FOR RUSSIA, CRITICISM IS HYPOCRISY

Posted on February 28, 2014 by Keghart



Category: Opinions

Thomas Walkom, The Toronto Star, 5 March 2014

There are two things to keep in mind about the Ukrainian crisis.

The first is that, rhetoric aside, there is little that the West can or will do to force Russian President Vladimir Putin's troops out of Crimea.

The second is that Russia's view of what's happening in Ukraine differs dramatically from the one commonly accepted here.

Thomas Walkom, The Toronto Star, 5 March 2014

There are two things to keep in mind about the Ukrainian crisis.

The first is that, rhetoric aside, there is little that the West can or will do to force Russian President Vladimir Putin's troops out of Crimea.

The second is that Russia's view of what's happening in Ukraine differs dramatically from the one commonly accepted here.

If those who overthrew the old order in Kyiv are counting on the West to protect them militarily from Moscow, they are almost certainly doomed to disappointment.

The U.S., Canada, and other NATO members have made it clear that they are not willing to go to war with Russia over Ukraine.

There has been talk of economic sanctions. But as both the West and Russia know, these would cut two ways.

In the short run, Western Europe depends on Russian oil and natural gas. Russian rubles grease Britain's important financial industry.

As the BBC reported, British Prime Minister David Cameron has been warned by his own officials against imposing sanctions that could interfere with London's role as a financial centre.

The West could expel Russia from the G8 group of big industrial nations. But so what? Many countries, including China, get by perfectly well outside of the G8.

Resolutions condemning Russia's intervention in Ukraine's Crimea region, such as the one passed unanimously in the Commons Monday, may make the participants feel virtuous. But they have no practical effect.

Lost in the clamour is the fact that Russia has an entirely different take on what is happening in Ukraine.

In the West, last month's revolution is lauded as a victory of democracy over despotism. To Russia's leaders, however, it was a Washington-backed putsch designed to draw a region long deemed essential to Moscow's security into the enemy camp.

Putin's press conference Tuesday was marked by whoppers, including his claim that Russian troops in Crimea are not Russian.

But I suspect he was speaking close to the heart when he accused the U.S. and its friends of playing a crucial role in the "coup d'état" that brought Ukraine's new government to power.

"They sit there across the pond as if in a lab running all kinds of experiments on the rats," Putin said.

To Moscow, the decision to dig in now follows logically from what it sees as two decades of Western double-dealing.

Canadians remember that the Berlin Wall came down in 1989. Russia remembers that, in return, the U.S. and its allies agreed to recognize Moscow's vital interest in its own neighbourhood.

In particular, then U.S. president George Bush pledged not to expand NATO eastward.

Yet to Russia's dismay, that pledge was soon broken as NATO welcomed 11 former Soviet satellites into its fold, including Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic.

In 2003 and 2004, Western countries backed so-called colour revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine. In 2008, NATO agreed that both would eventually be allowed to join the military alliance.

The West viewed all of this as the march of democracy. But Moscow saw it as hypocritical meddling.

Russia knows that the U.S. accords itself the right to intervene militarily in the affairs of its neighbours. It has famously done so throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.

Yet when Moscow does the same, it finds itself branded a pariah.

Being lectured on international law by the country that illegally invaded Iraq almost certainly irks.

In a perfect world, Moscow would abandon its strategic interests in Crimea (it's been home to Russia's Black Sea fleet since 1783). In a perfect world, Russia would not care if a united Ukraine joined NATO.

In the real world, this is unlikely to happen. For this crisis to end, Kyiv and Moscow will have to reach some kind of political accommodation.

Moral and financial support from the West may be cheering for Ukraine. But it won't be enough.