

The Ukraine Crisis: Quo Vadis?



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Yaroslav Brisiuck

Thank you very much Professor Alexander and thank you to the Potomac Institute and the Inter-University Center for Terrorism Studies for organizing today's discussion. Ukraine has been in the spotlight of global attention for quite a while, for the past twelve months. It is because, as we believe, the events in Ukraine have global significance and global consequences.

The present crisis in Ukraine: how did we arrive at this situation and what are the causes and what can we do to resolve this crisis? In our view, the short answer is very clear. It is not a domestic Ukrainian crisis; this crisis is brought to us from the outside by an overt aggression and intervention of the Russian Federation, which does not want Ukraine to get out of its orbit and potentially sees the events, the changes that are going on in Ukraine, as a threat to Russia itself, to the current regime in the Kremlin.

So how did it all start, and what is the reason behind all this? Ukraine, practically since its independence, declared its European aspirations. But, in reality, little was done over the years to realize them. We can compare Ukraine to Poland, where Poland was twenty years ago and where Ukraine was twenty years ago. Right now Polish GDP is three times as high as Ukraine's. Russia did not object to Ukraine's European aspirations at first. It objected, very strongly, our desire to join NATO. And in 2008 Russia practically blocked our attempts to get membership action plan from NATO. But at the same time they said that the European integration is okay and they did not have anything against it. At that point in time, it was not realistic. However, Ukraine was negotiating the association agreement since 2008 and closer to the middle of 2013, the prospects of signing the agreement and our getting closer to Europe and outside of Russia's orbit became more realistic. And we immediately saw the strong pressure from Russia in terms of economic measures, restrictions of market goods and so on and so forth.

The dramatic events in the winter of last year presented opportunities for Russia to intervene into the situation. As we all know, I do not think I need to recount the events, as a result of mass protests President Viktor Yanukovich was ousted. Russia declared that the events that are happening in Ukraine are a coup d'état; the junta and neo-Nazis seized power even though this is not true. Everything was done in accordance with legal procedures. The President fled the country, the Prime Minister Azarov at that time resigned and Parliament was the only institution that continued to work. By 328 votes, the constitutional majority, which was sufficient for the impeachment of the President, the Parliament removed him from power and appointed Turchynov as acting President and Yatsenyuk as Prime Minister. Nevertheless, Russia did not accept the legitimacy of those changes and decided to intervene under the pretext of the need to protect their "compatriots" as they call the Russian speakers who live in Ukraine. Then the events in Crimea ensued where Russian Duma authorized Putin on March 1st to use troops in the territory of Ukraine.

It is interesting Professor Alexander raised the issue of self-determination and separatism in this context. In Crimea, the people who could have rights to self-determination are Crimean Tartars. However, the majority of Crimean Tartars were deported in 1944, and over the past twenty years Ukraine was taking efforts for them to resettle in Ukraine. Crimean Tartars boycotted the referendum of March 16th and the data that Russian organizations themselves show

indicates that only about fifteen or twenty percent of the population actually supported the succession of Crimea, even though the official statistics are over ninety percent—over eighty percent turnout in the elections and over ninety percent in favor of Russia. The Council on Development of Civil Society and Human Rights under Putin indicates that only thirty percent of voters took part in the referendum and slightly more than half of them actually voted for succession.

We all know the story where Russian troops crossed Ukraine's border inside the Crimea, took over the authorities and pulled off this referendum in about two weeks. The same scenario pretty much replicated itself, or is being replicated, in the East of Ukraine in Donetsk and Luhansk, so called People's Republics, with strong support of Russia militarily, which continues to deliver troops and armaments and special forces up to this date.

The consequences of these events are truly of a global scale, global magnitude. Such events did not happen past World War II as the annexation of Crimea. The entire international security architecture is being undermined by Russia's actions. By annexation of Crimea, Russia violated the United Nations Charter, the Helsinki Final Act, the Statute of the Council of Europe, bilateral agreements with Russia including a big treaty where Russia recognized Ukraine and our borders as of 1991. And most importantly, these actions violated the Budapest Memorandum of 1994 where by Ukraine gave up the third largest nuclear arsenal in the world at that time, which was bigger than the UK, China and France combined: 1000 strategic and 2500 tactical nuclear missiles.

It became apparent that the mechanisms envisioned in the Budapest Memorandum did not fulfill the purposes that they were designed for. Even though we had security assurances from Russia and from other countries like the United States and the United Kingdom, unfortunately at this point the situation remains that the territorial integrity of Ukraine is violated. This sends a clear message to everyone that unless you have weapons with which you can protect yourself, no guarantees can be enough to prevent a foreign aggression. The situation could have been different if we were part of the North Atlantic Alliance, but as I said, Russia effectively prevented Ukraine from proceeding down that path in 2008 where it pressured a number of European countries that depend on Russia for energy.

What could be done, and what have we tried to do to resolve this crisis? Since April there have been a number of attempts and negotiations in different formats to put an end to it and reach an agreement. On April 17th there was a meeting in Geneva and an agreement signed by Ukraine, Russia, the United States and the European Union where all the parties agreed that armed groups must disarm and vacate the buildings that they violently seized. And I would like to make one small point on the buildings. The actions of the separatists in the East—the majority of those people are not Ukrainians; they are not Ukrainian citizens. All the leaders of the Donetsk Republic and the Luhansk Republic are Russian citizens like Strelkov, Girkin and Borodai. They have a track record of serving in the FSB, the Russian Security Service. And a telling example of the fact that this is not a local conflict by the people who protested the central authorities is that in one of the cities, in Kharkiv, the protestors tried to take over a government building. They took over a building of the theater by mistake. Apparently local people who know their town, they would not make such a mistake.

Vacating the taken over buildings was one of the agreements that parties reached. Kiev would stop the antiterrorist operation, which we started at the beginning of actual conflict with the separatists and the OSCE will monitor the implementation of the agreement. It became apparent at the end of April that the separatists had no intention to comply with those agreements; and in fact, eight OSCE observers were kidnapped—those who tried to monitor the implementation of this agreement. Then again, in the beginning of June, Foreign Ministers of Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany met in Berlin and agreed on a sustainable ceasefire, on the resumption of talks within the contact group and joint border control at checkpoints. That did not bring about tangible results in the armed conflict. On June 6th we had the meeting in Normandy with Poroshenko, Putin, Merkel and Hollande. Also, talks continued but the crisis continued to develop. After his election, President Poroshenko introduced a fifteen-point peace plan, which became a basis for further agreements in this field.

And as a side note - as a result of the election campaign, the political forces in Ukraine that Russia was threatening everyone with—neo-Nazis or radicals and so on and so forth—they got something like one percent of the votes. The party of Rabinovich his party got twice as many votes as the radicals who Moscow wanted to present as a threat.

So shortly after President Poroshenko came into office he proposed a fifteen-point peace plan as one thing, and the second thing what he did was he initiated the unilateral ceasefire as a good faith attempt on our side to stop the crisis. It was, indeed, unilateral. The separatists did not follow suit, and over that one week 27 people were killed, 69 wounded—so it did not work out. There were a number of contacts, including phone contacts, with President Putin and contacts as part of the trilateral contact group with the participation of Ukraine, Russia and the OSCE and the separatists and as a result on September 5th and 19th Minsk agreements were signed. We believe that these agreements are the basis how this conflict could be solved.

The key elements of this agreement is bilateral ceasefire with the OSCE monitoring, decentralization of power in Ukraine, monitoring of the border of Ukraine-Russia, release of all hostages, the amnesty law, early local elections in the East of Ukraine and retreat of unlawful military units and Russian troops from the territory of Ukraine. Unfortunately, we continue to see violations of the Minsk agreements. On October 17th there was a meeting in Milan between President Poroshenko, Putin, Chancellor Merkel, President Hollande and Italian Prime Minister Renzi as well as the European Commission President Barroso trying to induce Russia to abide by those agreements. But after three rounds of talks, the Russian side continued its line that basically Moscow has nothing to do with the conflict; it is an internal conflict of Ukraine.

On our side we are taking all possible steps to fulfill the Minsk agreements. We passed the Amnesty Law, which absolves all militants from criminal responsibility if they have not committed capital crimes. We passed the law on self-governance of the occupied areas of East Ukraine. We declared unilateral ceasefire; however, at the same time, like the first ceasefire in June, it continues to be unilateral and over the past two months over 100 Ukrainian soldiers are killed and over 600 soldiers are wounded. We had early elections to the parliament of Ukraine, which was yet another opportunity to include all the participants into an all-inclusive dialogue.

Unfortunately, the other side does not comply. The most serious violation of this agreement, we believe, was the election that was held last Sunday on November 2nd by the Donetsk and Luhansk “Republics”. There is a difference between the elections that we envision for December 7th as part of the Minsk agreement, which were supposed to be elections for local powers in Ukraine—local administrations under Ukrainian law, which would then be a part of the Ukrainian system of governance. The elections that took part last Sunday were quite different. They were elections for these new formations that they invented - the “DNR” and “LNR”. They were at the gunpoint of the militants. Most unfortunately, it was the reaction of Moscow to these elections. Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement on Sunday where they declared these elections valid and such as representing the will of the people.

There are a number of other instances where the other side does not fulfill the agreements and blocks the implementation of the peace process. The Russian side, unfortunately, blocks the decision, the OSCE decision to enhance the mandate of the observer mission on the border of Ukraine—to monitor the Ukraine-Russia border. This is an essential component of resolving this crisis because we believe that if we seal the border and cut the supplies to the separatists on the Russian side the conflict will end fairly soon. Because everything they get, they do not get from Ukraine. They are not peaceful protestors. And you can probably buy a Kalashnikov assault rifle on the black market but you cannot buy multiple rocket launch systems or tanks of the kind that the Ukrainian army does not have in its ranks. So once we seal the border, and we cut the supplies this can end by itself because it is even the local people in the effected areas, they do not support what the people who took over the power there are doing. The indication of that is the election of November 2nd where people were brought to the polling stations against their will. They were threatened that if they did not show up at polling stations they would be considered disloyal and so on and so forth.

Of course, another component is the Russian continued propaganda, which tries to shift the blame for the ongoing fighting on the Ukrainian side. We appreciate the assistance from the United States Department of State, which initiated this project of countering Russian lies. First it was the top twenty Russian lies, then it was top fifty, sixty and now it is over top hundred, where video material from ten years ago is used as a shelling by Ukrainian troops of peaceful quarters of Donetsk and Luhansk, where in fact these videos could be from Iraq or some other places.

What could be possible rationale for Moscow’s actions in general, and for continuing to support this conflict in the East? One of the possible rationales is trying to repeat the Crimean scenario and annex the Donetsk and Luhansk regions that are occupied by the terrorists right now to create possible access from Russia to Transnistria, which is a frozen conflict that has been going on for over twenty years, potentially for may be placing another South Stream-type pipeline from Russia to Europe, bypassing Ukrainian territory. It could also be an idea of federalizing Ukraine and preventing it from moving towards Europe by having this anti-Europe enclave in Ukraine. It could be bargaining chips for legitimizing the annexation of Crimea. Or it could also be for boosting popularity of the Putin regime in the face of economic difficulties and preventing events like Maidan from happening in Russia.

What is the solution and what has been the international response? The international response has been truly overwhelming—in different for a, an almost universal condemnation of

Russia's actions. The United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution with over one hundred countries supporting Ukraine's territorial integrity. Only eleven countries opposed that resolution including: Russia, Cuba, North Korea, Syria and several others. The same reaction from the European Union, from NATO, from the OSCE and a number of countries. As a response, sanctions were imposed to force Russia to withdraw and stop fueling this conflict and intervening into our affairs. These sanctions are beginning to work gradually. We had several levels of sanctions and our position is that these sanctions should not be rolled back—they should be further increased because we continue to see violations of the agreements to which Russia was a party. We welcome a statement that Federica Mogherini made today in Warsaw that the issue of sanctions is still on the table and Foreign Ministers of the European Union will review this issue on November 17th when they meet.

We see a solution in the implementation of the Minsk agreement, which provides a clear path to peace, which is ceasefire, pulling away the troops from line of combat, release of all hostages and repeal of the November 2nd "elections". We count on continued support from our partners - the United States, the European Union in forcing the other side to abide by those agreements.

And last but not least, the key to—maybe not to the resolution of this conflict itself—but to overall improvement of the situation is Ukraine's continued reforms and movement towards Europe. We recently held elections on October 26th, elections to the parliament of Ukraine, whereby the majority of MPs are from pro-European parties. We are waiting for the formation of the coalition, which should be done in the next few days. The official results will be certified on November 10th. Right now with over 99 percent of ballots counted it is clear that we have a pro-European Parliament with pro-European government and pro-European President.

So, despite the conflict, we will continue to implement all the necessary reforms and continue to count on assistance from the European Union and our partners as we move forward. Thank you.

Ian Brzezinski

I am going to start off with two quibbles that I have. One is with the title, and it follows from Yaroslav's comments. The phrase 'Ukraine Crisis' is used often to describe what is happening to Ukraine, and it infers an inaccurate depiction of events there. As Yaroslav pointed out, it is not an internal crisis that is occurring; it is an external invasion. It is a mistake for NATO, for our European allies, and especially the US Administration to avoid pointing out that factual reality. By intentionally avoiding this reality, we have ended up generating policies that are sadly inadequate. It is an invasion. The insurrection we see in Ukraine generated by proxies, lead by proxies, fought by proxies, it has been backed by Russian military equipment; it has been supported by the Russian military and is supported by the Russian government. It has been directed by a foreign power. It is an invasion.

The second thing that kind of irks me in Washington is when people kind of go 'Well – you know, Ukraine has wasted 20 years through its corruption, weakness, lack of commitment and determination to drive forward real reform. There is truth this statement. I lived in Ukraine in '93 and '94 and I saw a lot of corruption there and I saw all the inadequacies. But I can tell you one thing is very different from Poland. Poland did not have Russia breathing down its back, in its knickers, pumping in money to corrupt politicians and to stymie business development. Poland was not subjected to a blitzkrieg of information and propaganda. Poland did not have its subject to trade embargoes. It was not permeated by intelligence operatives.

It is amazing how far Ukraine has come being next to a great power, which has devoted a huge amount of resources to breaking down the emergent Ukrainian sense of a national identity. And when you look at Ukraine today compared to twenty years ago one cannot be but impressed as the the strength of the national identity that has evolved under those circumstances. So, when you criticize Ukraine for its inadequacies, let us not forget that a lot of its problems were externally generated and externally sustained.

Now, why should we care about this, here in Washington DC or in some European capitals? What we have here is an unprovoked violation of territorial integrity of a European nation – by the way, Europe's second largest nation and one situated at an important crossroads between Europe and Eurasia. Yaroslav pointed out the dangerous precedent has been set by allowing a treaty, designed to reinforce efforts to counter the proliferation of nuclear weapons, to be grossly violated and largely ignored.

I think, even more important has the reintroduction of a very dangerous principle into Europe, the principle of ethnic sovereignty. Putin is justifying his invasion of Ukraine on the grounds that he has the right to unilaterally redraw borders when he has a concern about the status of an ethnic minority beyond his borders. This is the same principle of ethnic sovereignty that wrought horrors to Europe twice during the last century and many times before.

Russia's invasion is certainly a threat to the vision of a Europe whole, free, and secure. Putin has invaded Ukraine in large part because the Ukrainian people want to join Europe. This also a real challenge to U.S. leadership, to NATO, and to the West as a whole. Putin is using this

invasion to demonstrate that the United States, NATO, and the EU, lacks the diplomatic economic and military capacity to counter a Russian power.

What does this invasion tell us about Russia? Many tend to kind of look at this war as an isolated event, but the fact is, that Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a continuum in Putin's foreign policy. It is part of a campaign plan or campaign history that includes energy embargos against Ukraine and the Baltics, a cyber-attack on Estonia, and the invasion of Georgia.

With seven years of precedents, Russia's invasion of Ukraine is clearly not an isolated event. It is part and parcel of a revanchist policy by Putin. He defines Russian greatness, not in terms of ideology but in terms of territory and nationalism, and, for that matter, an ugly form of nationalism.

The really dangerous thing is he is backing it up with military power. And I am struck by the difference between Russian military capability in 2008 and what we have seen demonstrated in Ukraine. Remember the pictures of the drunk Russian soldiers staggering on the backside of the battlefield, when Russia invaded Georgia? Russia actually had some difficulty invading Georgia? It won that conflict by mass, certainly not by skill. Georgians were knocking down aircraft and UAVs.

It is also important to remember what stopped Putin in Georgia in that summer of 2008. They would have kept on going had not the United States, demonstrated a little bit of muscle, that involved flying Georgian troops and humanitarian supplies into the country with USAF air lifters, basically signaling that the was ready directly risk a fight with Russian forces. That stopped Putin.

Compare that Russian military to what we recently saw in Crimea. I was really struck by the 20,000 to 30,000 Special Forces that deployed and fanned across that peninsula. Slick equipment, crisp uniforms, unbelievable communications discipline. This is a very different entity that we are dealing with. It shows how determined Moscow has been in learning from the lessons from 2008. It is reaping the benefits of a significant modernization of its armed forces. That was a professional force that we saw in Crimea. It is a professional undertaking we see in Eastern Ukraine.

And Moscow is backing this modernization up with a \$750 billion acquisition budget that is yielding new deployments in the Arctic, new deployments in Belarus, fifth generation aircraft, a shift of forces over to the Western Frontier, and massive military exercises. I met with a senior European chief of defense, and I asked him, "What has struck you most about Russian military modernization plans?" And he said without a snap, "their ability to decide quickly and to quickly mobilize large amounts of forces." Indeed we have seen Putin initiate on short notice exercises in the scale of 100 thousand. Literally, Putin gets on a weekend, calls up a military district, and says I want an exercise, and they have got 19, 20 thousand people out there.

Our largest NATO exercise for collective defense was Steadfast Jazz that had five thousand, maybe not even that, of which two thousand were desk jockeys. This is an order of magnitude about which we should be concerned. And these exercises are being complemented

by to increasingly assertive shows of force by the Russian forces, not just in Ukraine, but in the Arctic and the Baltic. These demonstrations of military force are intended remind the West that Putin is a big deal, and they are intimidating, particularly to the Central European neighbors.

So what should our response be? I was a little bit surprised when some say that we should be impressed by the international response to Russia's aggression. I am the opposite. I have been underwhelmed. I see a lot of rhetoric and completely inadequate action.

Let's examine the West's economic sanctions against Russia. They have had no discernable effect Putin's calculus. He is beefing up the outskirts of Mariupol as we speak, with convoys going into Eastern Ukraine this last weekend, maybe even additional artillery pieces. What we have are targeted sanctions against specific and limited set of Russian entities. And the fact remains that even with these sanctions millions of dollars are sloshing back and forth over the Russian border, including in the energy sector.

We need to impose sectorial sanctions. Otherwise, what we have right now are red badges of courage for those who have been targeted – pins that demonstrate loyalty to Putin and little more. Some oligarchs have been actually boasting that they have been sanctioned. To date, our sanctions have had little to no impact on Russian decision-making.

Allow me an aside to share with you my view of economic balance of power between Russia and the EU. Russia is a \$2 trillion economy. As Senator McCain says, it is no more than a gas station with only one product, gas and oil, and one client: the EU. The EU is a \$12 trillion economy. It is globally integrated. It has an excess of LNG terminals that it does not know what to do with. It gets only one third of its gas from Russia. And the EU, by the way, is the biggest source for foreign investment into Russia. Moreover, it is backed by a \$16 trillion economy, US economy. How is it that a \$2 trillion gas station is able to intimidate a \$12 trillion economy, six times its size that backed by a \$16 trillion economy? The answer has to be a mix found in the West of strategic shortsightedness, moral fecklessness – allowing a neighbor to be invaded while one sit on ones hands – and pure corporate greed. It is really, really disappointing. We are not leveraging the economic capabilities that we have.

The West's Military response has been even more limited. As I pointed out, Russia mobilizes and exercises on a given day 65 thousand. At one time during the invasion of Crimea and the heating up of the events in Eastern Ukraine, some estimates had 80 thousand Russian troops mobilized on Ukraine's border. What has the West done? What has been its response? A dozen or so aircrafts in the Baltics and Iceland and into Romania backed by handful of companies, units of 200 or so soldiers. It is grossly inadequate. It is no surprise it has done nothing to change the Russian military calculus. It is a symbolic show of force. At best, it thickens the red line on NATO's Eastern frontier.

We should be doing a lot more in the military side. We need battalion level deployments on NATO's eastern frontier. Moreover, look how slow we are in our reactions to Russia's aggression! The European Reassurance Initiative was rolled out by Obama in June, and NATO readiness action plan was decided in September. Months after Russia's blatant seizure of

Ukrainian territory. And it is still today, not clear what specific actions the ERI or RAP will entail.

This does not communicate resolve to Russia. This certainly does not bolster Ukrainian confidence. What should we be doing with Ukraine? We should be providing lethal assistance to the Ukrainians; anti- tank weapons, air defense weapons, and other capabilities that would enable them to impose real costs on the invading force.

Instead we have communicated to both Kiev and Moscow that we see Ukraine on the far side of the red line.

How can we give anti-tank weapons to Syrian rebel organizations and not the Ukrainian armed forces which I think are probably more reliable than the former. It is even more disillusioning to the Ukrainian military when one recalls that they contributed to an Article 5 exercise November of last year, Steadfast Jazz in Poland. When the West fails to provide real military assistance to enable Ukraine to better defend itself, that alone sends a terrible message. It is a message of disillusionment for the Ukrainians, and one of encouragement to Putin and his cronies.

We ought to be doing NATO exercises in Ukraine. I am glad that EUCOM led an exercise there in June, but there should be more of them. It helps the Ukrainian military train, it is a demonstration of commitment, and it complicates Russian military planning. We ought to be putting, not OSCE surveillance capacities, but allied surveillance capacities and trainers into Ukraine. This is what we did for Georgia after the invasion. Why? Because it was the most effective way to help the Georgian build up their capability, and it brought into the mix a Western presence that little bit more dicey for Russian military planners, because they did not know what they were going to get involved with. If they were going to strike in, they might end up hitting an American, or European, and that complicated their plan. We should be doing things like that.

We need to do more on the information front. I am so glad the State Department is doing more on that, but it limited in resources. One needs more than ten or twenty million dollars when going up against the kind of propaganda efforts that the Russians are imposing on Ukraine and others.

So where are we now? Is the worst yet to come? I do not know if the worst is yet to come but there is more to come. One should very concerned by the continued flow of Russian equipment and personnel into Eastern Ukraine -- particularly this weekend -- and the recent repositioning of 'separatist' forces.

I am worried that the Ukrainian military is getting chewed up. Its combat capability has been significantly degraded over the last eight months. So if there is another big showdown over Mariupol, it is not just going to be the loss of Mariupol but it could be a real crippling of the Ukrainian ability to exercise conventional resistance to Russian aggression. So I am pessimistic.

On a more positive note, one has to be impressed at how this invasion of Ukraine has reinforced the strength of the Ukrainian national identity. It is something that we should be fostering; and, it is something that we should not take for granted.

For this reason real thought has to be given to how NATO responds to any Ukrainian expression of interest in membership. We are going to have the most pro-reform, the most pro-Western, the most Europe-oriented and the most pro-NATO government in Kiev in Ukraine's history. Are Washington and Brussels, thinking strategically about how we are going to embrace those aspirations. And it just cannot be, "no, we do not want to hear about it." We have to have a strategy to think about how we embrace it in a way that is constructive and gives them more confidence.

What we need is strategy that integrates stronger, sectorial economic sanctions, a more robust military response along NATO's frontiers, real tangible efforts to help the Ukrainians defend themselves, all coupled with a broader vision that embraces Ukraine's European and transatlantic aspirations. That is going to be the most effective way to reverse Russia's course.

We have got to change course, we have got to have a firmer response, we have got to be more committed to Ukrainian sovereignty than we have. Otherwise we are going to end up with a far more complicated, perhaps more devastating problem.

Patrick Murphy

In the middle 1990s my wife Marlies and I adopted two children, now young adults, from Lviv in Western Ukraine. Later we, mainly my wife, helped 48 other Ukrainian kids to be adopted by American, often Ukrainian-American, parents. Hence my ongoing interest in that important and wonderful country.

The present crisis started early last spring, when the Ukrainian people forced their corrupt and pro-Russian President Yanukovich out of office. Within a few days and to everybody's surprise, the man I sometimes call "rasPutin" threw away \$50 billion worth of Olympic goodwill by seizing the Crimean Peninsula for Russia. And within a few weeks he started a minor-league civil war in Eastern Ukraine because, he claimed, Russian speakers were being oppressed. Recent Ukrainian Government elections in which Russian speakers took part seem to indicate that those Russian speakers much prefer to live in a democratic state which is pro-European but where Russian is a minority language, to living in Mother Russia with Putin as dictator.

By now his forces, Ukrainian-Russian or actual Russian citizens, have more or less secured their base in Donetsk and Luhansk, and may advance on Mariupol as well. This would give them a seaport and set the stage for further Russian advances to form a land bridge with Crimea and perhaps even eventually with Russian-held Transdnistria in Moldova. Of course, such developments would cut off Ukraine itself fully from its present Black Sea saltwater shores, and would add its great port city of Odessa to "Novorossiia." Pro-Russian forces also shot down a Malaysian Airways plane with a loss of nearly 300 lives, and all together are responsible for the loss of several thousand lives.

Mentioning Moldova brings up the question, "Why are we talking about Ukraine in a way we never spent much time on Moldova or Georgia, both of which have suffered partial Russian occupation for several years?" The reason is that Ukraine is the canary in the coal mine: Ukraine has a direct border with several NATO members, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania. Thus, what happens in Ukraine has a direct effect on NATO itself, and particularly on the three Baltic Republic NATO members, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. As if to underline the point, Putin sent Russian air force planes over the seas bordering Sweden, Norway, the United Kingdom, Germany, etc., all the way to Portugal before turning back. Putin did NATO and Ukraine itself a favor by doing so—some of the West European countries seem less than enthusiastic about such "old-fashioned" NATO ideas as Article 5's "an attack on one is an attack on all." Putin reminded these countries, plus neutral Sweden and Finland, that we are all in this together. A poll from a week ago showed that for the first time more Swedes favored joining NATO than opposed it.

One of the curious things about the West's response to Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine is, in a way, the West's refusal to call it what it is and to meet it head on. Apparently, when Vice President Biden recently declared that Russia had "invaded" Ukraine, he had to retract that statement. The West's financial sanctions seem always to be "a day late and a dollar short," though to be fair, they are having an effect, perhaps a serious one (along with the drop in the price of oil!) on the Russian economy.

And when the European Union recently signed an association agreement with Ukraine, it also signed a “Deep and Comprehensive Free-Trade Agreement” or DCFTA with that country. It is the latter that really implements changes both in trade between Ukraine and Europe, and within the battered Ukrainian economy itself. The Russians strong-armed the EU into postponing the entry into force of the Free-Trade Agreement from November 2014 to December 31, 2015, during which time they will presumably do all they can to stop its implementation from ever fully occurring. Ukrainian Deputy Foreign Minister Danylo Lubkivsky resigned in disgust at these developments.

Strangest of all, the West so far has refused to provide Ukraine any lethal weapons. The U.S. is providing MREs or Meals Ready to Eat, as well as blankets, etc., but as Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko courageously told an enthusiastic U.S. Congress a month or so ago, “. . . one cannot win the war with blankets.” And when Senators Carl Levin and James Inhofe recently wrote a bi-partisan article in the Washington Post titled “Why Ukraine should have U.S. weapons,” even they limited such aid to “providing defensive weapons that would help Ukraine defend its territory. . . . [T]hese weapons are lethal but not provocative because they are defensive.” They would include anti-tank weapons, but apparently no tanks as such. But how can Ukraine win back its own territory if it does not have what the senators must think of as offensive weapons? Finally, how can one in many cases even so easily distinguish between defensive and offensive weapons?

The ironic thing is that the Ukrainians have had enough of being pushed around for centuries by their neighbors, especially Russia. Many people forget that when the Germans invaded the Soviet Union in World War II, they met with ferocious partisan warfare, no matter what it cost the partisan (or guerrillas) if they were captured. And where did this partisan warfare largely take place? In Ukraine. I have already read that Ukrainian grandfathers are telling their grandchildren (of BOTH sexes), “Seventy years ago it was our turn; now it is yours.” The mothers of Russian soldiers have repeatedly told the press that they were amazed to get cell phone calls from their sons, saying that the sons were in Ukraine. When some of these sons return home in body bags, that will—and already has begun to—have an effect on the ordinary Russian citizens who gave Putin a pass on, for instance, Crimea. The Ukrainians will fight to the last man and woman to prevent a full Russian takeover of their country. It does appear that Putin is somewhat aware of that, as he has not really pushed very hard recently (though the latest reports are that more unmarked military vehicles have entered Ukraine).

Putin is in this game for the long haul. Are we?

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Established in 1994, the activities of IUCTS are guided by an International Research Council that offers recommendations for study on different aspects of terrorism, both conventional and unconventional. IUCTS is cooperating academically with universities and think tanks in over 40 countries, as well as with governmental, intergovernmental, and nongovernmental bodies.

International Center for Terrorism Studies (ICTS)

Established in 1998 by the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, in Arlington, VA, ICTS administers IUCTS activities and sponsors an internship program in terrorism studies.

Inter-University Center for Legal Studies (IUCLS)

Established in 1999 and located at the International Law Institute in Washington, D.C., IUCLS conducts seminars and research on legal aspects of terrorism and administers training for law students.

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