

# An Actual View On The Ukraine

by Colin A. Munro



On 3 October I attended a briefing at the Diplomatic Academy by Col. Markus Reisner Phd. and on 4 October I attended the 20<sup>th</sup> annual award of the Bruno Kreisky Prizes for Services to Human Rights. Sir William Browder KCMG (WB), Chairman of the Global Magnitsky Justice Campaign, pronounced the eulogy for Evgenia and Vladimir Kara-Murza (VKM). Vladimir Kara-Murza and Sir William Browder's analysis explain why it is essential, in their own security interest, for members of NATO/EU/G7 to prevent Putin from eradicating an internationally recognised – including by Russia – state.

## About Vladimir Kara-Murza And Sir William Browder

Vladimir Kara-Murza (dual Russian/British citizen) is a Cambridge educated historian whom Putin had poisoned twice for denouncing Russia's brutal war of aggression in Ukraine. On the first occasion in 2015 he was poisoned like Skripal with Novichok, experienced organ failure, and was given a 5% chance of survival. But, like Navalny, he believed that authentic opposition could only be expressed inside Russia. "I have to protest about Russian war crimes in Russia." When the invasion started in February 2022, he returned from London to Russia, ignoring warnings about his likely fate. After he had recovered from a second poisoning, he was arrested in April 2022, convicted in October of high treason, sentenced to 25 years of imprisonment in a punishment camp, the longest sentence handed down to a political prisoner since the fall of the Soviet Union.

Like Navalny he would have died had he not been released on 1 August 2024 in a prisoner swap. Putin got eight FSB thugs held in the west in return for political prisoners/hostages.

Sir William Browder's grandfather was leader of the Communist Party in the US during WW2. His mother was a holocaust refugee from Austria. Disillusioned with the US, he renounced US citizenship and became a naturalised British citizen in 1999. He first met Vladimir Kara-Murza in 2012. Browder's experience of investing in Russia explains how, under Putin, Russia has become a mafia state, already described as such by Misha Glenny in his book 'McMafia, Crime Without Frontiers' published in 2008. When he and his tax lawyer (Magnitsky) uncovered fraud, Putin had William Browder deported from Russia and Interpol issues a warrant for his arrest. He was convicted of fraud in absentia. Magnitsky (tried by the same judge who convicted Vladimir Kara-Murza) was mistreated in prison, and died. William Browder's campaign on his behalf has resulted in 35 countries, including the US, Canada and the UK passing Magnitzky acts. Sanctions have been imposed on Russians associated with his conviction and murder.

Evgenia started the campaign for Vladimir's release. According to Browder she is the better politician, telling his story in Berlin, Ottawa, Brussels, Washington and London. On 24 April Vladimir Kara-Murza learned from his lawyer that he had been awarded the Bruno Kreisky prize. He never thought he would receive it in person until he was released on 1 August and he believes that authoritarian regimes such as Putin's are strong – until suddenly, they are not. Putin wants the world to think that he is Russia. He is not.

There are many more political prisoners in Russia now than in the Soviet Union when Orlov, chair of the Moscow Helsinki Committee, was released in 1986. A free democratic Russia is possible. In his concluding remarks Professor Rathkolb agreed. Who would have expected in 1977 (protests by Vaclav Havel and Andrei Sakharov) the turn of events in the Soviet Union 13 years later. At the reception I had the chance of a short conversation with Vladimir Kara-Murza. His courtesy, courage and determination are inspiring.

### **The Actual Ukraine Situation – First Hand Impressions**

So, how do things stand in this war of attrition after two and a half years? Russia has regained momentum at a colossal cost in casualties, which, according to Reisner, can be sustained for another couple of years. Meanwhile the Ukrainians are getting tired. New recruits do not get sufficient training. Younger men are not being called up. They will be needed for reconstruction. The Russian navy has been driven out of the Western Black Sea. Ukrainian air defence is sufficient to defend critical infrastructure or the front line, but not both. One third of Ukraine's energy infrastructure has been destroyed. The Russian economy is on a war footing as in WW2, and is supported by China, North Korea, and Iran. In terms of consumption of ammunition Russia fires five shells for every one fired by Ukraine. The US anticipated a Russian nuclear strike in 2022, but China and India stopped it.

The US is still concerned about Putin's claims that Ukrainian use of long range weaponry would give substance to Putin's claims that NATO has joined the war. The problem for the UK and France is that for their weapons (Storm Shadow and Scalp) to achieve maximum accuracy they need US satellite guidance and anti jamming assistance. As of now Ukraine cannot win either the war or the peace. But it is not over yet. Three scenarios were possible:

- Russia collapses. Most unlikely.
- Ukraine collapses when Russia reaches the Dnipro river. Unlikely.
- A Korea style ceasefire which both sides would claim as a win. The most likely scenario in the period ahead.

The danger inherent in this third scenario is that a mere ceasefire could give Russia – but not Ukraine – the chance to regenerate, and restart the war to finish off Ukraine at a time of its choosing. Reisner argued that Europe had to prevent this at all costs, by “standing on its own feet.” Russia's war and occupation of Ukrainian territory was brutal. Nor would Putin stop at Ukraine. Europe had to give priority over social spending etc to rearmament.

### **History Tells: Companies Needed Orders**

Reisner gave the example of the UK in WW1. By 1915 the army was running out of ammunition. The government nationalised all the relevant companies, placed orders, and required round the clock production in three shifts. By 1917 the UK was equipping adequately an army of 5 million (pre war under 100,00). Reisner argued that it was time for decisions based on learning from history. Europe should work out what was needed to prevent a Ukrainian collapse, and decide accordingly. This meant “going all in to support Ukraine.” The alternative would be to find ourselves back in 1938 after the Munich agreement. (Remark: In March 1939 Hitler broke the Munich agreement and marched into Prague.)

Two further points: Reisner insisted that Austria could only claim to be a neutral country because it was surrounded and protected by members of NATO. He was asked about Belarus because the invasion was launched in part from that country. Reisner said that Lukaschenko would try to keep Belarus out of the war. The economy was doing OK.

### **Comment**

It was obvious from the moment that Putin reacted with fury to OSCE criticism of the December 2003 elections in Russia as a step back for democracy that he perceived the threat to his grip on power, and ambitions to restore the Soviet Union's empire.

This threat is coming not from NATO or the EU, but from democracy, the separation of powers, and respect for human rights, especially if that threat should emanate from Ukraine, as it did from 2004 onwards. The conclusion for European countries is obvious: stand on our own feet as necessary and prevent Putin from eradicating Ukraine as an independent state.

**The ABS is looking forward to receiving your views and comments!**

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#### *About the author*



**Colin A. Munro** is a Board Member of the Austro-British Society and is a UK native. He attended the George Watson's College and the Edinburgh University and joined HM Diplomatic Service in 1969. During his career he held numerous positions in Berlin, Kuala Lumpur, Bucharest, Frankfurt, Zagreb and served as the Private Secretary to the Minister of State responsible for Central and Eastern Europe. His last posting in HM Diplomatic Service was as Ambassador to the OSCE. He chairs the UK Citizens in Austria and in the ABS he is also a member of the Expert Council.

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