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Washington plays Russian roulette

By Pepe Escobar

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These are bleak times. I've been in serious conversation with some deep sources and interlocutors - those who know but don't need to show off, privileging discretion. They are all deeply worried. This is what one of them, a New York strategic planner, sent me:

The propaganda attack against Putin equating him with Hitler is so extreme that you have to think that the Russians cannot believe their ears and cannot trust the United States anymore under any circumstances.

I cannot believe how we could have gotten ourselves into this situation to protect the looters in the Ukraine that Putin would have rid the Ukraine of, and even had the gall to place in a leadership role one of the worst of the thieves. But that is history. What is certain is that MAD [mutually assured destruction] is not a deterrent today when both sides believe the other will use nuclear weapons once they have the advantage and that the side that gains a decisive advantage will use them. MAD is now over. That may sound somewhat extreme - but it's a perfectly logical extension, further on down the road, of what the Russian president intimated in his already legendary interview with Germany's ARD in Vladivostok last week: the West is provoking Russia into a new Cold War. [1]

Mikhail Gorbachev just stressed a few days ago the new Cold War is already on. Princeton's Stephen Cohen says the Cold War in fact never left. The Roving Eye reported about Cold War 2.0 months ago. Brits - still stranded in the 19th century new Great Game - prefer to spin the

"strident toxic personality" of "diminutive Putin"; [2] he is the "ruthless, charming and ultimately reckless" man who "put the cold war back in vogue". The Council on Foreign Relations, predictably, mourns the end of the post-Cold War world, blasts the current "disorder", and dreams of the good ol' unchallenged exceptionalist days. [3]

For arguably the best detailed background on how we came to this perilous state of affairs, it's hard to beat Vladimir Kozin of the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies. [4] Read him carefully. And yes, it's Cold War 2.0, the double trouble remix; between the US and Russia, and between NATO and Russia.

Seeing red

In his ARD interview, Putin stuck to actual facts on the ground: "NATO and the United States have military bases scattered all over the globe, including in areas close to our borders, and their number is growing ? Moreover, just recently it was decided to deploy special operations forces, again in close proximity to our borders. You have mentioned various [Russian] exercises, flights, ship movements and so on. Is all of this going on? Yes, it is indeed."

For the Russia-demonizing hordes, it's always convenient to forget that NATO expansion to Georgia and Ukraine was clinched at a NATO meeting in Bucharest in April 2008. The Georgia op spectacularly failed in the summer of 2008. Ukraine is a work in progress.

Crucially, in the ARD interview, Putin also told the EU coalition of the clueless/vassals/puppets/ that Russia can bring down the Ukraine House of Cards in a flash; Moscow just needs to emphasize it's time to collect the humongous amounts of cash it is legally owed.

Putin also made it very clear Moscow won't allow - and that was categorical: won't allow - Donbass to be overrun/smashed/ethnic-cleansed by Kiev: "Today there is fighting in eastern Ukraine. The Ukrainian central authorities have sent the armed forces there and they even use ballistic missiles. Does anybody speak about it? Not a single word. And what does it mean? What does it tell us? This points to the fact, that you want the Ukrainian central authorities to annihilate everyone there, all of their political foes and opponents. You want that? We certainly don't. And we won't let it happen." [5]

According to Kiev's own figures, no less than 65% of residential buildings and 10% of schools and kindergartens in Donbass have been destroyed. Over 40,000 medium-sized companies are paralyzed. Unemployment - Ukraine-wide, is over 40%. External debt may reach US\$80 billion - and don't expect the International Monetary Fund, which now owns Ukraine, to go philanthropic. Most of all, Kiev can't pay its billionaire gas bills to Gazprom because it spends a fortune terrorizing eastern Ukraine citizens. This Poroshenko rant sums it all up - with the US and EU fully complicit.

So NATO has been warned about Russia's real red lines. Still, substantial sectors of the Washington/Wall Street elites can't get enough of war. And they like it hot. [6] No one should ever underestimate the unlimited stupidity of the Return of the Living Neo-con Dead using their favorite pulpit, the editorial page of the Wall Street Journal.

The "logic" behind Cold War 2.0 - now in full swing - couldn't give a damn about European stability. The Obama administration launched it - with NATO as the spearhead - to in fact prevent Eurasian integration, building a New Berlin Wall in Kiev. The immediate target is to undermine Russia's economy; in the long run, regime change would be the ultimate bonus.

So the logic of escalation is on. The economically devastated EU is a joke; the only thing that counts for the US is NATO - and the overwhelming majority of its members are in the bag, sharing the prevailing mood in Washington of treating Putin as if he were Milosevic, Saddam Hussein or Gaddafi. There are no signs whatsoever Team Obama is willing to de-escalate. And when the Hillarator President-in-Waiting ascends to the throne, all bets are off.

Notes:

1. Putin's Sunday Interview on German TV (Dubbed + Transcript), Russian Insider, November 19, 2014.
2. The new cold war: are we going back to the bad old days?, The Guardian, November 19, 2014.
3. The Unraveling: How to Respond to a Disordered World, foreignaffairs.com, December 2014 issue.
4. See here.
5. The broken-down beauty of Eastern Ukraine, 25 years after the end of the USSR, Quartz, November 15, 2014.
6. The Wall Street Journal Wants the US to Go To War in Ukraine, Russia Insider, November 18, 2014.