

NATO on trade, in Europe and Asia, is doomed

By Pepe ESCOBAR

Pepe Escobar is an independent geopolitical analyst. He writes for RT, Sputnik and TomDispatch, and is a frequent contributor to websites and radio and TV shows ranging from the US to East Asia. He is the former roving correspondent for Asia Times Online. Born in Brazil, he's been a foreign correspondent since 1985, and has lived in London, Paris, Milan, Los Angeles, Washington, Bangkok and Hong Kong. Even before 9/11 he specialized in covering the arc from the Middle East to Central and East Asia, with an emphasis on Big Power geopolitics and energy wars. He is the author of "Globalistan" (2007), "Red Zone Blues" (2007), "Obama does Globalistan" (2009) and "Empire of Chaos" (2014), all published by Nimble Books. His latest book is "2030", also by Nimble Books, out in December 2015.

The President of the United States (POTUS) is desperate. Exhibit A: His Op-Ed defending the Asian face - the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) - of a wide-ranging, twin-headed NATO-on-trade "pivoting".

The European face is of course the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).

POTUS [frames](#) TPP – as well as TTIP - in terms of a benign expansion of US exports, and private (US) firms having “*a fair shot at competing against state-owned enterprises.*” “*Fair*”? Not really. Let's see how the mechanism works, focusing on TPP's European twin.

With impeccable timing, almost simultaneously to Obama's Op-Ed, Greenpeace Netherlands [leaked](#) 248 pages of classified TTIP documents that were to be re-discussed last week by negotiators in New York. There have been no less than 13 rounds of TTIP negotiations so far, over nearly three years.

The [documents](#) – negotiated in total secrecy since 2013 - represent roughly two-thirds of the latest negotiating text. An array of detailed studies, like [this](#) one, had been warning about the state of play. The veil of secrecy ended up being the ultimate giveaway to TTIP's toxicity. Before the Greenpeace Netherlands leak, EU elected representatives could only examine these documents under a police watch, in a secure room, without access to experts, and on top of it they could not discuss the content with anyone else.

I will crush you with my GMOs

Everything civil society across Europe – for at least three years – has been debating, and fearing, is confirmed; this is a sophisticated, toxic US-led corporate racket, a concerted assault across the spectrum, from the environment and animal welfare to labor rights and internet privacy. In a nutshell; it's all about the US corporate galaxy pushing the EU to lower – or abase – a range of consumer protections.

Hardball, predictably, is the name of the game. Washington no less than threatened to block EU car exports to force the EU to buy genetically engineered fruits and

vegetables. In my travels in France, Italy and Spain over the past two years, I confirmed this to be the ultimate nightmare expressed by practitioners of top-end artisanal agriculture.

Predictably, the lobbyist-infested European Commission (EC) fiercely defends TTIP, stressing it could benefit the EU's economy by \$150 billion a year, and raise car exports by 149 percent. Obviously don't expect the EC to connect these "car exports" to a US-led GMO invasion of Europe.

At least some nations have finally woken up from their (corporate lobbyist-induced) slumber. The French Minister for Foreign Trade, Matthias Fekl, said negotiations over a "*bad deal*" should stop. He went straight to the point, blaming Washington's intransigence; "*There cannot be an agreement without France and much less against France.*"

Perennially ineffectual President Francois Hollande, for his part, has threatened to block the deal altogether. Three years ago Paris had already [secured](#) an exemption for the French film industry not to be gobbled up by Hollywood. Now it's also about the crucial agriculture front. Hollande said he would never accept "*the undermining of the essential principles of our agriculture, our culture, of mutual access to public markets.*"

And what is the EC – leading the negotiations on behalf of the EU - doing? Pulling its predictable Trojan horse act; these are all "*alarmist headlines*" and "*a storm in a teacup*". Puzzled EU citizens, en masse, may question if this is really the way for the EC – a bureaucratic Brussels behemoth - to supposedly defend the rights of EU consumers. Yet, infiltrated as it is by corporate lobbyism, the EC simply can't protect the EU's environmental and health standards, much more sophisticated than the US's, from a corporate America bent on meddling with the content of EU laws all along the regulatory line.

I got an offer you can't refuse

POTUS was heavily campaigning for TTIP last month in Germany. POTUS still hopes he may have a deal in the bag before he leaves office in January 2017. White House spokesman Josh Earnest has tried to put on a brave face, saying the leaks will not have a "*material impact*" on the negotiations. Wrong; they will – as they are mobilizing public opinion all across the EU.

David Cameron, in the UK, is also in a bind. He's fiercely pro-TTIP. But Obama has already warned; this means Brexit is a no-no. Club Med nations, for their part, are leaning against. All 28 EU member nations – plus the European Parliament – would have to ratify TTIP if a deal is eventually reached.

TPP, for its part, has been negotiated. But it has not been approved by the US Congress (nor by Pacific nations). The approval process has gone nowhere. In fact it will be up to either Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump. Trump arguably is oblivious to TPP's details; but considering the deal is being heavily championed by Obama, Trump may go against it.

A case can be made that both TPP and TTIP vow to distort markets, in Europe and Asia; prop up (US) monopolies; transfer jobs to slave labor markets (in the case of

parts of Asia); trample on intellectual property rights (in the case of the EU); facilitate tax evasion; and ultimately transfer more wealth from the many to the 0.00001 percent.

And this leads us to how Hillary Clinton – the Wall Street/US establishment candidate – views both TPP and TTIP. Well, she supported both NAFTA and CAFTA, approved under Bill Clinton in the 1990s. As Secretary of State, she lobbied for the Panama trade deal. And, crucially, she has always treated the TPP as the “*gold standard*”. No wonder; this is the trade arm of the “*pivoting to Asia*” she’s been so fond of - a Pacific trade deal that excludes China, which happens to be the top trade partner of most Asian nations.

Moreover, those by now famous Goldman Sachs speeches are increasingly being seen as payments for services rendered (and promised) by Hillary Clinton to the 0,0001 percent, who are, of course, in favor of global corporate America expansion.

Yet it ain’t over till the November ballot sings. Hillary now faces serious scrutiny by working class voters in the US. So no wonder, in another flip-flopping masterpiece, she’s now leaning towards describing herself as opposing both TPP and TTIP.

Still, TPP at least may be approved during the post-election ‘lame-duck’ session of the US Congress. As for TTIP, it’s now mired in Walking Dead zone. Talk about what it takes for the Obama administration to imprint its trade “*legacy*” in the history books; to keep blackmailing Europeans and Asians alike as if it was just a lowly Mob extortion racket.