

If Russia Had ‘Freed’ Canada

Special Report: The U.S. government defined events in Ukraine as a “pro-democracy” revolution battling “Russian aggression” – at least as far as the world’s mainstream media was concerned. But what if the script were flipped, asks Joe Lauria.

By Joe Lauria

As the United States plans to move thousands of NATO troops to Russia’s borders and continues to bolster a fiercely anti-Russian regime in neighboring Ukraine, the official line in Washington and its subservient corporate media is that beneficent America is simply seeking to curtail Moscow’s “aggression.” But the U.S. government and media might look at things quite differently if the shoe were on the other foot.

What, for instance, would the U.S. reaction be if Russia instead had supported the violent overthrow of, say, Canada’s government and assisted the new Ottawa regime’s “anti-terrorist operations” against a few rebellious “pro-American” provinces, including one that voted 96 percent in a referendum to reject the new Russian-backed authorities and attach itself to the U.S.?

If the U.S. government tried to help these embattled “pro-American” Canadians – and protect the breakaway province against the Russian-installed regime – would Washington see itself as the “aggressor” or as simply helping people resist anti-democratic repression? Would it view Russian troop movements to the U.S. border as a way to stop an American “invasion” or rather an act of “aggression” and provocation by Russia against the United States?

The Ukraine Reality

Before playing out this hypothetical scenario, let’s look at the actual scene in Ukraine today as opposed to the gross distortion of reality fed the American people by the U.S. mainstream media the past two years. The reality is not the State Department’s fable of a pro-democracy “revolution” cleaning up corruption and putting Ukrainian people first.

In the real world instead, extreme right-wing nationalists took control of a popular protest by mostly western Ukrainians to spearhead a violent coup that succeeded on Feb. 22, 2014, in overthrowing President Viktor Yanukovich, a man whom I interviewed in 2013 after he had been democratically chosen in an election certified by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Proof of the U.S. role in the coup came in a leaked telephone conversation

several weeks earlier between U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland, and Geoffrey Pyatt, the U.S. ambassador to Ukraine. In the conversation, Nuland and Pyatt discussed how the U.S. could “midwife” the unconstitutional change of government and they rated which Ukrainian politicians should be put in charge, with Nuland declaring “Yats is the guy,” a reference to Arseniy Yatsenyuk.

As for the European Union’s less aggressive approach to the Ukraine situation, Nuland declared: “Fuck the E.U.”

Nevertheless, after the coup, Western governments denied there ever was a coup, peddling the line that Yanukovich simply “ran away,” as though he woke up one morning and decided he didn’t want to be president anymore.

In fact, on Feb. 21, to contain the mounting violence, Yanukovich signed a European-brokered deal to reduce his powers and to hold early elections. But the next day, as right-wing street-fighters overran government buildings, Yanukovich fled for his life – and the West moved quickly to consolidate a new government under anti-Russian politicians, including Nuland’s choice—Yats as prime minister. (Yatsenyuk remained prime minister until last month when he resigned amid complaints that his stewardship had been disastrous for the Ukrainian people.)

A Resistance Emerges

Since the vast majority of Yanukovich’s support came from the ethnically Russian eastern half of the country, some Yanukovich backers rose up to challenge the legitimacy of the coup regime and to defend Ukraine’s democratic process.

Instead the West portrayed this resistance as a Russian-instigated rebellion against the newly minted and U.S.-certified “legitimate” government that then launched a violent repression of eastern Ukrainians who were deemed “terrorists.”

When Russia supported the resisters with weapons, money and some volunteers, the West accused Russia of an “invasion” and “aggression” in the east. But there has never been satellite imagery or other proof of this alleged full-scale Russian “invasion.”

In the midst of the Kiev “anti-terrorist” offensive in the east, on July 17, 2014, a Malaysian commercial airliner, Flight MH-17, was shot out of the sky, killing all 298 people on board. The United States, again offering no proof, immediately blamed Russia.

Over the past year, the fighting has been largely contained after Russian,

Ukrainian and European leaders negotiated the Minsk Accords, though they are far from being implemented and widespread violence could break out again at any time.

Throughout the entire crisis the United States has insisted its motives are pure, including its new plans for deploying some 4,000 NATO troops, including about half American, on Russia's Eastern European borders north of Ukraine.

President Barack Obama told the U.N. General Assembly last year that the U.S. had no economic interests in Ukraine. But former State Department official Natalie Jaresko served as Ukraine's finance minister until recently and Vice President Joe Biden's son sits on the board of a major Ukrainian company. U.S. investment also has increased since the coup.

Yanukovich's overthrow occurred after he chose a Russian economic plan rather than sign an association agreement with the European Union, which Ukrainian economic analysts warned would cost the country \$160 billion in lost trade with Russia.

The E.U. plan would also have opened Ukraine to Western neoliberal economic strategies designed to exploit the country for the benefit of Western capital and local oligarchs (one of whom, Petro Poroshenko, emerged as the new president).

Turning the Tables

To help American readers better understand what has transpired in Ukraine, it may be useful to see what it would be like if the tables were turned. What would the story be like if Russia played the role of the U.S. and Canada the role of Ukraine? Most Americans would not be pleased.

In this reverse scenario, the world's mainstream media would follow Moscow's line and present the story as a U.S. "invasion" of Canada. The media would explain the movement of Russian troops to the U.S. border as nothing more than a peaceful step to deter U.S. "aggression."

But Americans might see matters differently, siding with the breakaway Maritime provinces resisting the Moscow-engineered violent coup d'état in Ottawa. In this scenario, Prince Edwards Islanders would have voted by over 90 percent to secede from the pro-Russian regime in Ottawa and join the United States, as Crimea did in the case of Ukraine. People in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick – stressing their close historic ties to America – also would make clear their desire not to be violently absorbed by the Ottawa coup regime.

In this alternative scenario, Moscow would condemn Prince Edwards Island's

referendum as a “sham” and vow never to accept its “illegal” secession. The popular resistance in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick would be denounced as “terrorism” justifying a brutal military crackdown by Russian-backed Canadian federal troops dispatched to crush the dissent. In this “anti-terrorist operation” against the breakaway region, residential areas would be shelled killing thousands of civilians and devastating towns and cities.

In this endeavor, the Canadian army would be joined by Russian-supported neo-fascist battalions that had played a crucial role in the overthrow of the Canadian government. In the Maritime city of Halifax, these extremists would burn alive at least 40 pro-U.S. civilians who took refuge in a trade union building. The new government in Ottawa would make no effort to protect the victims, nor conduct a serious investigation to punish the perpetrators.

Ignoring a Leak

Meanwhile, proof that Russia was behind the overthrow of the elected Canadian prime minister would be revealed in a leaked conversation between Moscow’s foreign ministry chief of the North America department and the Russian ambassador to Canada.

According to a transcript of the leaked conversation, the Moscow-based official would discuss who the new Canadian leaders should be several weeks before the coup took place. Russia would launch the coup when Canada decided to take a loan package from the U.S.-based International Monetary Fund that had fewer strings attached than a loan from Russia.

Russia’s ally in Beijing would be reluctant to back the coup. But this would seem to be of little concern to Moscow’s man who is heard on the tape saying, “Fuck China.” Although this conversation would be posted on YouTube, its contents and import would be largely ignored by the global mainstream media, which would insist there was no coup in Ottawa.

Yet, weeks before the coup, the Russian foreign ministry official would be filmed visiting protesters camped out in Parliament Square in Ottawa demanding the ouster of the prime minister. The Russian official would give out cakes to the demonstrators.

The foreign ministers of Russian-allied Belarus and Cuba would also march with the protesters through the streets of Ottawa against the government. The world’s mainstream media would portray these demands for an unconstitutional change of government as an act of “democracy” and a desire to end “corruption.”

In a speech, the Russian foreign ministry official would remind Canadian businessmen that Russia had spent \$5 billion over the past decade to “bring

democracy" to Canada, much of that money spent training "civil society" activists and funding anti-government "journalists." The use of these non-governmental organizations to overthrow foreign governments that stand in the way of Russia's economic and geo-strategic interests would have been well documented but largely ignored by the global mainstream media.

But recognizing the danger from these "color revolution" strategies, the United States would move to ban Russian NGOs from operating in the U.S., a tactic that would be denounced by Russia as America's rejection of "democracy."

The Coup Succeeds

The Canadian coup would take place as protesters violently clashed with police, breaking through barricades and killing a number of police officers. Snipers would fire on the police and the crowd from a nearby Parliament Square building under the control of hardline pro-Russian extremists. But the Russian government and the mainstream media would blame the killings on the embattled Canadian prime minister.

To stem the violence, the prime minister would offer to call early elections but instead would be driven from office violently by the pro-Russian street gangs. Russia and the global mainstream news media would praise the overthrow as a great step for democracy and would hail the pro-Russian street fighters who had died in the coup as the "Heavenly Hundred."

Following the coup, Russian lawmakers would compare President Barack Obama to Adolf Hitler for allegedly sending U.S. troops into the breakaway provinces to protect the populations from violent repression, and for accepting the pleas of the people of Prince Edward Island to secede from this new Canada.

Obama would be widely accused of ordering an "American invasion" and committing an act of "American aggression" in violation of international law. But the Maritimes would note that they had long ties to the U.S. dating back to the American Revolution and didn't want to live under a new regime imposed by a faraway foreign power.

Russia would claim intelligence proving that U.S. tanks crossed the Maine border into New Brunswick, but would fail to make the evidence public. Russia would also refuse to reveal satellite imagery supporting the charge. But the claims would still be widely accepted by the world's mainstream news media.

For its part, Washington would deny it invaded but say some American volunteers had entered the Canadian province to join the fight, a claim met with widespread media derision. Russia's puppet prime minister in Ottawa would offer as proof of an American invasion just six passports of U.S. soldiers found in New Brunswick.

Taking Aim at Washington

When – during one of the new regime’s “anti-terrorist” offensives – a passenger jet would be shot down over Nova Scotia killing all onboard, Russia would accuse President Obama of being behind the outrage, charging that the U.S. had provided the powerful anti-aircraft missile needed to reach a plane flying at 33,000 feet.

But Moscow would refuse to release any intelligence to support its claim, which would nevertheless be accepted by world’s mainstream media.

The plane’s shoot-down would enable Russia to rally China and other international allies into imposing a harsh economic boycott of America to punish it for its “aggression.”

To bring “good government” to Canada and to deal with its collapsing economy, a former Russian foreign ministry official would be installed as Canada’s finance minister, receiving Canadian citizenship on her first day on the job.

Of course, Russia would deny that it had economic interests in Canada, simply wanting to help the country free itself from oppressive American domination. But Russian agribusiness companies would take stakes in Albertan wheat fields and the son of Russia’s prime minister as well as other well-connected Russians would join the board of Canada’s largest oil company just weeks after the coup.

Russia’s ultimate aim, beginning with the imposition of the sanctions on the U.S. economy, would appear to be a “color revolution” in Washington, to overthrow the U.S. government and install a Russia-friendly American president.

This goal would become clear from numerous statements by Russian officials and academics. A former Russian national security adviser would say that the United States should be broken up into three countries and write that Canada would be the stepping stone to this U.S. regime change. If the U.S. loses Canada, he would declare, it would fail to control North America.

But the world’s mainstream media would continue to frame the Canadian crisis as a simple case of “American aggression.”

This fictional scenario perhaps lays bare the absurdity of the U.S. version of events in Ukraine.

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