NATO: A Great and Mighty Wind, Signifying Nothing

The surrealism of the Ukrainian conflict continued last week, with the 28 members of the NATO alliance meeting in a cozy golf resort in Wales, United Kingdom, to discuss all of the supposedly egregious and disconcerting Russian maneuvers against Ukraine and demanding that Russia stop inviting further sanctions and pressure against itself, as British Prime Minister David Cameron emphasized at the summit. All of this is well and good, of course, part of the pomp and circumstance of international organizations that believe more strongly in microphones than M-16s, but it does seem to beg the question from either impartial or disinterested observers: what reality does this address and what end is really trying to be achieved?

To a small degree one could feel sorry for Ukrainian President Poroshenko (and granted it is really just token sympathy as the leadership of Ukraine has not exactly stood out and distinguished itself all summer in terms of ending or settling the crisis in the East). He desperately wants NATO to give him arms, training, and intelligence support. And while NATO clearly talks lovingly and embracingly about the need to protect Ukraine from ‘Russian aggression,’ it seems fairly obvious that in real terms that is the closest NATO is going to come to giving Poroshenko such things. In the West this is portrayed as European realism as no one supposedly wants to provoke Russia to real action and retaliation within Ukraine. What I find incredulous is how few in the West stop to consider the total contradiction this is with the forced narrative: NATO is meeting to discuss how to stop Russian aggression in Ukraine, but will not take any real measures to properly equip Ukraine to fight because it does not want Russian aggression in Ukraine. So which is it? Are we trying to stop Russian aggression that is already occurring or are we worried about Russian aggression happening? NATO pronouncements reverse each other, conveniently ignored by media outlets, by saying on the one hand that Russia IS an aggressor while whispering on the other hand that it is most worried about Russia ‘REALLY’ being an aggressor. So are we fighting an enemy already in play or trying to stave off an enemy from truly being in play?

I believe this is part of the reason you can detect such frustration and irritation in the statements and positions of Putin and Lavrov, who sometimes almost seem exasperated by the situation, fighting off a narrative they really aren’t interested in but are constantly being asked on the world stage to address. This is especially apparent when the ridiculous subject of Ukraine joining NATO comes up. Lavrov stated during the Welsh summit that NATO should avoid ‘derailing’ the process both Russia and Ukraine are trying to hammer out. Worse still is how incredibly infantile and cruel this line of argument is from NATO: there is no chance, NONE, that Ukraine will be invited to join the group. While Obama says officially to the microphones that all options will remain open for global security and peace, France and Germany are both formally opposed to offering membership to Ukraine. As long as that is the case, Obama’s comments are just empty gestures, more cruelty to Ukraine than deterrent to Russia. Does anyone in their right mind think Russia worries more about microphone asides from the American President compared to official French and German policy? I have a bridge to Crimea to sell you if you believe that. Which is an interesting segue come to think of it!

In the West one of the more powerful arguments ‘proving’ so-called Russian aggression is the fact that Russia wants to secure areas in Eastern Ukraine so as to open a land corridor from its own territory to the newly annexed Crimea. I have personally heard diplomats and military members in important positions in the United States declare this as a
primary motivating factor for the Russian military. There is one small inconvenient problem with this logic: namely, it is bogus because it completely ignores the reality of relations between Ukraine and Russia before the tumultuous events set off way back when with the Maidan revolution. A massive commerce transportation bridge had already been contracted and construction already begun, connecting Russia proper to eastern Crimea, before 2014 was ushered in. In other words, even before Crimea held its secession declaration there was going to be a direct and highly functional transportation connection between Russia and the peninsula. Simply occupying land in Eastern Ukraine because it technically can connect to Crimea is horrifically flawed thinking, as anyone can tell you that has had personal experience trying to travel through Soviet-era roads in rural areas. So, which sounds more logical and powerful to you? Building a massive and modern super highway that directly connects Russia to Crimea or trying to forcefully occupy several regions of Eastern Ukraine so you could possibly build down the road new avenues to Crimea? Putin and Lavrov rightly see this as a question not befitting a five year old while almost every media conglomerate in the West, fed by NATO declarations, is pushing the Eastern-Ukraine-Land-Bridge option as being the only game in town. It is ridiculous.

Which leads us to the final, simple point of contention as it concerns Russian aggression: where are all of the dead Ukrainian soldiers??? Since March of this year I have heard of at least six different ‘incursions’ by the Russian Army into Eastern Ukraine. I have heard even more about the behind-the-scenes proliferation of massive amounts of Russian weaponry to rebels in the east. NATO is meeting and kvetching as we speak because of its belief that Russia is doing everything in its power to ‘set the clock back on principles of national sovereignty.’ My simple question to all of this is why do we not see data showing massive Ukrainian forces casualties? Am I to believe the Russian Army has fallen so far that it can ‘invade’ Ukraine a half-dozen times over the last six months and constantly feed separatist groups weapons and materiel and not kill ANY Ukrainian soldiers? Why is no one in the West looking perplexed as the casualty figures are dominated by civilian losses in Eastern Ukraine, meaning they have died as a result of the shelling of separatist-held towns by Ukrainian forces? I cannot say if the recently leaked communique where Putin was quoted out-of-context as saying Russia could take Kiev ‘in two weeks’ is accurate. But I am fairly confident that if Russia was truly interested in invading and occupying the relatively empty and isolated eastern half of Ukraine, there would at least be SOME Ukrainian force casualties for us to see and view. And I know if this was happening the authorities in Kiev would be certain to make sure every media outlet in the West would have those photographs and videos. And yet nothing.

Perhaps NATO should stop itching so badly for an enemy and get out of Russia and Ukraine’s way. There is an old saying that in a conflict if you are not being a help then you are by default a hindrance. NATO, today, is most certainly not helping.

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