

Delusions in Ukrainian Politics, Left, Right, and Center

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If I were forced to name the biggest problem with mainstream Ukrainian politics today, I'd have to say it can be summed up in one word — delusion. Denial and magical thinking appear to permeate the politics of every major political force in Ukraine, but each section of the political spectrum seems to have its specific delusions. I've decided to lay out these delusions by focusing on three identifiable segments in Ukrainian politics, the far right, the centrists or liberals, and the far left. Given Ukraine's current situation, I must point out that I am deliberately excluding those groups who appear to be in one of those three aforementioned categories but are in fact projects of the Kremlin or pro-Kremlin in any way. Such groups only claim to be interested in improving Ukraine in the most superficial, minimal way, and in any case, anyone in Ukraine who thinks that returning to a state of full Muscovite neocolonialism could ever be even remotely positive is delusional beyond all rehabilitation.

I shall start with the easiest of the three factions to evaluate- the far-right. As in most countries, Ukraine's far right is chimerical and difficult to pin down. There is certainly some overlap between their ideas and those of some of the centrist or «national» liberals. Nevertheless, this faction is delusional for a number of reasons. The difficulty is only in deciding where to begin when examining the far-right pathology.

The Far-Right: Immoral, Irrational, and Incompetent

Perhaps we should start with practical matters, grand strategy. First of all, Putin's regime has successfully established Russia as a beacon for the global far-right. Virtually every far-right party of organization in the West, both Europe and the Americas, look to Russia as a bastion of traditional values and some lost form of Western civilization that has allegedly been corrupted by liberals and Marxists. In fact, this belief about Russia can be more or less found as much as a century ago, and even the Bolshevik revolution and the establishment of the USSR couldn't stop far-right figures from looking to Moscow as a potential ally. This is a long and complex history, but I am referring to it here only to point out that this is a deep-rooted phenomenon that can't be easily undone, lest any Ukrainian nationalist think it is possible. The only far-right movements which are opposed to the Kremlin tend to be those in countries that have a historical grievance against Moscow, typically in the Baltics states, Croatia, and Poland, for example. Even some supporters of Poland's far-right PiS party have been reported to engage in what could be called soft or subtle pro-Moscow activity. It should be obvious that if Ukraine bets on far-right nationalism, to speak nothing of what kind of country we'd end up with when it is run by thuggish egomaniacs and legions of football hooligans, it would be totally isolated and faced with a global far-right movement that is firmly on Putin's side.

And we cannot speak about the Western far-right and its Kremlin connections without pointing out how Ukraine's far right-nationalists have become a national security threat. Apart from providing wonderful grist for Moscow's propaganda mills and embarrassing the country with their stunts, Ukraine's far-right has been making connections with groups in Europe that are known to be pro-Kremlin and which could have ties to Russian intelligence agencies. For example, for the 14 October nationalist march in 2018, members of a youth wing associated with the far-right National Democratic Party of Germany were invited to participate. The «adult» wing of this party has a long history of pro-Kremlin ties and activities. In fact, the party is said to have «firmly sided» with Russia ever since the annexation of the Crimea in 2014. The idea that some

Ukrainian nationalists could convince this party to give up on working with a strong regional power like Russia in favor of a «Western puppet state» is simply ludicrous. This sort of thing begs the question as to what sort of trash Ukraine's far right have been inviting into the country.

What is more, we have well over a century of history, as well as the present, showing us exactly what the limits of nationalism are. Were Ukraine not in such a dire situation at the moment, it would almost be amusing to look at the way Ukrainian nationalists express rage at Hungary's actions in Transcarpathia, or the Polish government's attacks on Ukrainian official history. What did you expect? Those governments are controlled by nationalists. In a similar vein, it one often sees Ukrainian far-right nationalists and their apologists dismiss international concerns about things such as history or language policy, and yet they are always dismayed when they see politicians or other public figures in the West express disdain for supporting Ukraine. When there is criticism about the tolerance of far-right groups or glorification of figures like Roman Shukhevych, it is dismissed with «We don't care what any other country thinks!» but the same people have their hand out, shouting «Please, give us Javelins!»

In short, the Ukrainian far-right nationalist believes nationalism is morally right for Ukraine, but demands that all other peoples be strict internationalists. And this is a general problem with nationalism- one nation's heroes are another nation's villains. This is especially a problem in Eastern Europe, where nurturing old grudges seems to be the regional sport. There was a time when nationalism took on a progressive character, specifically, when much of the world was ruled by colonial empires. But just as nation states emerged out from under imperial domination, so did they come face to face with the limitations and drawbacks of the nation state itself. The Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan decisively identified the root of this problem in his work *Democratic Confederalism*, in which he noted a key flaw of nationalism. Namely, humans typically did not settle into homogeneous geographic territories. Ukrainians need only to look to their own history in relation to the Polish Second Republic to see this problem in action. Like so many nation-states before and after, Poland made promises to guarantee the rights of non-Polish minority groups, which in total made up a significant part of the population. As anyone with even cursory knowledge of Ukrainian history surely knows, Poland reneged on these promises almost from the beginning.

If humans had settled into homogeneous geographic territories, there would be little problem with nationalism. Moreover, if human society wasn't divided into antagonistic classes, it would also eliminate one of the main flaws of nationalism, i.e. the assumption that everyone who is Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, etc. has the same interests based on nationality alone. Perhaps in such an ideal world, nationalism could exist without being harmful. But that world is nothing but a fantasy. The world we actually live in today has approximately 195 recognized states, nearly all of which have sizable and numerous minority groups, not to mention immigrants. Given the challenges facing our species, particularly in the realm of climate change and the danger of global war for resources, any rational thinking person ought to be horrified by the fact that we live in an age where nationalism is on the rise across the globe. Those who think nationalism, especially far-right nationalism, is the best path for Ukraine are steering the country toward destruction, for it is highly unlikely that in a battle royale with 194 other contestants, Ukraine will emerge the victor.

The «Pacifist Left»

Now let us turn to what passes for the far-left in Ukraine, what I've heard some call the pacifist left. If I had to define them, I would say these are sincere Marxists who do seem to be genuinely concerned with social issues in Ukraine and in some cases organize to alleviate them. They should not be confused with false leftists such as the Russian-front organization Borotba or the inappropriately-named «Communist Party of Ukraine,» both of which I would argue were far-right or at least red-brown organizations. The leftists I'm speaking about, at least based on my interactions and observations of them, are sincere in their progressive beliefs and most likely not linked to the Kremlin's security apparatus in any way.

The common thread that seems to unite these types is their constant calls for «peace,» to «fulfill Minsk,» and so on, but in nearly all cases the appeals are aimed at both Kyiv and Moscow, as though they bear equal responsibility for what is happening. They condemn «warmongering» rhetoric regardless of which side it is coming from, not taking notice of the fact that one nation's warmongering literally led to a war, for starters. Any additional «warmongering» rhetoric coming from that particular side is an implicit threat of further invasion, occupation, partition, and annexation. By contrast, while the tough talk of some Ukrainian politicians may justify rolling one's eyes, they are speaking about defending their own country from external aggression, even if it's clear they have no actual plan for victory.

These seemingly sincere but very confused leftists are engaging in what we call bothsidesism, making a false equivalency between Moscow and Kyiv. They say the most important thing is for both sides to fulfill Minsk II, but Russia has made it painfully, indeed literally painfully clear that it has no intention of fulfilling this agreement. Reminders of this trickle in from the front line in flag-covered caskets, sometimes on a daily basis. Minsk II was broken from the very start, when the Russian invaders continued their campaign to take Debaltseve. It is broken every time one of their soldiers or collaborators opens fire on Ukrainian positions. If Moscow really wanted peace, if it could have it in a matter of hours.

There is also the question of what fulfilling Minsk would even mean. Suppose Moscow, and Moscow is the only one who has the power here, did actually «fulfill Minsk II.» What then? Would this mean peace? Did our concerned pacifists forget that Russia had signed two peace treaties with Ukraine in the 1990's? What good would one more peace treaty be with the Putin regime? The same goes for negotiating directly with the «separatists.» These are literally agents of the Kremlin, not a genuine home-grown separatist movement. To think that negotiating with them could ever secure a peace treaty more unbreakable than the Budapest Memorandum or the Russian-Ukrainian Friendship Treaty is delusional.

The only peace you will ever have with the Putin regime is that which you force it to agree. Personally I believe there can never be peace or normal relations with the Putin regime or any Russian state in its currently-existing form, but that's a matter for another, much longer article. What the Ukrainian left needs to understand is that it can never hope to achieve any success in the struggle for human and workers' rights in Ukraine, nor in the struggles against corruption and far-right reaction, unless it can first state the obvious, that Ukraine is currently under attack by what amounts to a 21st century fascist, imperialist regime, and secondly, mobilize people more effectively to resist that attack. Stop calling for «peace» that isn't coming, and instead start forming volunteer battalions.

The Center

This leaves us with the third and largest group, the liberals, for lack of a better word. There are some who refer to a sub-category of «national liberals,» who share some ideological overlap with elements of the right, but that distinction isn't important. In general the liberals are a nebulous group, and many of them do sincerely hold progressive, positive positions on most issues facing Ukraine. The problem is, however, they still hold onto their own delusion.

If the delusion of the pacifistic left is thinking their calls for peace will succeed, the delusion of the liberal centrists is that Ukraine can somehow achieve victory and restore its territorial integrity without working for it, without sacrifice. It doesn't take a genius to realize that the National Corps' plan for acquiring nuclear weapons is a fantasy, but the liberal center puts forth ideas which are just as fantastical. The only proposal for victory I've seen from a liberal politician, in this case President Poroshenko, is a UN peacekeeping mission in the Donbas. Ignoring the question of the Crimea for now, this is a completely pointless topic to discuss. Any UN peacekeeping mission in Ukraine would have to be approved by the UN Security Council, in which Russia has a permanent seat. Moscow has made it very clear that it has no intention of allowing any sort of UN peacekeeping mission other than one whose deployment is limited to the line of contact and not the Russian-Ukrainian border.

But let us suppose one day that Russia's UN representative drinks too much boyarishnik and forgets to veto a UN peacekeeping mission covering the whole occupied territory to the border. What would be accomplished? For one thing, there's no guarantee that Russia wouldn't supply a large contingent of peacekeepers for the mission. This would allow Russia to openly station troops in occupied Donbas, meaning that if for any reason they came under attack for any reason, Russia could have a pretext for further invasion into Ukraine similar to what it did in Georgia in 2008. At the very least, the presence of a UN Peacekeeping mission in the Donbas would help to legitimize the DNR and LNR much in the same way that the peacekeeping mission in Bosnia legitimized the Republika Srpska in Bosnia (which still exists to this day as part of Bosnia and Herzegovina and has been a source of tension in the country recently).

Another similar delusion is the idea that Ukraine can somehow find protection in NATO prior to recovering its lost territory. This notion gained popularity after the Rada's adoption of a resolution to orient the country toward NATO membership. Those who dream of protection within the alliance forget that a country does not simply join NATO; they must be invited and unanimously accepted by the existing member states. The opposition of just one member state is enough to block the whole process, as we have seen in the case of Greece and Macedonia. With Ukraine it would be even more difficult, as there are several NATO countries which have fallen under the influence of Kremlin-friendly parties. Hungary would be the most obvious potential objector, especially given the situation in the Transcarpathia at the moment. Italy or the United Kingdom could be other potential opponents of membership. The nationalist government in Poland could possibly block membership over the rehabilitation of the OUN and UPA; if this seems far-fetched, remember that Greece was blocking Macedonia's EU and NATO membership bids all this time mainly due to the country's name.

But there is another bigger issue which could potentially serve as an excuse for less Kremlin-influenced governments to reject Ukraine's NATO ascension. In fact, it is the biggest issue—Ukraine has an ongoing border dispute with Russia, and there is an active war with that state in the east. This creates a serious problem over NATO's most important rule, Article 5, which states

that an attack on one NATO member is an attack on all members. Essentially, Article 5 would be triggered the moment Ukraine is allowed to join, basically creating a war between Russia and NATO, and there are many NATO member states whose governments are quite opposed to Russia yet not willing to actually fight a war against it. There is no way they could claim that Article 5 hasn't been triggered, as the only time it's ever been triggered was after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. The idea that Article 5 can be invoked against a non-state actor but not against Russia, often seen as the successor to the very state NATO was created to defend against, is ludicrous. The only alternatives would be to let Ukraine join the alliance and not invoke Article 5, which would make it meaningless as a deterrent and could possibly encourage Russian aggression elsewhere, or they could invoke Article 5 and not actually go to war, which is understandable yet ultimately just as absurd as the previous option because it would have the same result. In short, NATO membership is totally off the table until Ukraine's territorial integrity is restored, and not a minute sooner.

And speaking of alliances and blocs, another common delusion of the liberal center, one which they share with many nationalists, is the idea that Ukraine, via laws, embargoes, and so forth, can somehow escape from Russia and «join» the «Western world.» This idea is so pervasive among some people that it often leads them to treasonous ideas about abandoning the occupied Donbas or Crimea because the people there supposedly have the wrong mentality. Ukrainian nationalists and liberals are, to my knowledge, the only kind in the world who would gladly give away their own territory if it gives them more power to build the kind of Ukraine that exists in their own minds within whatever borders they have left. It is strange indeed how the self-proclaimed «patriots» in Ukraine will bristle with rage at someone using the wrong term to describe the enemy in the east, yet some of those same patriots are able to publicly talk about literally surrendering Ukrainian territory to Russia and not be labeled as traitors, which they surely are if they sincerely believe their words.

Ukraine cannot escape Russia unless someone devises a way to physically move the country somewhere else. Since this is impossible, we have to deal with the Russian question somehow. Even if Ukraine could somehow hold out until the collapse of the Putin regime, there is no guarantee that the next regime would be better toward Russia's neighbors, and it might even be even more aggressive. In any case, the fallout from the implosion that will inevitably occur in Russia after Putin's passing will inevitably hit Ukraine one way or another. This is why rather than running and hiding Ukraine must confront Russia and promote ideas in that country that will not only fan the flames of resistance against the Putin regime, but also ensure a smooth transition to a more stable, democratic, decentralized system on the territory of the former Russian Federation. I would also remind Ukrainian "patriots" of all stripes that within Russia there are millions of Ukrainians and people of Ukrainian descent who, if awakened, could become a powerful army behind the lines. Many liberals of the above-mentioned sort prefer to discard not only those Russian citizens of Ukrainian descent, but even Ukrainian citizens who work in Russia (many of whom began working long before the war). Rather than present an idea, a vision of the future to inspire those Ukrainians behind enemy lines to stand up to the regime, they pronounce *takfir* on them and leave Ukraine bereft of a resource that could make life very difficult for the Putin regime. This is in no way like the original Ukrainian national idea, which embraced Ukrainians wherever they lived, far beyond the borders of what was commonly known as Ukraine. It's worth noting that this same idea lived on even under the Ukrainian SSR as an official policy for a time, meaning

that even some among the leadership of that state had a stronger sense of national consciousness than some of our modern «patriots» today.

Of course there are many Ukrainian liberal centrists who don't dream of UN peacekeepers or premature NATO membership, and who would never advocate giving away Crimea or Donbas to Russia. But to them I ask- what is your plan for the future, and for victory? Speaking economically, what is the endgame? Ukraine has been acknowledged as one of the poorest countries in Europe. While some key reforms have been passed, the state of the country incentivizes corruption and it is foolish to think that all those in power who have hitherto made their wealth via the corrupt system would voluntarily submit to any system which would restrict their ability to enrich themselves and compel them to pay their fair share in taxes (or any share for that matter). It would be miraculous if even a small minority of these businessmen and politicians finally gave up the life of graft and corruption to make an honest living. After all, should they somehow lose their wealth and be cast down into the mass of Ukrainian workers, it would be an unmitigated disaster for them.

Even if we ignore that, Ukraine is, after all, one country in a capitalist world. We need only to look at dozens of other developing countries around the world which have accepted the dominant neo-liberal economic policies and the recommendations of the IMF and World Bank to see what this future timeline holds for Ukraine. Yes, modest gains can be made and some have been made, but ultimately in a capitalist world Ukraine's prosperity depends on foreign and domestic capitalists seeing enough potential for profit in the country to invest in it. In other words- Ukraine's future is at the mercy of a tiny minority of businessmen; that those businessmen may for the time being not be citizens of Russia is little consolation.

And here we must again return to Russia because whatever economic or social progress Ukraine does make can be easily spoiled by action from the side of Russia. This was, after all, the real aim of the annexation of Crimea and the invasion of the country. Should Ukraine make any major breakthrough in terms of reforms and living standards, a limited offensive by Russia could ruin it by scaring off investors, costing the government more money, and displacing more people. Therefore even if we acknowledge that liberal capitalism could lead to some concrete increase in living standards in Ukraine, without victory over Russia any such progress could be easily undone. Such a victory can only be attained via a long, full-spectrum struggle on a global scale. While the odds are indeed slim, Ukraine can win by waging an ideological, progressive, internationalist revolutionary war against Muscovite imperialism. Alternatives, at this time at least, do not yet exist.

Victory against such odds may seem unattainable, even mad, yet right now, when as I write this the Kremlin's imperialist forces have just made an aggressive move in the Azov Sea thus fulfilling the warnings in the paragraphs above, it is the most realistic choice. What seems insane is in fact rational and was commonplace throughout the 20th century, while what has been presented to us today as rational by Ukraine's ruling class and the Western liberal order is, like right nationalism and left-pacifism, simply delusional. The nationalists don't have the ideas that can win this war, the pacifists don't want to fight it, and the liberals want someone else to win it for them.

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