

War in Ukraine: Who Wants War? And Who Doesn't?

By [William Boardman](#)

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“Russian aggression” – the bad faith mantra of dishonest brokers

Just as NATO allies Germany and France were undertaking a peace initiative with Russia and Ukraine, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry turned up in Kiev at the same time, seeking to poison the talks before they started by spouting yet again the ritual U.S. accusation of “Russian aggression.” The incantation is meaningless without context. Its purpose is mesmerize a false consciousness. “Russian aggression” may or may not exist in the events of the past year, just like “Russian self-defense.” Reporting on the ground has been too unreliable to support any firm analysis, never mind the provocative “Russian aggression” the U.S. brandishes as a virtual call for war.

[Western aggression](#), political and diplomatic more than military, is a cold reality and has been for two decades. The West, and especially the U.S. has yet to accept responsibility for 20 years of anti-Russian aggression, much less pull back from such perennial hostility. The Obama administration (parts of it at least, given the incoherence of the “administration”) has acted as if its pulling off an only-slightly-violent coup in Kiev in 2014 was a grand triumph. Worse, having grabbed a government on Russia’s borders, the Obama hawks carry on as if the only reasonable choice for Russia is to accept the success of this Western aggression.

Rarely is this context acknowledged in discussions of the natural fissures in Ukraine that feed sectarian civil war. Rather the issues are over-simplified – falsified – by the U.S. Secretary of State, consistent with a hidden agenda of provoking a military confrontation (at the very least) with Russia and eastern Ukrainians. That’s the subtext that makes sense of Kerry’s otherwise seeming [blithering in Kiev](#) on February 5:

“We talked about the largest threat that Ukraine faces today, and that is Russia’s continued aggression in the east. There’s no other way to call it. We’re not seeking a conflict with Russia. No one is. ... The president is reviewing all of his options. Among those options, obviously, is the possibility of providing defensive — defensive — assistance to Ukraine. And those discussions are going on. The president will make his decision, I am confident, soon.”

Note the lie: “We’re not seeking a conflict with Russia. No one is.”

When Kerry said that, he was lying, he almost surely knew he was lying, and the question is whether his lie represents only the rogue war-faction in the U.S., or is part of a dicey good-cop/bad-cop routine out of Washington. The only way it’s true that “we’re not seeking a conflict” is that the U.S. is already engaged in conflict with Russia, decades-long and currently escalating. The lie of not seeking a conflict already engaged is used to mask the lie

of “defensive weapons,” a military-diplomatic oxymoron of long standing. So the most obvious answer to the question of who wants war in Ukraine is elements of the U.S. government whose immediate challenge is to persuade its Kiev client that it’s a good idea to risk turning it’s country into more of a battlefield than it already is.

Kiev’s desire is more obscure, and likely divided. Having taken power in something of a slow-motion coup d’état last spring, the government faced a restive-to-defiant population in eastern Ukraine. Rather than seeking to negotiate legitimate grievances with the eastern region, the Kiev government chose instead to escalate quickly, from political hostilities into civil war. When that didn’t work out militarily, when Kiev started losing what it started, it agreed on September 5 to [terms of a ceasefire](#) that it then failed to honor with consistency (as did the separatists). Now the Ukrainian president has been to Moscow for early peace talks, but only after he staked out a preposterous public position seeking to win with a losing negotiating hand what Kiev has already lost on the ground.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko met with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President François Hollande in Kiev on February 5 (when Kerry was in town but not part of the meeting). In his public statement, Poroshenko referred self-servingly to September’s [Minsk Agreement](#) signed by Ukraine, Russia, and the break-away Ukrainian states that call themselves the People’s Republic of Donetsk and the People’s Republic of Luhansk. The only other Minsk signatory was the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), [giving the agreement](#) the tacit endorsement of Europe without any individual European nation signing on. The United States was not directly involved in the Minsk Agreement, but a week later expressed its support for finding a peaceful solution by sending American troops to take part in [NATO military exercises](#) in Ukraine’s western provinces.

Understood in its actual context, Poroshenko’s [February 5 statement](#) is ludicrously disingenuous:

“The Minsk plan is very simple: immediate ceasefire; releasing all the hostages; closing the border, or renew the internationally recognized border on Ukrainian (side); withdrawal all of the foreign troops from the Ukrainian territory; launching very important process of the political regulation by the election on the municipal election, local election, under Ukrainian legislation in the territory of Donetsk and Luhansk.”

All signatories must take Minsk accord seriously to avoid war

It’s hard to find anyone who doesn’t urge compliance with the Minsk Agreement, even if that means different things to different people. Neither side in Ukraine has come close to significant compliance for any length of time. Poroshenko calls for the ceasefire, but omits the international monitoring called for in the agreement. He calls for closing the border with Russia, which is NOT part of the agreement. When he calls for the withdrawal of foreign troops, he omits mention of NATO. When he refers to elections, he omits Kiev’s failure to pass the legislation it promised, and he omits the elections that have already been held in the Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk [see “Election Note” at the end of this article]. Poroshenko also omits amnesty for separatists, improving humanitarian conditions in the region, and the recovery program, all of which are part of the Minsk Agreement.

Nevertheless, Poroshenko went to Moscow with his German and French colleagues to take

part in peace talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin there on February 6, at Russia's initiative. When similar talks had been proposed for mid-January, Chancellor Merkel had been instrumental in making sure they didn't happen. This time [her public posture](#) going in was appropriately statesmanlike:

"It is a question of peace and preserving the European peace order. It is a question of free self-determination of the people as part of this European peace order. And we are doing what we believe to be our duty at this time, namely trying to do everything in our power to end the bloodshed."

Merkel's reference to "free self-determination" is diplomatically murky and allows for a wide range of possible solutions for the self-proclaimed Republics in eastern Ukraine, and even hints at a resolution for Crimea. Her focus on peace serves all the parties' best interest, seeking to avoid a war that would, inevitably, cause much more suffering for Europe than the United States.

U.S. policy seems designed to turn Ukraine into the "European Iraq"

Presumably none of the parties meeting in Moscow on February 6 wants to see Ukraine become "another Iraq," even if Ukraine is already part way there. Where Iraq had been a coherent, modern state with cultural cohesion despite its dictatorship, Ukraine has a long history of quasi-chaos, internal squabbling, and corruption. Where it took an American invasion and occupation to reduce Iraq to a near-failed state, the [U.S.A.](#) sees an opportunity now to manipulate proxies into destroying Ukraine (and even Russia) for the next generation or so.

Germany, France, Russia, and especially Ukraine must be acutely tuned to the potential horrors they face. After meeting for four hours, the parties were generally low key and discreet in what they said about the substance discussed. This reality produced European coverage by the BBC and others characterized by cautious hopefulness. U.S. media more typically characterized uncertainty as failure, offering the talismans of magical thinking and instant gratification in place of accuracy or analysis.

Whatever they were, the four-way talks in Moscow were not a failure. All sides [called them "constructive,"](#) which is diplo-speak for: there's still a chance for a settlement. The parties are [continuing the negotiations](#) with apparent openness to a range of solutions. Hollande called this process "one of the last chances" to settle eastern Ukraine peacefully. Poroshenko has expressed hope for an early agreement to an "unconditional ceasefire" and one step toward reducing tensions. An unconditional ceasefire is beyond what was agreed to at Minsk in September, but creates no barrier to implementing the agreement later. Moscow's tactful obliqueness leaving room for the parties to maneuver was in sharp contrast to the bloviating cries for war coming mostly from U.S. Senators and the vice-president at the simultaneous regional security gathering in Munich.

The lesson of Munich for 2015: "War in our time"?

Meeting for the 51st year in Munich during February 6-8, the Munich Security Conference (MSC) provided a setting for mostly U.S. hawks to try to undermine the chances for peace in Ukraine. Founded in 1963, the Munich conference identifies itself as

“a key annual gathering for the international ‘strategic community’... an independent forum dedicated to promoting peaceful conflict resolution and international cooperation and dialogue in dealing with today’s and future security challenges.”

What the Munich conference seems to be is something of a foreign policy free-for-all to which almost anyone from anywhere can come and pontificate regardless of whether they hold any actual decision-making authority. The American delegation, including a dozen war-minded congress members, seems not to have gotten the memo about “promoting peaceful conflict resolution,” like the British lapdog also barking loudly for war.

Like any good multi-national circus, the Munich show offered a variety of clown acts and sideshows to distract from the U.S. rush to war. The Turks decided not to take part rather than share a panel with Israelis. Non-office-holder Arnold Schwarzenegger stumped for action on climate change. Some European Union members [ganged up on Greece](#) (again), this time for opposing some sanctions on Russia, while support for Greece (and peace) came from Cyprus, Austria, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic – most of which are closer to the likely war zone than those brave distant states ready to start a fight. In the Munich streets, some 2,000 peaceful protestors [demonstrated against NATO](#), otherwise known as an American sphere of influence (if not a Trojan horse).

Joe Biden toes the official line, smoothly riffing on official lies

Other members of the American delegation included Kiev coup supporters Vice President Joe Biden, Secretary of State Kerry, and assistant secretary of state Victoria Nuland, none of whom showed any public willingness to look at the realities of the present or the past 20 years. Like a good apparatchik of the American war party, Biden’s address to the conference included a subtle version of the requisite “Russian aggression” trope, along with 45 minutes of [neo-Cold-War boilerplate](#) propaganda. In one of the more hilarious highlights of this taken-very-seriously by the media speech, [Biden quoted himself](#) from the same conference in 2009:

“Six years ago at this podium, I said and I quote, ‘To paraphrase President Obama, it is time to press the reset button and reinvest in the many areas where we can and should be working together with Russia.’

That’s what everybody remembers. But they don’t often repeat what I then said.

I said, ‘We will also not recognize any nation having a sphere of influence. We will remain — it will remain our view that sovereign states have the right to make their decisions and choose their own alliances.’

I meant it when I said it then, and America means it as I repeat it now.”

The “reset button” rhetoric did not include changing U.S. support for the relentless push for NATO to include countries on Russia’s border, a form of blatant – and mindless – political aggression. NATO, the European Union, Europe itself are all U.S. spheres of influence, no matter what the Biden-shills of the world may say. Even as he lied sanctimoniously about spheres of influence in 2009, his country was its half-century of punishing Cuba for not being a loyal and subservient of the American hemisphere of influence.

And when Biden claimed, *“it will remain our view that sovereign states have the right to make their decisions and choose their own alliances,”* an honest audience would

have [laughed as derisively](#) at that as the same audience laughed at perceived absurdity from [Russian Foreign Minister](#) Sergey Lavrov [during his address](#) to the Munich conference.

Having destabilized Ukraine, the U.S. blames Russia for piling on

Remember how the present Ukraine crisis came about? In the fall of 2013, Ukraine was weighing a political, economic choice between a European proposal requiring exclusivity (and implying future NATO membership) and a somewhat more open Russian proposal (with no military alliance component). In Ukraine, as politically divided as ever, the western population yearned for Europe, the eastern population was content with Russia. When the legitimate, democratically-elected Ukraine government rejected the European offer, protesters mostly from western Ukraine launched the months-long Euro-Maidan demonstrations in Kiev (presumably with the connivance of the U.S. and others). In time, including on the scene visits from Biden (whose son reportedly has significant [economic interests](#) in Ukraine) and Nuland (with her cookies for the mob), the Maidan evolved into the coup d'état that produced the current Ukraine government.

So when Biden says *"that sovereign states have the right to make their decisions and choose their own alliances,"* he lying. He's lying about Ukraine and he's lying about U.S. behavior in the present and the recent past (and the not so recent past as well, to be sure).

Somewhat measured language from the White House

On February 5, as the flurry of events in Kiev, Moscow, and Munich was beginning, the White House expressed some awareness that military escalation might only make matters worse in Ukraine. [White House Press Secretary](#) Josh Earnest said, in part:

"... the United States has been saying for some time that it's a diplomatic negotiation that is required to bring this conflict in Ukraine to an end, that this is not something that's going to be solved or resolved militarily, but rather through diplomatic negotiations. So we certainly are encouraging and supportive of ongoing efforts to try to find a peaceful diplomatic resolution to the conflict in Ukraine.... [But] we need serious engagement from the Russians and the separatists, the likes of which we've not seen before....

... the President is going to make a decision [on [weapons to Ukraine](#)] that he believes is in the broader national security interests of the United States.... But certainly the President takes very seriously the views of our allies and is going to consult very closely as we evaluate any needed strategic changes ahead.... [But] this conflict was not going to rise to the level of a military confrontation between the United States and Russia. The President has been very clear about that. So there are things that we are going to continue to avoid.

But one of the concerns that we have about providing military assistance is it does contain the possibility of actually expanding bloodshed, and that's actually what we're trying to avoid. The whole reason that we are trying to encourage both sides to sit down and hammer out a diplomatic agreement is to end the bloodshed and end the escalating conflict in that country.

The press secretary made no effort to offer a balanced analysis of the Minsk Agreement, blaming the separatist Republics and Russia for virtually all the problems. He did allow that Ukraine had not lived up to all its commitments under the agreement.

Who actually speaks for the United States?

The same day the White House offered this view, NATO ministers in Brussels adopted a plan to ring Russia's European perimeter with a network of command centers and rapid reaction forces. According to NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, this plan is NATO's biggest reinforcement of collective defense since the end of the Cold War. He added that the first six multinational command and control units would be established immediately in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria. Estonia and Latvia border on Russia. Poland and Romania border on Ukraine.

The Secretary of State is carrying on as if he believes that this might be his legacy moment. He's acting as if he's thinking: *Hillary Clinton led the charge on Libya and made magnificent regional chaos there, so why shouldn't I be able to top that, and make a mess of Ukraine, and possibly create global chaos?*

But what if "Russian aggression" is real? As matters stand now, U.S. policy aggression for two decades has served as a self-fulfilling prophecy that creates "aggression" in response. What would happen if the U.S. especially, and the West in general, sent a clear signal that western aggression was over? How long would it take for Russia (or China) to trust that as reality? And would that persuade the Russians to relax what we now call their aggression? (We don't hear much about "Chinese aggression" these days, but chances are that Kerry or Biden or someone already has that speech written.)

The course the U.S. has been on since 1990 has no good ending, unless one assumes that the Russians (or the Chinese) will fold under pressure. That seems unlikely. Nor does the result seem worth the risk. But also unlikely is a U.S. course change as long as we remain enamored of our own exceptional face in the magic mirror that keeps telling us we're indispensable and can do no wrong. In Ukraine, today, probably the most dispensible nation is the U.S.

As this is written February 9, President Obama and Chancellor Merkel have met at the White House and offered [vague public assurances](#) that diplomatic efforts will continue to try to settle Ukraine issues peacefully. It's not reassuring that Obama's companions in his meeting with Merkel were committed aggressors: Biden, Kerry, and national security advisor Susan Rice. We don't know if this President is strong enough to be in control of his administration as it speaks with conflicting voices. What we know pretty surely is that this is a moment when President Obama could actually earn his Nobel Peace Prize by calling off "American aggression."

Or he could just follow the lead of the mindless, bi-partisan weapons-gaggle in Congress and elsewhere. The president could do the bidding of all those shrill demagogues who cry for escalating bloodshed, those grandstanding testosterone puffs who will never accept responsibility for the death and dismemberment they advocate. In that event, the President would once again ignore his own earlier wisdom when he once said: "Don't do stupid stuff."

Election Note [see above]:

The Donetsk and Luhansk [elections held November 2](#) were [supported by Russia](#) and rejected as illegitimate by Ukraine, as well as spokespersons for the European Union, Germany and others in the west. The [election results](#) mostly confirmed the local authority already in place, including the chief executive and parliamentary majorities in both Republics, which were

popularly approved in referendums in May. An OSCE spokesperson called the November elections a violation of the spirit and letter of the Minsk Agreement, which seemed to contemplate such elections taking place on December 7, under Ukrainian law. Ukraine had excluded Donetsk and Luhansk from its presidential election in May and its parliamentary election in October. The last apparently [legitimate presidential election](#) held in Ukraine chose Viktor Yanukovich president in February 2010. Yanukovich, whose support reached 90% of the vote in some districts of Donetsk and Luhansk, was forced from office in February 2014 by the [coup that emerged](#) from the Maidan protest. Ukraine has almost 34 million voters in all, of which more than 5 million are (or were) in Luhansk and Donetsk. Another 1.8 million voters in Crimea have not taken part in the 2014 elections outside Crimea.

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