

**RUSSIA FANS THE FLAMES:
THE DOGS OF WAR ARE AFOOT, AGAIN !**

With the unprovoked attack on Saturday, January 24, of Mariupol, the port city in southeastern Ukraine, situated on the coast of The Sea of Azov, it is very obvious that The Russian Federation is continuing to fund and to support, militarily, the pro-Russian separatists of the country.

More sophisticated weapons of war as well as well-trained, Russian soldiers are known to have entered Ukraine and are fighting alongside the separatists, according to very reliable sources.

Last Saturday's attack on Mariupol left some 30, Ukrainian civilians dead and 93 others wounded.

A large-scale attack of Mariupol appears imminent, according to General Jens Stoltenberg, Secretary General of NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation).

The City of Mariupol is considered key to the present plans of the Russia's President Vladimir Putin since, if occupied, it can become another stronghold of the pro-Russian separatists, creating a land link between The Russian Federation and The Crimea, the former Ukrainian peninsula that The Russian Federation annexed, last year.

General Jens Stoltenberg has gone on record, stating:

'For several months, we have seen the presence of Russian (well-armed) forces in eastern Ukraine, as well as a substantial increase in Russian heavy equipment.'

General Jens Stoltenberg went on to state that Russian troops brought with them command-and-control systems, air-defence systems, advanced surface-to-air missiles, unmanned aerial systems, rocket launcher systems and electronic warfare systems.

For the human population of The Russian Federation, numbering about 143 million people, about 46 million males and females, known to be fit for active military service, if the call went out for volunteers to come to the aid of the pro-Russian population of eastern Ukraine, without doubt, President Vladimir Putin would make the claim, publicly and stentoriously, that his country must be empathetic to the plight of the downtrodden, Russian-speaking people of the east of Ukraine.

This was President Vladimir Putin's ploy in respect of Russian-speaking population of The Crimea: It worked well for the 1.50 million-plus, Russian-speaking people of this, former Ukrainian peninsula in February of 2014.

Why not for the pro-Russian separatists of eastern Ukraine, today?

He might go on to make the claim that the pro-Russian separatists have been marginalised for far too long a period of time by the successive governments of Ukraine, especially, now, in the Administration of President Petro Poroshenko who assumed the purple of office on June 7, 2014.

President Vladimir Putin requires something dramatic in order to take the heat off the economic problems

that Russia is facing, today.

And a small, controlled war might just be the right medicine.

President Vladimir Putin's Nemesis

The Russian Federation is facing a grave economic crisis that could turn many of the people of the country against President Vladimir Putin unless their attention can be successfully diverted away from the financial woes that they are facing.

Love is fleeting and, when one's stomach is empty, it is no time to talk of anything, other than finding sustenance.

Christian missionaries of the United States, sent to the African Continent, a century ago, discovered this when trying to persuade pagans to accept monotheism and the teachings of the Bible: Feeding the pagans, first, more often than not, resulted in obtaining their full attention.

Many of these innocent people agreed to be baptised after being told that Jesus and the Church would, always, feed them.

Russia started to send in crack troops into The Crimea in February of 2014.

This followed widespread disenchantment with the former President of Ukraine, Mr Viktor Yanukovych, who was, eventually, ousted from office in what was described as a people's revolution.

With political chaos, sweeping most of Ukraine, the '*door*' was open for Russia, surreptitiously, to woo the Russian-speaking population of The Crimea.

He was masterfully successful and the annexation of The Crimea followed a referendum that was considered illegal and unconstitutional by the interim Kiev Government of Ukraine, prior to the election of Mr Petro Poroshenko as President .

No sooner had The Crimea become an integral part of The Russian Federation, than the Russian-speaking people of the east of Ukraine started making noises to the tune of: '*How about us?*'

The east of Ukraine is where a great deal of Russia's rolling stock is produced. The workers in the factories of the Donbass area of the Ukraine did not want their rice bowls to be cracked by the incoming government of President Petro Poroshenko.

Fearful of unknown, pro-Russian sympathisers in the east of the country held multiple demonstrations, resulting in anti-Ukrainian Government reactions that, in a short space of time, escalated into violence.

Armed conflicts followed in quick succession.

By mid-April 2014, the pro-Russian forces, encouraged by Russian '*volunteers*' who were said to have been on leave from the Russian Army and had made their way over the Russian/Ukraine border to be with their Ukrainian comrades, made demands that they wanted the Donetsk and Lugansk regions of Ukraine to be independent from rest of the country and that these regions must be known as The People's Republics.

This situation persists to this day.

The United Nations, noting the covert actions of The Russian Federation, imposed economic sanctions on President Vladimir Putin's Russia and members of his Administration.

The sanctions started to bite hard and the Russian economy soon became more than a little wobbly.

The first notable effect of these sanctions was the falling translation value of the ruble vis-à-vis the US dollar/the euro.

Against the US dollar, the ruble has tumbled 40-odd percent since the middle of 2014.

Against the euro, the ruble has tumbled 35 percent, during the same period.

On December 15 and 16, 2014, the ruble lost about 25 percent of its value as Russians stormed banks and financial entities in order to try to convert their ruble savings into US dollars/euros or some other '*hard*' currency.

As the run on banks and foreign-exchange houses continued, Russia's foreign reserves hit their lowest level of the previous five years of less than \$US400 billion.

With the translation value of the ruble in what was, clearly, free-fall, last December, the Russian Finance Ministry determined to sell \$US76 billion from its reserves, hoping that it would stop the rot.

To no avail.

The ruble's translation value then started to slide, faster and faster, losing, on occasion, between five percent and 10 percent in a single day.

One need not speculate as to how the average, man-in-the-street of Russia's many cities must have felt as he noted how his savings were being eroded by this troubling financial situation.

More Problems For Russia's President

Then, adding to the many problems, confronting the country, for the second, consecutive quarter, Russia experienced negative economic growth, as measured by the country's **Gross Domestic Product (GDP)**.

From people in the know in the Kremlin, the word, '*recession*', could be heard, echoing down the corridors of power.

Then, came the oil crisis on top of the problem of the falling translation value of the ruble vis-à-vis the US dollar and the euro.

In June of 2014, the price for a barrel of crude oil was changing hands at about \$US115.

By the beginning of October 2014, four months later, the price of a barrel of crude oil had fallen to \$US95, a drop of about 17 percent in just four months.

With increased oil production from Libya, Iran, and Iraq, oil supplies, internationally, increased throughout 2014.

With the economies of the West still struggling, especially in Europe, and with the People's Republic of China, the second-largest economy of the world, admitting that its economy was slowing down, thus obviating that country's need for increased oil imports, it was very clear that the supply had outpaced demand.

Oil-producing countries went into a huddle – but the price of crude oil continued to fall on international markets.

Today, the price of a barrel of crude oil is about \$US45. This is a drop of about 61 percent since the oil price hit a high of \$US115 in June of 2014.

For The Russian Federation, the falling price of crude oil was another horrific blow to the country's economy.

President Vladimir Putin was facing a disastrous situation, being compounded by the ever-growing weakness, internationally, of the ruble, vis-à-vis the US dollar and the euro, and the ever-falling price of crude oil on international markets.

This situation was growing worse by the day. It continues to worsen to this day.

Inflation in the country, today, is running at double-digit figures and threatens to rise even further unless somebody can pull a rabbit out of the hat.

The situation has all of the earmarks of the coming of another people's revolution in The Russian Federation – unless the President can find a solution to the country's many nagging problems.

Russia has to curb import spending, probably by as much as 50 percent, in order to safeguard what is left of its international reserves that have been shaved down by as much as \$US135 billion since December of 2014.

The standard of living in the country is being diminished, very materially. And the clock continues to tick.

How could Russia's economy not be affected by the numerous problems that it has been forced to endure over the past seven months or so?

Russia's President Vladimir Putin is the one person that has caused most of the country's problems, as history has recorded.

Ironically, President Vladimir Putin maintains that there are no major problems in the country, referring to comments to the contrary from his international critics as, simply, '*the current situation*' in the country.

President Vladimir Putin will not be able to maintain this stance forever: The penny must surely drop, probably sooner than later.

Of course, a little war could send up the price of oil, somewhat, but that would be a terrible gamble to take, even for this former colonel of the KGB (**K**omitet **G**osudarstvennoy **B**ezopasnosti).

Oil revenues, at their current, depressed levels, are not going to be sufficient to meet the needs of Russia's faltering economy, but President Vladimir Putin seems to be unable to make any definitive suggestions in order to stop the economic rot that is facing his country.

If the President's popularity with the masses should drop, materially, it could spark rebellion within the ranks, even from his stalwart supporters.

In Russia, today, as in the past, Number One, always, comes first.

*'Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly.
Then heigh-ho, the holly.
This life is most jolly.'*

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