

Europe's NATO Ambivalence

The just-completed NATO summit repeated tiresome U.S. propaganda about "Russia's aggressive actions" but some European leaders flinched at the heated rhetoric and warmongering, notes ex-CIA official Graham E. Fuller.

By Graham E. Fuller

Most Americans unflinchingly believe NATO generously serves the European Union's interests. Yet many Europeans don't see it that way. They fear that NATO actually undermines a balanced Europe. Is it NATO *with* the E.U.? Or NATO *versus* the E.U.?

The two organizations were created by different groups of states (albeit with significant crossover) for differing purposes and with differing goals; indeed, some might say partially *incompatible* goals.

The E.U. vision was to bring European peoples, states and countries – at bloody war among themselves for long centuries – to renounce war as an instrument to solve European problems, to find common cause, and to cooperate in a common economic endeavor. It is an exceptional aim – the first time in human history when multiple states have freely yielded up significant elements of national sovereignty in order to partake in a common project.

Yet the U.S. has always felt geopolitical ambivalence towards the E.U. Washington in principle applauded the ideal – a unified, peaceful and prosperous continent. But it also understood that the formation of the E.U. created a new counterweight that could hinder American ability to dominate politics on the European continent. For America, it was NATO that was a far more congenial and useful mechanism than the E.U.

NATO focused on Washington's primary agenda – checking the Soviet Union in a global struggle. To the extent that the E.U. strengthened that goal, fine; but to the extent that the E.U. weakened European resolve to stand against Russia, it was much less desirable. NATO was America's creature, the E.U. was not.

With the fall of the USSR, President George H.W. Bush (not "W") gave verbal assurances to Russia that the West would not seek to capitalize on the Soviet collapse. With Russia's astonishing acquiescence to the reunification of Germany, the U.S. gave assurances that there would be no NATO expansionism into former Soviet East Bloc states.

Needless to say, that promise was violated, and continues to be violated as neoconservative zealots in Washington seek to scoop up every small state on the

Russian periphery and enlist them in the anti-Russian NATO cause (including Georgia, or the Ukraine, or Kyrgyzstan, or even Montenegro.)

NATO's Reason for Continuing

The peaceful collapse of the Soviet Bloc in 1991 also posed a difficult question: what would be the rationale for NATO's continued existence? All organizations seek to perpetuate their own existence and NATO became almost desperate for a new mission – a new enemy. Washington was loath to yield up its key instrument of control in European politics.

But how much do European geopolitical goals mesh with American ones? This too depends on one's geopolitical vision of the world. For Europe, war among its members is virtually unthinkable. But Washington and NATO have a vested interest in maintaining a Russian threat as the centerpiece of E.U. geopolitics.

Today the U.S., including virtually all of its mainstream media, adopt reflexive anti-Russian positions. In U.S.-sponsored parlance, Russian President Vladimir Putin now represents a "resurgent threat." Indeed, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs incredibly informs Congress that Russia represents America's number one existential threat. Aggressive NATO maneuvers at the very doorstep of Russia help make this a self-fulfilling prophesy.

The E.U. has far less desire for confrontation or gratuitous demonization of Moscow. It sees little benefit and much potential harm in it. Germany in particular, given its history, geopolitical vision, and location, certainly seeks a modus vivendi with Russia. Is such a modus vivendi against U.S. interests?

Many Europeans remain highly ambivalent about whether it is NATO, or the E.U., that better represents their own geopolitical concerns. NATO is at heart an American institution, the E.U. is not. Indeed any real back-door influence the U.S. had in the E.U. came from the ever-loyal United Kingdom (which is why Brexit is such a disaster for the U.S. in Europe.)

And of course there are a number of small insecure neighbors living next to the Russian bear who will eternally champion U.S. intervention. Life next to any great power is never easy. But herding such states into the U.S. column is an unwise foreign policy strategy.

For Washington, even as the E.U.'s future falls into question, NATO is seen as the default, near-surrogate organization for keeping Europe together in some fashion. It can serve as both an instrument against Russia, or as an arm of U.S.

global military outreach under the “multilateral cover” of NATO.

Washington is uncomfortable in watching the E.U., as an economic and political organization, work closely with Russia. Indeed Germany, given its location, history and power, will be the quintessential European interlocutor with Russia – and thus most likely the major voice of reason and balance in East-West relations.

Germany, more than any other European power, will also bear the brunt of any potential hostilities with Russia. That is why the German foreign minister himself made cautionary comments a few weeks ago that NATO’s largest ever military exercises off Poland since 1991 constituted provocative saber-rattling towards Russia.

Undermining the E.U.

In this sense, then, Washington’s geopolitical agenda has in fact served to undermine the E.U. Washington strongly urged the immediate inclusion of as many former states of the East Bloc as possible in the E.U., seeking to glue them into a hopefully more anti-Russian Western “bloc.”

But many European leaders had serious and sensible doubts about the appropriateness of E.U. membership for most of these states – and not on geopolitical grounds. Many lacked any democratic tradition, had disastrous economies, suffered serious corruption, bad governance, and were economic basket cases.

To encourage their economic development is one thing; indeed Russia acknowledges that it too can benefit from E.U. presence around Russia, as long as the E.U. was seen as an economic project and not a strategic security one.

The upshot of U.S. pressures was that E.U. membership expanded far too rapidly and prematurely; stringent conditions for admission to the E.U. were often softened in favor of American geopolitical goals.

And now, not surprisingly, many of these states now struggle to meet E.U. criteria; they import into Europe neo-fascist views, represent a net drain on the E.U., and often have little interest in adopting E.U. social and democratic values. For them war with Russia is actually quite thinkable. Especially after suffering under half a century of disastrous Soviet rule.

The E.U., sadly, could still conceivably collapse as a project. If so, it will not be because of Brexit as such. One key reason will be because E.U. expansion brought too many diverse states into a complex union arrangement. After all, even parts of the early E.U. “south” – Greece, Portugal or Spain, are still

struggling to make it under E.U. rules. (And indeed, E.U. rules may need to be re-jiggered in the face of lessons-learned.)

Counterproductive Hostility

The hard question must be posed about whether Washington itself has not been pursuing a highly confrontational and aggressive set of policies against Moscow. In this context there is an important place for an independent European geopolitical, strategic and security policy.

Europe, however, approaches these issues very differently from Washington. Russia, as a significant (and bruised) great power, is still trying to find its place in the new post-Soviet geopolitical space. Russia needs to be tightly bound into diplomatic and organizational ties with the E.U. Indeed it seeks to be a partner in discussion of common legitimate issues of stability and economics in Eastern Europe.

Putin shows signs of great willingness to do so because Russia too can gain economically. Russia is not operating as a spoiler unless the E.U. adopts a hostile position towards Moscow.

Aggressive military posturing by NATO (“maintaining NATO credibility”) is not the way to go about creating a new European space.

Europe is basically quite capable of defending itself given its wealthy economies and technical know-how that even extends to weapons production. Europe does not need to be chivied up by Washington to develop a more “robust posture” towards Russia. It is Europe’s own future and they need to chart it themselves. The U.S. cannot operate as the anxious helicopter parent ready to intervene over European foreign policies.

Now, there is quite legitimate room for serious discussion about what Russia’s policies and intentions are towards Europe. But it must include serious and frank discussion of cause-and-effect in East-West tensions.

How much did talk of bringing Ukraine into NATO – taking with it what has for centuries been Russia’s *sole warm water port* in the Black Sea – spark Putin’s decision not to allow this naval and shipping base of extreme importance from being ceded to NATO? How would the U.S. react to threatened loss of its south-eastern ports to a hostile foreign power (or even the Panama Canal)?

How much did these unwise policies towards Ukraine, and the Western-sponsored coup against the elected (but incompetent) government of Ukraine, help trigger Putin’s response in destabilizing eastern Ukraine? Such issues require honest analysis.

Yet such searching and objective analysis of the sources of recent NATO-Russian confrontation is shockingly absent in most “responsible” media in the U.S., including in the persistently biased New York Times coverage of all things Russian.

How independent does Europe and the E.U. wish to be? How much is it willing to be dragged into the U.S. global strategic agenda with Washington’ preponderantly military approach to global issues?

Remarkably French President Francois Hollande remarked upon arriving at the just-completed NATO conference in Warsaw, Poland, “NATO has no role at all to be saying what Europe’s relations with Russia should be. For France, Russia is not an adversary, not a threat.”

It may well be time for the E.U. to consider again its own independent military force – a project to which the U.S. could contribute, but not control.

Is it not then legitimate to ask: aren’t we really talking about NATO *versus* the E.U. in this new strategic era?

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Russia Pushes Back on NATO Expansion

As NATO presses up to Russia’s borders – with secret schemes to influence and absorb unwilling populations – Russia has begun to push back, explaining the origins of the new Cold War, as Natylie Baldwin describes.

By Natylie Baldwin

Can Russian President Vladimir Putin turn the tables on NATO and the European Union in the Balkan states that are not yet members of the Atlanticist project? According to Filip Kovacevic, a political science professor who specializes in Russia and Eastern Europe, Putin has a plan. Some details were provided in an exclusive [report](#) in May on the nascent project by Russia to counter NATO expansion into the remaining Balkan countries that have not yet been swept into the Western alliance.

The plan has its origins in the grassroots movement that arose in the aftermath of the first Cold War, which called for non-alignment and cooperation with both

East and West. Kovacevic describes the movement as follows:

“Their members were generally young people who were enthusiastic, honest and genuinely committed to the public good, but were plagued by the lack of funding and faced with frequent media blackout and open discrimination. Nonetheless, their programs articulated the most promising and humane geopolitical vision for the Balkans. They conceptualized the Balkans as a territorial bridge between the West and the East rather than as the place of persistent confrontation, or the ‘line of fire’ as formulated by the U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry in 2015. They wanted the Balkans to become a force for peace and human dignity in the world. Their vision still remains the best option for the Balkans people.”

This desire for non-alignment is understandable as a continuation of the policy of Tito’s Yugoslavia during the Cold War – the nation that several of the modern day Balkan states were a constituent part of. However, according to Kovacevic, these groups were easily overwhelmed, in terms of both financial and propaganda resources, in the 1990s by pro-NATO forces in the West.

In addition to providing resources to build up pro-NATO sentiment in the media and NGO sectors of these countries, financial resources and pressure was used to sway a large number of politicians to favor NATO membership, often in opposition to the general population’s views. Some of the unsavory forms of incentive or pressure include what amounts to blackmail and bribery, Kovacevic told me in an email interview:

“This is a long-term process. In the U.S. intelligence community it is called ‘seeding.’ The intelligence scholar Roy Godson defines it as ‘identifying potential agents of influence’ at an early stage and then acting to advance their careers. This is typically done covertly, but there have been the historical examples of overt support. ...

“In the Balkans, the key role in the process of ‘seeding’ was accomplished by various institutes, conferences, retreats, grants, etc. For instance, I was told by a confidential source who participated in the same U.S.-NATO program, the long-time foreign minister and one-time prime minister of Montenegro, Igor Luksic, was a product of such a process. Luksic was chosen as a very young man to attend various conferences and retreats in Brussels and Washington and, after that, his political career really took off. All the while, he promoted the NATO agenda in Montenegro, even though this went against the will of the majority of the population.

“Another example is Ranko Krivokapic who was the speaker of the Montenegrin Parliament for over a decade. He traveled on official business to the U.S. a few times every year and boasted to others that he had a lot of friends in the State

Department and other institutions of the U.S. government. There are examples like these in Serbia, Macedonia, Croatia, etc. All over the Balkans.”

There is also the fact the European Union has dovetailed its security arrangements to such an extent with NATO that new members are now virtually brought into the NATO structures by default. For example, Mahdi D. Nazemroaya, author of *The Globalization of NATO*, reports that the E.U.’s Security Strategy was absorbed into NATO during its annual summit in 2006. The emphasis of the summit was on securing energy resources with the goal of ‘co-managing the resources of the EU’s periphery from North Africa to the Caucuses.’ Also implied was the goal of redefining the E.U.’s security borders in synch with both Franco-German and Anglo-American economic and geopolitical interests.

Moreover, British Russia scholar Richard Sakwa, has pointed out that the security integration of the E.U. with NATO was further intensified with the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007:

“As for the comprehensive character, this is something that has been gaining in intensity in recent years as the foreign and security dimension of the E.U. has effectively merged with the Atlantic security community. The E.U.’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) since the Treaty of Lisbon (the “Reform Treaty”) of 13 December 2007, which came into effect in 2009, is now in substance part of an Atlantic system. Acceding countries are now required to align their defense and security policy with that of NATO, resulting in the effective ‘militarization’ of the E.U.”

At this point, the forces seeking a non-aligned bridge role for the Balkan states are still very much around, but have suffered marginalization due to lack of resources to take on the powerful and now entrenched pro-NATO political forces. However, with increasing discontent with the weak economic prospects in certain Balkan states, combined with increasing instability in the E.U., it is believed that there is an opening for growth of the movement.

Economic Conditions in the Balkans

The Balkan states comprise Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, Macedonia, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Greece.

In 2007, Romania and Bulgaria became E.U. members (three years after joining NATO). Romania’s GDP has barely kept up with its 2008 rate and has a general unemployment rate of 6.4 percent, which sounds reasonable until you look at the youth unemployment rate of 21 percent, which doesn’t bode well.

Bulgaria, on the other hand, is not part of the Eurozone and has not adopted the euro as its currency. Its economic prospects since joining the E.U. have not

been impressive either. In the midst of the financial crisis of 2009, its GDP contracted by 5.5 percent, with a current unemployment rate of 7 percent and youth unemployment at 17 percent. Bulgaria is also recognized as one of the union's most corrupt countries.

Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania are all in the process of E.U. integration, with a supposed approval rate of 80-90 percent among the respective populations of these countries (except for Serbia), despite the virtual rape of Greece and the lackluster performance of Romania and Bulgaria.

It should be noted that all three Balkan nations that are actual E.U. members have higher emigration than immigration rates, another indication that accession to the E.U. doesn't necessarily translate into a prosperous future for the average person, particularly the young.

There is also the instability highlighted by the British people's vote to leave the E.U., spurred by disgust with austerity measures imposed by unaccountable bureaucrats in Brussels along with an influx of immigrants – one-third from these poorer E.U. nations – which adversely affect lower-wage natives.

Even if the E.U. had a better track record of effectiveness in terms of improving economic conditions for the masses, it would have a very tall order with some of the prospective Balkan states. Macedonia, for example, has an unemployment rate between 24 and 25 percent as of January 2016, although it has improved from the 2005 high of 37 percent. Despite this improvement, Macedonia still has one of the lowest GDPs in Europe and 72 percent of its citizens claimed they manage their household income only with "difficulty" or "great difficulty" in 2012.

Bosnia-Herzegovina is still feeling the effects of the war of 1992 to 1995 that included major physical destruction of infrastructure and the bottoming out of its GDP. It currently suffers an unemployment rate of 42-43 percent.

Kosovo, a state that owes its existence to a NATO intervention, has 33 percent unemployment, a high crime rate and increasing political violence due to ethnic tensions and a growing ultra-nationalist movement. The Council of Europe compared the government of Kosovo to a mafia state in a 2010 report which revealed trafficking in human organs as well as drugs and weapons throughout Eastern Europe, even implicating the then-prime minister in the operation.

Russia's Opening

Kovacevic states that the Atlanticist project of E.U. austerity economics and the enabling of Washington's destabilizing wars via NATO is starting to chip

away at its popularity among Balkan populations. He also says Putin is prepared to take advantage of this opening and, since the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis, has turned his attention “to the Balkans with political force and funding not seen since the days of tsar Nicholas II.”

This attention has manifested in the Lovcen Declaration, which was signed on May 6, by members of Russia’s largest political party, United Russia, and the opposition Democratic People’s Party in Montenegro in the village of Njegusi. Kovacevic explains:

“One of the most powerful political figures in Montenegro, the metropolitan Amfilohije, the chief bishop of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro, was present at the signing and gave his blessing. Though in the past Amfilohije has been known to support the authoritarian and pro-NATO prime minister Milo Djukanovi? around the election time, he has always publicly opposed NATO membership and has given fiery speeches on its ‘evil nature’ to the point of accusing NATO for continuing Hitler’s anti-Slavic project.

“Even more importantly, Amfilohije’s involvement with the Lov?en declaration reveals one of the fundamental components of Putin’s overall geopolitical plan – the nurturing and intensification of the religious Christian Orthodox connection between the Russians and the Orthodox peoples of the Balkans. This includes not [only] the Serbs, Montenegrins and Macedonians, but also the Greeks and Bulgarians whose states are in NATO and whose religious ‘awakening’ can easily subvert NATO from the inside.”

Criticism and minimization of the project have set the tone in Western media, to the extent that it has been covered at all, particularly in relation to utilizing an opposition party for significant influence. But Kovacevic argues that such a dismissive attitude is disingenuous:

“[T]he very same method has been used by the U.S. and NATO intelligence services to control the governments of East-Central European states since the collapse of communism. Countless small parties with just a handful of parliamentary deputies were formed with the money coming from the various ‘black budgets’ with the task of entering the governing coalition and then steering the entire government in the direction charted by their foreign founders and mentors.

“These parties have had minimal public legitimacy, but have made a great political impact with their ‘blackmail’ potential. As they also don’t cost very much, the CIA, the MI6, and the BND regularly create them for every new election cycle.

“Now the Russians (primarily, the SVR and the GRU) are using the same rulebook

for their own geopolitical interests. In addition, however, Putin's grand design for the Balkans embodied in the ANS is also likely to prove durable not only because it builds on the traditional cultural and religious ties linking Russia and the Balkans, but also because it rides on the wave of the enormous present popular dissatisfaction with the neoliberal Atlanticist political and economic status quo."

The fact that this declaration was signed in Montenegro is most relevant due to the fact that the country has been officially invited to join NATO, whose subsequent membership is treated in the West as a *fait accompli*. However, accession requires consensus approval by all current NATO members – one member could veto the move before completion of the process as happened with Macedonia when Greece vetoed their membership aspirations in 2008 when an invitation was to be offered at the Bucharest Summit – as well as approval by the population of Montenegro.

Joining any alliance treaty is arguably something that affects national sovereignty, which requires a referendum as Kovacevic, who is Montenegrin, explains:

"The corrupt government of Milo Djukanovic is trying to avoid a national referendum because it knows that it does not have a majority support for NATO. If given a choice, the people of Montenegro would reject the protocol. The Constitution requires a referendum for all matters that affect national sovereignty, but Djukanovic is arguing falsely that NATO membership leaves Montenegrin sovereignty intact."

Kovacevic predicts that a show-down over NATO membership could create instability in the country: *"[I]f he [Djukanovic] tries to push this decision through the Parliament (which he no doubt will), wide-scale strikes and demonstrations may take place all over the country. Whoever is pushing Montenegro in NATO is dangerously destabilizing the country in mid-to-long term."*

If that happens, Washington may find for the first time in recent memory that forcing instability on a smaller country may ultimately accrue benefits to another great power, helping to facilitate a shift in geopolitics that it didn't bargain on. As Nazemroaya comments in his book:

"The [NATO] alliance is increasingly being viewed as a geopolitical extension of America, an arm of the Pentagon, and a synonym for an evolving American Empire. ... Ultimately, NATO is slated to become an institutionalized military force. ... Nevertheless, for every action there is a reaction and NATO's actions have given rise to opposing trends. The Atlantic Alliance is increasingly coming into

contact with the zone of Eurasia that is in the process of emerging with its own ideas and alliance. What this will lead to next is the question of the century.”

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Challenging the New Cold War

As NATO plans for a new Cold War, some Western dissidents are questioning the scare-mongering about Russia and the rationale for this expensive and dangerous revival, write Medea Benjamin and Alice Slater.

By Medea Benjamin and Alice Slater

Donald Trump angered the D.C. establishment when he said that NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance, may be obsolete and the U.S. should reassess its spending on the alliance. Hillary Clinton has used Trump's comments as another example that he is a dangerous, loose cannon. But Trump has brought up an issue worth exploring and this month, amid NATO's Annual Summit in Warsaw, Poland, is an excellent opportunity to do so.

Formed in the early years of the Cold War, 1949, with the United States, Canada, Portugal, Italy, U.K., Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, and France, by 1952 this post-WWII alliance included Greece and Turkey, and had rejected the Soviet Union's request to join.

In 1956, when West Germany was admitted to NATO membership, the USSR formed the Warsaw Pact in response and the Cold War was then on, full-blown. Missiles and nuclear weapons from each side pointed menacingly at each other, with the United States parking nuclear weapons in five NATO countries (Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, Italy and Turkey), where they remain to this day. NATO doctrine provides that nuclear weapons will be used if necessary, at will, on behalf of all its members.

After the Berlin wall fell in 1989 and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev miraculously let go of all the Soviet-occupied Eastern European countries,

dissolving the Warsaw Pact without a shot, the U.S. promised Gorbachev that if he didn't object to East Germany's inclusion in NATO, we would never expand NATO further eastward. Russia had lost 27 million people to the Nazi onslaught during World War II and had good cause to fear a military alliance on its borders.

Despite U.S. assurances to Gorbachev, today NATO has expanded to include 12 new countries in eastern and central Europe, including Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, Albania and Croatia. NATO now extends right up to Russia's border, and has even been discussing membership with Georgia and the Ukraine.

One can only imagine what the response would be in the United States if Russia were to invite Canada and Mexico into its military alliance. Let us not forget how close we came to war when the Soviet Union put missiles in Cuba. And part of the deal President Kennedy made with President Khrushchev for their removal was to take U.S. missiles out of Turkey.

Although NATO took no military action during the Cold War, during the first Gulf War it deployed forces for the first time, and then acted unlawfully when it bombed Yugoslavia without UN authorization. The UN Charter, devoted to preventing "the scourge of war," allows nations to the use force only in self-defense when under threat of imminent attack, or when authorized by the Security Council, neither of which had occurred when NATO bombed Yugoslavia in the 1999 Kosovo war. Since then NATO has taken part in many military actions, including in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya. But this year it has been particularly aggressive and provocative, conducting massive military maneuvers on Russia's borders.

It is totally unacceptable to be taking these provocative measures when the U.S. and Russia have nearly 2,000 nuclear warheads on hair trigger alert, loaded on missiles, submarines and airplanes, poised and ready to fire in minutes. Next year, the Pentagon plans to quadruple military spending in Europe to \$3.4 billion and begin rotating an armored brigade through Eastern Europe – in addition to extra NATO forces to be deployed to Poland and the Baltics. The U.S., the main force behind NATO, is already in a deadly proxy war in eastern Ukraine.

In June, NATO launched the largest war games since the Cold War, involving hundreds of tanks and jets, as well as 31,000 troops from 24 countries. The war games in Poland included air-ground assaults and electronic warfare scenarios. Airborne units, infantrymen, medics, military police and aviation units have operated jointly throughout the exercise, which culminated in a massive live-fire event led by the U.S. military. A naval exercise involving NATO forces has just begun in Finland. Meanwhile, there is an ongoing "Saber Strike" operation

in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

One can only wonder how, 25 years after the end of the Cold War, we find ourselves rattling our sabers, nuclear and conventional, in this untenable dilemma. Surely President Eisenhower's prescient warning way back in 1961 that "we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex" is a potent warning for today, more than half a century later.

The time has come to spread the word about the dangerous mischief NATO is causing on Russia's border. With the recent breakup of the old paradigm after the U.K. just voted to leave the European Union, there may be a new opening for change. It has been reported that Germany and France have been talking about ending the sanctions on Russia imposed after the Ukraine events and are now recommending a less aggressive posture for NATO.

America too, could do its share to make good on the U.N. promise to "end the scourge of war" by ratcheting down the hostilities towards Russia and working for the abolition of NATO. You don't have to be a Donald Trump supporter to recognize that it is time to rethink NATO

Medea Benjamin is the cofounder of the peace group CODEPINK. Alice Slater is the New York Director of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation. [This article previously appeared in The Hill newspaper.

<http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/foreign-policy/286917-time-to-rethink-nato>
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NATO Marches Toward Destruction

As the West's elites growl about "Russian aggression" – as they once did about Iraq's WMD – NATO leaders meet in Poland to plan a costly and dangerous new Cold War, while shunning the few voices of dissent, John V. Walsh warns.

By John V. Walsh

German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier's cry of distress is that of a man watching a tidal wave of destruction gathering force, similar to ones that have engulfed his country twice in the Twentieth Century.

Commenting on NATO's recent military exercises in Poland and the Baltics, Steinmeier said, "What we shouldn't do now is inflame the situation further through saber-rattling and warmongering. ... Whoever believes that a symbolic tank

parade on the alliance's eastern border will bring security is mistaken. ... We are well-advised to not create pretexts to renew an old confrontation. .. [It would be] fatal to search only for military solutions and a policy of deterrence."

His dread is not to be dismissed since it comes from a man who is in a position to know what the U.S. is up to. His words reflect the fears of ever more people across all of Eurasia from France in the West to Japan in the East.

Under the euphemism of "containment," the U.S. is relentlessly advancing its new Cold War on Russia and China. Its instrument in the West is NATO and in the East, Japan and whatever other worthies can be sharked up.

It is a Cold War that grows increasingly hotter, with proxy wars now raging in eastern Ukraine and Syria and with confrontations in the South China Sea. There is an ever growing likelihood that these points of tension will flare up into an all out military conflict.

In the West, this wider conflict could begin in Eastern Europe and Russia, but it would not stop there. All the European NATO countries would be on the front lines. In the East, the conflict would take place in the Western Pacific in the region of China's coast and in the peninsulas and island countries in the region, including Japan, the Philippines and Indochina.

In each case, the U.S. would be an ocean away, "leading from behind," as Barack Obama's staff might put it, or engaged in "offshore balancing" as some foreign policy "experts" might term it.

Assuming that the conflict would stay "conventional" – i.e. non-nuclear – the devastation might be confined to Eurasia, from France in the West to Japan in the East. In that case, no matter which side prevails, the U.S. could escape unscathed and "win" in that sense. But Eurasian nations would lose in what could be World War II redux.

Eve of Destruction

One can get a sense of what this would mean in the case of economic conflict by looking at the minimal economic warfare now being waged on Russia in the form of sanctions. Those sanctions are hurting both Russia and the rest of Europe. The U.S. is untouched.

The same is also true for military conflict. Want to know what it would look like? Look at eastern Ukraine. All of Eurasia could come to resemble that sorry nation in the event of a military conflict pitting the U.S. and its allies against Russia and China. Eurasia, be forewarned!

The goal of the U.S. foreign policy elite would clearly be for Russia and China to “lose,” but even if they “won,” they would be brought low, leaving the U.S. as the world’s greatest economic and military power as it was in 1945.

Europe is beginning to awaken to this. We have Steinmeier’s plea. But it is not only Germany that is worried. The French Senate wants an end to the sanctions imposed on Russia. Business people in many Western European countries, most notably in Germany and Italy, European farmers who export to Russia and tourist entrepreneurs like those in Turkey and Bulgaria also want an end to sanctions and military exercises.

Parties of the Right want an end to domination by NATO and Brussels, both controlled by the U.S. The Brexit is just one rumbling of such discontent.

All these nations are growing increasingly aware of the fate that awaits them if overt conflict erupts with Russia. The people of Germany want none of it. Likewise the people of Japan are stirring against the U.S. effort to goad Japan into fighting China. All remember the devastation of WWII.

Let’s recall the casualty figures, i.e., deaths, among the principal combatants of WWII:

Soviet Union- 27,000,000 (14% of the population);

China- 17,000,000 (3.5%);

Germany- 7,000,000 (8.5%);

Japan- 2,800,000 (4%).

By comparison, for the U.S., safely far offshore, the number was 419,000 (0.32%)!

And for a few other countries which “got in the way” of the major adversaries:

Yugoslavia- 1,500,000 (9%)

Poland- 6,000,000 (17%)

French Indochina- 1,600,000 (6.11%)

Philippines- 527,000 (3.29%)

One wonders what the leaders of Poland or the Philippines or some elements in Vietnam are thinking when they take a belligerent attitude to Russia or China in order to please the U.S.

Nuclear Possibilities

The even more alarming problem with this U.S. strategy is that it could easily spill over into a nuclear conflict as nearly happened in the Cuban Missile Crisis. Then the U.S. too would be reduced to radioactive rubble. The bet of the Western policy elite must be that Russia and China would not respond to a conventional war with a nuclear strike.

However Vladimir Putin has made it clear that in any war with the West, the U.S. will feel the impact at once. The neocons and the rest of the U.S. foreign policy elite must be betting that Putin can do nothing, because he would not use nuclear weapons. So the destruction would be confined to Europe and Asia.

But that assumption is a dangerous one. Even if nuclear weapons are not used. Russia and China might respond with a conventional weapons attack on U.S. cities. In WWII, Germany was able to wreak considerable devastation using conventional bombs on England delivered by airplanes and V2 rockets.

Similarly the U.S. was able to do enormous damage to Germany and to Japan with conventional weapons, especially fire-bombing as in Tokyo and Dresden. Today technology has advanced greatly (bringing previously "safe" targets with range of missile and bomber attack), and U.S. cities have nuclear power plants nearby.

What is the likely outcome of a conventional war waged against U.S. cities? Do we wish to find out? And once it begins where is the firewall against an all-out nuclear exchange? Where are the neocons and the rest of the U.S. foreign policy elite taking us?

Certainly the damage would begin with Eurasia, but Americans would do well to worry that great swarms of chickens might come home to roost in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. This is no longer the Twentieth Century.

For some the scenarios above might seem unduly alarmist. You might doubt that the U.S. elite would be capable of consciously unleashing such a vast bloodletting. For those, it is useful to recall the words of President Harry S. Truman, who said in 1941, when he was still a Senator and before the U.S. had entered WWII: "If we see that Germany is winning the war, we ought to help Russia; and if that Russia is winning, we ought to help Germany, and in that way let them kill as many as possible. . . ."

Is that not what happened? People of Eurasia, beware.

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to be heard. Some of his work has been translated into Chinese and published in the mainland Chinese press. [A version of this article originally appeared on RT [here](#).]

Merkel Urged to Temper NATO's Belligerence

U.S. intelligence veterans are calling on German Chancellor Merkel to bring a needed dose of realism and restraint to the upcoming NATO conference, which risks escalating the dangerous new Cold War with Russia.

MEMORANDUM FOR: Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

SUBJECT: NATO Summit in Warsaw

REFERENCE: [Our Memorandum](#) to You, August 30, 2014

We longtime U.S. intelligence officers again wish to convey our concerns and cautions directly to you prior to a critically important NATO summit – the meeting that begins on July 8 in Warsaw. We were gratified to learn that our referenced [memorandum](#) reached you and your advisers before the NATO summit in Wales, and that others too learned of our initiative via the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, which published [a full report](#) on our memorandum on Sept. 4, the day that summit began.

Wales to Warsaw

The Warsaw summit is likely to be at least as important as the last one in Wales and is likely to have even more far-reaching consequences. We find troubling – if not surprising – NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg's statement at a pre-summit press event on July 4 that NATO members will agree to “further enhance NATO's military presence in the eastern part of the alliance,” adding that the alliance will see its “biggest reinforcement since the Cold War.”

The likelihood of a military clash in the air or at sea – accidental or intentional – has grown sharply, the more so since, as we explain below, President Obama's control over top U.S./NATO generals, some of whom like to play cowboy, is tenuous. Accordingly we encourage you, as we did before the last NATO summit, to urge your NATO colleagues to bring a “degree of judicious skepticism” to the table at Warsaw – especially with regard to the perceived threat from

Russia.

Many of us have spent decades studying Moscow's foreign policy. We shake our heads in disbelief when we see Western leaders seemingly oblivious to what it means to the Russians to witness exercises on a scale not seen since Hitler's armies launched "Unternehmen Barbarossa" 75 years ago, leaving 25 million Soviet citizens dead. In our view, it is irresponsibly foolish to believe that Russian President Vladimir Putin will not take countermeasures – at a time and place of his own choosing.

Putin does not have the option of trying to reassure his generals that what they hear and see from NATO is mere rhetoric and posturing. He is already facing increased pressure to react in an unmistakably forceful way. In sum, Russia is bound to react strongly to what it regards as the unwarranted provocation of large military exercises along its western borders, including in Ukraine.

Before things get still worse, seasoned NATO leaders need to demonstrate a clear preference for statesmanship and give-and-take diplomacy over saber-rattling. Otherwise, some kind of military clash with Russia is likely, with the ever-present danger of escalation to a nuclear exchange.

Extremely worrisome is the fact that many second-generation NATO leaders seem blithely unaware – or even dismissive – of that looming possibility. Demagoguery like that coming from former Polish President Lech Walesa, who brags that he would "shoot" at Russian jets that buzz U.S. destroyers assuredly are not at all helpful. Walesa's tone, however, does reflect the macho attitude prevailing today in Poland and some other NATO newcomers.

We believe Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier was correct to point out that military posturing on Russia's borders will bring less regional security. We applaud his admonition that, "We are well advised not to create pretexts to renew an old confrontation."

A Need For Candor

Speaking of "pretexts to renew an old confrontation," we believe the time has come to acknowledge that the marked increase in East-West tensions over the past two years originally stemmed from the Western-sponsored *coup d'état* in Kiev on Feb. 22, 2014, and Russia's reaction in annexing Crimea.

Although we have a cumulative total of hundreds of years of experience in intelligence, we had never before seen planning for a *coup d'état* exposed weeks in advance – and then carried out anyway. Few seem to remember that in early February 2014, YouTube published [a recording](#) of an intercepted conversation between U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and the U.S.

ambassador in Kiev, during which “Yats” (for Arseniy Yatsenyuk) was identified as Washington’s choice to become the new prime minister of the coup government in Kiev.

This unique set of circumstances prompted widely respected analyst George Friedman, president of the think tank STRATFOR, to label the Putsch in Kiev on Feb. 22, 2014, “really the most blatant coup in history.”

If one listens only to Western politicians and the corporate media, however, their version of recent history in Eastern Europe begins on Feb. 23, 2014. A particularly blatant example of this came on June 30, when U.S. Ambassador to NATO Douglas Lute spoke at a pre-summit press briefing:

“beginning in 2014 and still to this day, we’re moving into a new period in NATO’s long history. Why do I say that? Here’s the evidence I cite. **So the first thing that happened in 2014** that marks this change is a newly aggressive, newly assertive Russia under Vladimir Putin. So in late February, early March of 2014, the seizing, the occupying of Crimea followed quickly by the illegal political annexation of Crimea. ... Well, any notion of strategic partnership came to an abrupt halt in the first months of 2014.” (Emphasis added)

In view of the coup d’état and post-coup instability in Ukraine, what Ambassador Lute goes on to say about NATO’s professed desire for stability in Ukraine comes across as disingenuous. Far more important, it puts Russia on notice that – in the U.S. view, at least – meddling on the “periphery” between NATO and Russia will continue.

According to Lute, one of the “key themes” at Warsaw will be: “What do we do about the periphery.” Lute explains: “Here we talk about projecting stability. So we don’t have an obligation to defend states beyond NATO’s territory, but we realize it’s in our interest to make them as stable as possible.”

We suggest that it is past time for Western leaders to admit that there is not one scintilla of evidence of any Russian plan to annex Crimea before the coup in Kiev and the coup leaders began talking about Ukraine joining NATO. If senior NATO leaders continue to be unable or unwilling to distinguish between cause and effect, increasing tension is inevitable with potentially disastrous results – all of them unnecessary and avoidable, in our view.

Ukraine: Still Festering

In our August 2014 memorandum, we suggested that you be “appropriately suspicious of charges made by the U.S. State Department and NATO officials alleging a Russian invasion of Ukraine.” Actually, the gravity of the situation

was considerably worse than we realized at the time.

We now know that U.S. Air Force Gen. Philip Breedlove, who was Supreme NATO Commander until two months ago, was pressing hard for confrontation with Russia and the anti-coup separatists in eastern Ukraine. This comes through clearly in Breedlove's recently disclosed emails, which now confirm what we believed in 2014; namely, that everyone needed to examine closely Breedlove's exaggerated claims, many of them based on fuzzy photos and other highly dubious "intelligence."

Lobbying for approval to wage a proxy war with Russia in Ukraine, Breedlove was highly critical of President Barack Obama's policy, which Breedlove disparaged as simply: "Do not get me into a war." (As though this were some kind of cowardly order!)

The emails show that behind Obama's back, Breedlove kept trying to "leverage, cajole, convince or coerce the U.S. to react" to Russia. One of Breedlove's email correspondents wrote back to him: "Given Obama's instruction to you not to start a war, this may be a tough sell," but this did not stop Breedlove from trying.

In 2015, as your own intelligence analysts were able to tell you, Breedlove went beyond hyperbole to outright fabrication with claims that "well over a thousand combat vehicles, Russian combat forces, some of the most sophisticated air defense weapons, and battalions of artillery" had been sent to eastern Ukraine.

These were the kinds of faux claims Breedlove used in attempts to enlist help from the senior military and Congress in getting Obama to supply weapons to Ukrainian armed forces.

Lest we seem to be singling out Gen. Breedlove, his predecessor as Supreme NATO Commander, Adm. James Stavridis, was hardly provided good example. A year after the U.S. led some NATO countries in a Blitz of aircraft and missile strikes against Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi, Stavridis and former U.S. Ambassador to NATO Ivo Daalder wrote in *Foreign Affairs*: "NATO's operation in Libya has rightly been hailed as a model intervention."

The operation was just the opposite, of course. The chaos now reigning in Libya, with hundreds of refugees drowning in the Mediterranean, offers abundant proof that your government's decision to keep Germany at arms-length from that "model intervention" was a wise one.

While it is somewhat awkward for us to offer such candid comments on the character and caliber of the most senior U.S. generals and admirals – including those, like Ambassador Lute, who end up getting appointed to senior political

positions at NATO – such a critique is unavoidable. The important reality to which we draw your attention pertains not only to their qualifications, but also to their dismissive attitude toward President Obama.

We observed in our Aug. 30, 2014 memorandum that President Obama “has only tenuous control over the policymakers in his administration.” That this includes senior military leaders can be seen in Obama’s failure to remove Gen. Breedlove, who – in addition to his intense maneuvering behind Obama’s back – made little effort to hide his open disdain for the cautious approach of his commander in chief toward the possibility of armed confrontation in volatile places like Ukraine.

An Appropriate “Nein!”

One factor encouraging us to write to you again is your proven record of insistence on tenacious diplomacy rather than saber rattling and provocation. We noted, for example, that at a press conference with President Obama in Washington on Feb. 9, 2015, you personally experienced Breedlove-type pressure for sending lethal weaponry to Ukraine – the kind of pressure still being applied to Obama himself. You stuck to your guns, so to speak, when the first designated questioner noted that the U.S. was considering providing lethal weapons to Ukraine and that your view was “very different.”

“I have given you my opinion on the export of arms,” was your unequivocal answer. Nor did you diverge from your insistent preference for diplomacy over arms, as you replied to a final, plaintive question: “Mrs. Merkel, ... diplomacy, as you said yourself, has not brought much progress. Can you understand the impatience of the Americans when they say we ought to now deliver weapons?”

We believe your resolute “nein” to providing weapons to Ukraine was a key factor in scuttling that ill-conceived idea last year. And, as you know far better than we, your clearly expressed stance helped bring about a ceasefire that, however imperfect, was infinitely better than the escalation of fighting that would have inevitably resulted from sending weapons to Kiev’s government forces.

You stuck to your position, even though it put you in opposition to nearly all political, military, and media voices in the U.S., which were expressing disdain for diplomacy and preference instead for war.

It is inevitable that there will be more proposals to send weapons to the Kiev government, particularly in view of the continued hostilities in eastern Ukraine. We hope that unbiased scrutiny can be given to which parties are responsible for blocking full implementation of the Minsk accords that you, Foreign Minister Steinmeier, and your French and Russian counterparts have

worked hard to offer as a plan for peace in Ukraine.

Secretary of State John Kerry is visiting Kiev on July 7, a day before the Warsaw summit opens. He might be asked to share his impressions on the stormy political events in Ukraine over the past few months.

In our view, things have gone from bad to worse there, with Andriy Parubiy now speaker of the Ukrainian parliament. Parubiy is one of the most conspicuous leaders of Ukrainian ultra-nationalist, and outright neo-Nazi, movements. In 1991 he founded the Social-National Party of Ukraine, together with Oleh Tyahnybok, another February 2014 coup plotter, who now leads the extreme right Svoboda party.

The name of Parubiy's Social-National Party was chosen to identify it with Hitler's National Socialist Party. Its official symbol is the somewhat modified Wolf's Hook (Wolfsangel), used by the SS. Both parties blame Russia for the ills besetting Ukraine.

Parubiy as Parliament Speaker makes a mockery of NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg's insistence that NATO has resolved to make sure that a law-abiding Kiev is "committed to democracy."

On Monday, Parubiy stated on TV, "I have not supported the Minsk agreements from the very start," adding that Moscow's "plans on Ukraine may be stopped only by force and international sanctions."

Also on Monday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that Ukraine has not made any new effort to facilitate implementation of the Minsk accords that call for a ceasefire, weapons withdrawal, local elections in eastern Ukraine, and constitutional reform.

Doing the Possible in Poland

Instead of muscle flexing and saber rattling, it would likely be more constructive if NATO leaders held a serious discussion regarding Kiev's recalcitrance on the Minsk accords. An open discussion would mean avoiding the usual knee-jerk, wholesale identification with Ukraine's long list of real and imagined grievances against Russia.

U.S. Ambassador Lute might be asked if knows anyone with the kind of influence with Kiev that it would take to break the logjam and move events toward implementation of the peace agreements so painstakingly worked out at Minsk.

Another worthwhile endeavor would be to establish a NATO working group to respond to Russia's suggestion to devise organizational and technical measures

to prevent close encounters or clashes of aircraft over the Baltic Sea.

Lastly, it would be highly constructive if NATO would take responsibility for assessing the fundamental factors behind the hideous outbreak of the terrorist acts that took so many lives over recent days in Istanbul, Dhaka, Bangladesh, and Baghdad. In this context, as well as in central Europe, violence begets violence. It should not be beyond the capability of NATO to undertake a fresh, hard look at why terrorism continues to increase, and to attempt to come up with new, more imaginative, less violent ways to address the issues that ultimately fuel the curse of terrorism.

NOTE: As is our custom, we are sending the White House a copy of this memorandum. We would like you to know, however, that we rarely receive any acknowledgement that our memoranda get through to President Obama – or that he pays them any heed if they do reach his desk. We suspect that the wide generation gap between his relatively young advisers and the longtime collective experience that we in VIPS bring to the table may, in part, account for this. Therefore, if you find our thoughts informative – perhaps even provocative – we suggest that, when you see the President on Friday in Warsaw, you urge the President to obtain and read his copy.

For the Steering Group of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

William Binney, former Technical Director, NSA; co-founder, SIGINT Automation Research Center (ret.)

Daniel Ellsberg, former State Department and Defense Department Official (VIPS Associate)

Graham E. Fuller, Vice-Chair, National Intelligence Council (ret.)

Philip Giraldi, CIA, Operations Officer (ret.)

Mike Gravel, former special agent of the Counter Intelligence Corps. former United States Senator from Alaska

Matthew Hoh, former Capt., USMC, Iraq & Foreign Service Officer, Afghanistan (associate VIPS)

Larry C Johnson, CIA & State Department (ret.)

Brady Kiesling, Foreign Service Officer, Political Counselor, Embassy Athens, (ret.) (associate VIPS)

John Kiriakou, Former CIA Counterterrorism Officer

Edward Loomis, NSA Cryptologic Computer Scientist (ret.)

David MacMichael, National Intelligence Council (ret.)

Ray McGovern, former US Army infantry/intelligence officer & CIA analyst (ret.)

Elizabeth Murray, Deputy National Intelligence Officer for Middle East, CIA (ret.)

Torin Nelson, Former HUMINT Officer, U.S. Department of the Army

Todd Pierce, MAJ, US Army Judge Advocate (ret.)

Scott Ritter, former Maj., USMC, former UN Weapon Inspector, Iraq

Coleen Rowley, Division Counsel & Special Agent, FBI (ret.)

Peter Van Buren, U.S. Department of State, Foreign Service Officer (ret.) (associate VIPS)

Ann Wright, U.S. Army Reserve Colonel (ret) and former U.S. Diplomat

Misunderstanding Russia and Russians

Western media has demonized Russia and President Putin with unrelenting propaganda that has dazed and confused many Russians, a condition that retired U.S. Col. Ann Wright encountered on a recent visit.

By Ann Wright

I've just ended two weeks visiting cities in four regions of Russia. The questions that were asked over and over were: "Why does America hate us? Why do you demonize us?" Most would add a caveat – "I like American people and I think YOU like us individually but why does the American government hate our government?"

This article is a composite of the comments made and questions asked to our 20-person delegation and to me as an individual. I do not attempt to defend the views but offer them as an insight into the thinking of many of the persons with whom we came into contact in meetings and on the streets.

None of the questions, comments or views tell the full story, but I hope they give a feel for the desire of the ordinary Russian that his or her country and

its citizens are respected as a sovereign nation with a long history and that it is not demonized as an outlaw state or an “evil” nation. Russia has its flaws and room for improvement in many areas, just as every nation does, including for sure, the United States.

New Russia Looks Like You

The United States worked hard to make the Soviet Union collapse, and it did. You wanted to remake Russia like the United States – a democratic, capitalist country in which your companies could make money – and you have done that.

After 25 years, we are a new nation much different from the Soviet Union. The Russian Federation has created laws that have allowed a large private business class to emerge. Our cities now look like your cities. We have Burger King, McDonalds, Subway, Starbucks and malls filled with a huge number of totally Russian business ventures for the middle class.

We have chain stores with merchandise and food, similar to Wal-Mart and Target. We have exclusive stores with top-of-the-line clothing and cosmetics for the richer. We drive new (and older) cars now just like you do. We have massive rush hour traffic jams in our cities, just like you do. We have extensive, safe, inexpensive metros in all of our major cities, just like you have. When you fly across our country, it looks just like yours, with forests, farm fields, rivers and lakes – only bigger, many time zones bigger.

Most people on buses and in the metro are looking at our mobile phones with internet, just like you do. We have a smart youth population that is computer literate and most of whom speak several languages.

You sent your experts on privatization, international banking, stock exchanges. You urged us to sell off our huge state industries to the private sector at ridiculously low prices, creating the multi-billionaire oligarchs that in many ways mirror the oligarchs of the United States. And you made money in Russia from this privatization. Some of the oligarchs are in prison for violating our laws.

You sent us experts on elections. For over 25 years we have held elections. And we have elected some politicians you don't like and some that we as individuals may not like. We have political dynasties, just like you do. We don't have a perfect government, nor perfect government officials – which is also what we observe in the U.S. government and its officials. We have graft and corruption in and outside of government, just as you do. Some of our politicians are in jail for violating our laws, just like some of your politicians are in jail for violating your laws.

And we have the poor just like you do. We have villages, towns and small cities that are struggling with migration to the big cities with people moving in hopes of finding jobs, just like you do.

Our middle class travels throughout the world, just like you do. In fact, as a Pacific nation just like the U.S., we bring so much tourism money with us on our trips that your Pacific island territories of Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas have negotiated with the U.S. Federal government to allow Russian tourists to enter both of those U.S. territories for 45 days without the time-consuming and expensive U.S. visa.

We have a strong science and space program and are a key partner in the International Space Station. We sent the first satellite into space and the first humans into space. Our rockets still take astronauts to the space station while your NASA program has been curtailed.

Dangerous NATO Military Exercises

You have your allies and we have our allies. You told us during the dissolution of the Soviet Union that you would not enlist countries from the Eastern block into NATO, yet you have done that. Now you are placing missile batteries along our border and you are conducting major military exercises with strange names such as Anaconda, the strangling snake, along our borders.

You say that Russia could possibly invade neighboring countries and you have big dangerous military exercises in countries on our borders with these countries. We did not build up our Russian military forces along those borders until you continued to have ever increasingly large military “exercises” there. You install missile “defenses” in countries on our borders, initially saying they are to protect against Iranian missiles and now you say Russia is the aggressor and your missiles are aimed at us.

For our own national security, we must respond, yet you vilify us for a response that you would have if Russia would have military maneuvers along the Alaskan coast or the Hawaii islands or with Mexico on your southern border or with Canada on your northern border.

Syrian Conflict

We have allies in the Middle East including Syria. For decades, we have had military ties to Syria and the only Soviet/Russian port in the Mediterranean is in Syria. Why is it unexpected that we help defend our ally, when the stated policy of your country is for “regime change” of our ally – and you have spent hundreds of millions of dollars for Syrian regime change?

With this said, we Russia saved the U.S. from an enormous political and military blunder in 2013 when the U.S. was determined to attack the Syrian government for “crossing the red line” when a horrific chemical attack that tragically killed hundreds was erroneously blamed on the Assad government. We provided you documentation that the chemical attack did not come from the Assad government and we brokered a deal with the Syrian government in which they turned over their chemical weapons arsenal to the international community for destruction.

Ultimately, Russia arranged for the chemicals to be destroyed and you provided an especially designed U.S. ship that carried out the destruction. Without Russian intervention, a direct U.S. attack on the Syrian government for the mistaken allegation of use of chemical weapons would have resulted in even greater chaos, destruction and destabilization in Syria.

Russia has offered to host talks with the Assad government about power sharing with opposition elements. We, like you, do not want to see the takeover of Syria by a radical group such as ISIS that will use the land of Syria to continue its mission to destabilize the region. Your policies and financing of regime change in Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya and Syria have created instability and chaos that is reaching all over the world.

Coup in Ukraine

You say that Crimea was annexed by Russia and we say Crimea “reunited” with Russia. We believe that the U.S. sponsored a coup of the elected Ukrainian government that had chosen to accept a loan from Russia rather than from the European Union and the International Monetary Fund.

We believe that coup and the resulting government was illegally brought to power through your multi-million dollar “regime change” program. We know that your Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland described in a phone call, which our intelligence services recorded, that “Yats is the guy,” referring to Arseniy Yatsenyuk, who became prime minister after the pro-West/NATO coup.

In response to that U.S.-sponsored violent government take-over of the elected government of the Ukraine – rather than allow a new presidential election within a year – ethnic Russians in the Ukraine, particularly those in the eastern provinces and in Crimea were very afraid of the anti-Russian violence that had been unleashed by neo-fascist forces that were in the militia arm of the takeover.

With the takeover of the Ukrainian government, the people of Crimea – many of them ethnic Russians – voted by 96 percent with more than 80 percent of voters

casting ballots to unite with the Russian Federation instead of staying with Ukraine. Of course, some citizens of Crimea disagreed and left to live in Ukraine.

We wonder whether citizens of the United States realize that the Southern Fleet of the Russian military was located in the Black Sea ports in the Crimea and in light of the violent take over of Ukraine that our government felt it was vital to ensure access to those ports.

On the basis of Russian national security, the Russian Duma (Parliament) voted to accept the results of the referendum and annexed Crimea as a republic of the Russian Federation and gave federal city status to the important seaport of Sevastopol.

Sanctions and Double Standards

While the U.S. and European governments accepted and cheered for the violent overthrow of the elected government of the Ukraine, both the U.S. and European nations were very vengeful against the non-violent referendum of people of Crimea and have slammed Crimea with all sorts of sanctions that have reduced international tourism, the main industry of the Crimea, to almost nothing.

In the past in Crimea, we received over 260 cruise ships filled with international passengers from Turkey, Greece, Italy, France, Spain and other parts of Europe. Now, because of the sanctions we have virtually no European tourists. You are the first group of Americans we have seen in over a year. Now, our business is with other citizens from Russia.

The U.S. and the European Union have put sanctions on Russia again. The Russian ruble has been devalued almost 50 percent, some from the downturn of worldwide price of oil, but some from the sanctions the international community has placed on Russia from the Crimea "reunification."

We believe you want the sanctions to hurt us so we will overthrow our elected government, just like you put sanctions on Iraq for the Iraqis to overthrow Saddam Hussein or on North Korea or on Iran for the people of those countries to overthrow their governments.

Sanctions have the opposite effect than what you want. While we know sanctions do hurt the ordinary person and if left on a population for a long time can kill through malnutrition and lack of medicines, sanctions have made us stronger.

Now, we may not get your cheeses and wines, but we are developing or redeveloping our own industries and have become more self-reliant. We now see how the globalization trade mantra of the United States can and will be used

against countries that decide not to go along with the U.S. on its worldwide political and military agenda. If a country decides not to go along with the United States, its people will be cut off from the global markets that the trade agreements have made you dependent upon.

We wonder why the double standard? Why haven't the member states of the United Nations put sanctions on the U.S. since you have invaded and occupied countries and killed hundreds of thousands in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen and Syria.

Why is the U.S. not held accountable for kidnapping, extraordinary rendition, torture and imprisonment of almost 800 persons that have been held in the gulag called Guantanamo?

Elimination of Nuclear Weapons

We want the elimination of nuclear weapons. Unlike you, we have never used a nuclear weapon on people. Even though we consider nuclear weapons as a defensive weapon, they should be eliminated because one political or military mistake will have devastating consequences for the entire planet.

We know the terrible costs of war. Our great-grandparents remind us of the 27 million Soviet citizens killed during World War II, our grandparents tell us of the Soviet war in Afghanistan in the 1980s and the difficulties arising from the Cold War.

We don't understand why the West continues to vilify and demonize us when we are so much like you. We too are concerned about threats to our national security and our government responds in many ways like yours. We do not want another Cold War, a war in which everyone gets frost bitten, or worse, a war that will kill hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people.

We want a peaceful future. We Russians are proud of our lengthy history and heritage. We want a bright future for ourselves and our families... and for yours. We want to live in a peaceful world. We want to live in peace.

Ann Wright served 29 years in the US Army/Army Reserves and retired as a Colonel. She also served 16 years as a US diplomat in US Embassies in Nicaragua, Grenada, Somalia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sierra Leone, Micronesia, Afghanistan and Mongolia. She resigned from the U.S. government in March 2003 in opposition to President Bush's war on Iraq. She is the co-author of *Dissent: Voices of Conscience*.

Europeans Contest US Anti-Russian Hype

Besides the Brexit rejection of U.S.-style neoliberal economics, some European voices are protesting, finally, the U.S.-led, anti-Russian propaganda campaign that has justified an expensive new Cold War, notes Joe Lauria.

By Joe Lauria

A significant crack has been unexpectedly opened in the wall of Europe's disciplined obedience to the United States. I'm not only referring to the possible long-term consequences for U.S.-European relations in the wake of Britain's decision to leave the European Union, but the unlikely blow against Washington's information war on Moscow delivered by Germany's foreign minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who a week ago shockingly accused the North Atlantic Treaty Organization of "war-mongering" against Russia.

Since the Bush administration's twisting of events in the 2008 Russia-Georgia war, which the E.U. blamed on Georgia, Western populations have been subjected to the steady message that Russia is a "threat" to the West and is guilty of "aggression." This reached a peak with the false narrative of events in Ukraine, in which blatant evidence of the West's complicity in a violent *coups d'état* was omitted from corporate media accounts, while Russia's assistance to eastern Ukrainians resisting the *coup* has been framed as a Russian "invasion."

The disinformation campaign has reached the depths of popular culture, including the EuroVision song contest and sports doping scandals, to ensure widespread popular support for U.S. hostile intentions against Russia.

The Russian "aggression" narrative, based largely on lies of omission, has prepared the way for the U.S. to install a missile-shield in Romania with offensive capabilities and to stage significant NATO war games with 31,000 troops on Russia's borders. For the first time in 75 years, German troops retraced the steps of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union.

U.S. Designs on Russia

The U.S. is eyeing a post-Putin Russia in which a Wall Street-friendly leader like Boris Yeltsin can be restored to reopen the country to Western exploitation. But Vladimir Putin is no Yeltsin and has proven a tough nut for the U.S. to crack. Washington's *modus operandi* is to continually provoke and blame an opponent until it stands up for itself, as Putin's Russia has done, then accuse it of "aggression" and attack in "self-defense."

In this way, Washington builds popular support for its own version of events and

resistance to the other side of the story. Unfortunately it is not a new trick in the U.S. playbook.

“The statesmen will invent cheap lies, putting the blame upon the nation that is attacked, and every man will be glad of those conscience-soothing falsities, and will diligently study them, and refuse to examine any refutations of them; and thus he will by and by convince himself the war is just, and will thank God for the better sleep he enjoys after this process of grotesque self-deception,” wrote Mark Twain.

So suddenly, after many years of an air-tight, anti-Russia campaign believed unquestioningly by hundreds of millions of Westerners, comes Steinmeier last week blurting out the most significant truth about Russia uttered by a Western official perhaps in decades.

“What we shouldn’t do now is inflame the situation further through saber-rattling and warmongering,” Steinmeier stunningly told *Bild am Sonntag* newspaper. “Whoever believes that a symbolic tank parade on the alliance’s eastern border will bring security is mistaken.”

Instead Steinmeier called for dialogue with Moscow. “We are well-advised to not create pretexts to renew an old confrontation,” he said, saying it would be “fatal to search only for military solutions and a policy of deterrence.”

In keeping with the U.S. propaganda strategy, the U.S. corporate media virtually ignored the remarks, which should have been front-page news. *The New York Times* did not report Steinmeier’s statement, but two days later ran a Reuter’s story only online leading with the U.S. military’s rejection of his remarks.

NATO General: Russia is No Threat

Just a day after Steinmeier was quoted in *Bild*, General Petr Pavel, chairman of NATO’s military committee, dropped another bombshell. Pavel told a Brussels press conference flat out that Russia *was not at a threat* to the West.

“It is not the aim of NATO to create a military barrier against broad-scale Russian aggression, because such aggression is not on the agenda and no intelligence assessment suggests such a thing,” he said.

What? What happened to Russian “aggression” and the Russian “threat?” What is the meaning then of the fear of Russia pounded every day into the heads of Western citizens? Is it all a lie? Two extraordinary on-the-record admissions by two men, Steinmeier, the foreign minister of Europe’s most powerful nation, and an active NATO general in charge of the military committee, both revealing that what Western officials repeat every day is indeed a lie, a lie that may be

acknowledged in private but would never before be mentioned in public.

Two years ago I was in a background briefing with a senior European ambassador at his country's U.N. mission in New York and could hardly believe my ears when he said talk about Russia's threat to Eastern Europe was "all hype" designed to give NATO "a reason to exist." Yet this same ambassador in public Security Council meetings would viciously attack Russia.

But the hype is about more than just saving NATO. The fear campaign feeds the American and European military industries and most importantly puts pressure on the Russian government, which the U.S. wants overthrown.

Were these remarks made out of the exasperation of knowing all along that the Russian threat is hype? Were they made out of genuine concern that things could get out of hand under reckless and delusional leaders in Washington leading to a hot war with Russia?

Neither man has been disciplined for speaking out. Does this signal a change in official German thinking? Will German businessmen who deal with Russia and have opposed sanctions against Moscow over Ukraine, which were forced on Germany by the U.S., be listened to?

Were Steinmeier's remarks a one-off act of rebellion, or is Germany indeed considering defying Washington on sanctions and regime change in Moscow? Is the German government finally going to act in Germany's own interests? Such a move would spark a European defiance of the United States not seen since the days when Charles de Gaulle pulled France out of NATO in 1966 to preserve French independence.

The last time European governments broke with Washington on a major issue was the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. Then France and Germany joined Russia on the U.N. Security Council in blocking the war's authorization (although Britain supported it). But France and Germany then voted for a resolution several months later that essentially condoned the invasion.

It's Up to the European Public

One has to ask whether a conditioned German public is ready to see through the lies about Russia. Last November, I flew from St. Petersburg to Berlin and discussed this very question with a number of well-educated Germans.

I had visited Russia for the first time since 1995, 20 years before to the month. Those were the days of the Yeltsin-Jeffery Sachs Russia, of the unbridled neoliberal capitalism of the Wall Street-oligarch alliance that plundered the country leaving millions of Russians destitute. Outside train stations I saw

homeless encampments replete with campfires. Policemen were stopping motorists for bribes. I ran from two men intent on robbing me until I lost them in a Metro station. That's the Russia the neocons in Washington and the knaves and buccaneers on Wall Street want to see again.

The Russia I saw in St. Petersburg and Moscow, 20 years later, was orderly and prosperous, as modern as any European city. It is a testament to Russia's resistance to American attempts to restore its political and financial control. Russia is a capitalist country. But on its own terms. It is fully aware of American machinations to undermine it.

In Berlin I met several Germans, educated, liberal and completely aware, unlike most Americans, of how the United States has abused its post-World War II power. And yet when I asked them all why there are still U.S. military bases in Germany 70 years after the war and 25 years after the Cold War ended, and who the Americans were protecting them from, the universal answer was: Russia.

History shows European fears of Russia to be completely overblown. Germany and other Western powers have invaded Russia three times in the last two centuries: France in 1812, U.S., Britain and France in the 1918 Russian Civil War, and Germany again in 1941. Except for Imperial Russia's incursion into East Prussia after war was declared on it in 1914, the reverse has never been true.

In his memoirs Harry Truman admitted that false fear of Russia was the "tragedy and shame of our time" during the Cold War that he had much to do with in part to revive the U.S. post-war economy with military spending. George Kennan, the State Department official who advised a non-military containment of the Soviet Union, conceded as early as 1947 that Soviet moves in Eastern Europe were defensive and constituted no threat. In the 1990s, Kennan also decried NATO's expansion towards Russia's borders.

With its vast natural resources, Russia has been the big prize for the West for centuries, and is still today in neocon-driven Washington. But Germany, especially, has benefited from trade with Russia and has no need to join the U.S. imperial project.

The British voters' decision, days after Steinmeier's extraordinary remark, could herald significant change in Europe, which may be approaching an historical junction in its relationship with the United States. Growing anti-E.U. sentiment has spread across the continent, including calls for similar referenda in several countries.

British voters evidently saw through the hype about the Russian "threat," as a majority did not buy British Prime Minister David Cameron's scare tactic ahead

of the vote that Brexit would make it harder to “combat Russian aggression.”

Britain has been called Washington’s Trojan horse in the E.U. The thinking is that without Britain, the E.U. would be freer to chart its own course. But as Alexander Mercouris explained [here](#), Obama bypasses London to call Merkel directly with his demands. Still, [removing](#) Britain’s voice from the E.U., though more crucially not from NATO, opens space for more independent voices in Europe to emerge.

“I worry that we will have less clout on our own,” former British Ambassador to the United States Peter Westmacott told *The New York Times*. “In the future, we won’t have as much influence on Europe’s response to Putin’s transgressions, Iran’s nuclear ambitions, or the E.U.’s foreign and security policy. ... And we will be less able to ensure it is U.S.-friendly.”

But that could be a good thing. If German leaders conclude the United States is pushing Europe into a disastrous war with Russia, could we see a Charles de Gaulle moment in Berlin? Merkel doesn’t seem to have it in her. Three days after Steinmeier’s remarks, she told a news conference she [favored](#) increased German spending for NATO to counter Russian “threats.”

Instead it will require a revolt by an awakened citizenry against the E.U. and elected European governments that refuse to stand up to Washington, mostly because it benefits their own class interests, to the detriment of the majority.

The Future of the EU

European social democracy had been probably the best social and political system ever devised on earth, maybe the best that is humanly possible. Europe could have been a model for the world as a neutral power committed to social justice. As late as 1988, Jacques Delors, then president of the European Commission, promised the British Trades Union Congress that the E.U. would be a “social market.”

Instead the E.U. allowed itself to be sold out to unelected and unaccountable neoliberal technocrats now in charge in Brussels. European voters, perhaps not fully understanding the consequences, elected neoliberal national governments slavishly taking Washington’s foreign policy orders. But Brexit shows those voters are getting educated. Unity is a great ideal but E.U. leaders have refused to accept that it has to benefit all Europeans.

The E.U.’s Lisbon Treaty is the only constitution in the world that has neoliberal policies written into it. If it won’t reform – and the arrogance of the E.U.’s leaders tells us it won’t – it will be up to the people of Europe to diminish or dismantle the E.U. through additional referenda. That would give

liberated European nations the chance to elect anti-neoliberal national governments, accountable to the voters, which can also chart foreign policies independent of Washington.

The danger is that the right-wing sentiment that has driven a large part of the anti-Establishment movements in Europe (and the U.S.) may elect governments that grow even closer to Washington and impose even harsher neoliberal policies.

That is a risk that may need to be taken in the hope that the anti-Establishment left and right can coalesce around shared interests to put an end to the elitist European project.

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The Brexit Rejection of Neoliberal Tyranny

With the Brexit repudiation of the E.U. – in defiance of Establishment scare tactics – British voters stood up for common people who face marginalization in the neoliberal scheme of global economics, explains John Pilger.

By John Pilger

The majority vote by Britons to leave the European Union was an act of raw democracy. Millions of ordinary people refused to be bullied, intimidated and dismissed with open contempt by their presumed betters in the major parties, the leaders of the business and banking oligarchy and the media.

This was, in great part, a vote by those angered and demoralized by the sheer arrogance of the apologists for the “remain” campaign and the dismemberment of a socially just civil life in Britain. The last bastion of the historic reforms of 1945, the National Health Service, has been so subverted by Tory and Labour-supported privateers it is fighting for its life.

A forewarning came when the Treasurer, George Osborne, the embodiment of both Britain’s *ancient regime* and the banking mafia in Europe, threatened to cut £30 billion from public services if people voted the wrong way; it was blackmail on a shocking scale.

Immigration was exploited in the campaign with consummate cynicism, not only by populist politicians from the lunar right, but by Labour politicians drawing on their own venerable tradition of promoting and nurturing racism, a symptom of corruption not at the bottom but at the top.

The reason millions of refugees have fled the Middle East – first Iraq, now Syria – are the invasions and imperial mayhem of Britain, the United States, France, the European Union and NATO. Before that, there was the willful destruction of Yugoslavia. Before that, there was the theft of Palestine and the imposition of Israel.

The pith helmets may have long gone, but the blood has never dried. A Nineteenth Century contempt for countries and peoples, depending on their degree of colonial usefulness, remains a centerpiece of modern “globalization,” with its perverse socialism for the rich and capitalism for the poor: its freedom for capital and denial of freedom to labor; its perfidious politicians and politicized civil servants.

Saying ‘No More’

All this has now come home to Europe, enriching the likes of Tony Blair and impoverishing and disempowering millions. On June 23, the British said “no more.”

The most effective propagandists of the “European ideal” have not been the far Right, but an insufferably patrician class for whom metropolitan London is the United Kingdom. Its leading members see themselves as liberal, enlightened, cultivated tribunes of the Twenty-first Century zeitgeist, even “cool.” What they really are is a bourgeoisie with insatiable consumerist tastes and ancient instincts of their own superiority.

In their house paper, the *Guardian*, they have gloated, day after day, at those who would even consider the European Union profoundly undemocratic, a source of social injustice and a virulent extremism known as “neoliberalism.”

The aim of this extremism is to install a permanent, capitalist theocracy that ensures a two-thirds society, with the majority divided and indebted, managed by a corporate class, and a permanent working poor.

In Britain today, 63 per cent of poor children grow up in families where one member is working. For them, the trap has closed. More than 600,000 residents of Britain’s second city, Greater Manchester, are, reports a study, “experiencing the effects of extreme poverty” and 1.6 million are slipping into penury.

Little of this social catastrophe is acknowledged in the bourgeois-controlled

media, notably the Oxbridge-dominated BBC. During the referendum campaign, almost no insightful analysis was allowed to intrude upon the clichéd hysteria about “leaving Europe,” as if Britain was about to be towed in hostile currents somewhere north of Iceland.

Dismissing ‘These People’

On the morning after the vote, a BBC radio reporter welcomed politicians to his studio as old chums. “Well,” he said to “Lord” Peter Mandelson, the disgraced architect of Blairism, “why do these people want it so badly?” The “these people” are the majority of Britons.

The wealthy war criminal Tony Blair remains a hero of the Mandelson “European” class, though few will say so these days. The *Guardian* once described Blair as “mystical” and has been true to his “project” of rapacious war. The day after the vote, the columnist Martin Kettle offered a Brechtian solution to the misuse of democracy by the masses.

“Now surely we can agree referendums are bad for Britain,” said the headline over his full-page piece. The “we” was unexplained but understood – just as “these people” is understood. “The referendum has conferred less legitimacy on politics, not more,” wrote Kettle, adding: “the verdict on referendums should be a ruthless one. Never again.”

The kind of ruthlessness for which Kettle longs is found in Greece, a country now airbrushed. There, they had a referendum against more austerity and the result was ignored. Like the Labour Party in Britain, the leaders of the Syriza government in Athens are the products of an affluent, highly privileged, educated middle class, groomed in the fakery and political treachery of post-modernism.

The Greek people courageously used the referendum to demand their government seek “better terms” with a venal status quo in Brussels that was crushing the life out of their country. They were betrayed, as the British would have been betrayed.

On Friday, the Labour Party leader, Jeremy Corbyn, was asked by the BBC if he would pay tribute to the soon-to-be-departed Cameron, his comrade in the “remain” campaign. Corbyn fulsomely praised Cameron’s “dignity” and noted his backing for gay marriage and his apology to the Irish families of the dead of Bloody Sunday.

Corbyn said nothing about Cameron’s divisiveness, his brutal austerity policies, his lies about “protecting” the Health Service. Neither did he remind people of the warmongering of the Cameron government: the dispatch of British special

forces to Libya and British bomb aimers to Saudi Arabia and, above all, the beckoning of World War Three.

Ignoring Russia's Memories

In the week of the referendum vote, no British politician and, to my knowledge, no journalist referred to Vladimir Putin's speech in St. Petersburg commemorating the seventy-fifth anniversary of Nazi Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. The Soviet victory – at a cost of 27 million Soviet lives and the majority of all German forces – won the Second World War.

Putin likened the current frenzied build up of NATO troops and war materiel on Russia's western borders to the Third Reich's Operation Barbarossa. NATO's exercises in Poland were the biggest since the Nazi invasion; Operation Anaconda had simulated an attack on Russia, presumably with nuclear weapons.

On the eve of the referendum, the quisling secretary-general of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg, warned Britons they would be endangering "peace and security" if they voted to leave the E.U. The millions who ignored him and Cameron, Osborne, Corbyn, Obama and the man who runs the Bank of England may, just may, have struck a blow for real peace and democracy in Europe.

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European Union's Imperial Overreach

Exclusive: The European Union's haughty and hasty expansion into low-wage Eastern Europe may be its undoing, as the Brexit vote shows popular resistance to the westward migration of workers that followed, writes Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

While few analysts are putting it this way, the European Union suffers from a self-inflicted crisis of overexpansion – a form of "imperial overstretch," if you will. The Brexit vote was just the latest symptom of this policy disaster, which also includes escalating confrontations with Russia and the ongoing crisis in Ukraine.

Public opinion polls in the United Kingdom established that widespread concern over immigration was the single most important factor driving voters to support an E.U. exit. Pro-Brexit campaigners made much of the statistics released just

last month that net annual migration into the U.K. reached a third of a million people in 2015, double the rate just three years earlier.

Such numbers fed public concerns over the impact of immigrants on the country's National Health System and other social services, as well as jobs. They also fed deep suspicions about government credibility.

As the *Guardian* reported after the stunning election victory for the Brexit camp, "David Cameron's failure to give a convincing response to the publication of near-record net migration figures in the first week of the EU referendum campaign has proved to be its decisive moment.

"The figure of 333,000 not only underlined beyond any doubt that Britain had become a country of mass migration but also meant politicians who claimed they could make deep cuts in the numbers while Britain remained in the European Union were simply not believed."

The influx of these newcomers had a deeper psychological effect on the public. "The British government's inability to control (intra-European) migration is seen as emblematic of a wider loss of control," wrote Oxford political theorist David Miller just before the election. "Many Britons feel that they are no longer in charge of their own destiny: 'Take back our country' is a slogan that resonates along the campaign trail."

E.U. Expansion and Immigration

Roughly half of immigrants to the U.K. in recent years have come from other E.U. countries, taking advantage of the association's fundamental commitment to the free movement of people. Their large numbers reflected the enormous expansion of the E.U. since 2004 – and the lure of Britain's relatively affluent economy to poor workers from newer members like Poland and Romania.

The E.U. – which actually has a commissioner for "enlargement" – has expanded relentlessly without heeding concerns from grassroots constituents of its traditional core members. In 2004, the E.U. absorbed Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia – all low-wage countries with much lower standards of living than the likes of Germany, France or the U.K. In 2007, it also took in Romania and Bulgaria.

Official statistics show that citizens of these newer and poorer E.U. members account for nearly a third of net migration into the U.K. in recent years.

Although many economists defend free labor movement as good for the economy overall, the result – like that of free trade with low-wage countries – can harm less-skilled workers.

In 2011, two unpublished reports commissioned by the Department of Communities and Local Government made that point.

One warned senior government officials that sharply rising immigration could “increase tensions between migrant workers and other sections of the community” during the country’s recession. Another noted a huge rise in immigrants settling unexpectedly in rural areas, and concluded they were having “a negative impact on the wages of UK workers at the bottom of the occupational distribution.”

“We under-estimated significantly the number of people who were going to come in from Eastern Europe,” conceded Ed Milliband, leader of the Labour Party.

“Economic migration and greater labour market flexibility have increased the pressure faced by those in lower skilled work.”

Ironically, many of the localities that voted most decisively for Brexit had relatively low migrant populations. But many of them are still suffering from economic austerity and sharp reductions in the social safety net imposed by the Conservative government since 2010.

“Switching the scapegoat from the government to the faceless migrant . . . is easier when people are scared for their livelihood, and more convenient for the politicians campaigning on both sides,” remarked the London-based writer Dawn Foster.

Voters were easily persuaded that “distant” and “faceless” E.U. bureaucrats just didn’t grasp their concerns. Indeed, the E.U. remains bent on continued expansion. It is currently in membership discussions with Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey, and recognizes Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo as potential members.

Russia and Ukraine

The E.U.’s expansionist drive has had other costly repercussions for Britain and the rest of Europe. One notable disaster was its drive for an “association agreement” with Ukraine, a wide-ranging treaty that included not only provisions for tight economic integration, but also a commitment over time to abide by the E.U.’s Common Security and Defense Policy and European Defense Agency policies. On both fronts, the agreement was designed to pull Ukraine out of its traditional Russian orbit.

The E.U.’s expansion into Ukraine, like its expansion into the rest of Eastern Europe, was paralleled by the expansion of the NATO military alliance into the same countries, contrary to promises by Western leaders to their Russian counterparts in 1990. In 2008, NATO’s secretary general – backed by President George W. Bush and presidential candidate Barack Obama – pledged that Ukraine

would be granted NATO membership.

Needless to say, Russia reacted badly, as it did to the E.U.'s later power play. It pressured the government of President Viktor Yanukovich to resist entreaties by NATO and the E.U. His refusal to break with Russia in turn triggered the so-called "Euromaidan" protests and the Western-backed putsch that ousted his government in February 2014.

Within a month, the new pro-European and pro-U.S. prime minister, Arseniy Yatseniuk, had signed the political provisions of the E.U. agreement. Just months later, he declared that he would seek NATO membership as well.

The result has been a bloody civil war in Eastern Ukraine; dangerous and costly military confrontations between Russia and NATO; and mutual economic sanctions that impoverish both Russia and the E.U.

Future historians will help us understand the underlying sources of the E.U.'s self-destructive expansion. No doubt they include some combination of ideological faith in the universality of European values, bureaucratic aggrandizement, and pandering to neo-liberal elites. Whatever the causes, the results now threaten the entire European project.

The E.U.'s future will require serious self-examination on many fronts, but especially about its grandiose ambitions for expansion.

Jonathan Marshall is author or co-author of five books on international affairs, including *The Lebanese Connection: Corruption, Civil War and the International Drug Traffic* (Stanford University Press, 2012). Some of his previous articles for Consortiumnews were "Risky Blowback from Russian Sanctions"; "The US Hand in the Syrian Mess"; "Hidden Origins of Syria's Civil War"; and "Israel Covets Golan's Water and Now Oil."

Gen. Breedlove, Strangelove-ian War Hawk

Ex-NATO Commander Breedlove was so bellicose toward Russia that the Germans objected to his dangerous provocations, but he is now strutting his stuff in hopes of landing a job in a Clinton-45 administration, says Gilbert Doctorow.

By Gilbert Doctorow

At this conclusive stage of the presidential campaign cycle, *Foreign Affairs* magazine is doing what it traditionally does, showcasing on its pages candidates

for appointive office in the cabinet of the next president whom the magazine's editorial board would like to see installed.

Thus, the current, July-August issue carries an article by Philip M. Breedlove, until recently Commander of the U.S. European Command and NATO's Supreme Allied Commander, Europe. His piece, entitled "NATO's Next Act" might more honestly be called "Why I Have Earned My Next Job as Secretary of Defense in the Administration of Hillary Clinton."

During his service in Europe, General Breedlove was never bashful about being a politicking military officer who was keen to pick a fight with Russia. He met with the press often, making newsworthy pronouncements about Russia's malevolent intentions and illegal actions that were unsupported by facts. Our European allies objected to Breedlove, stating openly that some of his allegations regarding Russian operations in Ukraine contradicted what their own intelligence services were reporting.

Indeed, on March 6, 2015, the *Spiegel Online* carried a story under a headline that says it all: "Breedlove's Bellicosity: Berlin Alarmed by Aggressive NATO Stance on Ukraine." At the time, it was believed that Breedlove was trying to sabotage the recently instituted cease-fire in Donbas and overturn the Minsk-2 Accords in favor of resumed fighting in which the U.S. would provide Kiev with lethal weapons. By this scenario, a full-blown proxy war with Russia would follow.

The purpose of the new essay in *Foreign Affairs* is, as I say, to spread the word on what Breedlove achieved in his three years on duty in Europe by turning NATO around and giving it a new/old calling. When he arrived, NATO was busy extricating itself from its failed campaigns out of region, in Afghanistan and Iraq, where it had faced unfamiliar challenges for which it was ill-equipped, fighting insurgencies and irregular troops.

On his watch, a new threat was seen emerging in Eastern Europe. In Breedlove's words, this took the form of a revitalized and aggressive Russia, seeking to reclaim its great power status and sphere of influence in post-Soviet space.

With its takeover of Crimea in March 2014 and involvement in the Donbas on behalf of Russian-speaking forces rebelling against the new Maidan government in Kiev, Russia demonstrated both defiance of the American-controlled New World Order and breathtaking military prowess. It thereby became a threat worthy of NATO's finest traditions as defender of "law and order" on the European home front.

Still more recent Russian action in Syria awakened Breedlove to the fact that

Russia's ambitions are global. In this context he now declares Russia, with its nuclear arsenal, to be an "existential threat" to the United States which must be met by superior force. After all, Breedlove tells us, force is all that the Kremlin understands.

After going through this pre-history, Breedlove explains exactly what we are doing now to strengthen NATO in Poland, the Baltic States and Romania/the Black Sea so as to be prepared to resist Russian aggression and deter its existential threat.

Upside-Down Narrative

Most everything is wrong with what Breedlove tells us in his article. It is a perfect illustration of the consequences of the monopoly control of our media and both Houses of Congress by the ideologists of the Neoconservative and Liberal Interventionist School. We see a stunning lack of rigor in argumentation in Breedlove's article coming from absence of debate and his talking only to yes-men.

Perhaps the biggest mistakes are conceptual: urging military means to resolve what are fundamentally political issues over the proper place of Russia in the European and global security architecture. Whereas for Clausewitz war was "a continuation of politics by other means," for Breedlove politics – in this case, diplomacy – do not exist, only war.

In this respect, Breedlove is merely perpetuating the stone deafness of American politicians dating back to Dmitry Medvedev's proposal in 2010 to negotiate an international convention bringing Russia in from the cold. The earnest offer of Russia's most Westernizing head of state in a hundred years was left without response.

Breedlove's entire recounting of what NATO is doing to stop a Russian threat to the Baltics and to Poland – through additional NATO boots on the ground and pre-positioned American heavy equipment fails – to mention, let alone explain what possible reason there might be for a Russian attack.

I contend that no realistic assessment of Russian national interest could justify their taking over the territories in question. The net result of any occupation could only be heavily negative due to hostile local populations even without considering its geopolitical consequences or retaliatory military and other action by the West.

Presumably the logic behind the assumption of Russian aggressive designs is illogic: the assumption of an insane Russian leadership. Such a line of thinking would be the direct fruit of the demonization of Vladimir Putin and of Russia

more generally that the U.S. media has disseminated gleefully, with encouragement from the Obama administration.

Breedlove's would-be boss in the Oval Office, Hillary Clinton, has likened the Russian ruler to Hitler. That obviates the need to examine rational calculations of your adversary.

Then there is Breedlove's totally wrong-headed conceptualization of what constitutes the world order that he says is under threat. In his understanding, the United State is, by definition, the sole supplier of public good to the world and everything that it initiates is selfless and right.

This self-righteousness begins with history, with the sequencing of who did what to whom, who honored and who violated international obligations, who is the aggressor and who is the victim. But this all comes down to one question: when did history start.

In Breedlove's reading of history, the narrative that counts and is relevant to where we are today all started with the Russian "invasion" of Crimea. The controversial overthrow of the legitimately elected President of Ukraine on Feb. 22, 2014, the day after France and Germany brokered an agreement between the government and opposition (for reduced presidential powers and early elections) does not exist in Breedlove's version of history. Nor, of course, does any other prior Western intervention in the intra-Ukrainian power struggle going back to the start of the Maidan demonstrations in December 2013.

This leaves us with the whole series of Russian reactions that he gives us without any reference to the missing actions by the U.S.-led West. There are other holes in Breedlove's logic through which you could drive a tank, if I may use metaphors from his domain of expertise.

Reassessing Russian Might

It is in a way refreshing to see Breedlove recognize (within limits) the newfound capabilities of the Russian military, which just several years ago were mocked by Western commentators, even by the occupant of the Oval Office.

Breedlove does underestimate the skills and equipment of the Russian air force and insists on the underlying military superiority of the U.S. and its NATO allies in the European theater. But, on balance, he asserts that today Russia poses an existential military threat to the United States. It would be nice if he finished the thought and explained exactly how and why (since Russia is not the only country with nuclear weapons and the ability to deliver them but like those other countries – China, for instance – has no rational reason to do so unless directly threatened).

In any case, what is the appropriate response to an existential threat? Do you recommend the continued rapid build-up of NATO forces precisely at Russia's Baltic and Black Sea borders to counter a perceived (though nonexistent) localized threat or do you address the existential threat by seeking to minimize tensions?

To date, and into the next five years, all of the U.S. and NATO measures which Breedlove describes and for which he takes credit have only unnerved the Russians and caused them to respond with equally provocative and dangerous counter-measures of a localized nature without in any way compromising their nuclear capability to wipe the United States off the map in any hot war.

Does this baiting the Russians near their borders make any sense? This was precisely the point that German Minister of Foreign Affairs Frank Walter Steinmeier has just called out in an interview published in *Bild am Sonntag* in which he speaks against any further saber-rattling by NATO in Poland or the Baltic States.

The seeming parallels between stepping up to the line today, and stepping up to the line in Berlin during the Cold War are illusory. The present line is not in a distant buffer zone which Joseph Stalin had created precisely for this purpose, to remove conflict from Russia's borders.

It is so threatening to Russia's survival that the Kremlin is now moving vast military resources from Central Russia into the Leningrad Oblast, within a very few miles of the new NATO presence just across the border in the Baltics. The time for either side to react to local military incidents has been shortened immensely compared to the past. This is a formula for Doomsday which Breedlove willfully ignores.

The \$3.4 billion expenditure, which President Obama has allocated to bring forward depots of American heavy equipment and key personnel to Poland, Romania and the Baltic States, recognizes the logistical disadvantage of NATO forces under the remote defense perimeter that extends to Russia's western and southern frontiers. But it cannot resolve this intractable disadvantage.

Territorial Disadvantage

It has been argued that a major factor that worked against Russian forces in World War I was logistical – the length of time it took Russia to move its men and equipment from the centers of population of the country hundreds if not thousands of kilometers away to its western borders where the fight against Germany was going on.

Today, the U.S. and NATO have placed themselves in exactly the same disadvantage

by seeking to fight Russia in a conventional war right where the Russians are concentrating the bulk of their strength and where NATO can at best only position "trip wire" forces having symbolic, not actual military defensive value.

The best that NATO can propose, it would seem, is to snatch the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad (the clear mission of the Anakonda-16 games now going on in Poland) in case the Russians occupied the Baltic States (within the 60 hours or so that a recent Rand Institute study suggests is feasible).

However, as President Putin has stated clearly, such encroachment on Russian soil will unleash a nuclear response from Russia that will include missile attacks on the mainland USA, i.e. not limited to the European theater.

Finally, let's consider another absurdity in General Breedlove's letter setting out his candidacy for a cabinet position. He repeats, parrot-like, the position of the Obama administration and of putative Democratic candidate for President Hillary Clinton that we can selectively cooperate with Russia on issues of common interest like counter-terrorism, Pacific fishing rights (!) and the like even as we remain engaged in a life-or-death scramble for position on the ground in Europe.

In fact, the U.S. effort to totally isolate Russia by cutting off many, perhaps most of its bilateral programs of cooperation with the country have worked precisely to defeat cooperation, none more grievously so than in the area of fighting terrorism.

Meanwhile, what amounts to American encouragement of the Islamic State and Al Qaeda's Nusra Front in Syria by pressing for the overthrow of the Russian-backed regime of Bashar al-Assad continues to this day under the guise of protecting the "moderate opposition" that happens to be embedded among the jihadist "bad guys."

The fairy tales coming from Washington should not fool anyone, but Breedlove passes them along to his readers in the smug expectation that they will accept whatever he utters.

By lending its valuable "real estate" to the campaign for a high-level appointment by one of the most outspoken Cold Warriors within the U.S. military, the editorial board of *Foreign Affairs* magazine has shown yet again that it is incapable of guarding its own neutrality or balance.

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