

Let Ukrainians Determine Their Own Fate

By [John Quigley](#)

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The crisis playing itself out in Ukraine should be resolved without outside interference. Whether Ukraine orients its future eastward or westward has implications for the world's major powers, but the collective will of the people of Ukraine must be the decisive factor.

The lack of a single Ukrainian viewpoint is, of course, a problematic circumstance. Ukraine's history leaves it without a consolidated population. Nonetheless, the issue of affiliating with the European Union is for Ukraine a domestic matter.

Victoria Nuland, who serves as U.S. deputy secretary of state for European affairs, stepped over a line usually observed by foreign powers when she went into the streets of Kiev in December. There, Nuland demonstratively aligned herself with the protesters and in favor of Ukraine's affiliation with the EU. According to a recently leaked audiotape of a conversation that she had with the U.S. Ambassador to Kiev, Geoffrey Pyatt, Nuland also evidently has been strategizing on ways to alter the composition of the Ukraine government. Diplomats

and foreign officials are accustomed to avoiding involvement in domestic politics. Diplomatic and consular personnel risk being declared persona non grata for such activity.

A government's treatment of its citizens, however, is a legitimate concern to the outside world. So Secretary of State John Kerry was not out of bounds this week when he called on the government of Ukraine to avoid mistreating protesters. The problem, of course, is that when an outside state has a view about a disputed issue, its views about the correctness of the actions of the government or its opposition may be colored.

What could be helpful in the Ukrainian situation is outside involvement oriented toward determining disputed facts and to seeking a way for Ukraine to decide its own course.

Mediation may be helpful in working out a modus vivendi in Ukraine, but it must be structured carefully. Didier Burkhalter, the chairperson-in-office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, has proposed possible steps in that direction. Burkhalter, who also serves as foreign minister of Switzerland, has called for an "impartial international facilitator" to be appointed. Respected local figures could be drawn into the effort. Dialogue could perhaps be initiated that would lead in a positive direction.

Most critically, Burkhalter has called for a calming of the situation that has led to multiple deaths and injuries. "It is time for everyone concerned to do all in their power to move this situation away from violence and toward a political solution," he said.

The OSCE has a track record of working via preventive diplomacy to avert incipient crises and to resolve those that have already broken out. It has worked in the past with the government of Ukraine. It has a permanent presence in Ukraine. It is working in Ukraine currently on matters as varied as military training and human trafficking.

The OSCE has the potential of being accepted by all parties in Ukraine as genuinely interested in finding a solution that would not be colored by outside interests.

The OSCE could also examine allegations on both sides of violence against the other. Human rights abuses have been widely alleged as the government has tried to quell the unrest. Inevitably, each side regards the other as the perpetrator of violence. The OSCE could analyze the allegations and state conclusions that would be difficult for either side to dispute.

Outside powers may, of course, try to woo Ukraine in their direction. They may do so out of interests of their own, more than what might be good for Ukraine. That is normal. That activity might even affect public opinion in Ukraine to incline in either direction. But the ultimate choice must not be taken out of the hands of the population. Outside involvement should be directed at facilitating an outcome that is acceptable to the domestic parties.

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