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## Rehearsing for World War III

By *Justin Raimondo*  
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As I write this, US troops are building a bridge across Poland’s Vistula river, and conducting a nighttime helicopter assault to secure the eastern part of the country against a Russian assault.

Has World War III started? Well, not quite yet, although it’s not for want of trying.

This is Operation “Anakonda 16.” Thirty-one thousand troops, 14,000 of them American, are conducting war games designed to secure an Allied victory in World War III. The exercises involve “100 aircraft, 12 vessels and 3,000 vehicles,” and precede the upcoming NATO summit, which is expected to approve the stationing of yet more troops – mostly Americans – in eastern Europe.

NATO claims this is all strictly “defensive” in nature, designed to deter Russian “aggression” – but who is the real aggressor?

It is the Western powers who, ever since the fall of the USSR, have pushed eastward relentlessly, expanding the “defensive” NATO alliance to include such useless nonentities as Albania and Montenegro, and even extending “associate” status to distant Georgia. Their policy has been to eliminate the buffer between NATO and Russia, absorbing previously neutral Ukraine into the Western orbit by means of a violent coup d’etat, and launching a propaganda war that targets Russian President Vladimir Putin as the second coming of Stalin.

The Russian reaction has been to reverse Nikita Khrushchev's 1954 decision to hand Crimea to Ukraine, pull out of a treaty limiting the number of troops in Europe, launch a military build up on their borders, and upgrade their nuclear arsenal to parallel a similar effort by the US.

With the collapse of international communism, the need for NATO was obviated, and yet – like any and all government programs – it not only persisted, it expanded. Complementing the idea of “Greater Europe” and the creation of the European Union, the NATO-crats enlarged the original “defensive” vision that was supposedly the rationale for the alliance and embarked on an ambitious program that involved the creation of a permanent military architecture which inevitably sought to absorb real estate in the east. Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the Baltic states – all eventually joined NATO's ranks as Moscow looked on in alarm. As the “war on terrorism” commenced, NATO became the instrument of Western military operations in the Middle East, sending its tentacles into the former Soviet republics of Central Asia and insinuating itself into the Caucasus region.

From a cold war policy of containment, US/NATO has since moved into regime change mode: the idea is to encircle Russia militarily, while using “soft power” to undermine pro-Russian regimes in Russia's periphery and eventually achieve regime change in Russia itself. The Ukrainian operation was an example of the “soft power” approach: utilizing Western-funded “civil society” groups, they succeeded in evicting the democratically elected government from office and installing one handpicked in Washington. With the imposition of sanctions, and the continued encirclement of Russia, the idea is to squeeze the Russian bear until he either gives up or collapses. Which is why “Anakonda” – an iteration of the giant snake that crushes its victims to death and then devours them – is truly an evocative name.

As is usual with the regime-changers in Washington, they approach their task with little or no understanding of their intended victim. In Iraq and Afghanistan, they thought they could destroy the regime, and then create a Middle Eastern version of Kansas. It didn't work out that way – but our political class is incapable of learning the lessons of experience.

In the case of Russia, they believe that a Russian collapse would have to mean the ascension to power of a figure much like the late Boris Yeltsin, who was too drunk to resist the incursions of Western power most of the time, and went along with the marginalization of his country without too many protests. However, the memory of the Yeltsin era is abhorred by the Russian people, who saw their country plundered by the oligarchs, and their standard of living fall into a veritable abyss, while Russia was pushed around on the international stage like a freshman pledge on fraternity row.

What the NATO-crats want is a “pro-Western” figurehead in power in Russia, but what they don't get is that Putin is as pro-Western as they come in the current political milieu. His main opponent in the election that brought him to power was the virulently anti-Western Communist Party, which he handily defeated, with the even more anti-Western Russian nationalists coming in third.

Initially, Putin sought to include Russia in “Greater Europe,” and he proposed an agreement with NATO to ensure that Europe would be a “common space.” Yet his initiatives to create an

inclusive Europe were met with implacable hostility by the Western powers, who rejected the idea that Russia would be treated as an equal and insisted on the primacy of NATO and the EU. This set up the present standoff, in which the countries of the former Warsaw Pact were forced to choose between Brussels and Moscow.

If and when the West succeeds in collapsing the Russian economy and taking down Putin, it won't be a Yeltsin-like figure who will inherit the ruins. What comes after Putin, in this context, is something much worse. And in that case, the prospect of war will loom large on the horizon.

If Hillary Clinton gets into the White House, you can be sure the tensions with Russia will reach fever pitch. She has compared Putin to Hitler – always the signal that we are about to embark on yet another crusade – and her neoconservative supporters are eager to restart the cold war. The great danger is that a cold war may very well become a hot one – and that raises the specter that we lived with for half a century, the very real possibility of a nuclear war.

To compare Putin to Stalin, or Hitler, is absurd: Russia has come a long way since the days of the Gulag, when 60 million people were killed and imprisoned. If we want to push Russia back into the darkness, then the policy we are presently pursuing is the way to go: if, however, we want peace, then it's high time to disband NATO – which is outdated and expensive – give up our dreams of regime change in Russia, and start cooperating with Moscow in solving our mutual problems.