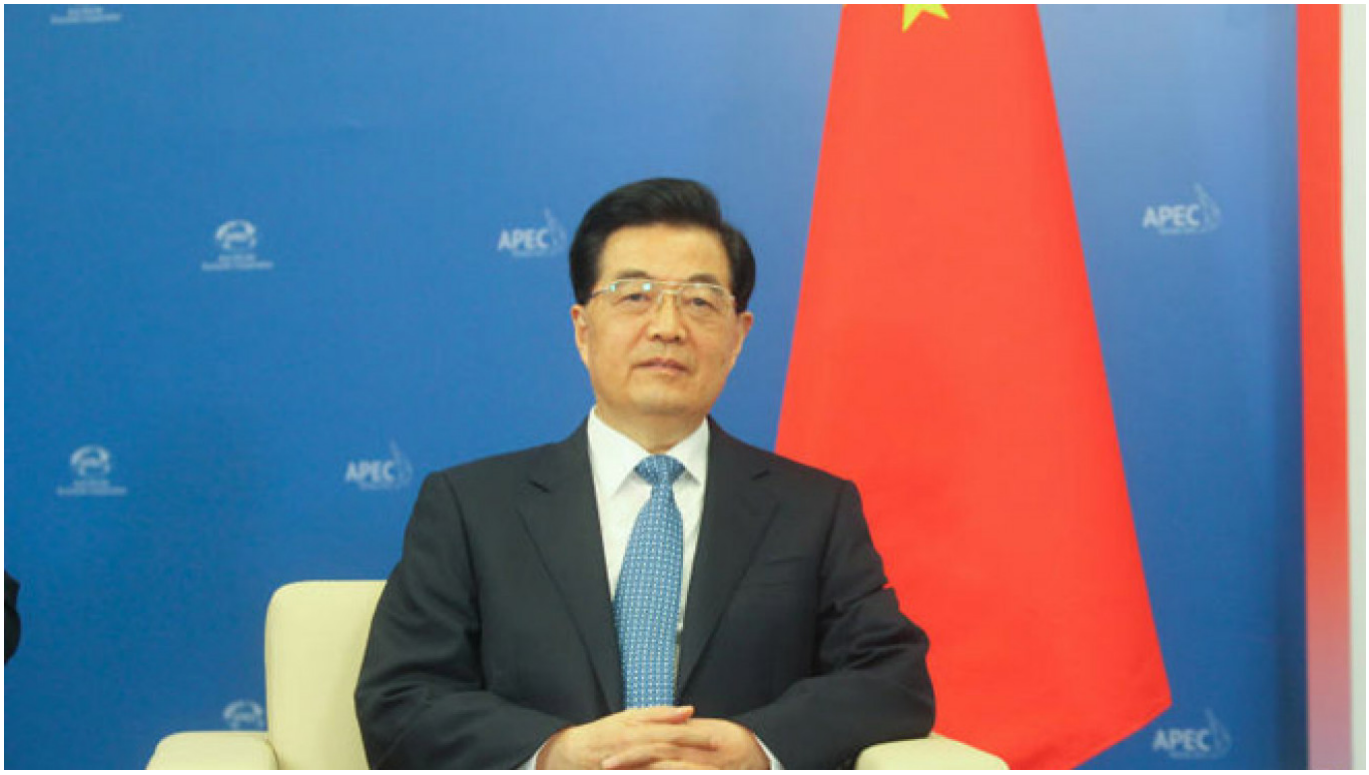
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If the West Won't Help Ukraine, China Will

By Alexei Bayer

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As it becomes increasingly clear that the West has no stomach for war with Russia over Ukraine, Ukraine must constantly remind Western politicians and their voters that it was former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych's refusal to sign an association agreement with the European Union that sent Ukrainians onto the streets in protest in November 2013.

Ukrainians rejected the oligarchic kleptocracy that they shared with Russia for 23 years. Ukrainians want free elections, human rights and transparency that don't exist in Russia. Ukrainians are Europeans and want to live in Europe, not post-Soviet hell.

Ukrainians paid in blood for their democratic pro-Western choice as the Euromaidan movement became increasingly violent. Since then, Ukraine has been under attack from Russia for its attempts to move closer to Europe.

Ukrainians have the right to demand full assistance from the West as they defend themselves from Russian aggression. The U.S. has always positioned itself as a defender of international

law. In the case of Ukraine, it is time for Washington to put its money where its mouth has always been.

Ukraine's case for assistance from its European neighbors is even stronger. United Europe does not belong to German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the European Commission or the European Parliament. It is an idea of an open, democratic continent in where nations live in peace and strive for prosperity.

The idea of European integration belongs to all Europeans, and none can be excluded from it. But the principle of a united Europe will be endangered if Brussels fails to help Ukraine withstand aggression.

There is always a possibility that current Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko is in close contact with Merkel and U.S. President Barack Obama and they have a secret strategy that explains why Ukraine has been tolerating Russian involvement in the separatist campaign in the east. Unfortunately, there is no sign of such a strategy.

More likely, Washington has been weakened by setbacks in the Middle East and squabbles over domestic policy, while Europe has no stomach for a confrontation with Russia, especially given its dependence on Russian energy.

Ukraine looks likely to be left to face Russia on its own, armed with its defiant spirit and Soviet-era weaponry. As far as the U.S. and Europe are concerned: If Putin defeats and dismembers Ukraine, so be it. If it survives, it will have no choice but to join the EU.

The only problem with the West's attitude is that Ukraine's choices are no longer limited to the West or Russia. There is also China, which is gradually entering the international arena. It has built up influence in Russia's former backyard in Central Asia and may emerge as a player in the Ukrainian conflict.

China's economic presence in Ukraine is already growing. The Ukrainian automotive market, while still small, is seen by Chinese automakers as a possible base for eventual global expansion. Ukraine has natural resources and agricultural land and could become an important supplier to China.

Moreover, Ukraine is of crucial strategic importance. Without Ukraine, Russia has no empire, which is why Putin is doggedly fighting for it. China, which has territorial claims on eastern Siberia, would be happy to see Russia enmeshed in a draining military conflict.

If Ukraine begins to crumble militarily, don't be surprised if Beijing starts to supply it with war materiel. It may help Ukraine survive, but what it will mean for the EU and U.S. is another matter.

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