

Russian Military Intervention in Crimea: Heard the One About Obama Denouncing a Breach of International Law?

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International law is suddenly very popular in Washington. President Obama responded to Russian military intervention in the Crimea by accusing Russia of a “breach of international law.” Secretary of State John Kerry followed up by declaring that Russia is “in direct, overt violation of international law.”

Unfortunately, during the last five years, no world leader has done more to undermine international law than Barack Obama. He treats it with rhetorical adulation and behavioral contempt, helping to further normalize a might-makes-right approach to global affairs that is the antithesis of international law.

Fifty years ago, another former law professor, Senator Wayne Morse, condemned such arrogance of power. “I don’t know why we think, just because we’re mighty, that we have the right to try to substitute might for right,” Morse said on national TV in 1964. “And that’s the American policy in Southeast Asia — just as unsound when we do it as when Russia does it.”

Today, Uncle Sam continues to preen as the globe’s big sheriff on the side of international law even while functioning as the world’s biggest outlaw.

Rather than striving for an evenhanded assessment of how “international law” has become so much coin of the hypocrisy realm, mainline U.S. media are now transfixed with Kremlin villainy.

On Sunday night, the top of the New York Times home page reported: “Russian President Vladimir V. Putin has pursued his strategy with subterfuge, propaganda and brazen military threat, taking aim as much at the United States and Europe as Ukraine itself.” That was news coverage.

Following close behind, a [Times editorial](#) appeared in print Monday morning, headlined “Russia’s Aggression,” condemning “Putin’s cynical and outrageous exploitation of the Ukrainian crisis to seize control of Crimea.” The liberal newspaper’s editorial board said that the United States and the European Union “must make clear to him that he has stepped far outside the bounds of civilized behavior.”

Such demands are righteous — but lack integrity and credibility when the same standards are not applied to President Obama, whose continuation of the Bush “war on terror” under

revamped rhetoric has bypassed international law as well as “civilized behavior.”

In these circumstances, major U.S. media coverage rarely extends to delving into deviational irony or spotlighting White House hypocrisy. Yet it’s not as if large media outlets have entirely excluded key information and tough criticism.

For instance, last October the McClatchy news service [reported](#) that “the Obama administration violated international law with top-secret targeted-killing operations that claimed dozens of civilian lives in Yemen and Pakistan,” according to reports released by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

Last week, just before Obama leapt to high dudgeon with condemnation of Putin for his “breach of international law,” the Los Angeles Times published an op-ed [piece](#) that provided illuminating context for such presidential righteousness.

“Despite the president’s insistence on placing limits on war, and on the defense budget, his brand of warfare has helped lay the basis for a permanent state of global warfare via ‘low footprint’ drone campaigns and special forces operations aimed at an ever-morphing enemy usually identified as some form of Al Qaeda,” wrote Karen J. Greenberg, director of the Center on National Security at Fordham University’s law school.

Greenberg went on to indicate the scope of the U.S. government’s ongoing contempt for international law: “According to Senator Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), the Obama administration has killed 4,700 individuals in numerous countries, including Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia. Obama has successfully embedded the process of drone killings into the executive branch in such a way that any future president will inherit it, along with the White House ‘kill list’ and its ‘terror Tuesday’ meetings. Unbounded global war is now part of what it means to be president.”

But especially in times of crisis, as with the current Ukraine situation, such inconvenient contradictions go out the mass-media window. What remains is an Orwellian baseline, melding conformist ideology and nationalism into red-white-and-blue doublethink.

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