



Don't Blame The Victim

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By every account Russia and its "insurgent army" are planning a new offensive in Ukraine. Shelling around Shyrokyne has increased considerably. Russia, once again violating the Minsk II agreement that it first broke even before the ink was dry, has brought up reinforcements, including air defenses - a telltale sign of an impending offensive. It has also reorganized and trained separatist fighters in Ukraine to make them more proficient and professional under Russian command and control.

Yet despite the fact that these ongoing Russian violations of Minsk II occur more often than do Ukrainian infractions, the leading members of the EU (the U.K., France and Germany) are all leaning on Kiev, not Moscow, to hasten implementation of the accord - lest it give Moscow a pretext for launching another invasion. In other words, the so-called "EU three" are doing what they have done throughout the crisis: that is, mainly blaming the victim, Ukraine, rather than standing up to Russia.

Moscow, for its part, repeatedly insists that the EU must bring the Ukrainians to heel in implementing the Minsk II accord, even though it and its forces have never felt bound by it. Indeed, Kiev has good reason to evade this misconceived accord. In calling for constitutional reform in Ukraine to decentralize or deconcentrate Ukrainian administration, the Minsk II agreement gives rebel forces in Donetsk and Luhansk provinces a veto power over anything Ukraine does for that purpose. Thus, they can bring the government to a standstill and create endless pretexts for further invasions. Essentially, this agreement is an invitation to Ukraine's state suicide. In this regard, it resembles numerous agreements going back to Tsarist times by which Russia invaded or menaced its neighbors, forced them to sign such agreements that invited further Russian intervention and then absorbed them.

Let us consider this situation more abstractly. A great European power bordering a smaller one of mixed population incites its co-ethnics, seizes and annexes some of its territory and invades other parts of it, all the while justifying this on its right to defend its supposedly oppressed co-ethnics or coreligionists despite the absence of any such oppression. The beleaguered target state, but not the aggressor, experiences intense pressure to accede to the great power's demands that the smaller state essentially consent to its own destruction.

The above analogy to Czechoslovakia in 1938 and to the Munich accord is telling. Consequently, the right term for Europe's policy is appeasement, all the more craven for not being necessary. Rather than invigorate European resolve or spur redoubled investments in the continent's military, political and economic capabilities, Russia's moves have led the major European states to blame the victim. The resulting pressure on Kiev to commit what amounts to suicide betrays the unwillingness of these countries to defend their own interests, sacrifice some of their comfort and uphold the principles upon which their own security is based.

Small wonder, then, that Russia remains contemptuous of the West even as it craves the West's lifestyle and material affluence. Little surprise, too, that Moscow is still mobilizing for a new offensive, since it has insufficient reason to be impressed by any penalties the West might threaten to impose upon it.