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The American Crisis

Selling Illusions

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The near instantaneous reemergence of antique Cold Warriors in response to the ‘crisis’ in Crimea is clear indication that they were never far from the front lines of U.S. foreign policy. The history in the West of cynical opportunists using contrived ideology in the service imperialist-capitalist land grabs and atrocities would have seemed to have met its logical end with baby (George W.) Bush’s botched wars on and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. Any social order interested in ‘its’ self-preservation would have packed these residual sociopaths off to long stints in the military stockade for their war crimes and then on to bedpan detail at the senior citizens’ homes to which most of them should have been consigned some time ago. Were it not for the West’s ongoing ability to end most life on the planet with nuclear weapons this seeming incapacity for self-preservation might be of limited relevance, of sociological interest to academics so inclined but otherwise just good riddance to its present and future victims. And the question for those confused by the speed of this miraculous resurrection is: why? What confluence of circumstances would lead ‘the West,’ whose citizens only three weeks ago couldn’t have located Crimea on a map even if given the proverbial ‘infinite period of time’ that a chimpanzee needs to type the Bible, to buy the neo-Cold War bluster-blather being fed it by Western news ‘services?’

Of no small irony of history, it was at the approximate time of the British and European invasion of the ‘New World’ to ‘free’ its indigenous populations from their mortal coils in order to import

kidnapped Africans to labor as chattel property in the service of freedom loving democratists that Crimean Tartars were marching north to enslave Russians rumored to have numbered in the hundreds of thousands. The related sacking of Moscow by said Tartars is of course fresh in every Western news-readers' mind as is the Russian 'annexation' of Crimea a short century later and around the time of the glorious American Revolution in which genocidal, slave 'owning,' plutocrats declared their 'freedom' from Britain's King George in order to bestow the gift of 'freedom' to 'their' slaves a brief century later, and under a wee bit of pressure, and to undertake the near extinction of the indigenous population who, like near endless 'liberated' who followed them, were 'freed' from existences so freshly rendered miserable by these very same in-the-process-of-being-reconstituted imperial ambitions. And while in the present one can only hope that 'empire' in all of its incarnations would disappear to make room for possibly functional political economy, it was the 'uni-polar' West, mainly the U.S., which persisted in imperial predations following the nominal end of the Cold War.

Whatever one thinks of the three centuries of imperial battles for Crimea and current geopolitical blather that in the West so quickly escalated to disinterred Cold War rhetoric, the larger question remains: why is the West ready to raise the geo-political stakes so far and so quickly? No doubt the 'question' of Crimea figures large in the minds and imaginations of the several or so government and 'private' analysts whose job it is to trade in 'nightmare' scenarios to the exclusion of imperial history. But what is in it for Western leaders who have more pressing business studiously failing to address the economic depressions in which 'their' populations continue to suffer? By way of signaling possible relation, the persistence of the neo-cons' hold on geo-political strategy following three or more decades of self-created calamity shares political-economic space with the rapid revival of the fortunes and influence of the very same radical capitalist ideologues who led Western economies to their near self-immolation in 2007 – 2008. This isn't to doubt the ideological insularity of the think-tank demagogues whose jobs exist to provide pseudo-plausible 'intellectual' veneer to support Western imperialist adventures and their associated industries. Neither is it to doubt the very same wisdom of Western economists who toil to explain the glorious goodness of the public-largesse dependent 'private' economy. In both realms a ruling class of atrophied petulance apparently immune to the consequences of its serial calamities continues against all reason and history to hold power.

This isn't to reduce geo-politics and history to simplistic economic explanations. But it is to point to the remarkable control that this catastrophe-generating class retains over Western political economy. Liberals in the U.S. have oft made the related point that the same pundits—appointed spokespersons for conventional 'wisdom,' somehow retain credibility despite being wrong about absolutely everything for as long as they have been alive. Implied is that 'clear' analysis of 'the issues' is not what pundits exist to do. With 'freedom' for the vast many in the West reduced to the opportunity beg for money in the streets until we crawl into a ditch to die, the ability of this catastrophe-generating class to achieve the rally-'round-the-flag response that its geo-political predations typically generates would by logic and reason at some point fail to assemble the necessary forces. With pundits whipped into a bluster-blather there remains little doubt that some as yet unspecified catastrophe will be generated— just likely not the catastrophe this Western ruling class is hoping to generate. Given the political-economic backdrop in the U.S.: a largely discredited political class approaching mid-term elections with ongoing economic depression; a publicly botched effort to save the extractive, dysfunctional healthcare system in

full view; continued political subservience to a predatory, extractive banking cartel and the forceful insistence by 'both' capitalist Parties that more catastrophe through unnecessary entanglements will solve 'our' problems, there is little reason why 'changing the subject' wouldn't be the plan of the powers that be.

With respect to Crimea, the Russian government has history on its side with its contention that the West, in particular the U.S., has moved aggressively to surround, restrict, threaten and confine Russia through NATO *since the nominal end of the Cold War*. The proxy / civil war in Syria finds international 'relief' that the CIA is only arming al Qaeda and the amalgam of loosely affiliated forces to fight the Syrian government rather than the U.S. conducting wholesale aerial bombardment to create even more chaos and misery. European dependence on Russian oil and gas is largely engineered to support imperialist-capitalist production. And whatever its 'true' genesis, association of the transitional government in Ukraine with Western 'gifts' like loans and loan guarantees inserts the mechanisms of Western (IMF- International Monetary Fund) control that have long history in the service of capitalist-imperialist predation. Access to the Black Sea is the strategic rationale for Russian bases in Crimea as has been the case on and off now for three centuries. Without access there is no place to put the Russian navy stationed there. By fabricating crisis the West has asserted its aggressive intentions while insisting that Russia substantially disband its navy. Crimea is only a 'crisis' because the West has made it one.

Raised at the drop of a hat after decades of near-silence is that nuclear annihilation is back 'on the table.' The U.S. is the only nation in history to use nuclear weapons aggressively and it did so against overwhelmingly civilian populations in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. NATO (the U.S.) has apparently used the 'Cuban missile crisis' that threatened placement of nuclear weapons within minutes of major U.S. cities as a template to install like weapons across Europe that are aimed at Russia. The much-touted geo-political dominance by the U.S. since 1990 could have been used to substantially reduce, or even possibly eliminate, nuclear arms. But as is evident from near instantaneous revival of the threat, the catastrophe-generating class in the West likes nuclear weapons just fine. The question of where precisely Israel's nuclear weapons came from meets the insistence that former U.S. client-state Iran has a nuclear weapons program that dates from about the time Israel's arsenal became public knowledge. And lo and behold, senior neo-con 'architects' of the U.S. imperial project in the Middle East had relations with pre-Revolutionary Iran, they led the U.S. catastrophes in Iraq and Afghanistan and they remain the geo-political arm of the catastrophe-generating class in Washington, New York and London. That leading Democrats, including ghost-of-Jimmy-Carter Barack Obama and liberal sociopathic opportunist in waiting Hillary Clinton, are jumping over one another to be the 'pro-nuclear annihilation' Party speaks to the factual worldview of the Western 'liberal' class.

The circumstance in the U.S. is of a political class that has aligned itself with every capitalist scam, con and predation yet imagined— home foreclosures against millions of citizens to protect banks and bankers from the predatory loans they made; wholesale, unconditional bailouts of the predatory, dysfunctional banker class at public expense; sequential programs posed as in the public interest that are corporate scams in fact— the ACA (Affordable Care Act), the JOBS Act, mortgage 'relief' programs, 'fracking' and the looting of public resources under the con of 'privatization,' that pose it clearly against the public interest. The 'pox on all houses' sentiment about to be realized in the mid-term elections will likely bring a Republican sweep and with it

more straightforward— less cluttered, implementation of the catastrophe-generating class's agenda. In Philadelphia, USA, a place dear to my heart, fully one-third of the city's population lives on food stamps. Recent cuts to food stamps—SNAP (Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Plan), have so decimated the 'engine of economic growth,' small businesses, that the Republican Governor of Pennsylvania is seeking to restore food stamp payments. The privatization of Philadelphia's schools is such an obvious scam that a graft system to induce local 'leaders' to continue to support it now constitutes a substantial proportion of the system's expenses. Suburban parents now a decade or more into their own economic diminishment have seen their children take tens of millions of dollars in onerous student loans to pay for college educations when half of college graduates work in low-paid, dead-end jobs to repay crushing debt that cannot be discharged. The political class in the U.S. most certainly wants to change the subject.

The war on and occupation of Iraq may have been the 'purest' demonstration in recent history of dim hubris in the service of unqualified catastrophe generation— over a million Iraqis killed, tens of thousand of Western troops killed or substantially destroyed and an entire modern nation-state left in chaos and ruins. The imperial 'spoils' system implemented when the adventure was still considered 'successful' shines light on the imperial mechanics that funnel resources and stolen booty to their rightful 'homes' in Georgetown, Manhattan and London— multi-national oil companies, 'security' and other military companies, 'reconstruction' contractors and various and sundry bogus financiers and opportunists are the new frontline of imperial extraction. In their 'purity' Western imperial predations in Iraq find general relation to half a century or more of cynical capitalists hiding behind ideological difference to sell naked imperial looting to always-gullible publics under the guise of responding to external threats. In Venezuela, Argentina, Chile, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Vietnam, Iraq, and Iran and on and on ad infinitum Cold War demagogues cobbled the residual of imperial history onto wholly contrived 'threats' to secure land, resources, compliant workforces and 'partners' in imperial expropriation to feed the engines of capitalist wealth 'production.' The technical 'problem' for the West now is that restoring geo-political credibility outside of rapidly diminishing television audiences will require that more enthusiastic modes of coercion be used.

Western imperial wealth, the greatest in world history, serves as advertising slogan for capitalist democracy. If you can ignore your lying eyes and three hundred years of imperial history then you too can live like us. Left out of this 'us' is opportunistic circumscription— the overwhelming preponderance of U.S. history is genocide against indigenous populations, slavery, wars of imperial conquest and internal and external social repression. This may by degree be true of other empires, but that is the point. Before tossing their lot with the West the good citizens of Ukraine may wish to spend time with the economic theory of 'internal devaluation' so recently applied by the EU (European Union) to the European periphery in the service of Western bankers. Internal devaluation was also the 'gift' from the IMF and assorted and sundry Western economists to Russia in the late 1990s, the product of the accumulated 'wisdom' of the Harvard, Princeton and University of Chicago economics departments distilled and applied to such economically catastrophic effect. Either known or not by capitalist demagogues in the U.S., internal devaluation is the implied goal of Western public policy for the last three or so decades. When engineered by Western bankers and the IMF it doesn't matter how onerous, or by whom, external debt was accumulated. Western bankers sitting in modern office towers wearing three thousand dollar suits will be repaid from your labor and your wealth. The

storyline in the West has it that the Russian ‘system’ runs on ‘graft.’ Left out is that the West has simply legalized graft to avoid unpleasant associations— see ‘campaign contributions’ and ‘Citizen’s United’ for details.

The Western ruling classes have had their way with geo-politics through the neo-cons and with political economy through the capitalist neo-liberals. In recent decades both saw spectacular and wholly temporary ‘successes’ before it became apparent to all but the most committed ideologues that imperial hubris in the service of self-serving demagogues benefits neither those who fell in line behind them nor their victims. It is however the ‘business’ of the West, it’s how ‘we’ pay our bills. On the surface it would seem that not even Americans are so deluded as to continue to raise the stakes over a manufactured crisis with three centuries of history behind it. The problem is that this is all that the ‘leadership’ in the West has. The duct tape and chicken wire used to patch up ‘the economy’ has repaired the exact and precise catastrophe-generating system of predatory finance that has given ‘us’ three decades of regularly recurring economic calamities of increasing breath and scope. And instead of repudiating the (baby) Bush ‘doctrine’ of pre-emptive self-defense the Obama administration has automated it through the global distribution of drone warfare. Whereas the CIA once-upon-a-time had to train its proxy armies to slice villages full of innocents from loin to throat (see Nicaragua, El Salvador and Honduras), the task of automated slaughter can today be carried out with the press of a button by marginally literate soldiers sitting in air conditioned trailers in Nevada, USA. Selling the illusion that this leadership is on ‘our’ side in the realms of the political or the economic becomes exponentially more difficult by the day. All that it has left to sell is the illusion that it is defending us from contrived threat.