



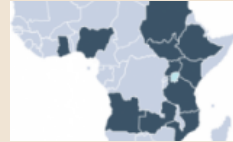
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## Guest post: give military support to Ukraine and save the Baltics

Sep 8, 2014 10:42am by guest writer

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By Taras Kuzio of the University of Alberta

Friday's abduction on Estonian soil of Eston Kohver, an officer in Estonia's Internal Security Service, by "green men" – Russian special forces in uniforms without identification – was the latest instance of a tactic first used during Russia's annexation of the Crimea in March. The

timing of this act of international piracy was no coincidence, coming a day after US President Barack Obama's visit to the country, when he promised Nato would defend the three Baltic states.

Gita Kalmet, Estonia's ambassador to Canada, told CBC on September 6 it was hard to believe this was a an isolated incident. She called it a deliberate provocation and "a brutal act" by Russia.

Vladimir Putin, Russia's ever cynical president, enjoys manipulating coincidences and anniversaries: Russia's invasion of eastern Ukraine took place on August 24, the anniversary of Ukrainian independence. Friday's incident was a shot across the bows of Nato to test the alliance's resolve in its soft underbelly. Nato is viewed through Russian lenses as a threat and the main pivot of the post-Cold War international order Putin's crusade seeks to destroy.

Russia has a long track record of questioning the so-called "artificiality" of former Soviet republics, as seen in its support for the creation of frozen conflicts in Azerbaijan, Moldova and Georgia (the latter reinforced by Moscow's August 2008 invasion). With one third of its population Russian-speakers, Estonia is similar to Ukraine. Half the Latvian and Kazakh populations are Russian-speakers; indeed, Russian can be heard in Riga as much as it can in Kiev.

Putin recently described his ally Kazakhstan as an "artificial state". This is similar to the way he spoke of Ukraine as long ago as 2008 at a Nato-Russia Council meeting during Nato's Bucharest summit. According to a leaked cable, Kurt Volker, US ambassador to Nato at the time, reported that Putin:

*implicitly challenged the territorial integrity of Ukraine, suggesting that Ukraine was an artificial creation sewn together from territory of Poland, the Czech Republic, Romania, and especially Russia in the*

*aftermath of the Second World War. He stated, “the Crimea was simply given to Ukraine by a decision of the Politburo of the Soviet Communist Party Central Committee.”*

Undermining the Baltic states using “non-linear” warfare would allow Russia to again deny culpability – as it continues to do in Ukraine – while at the same time poking Nato and the US in the eye. Only Estonia of the three Baltic states has fulfilled Nato’s target expenditure of two per cent of GDP on defence; all three countries are completely dependent on Russia for their energy.

The best way for Nato to avoid a showdown with Russia in the Baltics is to halt Russia’s aggression in Ukraine. As Wesley Clark, the former Nato Commander, wrote last week:

*Ukraine is fighting on Nato’s periphery for the very same values of freedom, self-government and democracy that Nato espouses.*

If Putin is able to get away with annexing the Crimea and creating a pro-Russian “state” in frozen conflict in the Donbas, he will see this as a sign of western weakness and begin to destabilise Estonia and Latvia. As Volker warned in the Sunday Times last week, “the failure to address Ukraine will be a signal that the US and Nato are not going to stand up to aggression”.

Nato members are sending “non-lethal” military equipment to Ukraine; five Nato members – the US, Poland, France, Italy and Norway – quickly denied claims by Putin’s adviser Yuriy Lutsenko that they were sending military assistance. “We’ve decided to keep Ukraine at arm’s length,” a senior Pentagon official told the Sunday Times. “It’s even to the point where we have other countries in the region that are members of Nato that are looking at us and they’re not trusting that we would be there for them”.

This was a clear reference to Poland and the Baltic states. The best way to assuage their fears is not through visits by US presidents but to by demonstrating the political will to halt Russia’s aggression in Ukraine.

It is particularly surprising that Canada, with its large Ukrainian diaspora and Conservative government, is providing a pitiful amount of “non-lethal” assistance to Ukraine. Canadian military advisers and special forces have been dispatched to Baghdad – even though Canada has never suffered from Islamic terrorism – but not to Kiev. How does Prime Minister Stephen Harper reconcile his strong anti-Putin rhetoric with his weak pro-Ukrainian actions?

Poland and non-Nato member Sweden, both very concerned at Russia’s destabilisation and invasion of Ukraine and fearful of Putin’s objectives in the Baltic states, should be in the forefront of providing defensive anti-tank and anti-aircraft weaponry, advice and training to Ukraine’s armed forces, national guard and border troops. Why is neither country acting on those fears?

Finally, the US and the UK have a moral duty to provide military assistance to back up their pledges under the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, in return for which Ukraine gave up the world’s third largest nuclear arsenal and joined the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Four years later, Ukraine and Nato signed an all-encompassing Charter. Ukraine has been one of the most active members of Nato’s Partnership for Peace during the past two decades.

The failure of Nato members to militarily support Ukraine will encourage nuclear proliferation around the world, spread distrust in US security guarantees and confirm Putin’s cynicism about the west. It will also encourage Putin to act against the Baltic states.

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