



UKRAINIAN AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION

Асоціація Українських Правників Америки

Putin is wearing “The Emperor’s New Clothes”

About 175 years ago, Hans Christian Anderson wrote a children’s fairytale, - *The Emperor’s New Clothes* - about a narcissistic monarch who was deceived by his tailors into believing that his non-existent new garb which they pretended to weave was real but would be invisible only to those who were hopelessly stupid or incompetent. The gullible emperor paraded in his imaginary non-attire before his subjects. Fearing that saying the truth to the vain sovereign would jeopardize their position in his imperial court, none of his ministers or citizens of his kingdom dared to state the self-evident – that the emperor had no clothes.

Similarly, Vladimir Putin has clad himself in a fictitious political costume weaved out of disinformation and lies and is pompously pretending that the war in eastern Ukraine is not of his making. According to Putin, there are no Russian military units in the Donbas area of Ukraine, which in his mind, is not even a real country. However, unlike the credulous emperor in Hans Christian Anderson’s fairytale, Putin knows full well the truth and that his fabricated political “regalia” - contrived of deception and deceit - is fully transparent to all. But he also realizes that he will not be critically challenged by Western media nor the West’s political elite. After all, in Putin’s mind, Western leaders and their media are hopelessly naïve, stupid and incompetent and will behave similarly to the emperor’s subjects in the fairytale and will consciously ignore reality.

Putin’s calculus is that as a result of pluralistic ignorance, ["no one believes, but everyone thinks that everyone believes."] no one in the West will counter the obvious since it would jeopardize their self-interest and preconceived view of the world order. Calling out Putin would require a clear acknowledgment that the world order and international rule of law – so painstakingly constructed since World War II - is no longer the *status quo* and that any rollback of the Kremlin’s illegal land grab in Ukraine requires strong affirmative and unified action by the West, including arming Ukraine so it can defend itself. These are measures the West is loath to take.

The primary bedrock upon which Putin has built his political charade is the contrived concept that the conflict in eastern Ukraine is a spontaneous internal insurrection by Russian residents of Ukraine ignited by long simmering disgruntlement over the central Ukrainian government in Kyiv. Overlaid on this fallacious premise is the intentionally misleading notion that eastern Ukraine was always a part of Russia and that the majority of the populace are historically ethnically Russian. In the logical progression of these fallacies, carefully weaved and propagated by the Kremlin’s age old disinformation machine, the combatants of the Donetsk and Luhansk “Peoples Republics” allegedly reflect the majority will of the Russian people of eastern Ukraine to rejoin the Russian “Mir” (world). Therefore, the actions of these righteous rebels are morally and politically justifiable. As such, the Kremlin has proclaimed that it is Russia’s divine duty and obligation to support their ethnic brethren. Using these canards as camouflage, Putin initiated an alternative non-conventional form of aggressive warfare against Ukraine using hired mercenaries that are trained, supplied with offensive lethal weapons, and directed by Russia. Russian Special Forces without insignia intermingle with the mercenaries and openly use sophisticated weapons that only regular Russian military units possess and have the required expertise to use.

The Kremlin's fallacies have been debunked by historians, scholars and independent observers on the ground and do not reflect reality. Nevertheless, Western political leaders and the media have gullibly accepted these Kremlin inspired myths as fact or knowingly refuse to challenge them. They continue to call the Russian military operatives/mercenaries as "separatists" and "Ukrainian rebels" rather than calling them what they truly are – "terrorists" and "invaders", thereby propagating even further the Kremlin's disingenuous mythology. Even though Russian military forces have been in the zone of conflict in eastern Ukraine since its inception, the West is only very recently [and very reticently] acknowledging their presence on Ukrainian soil. However, the Western political elites still fail to call the obvious Russian military activity for what it has been all along -- an aggressive military invasion by Russia of its neighbor, Ukraine, in violation of all international norms and rule of law.

Meantime, Putin continues his arrogant procession on the world's political arena smugly clothed in his political costume falsely proclaiming that Russia is not a party to the conflict and all that it wants in Ukraine is peace; but no western leader has had the moral or political fortitude to confront him with the naked truth. It is naively assumed by Western political leaders that if they remain mum as to the true reality of Putin's actions – a premeditated military invasion of Ukraine - then he will not be a danger to their geopolitical self-interest as long as they pretend he is not a menace to the world order and that he can be successfully dealt with through diplomacy.

Western leaders must immediately accept that Putin has been wearing "The Emperor's New Clothes" and their failure to confront him with the naked truth [and to take timely affirmative action to stop his military invasion of Ukraine] has emboldened him and exacerbated the potential for an irreversible danger to the peace and security of Europe. The time has come for Western leaders to shed their pluralistic ignorance of Putin and to boldly confront the reality of his actions and supply Ukraine with the military weapons necessary to defend itself, thereby preserving Ukraine's security and that of Europe and the world as a whole.

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