The Nutball the Neocons Wanted in NATO

Even interventionists are regretting some of the wars into which they helped plunge the United States in this century.

Among those wars are Afghanistan and Iraq, the longest in our history; Libya, which was left without a stable government; Syria's civil war, a six-year human rights disaster we helped kick off by arming rebels to overthrow Bashar Assad; and Yemen, where a U.S.-backed Saudi bombing campaign and starvation blockade is causing a humanitarian catastrophe.

Yet, twice this century, the War Party was beaten back when seeking a clash with Putin's Russia. And the "neo-isolationists" who won those arguments served America well.

What triggered this observation was an item on Page 1 of Wednesday's New York Times that read in its entirety:

"Mikheil Saakashvili, former president of Georgia, led marchers through Kiev after threatening to jump from a five-story building to evade arrest. Page A4"

Who is Saakashvili? The wunderkind elected in 2004 in Tbilisi after a "Rose Revolution" we backed during George W. Bush's crusade for global democracy.

During the Beijing Olympics in August 2008, Saakashvili sent his army crashing into the tiny enclave of South Ossetia, which had broken free of Georgia when Georgia broke free of Russia.

In overrunning the enclave, however, Saakashvili's troops killed Russian peacekeepers. Big mistake. Within 24 hours, Putin's tanks and troops were pouring through Roki Tunnel, running Saakashvili's army out of South Ossetia, and occupying

parts of Georgia itself.

As defeat loomed for the neocon hero, U.S. foreign policy elites were alive with denunciations of "Russian aggression" and calls to send in the 82nd Airborne, bring Georgia into NATO, and station U.S. forces in the Caucasus.

"We are all Georgians!" thundered John McCain.

Not quite. When an outcry arose against getting into a collision with Russia, Bush, reading the nation right, decided to confine U.S. protests to the nonviolent. A wise call.

And Saakashvili? He held power until 2013, and then saw his party defeated, was charged with corruption, and fled to Ukraine. There, President Boris Poroshenko, beneficiary of the Kiev coup the U.S. had backed in 2014, put him in charge of Odessa, one of the most corrupt provinces in a country rife with corruption.

In 2016, an exasperated Saakashvili quit, charged his patron Poroshenko with corruption, and fled Ukraine. In September, with a band of supporters, he made a forced entry back across the border.

Here is the Times' Andrew Higgins on his latest antics:

"On Tuesday … Saakashvili, onetime darling of the West, took his high-wire political career to bizarre new heights when he climbed onto the roof of his five-story apartment building in the center of Kiev…

"As … hundreds of supporters gathered below, he shouted insults at Ukraine's leaders … and threatened to jump if security agents tried to grab him.

"Dragged from the roof after denouncing Mr. Poroshenko as a traitor and a thief, the former Georgian leader was detained but then freed by his supporters, who … blocked a security service van before it could take Mr. Saakashvili to a Kiev

detention center and allowed him to escape.

"With a Ukrainian flag draped across his shoulders and a pair of handcuffs still attached to one of his wrists, Mr. Saakashvili then led hundreds of supporters in a march across Kiev toward Parliament. Speaking through a bullhorn he called for 'peaceful protests' to remove Mr. Poroshenko from office, just as protests had toppled the former President, Victor F. Yanukovych, in February 2014."

This reads like a script for a Peter Sellers movie in the '60s.

Yet this clown was president of Georgia, for whose cause in South Ossetia some in our foreign policy elite thought we should go to the brink of war with Russia.

And there was broad support for bringing Georgia into NATO. This would have given Saakashvili an ability to ignite a confrontation with Russia, which could have forced U.S. intervention.

Consider Ukraine. Three years ago, McCain was declaring, in support of the overthrow of the elected pro-Russian government in Kiev, "We are all Ukrainians now."

Following that coup, U.S. elites were urging us to confront Putin in Crimea, bring Ukraine, as well as Georgia, into NATO, and send Kiev the lethal weapons needed to defeat Russian-backed rebels in the East.

This could have led straight to a Ukraine-Russia war, precipitated by our sending of U.S. arms.

Do we really want to cede to folks of the temperament of Mikhail Saakashvili an ability to instigate a war with a nuclear-armed Russia, which every Cold War president was resolved to avoid, even if it meant accepting Moscow's hegemony in Eastern Europe all the way to the Elbe?

Watching Saakashvili losing it in the streets of Kiev like some blitzed college student should cause us to reassess the stability of all these allies to whom we have ceded a capacity to drag us into war.

Alliances, after all, are the transmission belts of war.

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