

Obama's Deadly Cold War Legacy

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Global Research, July 13, 2015

[Consortium News](#) 10 July 2015

Region: [Russia and FSU](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [UKRAINE REPORT](#)

Image: President Barack Obama and President Petro Poroshenko of Ukraine talk after statements to the press following their bilateral meeting at the Warsaw Marriott Hotel in Warsaw, Poland, June 4, 2014. (Official White House Photo by Pete Souza)

Whatever positive legacy that President Barack Obama might point to – the first African-American president, the Affordable Care Act, the changed social attitudes on gay rights, etc. – his ultimate legacy may be defined more by his reckless stewardship guiding the United States into a wholly unnecessary new Cold War.

The costs of this Cold War II will be vast, emptying out what's left of the U.S. Treasury in a new arms race against Russia, assuming that the new East-West showdown doesn't precipitate a nuclear war that could end all life on the planet. Already, the United States military has altered its national security policies to treat Russia as the principal foreign threat.

"If you want to talk about a nation that could pose an existential threat to the United States, I'd have to point to Russia," [said](#) General Joseph F. Dunford Jr., at Senate hearings on his nomination to be the new chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. "And if you look at their [the Russians'] behavior, it's nothing short of alarming."

Dunford also recommended shipping U.S. weapons to the post-coup regime in Ukraine so it can better prosecute its war against ethnic Russian rebels in the east who have resisted the overthrow of elected President Viktor Yanukovich and have been deemed "terrorists" by the U.S.-backed government in Kiev.

"Frankly," Dunford said on Thursday, "without that kind of support, they [the new powers-that-be in Ukraine] are not going to be able to defend themselves against Russian aggression."

Which may prove that no one in Official Washington grasps the concept of irony any more. While Dunford sticks to the propaganda line about "Russian aggression" and the Kiev regime wages its "anti-terror operation" against the ethnic Russians in the east, we now know that Kiev has dispatched a military force spearheaded by neo-Nazis, who are eager to ethnically cleanse those ethnic Russians from Ukraine, and Islamic jihadists with links to Islamic State terrorists.

So, if you want to talk about "aggression" and "terrorism," you might start with the inconvenient truth that the U.S.-beloved government of Ukraine – which supposedly "shares our values" – is the first European state since World War II to dispatch Nazi storm troopers to kill other Europeans – and arguably the first ever to create a combined military force of

Nazis and Islamic militants (described as “brothers” of the Islamic State). [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“Ukraine Merges Nazis and Islamists.”](#)]

Yet, when Russia helps these endangered ethnic Russians, who saw their elected president illegally ousted from office in a coup supported if not sponsored by the United States, that’s “Russian aggression.” And, when the ethnic Russians resist the new order, which has now sent Nazis and jihadists to kill them, it’s the ethnic Russians who are the “terrorists.”

To push the irony even further, while Dunford decried “Russian aggression” in connection with a civil war on Russia’s border, he openly declared that the U.S. military stands ready to bomb Iran — halfway around the world — to destroy its nuclear facilities. Asked if the U.S. military had that ability, Dunford said, “My understanding is that we do, senator.”

An Up-Is-Down World

In the up-is-down world that is now Official Washington, such extraordinary and profoundly dangerous statements draw only nodding approval from all the Important People. In part, that’s because President Obama has allowed so many false narratives to take hold regarding Russia, Iran and other nations that there is a Grimm’s Fairytale quality to it all.

But the most serious false narrative today is the one about “Russian aggression.” Whatever one thinks of Russian President Vladimir Putin, he did not initiate the Ukraine crisis; he reacted to a provocation by neoconservatives in the U.S. government, especially Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland, who sought a “regime change” on Russia’s border.

And, while there’s plenty of evidence to support the fact that the U.S. intervened in Ukraine, there is no evidence that Putin sought out this crisis or had any designs to recreate the Russian Empire, two key elements of the U.S. propaganda campaign. The truth is that by encouraging and instigating the violent Ukraine coup on Feb. 22, 2014, the Obama administration struck first.

Putin, who had been preoccupied with the Sochi Winter Olympics at the time, was caught off-guard and responded with an emergency national security meeting on Feb. 23 to decide on what steps were needed to protect the Russian strategic interests in Crimea, including the historic naval base at Sevastopol. He was reacting, not instigating.

It may be that President Obama was also surprised by the political crisis in Ukraine, since he also was preoccupied by a variety of other international hot spots, especially in the Middle East. Possibly, he and Secretary of State John Kerry had given too much leeway to Nuland to press for the destabilization of the Yanukovich government.

Nuland, the wife of arch-neocon Robert Kagan who famously promoted “regime change” in Iraq as a founder of the Project for the New American Century, pushed the envelope in Ukraine in the cause of achieving her own “regime change.” She even passed out cookies to anti-government protesters in Kiev’s Maidan square in fall 2013.

In December 2013, Nuland [reminded](#) a group of Ukrainian business leaders that the United States had invested \$5 billion in their “European aspirations.” Then, in early February 2014, Nuland was caught in a pre-coup [phone call](#) with U.S. Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt discussing which Ukrainian politicians should be elevated in the new government.

“Yats is the guy,” Nuland said, referring to Arseniy Yatsenyuk, who indeed would become the post-coup prime minister. Dismissing the less aggressive European Union approach to the crisis, Nuland exclaimed, “F**k the EU!” and pondered how to “glue this thing.” Pyatt wondered how to “midwife this thing.”

Based on this and other evidence, the reality of what happened in Ukraine was never hard to figure out. It was a coup with President Yanukovich forced to flee for his life on Feb. 22, 2014, and extra-constitutional steps then used to remove him as the nation’s leader. It was reminiscent of similar U.S.-orchestrated coups – Iran, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, etc.

But the increasingly unprofessional mainstream U.S. news media had already ditched even a pretense of journalistic objectivity. The media stuck white hats on the coup-makers and black hats on Yanukovich (and his ally Putin). The word “coup” became virtually forbidden in the U.S. news media along with any reference to the neo-Nazis who spearheaded the coup.

Any deviation from this “group think” opened you to charges of “Moscow stooge” or “Putin apologist.” Yet, there were a few people who still spoke frankly. George Friedman, the founder of the global intelligence firm Stratfor, [described](#) the overthrow of Yanukovich as “the most blatant coup in history.”

Why the Coup?

The motive for the coup was also not hard to divine. It was to deliver a powerful blow to Russia by forcing Ukraine out of Russia’s economic orbit and thus undermine popular support for Putin, all the better to build toward another “regime change” in Moscow.

The plan was laid out on Sept. 26, 2013, by National Endowment for Democracy President Carl Gershman, a major neocon paymaster who distributes more than \$100 million a year in U.S. taxpayers’ money to undermine governments disfavored by the U.S. — or in Official Washington speak to engage in “democracy promotion.”

On the op-ed page of the neocon Washington Post, Gershman called Ukraine “the biggest prize” and an important interim step toward toppling Putin, who “may find himself on the losing end not just in the near abroad but within Russia itself.”

It’s also important to remember that in 2013 Putin had offended Washington’s powerful neocons by working with President Obama to avert a U.S. military strike against Syria over the mysterious sarin gas attack on Aug. 21, 2013, and by helping to bring Iran to the negotiating table over its nuclear program. In both cases, the neocons wanted to bomb those countries to provoke more “regime change.”

So, Putin’s peacemaking made him the new target – and especially his cooperation with Obama to reduce international tensions. Ukraine, with its neuralgic sensitivity for Russians as the historic route for bloody invasions, was the perfect wedge to drive between the two leaders.

Obama could have directed the confrontation in a less hostile direction by insisting on a more balanced presentation of the narrative. He could have recognized that the violent right-wing coup in Kiev provoked an understandable desire among the ethnic Russians of Crimea to secede from Ukraine, a sentiment reflected in the 96 percent vote in a referendum. The ethnic Russians in south and east Ukraine also had reason to fear the

extreme Ukrainian nationalists in Kiev.

Instead, Obama bowed to the neocon storyline and bought into the rhetoric about a “Russian invasion.” Obama also could have told the American people that there was no credible intelligence suggesting that Putin had aggressive designs on eastern Europe. He could have tamped down the hysteria, but instead he helped fuel the frenzy..

Before long, the full firepower of U.S. propaganda arsenal was blasting away, enflaming a new Cold War. That effort was bolstered by the U.S. government pouring tens of millions of dollars into propaganda outlets, often disguised as “bloggers” or “citizen journalists.” The U.S. Agency for International Development alone estimates its budget for “media strengthening programs in over 30 countries” at \$40 million annually.

USAID, working with billionaire George Soros’s Open Society, also funds the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, which engages in “investigative journalism” that usually goes after governments that have fallen into disfavor with the United States and then are singled out for accusations of corruption. The USAID-funded OCCRP also [collaborates](#) with Bellingcat, an online investigative website founded by blogger Eliot Higgins.

Higgins has spread misinformation on the Internet, including discredited claims [implicating the Syrian government in the sarin attack in 2013](#) and directing an Australian TV news crew to what was clearly [the wrong location for a video of a BUK anti-aircraft battery](#) as it supposedly made its getaway to Russia after the shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 in 2014.

Leveling with Americans

Obama could have neutralized much of this propaganda by revealing details about what U.S. intelligence agencies know about some of these pivotal events, but instead he has withheld any information that undercuts the preferred propaganda theme.

Regarding Ukraine, for instance, Obama could disclose what the U.S. government knows about whether the coup-makers, not Yanukovich, carried out the bloody sniper attack on Feb. 20, 2014, that killed dozens of police and protesters and set the stage for the coup on Feb. 22.

Obama also could release what the U.S. intelligence community knows about the Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 shoot-down on July 17, 2014, an incident that killed 298 people and further escalated tensions. In the first five days after the crash, Obama let his administration put out sketchy information implicating the ethnic Russian rebels and the Russian government.

However, as the CIA collected and analyzed more detailed data, the administration shut up. One source briefed on the findings told me that the reticence resulted from the intelligence analysts seeing evidence implicating a “rogue” element of the U.S.-backed Kiev regime, not the rebels. The source said that if Obama let the full story out, the entire Ukraine narrative might collapse.

So, by staying silent on these key questions – and preventing the U.S. intelligence community from telling the public what it knows – Obama has protected the earlier narratives that put the ethnic Russians and Moscow in the worst possible light. That propaganda has fed the fires of a new Cold War and exacerbated dangerous tensions

between the two biggest nuclear powers.

Unless Obama somehow decides to change course – and level with the American people, rather than manipulate them – he will leave behind a grim legacy of a bloated military-industrial complex and a new Cold War.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, America's Stolen Narrative, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). You also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes America's Stolen Narrative. For details on this offer, [click here](#).

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