

# The Goldilocks War

by

**Dmitry Orlov**

on

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Are you happy with the way the war in the former Ukraine is going? Most people aren't-for one reason or another. Some people hate the fact that there is a war there at all, while others love it but hate the fact that it hasn't been won yet, by one side or the other. Bounteous quantities of both of these kinds of haters are found on both sides of the new Iron Curtain that is hastily being built across Eurasia between the collective West and the collective East. This seems reasonable; after all, hating war is standard procedure for most people (war is hell, don't you know!) and by extension a small war is better than a big one and a short war is better than a long one. And also such reasoning is banal, trite, platitudinous, vapid, predictable, unimaginative and... bromidic (according to the English Thesaurus).

Seldom is to be found a war-watcher who is happy with the progress and the duration of the war. Luckily, Russian state television shows a very significant one these almost daily. It is Russia's president, Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin. Having paid attention to him for over twenty years now, I can confidently state that never has he been so imbued with calm, self-assured serenity leavened with droll humor. This is not the demeanor of someone who feels at any risk of losing a war. The brass at the Ministry of Defense appear dour and glum on camera-a demeanor befitting men



who send other men to fight and possibly to be wounded or to die; but off-camera they flash each other quick Mona Lisa smiles. (Russian men don't give stupid American-style fish-eyed toothy grins, rarely show their teeth when smiling, and never in the presence of wolves or bears).

Given that Putin's approval rating stands firm at around 80% (a number beyond reach of any Western politician), it is reasonable to assume that he is just the visible tip of a gigantic, 100-million-strong iceberg of Russians who calmly await the successful conclusion of the special military operation to demilitarize and denazify the former Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (so please don't even call it a war). These 100 million Russians are seldom heard from, and when they do make noise, it is to protest against bureaucratic dawdling and foot-dragging or to raise private funds with which to remedy a shortage of some specialty equipment requested by the troops: night vision goggles, quadrocopters, optical sights, and all sorts of fancy tactical gear.

A great deal more noise is being made by the one or two percent whose entire business plan has been wrecked by the sudden appearance of the New Iron Curtain. The silliest of these thought that fleeing west, or south (to Turkey, Kazakhstan or Georgia) would somehow magically fix their problem; it hasn't, and it won't. The people we would expect to scream the loudest are the LGBTQ+ activists, who thought that they were going to use Western grant money to build East Sodom and East Gomorrah. They've been hobbled and muzzled by new Russian laws that label them as foreign agents and prohibit their sort of propaganda. In fact, the very term LGBTQ+ is now illegal, and so, I suppose, they will have to use PPPPP+ instead ("P" is for "pídor", which is the generic Russian term for any sort of sexual pervert, degenerate or deviant). But I digress.

It can be observed rather readily that those who are the least happy with the course of the Russian campaign are also the least likely to be Russian. Least happy of all are the good folks at the Center for Informational and Political Operations of the Ukrainian Security Service who are charged with creating and maintaining the Phantom of Ukrainian Victory. These are followed by people in and around Washington, who are quite infuriated by Russian dawdling and foot-dragging. They have also been hard-pressed to show that the Ukrainians are winning while the Russians are losing; to this end, they have portrayed every Russian tactical repositioning or tactical withdrawal as a huge, humiliating defeat personally for Putin and every relentless, suicidal Ukrainian attack on Russian positions as a great heroic victory. But this PR tactic has lost effectiveness over time and now the Ukraine has become a toxic topic in the US that most American politicians would prefer to forget about, or at least keep out of the news.

To be fair, the Russian tactical cat-and-mouse games in this conflict has been nothing short of infuriating. The Russians spent some time rolling around Kiev to draw Ukrainian troops away from the Donbass and prevent a Ukrainian attack on it; once that was done, they withdrew. Great Ukrainian victory! They also spent some time tooling around the Black Sea coastline near Odessa, threatening a sea invasion, to draw off Ukrainian forces in that direction, but never invaded. Another Ukrainian victory! The Russians occupied a large chunk of Kharkov region that the Ukrainians left largely undefended, then, when the Ukrainians finally paid attention to it, partially withdrew behind a river to conserve resources. Yet another Ukrainian victory! The Russians occupied/liberated the regional capital of Kherson, evacuated all the people who wanted to be evacuated, then withdrew to a defensible position behind a river. Victory again! With all these Ukrainian victories, it is truly a wonder that the Russians have managed to gain around 100km<sup>2</sup> of the former Ukraine's most valuable real estate, over 6 million in population, secured a land route to Crimea and opened up a vital canal that supplies irrigation water to it and which the Ukrainians had blocked some years ago. That doesn't seem like a defeat at all; that looks like an excellent result from a single, limited summer campaign.

Russia has achieved several of its strategic objectives already; the rest can wait. How long should they wait? To answer this question, we need to look outside the limited scope of Russia's special operation in the Ukraine. Russia has bigger fish to fry, and frying fish takes time because eating undercooked fish can give you nasty parasites such as tapeworm and liver fluke. And so, I would like to invite you to Mother Russia's secret kitchen, to see what's on the cutting board and to estimate how much thermal processing will be required to turn it all into a safe and nutritious meal.

Mixing our food metaphors, allow me to introduce Goldilocks with her three bears and her porridge not too hot and not too cold. What Russia seems to be doing is keeping their special military operation moving along at a steady pace-not too fast and not too slow. Going too fast would not allow enough time to cook the various fish; going too fast would also increase the cost of the campaign in casualties and resources. Going too slow would give the Ukrainians and NATO time to regroup and rearm and prevent the proper thermal processing of the various fish.

In an effort to find the optimal pace for the conflict, Russia initially committed only a tenth of its professional active-duty soldiers, then worked hard to minimize the casualty rate. It opted to start turning off the lights all over the former Ukraine only after the Kiev regime tried to blow up the Kerch Strait bridge that linked Crimea with the Russian mainland. Finally, it called up just 1% of reservists to relieve the pressure from the frontline troops and potentially prepare for the next stage, which is a winter campaign-for which the Russians are famous.

With this background information laid out, we can now enumerate and describe the various ancillary objectives which Russia plans to achieve over the course of this Goldilocks War. The first and perhaps most important set of problems that Russia has to solve in the course of the Goldilocks War is internal. The goal is to rearrange Russian society, economy and financial system so as to prepare it for a de-Westernized future. Since the collapse of the USSR, various Western agents, such as the National Endowment for Democracy, the US State Department, various Soros-owned foundations and a wide assortment of Western grants and exchange programs have made serious inroads into Russia. The overall goal was to weaken and eventually dismember and destroy Russia, turning it into a compliant servant of Western governments and transnational corporations that would supply them with cheap labor and raw materials. To help this process along, these Western organizations did whatever they could to drive the Russian people toward eventual biological extinction and replace them with a more docile and less adventurous race.

Starting well over 30 years ago, Western NGOs set to corrupting the minds of Russia's young. No effort was spared to denigrate the value of Russian culture, to falsify Russian history and to replace them both with Western pop culture and propaganda narratives. These initiatives achieved limited success, and the USSR, and Soviet-era culture, has remained ever-popular even among those who were too young to have experienced life in the USSR firsthand. Where the damage has been most severe is in education. Excellent Soviet-era textbooks that taught students how to think independently were destroyed and replaced with imports. These were at best useful for training experts in narrowly defined fields who can follow previously defined procedures and recipes but can't explain how these procedures and recipes were arrived at or to create new ones. Russian teachers, who saw their job not just in educating but in bringing up their students to be good Russians who love and cherish their country, were replaced by Western-trained educationalists who saw their mission as providing a competitive, market-based service in bringing up qualified, competent... consumers! Who are these people? Well, luckily, the Internet remembers everything, and there are plenty of other jobs for these people such as shoveling snow and stoking furnaces. But identifying and replacing them takes time, as does finding, updating and reproducing the older, excellent textbooks.

But what of the young people left behind by this wave of destruction? Luckily, not all is lost. The special military operation is providing them with some very valuable lessons that their ignorant educationalists left out: that Russia-a unique, miraculous agglomeration of many different nations, languages and religions-has been preserved and expanded over the centuries through the efforts of heroes whose names are not just remembered but venerated. What's more, some of them are alive today, fighting and working in the Donbass. It is one thing to visit museums, read old books and hear stories about the great deeds of one's grandfathers and great-grandfathers during the Great Patriotic War; it is quite another to watch history unfold through the eyes of your own father or brother. Give it another year or two, and Russia's young people will learn to look with disdain on the products of Russia's Western-oriented culture-mongers. Their elders do already: opinion polls show that a large majority of Russians see Western cultural influence as a negative.

And what of these Russian culture-mongers who have been worshiping all things Western for as long as they can remember? Here, a most curious thing happened. When the special military operation

was first announced, they spoke out against it and in favor of the Ukrainian Nazis—a stupid thing to do, but they thought it good and proper to keep their political opinions harmonized with those of their Western patrons and idols so as to stay in their good graces. Some of them protested against the war (ignoring the fact that it had been going on for eight long years already). And then quite a few of them fled the country in unseemly haste.

Keep in mind that these are neither brain surgeons nor rocket scientists: these are people who prance around on stage while making noises with their hands and mouths; or they are people who sit there while makeup artists do things to their faces and hair, then endlessly repeat lines written for them by someone else. These are not people who have the capacity to analyze a tricky political situation and make the right choice. In an earlier, saner age their opinions would be steadfastly ignored, but such is the effect of the Internet, social media and all the rest, that any hysterical nincompoop can shoot a little video and millions of people, having nothing better to do with their time, will watch it on their phones and make comments.

The fact that these people are voluntarily cleansing the Russian media space of their presence is a positive development, but it takes time. If the special military operation were to end tomorrow, there is no doubt that they would attempt to come back and pretend that none of this ever happened. And then Russian popular culture would remain a Western-styled cesspool full of vacuous personae who seek to glorify every single deadly sin for the sake of personal notoriety and gain. Russia has plenty of talented people eager to take their place—if only they would keep out long enough for everyone to forget about them!

Particularly damaging to Russia's future has been the emergence and preeminence of pro-Western economic and financial elites. Ever since the haphazard and in many cases criminal privatization of state resources in the 1990s, there was brought up an entire cohort of powerful economic agents who does not have Russia's interests in mind. Instead, these are purely selfish economic actors who until quite recently thought that their ill-gotten gains would allow them to enter into posh Western society. These people usually have more than one passport, they try to keep their families in some wealthy enclave outside of Russia, they send their children to schools and universities in the West, and their only use for Russia is as a territory they can exploit in creating their wealth extraction schemes.

When in response to the start of Russia's special military operation the West mounted a speculative attack on the ruble, forcing Russia's central bank to impose strict currency controls, these members of the Russian elite were forced to start thinking about making a momentous choice. They could stay in Russia, but then they would have to cut their ties to the West; or they could move to the West and live off their savings, but then they would be cut off from the source of their wealth. Their choice was made easier by Western governments which worked hard to confiscate the property of rich Russian nationals, freeze their bank accounts and subject them to various other indignities and inconveniences.

Still, it's a hard choice for them to make—realizing that, in spite of their sometimes fabulous wealth, for the collective West they are just some Russians that can be robbed. Many of them are mentally unprepared to throw in their lot with their own people, whom they have been taught to despise and to exploit for personal gain. A quick victory in Russia's special military operation would allow them to think that their troubles were temporary in nature. Given enough time some of them will run away for good while others will decide to stay and work for the common good in Russia.

Next in line are various members of the Russian government who, having been schooled in Western economics, are incapable of understanding the economic transformation that is occurring in Russia, never mind helping it along. Most of what passes for economic thought in the West is just an elaborate smokescreen over this fundamental dictum: "The rich must be allowed to get richer, the poor must be kept poor and the government shouldn't try to help them (much)." This worked while the West had colonies to exploit, be it through good old-fashioned imperial conquest, plunder and rapine, or through financial neocolonialism of Perkins's "economic hit men," or, as has recently been grudgingly admitted by several top EU officials, by taking advantage of cheap Russian energy.



That doesn't work any more-not in the West, not in Russia or any place else, and mindsets have to adjust. There is a great deal of inertia in appointments to government positions, where there are many vested interests vying for power and influence. It takes time for such basic ideas to percolate through the system as the fact that the US Federal Reserve no longer has a planet-wide monopoly on printing money. Therefore, it is no longer necessary for Russia's central bank to have dollars in reserve to cover their ruble emissions to defend it against speculative attack since it is no longer necessary for Russia's central bank to allow foreign currency speculators to run rampant and stage speculative attacks.

But some results have already been achieved, and they are nothing short of spectacular: over the past few months, just a few well-chosen departures from Western economic orthodoxy have made the ruble the world's strongest currency, have allowed Russia to earn more export revenue by exporting less oil, gas and coal, and have allowed it to drive inflation down to almost zero. Since the start of the special military operation, Russia has been able to reduce its national debt by a large amount and increase government revenues. A swift end to Russia's special military operation may spell the end of such miracles and a most unwelcome return to the untenable status quo ante.

Beyond the intangible world of finance, equally significant changes have been occurring throughout the physical Russian economy. Previously, many economic sectors, including car sales, construction and home improvement, software development and many others, were foreign-owned and the profits from these activities left the country. And then a decision was made to block the expatriation of dividends. In response, foreign companies sold off their Russian assets, taking a huge loss and depriving themselves of access to the Russian market. The change has been quite stunning. For example, at the beginning of 2022, Western car companies owned a large share of the Russian auto market. Many of the cars that were sold had been assembled within Russia at foreign-owned plants and the profits from these sales were expatriated. Now, less than a year later, European and American automakers are pretty much gone from Russia, replaced by a swiftly reborn domestic auto industry. Chinese automakers have immediately grabbed a large market share for themselves, while South Korea continued to trade with Russia and has held on to its market share.

Equally stunning have been changes in the aircraft industry. Previously, Russian airlines were flying Airbuses and Boeings, most of them leased. After the start of the special operation Western politicians demanded that these leases be rescinded and the aircraft returned to their owners, neglecting to take into account the fact that this would be ruinous financially (glutting the market for used aircraft for years to come and destroying demand for new aircraft) and, furthermore, physically impossible, given that there was no way to effect the transfer of the aircraft. In response, the Russian airlines nationalized the aircraft registry, stopped flying to hostile destinations where their aircraft might be arrested, and started making lease payments in rubles to special accounts at the Russian central bank.

Then came the news that Aeroflot is panning to buy over 300 new passenger jets, all Russian MC-21s, SSJ-100s and Tu-214s, all before 2030, with the first deliveries slated for 2023. There has been a scramble to replace almost all Western-sourced components, such as composites for the carbon fiber wing of the MC-21 and jet engines, avionics and much else for all of the above. Over this period many of the previously leased Boeings and Airbuses will be phased out, but these companies' market share in the largest country on Earth will be gone forever. Damage to Western aircraft manufacturers will be matched by the damage to Western airlines. At the outset of hostilities, the collective West closed its airspace to Russia, and Russia reciprocated. The problem is that Europe is small and easy to fly around while Russia is huge and flying around it takes a whole day. European airlines suddenly found that they can't compete on routes to Japan, China or Korea.

Following the closing of the airspace came other sanctions, from both the European Union and from the United States, all of them illegal, since the UN Security Council is the only body empowered to impose sanctions. Right now the European Union is working on the ninth packet of sanctions, all of which have been dubbed "sanctions from hell". Speaking of hell, Dante Alighieri's "Inferno" there are nine circles of hell, so perhaps the sanctions juggernaut is about to run its course.

These sanctions were supposed to have swiftly destroyed the Russian economy and have caused

so much social upheaval and suffering that the people would gather on Red Square and overthrow the dread dictator Putin (or so thought Western foreign policy experts). Clearly, nothing of the sort has happened and Putin's approval rating is as high as ever. On the other hand, the good people of the European Union are indeed starting to suffer. They can no longer afford to heat their homes or to take regular hot showers, food has become outrageously expensive for them, and so much else is going wrong that huge crowds of protestors have been gathering all across Europe and demanding, among other things, an end to anti-Russian sanctions, normalization of relations with Russia and a return to business as usual. Their demands are unlikely to be met, since this would mean a major loss of face for the European leaders.

But there is a more important reason why the sanctions will stay: a return to business as usual would mean that Russia would once again provide energy and raw materials to Europe cheaply while allowing European companies to profit from the labor of Russians. This is quite unappealing and is therefore unlikely to happen. Russia is using the sanctions as an opportunity to rebuild its domestic industry and reorient its trade away from hostile nations and toward friendly nations that are fair and sympathetic in their dealings with Russia. It is also working hard to phase out the use of currencies that Dmitry Medvedev called "toxic"; namely, the US dollar and the euro.

Add to this list a wonderful new Russian innovation called "parallel import." If some company, in complying with anti-Russian sanctions, refuses to sell its products to Russia or to service or upgrade its products in Russia, then Russia will buy these products and upgrades from a third or fourth or fifth party without permission from the US, the EU or the manufacturer. If a certain brand-name product becomes unavailable, the Russians simply rename the brand and make the same product themselves, or have the Chinese or another trade partner do it for them. And if the West refuses to license its intellectual property to Russia, then that intellectual property becomes free in Russia.

This works particularly well with software: free copies of brand-name software are just as good as the paid-for copies, and if tech support, training or other associated services become unavailable from the West, the Russians simply organize their own. Intellectual property of various sorts makes up a large portion Western notional wealth, and Western sanctions are having the effect of letting Russia make use of it free of charge. Thanks to modern digital technology, it works rather well with hardware too. Instead of painstakingly reverse-engineering products, now the same effect can be achieved by buying the 3D models on a thumb drive and 3D-printing them or automatically generating the mill and drill paths to create them on an NC mill. Putin likes to use the expression "tsap-tsarap" to describe this process. It is hard to translate directly but pertains to the act of a cat snatching its prey with its claws. The short of it is, what Russia previously had to pay for is now, thanks to sanctions, free to it.

Since the Goldilocks War is, after all, a sort of war, we need to briefly discuss its military aspects. Here, too, a steady-as-she-goes approach seems to be the most copacetic. The stated goal is to demilitarize and denazify the former Ukraine, and to some extent this has already been achieved: most of the armor and artillery that the Ukraine had inherited from the USSR has already been destroyed; most of the diehard Nazi battalions are either dead or a shadow of their former selves. Gone too are most of the volunteers that once fought on the Ukrainian side. After over 100000 Ukrainian soldiers "have been killed" since February 2022 (as forthrightly stated, then sheepishly denied, by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen), and after perhaps as many as half a million casualties, scores of service-age men bribing their way out of the country and several rounds of the draft, it is slim pickings. With well over a hundred Ukrainian casualties a day the pickings are bound to get even slimmer over time. Foreign mercenaries have been used to fill the gap-Anglos, Poles, Romanians-but there is a major problem with them: as Julius Caesar pointed out, lots of people are willing to kill for money but nobody wants to die for money-except an idiot, I would add. And on NATO's Russian front an idiot and his life are soon parted. Up-to-date information on Russian casualties is a state secret and the only number divulged by Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu in late September 2022 was 5937 killed since the start of the campaign. Casualty rates are said to have been significantly lower since then.

At present, there is still no shortage of idiots on the Ukrainian side-yet-and neither is there



a shortage of donated Western weaponry. First came used Soviet-era tanks and other weapons systems donated from all over Eastern Europe; then came actual Western weapons systems. And now throughout NATO one hears plaintive cries that they have nothing left that they can give to the Ukrainians: the cupboard is empty. Nor can they manufacture more weapons in a hurry. To start churning out weapons at the same rate as Russia is doing, these NATO members would first need to reindustrialize, and there are neither the human resources, nor the money to do so. And so the Russian army grinds away, demilitarizing the Ukraine, and the rest of NATO with it. In the process, it is perfecting the art of fighting a land war against NATO-not that a single NATO country would even entertain such an idea.

Perhaps this is mission creep, or perhaps this has been the plan all along, but what Russia is doing at this point is destroying NATO. You may recall that a year ago Russia demanded that the US honor certain security guarantees it made as a condition for allowing the peaceful reunification of Germany; namely, that NATO would not expand eastward. "Not an inch to the east" was how the official record of the meeting reads. Gorbachev and Shevardnadze failed to get this deal on paper and signed, but a verbal deal is a deal. A year ago Russia's offer was quite moderate: that NATO withdraw to its pre-1997 borders, when it expanded to Eastern Europe.

But, as usually happens when negotiating with the Russians, their initial offer is usually the best. For all we know, based on how things are going in the Ukraine, Russia's best and final offer may require NATO to disband altogether. After all, the Warsaw Pact disbanded 31 years ago but NATO is still around and bigger than ever; what for? To fight Russia? Well, then, what are they waiting for? Come and get it! This may not even take the form of a negotiation. For example, Russia could say, take a quick whack at Latvia (it richly deserves a whack or two for abusing its large native Russian population Nazi-style) and then stand back and say, "Come on, NATO, come and die heroically on our doorstep for poor little Latvia!" At this, NATO officials will stand united but very quiet, thoughtfully examining their own and each others' shoes. Once it becomes clear that there will be no offers to launch World War III to avenge Latvia, NATO will quietly dry up and blow away.

Finally, we come to what is perhaps the least important reason for the Goldilocks War: the former Ukraine itself. In view of Russia's other strategic goals, it seems more of the nature of a sacrificial piece in a chess gambit. Given what Russia has already achieved over the past nine months-four new Russian regions, six million new Russian citizens, a land bridge to Crimea, irrigation water supply to Crimea-there isn't much left for Russia to achieve militarily before its military campaign reaches the stage of diminishing returns. The addition of Nikolaev and Odessa regions and full control of the Black Sea coastline would, of course, be most valuable; control of Kharkov and Kiev somewhat less so. Control of the entire Dniepr hydroelectric cascade is a definite nice-to-have. As for the rest, it could be left to languish for ages as a deindustrialized, depopulated wasteland, labeled "Mostly harmless."

Let me divulge a personal detail or two. Two of my grandparents were from Zhitomir, my father was born in Kiev, my first romantic interest was a girl from Odessa, and over the years I've had as many friends from Odessa, Kharkov, Lvov, Kiev, Donetsk, Vinnitsa and elsewhere as anywhere else in Russia. Russia? You read that right: there is no way to convince me that so-called "Ukrainian territory" somehow isn't Russia or that the people who live there somehow aren't Russian-regardless of what some of them have been recently brainwashed to think. What's more, none of these people I have known over the years ever thought of themselves as the least bit Ukrainian and they would probably view the very idea of a Ukrainian nationalist identity as symptomatic of a mental condition. The label "Ukrainian" was to them some Bolshevik nonse; since then, Ukrainianness has been turned into a Western method for exploiting minor ethnic variations in order to make one group of Russians fight another group of Russians.

In case you are doubtful, let's apply the good old duck test: Do the people there walk, quack and look like Russians? All of that territory, with one minor exception in the far west, was part of Russia for anywhere between ten and three centuries; most of the people there, and virtually the entire urban population, speaks Russian as their native language; their religion is predominantly Russian Orthodox; they are genetically indistinguishable from the rest of the Russian population. So, what happened to them?

Unfortunately, a small piece of this Russian land spent three centuries in captivity to the Austro-Hungarian Empire or as part of Greater Poland, and this poisoned their minds with foreign ideas such as Catholicism and ethnic nationalism. Unlike Russia, which is a multinational, multi-ethnic, religiously diverse monolith, the West is a mosaic of ethnic nationalisms, and where there are nationalists there may be Nazis, ethnic cleansing and genocide.

As one drop of poison infects the whole tun of wine, these Western Ukrainians, with lots of help and funds from the German Nazis, then the Americans and the Canadians, managed to infect a large part of the formerly Ukrainian territory with a fake nationalism based on a forged history and a haphazardly concocted culture. Official bans on the teaching and, eventually, the use of Russian have brought up a generation of young people who are essentially illiterate in their native Russian. They are taught in Ukrainian, but Ukrainian literacy is close to an oxymoron, since nothing of any great consequence has ever been written or published in that language and the vast majority of Ukrainian literary works are, you guessed it, in Russian.

The Russian special military operation that's been ongoing since February 2022 has polarized the entire population. Those who had decided to be with Russia back in 2014 were, obviously, overjoyed to finally get some help from Russia. The now Russian regions of Donetsk, Lugansk, Zaporozhye and Kherson gladly voted to join Russia. But as far as the rest of the former Ukrainian territory, the polarization is mostly in the opposite direction. Those who wanted to be with Russia mostly voted with their feet and are now living somewhere in Russia.

This is something that time alone can fix. Eventually the population of the former Ukraine will be forced to make a choice: they can be Russian, or they can be refugees somewhere in Europe, or they can die fighting Russians at the front. Note that even Donetsk and Lugansk didn't make this choice right away, the way Crimea did. At that time, only some 70% of their population was in favor of leaving the Ukraine and rejoining Russia. It took eight years of relentless Ukrainian bombing to convince them to make this choice.

Over these intervening years, the diehard "Ukrainians" filtered out, leaving behind a population that was close to 100% pro-Russian. It was only then that the Kremlin granted them official recognition, sent in troops to defend them from imminent invasion and, soon after, accepted them into the Russian Federation. And now the same sort of sorting operation has to take place throughout the rest of the former Ukraine. How long will it take? Only time will tell, but it is already clear that, as far as Russia is concerned, there is no compelling reason to rush.