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## Joe Biden's Dangerous Game

By Thomas Knapp

February 9, 2015

US vice-president Joe Biden put American exceptionalism on display in a big way Saturday (February 7), laying down a tough line of patter to the 2015 Munich Security Conference. Biden called on Russian president Vladimir Putin to “get out of Ukraine,” doubling down on US threats to escalate conflict in the Russia-Ukraine border region by arming Kiev’s forces.

“Too many times, President Putin has promised peace and delivered tanks, troops and weapons,” quote Biden, by way of promising peace and simultaneously promising to deliver tanks, weapons and possibly US troops.

At issue are two new “ethnically Russian” states – the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics – which seceded from Ukraine in the wake of last year’s US-backed coup and the installation in Kiev of a regime friendlier to the US and the European Union and more hostile toward Russia.

Biden’s newly minted opposition to ethnic secessionist movements rings hollow, given his enthusiastic backing of such movements in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. He recalls his support for Bosnian and Kosovar secessionists – up to and including US bombing campaigns and ground troop interventions versus Serbia which dwarf even the most inflated claims of Russian meddling in the current conflict – as his “proudest moment in public life.” Hypocrisy much, Mr. Vice-President?

Biden, US president Barack Obama, and the more hawkish contingent in Congress might also do well to reconsider the practicality of a counterinsurgency campaign in the region. Given the complete failures and follow-on consequences of the 21st century's first two such US campaigns – in Iraq and Afghanistan – a betting man would likely put long odds on success in a third such misadventure. Especially one which antagonizes a major military power with the capacity to, in extremis, take things nuclear. But that same gambler would put similarly long odds on the likelihood of such reconsideration.

It took 58,000 American deaths in Vietnam to raise even minor self-doubt among American politicians on their post-World War II conception of themselves as “leaders of the free world,” disposing of the military might to impose their will around the globe in, as George III put it to Britain's rebellious colonies in 1775, “all cases whatsoever.”

The fall of the Soviet Union and the sugar high of victory in the first Gulf War dispelled that doubt. 9/11 put the War Party completely back in America's driver's seat. And we've been cruisin' for a bruisin' ever since.

If Joe Biden and Company can't figure out a way to gracefully walk away from the mess they've made in Ukraine and let Russia, Ukraine, the breakaway states and the EU settle their own arguments, this conflict may very well turn out to be that bruisin'.