



Illarionov: Putin's goal is to reduce Ukraine to crisis through acts of terrorism and default, to remove Poroshenko and to introduce federal system

Nataliya Dvali

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Vladimir Putin is not going to occupy the whole Ukraine using the military, his mission is to reduce the country to a political and economic crisis, to change the constitutional system and thus establish total control over Ukraine, the Russian economist and ex-Adviser to the President of the Russian Federation Andrey Illarionov said in the interview to the GORDON.

In the morning January 24, Mariupol, which is controlled by the forces of the Ukrainian anti-terrorist operation, was shelled from Gradov rocket systems. It were fighters from the village of Sakhanka of Donetsk region who fired. OSCE observers confirmed in their report that the city had been shelled from the territory controlled by the fighters of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic (DNR).

As a result of the shelling, 30 people died and 102 people got wounded, 53 multystorey houses, four schools, and three kindergartens were damaged, 40 cars burnt down. The secretary of the Council of National Security and Defense of Ukraine Oleksandr Tuchynov made the Russian President Vladimir Putin responsible for the event, and the president Petro Poroshenko called the attack at Mariupol "a crime against humanity".

The Russian economist, senior research associate of the Washington Cato Institute Andrey Illarionov is convinced that the shelling of Mariupol is only a trick; terrorists in Donbass are preparing assaults at other strategic objects. In the interview to the GORDON, Illarionov commented on the mistakes of the Ukrainian authorities, the Kremlin's immediate plans and "the historical mission" of the Russian President Vladimir Putin.

– You claimed that the shelling of Mariupol is "a deceptive maneuver" for Ukraine to relax its attention in other sectors of the front. Which ones?

– Putin's principal goal is to try to make the Ukrainian authorities sit down at the negotiating table with the terrorists, thereby legalizing them in the inter-Ukrainian context. The persuasion methods used are well-known techniques of the Committee for State Security – bribery, blackmail, threat of murder, and murder. It was so during the occupation of the Crimea, during occupation of the governmental buildings in Donbass, during the attack on August 24, 2014, and

Ilovaisk encirclement, it was so during the surrender of the Donetsk airport. The same approach is also used during the attack at Mariupol.

Obviously, it was first planned "to scare" residents of a large city in order to force Ukrainian authorities to "retreat" and commence negotiations with the terrorists under the threat of more terrible results of further attacks. However, there was the so-called "performer's excess" – the casualties turned out greater than "was planned". Therefore, it was urgently ordered to cancel any further actions, and Zakharchenko, who had just solemnly declared the beginning of "attack at Mariupol", had to turn around (*Alexander Zakharchenko, terrorist leader of DNR.*–**GORDON**).

Instead of "successful coercion to peace with terrorists", there was a rigid reaction from the world community. Putin has to take a break, even if a short one. Most likely, he will not continue attacks and shelling in the same sector of the front. Instead, he will shift the main pressure on other two sectors – Debaltsevo in Donetsk region and Shchastye in Lugansk region. Debaltsevo is an important transport hub that can help significantly simplify the transport network of DNR and LNR. In Shchastye, there is a power plant supplying Lugansk with heat.

– Very many people in Ukraine were sure that the situation in Donbass will be frozen and that conflict escalation is of no advantage for Russia because the European Union will revise sanctions against the Russian Federation in spring.

– It is self-deception, the Russian regime did not assumed such obligations. Obviously, the Ukrainian authorities fell victim to misinformation. Photos of Russian military equipment on bases in Rostov region were published some time ago. Though it was October in the pictures, the equipment was already painted white – the color of snow. Along with other facts, it testified to the fact that the Russian authorities were preparing for the winter campaign that they launched on January 11 by attacking the Donetsk airport.

– The Ukrainian economy is dilapidated, the correlation of military forces is not in our favour, too. Do you think that Ukraine will stand up to opposition against Russia?

– I have a dual feeling now. After the victory of Maidan in February 2014, I was full of optimism which grew stronger when I saw the work of volunteers and civil organizations. In the modern world, it is difficult to find such dedication in protecting one's own country as was demonstrated by average Ukrainians.

On the other hand, there are Ukrainian authorities, bureaucracy, officials (both civil and military). This part of Ukraine does not cause anything but pessimism. It has committed and continues committing all possible and impossible mistakes and crimes. In particular, I mean their inaction at the end of February 2014 when official Kiev not simply refused to protect the Crimea, but actually surrendered the peninsula. It also took place in Donbass in April 2014 when separatists started seizing public institutions with the consent of the Ukrainian authorities. It occurred on August 24, 2014 when Putin began a large-scale attack in Donbass, and the Ukrainian authorities, knowing about the planned mass invasion of the Russian troops, did not undertake anything to oppose it; as a result, many fighters of voluntary battalions were encircled, captured, or killed. Official Kiev claimed then that those who got in the encirclement would be rescued very soon. But the rescue did not come. Even after the beginning of the Russian invasion, the General Staff was convincing Ukrainians for several days that there was no

invasion though the Russian tanks were already closing the circle near Ilovaisk. The Ukrainian military command was also to blame for the surrender of the Donetsk airport in many respects.

– If the Ukrainian society inspires optimism and the Ukrainian power pessimism, what will happen to the country?

– As long as the Ukrainian authorities behave as they do now, the situation will remain very severe. It is necessary to carry out urgent military and economic reforms. For 11 months after the victory of Maidan, almost nothing has been made for the reduction of the government deficit, for reforming Naftogaz, for stopping the leakage of funds that are shrinking at a rate of 2.5 billion dollars a month. Foreign exchange reserves of Ukraine as of the beginning of 2015 were only USD 7.5 billion, while this figure was USD 20 billion a year ago. A default is threatening the country, which will be a stab in the back not just to all citizens, but first of all to the boys fighting in the east.

– How can you explain lack of real reforms in Ukraine?

– I will refrain from comments, but implementation of reforms is both the privilege and obligation of the Ukrainian society itself. I emphasize once again: until reforms are carried out, until people who have already demonstrated their incompetence, inability and unwillingness to carry out necessary economic and military transformations are removed, Ukraine will sustain serious damage.

– Does the West benefit from destruction of Ukraine?

– Of course, no! There has been obvious progress in the position of the West since the last year. It was obvious last spring that the West does not want to get involved in the war on the side of Ukraine. The European Union and the USA confined themselves to statements about their "deep concern" and "inadmissibility of aggression", but they did not take any serious steps. The passive position of the West considerably helped Putin to expedite and radicalize the actions in the Crimea and in the east of Ukraine.

Apparently, the relation of the West to the Russian aggression started changing over the last two months. The European Union and the USA seem to embark on a more responsible policy aimed at protection of Ukraine. It is evidenced both by the changed rhetoric of the Western leaders and their adoption of new documents, and by the actions of the military in the frontline NATO member states.

– Is it true that if the West had really wanted to stop Putin, it would have blocked personal bank accounts of the Russian President and his immediate environment long ago?

– I am afraid that it is too late to do it now. It should have been done six or seven years ago. A couple of years ago, Putin began the campaign of the so-called "nationalization of the elite" – transferring assets (both financial, and real estate) of the Russian officials and businessmen to the Russian Federation. Many Putin's associates fulfilled these requirements, therefore it is not very much that they have left in the West. The measures mentioned by you will hardly be very effective now, though it does not mean that they should not necessary be taken.

Now, Putin is not so much interested in money but rather in the so-called "eternal": glory, memory, feeling of what he perceives as his "historical mission". It seems that he has convinced himself that his historical mission is to annex Ukraine to Russia. If he fails to do that, in his opinion, it is necessary to destroy Ukraine.

– How far will the Russian troops advance until the West starts moving and Ukraine gets on its own feet?

– I am not sure that Putin plans to go far deep into Ukraine just using the military. His interest consists in using the bits of two regions - DNR and LNR – as two master keys, trying to crack the whole Ukrainian house with their help. The campaign of terrorist attacks will be pursued in other Ukrainian territories, first of all in Odessa, Kharkov, and Zaporozhie regions. Expansion of the geographic coverage of terrorist attacks is also possible.

Putin's goal is not to occupy the whole Ukraine using the military. He needs huge resources for occupation and subsequent military control of the whole country, and he does not have such resources. Putin's mission today is to destabilize Ukraine as much as possible so that it could not become a politically, economically and socially successful state. By constant treading on two pet corns in the east of Ukraine, by arranging acts of terrorism all over the country, by achieving a default, he wants to create conditions for a political crisis in Ukraine that could result in resignation of the current president. Such a political crisis would create ideal conditions for making changes in the Ukrainian constitution for its transformation into a federation and establishment of his effective control over it.

Andrei Illarionov is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute's Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity.