

NATO Invents Russian Threats in the Baltic - but Putin's Next Big Play is Greece

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While mainstream media promulgate a fictitious message of Russian threats in the Baltic, Vladimir Putin's next big play lies far to the south, writes Oliver Tickell. The gross intransigence of the EU, the IMF, the European Central Bank and Germany are forcing Greece into a powerful new economic and energy alliance with Russia that will reshape Europe - and for the better.

We could see Greece simply renouncing its manifestly unpayable and unjust €320 billion national debt, and quitting the Eurozone straitjacket - while receiving an emergency liquidity package from Russia to support the launch of the New Drachma.

Russian President Vladimir Putin will “launch a campaign of undercover attacks to destabilise the Baltic states on Nato’s eastern flank”, the [Telegraph reports](#) today - along with all other mainstream news media.

How do we know this? Because the UK’s Defence Secretary Michael Fallon has said so. Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia watch out - the Russian peril is fast coming your way.

“There are lots of worries”, Fallon told the newspaper.

“I’m worried about Putin. There’s no effective control of the border, I’m worried about his pressure on the Baltics, the way he is testing NATO, the submarines and aircraft ... They are modernising their conventional forces, they are modernising their nuclear forces and they are testing NATO, so we need to respond.”

Covert attack by Russia on the Baltic states is “a very real and present danger”, Fallon insisted.

Now where did we hear that before? Ah yes. On 16th December 1998 President Bill Clinton said that that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein presented “[a clear and present danger](#)” to the stability of the Persian Gulf and the safety of people everywhere.

We all know where that led: the Iraq war followed a few years later. We also know that the claim was a monstrous untruth: Saddam had no chemical, biological or nuclear weapons. So why should we believe Fallon now? Where is his evidence? He has none. When you already know the truth, who needs evidence?

Fallon – and NATO – should keep their eyes on the ball

But while Fallon’s attention is focused on the imaginary threat to the Baltic states, there is another country that really could be ‘at risk’ – and not because of cyber-attack, invasion by ‘green men’ or a campaign of destabilisation emanating from the Kremlin.

No, the EU, the European Central Bank, the IMF and European finance ministers have already been doing all the destabilisation that’s needed – forcing Greece into a deep programme of austerity that has seen the economy shrink by 25% over five years, the closure of vital public services, mass unemployment and the forced sell-off of public assets.

And now the Greeks – and their newly elected Syriza government – have had enough. This week the Greek prime minister Alexis Tsipras flatly refused to renew the €240 billion ‘bailout’ package, which comes with all the austerity strings, and he today [advanced proposals](#) for a ‘six-month assistance package’ free of harsh conditions to give Greece time to renegotiate its debt.

The standoff continues, and will be decided tomorrow by EU finance ministers. It’s not looking good: Germany has already stated that the Greek proposal “*does not meet the conditions*”. But if the finance ministers don’t agree, then what?

You guessed it: Tsipras will turn to Russia. Earlier this month Tsipras and Putin [agreed on a range of bilateral ties](#), including the construction of a pipeline that would carry Russian natural gas from the Turkish border across Greece to the other countries of southern Europe.

This follows the re-routing of the ‘South Stream’ pipeline, which had been due to cross Bulgaria but was effectively blocked by the EU’s retrospective application of energy market rules, under heavy pressure from the USA. Last November and December Putin negotiated the pipeline’s [realignment across Turkey](#) with Turkish President Erdogan – right up to the Greek border.

Following the agreement between Putin and Tsipras, which came complete with an invitation to Moscow on Victory over the Nazis day, 9th May, the pipeline link to the major countries of southern Europe is now complete, at least on paper. And once it’s built, Greece will effectively control – and profit from – that gas supply, and take a strategic position in Europe’s energy landscape.

But Greece is a NATO member!

Greece’s increasingly warm relationship with Russia is already causing concern among other EU and NATO countries. German Defense Minister [Ursula von Der Leyen has said](#) that Greece was “*putting at risk its position in the NATO alliance with its approach to Russia.*”

This provoked a fierce retort from Greek Defense Minister Panos Kammenos who branded the attack as “*unacceptable and extortionate*” – noting that “*Greece was always on the side of the Allies when they pushed back German occupation troops.*”

“*Statements that replace the EU and NATO’s institutional bodies are unacceptable as blackmailing*”, he added. “*They undermine the European institutions except if Germany’s aim is to dissolve the European Union and the NATO.*”

So if Tsipras's refinancing proposal is refused tomorrow will Greece quit NATO and the EU, to join the Eurasian Union? Not if Mr Putin gets his way: Greece is worth much more to Russia as an ally within the EU and NATO than outside - where it can veto more trade sanctions against Russia, block the TTIP and CETA trade deals with the USA and Canada, and oppose NATO's increasing belligerence from within.

But we could see Greece simply renouncing its [manifestly unpayable and unjust](#) €320 billion national debt, and quitting the Eurozone straitjacket - while receiving an emergency liquidity package from Russia to support the launch of the New Drachma.

In fact, we could see a re-run of important elements of the Ukraine play of December 2013, when Russia offered a [support package](#) under which it would buy \$15 billion in bonds from Ukraine, supporting its collapsing currency, and supply it with deeply discounted gas - £268 per cubic metre rather than the market price of \$400.

A \$15 billion purchase of New Drachma denominated Greek bonds would be a superb launch for Greece's new currency, and would firmly cement Greece's long term alliance with Russia, providing it with a valuable long term bridgehead into both the EU and NATO.

This move would also give inspiration and confidence to progressive political movements across Europe that take inspiration from Syriza's fight for economic justice - in Spain, Portugal, Ireland, Italy, the UK and beyond - and bear the powerful message: there is an alternative.

And while NATO, the EU, the USA and their loyal servants, among them the UK's Michael Fallon, deliberately whip up a fictitious threat in the Baltic, ignoring the real danger they face to the south, the masterly Mr Putin would once again make fools of them all.

Oliver Tickell edits The Ecologist, but this article is written in a personal capacity.

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