

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نیاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2014/03/12/the-new-crimean-war/print>

The New Crimean War *Balls, Brains and History*

by JOHN GRANT

MARCH 12, 2014

Making political sense out of the events in Ukraine and Crimea has become great sport. Does it mean a new Cold War? Is Vladimir Putin a better, more “potent” man than Barack Obama? Who has bigger balls?

We’re naturally reminded of those twisted times when the post-World War Two imperial United States stood toe-to-toe with the imperial Soviet Union. It was Richard Nixon and Leonid Brezhnev fighting for the souls of smaller, peripheral nations like Vietnam, where, in lieu of direct confrontation, Indochinese peasants were slaughtered in the millions and 58,000 Americans died.

Today is different. The Cold War is over. The Soviet Socialist Empire is gone. The American Capitalist Empire remains. We’re told ad nauseum it’s all because of Ronald Reagan. Most Americans have internalized the imperial reality as The Myth of American Exceptionalism and accept the nation’s natural right to intervene anywhere on the globe. Though the weaponry has

significantly advanced, the rhetoric hasn't changed much from the days of Theodore Roosevelt, who wrote in 1910 in his little book called *American Problems* about "The Management of Small States Which Are Unable to Manage Themselves."

He emphasized that the United States had no interest in "interfering" with poor countries. "The needs of civilization and humanity are sufficiently met by protecting them from outside aggression." We need to protect them from others.

That, of course, is the reason we interfered in the lives of the Vietnamese for 30 years once Truman betrayed our Vietnamese ally and handed their country back to the French in 1945. Of course, Truman did it to "protect" the Vietnamese from communists. If you watched Rachel Maddow's recent MSNBC documentary on why the Bush regime, lies aside, really invaded and occupied Iraq, it's the same theme. We invaded Iraq for oil. But not for ourselves. No. So "he" wouldn't control the oil. He being Saddam Hussein. We did it for the Iraqi people. Two oilmen who somehow got into the White House sent American soldiers to kill and die to gain control of Iraqi oil. There's no argument on that score anymore. Like the peace movement said from the beginning, it was War For Oil. Of course, while Bush overthrew the Saddam government, he also empowered the seventy percent Shiite element aligned with his bitterest enemy, Iran.

The imbroglio over Ukraine has resurrected the soft war-profiteer Dick Cheney, who features a brand new heart and is talking like a real war hero. He suggested President Obama was a pansy for not employing military exercises or bombings or some other form of military sabre rattling. Like a disappointed bitch in heat, Sarah Palin went for the groin, bemoaning Obama's lack of "potency." She said this: "The only thing that stops a bad guy with a nuke is a good guy with a nuke." Waving his arms painfully, Senator John McCain talked about Obama being "feckless." McCain's sidekick, Senator Lindsey Graham, was going to get Ukraine into NATO and create "a democratic noose around Russia." Bill Kristol said, "Putin needs to be humiliated." Rudy Giuliani drooled over Putin's decisiveness. The word "thug" was used often, maybe more times than it was used to describe Richard Sherman of the Seattle Seahawks for expressing himself while black. It was clearly a concerted Republican plan to suggest the President of the United States was less than a man. It was very entertaining.

Still, it was prissy compared to the high bar set by death squad politico Roberto D'Aubuisson running for president of El Salvador in 1984. Known as "blowtorch Bob" for his interrogation methods, D'Aubuisson ran a TV ad against Jose Napoleon Duarte in which a hand was shown holding two eggs. In Spanish, testicles are known as *jueves* — literally eggs. As a macho voice

exposed Duarte's lack of machismo, the hand slowly crushed the eggs. But D'Aubuisson lost. And today, a former FMLN guerrilla is expected to win the presidency.

What the Republican right is up to, here, is effeminate compared to D'Aubuisson. Here, the attack distills down to simple Obama hatred. They seem to understand enough to know, like Putin, that given the state of the US in the world today military action against Russia is out of the question. Thus they feel it's safe to pile on and gleefully bust the President's balls. One might argue such shameless ball-busting of the man elected to engage the Putins of the world was un-American or un-patriotic. But, then, of course, if Obama were Putin he'd have McCain, Graham, Palin, Kristol and Giuliani sent off to Siberia, where they could make all the jokes they wanted to the official gorillas eyeballing them. So maybe the right has a point. Maybe Obama should be more like Putin.

Alas, American reality is hard to absorb these days. The empire is in a long, slow decline from the halcyon days following World War Two. Reagan wrenched prosperity out of malaise and, in the process, set up the deregulation ducks that led to the 2008 financial debacle that has weakened the economy everywhere but on Wall Street. Social Darwinism is replacing any sense of social adhesion. As technology rockets upward, unions are flat on their back. Human beings are more and more superfluous to corporate profits. We're now seeing the same downsizing dynamic in the recent Pentagon cutbacks of personnel. The war machine no longer needs so many warm bodies to feed, clothe and pay a salary to. What they want is more fancier technological weapons and means to spy on everybody.

As wealth defies gravity and goes upward into the US oligarchic coffers of the likes of the Koch Brothers, significant elements of the nation's infrastructure are reaching crisis levels of maintenance neglect. My state, Pennsylvania, has the dubious honor of the most bridges in danger of collapse. Our education system is failing to educate and prepare non-rich kids for the world of the 21st century. Our prisons have been grotesquely over-used to solve problems, and it's now near impossible politically to turn the mess around. Health care is completely run by medically-insensitive, for-profit corporations, something only a marginalized left sees as a problem. And the defense budget still sucks most of the oxygen out of the room.

A friend likes to point out that everyone thinks their culture is the best. It's like rooting for your local football team even if they're a loser. People like feeling a part of something greater than themselves. But, then, this bonding idea has a dark side. It's the basis of the term "fascism," which was coined by Benito Mussolini from the Roman word fasces, the battle-axe surrounded

by sticks that was held aloft at the head of a Roman magistrate's entourage. The sticks symbolize the citizenry snuggling up to ballsy power.

Teddy Roosevelt put a fasces on the cover of his book *American Problems*. Two fasces appear on the wall of the US Senate behind the speaker's podium; they proudly stood astride Joe Biden and John Boehner during the State of the Union speech. They're all over the place in American government. At times of fear, humans seem to like the idea of huddling up around a symbol of masculine strength. Balls and fascism go hand in hand. That seems to be going on with Vladimir Putin in Russia right now, where his shirtless posing is pure Mussolini. He narcissistically thrives on his own balls. The fact the Russian mafia is considered one of the most ruthless in the world, an image all mixed up with a ruthless new Russian capitalistic oligarchy, also helps his image in a world where the notion of international law has lost much of its meaning.

But brains tend to trump balls. Evidence is on the rise that our century-long rise to world "domination" has reached a wall represented by what observers like Zareed Zakaria (*The Post-American World*) and Pankaj Mishra (*From The Ruins of Empire*) suggest is "the rise of the rest." This rise of the rest includes China, India, Brazil, Russia and others. It's in conjunction with the rocket-like rise of new technologies noted by capitalist observers like Thomas Friedman.

Putin Russia's "red line" in Crimea is a 21st century skirmish in this rise of the rest resurgence. Places either exploited by western imperialism or broken and humiliated as was the Soviet Union, are picking themselves up and rising to compete directly with the US. The idea of the nation state that came out of the treaty of Westphalia is becoming a thing of the past. The world is now a chaotic, ever-shifting network of loyalties.

So Putin spits in the eye of US hypocrisy, something anyone on the dirty end of the stick of US power can easily recognize. Only US imperialists cannot see it. George Bush can invade Iraq and say "the US does not torture" when everyone knows the war was dishonest and US agents were using torture. So, OK, Putin sends in troops without insignia and says with his incredible poker face that he's not invading or occupying Crimea. The USA is being bitten in the ass by its own hypocrisy. And Crimea is likely only the beginning.

As Pankaj Mishra puts it, "...the spell of Western power has finally been broken. ... Much of the 'emerging' world now stands to repeat, on an ominously larger scale, the West's own tortured and often tragic experience of modern 'development.'" He closes his book with this gloomy

forecast: "...it is easy to imagine that this [21st] century will be ravaged by the kind of economic rivalries and military conflicts that made the last century so violent."

One of the amazing ironies of the Ukraine/Crimea imbroglio is talk here in the US of the "strategic" sale of natural gas from fracking in the United States. Sale of US fracked gas to Europe and Ukraine will put strategic pressure on Russia, which now sells gas to Europe and Ukraine. In other words, our nifty empire has gone from sucking oil and gas from under the sands of Saudi Arabia and Iraq to, now, sucking gas out of US geological layers in a manner that will potentially taint US water supplies and who knows what else — all for strategic leverage over Vladimir Putin and Russia. How's that for balls? It's a literal case of a declining empire sucking the life out of its own homefront to reinforce its overextended imperial perimeter.

American Exceptionalism may have washed on the way up, but it's a whole different thing and won't wash so well on the long, slow decline downward. We in the United States would benefit from some honest self-examination so we can come to terms with our past and figure out just what is really worth fighting for in the coming years.

To re-fit America, I'd start with re-distributing wealth, decent health care for everyone, good education and a downsized military/surveillance budget. Empower Americans from the bottom up to become good citizens again. If that scenario transpired, I'd be the first to join the fight against anyone, inside or outside our borders, who chose to attack us.

We don't need bigger balls; we need humility and smarter brains.