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## Ukraine, Year Three (I) Ukraine Loses War



Red sunset on the Dnieper/Arjip Kuinzhi

Negotiating a peace with territorial concessions to Russia seems the only way to end the slaughter. The longer it takes them to recognize it, the worse it will be

The first chapter of the booklet I composed for CTXT on the same day of the invasion of Ukraine, two years ago, was entitled "[Towards a bankruptcy in Russia](#)". It abounded in the contradictions of the Russian autocratic regime. Without denying the future importance of these contradictions, the reality is that two years later, Russia, its regime and its economy, present an evident solidity and that today the chapter would be entitled "Towards a bankruptcy in Ukraine". I mention that Year 1 error as a warning against those who may

slip into my current appreciation of Year 3. There is nothing more unpredictable and changeable than war.

"The reality is that the Russians have the military initiative and are gradually completing and ordering the front line."

The newly deposed head of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, General Valeri Zaluzhny, defined the situation at the front as "*stagnant*" in December. It doesn't seem real to me. The reality is that the Russians have the military initiative and are gradually completing and ordering the front line. The seizure of Avdiivka, last weekend, is considered important by Russian and Western military experts and, among other things, distances the Ukrainian ability to bombard the city of Donetsk with artillery that every week claims civilian lives, although it is not reported here. While so far the Russian tactic has been more of attrition of the adversary than offensive, offensive moves towards Kharkiv and Odessa should not be ruled out.

The U.S. and the European Union have already spent more than \$200 billion on the war. In December, Zaluzhny asked the U.S. defense secretary for another \$350 billion to \$400 billion to achieve "victory." That doesn't seem to have any future.

"Even if the \$60 billion package for Ukraine stuck in the U.S. Congress succeeds, it is clear that the next administration will turn off the tap."

The fact is that Western aid in arms, ammunition and money is dwindling and looks set to do so even more. Even if the \$60 billion package for Ukraine stuck in the U.S. Congress succeeds, it is clear that the next administration, whether Democrat or Trumpist, will turn off the tap and pass the buck to the European Union, while they focus on Israel, Iran and China. That way, if the war ends in disaster for Ukraine, Washington (with Eastern European countries in chorus) will be able to blame Germany for under-aiding Kiev. In any case, the future of Ukraine will be decided in Washington and Moscow. And certainly not in Berlin or Brussels.



In the winter of 2022, the Russian invasion strengthened Ukrainian nation-building linked to victory against the invader. Now that victory is much more uncertain, which is being reflected in morale. Available polls suggest that the desire for victory remains high, but that there is less and less willingness to die for it, as evidenced by the difficulties of recruitment. It is only natural that this should be the case, considering that there has been a horrific carnage, with hundreds of thousands of dead, wounded and amputees (also on the Russian side, but the population difference works in Moscow's favour), the shortage of conscripts, the prospect of further defeats at the front and the decrease in Western aid.

The tendency towards defeat contributes, logically, to accentuating the divisions and the settling of scores in Kiev. Zelensky's former adviser, Aleksei Arestovich, whose criticism was increasingly frontal, has taken up residence in Switzerland. The dismissal of General Zaluzhny, arguably the most popular figure in Ukraine, has eroded Zelensky's prestige. Within twenty-four hours of the announcement, support for the president had fallen by 5%. According to a poll this week, cited by sociologist Volodymyr Ishchenko, 43% of Ukrainians (in the area under government control) do not want Zelensky to run for a second term.

"The dismissal of General Zaluzhny, surely the most popular figure in Ukraine, has eroded Zelensky's prestige"

Zelensky's prestige rests on his goal of "*total victory*", i.e. the expulsion of the Russian invader from all occupied territory annexed to the Russian Federation, including Crimea. It seems that the European Union also, at least pay lip service, supports such an objective (in the United States, much less), the impossibility of which is becoming more and more evident.



Map of the areas ceded by Finland to the Soviet Union after the 1940 Winter War. Such territorial concessions are shown in red.

In that situation, negotiating a peace with territorial concessions to Russia and neutrality for Ukraine seems the only way to end this slaughter. In its winter war against the USSR, Finland lost 11% of its national territory, thanks to which the border of Leningrad was moved away and the dramatic defense of the city after the German invasion of 1941 could be maintained. After the war, Finland coexisted with the USSR with a neutral status that did not go badly at all. The problem is that today no one dares to say in Kiev (certainly not among the experts of the lamentable European Union) that an arrangement with Russia that maintains 80% of the Ukrainian national territory, with security guarantees and a commitment to neutrality, could perfectly well be considered a victory for Ukraine. The

thesis of European politicians and their experts is the mantra that "if Putin wins in Ukraine, then he will mess with the Baltic, Poland, or Moldova", despite the fact that the Ukrainian campaign itself and the difficulties that Russia has encountered in it are the best denial.

As things stand, admitting such an arrangement would mean the end of Zelensky and, perhaps, the entry on the scene of some prestigious royalist military officer. The atmosphere of tension and rivalry between Zelensky and Zaluzhny could be related to that. In any case, the longer it takes Kiev to recognize the possibility of such an agreement with the cession of territories, the worse its negotiating position and that of its Western sponsors will be. For years, more than a few Ukrainian ethno-nationalist experts and politicians claimed that Ukraine could only be a "real country" the day the Russophiles from the east and south left the country. The Russian annexation, and the terrible slaughter unleashed,

"The problem is that no one dares to say in Kiev that an arrangement with Russia that maintains 80% of the Ukrainian national territory could be considered a possibility."

A prediction from last year that still seems valid to me is that "[Ukraine loses the war, but Russia does not win](#) it", because it is quite possible that the annexation of the new territories to the Russian Federation will not be stable. What is left of Ukraine will be responsible for organizing instability in these occupied territories with the help of NATO, forcing the establishment of Russian police and "anti-terrorist" administrations with the usual panoply of violence, attacks, torture and disappearances. Depending on how, a large terrain will be created for the attacks, attacks and personal assassinations of the Ukrainian secret services with Western help, especially British, against Russian personalities and "collaborators" (journalists such as Daria Dugina and Vladlen Tatarsky, and deputies such as Iliia Kiva, among many others), both in these newly incorporated territories and in Russia as a whole. All this could greatly harden the internal political climate in the country and turn a more or less frozen situation into a cancer for Russia.

*Rafael Poch de Feliu, for La Pluma*

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