

Poroshenko Finally Admits Ukraine's Military Defeat

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Poroshenko admits to Ukraine's military leadership that Ukraine cannot reconquer the Donbass.

Though it has received almost no international attention, Ukraine's President Poroshenko [finally admitted](#) on Friday 21st May 2016 a truth many Ukrainians still cannot face: Ukraine cannot regain control of the territories of the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics by military means.

Poroshenko's admission was made at a meeting of Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council – in effect to Ukraine's military leadership. That means that what Poroshenko said was not a slip or a pose but a genuine admission made to the commanders of the Ukrainian military who have been fighting its war.

This admission comes two years after Ukraine launched its so-called "Anti-Terrorist Operation" to crush opposition in the Donbass.

It also comes just short of two years after Ukraine launched a military offensive to regain the Donbass on 30th June 2014.

Poroshenko was elected President shortly before that military offensive was launched. It was he who gave the order to launch the offensive, ignoring warnings not to do so from the Russians and from Germany's Foreign Minister Steinmeier (who however did nothing to restrain him thereafter).

Poroshenko as President was also party to the Ukrainian decision to resume the offensive in January 2015.

The offensives Ukraine launched in June 2014 and in January 2015 ended in disastrous defeats.

Tens of thousands of people were killed, cities in the Donbass like Lugansk were bombed, shelled, placed under siege and devastated, millions of people were forced to flee from their homes to escape the fighting, the economy of Ukraine was dealt a possibly mortal blow, and the Donbass – Ukraine's richest region and its industrial powerhouse – has experienced a humanitarian catastrophe. Last but not least, the Malaysian airliner MH17 was shot down with heavy loss of life after the Ukrainian authorities allowed it to fly over the conflict zone.

Poroshenko now admits this was all for nothing. The military strategy for which he as Ukraine's President bears prime responsibility has been a total failure. As he now says himself, Ukraine's military is unable to do what he repeatedly ordered it to do: regain control of the Donbass by military means for Ukraine.

It is not as if Poroshenko and the Ukrainian government had no other choice.

On 17th April 2014 the Ukrainian government signed up to a Statement in Geneva which called for negotiations between the Ukrainian authorities and the representatives of Ukraine's regions – including obviously of the Donbass – to find a settlement to the conflict. Those negotiations never happened because the Ukrainian authorities chose to launch their misnamed “Anti-Terrorist Operation” instead.

Later, when the Ukrainian authorities launched their military offensive on 30th June 2014, a ceasefire was in place and negotiations were underway. Poroshenko broke off the negotiations, unilaterally ended the ceasefire, and chose war instead.

Lastly, at the time of Ukraine's second offensive launched in January 2015 Ukraine had committed itself to a peace process which the Russians had brokered in Minsk in September 2014. That envisaged negotiations with the leaders of the Donbass which again never took place as Poroshenko and the Ukrainians resolved to launch their second offensive instead.

Throughout these events the Russians repeatedly made known their strong desire for a negotiated solution to the conflict and repeatedly put pressure on the militias in the Donbass to enter into such negotiations.

If negotiations – as envisaged by the agreements agreed in Geneva in April 2014 and in Minsk in September 2014 – did not taken place, it was not the fault of the militia or of the Russians, who have always pressed for such negotiations. It was the fault of Poroshenko and of the Ukrainian leadership..

Similarly, if negotiations have still not taken place despite the defeat of Ukraine's second offensive in February 2015 and despite Ukraine's further commitment to enter into such negotiations made at the summit in Minsk in February 2015, it is again because the Ukrainians refuse to engage in them.

The responsibility for the war Ukraine chose to fight – and which Poroshenko now admits Ukraine has lost – therefore rests entirely with Poroshenko, the other members of the Ukrainian leadership who colluded with him to take the decision to go to war, and with the Western politicians who egged them on.

One thing can however be predicted with confidence. Though Poroshenko has now effectively admitted that Ukraine has been defeated, he will never accept responsibility for that defeat. Nor will the other Ukrainian leaders or the Western politicians who were involved in the decision to go to war with him.

Needless to say, there is no possibility of Poroshenko doing what any political leader with any sense of responsibility would do in this situation – which is resign and make way for someone else.

Nor is there the slightest possibility that Poroshenko or the rest of the Ukrainian leadership will draw the obvious conclusion from their defeat, which is that Ukraine's only way forward is to do what Ukraine has repeatedly committed itself to do but has always failed to do, which is talk to the leaders of the Donbass, who have defeated Ukraine in battle.

On the contrary the report of [Poroshenko's comments](#) to Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council shows that far from drawing this conclusion Poroshenko is instead still

looking for ways to achieve by diplomatic means what he failed to achieve on the battlefield: the reconquest of the Donbass without concessions to its people. It is merely his tactics which have changed. Having been defeated in battle he wants the West to bully the Russians into handing him the victory he could not achieve on the battlefield.

That the Russians have proved entirely resistant to such bullying and that this approach anyway fails to address Ukraine's real problem – the complete alienation of the people of the Donbass from the regime in Kiev – is something Poroshenko refuses to consider.

Instead, where he previously led Ukraine twice to defeat in battle, Poroshenko now seems intent to lead it up a blind alley, doubtless chalking up trivia like Ukraine's Eurovision win as "great victories" along the way.

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