

Trump ignorance on Crimea endangers Ukraine - and world peace

Opinion

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UBO: At the recent G-7 meeting in Canada, U.S. President Donald Trump reportedly demonstrated not only an abysmal ignorance of the reality regarding Russian annexation of Crimea but in the process gave additional credence to questions about his relationship with Vladimir Putin. In his commentary below on June 14, Paul Goble describes Trump's illusions about Crimea and the possible disastrous effects of the growing Trump-Putin bromance.

By Paul Goble for "Window in Eurasia": June 14 – Any time a dispute lasts beyond a few weeks, it is almost inevitable that some of those involved will seek to end it by accepting the position of their original opponents or by proposing what seems to be a way around the problem by recasting it in different terms. Both these steps represent serious risks in and of themselves; but often they also pose dangers far larger than the problem they purport to solve, dangers neglected as people react to them. Two such ideas have surfaced today regarding Crimea, one from US President Donald Trump and a second from Greeks on that occupied Ukrainian peninsula. The one that is certain to gain the greater amount of attention is a report in Buzzfeed today that Trump told the G7 meeting in Ottawa that "Crimea is Russian," a reversal of the US position up to now and a major victory for Vladimir Putin (buzzfeed.com/albertonardelli/trump-russia-crimea and thebell.io/buzzfeed-trump-nazval-krym-rossijskim/). That is disastrous enough as a betrayal of Ukraine, but the reason Trump reportedly invoked to justify this idea is even more disturbing. It goes further than even Putin has in justifying Russian aggression. Since 2014, Putin has justified the Anschluss by pointing to the referendum he orchestrated after Russian forces moved in. What Trump reportedly said was that Crimea is Russian because "all the people there speak Russian," a position that mirrors the Kremlin leader's earlier assertions about "a Russian world" embracing more than just Crimea and the Donbas and one that Moscow might seek to apply to northern Kazakhstan, parts of Belarus and so on. As of now, the White House has neither confirmed nor denied Trump said this, and one should treat the Buzzfeed report with caution because its sources were not authorized to report this and spoke only on condition of anonymity. But if it is true – or even if it is a trial balloon – no one should forget these larger problems as well as the immediate ones it can cause. The second proposal comes from the ethnic Greek community on the occupied Ukrainian peninsula. It has called for going back to the tsarist-era term for the region and calling Crimea again the Tauride, thus eliminating "Crimea" as a problem by eliminating the name – or at least creating confusion (ura.news/news/1052338816 and cont.ws/@comandanteoleg/975344). Nomenclature matters, and one perhaps can even sympathize with the tiny Greek minority on the peninsula for wanting to have a name more closely associated with themselves and their history than "Crimea" does. But there are two far-reaching consequences if this proposal gains any traction. On the one hand, it would dramatically undercut the position of the Crimean Tatars, for whom the Crimea is their unique national homeland. Indeed, some in Moscow and the West would likely view the Greek proposal as a way of denying that the Crimean Tatars have any rights to national self-determination. And on the other – and far more seriously – it would open the way for more Russian aggression.

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