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An S.O.S. From Battleground Ukraine

The president of an invaded country asks the West: Are you with the barbarian or with the Free World?

S.O.S. з поля бою України

Президент атакованої країни запитує Захід: Ви з варваром чи з вільним світом?

"Як і личить лідеру держави, яка веде війну, український Президент Петро Порошенко в інтерв'ю говорив відверто", - пише лондонський журналіст The Wall Street Journal Сохраб Ахмар. "На питання, яку зброю потрібно його збройним силам, щоб стримати подальшу агресію Росії та її агентів-сепаратистів на Східній Україні, Порошенко дав конкретну відповідь: "Ми шукаємо всього 1240 ракет Javelin, і це абсолютно справедливо", - йдеться в статті. 1240 - кількість ядерних боеголовок, від яких Україна відмовилася в 1994 році, пояснює автор. Протитанкові ракети і стратегічна зброя непорівнянні, але адміністрація Обами поки відмовляється передати Києву навіть ці ракети або інші смертельні засоби ведення війни, підкреслює автор. Замість цього Вашингтон і європейці вимагають, щоб обидві сторони конфлікту здійснювали Мінські домовленості. "Ми вважаємо, що з російської сторони "Мінськ "не працює", - говорить Порошенко. "Ми не вимагаємо, щоб британські, американські чи французькі солдати їхали сюди і воювали за нас, - говорить Порошенко. - Ми робимо це самі, платимо найважчу ціну, платимо життями наших солдатів. Нам просто потрібна солідарність". "Захід в підсумку розплатиться за задобрювання і короткозорість", - вважає автор статті. "Якщо ми не зупинимо агресора, - говорить Порошенко, - це означає, що глобальної безпеки не існує.

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/message-from-battlefield-ukraine-1438106297>



Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko. Photo: Krystian Maj/FORUM/Zuma Press

Kiev, Ukraine

As befits a head of state managing a war, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko is blunt in an interview Monday evening at the presidential-administration building here. Asked about the kind of weapons his armed forces would need to deter further aggression by Russia and its separatist proxies in eastern Ukraine, Mr. Poroshenko gets specific: “We’re looking for just 1,240 Javelin missiles, and this is absolutely fair.”

The number 1,240 has special significance for Mr. Poroshenko. He says that was the number of nuclear warheads Ukraine gave up under the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, jointly signed by the U.S., Britain and Russia. “Ukraine voluntarily gave up its nuclear arsenal,” Mr. Poroshenko says, “and in exchange for that the United States of America and Great Britain . . . promised to guarantee our sovereignty and territorial integrity.”

Compared with strategic nuclear weapons, 1,240 Javelins—portable antitank missiles fired from the shoulder—are small beer. Yet the Obama administration has thus far refused to transfer to Kiev the missiles—or any other form of lethal aid. Mr. Poroshenko is thankful for American political support, loan guarantees and nonlethal assistance, including Humvees, night-vision goggles, military-to-military training and artillery computers that allow Ukrainian troops to better protect themselves against shelling. Yet such assistance has so far failed to change Russian supreme leader Vladimir Putin’s calculus in the war.

Rather than helping Kiev impose real costs on the aggressor, the U.S. and the European powers are pushing both sides to work through the Minsk process, a series of accords negotiated in the Belarussian capital and aimed at de-escalating the conflict. Under the deal’s latest iteration, known as Minsk II, the parties have been required since early February to cease fire, create a buffer zone and withdraw heavy weapons, among other steps. “We think Minsk is not working from the Russian side,” says Mr. Poroshenko.

Russian forces and proxies in the east violate the letter and spirit of Minsk II on a daily basis. The latest evidence: Ukrainian forces over the weekend apprehended a Russian officer transferring a truck loaded with ammunition to a separatist position near Donetsk. “Today he gave up his full name,” Mr. Poroshenko says, for the first time confirming the officer’s rank and home base. “He is a major of regular forces who comes here to kill my people.” The officer’s home base is in Russia’s Rostov region.

Then there is the constant shelling. On Sunday there were 70 instances of shelling from separatist positions. The daily average during the past two months was 100. The numbers are lower compared with the height of the conflict, Mr. Poroshenko says, but the suffering “is still

tremendous. Altogether the number of civilians and military personnel [dead] is now close to 9,000. Nobody can imagine that this can happen in the center of Europe in the 21st century.”

Nor does Minsk II address Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea. The concern in Kiev is that the West would be willing to trade away the peninsula in exchange for calm in eastern Ukraine. “If anybody proposed to the U.S. to give up the Florida Peninsula,” the Ukrainian president says, “something like that would not work. This is our land. . . . Whether it’s Donetsk, Luhansk or Crimea, at the end of the day, they will be freed.”

Kiev doesn’t entirely despair of Minsk II. The deal’s value, Mr. Poroshenko says, lies in the fact that “we have on Minsk II Putin’s signature, which is delivering his direct responsibility for all the disasters we have here.” Still, the president has few illusions about talks with the Kremlin, and he worries that the moral and strategic stakes at the heart of the conflict may be obscured by diplomacy for its own sake.

“We aren’t demanding that British, American or French soldiers come here and fight for us,” Mr. Poroshenko says. “We’re doing this ourselves, paying the most difficult price”—here his voice breaks momentarily—“the lives of my soldiers. We need just solidarity.”

The West would ultimately pay the price for appeasement and myopia. “If we do not stop the aggressor,” Mr. Poroshenko says, “that means global security doesn’t exist. Anytime, any plane or submarine can make a missile attack, including against the U.S.”

That’s a lesson the West should have learned from the July 2014 Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 tragedy, in which putative separatists armed by Moscow shot down a passenger jet en route to Kuala Lumpur from Amsterdam.

The United Nations Security Council on Wednesday will vote on a resolution co-sponsored by Australia, Belgium, Malaysia, the Netherlands and Ukraine calling for an international tribunal to investigate that attack. Moscow has threatened to block the resolution. That “would be a disaster for Russia itself because it would be an admission of responsibility,” Mr. Poroshenko says. “This is the Middle Ages approach, the barbarian approach to solving international disputes.”

As Mr. Poroshenko puts it, the question the Ukrainian people are posing to the world is: “Are you together with the barbarian or together with the Free World?”

How is the leader of the Free World doing on that front? Mr. Poroshenko’s response is marked by subtle elisions: “I think the most important, we feel the support of the people of the United States—very, very strong support—no matter if they’re Republicans or Democrats.”

He never mentions President Barack Obama by name during our interview.

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