

Critiques on Putin's Six Conditions for Ceasefire in Ukraine

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“Peace Now!” poster by Edward Locke

After the start of the so-called “Special Military Operation” in Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin has made six demands as conditions for a ceasefire in Ukraine (five of them are required to be written into Ukraine’s Constitution). In this article, I will analyze them and determine their legitimacies and viabilities, based on international laws and conventions, established precedence, as well as acceptable universal values of human rights, democracy, freedom and justice.

Based on international laws and legal practices, four of Putin’s conditions are somehow legitimate; and the other two (with regards to Crimea’s and Donetsk’s and Luhansk’s independence) are not so legitimate.

Condition No. 1:

“Ukraine gives up joining NATO to maintain the status of neutrality; Russia will guarantee Ukraine’s national security”

In terms of United Nations Charter and its stipulations on national sovereignty and political independence, this demand is literally or theoretically illegitimate. However, in terms of historical precedence of the practice of international interaction, as well as geo-political or military reality, this demand is certainly reasonable. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, United States and the former Soviet Union reached an agreement for Cuba not to deploy Soviet missiles for the United States not to invade Cuba; this pragmatic deal based on restriction of Cuba’s sovereignty worked so far for the United States and Cuba to co-exist peacefully. In 1939, the Soviet Union invaded Finland (the Winter War), and during World War Two, Finland joined with Nazi Germany to fight the Soviet Union, and after the collapse of Nazi Germany, Finland gave up 11% of territory and became a neutral state to satisfy Soviet Union’s geo-political needs for the safety of the City of Leningrad. Another country, Austria, agreed to Soviet demand for neutrality between Warsaw Pact and NATO plus an agreement not to station foreign troupes, in exchange for the withdrawal of Soviet troupes and support for its capitalist and democratic government. Thus, national sovereignty is not absolute especially when small countries are located in the middle of powerful neighbors and when these powerful neighbors possess the military might to impose decisions based on their real or perceived needs for national security. Ukraine and Russia are located west of the Ural Mountain Range, and geologically, they are basically flat plains without mountains to be used as shields for military defense, should Ukraine join the NATO, the later could deploy missiles with nuclear warheads that could destroy the City of Moscow within less than 5 minutes, or tanks that could reach Moscow in less than 5 hours. Therefore, Russia’s rulers, regardless of their political spectrums, Czarist, Communist, capitalist, feudalistic, democratic, or otherwise, shall never allow this to happen. Putin shall fight to death to pre-emptively protect Russia from this “existential threat.” Therefore, unfortunately, Ukraine has no choice but to agree to this condition, immediately and permanently, just like what Finland, Austria and Cuba did before.

Ukraine being a “neutral” state is at the core of Russia’s national security interests, and no Russian ruler could make any concession on this issue. From a Russian perspective, President Putin has made enough concessions to the NATO when the later expanded into formal Soviet satellite states in Eastern Europe, which constitute “peripheral” national security interests for Russia, thus, after Putin’s start of Special Military Operation in Ukraine, his popularity soared,

and in the rally attended by more than 100 thousand Muscovites to celebrate the 8th anniversary of the annexation of Crimea, participants shouted the slogan that reads, “Ukraine, Crimea, Belarus, and Moldova, All Belong to the Motherland!” Historically, Kyiv Rus or today’s Ukraine was the birthplace of the Russian nation; people of Belarus, Ukraine and Russia came from the same ancestors; they became different ethnic groups largely because of Mongolian conquest and dominance in Russia. There is a famous saying in Europe, “If you remove the skin of a Russian, you see a Mongol;” 200 years of Mongols’ rule promoted Mongolian cultural and political traits and even genetic trait in Russia, in terms of political traditions, cultural values and even genetics (substantial portions of Russians today have both Russian and Mongolian ancestors). Peoples of Belarus and Ukraine have been ruled by Poland-Lithuania Confederation, Turks, and Germany, and thus, they have incorporated different ethnic traits and social values; and their genetic makeup or “racial stock” is more “purely” Caucasian or European. For this “genetic” or “blood lineage” issue, “White Supremacists” in Europe would never accept Russians as their “racial comrades;” but they could try to assimilate Belarussian and Ukrainian peoples into their Germanic-Teutonic spheres.

The above three Eastern Slavic entities, i.e., Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, constitute the core of the Czarist Empire and the first Union Republics to establish the former Soviet Union. Thus, traditionalist and nationalistic Russians naturally regard Ukraine as part of Russia and do not accept its membership in NATO or European Union. President Putin himself has for several times expressed his belief that Ukraine is a part of Russia, in 2008, he told President George W. Bush that “Ukraine is even not a country.” In the ethno-centric concept of average Russians, the “Russian people” include three components, i.e., the “Big Russia” (Russia per se), the “White Russia” (Belarus), and the “Small Russia” (Ukraine); they believe that all three parts sprang from the ancient Kyiv Rus; in fact, the ancient peoples of Kyiv Rus, ruled by the Viking aristocrats from modern Scandinavia (Sweden, Denmark, and Norway), and composed at the grass-root level, of ancient Eastern Slavic tribes, was the common ancestors of the peoples of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine. However, due to complicated historical causes, ancient Eastern Slavic tribes have been ruled by Poland-Lithuania confederation, Germany, Turks, and Mongolians; this caused cultural divides among the Eastern Slavic tribes.



“*Putin The Modern Day Attila The Hun and Genghis Khan*” photo-illustration by Edward Locke.

It is Czarist Russia that overthrew the Turkish and Polish-Lithuanian rulers and incorporated Ukraine as a part of the Czarist Russian Empire. Later, the former Soviet Union acquired Eastern Ukraine from Poland by military invasion after the notorious Stalin-Hitler Pact (1939), and in 1954, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev transferred Crimea to Ukraine. In eastern and southern

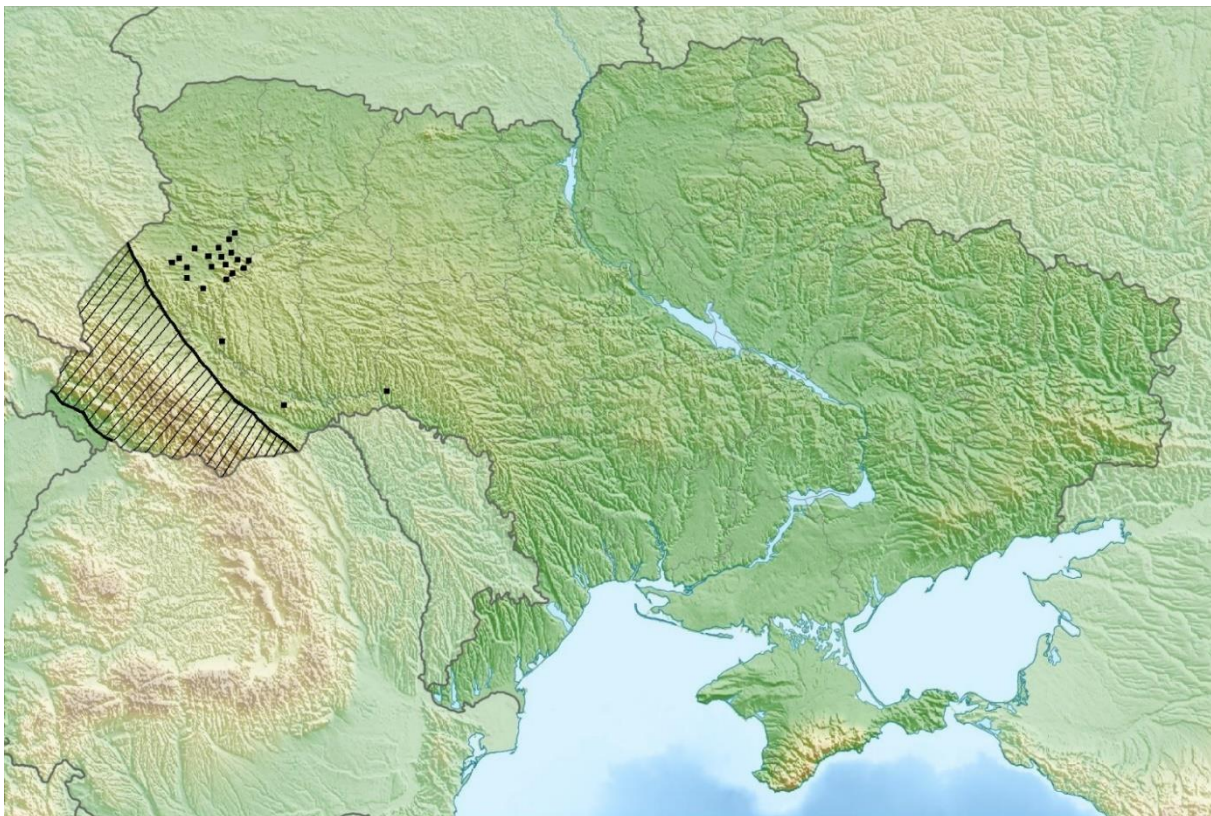
parts of Ukraine today, especially in Crimea, Luhansk, Donetsk, and Kherson, a lot of people identify themselves as both Ukrainian and Russians. Major causes of grievances of Ukrainian nationalists in the western part came from the three major tragedies that took place during Soviet time especially under Lenin's and Stalin's rule: (1) The Russia Civil War between Bolsheviks and White Armies caused 1.5 million people dead and hundreds of thousands homeless in the former Russian Empire territory including Ukraine; (2) the Program of Collectivization ended up in crop failure and death by starvation (the "Great Famine" or Holodomor, 1932-1933), with a death toll of between 2.5 million and 4.8 million; (3) Stalinist Great Terror (1937-1938) caused the execution of 681,692, and arrest of 1,372,382 political dissidents; (4) due to Soviet brutality during Stalin's rule, in 1942, during Nazi invasion, Ukrainians opposed to Soviet rule organized the Ukrainian Insurgent Army and Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, an ultra-nationalist and anti-Soviet group with a staunch anti-Communist ideology similar to Mussolini's Fascist Italy; both were responsible for killing a lot of Russians, Romanians, and Polish and were suppressed by the Soviet Union during and after World War Two, killing, arresting or expelling about half of a million Ukrainian civilians; (4) the explosion of a nuclear reactor in Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant (April 26, 1986) affected the health of 2.2 million people in Ukraine. Ukraine is a divided nation; people in the western part are mostly pro-European, while people in the eastern and southeastern parts are mostly pro-Russian. From Ukrainian President Zelenski's statement, it appears that he is willing to make concession on the issue of "neutrality," i.e., to permanently give up aspiration to join the NATO; this is the key condition for Russia to end the war. Experts believe that this issue has been solved by 80% during the recent round of negotiations.



Historical expansion of Ukrainian territory (image source: Wikipedia Commons)



Ethnic Russian rebellion against Kyiv authorities (image source: Wikipedia Commons)



Map of Ukraine in 3D (image source: Wikipedia Commons)

Condition No. 2:

“Ukraine must make Russian the second official language and abolish all restrictions on the use of Russian language”

This demand is completely legitimate; it is similar to “bilingual education” in the United States, and to the policies of Switzerland, a neutral state where French, German, Italian and Romansh are all equally official languages; Ukraine is a linguistically divided country with a large Russian-speaking population in the eastern and southern regions, especially Donetsk and Luhansk; thus, this demand is totally legitimate and Ukraine has no choice but to accept it to comply with the practices of modern democratic and civilized nations.

Condition No. 3:

“Ukraine must proceed to denazification and prohibition of extremist, Nazi and Neo-Nazi parties, and abolition of all laws that embellish Nazis and Neo-Nazis.”

This demand is equally legitimate based on the precedents established by Germany. After World War Two, both Communist East Germany and capitalist West Germany took strong measures to prohibit and suppress Nazi organizations. Before Russia’s invasion, the Azov Battalion, a neo-Nazi paramilitary group that is incorporated into the National Gurd of Ukraine, massacred a lot of innocent ethnic Russians in Donbas area (Luhansk and Donetsk). The Azov Battalion has been listed as a racist and terrorist organization with neo-Nazi connections by Simon Wiesenthal Center and other civil right groups; and in 2018, the U.S. House of Representatives also passed a provision blocking any training of Azov members by American forces. Putin is determined to militarily eliminate the Azov Battalion, which is responsible for massacre of more than 10,000 innocent ethnic Russia civilians; his invading troupes have already completed most parts of this task. Therefore, Ukraine has no choice but to accept this demand. In reality, Ukraine’s central authorities in Kyiv have lost control of the Azov Battalion and other neo-Nazi right-wing paramilitary forces; even during the current war, the regular army of Ukraine has got into bloody confrontation with the Azov Battalion.

Condition No. 4:

“Ukraine must proceed to demilitarization, abandoning all offensive weapons and military equipment to become a non-militarized state”

In reality, President Putin’s invading Russian troupes have already destroyed most of Ukraine’s military infrastructure. Since the start of the war, Russian troupes have already destroyed close to the entirety of Ukraine’s air and naval forces, plus most of the military equipment, depots of weapons, centers of commands and bases of its land forces, as well as its weapons manufacturing and maintenance plants, with supersonic missiles, disabling most of Ukraine’s defense forces. Russia is now controlling many areas in the northern, southern, and eastern parts of Ukraine; and it is difficult for NATO’s military supplies to reach the Ukrainian armed forces. Therefore, President Zelenski most likely will have no choice but to accept Russia’s demand for demilitarization. During the Soviet time, a lot of defense industry plants have been built in Ukraine; nowadays, they are obsolete as viable economic assets, their products are not competitive in international markets, and they cannot be upgraded or transformed easily, and the cost of

employment needed to operate Ukraine's Soviet-built defense industry remains high; thus, demilitarization will free Ukraine, paradoxically, from a heavy burden on its economy.

Condition No. 5:

“Ukraine must recognize Russia's sovereignty over the Crimean Peninsula”

Historically, Crimean Peninsula, together with Donbas area, was a part of Czarist Empire called New Russia (Novorossiia) since 1785, and later of the Soviet Union until 1954 when Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev transferred its sovereignty from Russian Federation to Ukraine as a gift to celebrate the 300th anniversary of unification of Russia and Ukraine. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, Ukraine inherited Crimea but the pro-Western government of Ukraine has implemented anti-Russian policies, and provoked Russia's retaliatory recovery of its former territory and holding of a referendum for which the majority of residents voted to re-join Russia (the tiny Tartar minority, descendants of Turks who lived in the area as aboriginals before Czarist takeover, who suffered from Soviet rule especially during World War Two when Stalin relocated many ethnic minorities to Siberia for alleged or real “disloyalty,” disagreed and felt sad though). Crimea's sovereignty is a thorny issue; Ukraine is unwilling to give up but Russia will not spit out either; the overwhelming majority of local residents are ethnic Russians who have voted to join Russia back in 2014. In the international community, only 11 countries recognized Russia's sovereignty over Crimea. The United States, China, United Kingdom and France do not grant Russia this recognition.

Based on the principle of territorial integrity, Russia's annexation of Crimea is obviously wrong; however, the mistaken policies of the pro-European Ukrainian Government in “de-russification campaign” to remove Russian influence in Ukraine including the suppression of the use of Russian language, has violated fundamental human rights of Russian-speaking Crimeans, and given Russia an excuse to foment a rebellion in Crimea, invade the area and annexed it under the cover of a “democratic referendum.” Russia could use this as a somehow “legitimate” excuse to justify its action. During the breakup of former Yugoslavia, Serbia's ethno-centric President Slobodan Milošević, out of an unequivocal desire to “uphold the unity of Serbs,” deviated from Marshall Tito's policy of ethnic equality and cooperation, engaged in “ethnic cleansing” leading to civil war and collapse of the federal state; due to NATO's intensive military intervention or “carpet bombing,” Serbia was defeated, and has lost Kosovo. Russian President Putin is now using the same logic to justify his “Special Military Operation” as “de-Nazification” and “liberation” for ethnic Russians. The above example clearly indicates that the principle of “territorial integrity” is conditioned upon respect for ethnic and racial equality of the sovereign states; should any sovereign state fails to honor ethnic and racial equality as a fundamental human right, it simply will give foreign powers chances to intervene and to deny its right to “territorial integrity.” Russia's logic of annexing Crimea becomes “legitimate” to certain degree. Russia, besides arguments based on historical circumstances relevant to the transfer of sovereignty over Crimea, possesses plenty of military power to control the area (“might makes it right”).

Based on the above analysis, President Zelenski's Ukraine most likely has no choice but to give up its fight to re-claim Crimea. This is very tragic, but it serves as a stern warning to all militarily weak sovereign states not to violate human rights and cause loss of territory.

Condition No. 6:

“Ukraine must recognize the independence of Donetsk and of Luhansk”

Russia's demand here is NOT in compliance with international laws. It is in direct violation of the principles of territorial integrity and national sovereignty, and in violation of its own promises. Russia's demand here is ABSOLUTELY NOT legitimate, but still viable due to its military muscles and ethno-political reality of the Eastern part of Ukraine.

Back on December 5, 1994, the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances was signed at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) conference in Budapest, Hungary. The memorandum prohibited the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States from threatening or using military force or economic coercion against Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. As a result of other agreements and the memorandum, between 1993 and 1996, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine gave up their nuclear weapons. Later on, China and France gave somewhat weaker individual assurances in separate documents. Although these memorandums are not legally binding, they represent solemn promises of great powers to weaker nations. Thus, it is wrong for Russia to use the excuses of Ukraine trying to join the NATO and neo-Nazism of the Azov Battalion to further dismember Ukraine. According to Reuter (March 25, 2022), Sergei Rudskoi, head of the Russian General Staff's Main Operational Directorate, recently announced that, “The main objectives of the first stage of the operation have generally been accomplished,” and that Russian forces and resources “will be concentrated on the main thing - the complete liberation of Donbass” (<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-says-first-phase-ukraine-operation-mostly-complete-focus-now-donbass-2022-03-25/>). Russia's ambition is not limited to Donetsk and Luhansk alone; it actually includes the entire eastern and southern border areas of Ukraine, including Kherson, Kharkiv, and Odessa.

Unlike the issue of sovereignty in Crimea, Russia and Ukraine have signed Minsk Agreement II (February 12, 2015), with the provision of “Decentralization of power, including through the adoption of the Ukrainian law on temporary Order of Local Self-Governance in Particular Districts of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts.” This agreement clearly stipulates the right of ethnic-Russians in Donbas region to self-government, and Ukraine's territorial sovereignty over the region. Although Ukraine has failed to strictly abide by the agreement's requirement, and remedying actions are needed, Russia has ABSOLUTELY NO right to annex the territory. The Minsk Agreement required Ukraine to amend its constitution, to decrease the power of the central government in Kyiv, to legalize the local armed forces and authorities in Donbas area (Donetsk and Luhansk); it served as a blueprint for both sides to find a peaceful solution to the issues of local autonomy for ethnic Russians in Eastern Ukraine. The Donbas issue is probably where both Russia and Ukraine might be willing to make some mutual concessions in exchange for Ukraine to grant the area with high degree of local autonomy, which is written into Minsk Agreement. Both sides have consented to holding a referendum. Most likely, the local residents

would vote for independence and then for joining Russia. Zelenski's eight years military campaign to recover Donbas with the support of the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion has failed. The Minsk Agreement II, signed by both Russia and Ukraine previously, should be the basis for negotiations leading towards a reasonable and just solution on the Donbas issue. Therefore, Russia's demand that Ukraine gives up sovereignty over Donbas region is illegitimate. The solution should be based on previously signed Minsk Agreement II although adjustment to the agreement should be considered to reflect new realities.

However, Russian leaders have recently pointed out that Russian Government is determined to recover its historical territory in Eastern part of Ukraine, which has always been a part of Czarist Russia, until founder of Soviet Union Vladimir Lenin transferred its sovereignty to Ukraine, again, without the democratic process of holding a referendum to get the support of local residents, who were mostly Russians; since the Soviet totalitarian regime has been overthrown, its decision on transfer of territorial sovereignty could not be honored by the current Russian Government. This historical fact makes the issue more complicated; however, one thing is clear, the majority of residents living in Eastern Ukraine including Donbas are ethnic-Russians; even if we pressure Russia and Ukraine to hold a U.N. supervised referendum, for any practical purposes, and in the most likely scenario, the overwhelming majority of people in Eastern Ukraine will vote for independence from Ukraine and for re-joining Russia. This potential outcome is very sad; however, based on international reality, Ukraine most likely has no choice but to give up Eastern part of its current territory and accept its previous borders during Czarist time before the Bolsheviks' October Revolution. In fact, if President Zelensky is willing to accept this reality, he could concentrate all of his troupes in Central and Western Ukraine, where the overwhelming majority of people are Ukraine nationalists, and strongly anti-Russia due to past atrocities of the former Soviet Union; if Putin dared to advance into Central and Western parts of Ukraine, his troupes probably will encounter a "protracted people's war" in urban and rural areas, a protracted guerrilla war similar to the one conducted by the Sein Fein and the Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland, which shall make these areas ungovernable by Russians military forces or pro-Russian puppet regime they might try to impose. Unfortunately, as the current fighting in Donbas shows, Russians most likely will completely control Eastern Ukraine and annex or "recover" it as they claim.

The above evaluations are in line with the judgement of Mr. Ibrahim Kalin, Turkey President Erdogan's spokesperson and foreign policy advisor, made during his interview with Turkey's journalists on March 20, 2022; he believed that out of the six conditions for ceasefire, two of them (with regards to the status of Crimea, Luhansk and Donetsk) are difficult for Ukrainian President Zelensky to accept, while the other four are relatively easy ("*Four Easy and Two Difficult Conditions for Ceasefire - Turkey: Russian and Ukrainian Leaders to decide at Meetings*," page B6, International News section, Monday, March 21, 2022, Chinese L.A. Daily News -Taiwan Times).

In conclusion, in the current Russia-Ukraine conflict, neither side is totally innocent. A viable and just solution to the crisis should take into consideration of: (1) respect for fundamental human rights of all ethnic groups in Ukraine, including ethnic Russians, to local self-government, and to the continuation of their distinct way of life, (2) respect for Russia's

legitimate geopolitical concerns for national security, and (3) respect for Ukraine's legitimate right to territorial integrity. Previous examples of solutions to similar crises could provide practical guidance and references. Peace can be reached only through honest negotiations, observance of previously signed agreements or made promises, and sincere willingness to make mutually beneficial compromises and concessions between Russia and Ukraine.