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Spring fails in Ukrainian plunderland

By Pepe Escobar

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Here's the US's exceptionalist promotion of "democracy" in action; Washington has recognized a coup d'etat in Ukraine that regime-changed a - for all its glaring faults - democratically elected government.

And here is Russian President Vladimir Putin, already last year, talking about how Russia and China decided to trade in roubles and yuan, and stressing how Russia needs to quit the "excessive monopoly" of the US dollar. He had to be aware the Empire would strike back.

Now there's more; Russian presidential adviser Sergey Glazyev told RIA Novosti, "Russia will abandon the US dollar as a reserve currency if the United States initiates sanctions against the Russian Federation."

So the Empire struck back by giving "a little help" to regime change in the Ukraine. And Moscow counter-punched by taking control of Crimea in less than a day without firing a shot - with or without crack Spetsnaz brigades (UK-based think tanks say they are; Putin says they are not).

Putin's assessment of what happened in Ukraine is factually correct; "an anti-constitutional takeover and armed seizure of power". It's open to endless, mostly nasty debate whether the Kremlin overreacted or not. Considering the record of outright demonization of both Russia and

Putin going on for years - and now reaching fever pitch - the Kremlin's swift reaction was quite measured.

Putin applied Sun Tzu to the letter, and now plays the US against the EU. He has made it clear Moscow does not need to "invade" Ukraine. The 1997 Ukraine-Russia partition treaty specifically allows Russian troops in Crimea. And Russia after all is an active proponent of state sovereignty; it's under this principle that Moscow refuses a Western "intervention" in Syria.

What he left the door open for is - oh cosmic irony of ironies - an American invention/intervention (and that, predictably, was undetectable by Western corporate media); the UN's R2P - "responsibility to protect" - in case the Western-aligned fascists and neo-nazis in Ukraine threaten Russians or Russian-speaking civilians with armed conflict. Samantha Power should be proud of herself.

Don't mess with Russian intelligence

The "West" once again has learned you don't mess with Russian intelligence, which in a nutshell preempted in Crimea a replica of the coup in Kiev, largely precipitated by UNA-UNSO - a shady, ultra-rightwing, crack paramilitary NATO-linked force using Ukraine as base, as exposed by William Engdahl.

And Crimea was an even murkier operation, because those neo-nazis from Western Ukraine were in tandem with Tatar jihadis (the House of Saud will be heavily tempted to finance them from now on).

The Kremlin is factually correct when pointing out that the coup was essentially conducted by fascists and ultra-right "nationalists" - Western code for neo-nazis. Svoboda ("Freedom") party political council member Yury Noyevy even admitted openly that using EU integration as a pretext "is a means to break our ties with Russia."

Western corporate media always conveniently forgets that Svoboda - as well as the Right Sector fascists - follow in the steps of Galician fascist/terrorist Stepan Bandera, a notorious asset of a basket of "Western" intel agencies. Now Svoboda has managed to insert no less than six bigwigs as part of the new regime in Kiev.

Then there are the new regional governors appointed to the mostly Russophone east and south of Ukraine. They are - who else - oligarchs, such as billionaires Sergei Taruta posted to Donetsk and Ihor Kolomoysky posted in Dnipropetrovsk. People in Maidan in Kiev were protesting mostly against - who else - kleptocrat oligarchs. Once again, Western corporate media - which tirelessly plugged a "popular" uprising against kleptocracy - hasn't noticed it.

Once again, follow the money

Ukraine's foreign currency reserves, only in the past four weeks, plunged from US\$17.8 billion

to \$15 billion. Wanna buy some hryvnia? Well, not really; the national currency, is on a cosmic dive against the US dollar. This is jolly good news only for disaster capitalism vultures.

And right on cue, the International Monetary Fund is sending a "fact-finding mission" to Ukraine this week. Ukrainians of all persuasions may run but they won't hide from "structural adjustment". They could always try to scrape enough for a ticket with their worthless hryvnia (being eligible for visa on arrival in Thailand certainly helps).

European banks - who according to the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) hold more than \$23 billion in outstanding loans - could lose big in Ukraine. Italian banks, for instance, have loaned nearly \$6 billion.

On the Pipelineistan front, Ukraine heavily depends on Russia; 58% of its gas supply. It cannot exactly diversify and start buying from Qatar tomorrow - with delivery via what, Qatar Airways?

And even as 66% of Russian gas exported to the EU transits through Ukraine, the country is fast losing its importance as a transit hub. Both the Nord Stream and South Stream pipelines - Russia not on-the-ground but under-seas - bypass Ukraine. The Nord Stream, finished in 2011, links Russia with Germany beneath the Baltic Sea. South Stream, beneath the Black Sea, will be ready before the end of 2015.

Geoeconomically, the Empire needs Ukraine to be out of the Eurasian economic union promoted by the Kremlin - which also includes Kazakhstan and Belarus. And geopolitically, when NATO Secretary General, the vain puppet Anders Fogh Rasmussen, said that an IMF-EU package for the Ukraine would be "a major boost for Euro-Atlantic security", this is what clinched it; the only thing that matters in this whole game is NATO "annexing" Ukraine, as I examined earlier.

It has always been about the Empire of Bases - just like the encirclement of Iran; just like the "pivot" to Asia translating into encirclement of China; just like encircling Russia with bases and "missile defense". Over the Kremlin's collective dead body, of course.

Let's plunder that wasteland

US Secretary of State John Kerry accusing Russia of "invading Ukraine", in "violation of international law", and "back to the 19th century", is so spectacularly pathetic in its hypocrisy - once again, look at the US's record - it does not warrant comment from any informed observer. Incidentally, this is as pathetic as his offer of a paltry \$1 billion in "loan guarantees" - which would barely pay Ukraine's bills for two weeks.

The Obama administration - especially the neo-cons of the "F**k the EU" kind - has lost its power play. And for Moscow, it has no interlocutor in Kiev because it considers the regime-changers illegal. Moscow also regards "Europe" as a bunch of pampered whining losers - with no common foreign policy to boot.

So any mediation now hinges on Germany. Berlin has no time for "sanctions" - the sacrosanct American exceptionalist mantra; Russia is a plush market for German industry. And for all the

vociferations at the Economist and the Financial Times, the City of London also does not want sanctions; the financial center feeds on lavish Russian politico/oligarch funds. As for the West's "punishment" for Russia by threatening to expel it from the Group of Eight, that is a joke. The G-8, which excludes China, does not decide anything relevant anymore; the G-20 does.

If a wide-ranging poll were to be conducted today, it would reveal that the majority of Ukrainians don't want to be part of the EU - as much as the majority of Europeans don't want the Ukraine in the EU. What's left for millions of Ukrainians is the bloodsucking IMF, to be duly welcomed by "Yats" (as Prime Minister Yatsenyuk is treated by Vic "F**k the EU" Nuland).

Ukraine is slouching towards federalization. The Kiev regime-changers will have no say on autonomous Crimea - which most certainly will remain part of Ukraine (and Russia by the way will save \$90 million in annual rent for the Sevastopol base, which until now was payable to Kiev.)

The endgame is all but written; Moscow controls an autonomous Crimea for free, and the US/EU "control", or try to plunder, disaster capitalism-style, a back of beyond western Ukraine wasteland "managed" by a bunch of Western puppets and oligarchs, with a smatter of neo-nazis.

So what is the Obama/Kerry strategic master duo to do? Start a nuclear war?