

Ukraine: How the US Drive for Hegemony Risks World War III

Book Review of Flashpoint in Ukraine: edited by Stephen Lendman

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[Flashpoint in Ukraine: How the US Drive for Hegemony Risks World War III](#), edited by [Stephen Lendman](#) (Clarity Press, May 2014), was rushed into print in order to capitalize on the current crisis there. Thus, the book has flaws and redeeming qualities.

The book's introduction and 24 chapters are uneven in quality; ranging from rants to hurried sketches to documented scholarship. Although some writers contradict others, the chapters are uniformly liberal in their point of view; which is to say that the neo-Nazis and oligarchs in Ukraine, the neoconservatives, liberal interventionists and predatory capitalists in the United States, as well as their feckless lackeys in the European Union and NATO, deserve much of the blame for the crisis. Notably absent from the book are chapters written by historians of Russia and Ukraine, which might have provided historical perspective to these recent events.

Not that it would be easy to find a scholar specializing in Russian or Ukrainian history who is reliable. Recently, Stephen D. Shenfield exposed the bias of 41 experts on Ukraine, working both in Ukraine and various Western countries. They failed to address the ugly truth about the leading role played by neo-Nazis in toppling the democratically elected government in Ukraine, because they feared that by doing so, they would be providing more fodder for Russia's propaganda campaign. Thus, Mr. Shenfield reluctantly concluded: "They seek not to determine where the truth may lie but rather to deal with the phenomenon of the Ukrainian radical nationalists in such a way as to do the least harm to the cause with which they sympathize."

Similarly, the West has very few historians of Russia who have not succumbed to "the image of Russian iniquity" that, according to Alessandra Stanley, "is so deeply embedded" in America's collective unconscious. Thanks to America's pathological collective unconscious about Russia, the views of Russophobes like Zbigniew Brzezinski and bombastic, attention-seeking politicians possessing no demonstrable knowledge of Russian history, like John McCain, Hillary Clinton, and John Kerry, are courted by an equally pathological and ignorant mainstream news media. Simultaneously, the views of sane and serious students of Russian history, like Steve Cohen, Jack Matlock and Gordon Hahn are virtually ignored.

Instead of including chapters by reliable historians, the book offers the views of the highly esteemed and always intriguing [Paul Craig Roberts](#). This former high level official in the Reagan administration now believes that "The Washington-sponsored coup in Kiev is a reckless act [that] ... should alarm the entire world."

He asserts that “the ultra-nationalists... introduced violence into the protests and changed demands from joining the EU to overthrowing the elected government.” He also sees similarities linking neoconservative claims of “American exceptionalism” to Hitler’s claims for the German nation. Finally, he warns, unless the U.S. rids itself of the obnoxious “Wolfowitz doctrine” – a doctrine that urged the use of American power to keep other countries forever locked into their subordinate positions – “nuclear war is the likely outcome.”

A few of the book’s authors address the economic aspects of the crisis in Ukraine. In [Michael Hudson’s](#) view, “Finance in today’s world has become war by non-military means.” (p.27) “Backed by the IMF and the European Central Bank (ECB) as knee-breakers in what has become in effect the financial extension of NATO, the aim is for U.S. and allied investors to appropriate the plums that kleptocrats have taken from the public domain of Russia, Ukraine and other post-Soviet economies...”

[Michael Parenti](#) agrees, but emphasizes that the “manufactured uprising in Kiev is something we have seen in numerous other countries.” (p.51) “[T]he goal of these western-financed attacks has been to make the world safe for the 1%, the global super rich. Ukraine citizens who think they are fighting for democracy will eventually discover that they are really serving the western plutocracy.”

Perhaps the best chapter to analyze the economic implications of the crisis in Ukraine is the one written by [Jack Rasmus](#) and titled, “Who Benefits from the Ukraine Economic Crisis?” He notes that the initial bailout package offered by the West totaled \$15 billion. It clearly was inferior to the money and huge gas discount offered by Russia. Moreover, Russia did not insist on a 50% reduction in household subsidies for gas, cuts in government employment and pensions, or the privatization of government assets and property.

Nevertheless, on 30 April 2014, Kiev’s coup regime negotiated a \$17 billion loan with the IMF. As a prior action, Naftogaz raised its subsidized gas rates to consumers by 50%, effective May 1st. As a prior action, a law was passed that raised property and excise taxes, cut pensions for former government employees by 10% and reduced the number of law enforcement employees.

As a prior action demanded by the IMF, Ukraine’s government implemented a free-floating exchange rate. Certain to spark inflation, the National Bank of Ukraine recently forecast inflation of 12 to 16 percent this year. (A 7 April 2014 article in *The Nation* by Alec Luhn was the source of the information provided above.)

But, as Professor Rasmus notes, \$17 billion was the estimated amount required just to avoid defaulting on payments to banks for debt already incurred. Thus, “the lion’s share” of the IMF loan will go to western banks to pay principal and interest on previous loans. (p.122)

Ukraine, in Rasmus’ view, actually needs a bailout of \$50 billion – which it never will receive. Consequently, Ukraine will find itself consistently begging for more loans. And, consequently, Kiev’s coup regime will find itself compelled to “cut services and privatize public assets, selling them to billionaires and western interests at fire sale prices.” (p. 130)

Mr. Rasmus claims that the West wants to get their hands on Ukraine’s nuclear power, shipbuilding, aircraft, automobile, truck and public bus manufacturing industries in order to integrate them into their international corporations. Downsizing and restructuring will follow

and will be accompanied by cuts in wages and benefits.

Thus, the winners from Kiev's economic turn to the West will be Ukraine's oligarchs, Ukraine's banks, western banks, and western corporations. Beyond the job losses and wage reductions in the private sector, the losers will be "the majority of Ukrainian households that will have their real income reduced as they pay higher costs for gas, Ukrainian elderly who will have their pensions cut, Ukrainian government workers who will lose their jobs, and all Ukrainian households who will lose other government services." (p. 123)

[John McMurtry](#) minces no words:

Big Banks, Oil, Military Contracting, Big Agri-Food and Pharma are themselves only vehicles of the one underlying economic disease of transnational money sequences... [which] feed on ruined societies as their carrion. (p. 250)

Ukraine follows this macro pattern. It comes into the fold of the EU through a US-led fascist coup posing as 'freedom' and 'revolution,' but in fact hollowing out the society's lifeblood...as the US-led coup and the EU straitjacket suck it dry.

(Note: Although articles outside this book by the highly esteemed economist, Paul Craig Roberts, support the economic interpretation offered above, it is safe to assume that this interpretation would be met with scorn in the White House, on Wall Street, at the IMF, the EU, and the World Bank.)

Perhaps the best chapter in the book is "The Geo-Politics of Euromaidan," by [Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya](#). It pays very close attention to the actual details of the coup that toppled the democratically elected government of President Yanukovich.

Andriy Parubiy was one of the founders of the neo-Nazi "Svoboda" party. He now serves as Kiev's coup regime secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine. Significantly, Parubiy was "the man controlling the so-called 'Euromaidan security forces' that fought government forces in Kiev." (p.91)

As Mr. Nazemroaya tells it, the former commandant of Ukraine's Security Service, Major-General Oleksandr Yakimento, claimed that:

... counter-intelligence forces were monitoring the CIA in Ukraine during the protests... [T]he CIA was active on the ground in Kiev and collaborating with a small circle of opposition figures. (p. 93)

Yakimento also said that it was not the police or government forces that fired on protesters, but snipers from the Philharmonic Building that was controlled by opposition leader Andriy Parubiy, which he asserts was interacting with the CIA. Speaking to the Russian media, Yakimento said that twenty men wearing 'special combat clothes' and carrying 'sniper rifle cases, as well as AKMs with scopes' ran out of the opposition-controlled Philharmonic Building and split into two groups of ten people, with one taking position at the Ukraine hotel. (pp. 93-94)

Mr. Yakimento's assertions about the Ukraine hotel were supported subsequently by an investigation conducted by German television's ARD Monitor program and televised on April

10, 2014. According to ARD Monitor, “there is this video that appears to show, that the demonstrators were hit from the back. The man in yellow on this recording goes even further. He was among the protesters who were on Institute Road for several hours that day. His name is Mikola, we met up with him at the scene of the events. He tells us that members of the opposition demonstrators were repeatedly shot in the back.

Mikola: “Yes, on the twentieth, we were shot at from behind, from the Hotel Ukraina, from the 8th or 9th floor.”

According to ARD’s report, “[T]he hotel on the morning of February 20 was firmly in the hands of the opposition. We talk to eyewitnesses from the Hotel Ukraina, journalists, opposition figures. They all confirm to us on February 20 the hotel held by the opposition was heavily guarded. It would therefore have been very difficult to sneak in a government sniper.”

ARD then tracked down a radio amateur who had recorded Yanukovich’s snipers talking to each other that day. Their radio traffic shows them discussing the fact that someone is shooting at unarmed people – someone they do not know.

1st government sniper: Hey guys, you over there, to the right from the Hotel Ukraina.

2nd government sniper: Who shot? Our people do not shoot at unarmed people.

1st sniper: Guys, there sits a spotter aiming at me. Who is he aiming at there – in the corner? Look!

2nd sniper: On the roof of the yellow building. On top of the cinema, on top of the cinema.

1st sniper: Someone has shot him. But it wasn’t us.

2nd sniper: Miron, Miron, there are even more snipers? And who are they?

ARD then interviewed Oleksandr Lisowoi, a doctor from Hospital No. 6 in Kiev, who confirmed that both protesters and government militia forces were shot by the same type of bullet. According to Dr. Lisowoi, “The wounded we treated had the same type of bullet wounds, I am now speaking of the type of bullets that we have surgically removed from the bodies – they were identical”

Thus, Dr. Lisowoi confirmed what Estonia’s Foreign Minister, Urmas Paet, told EU Foreign Policy and Security Policy chief, Catherine Ashton:

[W]hat is quite disturbing, the same Olga [Bogomolets] told that, well, all the evidence shows that people who were killed by snipers, from both sides, among policemen and then people from the streets, that they were the same snipers, killing people on both sides...[S]he also showed me the photos, she said that as a medical doctor, she can say that it’s the same hand-writing, the same type of bullets, and it’s really disturbing that now the new coalition, that they don’t want to investigate what exactly happened. So that there is now stronger and stronger understanding that behind snipers, it was not Yanukovich, but it was somebody from the new coalition. (Flashpoint in

When you consider the fact that not one member of the neo-Nazi Right Sector (Pravyi Sektor) party was killed by sniper fire, and when you consider that the investigation of the sniper shootings was placed in the hands of Oleg Machnitzki, a member of the neo-Nazi Svoboda party that probably deployed those very snipers, it seems clear that the Obama administration and its spineless lackeys in Europe have backed a criminal enterprise, but call it “freedom” and “democracy.”

Significantly, Mr. Nazemroaya sees the sniper fire as part of an attempted coup that failed to materialize on February 20th. As proof, he provides evidence which indicates that parts of Western Ukraine were preparing to declare their independence from the state still ruled by President Yanukovych after that date. He quotes *The Guardian*, which was commenting on the situation on February 21, 2014: “While protests continue on the streets of central Kiev, the cities in the west of Ukraine are slipping towards autonomy with new parallel governments and security forces that have openly admitted that they have deserted to the side of the protesters.” (p. 96) (Had President Yanukovych behaved as Petro Porshenko now behaves toward similarly motivated separatists in eastern Ukraine, he would have bombed those western Ukrainian cities.)

When the coup failed on February 20th, the EU stepped in to broker an agreement between the opposition and the Yanukovych government on February 21st. The move was intended to empower the opposition leaders. But, while one faction of the opposition was negotiating, another faction continued the pressure from the streets. Thus, Mr. Nazemroaya concludes that the EU-brokered agreement was “a disguise for a putsch.”

After the putsch, “the opposition leaders used the absence of about half the parliamentarians in the Rada to falsely give a cover of legality to their coup by taking the opportunity to pass parliamentary legislation that would have been defeated if all the Rada’s members were present and voting.” (p. 97)

Professor Rasmus adds one more piece to the coup puzzle, when he concludes that billionaire oligarchs, such as Victor Pinchuk, Igor Turchynov, Stepan Kuban, Sergey Tartuta, and Ihor Kolomyisky, “who are either themselves in the Ukrainian parliament, or who formerly and continue to control blocks of 30-50 votes each, were undoubtedly behind the inside strategy of the February 22 coup.” (p. 129)

Flashpoint in Ukraine contains another exceptionally good chapter titled, “The Ukraine Crisis and the Propaganda System in Overdrive,” written by [Edward S. Herman](#) and [David Peterson](#).

The authors focus on the many sins committed by the *New York Times*, which, relentlessly vilified President Putin, calling him a “Russian strongman,” “bare-chested muscleman,” “villain,” “unreconstructed Russian imperialist,” “leader of a rogue state,” “authoritarian rule[r],” and “bully.” (pp.173-74) Yet, “at no time through March 31 did a *Times* reporter, op-ed writer, or editorial characterize the events of February 21-22 as a “coup” or “putsch.” (p. 178)

Anyone who knows anything about the history of post-Soviet Russia knows that the West’s failure to honor its promise not to expand NATO eastward looms large in the minds of Russia’s politicians. The best study of this failed promise is by Mary Elise Sarotte, which not

only focuses on the many times “no further NATO expansion east” was discussed, but also on the actual verbal agreement reached between German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and Mikhail Gorbachev to trade a unified Germany under NATO for no further NATO expansion eastward.

Mr. Herman and Mr. Peterson correctly note that “this absolutely essential context to [explain] Russian action...was mentioned only twice in the pages of the *New York Times* from January through April 15, 2014, and only once by a *Times* writer.”

Yet, the critical significance of NATO expansion to Russia’s political elite has been made loud and clear. On December 10, 1993, Roger Cohen of the *Times* wrote: “Divergent Russian and NATO visions of the future of European security clashed today as President Boris N. Yeltsin of Russia repeated his opposition to any eastward expansion of the Atlantic alliance and top NATO officials said the door must be left open for the eventual admission of new members.” On September 21, 1995, Craig Whitney of the *Times* wrote: “President Boris Yeltsin has made clear that he feels that the eastward expansion of an alliance that was created to keep the Soviet Union out of western Europe is a strategic insult.”

On February 7, 1997, the *Chicago Tribune* published an article under the headline: “Russian Anger At Nato Plan Startles West.” And, on February 24, 1998, former ambassador to the United States, Vladimir Lukin, claimed “it is not the truth” in response to Madeline Albright’s lie that Russian officials have little objection to NATO expansion.

In March 1999, NATO began bombing Yugoslavia which caused outrage among every segment of Russian society. Representative of such outrage was an article by Alexander V. Buzgalin titled: “[Is NATO a Killer Cop?](#)”

Another round of NATO expansion in 2002 and the Bush administration’s invasion of Iraq in 2003 undermined Russian popular support for President Putin’s post-9/11 cooperation with the United States. Thus, in 2007, President Putin would deliver a blistering speech in Munich about the unipolar pretensions of the United States. Regarding NATO, Putin said the following:

I think it is obvious that NATO expansion does not have any relation with the modernization of the Alliance itself or with ensuring security in Europe. On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust. And we have the right to ask: against whom is this expansion intended? And what happened to the assurances our western partners made after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact? Where are those declarations today? No one even remembers them. But I will allow myself to remind this audience what was said. I would like to quote the speech of NATO General Secretary Mr. Woerner in Brussels on 17 May 1990. He said at the time that: ‘the fact that we are ready not to place a NATO army outside of German territory gives the Soviet Union a firm security guarantee.’ Where are these guarantees?

In April 2008, a NATO summit in Bucharest placed the potential membership of Georgia and Ukraine on the agenda. Russia’s complaints were ignored until Dmitry Rogozhin asserted that such a move might compel Russia to point nuclear warheads at Ukraine. Then the issue was dropped, at least temporarily.

In August 2008 and in March 2014, Russia delivered slaps across the faces of those in the United States, Europe and NATO who thought that they would expand NATO into Georgia

and Ukraine. To those who would deny Russia its sphere of influence and assert that Georgia and Ukraine have a right to join any military alliance they chose, I say: "Yes, they have as much right as Cuba had during the Cuban missile crisis."

On March 18, 2014, President Putin asserted, "...there is a limit to everything. And with Ukraine, our western partners have crossed the line." Anyone who knows anything about post-Soviet Russia knew precisely what he was saying.

Finally and unfortunately, *Flashpoint in Ukraine* has nothing to say about the bombing, displacement and killing of innocent women and children in places like Slavyansk and Kramatorsk. The Obama administration, which warned the Yanukovych government against using force to combat violent neo-Nazis in Kiev, now turns a hypocritical blind eye to the war crimes being committed against its own people by Kiev's coup regime of Petro Poroshenko.

In Clint Eastwood's movie, *Unforgiven*, there's a famous exchange between the young Schofield Kid and old Will Munny (Clint Eastwood) that goes like this:

The Schofield Kid (after killing a man for the first time): "It don't seem real... how he ain't gonna never breathe again, ever... how he's dead. And the other one too. All on account of pulling a trigger."

Will Munny: "It's a hell of a thing, killing a man. Take away all he's got and all he's ever gonna have."

The Schofield Kid: "Yeah, well, I guess they had it coming."

Will Munny: "We all got it coming, kid."

For bombing those innocent women and children in eastern Ukraine, the murderers in Kiev and Lviv certainly "got it coming." Not barbaric, American-style executions, but civilized, European-style indictments, convictions and incarcerations.

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