

TFF's Pressinfo nr 389: Ukraine as the border of Nato expansion

And why Russia doesn't have to be at threat to the West.

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If the Ukraine conflict is the centerpiece of the new 2nd Cold War, it is essential to ask: What really happened? What did NATO countries do to cause it? What did Russia do to cause it?

And – if you live in the West, in particular: Did we really have to end in this situation given Russia's significant weakness over 25 years?

This article argues that the superior West could have played its cards differently and it's time for self-critical soul-searching and just a little living yourself into the shoes of the other.

If peace rather than war is your true aim.

There was a beginning and a framework

The Ukraine conflict has a 25-years history. Instead of dissolving NATO, the alliance was expanded. Relieved from there being a Soviet Union and a Warsaw Pact, the alliance went as fast it could to do all it wanted. Remember, a series of WW III scenarios has been written in which that war would start with some uncontrollable event in Yugoslavia. Now it could be chopped up – freely and without risk. Serbia was bombed and Kosovo carved out without a UN mandate whatsoever (1999).

How did they think about that in the Kremlin at the time, one must wonder?

Clinton literally did not give a damn about all the promises made to Soviet leader Gorbachev by US leaders such as Bush, James Baker and German leaders including Hans-Dietrich Genscher. (Yes, they were not written down but confirmed by those involved and present).

He began the expansion of NATO in 1994 – in Georgia (see what I refer to elsewhere in this series). All around a Russia on its knees Americans were placed in the offices of prime ministers, defence and foreign ministers – I saw it myself in former Yugoslavia – and met CIA people in Croatia disguised as humanitarian workers. And had a long conversation with the representative of the US in Tblisi in 1994. Historical moment!

The bad Christians, the Orthodox, were the Serbs and Russians and Greeks – all should be antagonized and the good guys in Yugoslavia were those who had been on the fascist side in WWII – the leaderships in Croatia, Muslims in Bosnia and the Kosovo Albanians. The Serb minority that had lived 400 years as a minority in the Croatian republic were, in the common Western discourse, invaders masterminded by strongman Slobodan Milosevic – whom Clinton without hesitation called the new 'Hitler of Europe'.

Ukraine was – and remains – what its name says: the border areas (like Krajina in Croatia). This is where NATO can establish itself as little as Chruschev could get away with deploying nukes in Cuba – considerably further away from the US, but anyhow.

Imagine – with a little bit of empathy (not necessarily sympathy) how Washington would react if today Putin's Russia was 12 times stronger militarily than the alliance-free US (NATO dissolved 25 years ago) and tried with his alliance of 27 other members to make Canada or Mexico the 29th member. Perhaps most people in the US and Europe would have some sympathy for the negative reaction of Washington. Rand remember, Trump wants to build a wall to Mexico...

The main reason, it is stated again and again, in the Western press, NATO and other political circles is: Ukraine and Crimea. The lie about Putin's aggression on Ukraine is told so many times that it is becoming the truth. Just see these two recent articles by Newsweek as two of hundreds of articles.

Here's the chosen story in politics and media alike

The narrative is simplified beyond recognition and goes like this:

Putin (there is always just one top guy in Western eyes and it is one leader at the top like Milosevic, Mohamed Farah Aideed, Saddam Hussein, Moammar Khadafi, al-Assad) is a bad guy and you know that because out of the blue he suddenly annexed Crimea. By that he changes the borders of Europe and then he gets his disguised soldiers into Eastern Ukraine – a Ukraine that we, in contrast to Bush Senior, care very very much about today.

We care so much about it that we'd like Ukraine to be in both the EU and NATO, sooner or later. That's where it belongs and that's where the Ukrainians want to be, particularly when we have influenced them with our civil society funds, media and corporate capital/management.

At least two significant omissions stand out in NATO, EU and Western mainstream media discourses:

One, it is never mentioned that Russia's military expenditures is 8% of NATO's and that – for that reason alone – it is completely irrational to argue that it is a serious threat to NATO countries; and secondly:

Way before Putin annexed Crimea neocons in Washington – led by the wife of one of their leading advocates (Robert Kagan), Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland – decided by means of some US \$ 5 billion poured into Ukraine's civil society over a few years to instigate a regime change in Kiev. Funnily, it is all on record and denied by Western politicians.

They did so with some little help from neo-Nazis, Sector Right people and others – whereafter the (corrupt) President Yanukovich was sent fleeing and threatened on his life hours after he had signed a reconciliatory agreement between government and opposition, monitored by high-level Western politicians present. How did that happen?

Russia's move in Crimea must be seen as basically re-active. It doesn't make it legal, legitimate or wise. But ask yourself what Western politicians would have done in such a situation?

The significance of this annexation was not that this was a hugely important thing to the West, it wasn't. And NATO has already expanded with 10 former Warsaw Pact countries and has kind-of won the game.

But it was hugely important to Russia because of its legally leased base there, the largest in the region and the way out to the Mediterranean. Russia would begin to see a future Ukraine in NATO and wonder how to maintain a super-important military base there in a NATO country? And what about the 30+ year lease?

No, the annexation was a very counterproductive move and a violation of international law too. But to not foresee that Russia would react to the regime change in Kiev was utterly naive or a sign that Realpolitik logic no longer is an element among decision-makers in Washington.

The Crimea annexation as pretext and blame game

The annexation gave the West a brilliant pretext for covering up its own huge blunder of not having understood that Ukraine was a no-go for NATO. Most experienced, even right-wing 'hard' Realpolitik experts such as Kissinger and Brzezinski warned that this would have terrible consequences and that Ukraine

should be seen like Finland was seen during the first Cold War – i.e. neutral and helpful to both sides.

Others have, sensibly, argued that the best for Ukraine would be for both sides to "use" it and help it, an object of co-operation for all – and for it to have relations to both the EU and the Russia-led economic community or customs union.

One could also argue that of course there should have been an autonomy arrangement for the Tartars and anybody there who did not like to be annexed to Russia. Fair enough, it should have been done.

Undoubtedly, annexing Crimea was to change a European border. But – the famous "but" – there can't be different principles for different states in a lawful international society. It therefore begs the simple question:

What did the West/NATO countries do in former Yugoslavia? They split it up in six republics knowing full well, or being woefully ignorant, about the fact that that could be done only through bloodshed. Then they bombed Serbia to carve out Kosovo that has never been an independent state and makes, somewhat strangely, makes the second Albanian state in Europe (and still failed today). All this was done by applying almost limitless violence – of which there was very little in the annexation of Crimea.

And while we talk about violations of international law:

What about NATO countries in changing coalitions doing what they did in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Somalia etc. during the 25 years when Russia was very weak? None of these were on the right side of international law.

At some kind of objective international court Putin's Russia may deserve punishment for annexing Crimea but it would be small compared with that of the US, France, Britain, Italy, Denmark etc.

Russia seeks to influence opinions. Doesn't the West?

But that of course is lost upon people who create and consume Western mainstream media narrative according to which the West, much to its chagrin and against its best will, has to sacrifice itself for noble values such as democracy, freedom, women's liberation, human rights and – à la a modern version of the White Man's burden to offer/transmit/enforce civilisation's true, highest values – the 'mission civilisatrice' – upon barbarians for their own best.

And Ukraine of course should be freed from the claws of the Russian barbarian bear. NATO and EU members only meant well when its members infiltrated

Ukraine's various constituencies and brought about regime change. And pity that stupid, dictatorial and corrupt Putin who doesn't understand our NATO's exclusively benevolent, non-offensive intentions and policies:

Says Secretary-General of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg repeatedly: "We do not want a new Cold War, we do not want a new arms race and we do not seek new confrontation. As we strengthen our deterrents and our defense, we continue to seek a constructive dialogue with Russia."

It doesn't strike the people in those narrow(minded) circles, in this group think that increasingly protects itself from independent and dissenting voices out, that this kind of statement is either woefully anti-intellectual or purely deceptive and must be seen differently in Moscow, whether you like it or not.

And please Mr. Secretary-General of NATO: You speak as if you are perfectly aware subconsciously of the utter incompatibility of your aims – no intended confrontation by de facto confrontation – and that you are telling the world and Russia to not see it exactly the way it must rather logically be seen.

Empathy isn't a common feature in security politics.

Also pity poor Putin that he does not understand that the Ballistic Missile Defence has nothing to do with Russia but is a shield against a (de facto non-existing) threat to Europe by the nasty Iranians. Pity that he gets it so wrong to construe it as a gross de-stabilization of the whole philosophy of the post-1945 nuclear deterrence doctrine, the Mutually Assured Destruction, and the confidence-building between the two sides. Pity that he – like the Americans during the Cuba Missile Crisis – does not like offensive systems next to his mainland's border.

Or, pity actually that Russians are so nasty or foolish to place their motherland so close to our missiles, nukes and bases – and don't see how well-intentioned NATO actually is!

It's time for a very different narrative and for true dialogue – before it is too late

No reason to go on. Russia is not innocent. It too has a MIMAC (Military-Industrial-Media- Academic Complex). Indeed, some would say that it is a MI-MAC because, after all, what else is Russia good at producing and selling in the high-tech field but weapons? And, yes, it does have formidable nuclear arsenals and doesn't (yet) have a democracy of the Western kind.

But behind the tremendous propaganda of the Western MIMAC there is a larger truth, namely that Russia is an economic, ideological and military dwarf - dwarf - compared with NATO.

And that therefore it is not a threat. Unless, that is, NATO continues to make it one.

It's worth repeating the classical truth known by more careful and intellectual European politicians than those we have today: Whether you like it or not, Europe can only create security and peace together with Russia, not against it.

It's time for a new narrative, a genuine dialogue and the abolition of conventional as well as nuclear deterrence. It has never led to anything but more weapons.

It's time for ending the militarism and head for intelligent conflict-handling with both defensive military and civilian means.

And time isn't unlimited.

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