

Will Maidan Devour Its Own Children?

By [Jonathan Power](#)

September 16, 2015



Late last month right-wing demonstrators hurled themselves against police in Kiev's Maidan square. A grenade was thrown, three people died and 120 were hospitalized — mostly policemen. In an address to the nation, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko blamed the clashes on nationalistic forces, calling their actions "a stab in the back." Many in the West condemned the attacks, though there has been little criticism of the rightist militias and parties in Ukraine over the past year.

That is perhaps because it would interfere with the Western narrative on Ukraine — that the demonstrators that overthrew former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich in February 2014 were of a liberal, democratic hue. The overwhelming majority were. But the fact is that many of the people who led the crowd during the "Euromaidan" protests and fired bullets when the demonstrations turned ugly were these very same rightists.

The BBC's Ukraine correspondent, David Stern, reported on Sept. 1 that "the explosion in Maidan comes weeks after another armed incident involving volunteer militia with ties to the extreme right — a shoot-out between members of the so-called Right Sector and the local police in southwestern Ukraine. Although the militias have been nominally integrated

into government structures, many wonder how much control Kiev actually exercises."

The main gripe of the protestors is a bill that would give a measure of autonomy to the eastern Donbass region where pro-Russian rebels are fighting Ukraine's central government. But their violent action comes at the worst of times when progress is finally being made on the Minsk agreement of February that seeks to end the conflict. Besides the introduction of the devolution bill in parliament, the cease-fire seems to be working.

Russia, on the other hand, thinks too little devolution is on the table. A more satisfactory outcome, in my view, would be to compare the Ukrainian parliament's plans with the devolved powers that have been given to Scotland in Britain. If that amount of devolution can work in Britain then why not in Ukraine?

But the rightist, anti-devolution, nationalists, although only gaining 5 percent of the vote in the last election are determined to be the tail that wags the dog. This is a fearsome prospect as it means the violence they unleash will become more serious and more regular, especially as the bill goes to its second reading and as members of parliament may attempt to strengthen the bill to allow a greater degree of devolution.

The neo-fascist militias have plenty of battlefield experience. Their soldiers have often been the only ones holding their own in the fight against the separatists. The Ukrainian army, although showing more determination of late, has often been close to shambles. This has made the militias popular right across Ukraine.

Despite this, the government has no choice but to outlaw and imprison these rightist militias before the revolution destroys its own children. The West and Russia must stand together on this.

Meanwhile, the Ukrainian government has drawn up — in collaboration with the West — a list of policies it demands from the eastern rebels. Among them is full and immediate access to rebel-held areas for international monitors. Failure to deliver on these conditions, argues the president, would put the entire peace plan at risk, "with clear consequences and sanctions" for the Russian side.

Poroshenko is adamant that "fake" elections in separatist-controlled areas, currently planned for October and November, would draw such a response. All elections must be under the authority of Kiev with international supervision. Indeed, Russia must agree to persuade the separatists of this, as long as the Ukrainian side agrees to a Scottish-type measure of devolution for eastern Ukraine.

Jonathan Power was a foreign affairs columnist for the International Herald Tribune for 17 years.

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

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/09/16/will-maidan-devour-its-own-children-a49610>