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Ongoing Russian-Ukrainian Intricacies (II)

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The Predominating North American Academia/Media Slant

How history is taught can greatly influence some people, who don't actively seek other perspectives in full. It's quite ironic when it's periodically said that Russians in Russia are misled because they're regularly subjected to one-sided depictions. In the US, I've run into numerous over the age of twenty Ukrainian born ethnic Ukrainians, ethnic Russians, Jews and any mix of the three (as well as some others), who've spent a good deal of time in the West. They include individuals whose views generally coincide with mine. This grouping believes that post-Soviet Ukraine (especially after the so-called «Orange Revolution» in late 2004) has seen an increased anti-Russian historical slant, that has nurtured a greater acceptance of factually challenged views.

Unlike the bully pulpit approach, many of these individuals (including yours truly) directly address disagreeable points. A number of them note the lack of tolerance among those in high profile positions who disagree with them and can do so rather crudely. Instead of feeling free to comfortably express themselves in the open, some in the counter-Euromaidan/pro-Russian grouping prefer to not risk being labeled a «Kremlin troll», after making reasonable observations, without coming close to using such characterizations as «troll».

At times, an academic standing can have the appearance as an unofficial license to launch faulty diatribes. How can this aspect influence the teaching environment? In some academic settings (not all), a student (prospective or otherwise) in fields like history, political studies and journalism, might understandably be inclined to see that a kind of self-censorship might be needed to better advance. Unlike the hard sciences of precise formulas, there's more wiggle room in the liberal arts to short change a valid perspective that's unpopular with the predominating view.

In North America, the academic and non-academic likes of Alexander Motyl of Rutgers University and Serhii Plokhii of Harvard University, are more likely to get mass media action over others with a different overall take. I'm hard pressed to recall anyone at Rutgers and/or Harvard who've a mass media opinion piece in direct opposition to Motyl and Plokhii.

Plokhii wasn't challenged when he made some (put mildly) questionable comments in a featured Q & A with Star journalist Olivia Ward this past February 29. Contrary to Plokhii, in the lead-up to Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich's ouster, public opinion polls in Ukraine regularly showed a difference of within 10% and in some instances a virtual tie, or slight support favoring either the EU or the Russian involved Eurasian Economic Union. It's faulty to judge the prevailing mood in Ukraine on which group musters the largest street demonstration in Kiev.

Ward and Plokhii engage in revisionism when suggesting that Russia was the primary instigator of tension in Ukraine. The Kremlin and the then Ukrainian government weren't against three-way (Russia, Ukraine and EU) talks on how to best develop Ukraine. On this score, the West played more of the zero sum game.

Plokhii can be legitimately second guessed for saying that the Cossacks (in what's now modern day Ukraine) had united under Ivan Mazepa, when he chose to oppose Russia. Numerous historical accounts note Mazepa's downfall being partly attributed to the lack of support he received (from Cossacks and others) in the area he oversaw, after his changed allegiance from Russia to Sweden and Poland.

In several instances, Motyl has been featured in *Newsweek* and *The Wall Street Journal*. He has a blog at a venue dominated by a neocon to neoliberal leaning slant, favoring anti-Russian opinions over pro-Russian thoughts.

In a recent blog post, Motyl highlights Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's stature as a sign of a fascist Russia. Motyl is reluctant to categorize post-Soviet Ukraine as fascist, despite its issuing of stamps honoring Stepan Bandera, the elevation of Parubiy as Rada head and the level of post-Yanukovich period violence, in Kiev regime controlled Ukraine against counter-Euromaidan individuals.



Present day Russia doesn't formally honor Andrey Vlasov, who in WW II led an army of captured Russian soldiers in a nominal alliance with Nazi Germany. Vlasov's track record isn't as negative as what has been associated with Bandera.

As for Zhirinovsky, a substantial enough number seem to view him as a crude shtick comic with limited political influence. In 2002, he drew an enthusiastic audience in Brooklyn's Brighton Beach. A Belarusian-Jewish MD acquaintance who is Zionist in outlook and sensitive to anti-Jewish bigotry, told me that he finds Zhirinovsky entertaining and that he'd pay to see him speak live. (Zhirinovsky's father was Jewish). I gather from these instances that Zhirinovsky isn't for the politically correct, while he has found a niche as an acceptable enough personality, for a noticeable number of people who aren't necessarily extreme. At last notice, Zhirinovsky isn't involved with any militias harboring neo-Nazi views.

These observations are made without meaning to give him a complete pass. Those opposed to anti-Russian propaganda at or near the degree of bigotry aren't doing their cause right with inconsistency.

Motyl's infatuation with the image of Russia and fascism is indicated in another blog post of his, with a reference to Benito Mussolini and Vladimir Putin. Putin has an appointed inner circle and makes decisions as the head of state. What privately goes on between Putin and his cabinet isn't so well known. A recent feature in The Atlantic reveals that Obama has made decisions against his advisers. Does that make Obama a version of Mussolini? Motyl's reference of Putin with Mussolini is off the mark. Much unlike the Italian dictator, Putin has openly exchanged views with people who disagree with him and doesn't bite what he can't chew.

Witness the Syrian and Ukrainian scenarios. The Kremlin assisted Syrian government was on the offensive before Russia committed to a Syrian Civil War ceasefire and a reduced Russia military presence in Syria. Likewise, the pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine looked like they could've gained more territory, before Russia committed itself to the Minsk II ceasefire agreement. Libya, Ethiopia and Greece posed no threat to Italy. As they pertain to Russia, the more recent Syrian and Ukrainian situations are much different.

The Russian military support to the Syrian government includes the matter of a worse option that can blow over beyond Syria. Specifically, Syrian situated terrorists having Russia as one of their main targets, as well as prior US actions in Iraq and Syria, which have produced some negative results.

Crimea concerns a pro-Russian majority opposed to the overthrow of a democratically elected Ukrainian president, followed by a series of increased anti-Russian advocacy. The Donbass situation involves many in that territory with close ties to Russia, who aren't comfortable with the post-Yanukovich Kiev based rule.

In comparison to Ukraine, the reasonable perception of a more secure and economically better off Russia is a main element of the counter-Euromaidan/pro-Russian stance. While not necessarily being anti-Western, this perspective sees limits in what the West is willing to offer Ukraine.

The Counter Perspective at the Ivy League Level

From the *Fort Russ* blog, I was informed of a lecture at Brown University by Stanislav Byshok of the CIS-Europe Monitoring Organization. There doesn't appear to be an online video of this event. My response to his address (as posted by *Fort Russ*) include some of what I said in my *Strategic Culture Foundation* piece of this past September 29.

Byshok could've mentioned that «Kievan Rus» is a latter day academic characterization used to describe «Rus» and that a Novgorod prince, Oleg, moved his main locale to Kiev, at about the time that many begin the period known as «Kievan Rus». In 1862, Russia formally acknowledged its 1,000 year existence based out of Novgorod.

Kiev was to become the leading Rus city. Before the Mongol subjugation of Rus, Kiev was showing a decrease in influence. Back then, there were signs that territory in contemporary northwestern Russia would become the leading Rus base. This land was geographically more accessible to the leading Western powers. Within Rus, there were efforts to develop that territory.

When historically hyping Russian-Ukrainian differences, the «svidomites» highlight Andrey Bogolyubsky's attack on Kiev in 1169. (Svidomite is a derisively used term to describe Ukrainian nationalists with an anti-Russian lean.) Bogolyubsky's action should be arguably seen more as something akin to William Sherman's attack on Atlanta in the form of a civil war, than a foreign power attacking a different entity. Credited with developing Suzdal (near Moscow), Bogolyubsky had a dynastic claim to the Kiev throne, with his grandfather being a famous Kiev crown prince.

The pro-Russian community in post-Soviet Ukraine was willing to live in a separate Ukrainian state. This willingness was compromised with the action taken in the overthrow of Yanukovich and the elevated influence of anti-Russian leaning proponents.

I remain somewhat more upbeat than some others on the future of Russian-Ukrainian relations. Some once bitter rival nations have put their past differences aside. Byshok suggests that the importance of Russia can lead to a lessened Western enthusiasm for pro-Kiev regime controlled Ukraine. Another factor can include a growing realization that the Kiev regime hasn't been so virtuous. In one of his more realist moments, US President Barack Obama said (in his exchange with Jeffrey Goldberg in *The Atlantic*) that Ukraine means more to Russia than it does the West.