

Russian Bear Baiting



Failure has done nothing to moderate the insane ambitions of U.S. policymakers. Not content with the bloody fiasco in Iraq, the intensification of the

war in Afghanistan, a soaring budget deficit, and the electoral triumphs of the anti-American populist Left throughout South America, American policymakers have decided to open up a number of new battlefronts. First, they threaten to overthrow the clerical regime in Tehran. As if that weren't enough, they have now decided to pick a fight with Russia. Yes, Russia, the biggest country in the world and one that possesses thousands of nuclear warheads. Hubris like this has not been seen since Adolf Hitler.

A little while ago, Vice President Cheney went to Vilnius, Lithuania—a country that recently was an integral part of the Soviet Union—and accused Russia of undermining “the territorial integrity of a neighbor” and interfering with “democratic movements.” Cheney was belligerent, undiplomatic, and almost looking for trouble. But he was not bellicose enough for the Democratic Party leadership. A few days after Cheney's speech, an open letter was delivered to the White House, signed by Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, Joe “Your words are my words” Biden, and Carl Levin, the ranking Democratic member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The open letter urged President Bush to use the power of his office to dissuade Russia from selling the Iranians air defense missile systems. Those are of no threat to the United States, or indeed anyone else—unless Uncle Sam or Israel plans to attack Iran.

Amidst the hysteria over Russia's alleged threats against its neighbors, Washington of course ignores its own threatening moves toward Russia.

Having made promises to Gorbachev at the time of German reunification that NATO would not seek to take advantage of the fall of the Warsaw Pact and expand eastwards, the West, led by Uncle Sam, promptly threw these pledges into the wastebasket. In fact, the United States has surrounded Russia by inducting Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Romania, Bulgaria, and Hungary into NATO. Washington is also actively urging NATO membership for Ukraine, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. We are building military bases on Russia's borders and even threatening to station our ballistic missile defense system in former Warsaw Pact territory. When the Russians, in response to the increasingly belligerent anti-Russian leadership in Ukraine, said that in the future they would ask the Ukrainians to pay market prices for its gas imports, Western leaders shrieked as if Stalin were sending the Red Army into Finland.

What is going on here? Who in hell is this gang that can't shoot straight to tell others how to conduct themselves? Even a state with less reason to fear aggression than Russia (invaded twice in the 20th century, innumerable times before that) would regard such acts as hostile. And it gets worse. In 2004, the United States granted political asylum to Ilyas Akhmadov, former foreign minister of the self-styled Chechen republic and a close friend and ally of Shamil Besayev, head of Chechnya's deadliest jihadist movement and the man who masterminded the horrifying terrorist attack on the school in Beslan. As if that were not enough, Akhmadov was put on the U.S.

government payroll as the recipient of a research grant from the neocon National Endowment for Democracy. (Quite a double standard. Palestinians are terrorists, but Chechens are freedom fighters.)

Russia's democratic institutions have always been weak and fragile. In fact, they were nonexistent before 1991. What is Putin supposed to do? Force the Russian people to forget 700 years of Russian tyranny and turn into democrats overnight? Puffed up with their own importance, busybody fools like Madeleine Albright, Joe Biden, Richard Holbrooke, William Kristol, and Martin Peretz, among others, signed a ludicrous letter warning the West about Putin's dictatorial tendencies. (This following the Beslan slaughter of innocent Russian children.) A Washington outfit called the American Committee for Peace in the Caucasus is comprised of such individuals as Kristol, Elliot Abrams, Richard Perle, Frank Gaffney, James Woolsey, and Norman Podhoretz—all hawks where the Middle East is concerned but doves on Chechnya. The real purpose of the group is to justify Chechen terrorism, demonize Russia, and to seek to involve NATO in the Caucasus. These are the very same people who promised us a cakewalk in Iraq and are doing their best to get us to bomb Iran in order to make Israel safe. Just try and imagine the following: how would these “peace in the Caucasus” types respond if we were to substitute Palestinian for Chechen and Israel for Russia?

Russia is an ancient country with a great history behind it. The people who have got us into the Iraqi mess should try to keep their mouths shut for a while. As we do not permit anyone to tell us what to do—far from it—perhaps it's time to practice what we preach and mind our own business for a change. ■