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## Warpath Western States Block Diplomacy over Ukraine

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The US and its European allies are moving ever recklessly to a war footing with Russia over the crisis in Ukraine. Military maneuvers, inflammatory rhetoric and the readying of economic sanctions against Russia are creating an ominous momentum for confrontation – one that precludes even a modicum of diplomatic options to try to resolve the escalating tensions.

Washington and Brussels are condemning Russia for «aggression» and «violation» of Ukrainian territory without the slightest due consideration for the political background to the crisis, or for Russia’s legal rights to defend national interests in the Crimea Republic under a long-standing bilateral agreement.

US secretary of state John Kerry earlier this week rebuffed an invitation from his Russian

counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, to hold an urgent meeting in Moscow. Instead, with disturbing alacrity, Washington has sent fighter jets, spy planes, warships and troops to the Baltics, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria and along the border of Ukraine.

The US congress voted this week to condemn Russia and to impose a range of sanctions unless Russian military forces withdraw from Ukraine. Similar calls for sanctions against Moscow have been made by the leaders of Britain, France and Germany. French foreign minister Laurent Fabius said sanctions could be implemented within days, while British premier David Cameron gave the go-ahead for RAF reconnaissance planes to join NATO forces in Poland.

Meanwhile, Washington and its NATO allies have declared a forthcoming referendum to be held in Crimea this weekend on whether the autonomous republic should secede from Ukraine and join the Russian Federation as «illegal». This high-handed dismissal of Crimean self-determination by the NATO powers is in tune with the view voiced by the new Western-backed authorities in Kiev who have also denounced the Crimean Parliament's declaration of independence.

Ominously, the Western powers are shunning any path for a diplomatic solution. Washington and Brussels are imposing impossible demands on Moscow to fulfil. And yet despite this truculence, Washington is accusing Russian President Vladimir Putin of not showing seriousness in engaging in a diplomatic discourse.

It is not Putin who is not serious about diplomacy. It is Washington and its NATO allies.

For a start, Russia has not «annexed» Crimea as the West provocatively claims. Under the bilateral military agreement between Russia and Ukraine, Moscow is permitted legally to have up to 25,000 troops on the Crimean Peninsula, attached to the naval base at Sevastopol, which is the headquarters of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. Russia pays for this facility with an annual fee of \$100 million. The arrangement was renewed in 2010 for a further 25 years. So how can Russia have annexed territory where it is legally entitled to be present?

Bereft in any Western statements is cognizance of the fact that the parliament of the autonomous Crimean Republic made an official request for Russian military protection of its majority ethnic Russian population in the wake of violent unrest in Kiev. That unrest led to the overthrow of an elected government on February 22 by self-declared neo-Nazis and paramilitaries espousing anti-Russian threats. Subsequently in other parts of Eastern Ukraine, such as the cities of Donetsk and Kharkov, several pro-Russian people have been shot on the streets by unknown armed men, and many others have been injured in clashes.

Western ultimatums to Moscow to withdraw security forces from Crimea in this dangerous and volatile context are therefore not only legally unfounded; the ultimatums are a provocative demand for Russia to surrender its national interests in an area that is contiguous with Russia's borders and which has centuries of shared history and heritage. Does the West really expect Moscow to stand idly by while the lives of its compatriots are threatened? We don't have to imagine too hard what Washington, London or Paris would do in a similar situation.

Moreover, it is the demand from Washington and Brussels that Moscow must engage in talks with the new regime in Kiev that is especially untenable. America's top diplomat John Kerry and other Western leaders are saying that Moscow is not demonstrating seriousness for diplomacy because the Russian government is refusing to dialogue with Kiev. This is tantamount to the West forcing Russia to legally recognize the Western-backed cabal that seized power in Kiev from the elected president Viktor Yanukovych at the end of last month.

This is an unreasonable demand asserted by the Western powers. Russia has every right to withhold its recognition of sovereign legality and legitimacy to the self-appointed rulers in Kiev. The evidence is incontrovertible that the new regime, led by Arseniy Yatsenyuk and the so-called interim president Oleh Turchynov, came to power through violence and massive intimidation of the incumbent elected authorities. There is also disturbing evidence that many of the deaths among protesters and police officers during the Maidan demonstrations were actually caused by snipers working covertly for the opposition. These allegations must be investigated by an international commission, not brushed aside and ignored, while the alleged perpetrators of mass murder are lionized as Ukraine's «fledgling government».

The self-declared rulers in Kiev, heavily comprised of the neo-Nazi Svoboda party, are soundly opposed by Moscow as unconstitutional, if not criminal. Their rise to power is legally defined as a coup d'état using violence and terrorism. As made clear by Wayne Madsen and other commentators, the coup in Kiev is the result of Western covert destabilization in Ukraine, going back to the early 1990s, with the express objective of orchestrating pro-Western regime change. That regime change is aimed at giving Western capital unfettered access to Ukrainian resources and at expanding NATO's military encirclement of Russia.

Washington and its NATO allies are thus asking Russia for an impossible political concession in demanding that Moscow bestow official recognition to a wholly illegal and inimical regime in Kiev.

The reception afforded to Kiev's self-styled prime minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk by US president Barack Obama in the White House this week is not only a tendentious celebration of lawlessness, it is a barefaced snub to Russia as a major international power.

Coincidence or not, but the self-styled president Oleh Turchynov was also given a platform in the New York Times this week, with an opinion column in which he once again denounced Russian «aggression» and, ironically, accused Moscow of acting like «Somali pirates» over its recent security moves in Crimea.

This is top-level American offensiveness towards Russia that shows a boorish disregard for international protocol and norms of relations.

The ongoing rapid military build-up by NATO from the Baltics to the Black Sea, the pointed refusal to engage in diplomatic discourse about the real causes of instability in Ukraine, and the festooning of the Kiev power-grabbers by Washington and Brussels – are all sinister signs that the Western powers are pushing headlong for a confrontation with Russia.

The pre-empting of diplomacy by the US in particular has resonances with how it recklessly spurned political alternatives to war on Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003, and with Iraq before the First Gulf War in 1991.

This could all be a wild gambling bluff by Washington in the Last Chance Saloon in an attempt to intimidate Russia into NATO submission. But the worrying thing is that Washington's intoxication with its own arrogance and lawlessness makes for a highly dangerous situation in which bluffing blocks any alternative to destructive action.