Extract of www.acdn.net

https://www.acdn.net/spip/spip.php?article863

COLD WAR AGAIN

- Homepage - News - News Articles -

Publication date: Wednesday 23 April 2014

Copyright © www.acdn.net - All rights reserved

Between war and peace, between NATO and Russia, Europe is returning to the Cold War.

Placed online in French, 21 April 2014

Easter 2014, the Pope's Vision

This Sunday 20 April in Rome, in his message urbi et orbi, Pope Francis omitted none of the endemic wars that are being waged from Iraq to Venezuela, including Syria, Palestine and Central Africa. He called for peace, reconciliation and solidarity. He mentioned also the happy coincidence that meant that this year Catholic and Orthodox Christians were celebrating Easter simultaneously. And he prayed that God would "enlighten and inspire initiatives for peace in Ukraine, so that the interested parties, supported by the international community, might make every effort to prevent violence and to build the future of the country in a spirit of unity and dialogue."

Could God and the "interested parties" have heard the Pope's prayer even before he spoke it? It was possible to think so. But probably incorrect.

Hopes for Peace

On Thursday 17 April, the unexpected agreement made in Geneva between the USA, Russia, Europe and Ukraine seemed to have resulted in an end or at least a truce to the weeks of extreme tension brought about by the fall of Yanukovich, Russia's annexation of Crimea, and the Russian-separatist agitation in eastern Ukraine. The world sighed with relief. Perhaps God, if he exists, was rubbing his hands.

The Russian Vision

On Saturday 19 April in Moscow, Russia's press agencies revealed a transcription of a pre-recorded broadcast by Vladimir Putin, which was to be screened that day on state television. In it the Russian President declared that "nothing should get in the way of normalisation and cooperation between Russia and the West". This normalisation "depends not us, or not solely on us. It depends on our partners." Optimistically, he went as far as to express pleasure at the naming of Jens Stoltenburg, the former PM of Norway, at the head of NATO. "We have good relations, including personal relations. He's a very serious, responsible person...But we will see how he develops relations at his new post," added Putin.

There's a strange gap between these smug words and statements made at nearly the same moment in the West, specifically in the US.

To explain this, one must suppose that the interview given by Putin was recorded in the day or evening of Friday 18th, the day after the four-party agreement in Geneva which he has every reason to be pleased with: an agreement that commits him to very little but gives de facto ratification to the annexation of Crimea, about which it says nothing. At that moment Putin doubtless thought he had swallowed Crimea without fighting and with no sacrifice except some delay in the advancing of his pawns in eastern Ukraine. He did not know what Poland's Minister of Defense, Tomasz Siemoniak, was saying to the Washington Post - which published his words online on Friday shortly before 4pm local time (which is midnight in Moscow).

Copyright © www.acdn.net

What did Siemoniak say? In substance, that the Ukraine affair is far from over, and above all that the Cold War is going to start again.

The Polish Vision

On 18 April Poland's Minister of Defense met the US Defense Secretary, Chuck Hagel, at the Pentagon. Afterwards they held a joint press conference, which the New York Times proceeded to report. Then Siemoniak went to the Washington Post, where he told journalists that "Poland and the USA will announce next week the deployment of US ground troops in Poland, as an element in the expansion of NATO presence in central and eastern Europe, in response to the events in Ukraine."

Siemoniak told them that the decision was taken at the political level and that the military planners are now poring over the details. Cooperation will also be intensified in the areas of air defense, special forces and cyberdefense, among others. Poland will play the role of regional leader "under US patronage", he said.

But he said also that an immediate response to Russian aggression in Ukraine, though important, counts less than a long-term modification of defense postures in Europe and America. The USA, after announcing that they were "pivoting" their defense towards Asia, must now "re-pivot it" towards Europe - and the European nations that have reduced their military spending must now boost it again.

"The idea remained until quite recently that there were no more threats in Europe and that a US presence in Europe was unnecessary," he explained through in interpreter. "Now events show that a reorientation is indispensable, and that Europe, when she was stable and secure, owed this to the US presence."

What is the probability that military spending might be boosted again? Siemoniak answered that this idea received strong support at a recent meeting of European defense ministers. "At present they will return to their presidents, PMs and finance ministers, and that's where their difficulties will begin," he admitted. "But the push is very strong."

"The strongest push doesn't even come from the illegal annexation of Crimea but from the flagrant lies uttered by President Putin concerning actions done by Russians there, and his newly declared doctrine permitting Russia to intervene in any country where Russian-speaking populations are deemed by Moscow to be under threat. That represents a potential danger for the Baltic states, which are NATO members, and even more for Moldavia, Belarus and the nations of central Asia, which are not."

Like Obama, Siemoniak thinks it is still too soon to say whether the Geneva agreement made on Thursday will manage to reduce tensions. He thinks that "Russia's special operation in eastern Ukraine did not run as planned" and that Putin may well have decided to play a more long-term game. "He holds various instruments for influencing events in Ukraine." He will keep in reserve the option of an open military incursion, "although it would have huge political, military and financial costs."

Poland's minister, a man of 46, observed that even recently NATO was wondering what its mission should be, if it had one still, after its troops left Afghanistan.

"Now we have the reply", he concluded.

Indeed we do. Since the world's armies and arms-merchants are scared of a vacuum, the veterans of Afghanistan will now be able to refill the bases in Europe.

Copyright © www.acdn.net

The US Vision

On that same say, April 18, the New York Times presented a US viewpoint, "US Plans Military Drills in Eastern Europe". This article relativises things but nevertheless points in the same direction as the remarks of the Polish Minister.

Signed by Michael R. Gordon, it says:

"The United States plans to carry out small ground-force exercises in Poland and Estonia in an attempt to reassure NATO's Eastern European members worried about Russia's military operations in and near Ukraine, Western officials said Friday.

The moves are part of a broader effort by NATO to strengthen the alliance's air, sea and land presence in Eastern Europe in response to Russia's new assertiveness in the region.

It is not yet clear what additional troop deployments the United States and other NATO nations might undertake in Eastern Europe after the exercises and to what extent the moves would ease anxieties there."

The journalist that emphasises that "The land-force exercises the Obama administration is planning are extremely modest.

The exercise in Poland, which is expected to be announced next week, would involve a United States Army company and would last about two weeks, officials said. A company consists of about 150 soldiers. The exercise in Estonia would be similar, said a Western official who declined to be identified because he was talking about internal planning."

Nevertheless, "although the exercises would be short, the United States is considering other ways to maintain a regular ground-force presence in Eastern Europe by rotating troops and conducting training there."

"'There's an entire range of possibilities and measures that are being considered,' Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said on Thursday in a joint news conference with Poland's defense minister, Tomasz Siemoniak. 'Rotational basis of training and exercises are always part of that."

"The company-sized Army exercise that is planned is far from the sort of NATO deployment that Poland's foreign minister, Radoslaw Sikorski, suggested this month when he told reporters that he wanted the alliance to deploy two combat brigades with as many as 5000 troops each in Poland."

The New York Times, which then referred to Siemoniak's remarks in the Washington Post, mentioned also that during the week General Philip Mark Breedlove, supreme commander of NATO in Europe, presented members of the Alliance with a range of short, medium and long-term options, aiming to strengthen its military posture in response to Russia's annexation of Crimea. One of these options would be to transfer to Europe the US combat brigade of 4500 men currently stationed in Texas at Fort Hood.

Although the Obama Administration has yet to publicly approve this measure, the New York Times mentioned that the USA has already sent to Poland twelve F-16 pursuit aircraft with a personnel of 200 to service them, and that this week also the NATO secretary-general Anders Fogh Rasmussen announced that the Alliance would be sending

Copyright © www.acdn.net

more patrol flights over the Baltic and deploying allied ships there, while also opening the possibility of further deployments, including ground troops. "More measures will be taken, if necessary, in the weeks and months ahead", he said.

Finally, other NATO officials have made it known that besides the US other member states have offered to supply ground troops to member states in Eastern Europe between now and the end of the year.

In brief, the wish of the Poles and the other Baltic States to have NATO commit massive military means on their territory and in Eastern Europe is still far from being fully satisfied, but is making progress.

A page is being turned. Do the French people know it?

The French Vision

In France this Easter weekend nobody heard about NATO measures. President Hollande and his Foreign Minister, on the tarmac of Villacoublay airport, in unison with the media, the politicians and public opinion, the return of our journalists abducted in Syria by Islamist groups. Four journalists had been held captive for ten months. France's secret services presented their liberation as a gift to us.

Note how propitious are religious festivals, holidays and elections for the freeing of French hostages. Thus on 29 October 2013, two days before the All-Saints holidays, we learnt of the liberation after three years of captivity and anguish of the last four French hostages kidnapped in Niger on 16 September 2010 at the Arlit uranium site exploited by the Areva corporation and held by AQMI (Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb). This latest liberation is even better timed.

Happy outcomes, pure coincidences of course.

But can we attribute to chance the fact that throughout Easter week France's press and broadcast media, well aware of the movement of Russian troops and the actions of Russian-speaking separatists in eastern Ukraine, haughtily ignored the sending of three French naval ships, a record number, into the Black Sea where they still are?

Naturally we share the joy of the freed hostages and their families. But we would also like it if their courage and professional conscience, used in the service of the real information that they went to find at great risk in Syria, could be matched by their colleagues back in Paris who might at least have read and passed on essential facts that have been covered by the foreign press and are available on the internet.

Return to the Primary Era

Naval manoeuvres in the East Mediterranean, the Black Sea and the Baltic, ground manoeuvres in Poland and Estonia on the borders of Russia, transfers of troops: NATO is continuing its pressure eastwards, which has been continuous since the fall of the Berlin Wall, despite promises made at the time of Germany's reunification - i.e the annexation of East Germany by the German Federal Republic ("a little annexation" like the latest one) - and despite the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, which should have led to the dissolution of NATO. And what can one say of the "missile shield" surrounding Russia, allegedly destined to protect Europe from Iranian missiles? Indeed the "flagrant lies" of Putin have had their western counterparts.

Copyright © www.acdn.net

Now the time seems far distant when Hans M. Kristinsen, a great specialist in nuclear arms at the Federation of American Scientists, could announce that the US Navy had finished removing from all its ships all their tactical nuclear missiles: a total of over 3700 cruise missiles (SUBROC, ASROC, Terrier and Tomahawk) removed since 1987 from nearly 240 ships.

That announcement was in the good old days, when people still thought the Cold War was definitively behind us. That was March 2013.

Putin's Russia is not the only nation beating war-drums. People should realise this and say it, in order to better understand what Europe and the world are going to lose. This is the end of a hope of peace.

Jean-Marie Matagne

Copyright © www.acdn.net