

CICERO FOUNDATION GREAT DEBATE PAPER

No. 17/06

September 2017

**UKRAINE ‘EXPERTS’ IN THE
WEST AND PUTIN’S MILITARY
AGGRESSION:**

A NEW ACADEMIC ‘ORIENTALISM’?

DR. TARAS KUZIO

Fellow at the Center for Transatlantic Relations

Johns Hopkins University

Washington D.C.

Cicero Foundation Great Debate Paper No. 17/06

© Taras Kuzio, 2017.

All rights reserved

The Cicero Foundation is an independent pro-Atlantic and pro-EU think tank.

www.cicerofoundation.org

The views expressed in Cicero Foundation Great Debate Papers do not necessarily express the opinion of the Cicero Foundation, but they are considered interesting and thought-provoking enough to be published. Permission to make digital or hard copies of any information contained in these web publications is granted for personal use, without fee and without formal request. Full citation and copyright notice must appear on the first page. Copies may not be made or distributed for profit or commercial advantage.

Ukraine 'Experts' in the West and Putin's Military Aggression:

A New Academic 'Orientalism'?

Taras Kuzio

Edward Said's description of Western imperialist imagining of Orientalism is applicable to the manner in which Russian nationalism and national identity and the work of pro-(Vladimir) Putin apologists, realists and some Russianists imagine Ukraine. The Orient and Ukraine are treated as passive subaltern subjects of the world order who are denied the dignity of choosing their own destiny. The imaging of the colonies and Russia's Near Abroad was a relationship between power, domination and hegemony that benefitted the lives of those who were ruled, a relationship of the strong over the weak best served by a great power awarded a sphere of influence to maintain order over subaltern people incapable of ruling themselves. Ukraine was depicted in Polish and Russian literature as *terra incognita*, an empty land where chaos reigned and requiring the imposition of order by more 'civilised' historic peoples. Western imperialists described their colonial adventures as bringing "civilisation" to "backward peoples" who had no ability to rule themselves. The colonies are "a subject race, dominated by a race that knows them and what is good for them better than they could possibly know themselves."¹ Colonial rule was justified in the name of progress by a more "civilised" people.

Western colonies, similar to Ukraine, were described as artificial entities with immature rulers devoid of energy but good at intrigue, lying and deception. The depiction of cunning colonials is similar to Russian depictions of sly (*khytryy*) Ukrainians. Colonial peoples and Ukrainians if left to themselves and without a paternalistic "elder brother" will produce instability and act in a barbarous manner that threatens the established "civilised" order. Polish and Russian scholarship, literature, novelists, travelogues, military expeditions, judges, pilgrims, and

bureaucrats have for centuries written about Ukrainians as disorganised, uncivilised, despotic, backward and bloodthirsty people.² Until World II, Polish nationalists denied the existence of a Ukrainian people – as Russian nationalists such as Putin continue to do today. Ukrainians could not rule themselves or create a viable independent state.

Russian nationalists depict Ukraine as an artificial, failed and divided state whose ruling elites have sold their souls to the West. Being incapable of their own initiative, Ukrainians are manipulated by the West to pursue “Russophobic” policies and “anti-Russian conspiracies.”³ Eurasianism describes Russian and Soviet policies towards the non-Russians in a positive manner and more enlightened than the colonial policies of Western imperialists. Russians therefore object to criticism of their colonial policies as having de-nationalised Ukrainians and bringing serfdom and famine. Russian and Soviet historiography from the 1930s glorified the benefits of rule by the Russian “elder brother.”

Ukraine is a fragile (“divided”) entity incapable of evolving and unable to implement reforms.⁴ Ukraine’s artificiality is allegedly compounded by its lack of history. Western colonies and Ukraine are marginalised as “unhistoric peoples” in what Said describes as a Western-imposed racist hierarchy. Western and Russian identities are viewed with greater significance than that of the subaltern subjects in the Orient or Ukraine. The West and Russia are worthier of dignity than the former European and Russian colonies and non-Russian republics of the USSR. The Russian view of history, which continues to dominate many Western universities, is considered superior.⁵ Western histories of Ukraine by Orest Subtelny, Paul R. Magocsi and others only appeared in the late Soviet and post-Soviet era’s and although they have influenced Western academia these works by Ukrainianists have been largely ignored by Western scholars writing about the Russian-Ukrainian war. Reviewing Richard Sakwa’s *Frontline Ukraine*, Volodymyr Kravchenko writes that Ukrainianists are “recapped in this book only superficially and unsystematically” because “the author has no intention of delving into the Ukrainian material comprehensively.” Writing a book on Ukraine “had no impact on his preconceived notions and interpretation of Russia, Eastern Europe, and the world order.”⁶

ACADEMIC 'ORIENTALISM'

The crisis in relations between Russia and the West following Russia's annexation of the Crimea and military aggression in eastern Ukraine has led to a large number of publications and the proliferation of what Bohdan Vitvitsky describes as "drive-by analysis" by self-declared "Ukraine experts."⁷ These publications and experts have written about the crisis from the vantage point of their field of speciality, whether Russian and Eurasian area studies, international relations, realism, and security studies. Others have added Ukraine to books on other topics already in the process of production.⁸ The legacy of Russian-Ukrainian relations and national identity has been largely ignored by the majority of these publications. Scholars of Russian politics have continued to claim expertise on the non-Russian countries which emerged after 1991 as independent states in what I term academic orientalism. In the Soviet era, travel was restricted beyond Moscow to sensitive republics, such as Ukraine but this is not the case today. The Internet also provides scholars with a wide availability of primary sources from Ukraine and other non-Russian former Soviet republics, many of which are in Russian. The majority of Ukrainian media have Russian-language pages⁹ and two thirds to three quarters of Ukrainian print media are in Russian. Inter, Ukraine's most popular television channel, is largely in Russian. Nevertheless, apologists and Russianists still prefer to use Russian-language sources from Russia – not Ukraine.

In North America, area studies are frowned upon and greater emphasis is placed upon theoretical and comparative studies which leads to three problems. The first is a lack of language skills to analyse the crisis. The second is an absence of area speciality. The third is a weak understanding of the scholarly field of nationalism which Departments of Political Science in US universities rarely specialise in. All of the theoretical and comparative journals on nationalism are published in the UK. Students at MA and PhD levels are instructed to use primary sources and undertake fieldwork in the pursuit of their research. The teaching of this methodology is at the same time ignored by scholars themselves who do not use primary

sources from Ukraine (whether in Ukrainian or Russian)¹⁰ while few have visited the country and especially the conflict zone. Western orientalism towards Eurasia is evident in the work of Sakwa, Gerard Toal, Samuel Charap and Timothy J. Colton who are heavily reliant on secondary sources and quotes from official Russian sources. Sakwa never once cites Poroshenko but quotes Putin 31 times. Toal cites Putin and Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev on forty-four occasions and Poroshenko only once, more than the Soviet Union's last President Mikhail Gorbachev who is quoted twice. One cannot imagine a manuscript about a hypothetical Ukrainian invasion of the Kuban region of Russia being positively reviewed if it only cited Poroshenko but never Putin. While citing sources in Russia on 75 occasions, Sakwa's sixteen Ukrainian sources are only from the English-language *Kyiv Post*. It would be pertinent to ask whether a book about a hypothetical Ukrainian invasion of Russia would be considered scholarly if it used only sources from the English-language *Moscow News*?

WESTERN 'ORIENTALISM' TOWARDS UKRAINE: APOLOGISTS, REALISTS, RUSSIANISTS

Russia as the victim of Western malfeasance is drawn upon by two different groups of scholars from opposing ends of the political spectrum: left-wing apologists and right-wing realists. Sakwa's book is a "polemical attack on Western policy and Ukrainian nationalism."¹¹ Dutch journalist Chris Kaspar de Ploeg¹² has produced by far the most polemical of these books on the crisis as seen by reading the titles of his chapters which lay heavy emphasis upon conspiracies by Western governments, Ukrainian nationalists and oligarchs and their allegedly anti-Russian policies. Russia is described as a conservative, status quo defensive power that has not challenged international law.¹³ In Crimea, as in Georgia in 2008, Sakwa views Russia's interventions as an "opportunistic reaction to the developments and installation of an anti-Russian nationalistic government in Kiev" and "an angry and ad hoc response to Yanukovich's overthrow."¹⁴ Putin's xenophobia against Western interference into Russia's "privileged zone of interests" and alienation from the West was "years in the making."¹⁵ Russia did not drop its support for Crimean separatism and prioritise relations with Ukraine following Leonid Kuchma's election as Ukrainian President in 1994, as Toal writes,¹⁶ and it took Russia until 1997 to sign

the treaty recognising the border and another three years for both houses of the Russian parliament to ratify it.

Apologists, realists and Russianists downplay the involvement of Russia's military in the crisis. Sakwa writes that "the extent of Moscow's material and personnel support is far from clear" and compares Russian "advisers" to those "in the early stages of US interventions."¹⁷ Apologists also downplay Putin's plans to detach *NovoRossiya* ("New Russia"), eight regions in eastern and southern Ukraine.¹⁸ Toal in contrast writes about how the Russian identity of *NovoRossiya* and Russianess of Ukraine as a whole was overstated.¹⁹ A large volume of evidence from satellites, NATO, Organisation for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) peacekeepers, Western journalists, think tanks (such as Bellingcat), Ukrainian military intelligence and captured Russian soldiers have documented Russia's military involvement. In June 2017, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov admitted to Russia's involvement when he talked of "our decision to join the fight in Donbass and in Syria." In April 2016, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) described Russia's actions in eastern Ukraine as "hybrid annexation."²⁰

Current debates about whether monuments to racists, imperialists and those who commit crimes against humanity against native peoples are ignored by Western historians of Russia and Russia experts. Australian Labour opposition leader Bill Shorten reminded his fellow Australians that "Our history didn't start when Captain Cook sailed into sight of Australia in 1770."²¹ Nevertheless, apologists, realists and many Russianists hold a racist view of Crimea's history that monopolises Russia's ownership and ignores Tatar and Turkish legacies. Sakwa writes that the Crimea was "the heartland of Russian nationhood." If such an argument were used in the Americas, it would mean their history began when European colonists arrived in the 15th and 16th centuries and its peoples could no longer be called 'First Nations' and 'Native Peoples.' Apologists, realists and some Russianists describe Russia's annexation of the Crimea as returning to its "natural" home, a viewpoint of the Crimea being more "Russian" than Ukrainian which remains widespread among apologists, realists and Western historians of Russia. Neil Kent's otherwise informative and balanced history of the Crimea writes that the referendum

“was joyfully received by most Crimean’s.” He continues: “There is no doubt that the majority of the population of Crimea supported joining the Russian Federation.”²² In fact, as Paul R. Magocsi and Andrew Wilson both point out, if length of time within a state is the criteria through which we decide to whom the Crimea should belong then it should be returned to Tatars who ruled the peninsula from the thirteenth to the late eighteenth century.²³

Few if any apologists, realists and Russianists have undertaken field work in the Crimea to back up their confident claims of overwhelming public support for Russia’s annexation. Support for separatism never had majority support in the Crimea or the Donbas and during the two preceding decades prior to the crisis vacillated between 20-40 percent. The March 2014 referendum claimed an unlikely “Yes” vote of 97 percent when Tatars, who make up approximately fifteen percent of the population, boycotted it. A leaked report by the Russian Presidential Council on Civil Society and Human Rights showed that only 15-30 per cent of Crimean citizens had voted for unification with Russia.²⁴

ORIENTALIST VIEW OF ‘GOOD’ AND ‘BAD’ NATIONALISMS

Orientalism portrayed the “White Man’s Burden” as the bringing of “civilisation” to the colonies. Western policies were never depicted as imperialism but as an enlightened form of nationalism. Meanwhile, the nationalisms of the colonial peoples were depicted in highly negative ways and their national liberation struggles were “treacherous” and acts of “terrorism.” This orientalist view of “good” and “bad” nationalism is applied by many Western scholars to the Ukraine-Russia war. Apologists, realists and most Russianists downplay or ignore the influence of Russian nationalism while highly exaggerating the role of Ukrainian nationalism. Sakwa writes that Putin “is not an ideologue” and he “remains rational and pragmatic.” Political scientists who are Russianists also play down the influence of Russian nationalism.²⁵ Henry Hale writes that prior to the annexation of the Crimea, Putin did not use nationalist rhetoric and since 2015 it has declined in usage. Pal Kolsto and Marlene Laruelle similarly write that the nationalist rhetoric of 2014 was novel and subsequently declined.²⁶

Laruelle denies that Putin is an admirer of White Russian émigré writer and fascist sympathiser Ivan Ilyin who she admits was a 'rabid anti-Semite' and 'attracted to fascism.' Nevertheless, she downplays Ilyin's importance by saying Putin has 'only' quoted him on five occasions. Could one imagine the great deal of finger pointing by a whole host of Western apologists and Russianists at President Poroshenko if he 'only' quoted Ukrainian nationalist leader Stepan Bandera who is routinely depicted as 'fascist' on five occasions? ²⁷From the vantage point of Kyiv, Russian nationalism and chauvinism had never gone away in the USSR and continue to influence the unwillingness of Russian leaders to accept Ukrainians as a separate people and their disrespect for Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Marginal nationalism became mainstream nationalism in Russia in the 2000s when the "emergence of a virulent nationalist opposition movement took the mainstream hostage."²⁸ Extreme nationalism dominates politics in the Crimea and Russian-controlled Donbas. Russian proxy leaders do not pursue "pluralism" because they are vehemently hostile to multiculturalism, xenophobic towards the West and homophobic.²⁹ Toal writes that many Donbas and Crimean Russian proxies were "genuine neo-Nazis."³⁰ Russian proxies in the Crimea and DNR-LNR are more akin to Whites in the Jim Crow US south with Ukrainians the Blacks who have been denied their dignity, educational and cultural rights by the "most reactionary, intolerant and illiberal population within Ukraine." Yanukovich fought back against the Euromaidan in the same manner as Jim Crow's supporters with violence and intimidation by vigilantes akin to the the Klu Klux Klan.³¹

In the Crimea, Sergei Aksyonov, who was installed by Russian occupation forces as Crimean Prime Minister, was the leader of the extreme right-wing nationalist Russian Unity party. Similar to other Russian nationalists and Cossack groups in a region which has always had high levels of xenophobia, Aksyonov's political party espoused an extreme form of Russian chauvinism towards Tatar and Ukrainian minorities. Russian nationalists have long upheld Soviet leader Joseph Stalin's claim of "Nazi collaboration" to justify the ethnic cleansing of Crimean Tatars in 1944. In the Donbas, Russian neo-Nazi groups, Tsarist imperialists (such as the infamous Igor

Girkin) and Cossacks have dominated mercenaries travelling to the region to fight alongside Russian proxies. The first leaders of the pro-Russian protests in spring 2014 were from the neo-Nazi Russian National Unity (RNE) whose paramilitaries fought in all of the key battles that year.³² Russia's policy of "indigenisation" replaced Russian citizens in its two Donbas proxy enclaves with local extreme right-wing Russian nationalists. One of two parties of power in Russia's Donetsk proxy enclave is the Donetsk Republic,³³ a successor to the Inter-Movement of the Donbas founded in 1989 by Andrei Purgin, Dmitri Kornilov and Sergei Baryshnikov. So-called 'Internationalist Movements' were established by the Soviet secret services in Ukraine, Moldova and the three Baltic States to oppose their drive to independence. They came to power with the backing of Russian military and intelligence services in Moldova's Trans-Dniestr region in 1992 and under a new name in Ukraine's Donbas in 2014.

The Donetsk Republic was launched a year after the 2004 Orange Revolution and, similar to the Soviet Inter-Movement, with support from Russian intelligence. The Donetsk Republic and other Russian nationalist groups were provided with paramilitary training in summer camps organised by Aleksandr Dugin, an admirer of European fascism and leader of the Eurasian International Movement. Donetsk Republic was banned by the Ukrainian authorities in 2007-2008. Baryshnikov provides a flavour of the extreme Russian chauvinism he is well suited to promote as Dean of Donetsk University. Baryshnikov believes, "Ukraine should not exist" because it is an "artificial state." He admits that "I have always been against Ukraine, politically and ideologically" showing the long ideological continuity between the Soviet Inter-Movement and Donetsk Republic. Baryshnikov unequivocally states Ukrainians "are Russians who refuse to admit their Russia-ness" and supports the destruction of Ukrainian national identity "by war and repression" because it "can be compared to a difficult disease, like cancer."³⁴ While ignoring repression of Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars, apologists echo the exaggeration propagated by Russia's information warfare of repression of Russian-speakers. Although never having undertaken field work in eastern Ukraine or studied Ukraine's media environment, apologists can claim the Ukrainian authorities seek to destroy Russophone Ukraine.³⁵ Such claims are disproved by statistics; sixty percent of newspapers, 83 percent of journals, 87

percent of books and 72 percent of television programmes are in Russian.³⁶ Ukraine adopted a new law in 2017 that required fifty percent of regional television and radio to be in Ukrainian, a figure more progressive than multicultural Canada where two thirds of electronic media are legally mandated to be in French in Quebec.

Repression of Crimean Tatars is marginalised or downplayed by apologists and some Russianists. Instead, we read the incredible claim by Sakwa that they “welcomed the reunification with Russia” and that “Crimean Tatars are ready to be loyal citizens of Russia.”³⁷ This is simply fake news. Since Russia’s annexation of the Crimea in 2014, Tatars are undergoing levels of repression last seen under Stalin. According to human rights groups, at least eight and as many as 17 residents of Crimea have vanished since the Russian annexation. At least six of these have been found murdered.³⁸ The Tatar unofficial parliament *Mejlis* has been outlawed, Tatar leaders banned from returning to the Crimea and Tatar media closed down. Crimean Tatar leader Akhtem Chygoz was sentenced to eight years imprisonment by Russian occupation authorities.³⁹ Ukrainians, who made up a quarter of the Crimea’s population, have fared no better. Russian nationalists such as President Putin believe Ukrainians are a branch of the Russian people and therefore do not require schools and media in their own language. Although Ukrainians are the second largest national minority in the Russian Federation (after Tatars) they have no educational and cultural rights. This is replicated in the Russian nationalist Crimea and Russian-occupied Donbas where Ukrainian schools and Ukrainian-language media do not exist. Compare this to multicultural Ukraine where on the eve of the crisis, 17 percent of school children were being taught in Russian which corresponds to the proportion of Russians recorded in Ukraine’s 2001 census.⁴⁰

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarch (UOC-KP), which seeks autocephaly (canonical independence) from the Russian Orthodox Church, Ukrainian Greek-Catholics and Ukrainian protestants are banned in Russia and in the Crimea and Russian-occupied Donbas.⁴¹ After Russian intelligence officer Girkin and Russian forces fled from the western Donetsk city of Slavyansk, the bodies of the Church of the Transfiguration pastor’s two grown sons, Ruvim

and Albert Pavenko, and two deacons, Victor Brodarsky and Vladimir Velichko were found tortured and murdered.⁴² Countless Ukrainian patriots have been murdered for simply holding Ukrainian flags or protesting against Russian occupation authorities.⁴³ Perhaps the biggest reason to doubt the mythology surrounding a “multicultural Donbas” versus a “nationalist Ukraine” is to be found with the Jewish minority which has fled from Russian-occupied Donbas to Ukrainian-controlled territory after Russian proxies demanded they pay \$50 to register and provide proof of properties and businesses they owned. US Secretary of State John Kerry, commenting on this said “In the year 2014, after all of the miles traveled and all of the journey of history, this is not just intolerable, it's grotesque. It is beyond unacceptable.”⁴⁴

Jews in Ukraine are largely Russian speaking but this did not dent their support for the Euromaidan where they formed a self-defense platoon. Aleksandr Scherbanyuk, a Jewish-Ukrainian member of the platoon and two additional Jewish-Ukrainians, Josef Shiling and Evgeniy Kotlyar, were among the “Heavenly Hundred” as the protestors are called who were killed by *Berkut* police snipers.⁴⁵ Ukraine’s Jews have condemned Russian military aggression. Indeed, Dnipro Jewish-Ukrainian oligarch Ihor Kolomoysky funded two volunteer battalions. Asher Cherkassky, an Orthodox Jew who fled the Crimea, volunteered to join Ukrainian forces.⁴⁶ While downplaying the influence of Russian nationalism, the influence of Ukrainian nationalism is presented in a highly exaggerated manner to provide justification for the claims of a “civil war.” Sakwa has created a completely mythical dichotomy of a Ukraine divided between “monism” and “pluralism.”⁴⁷ Kharkiv-born Borys Lozhkin, President Poroshenko’s former chief of staff, writes that “the facts disprove Professor Sakwa’s concept.”⁴⁸ Protestors were radicalised by Russian propaganda and information warfare and transformed into an armed insurgency only with the assistance of Russian hybrid warfare.⁴⁹ While deriding “monists” Sakwa praises the Party of Regions for its “comprehensive vision” of Ukraine. By doing so, he idealises an authoritarian and Sovietophile political party with strong links to organised crime. The Party of Regions never had any interest in the equality of Ukrainian and Russian languages, a balanced and inclusive approach to Ukrainian history or respect for religious diversity but rather imposed the views of the Sovietophile Donbas upon the remainder of Ukraine.

Depicting Ukraine divided between “monism” and “pluralism” has little understanding of the concept of “Little Russia.” Volodymyr Kravchenko, a historian from Kharkiv, points out that Little Russianism does not contradict modern Ukrainian identity but in fact “the two are partially intertwined and interdependent.”⁵⁰ Donbas and Crimean separatists do not seek equality of Russian and Ukrainian languages, but a return to a Soviet hierarchy where Russian is dominant and defined as the language of progress, and Ukrainian is derided as an uncouth and a peasant tongue. Russian speakers with a Soviet identity or one aligned with the pan-Slavic identity of the *Russkii Mir* (Russian World) view Ukrainians and Belarusians as branches of the “Russian” people and their languages as Russian dialects. They are vehemently opposed to seeing the Russian language as a language of a national minority in Ukraine. In the international domain, they are xenophobic and opposed to European integration and view the *Russkii Mir* and CIS Customs Union/Eurasian Union as contemporary incarnations of the former USSR.

Apologists, realists and many Russianists see Ukraine through Moscow’s eyes as a country divided by region and language with the potential for disintegration and civil war. Predictions of Ukraine disintegrating into a civil war between its eastern and western regions have been published since the early 1990s, including by realists writing about Putin’s war against Ukraine.⁵¹ In the 1990s, Ukraine resolved its Crimean separatist threat in a peaceful manner and violent conflict only unfurled inside Ukraine after Russia’s military aggression in 2014. Putin’s alliance with, and in some cases financing of, European and North American fascists, neo-Nazi’s, White nationalists and extreme left are ignored. In exaggerating Ukrainian nationalism, they fail to explain how Ukraine has the lowest support in any European country for the extreme right. Only on one occasion in 2012 did the far-right *Svoboda* (Freedom) party enter the Ukrainian parliament – and that was with the assistance of its main financial sponsor, the Party of Regions.⁵² In 2014, nationalist parties received a combined six per cent but no parties entered parliament. Nevertheless, we are told by apologists that “radicalised Ukrainian nationalist elites” dominate the Ukrainian parliament, president and government.⁵³

Painting a picture of a nationalist-dominated Ukraine leads to another untrue claim of widespread political repression and, echoing Russian fake news, human rights abuses by Ukrainian forces.⁵⁴ Ukraine's democratisation has increased since 2014 from 4.93 to 4.61 (with 1 most free and 7 least) and is classified as "Partly Free" and "Hybrid Regime." Russia's democracy has deteriorated since Putin's re-election in 2012 from 5.5 to 6.5 and is "Not Free" and classified as a "Consolidated Authoritarian Regime."⁵⁵ Apologists love three conspiracy theories. The first is the belief that colour revolutions are organised by US intelligence as anti-Russian operations. The US and Western conspiracy behind the Euromaidan allegedly led to the US leading "Ukraine's war strategy" in the Donbas.⁵⁶ The second is the shooting of Euromaidan protestors by "Ukrainian nationalists," not *Berkut* police snipers. De Ploeg's book⁵⁷ cites on thirty occasions, some of them as very long quotations, Ivan Katchanovski's conspiracy of "Ukrainian nationalists" undertaking the sniper killings. Sakwa also loves to cite Katchanowski.⁵⁸ Katchanovski draws on a highly selective use of sources gleaned from all corners of the Internet and YouTube. There is little dispute among the broad mainstream of scholars, experts and policymakers that Yanukovich's vigilante's and *Berkut* riot police shot and killed the protestors. The third blames "Ukrainian nationalists" for the deaths of pro-Russian protestors in Odesa on 2 May 2014. Sakwa's main source of information for this conspiracy is the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs White Book which not surprisingly exaggerates the number of deaths into the hundreds as a "massacre" with "beatings" and "rapes" committed by "Ukrainian nationalists" to the chants of "Glory to Ukraine!"⁵⁹ The tragedy has been pieced together by local journalists in a blow by blow account of the day's tragic events.⁶⁰ In Odesa, the first deaths on that day were of pro-Ukrainian protestors and Molotov cocktails were thrown by *both* sides which set fire to the building leading to 48 dying, six from gunshot wounds, 34 from smoke inhalation and burns and eight from jumping to their deaths.

Realists John Mearsheimer, Rajon Menon and Eugene Rumer⁶¹ focus upon the West's great power relations with Russia where Ukraine is a subaltern side show; indeed, Menon and Rumer's conclusions do not once mention Ukraine. Realists are in awe with the relationship between power and politics where "small" nations are *de facto* pawns who should accept the

geographic neighbourhood they inhabit. Toal⁶² writes that “In Mearsheimer’s world, superpowers are the only ones with real agency, smaller states are subordinate clients, and substate actors are proxies.” Apologist and realist orientalism delegate Ukraine under a Russian great power suzerain state and do not permit it to possess a sovereign right to choose its geopolitical orientation. Realists believe the EU and NATO will prioritise resuming normal relations with Russia over enlargement to Ukraine and support a “grand bargain” between Russia and the US to divide up regions into spheres of influence. A “grand bargain” would recognise Russia as an equal great power and resemble a second Yalta agreement similar to that signed by the USSR and the West in 1945 that gave up central-eastern Europe to the Soviet sphere of influence. Russia’s interest in seeing Donald Trump elected was shaped by the belief he would drop sanctions against Russia and agree to such a “grand bargain.”

Dirk Bennett cites a number of “straw-man arguments and questionable assumptions”⁶³ made by realists:

1. Realists do not distinguish between Russia’s valid and invalid interests and the legitimate and illegitimate means to pursue these interests. In arguing that Russia has greater interests than the West in Ukraine, realists (and apologists) come close to excusing Russia’s actions. If Russian interests are greater than the West’s in the Crimea and eastern Ukraine then why not justify Russian suzerainty over Ukraine?
2. Realists wrongly assume the West is only interested in trade and reforms in Ukraine. In fact, a compelling Western interest is at stake in the Ukraine-Russia crisis; namely, the preservation of the post-Cold War order in Europe which has nothing to do with Ukraine joining NATO and the EU. German Chancellor Angela Merkel came to understand this early in the crisis as Germany arguably invested the most of any European country in supra-national institutions constraining German nationalism in the aftermath of World War II.
3. Realists view Ukraine through a narrow East-West lens that assumes Ukrainian interests are irrelevant or subordinated to Russia.

4. If the argument is paramount that the West should do nothing on Ukraine, including sending defensive military equipment, why should the West then support reforms in Ukraine?
5. Russia has continued to escalate the conflict at its choosing and Ukrainian forces are attacked on a daily basis. This makes it unclear how the sending of military equipment would change an on-going war.
6. If Russia escalated its military attacks on Ukraine these would be not painless. Ukraine would not need to defeat Russia's army and similar to what happened in Vietnam and Afghanistan, foreign forces could be compelled to withdraw.
7. The supplying of military equipment and support for Ukraine's security is not contradictory but complimentary to the West's support for reforms. An on-going war negatively impacts upon Ukraine's reforms by forcing the government to spend a high proportion of its budget on defence which harms fiscal and monetary policies and increases social tensions and political instability.

UNDERSTANDING NATIONAL IDENTITY IN PUTIN'S WAR AGAINST UKRAINE

There would be no crisis, war in eastern Ukraine and new Cold War if Russian leaders accepted the following five factors.

1. Ukrainians are a people and not a branch of the "Russian" people;
2. Ukrainians have a right to their own national memory;
3. Ukrainian is a language and not a dialect of Russian;
4. Ukraine is a sovereign state;
5. Ukraine is not part of Russia's "Near Abroad," natural member of the *Russkii Mir* or indispensable member of the CIS Customs Union/Eurasian Union;

W. Wayne Merry views Putin's war against Ukraine as a clash of sovereignties because Russia is at odds with the UN and international law in not viewing Ukraine and most former Soviet states as "sovereign" entities. Claiming for itself the status of first among equals and seeking the

primacy of its own interests, Russia is in “pursuit of suzerainty” whereby a great power exercises control over their neighbour’s external relations while giving internal autonomy to a satrap.⁶⁴ The client state recognises the external suzerain while receiving protection and aid, a relationship akin to that between Putin and Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. This is the same relationship Putin hoped to produce with Yanukovich after Ukraine was given a \$15 billion “loan” in December 2013 as a reward for turning away from European integration. Merry finds the source for Russia’s mistreatment of Ukrainian sovereignty in how “much of the Russian elite is incapable of thinking about Ukraine other than as a suzerain client.”⁶⁵

The attitudes of Russian nationalism and national identity towards Ukraine and Ukrainians cannot be divorced from the Soviet legacy and the regime built by Putin. By ignoring domestic factors in Russia and Ukraine, apologists, realists and some Russianists do not understand the root causes of the crisis and seek instead to play the blame game.

The question of identity needs to focus on four areas:

- Regime types in Russia and Ukraine;
- Post-Soviet national identities in Ukraine and Russia and relations between both countries since 1991;
- Russian policies towards its neighbours since 1991;
- The influence of Russian and Ukrainian nationalists in Russia and Ukraine.

Putin’s personality is important in understanding his policies towards Ukraine and the West. Western biographies of Putin, the majority of which are written by American and Russian scholars⁶⁶ barely touch upon the influence of Russian nationalism and national identity upon the Russian president.⁶⁷ Russian nationalists and Putin’s regime have common cause in their anti-Americanism, xenophobia and conspiracy theories and opposition to Westernisation. While it is not surprising that Russian nationalists are on the same page as Putin, the majority of opposition democratic political leaders such as Alexei Navalny also support Russia’s annexation of the Crimea.⁶⁸ There are countless examples of British, French and other Europeans who were democrats at home and racists and imperialists abroad. White Russian exiles developed the

theory of Eurasianism, which is highly popular in contemporary Russia and praised Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin because of his promotion of a blend of nationalism and communism (i.e. national bolshevism) from the late 1930s.⁶⁹ The works of Eurasianist ideologists such as Dugin, who called upon his fellow Russians to ‘kill, kill Ukrainians’⁷⁰ in 2014, have provided a new post-Soviet world outlook and identity for Russia’s security forces. Nevertheless, Dugin is mentioned only in passing by apologists and realists on the crisis. Charles Clover writes that Dugin “would plant the seed of European extreme-right theory in the fertile ground of Russia’s military nomenklatura, shorn of its status and privilege, and there it began to germinate.”⁷¹

Following the 2014 crisis, large numbers of scholars have sought to comment and write about Russia-Ukraine relations most of who had no previous experience in the field. This has meant there are often factual mistakes in the published material and often questionable and poorly documented analysis. Toal wrongly claims Russia revived the “fascist” bogeyman in 2014 when it had long-term Soviet roots and was used by Russian political technologists working for Yanukovich’s 2004 election campaign.⁷² Although Russian leaders and public believe they understand Ukraine their image of the country is clouded by deep-seated historical stereotypes. The Russian understanding of identity is similar to the German until very recently, grounded in language and culture where the three eastern Slavs are understood to be “Russians.” Thus, Russian leaders cannot comprehend Russian speaking Ukrainian patriots because in the *Russkii Mir* Russian speakers should be pro-Russian and pro-Putin.

Ukraine’s Russian speakers are similar to English-speaking Scots, Welsh and Irish whose identity and patriotism is grounded in civic terms. Putin’s reading of Russian speakers in *NovoRossiya* was wrong and his hopes of uprisings, captures of state buildings, creation of people’s republics, the holding of referendums and calls for Russian intervention never materialised. Even in the Donbas, Russian proxy forces were on the verge of defeat in the summer of 2014 requiring Putin to order mass artillery attacks across the border and an invasion by regular Russian troops. Orientalist stereotypes of Ukraine also cannot fathom why Russophones are fighting and dying for a “nationalist” Ukraine. The conflict in the Donbas cannot be understood

as a “civil war” between Russian and Ukrainian language speakers when half to two thirds of Ukraine’s security forces are estimated to be Russian speakers.⁷³ The largest number of Ukrainian military casualties have been from Russian-speaking regions controlled by Kyiv and bordering the Donbas. Even Ukrainian units with nationalistic reputations, such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs Azov regiment based near Mariupol in the southern Donetsk region, draws its volunteers from eastern Ukraine with a fifth from the Donbas, including areas occupied by Russian proxies.⁷⁴

CONCLUSION

A large body of scholarly and think tank journal articles, think tank papers and books have been published on Putin’s military aggression against Ukraine and the ensuing crisis. Many of these have been written using orientalist stereotypes of Russia, Ukraine and the Crimea that have deep roots in Western academia. It is not NATO and EU enlargement or Western conspiracies lurking behind colour revolutions which have created the crisis but the unwillingness of Russian chauvinism to accept Ukrainians as a separate people with a sovereign right to decide their destiny. If Putin were to wake up tomorrow and no longer believe Russians and Ukrainians are “odyn narod” the war would end the same day. Apologists, realists and some Russianists are unable to grasp this quite simple fact.

==+==+==+==+==+==+==+==+==+==

Biography Taras Kuzio

Taras Kuzio received a BA in Economics from the University of Sussex, an MA in Area Studies (USSR-Eastern Europe) from the University of London, and a PhD in Political Science from the University of Birmingham, England. Currently he is a Fellow at the Center for Transatlantic Relations, School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, Washington DC. He has held positions at the University of Alberta, George Washington University, University of Toronto, and Chief of Mission to the NATO Information and Documentation Office in Kyiv, Ukraine. Taras Kuzio is the author and editor of 17 books, including (with Paul D'Anieri) *The Sources of Russia's Great Power Politics: Ukraine and the Challenge to the European Order*, (2018), *Putin's War Against Ukraine. Revolution, Nationalism, and Crime*, (2017), *Ukraine, Democratization, Corruption and the New Russian Imperialism*, (2015), *From Kuchmagate to Orange Revolution*, (2009), and *Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives on Nationalism*, (2007). He is the author of five think tank monographs, including *The Crimea: Europe's Next Flashpoint?* (2010). Taras Kuzio is the author of 38 book chapters and 100 scholarly articles on Ukrainian and post-communist politics, democratic transitions, colour revolutions, nationalism, and European studies.

The Cicero Foundation

Independent Pro-EU and Pro-Atlantic think tank

Founded in 1992

Hondertmarck 45D
6211 MB MAASTRICHT
The Netherlands
Tel. +31 43 32 60 828
Tel. +33 1 41 29 09 30
Fax: +33 1 41 29 09 31

Email: info@cicerofoundation.org

Website: www.cicerofoundation.org

Registration No. Chamber of Commerce Maastricht 41078444

NOTES

¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism. Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin, 1995), p.35.

² E. Said, *Orientalism*, pp.328-367. See Mykola Riabchuk, 'Ukrainians as Russia's Negative 'Other': History Comes Full Circle,' *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol.49, no. 1 (March 2016), pp.75-85.

³ Fabio Belafatti, 'Orientalism reanimated: colonial thinking in Western analysis's comments on Ukraine,' *Euromaidan Press*, 27 October 2014. <http://euromaidanpress.com/2014/10/27/western-commentators-should-rid-themselves-of-old-prejudices-dating-back-from-the-age-of-colonialism-before-commenting-on-eastern-european-affairs/>

⁴ Samuel Charap and Timothy J. Colton in *Everyone Loses. The Ukraine Crisis and the Ruinous Contest for Post-Soviet Eurasia* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2017) repeatedly stress the poor performance of Ukraine's reforms.

⁵ Taras Kuzio, 'History and National Identity Among the Eastern Slavs. Towards a New Framework'. *National Identities*, vol.3, no.2 (July 2001), pp.109-132.

⁶ Volodymyr Kravchenko's review of Richard Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine. Crisis in the Borderlands* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2016) in *East-West. Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, vol.3, no.1 (2016), pp.155-163. <https://www.ewjus.com/index.php/ewjus/article/view/173>

⁷ <https://www.kyivpost.com/article/opinion/op-ed/bohdan-vitvitsky-ukraine-drive-analysts.html>

⁸ Gerard Toal, *Near Abroad. Putin, the West and the Contest over Ukraine and the Caucasus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017) has four chapters on Georgia and two at the end on Ukraine.

⁹ *Zerkalo Nedeli* and *Ukrainska Pravda*, for example, are published in Russian and Ukrainian. Three of Ukraine's five weekly political magazines are in Russian: *Fokus*, *Korrespondent* and *Novoye Vremya* and two are in Ukrainian: *Kray* and *Ukrayinsky Tyzhden*.

-
- ¹⁰ Richard Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine* and G. Toal, *Near Abroad*.
- ¹¹ Paul D’Anieri, ‘Ukraine, Russia, and the West. The Battle Over Blame,’ *Russian Review*, vol.75, no.3 (July 2016), pp.498 and 500.
- ¹² Chris Kaspar de Ploeg, *Ukraine in the Crossfire* (Atlanta, GA: Clarity Press, 2017).
- ¹³ R. Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, pp.207, 221-222, and 234.
- ¹⁴ R. Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, p.209.
- ¹⁵ G. Toal, *Near Abroad*, pp.208.
- ¹⁶ G. Toal, *Near Abroad*, p. 202.
- ¹⁷ R. Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, pp. 151, 153, 155, 165, 169, 195, 226, and 286-287. G. Toal (*Near Abroad*, p.289) writes that past US intervention in central and Latin America “does not justify current Russian interventionism.”
- ¹⁸ R. Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, pp.206-207 and C. K. de Ploeg, *Ukraine in the Crossfire*, p.178.
- ¹⁹ G. Toal, *Near Abroad*, pp.208, 234, 237-239, 244-245, 261, and 268-269.
- ²⁰ <http://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/News/News-View-EN.asp?newsid=6100&lang=2&cat=5>
- ²¹ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/australia-rewrites-history-with-campaign-against-colonial-statues-lachlan-macquarie-robert-burke-sir-thomas-mitchell-captain-james-cook-john-batman-7m2l9p6w9?shareToken=9fed26cf5484e127e956614c3d1ef48d>
- ²² Neil Kent, *Crimea. A History* (London: Hurst, 2016), pp.,157 and 160.
- ²³ Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis. What it Means for the West* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014) and Paul R. Magocsi, R. Paul, *This Blessed Land: Crimea and the Crimean Tatars* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 2014).
- ²⁴ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/paulroderickgregory/2014/05/05/putins-human-rights-council-accidentally-posts-real-crimean-election-results-only-15-voted-for-annexation/>
- ²⁵ Paul Chaisty and Stephen Whitefield, ‘Putin’s Nationalism Problem’ in Agnieszka Pikulicka-Wilczewska and R. Sakwa eds., *Ukraine and Russia: People, Politics, Propaganda and Perspectives* (Bristol: E-International Relations, March 2015), pp.165-172.
- ²⁶ Henry E. Hale, ‘How nationalism and machine politics mix in Russia,’ in Pal Kolsto and Helge Blakkisrud eds., *The New Russian Nationalism. Imperialism, Ethnicity and Authoritarianism*,

2000-15 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp.221-248; P. Kolsto, 'Crimea vs. Donbas: How Putin Won Russian Nationalist Support—and Lost It Again,' *Slavic Review*, vol.75, no.3 (Fall 2016), pp.702-703 and Marlene Laruelle, 'Is Nationalism a Force for Change in Russia?' *Daedalus*, vol.146, no.2 (Spring 2017), p.98.

²⁷ M. Laruelle, "In search of Putin's philosopher. Why Ivan Ilyin is not Putin's Ideological Guru," *Intersection*, 3 March 2017. <http://intersectionproject.eu/article/politics/search-putins-philosopher>

²⁸ Charles Clover, *Black Wind, White Snow. The Rise of Russia's New Nationalism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2016), p.287.

²⁹ Valerie Sperling, 'Putin's macho personality cult,' *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol.49, no.1 (March 2016), pp.13-23 and Maryna Romanets, 'Virtual Warfare: Masculinity, Sexuality, and Propaganda in the Russo-Ukrainian War,' *East/West: Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2017), pp.159-177.

³⁰ G. Toal, *Near Abroad*, p.252.

³¹ Alexander J. Motyl, "Ukraine's Donbas is Like America's South", *Huffington Post*, 5 January 2015. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alexander-motyl/alexander-motyl_b_6414802.html

³² <http://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.co.uk/2014/08/neo-nazi-russian-national-unity-in.html>

³³ 'Na territorii Donetskoy oblasti deystvovaly voyennyye lagerya DNR s polnym vooruzheniyem s 2009 goda,' *Novosti Donbassa*, 20 July 2014. <http://novosti.dn.ua/details/230206/>

³⁴ Tim Judah, *In Wartime. Stories from Ukraine* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2015), pp.XVI, 11, 150, and 152-153.

³⁵ C. K. de Ploeg, *Ukraine in the Crossfire*, p.41.

³⁶ <http://life.pravda.com.ua/society/2012/11/9/115486/>

³⁷ R. Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, p.112.

³⁸ <https://www.rferl.org/a/daily-vertical-ukraine-s-disappeared/28709197.html>

³⁹ <http://khpg.org/en/index.php?id=1505126407>

⁴⁰ https://ukrstat.org/uk/druk/publicat/kat_u/publ1_u.htm

⁴¹ <http://khpg.org/en/index.php?id=1504187187>

-
- ⁴² <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2014/0812/A-Ukrainian-murder-mystery-ensnares-a-church-in-former-rebel-stronghold>
- ⁴³ <http://khpg.org/en/index.php?id=1503486891>;
<http://khpg.org/en/index.php?id=1503235531>; <http://khpg.org/en/index.php?id=1503486891>;
<http://khpg.org/en/index.php?id=1504561565>; <http://khpg.org/en/index.php?id=1504385148>
- ⁴⁴ <http://time.com/67272/ukraine-jew-register-donetsk/>
- ⁴⁵ <http://eajc.org/page34/news43797.html>
- ⁴⁶ <https://qz.com/347948/the-ukrainian-city-thats-become-a-haven-for-jews-fleeing-another-european-war/>
- ⁴⁷ R. Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, pp.21, 3859, 206, 249, 279.
- ⁴⁸ Borys Lozhkin, *The Fourth Republic. Why Europe Needs Ukraine and Why Ukraine Needs Europe* (Kyiv: Novyy Druk, 2016), p.78.
- ⁴⁹ A. Wilson, 'Explaining Civil Conflict Perhaps, but Not Civil War,' *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol.68, no.4 (June 2015), pp.631-652.
- ⁵⁰ V. Kravchenko's review of R. Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*.
- ⁵¹ Eugene Rumer, 'Eurasia Letter: Will Ukraine Return to Russia?' *Foreign Policy*, no. 96 (Autumn, 1994), pp. 129-144. C. K. de Ploeg, citing Rumer as an example, has an entire chapter entitled "A Divided Country."
- ⁵² See two reports by the Party of Regions financed American Institute in Ukraine: "A Kind of 'Freedom' Ukraine Doesn't Need" (12 March 2011) and "May 9 Lesson From Lviv: 'Svoboda' a Danger to Ukraine's Democracy, Not a Card to Be Played for Political Advantage," (20 May 2011),), <http://www.aminuk.org/index.php?idmenu=12&idsubmenu=213&language=en> and <http://www.aminuk.org/index.php?idmenu=12&idsubmenu=229&language=en>.
- ⁵³ C. K. de Ploeg, *Ukraine in the Crossfire*, p.257. See also R. Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, pp.158, 166-167,171,176, 183-184.
- ⁵⁴ R. Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, pp.159, and 274.
- ⁵⁵ <https://freedomhouse.org/>
- ⁵⁶ C. K. de Ploeg, *Ukraine in the Crossfire*, p.58-59, 63, 224-226, 262-263, and 284.

⁵⁷ C. K. de Ploeg, *Ukraine in the Crossfire*, pp.174-176.

⁵⁸ R. Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, p.320.

⁵⁹ R. Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, pp.97-99.

⁶⁰ Table 11.1. 'The Odesa Conflict on 2 May 2014: A Chronology of What Took Place' in T. Kuzio, *Putin's War Against Ukraine. Evolution, Nationalism, and Crime* (Toronto: Chair of Ukrainian Studies, 2017), p.334.

⁶¹ John J. Mearsheimer, 'Why the Ukraine crisis is the West's fault: the liberal delusions that provoked Putin,' *Foreign Affairs*, vol.93, no.5 (September-October 2014), pp. 77-89 and Rajan Menon and E. Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine. The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015). <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-08-18/why-ukraine-crisis-west-s-fault>

⁶² G. Toal, *Near Abroad*, p.32.

⁶³ Dirk Bennett, 'The Realist Case for Arming Ukraine,' *The American Interest*, 20 February 2015. <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2015/02/20/the-realist-case-for-arming-ukraine/>

⁶⁴ W. Wayne Merry, 'The Origins of Russia's War in Ukraine: The Clash of Russian and European 'Civilizational Choices' for Ukraine' in Elizabeth A. Wood, William E. Pomerantz, W. W. Merry and Maxim Trudolyubov, *Roots of Russia's War in Ukraine* (Washington DC; Woodrow Wilson Center, 2016), p.30.

⁶⁵ W. W. Merry, 'The Origins of Russia's War in Ukraine,' pp.37-38.

⁶⁶ Charles G. Gaddy and F. Hill, *Mr. Putin. Operative in the Kremlin* (Washington DC; Brookings Institution Press, 2015).

⁶⁷ See the list of books on Putin reviewed by Benjamin Nathans in 'The Real Power of Putin,' *The New York Review of Books*, 29 September 2016. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2016/09/29/real-power-vladimir-putin/>

⁶⁸ T. Kuzio, 'Why are Russian Opposition Leaders Democrats at Home and Imperialists Abroad?' *New Atlanticist, Atlantic Council of the US*, 22 May 2017. <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/why-are-russian-opposition-leaders-democrats-at-home-and-imperialists-abroad>

⁶⁹ C. Clover, *Black Wind, White Snow*, p.287.

⁷⁰ 'Putin's Advisor Dugin says Ukrainians must be "killed, killed, killed,"' 12 June 2014.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MQ-uqmnwKF8>

⁷¹ C. Clover, *Black Wind, White Snow*, p.205.

⁷² G. Toal, *Near Abroad*, p. 218. See T. Kuzio, 'Russian Policy to Ukraine During Elections', *Demokratizatsiya*, vol.13, no.4 (Fall 2005), pp.491-517.

⁷³ <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2016-06-21/ukraines-fog-war>

⁷⁴ <https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/two-years-training-azov-regiment-itches-return-war.html>