

Geopolitical Interplay: The Ukraine Debacle Could Have Been Avoided?

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Looking back, the whole debacle might have been avoided – if only certain actors had behaved differently.

On February 21st, against the background of the deadly violence of the previous two days in which over 100 people had been killed by sniper fire, the Yanukovych regime and the leadership of the three main political players in the rebellion came to an agreement.

The agreement was accepted by the opposition because, in the circumstances, it made very considerable concessions – including early elections, a full amnesty for all protestors and, critically, a full and open EU-led enquiry into the recent deadly violence. Even the racist, homophobic and ethno-nationalist Svoboda party accepted the terms.

The agreement was brokered by the Polish, German and French governments, and the assumption was that it had the de facto support of the US regime. In subsequent statements, the Russians regularly referred to the agreement as the baseline for any progress in resolving divisions over the Ukraine. It was the only point of agreement between all parties. Well, all parties except one.

The very next day, the far-right ‘political soldiers’ element on the Maidan, buoyed by a growing sense of its own political power, rejected the agreement and launched a series of attacks that led to the craven flight of the Yanukovych leadership and the dubiously legal ‘impeachment’ of Yanukovych by the opposition parties, who then installed an interim government led by the ex-banker Yatsenyuk. The government, critically, contained members from Svoboda, a party that grew out of the former pro-Nazi Social National Party.

There and then, the USA and the EU should have said no to the fascists and required that the Svoboda group be ejected from the regime.

Svoboda is a party that gained 10% of the vote in the 2012 Rada election, less than the Ukrainian Communist Party.

So why was it tolerated in the regime?

The answer is that although it only represents a small section of the Ukraine overall, it represents a much larger section of the Ukrainians who were fighting the Berkut in the street and who overthrew the regime. The physical base of the regime, particularly in the early days, had a considerable ethno-nationalist, far-right element.

The USA/EU had clearly made a calculated decision to turn a blind eye to this element as long as it meant a regime that would finally bring the Ukraine into the Atlanticist bloc.

This was a critical error of judgement that, as will be shown, became a major factor in the Crimean and Donbas rebellion.

Throughout these events, the average consumer of Atlanticist media could have been forgiven for demonstrating complete ignorance of a number of critical facts. These would include the fact that the putsch regime had come to power on the coat tails of a far-right mob and the fact that the regime had placed the former leader of a gang of neo-nazi football hooligans in charge of National Security. But perhaps even more importantly, the average viewer of CNN or the BBC would have been largely ignorant of the fact that there were many millions of Ukrainians who not only played no part in this process, but who in fact had every reason to be strongly opposed to what had happened in what was, at least at that point, still their country too.

This ignorance was understandable, because all the Atlanticist media had really proffered was a montage of events designed to conform to the typical Atlanticist narrative structure deployed in situations where regime change is in Atlanticist interests. The storyline in these situations is a simple form of civilizational chauvinism – the victory of ‘western civilisation’, as represented by the USA, EU and NATO, is morally and historically ineluctable. All those who resist are morally bankrupt and will lose. This is what has happened in the Ukraine, and what is inevitable and right must therefore be for the good.

The problem is – it isn’t true. What happened in the Ukraine was that an Atlanticist backed regime containing far-right elements had come to power on the back of a violent uprising in which far-right elements had played a critical part. The USA/EU gamble was based on the Putin regime, Russian public opinion, and the pan-Russian and communist/socialist elements in the Ukraine, simply accepting the right of the Nationalist and right wing part of the Ukraine, together with the Atlanticists, to determine all of the Ukraine’s fate.

The gamble failed miserably.

Fast forward to May Day 2014. To the east of Ukraine, Russia has deployed a significant military capability, to the west and the north, NATO has increased its military capability. The Atlanticists have imposed sanctions against Russian individuals and corporations supposedly close to the Putin regime. Russia has experienced significant capital outflow and a drop over the forecast growth for Q1, but is not budging. The Crimea is long gone, and is now part of Russia. It wasn’t even mentioned in the Geneva agreement.

The Donbas is in a state of revolt, with armed rebels occupying strategic locations in over 10 towns and cities, including Donetsk, the industrial hub of the Ukraine – the Donbas region generates close to 30% of Ukraine’s GDP. There is considerable support for the Donbas rebellion amongst the local security forces, who are offering hardly any opposition. The Ukraine is planning to introduce military conscription, and the Putin regime is threatening that any action against Russian interests, in which it includes action against ethnic Russians in the Donbas, may result in military intervention. In Kiev, Right Sector fascists still occupy public buildings and are still acting out their fascist fantasies in night-time torch-lit parades. Meanwhile, the average Ukrainian of whatever political stripe is facing vicious austerity imposed by IMF ‘conditionalities’.

It is utterly facile to blame Russia for this. If Russia, and the Crimean and Donbas rebels, are to blame for anything, it is refusing to lie down and be dictated to by the Ukrainian nationalists and their Atlanticist backers. Did Nuland, McCain and the other siren voices of

one-eyed Atlanticist support for the nationalist rising ever stop to consider how it would play out against Ukraine's cultural, linguistic and political fault-lines? Did they expect the Crimea – a region that has consistently supported the irredentist cause ever since the 1991 independence of Ukraine – to just accept their new Ukrainian nationalist rulers? Did they expect the left-wing and pan-Russian elements in the south and east of Ukraine to accept a government that included some who identify with the former Galician SS and the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union?

The Ukrainian regime and its Atlanticist backers are becoming increasingly desperate in their attempts to whip up opinion against the Donbas rebels and the Putin regime. This reached an absolute nadir with the obviously fraudulent anti-Semitic 'registration notice' episode, which Kerry even saw fit to raise at the Geneva negotiations. Yatsenyuk then went on US television to accuse Putin of wanting to resurrect the Soviet Union (he doesn't). The Ukrainian government has even accused Putin of wanting to start World War 3 (he doesn't). This is the stuff of desperation.

One wonders whether Kerry has actually seen or read any of the banners that currently adorn public buildings throughout the Donbas. Many of them have a common theme – opposition to fascism. Has it not crossed Kerry's mind that the USA lost all credibility with these elements when, together with the EU, it supported a regime containing fascists and failed to condemn the continued fascist occupations of public spaces in Kiev?

Does Kerry realise that whereas possibly 100,000 Ukrainians fought with the Germans in WW2, around 2 million fought with the Soviet Union and that, in the Donbas, this is part of a shared historical tradition, ingrained for generations and strongly associated with the pan-Russian identity, that makes the presence of fascists in the Ukrainian putsch regime highly inflammatory. It seems that the one thing that the Atlanticist bloc cannot face up to is that if you were to ask the rebels and their supporters what it is they are fighting against, they would tell you they are fighting against fascism.

And in the Ukraine the US government and the EU are on the same side as the fascists.

Lionel Reynolds writes the www.dispatchesfromempire.com blog

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