

The escalation of the conflict in eastern Ukraine as an example of cynical rivalry of superpowers

By: Fazyl Amzaev

On 02 March 2017, Alexander Zakharchenko, head of the self-proclaimed DNR, in an interview with Russian media of the ultimatum of the Donbass blockade said:

“Now the countdown has begun. Each day is like a nail hammered into the coffin lid of the country, which is called Ukraine. Maximum of 60 days – And the state will virtually cease to exist”, – he said.

Zakharchenko also said that he was waiting for the start of escalation of military activities in Donbass.

The beginning of 2017 was marked by a new escalation of the conflict in Donbass.

In mid-January 2017 on the initiative of deputies of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine Semen Semenchenko, Pavel Kostenko and Vladimir Parasyuk there began a trade embargo of the separate areas of Donetsk and Lugansk regions (SADLR) under the control of pro-Russian militants. This action according to initiators' words is aimed to release the detained prisoners in the self-proclaimed republics and to suppress the financing of terrorism through trade with these republics.

The Ukrainian authorities in anticipation of the negative effects of these steps almost immediately opposed to them, so on 27 January, the chairman of the Donetsk regional military-civilian administration Pavel Zherbrivskiy said that he advocated “a legislatively regulated” trade with SADLR.

On 29 January, after the first phone call of Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin, military actions started in Avdeevka. From that day there began an intensive fire of the Ukrainian positions from the artillery and rocket systems and tanks banned by the Minsk agreements.

On 15 February, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine declared a state of emergency in the energy sector due to the lack of coal to generate the required amount of electricity, which was a consequence of the Donbass blockade, began in the beginning of the year.

In addition, it should be noted that the statements made by the US mandated persons on the Ukrainian crisis in February was a complete disappointment for Russia.

On 2 February 2017 during her first speech, newly appointed US representative of the UN Nikki Haley stated:

“The United States are with the people of Ukraine, who are more than three years of suffering from occupation and military intervention of Russia ... the US continues to condemn and call immediately stop the Russian occupation of the Crimea. The Crimea is a part of Ukraine”.

On 15 February, the US President Donald Trump released the so called “tweet full of disappointment” in which he stated that the Crimea was captured by Russia because of Obama's excessive softness.

And the night before the White House spokesman Sean Spicer expressed the position of Donald Trump in relation to Russia in part of the Crimea:

“President Trump makes it clear that he expects the Russian parliament de-escalation of violence in Ukraine and the return of the Crimea”.

Zakharchenko's threats made at the background of the above were the result of the expiration of an ultimatum demanding an end to the SADLR's blockade. Since the beginning of spring the self-proclaimed republics stopped the supply of the coal deliveries to Ukraine and “nationalized” the Ukrainian industrial enterprises located on the territory under their control.

Today it is obvious to all that the Ukrainian crisis from the very beginning was not isolated from other international problems. The superpowers, mostly the US and Russia, and to a lesser

European – France, England and Germany periodically use the aggravation of the Ukrainian crisis to promote their interests.

Yes, it is appropriate to talk about the redistribution of flows from the Ukrainian oligarchs in the trade with the self-proclaimed republics, but given the importance of the Ukrainian crisis for the international players, this factor can be at best only a concomitant, but not a fundamental.

The numerous escalating episodes occur due to the natural internal reasons, but often are the result of the impact of these international players. It's no secret that the so-called heads of the self-proclaimed republics are nothing more than puppets of the Kremlin, and the weakness of the Ukrainian government under the conditions of an undeclared war and economic crisis makes it powerless in opposing the unauthorized initiative of these three people's deputies, directed probably by the certain external forces.

Regarding the possibility of implementation of the scenario voiced by Zakharchenko, so it looks highly unlikely. Russia missed the initiative on this issue in the first half of 2014, when there was the so-called process of "reunification of the Crimea with Russia". At that time Russia with full determination was preparing for a full-scale intervention in case of resistance of the armed forces of Ukraine, which at the time were on the territory of Crimea. Today the scenario of a large-scale invasion into Ukraine will result in enormous losses for Russia. Although, of course, there is a small chance and this due to the fact that the modern Russia prefers military aid as leverage to political maneuvers according to its established centuries-old traditions.

To achieve the collapse of Ukraine using exclusively economic levers, namely the termination of deliveries of coal and the "nationalization" of the Ukrainian enterprises, is impossible. The Ukrainian government will soon find an alternative solution to these deliveries by means of so-called western partners.

There is a major confrontation between the US and Russia in the Ukrainian crisis. From the very beginning of the crisis Europe fearing of a large-scale conflict on its borders maintains a policy of pacification of Russia, imposition of sanctions and the freezing of the conflict. In this confrontation the United States are in the position of the attacker and Russia is the position of the defender.

The annexation of Crimea and the conflict in eastern Ukraine is the "Achilles heel" of Russia. The uncontrolled Russia's desire to come back to the international club of the world's superpowers at any cost makes it compliant to the persuasions of the United States "to cooperate on a wide range of international issues". Since the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis, the US exploits Russia to deal with such international issues: Iranian nuclear program, "the settlement of the Syrian crisis", to intimidate Europe in order to enhance NATO's position.

With the arrival of a new US president Donald Trump's administration, whose top priority in his foreign policy is confronting an ever-increasing economic and military power of China, the politically shortsighted Russia has another chance to curry favor with the US. However, Russia's foreign policy mediocrity does not allow her to understand that America, at least in the medium term does not agree with the full settlement of the Ukrainian crisis, because in its understanding it will be very foolish to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs.

This is the policy of the modern superpowers in the Ukrainian crisis, for which Ukraine, its wealth, and people are nothing more than expendable in achieving their international interests.

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