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Compiled by Dick Bennett for a Culture of Peace, Justice, and Ecology.

In this newsletter: The US superpower, imperial propaganda system is inciting fear and hatred of Russia, as in Cold War days against the Soviet Union, but alternative views are readily available in numerous independent print or online magazines. They need your financial support. If we are to have peace in the world we must be able to see the world as others see it, to qualify and test official dogma.

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**Meet the Americans Who Put Together the Coup in Kiev**

Steve Weissman / Environmentalists Against War

*(March 25, 2014) -- If the US State Department's Victoria Nuland had not said "Fuck the EU," few outsiders at the time would have heard of Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt, the man on the other end of her famously bugged telephone call. But now Washington's man in Kiev -- Geoffrey Pyatt -- is gaining fame as the face of the CIA-style "destabilization campaign" that brought down Ukraine's monumentally corrupt but legitimately elected President Viktor Yanukovych.*

http://www.envirosagainstwar.org/know/read.php?&itemid=14769

From david d

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**Why Cold War Again?**

*Stephen F. Cohen*

April 2, 2014 | This article appeared in the April 21, 2014 edition of The Nation.
The East-West confrontation over Ukraine, which led to Moscow’s annexation of Crimea but long predated it, is potentially the worst international crisis in more than fifty years—and the most fateful. A negotiated resolution is possible, but time may be running out.

A new Cold War divide is already descending in Europe—not in Berlin but on Russia’s borders. Worse may follow. If NATO forces move toward Poland’s border with Ukraine, as is being called for in Washington and Europe, Moscow is likely to send its forces into eastern Ukraine. The result would be a danger of war comparable to the Cuban missile crisis of 1962.

Even if the outcome is the nonmilitary “isolation of Russia,” today’s Western mantra, the consequences will be dire. Moscow will not bow but will turn, politically and economically, to the East, as it has done before, above all to fuller alliance with China. The United States will risk losing an essential partner in vital areas of its own national security, from Iran, Syria and Afghanistan to threats of a new arms race, nuclear proliferation and more terrorism. And—no small matter—prospects for a resumption of Russia’s democratization will be terminated for at least a generation.
Why did this happen, nearly twenty-three years after the end of Soviet Communism, when both Washington and Moscow proclaimed a new era of “friendship and strategic partnership”? The answer given by the Obama administration, and overwhelmingly by the US political-media establishment, is that President Vladimir Putin is solely to blame. The claim is that his “autocratic” rule at home and “neo-Soviet imperialist” policies abroad eviscerated the partnership established in the 1990s by Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin. This fundamental premise underpins the American mainstream narrative of two decades of US-Russian relations, and now the Ukrainian crisis.

But there is an alternative explanation, one more in accord with the facts. Beginning with the Clinton administration, and supported by every subsequent Republican and Democratic president and Congress, the US-led West has unrelentingly moved its military, political and economic power ever closer to post-Soviet Russia. Spearheaded by NATO's eastward expansion, already encamped in the former Soviet Baltic republics on Russia's border—now augmented by missile defense installations in neighboring states—this bipartisan, winner-take-all approach has come in various forms.

They include US-funded “democracy promotion” NGOs more deeply involved in Russia’s internal politics than foreign ones are permitted to be in our country; the 1999 bombing of Moscow’s Slav ally Serbia, forcibly detaching its historic province of Kosovo; a US military outpost in former Soviet Georgia (along with Ukraine, one of Putin’s previously declared “red lines”), contributing to a brief proxy war in 2008; and, throughout, one-sided negotiations, called “selective cooperation,” which took concessions from the Kremlin without meaningful White House reciprocity and followed by broken American promises.

All of this has unfolded, sincerely for some proponents, in the name of “democracy” and “sovereign choice” for the many countries involved, but the underlying geopolitical agenda has been clear. During the first East-West conflict over Ukraine, occasioned by its 2004 “Orange Revolution,” an influential GOP columnist, Charles Krauthammer, acknowledged, “This is about Russia first, democracy only second…. The West wants to finish the job begun with the fall of the Berlin Wall and continue Europe’s march to the east…. The great prize is Ukraine.” The late Richard Holbrooke, an aspiring Democratic secretary of state, concurred, hoping even then for Ukraine’s “final break with Moscow” and to “accelerate” Kiev’s membership in NATO.

That Russia’s political elite has long held this same menacing view of US intentions makes it no less true—or any less consequential. Formally announcing the annexation of Crimea on March 18, Putin vented Moscow’s longstanding resentments. Several of his assertions were untrue and alarming, but others were reasonable, or at least understandable, not “delusional.” Referring to Western (primarily American) policy-makers since the 1990s, he complained bitterly that they
were “trying to drive us into some kind of corner,” “have lied to us many times” and in Ukraine “have crossed the line,” warning: “Everything has its limits.”

We are left, then, with profoundly conflicting Russian-Western narratives and a political discourse of the uncomprehending, itself often the prelude to war. Demonized for years, Putin receives almost no serious consideration in Washington. His annexation speech, for example, was dismissed as a “package of fictions” by former secretary of state Madeleine Albright. Nothing in Washington’s replies diminishes Putin’s reasonable belief that the EU trade agreement rejected by Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych in November, and Yanukovych’s overthrow in February by violent street protests, leading to the current “illegitimate” government, were intended to sever Ukraine’s centuries-long ties with Russia and bind it to NATO. (Today’s crisis was triggered by the EU’s reckless ultimatum, despite Putin’s offer of a “tripartite” agreement, which compelled an elected president of a deeply divided country to choose economically between the West and Russia, an approach since criticized by former German chancellors Helmut Kohl and Gerhard Schröder. The EU’s proffered “partnership” also included little-noticed “security” provisions requiring Ukraine’s “convergence” with NATO policies, without mentioning the military alliance.)

Meanwhile, on both sides, belligerent rhetoric escalates, military forces are being mobilized and provocations mount in Ukraine’s political civil war, with toughs in black masks, armed militias, “spontaneous” secessionist demonstrations and extremist statements by some of Kiev’s would-be leaders. Anything is now possible—actual civil war, Ukraine’s partition and worse. Tit-for-tat “sanctions” only exacerbate the situation.

There is a diplomatic way out. Putin did not begin or want this crisis; among other costs, it obliterated the achievement of his Sochi Olympics. Nor did he initiate the unfolding Cold War, inspired in Washington years before he came to power. Western policy-makers should therefore take seriously the adage, “There are two sides to every story.” Is Putin right, as he also said on March 18, that Russia “has its own national interests that must be taken into account and respected,” particularly along its borders? If the answer is no, as it has seemed to be since the 1990s—if Putin is correct in angrily protesting, “Only they can ever be right”—then war is possible, if not now, eventually. But if the answer is yes, proposals made by Putin’s foreign ministry on March 17 could be the starting point for negotiations.

Briefly summarized, those proposals call for a US-Russian-EU contact group that would press for the immediate disarming of militias in Ukraine, as the Ukrainian Parliament ordered on April 1; a new federal constitution giving more autonomy to pro-Russian and pro-Western regions; internationally monitored presidential and parliamentary elections; a “neutral military-political” (that is, non-NATO) government in Kiev shorn of its extreme nationalist (some observers think “neofascist”) ministers; and maintaining Ukrainian-Russian economic relations essential to both
countries. In turn, Moscow would recognize the legitimacy of the new government and Ukraine’s territorial integrity, thereby disavowing pro-Russian separatist movements well beyond Crimea, though without returning the annexed peninsula. It would also vote for a UN Security Council resolution affirming the settlement and, possibly, contribute to the multibillion dollars needed to save the country from financial collapse.

The Obama administration’s reaction to Moscow’s proposals, which it has barely acknowledged publicly, is less than adequate. While accepting the need for some kind of federal Ukrainian constitution and a presidential election, the White House opposes new parliamentary elections, which would leave the existing Parliament strongly influenced, even intimidated, by its ultranationalist deputies and their armed street supporters, who recently threatened to impose their will directly by entering the building. Nor is it clear how fully Obama shares Putin’s concern that militias are further destabilizing the country. Meanwhile, the White House says Moscow should annul Crimea’s annexation (a nonstarter), remove its forces on Ukraine’s borders and recognize the unelected Kiev regime. Moreover, nothing the West has said suggests that it no longer intends to expand NATO to Ukraine; indeed, on March 31, NATO’s political chief, echoing Krauthammer from a decade ago, declared that the military alliance’s “task is not yet complete.” Still worse, Brussels may use the crisis to deploy troops deeper into Eastern Europe, toward Russia.

Even if these differences narrow, would Putin be a reliable partner in such negotiations? “Demonization of Vladimir Putin,” Henry Kissinger recently wrote, “is not a policy.” Nor does it recall that the Russian leader has assisted US and NATO troops in Afghanistan since 2001; supported harsher sanctions against Iran in 2010; repeatedly called for “mutually beneficial cooperation” with Washington; generally pursued a reactive foreign policy; and, as a result, been accused by harder-line elements in his own political class of appeasing the West. (No, Putin is not an all-powerful “autocrat”; and, yes, there is a high-level politics around him.)

Much, therefore, now depends on President Obama. He will have to rise to the kind of leadership capable of rethinking a twenty-year bipartisan policy that has led to disaster, and do so in Washington’s rabid anti-Putin, Russophobic atmosphere. There is a precedent. Three decades ago, America’s most Cold War president ever, Ronald Reagan, sensing in Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev enough in common, resolved to meet him halfway, despite protests by close advisers and much of his own party. Together, those two leaders achieved such historic changes that both believed they had ended the Cold War forever.

Read Next: Dimiter Kenarov on the dangers of reporting in Crimea
I am learning so much from all this work going on now about Ukraine. Statements, or even meanderings, have been slow to come from the leadership of many peace groups in the US and then they've been very cautious. Caution even from folks who know what is really going on. The old 'anti-reds' hysteria from the past still lives here in the US of A. But the up swell of interest and concern from every day grassroots activists is strong and they are seeing the bigger picture.

The big picture is what drives me.... I'm a visual learner. Once I get a feel for what is going on I can then find the rest of the pieces filling in the puzzle on the wall. So here are a few more sharings of some good honest thinking by some stalwarts in the peace movement.

I suspect this entire Ukraine Crisis had been war-gamed and war planned quite some time ago at the highest levels of US/NATO. Notice DOD slipped 2 US warships into the Black Sea just before the Olympics under a patently absurd pretext. In other words, what we are seeing unfold here is a US/NATO War Plan. They instigated the fascist coup against Yanukovich. They anticipated that Putin would then respond by taking over Crimea. I suspect the US/NATO/EU response will be to introduce military forces into Western Ukraine and Kiev and thus make Ukraine a de facto member of NATO, which has been their objective all along. They have already anticipated what Putin's next move after that will be. Notice also the massive anti-Russian campaign by the Western News Media working in lock-step with each other. Another sign that all this has been planned well in advance. I suspect that US/NATO/EU figure that Putin knows they have this offensive, first-strike strategic nuclear capability with a rudimentary ABM/BMD capability so that at the end of the day he will be forced to stand down—or else. Compellence as opposed to Deterrence. Just like during the Cuban Missile Crisis. That is where this US/NATO/EU War Plan is heading on the
assumptions that they can keep their deliberate Escalation Dominance under their control and that at the end day Putin will be forced to stand down just like Khruzhchev did and for the same reasons. That would leave US/NATO/EU in control of at least half of Ukraine as a de facto NATO member state.

- Francis A. Boyle, Champaign, IL, Lawyer, professor of International Law, and long-time peacenik [Boyle has done exemplary writing and court action for peace. Check him out. –Dick]

Last summer when I went to a conference in the Philippines on the US "pivot" to Asia-Pacific I met Dr. Chandra Muzaffar, President of the International Movement for a Just World in Malaysia. This white haired elder man, in a wheel chair, glowed with a beauty of love and joy. When he spoke about globalization's control of governments I was listening hard. He wrote this (and more) here:

If Ukraine is on the brink of a catastrophe, it is mainly because the present regime in Kiev and its supporters, backed by certain Western powers had violated a fundamental principle of democratic governance. They had ousted a democratically elected president through illegal means. President Viktor Yanukovich who had come to power through a free and fair election in 2010 should have been removed through the ballot-box. His opponents not only betrayed a democratic principle. They subverted a ‘Peace Deal’ signed between them and Yanukovich on 21 February 2014 in which the latter had agreed to form a national unity government within 10 days that would include opposition representatives; reinstate the 2004 Constitution; relinquish control over Ukraine’s security services; and hold presidential and parliamentary elections by December 2014. According to the Deal, endorsed by Germany, France and Poland, Yanukovich would remain president until the elections.

His co-signatories had no intention of honouring the agreement. Without following procedures, parliament, with the backing of the military, voted immediately to remove Yanukovich and impeach him. The Parliamentary Speaker was elected interim President and after a few days a new regime was installed.

- Dr. Chandra Muzaffar, Malaysia

A key bit that must continually be inserted into discussions about Ukraine is NATO expansion and US "missile defense" deployments encircling Russia.

When the Berlin Wall fell in December of 1991 the Soviet Union disintegrated into fifteen separate countries. Daddy Bush's Secretary of State James Baker promised Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet Union's last leader, that NATO would not expand one-centimeter eastward. Once Clinton took over he broke the promise and since that time NATO has been on steroids. NATO now includes Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Albania, and Croatia.... with Georgia and Ukraine waiting in the wings.
If you are Russia you are freaking out. Also consider NATO bases encircling Russia and new "missile defense" deployments going into Poland, Romania, Turkey and on US Navy Aegis destroyers (outfitted with MD interceptors) in the Black, Barents, Bering, and Mediterranean Seas. It's a chess game and US-NATO has now checkmated Russia. The ultimatum is either surrender (your natural gas, oil and national treasury) or face a unified NATO economic freeze and war if need be. It’s high-stakes… high-risk strategy…Texas style.

Admittedly this is a grab by the oil-i-garchs for total global control. The people are the pawns, easily cast aside when need be. The way I figure it, my job is to keep learning about all this and sharing it with others. Don’t fear the anti-commie BS that is used to put people back ‘into their place’. I don’t like people telling me what I can do or say…. I heard enough of that stuff while in the Air Force during the Vietnam War.

Help illuminate the picture on the wall for more to see. We’ve all, worldwide, got to create a unified demand to shut the capitalist war system down. The corporate fascists have taken over. It's the high-tech version of feudalism.

Stop taking the blue pill.

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Preparing for War with Russia

I've been writing for many years about US-NATO efforts to militarily surround Russia. The oil-i-garchy wants to get ahold of the natural gas (the world's largest supply) that sits on Russian territory. It also wants full control of the Arctic region now that climate change will make it possible to drill for oil there. Russia has a huge northern coastal border with the Arctic and thus stands in the way of western oil control.

Already the war drums are sounding after Russia moved more troops into Crimea to protect its Navy base and the large pro-Russian population in the region.

Writing yesterday in Foreign Policy Admiral James Stavridis (Ret) called for NATO to
immediately increase "all intelligence-gathering functions through satellite, Predator unmanned vehicles, and especially cyber" and to sail "NATO maritime forces into the Black Sea and setting up contingency plans for their use." This is full-blown war talk - with Russia. Admiral Stavridis was Supreme Allied Commander at NATO from 2009 to 2013. He is currently dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University.

If Stavridis is saying these things you can just imagine what plans are underway inside the Pentagon and at NATO HQ in Europe.

The Russians know that they are being set up. Reporting for Asia Times, Pepe Escobar wrote, "Even before neo-con Victoria ‘fuck the EU' Nuland’s intercept, [Russian intelligence] had already identified the wider mechanics of the CIA-style coup – including Turkish intelligence financing Tatars in Crimea... And what will the Tatars in Crimea do? Stage a jihad? Wait: the "West" will surely try to FINANCE THIS JIHAD."

It's Syria all over again, this time right on the Russian border.

Except this time the US-NATO are messing with a country that has the capability to fight back. This is how world wars get started. The Russians are not going to idly sit by and watch US-NATO set up a right-wing fascist state right on their border. Hitler tried that during WW II and at least 20 million died defending the Soviet Union. Ever since then the Russian people have been 'sensitive' about defending their immediate borders.

The decision adopted on March 1, by the Federation Council, upper house of the Russian parliament, which allows Putin to send troops to Crimea, an autonomy within neighboring Ukraine, aims to protect life and security, Irina Yarovaya, chair of the Security and Anti-Corruption Committee in the State Duma (lower house of parliament), said.

“Terrorism is the most dangerous crime around the world. But it is fascism and terrorism that have proclaimed their power in Ukraine and pose a real threat to the life and security of Russian citizens living in Ukraine and undoubtedly to the brotherly people of Ukraine,” she said.

“We have repeatedly warned the international community and the US against interfering in the internal affairs of Ukraine,” she said, adding “some European and US politicians bear direct responsibility for the crisis in Ukraine, for the bloodshed and for the coup.”

She believes that Obama’s latest statement on Russia “has fully exposed the US policy of brutal interference in the sovereign rights of other countries and aggressive imposition of its interests.”

Of course the Obama administration is saying that Russia is violating international law by moving more troops into Crimea. Obama is threatening Russia with "severe consequences". And now you can be sure that NATO is indeed preparing 'contingency plans'.

The open question is how will the American people react to all of this. They rightly opposed Obama's desired cruise missile attack on Syria. Will they be as wise about planting the cancerous NATO flag on Crimean soil?
Clearly Putin and Russia have been thoroughly demonized in the passive minds of most American citizens. But will they shake the cobwebs from their brains and see the absurdity and sheer recklessness of US-NATO saber rattling on the doorstep of Mother Russia?
Now is the time for all peaceful people to speak out. Before the real shooting starts.

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Fanning the Fires of Chaos in the Ukraine
What is the Real Price of Starting Another Cold War?
by FRANKLIN C. SPINNEY

In the late 1980s, the leaders of the west promised Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev that they would not expand eastward if the Soviet Union pulled out of Eastern Europe and ended the Cold War. That promise was not kept. A triumphal West stuck it to the Soviet Union’s greatly weakened Russian successor, by incorporating the former Warsaw Pact countries into NATO and the EU. But that was not enough to sate the lust of the neo-liberal triumphalists in search of a new imperium. Their next move tried to incorporate the Caucasus country of Georgia — a country more a part of Central Asia than of Europe — into the West’s sphere of influence. That turned out to be a bridge too far; the Russians intervened militarily to put a stop to the lunacy.

But events in the Ukraine suggest that stop may have been viewed as a temporary speed bump on the pathway to rolling back Russia’s geography to the years of Ivan the Terrible.

Ukraine may be descending into chaos, and some triumphalists in the west are again tempted to meddle and fan the fires of chaos and revolution, perhaps with a near-term aim of a partitioning the Ukraine along its historic Orthodox-Catholic fault line. Seaumas Milne
describes the chaotic state of play in Ukraine in this commentary in the Guardian. In so doing, Milne shows how the west is fueling revanchist fascism. Note the familiar role being played again by meddlers like Nato Secretary General Anders Rasmussen and Senator John McCain. According to Milne, they are encouraging the rise of Ukraine’s nascent fascism and rising instability to roll back Russia’s influence among its immediate neighbors. But the Ukraine, like Georgia, is too close to home. Ukraine is likely to prove another bridge too far that triggers a Russian reaction by the wily Mr. Putin (the man, who recently intervened to stop the US from going to war in Syria). But Putin’s reaction may well be portrayed as a reason to restart the Cold War with Russia.

Combine these efforts in the Ukraine with the ongoing push to start a Cold War with China (Obama’s Pacific pivot and the Navy-AF budget plan for the so-called Air-Sea Battle) and the halcyon years of ever rising defense budgets may be again in the political offing, triggered by yet another wave of Cold War hysteria. But this time, the MICC’s (Military-Industrial-Congressional-Complex) jumping off point will be from today’s far higher Defense budget.

This chart gives you an idea of the stakes. The figure compares the defense budget in current dollars to its portrayal in inflation-adjusted dollars, either by using GDP deflators or by using the Pentagon’s self-serving defense deflators.

Bear in mind, the Pentagon only started to account for inflation in the early 1970s. Its historical deflators for periods before 1976 are the fanciful concoctions of bureaucratic apparachiks in the office of the Pentagon’s comptroller. But there is method to their madness. The Comptroller’s calculations serve the goal of making past defense budgets look much higher relative to current budgets. This fanciful depiction creates the false impression that current budgets are lower relative to past budgets than is actually the case. Put another way, the Pentagon’s deflators assume the rate of price inflation affecting Pentagon’s budget is higher than the general rate of inflation for the economy as a whole. This assumption, of course, makes it far easier to hide the real effects of cost growth and outright fraud, waste, and abuse over time by attributing part of it to inflation, which is said to be beyond the MICC’s control.

The chart puts this scam in perspective. Compared to the two lefthand charts, the Pentagon’s deflators (i.e., the righthand graph) make the current defense budgets appear to be less of a departure from past budgets. The right hand chart is the one that the Pentagon briefs to Congress and the press dutifully regurgitates. It implies the current defense budget and future plans are less of a distortionary burden on the economy than is actually the case. (Readers interested in learning more about the inflation scam are referred to this report for a particularly outrageous case study documenting how the Pentagon scammed the Congress and the America people into believing the Reagan spendup was less wasteful than it really was.)

The charts give you an idea of the golden cornucopia awaiting the Military – Industrial – Congressional Complex (MICC), if its proponents can start a new Cold War. Anyone who doubts the possibility of the MICC’s capacity to pull this off, need only use these charts to think about (1) the durability of the so-called “peace” dividend accompanying the end of the Cold War in 1990 and (2) how the MICC exploited the horror of 9-11 to power boost the defense budget to levels undreamed of by the threat inflators during the worst days of the Cold War or Vietnam. Just try to think about what a new wave of cold-war hysteria could trigger.
When asked to pony up the money to pay for a new Cold War (and to sacrifice other programs like Medicare and Social Security), American taxpayers would be well advised to try to understand how future defense budgets compare to those of the past. They would be better served if everyone agreed to use the GDP inflator (or something like it) when trying to remove effects of inflation from a given budget level. The GDP deflator assumes the Pentagon’s budget is a part of the larger American economy. The alternative is to continue using the Pentagon’s deflators, which assume the economics of the MICC are a special place where the self-interested parties making up the MICC should make up the rules that establish the terms of political debate.

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Foreign Policy In Focus

Straight Talk on the U.S. and Ukraine

Given the limits of its power and its own compromised relationship with international law, the U.S. isn't in a position to do much about Ukraine.


It’s been interesting to observe the large numbers of people who suddenly think they’re experts on the ongoing crisis in Ukraine—both those on the left who blame it on Obama for intervening too much and those on the right who blame it on Obama for not intervening enough.

As someone who has spent his entire academic career analyzing and critiquing the U.S. role
in the world, I have some news: While the United States has had significant impact (mostly negative in my view) in a lot of places, we are not omnipotent. There are real limits to American power, whether for good or for ill. Not everything is our responsibility.

This is certainly the case with Ukraine.

**Delusions of Grandeur**

On the right, you have political figures claiming that Obama’s supposed “weakness” somehow emboldened Moscow to engage in aggressive moves against Crimea. Sarah Palin, for example, claims that Obama’s failure to respond forcefully to Russia’s bloody incursion into Georgia in 2008 made Russia’s “invasion” possible, despite the fact that Obama wasn’t even president then and therefore couldn’t have done much.

Even some Democrats, like Delaware senator Chris Coons, claim that Obama’s failure to attack Syria last fall made the United States look weak.

In reality, there seems to be little correlation between the willingness of Moscow to assert its power in areas within its traditional spheres of influence and who occupies the White House: The Soviets invaded Hungary in 1956 when Eisenhower was president; the Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968 when Johnson was president; the Soviets successfully pressed for martial law in Poland in 1981 when Reagan was president; the Russians attacked Georgia in 2008 when Bush was president. In each case, as much as these administrations opposed these actions, it was determined that any military or other aggressive counter-moves would likely do more harm than good. Washington cannot realistically do any more in response to Russian troops seizing Crimea in 2014 in the name of protecting Russian lives and Russian bases than Moscow could do in response to U.S. troops seizing Panama in 1989 in the name of protecting American lives and American bases.

There is an equally unrealistic view of supposed American omnipotence from some segments of the left in their claims that the United States was somehow responsible for the popular uprising that toppled the Yanukovych regime last month. [See the several preceding essays]
First of all, it’s not true that the United States government “spent $5 billion to destabilize Ukraine,” as some agitators have claimed. That figure is the total amount of money provided to the country since independence in 1991, which includes aid to pro-Western Ukrainian administrations (which the United States presumably would not have wanted to destabilize). Like most U.S. foreign aid, some of it went for good things and some for not so good things. There was also some funding through the National Endowment for Democracy and other organizations to some opposition groups that were involved in the recent insurrection, but this was in the millions of dollars, nothing remotely close to $5 billion. And this aid went primarily to centrist groups, not the far right, so claims that the United States “supported fascists” in Ukraine are without foundation.

It’s also unfair to imply that such aid was somehow the cause of the uprising, thereby denying agency to the millions of Ukrainians who took to the streets in an effort to determine (for better or worse) their own future. To claim that U.S. aid was responsible for the Orange Revolution of 2005 or the more recent revolt is as ludicrous as President Reagan’s claims in the 1980s that Soviet aid was responsible for the leftist revolutions in Central America.

The uprising that overthrew Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovych and his allied pro-Russian oligarchs was not a classic nonviolent pro-democracy uprising like those that have toppled scores of dictatorships in recent decades. Yanukovych was democratically elected, and the forces that ousted him included—though were not dominated by—armed, neo-fascist militias. At the same time, Yanukovych’s rampant corruption, repression, and divide-and-rule tactics had cost him his legitimacy in the eyes of the majority of Ukrainians. The protesters were primarily liberal democrats who engaged in legitimate acts of nonviolent resistance against severe government repression, many of whom spent months in freezing temperatures in a struggle for a better Ukraine dominated by neither Russia nor the West. To label them as simply puppets of Washington is as unfair as labeling peasant revolutionaries in El Salvador as puppets of Moscow.

At the same time, given that the new government includes corrupt neo-liberal oligarchs along
with representatives of the far right, it would be equally wrong to assume that the change of government represents some kind of major progressive democratic opening. And the refusal of the opposition to abide by the compromise agreement of February 21, which called for early elections and limited presidential powers, and seize power directly raises questions regarding the legitimacy of the new government. Whether for good or for ill, however, and despite whatever attempts Western powers have made to influence the outcome, the change of government is ultimately the responsibility of Ukrainians, not the Obama administration.

While the United States and the European Union no doubt want to lure Ukraine in a pro-Western direction and the Russians even more desperately want Ukraine to stay within their orbit, Ukrainians themselves—given the country’s centuries of subjugation—are strongly nationalistic and do not want to be under the control of Russia or the West. With a population of 45 million and significant agricultural and industrial capacity, they are not a country that would passively accept foreign domination.

Just as U.S. military action in the greater Middle East in the name of protecting Americans from Islamist extremism has ended up largely encouraging Islamist extremism, Russia’s actions in the name of protecting Russians from right-wing Ukrainian ultra-nationalists will likely only encourage that tendency as well. The United States, therefore, needs to avoid any actions that could encourage dangerous ultra-nationalist tendencies among either Russians or Ukrainians. Polls show most Russians are at best ambivalent about the Kremlin’s moves in Ukraine. Provocative actions by the United States would more likely solidify support for Russian president Vladimir Putin’s illegitimate actions.

One factor that may have partly motivated Russian moves in Ukraine could have been talk by U.S. officials of incorporating Ukraine in the NATO alliance, a move which—given the history of foreign invaders conquering Russia through the Ukraine—would be completely unacceptable to the Kremlin. However, Russia’s moves in Crimea may make such a scenario more likely rather than less likely. To ease such tensions, even such hawks as former U.S. National Security Advisers Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski acknowledge the limits of American power in such a situation and have proposed a compromise whereby Ukraine, like Finland during the Cold War, would be prohibited from joining any formal military alliance, and
the Russian-speaking areas would be granted a degree of autonomy. Should President Obama consider such a compromise, however, he would almost certainly be attacked not only by Republicans but by hawkish Democrats as well. Indeed, Obama’s former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, in comparing Putin to Adolph Hitler, has contributed to a political climate making the Obama administration’s ability to accept such a compromise all the more difficult.

**U.S. Leadership**

Thousands of Russian troops have fanned out from Russian bases in Crimea and, under Russian control, the Crimean parliament—dominated by ethnic Russians—has unilaterally declared independence and called for a snap referendum to reincorporate the peninsula into Russia. This is a clear violation of the 1994 Budapest Treaty—signed by Russia, Ukraine, the United States, France, Great Britain, and China—guaranteeing, in return for Ukraine giving up its nuclear arsenal inherited from the Soviet Union, the country’s territorial integrity and security assurances against threats or use of force.

As a result, there does need to be a strong international response to Russia’s aggrandizement. Unfortunately, the United States is hardly in a position to take leadership on the matter.

For example, Secretary of State John Kerry has chastised Putin’s actions in Crimea on the grounds that “You just don’t invade another country on phony pretext in order to assert your interests,” adding that Russia's actions constituted a “direct, overt violation of international law.” While this is certainly a valid statement in itself, it’s ironic coming from a man who so vigorously supported the illegal U.S. invasion of Iraq on the phony pretext that Saddam Hussein had “weapons of mass destruction.” Indeed, while Obama, to his credit, opposed the Iraq War, the fact that he appointed so many supporters of that illegal invasion and occupation to major foreign policy positions in his administration has severely weakened the United States’ ability to assume leadership in challenging the Kremlin on its own unilateral excesses.

Similarly, in 2004, Kerry, Joe Biden, and other members of Congress who later became key Obama administration officials unconditionally endorsed then-Israeli prime minister Ariel
Sharon’s plan to incorporate large sections of the occupied West Bank into Israel, a proposal denounced by international legal authorities worldwide as an illegal annexation. This makes it very difficult for the Obama administration to be taken seriously when it denounces the illegality of the proposed referendum to have Crimea incorporated into Russia.

There is also the fact that the Obama administration appears willing to accept Morocco’s illegal takeover of occupied Western Sahara (under the autocratic monarchy’s dubious “autonomy” proposal) in defiance of international law, a landmark 1975 World Court decision, and a series of UN resolutions. While illegitimate, the Russians are at least willing offer the people of Crimea a choice in a referendum. By contrast, the United States has effectively abandoned the United Nations’ insistence that there be a referendum in occupied Western Sahara, apparently in the recognition that the vast majority of Western Saharans would vote for independence.

In short, given the history of U.S. support for its allies’ land grabs and its own history of illegal invasions, this leaves the United States with little credibility to take leadership in this crisis. This in no way justifies or minimizes the seriousness of Russia’s aggression, of course. However, it underscores the fact that international leadership is not just a matter of being “tough.” It means being willing to abide by and defend the same international legal norms for yourself and your allies as you demand of your adversaries. Until there is such a change in policies, there is little the United States can do.

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Tags: Chris Coons, Crimea, far right extremists, Henry Kissinger, intervention, John Kerry, Military Intervention, National Endowment For Democracy, NATO, Russia, Sarah Palin, Ukraine

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[Repeated: My newsletters do not give the Corporate/Pentagon/White House/Congressional/Mainstream Media/Imperial propaganda system, because it commands billions of dollars to persuade and purchase agreement. My sources are independent and therefore usually on the edge financially. The old journalistic rule of giving both sides is completely absurd in this situation. No sane person would expect critics of this power to give equal time to perspectives that possess immense resources for promulgating war. (So purchase a subscription to your favorite independents.) Dick]

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END RUSSIA (AND UKRAINE) NEWSLETTER #2

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