and in March 2022 only a few weeks after the hostilities began, Ukraine was ready to settle. Then Mr. Boris Johnson flew to Kiev and told Ukraine what to do: Continue the war.

So much for the facts.

Long-Term US Strategy to Weaken Russia

The motives of the USA are simple: Weakening Russia in order to be prepared to go against China. This is an old strategy. The Americans do not even hide their intentions.

The best written proof is a study of the Rand Corporation of 2019 with the title "*Extending Russia*". On 300 pages the paper explains how the US can and should weaken Russia. The Rand Corporation, which is an American Think Tank, has an annual budget of USD 350 million. Rand Corporation is financed by the US-Military and companies of the military-industrial complex. The Ukraine conflict is just another project of American intentions to weaken Russia.

EU Politicians – Abettors of US Foreign Policy

The motives of the EU – though this may sound harsh – are inexistent. Being in conflict with Russia did only lead to hardship for the populations and businesses of EU member states.

Unfortunately, the politicians who are pursuing an anti-Russian policy are not feeling any hardship flying around in private jets, wining and dining in the best restaurants, sleeping in palaces and being paid horrendous salaries compared to

their subjects. These politicians are the abettors of the US Empire and have not the slightest problem to sell out their own peoples.

Many readers may now say that this cannot be true. But look for yourself; how has the standard of living been developing in the EU since the sanctions began?

Money – the Motive of Zelensky & Co.

The motive of the Ukraine leadership is to become rich. Before the West declared Ukraine as the greatest democracy, fighting against the evil Russians and put Ukrainian flags up in Western cities such as Zurich (sic!), everybody knew and declared Ukraine – and its president – to be the most corrupt nation in Europe. Many investigative news reports conveniently disappeared since February 2022.

The Ukrainians get slaughtered

The poor Ukrainians are slaughtered by their own government and forced to fight a war they did not want and they cannot win. It is a human disaster for all soldiers at the front whether they are Ukrainians or Russians makes not difference. Colonel Douglas Mac Gregor, in my opinion one of the foremost experts regarding this war, expressed a few days ago that so far, about 500'000 Ukrainians and about 50'000 Russians got killed by this massacre; these are all sons, brothers, and fathers of somebody.

Felix Abt: The collective West imposed sanctions, the weapon of hunger, on Russia long before the invasion, but has used this escalation of the conflict as an opportunity to strangle Russia economically. As it seems, this did not work out so well for the sanctioners. But certain effects they have had nonetheless. How have the sanctions affected Russia in general and the normal, daily life of ordinary Russian citizens in particular?

Western Sanctions – a Complete Failure

Dr. Hanseler: The sanctions against Russia, which already started in 2014 turned into a sanction storm in 2022 that has no comparison in history.

They were a complete failure – one cannot use another term.

The sanctions of 2014 forced Russia to become agriculturally independent and resulted in Russia today being the largest agricultural exporter in the world.

The sanctions did not work for several reasons. Firstly, sanctioning a country with no net debt, that is at the same time the largest commodity producer in the world, is outright naïve.

West Misjudged the Global South

Furthermore, the collective West totally misjudged the attitude of the Global South and were – to my own surprise – surprised that all the huge economies of the world, such as China, India and many more, did not participate in the sanctions notwithstanding big pressure exercised on these countries by the US and the EU. Unfortunately, Switzerland, which had a long history of being a neutral country – and also benefited for over two centuries from this status – folded to the pressure of the EU and the USA within days. The sanctions did not only not work but made the countries of the Global South aware of the danger to use the US-Dollar when the US illegally froze the foreign assets of the Russian Central Bank.

BRICS Power as a Result of Stealing Russian Assets, will lead to demise of the US-Dollar

The consequence of these unprecedented illegal actions by the Collective West can be seen now: Organizations like BRICS, SCO, EEU are abandoning to trade in the US-Dollar among themselves but are using their respective currencies in order to hold less US-Dollars to protect themselves from potential US sanctions.

BRICS Summit 2023

Furthermore, the BRICS-Summit 2023, which was held in Durban, South Africa between August 22 and 24 announced at the end of the summit that this organization with so far five members – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa – will accept another six members: Saudi-Arabia, Iran, the UAE, Argentina, Egypt and Ethiopia – now and that many further countries will join later their membership process being under way.

With this expansion only, BRICS will have the largest two oil producers (Saudi Arabia and Russia) plus the two largest natural gas producers (Russia and Iran) among their members. This is an incredible concentration of power over energy commodities and will be used by BRICS – do not doubt that.

Notwithstanding these facts, the Western press is still looking down on this organization and is obviously not being able to discern the geopolitical power shift which takes place right in front of our eyes.

It is very well possible that the BRICS+ countries, who already avoid using the US-Dollar in their trading where possible will soon introduce a trade settlement system which will be based on gold. Our blog has published several in-depth articles about BRICS & Co. and its potential consequences for the Global South and the Collective West.

Effects of Western Sanctions on Daily Life in Russia

Now to the effects of the western sanctions on the ground in Russia. I live in Moscow and when the sanctions began, it took Russia a few weeks – and for some luxury goods like the iPhone some months – until everything came back to normal.

Staple products were never an issue at all. All the goods, which are not imported directly into Russia anymore due to the sanctions find their ways through other countries such as Kazakhstan, Armenia, India, China, Dubai etc.

As an example, iPhone prices shot-up over 250% in the immediate aftermath of the sanctions. Today, the prices are back to normal. I checked a few weeks ago and the newest iPhone can be bought in Russia for the same price as in Switzerland.

All the western producers and suppliers have – for political or legal reasons – to follow the sanctions' regime. However, the western companies now export their products through different routes and are well aware of the fact that they still supply the Russian market. If the trade volume of a Western company with, e.g., Kazakhstan shoots-up by 350% it is obvious that these products are indirectly supplied to Russia – the respective companies are fully aware of this fact and are happy about it, since for them the Russian market turnovers did not disappear but merely moved to another line in the reporting.

Today, a Moscow hypermarket, which supplies the middle class, has a broader variety of brands than in Switzerland – hard to believe but true.

Felix Abt: Sanctions are a frequently used tool of Washington and its "coalition of the willing" to bring about chaos, discontent and regime change in a country. The West's goal is to exploit Russia as a cheap source of raw materials. BlackRock, the world's largest asset owner, is in the process of grabbing large parts of Ukraine, and Russia would be a particularly valuable asset too. President Putin stands in their way and has long been a thorn in the West's side and a target of regime change attempts because

he is independent and has a genuine "Russia First" policy. In addition to coercive economic measures, information wars and psyops are being waged against him. Anyone who consumes Western media recognizes this immediately. What are Vladimir Putin's successes and failures, and how stable are the Russian presidency and the current system of government?

Russian Federation before Putin

Dr. Hanseler: I know Russia since 1997. At that time, the business of the Oligarchs boomed but only a very small portion of the population had a decent life – the vast majority of the Russian population lived far worse than under the communist regime before. Nothing worked, the social structures of the communist regime were broken and the vast riches of the Russian industries were eviscerated by a very small number of oligarchs, who grabbed the riches of the Russian commodity business for token amounts, financed by American investment banks.

1998 Collapse

Not surprisingly, in August 1998 this system collapsed completely, the Ruble became worthless and this crisis brought Russia to the brink of total collapse. Only through the mentality of the Russian people civil war did not break out and people – to my own astonishment – did not riot.

President Putin's reign started in 2000.

Who is Vladimir Putin?

President Putin was not widely known in the West. He studied law in St. Petersburg and holds a Ph.D. in economics. He speaks flawlessly German and is even able to translate simultaneously. He is an ex-KGB man with an excellent education, he is a great organizer and puts loyalty above all. He was – very much to the contrary of many executive politician in the West – very well prepared to take over such a huge responsibility.

Tough Start for Putin – No Political Power to the Oligarchs

Vladimir Putin could not have had a more difficult start, and no one in the West believed that Russia would rise again.

President Putin took up the work and called the oligarchs to him. He told them to stay out of politics, in exchange for keeping their ill-earned money if they complied. His position was weak, too weak to take back the oligarchs' money. Most of them complied, some left Russia, and Khodorkovsky, the richest, tried to gain political power. He failed and ended up in prison.

Standard of Living Rises

The improvement of the standard of living in Russia since President Putin took over can only be described as mesmerizing. One should judge people according to the results they achieve. This is what I have been taught very early in my career and that is how the Russian people judge their president. His approval rating is around 80%. This is incredible and people in the West – including Western politicians – view this with either disbelief or envy. However, listen to the promises of Western politicians and view their results – they are regularly nil. Mr. Putin's approval rating is based on his performance and not based on some ill-founded "love for their leader".

Not Everything is Perfect

Not everything is perfect, but the everyday life, infrastructure, efficiency of dealing with the government regarding everyday matters is absolutely stunning. I am Swiss and we seem to be spoiled in this regard, but in Moscow things are working great. Moscow – I cannot judge all Russia – is my favorite city to live. I lead a middle-class life; my friends are Russian middle class and they have a good life and are happy to live in Moscow as I do.

However, in the regions there is still a lot to improve and corruption is a big problem in Russia. This is, however, not a Russian problem, but a problem, which arises automatically when people come in contact with money and are given the opportunity to steal. Is it better in the US? – Certainly not – just read and see.

So much about the successes of President Putin for the ordinary.

President Putin's Foreign Policy

His foreign policy towards the West is also a success. In the 90's Russia was not respected anymore in the West. President Putin changed that drastically by paying-off the huge debt burden, not squandering the high state income stemming from

commodity exports and re-building the Russian army which – as it shows now – was a very good idea. According to Colonel Mac Gregor, today, the Russian Army is second to none.

President Putin foresaw the geopolitical problems, which culminated in 2022 in a kinetic war and it was he who prepared Russia for a long conflict. It is obvious for a close observer that Russia is very much taking into consideration the possibility of an all-out war with NATO. Russia is prepared – NATO is not.

President Putin's foreign policy failure is most probably his patience he had with the Americans, waiting too long to oppose the eastern Expansion of NATO more fiercely at an earlier stage. This issue is discussed among the more conservative thinkers in Russia. It is – in my opinion – also proof that Mr. Putin tried everything to avoid a kinetic war and therefore, exactly the opposite of what he is described as in the West: A war monger.

On the inner-Russian policy side, a lot has still to be achieved. The vast land is still – in many places – waiting for more improvement. To call this fact a failure is, however, questionable since President Putin had to choose his priorities because not all can be done at the same time. History will show, how good a job he did.

Felix Abt: Western politicians and media completely demonize President Putin. The "information" about him is downright cartoonishly ridiculous. Tell us more about the real Vladimir Putin and what Russian citizens think about him.

Respect

Dr. Hanseler: The Russian people respect President Putin for what he has achieved and how well-tempered he has acted with his foreign policy – together with his amazingly smart Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov. It is not to be underestimated that pride is important in Russia. It is not only about economic success for the ordinary man that counts. Russians are proud of their country and their vast culture and want their motherland to be respected internationally. Also, with regard to this very important issue, President Putin has delivered.

Russians are Sceptics

To understand the attitude of the Russian people one has to be aware of a very important mentality trait of the Russians: They are sceptics. Russians differ greatly in their mentality from e.g., the Americans, which are (naively) sure that their

country is the greatest on earth, that they are the smartest and their president is a super hero.

As a consequence, the Russians love their motherland with patriotism not nationalism and they respect their President, love would be the wrong word. The vast majority thinks that Putin is acting in the interest of Russia and brings results – that is the reason that he is respected. Just compare: Does, e.g., the current German government act in the interest of Germany and bring any result for their people? It does not take a rocket scientist to find out why President Putin has such a high approval rating and the German government does not.

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To be continued

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