

Ukraine vs Syria: The Only Standards Are Double Standards

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President Barack Obama and President-elect 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)

President Obama is still embracing Official Washington's false narrative on Ukraine as he hypocritically blames the crisis entirely on Moscow and ignores the West's role in toppling an elected president and provoking a nasty civil war.

Sometimes in dealing with the U.S. government and its compliant mainstream media, I'm left with the feeling that if it weren't for double standards, there would be no standards at all. From President Barack Obama to the editors at the Washington Post and the New York Times, it's obvious that what's good for the goose is not good for the gander.

An election in an embattled country is valid and even inspiring if it turns out the way Official Washington wants, as in Ukraine last month; otherwise it's a sham and illegitimate, as in Syria this month.

Similarly, people have an inalienable right of self-determination if it's Kosovo or South Sudan, but not if it's Crimea or the Donbass region of Ukraine. Those referenda for separation from Ukraine must have been "rigged" though there is no evidence they were. Everything is seen through the eye of the beholder and the beholders in Official Washington are deeply biased.

When it comes to military interventions, U.S. officials such as Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power assert a "responsibility to protect" transcending national sovereignty if civilians are threatened in Libya or in Syria, but not when the civilians are being slaughtered in Gaza, Odessa, Mariupol or Donetsk. When those killings are being done by U.S. allies, the allies are praised for their "restraint."

The hypocrisy extends to the application of international law. If some leaders in Africa engage in actions that cause civilian deaths, they must be indicted by the International Criminal Court and dragged before The Hague for prosecution by jurists representing an outraged world.

But it's unthinkable that there would be any accountability for George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Tony Blair and other "respectable" leaders who invaded Iraq and caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands last decade.

The United States also presents itself as the great guardian of democracy and constitutional order, except when those democratic impulses conflict with U.S. interests. Then, the American people are treated to the cognitive dissonance of overthrowing democratically elected governments in the name of “democracy.” [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“America’s Staggering Hypocrisy.”](#)]

The Ukraine Case

When Ukraine’s elected President Viktor Yanukovich rejected austerity demands from the International Monetary Fund that accompanied a plan for European association, senior U.S. officials decided that Yanukovich had to go and urged on protests, ultimately spearheaded by neo-Nazi militias, that violently overthrew Yanukovich on Feb. 22.

The U.S. State Department’s “public diplomacy” officials then spun a narrative that glued white hats on the putschists and black hats on those who sought to defend the elected government. Whenever people mentioned the inconvenient truth about the crucial neo-Nazi role in providing the muscle for the coup, they were accused of spreading “Russian propaganda.”

Yet, while U.S. meddling in the internal affairs of another country is a good thing, it is a bad thing if a U.S. adversary does the same or is just suspected of doing the same.

When American and French volunteers go to Syria to fight with the U.S.-backed rebels, those volunteers are, of course, operating on their own (such as American suicide bomber Abu Hurayra Al-Amriki). To suggest otherwise without proof would be a “conspiracy theory,” a point with which I would agree .

But, remember, the rules are flexible; while the U.S. press corps would mock anyone who jumped to a conclusion that the American and French jihadists in Syria must have connections to Washington and Paris, the opposite assumption applies to any disfavored government; then, the U.S. press just “knows” that some indigenous resistance must be directed from some nefarious foreign capital.

For example, the U.S. government is accusing Russia of somehow being behind the unrest in eastern Ukraine, Yanukovich’s political base, even though the unparalleled U.S. intelligence agencies and American journalists on the ground have been unable to detect any proof of this alleged direction from Moscow.

Still, the assumption led the New York Times to get suckered into a State Department propaganda ploy when the Times ran a lead story based on photographs supposedly showing covert Russian military teams that were “clearly” in Russia but then popped up in eastern Ukraine.

Two days later, however, the Times was forced to retract its scoop when it turned out that a key photo purportedly taken in Russia had actually been snapped in Ukraine, destroying the story’s premise. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“NYT Retracts Ukraine Photo Scoop.”](#)]

But that egg-on-the-face moment only made the Times more determined to prove that the ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine indeed were “minions” of Moscow, not free-thinking people who simply reject what they regard as the imposition of illegitimate authority from Kiev.

So, when some Russian nationalists crossed the border to help their ethnic brethren in eastern Ukraine, it was assumed – again without evidence – that Russian President Vladimir Putin must have sent them.

Times reporter Sabrina Tavernise traveled to Donetsk but could not find the desired evidence. The Russian nationalists said they had no connections to Moscow and were motivated simply by a determination to help protect fellow ethnic Russians from the escalating military assault from western Ukraine.

Despite those disappointing findings, the Times [front-page story](#) on June 1 still made the desired point through its headline: “In Ukraine War, Kremlin Leaves No Fingerprints.” The phrasing assumes that Russian interference is real, just that the culprit has been careful to wipe away any evidence.

The article stated its conclusion this way: “Mr. Putin may not be directing these events, but he is certainly their principal beneficiary.” But is that tendentious phrasing even true? Putin has shown a willingness to have a dialogue with Ukraine’s new President-elect Petro Poroshenko in hopes of calming down the crisis on Russia’s border.

Protecting the Narrative

But Official Washington’s narrative of the crisis must always be maintained, whatever the lack of verifiable evidence. Though an objective observer might note that the crisis was provoked last year by a reckless European Union association offer – followed by the IMF’s draconian austerity plan that was rejected by Yanukovich, prompting U.S.-encouraged violent demonstrations (all while Putin was preoccupied by the Sochi Winter Olympics) – it is fundamental to the U.S. propaganda theme to boil the storyline down to “Russian aggression.”

Obama should and may know better – that Putin’s response was reactive to the West’s provocations, not a case of Russian provocation – but Obama is busy fending off accusations of “weakness” from Republicans and various neocons. So Obama apparently feels he has to talk tough and regurgitate the false narrative, as he did in [his June 4 speech](#) in Poland, declaring:

“As we’ve been reminded by Russia’s aggression in Ukraine, our free nations cannot be complacent in pursuit of the vision we share — a Europe that is whole and free and at peace. We have to work for that. We have to stand with those who seek freedom. ...

“We stand together because we believe that people and nations have the right to determine their own destiny. And that includes the people of Ukraine. Robbed by a corrupt regime, Ukrainians demanded a government that served them. Beaten and bloodied, they refused to yield. Threatened and harassed, they lined up to vote; they elected a new President in a free election — because a leader’s legitimacy can only come from the consent of the people. ...

“We stand together because we believe that upholding peace and security is the responsibility of every nation. The days of empire and spheres of influence are over. Bigger nations must not be allowed to bully the small, or impose their will at the barrel of a gun or with masked men taking over buildings.

“And the stroke of a pen can never legitimize the theft of a neighbor’s land. So we will not accept Russia’s occupation of Crimea or its violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty. Our free

nations will stand united so that further Russian provocations will only mean more isolation and costs for Russia. Because after investing so much blood and treasure to bring Europe together, how can we allow the dark tactics of the 20th century to define this new century?"

As I said, if it weren't for double standards, there would be no standards at all.

*Investigative reporter **Robert Parry** broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, America's Stolen Narrative, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). For a limited time, 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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