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US Blinks in Face-Off with Russia

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Last week started with US Secretary of State John Kerry coming to Russia to lay a wreath for the millions of Soviet soldiers who gave their lives in the historic defeat of Nazi Germany. Then the week ended with Kerry's deputy at the State Department, Victoria Nuland, flying to Moscow to meet Russian officials to discuss implementation of the Minsk ceasefire in Ukraine.

Nuland's was the second high-level political delegation from Washington to Russia in less than seven days. Before Kerry's attendance at the war memorial in Sochi, it was reportedly two years since a senior American official had set foot on Russian territory.

That's what you might call «America blinking first» in its high-stakes and reckless face-off with

Russia over the Ukraine crisis.

Recall that only a short while ago Russia was being painted as a global security threat on par with the ISIS terror network, according to US President Barack Obama.

Washington and its NATO military mouthpiece were vilifying Russian President Vladimir Putin as the «new Hitler» who had «annexed Crimea» and was waging «hybrid war» in Ukraine.

America's top diplomat John Kerry several times over the past year has pilloried Putin for «changing the borders of countries down the barrel of a gun».

Well, so much for the American hysterics. Kerry's respectful visit to Russian city Sochi last week had all the hallmarks of a school boy being brought to task by his seniors over a series of mad errors. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov reportedly told Kerry that Russia will be only dealt with on the basis of equals.

Later the same day in Sochi, a four-hour meeting was «granted» to Kerry by Putin, which was said to cover a whole range of international issues, with the Ukraine conflict top of the agenda. A four-hour meeting, please note. One can guess that Putin firmly, but politely donning a smile, read Kerry the riot act on geopolitics, thus: Washington better stop pushing its war agenda via the crazy Neo-Nazi regime in Kiev and better begin behaving itself with some sanity.

Putin can afford to talk like a man whose words are based on serious substance. Only days before Kerry's visit, Moscow staged its biggest military parade in decades to commemorate the 70th anniversary of Victory in Europe over Nazi Germany. Russia's modernised military prowess is indisputable, and so too are its global allies, primarily China. If the Americans were foolish enough to contemplate a wider war, they will have now gotten the picture that they do so at their own peril.

Kerry's visit also, in effect, bows to the indisputable historical fact that it was the Soviet Union and the sacrifice of over 25 million Russians that defeated European fascism – one of the greatest evils of the past century.

Washington's dalliance with the wannabe fascists in Kiev over the past year has entertained an attempt to re-write history and undermine Russia's inestimable role in defeating Nazism. But in the end any such revision of monumental historical reality is fatuous. Kerry paying respects at the war memorial in Russia last week is admission of this folly and the moral perversion of denying such historical truth.

The evidence that Washington has now blinked in its reckless standoff with Russia is further seen in Kerry's open embrace of implementing the Minsk ceasefire. This is the truce that Putin brokered, along with Germany's Merkel and France's Hollande, on 12 February in the Belorussian capital. Washington was out of the loop on that initiative and subsequently deigned an ambivalence toward it, preferring to continue making baseless accusations of Russian invasion of eastern Ukraine.

Well what do you know? Kerry is now calling for implementation of Minsk in a long-overdue respectful manner that finally acknowledges Russia's diplomatic efforts to bring peace to what is an internal Ukrainian conflict. Gone, it seems, are the snide American insinuations against Russia.

Even more significantly, while in Russia Kerry very publicly warned the Kiev regime to refrain from any further violations of Minsk. Only the day before Kerry's visit to Russia, the Kiev President Petro Poroshenko had declared that his forces were preparing to forcibly retake the international airport at Donetsk – which would be a brazen breach of the ceasefire accord. Kerry publicly delivered a rebuke to Poroshenko and said the US «does not endorse any such move».

Also, in the last week the NATO civilian chief, Norwegian Jens Stoltenberg, told the Kiev regime that it must implement the Minsk accords on a mutual basis with the rebel militia in the self-declared Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics. This is another marked change in attitude from the Washington-NATO axis. Up to recently, Stoltenberg has been dutifully reading his cue cards, claiming that Russia is covertly destabilising Ukraine. Now the NATO mouthpiece is putting the focus more on where it should: for the Kiev regime to take responsibility and engage directly with the DPR and LPR.

But the star-turn in the latest American display of blinking in the face of adversity has to go to State Department deputy Victoria Nuland. «Vicky» is the neocon cheerleader for covert regime-change operations. It was she who oversaw the CIA-backed illegal coup in Ukraine in February 2014. Back then, the American blood was pumping on a testosterone rush. The Neo-Nazis of Svoboda and Right Sector were being leveraged into power with the audacious ousting of a constitutionally elected government; and the new US-facilitated regime was going to drive on with the bigger prize of American regime-change agenda toward Russia.

Nuland is in Moscow this week to discuss in a business-like manner the implementation of Minsk. As TASS reported: «After a visit to Kiev, Nuland said Washington was willing to expand its participation in ensuring the implementation of the Minsk agreements, together with the EU and the 'Normandy Four' countries [Germany, France, Russia, Ukraine].»

That is a salient change in attitude from Nuland, who famously on the eve of her coup in Kiev last year, deprecated the EU by saying in a leaked telephone call: «Fuck the EU».

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov was also reported as saying that the US is showing interest not only in the Normandy Four format, but also in the Contact Group charged with overseeing the Minsk ceasefire.

So what is going on here? Only three weeks ago, the US had sent hundreds of its 173rd Airborne paratroopers to Ukraine to train the Kiev regime's National Guard and other units.

There is probably a combination of factors.

American-led economic sanctions and its own version of hybrid war in eastern Ukraine conducted covertly with the Kiev regime have failed to destabilise Russia, as was planned. Putin

has stood firm despite the tidal wave of propaganda unleashed by the Western governments and their servile news media. The defiant display of military force in Moscow at the May 9 victory commemorations would have shown Washington once and for all that it was dealing with a military superpower, not a lesser nation, such as Libya or Syria, that it can kick around.

Moreover, the US troops sent to train Kiev's squads probably in the end found outfits that were in no shape to prosecute a war. Low morale, poor equipment and prevalent dodging of military service no doubt showed that any deeper American involvement in Ukraine would end up with Americans having to do the fighting if it came to a war with Russia.

American media reports of the poor state of Kiev's tinpot army surfaced the week before Kerry apparently turned over a new leaf toward Russia. On May 6, for example, USA Today reported: 'Thousands dodge Ukraine army in fight with rebels'. The newspaper reported that 39,000 Ukrainians have managed to evade being called up to serve in military ranks – or 16 per cent of the required total.

USA Today quotes Kostyantyn Kovba, a 23-year-old aspiring businessman who «never answers calls from unknown numbers on his mobile phone... afraid a military commissioner might summon him to serve in Ukraine's army to fight pro-Russian separatists in the east.» Kostyantyn tells the US publication: «Serving in the army is a waste of time. I could spend that time learning something new.»

Another factor is economics. Germany's economy shrank in the first quarter of this year to 0.3 per cent, down from the already sluggish 0.7 per cent recorded in the final three months of last year. Economists attribute the alarming slowdown in the EU's economic powerhouse to the sanctions on Russia, which have caused German exports to plummet by 18 per cent over the past year, a loss that otherwise would have earned some €6.5 billion.

The Americans must know that these dire economic repercussions will sooner or later backlash on their own economy, as well as prompting more Europeans to openly oppose the US-led sanctions on Russia. Furthermore, Russia's economy seems to have solidly withstood the intended damage from the Western sanctions, reinforced by new strategic energy, trade and financial partnerships unveiled in recent months with China and other Asian partners.

Finally, there is the increasingly unhinged behaviour of the Kiev regime itself. This regime may have seemed like a good idea to Washington last year. But more and more recently it has shown itself to be a dangerous train wreck. The Kiev regime has overseen a Ukrainian economy that is imploding at double digit figures, while continually begging for billions more dollars in loans from its Western backers.

Poroshenko's rantings about launching a military assault on Donetsk international airport as well as recapturing Crimea and the breakaway Donbas regions not only expose who the aggressors are in this conflict, but in addition such fatuousness also gives a public-relations headache to even the most indulgent Western sponsors.

Meanwhile, the Kiev Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk – a hand-picked protégé of Nuland –

told French media last week: «We appreciate the support of our Western friends. But Europe and the world must remember the sacrifice that Ukrainians made to defend their freedoms and European values.»

This was the insufferably arrogant Yatsenyuk on another pitch for more Western money to pour into the Kiev black hole while, in his never-ending delusional mind, making a virtue of this begging by claiming to be defending European values from Russian aggression.

All in all, it seems that «Washington has finally come to its senses», as political analyst and journalist Paul Craig Roberts noted in recent days.

After staring Russia in the face for the best part of a year, the poker-faced Americans finally realised they are holding a bunch of worthless cards. And the Americans blinked.