

Ukraine and America's Doublethink. Recourse to International Law in Support of an Illegal Neo-Nazi Government?

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With the deployment of Russian forces into Crimea and eastern Ukraine, the US-NATO propaganda machine has kicked into high gear. Putin has been portrayed as a tyrannical aggressor, while the Obama administration and its European allies have attempted to stake out the moral high ground, declaring that peace, respect for sovereignty and international law should be the guiding principles. Naturally, such rhetoric warrants closer analysis.

The deployment of a small contingent of Russian forces into the autonomous region of Crimea is an important development in the continuing conflict in Ukraine. Because of the majority Russian population of Crimea, the seizure of power by vehemently anti-Russian Nazis and their Western-friendly neoliberal collaborators has sent a chill throughout Crimea and eastern Ukraine more broadly, leading to [massive protests](#) in a number of major cities in the region, and calls for support and protection from Moscow. This should come as no surprise considering the political, economic, cultural, and military ties between Crimea and the Russian Federation.

Russia maintains a naval base and other support facilities in the Crimean city of Sevastopol, home to the Russian Navy's Black Sea fleet. Additionally, the region's industry is heavily dependent both on Russian energy and the Russian market for its economic survival. Moreover, Crimea was in fact part of Russia proper until it was ceded to Ukraine by the Soviet Union in 1954 under then Premier Khrushchev. However, despite becoming nominally part of Ukraine, Crimea (and most of the East and South of Ukraine) maintained close ties with "Mother Russia," continuing to identify with Russia linguistically and politically, and governing itself with autonomous status within greater Ukraine.

In addition, it should be noted that the majority of Crimea and eastern Ukraine identify with Russia and the Moscow patriarchate of the Eastern Orthodox Church, unlike the west of Ukraine which, like its Polish neighbor, is traditionally aligned with the Western Church. This point should not be understated considering the fact that it is precisely these cultural ties that bind Ukrainian Crimea to Russia, and create the sense of community and shared experience that lead to the appeals for Russian protection against the putsch government in Kiev and its Nazi paramilitaries.

The Politics on the Ground

Some international observers question why the Crimea is calling on Putin to intervene on their behalf, portraying the move by Moscow as pure opportunism. This is far from the truth, as the political climate in Kiev seems to be the motivating factor. As I, and many others, [have documented](#) throughout the conflict in Ukraine, Nazi elements played, and continue to play, a key role in the overthrow of the democratically elected, though utterly corrupt and incompetent, Ukrainian President Yanukovich.

Avowed Nazi groups such as Right Sector, Trizub, Svoboda and others constituted the muscle of the putsch in Maidan and around the country. It was they who attacked riot police, stormed government buildings, threw petrol bombs and Molotov cocktails, and generally instigated the violence and unrest. Consequently, the so called “interim government” led by Victoria Nuland’s [handpicked neoliberal puppet](#) Arseniy Yatsenyuk, has been forced to cede control of the national security forces to the openly Nazi leaders of these organizations.

In particular, Andriy Parubiy, a co-founder of the Nazi Svoboda Party, has been made Secretary of the Security and National Defense Committee, with Dmitry Yarosh, leader of the Nazi paramilitary Right Sector group, as Parubiy’s deputy. These appointments, along with a number of other troubling power sharing arrangements, have created a putsch government that is essentially a collaboration between pro-EU liberals and right wing ultra-nationalists whose [expressed aim](#), aside from seizing power for themselves, is to cleanse Ukraine of Jews and Russians.

As part of this ideology of “cleansing” Ukraine of Russian influence, one of the first actions of the occupying government in Kiev was to [officially repeal](#) a previous law that guaranteed the legal right of minorities in Ukraine to conduct business and education in their own languages. This move was seen by international observers, including representatives of governments sympathetic to Kiev’s new rulers, as a direct assault not only on minorities in general, but on the Russian-speaking population specifically. So much for democracy and human rights.

It is precisely these developments that have created a grave sense of fear and impending danger in Crimea and led to the calls for Russian protection. However it is not merely average civilians who have expressed their skepticism and trepidation at the putsch government in Kiev and sided with Russia.

In fact, recent days have seen a number of key defections within the military and bureaucracy of Crimea. The newly appointed [head of Ukraine’s Navy has officially “defected”](#) from the putsch government in Kiev, instead swearing loyalty to the pro-Russian Prime Minister of Crimea. Other high ranking and influential figures within the military and bureaucratic structures have also refused to recognize the authority of Kiev, choosing instead to remain loyal to Crimea and, de facto, to Russia. In addition, [reports](#) have surfaced that Ukraine’s flagship naval vessel, the Hetman Sahaidachny has also defected to the Russian side. These and other defections demonstrate a growing trend in Crimea: de facto independence from Ukraine and a move towards full integration with Russia.

However, beyond defections and political developments, one must also recognize the security situation for ordinary citizens on the ground in Crimea. Eyewitness accounts confirm that ethnic Tatars have attacked peaceful, pro-Russian demonstrators throughout the region in an attempt to intimidate them into silence. As one eyewitness at a major protest recounts:

The radical Tatars, together with the people wearing the symbols of “Maidan,” started throwing bottles (some with “Molotov Cocktails”) and attacking the peaceful demonstration of Russian-speaking protesters with sticks, knives, aerosol and gas. Unarmed Russian protesters, numbering twice as many as the opposite demonstrators, were fiercely smashed by the aggressive crowd of radicals and extremists together with Crimean Tatars. About 30 people were injured...two people died...After that the group of aggressive Tatars rushed into the administrative building, crushed the furniture, but was pushed away by the militia officers.

Such stories are numerous throughout the major cities of Crimea, and the east of the country more generally. Today, the Russian flag can be seen flying above a number of important cities in the region, including Simferopol, Crimea’s capital, as well as Odessa, Dnepropetrovsk, and other cities outside Crimea. It is against this backdrop that one must ask the most pressing question: Is Russia’s military presence a violation of Ukrainian sovereignty? Or, is it rather a moral obligation to protect their people and their interests against a growing fascist menace along their border?

Intervention and “Democracy”

The movement of Russian troops into Crimea has caused an international outcry. Western leaders have been quick to condemn the move as an “invasion”, and assault on “democracy” and international law. However, there are a number of points that must first be examined. First and foremost is the fact that the [Russia-Ukraine Friendship Treaty](#) establishes that Crimea, and Sevastopol specifically, represents a strategic national interest for Russia. Moreover, it codifies the fact that the protection of the rights of the people of Crimea is the responsibility of the Ukrainian government. However, what happens when a so called government in Kiev is openly hostile to the region? Who then is responsible for the Russians living there? With Kiev’s putsch government having the backing of the US, NATO and Europe, it seems that no one other than Russia could possibly guarantee the security of Crimea.

Second is the fact that Russia’s naval facilities are undoubtedly of vital national security interest to Moscow. Considering the openly hostile attitude expressed by the new Security and National Defense Committee leadership in Kiev, it seems clear that Russia’s national security interests would be under threat. There is ample precedent in international law justifying Russia moving to protect its forces in Crimea. Moreover, with Ukraine falling into the hands of Nazi elements, a sound argument could be made that, beyond the Crimea, Ukraine poses a danger to the security of Russia proper. Naturally, all of these nuances are left completely out of the narrative of Western corporate media.

Third, and perhaps most important, is the fact that the putsch government in Kiev is absolutely illegal under international law. Yanukovich, whatever negative things could be said about him and his government (and there are many), was never defeated in a democratic election. Rather, he was chased out of the country by a violent mob that has now been consecrated by the much touted “international community” (read US-EU-NATO) as the recognized government. This is a blatant violation of Ukraine’s Constitution, not to mention international law and the accepted principles of modern democracy. With Yanukovich having taken refuge in Russia, and still being the legal President of Ukraine, isn’t it fair to say that Russia is acting as the guarantor of international law, rather than its enemy?

Now it would be easy to dismiss this as simple apologism for the actions of Putin and the Russian government. However, this is far too simplistic because one must consider, what would be the alternative? With international institutions such as the United Nations and International Criminal Court firmly under the “influence” (read control) of the United States, what other institution could possibly enforce international law in Ukraine? Surely not NATO, the alliance that has been angling to bring Ukraine into the fold since the fall of the Soviet Union. And so, it would seem that Ukraine’s fate, and that of Crimea specifically, rests on the shoulders of Russia and Putin.

Of course, the United States has taken the lead in blasting Russia for its intervention in Ukraine. On Sunday March 2nd, US Secretary of State John Kerry made the rounds of the major political talk shows. He [stated](#), “You don’t just invade another country on a phony pretext in order to assert your own interests.” The Orwellian doublethink required to make such a statement is palpable. The United States has invaded or, as the political Thought Police would say, “intervened,” all over the world countless times, each time violating those principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity that Kerry and the Obama administration seem to hold so dear today.

In Libya, US-NATO used its own phony pretext to coax the United Nations Security Council into passing Resolution 1973 which authorized a No-Fly Zone that NATO immediately transformed into an authorization for war, including bombing and aerial support to an insurgent army seeking to topple the legal authority in that country. The NATO mission led to the illegal assassination of Gaddafi, ethnic cleansing of black Libyans, the destruction of the country’s infrastructure and economy, and unleashed a continuing political and social nightmare that is tearing that country, or what used to be called a country, apart.

In Iraq, the United States skirted international law and all norms of international relations, unleashing a brutal war and occupation that has led to the deaths of more than a million Iraqis and the destruction of that country which continues to this day. The war on Iraq, universally recognized as having been waged under the phoniest of pretexts, is an ongoing war crime of the highest order.

One could cite many other examples of US-led “interventions” based on, as Kerry termed them, “phony pretexts,” including the bombing and destruction of Yugoslavia, the continued merciless drone bombings of Yemen, Somalia, and Pakistan, as well as the vicious wars in Central America which, for decades, were supported by the United States in the name of “peace” and “stability”. At what point does the hypocrisy of the United States become too much to bear?

Of course, the fundamental question with regard to all these conflicts is the question of US interests. Were there Americans directly under threat by the Gaddafi government? Certainly not. Was the US Navy in danger of being seized by hostile forces in Somalia or Nicaragua? Of course not. Were the American people under threat from Saddam Hussein or Slobodan Milosevic? Undeniably no. And yet, somehow these “interventions” were deemed acceptable, but Russia’s attempt to protect its own people and military installations in the face of a clear and present danger is a crime and breach of international law?

George Orwell wrote that doublethink was:

To know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while

telling carefully constructed lies, to hold simultaneously two opinions which cancelled out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing in both of them, to use logic against logic, to repudiate morality while laying claim to it, to believe that democracy was impossible and that the Party was the guardian of democracy, to forget, whatever it was necessary to forget, then to draw it back into memory again at the moment when it was needed, and then promptly to forget it again, and above all, to apply the same process to the process...

Doesn't this aptly describe US foreign policy and its attitudes? When examining the current situation in Ukraine and the Russian response to the conflict, let us recall Mr. Orwell's prophetic words. Let us recall the principles of modern democracy and international law. And let us reject the Empire's propaganda and double standards.

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