Debunking the Myth of Russian Aggression

Since the start of the Ukrainian crisis in November 2013, Western media and politicians have accused Russia’s role in the Ukrainian crisis, repeatedly claiming that Russia has acted aggressively without any provocation. Contrary to these frequent statements, Russia has been a victim of regular provocations over the last few years, but despite these aggravations, Russia has not acted bellicosely, but instead continued to search for a diplomatic solution to the current crisis.

How Russia was provoked by the West

The first myth stipulates that Russia deliberately attacked Ukraine without any reason, annexing Crimea and destabilising eastern Ukraine. Debunking this myth is crucial, as many other false statements about Russia originate from the assumption that Russia acted belligerently. However, the truth is that the West triggered Russia into reacting the way it did. Firstly, since 2004 the West continuously supported and injected finance into pro-Western groups in Ukraine, despite warnings from Russia to not destabilise Ukraine. Secondly, the European Union was blackmailing former Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovich into signing an Association Agreement, a deal that would be of grave consequences to Russian economy due to Western products flooding the Russian market.

When former Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovich decided against signing the agreement, realising that it would not be in Ukraine’s interest to do so, the West decided to support a violent coup of a legitimately elected President. Thirdly, Ukrainian opposition and its Western backers did not adhere to the agreement signed by Yanukovich and the opposition on 21 February 2014.

At this point, Russia realised that the West was not looking to find a compromise and a diplomatic solution that would benefit all sides. Instead, Europe was bent on usurping the whole of Ukraine to itself, despite the majority of people in eastern Ukraine refusing to support closer relations with the EU. When these people in Donbas protested against the new Western-backed government, Petro Poroshenko initiated an “anti-terrorist” operation that resulted in many ethnic Russian civilians dying in eastern Ukraine – a grave provocation towards Russia.

Is Russia really trying to re-build the Soviet Union?

The second assumption by the Western media claims that Russia is aiming to re-create the Soviet Union and is not going to stop its “expansion” in Crimea. However, there is virtually no evidence that Russia was bent on taking Crimea, much less any other territory in Ukraine, before the crisis in Ukraine began. President Putin’s actions in Crimea appear to have been a spontaneous reaction to Yanukovich’s ouster. The Kremlin had no choice but to take Crimea, a peninsula President Putin feared would host a NATO naval base if Ukraine decided to join the Western military alliance.

Western media like to point to Russia’s short war with Georgia and claim that this was the first illustration of Russia’s attempt to re-conquer the former Soviet Union. However, to argue that Russia initiated the conflict with
Georgia would be to re-write history. During the night of 7 to 8 August 2008, Georgia launched a large-scale military offensive against South Ossetia, in an attempt to reclaim the territory. This move was completely unprovoked. The Georgian attack caused casualties among Russian peacekeepers, who resisted the assault along with Ossetian militia. Russia reacted by deploying units of the Russian 58th Army and Russian Airborne Troops into South Ossetia one day later, and launched airstrikes against Georgian forces in South Ossetia and military and logistical targets in Georgia proper. It is now well established that the majority of experts, monitors and ambassadors agreed that the war was started by Georgia.

Ultimately, Russia was never interested nor is considering conquering or annexing any land. President Putin's response to events in Ukraine has been defensive, not offensive.

Russia is protecting its own national interest

Western leaders and its media have good reason to portray Russia as the aggressor. It enables NATO to use the apparent belligerence of Russia as an excuse to carry on with their expansion that they started after the end of the Cold War. NATO has continued to provoke Russia with the recent announcement on the 15th September that about 1,300 troops from 15 countries - including the US and other NATO members - have begun a military exercise near Lviv in western Ukraine. In addition, Ukrainian Defence Minister Valery Heletey said that NATO countries had begun arming his nation. These measures are a clear national security threat to Russia. One only has to imagine how the United States would react if a Russian-backed alliance, for example the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, carried out military exercises in Mexico or Canada.

When it comes to its own national security, Russia will have to adopt any measures that achieve its own safety from external threats. Western media may brand these measures as examples of aggression, but when examining the facts, it is evident that it is the West that has acted and continues to act in a hostile manner towards Russia, leaving the Kremlin with no choice but to take defensive and precautionary measures.

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