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[Will Ukraine Have a Junta?](#)



On October 14, 2015, several Ukrainian right-wing groups took to the streets to mark Defenders Day, a newly recognized holiday honoring those who have been fighting for Ukraine's independence. The march was organized by the marginalized far-right nationalist political parties, *Svoboda*, the All-Ukrainian Union "Freedom", and *Pravy Sektor*, or Right Sector.

Also present at the march was a small group whose main slogan was "Хунта буде!" (*Khunta bude!*) which can be roughly translated from Ukrainian as "We will have a junta!". The activists in this group waved flags of a few far right groups of no real significance even within the small, far-right segment of Ukrainian politics. However, they are active on social networking websites, where they post pictures of Benito Mussolini and representatives of the Greek military junta, and in Kyiv, they spray [graffiti images](#) of Mussolini with the slogan, "Хунта буде".

But the "junta" narrative goes beyond a tiny circle of fans of Mussolini and the Greek Colonels. Following the Kremlin-inspired disinformation campaign, according to which Ukraine's revolution resulted in a "fascist junta" coming to power in Ukraine, some far right elements in Ukraine have actually embraced this narrative.

It isn't that this group believes the Kremlin propaganda about Ukraine being led by a junta government. Not at

all. They do, however, maintain that the current authorities are essentially the same corrupt group who ruled Ukraine before the country's revolution, and the real change is only in the making. The "junta" narrative has also been appropriated as a meme. (Ukrainians are fond of making fun of the Kremlin's propaganda efforts, turning them into memes.) For some Ukrainian far right groups, the "junta" narrative is a combination of the two - the use the meme to express their genuine wish for a radical transformation of the country into a right-wing dictatorship. Thus, the slogan "*Khunta bude*" is also popular with [SvaStone](#), a Ukrainian right-wing fashion brand, and with some right-wing football hooligans who even organize tournaments [under this slogan](#).

But leaving the bizarre world of memes and fascist fantasies, how real are the prospects of having a right-wing junta in Ukraine? Let us consider the three mostly likely scenarios which would result in a right-wing junta (i.e. a right-wing authoritarian state run by the military, or a far-right regime), in Ukraine.

Scenario 1: Far right organizations successfully incite rebellion among some elements of the Ukrainian military, organize an armed march on Kyiv, and seize power.

Scenario 2: High-ranking officers rebel against the civilian authorities, command the troops to march on Kyiv, and seize power.

Scenario 3: A far-right party wins in elections, forms a government, radically amends or nullifies the Constitution, and establishes a far right dictatorship.

All three scenarios will lead to the delegitimization of Ukraine as a democratic state which will result in the renunciation of all Western support for Ukraine, and the fall of the state. Fortunately, there are reasons to believe that none of the scenarios above will ever come to fruition.

At first glance, it appears the situation is ripe for rebellion in the military. A fair number of rank and file, and middle-ranking officers in the military are disgruntled. Many of them feel betrayed by the authorities who, after a series of military defeats, opted for a questionable peace deal with Russia fixed in the Minsk and Minsk II agreements. They are dissatisfied with the lack of progress in the investigations of the dramatic defeats in the bloodiest battles of the Russian-Ukrainian war, such as the Battle of Ilovaik and the Battle of Debaltseve. Their social and financial standing leaves much to be desired - they hardly rejoice when they see "chairborne commandos" enjoying the sweets of life while soldiers and officers who risk their lives on the battlefields receive low salaries.

They are vulnerable to anti-establishment propaganda - in theory. Reality paints a different picture. First, the soldiers and officers understand turning arms against "internal enemies" will play into the hands of the external enemy and lead to the downfall of the state. Second, while they may be susceptible to anti-establishment propaganda, they are not vulnerable to far-right propaganda. While far-right groups may try to remedy this by presenting their ideas under the guise of patriotism, in the now huge marketplace of Ukrainian patriotism, their ideas will not (nor have they) successfully compete with other versions of Ukrainian patriotism.

A rebellion of high-ranking officers who orchestrate a military takeover is even less likely. First, there are simply no generals in Ukraine who can enlist at least some minimal military and political support for staging a *coup d'état*: not only does Ukraine lack a socio-cultural tradition of military heavy-weights, but the current Russian-Ukrainian war has not produced generals with the status of indisputable authority for a significant number of the military officers. Second, high-ranking officers have nothing to gain by rebelling against an establishment in which they enjoy the benefits of full integration. And they, too, well understand the dire consequences of such a rebellion for the Ukrainian state.

No Ukrainian far right party can win elections on the national level in the foreseeable future. They may get representation in the Rada, Ukraine's parliament, as they did in the past, but their numerical strength will hardly suffice to dictate their will to the parliament. There is a ceiling for far right electoral support. Svoboda became the largest Ukrainian far right party ever when it obtained 10.44% of the vote in the 2012 parliamentary elections. But in the autumn of 2014, at the very height of the war, electoral support for Svoboda fell to 4.71%. (This result would have been even lower had Crimea and the entire Donbas region voted in the parliamentary elections.) Right Sector obtained 1.80% of the vote in 2014. Public opinion polls

suggest that the Right Sector's popularity grew in 2015, but its support still only hovers around the 5% electoral threshold. Moreover, with the recent departure of its former leader Dmytro Yarosh, the Right Sector may never recover as a party.

None of the three most likely scenarios for the establishment of a far-right government in Ukraine are likely - and not only for the reasons outlined above. Neither civil society nor the media will remain quietly on the sidelines of any authoritarian developments in the country, and will mobilize against efforts to install a junta or a dictatorship. Even more so, Ukrainian political culture in general rejects authoritarianism and state violence. Ironically, today's somewhat chaotic democratic Ukraine owes much to the same causes which prevents the creation of right-wing dictatorship: there are too many competing political projects in Ukraine, and too little social trust towards any of them. A democratic order which does not specify its nature and characteristics represents the minimum consensus in Ukrainian society. Nevertheless, it is still a *democratic*, rather than *authoritarian*, order.

Although the three scenarios discussed above will not be realized, it does not mean that their underlying contexts are unproblematic. The disaffected in the Ukrainian military may stage powerful protests against the authorities, and although they will not result in a revolution or a regime change, their effect will hardly be negligible for the establishment. The far right milieu may harbour even more serious potential dangers. It is an open secret that all the prominent far right organisations in Ukraine are heavily infiltrated by the security services. While informants and agents help the state to protect itself from potential subversive and terrorist activities of the far-right, one cannot exclude that particular political or business circles in Ukraine may try to collude with individual secret service officers, and, through them, involve the far right in their political strife. Alternatively, these political and business circles may directly collude with the far right. The threat that the Ukrainian far right poses to the fragile stability of the Ukrainian state is potentially even more significant if the same far right organizations are infiltrated by the Russian secret services. For them, the anti-establishment and anti-system agenda of the Ukrainian far right is more than useful.

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