

Two Foreign Policy Issues the media constantly misrepresents

by Norman Berdichevsky



Nikita Khrushchev

The major foreign policy issues confronting the United States – Syria and Russian “expansionism” are constantly misrepresented by almost all of the media that leaves out crucial information.

Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad does not gas “his own people” (who are only less than 13% of Syrian residents and citizens (i.e. his own “Alawis” ; a “deviant Shi’ite sect”). Nevertheless, media spokespersons such as Sean Spicer (as well as leftwing star commentator Chris Matthews back in 2013) never tire of repeating this accusation (gassing his own people) which sounds as if Assad is some kind of self-hating masochist. Syria was and remains a geographic expression (like the Fertile crescent) state. It is NOT a nation and its people

were cobbled together as in Iraq when nothing held them together except geography and enmity.

Among his regular victims (the great majority of the half million victims in the Syrian "Civil War" are the remaining elements of the population who are all viewed by Assad and his clique as enemies, heretics, and infidels – these are the 68.4% of Syrians who are Sunni Muslims, the 11.2% who are Christians, and the other 9.1% who belong to other faiths. Most of the Kurds, who make up 9% of the population are also Sunni, as are the Turkmens who encompass 1% but both of these groups are similarly regarded as threats to the regime.

And How Different is the Ukraine?

Since Russian ejection of the Ottoman Turks from the Crimean Peninsula by Catherine the Great in 1783, the region has always been part of the Great Russian concept of the motherland and Russian language through Czarist times and including the first thirty-five years of incorporation in the USSR when it was NOT an administrative unit of the Ukrainian SSR but of the RSFSR (Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic).

Its transfer by administrative fiat in 1954 to Ukraine by Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev was an act of cosmetic political farce designed purely to throw Ukrainians a bone and pretend this "generosity" would help erase long memories of the terrible famines of the 1930s (largely caused by Stalin's policies) and the large degree of collaboration with the German invaders in World War II, thereby solidifying the "brotherhood" of the two peoples. Khrushchev was of mixed Russian and Ukrainian ancestry and was detested in the Ukraine as serving his Russian masters. His "generosity" was designed to pacify Ukrainian pride and promote his own image.

The Supreme Soviet of the USSR decreed this move a few weeks after the legal step (no need to tell the people immediately)

that the Crimean "oblast" (region) had been "transferred" from the RSFSR to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. The decree ran a mere eight lines stating that this measure "was being taken because of the economic commonalities, territorial closeness, and communication and cultural links" between Crimea and Ukraine."

In 1991, with the imminent collapse of the Soviet Union, it was widely expected that President Boris Yeltsin, the new president of the Russian Federation, would restore Crimea to Russia but the mercurial and often inebriated Yeltsin didn't bring it up during negotiations with Ukraine. Had he insisted on retaining the Crimea for Russia then or making it subject to a referendum, it would have unlikely been the source of international tension it is today.

According to the 1959 census, there were only 268,000 Ukrainians and 858,000 ethnic Russians living in Crimea. Does this matter? I would argue that it does as does the fact that Syria continues to be ruled by a tyrant representing a tiny "deviant" Shiite fragment among diverse peoples who are called "Syrians" on their passports in name only and against which Assad has pursued a war of aggression.

It would not be difficult to predict a grand compromise between American and Russian interests involving a compromise over these two issues that could be tied together in a "package". The U.S. would recognize Russian annexation of the Crimea and some limited form of autonomy with full language rights for the Russians living in the Eastern part of the Ukraine. Syria would be divided into several states with the Alawis retaining their rule over the Syrian coast including Latakia and adjacent mountainous regions while the inland Sunni majority, Christian, and Kurds would be allowed to join existing states or the new Kurdish autonomous (probably soon to be independent) region.

Should the Alawis along the Syrian coast decide that they

would prefer to continue under the rule of Bashar al-Assad who is a ruler from among "their own people", they must be free to do so. If they do not, and Assad prefers to impose his rule and use weapons of war against what are truly "his own people" (in fact) instead of against infidels, traitors (Sunni Arabs, Kurds, Turks, Turkomans, Christians), he should be free to do so with no more criticism than the media have hurled at him so far. Fortunately for the Jews who previously had resided in Syria, there are none left, having wisely fled to Israel, France and America since 1947.