

UKRAINE



by Ralph Berry

The tanks offensive continues unabated. Here are the consecutive headlines of Colonel Hamish de Bretton-Gordon, who is the point man for the tank interest in the media:

THE TANKS CRITICS ARE ABOUT TO BE HUMILIATED (11 (January)
BRITAIN IS SENDING UKRAINE THE RIGHT TANKS (20 January)
UKRAINE'S TANKS WILL ACHIEVE LITTLE WITHOUT MODERN FIGHTER
JETS (1 February)

They fear no escalation, do the tank warriors. They will provide all the escalation themselves. No sooner had we sent, or promised to send, tanks of high quality and sufficient number than next day the post delivered a demand for fighter jets. Tanks on their own, we were told, are useless; the monarch of the battlefield needs an entourage to keep up appearances. Tanks are merely prologues to the swelling scene. Biden must hope that Zelensky will not demand, in his peremptory way, an aircraft carrier. It would fit snugly into

Odessa and rule the Black Sea, once the tanks have taken it, perhaps named after BATTLESHIP POTESKIN.

Whatever, Ukraine is well on the way to being kitted out with a first-class defence system on easy terms. Meantime the country is being destroyed with equal zeal by Russia and Ukraine. There will follow the stupendous costs of the Marshall Plan to come, at which many nations will be invited to throw coins and notes into the offertory (and yes, they will be looking at the conspicuously rich American in the congregation). There is already resistance in Congress to overlarge spending. It is time to glance at some financial aspects of the Ukraine war.

—

Two words never before seen together in reports are 'Zelensky' and 'corruption'. They are now getting attention. 'Zelensky sacks ministers in anti-corruption shake-up' (25 January). Did this innocent President have no idea that Ukraine is a by-word for corruption?

He could have looked at a rather important publication, CORRUPTION PERCEPTIONS INDEX. This ranks 180 nations by perceived levels of public sector corruption. Cleanest at the top, as you would expect, are a closely-bunched six consisting of the Baltics, New Zealand, and Singapore. (Having worked in Singapore I can attest to the Confucian values of Lee Kwan Yew, who incidentally was married in Stratford-upon-Avon.) The UK comes in at 11, and the US at 27. These are respectable figures.

Ukraine is ranked 122. There are better numbers for Algeria, El Salvador, Panama, Egypt, Zambia. Russia of course is worse, at 136.

But it comes as a shock to learn that Albania, a country that has exported the bulk of its criminal population to Britain, is rated at 110 and can look down on Ukraine!

The costs of the Ukraine war spiral, for some nations more than others but Europe and the US are clearly suffering. Heavier losses are in sight. In the run-up to 1914, a theme put about by well-informed businessmen was that a major war was not possible: countries simply couldn't afford it. History settled that one, for both victors and vanquished. One begins to wonder if peace in Ukraine is affordable at present. War, which we have anyway, is a sunk cost and for a time might be cheaper than peace.