

Russia versus America: A Lesson In The Abuse and Use of Power

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Watching the addresses to the General Assembly of the United Nations by leaders of the major powers was a lesson in the use and abuse of power. The address made to the General Assembly by President Putin on behalf of the Russian Federation contrasted sharply with the address made by President Obama, for the United States. While President Putin emphasized the fact that the international world order and security system depended on the principles set out in the UN Charter, President Obama made the absurd claim that the United States had the right to ignore national sovereignty in order to “restore security” for peoples of nations oppressed by what it labelled “tyrants” and echoed the Bush doctrine that it would act alone or with its allies to accomplish these objectives, come what may.



Obama once again accused Russia of aggression in Crimea and Ukraine, accused Iran of sponsoring terrorism in the middle east, accused China of violating international law in the South China Sea, blamed Cuba and its people for the American imposed trade embargo for not “cooperating” with the United States and once again called for President Assad of Syria to be removed. He reiterated the claim that the United States had the right to impose its illegal sanctions where it saw fit and claimed, in an astonishing reversal of history and fact, that the United States has kept the peace in the world since the United Nations was founded.

President Obama gave the impression of an edgy street punk, intimidating everyone with his cock of the walk bravado and the threat of American military power unless we all “cooperated” with the United States. He talked of “terrible conflicts” throughout the world in the past seventy years, but never stated that the United States was the instigator of most of them, and claimed to have prevented a third world war when it is the United States that has threatened it many times in the past and, with the new threat of placing advanced nuclear weapons on German territory, threatens it now. He bragged about the cost imposed on those who chose to resist American hegemony instead of cooperating with it and claimed, with a straight face, that the order imposed by America had brought dignity and equal work for all people in the world but forgot that the one per cent have all the money while the rest

of us do all the work

Obama shifted the blame for the refugee crisis from his government that caused it to “strong men.” Clearly the crisis, according to him, is the fault of Saddam Hussein, Muammar Gadhafi, and President Assad, for forcing the American government to attack them. Such is the surreal logic used by the Americans to justify the unjustifiable. He then made several references to control of the media, oppression of political opponents, and control of access to information, as a swipe at Russia even though these are things that are happening in America and Europe. Then he tried to justify the use of illegal sanctions against Russia by claiming it was working and causing hardship for the nation and that Russians were leaving the country as a response. He seemed oblivious to the slap in the face he delivered to the UN as he said these words since unilateral sanctions are a violation of the UN Charter. But it is more likely that the contempt shown by these words was openly and deliberately defiant of the UN and all it stands for.

President Putin, to the contrary, rejected this false history and false presentation of the causes of the current world crisis and put the blame squarely on the doorstep of the United States and its NATO allies where it belongs. He began by reminding everyone that the concept of the UN arose at the Yalta meeting in Crimea during the fight against Hitler and that the UN has a long history in trying to prevent conflict. He recognised that the Americans and their allies complain of inefficiencies in the UN, which really means that they complain when they don’t get their way, but emphasised that differences in views were recognised as inevitable from the creation of the UN and that the veto power was necessary to guarantee that no single power could dominate the rest. He also reminded everyone of the fact that the US and its allies have long used the veto when their interests were concerned and that any nation that bypasses the UN or violates the UN Charter acts illegally, and outside international law. He added that the American claim to all world power after the end of the Cold War, if acceded to would result in a world dominated by selfishness, by ditkats instead of equality, democracy and freedom and a world where independent states would be replaced by de facto protectorates.

In distinct contrast to the American position that state sovereignty does not exist, he reaffirmed the fundamental principle of international law that state sovereignty is essential for the free development of a nation and its peoples. He illustrated his point with the examples of US aggression in the Middle East and North Africa where chaos and catastrophe for the peoples of those countries are the consequence, instead of stable governments, and which aggression resulted in the rise of Islamic state and other terrorist groups that were created by the west as tools to be used against secular states under attack. He accused the west of hypocrisy in dealing with the refugee crisis while at the same time financing and supporting Islamic State and other groups. He reiterated that no one but President Assad’s armed forces and the Kurd militia are really fighting these groups. He stressed that Russia does not have ambitions of any type but stated that “we can no longer tolerate the current state of affairs in the world.”

To deal with the current crisis in the Middle East he proposed the creation of a broad anti-terrorist coalition similar to the anti-Hitler coalition. He also called on the cooperation of the Islamic nations and religious leaders to help in this struggle against the common enemy and stated that statehood must be restored where it has been destroyed, and military, economic and material assistance provided to countries in difficult situations, and that this must be done in accordance with the UN Charter and international law. In this regard he made

special mention of Libya, Iraq and Syria. He stressed the need for global security and condemned the expansion of NATO after the Cold War, and the false choice presented to the east bloc countries by America of being either with the west or with the east and stated correctly that this aggressive logic had sparked the geopolitical crisis in Ukraine where popular discontent was used by the west to stage a military coup from outside that triggered a civil war. He reiterated Russia's support of the Minsk Agreements of February 12, 2015 as the only way out of the crisis and underlined that the interests and rights of the peoples of the Donbass region must be taken into account and respect given to their choices and that all steps taken by the Kiev regime must be coordinated with them.

He then shifted focus to another reality of the struggle for power in the world, the economic front and insisted that there must be a common space for economic cooperation using the World Trade Organisation principles of free trade, investment and open competition but the Americans are trying to bypass the WTO now and are trying to set up separate and secret structures such as the Trans Pacific Partnership project which Obama had bragged about. He also denounced the use of unilateral sanctions as a violation of the UN Charter and stated that they are being used not only to apply political pressure but also to eliminate economic competitors. These trends can unbalance the trade system completely and cause the disintegration of the global economic space. Russia, on the other hand, proposes harmonising regional economic projects, what he called the "integration of integrations", based on universal and transparent rules of international trade. He made a point of citing the plans to connect the Eurasian Economic Union and China's Silk Road Economic Belt and called for their further integration with the European Union.

Finally, while Obama paid lip service to the problem of climate change in his address, he made no concrete commitments to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The Chinese proposed that they would reduce their emissions by 40% over 2005 levels. Putin topped that with a promise to cut them by 75% over 1999 levels by 2030. But he went further by calling for fundamentally new technologies inspired by nature and for industrial development to be in harmony with nature in order to restore the balance between human activity and nature and called for a special UN forum to tackle climate change and stated that Russia is ready to co-sponsor such a forum.

So, there we have the world situation expressed in the speeches of these two men; Obama, for the United States, claiming the right to act on its own, to enforce its will with military might wherever it is resisted, to secure economic advantages for itself at all costs, all based on a refusal to treat every nation as equal and sovereign; and, President Putin, calling for a strict adherence to international law, for common efforts against terrorism and threats to peace, for integrated economic cooperation, all based on the principles of national sovereignty and the dignity of nations and peoples. The conflict has been clearly delineated. The lines have been drawn. We all wait to see how this fundamental conflict will be resolved.

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