

Putin's War against Ukraine

Taras Kuzio

This is a large book, embracing a vast amount of research. Kuzio provides the conclusion to the book as the conclusion to his introduction. It is somber, but realistic:

"There cannot be a conclusion to the book because the Donbas is an unresolved conflict that is on-going. There will be no closure of the Ukraine-Russia crisis as long as Putin is Russian president which will be as long as he remains alive. To fully implement the Minsk-2 Accords would mean jettisoning the DNR-LNR which Putin will not do and therefore, a political resolution to the Donbas conflict is difficult to envisage."

Having lived in Kyiv for ten years, I was witness to the latter chapters of the drama that Kuzio describes. His account jibes with what I witnessed, and provides a coherent explanation of the events as they unfolded. The animus against Yanukovich was universal. His blatant theft was visible to all. Every merchant I dealt with lived in fear of his tax police. We saw, or more often read accounts about, the depredations of the titushki (paid thugs) on a daily basis.

One of my key questions in 2014 was whether it might have been better to endure Yanukovich for another couple of years, until the elections. The Ukrainian people answered for me -- they had had enough. It wasn't exactly a coup, because the opposition was not well organized and because Yanukovich fled before he could be overthrown. But the will of the people was clear. He had to go. Kuzio makes a strong case that if it had not happened then, Yanukovich might have had time to secure his dictatorship in such a way that he could not be dislodged through democratic means.

Kuzio provides the most thorough and accurate description of the language situation I have ever read. A fact he often repeats is that a majority of the soldiers fighting against the Russians are themselves Russian speakers. Putin's claim that he is protecting a persecuted linguistic minority is absolute nonsense. Kuzio makes the very useful analogy between the use of English in Ireland and that of Russian in Ukraine. It is a matter of history and convenience.

Ukrainian is not a dialect of Russian. They are very distinct languages. Speaking Spanish, I was able to learn Portuguese quite easily. Speaking Russian has not enabled me to master Ukrainian. They have different alphabets and even different grammars. As a resident of Kyiv for 10 years I have not been forced to, and almost not been in a position to speak Ukrainian. Everybody I interact with is exactly as Kuzio describes – ardently Ukrainian, but nevertheless Russian speaking.

A question Kuzio does not raise is the utility of a language. For better or worse, Russian is a world language. There is a significant body of scientific literature, fiction and poetry written in Russian. It is, or was until recently, the lingua franca of the former USSR.

A lot of information about Kuzio himself is packed in the brief lead into his chapter entitled Anti-Zionism and Anti-Semitism: "Ukraine is in the hands of homosexuals and Jewish oligarchs. Aleksandr Dugin"

Russian philosopher Dugin is one of Kuzio's major *bête noires*. Kuzio's book makes it clear that Dugin is as much of an activist as he is a philosopher. Dugin seems to have a hand in most things anti-Ukrainian. As a philosopher he is nothing – his book [[ASIN:1907166653 The Fourth Political Theory]] is the subject of the most savage pan I have ever written. Nonetheless, he is taken seriously by the resurgent Russian nationalists and Putin himself.

Dugin's claim that Ukraine is in the hands of homosexuals is absurd. Homosexuals are tolerated here, but they are discrete. Most Ukrainians, though they have no love whatsoever for Russia, are largely in sympathy with Russia's stand against the flaunting of homosexuality. The college-educated twentysomethings whom I know seem unaware that they even know homosexuals, though it appears to this San Franciscan that some people in our circles must be gay.

The claim that Ukraine is in the hand of Jewish oligarchs is quite another matter. Kuzio gives quite rational explanations for anti-Ukrainian, anti-Belarusian and anti-Russian sentiment, a great deal of which he manifests himself. He somehow looks at anti-Semitism as a phenomenon that is beyond explanation. I would contend that it should be regarded just as the other anti- concepts. Especially in the former USSR, where the Jews were regarded as a separate people in the same way as Ukrainians.

He writes about the forged Protocols of the Elders of Zion. Fraud or hoax might be a better word. Internet sources name the author as a certain Russian Professor S. Nilus writing in 1901. The attractiveness of the fraud is that it coincides quite neatly with widely held opinions about the Jews, many of which have some substance.

Going to substance, Kuzio mentions some of the major Jewish oligarchs, Kolomoisky and Taruta, and some of the Jewish participants and Ukrainian politics: Yatsenyuk and Groisman. He discounts the notion that President Poroshenko's father, born Valtzman, was Jewish. I had never heard this account questioned. Other prominent Jews in Ukrainian politics/oligarchy who come immediately to mind include Feldman and Rabinowitz. It is not that there is anything wrong with Jews occupying dominant positions, but "simple Ivan" is not so stupid as to fail to notice them. It is also widely perceived that the Jewish oligarchs are no better or worse than the others, in that they put their personal interests ahead of that of the people who elected them. Poroshenko has been a major disappointment. Kuzio writes of Kolomoisky's support of the volunteer battalions in Donbas. True – but it was totally in line with his business interests.

The fact that six of the seven billionaires to emerge after the collapse of the USSR were Jewish belies Kuzio's claims that they were radically disadvantaged in the USSR. More balanced accounts of Soviet Judaism have been written by [[ASIN:0245527850 Robert Wistrich]], [[ASIN:5969707023 Alexander Solzhenitsyn]] and [[ASIN:0691127603 Yuri Slezkine]].

Even a paranoid has enemies. American Jewish neocons, especially Victoria Nuland and husband Robert Kagan, actively involved in Ukrainian politics, were strongly anti-Russian. Though Kuzio is absolutely correct that the animus of the Ukrainian people for Yanukovych was more than enough to power the Maidan uprising, it is also probably true that the CIA was covertly abetting the protesters.

Kuzio's history of the Donbas and Crimea provides a very useful background to the conflict. After the Welsh engineer John Hughes discovered coal around Donetsk in the 1880s there was a rush to exploit it. The sparse population of Ukrainian farmers was not interested in working the mines. The Russians brought in men from all over the Empire. A large number were criminals who earned early release by promising to work there. Others were simply soldiers of fortune.

Mining is dirty, dangerous and very masculine work. Kuzio reports that the history of the Donbas always mirrored the miners themselves. Politically, it sat in the middle between the Russians and the Ukrainians, respecting neither very much and casting its lot with whoever appeared at the moment to be most generous to them, more often Moscow than Kyiv.

Kuzio relates that Lenin included the Donbas within the Ukrainian SSR as a built-in fifth column, as a lever to control all of Ukraine. It remained after independence in 1991. The Donbas' unique culture and clannishness protected its politicians from probing inquiries into their dark pasts, such as Yanukovych' two prison terms. They would overlook his depredations and send him to Kyiv with the idea that "he's a crook, but he's our crook."

Crimea's history is even more convoluted, but the bottom line is that it has always been Russian speaking and did not identify greatly with Ukraine.

Kuzio reports, seemingly approvingly, that fellow author Alexander Motyl believes that Ukraine would be better off without these insubordinate, intransigent ingrates.

In the end, Kuzio sums the origins of the crisis up very well, "The roots of the Ukraine-Russia crisis do not lie in EU and NATO enlargement and democracy promotion, as left-wing scholars and realists would have us believe, but in two factors. The first is Russia's and specifically Putin's unwillingness to accept Ukrainians are a separate people and Ukraine is an independent state with a sovereign right to determine its geopolitical alliances. The second is Yanukovich and the Donetsk clan's penchant for the monopolization of power, state capture, corporate raiding of the state and willingness to accommodate practically every demand made by Moscow that culminated in treason on a grand scale. This was coupled with a shift to Sovietophile and Ukrainophobic nationality policies and return to Soviet style treatment of political opponents. Taken together, these policies made popular protests inevitable in the 2015 elections but they came a year earlier after Yanukovich bowed to Russian pressure to back away from the EU Association Agreement. These protests, in turn, became violent and nationalistic in response to the Party of Regions and KPU's destruction of Ukraine's democracy through the passing of draconian legislation, the president's refusal to compromise and his use of vigilantes and police spetsnaz for political repression, torture, and murders of protestors."

The question facing Ukraine at the moment is how to resolve the war in Donbas and how to prevent Russia from making further incursions. Kuzio shares some very useful insights in this regard.

Even in 2014, Russia simply did not have the resources to conquer Ukraine even if it had had the desire. Kuzio repeatedly makes the point that the Russian doctrine of hybrid war depends on a sympathetic or at least indifferent local populace. Even in the Donbass the Russians have not been welcomed by a majority.

Time and again, Putin proves himself too smart by half. In his desire to maintain deniability, he employed Chechens, Don Cossacks and "political tourists," thugs from all over Russia to infiltrate the Donbass as separatists. Criminals are simply not suited for either civil administration or organized warfare. After three months it was clear to Putin that he had to use Russian troops and administrators, pushing the separatists aside. Not mentioned in the book is the fact that a great many of the separatist leaders died mysteriously. Although Russia attempted to frame Ukraine for "Motorola's" death, it appears to have been done by Russian agents. Russia's treacherous duplicity neither won the war for them nor fooled anybody for very long.

Russia has thus had several handicaps in capturing and holding even the small, Russophone and previously Russophile enclaves in Lugansk and Donetsk. The LPR and DPR would not survive without ongoing Russian support. They have not won the hearts and minds of the people.

This calls to mind Custine's [\[\[ASIN:014139451X Penguin Classics Letters From Russia\]\]](#) on the fact that Russian duplicity and deceit made it impossible for them ever to subvert the West. Alexandr Zinoviev summed it up exquisitely in his satirical [\[\[ASIN:0871130807 Homo Sovieticus\]\]](#):

"Even though the West seems chaotic, frivolous and defenseless, all the same Moscow will never achieve worldwide supremacy. Moscow can defend itself against any opponent. Moscow can deliver a knockout blow on the west. Moscow has the wherewithal to mess up the whole planet. But it has no chance of becoming the ruler of the world. To rule the world one must have at one's disposal a sufficiently great nation. That nation must feel itself to be a nation of rulers. And when it comes to it, one that can rule in reality. In the Soviet Union the Russians are the only people who might be suited to that role. They are the foundation and the bulwark of the Empire. But they don't possess the qualities of a ruling nation. And in the Soviet empire their situation is more like that of being a colony for all the other peoples in it."

This is the bottom line, something for the warmongers in Washington to keep in mind. Ukraine and NATO cannot defeat Russia on its own doorstep, but Russia can certainly defeat itself. For NATO to arm Ukraine, as the west did Georgia, or continue to crowd it as they are doing in the Baltics, is counterproductive. It would be quite possible, but also quite stupid for Russia to roll over its neighbors. The adventure in Ukraine has already been expensive, and holding Crimea and Donbas will only become more so. Conversely, for the west to arm countries against the Russians, as the US did in

Vietnam, Afghanistan and Nicaragua, proved quite deadly for these supposed friends. Ukraine and the west should wait Putin out just as they waited out the USSR.

I have a couple of quibbles with the book. Kuzio uses the word "Fascist" to characterize various Russian nationalist groups that support Putin and attack Ukrainians. Fascism died with Hitler, 72 years ago. There should be a better term. This is especially true as Putin terms Ukrainians as "Fascists." The word is inappropriate, old and clichéd.

Kuzio goes on to paint the rising nationalist movements in Europe as Fascist, or extreme right wing. He excoriates Marine le Pen for taking Putin's money. There is a strong case to be made that anti-democrats, supported by mainstream parties, have seized the European Parliament and strongly suppressed free speech, open debate and the ability of such nationalists to find funding. Their national banks are prejudicially closed to Farage, Wilders, Orban, le Pen and the others. Kuzio should be more accommodating to the nationalists. Ukraine may soon find itself forced to work with them. Moreover, they have many good points. [[ASIN:1907166416 Generation Identity]] provides a succinct summary. It is a book of the millennial generation, the nationalists' strongest base, outlining their case against their elders, the boomers.

Ukraine is a conservative country. It is not wise to push the west's liberal agendas with regard to immigration, homosexuality, feminism and civil rights for the Roma and at the same time steel Ukraine for its fight against Russia. Even joining the battle against corruption smells of hypocrisy, as evidence of political corruption emerges all over the west. It is better to recognize the simple facts, as Kuzio does, and have a bit of faith. Ukraine managed against stiffer odds in 2014. It will survive.