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What Obama Didn't Say About Ukraine

By James Carden

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President Obama's statement from the podium of the White House briefing room on Friday consisted of nothing more than the usual bromides about respecting the "sovereignty, territorial integrity, and democratic future of Ukraine."

All in all, the statement was vacuous, inexact, and tendentious, yet mercifully brief.

What he could have done, instead, was talk about what is actually taking place. What we are witnessing now in this, the centennial year of the Great War is: 1) the slow-motion dissolution of a European country and 2) the drawing of a new Western/Russian divide that cuts right through the birthplace of Russian civilization.

What Russia now sees is a burgeoning new and intractably hostile rump state midwived by the violent actions of—among others—hardline anti-Semitic and anti-Russian extremists that are now pressing right up against Russia's southwestern border.

In responding to this emerging threat, Russia was warned by the president that "there will be costs for any military intervention in Ukraine." To which one wonders: Of what sort? Trade between the U.S. and Russia is anemic; the U.S. Department of State has already decided to defund Title VIII; and the U.S. is dependent on Russia to keep the Northern Distribution Network open to facilitate operations in Afghanistan. The White House, as of this writing, is

considering boycotting the upcoming G8 in Sochi, clearly because the president's decision not to attend the Olympics there made such an impression.

All that aside, what is facing us now—the possibility of a new and more dangerous Cold War, a state in Western Ukraine run, in part, by fascists, and the takeover of Eastern Ukraine—whether *de facto* or *de jure*—by Russia came about all because the duly elected (and yes, yes, thoroughly corrupt) president of Ukraine decided to pick one bailout package over another. The package he picked, Russia's, he knew would spare the country a wave of mass unemployment similar to the one that hit Russia two decades ago after it accepted the conditions of an IMF/Clinton-era Treasury bailout.

The American media narrative suggests that the Maidan putsch was justified on the grounds that the aspirations of the Ukrainian people were dashed by Yanukovich's decision to decline a trade deal with the EU at the Vilnius Summit in November; Yanukovich was corrupt; and Yanukovich ordered the shooting of protesters in Maidan.

Wholly neglected by both the American media and by statements emanating out of the State Department is any semblance of concern for the aspirations of the people of eastern and southern Ukraine who—as we are seeing in Crimea right now—most emphatically do not see the overthrow of their democratically elected president by radicals in Kiev as something to be celebrated. The fact that the next presidential election was scheduled to take place 12 months from now rarely gets a mention, as does the fact that the quasi-fascist Svoboda Party now has in its control the deputy premiership, three ministries, and the prosecutor general's office.

What this means for the future is unclear, but we may hazard a guess as to how Russia may respond based on the actions of our own country in the 20th century. When even relatively weak, far-off countries were headed by governments that various U.S. administrations felt to be less than friendly, the United States rarely hesitated to act. Even a cursory accounting for U.S.-led or financed acts of regime-change would include the overthrow of: Iran's Mossadegh in 1953, Guatemala's Guzman in 1954, Chile's Allende in 1973, Congo's Lumumba in 1964, and Panama's Noriega in 1989. Closer to our shores, the risible Castro was subject to numerous attempts on his life during those brief yet glorious Camelot years. And of course there was Grenada in 1983.

And so an emergency—which is what this is—begets emergency meetings of the UNSC and disingenuous pronouncements on respecting the “legitimate aspirations” of (at least some of) the Ukrainian people from the U.S. government and its chief executive, who evinces neither an interest in nor a desire to come to terms with the fact that Russia, like the United States, has legitimate national interests it is intent on protecting. Rather than a realistic approach to foreign affairs, we get treated to the embarrassing spectacle of senior U.S. diplomats attempting to square the circle, professing full-throated support for democratic processes, except, of course, when they don't.