**The case of Kazakhstan**

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The mainstream media, particularly the Washington Post and the New York Times, promote a simplistic view of Russian history as a pursuit of an aggressive and expansionist national security policy to counter the West, particularly the United States. Accordingly, the Post and the Times have been anticipating a Russian invasion of Ukraine for the past month, and now the introduction of 2,500 Russian ‘peacekeepers’ into Kazakhstan has led to heightened concerns about Russian President Vladimir Putin’s immediate goals.

The fact that the Russian force includes members of the 45th Brigade, an elite special forces unit, is indeed worrisome. This unit fought in both Chechen wars in 1996 and 1999; in South Ossetia in 2008 in the five-day war with Georgia; in the abrupt annexation of Crimea in 2014; and in Syria in 2015. Nevertheless, Russia’s overall view of war, as expressed by its own writers, is one of defeat and even humiliation. Moscow lost the Crimean War in the 1850; the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-1905; WWI, which opened the door to the Bolshevik Revolution; the Cold War with the United States; and finally the humiliation of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The Soviet demise meant the loss of two million square miles, which exceeds the size of the European Union or India. Even the so-called victory in WWII meant the loss of more than 27 million Soviets, and an economic and social recovery that took decades.

Russians know the cost of war, and Putin, who lost a brother in WWII, presumably shares that concern. His so-called adventurism has involved very short campaigns with limited risk. The short war with Georgia was typical, and in fact was brought on by the Bush administration’s encouragement of Georgian irredentism in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The seizure of Crimea was quick and tidy, and returned to Moscow a territory that had been in Russian hands for hundreds of years. As in Georgia, US manipulation of Ukraine’s political firmament had much to do with Putin’s decision to retake Crimea. (Politically, Ukraine is more united and stable without Crimea because of the heavy concentration of Russian ethnics in the region.)

In any event, Putin is not seeking a long war of engagement, which would follow any decision to invade. The Washington Post’s senior diplomatic writer, David Ignatius, echoes senior military and intelligence officials in favoring military assistance to turn Ukraine into a ‘porcupine’ that would be ‘hard for an invading Russian army to digest.’ But lethal military assistance to Ukraine would simply guarantee greater Ukrainian losses during a protracted struggle. The Obama and Trump administrations understood this, and refused to supply lethal weaponry that would increase the chances for confrontation. Recently, Post editorial writer Josh Rogin argued for supplying Ukraine with equipment for electronic warfare, air defense, and intelligence support as well as anti-sniper systems and helicopters.

President Joe Biden has ruled out a military response to any Russian offensive actions, but he is considering economic policies that would be both feckless and counterproductive. In stressing that the United States is prepared to do this time what it refused to do in 2014, Secretary of State Antony Blinken is threatening the removal of Russia from the SWIFT system, which executes global financial transactions between more than 1,100 banks and 200 countries. The Trump administration in 2018 pressured SWIFT to remove Iran, but Russia currently has an alternative to SWIFT and its economy is far larger than any country that the United States has removed. European nations that trade with Russia would be hurt by this step. Moreover, Russia supplies Europe with one-third of its natural gas requirements, and West European nations fear a Russian cutoff of gas in response to US escalation.

On the eve of important Russian-American diplomatic consultations over Ukraine and other security issues, the New York Times has stepped up its own propaganda campaign against Russia. On January 8, a long editorial dismissed the Russian concern with possible Ukraine membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization or even NATO’s increased military presence on Russia’s border, and warned that the Kremlin could “put on the war helmet at any moment.” Then, “other neighboring countries could become hostages of Russia’s system of survival, which requires external domination for the sake of internal security.”

The Times even argued that Biden’s ‘quick’ agreement to start talks with Russia meant that Putin’s strategy was ‘working.’ As a result, ‘the West has been forced to reward Russia -- through outreach, diplomacy, and, above all, attention – for the charitable act of not invading Ukraine.’ This ‘geopolitical advance,’ according to the Times, “would effectively underwrite [Russia’s] domestic agenda, too. And in the most bizarre statement of all, the editorial concludes that the “United States would become, at home and abroad, Russia’s security provider.”

Excerpted: ‘Kazakhstan: Militarist’s Newest Case For Confronting Putin’s Russia’

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