



institute
of world
policy

8/20 Shovkovychna Str., Kyiv,
Ukraine 01021
e-mail: letter.officeiwp@gmail.com
Phone: (044) 2535474

Policy Brief

Institute of World Policy, 2018



KURT VOLKER

ONE YEAR ON WORLD STAGE

“You know, it is very important for me to tell the truth. You cannot solve the problem if you cannot honestly discuss it. It is very important to discuss what is going on before our eyes, as it is, and then understand, whether we can solve the problem”.

Kurt Volker in the interview for the Dozhd TV-channel, August 2017

“What could be the role of the USA? To focus the vision of Vladimir Putin on the strategic aspect of the problem. So that he focuses on deciding whether he wants to come out of this dead end or not. The USA can tell Putin: “If You want – we can help, if You don’t want – we can guarantee that you will only get worse”.

Kurt Volker in the interview for the Mirror Weekly newspaper, September 2017

“I think, we should not expect that one day we would manage to force Russia to do what it does not want to do... It is impossible to force Russia, it is impossible to fool Russia, but it is possible to create relevant conditions to search for the rational solution”.

-//-

The change of the Presidential Administrations in the USA in January 2017 adversely influenced the America’s involvement in solution of Ukraine-Russia conflict in Donbass. On January 26, 2017, Victoria Nuland, the Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, resigned¹. In 2015-2016 she carried out active negotiations with the Russian Federation representatives (Grigoriy Karasin, Vladislav Surkov) concurrently with the Normandy Quartet. All the members of the Normandy Quartet expected that the USA would actively return to attempts of implementation of Minsk Agreements. As a result, in spring 2017 new discussions and speculations about who could take the position of Victoria Nuland and renew the bilateral contacts with Russia begun.² At the same time, it has become known that the USA are planning to return to attempts to implement Minsk Agreements and in such a way to bring peace to Donbass³. One of the elements of the US plan to restart the negotiation process was the appointment of a special representative for renewal of the bilateral channel of negotiations with Russia. Establishment of the institute of special representative for Ukrainian negotiations also had to help the Donald Trump’s Administration to avoid the further delay of the U.S. active involvement given a slow process of Senate approval of the U.S. State Department staff⁴. As a result, on 7 July 2017, Rex Tillerson appointed Kurt Volker to serve as the U.S. Special

¹ Elena Chernenko: “Victoria Nuland surrenders post-Soviet affairs”, Kommersant - <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3202136>

² John Hudson: «There’s Something New In The Trump-McCain Relationship These Days», BuzzFeed - https://www.buzzfeed.com/johnhudson/theres-something-new-in-the-trump-mccain-relationship-these?utm_term=.viXbkON5Y#.vnoB68GqW

³ Josh Rogin: «Inside the Trump administration’s plans to restart the Ukraine peace process», Washington Post - https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/inside-the-trump-administrations-plans-to-restart-the-ukraine-peace-process/2017/05/28/391da144-4234-11e7-8c25-44d09ff5a4a8_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.2d2a601e86a4

⁴ The Victoria Nuland’s successor for the position of Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs – Aaron Wess Mitchel – received an appointment only in October 2017.

KURT VOLKER – ONE YEAR ON WORLD STAGE

Representative for Ukraine Negotiations⁵ (it was the first time when such a position was created for Ukraine). Thereby, the speculations in the American mass-media concerning the possible candidate for the position of the U.S. Representative for the negotiations with Russia were borne out. The said appointment was favorably viewed by all the members of the Normandy process.

Work Stages of the U.S. Special Representative for Ukraine Negotiations

1. Familiarization Period (July – August 2017)

This stage of Kurt Volker work is characterized by his striving to get into the essence of things, to find out the key positions of Ukraine, European mediators and Russia, prior to development and articulation of the American vision of the ways of settlement of the conflict in Donbass. As early as on 9 July 2017, within the visit of the U.S. Secretary of State to Ukraine, the Special Representative came to Kyiv for the first time, and took an active part in negotiations. In general, during his first stay in the capital of Ukraine between 9 and 11 July 2017, Kurt Volker met with the representatives of the Administration of the President of Ukraine, the Cabinet of Ministers, the Verkhovna Rada, the management of the National Institute for Strategic Studies, as well as the members of the Trilateral Contact Group in Minsk⁶.

However, after a short break the U.S. Special Representative came to Ukraine for the second time in course of visit which started on 21 July 2017 and included the travel to the frontline zone⁷. This step is indicative, since neither Victoria Nuland nor European mediators have not had the courage to visit the Donbass region close to the confrontation line. On 23 July 2017, Kurt Volker visited Avdiivka, and Ukrainian task force “Donetsk”⁸. At the briefing by the results of the visit, the Special Representative said that this was not an internal conflict, since it was a direct result of the Russian aggression. Moreover, after the first visit to the frontline zone, Kurt Volker claimed that possible receipt of lethal defense weapons by Ukraine would not be a provocative step⁹. Thereby, he, in fact, started an active campaign for implementation of this initiative, since after his declaration the Donald Trump’s Administration started considering this issue.

⁵ «Secretary Tillerson Appoints Ambassador Kurt Volker Special Representative for Ukraine Negotiations», US Department of State - <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/07/272412.htm>

⁶ «Yeliseev: the U.S. Special Representative and the President’s Administration have defined the steps which would invigorate the “Minsk Process”, Radio Svoboda - <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news/28610893.html>

⁷ «United States Special Representative for Ukraine Negotiations Kurt Volker Travel to Ukraine, France, Belgium, Austria, and the United Kingdom», Department of State - <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/07/272783.htm>

⁸ «Volker: Conflict in Donbass should be terminated as soon as possible”, Ukrainska Pravda - <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2017/07/23/7150334/>

⁹ «US considering arms to Ukraine, says envoy Volker», BBC - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-40712385>

After the second visit to Ukraine, Kurt Volker visited a number of European countries and international organizations which were directly or indirectly involved into the settlement of the conflict with Russia in Donbass. Those were Germany, France, Great Britain, NATO, and OSCE. Along with the great European tour, the USA and Russia continued to prepare for the future meeting of the U.S. Special Representative and his Russian vis-à-vis, without which the first stage of Kurt Volker's work would be incomplete. On 6 August 2017, in course of the meeting of Rex Tillerson and Sergey Lavrov in Manila at the ASEAN Regional Forum, an arrangement about the future negotiations of the representatives of the USA and Russia dedicated to the discussion of the conflict in Donbass was made. And the Russian party clearly showed its interest in such a meeting¹⁰. Russia wanted to know the Kurt Volker's vision after his visit to Ukraine and European capitals. For his own part, the then US. Secretary of State noticed "some readiness of Russia to look for the ways of progress in Ukraine issues" after the meeting in Manila¹¹. On 18 August 2017, the U.S. Foreign Service finally confirmed that the first meeting of Kurt Volker and the Russian representative would take place in Minsk on 21 August¹².

It is worth mentioning that the meeting was of familiarizing nature, thus, was quite positive. Before the meeting the Special Representative set an objective only to find out the Russia's vision and not to persuade it to agree to relevant propositions¹³. The Russian party represented by the Assistant to the Russian President Vladislav Surkov remained satisfied with the meeting in Minsk on 21 August 2017, at which the parties exchanged their thoughts on how to implement the Minsk Agreements of 2015 on a practical level¹⁴. At the given stage, both the USA and Russia agreed that the preservation of the current status quo is unacceptable for them¹⁵. Such "consensus" strongly resembles the similar declarations made following the results of Normandy Quartet meeting at different levels. However, flaunty agreement in Minsk did not mean that further negotiations would also be so positive and effective.

On 23 August 2017, Kurt Volker came to Ukraine for the third time, after the visit to Lithuania. This was the time when the U.S. Special Representative started to actively communicate with Ukrainian, Russian, and European mass-media. This gave the Representative of the U.S. Department of State the possibility to better explain his position and to avoid its misinterpretation, as well as speculations about direct Washington-Moscow contacts concerning Ukraine. In a number of interviews at the end of August – the beginning of September 2017, Kurt Volker declared, inter alia, the necessity not to simply guarantee the

¹⁰ «Tillerson confirmed that the meeting of Volker and Surkov would take place in the nearest future», TASS - <http://tass.ru/politika/4465442>

¹¹ «Tillerson says U.S., Russia can settle problems, ease tension», Reuters - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-asean-philippines-usa-russia-idUSKBN1AN09B>

¹² «Special Representative Volker To Travel to Belarus, Lithuania, and Ukraine», Department of State - <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/08/273539.htm>

¹³ «Kremlin Envoy Played Central Role in Eastern Ukraine», WSJ - <https://www.wsj.com/articles/kremlin-envoy-played-central-role-in-eastern-ukraine-1503258417>

¹⁴ «Surkov called the meeting with Volker as "useful and constructive", TASS - <http://tass.ru/politika/4496200>

¹⁵ «Surkov-Volker meeting was of working and familiarizing nature», Interfax-Ukraine - <https://interfax.com.ua/news/political/443637.html>

KURT VOLKER – ONE YEAR ON WORLD STAGE

safety of local population of Donbass, but also “to search for the new approach to ensuring security in the region”¹⁶.

2. Russia’s Proposal for Peacekeepers – Development of U.S. Proposals in Response (September-October 2017)

On 5 September 2017, the President of Russia Vladimir Putin declared an idea about the necessity of involvement of UN peacekeepers for settlement of the conflict in Donbass¹⁷. In fact, this step was significant due to several reasons. It is indicative that as early as in August 2017, Russia was actively denying the necessity of bringing of “Blue Helmets” to assist the implementation of Minsk Agreements, as it had been offered by Ukraine since March 2015. Moreover, this offer of Russia may be considered as at least an attempt to respond to the message of Kurt Volker about the necessity to look for the new format to ensure security in Donbass, as well as an attempt to outmaneuver Ukraine, whose message has been: first, it is necessary to ensure security in the occupied part of Donbass, and only after – to talk about the implementation of the political part of Minsk Agreements.

The Vladimir Putin’s offer itself can only relatively be regarded as an initiative of deployment of the full-fledged UN peace-keeping mission in Donbass. Since in fact, the President of Russia offered to place peace-keepers only at the line of contact, and to use them to ensure the safety of SMM OSCE representatives within the scope of their work in the occupied territories. And Ukraine, according to Vladimir Putin, would have to contact with quasi-state formations for the purposes of such mission. However, in fact, implementation of the above-mentioned Russia’s proposal would only lead to freezing of the conflict in its current state, but not to its final settlement. Kurt Volker talked how important it was not to allow for such a scenario in August 2017. Despite all the drawbacks and weaknesses of the Russia’s proposal, Volker saw a chance for the final implementation of Minsk Agreements in the idea of Vladimir Putin.

As a result, the USA faced the necessity to develop and substantiate the counter-proposal in response to the initiative of the President of Russia. In fact, as early as on 13 September, the Spokesperson for the U.S. Department of State Heather Nauert declared that Washington stood for the UN peace-keeping mission with “broad mandate”¹⁸. This, inter alia, meant placing of peace-keepers all over the occupied territory of Donbass, which would prevent the further split of Ukraine. Moreover, the Spokesperson for the Department of State, when making her statement about the peace-keepers, clearly reminded of the role of Russia in ensuring the security in Donbass.

During his fourth visit to Ukraine in the mid-September 2017 to attend the Yalta European Strategy Conference, Kurt Volker came forward for the first time with an integral vision of what

¹⁶ “Kurt Volker” I do not see any difference between Russian invasion of Crimea and Donbass”, DW - <https://www.dw.com/uk/кyрт-волкер-я-не-бачу-різниці-між-російською-окупацією-криму-і-дoнбасу/a-40281807>

¹⁷ Press conference of Vladimir Putin by the results of BRICS Summit, web-site of the President of RF - <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/55535>

¹⁸ “The USA supported the idea of placing of UN peace-keepers in Donbass with “broad mandate” and at the border line with Russia”, Radio Svoboda - <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news/28734042.html>

the full-fledged UN peace-keeping mission in Donbass had to be like¹⁹, and of conditions that would make it real and worthy of support:

- ensuring of safety all over the territory of occupied Donbass;
- control over the Ukrainian part of the border-line with Russia;
- keeping and monitoring of heavy weapons²⁰.

This was the mission that would satisfy all the requirements of the USA and discover the way for political settlement. Moreover, at YES 2017, Kurt Volker clearly stated that partial fulfillment of Minsk Agreements would not lead to relief from sanctions. Only complete fulfillment of agreements along with restoration of Ukrainian sovereignty in Donbass can guarantee the cancellation of major economic restrictions. Such statement is of great significance, since the idea of concurrent step-by-step cancellation of sanctions in response to partial implementation of Minsk Agreements has been and remains popular, especially among a number of European politicians²¹.

On 21 September 2017, Petro Poroshenko met with Donald Trump within the framework of the UN General Assembly session. Kurt Volker was also present at the meeting from the U.S. part, which proves active engagement of the U.S. Special Representative in forming of American position concerning settlement of the conflict in Donbass²². After the meeting in New-York, the President of Ukraine said that the USA had supported the Ukrainian vision of the UN peace-keeping mission. This statement is true, since the Washington's position on this issue coincides with the Ukrainian point of view.

In fact, as soon as the American position concerning peace-keepers placing was developed, the main task for Kurt Volker was to try to persuade Russia to accept the common consolidated position of Ukraine and the West. The second meeting with Vladislav Surkov was of critical importance, since it could give the possibility to move to the practical discussion of the mandate of possible UN peace-keeping mission for Donbass. At the end of September 2017, the then U.S. Ambassador to RF John Tefft announced that the next meeting of the representatives of two countries would take place in Belgrade at the beginning of October 2017²³. In addition, the diplomat repeated again the official position of the USA concerning what the UN peace-keeping mission mandate had to be like to ensure its efficiency. After that,

¹⁹ «U.S. Ukraine Envoy Welcomes Russia Proposal For Peacekeepers, But Sees 'Obstacles'», RFE/RL - <https://www.rferl.org/a/volker-ukraine-russia-peacekeepers-united-nations-donetsk-luhansk/28739922.html>

²⁰ «Volker stated the Washington's requirements to peace-keepers in Donbass», Ukrainska Pravda - <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2017/09/16/7155392/>

²¹ «The USA will not relieve Russia from sanctions for partial implementation of Minsk Agreements – Volker», Ukrainska Pravda <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2017/09/16/7155397/>

²² «Meeting between the Presidents of Ukraine and USA: USA fully supports the proposals of Ukraine about the deployment of peacekeepers with the UN mandate in the occupied territory», Official website of the President of Ukraine - <http://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/ssha-povnistyu-pidtrimuyut-propoziciji-ukrayini-shodo-rozmis-43498>

²³ «John Tefft: We are ready to turn this page and move on», Kommersant - <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3423620>

KURT VOLKER – ONE YEAR ON WORLD STAGE

the close to Vladislav Surkov “informed sources” confirmed that the second meeting would take place in the capital of Serbia²⁴.

Before the meeting, Kurt Volker received the positive signal from the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, who by their voting for the Law No. 7164 On prolongation of special local government confirmed their intentions to continue to act within the framework of Minsk Agreements. This decision, according to the U.S. Special Representative, has proved that Ukraine takes uneasy steps for settlement of the conflict. Also, the Verkhovna Rada’s voting gave Kurt Volker the possibility to claim that it has come time for Russia now to adequately respond to Ukrainian actions.

On 7 October 2017, as it had been planned, the second meeting of Kurt Volker and Vladislav Surkov took place in the capital of Serbia. By its results, the Russian Representative said that progress was possible. In Surkov’s opinion, the majority of disagreements could be overcome²⁵. Post factum, Kurt Volker also pointed out that the first meeting in Belgrade had been positive, as compared to the second one which took place in November 2017. On 12 October 2017, there was a telephone conversation between Rex Tillerson and Sergey Lavrov. By its results, it has been agreed to continue communication between Vladislav Surkov and Kurt Volker²⁶. This confirms that in the mid-October 2017 the parties were still interested in continuation of the dialogue, although there were no practical results in the form of concrete agreements.

Moreover, October 2017 was marked with two important statements which directly influenced the negotiations with the participation of Kurt Volker. On the one part, the new U.S. Ambassador to Russia Jon Huntsman, having assumed the office, clearly stated that the restoration of the Ukrainian sovereignty in the East of the country is one of the two main conditions for normalization of relations between the USA and Russia²⁷. This gave high priority and particular significance to the mission and work of the U.S. Special Representative. On the other part, Vladimir Putin, speaking at the Valdai Forum, severely criticized the U.S. proposals concerning the mandate of possible UN peace-keeping mission in Donbass²⁸. According to him, the American proposals could potentially lead to repeating of the situation which took place in Srebrenica in 1995. Similar comparison was not accidental and proved that Kremlin does not want to change its attitude to the mission of “Blue Helmets”.

This position had an instant effect on further contacts between the USA and Russian Representatives. With his statement at Valdai Forum, Vladimir Putin created the red line before Vladislav Surkov, which the latter could not cross and step aside from the primary proposal of September 2017. In a similar way, later on Sergey Lavrov called the Kurt Volker’s ideas of

²⁴ “Meeting of Surkov and Volker takes place on Saturday in Serbia”, Interfax-Ukraine - <https://interfax.com.ua/news/general/452720.html>

²⁵ “Surkov has told about the negotiations with Volker”, RBC - <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/07/10/2017/59d9053b9a7947478a376f32>

²⁶ «Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s telephone conversation with US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson», Russian MFA - http://www.mid.ru/en/main_en/-/asset_publisher/G51iJnfMMNKX/content/id/2899176

²⁷ “Huntsman: Resuming Ukraine’s control over the border-lines is a high-priority task”, Voice of America - <https://www.golos-ameriki.ru/a/ap-bc-us-huntsman-ceremony-utah/4061423.html>

²⁸ Session of the International Valdai Discussion Club, official web-site of the President of RF - <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/55882>

implementation of Minsk Agreements with the help of UN peace-keeping mission an actual occupation and said that they contradict to these agreements as such²⁹. It is clear that such statements put in question the efficiency of future contacts between Kurt Volker and Vladislav Surkov.

Concurrently, on 27-28 October 2017, the U.S. Special Representative made the fifth visit to Ukraine³⁰. Within the framework of the visit, he carried out negotiations with all the major players who have impact on the peace process in Donbass. This meeting was important, since it gave Kurt Volker the possibility to demonstrate that there was no collusion between the USA and Russia in respect of Ukraine. To the contrary – Washington is ready to inform the Ukraine about all the details of negotiations and contacts with the Russian party.

3. Attempts to persuade Russian to accept the U.S. Position Concerning Peace-Keepers (November 2017 – January 2018)

We may say that this stage of work of the U.S. Special Representative was the key one. This period was characterized by the most active attempts to persuade Moscow through Vladislav Surkov to change its position concerning the UN peace-keeping mission mandate and to join the consolidated position of the USA, EU countries, and Ukraine.

On 13 November 2017, the third negotiations between the USA and Russian Representatives about the peace process in Donbass took place. Their goal, unlike the communication in August and October, was not the familiarization in general or with the idea of peace-keepers in particular, but the substantive discussion of the UN “Blue Helmets” mission mandate in Donbass³¹. The American delegation seriously prepared for these negotiations. First of all, Russian Representative was given the clear list of amendments to the Russian draft resolution of UN Security Council. Moreover, Kurt Volker came to the second negotiation with Vladislav Surkov with a concrete proposal about the deployment of the UN peace-keeping mission numbering 20 thousand of people.³²

However, the negotiations in Belgrade turned out to be a complete fiasco. According to Kurt Volker, Russia, in fact, made a step back in its position and completely returned to the proposals of September 2017. Russia was ready to accept only three out of 29 paragraphs of the U.S. proposals on the hypothetical resolution of the UNSC³³. The parties agreed to continue consultations and acknowledged that it was necessary to fulfill Minsk Agreements. Such formulations are usually used to hide deep contradictions in the vision of the way of

²⁹ “Lavrov: The USA want to “occupy” Donbass with peace-keepers”, Ukrainska Pravda - <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2017/10/31/7160229/>

³⁰ “Vitaliy Chervonenko: “Volker’s fifth visit: what is to be discussed?”, BBC Ukraine - <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-41776479>

³¹ «U.S. and Russia to Renew Talks on Peacekeeping Force for Ukraine», Bloomberg - <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-11-03/u-s-and-russia-to-renew-talks-on-peacekeeping-force-for-ukraine>

³² «U.S. to Seek Russian Approval for Peacekeepers in Eastern Ukraine», WSJ - <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-to-seek-russian-approval-for-peacekeepers-in-eastern-ukraine-1510258304>

³³ “Surkov regards some of the U.S. proposals to the resolution of UN mission in Donbass to be acceptable”, TASS - <http://tass.ru/politika/4726008>

KURT VOLKER – ONE YEAR ON WORLD STAGE

settlement of problem. Russia continued to promote the idea of concurrent implementation of Minsk Agreements – Ukraine had to fulfill the political items, and illegal state formations – security steps. The USA technically supported the idea of combining of these steps³⁴. But, if to be guided by the further statements of Kurt Volker, the USA regarded this as a sequence of actions totally different from that of Russia. Washington continued to insist on a step-by-step and not a concurrent process of implementation of Minsk Agreements. The key requirement was as follows: the Russian troops had to leave the territory of Donbass before coming of the UN peace-keeping mission which could create relevant safety conditions for Ukraine to implement the political part of the agreements. After that the “Blue Helmets” along with the transitional authority would be able to ensure fulfillment of political provisions undertaken in February 2015³⁵. Meantime, Vladislav Surkov continued to insist after the meeting on that only the Russian plan concerning peace-keepers could bring back peace to Donbass³⁶. In fact, on 19 December 2017, the Spokesperson for the U.S. Department of State recognized that there were significant contradictions between Washington and Moscow concerning the UN peace-keeping mission mandate.

On 23 January 2018, the U.S. Special Representative came to Ukraine for the sixth time. Within the framework of his visit, he gave a favorable assessment of the recently approved by the Verkhovna Rada Law “On special aspects of state policy for ensuring of Ukraine’s sovereignty over the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions”. Moreover, there appeared a new thesis in public rhetoric of Kurt Volker pointing out that Ukraine was taking all the possible and necessary political steps to ensure the implementation of Minsk Agreements³⁷. At the same time, the final implementation of these steps depends only on the future security actions of Russia – such as withdrawal of its troops from ORDLO (certain districts of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions), and agreement to full-scale UN peace-keeping mission who would also disarm the local mercenaries.

The mentioned statements became milestone at the background of the fourth meeting of Kurt Volker with Russian Representative which, this time, was held in Dubai on 26 January 2018. Within the framework of these negotiations, the parties disagreed on the assessment of the Law “On special aspects of state policy for ensuring of Ukraine’s sovereignty over the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions”³⁸. The USA and Russia did not manage to agree on this issue. Although, Kurt Volker supported the mentioned law, saying that it called the things as they were. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that following the negotiations, Vladislav Surkov said that Russia liked the U.S. proposals articulated in Dubai (Dubai Package). However, after the meeting, the Russian party spread the information that the

³⁴ Meeting between U.S. Special Representative Volker and Russian Presidential Representative Surkov, US Embassy in Russia - <https://ru.usembassy.gov/statement-u-s-special-representative-volker-russian-presidential-representative-surkov/>

³⁵ SUSAN B. GLASSER «Kurt Volker: The Full Transcript», POLITICO - <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/11/27/kurt-volker-the-full-transcript-215868>

³⁶ “Vladislav Surkov: Another meeting with Volker is planned to take place at the beginning of the next year”, TASS - <http://tass.ru/opinions/interviews/4771693>

³⁷ Yana Polianska: “Putin still can change the strategy in respect of Ukraine – Kurt Volker (exclusive interview)”, Radio Svoboda - <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/28994532.html>

³⁸ “Surkov and Volker did not manage to come to an agreement in respect of the Ukrainian law on Donbass”, Interfax - <http://www.interfax.ru/russia/597307>

USA had agreed on the ideas of Russia concerning the necessity of the concurrent implementation of Minsk Agreements³⁹. In the end, Russia promised to study in detail the U.S. proposals and to return to their consideration in the future.

4. Crisis in Volker-Surkov Negotiations Channel (February – July 2018)

As it turned out, the negotiations between the USA and RF Representatives in Dubai were the last ones. However, there appeared some messages about possible new negotiations in February 2018 in mass media. Such pause in the dialogue was first explained by the presidential campaign in Russia⁴⁰. But it has not returned to consideration of proposals, and what is more – has not given any substantial answer. To the contrary, people close to Vladislav Surkov were saying in June 2018 that Russia was waiting for the U.S. response to its proposals for peace-keepers⁴¹. Now, the date of the next meeting and whether it will bring any concrete results is still in question.

Despite the absence of any contacts and negotiations with Russian representatives, Kurt Volker continued to promote the American idea for settlement of the situation in Donbass. First of all, this was about active communication of the U.S. position. At the end of January 2018, when talking to journalists, the U.S. Representative sent a clear message that the so-called U.S. consent to concurrent implementation of Minsk Agreements did not correspond to reality⁴². To the contrary – Kurt Volker continued supporting the idea of the role of UN peace-keepers which had been articulated by him for the first time in September 2017. Kurt Volker continued the practice of active interaction with mass media through exclusive interviews and communication via press-centers⁴³. In addition to active communication with mass media, the U.S. Special Representative also took part in think tanks' events, promoting the idea of settlement of conflict in Donbass with the help of UN peace-keepers⁴⁴.

Simultaneously, on 14 May 2018 the U.S. Special Representative made the seventh during less than a year visit to Ukraine and visited Donbass for the second time⁴⁵. This visit was of great importance because it gave the possibility to pay attention to the state of affairs in front-line area, and to various problems the local population was dealing with due to the armed aggression. In such a way Kurt Volker is trying to show the world that the problem of conflict in Donbass is still burning and requires settlement. During the press-conference after the visit, the

³⁹ "Surkov: New U.S. proposals concerning Ukraine seem to be feasible", TASS - <http://tass.ru/politika/4907699>

⁴⁰ "Kurt Volker: "Javelins" will be the part of assistance, but we are talking about much more", European Truth - <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/interview/2018/02/21/7077815/>

⁴¹ "Moscow is waiting for Volker's written proposals concerning UN mission in Donbass", Interfax - <http://www.interfax.ru/world/615949>

⁴² Telephonic Press Briefing with Ambassador Volker, Special Representative for Ukraine Negotiations, Department of State - <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/ime/useuropeanmediahub/277755.htm>

⁴³ Telephonic Press Briefing with Ambassador Volker, Special Representative for Ukraine Negotiations, Department of State - <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/ime/useuropeanmediahub/282501.htm>

⁴⁴ «Reuniting Ukraine through International Cooperation: Options in Donbas», Hudson Institute - <https://www.hudson.org/events/1531-reuniting-ukraine-through-international-cooperation-options-in-donbas32018>

⁴⁵ "Kurt Volker in Donbass: I have been stunned with the strength of peoples' spirit here", Radio Svoboda - <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/donbass-realii/29228598.html>

KURT VOLKER – ONE YEAR ON WORLD STAGE

U.S. Special Representative spoke again about the idea of settlement of the conflict in the East of Ukraine with the help of UN peace-keeping mission.

During the above period, on 6 April 2018, the U.S. Treasury Department introduced additional sanctions against seven Russian oligarchs and 17 state officials and related companies⁴⁶. This step is regarded as the Donald Trump's Administration's attempt to show the Congress and internal political opponents that the White House is determined to implement the "Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act" (CAATSA) provisions. Introduced restrictions were also important because they showed the real potential of pressure on Russia. In particular, immediately after introduction of sanctions the Russian Stock Exchange experienced almost the most serious fall-down during the last years, which is comparable to the fall of 2014⁴⁷. Moreover, the possibility of future economic restrictions, in fact, resulted in large-scale termination of corporate and state loans in April-June 2018⁴⁸. According to estimates of certain banks, several rounds of such sanctions, which would force the Russian Government to intervene to support relevant economic sectors, would be too much for Russia⁴⁹. However, the U.S. Government confined itself to demonstration of instruments of increase of price for aggression against Ukraine and continuation of conflict in Donbass, whereof Kurt Volker was constantly speaking and emphasizing during his activity in capacity of the U.S. Permanent Representative.

U.S. Bargaining Position on Settlement of Conflict in Donbass

The U.S. key positions on settlement of conflict in Donbass were formulated by Kurt Volker after his visits and negotiations which took place in July-November 2017. First of all, the U.S. Special Representative proceeds from the premise that the desire of Russia to have an influence on Ukraine is a normal state of things in the international relations. But, the practical steps in the form of invasion and annexation of Crimea, as well as aggression in Donbass led to results exactly opposite to those expected by Moscow⁵⁰. Hence, instead of joining the Russian integration formations, Ukraine took the course for NATO and EU. Moreover, aggression has become the grounds for rise of national consciousness in Ukraine, which is based, to a significant extent, on anti-Russian feelings. In such a way, Russia has lost Ukraine for a long time due to its policy.

In addition to internal consolidation in Ukraine due to need to counteract to the current policy of Russia, since 2014 Kremlin has been facing with the joint position of the USA and European countries who have not accepted the Russian policy. This has been expressed, first of all, in the form of sanctions. At the same time, the dreams of Russia for cancellation of sanctions

⁴⁶ «Ukraine-/Russia-related Designations and Identification Update», OFAC - <https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/OFAC-Enforcement/Pages/20180406.aspx>

⁴⁷ "Stock exchange crash, loss of billions – new U.S. sanctions in action, BBC - <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-43659843>

⁴⁸ "Sanctions stopped loans" - Kommersant - <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3619212>

⁴⁹ «Moody's: Russian bank system will be able to stand another wave of U.S. sanctions», Kommersant - <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3651177>

⁵⁰ «Ukraine crisis will 'cripple' Russia-US relations, envoy warns», Financial Times - <https://www.ft.com/content/c725eb8c-89aa-11e7-8bb1-5ba57d47eff7>

after elections in the USA and France in 2016-2017 did not come true. Therefore, Moscow still has to exist under the economic pressure⁵¹.

Another significant point of the U.S. position on conflict settlement which has been articulated by Kurt Volker is that: the only place where the safety of ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking population of Ukraine is under threat is the occupied territories of Donbass and close-to-front area⁵². In view of this there is a paradox – Russia justifies its aggression against Ukraine by the need to protect the Russian-speaking population, but it is its aggression that jeopardizes safety the most. However, on the other part, Kurt Volker has emphasized several times that any efficient settlement of conflict should guarantee safety of people irrespective their ethnic origin or religious identity⁵³.

At the end of August 2017, there appeared a new thesis about the necessity to find “a new approach to ensuring security” in the occupied territories of Donbass in Kurt Volker’s public rhetoric⁵⁴. That is why the U.S. Special Representative favorably accepted the Russian proposal for UN peace-keeping mission. In Kurt Volker’s opinion, the main problem of Minsk Agreements as an instrument for conflict settlement is the prioritization issue – which part to implement first: the political or the security one. Russia stands for the political one, while Ukraine in a well-argued manner stands for the necessity to create relevant safety conditions. Therefore, the UN peace-keeping mission with relevant mandate and number could break this vicious circle of reciprocal claims of both parties relating to what provisions of Minsk Agreements should be implemented first⁵⁵. According to the U.S. Special Representative, the peace-keeping mission should, first of all, protect depots of weapons which should be given up, and to disarm local mercenary squads. Before that, Russia should withdraw its troops from Donbass. Only in such a way the UN “Blue Helmets” could have the possibility to create conditions for the final implementation of the political part of Minsk Agreements.

The important aspect of Volker’s position is that Ukraine should not seek for agreement with local quasi-state formations, which Russia is constantly insisting on⁵⁶. Placement of peace-

⁵¹ “Kurt Volker: The USA can tell Putin: If You want – we can help, if You don’t want – we can guarantee that you will only get worse”, Mirror Weekly - https://dt.ua/internal/kurt-volker-ssha-mozhut-skazati-putinu-yakscho-hochete-mi-mozhemo-dopomogti-yakscho-ne-hochete-mi-mozhemo-garantuvati-scho-vam-stane-girshe-254938_.html

⁵² “Russia has gone too far with its military presence in Ukraine”, Gazeta.ru - https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2017/10/05_a_10919504.shtml

⁵³ “It is necessary to withdraw Russian troops from Donbass”: U.S. Special Representative Volker talking about the results of the meeting with Surkov”, Dozhd - <https://tvrain.ru/teleshov/interview/volker-442955/>

⁵⁴ “Kurt Volker: I cannot see any difference between Russian invasion of Crimea and Donbass”, DW - <https://www.dw.com/uk/кyрт-волкeр-я-не-бачу-рiзницi-мiж-росiйською-окупациєю-кpимy-i-дoнбасу/a-40281807>

⁵⁵ Myroslava Gongadze: “Kurt Volker: Putin is at the head. Surkov’s role is to propose a plan”, Voice of America - <https://ukrainian.voanews.com/a/volker-dumaju-rol-surkova-zaproponuvaty-plan/4044564.html>

⁵⁶ “Kurt Volker: The USA can tell Putin: If You want – we can help, if You don’t want – we can guarantee that You will only get worse”, Mirror Weekly - <https://dt.ua/internal/kurt-volker-ssha-mozhut-skazati->

KURT VOLKER – ONE YEAR ON WORLD STAGE

keeping mission depends only on the dialogue between Ukraine and Russia, and European intermediaries involved. Another Volker's permanent thesis is that the conflict in Donbass is not a civil war or internal ethnic conflict, but a result of Russian aggression. Therefore, UN peace-keeping mission could give Russian the possibility to come out from Donbass with minimal image damage and to terminate the conflict, which does not allow Moscow to reach the key goals of effective influence on Ukraine, and only leads to counter-efficient results⁵⁷.

Kurt Volker has determined that his primary task is to persuade Vladimir Putin through Vladislav Surkov to terminate the conflict in Donbass and to save the face with the help of the UN peace-keeping mission. In such a way, Kremlin should understand that with its current behavior Russia only damages its national interests concerning Ukraine. On the other part, Kurt Volker was constantly aware of that Russia had the resources to continue its presence in Donbass and to transform the confrontation in the East of Ukraine into another frozen conflict in the post-Soviet region⁵⁸. Thus, only the change in thoughts of Kremlin, assessment of state and prospects of the conflict in Donbass can lead to its termination. According to Kurt Volker, if to change the Russian position, the conflict in the East of Ukraine could be settled in several months⁵⁹. Therefore, it has to make a strategic decision – to refuse of further aggression in Donbass, or to go on and to continue to pay for it and not to achieve its main goal of efficient influence on Ukraine⁶⁰.

Main Achievements of U.S. Special Representative for Ukraine

For over a year of work on the post, Kurt Volker has not reached the main goal – to settle the Ukraine-Russia conflict in Donbass. However, we cannot say that the work of the U.S. Special Representative has not had any practical results or positive effect.

1. Change in Paradigm of Thoughts and Perception of Conflict in the East of Ukraine

With his statements, Kurt Volker promoted the change in perception of conflict in Donbass. As a matter of fact, he was the first among the Western mediators who started talking clearly about the reason of the conflict – Russian aggression against Ukraine. Similarly, according to the U.S. Special Representative, the main obstacle for settlement of conflict in Donbass is the continued presence of Russia in Donbass. Moreover, he clearly characterized so-called DPR and LPR as puppet formations totally controlled by Moscow.

putinu-yakscho-hochete-mi-mozhemo-dopomogti-yakscho-ne-hochete-mi-mozhemo-garantuvati-scho-vam-stane-girshe-254938_.html

⁵⁷ U.S. Special Representative for Ukraine Negotiations Kurt Volker, Department of State - <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/11/275298.htm>

⁵⁸ « Ukraine crisis will 'cripple' Russia-US relations, envoy warns», Financial Times - <https://www.ft.com/content/c725eb8c-89aa-11e7-8bb1-5ba57d47eff7>

⁵⁹ "Russian troops should be withdrawn from Donbass": U.S. Special Representative Volker about the results of meeting with Surkov", Dozhd - <https://tvrain.ru/teleshov/interview/volker-442955/>

⁶⁰ "For UN peace-keepers to come to Donbass, Russia has to withdraw its forces", - U.S. Special Representative Kurt Volker", Public TV - <https://hromadske.ua/posts/specposlannik-ssha-po-ukraini-pro-mirotvorchu-misiyu-na-donbasi>

These statements are important due to several reasons. First of all, they have considerably eliminated the Russia's narrative concerning conflict in Donbass, which was positioned by Moscow as an internal one, and Russia itself was only acting as a mediator. Grounding on such characteristic of the conflict, Moscow tried to settle it through incorporation of quasi-state formations into Ukraine and preservation of Russian control over them. However, the respective characteristic of the conflict by Kurt Volker significantly reduced the chances for realization of the Russian scenario for implementation of Minsk Agreements.

On the other part, the adequate characteristic of the state of affairs in Donbass made the approval of the Law "On special aspects of state policy for ensuring of Ukraine's sovereignty over the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions" look more convincing and justified. The formulations in the document concerning Russia as an occupying force completely coincided with the rhetoric of relevant statements of Kurt Volker. In fact, the U.S. Special Representative claimed that this Act adopted in January 2018 was showing the actual state of affairs⁶¹.

In such a context it was not a surprise that the relevant position of Kurt Volker and his openness to mass media became the object for constant criticism from Russia, since the U.S. Special Representative was ruining its plans for Ukraine with his statements⁶².

2. Active Communication of U.S. Position

Kurt Volker's openness to mass media, participation in a great number of events, and his general publicity should be specially mentioned. With his behavior, the U.S. Special Representative significantly contrasts to his predecessor Victoria Nuland who used to avoid public statements and preferred to act behind the scenes. Such methods of Victoria Nuland often led to incorrect interpretation of American position. On the other part, the current U.S. Representative's active communication allows to avoid negative speculations concerning Washington's position, and confirms his thesis that no settlement of conflict in Donbass will take place at the account of Ukraine's national interests.

3. Reminding of the Problem of Crimea

Since the main efforts in negotiations are directed to settlement of conflict in Donbass, the problem of Crimea is constantly receding into the background. However, Kurt Volker in his statements expressed two main positions concerning the occupied peninsula. To his mind, occupation and annexation of Crimea and aggression in Donbass are equivalent, and should not be disunited or forgotten⁶³. Moreover, the U.S. Special Representative excluded any possibility of recognition of Crimea annexation in exchange for Russian concessions in

⁶¹ Yana Polianska: "Putin cannot change strategy concerning Ukraine – Kurt Volker (exclusive interview)", Radio Svoboda - <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/28994532.html>

⁶² "Volker should stop his talking diplomacy", Gazeta.ru - https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2018/04/18_a_11720875.shtml

⁶³ U.S. Special Representative for Ukraine Negotiations Kurt Volker, Department of State - <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/11/275298.htm>

KURT VOLKER – ONE YEAR ON WORLD STAGE

Donbass issue in his statements⁶⁴. In general, his reminding of the Crimean problem allows to raise important questions connected with occupation of the peninsula by RF.

4. Updating of Donbass Issues and Popularization of the Idea of UN Peace-Keepers

Two visits of Kurt Volker to Donbass allowed to remind the world what the consequences of the long-term aggression of Russian in the East of Ukraine are. So far as, similarly to Crimean issue, the Donbass case has to actively compete for the attention of mass media and international community with other urgent problems and crisis phenomena in the world politics. As a result, the direct visit to the close-to-front area gave the possibility to remind the world that the conflict in Donbass is still on and needs settlement, since its continuation means further victims, destruction, and damages.

For this reason, the current U.S. Special Representative has not only developed an overall plan for settlement of the conflict in Donbass, but has also undertaken its active popularization in the USA and Europe. This has been done not only through a great number of interviews, but also through his participation in public events of various think tanks and negotiations with the key international players. Active discussion of the problem of UN peace-keeping mission in Donbass by expert centers started and became the subject of behind-the-scene discussions during the Munich Security Conference. According to Ukrainian estimates, as of April 2018 about 40 countries declared their readiness to send their peace-keepers to Donbass. Such active discussions and statements are proving that the peace-keepers idea itself is becoming more and more popular⁶⁵.

5. Standing up for the Necessity to Give Lethal Defense Weapons to Ukraine

One of the main statements constantly articulated by Kurt Volker consists in support of reasonability of giving lethal defense weapons to Ukraine⁶⁶. He has emphasized that it would not be a provocative step which could result in escalation. To the contrary – strengthening of Ukrainian defense ability could make Russia change its position and open the way for attempts to find the compromise in Donbass. Such arguments allowed for the change of USA's attitude to giving the lethal defense weapons to Ukraine. Finally, in April 2018 official Kyiv received first American antitank missile systems Javelin, the public trial of which took place in the following month.

⁶⁴ "Kurt Volker: "I do not see any difference between Russian invasion of Crimea and Donbass", DW - <https://www.dw.com/uk/курт-волкер-я-не-бачу-різниці-між-російською-окупацією-криму-і-донбасу/a-40281807>

⁶⁵ "Poroshenko: Over 40 countries are ready to participate in UN peace-keeping mission in Donbass", UNIAN - <https://www.unian.ua/politics/10080494-poroshenko-ponad-40-krajin-gotovi-vztyati-uchast-v-mirotvorchiy-misiji-oon-na-donbasi.html>

⁶⁶ «US considering arms to Ukraine, says envoy Volker», BBC - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-40712385>

Main Barriers for Kurt Volker's Plan Implementation

1. Not Completely Developed U.S. Strategy on Russia

For 18 months of Donald Trump Administration in office, the White House has not managed to develop a consistent and non-contradictory policy concerning Russia with a relevant attention to the idea of settlement of the Ukraine-Russia confrontation in Donbass. The main reason for this is that the U.S. President himself and his Government have different opinions on the relations with Moscow, which leads to contradictory and ambiguous signals. Donald Trump's constant desire to normalize the relations with Russia significantly damages the policy of pressure on Moscow which the Republican Administration has not only inherited but also intensified in many ways. As a result, having such contradictory signals from Washington, Kremlin does not make a strategic decision to withdraw its forces from Donbass, whereof Kurt Volker was speaking.

This is accompanied by the institutional weakness of Donald Trump's Administration, as well as by the confrontation with the Congress in respect of Russia-related policy. American President's Administration does not show much enthusiasm for implementation of Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, considering it as an intervention with prerogatives of executive power. As a result, the U.S. Special Representative thesis about the increase in price Russia will pay for aggression against Ukraine often has no practical sense. Finally, the post of Kurt Volker was created under the Department of State, and he is accountable to the Secretary of State. Such hierarchy decreases the persuasive power of Kurt Volker statements in the eyes of Russians, as compared to scenario when the U.S. Special Representative would be accountable directly to the President and actively cooperating with them in efforts to settle the conflict in Donbass.

2. Contradictory Position of EU Countries

Technically, France and Germany supported the American and not the Russian position on the mandate of possible UN peace-keeping mission in Donbass. However, in their statements, the EU countries representatives were not so categorical as Kurt Volker. This creates an illusion for Russia that there is a chance to persuade the European countries to support the Russian idea of implementation of Minsk Agreements with time. Such impression is created due to statements that it is worth trying to partially cancel sanctions in response to Moscow's steps for implementation of agreements of 2015. Similarly, the statements of the Western European countries concerning the Russian policy in respect of neighboring countries do not help to create an adequate impression of the joint position of NATO countries. We are talking about the President of France Emmanuel Macron's statements at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum 2018. Such contradictory signals from Europe undercut bargaining positions of the U.S. Special Representative, which are grounded on the necessity to preserve the consolidated position of the West.

3. Unwillingness of Kremlin to Make Tactical Rearrangement

Finally, the main obstacle for implementation of the plan of settlement of conflict in Donbass offered by Kurt Volker is unwillingness of the Russian leadership to modify their position. Public statements of Vladimir Putin, Sergey Lavrov and other Russian representatives demonstrate total unwillingness to admit that aggression in Donbass turned out to be inefficient, and Russia has to reconsider its ideas of this issue. This position makes a contrast to ideas arising among

KURT VOLKER – ONE YEAR ON WORLD STAGE

some Russian experts that Moscow should have at least make a tactical rearrangement on the global stage. This should include the withdrawal from Donbass⁶⁷. However, the current situation is that Russia has decided not to change its strategical decision in the mentioned region. At the same time, as Kurt Volker has mentioned, it is impossible to force it to leave the East of Ukraine. This can only happen after the reassessment of the current policy and understanding of its inefficiency.

Conclusions

The year after the appointment of Kurt Volker for the post of U.S. Special Representative for Ukraine Negotiations did not show much progress in settlement of Ukraine-Russia conflict in Donbass. However, within July 2017 – July 2018, U.S. Special Representative managed to create a qualitatively new approach to settlement of conflict in Donbass. Moreover, during the major part of this time, Volker-Surkov channel was the only forum for active discussion of the vectors of possible settlement of conflict, while France and Germany were pursuing their own interests.

During this period, owing to the U.S. Special Representative's position, the approach to characterizing of the events in Donbass significantly changed. Active discussions of the problems of Ukrainian East and Crimea on the global level started again. Idea of UN peace-keeping mission became the subject for not only active discussions of experts but for interstate dialogues as well. During this period, Ukraine received the first portion of lethal defense weapons from USA. Another Kurt Volker's achievement is that his style of communication gave the possibility to prevent any speculations concerning Washington's policy in respect of Ukraine-Russia conflict.

However, due to Russian unwillingness to admit that its policy in Donbass is a dead-end road and to make tactical rearrangement, the further staying of Kurt Volker in the position of U.S. Special Representative for Ukraine Negotiations is in question. In November 2017, he estimated the chance of preservation of the current state of affairs in Donbass in one year as 80%. Nevertheless, even in case of disestablishment of his post, we may expect that Kurt Volker will receive new post in the U.S. Government that will be connected with our region, due to his experience gained during the last year, and significant staff shortage in Donald Trump's Administration.

⁶⁷ Dmitriy Trenin "Understand Ukraine", Russia in global politics" - <http://www.globalaffairs.ru/number/Ponyat-Ukrainu-19123>