FORVM GEOPOLITICA
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The Stupidity of Man - The stupidity of man is manifest, and when I say “man”, I mean “Gilbert Doctorow”

For Gilbert Doctorow, Ukrainian drone strikes on Russian refineries mark the beginning of the end for Moscow. For Scott Ritter, the "Russologist's" alarmism betrays a fundamental misreading of military realities.

Scott Ritter

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Gilbert Doctorow, the highly educated modern manifestation of *Henny Penny*, has published a new essay entitled “Russia is losing the War!”

Those who listen to Scott Ritter, to Colonel Macgregor, to Larry Johnson, Doctorow starts, *on their nearly daily podcast appearances and believe that the inexorable progress of Russian forces on the line of contact in Donbas, moving towards the Dnieper and conquest of the entire Donbas mean RUSSIAN VICTORY are being deceived. As I have been saying for some time, loss of the Donbas, even loss of Odessa will not force Ukraine to capitulate and will not put an end to the ever more damaging Ukrainian attacks on Russian critical infrastructure in the energy sector.*

First, I want to thank Gilbert Doctorow for including me in such company as Colonel Macgregor and Larry Johnson. I am deeply honored.

But this will not stay the sword.

The distinguished graduate of Harvard University (magnum cum laude!) and Columbia University (a two-for-one Ivy Leager!) makes this initial foray into his intellectual evisceration quite easy.

Gilbert Doctorow has never served in the military and clearly doesn't understand the concept of military math: battles are won by the side that owns the boots that occupy the ground upon which they stand, and those boots almost always belong to the side that kills more of the enemy than the enemy kills of them. And here Doctorow acknowledges that Russia is well on the way to putting Russian boots on the ground where Russia wants them to be, and that this is being done because Russia is killing more Ukrainians than Ukrainians are killing Russians.

But the esteemed "Russianist" now throws away this established reality and inserts his own unique fictional modifier: none of these factors matter because Ukraine is attacking "Russian critical infrastructure in the energy sector".

The issue of Russian energy will be discussed in greater detail later in this essay.

First, we must address some of the finer points of Dr. Doctorow's intellectual failings regarding his proposition that "Russia is losing the war!" (Exclamation mark retained to underscore Doctorow's state of mind when writing his essay.)

As Dr. Doctorow observes, *moreover, those attacks deep inside Russia directed against infrastructure could just as easily be directed against President Putin, against his family, against the State Duma. In a word, the Russian Federation is now as vulnerable to "Ukrainian" attacks as is Kiev to Russian attacks. In that sense, the war is now at a stalemate and is going against Russia, because Kiev is waging all-out war while Russia is still holding one arm behind its back while seeking the approval of progressive humanity for its forbearance and humane behavior.*

Let's start off with the basics: It was Zelensky who had to be reassured by Putin, indirectly, back in February 2022 that Russia wasn't out to kill the Ukrainian mini-Fuehrer.

Not the other way around.

The notion that the Russian President or his family spends their nights worried about a decapitation strike launched by Ukrainian drones is absurd.

I know many members of the Russian State Duma.

None of them have sleepless nights as well.

I was just in Moscow when it was attacked by hundreds of Ukrainian drones.

Other than some inconvenience (internet connectivity was degraded, and my flight was delayed leaving Vnukovo Airport, causing me to miss my connection in Istanbul), no one I saw in Moscow seemed too perturbed by the prospects of a regime-change generating attack from the Ukrainian drone army.

On June 18 of this year, I drove back to Moscow from a ten-day visit to the Donbas and New Territories. As we entered Moscow, Russia was under attack from a massive wave of Ukrainian drones. Russia's defense ministry said 555 drones were shot down across the country. The Moscow Mayor said 180 drones were shot down around Moscow alone. In the surrounding Moscow region, a high-rise residential building, an industrial facility and several private houses were damaged in the drone attack, which also injured 16.

Were these attacks inconvenient for Russia?

Yes.

Embarrassing to Russian leadership?

Yes.

But fatal to the Russian nation?

Hell no.

But the headlines read around the world focused on the visible flames and plumes of smoke that could be seen over the densely populated southeastern district of Kapotnya, where a critical oil refinery responsible for supplying the Russian capital with fuel was located.

The Kapotnya Oil Refinery on fire following a Ukrainian drone attack.

The Kapotnya refinery supplies up to 40 per cent of Moscow's overall fuel market, including 70 per cent of Moscow and the surrounding region's gasoline and diesel needs.

It had been previously attacked by Ukraine several times before, most recently at the end of May, when its oil production capacity dropped below 4 million barrels a day. But repairs were made, and the Kapotnya refinery recovered to exceed 4.5 million barrels a day production by June 4.

The attacks damaged both of Kapotnya's primary oil distillation units, AVT-6, which accounts for 53% of the plant's capacity, was damaged during Ukraine's previous strike on June 16, and the Euro+unit, responsible for 47% of Kapotnya's production, which was brought back into operation in less than a week.

In Moscow there was no gnashing of the teeth, beating of the breast, or any other demonstration on the part of the populace that things were somehow amiss.

Life went on without interruption.

Ten days later, Russian President Vladimir Putin acknowledged that the Ukrainian drone strikes were causing some disruption in Russian energy supplies. Putin spoke at a meeting of senior officials of the ruling United Russia Party, and in an interview published that night. "As for strikes against critical infrastructure in

general", Putin said in the interview, "and energy infrastructure in particular, of course these attacks on our infrastructure facilities create problems, that's obvious. Right now, we're observing a certain shortage, but it's not critical."

No panic.

Neither on the part of the Russian leader, nor the Russian people.

The Syzran Oil Refinery burning after a Ukrainian drone attack.

But not so Gilbert Doctorow, who continued his essay:

I was prodded to it by the latest news that the broadcaster wanted me to comment upon, namely a successful drone attack on a major refinery near Samara. Look at the map: Samara is more than 1,000 km southeast of Moscow in the heartland of European Russia. It must be close to 2,000 km from wherever in Ukraine these drones were launched. This strike was most likely using highly advanced drones supplied from Europe which are guided by military intelligence provided to Ukraine by the USA. In short, Russia is under attack from NATO, for which the Ukraine is only a dummy warrior.

It is stunning that Doctorow, the noted "Russia watcher", would come undone because of a single report of a "successful" Ukrainian drone attack on "a major refinery" located near Samara. Maybe it was the adrenaline rush he felt when a "broadcaster" asked him to comment on the attack.

Who knows.

What we do know is that on July 12 Ukrainian drones struck the JSC Syzran Oil Refinery, which is part of the structure of the Russian company Rosneft.

According to preliminary analysis, the strike targeted the refinery's critical ELOU-AVT-5 unit, which handles up to 30% of the Syzran Oil Refinery's primary oil processing capacity.

The JSC Syzran Oil Refinery is located more than 800 kilometers (500 miles) from Ukraine's border and can process between 8.5 and 8.9 million metric tons of crude oil annually.

Reports are that operations at the ELOU-AVT-5 unit have been suspended pending repairs.

I mean, look at a damn map!

This is serious!

Just ask Gilbert Doctrow.

But it was serious in February 2025, December 2025, April 2026, and May 2026, too.

On each of these dates, Ukrainian drones struck the JSC Syzran Oil Refinery.

Each time the refinery shut down.

And each time the refinery was brought rapidly back into operation.

Just like it will be following the latest attack.

No need to panic.

Unless, of course, your name is Gilbert Doctorow.

Because, you know, "this strike was most likely using highly advanced drones supplied from Europe which are guided by military intelligence provided to Ukraine by the USA."

Yup.

FP-1 drone being launched at night

The strike was conducted using the FP-1 drone, built from “highly advanced” plywood (“radar absorbing material”) and powered by a two-cylinder combustion engine that turns a wooden propeller that can generate speeds of up to 60 kilometers an hour.

Damn.

Say it ain’t so, Gilbert.

That’s some advanced stuff.

It is an open secret that since 2024 the CIA has been sharing target intelligence and providing other support for Ukrainian UAV attacks against Russian oil facilities. The “other support” includes enabling what is known as “terminal engagement” capability via Starlink satellite communications relay which, when combined with AI-assisted optical guidance for autonomous terminal homing, allows the FP-1 to operate effectively deep inside Russia.

When the FP-1 first began operations in 2024, it enjoyed a 70% success rate.

Today, that rate has fallen to just around 10%.

And it's only going to get worse.

Russia is starting to shut down the Starlink network.

And Russia is beginning to deploy more advanced anti-drone capabilities.

The idea that the FP-1 drone should be hyped up as a major NATO weapons system delivering decisive blows against Russian infrastructure via the "dummy warrior" seems like a stretch.

The FP-1 is, to be sure, a pain in the ass for Russia.

But what Doctorow ignores is that the war with Ukraine is not a one-way street where only the western-assisted Ukrainian forces deliver blows against Russia.

At the same time the FP-1 scores the occasional success against Russian energy infrastructure, Russia is delivering powerful ballistic missile and drone attacks of its own against Ukrainian industry and energy targets.

These attacks don't go "pop", like the FP-1.

They go "boom".

The facilities hit by Russia aren't damaged but destroyed, including many of the factories used by Ukraine to produce and assemble the FP-1 drones.

Rather than running around like Chicken Little claiming the sky is falling, Doctorow would do well to learn the facts and details of what he is assessing before committing to a narrative that is factually incomplete and analytically embarrassing.

Next, Doctorow informs us of the following: *Today's New York Times has an article on a secret factory in Germany now providing AI controlled drones to Ukraine. This is a state-of-the-art attack system and it makes Germany a co-belligerent just as the formerly proposed delivery of its Taurus missiles would have been.*

Here Doctorow again shows his ignorance of military affairs and, frankly speaking, as an analyst (apologies to Harvard and Columbia.) A modicum of due diligence combined with journalistic integrity would have compelled the self-professed "professional Russia watcher" to note that the "secret German factory" is operated by the Bavarian-based German defense technology company, Helsing SE, which was founded in 2021 with startup money provided by Spotify's Daniel Elk. In the fall of 2024 Helsing SE contracted to provide Ukraine with 4,000 of its HF-1 unnamed loitering drones. By November 2025, some 2,000 HF-1 drones, which

make use of three AI components—terminal guidance, midcourse guidance and visual target acquisition—have been delivered to the Ukrainian Special Forces, many of which have been used in combat.

HX-2 loitering drone

Also in 2024, Helsing SE signed a contract to provide Ukraine with an additional 6,000 X-wing AI-assisted loitering drones—the HX-2.

It is the HX-2 that Doctorow is posturing as a "state-of-the-art attack system", and the provision of which makes Germany "a co-belligerent" which needs to be attacked by Russia "now".

Here's the fine print that Doctorow won't tell you, either because he is intellectually lazy as a journalist, doesn't understand a damn thing about modern warfare, or both.

First, the HF-1 sucks.

The Ukrainian Special Forces refuse to use it.

Fully 40% of the inventory of supplied drones remains in storage, unused.

Why? It doesn't work—the over-hyped AI components glitch.

It's too expensive.

And given the lethality of drone warfare, where the hunters become the hunted in very short order, the Ukrainians view the HF-1 as a death trap—too much risk for too little gain.

And they feel the same way about the HX-2, which in initial combat tests conducted by the Ukrainian Special Forces has an astounding 75% failure to launch rate.

Moreover, the HX-2 that Doctorow claims is "state-of-the-art" is simply a German knock-off of the vastly superior Russian Lancet loitering munition which has devastated Ukrainian rear-area operations since 2022.

But the biggest error Doctorow makes is conflating the HX-2 with the deep-strike drones used by Ukraine to attack Russia's infrastructure.

Both the HF-1 and HX-2 are strictly battlefield support weapons.

They are not analogs to the already discussed FP-1 that has been used to attack Russia's oil and energy sector.

So, in the end, Doctorow's big "reveal" turns out to be a bust—a giant "nothing burger."

Just like the rest of Doctorow's underlying analysis of the situation:

The consequences of these infrastructure attacks, on attacks on Russian oil tankers inside Russia as well as on the open seas, is that Russia has severe fuel shortages in many regions. It has now banned export of diesel fuel so as to compensate for shortages at home. Vice Prime Minister Novak has just announced that Russia is importing refined petroleum.

This situation is no longer just an inconvenience for car owners in one or another locale. It is going to cripple Russian industry, including military industry if it continues and escalates, which now seems likely.

Note that until recently Russia accounted for 12% of global diesel exports. That loss now is driving up fuel costs globally.

Yes, Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak told at a meeting on the energy sector convened by Russian President Vladimir Putin on July 8 that the government had halted diesel exports to boost domestic supplies.

"Today, a ban on diesel fuel exports was imposed, and this will allow us to increase supplies to the domestic market", Novak said.

Russia, Novak added, will also begin importing fuel this month to help stabilize the market, and planned maintenance at oil refineries will be postponed, sustaining domestic production.

The fuel shortages have been driven by the Ukrainian attacks that have put several Russian oil refineries out of operation. Novak also cited rising seasonal demand linked to the harvest.

But this wasn't Novak's first rodeo: back in September 2025, Novak had announced that Russia had extended its ban on gasoline exports and introduced new restrictions on diesel shipments until the end of the year in order to stabilize domestic fuel supplies.

The reason?

Ukrainian drone attacks on Russian oil refineries.

And the sky did not fall.

Nor will it today, despite what Doctorow believes.

Responding to Novak's latest announcement, Russian President Vladimir Putin noted that Russia's energy sector had one of the world's largest supply buffers. He instructed oil companies not to keep surplus fuel as reserves for their own filling station networks, but to share supplies with independent retailers.

He was calm.

Because this was not a crisis.

Just a temporary inconvenience.

One Russia would recover from in due course.

No panic.

No overreaction.

Stay the course.

To victory.

But such an outcome is unacceptable to Gilbert Doctorow.

Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak

But for Russia, he concludes, *there has to be a response appropriate to the now developing existential threat: the factories producing these drones, wherever they are, in Germany or elsewhere, must be destroyed. Now! If Russia fails to act, it is going to lose the war and to lose its sovereignty, regardless of how many speeches President Putin makes calling his citizens to sit tight and ignore what is happening to them.*

Let's get this straight.

There is no existential threat to Russia now.

At least none that Gilbert Doctorow can define with facts.

The German drone factories pose zero threat to Russia.

And Russia is in the process of neutralizing the Ukrainian-made, CIA-directed drones that have been responsible for the attacks on Russia's oil and energy infrastructure.

Attacking Germany (*Now!*, Doctorow insists) would resolve nothing, since German drones are not a threat.

It could, however, drag Germany and NATO into a direct confrontation with Russia that would upset the very algorithms driving the military math that has Russia moving steadily forward toward victory over Ukraine and the collective West, Germany included.

This is exactly what Ukraine and its Western masters want.

Which is why Russian President Vladimir Putin won't entertain such nonsense.

This of course begs the question as to why Gilbert Doctorow, the self-proclaimed expert on everything Russian, would be promoting a course of action so obviously detrimental to the welfare of the Russian nation and its people?

The answer becomes obvious when one understands that the entire strategy behind the manufacturing of an air of crisis is driven by Western intelligence.

If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, it's probably a duck.

But that's an issue for another time.

For now, simply reflect on the notion that the stupidity of man is manifest, and that when I say "man", I mean "Gilbert Doctorow".

(The analysis underpinning this article was influenced by my experiences during my most recent trip to Russia. This trip was made possible through the generous donations of readers and supporters. Future visits to Russia intended to capture the reality of that land and its people and bring it back to an American audience are being planned. Please consider donating so this important work can continue.)

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