The crisis in Ukraine has spun the world backward on its axis. Russian President Vladimir Putin’s atypical military campaign, or denazification as some refer to it, has most western nations frantic for solutions. Unfortunately, the NATO and EU states don’t bother to ask the right questions, let alone propose the correct answers. Now, with Russia flexing to escape complete encirclement, borderlands like wealthy Azerbaijan are now being pulled into this orbit of conflict. The all-powerful geniuses from out west in Oz, have really made a mess this time.

A report by Fuad Shahbazov at World Political Review (WPR) tells of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev visiting Moscow at the invitation of Russian President Vladimir Putin on February 22nd, days before Russia launched the demilitarization campaign against Ukraine. Aliyev’s visit was to reframe the two countries’ relationship to one of “allied cooperation.” Shahbazov reported this way:

“The declaration expresses both sides’ intention of strengthening cooperation across a wide range of fields, including regional security issues, military ties, energy and trade, while calling for mutual consultations on joint efforts in international organizations, with the aim to protect the interests of Azerbaijan and Russia.”
Of course, everyone in geopolitics knows Azerbaijan has been teetering on the west-east fence since the Azerbaijan SSR days ended. Washington forged into the rich Caspian state with great enthusiasm, as soon as the Soviet Union dissolved. The atrocities and pogroms, tens of thousands dead, 800,000 Azerbaijanis and 300,000 Armenians displaced, and U.S. involvement is well documented via WikiLeaks and history books.

What most people do not see, is the current U.S. administration’s role in reopening old wounds. As an example, Joe Biden’s CIA Director William Burns was involved in the carnage in South Caucasus and the Karabakh conflict settlement. President Putin’s meeting with Aliyev is best understood by understanding America’s resurgent role on Russia’s borders. This report by the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program (CIAC) Analyst Fariz Ismailzade puts everything in context:

"Over the past 30 years, Azerbaijan and the United States have developed a strategic partnership based on common interests and values. This partnership includes areas of cooperation such as energy security, counter-terrorism, joint economic opportunities, and trade, political and humanitarian efforts. Clinton and Bush administrations have pursued a bipartisan policy of deepening engagement with Azerbaijani to increase US national interests in the Caspian region."

The complexity of this gaming of detente is circuitous, but what we are seeing is a renewal of the so-called Obama Doctrine, with crises being rekindled on Russia’s borders. This is why Mr. Putin met, symbolically, with Azerbaijan’s leader. I suspect the direct talks involved, "if this, then that" will happen. People simply do not understand how the situation between America and Russia has deteriorated, and how the Russians are prepared for all-out war.

Stepping sideways, a new set of discussions between Azerbaijan and Romania on energy cooperation bear scrutiny. Among the topics discussed, a project of laying an underwater cable underneath the Black Sea through Azerbaijan and Georgia to Romania seems most pertinent. The short of this is, if the west cuts off Russian gas, Romanians will be the coldest nation of people in Europe come next winter, if the country’s leadership doesn’t find solutions. North American supplies cannot warm and power all of Europe, so we’ll be seeing NATO’s eastern flanks turned into a sort of new Iron Curtain, but fossil fuels scavengers as well. It’s pretty sad stuff if you know as many great Romanians as I do. They had such high hopes.

Meanwhile, the Bulgarian people, quite used to freezing to death in Winter, seem okay with being at the tail end of European comfort. The ministers there are scrambling to get connected via Greece, and support for the speedy integration of the Ukrainian electricity system into the European one. There only seems to be a slight problem, which involves Ukraine no longer being in the NATO-pact equation. Maybe the Bulgarians are just waiting for Ukraine to reopen gas pipes once the Russians have achieved their strategic goals? It seems unlikely the United States and allies will allow a trickle of Gazprom gas west of the Black Sea’s shores. The Greece-Bulgaria gas interconnector is scheduled to begin commercial operations in July. Unfortunately for the Bulgarians, 65% of Greece’s electrical power comes from natural gas. And since Greek electric bills doubled already this month, it seems unlikely most people in Bulgaria will be able to afford heat next year. Already my Greek neighbors here on Crete are wondering how they will pay their current bills. So you know, Greece’s natural gas comes from Algeria, Azerbaijan, Russia, and Turkey.

I could continue, but the reader has already gotten the gist. Cold War 2, whoever is ultimately responsible, will be defined as unprecedented hardship, fear, uncertainty, and eventually the loss of life and liberty worldwide. In the coming months, unless an all-out nuclear war envelops our planet, many experts will be questioning the reasoning behind ignoring Russia’s security concerns over NATO. While the demilitarization of Ukraine was not the ideal solution to the problem, history will show that Putin had few choices given NATO expansion plans. Recent reports suggest the Russians simply preempted a NATO-backed plan for Kyiv to retake the Donbass region by force. In the end, none of this will matter when half of Europe learns to be more “Russian” next winter.

Phil Butler, is a policy investigator and analyst, a political scientist and expert on Eastern Europe, he’s an author of the recent bestseller “Putin’s Praetorians” and other books. He writes exclusively for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook”.