

8 Questions on Ukraine

By [David C. Speedie](#)

March 20, 2014



Events in and concerning Crimea have raised to fever pitch the cacophony in the West over Ukraine. For one observer, there are some fundamental questions that seem to apply from the very beginning of the crisis and which seem important in understanding the broader context.

1. Why did the U.S. and the West cry "unconstitutional foul" on the vote in the Crimean parliament to reunite with Russia, while endorsing and abetting the overthrow of an elected president in Kiev. This was clearly an unconstitutional act since President Viktor Yanukovich, although venal, incompetent and corrupt, was just that — a democratically elected president?

Does anyone in the U.S.
administration know history?
Do they know that the core
of Russian identity was born
in Kiev?

2. What is the West's moral high ground in preaching democracy, rule of law and good governance to Russia and to the rest of the world while supporting a coup? Are these ethical imperatives placed on hold in the case of a regime that the West disapproves of?
3. Why do similar double standards prevail in our approach to self-determination? Kosovo was historically linked to Serbia, yet we invoked the secessionist right of the Albanian majority. Crimea is historically Russian — a 200-year history dating back to Catherine the Great, which was artificially rewritten in 1954 in the form of an internal transfer to Ukraine within the then-Soviet Union. Do we conclude that the rules of the self-determination game change when the irredentist impulses involve those who would unite with Russia — South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Crimea?
4. How can we possibly welcome the interim government in Kiev as a unifying force when its leaders have exploited the east-west divide in the country by sending loyal governors from the western regions of the country to Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovsk, thus inflaming the pro-Russia majority? Or by appointing just two eastern figures in the 19 new ministries? Or by including in the government six representatives of ultra-right forces, including the Svoboda movement, denounced in a 2012 European parliament resolution as "xenophobic, racist and anti-Semitic"?
5. Why does the West not understand that threats do not work with Putin's Russia? Reports from Moscow suggest that there is a widespread conviction — even among those opposed to Putin — that the U.S. and the European Union have gone too far in meddling in the Ukraine crisis. It is certainly true to say that among Russians, Putin has been strengthened by the standoff with the West. This is reinforced by a sense of lese-majeste on the part of the U.S.-led West toward Russia in the post-Soviet era. As one scholar put it, the two decades after the end of the Cold War have offered Russia a deal "closer to Versailles than Bretton Woods" — or certainly the Marshall Plan.
6. Does anyone in the U.S. administration understand history? History might remind us that the very ideal of "Rus" — that is, the core of Russian identity — was born in Kiev centuries before Moscow was founded. Ukraine will never be "just another country" to Russians, or for that matter to the 30 percent of those of Russian origin who live in Ukraine. The U.S.' own history also takes us back almost 200 years to the Monroe Doctrine, whereby the U.S. reserved the right to resist and turn back any foreign adventurism on the entire American continent — a right Washington has invoked.
7. Why have the U.S. and the West rejected outright the tripartite EU-Russia-Ukraine solution tentatively advanced by Russia that would avoid the zero-sum choice forcing Ukraine into an us-versus-them cul-de-sac? This is basically what was proposed by former defense and foreign ministers of Russia, Poland and Britain three months ago.
8. Why, oh why, does the U.S.' distinguished former secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, think it is in any way helpful to make comparisons between Russia's actions in Crimea and Hitler's annexation of Austria? Consider, again, the history of Ukraine and Crimea. This is especially gauche, if not politically cynical, in the context of a country in which many recall pro-Nazi collaboration in western Ukraine in the 1940s.

David C. Speedie is a senior fellow and director of the U.S. Global Engagement Program at the Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs in New York.

The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

Original url: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/03/20/8-questions-on-ukraine-a33188>