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Ukraine: Out of Control

By Justin Raimondo

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They don't make war propaganda like they used to – or maybe it has something to do with this newfangled thing they call the Internet – but the latest "evidence" of Russian troops supposedly directly involved in east Ukraine turmoil was debunked almost as soon as it was made public. It turns out that a key photo touted by the US State Department and the *New York Times* as proof positive of Russian special forces in Ukraine was lifted off the photographer's Instagram page. Yes, folks, it's strictly amateur hour at the CIA, or whichever agency cooked up this "intelligence." The photo wasn't taken in Russia, as the *Times* and US officials claimed, but in Sloviansk, which fatally undermines their case that these are Russian special services.

We can chalk this one up to desperation. They had to do *something* to salvage their fading credibility as the Ukrainian government's "anti-terrorist" operation sputtered out as soon as it began. In a truly pathetic scene, a phalanx of crack Ukrainian "special forces" in armored personnel carriers advanced on Sloviansk and Kramatorsk, where they were surrounded by unarmed civilians – and promptly defected en masse. It was a humiliating comedown for the Kiev regime: Ukrainian officials had been boasting to the international media that their mighty army would subdue the "terrorists" in short order.

Sloviansk, by the way, is the scene of the Kiev regime's latest attack on civilian protesters. "At least five" pro-Russian protesters are dead, according to the Ukrainian "interior minister." Bereft of professional troops, who have mostly gone over to the pro-Russian side, the coup leaders sent

in their Right Sector stormtroopers along with the remnants of the national police – who attacked a checkpoint manned by unarmed civilians in the dead of night.

Yes, *they're killing they're own people* – but that isn't something you'll hear US officials say about a government deemed "pro-American."

The lies, the hypocrisy, the brazen whitewashing of a gang of extremists – this administration's championing of the Kiev coup leaders is Washington's most reckless act since the end of the cold war. Yes, more dangerous than even the 2003 invasion of Iraq: Russia, after all, really *does* possess weapons of mass destruction.

The Geneva talks were supposed to have de-escalated the looming conflict: instead they made conflict more likely. The reason is because Lavrov, Kerry, and the EU failed to invite the key participants: the east Ukrainians, including representatives from the self-proclaimed Donetsk Republic as well as Crimea. The big powers thought they could devise a diplomatic "solution" without consulting the people most directly involved. The Russians are just as responsible for this slight oversight as the Americans: indeed, more so, since they pose as champions of Russian-speakers in their "near abroad."

The irony is that the turmoil in east Ukraine underscores the truth of Russia's protestations that it is not responsible for the actions of pro-Russian separatists: Moscow, which has nothing to gain from such provocations, really thought the east Ukrainians would meekly follow the Kremlin's lead. Yet the Russian Foreign Ministry is hard put to explain away the double standard that requires pro-Russian militants to surrender their positions in the various city halls and government buildings they've taken over but allows the Maidan protesters to occupy the seat of government in Kiev.

As predictably histrionic as criticism of administration policy from the John McCain/Peter King wing of the GOP is, the White House seemingly went out of the way to display its own powerlessness by revving up the rhetoric – and tacitly acknowledging there is little they can do about Crimea or east Ukraine. That old geopolitical adage – "put up or shut up" – seems to have been forgotten as John Kerry flies hither and yon, possessed by the idea that the US must "do something" in response to every ginned-up overseas "crisis."

The lesson of recent events in Ukraine is that no one—not Washington, not Moscow, not Kiev, not *nobody* – is in control. Ukraine sends in platoons of highly-trained "crack" troops to quell the Donetsk uprising – and the next thing you know they've gone over to the other side. The Kremlin uses the Donetsk rebels as a bargaining chip in seemingly successful negotiations that changed the subject from Crimea to east Ukraine – and a day later the Donetsk Republic is telling the world, in effect, "Putin doesn't speak for us!" Washington, for its part, financed and directed a regime change operation that was supposed to put its favored oligarchs back in power – and instead found itself saddled with an "interim" government dominated by right-wing extremists with a penchant for anti-Semitism.

The hubris of the American political class doesn't allow them to understand the implications of their own ignorance: they think they are master puppeteers, and that they can manipulate the

strings of history in an endless morality play written and directed by their all-powerful selves. Yet events on the ground in Ukraine disprove this conceit every day.

And it is a dangerous conceit. Back in 1914, the Russian Foreign Ministry didn't realize that the Serb fanatic Gavrilo Princip would set off World War I – a conflict that would bring down the Romanovs – when they aided and abetted Serbian secret societies in the Balkans: the Austrians didn't realize the visit by Crown Prince Francis Ferdinand would provoke a war that would end their empire for good: the Germans, the French, and the British all miscalculated, drawn inexorably into the conflict by means of interlocking alliances, numerous tripwires, and the pernicious concept of "collective security."

The exact location of Ukraine's borders is not a matter the US has any business having an opinion about – never mind intervening on one side or the other. According to the principle of national self-determination, which Washington pays lip service to, the people of Crimea and east Ukraine have the right to secede and go independent, or seek union with the Russian Federation: it's up to them. And they were not consulted when the big powers sat down to determine their fate – with the result being that the situation is rapidly veering out of control.

Speaking of chaos: the news that Right Sector – the neo-fascist formation that served as the "muscle" of the Maidan rebellion – has moved its headquarters to east Ukraine, and set up a paramilitary army of some 800 heavily armed fighters, does not bode well for the future. According to the terms of the Geneva agreement, Right Sector was to have been disarmed: instead they have been unleashed. As more of the regular Ukrainian army and police defect to the Russian side, Right Sector and various other fascist gangs are increasingly taking their place – setting the stage for a violent provocation that could send the Russians marching in. And also setting the stage for a possible future ultra-nationalist coup against the unelected "interim" government – thus giving the Kiev coup leaders a taste of their own medicine.

There is only one solution to the Ukrainian "crisis," and that is a referendum offering the people of east Ukraine a choice between the status quo, autonomy within Ukraine, or union with Russia. As both the more moderate Kiev officials and Putin seem to realize, federalism and decentralism are the keys to peace.

Yet the Kiev regime is under considerable pressure from super-centralist ultra-nationalists, who hold key positions in the interim government, to resist such demands. Putin, on the other hand, is under pressure from extreme Russian nationalists who want to grab all Ukraine and dream of restoring the old Russian empire.

The wily Russian leader, for his part, no doubt realizes this is just a dream – because an empire is a luxury ramshackle Russia can no longer afford. With a rapidly declining population and an economy standing on some very shaky ground, the best Putin can do is manage Russia's inevitable decline and hope his country will come in for a soft landing.

The not-so-wily Americans, on the other hand, persist with their delusions of global hegemony, unaware that their ambitions have seriously outrun their resources. Which practically ensures

that when our bankrupt-in-more-ways-than-one country comes in for a landing it's going to be quite hard.