

Iron Curtain Reprise

Diana Johnstone

NATO leaders are currently acting out a deliberate charade in Europe, designed to reconstruct an Iron Curtain between Russia and the West. With astonishing unanimity, NATO leaders feign surprise at events they planned months in advance. Events that they deliberately triggered are being misrepresented as sudden, astonishing, unjustified ‘Russian aggression’. The United States and the European Union undertook an aggressive provocation in Ukraine that they knew would force Russia to react defensively, one way or another.

They could not be sure exactly how Russian President Vladimir Putin would react when he saw that the United States was manipulating political conflict in Ukraine to install a pro-Western government intent on joining NATO. This was not a mere matter of a ‘sphere of influence’ in Russia’s ‘near abroad’, but a matter of life and death to the Russian Navy, as well as a grave national security threat on Russia’s border. A trap was thereby set for Putin. He was damned if he did, and damned if he didn’t. He could under-react, and betray Russia’s basic national interests, allowing NATO to advance its hostile forces to an ideal attack position. Or he could over-react, by sending Russian forces to invade Ukraine. The West was ready for this, prepared to scream that Putin was ‘the new Hitler’, poised to overrun poor, helpless Europe, which could only be saved (again) by the generous Americans.

In reality, the Russian defensive move was a very reasonable middle course. Thanks to the fact that the overwhelming majority of Crimeans felt Russian, having been Russian citizens until Khrushchev frivolously bestowed the territory on

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Ukraine in 1954, a peaceful democratic solution was found. Crimeans voted for their return to Russia in a referendum which was perfectly legal according to international law, although in violation of the Ukrainian constitution, which was by then in tatters, having just been violated by the overthrow of the country's duly elected president, Victor Yanukovych, facilitated by violent militias. The change of status of Crimea was achieved without bloodshed, by the ballot box. Nevertheless, the cries of indignation from the West were every bit as hysterically hostile as if Putin had over-reacted and subjected Ukraine to a US-style bombing campaign, or invaded the country outright –which they may have expected him to do.

US Secretary of State John Kerry led the chorus of self-righteous indignation, accusing Russia of the sort of thing his own government is in the habit of doing.

'You just don't invade another country on phony pretext in order to assert your interests. This is an act of aggression that is completely trumped up in terms of its pretext,' Kerry pontificated. 'It's really 19th century behaviour in the 21st century.'

Instead of laughing at this hypocrisy, US media, politicians and punditry zealously took up the theme of Putin's unacceptable expansionist aggression. The Europeans followed with a weak, obedient echo.

It was planned at Yalta

In September 2013, one of Ukraine's richest oligarchs, Viktor Pinchuk, paid for an élite strategic conference on Ukraine's future that was held in the same Palace in Yalta, Crimea, where Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill met to decide the future of Europe in 1945. *The Economist*, one of the élite media reporting on what it called a 'display of fierce diplomacy', stated that:

'The future of Ukraine, a country of 48m people, and of Europe was being decided in real time.'

The participants included Bill and Hillary Clinton, former CIA head General David Petraeus, former US Treasury secretary Lawrence Summers, former World Bank head Robert Zoellick, Swedish foreign minister Carl Bildt, Shimon Peres, Tony Blair, Gerhard Schröder, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, Mario Monti, Lithuanian president Dalia Grybauskaitė, and Poland's influential foreign minister Radek Sikorski. Both President Viktor Yanukovych, deposed five months later, and his recently elected successor, Petro Poroshenko, were present. Former US energy secretary Bill Richardson was there to talk about the shale-gas revolution which the United States hopes to use to weaken Russia by

substituting fracking for Russia's natural gas reserves. The centre of discussion was the 'Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement' (DCFTA) between Ukraine and the European Union, and the prospect of Ukraine's integration with the West. The general tone was euphoria over the prospect of breaking Ukraine's ties with Russia in favour of the West.

Conspiracy against Russia? Not at all. Unlike Bilderberg, the proceedings were not secret. Facing a dozen or so American VIPs and a large sampling of the European political élite was a Putin adviser named Sergei Glazyev, who made Russia's position perfectly clear. Glazyev injected a note of political and economic realism into the conference. *Forbes* reported at the time on the 'stark difference' between the Russian and Western views 'not over the advisability of Ukraine's integration with the EU but over its likely *impact*'. In contrast to Western euphoria, the Russian view was based on 'very specific and pointed economic criticisms' about the Trade Agreement's impact on Ukraine's economy, noting that Ukraine was running an enormous foreign accounts deficit, funded with foreign borrowing, and that the resulting substantial increase in Western imports could only swell the deficit. Ukraine 'will either default on its debts or require a sizable bailout'. The *Forbes* reporter concluded that 'the Russian position is far closer to the truth than the happy talk coming from Brussels and Kiev'.

As for the political impact, Glazyev pointed out that the Russian-speaking minority in Eastern Ukraine might move to split the country in protest against cutting ties with Russia, and that Russia would be legally entitled to support them, according to *The Times* of London. In short, while planning to incorporate Ukraine into the Western sphere, Western leaders were perfectly aware that this move would entail serious problems with Russian-speaking Ukrainians, and with Russia itself. Rather than seeking to work out a compromise, Western leaders decided to forge ahead and to blame Russia for whatever would go wrong. What went wrong first was that Yanukovich got cold feet faced with the economic collapse implied by the Trade Agreement with the European Union. He postponed signing, hoping for a better deal. Since none of this was explained clearly to the Ukrainian public, outraged protests ensued, which were rapidly exploited by the United States ... against Russia.

Ukraine as bridge ... or Achilles' heel

Ukraine, a term meaning borderland, is a country without clearly fixed historical borders that has been stretched too far to the East and too far to the West. The Soviet Union was responsible for this, but the Soviet Union

no longer exists, and the result is a country without a unified identity and which emerges as a problem for itself and for its neighbours. It was extended too far East, incorporating territory that might as well have been Russian, as part of a general policy to distinguish the USSR from the Tsarist empire, enlarging Ukraine at the expense of its Russian component and demonstrating that the Soviet Union was really a union among equal socialist republics. So long as the whole Soviet Union was run by the Communist leadership, these borders didn't matter too much. It was extended too far West at the end of World War Two. The victorious Soviet Union extended Ukraine's border to include Western regions, dominated by the city variously named Lviv, Lwow, Lemberg or Lvov, depending on whether it belonged to Lithuania, Poland, the Habsburg Empire or the USSR, a region which was a hotbed of anti-Russian sentiments. This was no doubt conceived as a defensive move, to neutralise hostile elements, but it created the fundamentally divided nation that today constitutes the perfect troubled waters for hostile fishing.

The *Forbes* report cited above pointed out that:

'For most of the past five years, Ukraine was basically playing a double game, telling the EU that it was interested in signing the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement while telling the Russians that it was interested in joining the customs union.'

Either Yanukovich could not make up his mind, or was trying to squeeze the best deal out of both sides, or was seeking the highest bidder. In any case, he was never 'Moscow's man', and his downfall owes a lot no doubt to his own role in playing both ends against the middle. His was a dangerous game of pitting greater powers against each other.

It is safe to say that what was needed was something that so far seems totally lacking in Ukraine: a leadership that recognises the divided nature of the country and works diplomatically to find a solution that satisfies both the local populations and their historic ties with the Catholic West and with Russia. In short, Ukraine could be a bridge between East and West – and this, incidentally, has been precisely the Russian position. The Russian position has not been to split Ukraine, much less to conquer it, but to facilitate the country's role as bridge. This would involve a degree of federalism, of local government, which so far is entirely lacking in the country, with local governors selected not by election but by the central government in Kiev. A federal Ukraine could both develop relations with the European Union and maintain its vital (and profitable) economic relations with Russia. But this arrangement calls for Western readiness to

co-operate with Russia. The United States has plainly vetoed this possibility, preferring to exploit the crisis to brand Russia 'the enemy'.

Plan A and Plan B

US policy, already evident at the September 2013 Yalta meeting, was carried out on the ground by Victoria Nuland, former advisor to Dick Cheney, deputy ambassador to NATO, spokeswoman for Hillary Clinton, wife of neo-con theorist Robert Kagan. Her leading role in the Ukraine events proves that the neo-con influence in the State Department, established under Bush II, was retained by Obama, whose only visible contribution to foreign policy change has been the presence of a man of African descent in the presidency, calculated to impress the world with US multicultural virtue. Like most other recent presidents, Obama is there as a temporary salesman for policies made and executed by others.

As Victoria Nuland boasted in Washington, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States has spent five billion dollars to gain political influence in Ukraine (this is called 'promoting democracy'). This investment is not 'for oil', or for any immediate economic advantage. The primary motives are geopolitical, because Ukraine is Russia's Achilles' heel, the territory with the greatest potential for causing trouble to Russia.

What called public attention to Victoria Nuland's role in the Ukrainian crisis was her use of a naughty word, when she told the US ambassador, 'fuck the EU'. But the fuss over her bad language veiled her bad intentions. The issue was who should take power away from the elected president, Viktor Yanukovych. German Chancellor Angela Merkel's party had been promoting former boxer Vitaly Klitschko as its candidate. Nuland's rude rebuff signified that the United States, not Germany or the EU, was to choose the next leader, and that was not Klitschko but 'Yats'. And indeed it was Yats, Arseniy Yatsenyuk, a second-string US-sponsored technocrat known for his enthusiasm for International Monetary Fund austerity policies and NATO membership, who got the job. This put a US sponsored government, enforced in the streets by fascist militia with little electoral clout but plenty of armed meanness, in a position to manage the May 25 elections, from which the Russophone East was largely excluded.

Plan A for the Victoria Nuland *putsch* was probably to install, rapidly, a government in Kiev that would join NATO, thus formally setting the stage for the United States to take possession of Russia's indispensable Black Sea naval base at Sebastopol in Crimea. Reincorporating Crimea into Russia was Putin's necessary defensive move to prevent this. But the

Nuland gambit was in fact a win-win ploy. If Russia failed to defend itself, it risked losing its entire southern fleet – a total national disaster. On the other hand, if Russia reacted, as was most likely, the US thereby won a political victory that was perhaps its main objective. Putin's totally defensive move is portrayed by the Western mainstream media, echoing political leaders, as unprovoked 'Russian expansionism', which the propaganda machine compares to Hitler grabbing Czechoslovakia and Poland.

Thus, a blatant Western provocation, using Ukrainian political confusion against a fundamentally defensive Russia, has astonishingly succeeded in producing a total change in the artificial *Zeitgeist* produced by Western mass media. Suddenly, we are told that the 'freedom-loving West' is faced with the threat of 'aggressive Russian expansionism'. Some 25 years ago, Soviet leaders gave away the store under the illusion that peaceful renunciation on their part could lead to a friendly partnership with the West, and especially with the United States. But those in the United States who never wanted to end the Cold War are having their revenge. Never mind 'communism'; if, instead of advocating the dictatorship of the proletariat, Russia's current leader is simply old-fashioned in certain ways, Western media can fabricate a monster out of that. The United States needs an enemy to save the world from.

The protection racket returns

But first of all, the United States needs Russia as an enemy in order to 'save Europe', which is another way to say, in order to continue to dominate Europe. Washington policy-makers seemed to be worried that Obama's swing to Asia and neglect of Europe might weaken US control of its NATO allies. The May 25 European Parliament elections revealed a large measure of disaffection with the European Union. This disaffection, notably in France, is linked to a growing realisation that the EU, far from being a potential alternative to the United States, is in reality a mechanism that locks European countries into US-defined globalisation, economic decline and US foreign policy, wars and all.

Ukraine is not the only entity that has been overextended. So has the European Union. With 28 members of diverse language, culture, history and mentality, the EU is unable to agree on any foreign policy other than the one Washington imposes. The extension of the EU to former Eastern European satellites has totally broken whatever deep consensus might have been possible among the countries of the original Economic Community: France, Germany, Italy and the Benelux states. Poland and

the Baltic States see EU membership as useful, but their hearts are in America – where many of their most influential leaders have been educated and trained. Washington is able to exploit the anti-communist, anti-Russian and even pro-Nazi nostalgia of north-eastern Europe to raise the false cry of ‘the Russians are coming!’ in order to obstruct the growing economic partnership between the old EU, notably Germany, and Russia.

Russia is no threat. But to vociferous Russophobes in the Baltic States, Western Ukraine and Poland, the very existence of Russia is a threat. Encouraged by the United States and NATO, this endemic hostility is the political basis for the new ‘iron curtain’ meant to achieve the aim spelled out in 1997 by Zbigniew Brzezinski in *The Grand Chessboard*: keeping the Eurasian continent divided in order to perpetuate US world hegemony. The old Cold War served that purpose, cementing US military presence and political influence in Western Europe. A new Cold War can prevent US influence from being diluted by good relations between Western Europe and Russia.

Obama has come to Europe ostentatiously promising to ‘protect’ Europe by basing more troops in regions as close as possible to Russia, while at the same time ordering Russia to withdraw its own troops, on its own territory, still farther away from troubled Ukraine. This appears designed to humiliate Putin and deprive him of political support at home, at a time when protests are rising in Eastern Ukraine against the Russian leader for abandoning them to killers sent from Kiev.

To tighten the US grip on Europe, the United States is using the artificial crisis to demand that its indebted allies spend more on ‘defence’, notably by purchasing US weapons systems. Although the US is still far from being able to meet Europe’s energy needs from the new US fracking boom, this prospect is being hailed as a substitute for Russia’s natural gas sales – stigmatised as a ‘way of exercising political pressure’, something of which hypothetical US energy sales are presumed to be innocent. Pressure is being brought against Bulgaria and even Serbia to block construction of the South Stream pipeline that would bring Russian gas into the Balkans and southern Europe.

From D-Day to Dooms Day

June 6, 2014, the seventieth anniversary of the D-Day landing, was played in Normandy as a gigantic celebration of American domination, with Obama heading an all-star cast of European leaders. The last of the aged surviving soldiers and aviators present were like the ghosts of a more innocent age when the United States was only at the start of its new career

as world master. They were real, but the rest is a charade. French television was awash with the tears of young villagers in Normandy who have been taught that the United States is some sort of Guardian Angel, which sent its boys to die on the shores of Normandy out of pure love for France. This idealized image of the past is implicitly projected on the future. In seventy years, the Cold War, a dominant propaganda narrative and, above all, Hollywood have convinced the French, and most of the West, that D-Day was the turning point that won World War Two and saved Europe from Nazi Germany.

Vladimir Putin came to the celebration, and was elaborately shunned by Obama, self-appointed arbiter of Virtue. The Russians are paying tribute to the D-Day operation which liberated France from Nazi occupation, but they – and historians – know what most of the West has forgotten: that the *Wehrmacht* was decisively defeated not by the Normandy landing, but by the Red Army. If the vast bulk of German forces had not been pinned down fighting a losing war on the Eastern front, nobody would celebrate D-Day as it was celebrated in 2014.

Putin is widely credited as being ‘the best chess player’, who won the first round of the Ukrainian crisis. He has no doubt done the best he could, faced with the crisis foisted on him. But the US has whole ranks of pawns which Putin does not have. And this is not only a chess game, but chess combined with poker combined with Russian roulette. The United States is ready to take risks that the more prudent Russian leaders prefer to avoid ... as long as possible.

Perhaps the most extraordinary aspect of the current charade is the servility of the ‘old’ Europeans. Apparently abandoning all Europe’s accumulated wisdom, drawn from its wars and tragedies, and even oblivious to their own best interests, today’s European leaders seem ready to follow their American protectors to another D-Day ... D for Doom.

Can the presence of a peace-seeking Russian leader in Normandy make a difference? All it would take would be for mass media to tell the truth, and for Europe to produce reasonably wise and courageous leaders, for the whole fake war machine to lose its lustre, and for truth to begin to dawn. A peaceful Europe is still possible, but for how long?

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