

# The Flaw in 'Cornering' Russia

Official Washington, including its compliant mainstream media, paints Moscow as the "black hat" in the Ukraine crisis but the fuller picture would show that the supposed U.S. "white hats" are the ones who have violated the deal that ended the Cold War, writes ex-CIA analyst Melvin A. Goodman.

By Melvin A. Goodman

Twenty years ago, the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union marked a virtual end to the long-standing military and ideological threat that Moscow represented to the United States.

Yet, instead of "anchoring" Russia to the political and economic architecture of the Western alliance system, which George F. Kennan's "containment doctrine" endorsed, successive U.S. administrations have not only kept the Kremlin at arm's length but have drawn the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) closer to Russia itself. This is central to the current crisis over Crimea.

In expanding NATO, the United States has been guilty of betraying a guarantee that Secretary of State James Baker gave to Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze in 1990, when the United States stated that it would not "leapfrog" over East Germany to place U.S. military forces in East Europe in the wake of the Soviet military withdrawal from Germany.

The administrations of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush ignored that commitment when the United States sponsored the entry of eight former Warsaw Pact members as well as three former Soviet Republics into NATO. The Obama administration, meanwhile, appears ignorant of the geopolitical context of its foreign policies, which have not taken this betrayal into account in the Crimean crisis.

President Clinton seemingly had no appreciation of the great difficulty involved in Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's acceptance of the unification of Germany and German membership in NATO in view of Russian historical memories and huge World War II losses. One of the few sources of Soviet pride in foreign policy was the Soviet defeat of the German Wehrmacht, which was the key to the U.S. and British victory on the Western front. Three-fourths of the German Army fought on the Eastern front, and three-fourths of German losses took place on the Eastern front.

U.S. diplomats and academics, particularly those with expertise in European policy and the Soviet Union such as George Kennan, made a valiant effort to convince President Clinton that the expansion of NATO was bad strategic policy. Even members of the administration, including Secretary of Defense

William Perry, tried to dissuade the President from his strategic blunder. In using military power against Serbia in the late 1990s, Clinton seemed to have no idea of the long historical ties between Russia and Serbia.

President Bush made further significant contributions to the alienation of the new Russian leadership by sponsoring NATO membership for former Soviet Republics (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania); abrogating the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, which was the cornerstone of strategic deterrence; and deploying a national missile defense system in California and Alaska.

The Bush administration's disdain for multilateral diplomacy and arms control, as well as its reliance on the use of force, particularly the unnecessary war against Iraq, angered the Russian leadership as well as many European leaders. President Bush explained that national missile defense as well as the regional missile defense in East Europe would not be aimed at Russia, but rather the "world's least-responsible states," which the President did not name. Of course, no one in the Kremlin believed him.

While a warning to Russia, the Bush administration was a welcome relief to the neoconservative community. The appointment of right-wing ideologues who brandished a deep animosity to the Russian state included Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretaries of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Robert Gates, CIA Director Porter Goss as well as such Pentagon luminaries as Douglas Feith, William Luti, and Abram Shulsky.

In his memoir *Duty*, Gates prides himself for opposing any improved relations with Russia, since "making the Russians happy wasn't exactly on my to-do list." During meetings with his Russian military counterparts, Gates passed a childish and churlish note to Secretary of State Condi Rice stating "I'd forgotten how much I really don't like these guys." President Bush even favored the expansion of NATO into Ukraine and Georgia, and U.S. military support for Georgia played a significant role in the five-day war between Russia and Georgia in 2008.

President Obama initially received some credit for pushing the "reset" button in relations with Russia, but it was soon obvious that the button was simply symbolic and that no effort was being made to institutionalize bilateral relations. The Obama administration also ignored Secretary of State Baker's verbal commitment against "leapfrogging" over a united Germany by basing U.S. fighter jets in Poland as well as favoring the deployment of a sophisticated regional missile defense in Poland and the Czech Republic. He is using the Crimea crisis to base additional fighter jets in Poland and is considering the expansion of fighter patrols over the Baltic States.

At present, there is no U.S. ambassador in Russia, and Secretary of State John Kerry has been holding talks with his Russian counterpart without any senior Russian experts at his side. The intemperate remarks of Kerry's assistant secretary of state for European affairs last month as the crisis in Kiev was worsening speaks to the lack of diplomatic experience at Foggy Bottom.

During the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, a former U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union played a key role in convincing President John F. Kennedy that, if the United States gave Moscow some diplomatic room, the Kremlin would find a way to withdraw its missiles and bombers from Cuba and thus avoid a military confrontation.

In the Crimean crisis, President Obama seems to be unnecessarily accommodating the right-wing criticism of his administration from politicians and pundits instead of finding a diplomatic solution to the current imbroglio. If the United States offered guarantees against the further expansion of NATO and invited Russia to take part in a multilateral economic aid program for beleaguered Ukraine, then it is possible that President Vladimir Putin would find a way to lower the Russian military presence in the Crimea.

In the meantime, the U.S. reliance on modest military steps, travel bans and economic sanctions will not bring any favorable change to the situation on the ground in Crimea. These steps will only worsen the crisis in the Ukraine and ensure that the United States and Russia cannot discuss important geopolitical matters on arms control and disarmament, nonproliferation and counter-terrorism, which finds them essentially in agreement.

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## Crimea's Case for Leaving Ukraine

**Exclusive:** Virtually everyone in Official Washington is condemning Russian "aggression" in Ukraine and demanding a belligerent U.S. response to Crimea's desire to secede and join Russia, as a new Cold War hysteria grips U.S. pols and pundits, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

If you were living in Crimea, would you prefer to remain part of Ukraine with its coup-installed government – with neo-Nazis running four ministries including the Ministry of Defense – or would you want to become part of Russia, which has had ties to Crimea going back to Catherine the Great in the 1700s?

Granted, it's not the greatest choice in the world, but it's the practical one facing you. For all its faults, Russia has a functioning economy while Ukraine really doesn't. Russia surely has its share of political and financial corruption but some of that has been brought under control.

Not so in Ukraine where a moveable feast of some 10 "oligarchs" mostly runs the show in shifting alliances, buying up media outlets and politicians, while the vast majority of the population faces a bleak future, which now includes more European-demanded "austerity," i.e. slashed pensions and further reductions in already sparse social services.

Even if the U.S.-backed plan for inserting Ukraine into the European Union prevails, Ukrainians would find themselves looking up the socio-economic ladder at the Greeks and other European nationals already living the nightmare of "austerity."

Beyond that humiliation and misery, the continuing political dislocations across Ukraine would surely feed the further rise of right-wing extremists who espouse not only the goal of expelling ethnic Russians from Ukraine but Jews and other peoples considered not pure Ukrainian.

This troubling racist element of the "inspiring" Ukrainian uprising has been mostly airbrushed from the U.S. media's narrative, but more honest sources of news have reported this disturbing reality. [For instance, watch [this report from the BBC.](#)]

### **What's Wrong with Secession?**

And, despite what you hear from the U.S. government and the mainstream U.S. media, it's not at all uncommon for people to separate themselves from prior allegiances.

It's especially common amid political upheavals, like Ukraine's neo-Nazi-spearheaded coup that ousted elected President Viktor Yanukovich after he signed an agreement on Feb. 21 to relinquish much of his power, hold early elections and order police to withdraw.

Though this agreement was co-signed by European nations, they stood aside when

neo-Nazi militias exploited the police withdrawal and overran government buildings, forcing Yanukovich and many government officials to flee for their lives.

Then, under the watchful eye of these modern-day storm troopers, the rump parliament “impeached” Yanukovich but did not follow the procedures laid out by Ukraine’s constitution. The overthrow was, in reality, a putsch.

But American political leaders and journalists have pretty well expunged that inconvenient history, making the crisis simply a case of black-hatted villain, Russian President Vladimir Putin, bullying the white-hatted “pro-democracy” coup-making heroes of Ukraine.

U.S. politicians and pundits now cite the Ukrainian constitution as some sacred document as they argue that Crimea has no right to hold a popular referendum on leaving Ukraine and joining the Russian Federation. President Barack Obama says a Crimean plebiscite would be illegitimate unless Crimea gets permission to secede from the national government in Kiev as stipulated in the constitution.

In other words, the Ukrainian constitution can be violated at will when that serves Official Washington’s interests, but it is inviolate when that’s convenient. That situational view also presumes that some normal constitutional process exists in Kiev when one doesn’t.

### **More Hypocrisy**

This U.S. government/media hypocrisy on the Crimean vote is underscored, too, by Official Washington’s frequent role in advocating and even mid-wifing secession movements when they correspond with U.S. foreign policy interests.

Fifteen separate nations emerged from the Soviet Union’s collapse in 1991 as U.S. politicians celebrated. No one seemed to mind either when Czechoslovakia split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993.

That same decade, U.S. officials helped negotiate the dissection of Yugoslavia into various ethnic enclaves. Later in the 1990s, the U.S. government even bombed Serbia to help Kosovo gain its independence, despite centuries of deep historical ties between Serbia and Kosovo.

In 2011, the U.S. government supported the creation of South Sudan, carving this new oil-rich nation out of Sudan. The supposed motive for breaking South Sudan loose was to stop a civil war, although independent South Sudan has since slid into political violence.

The Obama administration disputes allegations of U.S. hypocrisy about

secessions, calling these comparisons “apples and oranges.” But the truth is that all secession cases are unique, a balance of history, pragmatism and politics. Very seldom are they simple and clear-cut.

In Crimea, the case for secession from Ukraine seems strong: Crimea is populated mostly by ethnic Russians; many people speak Russian; and they have historically viewed themselves as part of Russia. If a large majority of the voters prefer joining Russia, why shouldn't they?

Perhaps the case for Crimea's secession would have been weaker if the Western nations hadn't so eagerly embraced the putsch in Kiev. If the Feb. 21 agreement had been enforced clearing the way for Yanukovich's orderly departure Obama's argument might make more sense. The constitutional procedures would have remained intact.

But the haste with which Washington and Brussels recognized the coup government with Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland's choice for Ukraine's leadership, neoconservative favorite Arseny Yatsenyuk, named interim prime minister shattered the formal political process of Ukraine.

That was followed by the post-coup rump parliament passing measures, often unanimously, that targeted the political security of ethnic Russians in the country's east and south. Combined with threats from the neo-Nazis who have grabbed significant power and favor a purified Ukraine for ethnic Ukrainians, the nation confronts a potential civil war.

In such a case with the prospects of ethnic cleansing and the violence that would surely follow the most reasonable solution might well be to hold referenda in Crimea and in eastern Ukraine on whether the people in those areas want to stay attached to the Kiev regime. If the people in those regions want independence or association with Russia, why should the United States ratchet up a new Cold War to prevent that?

If what's left of Ukraine wants to join the European Union – and if the EU would want it – then those Ukrainians could vote for their future, too.

Democracy means little if populations are compelled to remain part of an undemocratic regime that has seized power in the capital by force and demonstrates hostility toward outlying regions. Since such a predicament now exists in Ukraine, the best-imperfect solution could be to dispatch international observers to Crimea to monitor the plebiscite and verify whether the popular vote fairly reflects the people's will.

[For more of Consortiumnews.com's exclusive coverage of the Ukraine crisis, see [“The ‘We-Hate-Putin’ Group Think”](#); [“Putin or Kerry: Who's Delusional?”](#);

[“America’s Staggering Hypocrisy”](#); [“What Neocons Want from Ukraine Crisis”](#);  
[“Ukraine: One ‘Regime Change’ Too Many?”](#); [“A Shadow US Foreign Policy”](#);  
[“Cheering a ‘Democratic’ Coup in Ukraine”](#); [“Neocons and the Ukraine Coup.”](#)]

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, *America’s Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). For a limited time, you also can order Robert Parry’s trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America’s Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).

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## Biased US Media Attacks RT ‘Bias’

U.S. mainstream news media, which routinely shuts out journalists and analysts who question the righteousness of American interventionism, is now targeting the presence of RT as a Russian-financed alternative news source in Washington, writes Danny Schechter.

By Danny Schechter

James Kirchick is just the sort of *neutral* reporter the Daily Beast would assign to report on the ideological controversy surrounding the Russian-backed RT-TV Channel’s coverage of the crisis in the Ukraine. The Beast lives up to its name by sending a hardcore polemical ideologue to uncover what he predictably labels as ideological media bias.

Kirchick is a veteran of the anti-communist wars, now revived as the anti-Putin wars, not some neutral journo crusading for democracy. According to Wikipedia, he is a [fellow](#) with the [Foundation for Defense of Democracies](#) in Washington, prior to this he was writer-at-large for [Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty](#). He is a graduate of the New Republic and Murdoch’s Weekly Standard and writes for Azure, a magazine that described itself as pro-Zionist and free market.

Okay, just so we know who are dealing with here. And now, to bolster his “credibility” he presents himself as a victim in his latest article that exposes himself, far more than his target, asserting that his rights as a journalist were somehow compromised because of a gutsy quest for truth. Here’s his exhibit:

â€¢**The Headline:** “Watch RT, Putin’s TV Network, Call the Cops on Me”

â€¢**The Lead:** “That’s what happens, it seems, when you ask some simple questions

outside RT's Washington headquarters."

â€¢**The Polemic:** "What would possess an American to work for a Russian propaganda outlet, especially now that the world is on the brink of a potential war in Eastern Europe? I asked that question of about two dozen people coming in and out of the Washington headquarters of RT, the Kremlin-funded television network that has become infamous in recent days for whitewashing Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine. No one would answer me directly. Instead, RT called the local cops on me."

Kirchik's first story in his jihad against RT was to interview Anchor Liz Wahl who resigned flamboyantly on the air denouncing the channel she worked for and making her an instant *shero* among Russia-bashers the world over. Wahl offered up sweet innocence laced with the veneer of red, white and blue patriotism.

"I'm very lucky to have grown up here in the United States," she said. "I'm the daughter of a veteran. My partner is a physician at a military base where he sees every day the first-hand accounts of the ultimate prices that people pay for this country. And that is why personally I cannot be part of a network that whitewashes the actions of Putin. I am proud to be an American and believe in disseminating the truth and that is why after this newscast I'm resigning."

Cue the National Anthem! Funny, after her declaration of independence and stogy pledge to quit was broadcast on a network that could have cut her off none other than former Rep. Ron Paul, whose interview with Wahl she claimed RT had censored, denied it, saying, "I don't think it was slanted in any way."

Earlier, another RT on-air personality, Abby Martin, also denounced Putin's Ukraine policy on the air but was not fired and did not quit. Later, she turned up debating the fairness and objectivity of most American TV with Piers Morgan on CNN, a network considered by some critics as an "American propaganda outlet."

In an article about Martin in National Journal, Lucia Graves wrote, "While it's clear the [RT] network maintains a strong pro-Russian bias, Glenn Greenwald on Tuesday defended RT's coverage, saying it isn't so different from what we saw on American media outlets in the lead up to the Iraq War."

"For all the self-celebrating American journalists and political commentators: Was there even a single U.S. television host who said anything comparable to this in the lead up to, or the early stages of, the U.S. invasion of Iraq?" he wrote.

Back to Mr. Kirchick's heroism in defense of democracy! Watch the video of how he posed some of his "simple" questions to RT employees outside their office.

What you see is a wise-guy provocateur harassing people entering the building with hostile, if not nasty and self-righteous questions, in an argumentative and aggressively hostile manner. RT later challenged this image-building exercise of the “man who is not afraid of Putin” with a denial that they called the cops, an “update” that the Daily Beast tacked on to their story.

“RT America did not contact the DC police at any point,” Anna Belkina said in a statement. “The building’s security personnel called in the police after an intruder has been reported inside the building. The police questioned Mr. Kirchick as part of the investigation of that incident.”

Kirchick’s shouted out questions were there to call attention to himself, and score political points, and not to challenge the network that actually offers programs with views that are more diverse than on any U.S. TV news channel. It features programs with Tom Hartmann and even Larry King, both of whom deny they have been censored.

As an occasional commentator on RT News myself, I can and have said the same. I am not surprised that the networks I once worked for ABC, CNN and CNBC never have me on, while BBC, RT, Press TV and Saudi TV, among others, feature my commentaries without telling me what to say.

Kirchick is less bothered by what gets on RT than that it exists at all, and especially because the network has built an audience among Americans disgusted by how controlled and manipulated most U.S. media outlets are.

His real target are RT’s viewers who he bitterly denounces as a “species,” perhaps because they are looking for information you never find on the Daily Beast or many of the outlets he whores for as a self-styled “objective newsman.”

Listen to this: “RT has become the go-to network for a particular species of disillusioned American, fed-up with what the ‘corporate media’ is telling them about the world.” He doesn’t waste any putdowns either from an arsenal of vituperative broadsides and even get this denounces RT employees as “slovenly.” He then rants on to share what may have been his Yale-bred elitism about his perception of the people the network interviews that includes politicians and commentators of all stripes.

“RT, both in its employment and viewership,” he writes, “seems to attract a particular type of person. You know the man who writes political chain emails IN ALL CAPS or the bag lady shouting on the street corner about the metal device the government has implanted in her head? Under normal circumstances, no one would give them a television show. But these are the people who appear on, and watch, RT.”

Oh, really another round of clichés to keep the truth from getting in the way of his preconceived perceptions. Now, now, feel better Mr. Kirchick, time to take your medication, before you melt down, or stir up more hatred and animosity for people who lack your years of slimy experience as a media warrior in the service of a neocon empire.

MR KIRCHICK? Oh, you have more to say?

“For the past 9 years, RT has provided steady paychecks and frequent media appearances to a veritable insane asylum of the great unwashed and unemployable dredges of the American fringe.”

Whew, I am glad he got that out of his system, until tomorrow, of course, when he will find another way of cursing without cursing, while showcasing superiority to those of us in that other sub-human “species.” Now, let me get back to my Rolling Stones record:

*I'll never be your beast of burden*

*I'll never be your beast of burden*

*Never, never, never, never, never, never, never, never be*

Also, by the way, do I need to say that I am not a Putin booster, my father was a veteran, I have pledged allegiance to the flag many times, and wrote two books and made a film about media miscoverage of the Iraq War. My critique was based, in part, in my own experience in network TV.

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## Explaining US Hypocrisy on Ukraine

U.S. government hypocrisy toward the Ukraine crisis has been breathtaking, as has the U.S. press corps' stubborn refusal to see the hypocrisy (i.e. the Iraq War and many other U.S. interventions). William Blum looks at the reasons behind the double standards.

By William Blum

When it gets complicated and confusing, when you're overwhelmed with too much information, changing daily; too many explanations, some contradictory try putting it into some kind of context by stepping back and looking at the larger,

long-term picture.

The United States strives for world domination, hegemony wherever possible, their main occupation for over a century, it's what they do for a living. The United States, NATO and the European Union form The Holy Triumvirate.

The Holy Triumvirate has subsidiaries, chiefly The International Monetary Fund, World Bank, World Trade Organization, International Criminal Court all help to keep in line those governments lacking the Holy Triumvirate Seal Of Approval: the IMF, WB, and WTO impose market fundamentalism, while foreign leaders who act too independent are threatened with being handed over to the ICC for heavy punishment, as the United States imposes sanctions on governments and their leaders as only the King of Sanctions can, lacking any sense of hypocrisy or irony.

And who threatens United States domination? Who can challenge The Holy Triumvirate's hegemony? Only Russia and China, if they were as imperialistic as the Western powers. (No, the Soviet Union wasn't imperialistic; that was self-defense; Eastern Europe was a highway twice used by the West to invade; tens of millions of Russians killed or wounded.)

Since the end of the Cold War the United States has been surrounding Russia, building one base after another, ceaselessly looking for new ones, including in Ukraine; one missile site after another, with Moscow in range; NATO has grabbed one former Soviet Republic after another.

The White House, and the unquestioning American mainstream media, have assured us that such operations have nothing to do with Russia. And Russia has been told the same, much to Moscow's continuous skepticism.

"Look," said Russian president Vladimir Putin about NATO some years ago, "is this is a military organization? Yes, it's military. Is it moving towards our border? It's moving towards our border. Why?" [*Guardian Weekly* (London), June 27, 2001]

The Holy Triumvirate would love to rip Ukraine from the Moscow bosom, evict the Russian Black Sea Fleet, and establish a U.S. military and/or NATO presence on Russia's border. (In case you were wondering what prompted the Russian military action.)

Kiev's membership in the EU would then not be far off; after which the country could embrace the joys of neo-conservatism, receiving the benefits of the standard privatization-deregulation-austerity package and join Portugal,

Ireland, Greece and Spain as an impoverished orphan of the family; but no price is too great to pay to for being part of glorious Europe and the West!

The Ukrainian insurgents and their Western-power supporters didn't care who their Ukrainian allies were in carrying out their coup against President Viktor Yanukovich last month thugs who set policemen on fire head to toe all manner of extreme right-wingers, including Chechnyan Islamic militants [RT.com, Moscow/Washington, DC, March 1, 2014] a deputy of the ultra-right Svoboda Party, part of the new government, who threatens to rebuild Ukraine's nukes in three to six months. [Deputy Mikhail Golovko, RT, March 1, 2014] the snipers firing on the protestors who apparently were not what they appeared to be A bugged phone conversation between Urmaz Paet, the Estonian foreign minister, and EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, reveals Paet saying: "There is now stronger and stronger understanding that behind the snipers it was not Yanukovich, but it was somebody from the new coalition." [RT, March 5, 2014, "The EU's Ukraine policy and moral bankruptcy"; the phone conversation is believed to have taken place Feb. 26.] neo-Nazi protesters in Kiev who have openly denounced Jews, hoisting a banner honoring Stepan Bandera, the infamous Ukrainian nationalist who collaborated with the German Nazis during World War II and whose militias participated in atrocities against Jews and Poles.

The Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* reported on Feb. 24 that Ukrainian Rabbi Moshe Reuven Azman advised "Kiev's Jews to leave the city and even the country." Edward Dolinsky, head of an umbrella organization of Ukrainian Jews, described the situation for Ukrainian Jews as "dire" and requested Israel's help.

All in all a questionable gang of allies for a dubious cause; reminiscent of the Kosovo Liberation Army thugs Washington put into power for an earlier regime change, and has kept in power since 1999.

The now-famous recorded phone conversation between top U.S. State Department official Victoria Nuland and the U.S. ambassador to the Ukraine, wherein they discuss which Ukrainians would be to Washington's liking in a new government, and which not, is an example of this regime-change mentality. Nuland's choice, Arseniy Yatseniuk, emerged as interim prime minister.

The National Endowment for Democracy, an agency created by the Reagan administration in 1983 to promote political action and psychological warfare against states not in love with U.S. foreign policy, is Washington's foremost non-military tool for effecting regime change.

The NED website lists 65 projects that it has supported financially in recent years in Ukraine. The descriptions NED gives to the projects don't reveal the fact that generally their programs impart the basic philosophy that working

people and other citizens are best served under a system of free enterprise, class cooperation, collective bargaining, minimal government intervention in the economy, and opposition to socialism in any shape or form. A free-market economy is equated with democracy, reform and growth; and the merits of foreign investment in their economy are emphasized. [NED 2012 Annual Report]

The idea was that the NED would do somewhat overtly what the CIA had been doing covertly for decades, and thus, hopefully, eliminate the stigma associated with CIA covert activities. Allen Weinstein, who helped draft the legislation establishing NED, declared in 1991: "A lot of what we do today was done covertly 25 years ago by the CIA." [Washington Post, Sept. 22, 1991]

NED, receives virtually all its financing from the U.S. government, but it likes to refer to itself as an NGO (Non-governmental organization) because this helps to maintain a certain credibility abroad that an official U.S. government agency might not have. But NGO is the wrong category. NED is a GO. Its long-time intervention in Ukraine is as supra-legal as the Russian military deployment there.

Journalist Robert Parry has observed: "For NED and American neocons, Yanukovich's electoral legitimacy lasted only as long as he accepted European demands for new 'trade agreements' and stern economic 'reforms' required by the International Monetary Fund. When Yanukovich was negotiating those pacts, he won praise, but when he judged the price too high for Ukraine and opted for a more generous deal from Russia, he immediately became a target for 'regime change.'"

Thus, we have to ask, as Mr. Putin asked "Why?" Why has NED been funding 65 projects in one foreign country? Why were Washington officials grooming a replacement for President Yanukovich, legally and democratically elected in 2010, who, in the face of protests, moved elections up so he could have been voted out of office not thrown out by a mob?

Yanukovich made repeated important concessions, including amnesty for those arrested and offering, on Jan. 25, to make two of his adversaries prime minister and deputy prime minister; all to no avail; key elements of the protesters, and those behind them, wanted their *putsch*.

Carl Gershman, president of NED, wrote last September that "Ukraine is the biggest prize." [Washington Post, Sept. 26, 2013] The man knows whereof he speaks. He has presided over NED since its beginning, overseeing the Rose Revolution in Georgia (2003), the Orange Revolution in Ukraine (2004), the Cedar Revolution in Lebanon (2005), the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan (2005), the Green Revolution in Iran (2009), and now Ukraine once again. It's as if the Cold War never ended.

The current unbridled animosity of the American media toward Putin also reflects an old practice. The United States is so accustomed to world leaders holding their tongue and not voicing criticism of Washington's policies appropriate to the criminality of those policies, that when a Vladimir Putin comes along and expresses even a relatively mild condemnation he is labeled Public Enemy Number One and his words are accordingly ridiculed or ignored.

On March 2, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry condemned Russia's "incredible act of aggression" in Ukraine (Crimea) and threatened economic sanctions. "You just don't in the 21st century behave in 19th century fashion by invading another country on completely trumped up pretext." ["Face the Nation", CBS, March 2, 2014]

Iraq was in the 21st century. Sen. John Kerry voted for it. Hypocrisy of this magnitude has to be respected.

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## The Sanctions Madness on Russia

Official Washington is in full meltdown mode as politicians and pundits frantically one-up each other in over-the-top rhetoric on the Ukraine crisis. But now the madness is shifting into legislative excesses to sanction Russia, notes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

Seventeen years ago, Richard Haass, now president of the Council on Foreign Relations, wrote an article titled "Sanctioning Madness." The crux of his argument was:

"With a few exceptions, the growing use of economic sanctions to promote foreign policy objectives is deplorable. This is not simply because sanctions are expensive, although they are. Nor is it strictly a matter of whether sanctions 'work'; the answer to that question invariably depends on how demanding a task is set for a particular sanction. Rather, the problem with economic sanctions is that they frequently contribute little to American foreign policy goals while being costly and even counterproductive."

Haass was not saying to give up sanctions entirely. But they should not be the go-to tool, reached for habitually and unthinkingly, to address any foreign policy problem under the sun.

The American sanctions habit has not lessened at all during the intervening years, especially on Capitol Hill. Now Congress is getting out its sanctions pen yet again to see what it can do to Russia in response to the Crimean crisis. This may be an even clearer indication of the sanctions addiction than the recent unsuccessful effort to impose more sanctions on Iran, given that the latter move was more of a calculated attempt to sabotage an ongoing negotiation.

The multiple drawbacks and limitations of economic sanctions are too infrequently considered before sanctions are enacted. These include issues of who exactly in the target country will be hurt and who might actually benefit. They also include consideration of counterproductive political reactions, including resistance to be seen buckling under pressure.

The costs, including economic costs, to ourselves of sanctions we impose are insufficiently acknowledged. In some situations trade patterns are such that the costs to ourselves may be minimal, but in those circumstances, and for that very reason, the desired impact on the target country is likely to be minimal as well.

This may be the case with Russia today, with which the European Union has much more trade than the United States. Unilateral U.S. sanctions are thus likely to be ineffective with regard to Russia, while being needlessly disruptive to cooperation and common purpose with regard to the Europeans. Of course, any policy conducted with an attitude of "f-- the E.U." is not likely to be swayed by that concept.

The most important shortcoming to how sanctions tend to be used is a failure to link them carefully to the behavior we would like to see on the part of the target government. This means being very clear about exactly what it is to which we want the other side to say yes. It also means being clear in our own minds how the sanctions fit into an overall set of incentives and disincentives that will make saying yes seem more attractive than the alternative.

Ask someone pushing for sanctions against Russia today what they are intended to accomplish, and the answer is likely to be an end to Russian military occupation of Crimea. But that concept needs clarification, given that a reversal of moves made over the past week would still leave a Russian military presence on the peninsula by virtue of previous treaties and base leases.

Needed also is a more complete package of understandings with the Ukrainians on

matters of interest and concern to Russia, ranging from Ukraine not joining NATO to the status of the Russian language within Ukraine. It is unlikely that Russian military withdrawals will take place in the absence of some such understandings. It is thus unlikely U.S. sanctions would do any good unless carefully integrated into such a larger package.

The sanctions habit has persisted because imposing sanctions is a primitive, easy way to “do something” about difficult problems on which there is an urge to do something. It is a gesture. Congress needs to decide whether gestures are more important than making progress in getting out of the current crisis.

**Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency’s top analysts. He is now a visiting professor at Georgetown University for security studies. (This article first appeared as a [blog post at The National Interest’s Web site](#). Reprinted with author’s permission.)**

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## Putin or Kerry: Who’s Delusional?

**Exclusive:** Official Washington and its compliant mainstream news media operate with a convenient situational ethics when it comes to the principles of international law and non-intervention in sovereign states. The rules apply only when they’re convenient, explains Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

When Secretary of State John Kerry denounces Russia’s intervention in Crimea by declaring “It is not appropriate to invade a country and at the end of a barrel of gun dictate what you are trying to achieve. That is not Twenty-first Century, G-8, major-nation behavior,” you might expect that the next line in a serious newspaper would note Kerry’s breathtaking hypocrisy.

But not if you were reading the New York Times on Wednesday, or for that matter the Washington Post or virtually any mainstream U.S. newspaper or watching a broadcast outlet.

Yet, look what happens when Russia’s President Vladimir Putin does what the U.S. news media should do, i.e. point out that “It’s necessary to recall the actions of the United States in Afghanistan, in Iraq, in Libya, where they acted either without any sanction from the U.N. Security Council or distorted the content of these resolutions, as it happened in Libya. There, as you know, only the right to create a no-fly zone for government aircraft was authorized, and it all ended in the bombing and participation of special forces in group operations.”

Despite the undeniable accuracy of Putin's observation, he was promptly deemed to have "lost touch with reality," according to a Washington Post's editorial, which called his press conference "rambling" and a "bizarre performance" in which his words have "become indistinguishable from the propaganda of his state television network."

You get the point. If someone notes the disturbing U.S. history of military interventions or describes the troubling narrative behind the "democratic" coup in Ukraine spearheaded by neo-Nazi militias who overthrew a duly elected president you are dismissed as crazy.

### **Revised Narrative**

Yet, it has been the Post, Times and other U.S. news outlets which have led the way in developing a propaganda narrative at odds with the known reality. For instance, the violent February clashes in Kiev are now typically described as the Ukrainian police having killed some 80 protesters, though the original reporting had that death toll including 13 policemen and the fact that neo-Nazi militias were responsible for much of the violence, from hurling firebombs to shooting firearms.

That history is already fast disappearing as we saw in a typical New York Times report on Wednesday, which reported: "More than 80 protesters were shot to death by the police as an uprising spiraled out of control in mid-February."

Those revised "facts" better fit the preferred narrative of innocent and peaceful demonstrators being set upon by thuggish police without provocation. But that isn't what the original reporting revealed. Either the New York Times should explain how the earlier reporting was wrong or it should respect the more nuanced reality.

To do so, however, would undercut the desired narrative. So, it's better to simply accuse anyone with a functioning memory of being "delusional." The same with anyone who mentions the stunning hypocrisy of the U.S. government suddenly finding international law inviolable.

The history of the United States crossing borders to overthrow governments or to seize resources is a long and sordid one. Even after World War II and the establishment of the Nuremberg principles against "aggressive war," the U.S. government has routinely violated those rules, sometimes unilaterally and sometimes by distorting the clear meaning of U.N. resolutions, as Putin noted.

### **No Accountability**

Those violations of international law have done nothing to diminish the official

reputations of presidents who broke the rules. Despite the slaughters of millions of people from these U.S. military adventures, no U.S. president has ever been punished either by U.S. judicial authorities or by international tribunals.

In 1983, President Ronald Reagan, one of the most honored political figures in modern American history, ordered the invasion of the tiny Caribbean island of Grenada to overthrow its leftist government amid a political crisis that U.S. hostility had helped stir up. Reagan's pretext was to protect American students at the St. George's Medical School, though the students were not in any physical danger.

The U.S. invasion killed some 70 people on the island, including 25 Cuban construction workers. Nineteen U.S. soldiers also died. Though Reagan's clear violation of international law was noted around the globe, he was hailed as a hero by the U.S. media at home and faced no accountability from the United Nations or anyone else.

When I went to Grenada to report on the invasion for the Associated Press, an article that I co-wrote about abuses committed by American troops, including the ransacking of the personal libraries of prominent Grenadians (in search of books such as Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*), was spiked by my AP editors, presumably because it clashed with the feel-good U.S. public reaction to the invasion.

Last week, as I was reviewing documents at the Reagan Presidential Library at Simi Valley, California, I found a number of papers about how the Reagan administration used propaganda techniques to manipulate the American people regarding Grenada.

The files belonged to Walter Raymond Jr., a top CIA expert in propaganda and psychological operations who had been reassigned to Reagan's National Security Council staff to oversee the creation of a global psy-op structure including one aimed at the U.S. public.

On Nov. 1, 1983, just a week after the invasion, White House public-relations specialist David Gergen advised Reagan's image-molder Michael Deaver on steps to orchestrate the "follow-up on Grenada" to impress the American people, including making sure that the phased U.S. withdrawals were "well publicized, the bigger the groups the better. When units of the fleet leave, that also ought to be done with fanfare."

The P.R. choreography called, too, for using the "rescued" students as props. Gergen wrote: "Students Meet with Liberating Forces: Everyone sees this as a key event, and it needs to be done before RR [Reagan] leaves for the Far East.

Students Visit the Wounded: Many of the wounded would probably welcome a thank you visit from a student delegation.”

In a handwritten comment on the last suggestion, Raymond praised the idea: “Happy Grenada theme.”

### **More Recent Violations**

Secretary Kerry might argue that Grenada was so Twentieth Century, along with such events as the Vietnam War, the invasion of Panama in 1989 and the Persian Gulf conflict of 1990-91, which involved the slaughter of Iraqi soldiers and civilians even after the Iraqi government agreed to withdraw from Kuwait in a deal negotiated by then-Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev. [For details, see Robert Parry’s [Secrecy & Privilege](#).]

However, if one were to take up Secretary Kerry’s challenge and just look at the Twenty-first Century and “G-8, major-nation behavior,” which would include the United States and its major European allies, you’d still have a substantial list of U.S. violations: Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen, Libya and others. France and Great Britain, two other G-8 countries, have engaged in military interventions as well, including France in Mali and other African conflicts.

On Aug. 30, 2013, Secretary Kerry himself gave a belligerent speech justifying U.S. military action against Syria over murky accounts of a chemical weapons attack outside Damascus, a war that was only averted by Putin’s diplomatic efforts in convincing President Bashar al-Assad to agree to eliminate Syria’s chemical weapons.

Plus, throughout his presidency, Barack Obama has declared, over and over, that “all options are on the table” regarding Iran’s nuclear program, a clear threat of another U.S. bombing campaign, another crisis that Putin has helped tamp down by assisting in getting Iran to the bargaining table.

Indeed, it appears that one reason why Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, a neocon holdover, has been so aggressive in trying to exacerbate the Ukraine crisis was as a form of neocon payback for Putin’s defusing the confrontations with Syria and Iran, when Official Washington’s still-influential neocons were eager for more violence and “regime change.” [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“What Neocons Want from Ukraine Crisis.”](#)]

In virtually all these threatened or actual U.S. military assaults on sovereign nations, the major U.S. news media has been enthusiastically onboard. Indeed, the Washington Post and the New York Times played key roles in manufacturing public consent for George W. Bush’s invasion of Iraq in 2003 under the false pretext of eliminating its non-existent weapons of mass destruction.

By promoting dubious and false allegations, the Post and Times also have helped lay the groundwork for potential U.S. wars against Iran and Syria, including the Times making the bogus claim that the Aug. 21 chemical weapons attack east of Damascus was launched by Syrian government forces northwest of the city. Months later, the Times grudgingly admitted that its reporting, which helped bring the U.S. to the brink of another war, was contradicted by the fact that the Sarin-laden missile had a much more limited range. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[The Mistaken Guns of Last August.](#)"]

However, when Russia has a much more understandable case for intervention in an incipient civil war on its border that involves clear U.S. interference, the overthrow of an elected president and the participation of neo-Nazi militias by the U.S. government and its compliant mainstream media lock arms in outrage.

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). For a limited time, you also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).**

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## America's Staggering Hypocrisy

**Exclusive:** Official Washington is in deep umbrage over Russia's intervention in Ukraine after a U.S.-backed coup overthrew the democratically elected president. Some top neocons want a new Cold War, but they don't want anyone to note their staggering hypocrisy, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Since World War II and extending well into the Twenty-first Century the United States has invaded or otherwise intervened in so many countries that it would be challenging to compile a complete list. Just last decade, there were full-scale U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, plus American bombing operations from Pakistan to Yemen to Libya.

So, what is one to make of Secretary of State John Kerry's pronouncement that Russia's military intervention in the Crimea section of Ukraine at the behest of the country's deposed president is a violation of international law that the United States would never countenance?

Kerry decried the Russian intervention as “a Nineteenth Century act in the Twenty-first Century.” However, if memory serves, Sen. Kerry in 2002 voted along with most other members of the U.S. Congress to authorize President George W. Bush’s invasion of Iraq in 2003, which was also part of the Twenty-first Century. And, Kerry is a member of the Obama administration, which like its Bush predecessor, has been sending drones into the national territory of other nations to blow up various “enemy combatants.”

Are Kerry and pretty much everyone else in Official Washington so lacking in self-awareness that they don’t realize that they are condemning actions by Russian President Vladimir Putin that are far less egregious than what they themselves have done?

If Putin is violating international law by sending Russian troops into the Crimea after a violent coup spearheaded by neo-Nazi militias ousted Ukraine’s democratically elected president and after he requested protection for the ethnic Russians living in the country’s south and east then why hasn’t the U.S. government turned over George W. Bush, Dick Cheney and indeed John Kerry to the International Criminal Court for their far more criminal invasion of Iraq?

In 2003, when the Bush-Cheney administration dispatched troops halfway around the world to invade Iraq under the false pretense of seizing its non-existent weapons of mass destruction, the U.S. touched off a devastating war that killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and left their country a bitterly divided mess. But there has been virtually no accountability.

And, why haven’t many of the leading Washington journalists who pimped for those false WMD claims at least been fired from their prestigious jobs, if not also trundled off to The Hague for prosecution as propagandists for aggressive war?

Remarkably, many of these same “journalists” are propagandizing for more U.S. wars today, such as attacks on Syria and Iran, even as they demand harsh penalties for Russia over its intervention in the Crimea, which incidentally was an historic part of Russia dating back centuries.

### **The WPost’s Double Standards**

A stunning example of the U.S. media’s double standards is the Washington Post’s editorial-page editor Fred Hiatt, who pushed for the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 by treating the existence of Iraq’s non-existent WMD as “flat fact,” not an allegation in dispute. After the U.S. invasion and months of fruitless searching for the promised WMD caches, Hiatt finally acknowledged that the Post should have been more circumspect in its claims about the WMD.

“If you look at the editorials we write running up [to the war], we state as

flat fact that he [Saddam Hussein] has weapons of mass destruction,” Hiatt said in an interview with the Columbia Journalism Review. “If that’s not true, it would have been better not to say it.” [CJR, March/April 2004]

Yes, that is a principle of journalism, if something isn’t true, we’re not supposed to say that it is. Yet, despite the enormous cost in blood and treasure from the Iraq War and despite the undeniable fact that the U.S. invasion of Iraq was a clear violation of international law nothing happened to Hiatt. He remains in the same job today, more than a decade later.

His editorials also continue to state dubious points as “flat fact.” For instance, the Post’s belligerent editorial on Monday, entitled online as “President Obama’s foreign policy is based on fantasy,” resurfaces the discredited claim that the Syrian government was responsible for a chemical weapons attack outside Damascus on Aug. 21, 2013.

The Post wrote, “Since the Syrian dictator crossed Mr. Obama’s red line with a chemical weapons attack that killed 1,400 civilians, the dictator’s military and diplomatic position has steadily strengthened.”

Note how there is no attribution or doubt expressed regarding either the guilt of the Syrian government or the number of casualties. Just “flat fact.” The reality, however, is that the U.S. government assertions blaming the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad for the poison gas attack and the death tally of 1,400 have both crumbled under examination.

The U.S. casualty figure of “1,429” always was regarded as a wild exaggeration, since doctors on the scene cited a much lower death toll of a few hundred, and the Wall Street Journal later reported that the strangely precise number was ascertained by the CIA applying facial recognition software to images of dead bodies posted on YouTube and then subtracting duplicates and those in bloody shrouds.

The problems with this “methodology” were obvious, since there was no way to know the dates when the YouTube videos were taken and the absence of bloody shrouds did not prove that the cause of death was poison gas.

More significantly, the U.S. claims about where the missiles were launched more than nine kilometers from the impact site turned out to be false, since expert analysis of the one missile that was found to carry Sarin gas had a maximum range of around two kilometers. That meant that the launch site was within territory controlled by the Syrian opposition, not the government. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “The Mistaken Guns of Last August.”]

Though it remains unclear which side was to blame for the chemical attack, the

Syrian government's guilt surely was not a "slam dunk" anymore than the Iraqi government's possession of WMD in 2003. In such a case especially on sensitive matters of war or peace responsible journalists reflect the uncertainty, not simply assert an allegation as "flat fact."

However, since Hiatt was never punished for his earlier journalistic violation even though it contributed to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people, including some 4,500 U.S. soldiers he is still around to commit the same offenses again, in an even more dangerous context, i.e., a confrontation between the United States and Russia, two nuclear-armed states.

### **Pushing for a New Cold War**

And, what do Hiatt and other neocons at the Washington Post say about confronting the Russians over the Ukraine crisis, which was stoked by neocon holdovers in the U.S. State Department, such as Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, and the U.S.-funded National Endowment for Democracy, which was founded in 1983 to replace the CIA in the business of destabilizing targeted governments? [See Consortiumnews.com's ["What Neocons Want from Ukraine Crisis."](#)]

The Post is demanding a new Cold War with Russia in retaliation for its relatively non-violent interventions to protect pro-Russian provinces of two countries that were carved out of the old Soviet Union: Georgia where Russian troops have protected South Ossetia and Abkhazia since 2008 and in Ukraine where Russian soldiers have taken control of Crimea. In both cases, the pro-Russian areas felt threatened from their central governments and sought Moscow's assistance.

In the case of Ukraine, a neo-Nazi-led putsch representing the interests of the western part of the country overthrew the democratically elected president, Viktor Yanukovich, who came from the eastern region. Then, under the watchful eye of the neo-Nazi storm troopers in Kiev, a rump parliament voted unanimously or near unanimously to enact a series of draconian laws offensive to the ethnic Russian areas in the east and south.

Having fled Kiev for his life, Yanukovich asked Russia for help, which led to Putin's request to the Russian parliament for the authority to deploy troops inside Ukraine, essentially taking control of Crimea in the south, an area that has been part of Russia for centuries.

Though the Russian case for intervention in both Georgia and Ukraine is much stronger than the excuses often used by the United States to intervene in other countries, the Washington Post was apoplectic about Russia's "violation" of suddenly sacred international law.

The Post wrote, “as long as some leaders play by what Mr. Kerry dismisses as 19th-century rules, the United States can’t pretend that the only game is in another arena altogether. Military strength, trustworthiness as an ally, staying power in difficult corners of the world such as Afghanistan, these still matter, much as we might wish they did not.”

The Post also laments what it sees as a “receding” tide of democracy around the world, but it is worth noting that the U.S. government has a long and sorry record of overthrowing democratic governments. Just a partial list since World War II would include: Mossadegh in Iran in 1953, Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954, Allende in Chile in 1973, Aristide in Haiti twice, Chavez in Venezuela briefly in 2002, Zelaya in Honduras in 2009, Morsi in Egypt in 2013, and now Yanukovych in Ukraine in 2014. The next target of a U.S.-embraced “democratic” coup looks to be Nicolas Maduro of Venezuela.

Perhaps the closest U.S. parallel to the Russian intervention in Ukraine was President Bill Clinton’s decision to invade Haiti in 1994 to reinstall Haiti’s elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide to office, though Russia has not gone nearly that far regarding Yanukovych in Ukraine. Russia has only intervened to prevent the fascist-spearheaded coup regime in Kiev from imposing its will on the country’s ethnic Russian provinces.

Also, in the case of Aristide, the U.S. role wasn’t as pro-democratic as Clinton’s invasion on his behalf might suggest. Clinton ordered the action to reverse a 1991 military coup that ousted President Aristide with the support of President George H.W. Bush. Aristide was deposed a second time in 2004 in a coup partly engineered by the administration of President George W. Bush.

In other words, Clinton’s intervention on behalf of a popularly elected leader in Haiti was the anomaly to the more typical U.S. pattern of collaborating with right-wing military officers in the overthrow of elected leaders who don’t comply with Washington’s wishes.

Thus, the overriding hypocrisy of the Washington Post, Secretary Kerry and indeed nearly all of Official Washington is their insistence that the United States actually promotes the principle of democracy or, for that matter, the rule of international law. Those are at best situational ethics when it comes to advancing U.S. interests around the world.

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, *America’s Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). For a limited time, you also can order Robert Parry’s trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives**

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## Neocons Move to Exploit Ukraine Crisis

U.S. neocons are wasting little time in taking advantage of the Ukraine crisis that they helped to stoke, with former Reagan-Bush operative Elliott Abrams urging Congress to pass legislation that would impose new sanctions on Iran, notes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

The Crimean crisis has energized those who wallow in a conventional wisdom that, [as Fareed Zakaria noted](#) last week, had already become a familiar theme on the opinion pages. This is the theme that the United States is in retreat, that it is insufficiently assertive, and that this lack of assertiveness is having awful consequences around the world.

The crisis is tailor-made to encourage such wallowing, involving as it does a use of armed forces by the successor to the old Cold War adversary. [So no time has been wasted](#) by those who complain that soft U.S. policies have brought things in Ukraine to this juncture and who cry for more U.S. assertiveness in response, including saber-rattling with U.S. armed forces.

The conventional wisdom prospers, despite empirically mistaken aspects of it that Zakaria points out, partly because of the difference between punditry and incumbency and the related difference between posturing and policy-making.

Pundits can do grand hand-wringing about supposed decline without the hard labor of thinking through which specific alternative options really exist with regard to specific problems and what their specific results are likely to be. It prospers also because of conceptual sloppiness that, [as Paul Saunders notes](#), tends to equate leadership with the use of military force.

Most fundamentally, this conventional wisdom is one manifestation of a longstanding American tendency to view international politics as a single global game that pits the United States against sundry bad guys. The bad guys have taken various identities, the Soviet Union and world communism for the most part during the Cold War, and more often Islamists of some stripe today, but the distinctions don't seem to matter all that much if it is all seen as one big contest in which setbacks for one side somewhere on the global playing field mean that side is losing overall.

One of the major flaws in this perspective is that much of import that happens in the world, including much that is violent or disturbing, is not the work of the United States and is not within the power of the United States to prevent.

Another major flaw is that there is not nearly as much of a connection between what happens in a situation one place on the globe and how players assess credibility and motivations in a different situation someplace else. Governments simply do not gauge the credibility of other governments that way.

Much more important than any vague global reputation are the specific interests and options involved in whatever is the situation currently at hand. And so, regarding the Crimean situation, rather than calling for more saber-rattling as if it were some sort of general elixir that boosts U.S. influence worldwide, it is better to ask exactly how it would relate to any actual moves it would make sense, in our eyes, as well as Vladimir Putin's, to take.

Is anyone seriously contemplating, in a sort of updated replay of 1853, the introduction of U.S. military forces in Crimea? If so, let us hope that sanity can be restored. If not, then how does any threatening gesture involving military force either help to deal with the problem in Ukraine or to enhance U.S. credibility anywhere else?

Also, rather than simply tallying every apparent advance by presumed foreign adversaries as if it were yardage gained in a football game, we need to ask what a particular move does to affect the adversary's interests and, even more importantly, our own. This means asking, for example, as Jacob Heilbrunn does, what Putin actually would or would not be gaining if he were to make more of a military move into Ukraine.

The global, indiscriminate hard-line approach lends itself to exploitation for other purposes that also do not advance U.S. interests. The theme about American retreat is, of course, an old stand-by for politically attacking Barack Obama.

An example of another kind of exploitation is Elliott Abrams arguing that the Crimean crisis is somehow a reason for passing the Kirk-Menendez bill to slap more sanctions on Iran. Never mind that his argument shows no cognizance of what is most needed at this juncture to keep the Iranians negotiating seriously. In fact, never mind the argument at all, because it is delivered not to improve the chance of reaching an acceptable agreement with Iran but instead to prevent any such agreement.

Just savor the inventiveness necessary to contend that a proper response to a Russian military move in Crimea is to bash Iran with more sanctions. That makes about as much sense, unsurprisingly, given the neocon source, as saying that a

proper response to a terrorist act by an Afghanistan-based group is to launch a war against Iraq.

Considering in tandem a Middle Eastern problem and a Russian military action in its own sphere of influence brings to mind one of the great historical instances of accidental simultaneity: in 1956, the Soviet quashing of the Hungarian revolt and the Israeli-Anglo-French invasion of Egypt. Zakaria mentions the latter of those two crises, in the course of admiring Dwight Eisenhower for wisely deflecting repeated calls, which sounded very similar to ones we hear today, for the United States to intervene hither and yon lest freedom retreat all over the world.

Indiscriminately assuming a hard-line posture is if anything even more unwise with the challenges of the moment than it would have been in the autumn of 1956. Russia has a more plausible claim to having a lasting and legitimate interest in Crimea than the Soviets ever did in Hungary.

And an Iran that is on track to negotiate a more normal and nuclear-weapons-free relationship with the rest of the world is much different from an Egyptian strongman who made a nuisance of himself by nationalizing canals.

**Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency's top analysts. He is now a visiting professor at Georgetown University for security studies. (This article first appeared as [a blog post at The National Interest's Web site](#). Reprinted with author's permission.)**

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## Double-Think over Ukraine

Secretary of State Kerry, who voted for George W. Bush's Iraq invasion in 2003 and wanted to bomb Syria last year, and President Obama, who's crossed borders regularly to kill enemies, are outraged that Russia has intervened in Ukraine, a case of double-talk and double-think, says Norman Solomon.

By Norman Solomon

International law is suddenly very popular in Washington. President Obama responded to Russian military intervention in the Crimea by accusing Russia of a "breach of international law." Secretary of State John Kerry followed up by declaring that Russia is "in direct, overt violation of international law."

Unfortunately, during the last five years, no world leader has done more to

undermine international law than Barack Obama. He treats it with rhetorical adulation and behavioral contempt, helping to further normalize a might-makes-right approach to global affairs that is the antithesis of international law.

Fifty years ago, another former law professor, Sen. Wayne Morse, condemned such arrogance of power. "I don't know why we think, just because we're mighty, that we have the right to try to substitute might for right," Morse said on national TV in 1964. "And that's the American policy in Southeast Asia – just as unsound when we do it as when Russia does it."

Today, Uncle Sam continues to preen as the globe's big sheriff on the side of international law even while functioning as the world's biggest outlaw. Rather than striving for an evenhanded assessment of how "international law" has become so much coin of the hypocrisy realm, mainline U.S. media are now transfixed with Kremlin villainy.

On Sunday night, the top of the *New York Times* home page reported: "Russian President Vladimir V. Putin has pursued his strategy with subterfuge, propaganda and brazen military threat, taking aim as much at the United States and Europe as Ukraine itself." That was *news* coverage.

Following close behind, a *Times* editorial appeared in print Monday morning, headlined "Russia's Aggression," condemning "Putin's cynical and outrageous exploitation of the Ukrainian crisis to seize control of Crimea." The liberal newspaper's editorial board said that the United States and the European Union "must make clear to him that he has stepped far outside the bounds of civilized behavior."

Such demands are righteous – but lack integrity and credibility when the same standards are not applied to President Obama, whose continuation of the Bush "war on terror" under revamped rhetoric has bypassed international law as well as "civilized behavior."

In these circumstances, major U.S. media coverage rarely extends to delving into deviational irony or spotlighting White House hypocrisy. Yet it's not as if large media outlets have entirely excluded key information and tough criticism.

For instance, last October the McClatchy news service reported that "the Obama administration violated international law with top-secret targeted-killing operations that claimed dozens of civilian lives in Yemen and Pakistan," according to reports released by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

Last week, just before Obama leapt to high dudgeon with condemnation of Putin for his "breach of international law," the *Los Angeles Times* published an op-ed piece that provided illuminating context for such presidential righteousness.

“Despite the president’s insistence on placing limits on war, and on the defense budget, his brand of warfare has helped lay the basis for a permanent state of global warfare via ‘low footprint’ drone campaigns and special forces operations aimed at an ever-morphing enemy usually identified as some form of Al Qaeda,” wrote Karen J. Greenberg, director of the Center on National Security at Fordham University’s law school.

Greenberg went on to indicate the scope of the U.S. government’s ongoing contempt for international law: “According to Senator Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), the Obama administration has killed 4,700 individuals in numerous countries, including Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia. Obama has successfully embedded the process of drone killings into the executive branch in such a way that any future president will inherit it, along with the White House ‘kill list’ and its ‘terror Tuesday’ meetings. Unbounded global war is now part of what it means to be president.”

But especially in times of crisis, as with the current Ukraine situation, such inconvenient contradictions go out the mass-media window. What remains is an Orwellian baseline, melding conformist ideology and nationalism into red-white-and-blue doublethink.

**Norman Solomon is co-founder of [RootsAction.org](http://RootsAction.org) and founding director of the Institute for Public Accuracy. His books include *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death*. Information about the documentary based on the book is at [www.WarMadeEasyTheMovie.org](http://www.WarMadeEasyTheMovie.org).**

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## Ukraine: One ‘Regime Change’ Too Many?

**Exclusive:** Russia’s parliament has approved President Putin’s request for the use of force inside neighboring Ukraine, as the latest neocon-approved “regime change” spins out of control and threatens to inflict grave damage on international relations, ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern explains.

By Ray McGovern

Is “regime change” in Ukraine the bridge too far for the neoconservative “regime changers” of Official Washington and their sophomoric “responsibility-to-protect” (R2P) allies in the Obama administration? Have they dangerously overreached by pushing the putsch that removed duly-elected Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich?

Russian President Vladimir Putin has given an unmistakable “yes” to those

questions in deeds, not words. His message is clear: "Back off our near-frontier!"

Moscow announced on Saturday that Russia's parliament has approved Putin's request for permission to use Russia's armed forces "on the territory of the Ukraine pending the normalization of the socio-political situation in that country."

Putin described this move as necessary to protect ethnic Russians and military personnel stationed in Crimea in southern Ukraine, where the Russian Black Sea Fleet and other key military installations are located. But there is no indication that the Russian parliament has restricted the use of Russian armed forces to the Crimea.

Unless Obama is completely bereft of advisers who know something about Russia, it should have been a "known-known" (pardon the Rumsfeldian *mal mot*) that the Russians would react this way to a putsch removing Yanukovich. It would have been a no-brainer that Russia would use military force, if necessary, to counter attempts to use economic enticement and subversive incitement to slide Ukraine into the orbit of the West and eventually NATO.

This was all the more predictable in the case of Ukraine, where Putin although the *bête noire* in corporate Western media holds very high strategic cards geographically, militarily, economically and politically.

### **Unlike 'Prague Spring' 1968**

Moscow's advantage was not nearly as clear during the short-lived "Prague Spring" of 1968 when knee-jerk, non-thinking euphoria reigned in Washington and West European capitals. The *cognoscenti* were, by and large, smugly convinced that reformer Alexander Dubcek could break Czechoslovakia away from the U.S.S.R.'s embrace and still keep the Russian bear at bay.

My CIA analyst portfolio at the time included Soviet policy toward Eastern Europe, and I was amazed to see analysts of Eastern Europe caught up in the euphoria that typically ended with, "And the Soviets can't do a damned thing about it!"

That summer a new posting found me advising Radio Free Europe Director Ralph Walter who, virtually alone among his similarly euphoric colleagues, shared my view that Russian tanks would inevitably roll onto Prague's Wenceslaus Square, which they did in late August.

Past is not always prologue. But it is easy for me to imagine the Russian Army cartographic agency busily preparing maps of the best routes for tanks into

Independence Square in Kiev, and that before too many months have gone by, Russian tank commanders may be given orders to invade, if those stoking the fires of violent dissent in the western parts of Ukraine keep pushing too far.

That said, Putin has many other cards to play and time to play them. These include sitting back and doing nothing, cutting off Russia's subsidies to Ukraine, making it ever more difficult for Yanukovich's successors to cope with the harsh realities. And Moscow has ways to remind the rest of Europe of its dependence on Russian oil and gas.

### **Another Interference**

There is one huge difference between Prague in 1968 and Kiev 2014. The "Prague Spring" revolution led by Dubcek enjoyed such widespread spontaneous popular support that it was difficult for Russian leaders Leonid Brezhnev and Aleksey Kosygin to argue plausibly that it was spurred by subversion from the West.

Not so 45-plus years later. In early February, as violent protests raged in the Ukrainian capital of Kiev and the White House professed neutrality, U.S. State Department officials were, in the words of NYU professor emeritus of Russian studies Stephen Cohen, "plotting a coup d'État against the elected president of Ukraine."

We know that thanks to neocon prima donna Victoria Nuland, now Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, who seemed intent on giving new dimension to the "cookie-pushing" role of U.S. diplomats. Recall the photo showing Nuland in a metaphor of over-reach, as she reached deep into a large plastic bag to give each anti-government demonstrator on the square a cookie before the putsch.

More important, recall her amateurish, boorish use of an open telephone to plot regime change in Ukraine with a fellow neocon, U.S. Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt. Crass U.S. interference in Ukrainian affairs can be seen (actually, better, heard) in an intercepted conversation posted on YouTube on Feb. 4.

### **Yikes! It's Yats!**

Nuland was recorded as saying: "Yats is the guy. He's got the economic experience, the governing experience. He's the guy you know. ... Yats will need all the help he can get to stave off collapse in the ex-Soviet state. He has warned there is an urgent need for unpopular cutting of subsidies and social payments before Ukraine can improve."

And guess what. The stopgap government formed after the coup designated Nuland's guy Yats, Arseniy Yatsenyuk, prime minister! What luck! Yats is 39 and has

served as head of the central bank, foreign minister and economic minister. And, as designated pinch-hitter-prime-minister, he has already talked about the overriding need for “responsible government,” one willing to commit “political suicide,” as he put it, by taking unpopular social measures.

U.S. meddling has been so obvious that at President Barack Obama’s hastily scheduled Friday press conference on Ukraine, Yats’s name seemed to get stuck in Obama’s throat. Toward the end of his scripted remarks, which he read verbatim, the President said: “Vice President Biden just spoke with Prime Minister [pause] the prime minister of Ukraine to assure him that in this difficult moment the United States supports his government’s efforts and stands for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and democratic future of Ukraine.”

Obama doesn’t usually stumble like that especially when reading a text, and is normally quite good at pronouncing foreign names. Perhaps he worried that one of the White House stenographic corps might shout out, “You mean our man, Yats?” Obama departed right after reading his prepared remarks, leaving no opportunity for such an outburst.

Western media was abuzz with the big question: Will the Russians apply military force? The answer came quickly, though President Obama chose the subjunctive mood in addressing the question on Friday.

### **Throwing Down a Hanky**

There was a surreal quality to President Obama’s remarks, several hours after Russian (or pro-Russian) troops took control of key airports and other key installations in the Crimea, which is part of Ukraine, and home to a large Russian naval base and other key Russian military installations.

Obama referred merely to “reports of military movements taken by the Russian Federation inside of Ukraine” and warned piously that “any violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity would be deeply destabilizing.”

That Obama chose the subjunctive mood when the indicative was, well, indicated will not be lost on the Russians. Here was Obama, in his typically lawyerly way, trying to square the circle, giving a sop to his administration’s neocon holdovers and R2P courtiers, with a Milquetoasty expression of support for the new-Nuland-approved government (citing Biden’s assurances to old whatshisname/yatshisname).

While Obama stuck to the subjunctive tense, Prime Minister Yatsenyuk appealed to Russia to recall its forces and “stop provoking civil and military resistance in Ukraine.”

Obama's comments seemed almost designed to sound condescending paternalistic, even to the Russians. Already into his second paragraph of his scripted remarks, the President took a line larded with words likely to be regarded as a gratuitous insult by Moscow, post-putsch.

"We've made clear that they [Russian officials] can be part of an international community's effort to support the stability of a united Ukraine going forward, which is not only in the interest of the people of Ukraine and the international community, but also in Russia's interest."

By now, Russian President Vladimir Putin is accustomed to Obama, Secretary of State John Kerry, National Security Adviser Susan Rice, et al. telling the Kremlin where its interests lie, and I am sure he is appropriately grateful. Putin is likely to read more significance into these words of Obama:

"The United States will stand with the international community in affirming that there will be costs for any military intervention in Ukraine ... and we will continue to coordinate closely with our European allies."

### **Fissures in Atlantic Alliance**

There are bound to be fissures in the international community and in the Western alliance on whether further provocation in Ukraine is advisable. Many countries have much to lose if Moscow uses its considerable economic leverage over natural gas supplies, for example.

And, aspiring diplomat though she may be, Victoria Nuland presumably has not endeared herself to the EC by her expressed "Fuck the EC" attitude.

Aside from the most servile allies of the U.S. there may be a growing caucus of Europeans who would like to return the compliment to Nuland. After all does anyone other than the most extreme neocon ideologue think that instigating a civil war on the border of nuclear-armed Russia is a good idea? Or that it makes sense to dump another economic basket case, which Ukraine surely is, on the EU's doorstep while it's still struggling to get its own economic house in order?

Europe has other reasons to feel annoyed about the overreach of U.S. power and arrogance. The NSA spying revelations that continue, just like the eavesdropping itself does seem to have done some permanent damage to transatlantic relationships.

In any case, Obama presumably knows by now that he pleased no one on Friday by reading that flaccid statement on Ukraine. And, more generally, the sooner he realizes that without doing dumb and costly things he can placate neither the neocons nor the R2P folks (naively well meaning though the latter may be), the

better for everyone.

In sum, the Nulands of this world have bit off far more than they can chew; they need to be reined in before they cause even more dangerous harm. Broader issues than Ukraine are at stake. Like it or not, the United States can benefit from a cooperative relationship with Putin's Russia the kind of relationship that caused Putin to see merit last summer in pulling Obama's chestnuts out of the fire on Syria, for example, and in helping address thorny issues with Iran.

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