

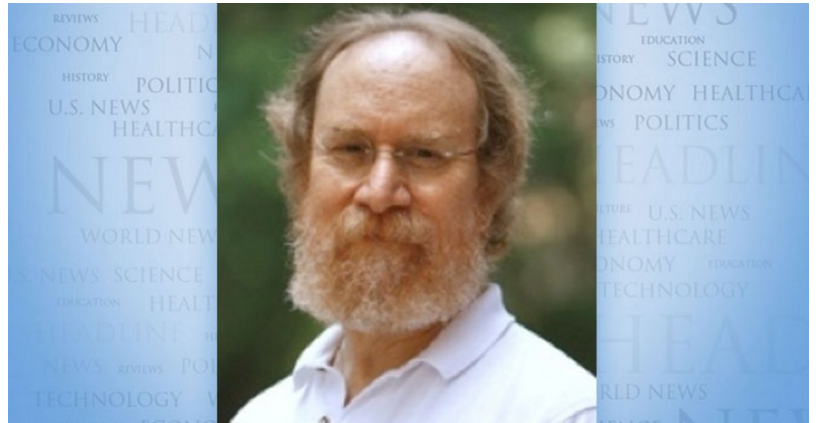


Written by [Sheldon Richman](#) on March 23, 2014

Did Team Obama Blunder or Conspire in Ukraine?

While no one ever lost money overestimating the capacity of the U.S. government to blunder, we cannot rule out that American officials knew exactly what they were doing when they helped provoke the crisis in Ukraine.

It is hard to believe that all these officials are so ignorant of Russian history that they could not anticipate how President Vladimir Putin would respond to [U.S.-backed machinations in Kiev](#). These machinations led to the ouster of elected (if corrupt and power-hungry) president Viktor Yanukovich after street demonstrations, which included neo-Nazi elements now represented in the new government.



About these machinations there is little doubt. We have a [phone call](#) between Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland and U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt, in which they talk about who should rule Ukraine next. Nuland says, “I don’t think Klitsch [an opposition leader, Vitaly Klitschko] should go into the government. I don’t think it’s necessary, I don’t think it’s a good idea.... I think Yats [Arseniy Yatsenyuk, another opposition leader] is the guy who’s got the economic experience, the governing experience.” Yatsenyuk became the prime minister after Yanukovich’s ouster.

Pyatt responds, “I think you reaching out directly to him [Yatsenyuk] helps with the personality management among the three [opposition leaders].”

The U.S. government worked to replace Yanukovich with its “guy” — which is not what the Obama administration tells the American people.

Pyatt adds, “But anyway we could land jelly side up on this one if we move fast.... [W]e want to try to get somebody with an international personality to come out here and help to midwife this thing.”

This phone call made headlines because Nuland used an obscenity regarding the European Union. But the news is that, contrary to public statements, the Obama administration sought to “midwife” regime change.

One need not be a Putin apologist to ask how the Americans failed to see that this activity would provoke the Russian president.

Let’s not forget that all this came at the end of a long train of U.S. abuses that began when the Soviet Union disbanded in 1991. These include the expansion of NATO up to Russia’s border, contrary to the promise President George H. W. Bush made in exchange for the withdrawal of the Red Army from East Germany; the incorporation into NATO of former Soviet republics and the grooming for NATO membership of Ukraine and Georgia; and U.S. military deals with Muslim-dominated former Soviet republics in central Asia.



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Anyone with a smidgen of knowledge about Russian history would know that these things would eventually produce a nationalist response. The retaking of Crimea was the most predictable response. Who really believes the Americans were surprised by this?

The only question is whether they wanted that response. It seems so. To what benefit? Putin may have Crimea, but the rest of Ukraine is likely to move hard into the European camp (even though the EU's economic offer to Ukraine was less generous than Russia's). And Putin's ham-handed moves present new opportunities for demonizing him, perhaps increasing the American regime's stock, which has suffered in recent years. An additional dividend might be a stanching of moves to cut the Pentagon budget. The military-industrial complex will be happy about that. Other [corporate interests](#) also stand to [benefit](#).

Nor can we rule out that, perhaps despite Obama's wishes, the neoconservatives inside and outside his administration want to [undermine cooperation](#) between the United States and Russia on Iran and Syria, where Putin has helped Obama.

Meddling in other countries' affairs is [nothing new](#) for America. We can learn much from Secretary Nuland's husband, neoconservative brain-truster Robert Kagan, whose 2006 historical work, [Dangerous Nation](#), urges Americans to realize that their country is an empire now and always has been:

Americans have cherished an image of themselves as by nature inward-looking and aloof, only sporadically and spasmodically venturing forth into the world, usually in response to external attack or perceived threats. This self-image survives, despite four hundred years of steady expansion and an ever-deepening involvement in world affairs, and despite innumerable wars, interventions, and prolonged occupations in foreign lands.

Kagan wants us to embrace the empire with gusto. Instead, we should reject and liquidate it.

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