

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko Preparing to Attack Donbass and Crimea

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In the aftermath of [the shoot outs in Crimea](#) the Russian and Ukrainian Presidents, Vladimir Putin and Petro Poroshenko, have met with their higher political and military leaderships.

Putin's meeting took the form of a plenary meeting of Russia's Security Council, the body which was partially and hurriedly convened on Monday. Poroshenko's meeting was with the Ukraine's National and Security Council, a body that has a similar name to Russia's Security Council but which does not have the same all-encompassing powers, and whose remit is far more narrowly restricted to defence and security questions.

Poroshenko has also put the Ukrainian military in Donbass and along the border with Crimea on alert. He is also trying to contact the US and European leaderships to gain their support. It is a certainty that over the next few hours ritual statements of support for Ukraine and criticisms and warnings to Russia will indeed come from the US and European leaderships.

Putting aside all the rhetoric, will these latest moves result in war between Russia and Ukraine in Crimea, and between Ukraine and the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics in the Donbass?

Two things first need to be said. Firstly the idea that there is peace in the Donbass is a myth. Fighting goes on there every day on the contact line with the Ukrainian military regularly shelling militia positions and the militia shelling the Ukrainian military in return. Firefights happen continuously. At the beginning of July Ukraine admitted losing 80 of its soldiers in fighting in the Donbass in the course of just one week, whilst towards the end of July Ukraine admitted losing 6 of its soldiers in a single clash on just one day. Secondly the political situation in Ukraine is so unstable and the anti-Russian atmosphere there is so strong that it would be foolish to count on Ukraine showing any sort of restraint. War is therefore unfortunately a very real possibility.

On balance however I doubt it will happen. The Kremlin's [brief summary](#) of Putin's meeting with the Security Council speaks only of discussions for "additional security measures and critical infrastructure protection in Crimea" and of a detailed review of "scenarios of counter-terrorism security measures along the land border, offshore and in Crimea's air space." That suggests that the Russians are only looking at tighter security measures within Crimea itself, and that they at least have no plans to start a wider war. That would of course be consistent with the whole approach the Russians have been taking ever since the Ukrainian conflict began in 2014.

As for Ukraine, though there are undoubtedly individuals there who are fully capable of starting a war and who show every indication of wanting to do so, I personally doubt that in the end Ukraine will take the plunge and go to war. Behind the ritual statements of support I expect both the US and the Europeans in private to be urging Ukraine to show restraint for two reasons: firstly, because whatever they may pretend in public I am sure they have guessed the truth that it is the Russian account of the Crimean incident which is true; and secondly and far more importantly because they know that in any war between Ukraine and Russia – or even between Ukraine and the two People's Republics of the Donbass – Ukraine would lose.

Obama certainly does not want another defeat in Ukraine in the middle of a US Presidential election campaign on his hands, especially since this would probably play into the hands of Donald Trump, though unfortunately the same cannot be said of some of [the more psychopathic individuals](#) who support Hillary Clinton, who seem to be yearning for confrontation with Russia on just about any pretext. More to the point I just cannot imagine that Angela Merkel, facing criticism in Germany for her open-door refugee policy and with her anti-Russian policy coming under growing criticism from the SPD, the CSU and the German business community, wants another debacle in Ukraine on her hands.

In fact I suspect that some people both in the US and Europe are privately furious with the Ukrainians for landing them in this mess, whatever they may feel obliged to say in public. Whether or not that is so I expect that the telephone lines between Western capitals and Kiev are currently burning with urgent calls for restraint. Despite the strength of the war party in Kiev I doubt that the Ukrainian authorities in the end feel strong enough to disregard these calls.

There will be dismay in Europe over something else. The Europeans have stupidly linked the lifting of sanctions against Russia to the full implementation of the Minsk II Accords notwithstanding that they know perfectly well that it is Kiev not Moscow which is not honouring them. The whole premise of this foolish step was that it would pressure Moscow to make concessions. In the event not only has Moscow failed to make any concessions but Putin has now called off the next Normandy Four meeting, which was supposed to review progress in implementing the Minsk II Accords. With growing public anger in Europe over the sanctions there must now be panic on the part of some European leaders that the Russians may be prepared to walk away from the whole Minsk II process – which the Europeans have foolishly linked the sanctions to – leaving these same European leaders high and dry.

Just as I suspect that the telephone lines between Kiev and Western capitals are currently burning with calls for restraint, so therefore I suspect that the telephone lines between Moscow and Western capitals are also burning with urgent calls to the Russians asking them to modify and explain their new hard line and to recommit to the Normandy Four format. I would not be surprised if in return the Russians are being given private assurances that the Western powers will act to prevent Kiev from doing what it has just tried to do in Crimea ever again. Whether of course the Russians would believe those assurances is another matter.

Having said all this I want to repeat again that the situation remains extremely dangerous. Ultimately any decision for war or peace lies with Kiev. No one in their senses would place any firm reliance on Kiev doing the sane thing. The next few days or hours will decide the issue.

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