

## **The US's suicidal strategy on Ukraine**

By [Chris Martenson](#), 19 Feb 2015

Ukraine is back in the news cycle and for good reason. The cease-fire has broken, fighting is intensifying, and the Western-supported and installed leadership in Kiev is losing the campaign. At this point, the West's choice is to either double down and bet even more on a badly failing set of policies, or admit it has lost this round and seek to deescalate the situation. Meanwhile, Europe has finally woken up to the risks and seems to be ready to carve out a different path than the US. A lot hinges on the high-level talks that are currently underway between Russia and Europe's leaders.

As President Hollande of France [put it on February 7](#), *"If we don't find not just a compromise but a lasting peace agreement, we know perfectly well what the scenario will be. It has a name, it's called war."*

He's not simply referring to an escalation of the factions fighting within Ukraine. He's warning about the real deal: a wider conflict that could easily spread into Europe, and possibly, embroil powers across the world.

### **A Recipe for Unrest**

[As I've written previously](#), the West, especially the US, was instrumental in toppling the democratically elected president of Ukraine back in February 2014. US officials were caught on tape plotting the coup, and then immediately supported the hastily installed and extremist officials that now occupy the Kiev leadership positions.

In short, the crisis in Ukraine was not the result of Russia's actions, but the West's. Had the prior president, Yanukovich, not been overthrown, it's highly unlikely that Ukraine would be embroiled in a nasty civil war. Relations between Russia and the West would be in far better repair.

Russia, quite predictably and understandably, became alarmed at the rise of fascism and Nazi-sympathetic powers on its border. Remember the repeated statements by Kiev officials recommending extermination of the Russian speakers who make up the majority living in eastern Ukraine? Were a parallel situation happening in Canada, for example, I would fully expect the US to be similarly and seriously interested and involved in the outcome.

The only people seemingly surprised by this predictable Russian reaction toward protecting its people and border interests are the neocons at the US State Department who instigated the conflict in the first place. In my experience, these are dangerous people principally because they seem to lack perspective and humility.

### **Ukraine's Civil War: Going Poorly for the Regime**

Looking at the state of things, it's not going well militarily for the Kiev regime. Huge losses and persistent reports of low morale among Ukrainian troops tell the tale: Kiev is losing badly. Let's begin with the reports of the fighting in Ukraine, which have recently intensified:

[Ukraine Bloodshed Intensifies Ahead of Peace Summit](#)  
Feb. 11, 2015

Kiev (AFP) – Intense fighting in Ukraine, including **a devastating rocket strike on Kiev’s military headquarters in the east**, killed at least 37 people on Tuesday, the eve of a four-way peace summit.

**Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko said rockets for the first time hit the military’s command centre in Kramatorsk**, the government’s administrative capital in the region, well behind the frontlines and **far from rebel positions**.

**The latest fighting also saw rebels seek to encircle railway hub Debaltseve** and Ukrainian forces launch a counter-offensive around the strategic port of Mariupol.

The rebels have encircled and ruined a number of Kiev forces over the past several months in what are called “cauldrons,” where the encircled forces are slowly ground down and destroyed. This [appears to have finally happened](#) in Debaltseve, which would be just another in a long string of heavy losses for Kiev.

The losses in prior cauldrons have been staggeringly high, with many analysts concluding that Kiev has been underreporting losses by as much as 90%.

I cannot vouch for all of these sources. But the following is a typical example of reporting coming from the front lines of the Ukraine conflict, which directly contradicts the official Kiev war reports:

#### [Ukraine Hides Devastating Losses as Russia-Backed Fighters Surge Forward](#)

Jan. 25, 2015

**Artyomovsk, Ukraine** – An ashen-faced man in a loose-fitting military uniform shuffles past a blood-soaked stretcher propped against the wall. Slowly stirring a cup of tea, he watches **Ukrainian military officials announce the day’s casualties—one killed and 20 wounded**.

“**Don’t believe what they tell you**,” he says, checking the door is closed before continuing.

“**There are many, many more. At least 280 were injured in just one day last week and 30 or 40 killed. There were many more killed this week, Debaltseve and Konstantinovka are the worst cities now. I take 18 wounded to Kharkiv myself every day.**”

The man, who didn’t want to be named, is a medic in Ukraine’s overstretched, under-resourced army. Clearly traumatized, he speaks quietly and hesitantly, barely audible over the low rumble of artillery fire from the outskirts of town.

**His words confirm Ukraine’s worst-kept secret—that the Ukrainian army is drastically understating its casualties.** But only now is the scale of that understatement starting to become clear.

On Jan. 22, the director of Kostiantynivka hospital told Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe monitors that in the last two weeks that the number of soldiers admitted has “**increased dramatically, with figures comparable to those in August and September 2014.**”

Between Aug. 10 and Sept. 3, when Russian troops first entered Ukraine in support of a beleaguered rebel force on the brink of defeat, the **Kyiv Post estimates at least 200 servicemen were killed**.

**Many of the recent casualties are coming from areas around the besieged town of Debaltseve, a strategic rail junction between Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts**, where thousands of Ukrainian soldiers are struggling to prevent being surrounded and cut off from Ukrainian lines.

The town's defenders—and its civilian population—have faced an incessant artillery bombardment from three sides since Russian-backed rebels launched a massive offensive all along the front line last week.

I have read enough firsthand reports to suspect that this article is pretty close to the truth. The contradicting numbers in the statements from the Kiev regime about losses are very hard to believe.

Part of what plagues Kiev's forces is the age-old problem of fielding an unmotivated force. Not everybody is excited to be fighting against people from within their own country. Moreover, training is poor, equipment and ammunition are in poor shape and supply, and pay is often late in coming, if it comes at all. This is a very usual litany of problems that have plagued struggling armies through the centuries.

On the other side of the battle lines, you have people fighting for their homes, their families, and their ethnic community, which the Kiev regime has promised to exterminate if and when it's given the chance.

### **Dubious Reporting**

It's interesting to contrast foreign reporting with US reporting on the conflict:

[As Fighting Deepens in Eastern Ukraine, Casualties Rise and Truce Is All but Dead](#)

Jan. 20, 2015

Moscow – **Intensifying battles, mounting death tolls and new accusations of Russian interference in eastern Ukraine** have marked some of the worst fighting between government troops and pro-Russian separatists since last summer, rendering a months-old cease-fire agreement effectively defunct.

**The two sides have been trading heavy fire at the Donetsk airport**, a prize that, though more symbolic than strategic, has been at the center of punishing recent attacks that have reduced much of the facility to rubble. **Each side has claimed control of the airport at various points**, and militia and army fighters there continued to launch strikes against each other over the past several days.

**The U.S. ambassador to Ukraine, Geoffrey R. Pyatt, bolstered Ukraine's accusations Tuesday, saying the United States was alarmed by what he called a Russian-provoked military escalation, coupled with the arrival of large quantities of weaponry from Russian territory**, according to the Russian Interfax news service. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin told reporters Tuesday that pro-Russian separatists were **“taking advantage” of the military's compliance to seize “very substantial territory—more than 500 square kilometers.”**

Let's decode this piece of writing from the *Washington Post* and provide some essential context that is, regrettably, missing far too often from US media sources when reporting on the Ukraine conflict.

To begin, there's the [assertion once again](#) that Russia has been supplying “large quantities” of weapons to the separatists. While this may or may not be true, not one shred of satellite or other imagery or any other evidence has been provided by the US to support that charge.

In this day and age, it is *literally not possible* to move large amounts of heavy weaponry across open land without satellites and/or drones taking pictures of them.

Furthermore, in this case the charges are being levied by one Geoffrey Pyatt, the infamous US ambassador to Ukraine who was caught on tape discussing the imminent coup of then-President Yanukovich. He also famously tweeted out [a crudely doctored photo](#) purporting to show that the missile attack on MH-17 came from the separatists—evidence that was quickly defrauded by the intelligence community.

Why the *Washington Post* would report anything from Pyatt as worthy of our serious consideration given his blighted track record so far is a complete mystery to me. It would be like recommending your friend to a doctor you knew had committed gross malpractice multiple times.

Next, the separatists are not “taking advantage” of a one-sided lull in the fighting to claim territory. They have been winning battle after battle. What they have taken advantage of is the poor training and lackluster military strategy undertaken by Kiev’s forces.

It should also be noted that the above article presents the status of the conflict an even match. There’s no indication that one side is winning or losing. This is par for the course with US media reports these days, and it’s really a disturbing indication that the shoddy journalistic ethics on display during the horrendously misreported weapons of mass destructions lies that led to the most recent US attack on Iraq are still with us today.

It’s quite sad, really. Because when it comes to an issue as important as a potential conflict with Russia, the US owes it to itself to get the facts right. The stakes are worthy of that.

A final point about the shortcomings of the *Washington Post* piece above concerns the heavily contested Donetsk airport. Five days prior to the above article’s publication, the airport had been clearly reported by other outlets to have already been lost by Kiev forces:

#### [Russia-Backed Separatists Seize Donetsk Airport in Ukraine](#)

Jan. 15, 2015

**Russian-backed separatists announced that they have captured the shattered remains of the Donetsk airport terminal** in eastern Ukraine and plan to claw back more territory, further dashing hopes for a lasting peace agreement.

The airport, on the fringes of the rebel stronghold of Donetsk, has been at the centre of bitter battles since May. Control over it was split between the separatists and Ukrainian forces, who had held onto the main civilian terminal. Reduced to little more than a shell-strewn wreck, the building is of limited strategic importance but has great symbolic value.

**An AP reporter saw a rebel flag hoisted over that building Thursday, although fighting still appeared to be ongoing. Ukraine insisted government troops were holding their positions at the airport.**

Instead of the airport being up for grabs as the *WaPo* article implies, it has had the rebel flag flying over it as of five days ago. It’s clearly in the hands of one side, the separatists. That’s a huge difference, and is just one more example of heavily slanted writing that passes for news in the US these days.

But leaving the shoddy reporting aside, the main summary here is that the intense fighting in Ukraine has resulted in mounting losses for Kiev.

All of which provides the context for this week's hurriedly brokered "peace summit" that will involve France, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine.

### **Splitting Away**

Europe has begun the process of splitting away from the US on the matter of Russia and Ukraine.

What's interesting is that an emergency meeting is being convened amongst several of the top leaders in the world, but look who's suspiciously absent from the talks:

#### [Merkel and Hollande's Surprise Moscow Visit Raises Hopes of Ukraine Deal](#)

Feb. 5, 2015

The leaders of Germany and France abruptly announced a summit with the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, in Moscow on Friday in response to overtures from the Kremlin, raising hopes of a breakthrough in the year-old Ukraine conflict.

The sudden and unusual decision by the chancellor, Angela Merkel, and the president, François Hollande, to travel to Moscow, with the French leader talking of decisions of war and peace, increased the stakes in the crisis while also raising suspicions that the Kremlin was seeking to split Europe and the US. Putin was said to have made "initiatives" to the European leaders in recent days.

Merkel and Hollande met the Ukrainian president, Petro Poroshenko, in Kiev on Thursday evening but left without making any comment.

EU diplomats and officials said that growing US talk of arming Ukraine was pushing the Russians and Europeans towards a diplomatic deal, with both sides keen to avoid weapons deliveries but also to keep the US on the sidelines of the diplomacy.

Note the progression of what transpired, which we can piece together from this and other articles. US Secretary of State John Kerry *was* in Kiev meeting with the president and prime minister of Ukraine, but did not attend similar meetings with Hollande and Merkel held on the same day.

Then Hollande and Merkel jet straight off to Moscow for high-level talks.

Missing in action from the Germany-France-Ukraine-Russia talks is John Kerry, President Obama, or any other ranking US official. This speaks volumes about where we are in this narrative.

When the US started down this path of confrontation with Russia, which remains a complete strategic mystery to nearly all thoughtful observers, there were two large possible outcomes: isolating Russia and fracturing its growing ties with Europe; or accidentally fracturing the strong ties between the US and Europe.

Oops. Looks like we've opened Door #2.

I didn't know how serious it was until I read this:

## Kerry Insists “There Is No Split” with Europe on Russia, Ukraine

Feb. 8, 2015

Munich – **Secretary of State John Kerry on Sunday denied any divisions between the U.S. and Europe** over how to handle Russia, as Germany announced another high-level summit aimed at stemming the crisis in Ukraine.

Kerry told a security conference in Munich that he wanted to “**assure everybody there is no division, there is no split**” between Washington and its European allies amid the crisis in Ukraine.

“**We are united, we are working closely together,**” he told the conference following meetings with his French and German counterparts. “We all agree that this challenge will not end through military force. **We are united in our diplomacy.**”

It’s not terribly hard to read through that diplomatic double-speak here. The US is “united in our diplomacy” with Europe, even though the US was apparently not invited to be part of the biggest gathering of heads of state on what could be the flash point for a major regional war.

Nice try, John.

There’s a saying that news is never official until it’s denied. Well, I guess that makes it official: there’s an emerging split between the US and Europe over the matter of Russia and Ukraine. And it’s about time.

The key issue, apparently, is that the US, true to form, is ready to send in military arms to the Ukraine regime, and Europe thinks that’s a bad idea for multiple reasons. I could not agree more.

After all, when has the US arming one side of a regional conflict led to regional peace and a good outcome for the citizens of any particular area? If you can’t think of any recent examples, neither can I. The track record of late is nothing short of being a complete disaster for the people of the various countries involved. Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Yemen, and Nicaragua come to mind.

But the people of Ukraine have to be kicking themselves right about now. Not only did they fall for the rosy promises of change and hope peddled by the West, they also believed the West would be a better partner for them than Russia. Worse, instead of finding a way to have both as partners, they adopted the West’s idea that it had to be one or the other. And now their country is being torn apart.