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Russia, Ukraine and U.S. Hegemony

by Judith Deutsch

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The Ukraine/Russia conflict is particularly ominous because tensions with the United States could escalate into a nuclear war. For this reason, it is necessary to understand NATO's role, patterns of U.S. domination and the nuclear arms race. The political world is dangerously in flux, with entangled military and economic alliances and a robust weapons trade. This is similar to the prelude to World War I when it took one trigger to unleash cascading inter-state violence.

The demonization of Russia and Putin leaves out the role of the United States and NATO. Seumas Milne, writes in The Guardian, March 4, 2015, "A quarter of a century after the end of the Cold War, the 'Russian threat' is unmistakably back. Vladimir Putin, Britain's defence secretary Michael Fallon declares, is as great a danger to Europe as 'Islamic State'...

"Putin's authoritarian conservatism may offer little for Russia's future, but this anti-Russian incitement is dangerous folly. There certainly has been military expansionism. But it has overwhelmingly come from NATO, not Moscow."

James Bissett is a former Canadian ambassador to Yugoslavia, Albania, and Bulgaria. He wrote in the Ottawa Citizen last year, "The current crisis in Ukraine threatens global security and at worst has the potential for nuclear catastrophe. At best, it signals a continuation of the Cold War. Sadly, the crisis is completely unnecessary and the responsibility lies entirely in the hands of the

United States-led NATO powers. The almost virulent propaganda onslaught blaming Russia for the instability and violence in Ukraine simply ignores reality and the facts.”

Stephen Cohen, emeritus professor of Russian studies at Princeton University and New York University says that simply blaming Vladimir Putin and Russia for the present stand-off in relations means “no negotiation” and that no negotiation leads to war. He told *Democracy Now* last year, “The false statement [Obama] made, and the premise on which American policy is being made, is that Putin attacked Ukraine and began this whole mess. Whatever you think about what the outcome should be, that is just factually untrue. All of this began when the United States and Europe asked Ukraine back last November to make a decision between Russia and the European Union.”

The demonization of Putin can be allusive, such as in *Globe and Mail* columnist Doug Saunders’ article on July 18, 2014 about the downing of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 the day before. He wrote Putin is to blame regardless of who actually shot down the plane because Russia caused all the chaos in Ukraine. He wrote that all of Europe is under “assault” from Russia.

NATO

NATO was established in 1949, ostensibly as a defensive alliance against communism. In response, European communist states united under the Warsaw Pact in 1955.

When the Berlin wall came down in 1989, Mikhail Gorbachev and George H.W. Bush made a verbal agreement to accede to the reunification of West and East Germany but under condition that NATO would not expand “one inch” to the east. The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 ushered in major geopolitical shifts. In 1991, all nuclear weapons could have been eliminated. Instead, the U.S., with NATO involvement, immediately launched into the first major oil war with “shock and awe” in Iraq. NATO wars in Bosnia (1992-1995) and in Serbia (1999) contravened the United Nations Charter. The Clinton administration “was sticking to its stand that NATO should be able to act independently of the United Nations.”[1]

Strobe Talbott, Deputy Secretary of State under Clinton, has strongly criticized NATO expansion. “Russia’s resentment toward the United States and the crisis that erupted in March 2014 with Russia’s occupation of Crimea were not unrelated to the Clinton administration’s insistence in the 1990s that NATO be expanded to Russia’s borders....It seemed like virtually everyone I knew from the world of academe, journalism, and foreign policy think-tanks was against enlargement”[2]

George Kennan termed NATO enlargement a “strategic blunder of potentially epic proportions”. “[E]xpanding NATO would be the most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-cold war era,” he wrote.

“Such a decision may be expected to inflame the nationalistic, anti-Western and militaristic tendencies in Russian opinion; to have an adverse effect on the development of Russian democracy; to restore the atmosphere of the cold war to East-West relations, and to impel Russian foreign policy in directions decidedly not to our liking.” [3]

Russians note the double standard comparing Kosovo and Crimea. Kosovo, backed by NATO, seceded from Serbia in 2008 without any referendum and was recognized immediately by the United Nations. But when a large proportion of Crimeans voted to secede from Ukraine and re-join Russia, the UN strongly condemned Russia's so-called aggression. Subsequent, reliable polls of Crimeans show a high rate of approval of absorption into Russia. [4]

Contrary to the verbal promise to Gorbachev, NATO expanded to the east. In 1999, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland were welcomed into the alliance. Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia joined in 2004.

At the April 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest, the United States supported inviting Georgia and Ukraine to join the alliance. In May 2008, the EU concurred, thus knowingly crossing Russia's "red line". By August of that year, there was war between Georgia and Russia. Obama failed to reset relations with Russia and the US continued to pursue its policy of pulling Ukraine from the Russian orbit and integrating it into the West. (Speech by John Mearsheimer in March 2015.)

Coinciding with NATO expansion are institutional changes in the United States. Without Congressional approval or accountability to the judiciary, the president is able to order targeted killings, declare war, nullify prisoner rights, annul treaties and expand intelligence and national security measures. In his book on "double government", Michael Glennon writes that the president appoints the several hundred national security policymakers who "wield immense, unnoticed power". They define security as military and intelligence which encourages the exaggeration of existing threats and the creation of imaginary ones. There are no meaningful constraints. International law affords great deflective possibilities. The rules of the UN Charter concerning the use of force can plausibly be marshalled to support virtually any U.S. military action deemed in the national interest. NATO provides credibility, flexibility, and anonymity in equal doses; its Council has no substantive written rules of procedure. It issues no legal guidance or guidelines that might restrict member states. No internal rules exist that would render NATO responsible for a violation of international law. The Organizations' policy is not to reveal which member state participated in a military operation. All of this gives NATO its greatest asset, its capacity to serve as a veil. NATO shields member states from legal and political accountability.[5]

NATO is now global. In 2011, NATO used UN cover to justify attacking Libya, though technically the UN Security Council resolution did not authorize outside powers to provide air support to the rebellion against Gaddafi. NATO's operation led to the chaotic violence and collapse of Libya.[6]

NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen has defended a global role for NATO. His illogic rationalizes NATO crimes. "We are pretty close to a new Cold War because of Russia's illegal actions in Ukraine. I would say NATO is the most successful peace movement the world has ever known." He said the accusation of encirclement of Russia is not justified, is not a threat against Russia. About the promise made to not move one inch further east: "That view is pure propaganda." He said, "It's the right thing to expand... Russia benefits from a zone of security. Encirclement is paranoid. The root cause is Russia expansion. NATO expansion brings prosperity."

Philip M. Breedlove, current NATO commander, is similarly not compelled by facts. “40,000 Russian troops were ‘massing on the border of Ukraine... but in the age of forensic satellite evidence, he offered none...”

“German leaders in Berlin were stunned. They didn’t understand what Breedlove was talking about. And it wasn’t the first time. Once again, the German government, supported by intelligence gathered by Germany’s foreign intelligence agency, did not share the view of NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander. The pattern has become a familiar one.”

There is up-to-date documentation on NATO expansion and war games. For example, Rick Rozoff in *Stop NATO*, Bruce Gagnon’s Global Network Against Weapons and Nuclear Power in Space and Roger Annis’ *New Cold War.org*.

Competition with Russia for the Arctic: a motive for NATO expansion

In 2009, the U.S. Department of the Navy released a 36 page document called *Navy Arctic Roadmap*, declaring the Arctic a zone of its strategic interests. “The United States has broad and fundamental national security interests in the Arctic region and is prepared to operate either independently or in conjunction with other states to safeguard these interests. These interests include missile defense and early warning, deployment of sea and air navigation, and overflight.”

“What the practical implementation of this policy means is the expanded penetration of the Arctic Circle by the U.S. Navy’s submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) third of the American nuclear triad...”

Russian news reported “NATO is seriously thinking of establishing military presence in the Arctic. It considers global warming and consequently an Arctic thaw as an occasion for this.” [7]

Washington and Brussels have employed Canada to confront Russia in the impending showdown over the Arctic. Ottawa has conducted its largest-ever military exercises, established new military bases and is exhibiting increasing truculence and sabre-rattling toward Russia in the region.^{vi} On June 16, 2015, *Democracy Now* reported military expansionism into pristine Arctic wilderness areas, with the U.S. Navy “unleashing thousands of sailors, soldiers, airmen, marines and Coast Guard members along with several Navy destroyers, hundreds of aircrafts, untold weaponry and a submarine for the naval exercises”.

Canadian Ron Macnab is past chairman of the International Advisory Board on the Scientific and Technical Aspects of the Law of the Sea. He writes that Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s “loud and public vilification of the Russian president” is linked to competition over the Arctic. Evidence is suppressed in order to press Arctic land claims. Harper “ordered a re-drafting of offending texts and maps so they would illustrate new maritime limits that encompassed the seabed in the vicinity of the North Pole...”

“On an internal level, it has been reported that instructions were issued to members of Canada’s UN Convention on the Law of the Sea project team to have no contact with their Russian

counterparts, notwithstanding the positive working relationships that had existed between the two teams up until then.”[8]

Nuclear weapons

The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists this year advanced the Doomsday Clock warning of human extinction to three minutes before midnight because of nuclear weapons and climate change. The public is dangerously ignorant about nuclear weapons. Major meetings on eliminating nuclear weapons are unreported in the media (and at universities). Unreported was the 2015 UN Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, the 2015 New York symposium ‘Dynamics of Possible Nuclear Extinction’, the 2015 World Uranium Symposium in Quebec and the 2015 Humanitarian Pledge for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons, signed by 107 countries. Medical and epidemiological research on the effects of radiation from weapons and nuclear reactors are unreported.[9]

The Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) came into effect in 1970 and has two parts: non-proliferation and elimination of nuclear weapons. NATO is in violation of the NPT by refusing to rule out offensive first use of nuclear weapons. In 1977, Donald Rumsfeld outlined strategies for a first strike: precise strategic weapons to destroy Soviet land-based missiles in silos and other critical targets, anti-submarine warfare before they can fire their weapons, anti-ballistic missiles and bomber defenses to stop any weapons that survived the first assault, and space warfare to eliminate Soviet early warning, communications, and navigation satellites. [10]

Russia is characteristically painted as the aggressor, yet there is a historical pattern of U.S. action, prompting USSR reaction. The first U.S. nuclear chain reaction was in 1942; the USSR followed suit in 1946. The U.S. detonated the first atomic bomb in 1945, the USSR in 1949. The first ballistic-missile-launching submarine was launched in 1960 by the U.S., then in 1968 by the USSR. Penetration aids were placed on U.S. missiles in 1964; none were ever done on Soviet missiles before 1982. The accelerated buildup of strategic missiles by the U.S. in 1961 was followed by the USSR in 1966. Multiple warheads on missiles (MIRVs) were first introduced by the U.S. in 1964; by the USSR in 1973. Computerized guidance on U.S. missiles came into existence in 1970; in 1975 on Soviet missiles. [11]

In 2014, Obama allocated \$1tn to upgrade nuclear weapons over the next three decades. Hardly an act of non-proliferation. In 2002, George W. Bush unilaterally pulled out of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM). The 1972 ABM treaty was the cornerstone of nuclear weapons deterrence and international security. During the Cold War, there was a belief that there could be no winners because of “mutually assured destruction”. But the development of missile defense, with technology capable of detecting missiles within one minute of launch, led to U.S. belief in a winnable nuclear war. Missile defense is actually an “offense” system. [12]

Despite member states’ commitment to transparency in the 2000 NPT Final Document, NATO does not disclose details about its nuclear weapons. The threat to use nuclear weapons is itself a violation of the NPT according to the advisory opinion of International Court of Justice. Yet this April, Members of European Parliament declared that the EU’s readiness for nuclear war “is one of the best steps to deter Russia from further aggression.”

Theodore Postol, MIT professor emeritus of science, technology, and national security, urgently warns that the U.S. recklessly treats nuclear weapons as if they are conventional weapons. “The nuclear weapons overhaul announced by Obama [2014] focuses on improving the accuracy of long-range land- and sea-based ballistic missile warheads and on increasing the killing power of other nuclear warheads...

“But a close analysis reveals a technically sophisticated effort to ready U.S. nuclear forces for a direct confrontation with Russia.” Postol concurs with “sophisticated Russian analysts, especially those who understand the technical aspects of nuclear weapons, [who] see the [U.S.] modernization drive as a disturbing indication that the U.S. military believes a nuclear war against Russia can be fought and won.”

Postol writes that technical problems greatly increase the chances of a nuclear war. Russians do not have a working space-based early warning system that can detect incoming missiles below the earth’s horizon. This means that they would only have six minutes to decide whether to counterattack with nuclear weapons. He concludes that “the [U.S.] modernization effort significantly increases the chances of an accident during an unpredicted and unpredictable crisis – one that could escalate beyond anyone’s capacity to imagine.” [13]

On June 5, 2015, RT.com quoted an unclassified portion of an Associated Press report written by the office of General Martin Dempsey, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. “The Pentagon is considering scrapping a Cold War-era treaty and deploying nuclear-capable intermediate-range cruise missiles in Europe over Moscow’s alleged treaty violations. [They] would be potentially capable of destroying military targets within Russian territory.” The U.S. alleges that Russia is violating the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty and the U.S. response is to violate the treaty too.

Conclusion

There are lengthy discussions among U.S. military strategists, military-funded think tanks, and nuclear scientists about new, precise, targeted, “lesser evil” uses of advanced nuclear and conventional weapons. What they neglect and distort in their calculations is that the United States never fights defensive, contained wars, even on its own soil. The Civil War and wars against First Nations were “scorched earth” wars of attrition.

Eminent journalist and filmmaker John Pilger writes, “[S]ince 1945, more than a third of the membership of the United Nations—69 countries—have suffered some or all of the following at the hands of America’s modern fascism: they have been invaded, their governments overthrown, their popular movements suppressed, their elections subverted, their people bombed and their economies stripped of all protection, their societies subjected to a crippling siege known as ‘sanctions’.”

The US military is on a trajectory to doubly exterminate human beings. Harvard academic Elaine Scarry writes, “Current scientific research shows that even a smaller nuclear arsenal, if used in a major exchange, will still produce nuclear winter, causing a drop in the average temperature

across earth larger than what occurred in the Ice Age 18,000 years ago, reducing rainfall by 45 percent...

“This new research also models what will happen if a tiny fraction (not even one per cent but even .015 per cent) of today’s total arsenal is used in a regional exchange of fifty Hiroshima-size weapons: 44 million people will die at once; 1 billion will die from starvation.”[14]

There is the neglected role of the military in climate change: “[By] every measure, the Pentagon is the largest institutional user of petroleum products and energy in general. Yet the Pentagon has a blanket exemption in all international climate agreements.”

A great deal about the nuclear threat is known and is accessible. In his song, ‘Talking World War III Blues’, Bob Dylan attributed to Abraham Lincoln, “You can’t fool all the people all the time.” Simply demonizing Russian leader Vladimir Putin shuts out dire facts about the actions and intentions of the U.S. and its allies.

Notes

[1] NY Times, Feb. 11, 1999, quoted by Chomsky, Noam. *Rogue States*, (2000). p. 37.

[2] P. Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A memoir of Presidential Diplomacy* 224, 2003, quoted in Glennon, Michael J. *National Security and Double Government*. Oxford. (2015). P. 143n - 144n.,

[3] Glennon, quoting from “A Fateful Error, N.Y. Times Feb 5, (1997). P. 144n.

[4] A June 2014 Gallup poll, which was sponsored by the U.S. government’s Broadcasting Board of Governors, found that 82.8 percent of Crimeans said the March 16 referendum on secession reflected the views of the Crimean people. In the poll, when asked if joining Russia would improve their lives, 73.9 percent said yes and only 5.5 percent said no. (Read report on Consortium News.) Also, listen to CBC Radio One’s *The Current*, March 15, 2015.

[5] Glennon, Michael J. (2015). *National Security and Double Government*. Oxford. P. 99-101.

[6] Campbell, Horace (2013). *Global NATO and the Catastrophic Failure in Libya: Lessons for Africa in the forging of African unity.* Monthly Review Press. P. 69-73. Also see Maximilien Forte Vijay Prashad *Arab Spring, Libyan Winter* (New York: AK Press, 2012).

[7] On Navy Arctic Roadmap, see *Stop NATO, Russia Insider*. Also see ‘Climate Change and the Military’, by Emily Gilbert, in *Canadian Dimension Magazine*, Nov/Dec 2014.

[8] <http://thechronicleherald.ca/opinion/1293505-how-harper-froze-out-scientists-triggered-arctic-debacle>. Dalhousie University biologist Hutchings: “you look at the rise of certain political parties in the 1930s and have to ask how could that happen and how did they adopt such extreme ideologies so quickly, and how could that happen in a democracy today?” http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/capt-trevor-greene/science-cuts-canada_b_4534729.html “The

government is either incompetent or malevolent or both,” added Ayles. Burt Ayles, a 68-year-old retired research scientist and former regional director general for freshwaters in central Canada and the Arctic. dramatic cuts to the Canada Offshore Oil, Gas and Energy Research Centre at the Bedford Institute of Oceanography <http://thetyee.ca/News/2013/12/09/Dismantling-Fishery-Library/>

[9] Dewar, Dale and Florian Oelck, Florian. From Hiroshima to Fukushima to You. Between the Lines: Toronto. (2014). P. 21.

[10] Aldridge, Robert. (1983). First Strike: The Pentagon’s Strategy for Nuclear War. South End Press. (1983). P. 36.

[11] See Regehr and Rosenblum, Canada and the Nuclear Arms Race, (1983). p. 9.

[12] See for example Chomsky <http://rt.com/news/203055-us-russia-war-chomsky/>; Bruce Gagnon <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-pentagons-strategy-for-world-domination-full-spectrum-dominance-from-asia-to-africa/5397514>

[13] <http://www.thenation.com/article/192633/how-obama-administration-learned-stop-worrying-and-love-bomb>. Also see Eric Schlosser (2013) Command and Control: Nuclear weapons, the Damascus accident, and the illusion of safety. Penguin.

[14] Elaine Scarry. Thermonuclear Monarchy: Choosing between democracy and doom. W.W. Norton and Co. (2014). p. 145-6.