

# UK steps up militaristic propaganda against Russia

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A cross-party House of Lords committee has slammed British foreign policy as too inactive and accused the UK and Europe of “sleepwalking” into the crisis in Ukraine.

The report, *The EU and Russia: before and beyond the crisis in Ukraine*, has been hailed as the first extensive, “objective” account of Russia-European relations. It is nothing of the sort.

According to Lord Tugendhat, chairman of the foreign affairs committee, a lack of expertise in the UK Foreign Office and the European Union, led to a “catastrophic misreading of the mood” in Russia in the run-up to the crisis.

The report says that member states had “displayed a worrying lack of political oversight” regarding negotiations with Ukraine on the Association Agreement in November 2013. “Having said that, Russia misread the Ukrainian appetite for a trade agreement with the EU. The combination led to the crisis we have today, which neither side saw coming.”

Such claims stand reality on its head. Far from “sleepwalking” into the Ukraine crisis, the EU, alongside the US, actively fomented it.

Former President Viktor Yanukovich’s refusal to sign the Association Agreement, aimed at subordinating Ukraine to the diktats of the EU and International Monetary Fund, triggered the February 2014 Western-backed coup. With the aid of fascist thugs, the regime of President Petro Poroshenko was installed, which duly signed off on the agreement while instigating a brutal civil war against its Russian-oriented opponents in the east of the country.

The report acknowledges that “the EU knew that the Russians ‘did not like what was happening’ but assumed ‘Ukraine could simply ride over that’.”

It is a moot point as to whether this was really the thinking in foreign office circles. The Russian plutocracy around President Vladimir Putin had been

accommodating to the Western powers, desirous only to be admitted to the top table of the capitalist club. But regime-change in the country hosting Russia’s strategic naval base and with a large Russian minority could only be interpreted as a hostile and provocative act by the US and the EU. It made clear that the major imperialist powers had no intention of allowing an independent capitalist Russia, but were working on longstanding geostrategic plans for its encirclement and dismemberment.

The resulting civil war in Ukraine has provided the pretext for a significant expansion of NATO, with the deployment of a 5,000-strong Rapid Reaction Force to be stationed in states on Russia’s borders.

The Lords report was compiled between July and December 2014 and written up in January this year. It does not deal with the failure of the Kiev regime to subdue opposition in the east militarily, nor the threat of martial law in response to rising social and political discontent in the west.

These failures are behind Washington’s threat to directly arm Ukrainian forces. With a potentially catastrophic escalation of hostilities against Russia, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Francois Hollande brokered a cease-fire in Ukraine, with Putin’s support. But the deal has resolved nothing, while the humiliating withdrawal of Ukrainian forces from Debaltsevo has only fuelled US ire.

The Lords committee is concerned at the prospect of a rupture within the EU. While it praises the unity of member states up to this point, it warns that there “seems to be less consensus on a constructive way forward, and a resulting danger that current unity could dissolve.” It notes political divisions within Germany as to relations with Russia.

The report speaks of establishing “ground rules within which the two sides [the EU and Russia] can work to their

mutual benefit,” which must include “an understanding of legitimate Russian concerns.” But the real message is to prepare for tougher action against Moscow.

The EU’s “relationship with Russia has for too long been based on the optimistic premise that Russia has been on a trajectory towards becoming a democratic ‘European’ country,” it states. Instead, “Russia is increasingly defining itself as separate from, and as a rival to the EU.”

“The model of European ‘tutelage’ of Russia is no longer possible,” it concludes. The EU should supply massive funds to Ukraine, and extend financial sanctions against Moscow in the event of a breakdown of the Ukraine ceasefire, including against its financial sector.

Of particular note, the report sets out the need to differentiate “between the Russian state and the Russian public,” with the EU playing a “greater role in supporting civil society within Russia.” It cites positively the comments of Vladimir Kara-Murza, Coordinator of Open Russia, on the need to “talk to opposition leaders, to civil society representatives and to people who frankly could be the face of the Russia of tomorrow.”

Open Russia, launched by oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky, is described as aiming to unite pro-European Russians in a bid to challenge Putin’s grip on power.

This is backed up with calls by the Lords committee for NATO and the EU to respond to “hostile actions of any kind” by Russia to be met “with a strong response.”

The report complains that, as a signatory to the 1994 Budapest memorandum, governing security assurances to Ukraine, “the UK had a particular responsibility towards the country and it has not been as active or as visible as it could have been.”

This codifies numerous complaints within military and ruling circles that parliament’s surprise failure to authorise military intervention against Syria in August 2013 has left the UK on the “sidelines.”

The UK government must now develop a “strategic response for the long-term” on Russia, the Lords committee insists.

Simultaneous with publication of the report, government ministers have stepped up propaganda against Russia.

Defence Secretary Michael Fallon provocatively compared the “threat” posed by the Putin regime to the Islamic State in Syria (ISIS) and warned that NATO had to be ready to respond to any further aggression, “whatever form it takes.”

Prime Minister David Cameron warned of an extension of sanctions against Moscow, that “will have economic and financial consequences for many years to come if you [Russia] do not desist.”

Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond pointedly refused to rule out authorising “lethal” weapons for Ukraine, stating that while the decision had not yet been taken, the UK “could not allow the Ukrainian armed forces to collapse.”

Speaking at the Royal United Services Institute think-tank Friday, Sir Adrian Bradshaw, second-in-command of NATO’s military forces in Europe, stated that the alliance must prepare for a “Russian blitzkrieg” against the continent.

Two days earlier, Royal Air Force Typhoon jets intercepted a pair of Russian aircraft flying over international waters near Cornwall. British fighter jets have been scrambled more than 40 times against Russian military planes alleged to be encroaching UK airspace since the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition took office in 2010.

An essential aim of the sabre rattling against Russia is to provide a rationale for a massive increase in defence spending. The UK is still the largest spender on defence in Europe, at more than £40 billion last year. But the ruling elite are now insisting that military spending must be “ringfenced” from austerity measures to fight the “Russian threat.”

Conservative chair of the Defence Select Committee, Rory Stewart, called for a manifesto pledge to protect defence spending by all the parties in the May election, claiming that “Putin will be looking for” any sign of “weakness.”

Two former defence ministers, Tory Sir Peter Luff and Labour’s Bob Ainsworth are among nearly 30 MPs who have signed a motion demanding the next government maintain defence spending. Writing in the right-wing *Spectator* magazine, Retired Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Graydon and retired Vice Admiral Sir Jeremy Blackham called on all political parties to “weaponise defence” in the election.



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