

## **How the US Can Help Ukraine Help -- and Defend -- Itself**

### **Opinion**

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**Ukrainian army soldiers march on Khreshchatyk street during military parade on the occasion of Ukraine's Independence Day in the capital Kyiv, Ukraine, Monday, Aug. 24, 2015.**

BY MICHAEL CARPENTER for Defense One, Aug 2, 2017 When Secretary Mattis arrives for his upcoming visit, he should bring promises of arms for the military and support for anti-corruption forces and the country's defense industry. Three and a half years since Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine, Russian soldiers and their proxies are still killing Ukrainian civilians and service-members on a daily basis. This spring, the Kremlin accelerated its violations of the ceasefire, increasing its deadly artillery and rocket attacks and launching subversive operations across Ukraine. The latter are meant to signal that Russia is no longer confining the kinetic conflict to the Donbas battlefield. A sabotage operation in March blew up a large munitions depot near Kharkiv that forced the evacuation of 20,000 nearby residents. The same month, an exiled Russian member of parliament was shot dead in Kyiv. In June, a senior Ukrainian military intelligence officer was assassinated with a car-bomb, also in Kyiv. Finally, the summer fighting in the Donbas was accompanied by a massive cyber-attack that briefly disabled Ukrainian ATMs, banks, and metro systems and went on to infect tens of thousands of computers worldwide. So much for a "frozen" conflict. In addition to these kinetic operations, the Kremlin has stepped up its efforts to weaponize corruption by working to buy off Ukrainian politicians and burrow even deeper into the country's political establishment. The Kremlin's strategy is clear: keep the war in the Donbas simmering to foster political discontent while channeling funds to pliable Ukrainian politicians to try to change Kyiv's geopolitical orientation after the next parliamentary election. For all its hysteria about purported Western attempts at regime change in Russia, that's exactly what the Kremlin wants in Ukraine, which it politely calls "resetting the ruling regime." This strategy may in fact be viable. One of the ruling coalition parties, the National Front, is polling in the single digits while the other, Bloc Petro Poroshenko, has lost first place in the polls to former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko's Fatherland party. If Moscow throws serious money into the next Ukrainian parliamentary election, it's anyone's guess how things will turn out. After interfering in the U.S. election and helping their dark horse candidate win, Kremlin strategists must be feeling pretty good about their odds of success. As it pursues its strategy of subversion inside Ukraine, the Kremlin also continues to hold out the possibility of a negotiated settlement to the conflict in the Donbas, albeit on Moscow's terms. The principal forum for such discussions are the "Normandy format" talks involving the leaders of France, Germany, Ukraine, and Russia. Following the July 24 session in which French President Emmanuel Macron participated for the first time, and in anticipation of the arrival of Kurt Volker, the new U.S. special envoy for Ukraine, Moscow continues to signal that a negotiated option is possible. Donetsk separatist leader Aleksandr Zakharchenko has used the term "Malorossiya" to refer to the creation of an entirely new Ukrainian polity, without Crimea, and with a capital in Donetsk. That is of course a complete pipedream, but it telegraphs Moscow's desire to negotiate a solution that preserves a Ukrainian state (minus Crimea) that includes the occupied regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. Sergei Tsekov, who ostensibly represents Crimea in Russia's

Federation Council, has explicitly spelled this out, saying that the creation of "Malorossiya" would be a step towards the federalization of Ukraine. In return for the West's acquiescence to the creation of a quasi-autonomous statelet in the Donbas — analogous to the Republika Srpska entity within Bosnia and Herzegovina — Moscow would no doubt promise to withdraw its regular troops from the Donbas, pull back heavy weapons from the Line of Control, and stop the daily ceasefire violations, effectively "freezing" the conflict. As Moscow will no doubt point out, a "Malorossiya" scenario would preserve Ukraine's de jure territorial integrity (though "a la Srpska") and would put an end to the kinetic conflict. For Ukraine, however, this scenario would amount to the permanent surrender of its sovereignty, and would effectively preclude the country's future Euro-Atlantic integration, just as Banja Luka effectively blocks Bosnia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations. This remains the Kremlin's negotiating position, and so long as it is rejected by the West, blood and dirty money will continue to flow freely within Ukraine. [⋮] [http://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2017/... and-defend-itself/139946/](http://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2017/...-and-defend-itself/139946/)