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http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/CEN-01-170414.html

Ukraine and the grand chessboard

By Pepe Escobar

4/17/2014

The US State Department, via spokeswoman Jennifer Psaki, said that reports of CIA Director John Brennan telling regime changers in Kiev to "conduct tactical operations" - or an "anti-terrorist" offensive - in eastern Ukraine are "completely false". This means Brennan did issue his marching orders. And by now the "anti-terrorist" campaign - with its nice little Dubya rhetorical touch - has degenerated into farce.

Now couple that with NATO secretary general, Danish retriever Anders Fogh Rasmussen, yapping about the strengthening of military footprint along NATO's eastern border: "We will have more planes in the air, mores ships on the water and more readiness on the land."

Welcome to the Two Stooges doctrine of post-modern warfare.

Pay up or freeze to death

Ukraine is for all practical purposes broke. The Kremlin's consistent position for the past three months has been to encourage the European Union to find a solution to Ukraine's dire economic mess. Brussels did nothing. It was betting on regime change to the benefit of Germany's heavyweight puppet Vladimir Klitschko, aka Klitsch The Boxer.

Regime change did happen, but orchestrated by the Khaganate of Nulands - a neo-con cell of the State Department and its assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nulands. And now the presidential option is between - what else - two US puppets, choco-billionaire Petro Poroshenko and "Saint Yulia" Timoshenko, Ukraine's former prime minister, ex-convict and prospective president. The EU is left to pick up the (unpayable) bill. Enter the International Monetary Fund - via a nasty, upcoming "structural adjustment" that will send Ukrainians to a hellhole even grimmer than the one they are already familiar with.

Once again, for all the hysteria propagated by the US Ministry of Truth and its franchises across the Western corporate media, the Kremlin does not need to "invade" anything. If Gazprom does not get paid all it needs to do is to shut down the Ukrainian stretch of Pipelineistan. Kiev will then have no option but to use part of the gas supply destined for some EU countries so Ukrainians won't run out of fuel to keep themselves and the country's industries alive. And the EU - whose "energy policy" overall is already a joke - will find itself with yet another self-inflicted problem.

The EU will be mired in a perennial lose-lose situation if Brussels does not talk seriously with Moscow. There's only one explanation for the refusal: hardcore Washington pressure, mounted via the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Again, to counterpunch the current hysteria - the EU remains Gazprom's top client, with 61% of its overall exports. It's a complex relationship based on interdependence. The capitalization of Nord Stream, Blue Stream and the to-be-completed South Stream includes German, Dutch, French and Italian companies.

So yes, Gazprom does need the EU market. But up to a point, considering the mega-deal of Siberian gas delivery to China which most probably will be signed next month in Beijing when Russian President Vladimir Putin visits President Xi Jinping.

The crucial spanner in the works

Last month, while the tortuous Ukraine sideshow was in progress, President Xi was in Europe clinching deals and promoting yet another branch of the New Silk Road all the way to Germany.

In a sane, non-Hobbesian environment, a neutral Ukraine would only have to gain by positioning itself as a privileged crossroads between the EU and the proposed Eurasian Union - as well as becoming a key node of the Chinese New Silk Road offensive. Instead, the Kiev regime changers are betting on acceptance into the EU (it simply won't happen) and becoming a NATO forward base (the key Pentagon aim).

As for the possibility of a common market from Lisbon to Vladivostok - which both Moscow and Beijing are aiming at, and would be also a boon for the EU - the Ukraine disaster is a real spanner in the works.

And a spanner in the works that, crucially, suits only one player: the US government.

The Obama administration may - and "may" is the operative word here - have realized the US government has lost the battle to control Pipelineistan from Asia to Europe, despite all the efforts of the Dick Cheney regime. What energy experts call the Asian Energy Security Grid is progressively evolving - as well as its myriad links to Europe.

So what's left for the Obama administration is this spanner in the works - still trying to scotch the full economic integration of Eurasia.

The Obama administration is predictably obsessed with the EU's increasing dependency on Russian gas. Thus its grandiose plan to position US shale gas for the EU as an alternative to Gazprom. Even assuming this might happen, it would take at least a decade - with no guarantee of success. In fact, the real alternative would be Iranian gas - after a comprehensive nuclear deal and the end of Western sanctions (the whole package, not surprisingly, being sabotaged en masse by various Beltway factions.)

Just to start with, the US cannot export shale gas to countries with which it has not signed a free trade agreement. That's a "problem" which might be solved to a great extent by the secretly negotiated Trans-Atlantic Partnership between Washington and Brussels (see Breaking bad in southern NATOstan, Asia Times Online, April 15, 2014.)

In parallel, the Obama administration keeps applying instances of "divide and rule" to scare minor players, as in spinning to the max the specter of an evil, militaristic China to reinforce the still crawling "pivoting to Asia". The whole game harks back to what Dr Zbig Brzezinski conceptualized way back in his 1997 opus *The Grand Chessboard* - and fine-tuned for his disciple Obama: the US ruling over Eurasia.

Still the Kremlin won't be dragged into a military quagmire. It's fair to argue Putin has identified the Big Picture in the whole chessboard, which spells out an increasing Russia-China strategic partnership as crucial as an energy-manufacturing synergy with Europe; and most of all the titanic fear of US financial elites of the inevitable, ongoing process centered on the BRICS-conducted (and spreading to key Group of 20 members) drive to bypass the petrodollar.

Ultimately, this all spells out the progressive demise of the petrodollar in parallel to the ascent of a basket to currencies as the reserve currency in the international system. The BRICS are already at work on their alternative to the IMF and the World Bank, investing in a currency reserve pool and the BRICS development bank. While a tentative new world order slouches towards all points Global South to be born, Robocop NATO dreams of war.