

What is Wrong and Dangerous about US Foreign Policy, How Washington's Demands Risk War with Russia

Former Ambassador to Russia McFaul's Article

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In a [lengthy article](#) in the Washington Post lamenting the Brexit vote and calling it a “victory for Putin”, former US ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul slips out a fascinating comment that is very revealing of the looking glass world of neocon thinking:

“He (Putin) stopped NATO’s expansion by invading Georgia in 2008 and slowed E.U. expansion by invading Ukraine in 2014. He has increased Russia’s economic hegemony in large parts of the former Soviet Union by building the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). As a result of his military intervention in Syria, Putin is expanding Russia’s presence in the Middle East, as Europe and the United States pull back.”

In McFaul’s world all this is taken as axiomatically bad. But what actually makes it bad? Let us take each of these propositions one by one:

Stopping NATO expansion and slowing EU expansion

Putin or rather Russia did not invade Georgia in 2008. As was conclusively established by an EU report what happened in 2008 was that Georgia attacked South Ossetia and Russia repulsed the Georgian attack.

Nor did Russia invade Ukraine in 2014. What happened in 2014 was that following a violent and unconstitutional coup in Kiev, which overthrew the country’s democratically elected President, Crimea voted to secede from Ukraine and join Russia whilst Ukraine’s eastern regions – which had overwhelmingly voted for the overthrown President – protested following his overthrow and demanded more autonomy. The new coup-installed Ukrainian government in Kiev in turn responded by launching a military attack on the protesters in the eastern regions causing the war there. The fact that the conflict in Ukraine is a civil war is explicitly recognised in the Minsk II agreement – which was brokered by the Germans and the French and which sets out a road-map for a political settlement – and which is itself an international legal document approved and supported as such by the US and by a vote of the UN Security Council.

Putting aside these factual points, why is it wrong for Russia to oppose the expansion of NATO and the EU to its borders and why is it right to seek to expand them in that way? Why is it a bad thing if the expansion of the one is halted and the expansion of the other is

slowed down?

McFaul does not answer or even pose these questions. For him the mere fact the US wants these organisations expanded right up to Russia's border suffices in itself to make their expansion good and Russian opposition bad. As his comment all too obviously shows, in McFaul's world Russia is not entitled to have opinions on such questions, much less to act on them, even though they concern questions which are vital to Russia's security and national interests.

The Eurasian Economic Union

Unlike the EU, which has expanded following wars in Yugoslavia and which McFaul wants to expand into Ukraine following a violent coup there, the Eurasian Economic Union has been established entirely peacefully.

Why is wrong and bad for Russia to promote peacefully the EEU and good and right for the US to promote – sometimes violently – the EU?

In his article McFaul essentially accuses Russia of working to subvert and disintegrate the EU for example by wanting Brexit. Yet isn't that precisely what he wants the US and EU to do to the EEU? Why is Russia doing the one to the EU wrong and bad and the US and the EU doing the same to the EEU good and right?

As it happens McFaul is wrong. The Russians are not trying to subvert or disintegrate the EU. The "evidence" they are amounts to nothing more than the fact that Marine Le Pen's party in France once borrowed some money from a Russian commercial bank. The Russians did not try to achieve a Leave vote in the British Brexit Referendum and Putin did not welcome the result when it came out. As Putin made perfectly clear at his speech in SPIEF 2016, far from wanting to destroy the EU the Russians want it to become a partner in their Greater Eurasia project.

By contrast the US has openly committed itself to doing all it can to stop or delay the EEU. The coup in Kiev and the war in Ukraine are at least in part a result of that.

Expanding Russia's presence in the Middle East and the war in Syria

The US has been trying to expand its presence in the Middle East for decades. It has bases in Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Bahrain and Turkey. It is allied to Israel and Saudi Arabia. It has waged aggressive wars which have overthrown the governments of Iraq and Libya. It has for some years supported the insurgency which is seeking to overthrow the government of Syria; and it has placed Iran under virtual siege.

Why is it good and right for the US to expand its presence in the Middle East in this way through war and violence and wrong and bad for Russia to do the same?

As it happens McFaul is again misrepresenting Russian policy. Firstly it is debatable whether Russian influence in the Middle East is really expanding. Russia already had a presence in Syria before the war there started and though Russia's ties with Iran are growing stronger Iran is in no sense a Russian vassal state or satellite and will not become one. As for the Russian intervention in Syria, as the Russians have been at pains to point out unlike the various US interventions it is not merely legal but supports an existing government – and

thus order and stability in the region – rather than seeking to overthrow or disrupt it. Moreover unlike the US, which never talks to Russia about anything unless forced to do so, the Russians have gone to great lengths to talk to the US about Syria and to try to work with the US to find a diplomatic solution to the crisis in Syria.

McFaul’s piece encapsulates everything which is wrong and dangerous about US policy. As is only too obvious, in his world view and in that of the neocons Russia – and all other countries – are not entitled to their own opinions and are certainly not entitled to an independent foreign policy. The only proper and “good” course for them is to agree to whatever the US demands of them. When they behave differently by acting in their own interests they are doing something wrong and bad, become “evil” and are vilified and attacked.

This is an impossible, overweening demand the like of which has never been made by any Great Power since the Fall of the Roman Empire. There is no possibility of strong independent countries like Russia ever agreeing to it. Demanding it of them is what is driving the world towards war.

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