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## Crimea Self-Determination amid Western Law of the Jungle

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Ahead of the referendum in Crimea this weekend on whether the Ukrainian autonomous republic should secede and join the Russian Federation, Washington and Europe are piling on the pressure to scupper the poll with unprecedented threats of reprisals.

German chancellor Angela Merkel reiterated provocative American claims that Russia is using «19th and 20th century tactics» and «law of the jungle» (meaning military aggression), when the reality is the reverse: it is Western states that are railroading political aims with wild threats of war.

US secretary of state John Kerry, ahead of his meeting with Russian foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, in London on Friday, said that if the Crimea referendum goes ahead then that would «close off any available space for diplomacy». Notwithstanding the fact that Washington has already done its best to close off diplomatic options for de-escalating tensions by mobilizing fighter jets, warships and troops on Russia's borders, as well as brandishing punitive sanctions.

Both the US and European leaders have warned of «massive sanctions» and other veiled threats of «serious steps» should the Crimea referendum pass. Such threats are reckless moves towards war – conducted by Western states that arrogantly presume to be the standard-bearers of law and

order.

With a majority ethnic Russian population in Crimea and its parliament having already voted for a declaration of independence from the rest of now-lawless Ukraine, it seems certain that the electorate will approve of joining the Russian Federation.

But the Crimean population is going to the polls to exercise their right to self-determination under conditions of extreme and completely unacceptable duress. That in itself constitutes gross interference in the internal affairs of the autonomous southern peninsula.

The ironies, contradictions and hypocrisies of Washington and its European allies towards the people of Crimea are staggering. Western standards are readily being seen to be nothing but empty, cynical rhetoric, used to conceal their own rapturous embrace of «law of the jungle».

The crisis stems from the Western allies engaging in a tug-o-war to incorporate Ukraine into the European Union, allegedly so that the former Soviet Republic would benefit from EU standards of economics, law and culture. This supposedly high-minded objective has been pursued by Washington, London, Paris and Berlin by destroying the sovereignty and constitution of Ukraine in their illicit support for putschists who overthrew the elected authorities in Kiev last month – after nearly four months of Western-backed street violence conducted by neo-Nazi paramilitaries.

That violence also included acts of mass-murder, most probably, the evidence shows, carried out by covert snipers working for the Western-backed agitators, in which up to 100 people, protesters and police, were shot dead and hundreds more wounded.

Now the Western sponsors of the coup d'état in Kiev turn around and accuse Russia of violating Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity because Moscow has welcomed the decision by the Crimean republic to hold a legally constituted referendum.

A century ago, Western powers embarked on the First World War allegedly to uphold the principle of «self-determination of small nations». Evidently, that principle does not apply now to the people of Crimea.

What other Western standards are being trampled on when it comes to the Ukraine and Crimea?

This year across Europe, there are much-anticipated referendums within EU states for regional political independence.

In September, Scotland is to hold a vote on becoming an independent, separate state from the United Kingdom. Already, the Scots have their own devolved parliament dating from 1999, which has since given the go-ahead for a vote on setting up a fully independent state. To be sure, the Westminster parliament in London and the central government led by Conservative prime minister David Cameron are not happy about the prospect of the Scots abandoning the UK. The British monarchy has also expressed concern that Scottish independence may lead to the eventual break up of the entire kingdom. Nevertheless, the right to Scottish self-determination is

irreproachable and unstoppable, even by the reactionary British imperialist establishment.

Britain is itself due to hold a referendum on whether to remain inside the European Union. Tory leader Cameron has vowed this year to «let the people decide» if his party is re-elected in the next general election, with the eventual poll on Europe to be held sometime in 2017.

Following the Scottish ballot this year, in November the people of Catalonia in Spain's northeast region are scheduled to go to the polls to cast their vote on whether to set up an independent Catalan republic. Again, the central government in Madrid and the Spanish monarchy are far from pleased about the move. But it seems incontestable that the Catalan people will avail of their right to self-determination.

Ironically, among the voices within the EU supporting the referendum in Catalonia are the leaders of Lithuania and Latvia, who are now among the NATO allies making a hue and cry about the Crimean republic exercising this very same right.

So, what the people in the Crimea are doing this weekend is conforming to a very European standard and indeed a supposedly universally recognized standard, which Washington in particular has long espoused, going all the way back to president Woodrow Wilson and the League of Nations.

More recently, it was Washington that affirmed the right to self-determination for Kosovo when it voted to secede from Serbia in 2008. A later ruling by the UN International Court of Justice in 2010 upheld that «Kosovo's declaration of independence did not violate any international norms».

Added to these precedents is the fact that the Crimean parliament has conducted the referendum process constitutionally, with overwhelming majority approval from its members. On March 11, the parliament voted for a declaration of independence, as legally required, to underpin the outcome of the referendum. If the process can be accused of being hasty, as president Obama asserts, then that is because of the political crisis and insecurity that Obama and his Western allies illegally imposed on the Ukraine, prompting the referendum in Crimea.

Moreover, there is the important precedent that the Crimea region was historically part of Soviet Russia up until the 1950s.

For Washington and Europe to now decry that Crimea is acting «unconstitutionally» and «illegally» defies their own avowed principles and practices elsewhere. It is especially odious that the Western-backed unelected regime occupying Kiev is condemning Crimea and Russia of illegality and «violating Ukrainian territorial integrity».

This regime is occupying Kiev after it violently seized power from a legally constituted elected government on February 22. That power-grab destroyed the constitution and rule of law in Ukraine, and it was given full support by Washington and European governments. The installed junta comprises neo-Nazis and fascists who have openly declared war on Russian-speaking people within Ukraine and who are calling for the «cleansing of occupiers» from the East of the

country. The neo-Nazi ministers for National Security, Andriy Parubiy and Dimitry Yarosh, are also warning that their paramilitaries will launch attacks on Crimea if the referendum passes. The prospect of a Western-induced civil war in Ukraine and a wider war with Russia is frighteningly real.

The thuggish threats emanating from the junta in Kiev are integrated with the wider political threats being issued by Washington and its European allies towards Russia.

Despite all the lofty standards of law and rights articulated by Western states, what we are witnessing with regard to the Ukraine and Crimea are the real Western «standards» in practice – of hypocrisy and resort to violence when it suits their aims.

Angela Merkel is half-right. The «law of the jungle» is being practiced. It's standard Western practice all down through history and presently over Ukraine.