



Statement before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee

“RUSSIA AND DEVELOPMENTS IN UKRAINE”

A Statement by

Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski

Counselor and Trustee
Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)

July 9, 2014

419 Dirksen Senate Office Building

More than three months have passed since Putin's triumphalist speech to the Russian Parliament. In it, he exalted in his military seizure of Crimea while basking in an orgy of unleashed chauvinistic sentiments. Putin clearly relished the enthusiasm and apparently gave little thought to the larger and longer-term strategic consequences of what he unleashed.

Three months later, with continuing uncertainty regarding the future of Russo-Ukrainian relations, but also growing international costs for Russia itself, Putin faces three basic choices:

- (1) To accommodate with Ukraine by terminating the assault on Ukrainian sovereignty and economic well-being. This will not be easy to do, and it will require wisdom and persistence both from Russia as well as Ukraine and the West. Essentially, an accommodation should involve the termination of the Russian efforts to destabilize Ukraine from within, not to mention ending possible threats of a larger military invasion – as well as some sort of an East-West understanding which entails Russia's tacit acceptance of Ukraine's prolonged journey towards eventual EU membership. At the same time, it should be made clear to all concerned that Ukraine neither

seeks nor the West contemplates Ukrainian membership in the NATO alliance. It is reasonable for the Russians to feel uncomfortable about that prospect.

At the same time, it would be made clear that Russia no longer expects Ukraine to become part of the “Eurasian Union”, a designation which is a transparent cover for the recreation of something approximating the former Soviet Union or the Tsarist Empire. An understanding regarding this issue should not preclude, however, a Russian-Ukrainian trade deal, based on the fact that from a purely economic point of view, both countries can benefit from normal and increasingly cooperative trade as well as financial relations.

The international community, specifically the West, could in some fashion reiterate their support for that outcome, not to mention the full scale resumption of more normal relations with Russia itself, including the lifting of existing sanctions.

(2) Putin's second choice is to continue the effort to destabilize Ukraine by sponsoring thinly veiled military intervention designed to disrupt normal life in portions of Ukraine. Should Russia continue on this course, obviously the West would have to undertake a full scale, prolonged, and truly painful application of sanctions designed to convey to Russia the painful consequences of its unwarranted violation of Ukraine's sovereignty. In effect, this very unfortunate outcome would likely produce the emergence of two basket cases in Eastern Europe: in Ukraine because of deliberate Russian actions; and in Russia itself as a justified consequence of the needed Western reaction to its aggression.

(3) Putin's third choice could involve the decision to invade Ukraine across the board, exploiting Russia's obviously much larger military potential. Such an action, however, would not only prompt sustained retaliation by the West but could provoke prolonged Ukrainian resistance, especially based on spontaneous outbursts of anger in its larger cities. In these conditions, it is unlikely that the West would remain entirely passive. If the resistance was sustained

and intense, there would be growing pressure on the members of NATO to provide various forms of support for the Ukrainians, thereby making the conflict much more prolonged and costly to the aggressor.

For the Kremlin, the consequence of the third option would be not only a permanently hostile Ukrainian population of more than forty million people, but also an economically retarded and politically isolated Russia, facing the growing possibility of increasing internal unrest.

In brief, the obvious choice for everyone concerned is to find a formula for international accommodation, and that has to involve the abandonment of the use of force against Ukraine by Russia. The issue of Crimea will remain unresolved for the time being, but it will be an enduring reminder that chauvinistic fanaticism is not the best point of departure for the resolution of larger and more complex issues. This is why Putin's actions are a threat not only to the West but ultimately also to Russia itself.