

Ukraine: Somewhere Between Afghanization and Syrianization

Ukraine is finished as a nation - neither side will rest in this war. The only question is whether it will be an Afghan or Syrian style finale.

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One year after the astounding US humiliation in Kabul - and on the verge of another serious comeuppance in Donbass - there is reason to believe Moscow is wary of Washington seeking vengeance: in the form of the ‘Afghanization’ of Ukraine.

With no end in sight to western weapons and finance flowing into Kiev, it must be recognized that the Ukrainian battle is likely to disintegrate into yet another endless war. Like the Afghan jihad in the 1980s which employed US-armed and funded guerrillas to drag Russia into its depths, Ukraine’s backers will employ those war-tested methods to run a protracted battle that can spill into bordering Russian lands.

Yet this US attempt at crypto-Afghanization will at best accelerate the completion of what Russia’s Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu describes as the “tasks” of its Special Military Operation (SMO) in Ukraine. For Moscow right now, that road leads [all the way to Odessa](#).

It didn’t have to be this way. Until the recent assassination of [Darya Dugina](#) at Moscow’s gates, the battlefield in Ukraine was in fact under a ‘Syrianization’ process.

Like the foreign proxy war in Syria this past decade, frontlines around significant Ukrainian cities had roughly stabilized. Losing on the larger battlefields, Kiev had increasingly moved to employ terrorist tactics. Neither side could completely master the immense war theater at hand. So the Russian military opted to keep minimal forces in battle - contrary to the strategy it employed in 1980s Afghanistan.

Let’s remind ourselves of a few Syrian facts: Palmyra was liberated in March 2016, then lost and retaken in 2017. Aleppo was liberated only in December 2016. Deir Ezzor in September 2017. A slice of northern Hama in December and January 2018. The outskirts of Damascus in the Spring of 2018. Idlib - and significantly, over 25 percent of Syrian territory - are still

not liberated. That tells a lot about rhythm in a war theater.

The Russian military never made a conscious decision to interrupt the multi-channel flow of western weapons to Kiev. Methodically destroying those weapons once they're in Ukrainian territory - with plenty of success - is another matter. The same applies to smashing mercenary networks.

Moscow is well aware that any negotiation with those pulling the strings in Washington - and dictating all terms to puppets in Brussels and Kiev - is futile. The fight in Donbass and beyond is a do or die affair.

So the battle will go on, destroying what's left of Ukraine, just as it destroyed much of Syria. The difference is that economically, much more than in Syria, what's left of Ukraine will plunge into a black void. Only territory under Russian control will be rebuilt, and that includes, significantly, the bulk of Ukraine's industrial infrastructure.

What's left - rump Ukraine - has already been plundered anyway, as Monsanto, Cargill and Dupont have already bagged 17 million hectares of prime, fertile arable land - over half of what Ukraine still possesses. That translates de facto as BlackRock, Blackstone and Vanguard, top agro-business shareholders, owning whatever lands that really matter in non-sovereign Ukraine.

Going forward, by next year the Russians will be applying themselves to cutting off Kiev from NATO weapons supplies. As that unfolds, the Anglo-Americans will eventually move whatever puppet regime remains to Lviv. And Kiev terrorism - conducted by Bandera worshippers - will continue to be the new normal in the capital.

The Kazakh double game

By now it's abundantly clear this is not a mere war of territorial conquest. It's certainly part of a [War of Economic Corridors](#) - as the US spares no effort to sabotage and smash the multiple connectivity channels of Eurasia's integration projects, be they Chinese-led (Belt and Road Initiative, BRI) or Russian-led (Eurasian Economic Union, EAEU).

Just like the proxy war in Syria remade large swathes of West Asia (witness, for instance, Erdogan about to meet Assad), the fight in Ukraine, in a microcosm, is a war for the reconfiguration of the current world order, where Europe is a mere self-inflicted victim in a minor subplot. The Big Picture is the emergence of multipolarity.

The proxy war in Syria lasted a decade, and it's not over yet. The same may happen to the proxy war in Ukraine. As it stands, Russia has taken an area that is roughly equivalent to Hungary and Slovakia combined. That's still far from "task" fulfillment - and it's bound to go on until Russia has taken all the land right up to the Dnieper as well as Odessa, connecting it to the breakaway Republic of Transnistria.

It's enlightening to see how important Eurasian actors are reacting to such geopolitical turbulence. And that brings us to the cases of Kazakhstan and Turkey.

The Telegram channel [Rybar](#) (with over 640k followers) and hacker group Beregini revealed in an investigation that Kazakhstan was selling weapons to Ukraine, which translates as de facto treason against their own Russian allies in the Collective Security Treaty Organization

(CSTO). Consider too that Kazakhstan is also part of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the EAEU, the two hubs of the Eurasian-led multipolar order.

As a consequence of the scandal, Kazakhstan was forced to officially announce the suspension of all weapons exports until the end of 2023.

It began with hackers unveiling how Technoexport – a Kazakh company – was selling armed personnel carriers, anti-tank systems and munitions to Kiev via Jordanian intermediaries, under the orders of the United Kingdom. The deal itself was supervised by the British military attaché in Nur-Sultan, the Kazakh capital.

Nur-Sultan predictably tried to dismiss the allegations, arguing that Technoexport had not asked for export licenses. That was essentially false: the Rybar team discovered that Technoexport instead used Blue Water Supplies, a Jordanian firm, for those. And the story gets even juicier. All the contract documents ended up being found in the computers of Ukrainian intel.

Moreover, the hackers found out about another deal involving Kazspetsexport, via a Bulgarian buyer, for the sale of Kazakh Su-27s, airplane turbines and Mi-24 helicopters. These would have been delivered to the US, but their final destination was Ukraine.

The icing on this Central Asian cake is that Kazakhstan also sells significant amounts of *Russian* – not Kazakh – oil to Kiev.

So it seems that Nur-Sultan, perhaps unofficially, somehow contributes to the ‘Afghanization’ in the war in Ukraine. No diplomatic leaks confirm it, of course, but bets can be made Putin had a few things to say about that to President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev in their recent – cordial – meeting.

The Sultan’s balancing act

Turkey is a way more complex case. Ankara is not a member of the SCO, the CSTO or the EAEU. It is still hedging its bets, calculating on which terms it will join the high-speed rail of Eurasian integration. And yet, via several schemes, Ankara allows Moscow to evade the avalanche of western sanctions and embargoes.

Turkish businesses – literally all of them with close connections to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) – are making a killing, and relishing their new role as crossroads warehouse between Russia and the west. It’s an open boast in Istanbul that what Russia cannot buy from Germany or France they buy “from us.” And in fact several EU companies are in on it.

Ankara’s balancing act is as sweet as a good *baklava*. It gathers economic support from a very important partner right in the middle of the endless, very serious Turkish economic debacle. They agree on nearly everything: Russian gas, S-400 missile systems, the building of the Russian nuclear power plant, tourism – Istanbul is crammed with Russians – Turkish fruits and vegetables.

Ankara-Moscow employ sound textbook geopolitics. They play it openly, in full transparency. That does not mean they are allies. It’s just pragmatic business between states. For instance, an economic response may alleviate a geopolitical problem, and vice-versa.

Obviously the collective west has completely forgotten how that normal state-to-state behavior works. It's pathetic. Turkey gets "denounced" by the west as traitorous – as much as China.

Of course Erdogan also needs to play to the galleries, so every once in a while he says that Crimea should be retaken by Kiev. After all, his companies also do business with Ukraine – Bayraktar drones and otherwise.

And then there's proselytizing: Crimea remains theoretically ripe for Turkish influence, where Ankara may exploit the notions of pan-Islamism and mostly pan-Turkism, capitalizing on the historical relations between the peninsula and the Ottoman Empire.

Is Moscow worried? Not really. As for those Bayraktar TB2s sold to Kiev, they will continue to be relentlessly reduced to ashes. Nothing personal. Just business.

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