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## US Options in the Ukraine: Trigger a Religious War?

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Listening to the imperial media one might be excused for thinking that nothing dramatic is happening in the Ukraine and that the crisis has basically leveled off in some way. Well, why not? They just had recent elections and, apparently, that went well, Russia is still showing her usual bad will and threatening behavior towards Europe, but at least Putin was

forced to release the Ukrainian Jeanne d'Arc (aka Nadezhda Savchenko), and there is hope that the united front of the EU and NATO will eventually force Putin to stop his aggression against the Ukraine and to comply with the Minsk Agreements. Oh, and the Ukrainian National Bank has announced, I kid you not, a return to growth (by 0.1%) for the first quarter of the year.

Alas, the disconnect between this kind of nonsense and reality is total. Yes, elections did take place, but they were anything but free, the neo-Nazis are now more influential than ever and the fact that Putin did agree to exchange Savchenko for 2 Russian citizens accused of being, I kid you not, GRU Spetsnaz operators, was just a slick way for him to stop Savchenko from being his problem while making her Poroshenko's (and even Timoshenko's). As for the Minsk Agreements, Russia is not party to them at all, she just is a guarantor along with Germany and France. But yes, Poroshenko is still in power, people are still finding goods in stores and no new "Maidan" has taken place. So, externally, things are not too bad.

The problem with that rosy image is that nobody at Langley really believes it.

The folks at Langley know that the Ukrainian economy is basically dead and coasting to its inevitable breakdown on inertia. They know that the government services are barely kept alive by western aid and that even that is not enough to maintain the authority of the central government which is gradually becoming irrelevant and replaced by local 'authorities' (oligarchs and mobsters). Even more importantly, they now have lost any hope of drawing Russia into this conflict and they are seeing clear signs that the "European front" is cracking: France, Italy and others are already showing signs of discontent with the current situation, as has Germany (all these countries have their own "Langleys" who are making exactly the same dire predictions). So the big question for the USA is what to do next?

The initial plan was to make the Ukraine a sort of "black hole" which would suck in all the economic, political, and military resources of Russia, ideally by having Russia occupying the Donbass. But now that the Russians have declined to get sucked in, it is Europe which is now threatened with the Ukrainian black hole.

The Americans probably realize by now that it is too late to put Humpty Dumpty together again and they are right. While, in theory, a joint effort of the USA, EU and Russia could, at a huge cost, try to rebuild the Ukraine, political realities make such a joint action impossible, at least for the foreseeable future. They also realize that, courtesy of Mrs Nuland's candid words, the blame for the disastrous outcome in the Ukraine will be put on the USA (which is not quite fair, the Europeans are also guilty as hell, but such is life). And if "losing Syria" was bad enough, then "losing the Ukraine" will do irreparable damage to the USA simply by debunking the myth of the USA's omnipotence. This is very serious, especially for an Empire which has basically given up on negotiations or diplomacy and which now only delivers ultimatums.

So what are the US options here?

It is hard to predict at this time what the US might try to do. The normal US practice in such a situation is to simply declare victory and leave. That would work in Africa or Asia, but smack in the middle of the European continent that is hardly an option as it would result in a PR disaster.

The second option could be to basically blame the Ukrainians themselves for everything and try to protect Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Moldova from the inevitable consequences of the spreading chaos. The risk here, at least from the US point of view, is that Russia and her Novorussian allies would be more or less free to move in the created vacuum and that is something the USA absolutely cannot accept. The Americans would have visions of Zakharchenko in Kiev or pro-Russian riots in Odessa and that is simply beyond unacceptable.

Which leaves option three: to deliberately blow up the Ukraine.

Rostislav Ishchenko, in my opinion the best specialist of the Ukraine on the planet, has recently began **warning that such a mechanism is already in place**: to turn the civil war into a religious war pitting not Latins (“Roman Catholics”) against the Orthodox, but **various Orthodox group against each other**. Let me explain.

Like everything else in the Ukraine, the history of the various Orthodox jurisdictions in the Ukraine is very complex and goes far back for centuries. I cannot go into a detailed discussion of this very interesting topic here, but I want to offer some key pointers.

There are three main groups which all call themselves the “true” or “canonical” Ukrainian Orthodox Church: the biggest one is the **Autonomous Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate**, followed by the **Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyivan Patriarchate** and, finally, the **Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church**. Of course, all three of these churches claim to be the true representative of the legitimate Ukrainian Orthodoxy.

[Full disclosure: I personally don't consider any of them to be legitimate or truly Orthodox so I don't have a personal stake in this one].

They are:

The **AUOC-MP** is the biggest of the three. It is self-governing, but not fully independent. It is probably the biggest of the three churches and it is in full communion with all of the other “official” (read: “state approved”) Orthodox Churches out there. The AUOC-MP is viewed as the “hand of the Kremlin” by the nationalists.

The **UOC-KP** was founded by a former Bishop of the Moscow Patriarchate, **Filaret Denisenko** who created a “schism” (a unilateral separation in contradiction to the Canons of the Church) from the Moscow Patriarchate (which is ironic since Filaret was a former “deputy” (**locum tenens**) to Patriarch **Pimen I** of the Moscow Patriarchate and even considered a front-runner to succeed him). Even by Soviet standards Filaret was always known to be an exceptionally immoral, corrupt and unprincipled man, but the Moscow

Patriarchate only excommunicated him when he broke-off from the MP to create his own “church”.

The UAOC is basically a 1921 creation of the Ukrainian National Republic of 1917 (just as the Moscow Patriarchate is a 1937 creation of the Bolshevik state of 1917) and it represents the “non-Soviet” version of Ukrainian Christianity, with several of its clergymen have been persecuted by the Soviet state.

What makes this situation truly unique are two factors:

- Historically, the territory which is today known as the Ukraine has mostly been part of the Patriarchate of Constantinople between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century (this is a gross simplification, but basically correct).
- The modern Patriarchate of Constantinople is in a desperate quest for relevance (by itself it is tiny and subject to the Turkish authorities) and has extremely bad relations with Moscow

*There is, therefore, at very real risk that the authorities in Kiev will decide to declare the AUOC-MP as an “aggressor country Church” and that they will order all the parishes, monasteries and other building currently owned by the clergy of the AUOC-MP to be forcibly transferred to either the UOC-KP and/or the UAOC. There is also a possibility that the Patriarch of Constantinople might decide to “heed the cries of the faithful” and recognize either the UOC-KP and/or the UAOC as an autonomous part of the Constantinople Patriarchate thus basically taking the entire Ukraine under his control. And even if the authorities in Kiev don’t formally declare the AUOC-MP as a fair game for pogroms and illegal expropriations, they can just look away and let the neo-Nazi death-squads (like the infamous “Aidar”) do the dirty job for them.*

How big is this risk?

I would assess it as high. To create civil disturbances is the ideal way for the regime in Kiev to blame the “hand of Moscow” for all the problems. The spineless Europeans would have to follow the (US) party line and blame Putin for “stirring up the Russian-speakers” in the Ukraine and “using the pro-Moscow Russian minority initiate a new phase in the hybrid war against the sovereign Ukraine”. Such a confrontation would also allow the oligarch controlled political factions to unite with the real neo-Nazis who are currently in a “moderate opposition” mode. For the oligarchs, this would be the perfect opportunity to murder their neo-Nazi opposition (Savchenko for example) and blame it on “Moscow’s agents”. Last but not least, the eruption of intra-Orthodox clashes would be the perfect pretext to further unleash the SBU (Ukie KGB) against any opposition party.

Just as in the war against the Donbass, Putin would be put under tremendous pressure inside Russia to “do something about this” and some will not shy away from demanding that Russian tanks be sent to Kiev. Of course, Putin would never agree to such a folly, but that refusal would most definitely hurt him in the Russian public opinion, yet another good result from such an intra-Orthodox conflict in the Ukraine.

For the time being, the Empire is limiting its anti-Russian informational war to petty actions like the banning of Russian athletes from the Olympics in Brazil, focusing solely on Russian hooligans in France and giving the Eurovision to a political singer against all Eurovision rules. These are annoying for sure, but they are very limited in their effects: yes, it makes Russia look like the “uncivilized bad guy” in the eyes of the TV-watching idiots in the West, but a lot of people are not buying into this and see straight through it all, and it just serves to consolidate the support of the Russian people for Vladimir Putin. At the end of the day, turning Western public opinion against Putin is useless. What the Empire would really want is to turn the Russian public opinion against Putin – that is The Prize, at least for the folks in Langley.

So what better way would there be to set the Ukraine (further) ablaze while giving the Russian people the impression that “Putin has betrayed the Orthodox people”, than to trigger a religious war ?

We all know the famous words of a US officer in Viet-Nam “**It became necessary to destroy the town to save it**”. There is now a real risk that the US might decide to destroy the Ukraine in order to “save it”, especially if the Neocons re-take full control of the Executive under Hillary.