

Ukraine & Egypt: A tale of two coups

Written by Eric Walberg Эрик Вальберг/ Уолберг □□□□□ □□□□
Monday, 03 March 2014 05:28



US plans for Egypt and Ukraine are falling apart and Russia is scrambling to pick up the pieces.

In the latest color revolution, it was not an army but a rump parliament that pulled the plug on the elected president on a wave of protest, pushing out Ukraine's Viktor Yanukovich on 22 February. He apologized from exile in the Russian city of Rostov-on-the-Don for his weakness during the uprising, but his fate was sealed when he was disowned by his own Party of the Regions, the largest party in the fractious parliament. The rump parliament unsurprisingly ordered the release of Yanukovich's arch rival, ex-Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko from prison, a condition for Ukraine's signing a European Union Association Agreement.

The collapse of authority in Ukraine led to what appears to be the breakaway of an already autonomous Crimea, now to be aligned with Russia. The frigate Hetman Sahaydachniy (the flagship of the Ukrainian Navy), on NATO maneuvers in the Gulf of Aden, refused to take orders from Kiev and raised the Russian naval flag as it returned to Simferopol. Simultaneously, Russian troops blocked three Crimean bases, demanding Ukrainian forces surrender. Residents have announced they are going to hold a referendum on 30 March to determine the fate of Crimea.

High ranking Ukrainian military and security officials swore their allegiance to the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, rejecting the new government in Kiev as illegitimate. Acting Ukrainian President Oleksandr Turchynov dismissed his newly appointed Navy commander Denis Berezovsky when he took the oath of allegiance to "Crimean people", accusing him of treason. "This is actually a declaration of war to my country," exclaimed the outraged Ukrainian interim PM Arseniy Yatsenyuk. Oh really? Is this a case of Russian aggression, or the new humanitarian justification for intervention R2P (right to protect)? Or is it something much simpler?

Ukraine & Egypt: A tale of two coups

Written by Eric Walberg Эрик Вальберг/ Уолберг □□□□□ □□□□

Monday, 03 March 2014 05:28

Russia modern, Ukraine postmodern

The post-Soviet New World Order that the West is trying to impose in Afghanistan, Iraq, Egypt, Ukraine, etc. requires obedient “postmodern states”, open to “free trade” (in US dollars) and “free” elections (preferably with short terms making for weak presidents), the whole process monitored by a “free” media (read: privately controlled) and western NGOs. It’s a very expensive racket—the winner is generally the best-funded and most widely advertised in the “free” media. Sometimes it’s even a military dictator, as long as he can arrange to be elected.

Occasionally things go awry—a populist like Venezuela’s Hugo Chavez gets elected and re-re-elected, and must be subverted through media and NGO targeting, or a country like Iran opts out of the whole circus and survives to tell the tale. But the immense power and prestige of the empire usually asserts itself after chipping away at the offender long enough to bring the renegade’s supporters to their knees.

However, this scenario is still not the order of the day when it comes to Russia. “Foul!” cry President Obama and western politicians, unanimously buttressed by screaming media headlines, at various anti-empire moves by the Russian bear. This is the case now, with Russia’s move to fill the dangerous vacuum in Ukraine and assure its continued control of the strategic Crimean peninsula, which has for centuries been Russia’s main Black Sea outlet and is populated largely by Russians.

Ukraine has always been Russia’s twin. Long ago it was the elder twin, as in Kievan Rus, the federation of Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia in the 9th–13th cc. The next seven centuries were messy ones, with the Tatar invasions, and Poland and Russia battling it out on the Ukraine’s fertile black earth. Catherine the Great put an end to the Cossack ‘Ukraine’ in 1764 (and to the Crimean Khanate in 1776), though it could hardly be called a state. ‘Ukraine’ can really only claim ‘independence’ as a modern state for a few months following the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917. In the Polish-Soviet Peace of Riga in 1921, it was shorn of its western and northern regions to Poland and Russia, and became a Soviet republic.

Ukraine’s very spotty experience as an state since is hardly much better—Stalin’s reincorporation of a very unreceptive western Ukraine following WWII, and Khrushchev’s thoughtless gift of Crimea in 1954, when Soviet borders were of no importance. The ‘independence’ ‘won’ in 1991, when Soviet-era leaders in Ukraine, Belarus and Russia secretly agreed to abandon the Soviet Union, precipitating its collapse, was a *faux* independence within

Ukraine & Egypt: A tale of two coups

Written by Eric Walberg Эрик Вальберг/ Уолберг □□□□□ □□□□
Monday, 03 March 2014 05:28

the US-dominated 'peaceful' world order.

This finally reached a breaking point when President Yankovitch was given an ultimatum by the EU last year. The choice was to submit to the EU proposed association agreement (and face drastic disruption to its economic relations with Russia), or reestablish itself as part of the Russian 'near abroad', now being reorganized as a Eurasian customs union (where it would arguably have more real 'independence' than it would under the EU's highly integrated economic, political and legal system).

EU accession—as a prelude to NATO membership—is vital to securing the rather shaky empire, which has recently suffered a string of debacles, notably in the Muslim world. The problem is that Ukrainians are evenly split on the EU vs Russia as chief partner. A Johns Hopkins Center for Transatlantic Relations study concluded, "The main obstacle" to Ukraine's joining the organization "is not Russian opposition but low public support for membership in Ukraine itself."

Freedom and Fatherland

So to overcome this hurdle, a coalition that would embrace right wing nationalists and Europhiles was necessary to defeat the pro-Russians, a repeat of the 2004 color revolution that brought the Europhiles to power but left Ukraine in even worse shape than it was. And because a repeat performance of 2004 would not get the same response from a jaded populus, it was necessary to allow the neo-Nazis to be at the forefront of the resistance, given their enthusiasm for violent confrontation in the name of the fatherland. Ironically, they gather under the misnomer Freedom Party, while their Europhile allies-of-convenience (ex-PM Tymoshenko and current PM Yatsenyuk) gather under the equally misnamed Fatherland Party.

Neofascists and neoliberals are joined in an unholy alliance for 'freedom' and 'fatherland' against a weak, waffling government less pretentiously merely trying to placate conflicting groups, with the US finding itself on the side of the neofascists. Does this sound like Egypt, Syria, Libya? Writes Israel Shamir, "Liberals do not have to support democracy. They can join forces with al-Qaeda as now in Syria, with Islamic extremists as in Libya, with the army as in Egypt, or with neo-Nazis, as now in Russia and the Ukraine."

Ukraine & Egypt: A tale of two coups

Written by Eric Walberg Эрик Вальберг/ Уолберг □□□□ □□□□

Monday, 03 March 2014 05:28

Even if we could believe the opposition's rousing rhetoric of 'freedom' and 'fatherland', there is no room anymore for either in the empire. EU President Herman Van Rompuy confirmed this when he said that "the time of the homogenous nation state is over. The belief that countries can stand alone is a lie and an illusion."

Belarus (or Belorussia, meaning white Russia) under its stern populist Alexandr Lukashenko realized the illusory nature of the Euro offerings long ago, negotiating an unprecedented voluntary commonwealth with Russia in 1996, though putting the Eurasian Humpty Dumpty together again is proving to be as hard as the fairytale suggests, even for the stalwart Lukashenko.

This Ukraine is not the one the EU bargained for. The new government includes Freedom (read: neofascist) Party officials in control of the armed forces, national security, the economy, justice and education. They include the "kommandant" of the EuroMaidan movement Andriy Parubiy as the new secretary of the National Security and National Defense Committee, Oleh Makhnitsky as the new prosecutor-general of Ukraine, Serhiy Kvit as the new education minister, to name a few. This no doubt gives heart to neofascists in western Europe, who are itching to join similar governing coalitions.

It is not the Ukraine Russia bargained for either. It certainly looks like Ukraine will be pulled into the EU now, and despite support for closer relations with Russia by half the population, it will be officially firmly anti-Russian (unless it splits apart).

Russian hardball

Early fantasies by Russian liberals of joining the empire as an obedient postmodern EU member-state evaporated as the empire's plans became clear in the 1990s, and mutual EU-Russian hostility became entrenched. Russia's reassertion of control of Chechnya and refusal to abandon allies in Ossetia and Abkhazia, and its newly assertive policy in the Middle East and elsewhere are further proof that it will not join the empire as a subservient member.

Ukraine & Egypt: A tale of two coups

Written by Eric Walberg Эрик Вальберг/ Уолберг □□□□ □□□□

Monday, 03 March 2014 05:28

On the contrary, apart from Ukraine, it faces off against the West in Syria and now in Egypt. It is reestablishing a military presence in the world distinct from the empire's, a presence which includes its traditional base in Crimea, the Syrian port at Tartus, and—the week before Ukrainian president's resignation—a \$2b arms deal with Egypt's junta.

Russia's gentlemanly agreement with the previous Ukrainian government for use of Simferopol till 2042 was voided by the recent coup. Unless Russia plans to join NATO itself, the prospect of paying rent to NATO to use its own Black Sea docking facilities doesn't make much sense. Simferopol and Tartus are stepping stones to allow Russia an international naval presence, as Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu alluded to last week when he announced the military was engaged in talks with Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Algeria, Cyprus, the Seychelles, Vietnam and Singapore for use of naval facilities.

It looks now as if the EU will have its cake—minus Crimea, but it is bound to be inedible. It has no money to spare for the gargantuan task of incorporating Ukraine as it did the neighborhood Latvias. Britain has already given the EU notice after the Polish invasion. There will be no stomach for tens of thousands of desperate Ukrainians selling their labor or whatever. Already the coup is unraveling, an unstable mix of neofascist xenophobes and neoliberal Europhiles. Rebel leader Aleksandr Muzychko has threatened to assassinate the new interior minister after his pledge to investigate Muzychko for some of his recent actions. Sound like Libya?

Compare this 'populist coup' with another carried out on a wave of US-cheerled anger—in Egypt last July. There, it was by the army. In Ukraine, it was by the parliament (Ukraine doesn't have much of an army). Both featured the standard occupation of the main square in the capital. However, in the Ukrainian protest center, western Ukraine's Lviv, the mayor assisted demonstrators to take control of the local police station and distribute arms to create a citizen militia to replace the police. In Egypt, in contrast, the police and army actively conspired with the demonstrators to overthrow the president, making the coup a walk-over. In both cases, the demonstrators were a coalition of liberals and right-wing nationalists.

Both coups succeeded because they were backed by the empire, but will be faced with unsolvable economic problems and a fractured, weakened state, in desperate need of handouts. The Russian response to both was neither aggression nor R2P, but rather calculated *realpolitik*

Ukraine & Egypt: A tale of two coups

Written by Eric Walberg Эрик Вальберг/ Уолберг □□□□ □□□□

Monday, 03 March 2014 05:28

—salvage the Crimea in Ukraine (albeit full of loyal Russians), try to wean the coup makers in Egypt from their total reliance on what is clearly a fickle US. Not a pretty picture, but there it is. Save the collapse of the EU or the empire itself, the writing is on the wall. Welcome to the world of postmodern imperialism.

A version of this appeared at [PressTV](#)