



UKRAINE ON THE BRINK: "THE GUILTY BLAMING THE INNOCENT"

By John R. Haines



John R. Haines is a Senior Fellow and Trustee of the Foreign Policy Research Institute and directs the Princeton Committee of FPRI. Much of his current research is focused on Russia and its near abroad, with a special interest in nationalist and separatist movements. He is also the chief executive officer of a private sector corporation that develops nuclear detection and nuclear counterterrorism technologies. The author is responsible for the translation of all source material unless noted otherwise.

"[A]rmed struggle...is conducted by individuals and by small groups. [...] It pursues two different aims...in the first place, the struggle aims at assassinating individuals, chiefs and subordinates in the army and police..."

"The old Russian terrorism was an affair of the intellectual conspirator; today as a general rule guerrilla warfare is waged by the worker combatant, or simply by the unemployed worker..."

Vladimir Lenin (1906)
Guerrilla Warfare

"The potential for guerrilla conflict in Ukraine is very high," says Rostislav Ishchenko¹ in a troubling account published on the Russian news portal *Versiya* ("Version").²

A few days earlier, Ishchenko published another commentary "After New Russia" on the Russian portal *Aktual'nyye kommentarii* ("Urgent Commentaries").³ He depicts a Ukraine at the brink, facing "growing anarchy and the real threat" that electric power generation will collapse, causing the nation's "life support systems" — "electricity, gas, heat, sewer, water and other small pleasures that make life acceptable" — to collapse as well. He sees Ukraine driven by the United States "to escalate the conflict" in Donetsk and Lugansk "even if it risks a rapid defeat of Kyev's forces." If pro-Russian separatist militias respond in kind by mounting an offensive, Russia would be blamed, hardening the stance of the United States and European Union. Alternately, Ukraine's armed forces might buckle in the face of determined resistance, forcing President Poroshenko to call for an international peacekeeping force to restore order in eastern Ukraine. Or, Ishchenko speculates, the political infighting in Kyev could provoke a *putsch* by Right Sector's Ukrainian Volunteer Corps,⁴ and in the resulting chaos, an

"The Guilty Blaming the Innocent" is the title of a 1905 essay by Lenin published in *Vperyod* ("Forward"), at the time the official organ of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party that was ancestral to the Soviet Communist Party.

¹ Rostislav Ishchenko is usually identified as president of the Center for Systems [sometimes appearing as "System-based" or "Systematic"] Analysis and Forecasting. The Center's location is identified in published reports at Kyev, Ukraine, although Ishchenko is described in one profile as "forced to live in Moscow."

[<http://en.cyplive.com/ru/news/rostislav-ischenko-soedinennye-shtaty-na-ukraine-uzhe-proigrali.html>. Last accessed 19 January 2015] His commentary is notably pro-Russian — in a January 2014 interview with the online news portal *The Mirror of Crimea*, Ishchenko opined that "Russia has done all that is possible and even more" and "Ukraine will be turned into an anti-Russian battering ram." [see: http://zerkalokryma.ru/lenta/people/interview/rossiya_sdelala_vso_chto_mozhno_i_dazhe_bol_she/] He is quoted approvingly in the semi-official Russian media on matters related to Ukraine, and is a contributor to *Rossiya Segodnya* ("Russia Today"), a Moscow-based news agency established upon the December 2013 liquidation of *RIA Novosti* by decree of President Putin.

² "Вышли из леса" ("Out of the woods"). *Versia.ru* [online Russian edition, 19 January 2015]. http://versia.ru/articles/2015/jan/19/vyshli_iz_lesa. Last accessed 20 January 2015.

³ "New Russia" or *Novorossiya* is the name of the proposed confederation between eastern Ukraine's self-declared Donetsk People's Republic and Lugansk People's Republic, respectively. "После Новороссии." *Актуальные комментарии* [online Russian edition, 14 January 2015]. <http://actualcomment.ru/posle-novorossii.html>. Last accessed 19 January 2015. "Urgent Commentaries" is an improved translation of the portal's name on its web address, where it appears as "Actual Comment" (actualcomment.ru).

⁴ The Ukrainian Volunteer Corps is a paramilitary organization established in April 2014 by Ukraine's Right Sector [Ukrainian: Правий сектор. Ukrainian transl.: *Pravy Sektor*], a political party organized in November 2013 as a union of several far-right nationalist movements. The Ukrainian Volunteer Corps is sometimes referred to as "DUK Right Sector" for its acronym in Ukrainian, *Dobrovol' chyy Ukrayins' kyy korpus*. Right Sector claims the UVC/DUK Right Sector is formally

international peacekeeping force would have to enter the country to restore order. Ishchenko is hopeful, if not optimistic, that Russia might derail what he sees as the United States' plan for Ukraine, with the most likely scenario being that civil conflict emerges elsewhere in the country in a determined effort to draw Ukraine's armed forces away from eastern Ukraine.

"Perhaps the Russian government will be able to roll back United States relations with the European Union and at the last minute save Russia's head, which has already been thrust into Europe's noose. Russia may be able to force Ukrainian armed forces to redeploy from New Russia, especially if the combat readiness of the Odessa, Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhzhya undergrounds are even half of what is claimed."

Ishchenko elaborates on these underground units' combat readiness in the *Versiya* article, claiming pro-Russian groups have ten thousand *shtykov* ("bayonets") in the Odessa region, twelve to fifteen thousand in Kharkov, and at least five thousand in Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhzhya. Calling them *narodnykh mstitieliej*⁵ or "people's avengers," Ishchenko claims many are former Ukrainian soldiers or police officers, some of whom were fired after refusing to take part in anti-terrorist operations in eastern Ukraine.

"Regularly nowadays in Ukraine, freight trains loaded with supplies for so-called "anti-terrorist operations" explode, buildings blow up in which the ultra-nationalists are meeting, and for quite some time now local officials and warlords who risk going home simply vanish. So the guerrilla war is going full throttle. It has not claimed many victims so far, which gives the Kyev authorities grounds to claim that that extent of the problem is being inflated. Meanwhile, the number of arson attacks and bombings continue to grow. Law enforcement agencies apparently can no longer cope, and the other day Odessa was forced to bring in National Guard forces to put an end somehow to vigilantism there."⁶

By some estimates the number and severity of these incidents are increasing. As to whether "buildings blow up," Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council on 19 January blamed Russia for a recent explosion in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second largest city:

"The Russian Federation continues its war against Ukraine as well as acts of terrorism committed on our territory. In particular, the explosion in Kharkiv during which 13 people were injured, 6 of them seriously, is another example of sabotage by the Russian Federation directed against civilians."⁷

Similar incidents have occurred in Odessa, Mariupol and Kyev. As to Ishchenko's exploding freight trains, on 20 January an device thought to be a mine destroyed a railway bridge near Kuhnetsovka on the border of the Zaporizhia and Donetsk regions. It derailed a freight train and closed the rail line between Kamysh-Zarya and Rozovka, severing rail access to the port of Mariupol, where separatist units were advancing from the east. The SBU responded by extending "counter-terrorism measures" to the Zaporizhia region. Some believe Russia is targeting the area south and east of an arc extending from Kharkiv — "a critical industrial and communication node" in the country's northeast — to Odessa — "the freight gateway to Ukraine and the corridor to Transdnistria" — while it encourages separatists to engage in diversionary acts of sabotage in such Ukrainian cities as Kyev, Zaporozhye, Dnepropetrovsk, Nikolaev, and Kherson.⁸

Ishchenko's warning in *Versiya* comes only weeks after a Ukrainian weekly, *Tyzhden* ("The Week"), published an interview with Ukrainian parliamentarian Andriy Levus. He claimed Ukraine was responding in-kind, with pro-government partisans operating behind separatist lines in the Donbass; and more ominously, with acts of sabotage "on the territory of the Russian Federation."⁹ Levus is certainly in a position to speak with authority: a member of the national parliament representing the Popular Front¹⁰ party of Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk, Levus is the former deputy chief of Ukraine's internal security agency, the SBU.¹¹ During the *Maidan* uprising against the Yanukovych government, he was the deputy head of "self-defense" forces, an umbrella group of anti-government paramilitaries.¹² Asked by *Tyzhden* whether Ukraine conducts "sabotage operations, similar to what Russia is doing,"¹³ Levus answered, "Often our citizens have opportunities in enemy territory. However, we don't issue press releases or leave Yarosh's business card." The reference is to Dmytro Yarosh, the DUK Right Sector¹⁴ leader, and to Russian claims that his business card (*vizytka Yarosha*) was discovered at the scene of an April

independent in deference to a legal prohibition against political parties maintaining paramilitary forces.

⁵ Russian: народных мстителей.

⁶ *Versia.ru*, 19 January 2015, *op cit*.

⁷ "СНБО возлагает на Россию ответственность за взрыв в Харькове" ("National Security Council holds Russia responsible for the blast in Kharkiv"). *PIIA Новості*. [online Russian edition, 20 January 2015]. <http://ria.ru/world/20150120/1043317306.html>. Last accessed 21 January 2015. The suspected grenade detonation near the Moskovsky district court in Kharkiv wounded several Right Sector activists as they left a court hearing.

⁸ "Какие города Украины наиболее подвержены угрозе терроризма?" ("What Ukrainian cities are most vulnerable to the threat of terrorism?"). *Обозреватель* [online Ukrainian edition, 4 January 2015]. <http://obozrevatel.com/crime/32458-kakie-goroda-ukrainyi-naibolee-podverzhenyi-ugroze-terrorizma.htm>. Last accessed 21 January 2015.

⁹ "Андрій Левус: «Успішна постреволуційна Україна – це крах російського проекту»." ("Andriy Levus: 'A successful post-revolutionary Ukraine would be the collapse of [Russia's] project'."). *Тиждень.ua* [online Ukrainian edition, 22 December 2014]. <http://tyzhden.ua/Society/126006>. Last accessed 20 January 2015.

¹⁰ Ukrainian: Народний фронт. Ukrainian transl.: *Narodnyy front*.

¹¹ The Security Service of Ukraine [Ukrainian: Служба Безпеки України. Ukrainian transl.: *Sluzhba Bezpeky Ukrayiny*] is the country's main internal security agency with responsibility for counterintelligence and anti-terrorist operations. It is usually referred to by its Ukrainian transliteration's acronym, SBU. In February 2014, Levus was decreed the SBU's deputy chief by Alexander Turchinov, the Speaker of Ukraine's national parliament, who had earlier relieved the SBU's 11 top-ranking officials of their duties. See: "Andrei Levus appointed deputy head of Ukraine's Security Service." ITAR-TASS [online English edition, 27 February 2014]. <http://itar-tass.com/en/world/721131>. Last accessed 19 January 2015.

¹² Andrew Higgins (2014). "As His Fortunes Fell in Ukraine, a President Clung to Illusions." *The New York Times* [online edition, 23 February 2014]. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/24/world/europe/as-his-fortunes-fell-in-ukraine-a-president-clung-to-illusions.html?_r=0. Last accessed 20 February 2015.

¹³ It is notable that *Tyzhden* omitted this exchange from the English language version of the interview. See: <http://ukrainianweek.com/Politics/126456>.

¹⁴ See footnote (4). Yarosh was reportedly wounded in the Donbass on 21 January 2015.

2014 shootout at a separatist checkpoint in Slovyansk.¹⁵ One operation for which the SBU did claim credit occurred on 22 January, when a special operations unit tagged "Dnipro-1"¹⁶ destroyed a freight train outside the city of Sverdlovsk that was transporting coal to Russia. The damage forced authorities to close the main rail line between the southern Luhansk region and Russia.¹⁷ Two days earlier, the SBU announced that it disrupted "a DNR terrorist funding scheme"¹⁸ involving metallurgical coke (made from coal) manufactured in Makiyivkoks and Yasynivsky in the Donetsk region. The plants are owned by Viktor Nusenkis, a Russian citizen associated with former Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich. The SBU claimed money from the sale of metallurgical coke exported illegally through a third company in Mariupol was used "to finance militants, mercenaries, and actions aimed at intimidating the civilian population."¹⁹ This may have been related to a separatist attack a few days against the Avdiyevka metallurgical coke plant, the largest under Ukrainian control and "a strategic target" according to Prime Minister Yatsenyuk, the loss of which would jeopardize Ukraine's steel production.

When Levus was asked whether he meant sabotage operations in occupied territory, he responded that while "our work [in the Donbass] continues deliberately," "I'm talking about action in other areas where we have geopolitical interests: on the territory of the Russian Federation." The "SBU does not deny conducting sabotage operations on the territory of the Russian Federation," but "it leaves no trace." A December 2014 *Versiya* report²⁰ on the Tyzhden' interview cited intelligence warnings about the SBU's deployment of Chechen volunteers²¹ to conduct terrorist operations inside Russia.

Tyzhden' asked Levus about the recent escalation of guerrilla activity in the Donbass and the SBU's role in coordinating efforts there among partisan groups.

"The partisans are a people's movement which we only help coordinate. It's not a conventional movement in the sense of an organized group that operates in occupied territory with support, agents and so on. Resistance groups there provide intelligence — people in occupied territory who stay behind to gather information. Then there are units engaged in direct action, who do everything possible to reduce the occupation force's numbers. Then in newly liberated territory, there are volunteer units engaged in mopping up the enemy, and in counter-subversion²² to find and eliminate enemy networks. Those are three directions. But to talk about a large-scale movement that is coordinated and controlled by us is an exaggeration."²³

It is interesting to see the contrast between Ishchenko's perspective on the threat of Western intervention and what is for Levus, the hope of it:

"As soon as we do our homework and strengthen our army, the world may find itself on the verge of global conflict, when the global system of checks and balances will finally start working. But if we don't do our homework and keep fighting, if we just wear pacifism's rose-colored glasses, why would anyone from Alabama or England fight for us?"

While our generals spend time thinking about where to put checkpoints, Russia will grab another region from us. We should speak frankly about the need to shift from a defensive national strategy to an offensive one. That is the mindset that has to change."²⁴

The deteriorating security situation in Ukraine should concern everyone. As Lenin observed in his essay, "Guerrilla warfare is an inevitable form of struggle at a time when the mass movement has actually reached the point of an uprising and when fairly large intervals occur

¹⁵ "Yarosh's business card" sparks new Internet meme." *Kyiv Post* [online English edition, 21 April 2014]. <http://www.kyivpost.com/multimedia/photo/yaroshs-business-card-kremlin-propaganda-spawns-a-new-internet-meme-344412.html>. Last accessed 19 January 2015.

¹⁶ The volunteer unit was organized in the Dnipropetrovsk region in April 2014 and deployed to eastern Ukraine in late summer.

¹⁷ "Батальон 'Днепр-1': Партизаны подорвали поезд, которым террористы возили уголь в Россию" ("Battalion 'Dnipro-1': Guerrillas blow up a train carrying terrorists' coal to Russia"). *Гордон* [online Russian edition, 22 January 2015]. <http://gordonua.com/news/war/Batalon-Dnipro-1-Partizany-podorvali-poezd-kotorym-terroristy-vozili-ugol-v-Rossiiyu-62516.html>. Last accessed 22 January 2015.

¹⁸ The Donetsk People's Republic is usually referred to in Ukrainian and Russian press reports as "the DNR," the acronym of its transliterated name in Ukrainian and Russian. Ukrainian: Донецька Народна Республіка. Ukrainian transl.: *Donets'ka Narodna Respublika*. Russian: Донецкая Народная Республика. Russian transl.: *Donetskaya Narodnaya Respublika*.

¹⁹ СБУ ліквідувала схему фінансування терористів через експорт кокса" ("SBU eliminates scheme to finance terrorists through coke exports"). *Гордон* [online Russian edition, 20 January 2015]. <http://gordonua.com/news/war/SBU-likvidirovala-shemu-finansirovaniya-terroristov-cherez-eksport-koksa-62268.html>. Last accessed 22 January 2015.

²⁰ "Українські спецслужби готують теракти в Росії" ("Ukraine's intelligence agencies are preparing attacks inside Russia"). *Versia.ru* [online Russian edition, 22 December 2014]. <http://versia.ru/articles/2014/dec/22/ukrainskie-specsluzhby-gotovyat-terakty-v-rossii>. Last accessed 19 January 2015.

²¹ "Chechen warriors help Ukraine to deal with Russian terrorists." *Odessa Crisis Media Center* [online English edition, 24 October 2014]. <http://www.odcrisis.org/en/chechen-warriors-help-ukraine-to-deal-with-russian-terrorists-2/>. Last accessed 20 January 2015. The Dzhokhar Dudayev Battalion formed in October 2013 was named for the former president of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria who in 1991 declared its independence from the Soviet Union. Dudayev was killed in an April 1996 Russian missile strike during the First Chechen War. There are published reports that the Dudayev Battalion is comprised of Chechens who came to Ukraine from Austria and other European Union countries where they enjoyed refugee status. [See: "В Україні проти́в Пу́тина і кады́ровцев воюю́т австрійські чеченці – СМІ" ("Austrian Chechens are fighting in Ukraine against Putin and Kadyrov's collaborators"). *Українська правда* [online Ukraine edition, 8 September 2014]. <http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2014/09/8/7037097/>. Last accessed 19 January 2015] In later October 2014, Ukrainian President Poroshenko agreed to grant Ukrainian citizenship to foreign volunteers. [See: "Іноштра́нці доброво́льческих батальо́нов мо́гут получи́ть украи́нское гра́жданство" ("Foreigners volunteer battalions can get Ukrainian citizenship"). *Гордон* [online Russian edition, 31 October 2014]. <http://gordonua.com/news/war/Inostrancy-dobrovolcheskih-batalonov-mogut-poluchit-ukrainskoe-grazhdanstvo-49217.html>. Last accessed 19 January 2014]

²² The SBU's counterintelligence unit is believed to lead many of these efforts.

²³ *Ibid.*, fn(9).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, fn(9).

between the 'big engagements' in the civil war." If the next "big engagement" turns out to be a Ukrainian offensive that withers and collapses — or worse, provokes a separatist counter-offensive backed by full-scale Russian armed intervention — an already a bad situation could quickly morph into a most dangerous one.

As to the two-sided escalation we are witnessing now, Russian separatists promise sabotage and acts of terror in Ukraine's cities, and militant Ukrainians threaten to bring the fight into Russia proper. To this, Lenin's concluding observation to the essay written some eleven decades ago has great relevance today:

"It is not guerrilla actions which disorganize the movement, but the weakness of a party which is incapable of taking such actions under its control. That is why the anathemas which we Russians usually hurl against guerrilla actions go hand in hand with secret, casual, unorganized guerrilla actions..."

The unanswered question is whether either side can (or wants) to control the forces of terror each seems determined to unleash on each other, and sadly, on the hapless residents of eastern Ukraine.

FPRI, 1528 Walnut Street, Suite 610, Philadelphia, PA 19102-3684

For more information, contact Eli Gilman at 215-732-3774, ext. 103, email fpri@fpri.org, or visit us at www.fpri.org