

US hypocrisy on Crimean independence referendum

By Chris Marsden
19 March 2014

There is little that is more nauseating than the pose of outraged defence of “international law” being struck by the Obama administration and its European allies over Crimea.

In his speech to the Russian Federal Assembly, President Vladimir Putin said that Crimea’s referendum was in line with the “United Nations Charter, which speaks of the right of nations to self-determination.”

He continued: “Incidentally, I would like to remind you that when Ukraine seceded from the USSR, it did exactly the same thing, almost word for word... Moreover, the Crimean authorities referred to the well known Kosovo precedent—a precedent our Western colleagues created with their own hands in a very similar situation, when they agreed that the unilateral separation of Kosovo from Serbia, exactly what Crimea is doing now, was legitimate and did not require any permission from the country’s central authorities.

“Pursuant to Article 2, Chapter 1 of the United Nations Charter, the UN International Court agreed with this approach and made the following comment in its ruling of July 22, 2010, and I quote: ‘No general prohibition may be inferred from the practice of the Security Council with regard to declarations of independence,’ and ‘General international law contains no prohibition on declarations of independence.’”

Putin, who wants nothing more than to reach an accommodation with the US and the European powers that safeguards the interests of the Russian bourgeoisie, can do no more than score a polemical point against his critics. Nevertheless, the experience he cites—a bloody chapter in the break-up of the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY)—is a lesson that should be learned by all those seeking to cut through the lies and

hypocrisy of the politicians and media in support of economic, political and military aggression.

In 1991, Croatia and Slovenia held illegal referenda to secede from Yugoslavia. These were not carried out on an all-national basis, as the US claims would be needed in Ukraine for a legal Crimean referendum. Nevertheless, by January 1992, the European Union had recognised both as independent states. The US followed its example in April 1992.

In 1990, Kosovo held an independence referendum that was boycotted by Serbs living in the region and was not recognised by anyone but Albania, whose kinsmen make up a large part of Kosovo’s population.

In February of 1992, Bosnia Herzegovina held an independence referendum in violation of its own constitution and that of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In April, the US nevertheless recognised Bosnia. Civil war between Bosnian Muslims, Croats and Serbs followed, lasting until 1995.

The Kosovo War began February 28, 1999 and lasted until June 11, 1999. At the Rambouillet talks that preceded the US-NATO air war, NATO demanded an independence referendum be held in Kosovo. The war on the ground was fought by ethnic Serbian forces of the FRY and the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), an ethnic Albanian terrorist group sponsored by Washington. The US and NATO waged a bombing campaign that killed thousands, with the ultimate aim of deposing the FRY government of Slobodan Milosevic.

In 2008, Kosovo, which had been under United Nations supervision, unilaterally declared itself independent of Serbia. It did so in defiance of the central government in Belgrade. The major European powers and the United States quickly recognized the centuries-old Serb province as an independent state.

In the present situation, it should be noted that all invocations of Ukrainian sovereignty are in reference to a government that was installed by a coup engineered and financed by the Western powers. In this respect, a report commissioned by the Ukrainian regime and posted on the EuroMaidan web site is significant.

The report claims that the removal of President Viktor Yanukovich was legal. But it includes admissions that make absolutely clear the opposite is the case. It begins, “Although there were no constitutional grounds for shortening the presidential term, the new government was established in accordance with Ukrainian law...”

It later acknowledges: “Article 108 of the Constitution... sets out four instances for the early termination of the authority of the President: resignation, impeachment, death, and an inability to continue due to health reasons.” It then states: “None of these occurred.”

Why then was Yanukovich’s removal legal? Because he had fled Ukraine (for fear of being killed by Western-backed fascists in the leadership of the opposition protests).

The report states: “An agreement to settle the crisis was signed on February 21, 2014 between incumbent President Yanukovich and the ‘three tenors’ of Maidan: Arseniy Yatsenyuk, Vitaliy Klitschko, and Oleh Tiahnybok. This agreement required that, within 48 hours, a special law be adopted, signed and brought into effect to allow for a return to Ukraine’s 2004 Constitution...”

However, “Not long afterwards, Yanukovich disappeared” and “did not sign the decision adopted by Parliament.” A resolution “concerning the ‘self-withdrawal’ of the President was adopted,” declaring that “the President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich in an unconstitutional way withdrew himself from the exercise of constitutional powers and thus does not perform any duties.”

Therefore, “despite the indubitable shortcomings of the resolution on the removal of Yanukovich from power,” his removal is declared legal and an expression of “the constitutional principle of the sovereignty of the Ukrainian nation.”

So speaks the Ministry of Truth.

To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>