

The Difference Between Common Perception and Reality Regarding the Ukraine Conflict

By [Bharat Dogra](#)

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*A very important aspect of democracy is supposed to be that well-informed public opinion is able to influence government policy in important ways, functioning as an effective corrective. Hence policy mistakes and distortions have a reasonable chance to be corrected at an early stage, and an even higher chance to be corrected in due course of time. **To ensure that people are well-informed, freedom of expression and media are supposed to exist as very important pillars of democracy.***

All this is supposed to work particularly well in western countries which are supposed to have some of the most celebrated democratic systems in the world.

Despite this, it has been seen time and again regarding several important events of contemporary history that there is a big difference between common perception and reality. This is certainly true of the Ukraine conflict.

The widely held common perception is that Russia used its stronger position very unfairly and arrogantly to invade a smaller neighbor Ukraine and annex a big part of its territory and so it is the duty of others to support the valiant resistance effort of the people and the government of Ukraine.

The reality is very different and although several senior scholars of western countries too have drawn attention to the reality but somehow the perception has been widely along the lines indicated above.

The reality is that given the geographical, economic, strategic and historical realities it is definitely in the interests of both Ukraine and Russia to live as friendly neighbors. At the same time Ukraine can have friendly relations with any other country as long as it does not

create any serious problems in Ukraine's relations with its most important neighbor.

Unfortunately, the USA, its close allies and NATO decided on a **course of using Ukraine as a proxy to create increasing problems for Russia, as a part of the wider strategy of encircling Russia with relentless eastward expansion of NATO**, violating earlier promises of not expanding even an inch in this direction.

In 2014 a neutral, democratically elected government of Ukraine that had enjoyed good relations with Russia was toppled in a coup engineered by the USA and Britain. This was followed by immediately withdrawing Russian language as an official language and violence against several Russian speaking people and areas of Ukraine. Russia annexed the Crimea region, an action which was widely supported by most people of Crimea. Discontent continued to grow among Russian speaking people in and around the Donbas region, and there was much repressive action against them by Ukraine forces. The people here mobilized, without military support from Russia, and achieved some success. In these conditions Minsk Accords 1 and 2 were signed in 2014 and 2015 with the mediation of European countries to provide for growing autonomy, (not separatism or secession) within a united Ukraine. Russia welcomed this along with other countries as the way forward and showed no inclination to intervene militarily. However Ukraine increasingly went back on implementing the Accords and increased its repressive actions with the passage of time.

These suddenly and decisively increased in early 2022 with very aggressive attacks by the Ukrainian forces on the people of Donbas where several thousand people had already perished, as per UN estimates. Instead of rushing to invade, President Putin tried a lot to avoid a military intervention despite coming under public pressure in Russia and Donbas for this, but finally relented in February 2022.

This version of the events is actually supported by what several senior US and western scholars have themselves stated. Several of them in fact warned their countries against such hostility and aggression towards Russia and against this steadily advancing proxy war of 2014-24 (not just 2022-24) but their advice was ignored. Very senior leaders of Europe later said that they merely used the Minsk accords to give Ukraine time to prepare better for war!

Here attention may be drawn to just one early warning given by a well-informed western observer. The reference here to a paper published in March-April 2022 in the Postil Magazine and subsequently re-published at several other places on the military situation in Ukraine, written by Jacques Baud. The author, trained in British and American intelligence, worked in UN peace operations and in NATO in senior positions and also had responsibilities to uplift Ukrainian military.

He has stated that in 2020 40% of Ukrainian military force comprised of paramilitary militias of mercenaries assembled from nearly 19 countries. He says clearly that western countries supported such far-right militias. These militias "convey a nauseating ideology" and are "virulently anti-Semitic". "The west continued to arm militias that had been guilty of numerous crimes against civilian population since 2014—rape, torture and massacres." Several of these militias were integrated with the National Guard. What is more, "in the Ukraine, with the blessing of the western countries, those who are in favor of negotiations have been eliminated." Examples of assassinations given in this paper include the assassination of Danes Kireyev, negotiator, and assassination of Dmitry Demyaneko.

However papers such as this have been an exception and despite several respected voices from the west warning against the policy of initiating and relentlessly pursuing a proxy war using Ukraine to endlessly trouble Russia, this has been pursued by the USA and close allies. It is difficult to see how this has benefited the USA in any meaningful way while the energy situation of its European allies has been worsened. Meanwhile several hundred thousand people have died or have been injured in very painful ways, while millions have been uprooted. Endless supply of weapons by the west has led in many cases to weapons reaching the wrong hands; weapons and other forms of trafficking have increased.

Hence the real situation is very different from the common perception based on repetition of lies and half-truths. Those concerned with the future of democracy should seriously explore how many respected dissenting voices went unheeded, while a false discourse could be very widely propagated to support very harmful policies of US and western governments, and despite media playing a dominant role in society the task of creating public opinion based on the truth, the real situation remained completely sidelined or neglected.

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Bharat Dogra is Honorary Convener, Campaign to Save Earth Now. His recent books include *Protecting Earth for Children*, *Planet in Peril*, *Earth without Borders* and *A Day in 2071*. He is a regular contributor to *Global Research*.

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