

After Kiev Coup, the West Will Focus on Moscow

By [Sergei Markov](#)

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In a conversation with U.S. President Barack Obama several weeks ago, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said she had the impression President Vladimir Putin was living in another world.

That statement was quickly picked up by the Western media and dominated headlines for days.

But it seems to me that Merkel felt this way because of a lack of understanding of Russia's reality, which is common among Western observers.

The West's Feb. 22 coup in Kiev was just the appetizer. The main meal will be when the U.S. and Europe support the

Russian opposition in its attempt to overthrow Putin and form a Maidan-style government in Moscow.

What is the Russian reality? If we are talking about the nature of the conflicts in Crimea and Ukraine, Russia's understanding differs significantly from the West's.

In Russia's reality, the Maidan protests and coup did not move Ukraine closer to democracy and the rule of law but in the opposite direction: toward lawlessness and violence against journalists, political opponents and ordinary citizens. The revolutionary authorities in Kiev are dominated by an armed, extremist minority that is planning a campaign of widescale repression against ethnic Russians and others.

In Russia's reality, Ukraine has no legitimate government because demonstrators overthrew a democratically elected president.

In our reality, Ukraine has no sovereign authority because the U.S. effectively appointed the country's senior officials behind the scenes. Why else did the little-known Oleksandr Turchynov become acting president, while Vitaly Klitschko, who had actively pursued that post but was disliked by Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, was sidelined? And on what grounds did Arseny Yatsenyuk, who was not popular among Ukrainians but was Nuland's clear favorite, become prime minister?

Nuland's plans for Ukraine were revealed during a leaked phone conversation several weeks before the coup that ousted President Viktor Yanukovich.

In Russia's reality, Ukrainian deputies were threatened with force to vote for ministers whom they did not know. After all, force takes precedence over the rule of law in the new Ukraine, which is effectively ruled by a junta composed of various militias. In addition to Turchynov and Yatsenyuk, that junta includes Andrei Parubiy, the head of the National Security and Defense Council. He was also head of the Maidan self-defense forces, an armed group that apparently took the lead in carrying out orders from Washington in February. The junta also includes Dmitry Yarosh and Oleh Tyahnybok, who control the neo-Nazi Right Sector and Svoboda armed militias, respectively.

Who are these junta leaders? We are told they are nationalists, but they display all the signs of neo-Nazis. In a reference to the fascists of World War II, they call themselves followers of Stepan Bandera, Roman Shukhevych and the fascist theorist Dmitry Dontsov. Bandera and Shukhevych both swore fidelity to Hitler. They entered Ukraine in 1941 along with the Wehrmacht, or more exactly, the German SD — the Nazi intelligence division — that they obeyed. The SD issued the Ukrainian extremists weapons, ammunition and administrative posts on the occupied territories. On German orders, they actively fought against Soviet partisans.

During the three years that Bandera later spent in a German concentration camp, he was well fed and enjoyed the comforts of a radio and access to a library. In 1944, Nazi leader Heinrich Himmler removed Bandera from detention and transferred him into active service, giving him

money and weapons.

During the Cold War, the U.S. and its allies used veterans of Bandera's forces in their struggle against the Soviet Union, turning a blind eye to their Nazi collaboration. Yet, Russia has always viewed these "Banderas" as accomplices to Hitler and fascists. Shukhevych, for his part, headed the notorious Nachtigall punitive battalion and was responsible for the mass murder of Jews and other civilians.

Today's Right Sector and Svoboda organizations employ many neo-Nazi beliefs and practices. These include the use of stylized Nazi symbols, Nazi flags, Nazi greetings such as "Glory to Ukraine — Glory to the Heroes!" that is associated with Bandera's movement. These two leading Ukrainian extremist groups preach anti-Semitism, hatred of neighboring peoples, Russophobia, a violent struggle against opponents, glorification of Nazi veterans and the denial of Nazi crimes.

The result is that Svoboda and Right Sector are not just radical nationalists, but hardcore neo-Nazi groups that have come to power and now control Ukraine's main law enforcement agencies.

Ukraine already had dozens of political prisoners even before these groups took over. On its first day in power, the supposedly pro-European government suspended the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, then switched off the Russian-language version of government agency websites and prohibited schoolteachers from teaching in Russian. When the Constitutional Court refused to recognize their coup as constitutional, the authorities dissolved the court and brought criminal charges against its judges. In Russia's world of reality, neo-Nazi militants shoot at demonstrators in Kharkiv, and the authorities provide them with safe passage back to Kiev.

In this reality, the U.S. and the European Union are behaving irrationally, abandoning the Ukrainian people to the extremist authorities in Kiev and supporting criminal leaders. As for the sanctions, can anyone explain why Putin aide and former minister Andrei Fursenko was included on the list? Is it only because he owns a dacha at the Ozero cooperative? It seems the list of sanctions was copied directly from the article that whistleblower Alexei Navalny published in The New York Times last week, immediately before the names were announced. Perhaps the U.S. State Department wanted to strengthen Navalny's influence in Russia?

In Russia's reality, the obvious conclusion is that the U.S. and EU are trying to help the Russian opposition overthrow Putin and form a Maidan-style government in Moscow.

How will the West execute this coup in Russia? First, it will install a leader in Kiev who will be much like former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili — an anti-Russian hothead willing to do all of the West's bidding. Then, it will finance the Ukrainian army, and in 2017 — on the eve of Russia's presidential elections — it will send that army into Crimea and Russia proper, just as it deployed Georgian troops in 2008. Does the West seriously believe that Putin will take this military aggression against Russia passively?

Russia demands a compromise: immediately form a new coalition government in Ukraine, disarm the extremists, ultra-nationalists and fascists, institute federalism, provide constitutional guarantees of equality for the Ukrainian and Russian languages and hold

honest and fair elections. But in place of that, the U.S. and EU continue their threats and insistence that Russia accept the current status quo.

Do Western leaders really believe that Putin will reconcile himself to their distorted vision of reality? By insisting that Putin capitulate, the West is actually leaving him no option but to respond with force.

And in the face of this harsh reality, Russia has always chosen war over capitulation.

Sergei Markov is director of the Institute of Political Studies.

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