

## Putin 'like Hitler'? How did Prince Charles get it so wrong?

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*Far from being 'like Hitler' as Prince Charles accuses, Putin is sober, cautious, defensive, a stickler for international law, determined to modernise Russia, and anxious to avoid military confrontation. Israel Shamir sees through the NATO propaganda ...*

Putin's choice is not an easy one. As Russia procrastinates, as the US doubles the risks, the world draws nearer to the nuclear abyss. Who will chicken out?

It is not much fun to be in Kiev these days. The revolutionary excitement is over, and hopes for new faces, the end of corruption and economic improvement have withered.

The Maidan street revolt and the subsequent coup just reshuffled the same marked deck of cards, forever rotating in power.

The new acting President has been an acting prime minister, and a KGB (called 'SBU' in Ukrainian) supremo.

The new acting prime minister has been a foreign minister. The oligarch most likely to be 'elected' President in a few days has been a foreign minister, the head of the state bank, and personal treasurer of two coups, in 2004 (installing Yushchenko) and in 2014 (installing himself).

His main competitor, Mme Timoshenko, served as a prime minister for years, until electoral defeat in 2010.

The new rulers are the ones that ruined Ukraine

These people had brought Ukraine to its present abject state. In 1991, the Ukraine was richer than Russia, today it is three times poorer because of these people's mismanagement and theft.

Now they plan an old trick: to take loans in Ukraine's name, pocket the cash and leave the country indebted. They sell state assets to Western companies and ask for NATO to come in and protect the investment.

They play a hard game, brass knuckles and all. The Black Guard, a new SS-like armed force of the neo-nazi Right Sector, prowls the land. They arrest or kill dissidents, activists, journalists.

Hundreds of American soldiers, belonging to the 'private' company Academi (formerly Blackwater) are spread out in Novorossia, the pro-Russian provinces in the East and South-East.

IMF-dictated reforms slashed pensions by half and doubled the housing rents. In the market, US Army rations took the place of local food.

Kiev - even the pretence of democracy has gone

The new Kiev regime had dropped the last pretence of democracy by expelling the Communists from the parliament. This should endear them to the US even more.

Expel Communists, apply for NATO, condemn Russia, arrange a gay parade and you may do anything at all, even fry dozens of citizens alive. And so they did.

The harshest repressions were unleashed on industrial Novorossia, as its working class loathes the whole lot of oligarchs and ultra-nationalists.

After the blazing inferno of Odessa and a wanton shooting on the streets of Melitopol the two rebellious provinces of Donetsk and Lugansk took up arms and declared their independence from the Kiev regime. They came under fire, but did not surrender.

The other six Russian-speaking industrial provinces of Novorossia were quickly cowed. Dnepropetrovsk and Odessa were terrorised by personal army of Mr Kolomoysky. Kharkov was misled by its tricky governor.

Russia did not interfere and did not support the rebellion, to the great distress of Russian nationalists in Ukraine and Russia who mutter about "betrayal". So much for the warlike rhetoric of McCain and Brzezinski.

An exasperating respect for international law

Putin's respect for others' sovereignty is exasperating. I understand this sounds like a joke, - you hear so much about Putin as a "new Hitler" - most recently in unguarded comments from [Prince Charles on his Canadian tour](#).

As a matter of fact, Putin had legal training before joining the Secret Service. He is a stickler for international law. His Russia has interfered with other states much less than France or England, let alone the US.

I asked his senior adviser, Mr Alexei Pushkov, why Russia did not try to influence Ukrainian minds while Kiev buzzed with American and European officials. "We think it is wrong to interfere", he replied like a good Sunday schoolboy.

It is rather likely Putin's advisors misjudged public sentiment. The majority of Novorossia's population does not like the new Kiev regime, but being politically passive and conservative, will submit to its rule", they estimated.

"The rebels are a small bunch of firebrands without mass support, and they can't be relied upon", was their view. Accordingly, Putin advised the rebels to postpone the referendum indefinitely, a polite way of saying "drop it".

A convincing vote for secession

They disregarded his request with considerable sang froid and convincingly voted en masse for secession from a collapsing Ukraine. The turnout was much higher than expected, the

support for the move near total.

As I was told by a Kremlin insider, this development was not foreseen by Putin's advisers.

Perhaps the advisors had read it right, but three developments had changed the voters' minds and had sent this placid people to the barricades and the voting booths.

### 1. The Odessa incineration

The first one was the fiery holocaust of Odessa, where the peaceful and carelessly unarmed demonstrating workers were suddenly attacked by regime's thugs - the Ukrainian equivalent of Mubarak's shabab - and corralled into the Trade Unions Headquarters.

The building was set on fire, and the far-right pro-regime Black Guard positioned snipers to efficiently pick off would-be escapees.

Some fifty, mainly elderly, Russian-speaking workers were burned alive or shot as they rushed for the windows and the doors. This dreadful event was turned into an occasion of merriment and joy by Ukrainian nationalists who referred to their slain compatriots as "fried beetles".

It is being said that this auto-da-fé was organised by the shock troops of Jewish oligarch and strongman Kolomoisky, who coveted the port of Odessa.

Despite his cuddly bear appearance, he is pugnacious and violent person, who offered \$10,000 for a captive Russian, dead or alive, and proposed a cool \$1 million for the head of Mr Tsarev, a Member of Parliament from Donetsk.

### 2. The Mariupol pogrom

The second was the Mariupol attack on May 9, 2014. This day is commemorated as V-day in Russia and Ukraine (while the West celebrates it on May 8). The Kiev regime forbade all V-day celebrations.

In Mariupol, the Black Guard attacked the peaceful and weaponless town, burning down the police headquarters and killing local policemen who had refused to suppress the festive march. Afterwards, Black Guard thugs unleashed armoured vehicles on the streets, killing citizens and destroying property.

The West did not voice any protest. Nuland and Merkel weren't horrified by this mass murder, as they were by Yanukovich's timid attempts to control crowds.

The people of these two provinces felt abandoned. They understood that nobody was going to protect and save them but themselves, and went off to vote.

### 3. The Eurovision Song Contest. Yes, seriously ...

The third development was, bizarrely, the Eurovision jury choice of the Austrian transgender singer Conchita Wurst as winner of its 2014 song contest. The politically correct judges of the jury chose to "celebrate tolerance", in line with Western European cultural trends.

However this support for re-gendering did not go down well with most Russians and / or

Ukrainians, who remain socially conservative on such issues. Traditionally minded Novorossians want no part of such a Europe, which they see as an affront to their values, traditions, religion and culture.

The Russians have readjusted their sights, but they do not intend to bring their troops into the two rebel republics, unless dramatic developments should force them.

Sochi Olympics were meant to showcase the new Russia

Imagine: you are dressed up for a night on Broadway, but your neighbours are involved in a vicious quarrel, and you have to gun up and deal with the trouble instead of enjoying a show, and a dinner, and perhaps a date. This was Putin's position regarding the Ukrainian turmoil.

A few months ago, Russia had made a huge effort to become, and to be seen as, a very civilised European state of the first magnitude.

This was the message of the Sochi [Olympic games](#): to re-brand, even re-invent Russia, just as Peter the Great once had, as part of the First World; an amazing country of strong European tradition, of Leo Tolstoy and Malevich, of Tchaikovsky and Diaghilev, the land of arts, of daring social reform, of technical achievements, of modernity and beyond – the Russia of Natasha Rostova riding a Sikorsky 'copter.

Putin spent \$60 billion to broadcast this image. The old fox Henry Kissinger wisely [said](#):

“Putin spent \$60 billion on the Olympics. They had opening and closing ceremonies, trying to show Russia as a normal progressive state. So it isn't possible that he, three days later, would voluntarily start an assault on Ukraine.

“There is no doubt that ... at all times he wanted Ukraine in a subordinate position. And at all times, every senior Russian that I've ever met, including dissidents like Solzhenitsyn and Brodsky, looked at Ukraine as part of the Russian heritage. But I don't think he had planned to bring it to a head now.”

But the US does not want a modern Russia

However, Washington hawks decided to do whatever it takes to keep Russia out in the cold. They were afraid of this image of “a normal progressive state” as such a Russia would render NATO irrelevant and undermine European dependence on the US.

They were adamant about retaining their hegemony, shattered as it was by the [Syrian confrontation](#). They attacked Russian positions in the Ukraine and arranged a violent coup, [installing a viciously anti-Russian regime](#) supported by football fans and neo-Nazis, paid for by Jewish oligarchs and American taxpayers.

The victors banned the Russian language and prepared to void treaties with Russia regarding its Crimean naval base at Sebastopol on the Black Sea. This base was to become a great new NATO base, controlling the Black Sea and threatening Russia.

Putin had to deal quickly and so he did, by [accepting the Crimean people's](#) request to join Russian Federation. This dealt with the immediate problem of the base, but the problem of Ukraine remained.

A Ukraine hostile to Russia is not acceptable

The Ukraine is not a foreign entity to Russians, it is the western half of Russia. It was artificially separated from the rest in 1991, at the collapse of the USSR.

The people of the two parts are interconnected by family, culture and blood ties; their economies are intricately connected. While a separate viable Ukrainian state is a possibility, an 'independent' Ukrainian state hostile to Russia is not viable and can't be tolerated by any Russian ruler.

And this for military as well as for cultural reasons: if Hitler had begun the war against Russia from its present border, he would have taken Stalingrad in two days and would have destroyed Russia in a week.

A more pro-active Russian ruler would have sent troops to Kiev a long time ago. Thus did Czar Alexis when the Poles, Cossacks and Tatars argued for it in 17<sup>th</sup> century. So also did Czar Peter the Great, when the Swedes occupied it in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. So did Lenin, when the Germans set up the Protectorate of Ukraine (he called its establishment "the obscene peace"). So did Stalin, when the Germans occupied the Ukraine in 1941.

Washington's geo-political goals

Putin still hopes to settle the problem by peaceful means, relying upon the popular support of the Ukrainian people. Actually, before the Crimean takeover, the majority of Ukrainians (and near all Novorossians) overwhelmingly supported some sort of union with Russia. Otherwise, the Kiev coup would not have been necessary.

The forced Crimean takeover seriously undermined Russian appeal. The people of Ukraine did not like it. This was foreseen by the Kremlin, but they had to accept Crimea for a few reasons.

Firstly, a loss of Sevastopol naval base to NATO was a too horrible of an alternative to contemplate. Secondly, the Russian people would not understand if Putin were to refuse the suit of the Crimeans.

The Washington hawks still hope to force Putin to intervene militarily, as it would give them the opportunity to isolate Russia, turn it into a monster pariah state, beef up defence spending and set Europe and Russia against each other. They do not care about Ukraine and Ukrainians, but use them as pretext to attain geopolitical goals.

No succour from the EU

The Europeans would like to fleece Ukraine; to import its men as 'illegal' workers and its women as prostitutes, to strip assets, to colonise. They did it with Moldova, a little sister of Ukraine, the most miserable ex-Soviet Republic.

As for Russia, the EU would not mind taking it down a notch, so they would not act so grandly. But the EU is not fervent about it. Hence, the difference in attitudes.

Putin would prefer to continue with his modernisation of Russia. The country needs it badly. The infrastructure lags 20 or 30 years behind the West.

Tired by this backwardness, young Russians often prefer to move to the West, and this brain drain causes much damage to Russia while enriching the West.

Even Google is a result of this brain drain, for Sergey Brin is a Russian immigrant as well. So are hundreds of thousands of Russian scientists and artists manning every Western lab, theatre and orchestra.

Meeting the aspirations of Russia's young people

Political liberalisation is not enough: the young people want good roads, good schools and a quality of life comparable to the West. This is what Putin intends to deliver.

He is doing a fine job of it. Moscow now has free bikes and Wi-Fi in the parks like every Western European city. Trains have been upgraded. Hundreds of thousands of apartments are being built, even more than during the Soviet era.

Salaries and pensions have increased seven-to-tenfold in the past decade. Russia is still shabby, but it is on the right track. Putin wants to continue this modernisation.

As for the Ukraine and other ex-Soviet states, Putin would prefer they retain their independence, be friendly and work at a leisurely pace towards integration a la the European Union. He does not dream of a new empire. He would reject such a proposal, as it would delay his modernisation plans.

If the beastly neocons would not have forced his hand by expelling the legitimate president of Ukraine and installing their puppets, the world might have enjoyed a long spell of peace. But then the western military alliance under the US leadership would fall into abeyance, US military industries would lose out, and US hegemony would evaporate.

Peace is not good for the US military and hegemony-creating media machine. So dreams of peace in our lifetime are likely to remain just dreams.

What will Putin do?

Putin will try to avoid sending in troops as long as possible. He will have to protect the two splinter provinces, but this can be done with remote support, the way the US supports the rebels in Syria, without 'boots on the ground'.

Unless serious bloodshed on a large scale should occur, Russian troops will just stand by, staring down the Black Guard and other pro-regime forces.

Putin will try to find an arrangement with the West for sharing authority, influence and economic involvement in the failed state. This can be done through federalisation, or by means of coalition government, or even partition.

The Russian-speaking provinces of Novorossia are those of Kharkov (industry), Nikolayev (ship-building), Odessa (harbour), Donetsk and Lugansk (mines and industry), Dnepropetrovsk (missiles and high-tech), Zaporozhe (steel), Kherson (water for Crimea and ship-building), all of them established, built and populated by Russians.

An independent Novorossia?

They could secede from Ukraine and form an independent Novorossia, a mid-sized state, but still bigger than some neighbouring states. This state could join the Union State of Russia and Belarus, and / or the Customs Union led by Russia.

The rump Ukraine could manage as it sees fit until it decides whether or not to join its Slavic sisters in the East. Such a set up would produce two rather cohesive and homogeneous states.

Another possibility (much less likely at this moment) is a three-way division of the failed Ukraine: Novorossia, Ukraine proper, and Galicia&Volyn. In such a case, Novorossia would be strongly pro-Russian, Ukraine would be neutral, and Galicia strongly pro-Western.

The EU could accept this, but the US probably would not agree to any power-sharing in the Ukraine. In the ensuing tug-of-war, one of two winners will emerge. If Europe and the US drift apart, Russia wins. If Russia accepts a pro-Western positioning of practically all of Ukraine, the US wins.

The tug-of-war could snap and cause all-out war, with many participants and a possible use of nuclear weapons. This is a game of chicken. The one with stronger nerves and less imagination will remain on the track.

#### Pro and Contra

It is too early to predict who will win in the forthcoming confrontation. For the Russian president, it is extremely tempting to take all of Ukraine or at least Novorossia, but it is not an easy task, and one likely to cause much hostility from the Western powers.

With Ukraine incorporated, Russian recovery from 1991 would be completed, its strength doubled, its security ensured and a grave danger removed. Russia would become great again. People would venerate Putin as Gatherer of Russian Lands.

However, Russian efforts to appear as a modern peaceful progressive state would have been wasted. It would be seen as an aggressor and expelled from international bodies.

Sanctions will bite: high tech imports may be banned, as in the Soviet days. The Russian elites are reluctant to jeopardise their good life. The Russian military just recently began its modernisation and is not keen to fight yet, perhaps not for another ten years. But if they feel cornered, if NATO moves into Eastern Ukraine, they will fight all the same.

#### The Ukrainian national interest lies with Russia

Some Russian politicians and observers believe that Ukraine is a basket case. Its problems would be too expensive to fix. This assessment has a 'sour grapes' aftertaste, but it is widespread.

An interesting new voice on the web, The Saker, [promotes this view](#). "Let the EU and the US provide for the Ukrainians, they will come back to Mother Russia when hungry", he says. The problem is, they will not be allowed to reconsider. The junta did not seize power violently in order to lose it at the ballot box.

Besides, Ukraine is not in such bad shape as some people claim. Yes, it would cost trillions to turn it into a Germany or France, but that's not necessary. Ukraine can reach the Russian

level of development very quickly – in union with Russia. Under the EC-IMF-NATO, Ukraine will become a basket case, if it's not already.

The same is true for all East European ex-Soviet states: they can modestly prosper with Russia, as Belarus and Finland do, or suffer depopulation, unemployment, poverty with Europe and NATO and against Russia, vide Latvia, Hungary, Moldova, Georgia.

It is in Ukrainian interests to join Russia in some framework. Ukrainians understand that. For this reason they will not be allowed to have democratic elections.

Putin's hard choices

Simmering Novorossia has a potential to change the game. If Russian troops don't come in, Novorossian rebels may beat off the Kiev offensive and embark on a counter-offensive to regain the whole of the country, despite Putin's pacifying entreaties. Then, in a full-blown civil war, the Ukraine will hammer out its destiny.

On a personal level, Putin faces a hard choice. Russian nationalists will not forgive him if he surrenders Ukraine without a fight. The US and EU threaten the very life of the Russian president, as their sanctions are hurting Putin's close associates, encouraging them to get rid of or even assassinate the President and improve their relations with the mighty West.

War may come at any time, as it came twice during the last century – though Russia tried to avoid it both times. Putin wants to postpone it, at the very least, but not at any price.

Putin's choice is not an easy one. As Russia procrastinates, as the US doubles the risks, the world draws nearer to the nuclear abyss. Who will chicken out?

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