

IT'S NOT OVER TILL IT'S OVER

As War in Ukraine devolves into an evermore pointless exercise in futility, getting a handle on what Russians are thinking can be difficult, then there is the difficulty of determining what is propaganda, or fact. The same holds true of official sources and most news feeds.

"The fog of war" Guarantees disinformation.

This opinion piece by **Sergei A. Karaganov**, from the Russian weekly 'Profile' magazine offers some perspective. Karaganov is an academic in Moscow, known to be close to Putin, and chairman of the **Russian Council on Foreign and Defense Policy**. His analysis is hair-raising and in many ways seems accurate. However his conclusions are terrifying, proving how broken our world is.

In Karaganov's view, war against Russia in Ukraine, with the participation of the US and support of NATO is inevitable and unavoidable, **because the fear of nuclear war is gone**. He argues what is happening today in Ukraine would be unthinkable in the early years of the nuclear era, and so with Dr. Strangelove logic he advocates for a return to an unequivocal threat of **Mutually Assured Destruction**- The MAD doctrine that frightened and traumatized the 'duck and cover' generation during the 'Cold War' which was always more tepid than cold.

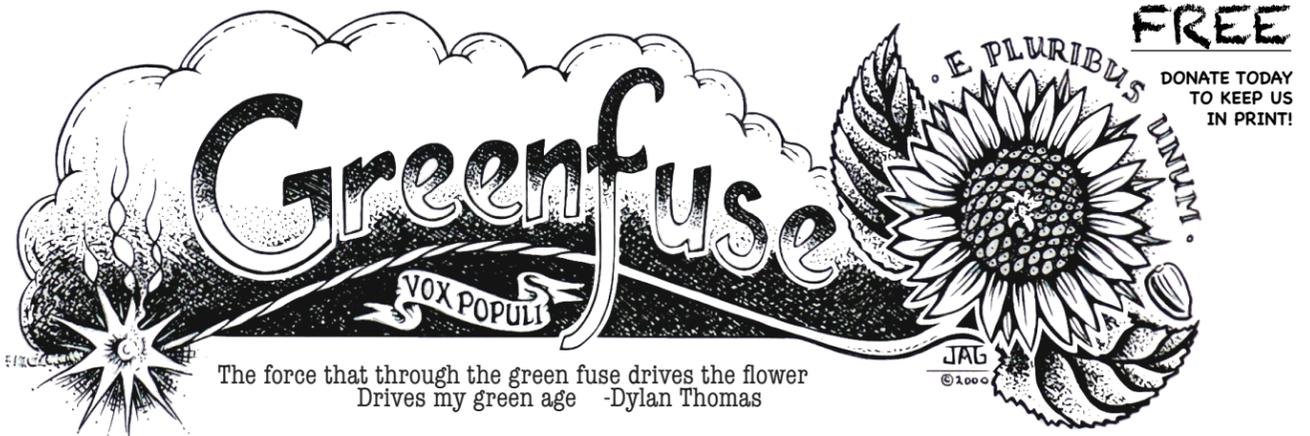
Karganov:

"Russia and its leadership seem to be facing a difficult choice. It becomes increasingly clear that **a clash with the West cannot end even if we win a partial or even a crushing victory in Ukraine**. It will be a really partial victory if we liberate four regions. It will be a slightly bigger victory if we liberate the entire East and South of present-day Ukraine in the next year or two. But there will still remain a part of it with an **even more embittered ultranationalist population pumped up with weapons—a bleeding wound threatening inevitable complications and a new war**.

Perhaps the worst situation may occur if, at the cost of enormous losses, we liberate the whole of Ukraine and remain in ruins with a population that mostly hates us. Its **"redemption"** will take more than a decade. Any option, especially the latter one, will distract our country from making an urgently needed step to shift its spiritual, economic, and military-political focus to the east of Eurasia. We will get stuck in the west, with no prospects in the foreseeable future, while present-day Ukraine, primarily its central and western regions, will sap managerial, human, and financial resources out the country. These regions were heavily subsidized even in Soviet times.

The feud with the West will continue as it will support a low-grade guerrilla civil war.

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BITING OFF MORE THAN WE CAN CHEW?

It always amazes me that despite all the chaos of contemporary civilization, the mundane realities of life keep churning, and time marches on. Contradictions be damned.

In the face of war, famine, pestilence, and death- the fabled 4 Horseman (one wonders why why death is included, it seems given with the first 3) people, well, people who have a place to live, and the means to keep their heads above water, keep going to school, going to work, and shopping. We party, we consume entertainment, we go on vacation, and above all we burn fuel.

There's some bad news on the fuel front (is that an oxymoron?)

An analysis, commissioned by **Carbon Tracker Initiative**, a financial think tank that studies how the transition away from fossil fuels impacts markets and the economy, used California regulators' draft methodology for calculating the costs associated with plugging oil and gas wells and decommissioning them along with related infrastructure, developed with feedback from the industry.

The report broke down the costs into several categories, and the price could bring the total cleanup bill for California's on-shore oil and gas industry to \$21.5 billion.

Meanwhile, it is estimated that California oil and gas production will earn about \$6.3 billion in future profits over the remaining course of operations.

The industry has set aside only about \$106 million that state regulators can use for cleanup when a company liquidates or otherwise walks away from its responsibilities. That amount equals less than 1% of the estimated cost.

That's not really planning ahead very well.

In more awkward news- The California insurance commissioner admonished the insurance industry to better account for catastrophic risk, which industry leader **State Farm**, a company worth \$131 billion, covering 20% of home insurance policies and 13 percent of commercial policies in California, has done, announcing it will not accept new applications for business or personal property and casualty insurance. Joined by **All State**, the fourth-largest property insurer in California, which will also not be signing new policies, saying: *"The cost to insure new home customers in California is far higher than the price they would pay for policies due to wildfires, higher costs for repairing homes, and higher reinsurance premiums."*

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THE FIRST SKIRMISH IN A NEW WAR

The picket lines in Hollywood could be a harbinger of future fights over industries threatened by AI. Will it take writers, directors, and actors to save all of us from the robot apocalypse?

When you're writing a story about an issue that affects a large group of people, whether it's for a news outlet or a television show, you often pick one person as the anecdotal lead of the tale. That character serves a purpose: to make a specific thesis feel less nebulous and more, dare I say, human. Right now in Hollywood there are some 11,500 humans who could be the lead of this particular story. Writers who have spent their careers holed up in writers rooms or coffee shops, figuring out plots and characters and dialogue and stuffing them into 30- or 60-page scripts. But those same screenwriters have woken up, donned blue T-shirts that say **"Writers Guild of America,"** grabbed a red-and-black picket sign, and descended on the sidewalks of one of the big Hollywood studios. Then, as gangly palm trees sway nearby and rivers of cars flow along Los Angeles's concrete canals, these writers have trudged back and forth on the pavements in front of **Paramount Studios** and **CBS** and **Disney** and **Netflix**—on strike as screenwriters for television shows and movies for the first time in 15 years.

But in reality, it isn't just the 11,500 people wearing those blue T-shirts and chanting, **"No contract! No content!"**—or my personal favorite, **"Here's a pitch: Pay us, Bitch!"**—who could be the lead of this story. It's actually a much larger group; an estimated 375 million people worldwide, to be precise. "What?!" you're saying. "There aren't that many writers in Hollywood!" No, there are not. But there are many people who will be affected by what happens with one of the issues at stake between the writers and the studios. (This is where we cue the scary music.)

I'm referring to artificial intelligence. No, no...I know what you're thinking, not another AI story, but wait! Stop! Keep reading, I promise you this will all make sense momentarily. AI in Hollywood could be a harbinger of what's to come to everyone—and I mean everyone. It could be the issue that signals what will happen to almost all creative jobs (and many other kinds of white-collar vocations) in the not-too-distant future. That's because, among the lists of demands the WGA is asking for, which include better pay and larger writers rooms, the most important topic (to me) is the demand that the studios agree not to use AI to write or rewrite stories (though the guild has said it's okay for writers to use it as a tool). The **AMPTP**, the **Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers**, which represents the studios and networks, rejected this proposal, saying that the group representing the studios would be open to offering an annual meeting to discuss advancements in technology.

"The writers strike is too easily dismissed as coastal elites protecting their cushy gigs. Instead it should be seen as the first skirmish in a new war, one where more than half of all jobs are at risk as we lose control of language itself—and thus of being human—to large language models," Paul Kedrosky, an investor and prominent thinker on how AI is going to change society over the next few years, told me when I asked if this is the first true battle in the humans-versus-artificial-intelligence war. "Too many people are trapped in the past, arguing that we have always had to adapt to new technologies. Yes, but we have never been chased by an all-encompassing technology whose DNA is evolving in real time so quickly. Our attempts to stay ahead are charmingly vestigial, like buying expensive carbon plate running shoes to out-run a rocket-powered steamroller."

The irony of the AI debate is that six months ago, when the WGA and AMPTP were gearing up for these talks and negotiations, AI wasn't even something they were discussing as part of the demands. ChatGPT was not released until November of last year, and it didn't really show its true prowess until March 14 of this year—around 50 days ago—when GPT-4, the most advanced version of the platform, was released. And yet, at the end of the day, while all of the other negotiation topics by the WGA are incredibly important to writers—including being paid residuals for popular shows and the elimination of "mini" rooms, where shows are created with a skeleton staff—the requisition to put AI-written scripts at bay could prove to be the most important battle not just for screenwriters, but hundreds of millions around the world—which (most ironically) includes the hundreds of thousands of people who work for the studios the AMPTP is representing.

It isn't that AI will simply write scripts in the future—it will do everything, and do it in real time. You can imagine a scenario a few years from now, you walk into your living room after a long day (not working because you're out of a job), plop on the couch, and say to your TV, "Hey, Netflix, make me a 20-minute comedy set in New York in the 1980s starring Marilyn Monroe, The Rock, and Dave Chappelle. Oh, and throw in a few zombies and make one of them my ex-wife." Your TV will go beepedy-beep-beep-beep and your customized show will begin. An AI has written the script, created AI actors (that look completely real), created an AI score (which sounds like it was written by Max Richter or Hans Zimmer and performed by the Vienna Philharmonic), and generated AI sound effects (you don't think an AI can fake a broken bone?), and it's edited, directed, and produced by the same software. (Cue even scarier music...this time, made by an AI.)

- Nick Bilton

WE'RE ALL ON A JOURNEY TOGETHER

Even if you never leave your hometown, you've travelled an enormous distance in the last year. That's because, whether you move or not, the Earth moves.

First, every day, the Earth completely rotates on its axis. At the equator, you've travelled ~40,000 km / day, or 14.6 million km / year - just spinning.

The closer to the pole you live, the rotational circle gets smaller -- falling off with the cosine of your latitude. For example, in San Francisco, at 38 degrees N, we would spin around 31,500 km a day, not 40,000.

Second, we travel much faster around the sun each year, as Earth revolves in our solar system orbit. At ~150 million km from the sun, we travel 2.5 million km a day, or 942 million km a year, hurtling through the solar system.

Adding the rotation and revolution distances (even through they aren't going the same directions) we all travelled by spinning on our planet's axis,

and revolving around the sun, about 956 million kilometers, call it roughly 1 billion km - last year! We move ~60 times farther around the sun each day than we do around Earth's axis.

No wonder we're all tired!

And, of course, the solar system itself is revolving around the core of the Milky Way Galaxy, which is itself moving through the local group of galaxies and the Virgo supercluster. And the universe itself is expanding too. Bottom line:

We're on the move, whether we know it or not.