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Washington's Confrontation with Russia

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You may find it difficult to believe the content of a speech by US President George W Bush in November 2001 when he met with President Putin in Texas and, among other things, declared that «a lot of people never really dreamt that an American president and a Russian president could have established the friendship that we [have]».

He went on to say that «When I was in high school, Russia was an enemy. Now the high school students can know Russia as a friend, that we're working together to break the old ties, to establish a new spirit of cooperation and trust so that we can work together to make the world more peaceful».

How sensible. How optimistic.

But, regrettably, how wrong. Because the United States administration, at the urging of the Pentagon and its sub-office in Brussels, the HQ of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, had already embarked on a policy of confrontation, encouraging expansion of that anti-Russia military alliance from 16 to its present 28 countries.

Two years after President Bush welcomed President Putin to Texas, NATO welcomed eight more nations as members, increasing its military presence ever-closer to Russia's border.

President GW Bush was not the most intellectually gifted occupant of the White House. In fact, to be blunt, he was probably one of the most disastrous presidents ever self-inflicted by an American electorate, so far. But he was right in declaring that «I believe the US-Russian relationship is one of the most important relationships that our country can have, and the stronger the relationship is, the more likely it is the world will be at peace...»

The fact that Russia's unqualified priority was trade, initially with Europe but expanding throughout the globe, was welcomed by all except the warmongers of NATO and the Pentagon whose foremost priority was justification of NATO's existence. It didn't matter to them that Russia was concentrating on improving its economy for the benefit of its people and that its defence budget was comparatively tiny. They wanted a reason for NATO to exist, because embarrassing questions were being asked about the need for such an expensive military grouping to endure when the reason for its creation and very existence was simply and solely to counter the perceived military threat from the Soviet Union that had ceased to exist. In the year of President Putin's visit to Texas, Russia's expenditure on defence was 36 billion dollars, while that of the US was 290 billion and the European NATO countries' total was 158 billion.

In 2015, as reported by Britain's Daily Telegraph, the United States spent 569 billion dollars on its military while Russia's defence budget was 53 billion and that of Britain a staggering 66 billion – very much more than the UK can afford. The Telegraph and most other western media and many allegedly independent think-tanks noted that the US military budget had decreased from the previous year's 610 billion, and applauded the reduction – without noting that the massive US-NATO draw-down in Afghanistan had resulted in far less expenditure on that disastrous war, which has cost the US taxpayer a fortune.

In 2011, for example, the US spent 122 billion dollars fighting its war in Afghanistan. This went down to 35 billion in 2015 thereby reducing the total defence budget. It is deliberately misleading for the Pentagon and western media to claim that the USA has reduced its military spending as a matter of principle.

The mantra of those who advocate and approve massive military spending is that there are threats from Russia and China. In the case of Russia this assertion is founded on the Ukraine debacle, and it is fitting to briefly examine the allegation in the light of what actually went on.

The United States encouraged a coup in Ukraine in 2014, and although the Ukrainian news agency Interfax reported in June 2015 that President Poroshenko stated that the overthrow of his predecessor was «unconstitutional» there was no change to the ceaseless western propaganda line that the whole thing was entirely democratic. Similarly the allegations that Crimea was «annexed» by Russia have been successful to the point that very few in the west believe that, as the UK's Independent newspaper reported, «Fireworks exploded and Russian flags fluttered above jubilant crowds after residents in Crimea voted overwhelmingly to secede from Ukraine

and join Russia». The referendum was a perfectly fair expression of opinion in Crimea. Indeed, it would have been very surprising if the vote hadn't gone in favour of rejoining Russia, because it is undeniable that the vast majority of Crimea's citizens are Russian-cultured and Russian-speaking.

The main thing, however, is the allegation that Russia was in some way seeking to invade Ukraine itself. There is no doubt that Russia was and continues to be supportive of the separatists of eastern Ukraine, but the notion that Russia wanted or wants to attack and occupy Ukraine is ludicrous.

Russia doesn't want to attack Ukraine, or any other bordering country. What possible benefit would accrue to Russia by going to war? All that Russia wants to do is to trade with as many countries as possible and ensure that Russian-cultured people on its borders are treated fairly and according to their wishes.

President Obama seems to be fundamentally decent, and is decidedly more intelligent than President GW Bush, but he has followed the war-advocates of the Pentagon in what can be described only as a slavish manner. His diatribe on Crimea was directed personally against President Putin and his arrogant boast that «We will not accept Russia's occupation of Crimea» was a declaration of indefinite confrontation.



Little wonder that General Philip Breedlove, the commander of the US European Command, and NATO's «Supreme Allied Commander Europe», declared that «we are prepared to fight and win» against Russia. He announced in February 2016 that in his opinion Russia has «chosen to be an adversary and poses a long-term existential threat» to the United States, and therefore «[t]his year's budget request reflects our solemn commitment to the security of our allies and partners».

So up goes US military expenditure yet again, and the Pentagon's generals and the Wall Street investors and the weapons manufacturers all over the United States rub their hands in delight.

These snaky schemers are what the great President Eisenhower called the «military-industrial complex» of seemingly patriotic Americans who, in the final essence, are America's own worst enemy.

In 2001 when President Bush met with President Putin he said that «the more I get to know President Putin, the more I get to see his heart and soul and the more I know we can work together in a positive way. And so anytime leaders can come together and sit down and talk about key issues in a very open and honest way, it will make relations stronger in the long run».

He was absolutely right: but President Obama prefers military-industrial complex confrontation to talking with President Putin in «a very open and honest way».

Washington's changed attitude to Russia is not only petulant and immature, it is extremely dangerous. President Obama «will not accept» the fact that Crimea is once again part of Russia, at the wish of its citizens. So what is he going to do about it? What advice is he receiving from his bellicose generals?

Why is he driving the world close to war?