

US-NATO Saber Rattling on Russia's Doorstep

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On the eve of the NATO Summit in Wales, President Barack Obama delivered a provocative speech in Estonia that was meant to intimidate Russia.

With Ukrainian forces under the Kiev government suffering a recent spate of setbacks at the hands of eastern Ukrainian forces, Obama asserted that the conflict was triggered by an invasion by Russian forces, even though Russia has no troops in the Ukraine.

Buoyed by a hyperventilating Western media campaign demonizing Russia, Obama adopted an aggressive tone, arguing,

"The Russian forces that have now moved into Ukraine are not on a humanitarian or peacekeeping mission. They are Russian combat forces with Russian weapons in Russian tanks."

This "brazen assault on the territorial integrity of Ukraine," Obama announced, "challenges that most basic of principles of our international system, that borders cannot be redrawn at the barrel of a gun, that nations have the right to determine their own future." The rights of nations and peoples, Obama continued, "can't simply be taken away by brute force."

Surely such words could only have been meant ironically, coming from the president of the nation that played a major role in the 1991 Conference on Yugoslavia, during which Western nations and the republics decided on the breakup of Yugoslavia, while the federal government was explicitly barred from attending and was thereby given no say over its own fate. Nor were those principles upheld when the U.S. and its NATO partners bombed Yugoslavia and supplied arms and military intelligence to secessionist forces in order to separate by force the province of Kosovo. Is the right of nations to determine their future upheld by U.S. sanctions on Zimbabwe, embargo on Cuba, and the provision of substantial aid to groups seeking to overthrow the government of Venezuela? Was the barrel of a gun not used when the U.S. invaded Iraq and bombed Libya? Were Syrians allowed the right to determine their future as the U.S. coordinated and aided efforts by the Saudi and Qatari monarchies to supply and organize infiltration by Islamic extremists into their nation, leading to the creation and blossoming of ISIS?

"Now, let's put to rest once and for all the distortions or outdated thinking that has caused this crisis," Obama assured his audience. "Our NATO alliance is not aimed against any other nation. We're an alliance of democracies dedicated to our own collective defense." Obama must have assumed his audience was ignorant of history. Not once in its entire history has NATO acted in defense. Since the end of the Cold War, it has become an agent of imperialism, carrying out unprovoked wars of aggression against Yugoslavia and Libya and

participating in the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq that followed U.S. invasions.

Without question, NATO is primarily at against Russia. During discussions on a unified Germany in 1990, German foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher told Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze, "For us, however, one thing is certain: NATO will not expand to the east. As far as the non-expansion of NATO is concerned, this also applies in general." U.S. Secretary of State James Baker assured the Soviets that if they acquiesced to NATO membership for a reunited Germany, NATO would not expand "one inch to the east." One day later, Baker explicitly told Shevardnadze this meant Eastern Europe as a whole. Since that time, NATO has tightened its noose around Russia by bringing into its fold the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Albania and Croatia. Georgia is on track for future membership, and it was the hope of someday adding Ukraine to its roster that partially motivated the U.S. to back the removal of the Yanukovych government. The U.S. has installed ballistic missile defense installations in Poland and the Czech Republic, targeted at Russia.

"The protests in Ukraine on the Maidan were not led by neo-Nazis or fascists," Obama wants us to believe, but openly neo-Nazi and fascist groups, replete with regalia, served as the violent shock troops in the protests that toppled the government. "After an agreement was brokered for constitutional reform, the former president then abandoned his office, and parliament endorsed new elections," Obama continued. What he failed to point out was that Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych left his country only after his car was fired upon and he had been forced to move his family around on a daily basis, out of fear for their safety in the face of threats made against them made by neo-Nazi and fascist groups. When parliament voted to remove Yanukovych from office, it lacked the number of votes necessary to do so under the constitution. Soon thereafter, an interim government was installed with its head hand-picked by the U.S.

Obama challenged Russia to follow the path that starts with it "changing course and leaving Ukraine," even though Russia cannot leave Ukraine because it is not there to begin with, "so that Ukrainians can make their own decisions." Why this sudden respect for Ukrainians making their decisions? When Yanukovych was in office, the United States pumped \$5 billion into the pockets of groups willing to do its bidding, and the European Union supplied \$586 million to these same anti-government groups that eventually overthrew the government and set Ukraine spiraling into violence and disorder.

None of this is relevant, apparently. Instead from Obama what we heard was talk of Russia "trying to reclaim lands lost in the 19th century." Adopting a pose of moral righteousness, Obama went on to say, "It only shows that unrestrained nationalism is the last refuge of those who cannot or will not deliver real progress and opportunity for their own people at home." Someone walking into the room in time to hear only this sentence could have been forgiven for thinking that Obama was talking of his own country, with its elite celebrations of one military intervention after another, and the pumping of trillions of dollars into its war machine as working people are faced with declining incomes and vanishing benefits while corporate profits mount.

"We reject any talk of spheres of influence," Obama claimed. Indeed, from the perspective of U.S. leaders, there should be only one sphere of influence – its own – covering the entire globe. And along those lines, the U.S and NATO are ratcheting up tensions with Russia in a reckless manner. Sanctions have been imposed. Obama promised "to bolster the security of

our NATO allies and further increase America's military presence in Europe." In the Baltics, he said, there would be more "American equipment," more "training and exercises," and "more U.S. forces, including American boots on the ground."

In a recent press conference, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen announced that the alliance would "significantly enhance the responsiveness of our NATO Response Force," and that in the NATO Summit, members would "agree to a Readiness Action Plan" that "responds to Russia's aggressive behavior." NATO will develop a "spearhead" within the force "able to deploy at very short notice." In preparation, NATO will establish a number of facilities and "pre-positioned equipment and supplies." Also planned are "possible upgrades to national infrastructure," including airfields and ports. According to Obama, this buildup would include the Baltic nations. That can only be construed as being directed at Russia.

With the mass media and Western leaders continuing their efforts to whip up public sentiment for rash actions, it is to be hoped that a diplomatic settlement can be reached between the Ukrainian parties in spite of U.S. backing for Kiev to impose a military solution. The potential dangers in Washington's precipitate path are too great.

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