

A Response to Jean Batou on Ukraine

August 30, 2015



Jean Batou's article *Putin, The War in the Ukraine, and the Far Right* in Volume XV No. 3 of *New Politics*, despite briefly acknowledging in its final paragraphs the role of NATO in the Ukrainian crisis, basically echoes the party-line apologists for NATO and American imperialism.

In fact, the establishment press, the *New York Times* and the *Guardian* among others, have mentioned some of the details that undermine this party line even if they have not emphasized them. In particular, Batou ignores the fact that what precipitated the crisis was the insistence of the IMF that Yanukovich agree to an austerity program similar to the ones that have devastated Greece and Spain. And the principal victims of such a program would have been the Russian-speaking inhabitants of the eastern Ukraine. It was this industrial and mining area that would have become the next Greece.

Batou spends a good deal of his article on Lenin's denunciation of Czarist imperialism and Stalin's resurrection of it. But Lenin's defense of the right of self-determination was not confined to victims of Czarism. The fundamental issue in the present crisis is: do the Russian-speaking people of the Crimea and the Eastern Ukraine have the right to self-determination or not?

In one paragraph of his article Batou states "... the Kiev powers endorsed an elementary democratic demand — the integrity of the Ukrainian nation..." A few paragraphs later he refers favorably to the Dayton Accord which dissolved the Yugoslav nation. How can the defenders of NATO and its fronts like the IMF and the OSCE defend the right to self-determination of Croats and Bosniaks while denying that right to the Russian speaking inhabitants of the Crimea and the Eastern Ukraine? The hypocrisy of NATO's defenders was made even more blatant when Croatian nationalists, with the aid of the CIA, ethnically cleansed the Serbs of Krajina. For that matter, I have not seen any mention in the establishment press that the Russian-speaking majority of the Crimea became Ukrainian citizens in 1954 when Nikita Khrushchev without any vote ceded the area to the Ukraine. While Khrushchev was himself of Ukrainian origin, he most likely intended this act as a bribe to keep the Ukrainian party leaders in the Soviet Union.

I assume that Batou's article is aimed at the fringe left that is sympathetic to Putin. But in fact it is apologists for NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe who are Putin's real friends. Putin's popularity is at an all-time high as a result when, only a few years ago, the opposition movement was growing. It is the Russian people, especially on the border of Ukraine, who feel threatened by NATO expansionism.

An interview by Thomas Friedman in the *New York Times* of May 2, 1998 put it best:

I think it is the beginning of a new cold war. I think the Russians will gradually react quite adversely and it will affect their policies. I think it is a tragic mistake. There was no reason for this whatsoever. No one was threatening anybody else. This expansion would make the

Founding Fathers of this country turn over in their graves. We have signed up to protect a whole series of countries, even though we have neither the resources nor the intention to do so in any serious way. [NATO expansion] was simply a light-hearted action by a Senate that has no real interest in foreign affairs.

What bothers me is how superficial and ill informed the whole Senate debate was. I was particularly bothered by the references to Russia as a country dying to attack Western Europe. Don't people understand? Our differences in the cold war were with the Soviet Communist regime. And now we are turning our backs on the very people who mounted the greatest bloodless revolution in history to remove that Soviet regime.

And Russia's democracy is as far advanced, if not farther, as any of these countries we've just signed up to defend from Russia, It shows so little understanding of Russian history and Soviet history. Of course there is going to be a bad reaction from Russia, and then [the NATO expanders] will say that we always told you that is how the Russians are — but this is just wrong.

The person interviewed was George F. Kennan, one of the principle architects of NATO.