

Azerbaijan Should Be Very Afraid of Victoria Nuland

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The US' Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, Victoria Nuland, visited Baku on 16 February as part of her trip to the Caucasus, which also saw her paying stops in Georgia and Armenia. While Azerbaijan has had positive relations with the US since independence, they've lately been complicated by Washington's 'pro-democracy' rhetoric and subversive actions in the country. Nuland's visit, despite her warm words of friendship, must be look at with maximum suspicion, since it's not known what larger ulterior motives she represents on behalf of the US government.

A Bad Omen

Nuland is most infamously known for her ["F**k the EU!" comment](#) that was uncovered during a secretly recorded conversation with the American Ambassador in Ukraine, Geoffrey Pyatt. The two were conspiring to build a new Ukrainian government even before democratically elected (but unpopular and corrupt) president Viktor Yanukovich was overthrown by the US-supported EuroMaidan coup. Nuland played a direct role in events, not only behind the scenes, but also on the streets, since she proudly handed out cookies and other foodstuffs to the 'protesters' that would violently seize power just over two months later. Her role in the Ukrainian events forever marks her as an agent for US-supported regime change in the former Soviet sphere, and her visit anywhere in that space should be seen as the bad omen that it is.

Like Husband, Like Wife

Normally an individual's personal life doesn't have any bearing on their professional one, but in the case of Nuland, it's the opposite because her husband is the leading neo-conservative thinker Robert Kagan. He and his ilk are known for their expertise in exploiting foreign geography to maximize US power, regardless of the regional cost. Also, he [previously referred](#) to Azerbaijan in 2006 as a "dictatorship" and said the US will "pay the price" for dealing with it when responding to a user-submitted Q&A session with the Financial Times:

"During the Cold War, both Europeans and Americans had to compromise with dictators around the world in order to weaken the Soviet Union and communism. What would be, in your view Mr Kagan, the new sort of compromises that the US government is willing to make to defeat terrorism? Corneliu, Bucharest

Robert Kagan: Clearly we are making such kinds of compromises all over the place in the war on terrorism, although I must say I doubt they are proving very useful.

We are turning a mostly blind eye to the Mubarak dictatorship in Egypt, despite much rhetoric to the contrary, as well in Saudi Arabia. We have been forgiving of the dictatorships in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. Nor have we been very critical of the Putin dictatorship in Russia, no matter how many people he assassinates.

This is all largely in the service of the war on terror. During the Cold War I actually believed that we wronged to support so many dictators, for it often did not help but hurt in the struggle against communism, in addition to being a violation of the principles we were struggling to defend.

I am equally unpersuaded today that our support for these dictatorships will help us fight terrorism, and once again we pay the price of moral and ideological inconsistency."



Given the ideological context in which Nuland likely sees eye-to-eye on with her husband, plus her experience in instigating the Color Revolution in Ukraine, it is not likely that she came to Baku with positive intentions, or even with a positive image of the country in her mind. This is all the more so due to the recent scandal over Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

Foreign Agent, Domestic Punishment

The US-government-sponsored information agency was closed down at the end of December under accusations that it was operating as a foreign agent. While the US has harshly chided the Azeri government for this, at the end of the day, it remains the country's sovereign decision and right to handle suspected foreign agents as it sees fit. Azerbaijan's law is similar to Russia's, in that entities receiving foreign funds must register as foreign agents, and interestingly enough, both of these laws parallel the US' own 1938 Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA).

So why does the US feel that it reserves the sole right to register foreign agents and entities, and if need be, identify and punish those that are acting in the country illegally, but Azerbaijan is deprived of this exercise of sovereignty? The reason is rather simple, actually – it's the US that is the most likely to use these foreign agents to destabilize and potentially overthrow governments (as in Ukraine most recently), whereas Azeri agents in America, should they even exist, are nothing more than an administrative nuisance incapable of inflicting any real harm on the authorities. This double standard is at the core of the US' relations with all countries in the world, not just Azerbaijan, but it's a telling example of the power and leverage Washington attempts to hold over Baku, which is seen most visibly by the blistering criticism leveled on the government after Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's closing in compliance with the law.

Duplicitous Games

Even more concerning for Azerbaijan isn't the seditious game that the US and Nuland might be playing within the country, but the geopolitical one that they might be playing next door with Armenia. Although Washington says that it values Baku as a strategic and pragmatic partner, one needs to wonder to extent a prosperous, neutral Azerbaijan is more important to the US than a destabilized one that could be used as a weapon against Russia. To put everything into context, take a look at the [threat](#) that then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton issued towards Russia and the Eurasian Union back in December 2012:

"There is a move to re-Sovietise the region, It's not going to be called that. It's going to be called a customs union, it will be called Eurasian Union and all of that, but let's make no mistake about it. We know what the goal is and we are trying to figure out effective ways to slow down or prevent it."

One year later, Ukraine, which could have been of immense value to the US and its geostrategy as a neutral, stable state, was in the middle of the US-supported EuroMaidan Color Revolution, showing that Washington will go to great and dramatic lengths to sacrifice its pragmatic interests for the sake of destabilizing Russia. So the question is, could the US also do the same in the Caucasus in order to simultaneously destabilize Russia from the southern flank while it's distracted in dealing with Ukraine?

In Armenia Against Azerbaijan, The US Always Wins



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Armenia is arguably the weakest member of the Eurasian Union, and is thus the most prime for any external destabilization attempt. As the world has seen, the US will even go as far as instigating a war on Russia's borders (the Ukrainian Civil War) just to hamper its regional integration efforts in the west. Could it also try to instigate a new war in Nagorno-Karabakh, too, in order to facilitate this goal in the south? Azerbaijan doesn't know what matters Nuland discussed with Armenia behind closed doors, nor what convincing promises or irresistible threats she may have given Yerevan. The authorities can no longer be assured that Azerbaijan's enormous energy reserves guarantee it a safe place in the US' regional vision, especially considering the caustic language the US has used since the closing of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. If America is successful in instigating a continuation war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, neither of the two states would emerge as the strategic victor, since it's the US that would ultimately triumph because it would have succeeded in destabilizing Russia at the entire Caucasus' expense.

Walking A Tightrope

Given the fact that Azerbaijan can no longer trust the US to not conspire against its internal or external affairs, it is necessary for the country to tweak its foreign policy in order to best safeguard its interests. This means that although Baku cannot outright reject Washington or forget the two-decades-long history of fruitful cooperation with it (nor should it), it must pragmatically reorient its policies to adapt to multipolarity. By this, it is meant that Azerbaijan should look to diversify its partners and foreign policy dealings, namely, in the direction of Russia and Iran, the two neighborly countries that would support its leadership against any US-inspired plot against it. Although there are certainly challenges existing in bilateral relations with Iran, this doesn't mean that they can't be overcome in the interests of preserving Azerbaijan's prosperity and protecting the country's overall population from any unwanted trans-Atlantic tinkering that could endanger it.

Despite the fact that the US is most definitely interested in seeing Azeri energy power the EU, it is not yet known whether this objective of EU energy diversification is more important than the one of Russian destabilization. Under such circumstances, Azerbaijan must carefully walk a tightrope between the West (US/EU) on one hand, and the East (Russia/Iran) on the other, and if it is successful in delicately balancing between both worlds, then it can pivotally reap the resultant benefits thereof and propel its global prominence.

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