

Ukraine must get rid of kleptocrats before the West can help rebuild

By Conrad Black

The plans that President Trump has been carefully developing to force a reasonable peace upon Russian President Putin after his nearly four years of unsuccessful aggressive war in Ukraine are being complicated by the practically undeniable corruption around the very summit of the Ukrainian government. Trump negotiated in good faith with Putin to the point of being accused by his enemies of being bewitched by Putin and gamed by him and has aligned



Are the brave Ukrainian soldiers fighting to protect a corrupt government? (epa12014377 EPA/MARIA SENOVILLA)

American opinion solidly behind him by Putin's insolent and duplicitous failure to deliver on promises he made to Trump. It is slightly reminiscent of the completely false argument that Roosevelt and Churchill were duped by Stalin at Yalta. As historian Ted Morgan pointed out, "If Yalta had been a bad

agreement for the Western powers, Stalin would not have violated every clause of it." It is vintage Russian behaviour: Concede anything the other side wants and simply ignore the promises that have been made, on the theory that whoever has the armed force in place will prevail, whatever the diplomatic niceties.

The problem with this calculation in the case of Ukraine is that where Stalin's Red Army had over 300 battle-hardened divisions in Eastern Europe and it was seven years before they had any difficulty occupying demilitarised liberated countries populated with famished, traumatised victims of the Nazis, Ukraine has put up a fierce and successful resistance, and the performance of the Russian military on balance has been a fiasco.

Trump also shut down the numerous and vocal isolationists in his own camp by heavy persuasion of the NATO allies to pull their weight in the alliance and to buy advanced weaponry from the United States and hand it on to Ukraine. The paleoconservative Republicans of the pre-Roosevelt Fortress America variety, who imagine that is of no consequence who governs in Europe and the Far East, could not object to profitable arms sales.

Trump's next obstacle was the exemplary demonstration of the chronic political enfeeblement of Europe: The inconvenient fact that Europe's acquisition of Russian oil and gas was in fact financing Russia's aggressive Ukraine war that the Europeans were beseeching the Americans to help them to defeat. Finding alternate sources of energy for Europe, a process that should have been underway at the latest on the day after the Russian invasion of Ukraine began, is seriously underway now.

Ukraine never existed as a jurisdiction until it was invented by Lenin in 1919. It is a geographic and not an ethnic or sectarian or political creation as it is a still tangled

amalgam of Poles, Lithuanians, Russians, and the Tartar's (Asiatic Russians), with a mixture of different Orthodox Churches and the Uniate Roman Catholics. The Ukrainians were so horribly mistreated and massacred by Stalin that they briefly greeted the Nazis as liberators in 1941 and hundreds of thousands of them fought the Communists. There is no evidence that Ukraine, in all its variety, bought into Russian Communism in the 45 years between the end of World War II and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. While approximately one sixth of Ukrainians are primarily Russian speakers, there is no evidence that they would rather live in Russia than Ukraine.

But Ukraine as an independent country was, until it's inspiring response to Russian aggression, effectively a failed state, with successive dubious elections and levels of flagrant corruption and embezzlement of public funds rarely rivalled in any otherwise reasonably advanced country. There are monitors of corruption now active within Ukraine that are trying to promote honest government, especially the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine, which despite raids from President Zelensky's police (without warrants) in June, prepared indictments of close collaborators of the president, (one of whose nickname is "Sugarman," who have fled to Israel just ahead of the sheriff).

The American media, who are always happy to take issue with anything the Trump administration might be contemplating, is digging into this brazen corruption and are up to point, assisting the administration in its demands that the government of Ukraine cease to function like a medieval shakedown operation. It is reasonable to expect that the assistance Ukraine will need to force Russia to negotiate seriously for peace will include presidential cooperation with the legitimate anticorruption authorities, and a modification of the habitual procedure of declaring all such investigations to be inspired and commissioned by Russia. It will also have

to be understood that when a satisfactory peace has been negotiated, an absolutely reliable election will have to be held in Ukraine to turn a new page in the governance of that country. Volodymyr Zelensky has earned the respect of the world as courageous and resourceful war leader, but he is the product of a political culture which is not compatible with democratic government and would not be eligible for the economic assistance of the West which will be essential to the recovery of post-war Ukraine.

This war can still work out well, but in addition to their heroic resistance against the ancient Russian foe, Ukraine must show that it has the political maturity to govern itself, and not just produce a rotation of kleptocrats in rigged elections.

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