

Obama's Speech on Ukraine: Propaganda and Lies

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The speech delivered by President Barack Obama in Brussels Wednesday was a call to arms for a US-NATO confrontation against Russia. With a series of lies and evasions, Obama presented a world turned upside down in which the US and European imperialists, who backed the coup in Ukraine spearheaded by fascistic forces, are the defenders of democracy and peace.

There was little in the speech that could convince working people, either in Europe or the United States, that a policy of open-ended conflict with Russia was in their interests. That was not the purpose of the speech, which consisted of one propaganda lie after another, uttered with the assurance that there would be no serious criticism, let alone opposition, within the ruling elites of the US and Europe or from their media mouthpieces.

Obama sought to elaborate the basis for a major turn in US foreign policy—what one of his foreign policy advisers called a “strategic pivot” towards confronting Russia, deliberately employing the same term that the White House has used to describe its systematic anti-China policy in the Far East.

One aim of this strategy of confrontation is to provide a new political axis for the US-dominated NATO military structure, which has visibly frayed in the absence of the old Cold War framework.

Much of the speech was devoted to rehashing long-discredited claims that American imperialism and its European allies represent democracy, freedom and the popular will. Obama invoked the conflict between democratic ideals and the authoritarian view that “order and progress can only come when individuals surrender their rights to an all-powerful sovereign.”

But the words rang rather hollow coming from a president who has claimed absolute and unreviewable power to order the drone-missile assassination of anyone he chooses, anywhere in the world, and whose government asserts the right to collect and store the e-mails, text messages and telephone calls of the entire human race.

The focus of the speech was an indictment of Russian actions in Crimea, which was annexed last week after a popular referendum in the region. “Russia’s leadership is challenging truths that only a few weeks ago seemed self-evident,” Obama declared, “that in the 21st century, the borders of Europe cannot be redrawn with force, that international law matters, that people and nations can make their own decisions about their future.”

Of course, these are precisely the principles that successive US governments have trampled on: the 1999 US-NATO bombing of Serbia that resulted in the redrawing of its borders by

force and the secession of Kosovo; the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, in flagrant violation of international law; and countless instances in which the US tramples on the rights of “people and nations” to “make their own decisions” when those decisions come into conflict with the interests of American imperialism.

The Russian government of President Vladimir Putin has pointed to the hypocrisy of the US-European outcry over Crimea, citing many of these examples, and Obama sought to rebut Putin’s arguments by employing the technique of the big lie.

He rejected any comparison between Crimea and Kosovo, denying that Kosovo was an example “of the West interfering in the affairs of a smaller country.” Obama asserted, “NATO only intervened after the people of Kosovo were systematically brutalized and killed for years,” ignoring the responsibility of the United States and the European powers, particularly Germany, for fomenting the breakup of Yugoslavia along ethnic lines. In Kosovo, the US sponsored the gangsters of the Kosovo Liberation Army, who carried out tit-for-tat atrocities against the Serb population, and now, in power, persecute the Roma and other minorities.

“Russia has pointed to America’s decision to go into Iraq as an example of Western hypocrisy,” Obama continued. “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.”

There was no significant debate or democratic discussion in the lead-up to the US invasion of Iraq. The war was the outcome of a political conspiracy. The Bush administration went to war on the basis of brazen lies about Iraq’s supposed possession of weapons of mass destruction and its nonexistent alliance with Al Qaeda. The mass demonstrations that showed the opposition of millions of Americans, and a majority of the world’s population, were simply ignored.

After claiming he had opposed the Iraq war, Obama sought to justify its conduct and outcome, claiming, “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 in a fully sovereign Iraqi state that can make decisions about its own future.”

The truth is that the war in Iraq was the greatest crime—up to now—committed in the 21st century. More than a million Iraqis lost their lives as a result of the US invasion and occupation, and Iraq was destroyed as a functioning society. The Bush administration openly declared that the Geneva Conventions and international law did not apply either to the war in Iraq or the previous conquest and occupation of Afghanistan, a position that the Obama administration continues to uphold.

Obama seeks to rally the world against the supposed crimes of Russia in Crimea, in which, as of this writing, two people have been killed (one Ukrainian soldier and one Russian), while opposing any prosecution of the American war criminals responsible for the immense bloodbath visited upon the people of Iraq.

Instead, the US president excused the monumental crimes of his own government with the statement, “Of course, neither the United States nor Europe are perfect in adherence to our ideals. Nor do we claim to be the sole arbiter of what is right or wrong in the world.”

Actually, the US government does claim that role. Administration after administration has declared the United States to be “the indispensable nation,” the sole superpower, the country whose military-intelligence apparatus must be the world’s policeman, and whose leaders are immune from any accountability for their actions.

Obama’s arguments were no less fraudulent when he addressed the specifics of the situation in Ukraine. “Yes, we believe in democracy, with elections that are free and fair, and independent judiciaries and opposition parties, civil society and uncensored information so that individuals can make their own choices,” he claimed.

But in Ukraine, the United States and the European Union rode roughshod over national sovereignty, intervening to foment a coup that overthrew Viktor Yanukovich, an elected president, and installing in power not the “choice” of the Ukrainian people, but the choice of Washington.

This was exposed by the notorious phone calls between State Department official Victoria Nuland and US Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt, in which they discussed the pluses and minuses of various Ukrainian politicians and made their selection of “Yats”—the newly appointed stooge prime minister, Arseniy Yatsenyuk—as the best option.

Obama dismissed the charge that the US is backing fascists in Kiev with a banal reference to his grandfather serving in Patton’s army fighting the Nazis in World War II, as though this had any significance. The US government has backed countless fascists and authoritarian killers since 1945, from Franco in Spain, to the Shah in Iran, to Pinochet in Chile, to the Egyptian military butchers of today—to name only a few.

Obama made no mention of Egypt in his speech, maintaining a guilty silence over the US support for the junta that has just sentenced 529 Muslim Brotherhood supporters to death after a two-day show trial. This was a deliberate and cynical omission, as Obama referred to democratic strivings in “Tunis and Tripoli,” but not in Cairo’s Tahrir Square.

Russian charges of US collaboration with fascists in Kiev are true. US officials have repeatedly met with leaders such as Oleh Tyahnybok, head of the ultra-right Svoboda party, which is a key component of the Ukrainian cabinet, as well as officials of the neo-Nazi Right Sector, which played the role of storm troopers in the fighting to overthrow the elected government of Ukraine. In all, the US State Department and other agencies have expended \$5 billion to subvert pro-Russian governments in Ukraine since the breakup of the Soviet Union.

Obama’s speech in Brussels was an attempt to justify a policy towards Russia that is aggressive, provocative and incalculably dangerous. The real goal of US actions in this crisis was suggested in the US president’s sneering reference on Tuesday to Russia as merely a “regional power.”

This was not, of course, Obama’s language when seeking to enlist Russian assistance in overthrowing the Assad government in Syria, browbeating Iran or isolating North Korea. But it has been the goal of American imperialism ever since the collapse of the USSR to expand its influence throughout the former Soviet bloc—first in the countries of Eastern Europe, then in former Soviet republics in the Baltics, the Caucasus and Central Asia, and now Ukraine.

Russia is to be reduced not merely to the status of “regional power,” but to a semi-colonial status, dismembered and carved up by the major imperialist powers. In this context, it is clear that when Obama speaks of diplomacy, he means the capitulation of the Russian regime to US and EU demands.

Obama insisted in his speech that Russia’s failure to accept the new arrangements in Eastern Europe established by American and European imperialism be met with ever harsher economic sanctions and political isolation.

In the pursuit of this policy, Washington is turning the regions that border Russia on the west into an armed camp, creating the conditions for any spark or provocation to ignite a military conflagration between nuclear powers. Obama made a point in his speech of invoking Article Five of the NATO charter, which obliges all NATO member states to come to the defense of any single member state that comes under attack—including former East Bloc countries or Soviet republics such as Poland, the Baltic states, Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary. This was an implied threat of military force.

The struggle against imperialist militarism and the threat of US-NATO intervention in the Ukraine crisis requires the independent political mobilization of the working class on an international basis, uniting workers of North America, Europe and the former Soviet Union in a common struggle.

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