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## Putin's Dilemma

### *Fending Off the United State's Imperial Hand*

by MIKE WHITNEY

APRIL 23, 2014

“The last decade of the twentieth century has witnessed a tectonic shift in world affairs. For the first time ever, a non-Eurasian power has emerged not only as a key arbiter of Eurasian power relations but also as the world’s paramount power.” (p. xiii)

“Now a non-Eurasian power is preeminent in Eurasia — and America’s global primacy is directly dependent on how long and how effectively its preponderance on the Eurasian continent is sustained.” (p.30)

Excerpts from *The Grand Chessboard : American Primacy And Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Basic Books, 1997

“We were promised in Munich that after the unification of Germany, no expansion of NATO would take place in the East. Then NATO expanded by adding former Warsaw Pact countries,

former U.S.S.R. countries, and I asked: ‘Why are you doing that?’ And they told me, ‘It is not your business.’”

– Russian President Vladimir Putin, Moscow press conference, April 2014

The United States is in the opening phase of a war on Russia. Policymakers in Washington have shifted their attention from the Middle East to Eurasia where they hope to achieve the most ambitious part of the imperial project; to establish forward-operating bases along Russia’s western flank, to stop further economic integration between Asia and Europe, and to begin the long-sought goal of dismembering the Russian Federation. These are the objectives of the current policy. The US intends to spread its military bases across Central Asia, seize vital resources and pipeline corridors, and encircle China in order to control its future growth. The dust-up in Ukraine indicates that the starting bell has already been rung and the operation is fully-underway. As we know from past experience, Washington will pursue its strategy relentlessly while shrugging off public opinion, international law or the condemnation of adversaries and allies alike. The world’s only superpower does not have to listen to anyone. It is a law unto itself.

The pattern, of course, is unmistakable. It begins with sanctimonious finger-wagging, economic sanctions and incendiary rhetoric, and quickly escalates into stealth bombings, drone attacks, massive destruction of civilian infrastructure, millions of fleeing refugees, decimated towns and cities, death squads, wholesale human carnage, vast environmental devastation, and the steady slide into failed state anarchy; all of which is accompanied by the stale repetition of state propaganda spewed from every corporate bullhorn in the western media.

Isn’t that how things played out in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria?

Indeed, it did. And now it’s on to Moscow. Putin’s survival and that of the Russian Federation depends to large extent to his ability to grasp the new reality quickly and to adapt accordingly. If he decides to ignore the warning signs hoping that Washington can be appeased or that the men who dictate US foreign policy can be persuaded to abandon the so-called “pivot to Asia”, he could face the same end as Saddam or Gadhafi. So the first priority is simply to accept the fact that the war has begun. All future policy decisions should derive from that basic understanding.

So what does Putin know already?

He knows that the CIA, the US State Department and the US-funded NGOs were directly involved in the coup in Kiev. He knows (from hacked phone messages) that Washington had a

hand in picking the junta's leaders. He knows that the White House and NATO have already undermined the spirit of Friday's Geneva agreement by threatening to intensify economic sanctions and by planning to move more military assets to the Baltics as well as 10,000 US ground troops to Poland and additional American warships to the Black Sea." He knows that high-ranking US policymakers have demonized him in the media as the new Hitler, a moniker that is unfailingly affixed to targets of Washington's aggression. And he knows that the Obama team is loaded with bloodthirsty neocons and recalcitrant Cold Warriors who have never abandoned the idea of splintering Russia into smaller pieces, pilfering its resources, and installing a US puppet in Moscow.

To that end, the western media has shaped an absurd narrative that Crimea is part of "evil" Putin's plan to reconstruct the Soviet Union and return to the glory days of the Russian Empire. While there's no point in refuting such a laughable allegation, it is worth noting that many journalists have repudiated the media's performance comparing the coverage to state-managed propaganda. Here's how Robert Parry summed it up in a recent piece:

"In my four-plus decades in journalism, I have never seen a more thoroughly biased and misleading performance by the major U.S. news media. Even during the days of Ronald Reagan ...there was more independence in major news outlets. There were media stampedes off the reality cliff during George H.W. Bush's Persian Gulf War and George W. Bush's Iraq War, both of which were marked by demonstrably false claims that were readily swallowed by the big U.S. news outlets.

But there is something utterly Orwellian in the current coverage of the Ukraine crisis, including accusing others of "propaganda" when their accounts...are much more honest and more accurate than what the U.S. press corps has been producing.... The casualness of this propaganda... is not just wretched journalism but it is reckless malfeasance jeopardizing the lives of many Ukrainians and the future of the planet." ("Ukraine, through the US looking glass", Robert Parry, Smirking Chimp)

Unfortunately, the fog of state-generated propaganda has kept the public largely in the dark about the real motives for the present conflict as well as the sordid history of US hostility towards Russia. Here's a short blurb from an article in the World Socialist Web Site that helps cut through the BS and shed a bit of light on what's really going on:

"When the Soviet Union was collapsing in late 1991, Dick (Cheney) wanted to see the dismantlement not only of the Soviet Union and the Russian empire but of Russia itself, so it

could never again be a threat to the rest of the world,” wrote former US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates in his recently published memoirs. Gates was referring to the then-Secretary of Defense, and later US Vice President, Dick Cheney.

The statement sheds light on the geopolitical dimensions of the recent putsch in Ukraine. What is at stake is not so much domestic issues—and not at all the fight against corruption and democracy—but rather an international struggle for power and influence that stretches back a quarter of a century.” (The geopolitical dimensions of the coup in Ukraine, Peter Schwarz, World Socialist Web Site)

President Jimmy Carter’s National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, is the main architect of the current policy. In his classic “The Grand Chessboard...American Primacy And It’s Geostrategic Imperatives”, Brzezinski makes the case that US needs to control the Eurasia landmass and fend off potential rivals in order to maintain its position as the world’s only superpower. Critics claim that the book is a blueprint for global dictatorship, a claim that’s hard to dispute given Brzezinski’s maniacal focus on what-he-calls “America’s global primacy.” Here are a few clips from the text that will illuminate the author’s thoughts on US expansion into Asia:

“America is now the only global superpower, and Eurasia is the globe’s central arena. Hence, what happens to the distribution of power on the Eurasian continent will be of decisive importance to America’s global primacy and to America’s historical legacy.” (p.194) “It follows that America’s primary interest is to help ensure that no single power comes to control this geopolitical space and that the global community has unhindered financial and economic access to it.” (p148) ...

The world’s energy consumption is bound to vastly increase over the next two or three decades. Estimates by the U.S. Department of energy anticipate that world demand will rise by more than 50 percent between 1993 and 2015, with the most significant increase in consumption occurring in the Far East. The momentum of Asia’s economic development is already generating massive pressures for the exploration and exploitation of new sources of energy and the Central Asian region and the Caspian Sea basin are known to contain reserves of natural gas and oil that dwarf those of Kuwait, the Gulf of Mexico, or the North Sea.” (p.125) ...

“...how America `manages’ Eurasia is critical. Eurasia is the globe’s largest continent and is geopolitically axial. A power that dominates Eurasia would control two of the world’s three most advanced and economically productive regions. ...About 75 per cent of the world’s people live

in Eurasia, and most of the world's physical wealth is there as well, both in its enterprises and underneath its soil. Eurasia accounts for 60 per cent of the world's GNP and about three-fourths of the world's known energy resources." (p.31) ... (Excerpts from *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy And Its Geostrategic Imperatives* — Zbigniew Brzezinski, Basic Books, 1997)

Taken as a whole, Brzezinski's "Chessboard" is a pretty straightforward strategy for ruling the world. All one needs to do is seize critical energy supplies and transit lines, crush potential rivals, and subvert regional coalitions, or as Brzezinski breezily puts it, "keep the barbarians from coming together."

The plan does involve considerable risks, however, (Russia does have nuclear weapons, after all) but the risks are far outweighed by the prospect of unchallenged global dominance for the foreseeable future.

The trouble with Washington's Ukraine policy, is that it leaves Putin with few options. If he deploys troops to defend ethnic Russian's in the East, then Obama will demand additional economic sanctions, a "no fly" zone, NATO deployment, and the cutting off of natural gas and oil supplies to Europe. On the other hand, if Putin does nothing, then the attacks against Russian-speaking people in Ukraine (like Sunday's shootout at an Eastern checkpoint that left three people dead.) will intensify and the US will provide covert military and logistical support to neo-Nazi extremists in the Interior Ministry, just as they have with jihadi terrorists in Syria and Libya. That will hurtle Ukraine into a devastating civil war that will damage Russia's economy and undermine its national security. Anyway you look at it, Russia loses.

Journalist David Paul summed up the situation in an article titled "Forget the Spin, Putin Is Holding a Losing Hand" at Huffington Post. He said:

"Brzezinski's strategic formulation is designed to enhance American power in the region in the long term, and whether Putin finds a way to pull back or chooses to invade is immaterial. Either choice Putin makes... will ultimately serve America's interests, even if a Ukrainian civil war and an energy crisis in Europe have to be part of the price along the way." (Huffington Post)

This is Putin's dilemma, to choose the path that is least likely to exacerbate the situation and plunge Ukraine deeper into the abyss. For now, the choice seems obvious, that is, he should simply sit-tight, resist the temptation to get involved, and avoid doing anything rash. Eventually,

his restraint will be seen as strength not weakness and he'll be able to play a more constructive role in guiding Ukraine back to peace and security. But, for now, he must be patient and wait.