



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on June 15, 2014

Obama and Putin: Cold War or Just Cold Shoulder?

As each day's headlines bring new reports of Iraqi cities overrun by forces of the al-Qaeda-led Islamic Republic of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), other reports indicate that the war over the future of Ukraine will not be quelled by the economic pressure that the United States and its Western allies are applying against selected targets in Russia.

Sunday's news included reports that separatists seeking alignment with Russia in the former Soviet territory shot down a Ukrainian military transport plane, killing the nine crew members and 40 paratroopers aboard in the deadliest incident in what the *New York Times* delicately calls the "unrest" in the eastern region of Ukraine. The State Department confirmed Friday that Russia sent T-64 tanks and BM-21 multiple rocket launchers to aid pro-Russian fighters battling against Ukrainian government forces.



On Saturday, Senator Bob Corker (R-Tenn.) called on President Obama to impose tougher sanctions aimed at isolating Russia economically and diplomatically.

"None of the minor actions that have been taken so far have changed Putin's calculus, so a failure to respond vigorously now will have disastrous consequences, not only for Ukraine, but all neighboring countries who face similar threats from Russia," said Corker, the senior Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

The Tennessee lawmaker has introduced legislation that would place immediate new sanctions on Russian officials involved in the occupation of Crimea as well as on Russian banks and corporations linked to the rebellion in East Ukraine. The bill would impose further sanctions to bar Russian officials and companies from the world's financial system if Russia sends troops into the country or attempts to annex any part of Ukraine.

Secretary of State John Kerry is reported to have expressed his "strong concern" about the reported flow of heavy weapons and militants into Ukraine from Russia, though the United States has seldom been reluctant to send weapons and military advisors into countries around the world — despite a history of those weapons frequently [ending up in the hands enemy forces](#). Kerry also assured Ukraine's prime minister that the United States is committed to helping Ukraine defend its border, though the continued [flow of illegal immigrants into the United States](#) indicates we are not doing too well in securing our own border.

Among the lesser-known consequences of the growing tension between Presidents Obama and Putin is



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the possibility that it may have ruined the diet of French President François Hollande, who hosted world leaders recently gathered in France for the 40th anniversary of D-Day. Hollande had planned a dinner for both leaders, author and journalist Eric Margolis reported, but given their estrangement, decided instead to dine with each separately. That may have forced the French leader off the diet he has been on ever since being called “little fat man” by former President Nicholas Sarkozy. The Associated Press reported that Obama studiously avoided any contact with Putin in France “despite coming within an arm’s length of his Russian counterpart.

The United States is, of course, ever vigilant against Russian territorial ambitions. Speaking in Warsaw on the 25th anniversary of Poland’s independence from the Soviet Union, President Obama said: “The days of empire and spheres of influence are over. Bigger nations must not be allowed to bully the small, or impose their will at the barrel of a gun or with masked men taking over buildings.” While U.S. troops may not be masked, they have imposed America’s will “at the barrel of a gun” in quite a few smaller nations.

The irony of the president’s remarks is surely not lost on the Kremlin. As Margolis pointed out, “Obama and America’s European allies are cold-shouldering Putin for re-absorbing Crimea into Russia, to which it had belonged for 300 years, and for stirring the pot in eastern Ukraine. Meanwhile, US military forces are in action or based in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Djibouti, the Philippines, Yemen, Somalia, Uganda, Central African Republic, Colombia, Kenya, Europe, South Korea, Japan — in fact, around the globe.”

The crisis in the Ukraine began when President Viktor Yanukovich turned down an offer from the European Union of an economic recovery loan, financed through the International Monetary Fund and accompanied by stringent austerity requirements. Instead, Yanukovich struck a deal with Putin that included the Russian purchase of \$15 billion in Ukrainian bonds, and a discount of one-third on Russian gas prices to Ukraine.

Violent clashes followed between pro-Western Ukrainians and police in the capital city of Kiev. With the U.S. National Endowment for Democracy supporting and encouraging the dissidents, along with visits to Maidan Square by the State Department’s Victoria Nuland and Sen. John McCain, the U.S. influence in the coup that followed could hardly be denied. It was made even clearer by the leak of a taped phone conversation between Nuland and the U.S. ambassador in Kiev concerning whom the United States wanted in the next Ukrainian government.

That intervention in the domestic politics of the nation followed roughly a quarter-century of incorporating former Soviet satellite nations into NATO to expand the presence of the Western alliance on the Russian doorstep. As columnist Pat Buchanan noted, “Imagine where America would be today had the neocons gotten their way and brought Georgia and Ukraine into NATO. We would have been eyeball-to-eyeball with Russia in the South Ossetian war of 2008, and eyeball-to-eyeball today over Kiev. Yet, in neither country is there any vital U.S. interest worth risking war with Russia.”

The treaty creating the NATO alliance was ratified by the U.S. Senate in 1949 as a means of deterring Soviet expansion into Western Europe. But it was sold to Congress and the American public as a temporary alliance, providing a shield to our European allies while they, with generous U.S. support, rebuilt their nations’ economic and military strength following the devastation of World War II. In 1951, Dwight Eisenhower, then supreme commander of NATO, said: “If in 10 years, all American troops stationed in Europe for national defense purposes have not been returned to the United States, then this whole project will have failed.”



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Sixty-three years later, NATO is larger and more active than ever in ostensibly sovereign nations. American troops are not only still stationed in Europe, but, as Margolis noted, they are present in nations all around the world, as the United States continues to ignore the early warnings of Washington and Jefferson against permanent and entangling alliances.

Whether the mission of the “whole project” called NATO has failed, however, depends on what that mission is. Perhaps it is to foment wars, coups, and revolutions in pursuit of a “new world order.”

Photo of U.S. President Barack Obama and Russian President Vladimir Putin displayed on a video screen at the D-Day commemoration in France: AP Images



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