

## THE MERGER OF CRIMEA INTO RUSSIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE POST-SOVIET STATES

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### **Abstract**

*The study probes into the causes and effects of Ukrainian crisis and merger of Crimea into Russia. It also endeavours to examine the implications for post-Soviet states. It is pointed out that external forces' competition of power combined with internal political conflicts have triggered the Ukrainian crisis and resulted into the fragmentation of Ukraine. Here, the entrenched causes of hostility between Russia and Ukraine are studied in the context of Eurasianism. An effort is made in addition to highlight Russia's foreign policy towards the post-Soviet republics in which Moscow seeks the support of the latter in the wake of the Ukraine crisis. Moscow's grand strategy to exert influence on the ex-Soviet Union states and protect the Russian-speaking population in and around Russia was a prima facie case to merge Crimea. Therefore, the logic of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) approach serves as a good pretext to cover Russia's action in Ukraine. Subsequently, the former Soviet states have come to adopt wary approach towards Russia. Finally, the paper will offer a futuristic outlook of Russian relations with the post-Soviet states.*

**Keywords:** Merger, Eurasianism, Russia, R2P, Post-Soviet States, Crimea, Ukraine, Russia.

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## Introduction

The Post-Soviet Republics are on a new trajectory where Russia's influence is no more same as it was in the past. Yet Eurasian conception is still popular within Russia where its new worldview is justified in Russia but criticized in the West. In this backdrop, Ukraine crisis has appeared as a showground between *Eurasianists* and *anti-Eurasianists*. The paper aims to investigate the causes and effects of the merger of Crimea with Russia. Moreover, it delves into emanating challenges and prospects of Russia's annexation of Crimea are under review. The effects of the crisis are strong in the post-Soviet states and the region. East-West rivalry is changing the contour of the foreign policies of these states. Moreover, realpolitik is an important part of Kremlin's policy in pursuit of the great power status.

Russia's interventions in Georgia (2008) and later in Ukraine (2013) were rationalized as acts of protecting the minority groups in these states. However, both intrusions were internationally construed as driven by strategic impulses than humanitarian considerations. The Russian intervention in Ukraine has not only undermined the territorial integrity of adjacent states but also signalled imperialist approach for reviving influence in these states. Nevertheless, this development has elicited strong reaction leading to angst in the post-Soviet region. Besides, some states have strongly leaned towards the West for guarding their territorial integrity and containing Russian influence.

Moscow's stance over the merger of territories of Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia had led to a division between Russia and the West and a friction has appeared between Russia, China and other members of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) too.<sup>1</sup> Despite the desire of some countries and opposition party of Russia to propagate a negative image, it was observed that United Russia (political party) got more cohesion and that was visible in Duma's elections (September 2016), when United Russia secured the highest turnout.<sup>2</sup> In this way, Moscow internationally conveyed its stance that it has a right to defend Russian nationals beyond its own territory and that use of force was legitimate and needed to protect ethnic Russians.

On the other hand, the Western perspective of Ukraine crisis is that it has exposed resurgence of imperial Russia and sensitizes post-Soviet states as they have sizeable Russian population. This paradox is ominous of a new rivalry in which West is trying to make Russia economically and politically weak. Implications of the aforesaid crisis are acute for the post-Soviet states

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<sup>1</sup> Janusz Bugajski and Margarita Assenova, *Eurasian Disunion: Russia's Vulnerable Flanks* (Washington DC: The Jamestown Foundation, 2016), 392.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Bodner and Mikhail Fishman, "Elections 2016: An Overwhelming Victory for the Kremlin" *The Moscow Times*, (September 19, 2016).

such as Central Asian Republics (CARs), dependent on Russia with their economies, are directly affected due to its imposed economic embargoes. Although CARs loyalty to Russia is due to the economic interests, yet the use of force has made them, as other post-Soviet republics, apprehensive.

Some scholars pronounce Russia will make another move to further redraw the map of post-Soviet republics by incorporating other Russian-speaking regions. Whereas others believe that Russia's mission has more or less ended with the annexation of Crimea and its ambitions will be limited. Further, Putin's actions find new worldview in the post-imperial complex of Russia, first; rebuilding of Russia by binding together the lost territories. Second; start of a new Cold war between East and West.

This paper endeavours to find answers to some of these questions; to what limit Russia can go in pursuing its interests in the post-Soviet region? What challenges is it facing in the wake of the Crimea's merger? Can these post-Soviet states resist Russian encroachment in future? A detailed reading of sources including journal and newspaper articles, books, official websites and social media are used for information and analysis. Thus, this paper endeavours to analyse Russia's changing political dynamics and its effects on the post-Soviet region.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In the words of J. Mankoff, Russia wanted to establish itself as a powerful state of the world.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, due to contested politics of Eurasia, Russia faces a lot of problems in the pursuit of this coveted great power status. As the central state of the Eurasian region, it considers itself a responsible security guarantor to many regional weak states. This self-positioning of Russia in the heart of Eurasia provides some degree of logic to Russia's *Eurasianist* ideology. The *Eurasianists* rely on a powerful Russia (working together with all those who oppose *Atlanticism*) will bring about the multipolar world they want. *Eurasianism* is meant to thwart *Atlanticism*<sup>4</sup> which signifies another type of union of European and American nations. It was based on a historical Eurasian movement of Russian émigré community (1920) which opposed forces of modernity and stood for Eurasian traditionalism.<sup>5</sup> Hence, the ideas of Aleksandr Dugin, intended to curb US

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<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey Mankoff, *Russian Foreign policy: The Return of Great Power Politics* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Alexander Dugin, *Eurasian Mission: An Introduction to Neo-Eurasianism* (Arktos Media, 2014), 43.

<sup>5</sup> Tatiana Zhurzhenko, *Borderlands into Bordered Lands: Geopolitics of Identity in Post-Soviet Ukraine* (Stuttgart: ibidem Press, 2014), 44.

hegemony, became a popular work in Russia.<sup>6</sup> In order to maintain its centrality, Russia always prefers to be a hegemon. The *Eurasianists* envision Russia's re-emergence as a world power, by influencing the post-Soviet region, in opposition to liberal views of West. Russia acted according to the assumptions in its self-defined philosophy i.e. *Eurasianism* and moved to rebuild the former Soviet area is headed by the Crimea's merger with Russia<sup>7</sup>. This hypothesis is widely discussed by Aleksandr Dugin in his work *The Fourth Political Theory*.<sup>8</sup> Eventually, his ideas galvanized politics of Russia and termed West its main opponent. Russian Political figures, incumbent head of state and ruling Duma party United Russia, are all inspired by the *Eurasianists*.

Ostensibly, *Eurasianism* motivated Russia to pursue its objectives through the use of force. In John Mearsheimer's words "it is difficult to get global hegemony due to geographical features of our planet; however, the state might pursue regional hegemony instead."<sup>9</sup> Thus, in order to establish regional hegemony, the strategic significance of Crimea provides a clue to Russia's military actions of 2013. Moreover, Russia calls the military action of 2013, a legal move to protect the Russian speaking minority in Ukraine and used the justification of the principle of Responsibility to Protect (R2P).<sup>10</sup>

### **Causes of the Merger of Crimea**

Russia remained politically dormant in post-Soviet space from independence until 2000 due to its internal problems. NATO's enlargement (the 1990s) and later coloured revolutions in Georgia (2003) and Ukraine (2004) persuaded Kremlin to reassert itself in the traditional area of interest.<sup>11</sup> Russia eventually started to warm its relations with its old republics to dislodge the US influence in the post-Soviet area. In order to

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<sup>6</sup> Alexander Dugin, *Foundations of Geopolitics* (Moscow: Arktogeya, 1997). The book is popular in Russia and laid out geopolitical agenda.

<sup>7</sup> Niraj Kumar, *Asia in the Post-Western Age* (New Delhi: Knowledge World, 2014), 03.

<sup>8</sup> Aleksandr Dugin, *The Fourth Political Theory* (London: Arktos, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 308.

<sup>10</sup> The UN reading of the three pillars of R2P is 1: states carry the primary responsibility for protecting populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing; 2: the international community has a responsibility to encourage and assist states in fulfilling this responsibility, 3: responsibility to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian means to protect populations from these crimes. If a state is manifestly failing to protect its population, the international community must take collective action to protect populations, in accordance with the UN Charter, <http://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/adviser/responsibility.shtml>.

<sup>11</sup> David Svarin, "The construction of 'geopolitical spaces' in Russian foreign policy discourse before and after the Ukraine Crisis" *Journal of Eurasian Studies*: 7 (2016), 132.

expand its influence, Moscow confronted opposition groups in many parts of the post-Soviet states such. In case of the merger of Crimea, Ukraine sought to hinder the Russian influence by using its diplomatic power however, troubled region eventually became part of Russia. As Russia wants to acquire sphere of influence in its neighbourhood for security reasons, it appears that several factors had been involved in the merger of Crimea into Russia. Economic, ideological and political confrontation triggered the Ukrainian crisis and manifest causes of the Crimean merger.

### **I. Geopolitical Importance of Ukraine and Crimea**

The geopolitical salience of Ukraine is its geography; it is situated in the southwest of Russia and strongly linked geographically as well as historically with Russia. Apart from ethnic identity linkages, their interdependence helped forge strong ties. Ukraine provided energy transit routes to Russia for the supply of oil and gas to Europe and its territory had been used for creating nuclear weapons.<sup>12</sup> Eventually, Kiev got close to Moscow and despite fear of Russia's dominance; it became the founding member of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Ukraine was the first post-Soviet state, joined NATO's Partnership for Peace Program (NATO's PFP) in 1994.<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, Kiev remained important to Moscow even after its membership of European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), European Union (EU) offers to some of its neighbours. As a matter of fact, the geopolitical importance of this region was largely due to Crimea where two-thirds of the population called themselves Russians. The Crimean Peninsula located on the north-eastern coast of the Black Sea with approximately 70% to 75% of the population identifying as Russian, it had the maximum number of Russian speakers in Ukraine. Furthermore, the port of Sevastopol, connecting through Crimea, had been used by Russia for its Black Sea Fleet (BSF).

### **II. Historical Overlay**

Being a homeland of Russians, Crimea is regarded as an integral part of Russia. As a consequence of century's long history, Russian as a lingua franca and ethnic commonalities could not separate the two republics. Many Russian nationalists associate themselves with Crimea due to its old character of *New Russia* 'Новороссия' (Novorossiia).<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless,

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<sup>12</sup> Marta Dyczok, *Ukraine: Movement without Change, Change without Movement* (Amsterdam Overseas Publishers Associations, 2000), 113.

<sup>13</sup> "NATO Partnership for Peace program marks its 20th anniversary" (13 January 2014 ), <http://nato.mfa.gov.ua>

<sup>14</sup> The historical term used in Russian empire from 1764-1873 for the area to the north of the Black Sea. The territory was given the name of 'New Russia' because it was never part of old Kiev Rus. Catherine II (the Great) had conquered the area in the late 1700s

Crimea had been part of Russia, geographically linked with Ukraine and all land transportation to Crimea was through Ukraine. After World War-II, Crimea was declared as an Oblast (province) within the Soviet Union. In 1954 Crimea was transferred to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (UkrSSR) by Nikita Khrushchev and considered as a natural extension of Ukraine which left its inhabitants baffled.<sup>15</sup> Even Khrushchev had suggested to Stalin as early as 1944 that transferring Crimea to Ukraine would help Moscow in securing the support of Ukrainian's elites.<sup>16</sup>

At the time of disintegration of the Soviet Union, it was anticipated that Crimea would be part of Russia but contrary to this, territorial integrity was recognized by Russia and guaranteed by Britain, France and the United States in an agreement named Budapest Memorandum (1994).<sup>17</sup> This was a commitment to “refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine.”<sup>18</sup> Crimea was part of Ukraine and in order to get access to open waters in Russia, signed a lease agreement for the use of Sevastopol port as it was the main base of its fleet. To be more exact the two sides approved the division of the fleet's assets and to lease port to the Russian Navy in Sevastopol.<sup>19</sup>

Ironically, not a single protest was made over the transfer of Crimea to Ukraine in 1954, but after sixty years, the new justifications were marshalled to get over Crimea. Actually, the overwhelming influence of Russia on Ukraine and cultural ties of the people persuaded leaders of Russia and Ukraine to normalize ties. Putin and Leonid Kuchma in 2000 successfully transformed a decade-long bitterness to amiable mutual relations. The period of 2005 to 2009 was irritable as Ukraine attempted to integrate itself into the Western institution which had sown the seeds of anti-Russian movements and facilitated foreign involvement. Afterwards, during the time of Viktor Yankovich (2010), Ukraine has started to make efforts to improve its relations with Russia.

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and the Russian Empire held it until 1917-1920. It then became part of the USSR, and then of present Ukraine. The territory of Novorossiya encompasses some other areas, such as Rostov, Stavropol, and Krasnodar.

<sup>15</sup> Nikita Khrushchev served as the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party from 1938-1947, available at [www.english.pravda.ru](http://www.english.pravda.ru), (Accessed January 2, 2015).

<sup>16</sup> Hall Gardner, *Crimea, Global Rivalry and the Vengeance of History* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). 43.

<sup>17</sup> Steven Pifer, "Mr Lavrov, Russia and the Budapest Memorandum" *Brookings*, January 18, 2016. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2016/01/28/mr-lavrov-russia-and-the-budapest-memorandum/>. (Accessed March 17, 2017).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> “Black Sea Fleet (BSF)”, *Federation of American Scientists*, <https://fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/agency/mf-black.html>, (Accessed April 24, 2017).

### III. Grounds for the Use of Force

Historical records, especially wave of coloured revolutions (the early 2000s) in Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan and the Russo-Georgian war of 2008, demonstrated bitter relations between the West and Russia because in all incidents West supported anti-Russian campaigns. There was an emphasis on non-intervention of Russia in these states and a severe Western response was observed during Russia's war against Georgia in 2008. H. Gardner maintained that Moscow's decision to seize Crimea in February-March, 2014 was an act of reactive or preclusive imperialism;<sup>20</sup> however, Kremlin rejected this narrative. Legally, Russia legitimizes its use of force refereeing R2P to control the post-Soviet republics. At the time of the merger of Crimea into Russia, President Putin termed intervention in Ukraine as a humanitarian project.<sup>21</sup> According to President Putin in a press conference, the question of the use of force was a humanitarian mission and in the interest of Russia's national interest. He was linking it to the use of R2P "use all available means to protect the people of Crimea from tyranny and violence with whom we have close historical, cultural and economic ties."<sup>22</sup>

### IV. Competition with European Union (EU)

The geo-economic and geopolitical positioning of Ukraine has enticed both East and West, however, the strategic partnership of Russia with Ukraine is crucial for European security. Russia's competition with European Union (EU) to exert influence over Eastern Europe provides a basic understanding of the Ukrainian crisis. The formation of single economic space has been President Putin's priority since his entry into Kremlin. Hence, in 2009, the Eastern Partnership Program of the EU attracted Former Soviet Republics (FSU) including Ukraine, which was seeking active partner/s. Russia was also then struggling to make Ukraine and other old republics of Soviet Union to join the Customs Union. The organization was formed to build a Russian-led community of the post-Soviet states to create economic benefits and get a better bargaining position vis-a-vis continental neighbours, i.e. the EU to the West and China to the East.<sup>23</sup> The formation of Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) in 2015 was the

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<sup>20</sup> Hall Gardner, *Crimea, Global Rivalry, and the Vengeance of History* ....30.

<sup>21</sup> "Transcript: Putin defends Russian intervention in Ukraine", See full text at [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/transcript-putin-defends-russian-intervention-in-ukraine/2014/03/04/9caded1a-a3a9-11e3-a5fa-55f0c77bf39c\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/transcript-putin-defends-russian-intervention-in-ukraine/2014/03/04/9caded1a-a3a9-11e3-a5fa-55f0c77bf39c_story.html).

<sup>22</sup> President Putin answered journalists on the Ukrainian Crisis, *President of Russia*, available at [eng.kremlin.ru](http://eng.kremlin.ru), (March 4, 2014).

<sup>23</sup> "Black Sea Fleet (BSF)", *Federation of American Scientists*, (Accessed April 24, 2017), <https://fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/agency/mf-black.html>, 4.

continuation of the Russian efforts to diffuse tension between Russia and the EU relations. However, subtle divergences gradually morphed dichotomies and clamour against Russia got louder in the western part of Ukraine and lead to a referendum in Crimea.

## V. East-West Rivalry

A long-term East-West tense relation was a prominent factor in precipitating the Ukraine crisis. At the time of disintegration of Soviet Union, it was expected that the ex-Soviet space would remain under the influence of Russia due to geographical, ideological and historical linkages. Yet because of involvement of the West, the anti-Russian huddles occurred. The 9/11 event was a turning point in West-Russia's relations, as Russia and the West tried to establish cordial relations in face of the common threat of terrorism. Despite the fact that NATO's expansion had always been a threat to Russia in extending military cooperation; the latter gave consent for setting up the NATO-Russia Council,<sup>24</sup> to reduce tension.

All presidents of the Russian Federation namely, Mr Yeltsin, Mr Medvedev and President Putin, had tried to set better relations with the US and Europe but these expectations did not materialize as Moscow continued to be a target of frantic criticism by the West. President Putin denounced the inequities of the post-Cold War settlement and promised that he would pristine Western injustices during the Cold War and restores the glory of Russia.

The West, on its part, propagated that Russia was violating human rights in Chechnya, had used force against Georgia (2008) and unlawfully annexed Crimea. Moreover, a wave of colour revolutions in the post-Soviet states with pro-West leanings had tempted these states to join NATO. Hence, Poland and Hungary were admitted into NATO. The Group of industrialized states (G-8) cancelled the membership of Russia, NATO and terminated cooperative links with Moscow, and the EU cut off its ties with Moscow. Thus, a tug of war emanated in which Russia was trying to get close with Ukraine whereas EU wanted to bring it in its orbit of influence. Triple set of initiatives viz Western policies, NATO enlargement and EU expansion all added fuel to fire,<sup>25</sup> and caused tense relations of Ukraine with Russia.

The strategic dissonance between Russia and the West intensified over the Ukrainian issue. Subsequently, a phase of East-West rivalry had resurfaced, with Kiev's hasty turn to the West and Washington's backing of

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<sup>24</sup> James Sherr, *Hard Diplomacy and Soft Cooperation: Russia's Influence Abroad*, (Washington DC: Chatham House, 2013), 56.

<sup>25</sup> J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault: The liberals Delusions that Provoked Putin", *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 2014).



democratic change in Ukraine. As the new Cold War between East and West re-appeared, the secessionist movements also got strengthened due to internal instability and external involvement in Crimea. The situation became worse when Malaysian Airline Flight MH-17 was targeted while flying over the conflict zone and a blame game started between Ukraine and Russia.<sup>26</sup> This heinous act was widely condemned by the international community. Indeed, these crises seemed to be a turning point in ending the brief honeymoon of friendship between Russia and the West.

## **VI. The Russian Language**

Former Soviet republics are home to significant ethnic Russians; they have the close affiliation with the Russian populace in terms of language, culture and ideology. Similarly, large numbers of ethnic Russians are residing in Ukraine, particularly in southern and eastern areas. As a Slavic state, it has close ties with Russia, however, the use of Russian language had become a serious political matter soon after independence, and many ethnic Russians residing in Ukraine were pressurized to quit using the language. The *Ukrainization* or the separate identity of Ukrainians appeared as a popular nationalist campaign. Efforts were made to close schools where the Russian language was used as a medium of instruction. According to a survey from 1989 to 2001, many schools closed down because they were teaching in the Russian language.<sup>27</sup> The Ukrainian language was made compulsory and was seen by Kremlin as a violation of minority rights.

In 2012, Verkhovna Rada (the Ukrainian Parliament) announced a new state language policy, allowed government offices to use any other language in case of 10% local population speaks that language, and this would get status of the second official language. Thus, "13 out of Ukraine's 27 regions (mainly those in Eastern Ukraine) had adopted Russian as second official language."<sup>28</sup> However, before the Ukrainian crisis, the parliament (Rada) stopped this policy; this decision was taken next day when President Viktor Yanukovich was removed.<sup>29</sup> Angry Russian diaspora agitated and a severe backlash followed. As Dmitri Trenin, director of Carnegie Endowment Moscow Centre expounded;

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<sup>26</sup> *BBC News Europe*, September 9, 2014.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Goble "Ukraine: Analysis from Washington- Language Policy and National Integration" *Radio Free Europe: Radio Liberty*, (September 11, 2001), [www.rferl.org/a/1097361.html](http://www.rferl.org/a/1097361.html).

<sup>28</sup> Tatiana Zhurzhenko, "Language and Nation Building, Dilemmas of Language Politics in Contemporary Ukraine", <http://www.iwm.at>, (Accessed on January 13, 2015).

<sup>29</sup> "Cancelled Language Law in Ukraine Sparks Concern among Russian and EU diplomats" *RT News* (February 27, 2014).

"The rallies of Russian speakers, residing in eastern and southern Ukraine, raised the demand of autonomy of region and for [the] Russian language. Afterwards, these rallies were followed by revolutionary groups, grabbing government buildings. In May 2014, in Donetsk and Luhansk, the revolutionaries held the regional referendum and declared their own republics detached from Kiev."<sup>30</sup>

Kremlin could not conceal its support for Russian speakers and advocated Russian intervention which caused a civil war-like situation in Ukraine.

## VII. Referendum in Crimea

Russia sought to thwart its neighbouring states from joining Western-led institutions and coalitions in the same way when it persuaded Yanukovich not to join the EU. Kremlin took Ukraine as a subdivision of the Russian people or 'Little Russians' and Russia is their 'старший брат' (older brother).<sup>31</sup> During Ukraine crisis, pro-Russian protests were held and resentment gradually converted to a demand of referendum in March 2014. The authorities in Crimea set a referendum to get people's response on the issue of joining Russia or Ukraine. Surprisingly, the majority of population cast their votes for joining of Russia over which President Putin asserted, "a union with Russia was approved by almost 96% of the Crimean voters, as they spoke in favour of Russia."<sup>32</sup> Conversely, Western Ukraine along with mainstream West criticized the referendum as an illegal enactment and questioned the fair voting. Crimea formally merged into Russia on March 18, 2014, and signed a treaty which was presented in Duma for approval. A bill, related to Crimea and Sevastopol's addition as federal units of Russia, was also presented. Henceforth, the referendum proved to be the immediate cause of the merger of Crimea into Ukraine.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR EUROPE, RUSSIA AND POST-SOVIET STATES

### I. Wider Europe

Europe is divided ideologically, politically, linguistically and frequent conflicts are largely affecting its economy. There are three existing arrangements in Europe; first, the established Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) emphasizes political links to integrate states; second, urge in bringing together the NATO members; and third, European

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<sup>30</sup> Dmitri Trenin, "The Ukraine Crisis and the Resumption of Great Power Rivalry", *Carnegie Moscow Centre*, (July 2014), 14.

<sup>31</sup> James Sherr, *Hard Diplomacy and Soft Coercion: Russia's Influence Abroad*, 57.

<sup>32</sup> "Address by President of the Russian Federation", (March 18, 2014), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>

Union (EU) in which states courteously accept each other's differences and yet cooperate. These three blocks, EU, NATO and OSCE try to cope up with security threats and create models to manage challenges.<sup>33</sup> Russia wants to establish a different platform for the post-Soviet states to resolve their matters. In theory and practice, Russia views NATO and EU as the threat to its interests because it is a Western bloc. Both West and Russia consider their stance justified and mutual tension appears as the natural occurrence.

Admittedly, geopolitical interests are guiding foreign policies of the two rivals of the Cold War era. Despite strong opposition, Russia and the West are not yet in a full-fledged defiance mode and prospects of Russia's limited compromises exist with the West. Kremlin maintains that it is threatened by the West,<sup>34</sup> as the latest Russian military doctrine has labelled NATO 'a threat'. Similarly, the West tends to reinforce Article 5 of NATO (promises that each member of NATO defends fellow member states).<sup>35</sup> In this backdrop, geopolitical differences over Ukraine are intensifying and posing challenges to mutual relations.

Over the military actions of Russia in Ukraine, the Baltic States did not respond in favour of Russia. Baltic states, particularly Estonia and Latvia, are home to significant Russian-speaking people and ethnic Russians are not satisfied there and are seeking rights of citizenship in the Baltic States. So they fear that such situation may invite another aggressive reaction (unlikely) of Russia and may cause a regional friction. Nevertheless, the Ukraine crisis did not affect much change in the Baltic States' policies towards Russia rather they have started to seek Western support to counter Russia.

## **II. Effects on Ukraine**

Certainly, there was a strong internal support to Russia for its action towards Ukraine; yet it is assumed in Kiev that decision to annex Crimea was limited to a small circle. In addition, Ukraine has neither accepted Crimea as part of Russia, nor it is taking necessary steps to tide over the situation. "Kiev has no leverage to change Crimea's status and has put the issue on the back burner and the diplomatic focus is on Donbas and the

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<sup>33</sup> Roberto Domínguez Rivera, "Contributions of NATO, EU and OSCE to European Security: Threats and Risks", *Jean Monnet/Robert Schuman Paper Series*, Vol.5, No. 7 (April 2005), 04.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Sokolsky, "The New NATO-Russia Military Balance: Implications for European Security", *Task Force on U.S. Policy Toward Russia, Ukraine, and Eurasia, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, (March 13, 2017),1.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Coalson, "What are NATO's Articles 4 and 5?" *Radio Free Europe: Radio Liberty* (June 6, 2012), [www.rferl.org](http://www.rferl.org),

Minsk agreement.”<sup>36</sup> A significant increase, however, in Ukraine’s military budget is a meaningful development. Ukraine is publicizing Russia’s intervention illegal and deliberating its violation of international law. Moreover, it is seeking international support to prove Russia’s action unjust, “Ukraine has filed a case against Russia at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), and accusing Moscow illegally annexed Crimea and violated human rights.”<sup>37</sup> So far only six UN member states, including Russia, have recognized Crimea and Sevastopol as the federal part of the Russian Federation. Yet Ukraine has to pick out its association with EU-NATO and improve its economy.

### III. Impact on Russia

Russian-Ukrainian ties have been fluctuating since 2013 with serious effects for Moscow. Among the consequences are Western-led economic sanctions; the cost of Russia’s perceived support to separatists in Eastern Ukraine. The rapid decline in rouble’s exchange rate and intense opposition has occurred between Russia and the West. Russia has moreover acquired a status of somewhat ‘unpredictable’ state in world politics. Kremlin is seeking cooperation with former territories, including Ukraine, but facing problems in establishing good links with old territories, including Ukraine. Moscow nowadays is the target of allegations too, such as transgressor of the international law, a violator of Budapest conference, 1994, and breach of Ukraine constitution. Besides, the UN non-binding resolution proclaimed merger of Crimea into Russia and subsequent referendum as ‘illegal actions’.<sup>38</sup> The Syrian crisis has further deteriorated the situation and transpired in the form of declining oil prices in international market, an economic shock to Russia.

Russia’s heavy dependence on hydrocarbons and current cuts in export is leading to challenging situation e.g. Europe has reduced its demand for natural gas which is an economic setback for Russia. Although Russia directly came under Western economic sanctions yet merger of Crimea is regarded as a successful and momentous event by President Putin when he stated: “this event will forever remain a most important milestone in the national history.”<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, the merger of Crimea could possibly

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<sup>36</sup> Fiona Hill and Steven Pifer, “Dealing with a simmering Ukraine-Russia conflict” *Brookings* (October 06, 2016), [www.brookings.edu/research/dealing-with-a-simmering-ukraine-russia-conflict](http://www.brookings.edu/research/dealing-with-a-simmering-ukraine-russia-conflict).

<sup>37</sup> “Ukraine sues Russia over Crimea annexation and on-going war”, *The Telegraph*, (January 17, 2017)

<sup>38</sup> “Ukraine: UN Condemns Crimea Vote as IMF and US back Loans” *BBC News*, (March 27, 2014).

<sup>39</sup> “Putin: Crimea Annexation Important Milestone”, *Aljazeera*, (January 1, 2015), [www.aljazeera.com](http://www.aljazeera.com),

amplify nationalist, separatist and military adventurism, within Russia and across the post-Soviet periphery.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, there are emerging signs of forthcoming economic blow in terms of liquidity and economic recession is rising as are domestic interest rates; yet, Russia still wields leverage over post-Soviet states due to their energy demands and dependence. It appears that Ukraine's entry into EU and Western-led bloc would be difficult at least for now. Despite prevailing economic stress in Russia, overall national cohesion is palpable. Historical records are a witness that Russia has always been resilient and strengthened itself after waging war against other states. Thus, it can be safely inferred that Kremlin's forceful strategy might buttress Russia's internal position; nevertheless, it might be dangerous for the global economy to maintain long-term economic sanctions against Russia; being a crucial part of the global economy. The chances of further dissonance are imminent and potential ramifications are suggestive of likely future civil wars in Europe and Russia.

In short, the Ukrainian crisis has proved a turning point for Russia; theatrically it gave birth to domestic and regional tensions which were simmering before the Ukraine crisis. The domestic unrest, led by the opposition including Alexei Navalny, was earlier extant in moderate form; however, the decreased oil prices and uncertainty has made the opposition more vocal. Externally, Western sanctions are bitterer to make it widespread that "Russian economy went into decline."<sup>41</sup>

Interestingly, Moscow has openly challenged the post-Cold War settlements and responded by espousing the cause of 'separated' Russians. In this manner, Moscow is sending overtures of support to ethnic Russians in its old territories. The present nationalist leadership of Russia is focusing more on the post-Soviet reintegration in Central Asia and Eastern Europe, formation of Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) is a validation of Russian efforts. Meanwhile, Russia has taken a big step toward restoring its dominance in the Black Sea region. Its geopolitical position has become stronger by attaching Crimea and Sevastopol as now it uses its naval fleet without much inhibition. Certainly, this also affects Turkey which, since the Soviet Union collapse, has been projecting power in the Black Sea. Now the Turkish fleet can be challenged after the control of Sevastopol base.

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<sup>40</sup> 34 Nate Schenkan, "Eurasian Disunion: Why the Union Might Not Survive 2015", *Foreign Affairs* (December 2014), [www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-08-18/why-ukraine-crisis-west-s-fault](http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-08-18/why-ukraine-crisis-west-s-fault)

<sup>41</sup> Alexander J. Motyl, "Goodbye Putin: Why the President's Days are Numbered", *Foreign Affairs* (February 2015), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2015-02-05/goodbye-putin>

#### IV. Caucasus Region

The Caucasus connects Europe with Asia; therefore, it is attached to the European and Asian political dynamics. Since the Ukraine crisis has created ripple effects on the Caucasian region, the national security has become a top priority of Caucasus states. Apparently, for example, Georgia remained unaffected but being a signatory of EU Association Agreement, it pushes Moscow to get close to Georgia's neighbours to curb Western influence. Moreover, Georgia has been staunchly supporting Ukraine and fighting a common battle against Russian hegemony in the post-Soviet region.<sup>42</sup> Hence, it condemned Russia's action in Crimea as it had also passed through the same experience in 2008.

Despite the significant presence of Armenians in Ukraine and strong relations with each other, Armenia proved to be pro-Russian. Armenia is steadfastly supporting EEU, and seeking the help of Moscow due to its contiguous territorial issues (e.g. Nagorno-Karabakh). In this setting, Azerbaijan had opted to remain impartial in the escalating tug-of-war between West and Russia (after Ukraine crisis) and state-owned media in Azerbaijan stayed away from harsh criticism of Russian actions.<sup>43</sup> Moscow, in order to restore customary relations, is trying to engage Baku in the energy sector and has promised to find some solutions to the tense Nagorno-Karabakh issue.

#### V. Impact on the CARs

Many analysts are concerned that Kremlin's takeover of Crimea could set a similar model of intervention against the post-Soviet states particularly CARs. Home to substantial ethnic Russians, the CARs are distant from the direct range of the EU; but geographical voids cannot fully isolate the region as the tussle between Moscow and EU backed by NATO is upsetting the regional states. The Soviet-style governments of the CARs are different from the EU and geographically proximate to Asia. So, Kremlin has found fertile political grounds in Central Asia for the resurgence. Yet, Russia is also aware that if it uses identical means as employed in Ukraine, anti-Russian sentiments could rise as revulsion against Moscow. Moreover, destabilization in Russia and economic dislocation could affect the CARs which are still beholden to Russia. Thus CARs, as well as the Caucasian

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<sup>42</sup> Gerhard Besier and Katarzyna Stoklosa eds., *Neighbourhood Perceptions of the Ukraine Crisis: From the Soviet Union into Eurasia*, (New York: Routledge, 2017), 143.

<sup>43</sup> Anar Valiyev, "The Ukrainian Crisis and Implications for Azerbaijan", *Caucasus Analytical Digest*, No. 67–68, (December 2014), 12.

states, could hit bottom with it.<sup>44</sup> Emil Joroev has noted, "penalties against Moscow had a strong impact in all five republics since most international trade through Central Asia is brokered by Russia."<sup>45</sup> Therefore, the special association of CARs with Russia is becoming dubious and fears of Ukraine-like situation could be predicted if there are internal conflicts and ethnic Russian residents are involved.

Interestingly, any outright condemnation of Russia has been rare in Central Asia due to the latter's dependency on Russia. CARs are not only close to Russia but are also interacting with China and the Western domain of economy and security is also present in/directly. However, geographical location of Russia is a prime factor for CARs dependence on the former. The CARs are concerned due to the strain on Russia's economy caused by sanctions. Especially, Tajik and Kyrgyz workers in Russia are directly affected as they make the substantial contribution to the GDPs of their states. In this regard, *Russia's Federal Migration Service* (January 2015) highlights 2% to 4% decline of Kyrgyz, Tajik, and Uzbek workers in Russia.<sup>46</sup> Moscow maintains the major military presence in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan which acts as its influence and determines domination in the region. The Sevastopol naval base of Russia is analogous to the CARs military bases. No wonder, Kyrgyzstan initially hesitated in supporting Russia's action to merge Crimea into its territory. Despite heavy dependence on Moscow, Bishkek opposed Russian advocacy for Viktor Yanukovich. Yet it became the member of EEU and Russian actions in Ukraine were substantiated as Russia provides Kyrgyzstan assistance in the field of migration.

Economic crisis leads Russia to cut its goods and services, particularly, in 2015; Russia started to curtail its gas imports from CARs due to economic strains. "In Uzbekistan, as in Turkmenistan, Gazprom is drastically cutting gas imports for this year, purchasing only one-quarter of the supply it obtained in 2014."<sup>47</sup> Tashkent has always avoided Kremlin's domination and hoped that it would not be treated in the Ukrainian way. Yet it is hinted that separatist movement within Karakalpakstan could be a triggering factor of Russia's intervention in Uzbekistan in future. Tashkent has preferred to withdraw or stay away from the Russian-led organizations, such as EEC and

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<sup>44</sup> Nate Schenkkan, "Eurasian Disunion: Why the Union Might Not Survive 2015", *Foreign Affairs* (December 2014), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/armenia/2014-12-26/eurasian-disunion>.

<sup>45</sup> Emil Joroev, Associate Professor of comparative politics, the American University of Central Asia explained in a blog, "Central Asia's Response to the Ukraine Crisis", *World Policy Blog* (April 17, 2016), [www.worldpolicy.org/blog/2015/04/17/central-asia%E2%80%99s-response-ukraine-crisis](http://www.worldpolicy.org/blog/2015/04/17/central-asia%E2%80%99s-response-ukraine-crisis).

<sup>46</sup> Nate Schenkkan, "Impact of the Economic Crisis in Russia on Central Asia", *Russian Analytical Digest*, No. 165, (March 17, 2015), 5.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) which it joined and later left. On Crimea's merger with Russia, Uzbekistan's *Ministry of Foreign Affairs* stated that it "creates real threats to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country."<sup>48</sup>

As far as Kazakhstan is concerned, it appears to be a penetrable state; bears analogy with Crimea in many ways, including the presence of sizable Russian diaspora. With strong linkage to Russia due to strategic interests, it cannot afford tense relations with Moscow. Astana has refrained from recognizing Crimea as a part of Russia and hoped that Moscow will not be capitalizing on ethnic affinities and linguistic nexus as a tool for any future intervention. In addition, Astana desired in de-escalating of the conflict (Ukraine-Russia) but might not have the control.<sup>49</sup> Its political bonds are however intact even after the crisis and any economic sanctions on Russia cannot rupture their close relations. Given all reservations, it seems well-nigh impossible for CARs to detach themselves completely from Moscow for there is no replacement of a traditional partner.

### **The Western Response**

The merger of Crimea into Russia has led to some punitive policies of the West e.g. purposeful indirect economic sanctions, causing adverse effects to the Russian economy. The Cold war enmity between East and the West has appeared once again; it is not just short-term bad weather but an essential change in Russia-West relations.<sup>50</sup> Admittedly, Ukraine crisis became an immediate cause of tension between Russia and the US. J. Mearsheimer claimed that Putin worked to destabilize Ukraine until it abandoned its efforts to join the West.<sup>51</sup> Reciprocally, the US had challenged the legality of the referendum held in Crimea (2014) and became anxious due to the control of Russia over the naval base in Sevastopol.

With the aim to isolate Russia, Western tactics are operating steadfastly, resulting in depreciation of rouble, capital flight and decreased investment.

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<sup>48</sup> "Russia's Actions in Crimea Stir Bad Memories in Former East Bloc", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, (March 05, 2014), [www.rferl.org/a/russia-crime-bad-memories/25286948.html](http://www.rferl.org/a/russia-crime-bad-memories/25286948.html)

<sup>49</sup> Catherine Putz, "Nazarbayev the Mediator Sets Sights on Ukraine Crisis", *The Diplomat* (August 18, 2016), <http://thediplomat.com/2016/08/nazarbayev-the-mediator-sets-sights-on-ukraine-crisis>.

<sup>50</sup> Kalev Stoicescu, "Future Prospects for the Russian Federation under President Vladimir Putin" *International Centre for Defence and Security*: Estonia, (January 2016), 10.

<sup>51</sup> John Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault", *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 2014), [www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-08-18/why-ukraine-crisis-west-s-fault](http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-08-18/why-ukraine-crisis-west-s-fault).



Energy diversification is taking place in Europe to lessen dependency of Europe on Russian goods and resources. The boycott of Russian companies, particularly of *Rosneft*, is a serious economic blow for Russia. Further, explicit warnings are coming in with the emerging US-EU energy relationship which reflects further isolation of Russia. Hence, Also, following the referendum in Crimea in 2014, several Western delegates declined to attend the conference on security in Russia same year. Sensing diplomatic decline in relations and discerning that Washington is preparing its allies for the enactment of sanctions Moscow is inclined to now back non-Western nations and non-US allies. Basing of Western military contingents in Romania, Poland and the Baltic states are for perceived as Russian 'encirclement'. Further, NATO's basing rights for prolonged stay is seen as validating the East-West divide more clear and stark.

In this backdrop, the Crimean case can be taken as testing waters for Russia; it caused ripples of destabilization in the region bringing moral pressure on Russia and the West found an opportunity to accelerate assistance to the neighbouring states of Russia to get their support. However, it should not be considered an absolute economic decline rather it is a relative decline of the Russian economy.

### **Conclusion and Some Reflections**

The Crimean merger into Russia has introduced new fixtures for the post-Soviet region where old fault lines of the Cold War era are reactivated and the Western-led anti-Russian campaign has started. The Western interpretation on Russia's military action in Ukraine is based on allegations such as violation of international law for which it must be punished. Russia declared its action in Ukraine on the principle of "responsibility to protect", Slavic people residing in Ukraine and vented crisis were an incitement engineered by West. Although Russian leaders earned the modicum of popularity internally a phase of East-West hostility had started, the economic system disturbed internally and NATO-EU alliance got the fresh impetus to check Russia's return to the great power status. Moscow's aggressive actions have been causative to the economic instability in the post-Soviet republics. It saw NATO-EU's involvement in the post-Soviet states as a part of encirclement policy. As a result, Kremlin started focusing on forging alliances on its periphery as geography has always been an asset for Russia. In order to develop politico-economic ties, the EEU is designed to accomplish Russia's interests. Moreover, some non-traditional partners are also in Russia's spotlight.

Interestingly, vagaries of global politics are bringing regional changes and forming unexpected alliances. Cold relations with Pakistan are

improving due to India's increasing closeness with the US. Besides, the wave of terrorism is infecting the periphery of Russia and the emergence of the so-called Islamic State (IS) in the Middle-East with conceivable links to militants in Central Asia is becoming a headache for Russia. Economic sanctions and falling oil prices are causing internal and external ramifications for Russia and negatively affecting Putin's policies as the opposition is becoming more vocal by leaning on the Western propaganda of democracy, human rights and accountability. Interestingly, Russia's Eurasianist identity that is being focused most by the Putin administration; show that Russia has a greater role in the post-Soviet space. Under *Eurasianism*, Russia tries to forge ties with its neighbours that would in effect expand Russia's influence. In order to avoid global isolation, Russia is gravitating towards the post-Soviet states for fresh alliances. Russia has succeeded in its goals by incorporating Crimea; however, it seems problematic for Russia to annex other post-Soviet states as circumstances are quite different there.

Albeit conventional military success may have been achieved yet seeds of parochial conflicts are germinating. The Ukrainian parliament considers this a temporary phase and has professed/predicted that Crimea would revert to it soon. Difficult for Ukraine to handle the issue alone being a vulnerable state yet it seems that it needs farsighted and strong leaders. Therefore, it is likely that this might lead to increased military spending in Europe. Russia, on its part, is already spending heavily on military and Ukraine has also recently ramped up its military budget. As a consequence, it could imperil the security architecture of the Eurasian region.

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