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The new US-Russia Cold War

By Pepe Escobar

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Meet the new (cold) war, same as the old (cold) war. Same same, but different. One day, it's the myriad implications of Washington's "pivoting" to Asia - as in the containment of China. The next day, it's the perennial attempt to box Russia in. Never a dull moment in the New Great Game in Eurasia.

On Russia, the denigration of all things Sochi - attributable to the inherent stupidity of Western corporate media "standards" - was just a subplot of the main show, which always gets personal; the relentless demonization of Russian President Vladimir Putin. [1]

Yet Nulandgate - as in US Assistant Secretary of State Victoria "neo-con" Nuland uttering her famous "F**k the EU" - was way more serious. Not because of the "profanity" (praise the Lord!), but for providing what US Think Tankland hailed as "an indicator of American strategic thinking".

Here's the game in a nutshell. Germany remote controls one of the leaders of the Ukrainian protests, heavyweight boxer Vitali Klitschko. [2]

"F**k the EU" is essentially directed towards Berlin and Klitschko, its key protege. Washington sees this going nowhere, as Germany, after all, has been slowly building a complex energy-investment partnership with Russia.

The Obama administration wants results - fast. Nuland herself stressed (check it out, starting at 7:26) that Washington, over the past two decades, has "invested" over US\$5 billion for the "democratization" of Ukraine. So yes: this is "our" game and the EU is at best a nuisance while Russia remains the major spoiler. Welcome to Washington's Ukrainian "strategy".

The Ukrainian chessboard

US Think Tankland now also peddles the notion that the Obama administration is expertly adept at a balance of power strategy. To include Libya as part of this "strategy" is a sick joke; Libya post-Gaddafi is a failed state, courtesy of humanitarian bombing by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Meanwhile, in Syria, the US "strategy" boils down to let Arabs kill Arabs in droves.

Iran is way more complex. Arguably, the Obama administration calculates that through talks between Iran and the P5+1 - the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany - it will be able to outmaneuver the Russians, who are close to Tehran. This assuming the Obama administration really wants a nuclear deal with Iran that would later release the floodgates of Western business.

On Syria, it's the Russian positions that have kept the upper hand; not to mention that Putin saved Obama from yet another Middle East war. As Syria was a Russian win, no wonder Washington dreams of a win in Ukraine.

We can interpret what's goin' on now as a remix of the 2004 Orange Revolution. But The Big Picture goes way back - from NATO's expansion in the 1990s to American NGOs trying to destabilize Russia, NATO's flirt with Georgia, and those missile defense schemes so close to Russian borders.

In already trademark Obama administration style, the State Department's support for anti-Russia, pro-EU protests in Ukraine qualifies as "leading from behind" (remember Libya?)

It comes complete with "humanitarian" appeal, calls for "reconciliation" and good against evil dichotomy masking a drive towards regime change. Abandon all hope to find voices of sanity on US corporate media such as NYU and Princeton's Stephen Cohen, who cut to the chase in this piece, stressing that the essential revelation of Nulandgate "was that high-level US officials were plotting to 'midwife' a new, anti-Russian Ukrainian government by ousting or neutralizing its democratically elected president - that is, a coup".

Here the "strategy" clearly reveals itself as a US puppet now - coup or no coup - instead of an EU puppet later. No one in the Beltway gives a damn that Viktor Yanukovich was legally elected president of Ukraine, and that he had full authority to reject a dodgy deal with the EU.

And no one in the Beltway cares that the protests are now being led by Pravy Sektor (Right Sector) - a nasty collection of fascists, football hooligans, ultra-nationalists and all sorts of unsavory neo-Nazi elements; the Ukrainian equivalents of Bandar Bush's jihadis in Syria.

Yet the US "strategy" rules that street protests should lead to regime change. It applies to the Ukraine, but it does not apply to Thailand.

Washington wants regime change in the Ukraine for one reason only; in the wider New Great Game in Eurasia context, that would be the rough equivalent of Texas defecting from the US and becoming a Russian ally.

Still, this gambit is bound to fail. Moscow has myriad ways to deploy economic leverage in Ukraine; it has access to much better intel than the Americans; and the protesters/gangs/neo-Nazis are just a noisy minority.

Washington, tough, won't give up, as it sees both the political crisis in Ukraine as the emerging financial crisis in Kazakhstan as "opportunities" (Obama lingo) to threaten Moscow's economic/strategic interests. It's as if the Beltway was praying for a widespread financial crisis in the Russia-led Customs Union (Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus).

Pray in fact is all they've got, while the EU, for all the grandiose, rhetorical wishful thinking, remains a divided mess. After Sochi, Vlad the Hammer will be back in business with a vengeance. Nuland and co, watch your back.

Notes:

1. Journalistic malpractice & the dangers of Russia-bashing, RT, February 9, 2014.
2. EU Grooming Klitschko to Lead Ukraine, Der Spiegel Online, December 10, 2013.