

Kerry, Obama, Putin: The Fool, the Demagogue, and the Former KGB Colonel

Russia is under Serious Attack and Threat by the US

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The fool is John Kerry, who has looked bad in his rushing around between Washington and Tel Aviv trying to get in place a “framework” agreement between Israel and the Palestinians that would show progress in the efforts of the honest broker, assailing Nicholas Maduro of Venezuela for his “terror campaign against his own people,” and, of course, denouncing the Russians for their “aggression” against the coup-regime of Ukraine.

His statement that “You just don’t in the 21st century behave in 19th century fashion by invading another country on a completely trumped-up pretext,” has to be regarded as an Orwellian classic and may be his signifier in future history books, in the unlikely event that he makes it at all. His punchline has been the subject of many jokes and laughs in the dissident media, but the mainstream media have hardly mentioned it and certainly haven’t made it the butt of jokes and a basis for discrediting the man (just as there has been no discrediting of Madeleine Albright based on her statement on national TV that killing 500,000 Iraqi children via the sanctions of mass destruction in the 1990s—which she helped engineer—“was worth it”).

Of course, it is possible that Kerry really believed he was speaking truths, having internalized the assumptions that flow from U.S. “exceptionalism,” which make words like “invasion,” “aggression” and “international law” inapplicable to us as the world’s police; and what might be a “completely trumped up pretext” if offered by the Russians is only a slight and excusable error or misjudgment when we do it. After all, the New York Times quickly used the word “aggression” in editorializing on the Crimea events (“Russia’s Aggression,” March 2, 2014), whereas it never used the word to describe the invasion-occupation of Iraq, nor did it mention the words “UN Charter” or “international law” in its 70 editorials on Iraq from September 11, 2001 to March 21, 2003 (Howard Friel and Richard Falk, *The Record of the Paper*).

A bit more subtle, but more calculated, dishonest, hypocritical, often absurd, and demagogic were the words of President Barack Obama, speaking in Belgium, as he tried to confute the charges of hypocrisy that Russian President Putin leveled against Western denunciations of the Crimean independence vote and subsequent Russian absorption of Crimea (“Remarks by the President in Address to European Youth,” Brussels, March 23, 2014).

It is amusing to see how outrageously he can twist history and his own record. According to Obama our founding fathers put into our “founding documents” the beautiful concept that “all men—and women—are created equal.” He apparently forgot about slavery and the 3/5th value per slave for the South’s representation credit and that women didn’t get the

vote till the 20th century. He speaks about the ideal of “uncensored information” that will “allow individuals to make their own decisions,” but this is the man who has worked hard to control the flow of information and to make it costly for whistleblowers to break through a growing wall of government secrecy.

Obama is aghast at “the belief among some that bigger nations can bully smaller ones to get their way—that rejected maxim that might somehow makes right.” The United States has its immense military budget and 800-plus military bases not to allow it to bully smaller nations but for its national security. He is also impressed with Russia’s “challenging truths that only a few weeks ago seemed self-evident...[including] that international law matters.” This statement is brazen given that U.S. officials (e.g., Dean Acheson, Madeleine Albright) have explicitly stated that they don’t take international law seriously in fixing U.S. policy; that Obama’s predecessor George W. Bush dismissed it as a joke: “International law? I better call my lawyer; he didn’t bring that up to me”—and we can observe a steady, even growing, stream of actions that violate international law, including many engineered by Obama. Violating international law is as American as apple pie.

Putin, of course, pointed this out in reference to Iraq, but Obama answers him:

“Now it is true that the Iraq war was a subject of vigorous debate not just around the world, but in the United States as well. I participated in that debate and I opposed our military intervention there. But even in Iraq, America sought to work within the international system. We did not claim or annex Iraq’s territory. We did not grab its resources for our own gain. Instead we ended our war and left Iraq to its people and a fully sovereign Iraqi state that could make decisions about its own future.”

We may note the laughable evasion of the issue of “international law,” which he has said really “matters” in considering Russian actions, but dodges in addressing the U.S. case. His mentioning a “vigorous debate” is not only irrelevant to the question of law violation, it is also highly deceptive, as it is well established that Bush and his small coterie of advisers had determined to attack Iraq long before any public discussion of the subject and they picked on “weapons of mass destruction” as the excuse on the basis of its saleability.

So it was an aggression built on a lie and the ultimate in a “trumped up case.” On the “working within the international system,” the UN Charter is basic to a meaningful international system and the invasion was a gross violation of that key ingredient. He brags that we didn’t steal their resources and eventually got out. He doesn’t point out that we got out only after many years of killing and destruction which actually helped create a resistance that, in effect, pushed us out. He doesn’t mention that our major international law violation in Iraq was responsible for the death of probably a million people, the creation of four million refugees, and huge material destruction. By contrast, that awful Russian action in the Crimea seems to have resulted in fewer than half a dozen deaths.

Obama also fails to mention that Iraq is far away from the United States and the U.S. attack there was an acknowledged “war of choice” that had nothing to do with protecting U.S. security. Crimea, by contrast, is adjacent to Russia, its people are linguistically and culturally close to Russia, it houses a major Russian naval base, and the coup in Kiev, engineered with the support of the United States and other NATO powers, posed a genuine security threat to Russia. Its leaders were taken unawares by the coup and threat to its

naval base, and its moves were arguably defensive and a “war of necessity.”

The referendum carried out in Crimea, which produced an overwhelming vote supporting secession from Ukraine and integration into Russia, would seem like a relatively democratic procedure and consistent with the principle of self-determination. Obama and company found it a violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty and a violation of international law. Here we have two principles seemingly at odds with one another and, in this case, the United States and its allies chose the one that serves their interest and the Russians go for the other. But Putin points out that in the case of Kosovo, as part of Serbia, the NATO alliance strongly supported a secession on self-determination principles. Obama tries to rebut Putin’s mentioning of Kosovo, saying

“But NATO only intervened after the people of Kosovo were systematically brutalized and killed for years. And Kosovo only left Serbia after a referendum was organized not outside the boundaries of international law, but in careful cooperation with the United Nations and with Kosovo’s neighbors. None of that even came close to happening in Crimea.”

But NATO didn’t just “intervene,” it carried out a massive bombing war that was itself a violation of the UN Charter and hence of that sacred “international law” to which Obama is so devoted. Obama ignores the fact that the CIA had been training KLA terrorists in Kosovo for some time (and they had been designated “terrorists” by U.S. officials). The KLA was well aware that actions that induced Serb retaliation would serve their interests in helping justify a NATO attack. The day before the NATO bombing war began, the British Defense Minister told the British Parliament that the KLA had probably killed more civilians in Kosovo than the Serb army.

Obama also lies about an alleged referendum in Kosovo. None took place. On February 17, 2008, the Kosovo Albanian-dominated parliament issued its Declaration of Independence, and that sufficed for the United States and its closest allies, now so indignant at the Crimea referendum. That Kosovo vote also took place after a NATO war and Kosovo Albanian actions had driven large numbers of Serb and Roma residents out of Kosovo.

The United States constructed a huge military base in Kosovo during its war and occupation of Kosovo, which was not agreed to by Serbia or by any vote of the Kosovo or Serbian population. Russia had a naval base in the Crimea by long-standing agreement with the Ukraine government. It didn’t bomb the Ukraine as a prelude to the referendum vote and the vote was essentially uncontested and unopposed by any local constituencies. So, as Obama says, there is no comparison between the two cases. Obama’s draws a picture of the freedom loving West, with NATO standing as a vigilant sentinel, with the dark and evil forces behind the Iron Curtain being kept at bay. “The United States and NATO do not seek any conflict with Russia.... Since the end of the Cold War, we have worked with Russia under successive administrations to build ties of culture and commerce and international community.” But he admonishes that Russia must be a “responsible” power. “Just because Russia has a deep history with Ukraine doesn’t mean it should be able to dictate Ukraine’s future. On the fundamental principle that is at stake here—the ability of nations and peoples to make their own choices—there can be no going back. It’s not America that filled the Maiden with protesters—it was Ukrainians. No foreign forces compelled the citizens of Tunis and Tripoli to rise up—they did so on their own.”



Obama fails to mention that since the end of the Cold War, NATO has worked steadily, in violation of a pledge by U.S. officials not to move “one inch” toward the Russian borders, to encircle Russia, to press up against its borders, and to support border regime leaders openly hostile to Russia. So Western support of a regime hostile to Russia in Ukraine would have to be regarded by Russian officials as an unfriendly and threatening action. Obama’s claim that it was only Ukrainians who were protesting in Maiden twists the evidence, as the United States was actively supporting some of them, including the most violent, and was, therefore, itself trying to “dictate Ukraine’s future.”

It is notorious that a compromise transition government plan negotiated between Ukrainian factions, with EU support, was quickly overturned by violent protesters, leading immediately to the coup government headed by Victoria Nuland’s first choice, and effectively “fucking the EU’s” effort to end the strife peaceably. The unelected government then in place, loaded with rightwingers in strategic positions, represented a non-Russian “dictation” of Ukraine’s government and one that definitely threatened Russians within Ukraine and the Russian state. In that context, the Crimean referendum represented an important and justifiable case of where the ability of “peoples to make their own choices” (Obama) was applicable.

An argument can be made that the Western, and mainly U.S., intervention and role in overthrowing the elected government of Ukraine was a form of aggression against Russia, which would make Russian actions actually a response to aggression. An important modern form of Western-sponsored regime change has been via encouragement, training, and material and propaganda aid to dissident groups that disorganize and discredit a target government and help dislodge it from power. This is done under the PR heading of “democracy promotion,” but it is often de facto “democracy demotion.” This is not done in Bahrain or Saudi Arabia, but rather in Serbia, Ukraine, and Venezuela.

The government displaced in Ukraine was elected; the coup government that has replaced it was not. In his Brussels speech, Obama mentions that "Latin American nations rejected dictatorship and built new democracies," but he fails to point out that scads of those dictatorships were U.S. sponsored and that, while it supported tyranny in Venezuela for many years, the United States has been consistently hostile to the left-oriented Bolivarian democracy that has been in place for more than a decade; and that while Obama was speaking in Brussels his government was encouraging the often violent protesters in Caracas, denouncing Maduro and threatening sanctions and more in the traditional U.S. "democratic demotion" mode. (See Kerry's pugnacious statement of March 13, 2014 before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on "Advancing U.S. Interests Abroad: The FY 2015 Foreign Affairs Budget.")

Comparing Vladimir Putin's address to the Russian Federation on March 18, 2014 dealing with the Crimean referendum and associated crisis with Obama's March 23 address in Brussels is no contest—Putin wins hands down.

This, I believe, is a result of the fact that Russia is under serious attack and threat by the United States, which is a still expanding empire that cannot tolerate serious rivals and actually turns them into enemies that must resist. This is mainly Russia and China, and U.S.-NATO actions have succeeded in transforming Russia from a virtual client in the Yeltsin era to the enemy and "aggressor" today. It is amazing to see how the mainstream media and intellectuals can fail to see the security threat to Russia posed by the Western-underwritten change in government in Kiev, and the continuity in the extension of this threat in NATO's steady expansion on Russia's borders.

And the double standard on aggression and international law is breath-taking. Putin sardonically notes, "Firstly, it's a good thing that they at least remember that there exists such a thing as international law—better late than never." He makes his point in low key and with wit. Obama is never funny in Brussels and his stream of clichés and misrepresentations is painful. He is defending the indefensible and his target looks good by comparison, both intellectually and morally.

But Putin is the loser in mainstream America. He is a victim of the standard demonization process that is applied to any challenger or target of the imperial state. It is amusing to see him so often referred to as the "former KGB colonel"—can you imagine the U.S. media regularly referring to George Bush-1 as the "former head of the CIA." Of course, every blemish in his career, and they are real—Chechnya, his position on gay rights, the weakness of Russian democracy and power of the oligarchs (which he inherited from the U.S.-supported Yeltsin)—is featured regularly. Underneath this is the fact that he represents Russian national interests, which conflict with the outward drive and interests of the U.S. imperial elite.

For a tiny illustration of the bias, we may consider the media treatment of the Pussy Riot band, jailed after an action in a major Moscow church and made into virtual saints in the U.S. media. They feature the badness of Putin and his Russia. The New York Times had 23 articles featuring the Pussy Riot band from January 1, 2014 through March 31, a number of them with pictures of the band visiting various places in New York. They met with the Times editorial board and were honored by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, among others. They are not good musicians and often do things that would land them in jail in the United States.

One of them, Maria Alyokhina, was even given op-ed space in the paper ("Sochi Under Siege," February 21). Two interesting contrasts: John Mearsheimer, a University of Chicago political scientist and author of several important books on foreign affairs, wrote an op-ed column "Getting Ukraine Wrong," published on March 14 in the International New York Times, but not in the U.S. print edition. His message was too strong for the main NYT vehicle as he argued that "The taproot of the current crisis is NATO's expansion...and is motivated by the same geo-political considerations that influence all great powers, including the United States." This is not opinion and analysis fit to print.

Another interesting comparison is this: in February 2014, while the trials and opinions of Pussy Riot were hot news, 84-year-old nun, Sister Megan Rice, was sentenced to 4 years in prison for having entered a nuclear weapons site in July 2012 and carried out a symbolic action there. The New York Times gave this news a tiny mention in its National Briefing under the title "Tennessee. Nun is Sentenced for Peace Protest." Rice was not invited to visit the Times editorial board or write an opinion column. Her sentencing was news barely fit to marginalize.

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