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PUTIN SEES 'WEAK OBAMA' AS CHANCE TO SEIZE UKRAINE

Russia 'cold-bloodedly calculated it can get away with everything'

Published: 07/09/2014 at 8:32 PM

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By Jerome R. Corsi and Delia M. Arias De León

UNITED NATIONS – With an eye on Ukraine, Russian leader Vladimir Putin senses an opportunity as he looks at the state of affairs in the West, particularly in the White House, according to an expert on the region.

"Putin is trying to go down in the history books as the man who restored something like the Russian Empire; this is absolutely clear," said Alexander Rondeli, director of the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies, in an interview with WND.

"To him, the West is very weak," Rondeli said. "He sees the Obama administration as a loser."

Rondeli said Putin "believes this is the moment when Russia can take Ukraine, and he intends to do so."

After renewed fighting and fresh deadly clashes in eastern Ukraine, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon [issued a press release \(http://www.un.org/sg/offthecuff/index.asp?nid=3471\)](http://www.un.org/sg/offthecuff/index.asp?nid=3471) Monday in which he "strongly condemned the continued, unlawful actions of armed groups" and "urged Ukrainian authorities to exercise maximum restraint" to ensure civilian safety.

Rondeli dismissed the U.N. statement as insufficient and ineffective, believing only strong United States-led sanctions enforced with determination would have any effect upon Putin's actions in Ukraine.

"Russia took Crimea without any United Nations-imposed legal repercussions, and now Russia's control of Crimea is a fait accompli," Rondeli said. "Nobody is talking about Crimea anymore, and now Putin is set to take control of Ukraine."

The West has threatened on numerous occasions to impose further sanctions on Russia, but so far, has not done so.

Just last Thursday, [APA reported \(http://en.apa.az/xeber-us-ready-to-impose-additional-sanctions-213553.html\)](http://en.apa.az/xeber-us-ready-to-impose-additional-sanctions-213553.html) that during a phone conversation with Ukrainian leader Pyotr Poroshenko, Vice President Joe Biden affirmed that the U.S. was ready to impose further costs on Russia if Moscow failed to withdraw "its ongoing support for the separatists," which includes the "provision of heavy weapons and material."

Rondeli despaired of the Obama administration having the required resolve to impose meaningful sanctions on Russia.

"The West is afraid to introduce bigger sanctions, because they are bound by economic interests and private interests," he said. "As a result, Russia has cold-bloodedly calculated that they can get away with everything; and in Ukraine, just like Crimea, Russia is getting away with everything."

Despite the ongoing threat of sanctions, U.S. exports to Russia actually rose 21 percent in May (<http://en.ria.ru/world/20140704/190808390/US-Exports-to-Russia-Hit-Record-Levels-in-May-Despite-Sanctions.html>), according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, reaching a record high of \$1.25 billion.

In this same month, U.S. imports to Russia decreased by 8.5 percent, totaling \$2.15 billion.

The drop in exports prompted the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and National Association of Manufacturers to warn Washington that adopting new sanctions against Russia could harm more Americans than Russians.

Russia continues to deny its involvement in the current protests by Russian-supported separatists (http://rbth.com/news/2014/05/24/putin_denies_accusations_of_trying_to_revive_ussr_36914.html) in southeastern Ukraine, despite using Russian troops to influence a controversial referendum and takeover of Crimea last March.

Russia has also publicly supported a peaceful resolution to the conflict and continues to ask for the reinstatement of a cease-fire (<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-28002993>).

On June 24, President Putin asked the Russian Parliament to revoke the right for military intervention in Ukraine, though he stressed that this did not mean Russia would stop protecting ethnic Russians in Ukraine.

Rondeli told WND he believes Russia is seeking to stabilize the situation so that talks of federalization can commence.

"Putin will say, 'If federalization is introduced, then everything will be solved!'" Rondeli explained. "But federalization will mark the end of Ukraine as a nation independent of Russia."

Federalization in the case of Ukraine would mean that the eastern region of the country, which shares Russia's culture, language and orthodoxy, would have a greater say in how the nation is run (<http://atlanticsentinel.com/2014/04/federalization-is-russian-design-to-weaken-ukraine-not-save-it/>).

Following the new surge in violence in southeastern Ukraine, both sides of the conflict have suffered heavy losses (<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/europe/2014/07/ukraine-slovyansk-recapture-turning-point-20147619230752632.html>). Russia continues to ask for the reinstatement of a cease-fire, but Ukrainian government forces on Monday recaptured the key border city of Slovyansk, a necessary step if those fighting for independence in Ukraine hope to drive back the pro-Russian rebels.

There have now been reports of a fast-approaching "showdown" in Donetsk (<http://online.wsj.com/articles/ukrainian-government-troops-target-further-gains-in-east-1404644564>) after the capture of Slovyansk, which could turn the tide in favor of Ukraine government forces.

Up until this point, the small city of Slovyansk had been the rebel force's base in the region. Donetsk, a city of 1 million residents and the political and economic center of eastern Ukraine, would be a far bigger capture (<http://online.wsj.com/articles/ukrainian-government-troops-target-further-gains-in-east-1404644564>).

But Rondeli believes any hope Ukrainian government forces fighting for independence will win is mere fantasy.

"Putin will not lose," he said. "The Russians will only stop when they have achieved their goals to make Ukraine into a pro-Russian state."

He also warned that Russia's takeover of Ukraine will have far-reaching consequences in Eastern Europe.

"Everyone is scared," he said.

"Georgia knows what is coming. We remember. Poland is also terrified. Russia is going ahead with methods that are absolutely unacceptable. If the Obama administration allows Russia to take over Ukraine, everybody knows Putin will not stop here."

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