



Russia to be major loser in Ukraine



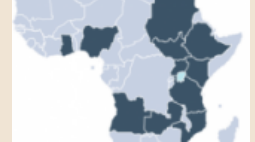
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## Guest post: Ukraine's unpalatable choices – capitulate, fight or consolidate

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*By Taras Kuzio of the University of Alberta*

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine the tide on the battlefield has turned against Kiev, with its armed forces and volunteer National Guard on the retreat. Russia's next move could be to push towards Mariupol to create a land corridor from Russia through the Donbas to occupied

Crimea.

Whatever steps Vladimir Putin, Russia's president, takes next it is beyond doubt that two of Europe's biggest countries are at war.

Ukraine must choose between three options: capitulate, fight or consolidate.

The first option entails acceptance of Putin's de facto demand for Donbas "statehood" inside Ukraine. Such a state, which he has called New Russia using the Tsarist name for eastern and southern Ukraine, with its own security forces and extensive autonomy, would transform Ukraine into a federalised state.

Through New Russia, Moscow would hold a veto over Ukraine's domestic and foreign policies. Russia has long sought to prevent CIS countries such as Georgia and Ukraine from joining Nato and more recently has opposed their European integration through the Association Agreements both signed this year with the European Union.

It would be political suicide for any Ukrainian president, including Petro Poroshenko, to agree to transform Ukraine into a second Belarus. He would come under intense pressure from Yulia Tymoshenko, Euromaidan civil society and the nationalists who fill the ranks of the volunteer battalions.

A second option would be for Ukraine to regroup its forces and re-launch military and partisan attacks against Russian and separatist forces. No western government questions Ukraine's right to use all methods available to regain control of its territory but such a strategy would be difficult to pursue without western military assistance, advice, training and intelligence.

Such aid is more likely to come from countries such as the UK, the US and Canada rather than through Nato. Calls to provide Ukraine with military assistance aim to make Putin pay for his imperial adventures as Russian casualties mount in Ukraine. Other sources are unavailable: Ukrainian émigré communities have not followed the

example set by the Croatian diaspora who raised tens of millions of dollars, smuggled arms and sent volunteers to support Croatia in its Homeland War of 1991 to 1995.

The downside of re-launching a military campaign would be two-fold. First, it would involve heavy fighting that would further transform the Donbas into an economic and urban wasteland. Civilian casualties would be very high. Second, Ukrainian military successes could trigger a greater invasion of Russian forces deeper into Ukraine. Putin may have bragged to EU leaders that his forces could be in Kiev in two weeks but this ignores the widespread anti-Russian mood throughout Ukraine and the huge size of Ukraine requiring the use of half of Russia's 750,000 armed forces.

A third option supported by some western Ukrainian intellectuals and outlined by Alexander J Motyl of Rutgers University calls for rebuilding Ukraine without the Donbas and ultimately Crimea. These are the most pro-Russian and Soviet of Ukraine's regions; without them Ukraine would be a very different country. The Communist Party and Party of Regions, each with their home bases in these two areas, have won four out of six parliamentary elections. But with the former soon to be banned and the latter having disintegrated they will not win many seats in next month's elections.

Motyl calls for Ukrainian forces to withdraw from the Donbas and concentrate on protecting the remainder of Ukraine's territory. A referendum could be held under international auspices to decide the future of the Donbas, between remaining in Ukraine or joining Russia (separatist leaders seek the latter).

There are four pitfalls to this approach. First, Putin's appetite for territorially dismembering Ukraine may not stop at the Donbas and he may have his eye on neighbouring Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporozhzhya. Second, nationalists would be opposed to giving up territory that many of their comrades died fighting for. Third, western and southern regions of Donetsk and Northern Luhansk would not wish to join Russia. Fourth, Putin himself would oppose the Donbas joining Russia precisely because Kiev might support such a move.

Such an option would only work to Ukraine's benefit if it gave up territorial claims to the Crimea and the Donbas. Countries cannot join Nato or the EU with territorial conflicts, which is why Putin wishes to carve out another frozen conflict in eastern Ukraine.

Of our three options, the outcome of the first would be to transform Ukraine's president into a Russian suzerain. Six years ago, Kostyantyn Gryshchenko, Ukraine's ambassador to Moscow, said the Kremlin wanted a "regency" – someone in power in Kiev who is totally subservient.

The second and third options are more palatable to Ukraine's leaders but would require western military assistance, which this week's Nato summit in Wales will discuss. The US and the UK are morally bound to assist Ukraine because they signed the 1994 Budapest Memorandum which provided Ukraine with security guarantees in exchange for giving up the world's third largest nuclear arsenal, bigger than the nuclear stockpiles of France, the UK and China combined (Russia also signed but reneged).

Which of the three options Ukraine opts to pursue will have a profound impact on European security and the west's relations with Russia.

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