

**Taras Kuzio**, *Putin's War Against Ukraine: Revolution, Nationalism, and Crime* (Toronto: Chair of Ukrainian Studies, University of Toronto, 2017), 490 pp.

The title of this book, *Putin's War Against Ukraine*, does a good job summarizing its contents: it is an indictment of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. The detailed examination of this timely issue is a useful addition to the literature on Ukraine because it fills in many blank spots on the Donbas, a part of Ukraine that is unfortunately only rarely studied and poorly understood.

Kuzio's use of epigraphs at the beginning of his manuscript makes clear how he sees Russia's policy toward Ukraine and how Russia conceptualizes Ukrainian statehood. In short, Russian President Vladimir Putin, like many before him, do not conceive of Ukraine as a country separate from Russia and that provides a partial explanation of how the Russian president defines his country's policy toward his south-western neighbor. Kuzio makes clear that Russia considers itself to be at war both with the West and Ukraine. The author put the finishing touches on his analysis at the beginning of 2017. There have been lots of events since then, though little of overall substance has changed that would undermine the thrust of the book's analysis. The steady drip of reports from special prosecutor Robert Mueller's investigation of Russian interference into the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign, as well as Russia's ongoing information warfare against Western countries, supports Kuzio's overall depiction of Russian behavior. As for Ukraine, Russia promotes separatism while denouncing such policies inside Russia (p. 6). Kuzio emphasizes that Ukraine would never accept a deal between Russia and the West that left it in the Russian sphere of influence.

The book goes on to explain why and how Putin launched a war against Ukraine. At the center of analysis is "Russian nationalism and Russian-Ukrainian identity relations" (p. 21). Kuzio cites the growing popularity of Russian nationalism, chauvinistic views toward Ukraine, fascist ideologies moving to the center of Russian politics, and the role of regional identity, language and culture to explain the sources of the Ukraine-Russia crisis.

The heart of Kuzio's book deals with the Donbas, shedding useful light on parts of Ukraine that Russia currently occupies. On the eve of the crisis, "the Donbas contributed 16 percent of Ukraine's GDP and 25 percent of the sales of industrial products (p. 22)." But the region relied on heavily polluting coal-mining and metallurgy that were in decline even before Russia invaded. Lviv, Kyiv and Kharkiv, with their focus on the high tech sector, were generating more income for Ukraine and likely will define the future economy. Because the coal industry was heavily subsidized and the region's oligarchs, rather than the Ukrainian state, captured much of the region's industrial profit, it was not clear that the Donbas contributed to the Ukrainian budget overall. While Donbas has always had a strong, deeply held regional identity, according to Kuzio's analysis, Moscow has been much more effective in controlling it than Kyiv.

The conflict has by now destroyed much of the remaining economic potential of the Donbas region and whichever country controls the territory will face enormous costs in rebuilding. It is likely neither Ukraine nor Russia will have the resources necessary to turn the Donbas's devastated industrial plants into a functional economy that can stand on its own strengths.

The individual chapters of this long book detail the evolution of Russian nation-

alism, imperialism, and chauvinism; the “long-term nature” of Ukrainophobia within the tsarist Russian empire, Soviet Union, and Russian Federation; anti-Semitism in Russia and Ukraine during the twentieth century and the Donbas crisis; criminality and violence in the Donbas; Donbas regional identity; the Party of Regions as Ukraine’s only political machine; Russian policy toward Ukraine from the Orange Revolution to the Euromaidan; Russia’s hybrid warfare in the Donbas, including widespread human rights abuses; and the impact of the Donbas conflict on Ukraine’s national identity.

While there is a growing literature on organized crime and corruption in the former Soviet Union, Kuzio does a great job filling in some gaps in our knowledge and understanding of these topics in the Donbas region. On this point, Kuzio quotes Mark Galeotti as noting that crime has been at the heart of events in the Donbas from the start. Criminal networks pervade the region. Tracing the history of migration to the Donbas, Kuzio points out that residents do not necessarily take a negative view of public officials with criminal records the way other citizens of Ukraine do. Kuzio also places the region’s prison culture at the heart of the Party of Region’s rise to power in the region by 2000. Under Yanukovich, this party twice sought to control national politics in Kyiv, leading to democratic revolutions in both cases. The detailed discussion of the oligarchs in this chapter is particularly useful.

The book effectively ends without a conclusion because there is no end in sight for the war. Kuzio argues that the conflict will continue as long as Putin remains in power and that the Kremlin will never give up on the Donetsk and Luhansk people’s republics which it backs. Kuzio sees the war as marking the death of “brotherly relations” between Ukraine and Russia, with 72 percent of Ukrainians seeing Russia as an “aggressor state.” (p. 355) Although Ukraine continues to struggle with its own fight against corruption and its inability to develop a fully inclusive national state, Kuzio is right to point out that the annexation of Crimea and Donbas conflict have forever transformed its relations with Russia.

Overall, the book is a well written defense of its arguments. Without a strong conclusion, the author missed a chance to tie together his key themes in a full-throated outline of his main points. In places the analysis is overly long and the author gets bogged down in arcane disputes with other observers of the region. However, the book fills in many blank spaces in our understanding of Donbas and Ukraine, adds extensive valuable information and interpretation, and is a worthy addition to the literature on Ukrainian-Russian relations.

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