

New Cold War Feeds War Machine

The apparent madness in the Obama administration starting a new Cold War with Russia and China makes sense if viewed from the perspective of the Military-Industrial Complex, which must justify ever-larger budgets, as Chuck Spinney explains.

By Chuck Spinney

Today, America's foreign policy is a shambles. Its primary features are (1) a perpetual war on terror, and (2) the seemingly inevitable march into a new and unnecessary Cold War against Russia and China.

At the same time, President Obama is leaving his successor with a budget plan containing a front-loaded and political-engineered procurement bow wave that guarantees steeply rising defense expenditures well into the next decade and possibly beyond. Such long term increases in the defense budget can only be justified by a new cold war. [For explanations on loading and political engineering, see my 1990 pamphlet Defense Power Games]

Yet the United States now spends far more on the military than any other country. Add in the expenditures of our allies, and the spending advantage over any conceivable combination of adversaries becomes overwhelming. Nevertheless, U.S. citizens are more fearful than they were during the Cold War, and politicians and the yellow journalism of the mainstream media are hyping those fears to a greater extent than they did during the Cold War. What is going on?

Most pundits and policy-makers who debate this dismal state of affairs subscribe to the view that fixing foreign policy is the first step toward getting control of the Pentagon and ultimately reducing defense budgets. In their view, the top priority should be to re-define our foreign policy goals (hopefully in accordance with the criteria for a sensible grand strategy, although these criteria are seldom examined in a systematic way).

The redefined grand strategic goals would then form a basis for defining a rational military strategy to meet these goals. Once the strategy is settled upon by the policy elites, the drones in the Pentagon can define the force structure to meet the strategy. That force structure would then provide the template against which the budgeteers can define the budget decisions needed to build and maintain the forces necessary to execute the strategy. QED.

This neat comforting top-down viewpoint conveys the illusion of control. It plays well in the high-brow salons of Versailles on the Potomac, the halls of Congress, and among the elitist punditocracy in the mainstream media and the

ivory tower think tanks of Washington. But history shows this logic does not work.

The logic has been repeated ad nauseam by policy wonks on the left and right since the dawn of the Cold War in 1950. Yet for all their handwringing about strategy-budget mismatches, the policy wonks refuse to recognize the obvious: Since 1962, the Pentagon's formal planning system – the Planning, Programming, and Budgeting System (PPBS) – is a set of bureaucratic procedures designed precisely in accordance with their sacred top-down logic. Yet the PPBS has failed repeatedly to link budgets to forces and strategy (for reasons I explained [here](#) and [here](#)).

A Money-Eating Organism

The simple-minded idea that foreign policy (i.e., grand strategy) drives strategy and shapes force structures and budgets simply does not work in the real world. And the reason is fundamental: the Military – Industrial – Congressional Complex (MICC) is *not* a top-down mechanistic phenomenon that *responds* predictably to this kind of naive control theory.

The MICC is more accurately thought of as a synthetic (bottom-up) living culture that *creates* its own political-economic ecology. Part of that ecology is the MICC's corrupting effects on domestic politics. President Eisenhower's [prophetic warning](#) about the rise of misplaced power hinted at but did not delve into the reasons for the living nature of this political-economic ecology.

It is now 54 years later, and the MICC has evolved into a deeply entrenched, bewildering variety of ever changing goal-seeking factions, each fighting for money and power in a game of very messy domestic politics. These factions are loosely self-organized (via revolving doors, for example) into [iron triangles](#) that grow and decay over time.

These factions compete with each other or make temporary alliances of convenience in their efforts to acquire money and power (as I explained [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)). Put another way, the MICC is fundamentally a bottom-up living, evolving political-economic *organism*, and it produces its own peculiar ecology.

It is made up of self-organizing factions in which the pursuit of each faction's individual goals create combined effects that can be thought of as the MICC's emergent properties. There is simply no way the sterile top-down logic described above can cope with the MICC's ever-evolving power games and unpredictable work-arounds.

Or as Colonel John R. Boyd, a fighter pilot, aircraft designer and strategist, has observed: “People say the Pentagon does not have a strategy. They are wrong; the Pentagon does have a strategy. It is: Don’t interrupt the money flow, add to it.”

Boyd’s quote pithily sums up the output of the game, and the MICCs players are now hell-bent on starting a new Cold War as the only way to achieve its factional ambitions. We will not fix this problem posed by the MICC until we come to grips with its elemental nature.

[For more on this topic, see a recent [essay](#) by my good friend Andrew Cockburn, who brilliantly elaborates on Boyd’s point and the apparent disconnect between strategy and budgets. I say “apparent disconnect” because the MICC has a real strategy, and like all effective strategies, it is not obvious.]

Chuck Spinney is a former military analyst for the Pentagon who was famous for the “Spinney Report,” which criticized the Pentagon’s wasteful pursuit of costly and complex weapons systems.

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.

Gilbert Doctorow is the European Coordinator of The American Committee for East West Accord Ltd. His most recent book, *Does Russia Have a Future?* was published in August 2015. © Gilbert Doctorow, 2016

A Peace Journey to Russia

The dangers from a new Cold War between the U.S. and Russia have prompted American peace activists to reach out to the Russian people and to fellow Americans to urge a step back from the cliff, as Kathy Kelly describes.

By Kathy Kelly

Since 1983, Sharon Tennison has worked to develop ordinary citizens' capacities to avert international crises, focusing on relations between the U.S. and

Russia. Now, amid a rising crisis in relations between the U.S. and Russia, she has organized a delegation which assembled in Moscow for a two-week visit. I joined the group on Thursday, and happened to finish reading Sharon Tennison's book, *The Power of Impossible Ideas*, when I landed in Moscow.

An entry in her book, dated Nov. 9, 1989, describes the excitement over the Berlin Wall coming down and notes that "prior to the Wall's removal" U.S. leaders "assured Secretary General Gorbachev that if he would support bringing down the Wall separating East and West Berlin, NATO would not move 'a finger's width' closer to Russia than East Germany's border. With this assurance Gorbachev gladly signed on.

"Little could he or the world have guessed that this promise would soon be broken ... and that the redeveloping distrust between the countries would threaten to become a second Cold War, due to NATO's expansion up to Russia's borders."

Today, NATO and U.S. troops will conclude 10 days of military exercises, Anaconda, on Russia's western border, involving 31,000 troops. The operation was named after a snake that kills by crushing its prey. Ongoing deployment of 4,000 additional NATO troops has been announced. U.S. and South Korean military exercises just completed at the Demilitarized Zone between North and South Korea were dubbed "Decapitation" and mobilized 320,000 troops.

Conn Hallinan, in "Bear Baiting Russia," notes that "Russia has two bases in the Middle East and a handful in Central Asia. The U.S. has 662 bases in foreign countries around the world and Special Forces (SOF) deployed in between 70 and 90 countries at any moment. Last year SOFs were active in 147 countries. The U.S. is actively engaged in five wars and is considering a sixth in Libya. Russian military spending will fall next year, and the U.S. will out-spend Moscow by a factor of 10. Who in this comparison looks threatening?"

Mutual Learning

It's important for U.S. people to learn more, from ordinary Russian people, about their responses to troop build-ups and new bases on their borders, threatening military exercises, and antagonistic arsenals of nuclear weapons on high alert. As President Vladimir Putin begins summoning a new Russian National Guard that could include 400,000 troops, it's important to hear how Russian people feel about this development.

Rather than foster cartoonized versions of foreign policy, the U.S. media should help people recognize complexity in Russian society and include awareness of desires to live in peace on the part of people in both countries.

U.S. people committed to peace-making might help ordinary Russians sense the

complexity of U.S. society and better understand how U.S. military spending and build-up toward war adversely affects civil society in the U.S.

Suppose someone in Russia were to ask me what I was doing before coming to Russia. In honesty, I'd explain that in the previous week, companions and I finished a 150-mile walk to a Supermax prison in my home state of Illinois which could eventually subject 1,900 people to tortuous years of solitary confinement, doubling the number of such cells in the U.S. Like the military-industrial complex in the U.S., the prison-industrial complex is now rooted in government salaries and corporate profits, and it's hard to uproot it.

Before joining the walk, I lived for several weeks in late May and early June with young volunteers in Kabul who long to "live without war." Fifteen years into the U.S. war in Afghanistan, the U.S. has "succeeded" in creating conditions for ongoing war.

NATO and U.S. officials claim that their military exercises in countries around the world will enhance international security, but those of us who are members of the delegation here in Russia believe that it's essential to swiftly reverse the present trend toward Cold Wars with Russia and China.

Delusions of Domination

The fantasy of world domination endangers people throughout the world and within the U.S. as people again shudder over the possibility of war between nuclear-armed powers.

Dmitri Babich, an active journalist for over 25 years focusing on Russian politics, said it's important to name the problem we face, and he believes the fundamental problem is the U.S. insistence on being institutional supremacists, – exceptionalists.

In other words, the policy fantasy that stands in the way of addressing major world problems cooperatively is the idea that the United States can retain and expand the boundaries of "sole superpower" domination. United States policy should stop poking and provoking Russia and China along their frontiers, and instead seek negotiated peaceful coexistence.

Missiles fitted with thermonuclear warheads and on battle-ready status are unstable, and, at any time, can result in the catastrophic destruction of cities on both sides, and even the ending of civilized life on earth.

With active cooperation among the great powers and large reductions in wasteful competitive military spending, all countries could cooperatively address the threats from climate change, water shortages, regional underdevelopment, and

economic pressures caused by population growth.

Ordinary people everywhere should do all that we can to demand that all international disputes be resolved by non-military means, avoiding all wars and achieving the deactivation of all nuclear weapons.

Sharon Tennison's work to develop citizen-to-citizen diplomacy, since 1983, suggests that people could work together to tackle such problems. But, informed public opinion in the U.S. and in Russia will be crucially needed.

My friend Brad Lyttle, a lead organizer of and participant in the "San Francisco to Moscow Walk" (1960 -1961) recently wrote to President Obama that there is no reason why the U.S. and Russia should continue to jeopardize the very existence of the human species with their huge nuclear arsenals.

"Work with President Putin to reduce and eliminate these," wrote Lyttle. "Emphasize a trustful and positive approach. Don't assume that the future needs always to be as bad as much of the past."

Kathy Kelly (Kathy@vcnv.org) co-coordinates Voices for Creative Nonviolence
www.vcnv.org

Bridging Divides of a New Cold War

As NATO steps up military maneuvers near Russia's borders and congressmen fume about "Russian aggression," a delegation of Americans including former U.S. officials is looking for face-to-face ways to encourage peace, writes Ann Wright.

By Ann Wright

I just flew across 11 time zones – from Tokyo, Japan to Moscow, Russia. Russia is the largest country in the world, covering more than one-eighth of the Earth's inhabited land area, nearly twice as large as the United States and has extensive mineral and energy resources, the largest reserves in the world. Russia has the world's ninth largest population with over 146.6 million people. The population of the U.S. of 321.4 million is more than twice as large as Russia's.

I haven't been back to Russia since the early 1990s when the Soviet Union dissolved itself and allowed 14 new countries to be created from it. At the time I was a U.S. diplomat and wanted to be a part of the historic opening of U.S.

Embassies in one of the newly formed countries. I asked to be sent to a new country in Central Asia and soon found myself in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

Since the new embassies were being logistically supported out of the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, I was fortunate to make frequent trips to Moscow in the short three months I was in Uzbekistan until the permanent Embassy staff was assigned. Several years later in 1994, I returned to Central Asia for a two-year tour in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan and again made trips to Moscow.

Over almost 25 years since the Cold War ended, Russia has undertaken a monumental shift from state-operated institutions to privatized businesses with the Russian Federation joining the G20, the Council of Europe, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the World Trade Organization.

But now the U.S./NATO and Russia are engaged in a 21st Century new Cold War complete with large military "exercises" in which a small misstep could bring actual war.

On June 16, I will join a group of 19 US citizens and one from Singapore in Moscow, Russia. We are going to Russia to do what we can to continue bridges of peace with the Russian people, bridges that our governments seem be having difficulty maintaining.

With international tensions high, members of our delegation believe its time for the citizens of all nations to loudly declare that military confrontation and hot rhetoric are not the way to resolve international problems.

Our group is composed of several retired U.S. government officials and persons representing peace organizations. As a retired U.S. Army Reserve Colonel and former U.S. diplomat, I join retired CIA officer Ray McGovern and retired Deputy National Intelligence Officer for the Middle East and CIA analyst Elizabeth Murray. Ray and I are members of Veterans for Peace and Elizabeth is the member-in-residence of Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action. The three of us are also members of the Veterans Intelligence Professionals for Sanity.

Long-time peacemakers Kathy Kelly of Voices for Creative Non-Violence; Hakim Young of Afghan Peace Volunteers; David and Jan Hartsough of the Quakers, Nonviolent Peaceforce and World Beyond War; Martha Hennessy of the Catholic Workers movement; and Bill Gould, former national president of Physicians for Social Responsibility are just a few of the delegates on this mission.

The delegation is led by Sharon Tennison, the founder of the Center for Citizen Initiatives (CCI). Over the past 30 years, Sharon brought thousands of Americans

to Russia and over 6,000 young Russian entrepreneurs to 10,000 companies in over 400 American cities in 45 states. Her book *The Power of Impossible Ideas: Ordinary Citizens' Extraordinary Efforts to Avert International Crises*, is the remarkable story of bringing citizens of the U.S. and Russia together in each other's country for better understanding and peace.

In the tradition of going where our governments do not want us to go to witness the effects of the breakdown of non-violent approaches to conflict resolution, we will be meeting with members of Russian civil society, journalists, businesspersons and perhaps government officials to express our commitment to non-violence, not war.

The Russian people know well the carnage caused by war, with over 20 million Russians killed during World War II. Although not on the same scale as Russian deaths, all too many U.S. military families know the agony of injuries and deaths from World War II, the Vietnam War and the current wars in the Middle East and Afghanistan.

We go to Russia to talk with the Russian people about the hopes, dreams and fears of the American people and to call for a peaceful resolution to current tensions between the US/NATO and Russia. And we will return to the United States to share our first-hand impressions of the hopes, dreams and fears of the Russian people.

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

The US-Russia Info-War: What's Real?

The Obama administration is dangling the possibility of real peace progress in Ukraine to convince the Europeans to renew sanctions on Russia, but is that just a bait-and-switch trick to keep Europe in line, asks Gilbert Doctorow.

By Gilbert Doctorow

The ongoing information war between Russia and the U.S.-led West creates moments that are paradoxical if not downright confusing. But confusion may be the prime objective of both sides, following the old maxim: if you cannot convince,

confuse. But confusion can be dangerous, too.

This week, National Security Adviser Susan Rice expressed hope that the Ukraine crisis could be resolved by the time President Barack Obama leaves office on Jan. 20, 2017, citing redoubled efforts by U.S., French and German officials to complete implementation of the Minsk-2 agreement signed in February 2015.

“This is something that could get done between now and the end of the administration if the Russians in particular exhibit sufficient political will,” Rice said at a Washington Post event. “We are hopeful if the Russians want to resolve this – and we have some reason to believe they might – we have the time and the wherewithal and the tools to do so.”

Though Rice’s comments got scant attention in the U.S. news media, Russians picked them up presumably because they offer hope of an end to anti-Russian sanctions before the end of Obama’s term. But was Rice serious or was she just dangling some false optimism to ensure that the European Union doesn’t disrupt this supposed peace progress by failing to renew sanctions against Russia that are otherwise set to expire at the end of June?

The timing for this optimistic prediction from one of Obama’s closest advisers on security matters was well chosen to influence opinions within the E.U. in the next couple of weeks when the 28 Member States take a decision whether or not to extend the present sanctions for another six months.

After all, the thinking would go, if the pressure on Russia has brought the Kremlin to the point of implementing fully the Minsk-2 terms, why let up. Rice’s overture seems especially designed to shut up Hungary, Italy and most recently France, countries that have raised their voices in recent weeks. These waverers have suggested that the sanctions deserve an open discussion now and that some softening should be implemented without delay.

The underlying assumption in Rice’s statement is that Washington can break the deadlock on the Ukrainian side that has held up progress on implementation of Minsk-2, namely the passage through the Rada (Ukraine’s parliament) of laws for holding elections in the breakaway republics of the Donbass expected in July. However, given the present configuration of power in Kiev, nationalist radicals are in a position to block any meaningful concessions.

Russia’s Wishful Thinking

Meanwhile, the wavering within Europe has been wildly exaggerated, partly with the help of the self-deluding Russian media which gave intensive coverage to the near unanimous vote earlier this week by the French Senate to soften sanctions, thereby putting both houses of the French legislature on record as opposing the

policy of President Francois Hollande and the E.U. leadership to punish Russia over Ukraine. By contrast, French major media largely overlooked the vote in its own Senate.

These alternative interpretations of what's important and what isn't also influence the people of both Russia and the West. This pattern of contradictory emphasis is not propaganda in the classic sense, but it has the effect of muddling minds and contributing to the misreading by one side of the other.

That, in turn, can contribute to very real dangers. The West insists that NATO's war games, code-named Anaconda, very close to Russia's borders are simply intended to deter "Russian aggression." But these largest maneuvers since the Cold War are rehearsing, we are told, the capture of Russia's Kaliningrad enclave.

So, Moscow sees the West threatening Russia by expanding NATO right up to Russia's border, placing anti-ballistic missiles in Romania, and orchestrating the 2014 coup in Ukraine that installed a virulently anti-Russian regime.

This divergence of opinion about who's threatening whom creates genuine – not just theoretical – danger. And the last thing we need at this moment is muddled minds.

Gilbert Doctorow is the European Coordinator of The American Committee for East West Accord Ltd. His most recent book, *Does Russia Have a Future?* was published in August 2015. © Gilbert Doctorow, 2016

Sleepwalking Toward Catastrophe

Because the mainstream U.S. media remains neocon-dominated, there has been little rational debate about the risks of stumbling into nuclear war with Russia, as James W Carden writes.

By James W Carden

One question that the no-doubt intrepid debate moderators of the forthcoming Republican and Democratic debates might bestir themselves to ask the remaining candidates is: Given the fact that the U.S. and Russia are now circling one another on the Black Sea, in Ukraine, and in the skies over Syria, it is possible that policymakers are not completely alive to the risks inherent in such maneuverings?

The question is well worth asking since the world balance in 2016 is not only dangerous, it carries risks far in excess to the last time the great powers accidentally stumbled, into catastrophe. After all, unlike in the summer of 1914, today, *all* the great world powers have nuclear weapons. A brief consideration of The Great War reveals startling parallels with the situation that obtains today.

In the days immediately following the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand no one could have imagined what was ahead – and this points to a lesson that is still very relevant today: that in international affairs the intentions of other nation-states are essentially unknowable. As such, the pre-war status quo collapsed under the weight of that uncertainty.

What followed stands as a vivid example of what the political scientist Robert Jervis has called “the security dilemma.” This posits that when a state undertakes measures to increase its security, those measures will inevitably be seen as offensive rather than defensive by other states, who will then take counter-measures to increase their own security, and so on. In other words, so-called “defensive” weapons are not seen as “defensive” in the eyes of the states against which they are aimed.

As the eminent scholar of Europe, Professor David Calleo, has written, the Germans didn’t see themselves as aggressors. “The Imperial Germans,” he writes, “maintained they were waging war for defensive purposes, they were protecting their national unity from the wrath of the French who were determined to undo it.” The Entente Powers saw things differently.

It is also instructive to note the way democratic societies behaved in the run-up to the First World War. Today, well-funded and influential think tanks endlessly promote the idea that the U.S. ought to engage in a crusade to promote democracy abroad because “democracies don’t fight each other.” Yet the Great War puts the lie to that assertion, especially when you consider that the voting franchise in Germany was more inclusive than America’s at the time.

Democratic peace theory also purposefully ignores one of democracy’s principal problems: that when it comes to war, its citizens are prone to fall prey to a mob mentality. And a mob mentality and a war fever is exactly what gripped the democracies in Europe in the run-up to the Great War.

In an editorial published a week before hostilities broke out, *The Nation* magazine reported that: “In Vienna, in Paris, in Berlin, in St Petersburg, there were signs of acute mania affecting large bodies of people. Mob psychology often shows itself in discouraging and alarming forms, but is never so repulsive and appalling as when it is seen in great crowds shouting for war. Lest we forget

indeed – about nothing does the mob forget so quickly as about war.”

The editorial went on to conclude: “If one looked only at these surface manifestations, one would be tempted to conclude that Europe was about to become a gigantic madhouse.”

Professor Calleo recounts that after Chancellor of Germany, Bethmann-Hollweg, was deposed, he wrote that he too saw the role of public opinion as “the crucial element – how else to explain the senseless and impassioned zeal which allowed countries like Italy, Rumania, and even America not originally involved in the war, no rest until they too had immersed themselves in the bloodbath?”

Today’s rush, likewise senseless and impassioned, to restart the Cold War is largely a product of the mutual admiration society that has sprung up between the Pentagon, hawkish administration officials, and their unscrupulous admirers in the media.

The propaganda churned out by Washington’s ‘military-media-think tank complex’ would have been all too familiar to the poets Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, both of whom served on the front lines of the Great War in France.

Owen’s poem “Dulce et Decorum est” was written at the front in 1917 and describes the death of a fellow soldier who had been gassed by the Germans. In the poem’s final stanza, Owen directly addresses a civilian war propagandist back in England, telling him that if he had seen first-hand the horrors of war:

“My friend, you would not tell with such high zest

To children ardent for some desperate glory,

The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est Pro patria mori

It is sweet and right to die for your country”

Owen was killed at the front a week before the Armistice was signed. His friend Sassoon survived. Unlike Owen, Sassoon lived a long life and produced some of the best known anti-war literature of the day.

At the front he produced what may be his most memorable offering, *Suicide in the Trenches*, in which he too castigated the hearty band of war propagandists cheering from the sidelines:

“You smug faced cowards with kindling eye

Who cheer as soldier lads march by

Sneak home and pray you’ll never know

The Hell where youth and laughter go”

One can't help but wonder what Owen and Sassoon might have made of the legions of armchair generals and assorted foreign policy hangers-on who make up the ever expanding ranks of the New Cold Warriors in Washington today.

James W Carden is a contributing writer for The Nation and editor of The American Committee for East-West Accord's eastwestaccord.com. He previously served as an advisor on Russia to the Special Representative for Global Inter-governmental Affairs at the U.S. State Department. [This article is adapted from a lecture given to students at the Moscow State University in February.]

Hearing the Russian Perspective

The neocons and liberal hawks who dominate the U.S. foreign policy and media establishment are pushing the world toward a nuclear showdown with Russia as few people hear a comprehensive response from the other side, an imbalance that a new Russian documentary addresses, writes Gilbert Doctorow.

By Gilbert Doctorow

Without mincing words, the new Russian documentary *World Order* is a devastating critique of U.S. global hegemony justified in the name of “democracy promotion” and “human rights” ever since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1992.

It is directly in line with Russian President Vladimir Putin's first repudiation of the American unipolar world issued in his speech to the Munich Security Conference in February 2007 and his further, ever more explicit exposés in a succession of speeches that challenged specific manifestations of “American exceptionalism.”

World Order, which is now [posted](#) on YouTube (in Russian) and at [another site](#) (with English subtitles), illustrates through graphic footage and the testimony of independent world authorities the tragic consequences, the spread of chaos and misery, resulting from U.S.-engineered “regime change” and “color revolutions,” of which the violent overthrow of the Yanukovich regime in Ukraine in February 2014 is only the latest example. (Some of the highlights from Putin's interview are translated into English [here](#) and [here](#).)

The title of the film follows on Putin's address to the 70th anniversary gathering of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015 which had as its central message that world order rests on international law, which in turn

has as its foundation the UN Charter.

By flouting the Charter and waging war without the sanction of the UN Security Council, starting with the NATO attack on Serbia in 1999 and continuing with the invasion of Iraq in 2003 up to its illegal bombings in Syria today, the United States and its NATO allies have shaken the foundations of international law.

As set out in *World Order*, Putin's identification of the root cause of the failure to bring the U.S. back to reason lies not in given individuals, like Barack Obama or George W. Bush, but in the mentality of Western, and in particular American elites formed by their impunity, their ability to walk away from the catastrophes their policies create without any feeling of responsibility, without being held to account. Their evasion of responsibility and failure to learn from error come from being the richest and militarily most powerful nation on earth.

World Order presents dramatic evidence of the brutality which flows from American policies when functioning if flawed states are converted into failed states through color revolutions, as has happened across the Middle East and North Africa since the new millennium. We are shown Saddam Hussein's final moments before execution, then the denunciation of this judicial murder by Muammar Gaddafi before a laughing audience of Arab League deputies, then the barbaric mob murder of Gaddafi himself followed by the exultant face of Hillary Clinton after this triumph of U.S. foreign policy.

We also listen to Gaddafi's detailed prediction of the vast flood of refugees and spread of jihadists in North Africa that would follow should his regime be toppled. And we are given video footage from the 2015 refugee flows into Europe with their mob scenes at state borders that bear out those warnings.

Diverse Points of View

The foreign interviewees in *World Order* comprise an impressive and diverse selection of leaders in various domains, including American film director Oliver Stone; Thomas Graham, former National Security Council director for Russia under George W. Bush and current managing director at Kissinger Associates; former IMF Director Dominique Strauss-Kahn; former Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf; former French Foreign Minister Dominique Villepin; former Israeli President Shimon Peres; Wikileaks founder Julian Assange; and deputy leader of the Die Linke party in the German Bundestag Sahra Wagenknecht. Others, like UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, put in cameo appearances.

Strauss-Kahn, Musharraf and others charge that the U.S. plots against and destroys foreign leaders who dare to oppose America's total control over global

flows of money, goods and people. Wagenknecht addresses the question of Germany's subservience to American *Diktats* and its de facto circumscribed sovereignty. The statements support Putin's long-standing argument, reiterated in the film, that the Western European allies of the U.S. are nothing more than vassals.

Vladimir Putin's closing remarks about the place of nuclear arms in Russia's military doctrine must not be played down. Saying aloud that Russia has not and will not brandish its nuclear truncheon, is, in effect, doing just that. All of this is of one piece with the way Russia's aerospace forces have conducted their attacks in Syria on the Islamic State and on the armed opposition to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad these past two months.

The use of heavy bombers flying 15,000 kilometers from the Kola Peninsula, in northwest Russia along the Arctic Circle, with the help of night-time in-flight refueling; the use of cruise missiles fired from frigates in the Caspian Sea at distances of 1,300 km to targets in Syria; and the use of cruise missiles launched from Russian submarines in the Mediterranean have all had a political dimension far exceeding military necessity in the Syrian theater: they demonstrate Russia's capability of waging global war, including global nuclear war. These actions are also depicted in the film.

Is *World Order* propaganda? It most certainly is. Is it directed primarily at the Russian domestic audience, as the *Telegraph* newspaper insists? No. Like all of Putin's foreign policy addresses, whether delivered abroad or at home, as in the Valdai Discussion Club, whether issued with subtitles in English or not, its primary audience is in Washington, D.C. with a secondary audience in Brussels.

One may suppose that the purpose is not to touch off or accelerate an arms race but, on the contrary, to bring the other side to its senses and persuade it of 1) Russia's seriousness about defending militarily what it sees as vital national interests and 2) its ability to deliver massive destruction to an enemy even in the face of a possible first nuclear strike, and so to reinstate the Mutually Assured Destruction deterrence that America's global missile defense was supposed to cancel out.

However, in *World Order*, Putin lists several areas of common concern over which Russia is prepared to cooperate with the West. Indeed these very same prospective areas of cooperation come up repeatedly in the public writings and speeches of the relatively few "fighters for peace" who are trying to draw the world community back from the brink into some kind of *détente*.

Dangerous Clash

Yet, pulling that raisin out of cake is to seriously misunderstand the very clear message coming out of Russia: that the destruction of world order by U.S.-led “democracy promotion” and its spread of “universal values” will not be tolerated and that Russia has set down certain red lines, such as against NATO expansion into Ukraine or Georgia over which it will fight to the death using all its resources. We ignore these messages at our peril.

As we enter the U.S. presidential electoral season and a vast number of foreign policy and military advisers are emerging to give counsel to the candidates on relations with Russia and other major powers in the hope of securing high posts in the next U.S. administration, it is worth looking again at the lessons of the summer and autumn of 2008, when what became the “reset” policy was formulated, through April 2009 when its implementation began.

That initiative took shape the last time that the United States and Russia were on a course of confrontation leading straight to armed conflict. The context was the Russian-Georgian war and the deployment of U.S. naval forces off the coast of Abkhazia, poised to attack the nearby Russian ground forces.

The imminent threat of war and the ongoing campaigning for presidential elections in November formed a nexus of circumstances not very dissimilar from where we are today when U.S. and allied air forces compete for space in the skies above Syria with a substantial Russian force that includes fighters, bombers and the most advanced air-defense system in the Russian arsenal.

I have set out the origins of the reset policy in the 15-page chapter entitled “Obama Changes US-Russian Relations” in my 2013 book *Stepping Out of Line* to which I refer the reader for full details. Here I will limit myself to several key facts and conclusions as they bear on our present situation.

First among these key facts was the mobilization of America’s political and scientific elites to bring about a change in U.S. foreign policy that would take us back from the brink of war. Many of the names which came into play then are once again being summoned by the fighters for peace to weigh in on the side of the angels.

The problem is that those who had created the conventional wisdom about the role of the U.S. in the world were ill-prepared to go beyond tinkering at the edges of that wisdom, resulting in the failure of reset to go to the heart of the dispute with Russia and ultimately this led to many tears of regret all around.

An Incomplete Reset

The starting point of what became the “reset” was the founding on Aug. 1, 2008, of the Commission on U.S. Policy Toward Russia under the aegis of former

Senators Chuck Hagel (Republican) and Gary Hart (Democrat), setting the bipartisan course of the initiative. It had as its backers the Nixon Center in Washington, a think tank whose Honorary Chairman was former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. It was also supported by the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, a research center within the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

Members included former U.S. ambassadors to the USSR or Russia James Collins, Jack Matlock and Thomas Pickering as well as former National Security Council or Defense Department officials and top business leaders, such as the former chairman of the world's largest insurance company, Maurice Greenberg. Among those who worked closely with the Commission either inside or outside were former Secretary of State George Schultz, former Defense Secretary William Perry and former Senator Sam Nunn.

Ultimately the Commission issued a 17-page report entitled "The Right Direction for U.S. Policy toward Russia" which contained many of the points taken up in the papers outlining reset which President Obama's delegation signed off with the Russians when they met in London on April 1, 2009, on the sidelines of the first summit meeting between Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev.

The centerpiece of "reset" as defined in the state papers signed in London was renewal of the 1994 Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (START) that was scheduled to expire in December 2009. It also called for organizing "contacts between our two governments in a more structured and regular way." And it went on to urge greater cooperation between societies: more cultural exchanges, student exchanges, scientific cooperation, and cooperation among NGOs.

START renewal was established as a priority of the Obama administration's overall foreign policy, which called for stopping and reversing deployment of nuclear arms and enforcing non-proliferation. In the end, that objective was achieved. But in the end, that achievement did nothing to prevent the outbreak of a new arms race and ever greater risk of nuclear war among the great powers that we see today.

A major reason for this failure was the timidity of those calling for a new policy on Russia. The report from the Commission assumed continuing U.S. hegemony in world affairs. It stood by the policy of continuing expansion of NATO membership, including to Ukraine and Georgia, and the only concession was to slow down the timetable. It called for the continued roll-out of the global missile defense shield.

While the authors urged ending U.S. restrictions on trade with Russia and its admission to the World Trade Organization, they nonetheless espoused the

conventional wisdom on the dangers of Russia's dominant position as energy supplier to Europe and came out in favor of building gas pipelines to Europe skirting Russian territory and thereby diversifying Europe's energy supplies at Russia's expense.

A New Security Architecture

The overriding Russian concern for a new security architecture to be put in place in Europe that would bring them in from the cold received a sympathetic if noncommittal response from the Commission. The proposals in this regard put forward by President Medvedev in April 2008 should be formally reviewed, they said, but without any specific recommendations.

With respect to "democracy promotion" in Russia, the Commission members called for the volume of criticism of Russia to be turned down. They also called for a show of decency by Americans in their dealings with Russia.

Aside from the new strategic arms reduction treaty, Obama's reset came to naught.

It bears stressing that today's situation is more threatening than in 2008. Against a background of shrill Information Warfare between Russia and the West, the denigration of the Russian leadership and of the country in general by the occupant of the Oval Office and by leading members of Congress has advanced to levels unequalled in the worst days of the Cold War.

Meanwhile Russia's strategic military capabilities in both nuclear and conventional warfare have advanced incredibly from the levels of 2008 when Western military observers expressed their satisfaction that the performance of the Russian military did not seem much improved over the days of the ill-fated Afghan war that brought down the Soviet Union. Today, if we are to escape from the cycle of "resets" from bitter disappointment over souring of relations after a few landmark fruits of cooperation and then the onset of new, heightened risks of nuclear war we must seize the nettle and resolve to address the underlying problems of international relations that the Russian leadership cite, most recently in the documentary film *World Order*.

DÃ©tente, i.e., relaxation of tensions and improved atmospherics, is only a good beginning, nothing more.

It's worth noting that the film's director and co-author is one of the most intelligent and fair-minded presenters on Russian television, Vladimir Soloviev, who is best known today for prime-time evening debates on hot domestic and international issues in which the "other side," whether Ukrainian or American or the Russian opposition parties in the Duma, is always present in what amounts at

times to astonishing openness of discussion on live television, when it does not descend into shouting matches.

Soloviev has a Ph.D. in economics from the Institute of World Economics and International Relations of the USSR Academy of Sciences. He was an active entrepreneur in the 1990s and spent some time back then in the U.S., where his activities included teaching economics at the University of Alabama. If he is the author of propaganda, one can be certain it is sophisticated and serves certain philosophical and ethical values, not individuals or power for power's sake.

The documentary was released by the state broadcaster *Pervy Kanal* on Dec. 20.

Gilbert Doctorow is the European Coordinator, American Committee for East West Accord, Ltd. His latest book *Does Russia Have a Future?* (August 2015) is available in paperback and e-book from Amazon.com and affiliated websites. For donations to support the European activities of ACEWA, write to eastwestaccord@gmail.com. © Gilbert Doctorow, 2015
