

POSSIBLE SCENARIOS FOR UKRAINE: GIVING
AUTONOMY TO EASTERN REGIONS KEY TO CRISIS
RESOLUTION

МОЖЛИВІ СЦЕНАРІЇ ДЛЯ УКРАЇНИ: НАДАННЯ
АВТОНОМІЇ СХІДНИМ РЕГІОНАМ Є КЛЮЧОМ ДО
ВИХОДУ З КРИЗИ

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The Russian military forces were taken into captivity by the Ukrainian army, which elicited severe reactions from the European Union, the NATO, and the United States. Russia has responded by announcing that the captive Russian forces were volunteers, thus trying to deny its direct military presence in Ukraine. The question now is what goals Russians are trying to achieve in Ukraine? And what possible reactions may be shown to these developments by the Western countries? Answers given to these two questions will help delineate the future destination toward which Ukraine is heading. The main goal of Russia's large-scale strategy is that the former republics of the Soviet Union and, as much as possible, other countries in its neighborhood, remain out of the framework of security and political arrangements of the West and do not pose a

threat to national security of Russia. The ruling political elite in Russia are following a policy of force to establish their influence outside their immediate neighborhood by bolstering such regional organizations as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, or having direct military presence in Georgia, Armenia and Ukraine. The ongoing developments in Ukraine can be analyzed along the lines of this large-scale strategy which is being pursued by Russia. More than being concerned about the collapse of the government of former Ukrainian president, Viktor Yanukovych, Russia was wary about possible alignment of Ukraine with geopolitical policies of the West. Later developments, however, took a different turn and finally a Western-minded government appeared at the helm in Kiev. As a result, Moscow moved to separate the strategic Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine and annex it to its own territory. Afterwards, Moscow expected the new government in Ukraine to try to cool down the situation inside the country by changing the constitution and granting more autonomy to certain regions, especially in the east. This, however, did not take place because the direction in which political developments move in a given country is not determined by a single player and no player is omnipotent enough to make its desired developments come about. On the other hand, any strategy adopted in line with a country's foreign policy will be followed by its own domestic and foreign advantages and disadvantages. If Moscow did not support ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine and allowed the new Ukrainian government to rout them, it would risk the credit and popularity of Kremlin leaders, especially Putin himself, who were sure to lose a lot of their credit in the eyes of the Russian people. In addition, Russia would have certainly faced many problems with its new vengeful neighbor, which is also a close ally of the West. On the other hand, if Russia supports the ethnic Russians in Ukraine, it will have to brace for more intensive Western sanctions and see itself more isolated within international system. Therefore, in this stage, regardless of what policy Russia adopts with regard to Ukraine, it will have to get ready for the positive and negative outcomes of its policy. Now, with all these presumptions in mind, the question is

what future course Russia has envisaged for Ukraine? Basically speaking, three scenarios are imaginable for future Ukraine in view of the ongoing events in the country and the role played by Russia. First, the Ukrainian government will triumph over the separatist forces in eastern parts of the country through West's support and oversight of Russia. As a result, a new Ukraine will rise in the immediate neighborhood of Russia, which will be a satellite of the Western powers with a totally new identity. The evidence on the ground does not support this scenario because such a scenario will be certainly not desirable for Moscow.

In the second scenario, the central government in Ukraine will change the constitution and grant vast rights of autonomy to eastern regions of the country with the right of veto over issues of foreign policy importance. For example, the new constitution would see to it that Ukraine would not be able to accede to Western institutions such as the NATO without the consent of the aforesaid regions. Under present circumstances, Russia is apparently willing for this scenario to be realized in Ukraine. However, this scenario is not supported by the central government in Kiev and the West.

In the third scenario, the eastern parts of Ukraine will be finally separated from the country and a new government dependent on and inclined to Moscow will take charge. This scenario has been totally rejected by the Western countries and their ally, the government of Ukraine, but the evidence on the ground points to de facto secession of the eastern regions from the rest of the country. Of course, the local governments established in those regions by local people have not been recognized by any country in the world. If Russia failed to make the government of Ukraine accept the second scenario through either diplomacy or the policy of force, then it will most probably pursue the realization of the third scenario. If this scenario materializes in reality, Russia will be able to create a buffer zone from the port city of Mariupol all the way to the city of Luhansk in the first phase of the scenario in order to head off possible security threats to Russian territory from Ukraine.

Now, the question is what are the trump cards that the West may play in this game? It seems that imposing more sanctions against Russia as well as offering more financial and military support for Kiev will be the sole trump cards that the West possesses in this case. On the other hand, the evidence shows that Moscow has overcome the primary shock of having to deal with the Western sanctions and is not willing to give in to the economic pressures of the West by giving geopolitical concessions to the Western countries. In view of the fact that Moscow is actually at the helm of political developments in Ukraine, it seems that the government in Kiev has no other option but to give concessions to Moscow. As a result, the second scenario appears to be the most possible scenario and the best option for future diplomatic bargaining. from Foreign Policy Journal