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## NATO's soft war on Russia

By Pepe Escobar

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Poor NATO. Damned Soviets. The benign North Atlantic Treaty Organization has spent two decades "trying to build a partnership" with Russia. But now, "clearly the Russians have declared NATO as an adversary, so we have to begin to view Russia no longer as a partner but as more of an adversary", according to NATO deputy secretary-general Alexander Vershbow, a former US diplomat/ Pentagon employee.

The hot lava irony of a Pentagon hack carping about "Russia clearly trying to re-impose hegemony" is enough to put the Vesuvius to shame. But that's only a minor plot twist in NATO *The Expandables* (the movie).

NATO - still in the process of being epically humiliated on a daily basis by a bunch of Pashtuns with Kalashnikovs in Afghanistan - is now considering "new defensive measures" to deter "evil" Russia from "aggression" against NATO members, mostly the Baltic states. And that will mean deployment of "more substantial numbers of allied combat forces to Eastern Europe" - mostly Poland. Permanently. Or, in Pentagonese, "semi-permanent unit training rotations". As if any doubt remained that Cold War 2.0 is here to stay.

NATO will "debate" the issue - in its usual muddy waters fashion - over the summer, and the result will be announced at a meeting in Wales in September, presided by Emperor Barack Obama himself.

Any analyst not embedded in the Pentagonese matrix knows that key European Union powers Germany and France - which have solid economic and business ties to Russia - will never buy this new spin for Cold War 2.0. As for other sizable NATO members, they are simply broke, and/or have better (economic) fish to fry at home.

Informed opinion also knows that were Cold War 2.0 to progress, payback will be handsome - as in, just for starters, Russia simply killing the Northern Distribution Network, which allows NATO's escape route from its sterling performance in Afghanistan.

### **Vlad the contemplator**

Nonetheless, NATO spin remains relentless; there's "no sign of Russian troops withdrawing from the Ukraine border; the US is sending "non-lethal" military aid to Ukraine (as in what? Baseball bats?); US ground forces are being sent to Poland. And all this to fight "separatists" and "pro-Russian" militants in Eastern Ukraine.

Rubbish. These people need to study geography, not to mention NATO's own charter. Ukraine is not even part of NATO, to start with. And the majority of Eastern Ukrainians don't want to annex themselves to the Russian Federation. What they want is strong autonomous provinces, free from Kiev meddling, in a cadre of a federal, Finlandized Ukraine. All one needs is to ask those Ukrainians who are now controlling 23 cities - and counting - in the Donbass, which accounts for over a third of Ukraine's GDP.

Meanwhile, adults are talking, unlike the Obama administration's proponents of the juvenile delinquent school of diplomacy. Russian President Vladimir Putin and German Chancellor Angela Merkel were on the phone on Workers Day. Putin once again stressed Kiev should halt its repeated "anti-terrorist" offensives, and launch an inclusive national dialogue. That does not seem likely.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu also felt compelled to remind Pentagon head Chuck Hagel that Russia will not "invade" anything, unless Kiev uses their military against unarmed civilians - which is exactly what the latest Kiev provocation in Slavyansk is all about.

US Think Tankland is frantically downgrading NATO hysteria about "aggressive Russia" as a "measured response". That fools only the hopelessly misinformed. After creating a failed state in Libya and the Afghanistan fiasco, global Robocop NATO, in its quest for "purpose" and meaning, cannot stop from fabricating an enemy.

Some gloss is offered via what is described as shifting the "strategic focal point" - from Afghanistan? - to the Baltics plus Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic. The Pentagon as well as Vice-President Joe Biden has promised to "increase training" with "eastern NATO partners".

Putin, meanwhile, is just applying Sun Tzu. He might as well be calmly cross-legged contemplating the waters of the Volga. So far away from that nonsense about Moscow

"aggressively" invading the Baltic states. By the way, it could be done in a heartbeat; and NATO would never see it coming. But Moscow does not want, or need, any such escalation.

The bottom line: global Robocop NATO can only survive if it faces a mortal threat. So what better platform to "harmonize" NATO than a "hostile" Russia? Either that, or keep licking those Pashtun-inflicted wounds in the Hindu Kush.