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## Ukraine crisis: Trends and Perspectives

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### Abstract:

The crisis in Ukraine has become a tragedy, as is evidenced by the thousands of people who have been killed, and hundreds of thousands of refugees. It will alter the future of Ukraine, Europe, Eurasia and possibly the world. The crisis began in the fall of 2013 as a public response to the authorities' ill-advised policy and the greed of the elite. However, clumsy assistance provided by concerned «partners» turned the crisis into a coup, a power grab and subsequent chaos, which quickly spread across Ukraine, one of Europe's largest countries. Months later, Ukraine is still fighting a bloody civil war and humanitarian catastrophe amid an increasingly destructive economic crisis. However, few have looked at what came to be called the 'Ukraine crisis' from the point of view of Russo-Ukrainian relations, and grasped the perspectives of various groups involved, as well as the discursive processes that have contributed to the developments in and interpretations of the conflict.

**Keywords:** Crisis, International system, Ukraine, Great power,

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### Introduction

The political crisis that erupted in Ukraine in early 2014 has ended the period in Russian-Western relations that began with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The crisis marks the end of a generally cooperative phase in those relations, which even included a failed effort at Russia's integration with or into the West on its own terms. Instead, the Ukraine crisis has opened a new period of heightened rivalry, even confrontation, between former Cold War adversaries. On the face of it, this new period is broadly reminiscent of the Cold War, but it differs from it in important ways. Today's situation has a values component to

it but is not nearly as focused on ideology as the conflict between communism and liberal democracy was. It has a traditional military dimension too, but this aspect is not—yet—dominant. The current crisis has global implications, but, in and of itself, it is not central to the global system. Most importantly, unlike the Cold War, the present crisis is not the organizing principle of either world politics or even the foreign policies of the conflict's main contestants, particularly that of the United States. If historical analogies are of any use, parallels to the nineteenth-century Great Game for supremacy between the Russian and British Empires would be more to

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the point, except, of course, that the present U.S.-Russian rivalry is asymmetrical (Trenin, 2014: 1).

The severity of the crisis came as a surprise to many, in Ukraine itself, Russia, the European Union (EU), and the United States. Not that the gestation of the crisis and the steadily worsening environment in Russia's relations with the West had been overlooked. Rather, many Ukraine watchers who continued to believe that "the more the country changes, the more it stays the same" were caught off guard by the dynamics on the ground. In late February 2014, Ukraine moved too far and too abruptly to the West and lost balance. Just before that, U.S. policy in support of democratic change in Ukraine had steered past safe limits. Russia felt cornered, and its reaction surprised many Russians, not to speak of Ukrainians and Westerners. This new battle for influence is very real and will have major ramifications beyond just Ukraine. The confrontation will take some time to lead to an outcome, and neither the period nor the result can be clearly foreseen at this point. What is clear, however, is that the Euro-Atlantic region has entered a different epoch (Trenin, 2014: 3).

### **Origins of the Ukraine Crisis**

The Ukraine crisis was immediately preceded by competition between the EU and Russia for the future geo-economics' orientation of Ukraine. The roots of the crisis lie in the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia, which ended the prospect of enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) for both Georgia and Ukraine, and in the beginning of the global financial crisis, which seemed to give more credence to regional economic arrangements. Then, the EU and

Russia drew different conclusions from the war and the crisis. The Europeans, through the Eastern Partnership program the EU launched in 2009, looked to associate Ukraine, along with five other former Soviet republics, economically and politically with the EU.<sup>2</sup> Rather than a step toward future EU enlargement, however, this initiative was an attempt to constitute a "zone of comfort" to the east of the union's border and enhance these countries' Western orientation. The Russian Federation, for its part, tried to attract Ukraine and most of the rest of the former Soviet Union to its flagship project of a customs union, also energized in 2009, which led by May 2014 to the signing of the treaty establishing a Eurasian Economic Union.<sup>3</sup> Rather than re-creating the Soviet Union, as suspected in the West, Moscow began building a Russian-led community in Eurasia that would give Russia certain economic benefits and, no less important, better bargaining positions with regard to the country's big continental neighbors—the EU to the west and China to the east. Including Ukraine into the scheme, which Russian President Vladimir Putin had been trying to achieve since the 2003–2004 project of a "single economic space," was designed to give the new compact the critical mass of 200 million consumers, of which Ukraine would supply almost a quarter. Yet at the same time, Putin remained wedded to his master concept of a "Greater Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok," which he first outlined in 2010 and has reiterated since. Thus, Brussels and Moscow each saw Ukraine as an important element of their own geopolitical project. The Russians have also made an effort to explore the possibility of associating Ukraine with both economic units and in this way keeping the country's interna-

tional and domestic balance. Yet, for the Europeans there was no chance of talking to a third country about Ukraine's association. Eventually, both Russia and the EU came to see Ukraine's choice as a zero-sum game and worked hard to influence the outcome (Trenin, 2014: 3-4).

### **Ukraine crisis: Russia's Policies**

Russia is facing its own economic and political crisis, which is intimately linked to the conflict in Ukraine, but at the same time also reflects the fundamental weaknesses of Russia's own economy, including the failure of Putin's Kremlin to reduce dependence on natural resource exports during his tenure in power. Russia's economic problems began even before the United States and European Union imposed sanctions in response to the February 2014 annexation of Crimea. For now, the most likely course for Russia is continued economic decline, with the main uncertainty centered on the effects that the economic crisis will have on both Russian actions in Ukraine and on domestic stability (Mankoff & Kuchins, 2015: 1). These dramatic developments were most traumatic for Moscow. From a Russian perspective, Ukraine had for two decades been a weak, fragile, and often unreliable state, chronically creating problems for Russian energy giant Gazprom's transit to Europe. However, to most Russians, the country was foreign. Now, Ukraine was suddenly turning into a country led by a coalition of pro-Western elites in Kiev and anti-Russian western Ukrainian nationalists. This shift, in the Kremlin's eyes, carried a dual danger of Kiev clamping down on the Russian language, culture, and identity inside Ukraine and of the country itself joining NATO in short order. Putin reacted immediately by apparently putting in motion contingency plans that Mos-

cow had drafted for the eventuality of Kiev seeking membership in the Atlantic alliance (Trenin, 2014: 6).

Russia's Ukraine policy, which until then had been publicly low-key and heavily focused on top-level interaction with the Ukrainian president, immediately went into high gear. Defense and maneuvering stopped, to be replaced by a counteroffensive. The main goal became to keep Ukraine from joining NATO and, ideally, to win back the country for the Eurasian integration project, whose core element is the reunification of what Moscow sees as the "Russian world." In pursuing its new, proactive approach, Russia had two main objectives. The first was to make Crimea off limits to the new post-Yanukovich authorities in Kiev. This was executed by means of Russian Special Forces physically insulating the peninsula from mainland Ukraine, neutralizing the Ukrainian garrison in Crimea, and helping Crimea's pro-Russian elements take control of the local government, parliament, and law enforcement agencies. Russia also encouraged those elements to hold a referendum on Crimea's status and pursued an all-out campaign in favor of Crimea's reunification with Russia. The vote, held on March 16, 2014, overwhelmingly endorsed such a union. Two days later, a treaty was signed in Moscow to incorporate Crimea and the city of Sevastopol into Russia (Trenin, 2014: 7).

Putin's response was what Soviet leaders had always done in central Europe throughout the Cold War: he turned to the military. The coup taking over Crimea in the last days of February this year was not wholly unexpected by Russia hands in the West. Sevastopol's importance as the Russian navy's Black Sea homeport -- its outlet to the Mediterranean and so through the Suez Canal to the southern oceans matches Pearl

Harbor's importance to America's Pacific fleet. Judged technically, the coup was a brilliantly executed politico-military operation.

Whether Putin initially envisaged his seizure of Crimea as a lone salvaging from the wreckage of his Ukraine policy is unclear. Whether the West's hesitant response to his coup, minimal economic sanctions on Russia, even those only after much hand wringing in Europe --- emboldened him is as unclear. Perhaps he was lured on by polls showing Russian public opinion ecstatically behind him. Putin doubled down. He began covert support for the resistance in eastern Ukraine. The resistance was genuine, though Russia's hysterical denunciations of the interim government replacing Yanukovich in Kiev as "fascist" or even "Nazi" surely fanned it. Ukraine is in many respects two countries. Those in the heavy industrial centers of the east are Russian speaking, Orthodox worshippers, linked to Russia by networks of family ties. Western Ukraine is Catholic, Ukrainian speaking, increasingly a part of Europe. All Putin needed was to insert modest numbers of Russia's able Special Forces to organize and arm the easterners' self-generated resistance. In the short-term, Putin succeeded. Fantasies like the self-proclaimed People's Republic of Donetsk took birth. To foreclose any NATO military response---not that one was ever contemplated---Putin massed along Ukraine's eastern border rather more than 10,000 troops, most probably two of the Russian Army's relatively new formations: its "combined arms brigades", created specifically to put down small-scale threats along Russia's borders. Satellite surveillance indicated that two more brigades were echeloned further back --- a second-wave assault force if one

was needed. Putin must have taken a NATO intervention seriously. When he told European Commission president Jose Manuel Barroso at the end of August: "if I wanted to, I could take Kiev in two weeks," he was being uncharacteristically modest.

### **Ukraine crisis: U.S. Policies and Respond**

The crisis in and around Ukraine matters because it touches on a wide range of major security interests for both the United States and its allies. Apart from the impact on the bilateral U.S.-Russian relationship, the crisis affects European security in manifold ways, from NATO's future orientation to the cohesiveness of the European Union and arms control. As Russia is a major player across a range of geographic and substantive ("functional") priorities for the United States, the effects of the crisis extend far beyond Europe as well. Russia, for instance, could be an important player in U.S. efforts to end, or at least contain, the Syrian conflict and the resultant spread of the so-called Islamic State (IS). It also plays a key role in international efforts to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons and in stabilizing Afghanistan and Central Asia following the drawdown of coalition forces. While the United States has been reluctant to see Russia as a major player in the Asia-Pacific region, the sanctions have led Russia to deepen its already robust engagement with China and give new momentum to its own Asia "pivot" strategy. The challenge for the United States is to achieve its objectives in and around Ukraine, while minimizing the impact on its ability to cooperate with Russia across the whole range of issues where U.S. and Russian priorities intersect. Even as it works to bring the conflict in Ukraine to an end through continued pres-

sure, the United States needs to ensure that it keeps lines of communication to Moscow open, both as part of the overall diplomatic process on Ukraine and to lay the foundation for more substantive engagement in the future. One of the more pernicious aspects of the crisis on U.S.-Russian relations has been the suspension of existing channels ranging from the Bilateral Presidential Commission to regular military-to-military engagements. Given this closing of communications and the overarching need to find a solution to the Ukraine crisis, establishing a high-level back channel to the Kremlin should be a top priority right now. At the same time, unofficial engagement, including at the Track 2 level, should be expanded to discuss the parameters for renewed U.S.-Russian engagement once the immediate crisis has ended (Mankoff & Kuchins, 2015: 3-4).

#### **Russia and the West: The Ukrainian clinches**

The Ukrainian conflict developed from the very beginning on two barely intersecting planes: one within Ukraine and the other between Russia and the West, where Ukraine was merely the pretext. Ukraine became an obstacle in Russian-US relations during the presidency of George Bush, Jr., insofar as its “democratization” fit in with his Freedom Agenda. Even under President Clinton, Ukraine, ranked third after Israel and Egypt for US aid received. Ukraine received millions of dollars through man who thwarted the Ukrainian turn toward Europe. However, the reintegration of Crimea into Russia demonstrated Moscow’s political U-turn from noninterference to active moves challenging the world, partly because the Russian leadership saw the February 21 agreements as a failure due to the West plotting to establish a government loyal to it in Kiev. This extreme right government was to revoke the

agreement on the deployment of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet in Crimea, promptly apply for EU and NATO membership, suppress the Russian-speaking community and legitimize the power shift.

Time proved that Moscow was right. As soon as Yanukovich fled Kiev, power was grabbed by extreme right radicals, who gave armed nationalists free reign.<sup>7</sup> The West promptly accused Russia of annexing Crimea counter to international law and of aggressive expansionism. The Ukrainian crisis raised the Russian- Western rivalry from the local to the global level. What matters now is not Ukraine, but the global arrangement of forces, which Russia is questioning, as the US sees it. Western experts repeatedly noted Russia’s desire to be an equal party in international politics. To introduce Russian interests into the big political game is Russia’s foreign policy goal during Putin’s presidency. Though Russia’s motives were quite clear, its interests and concerns were not taken into consideration as it was not regarded as an equal partner, particularly where NATO expansion was concerned, a theme that Russia has emphasized since the 1990s. As Russia stressed more than once, its interests were endangered not so much by such expansion (Russia was even willing to join NATO) as by the appearance of military facilities close to its border. According to contemporary philosopher Slavoj Žižek, the relations between Russia and the Western powers were regulated in the 1990s by the silent admission that the West should treat Russia as a great power on the condition that it would not behave as one. When Russia had enough of this, and started to behave as a great power, a catastrophe followed, which threatens the entire existing system of relations, as the events of five year ago in Georgia showed. The Ukrainian crisis demonstrates a sociopolitical

phenomenon that has become the main source of conflict and instability in today's world. The global environment obliterates the border between internal and external processes, thereby creating permanent resonance. Domestic upheavals, especially in large states or countries where major interests clash, instantly evoke an external response, and so rise to a higher, interstate level. These oscillations reinforce each other, upsetting the regional and occasionally the global environment. It is very hard to withstand this effect and dampen its waves. This challenge demands a simultaneous response within and without: the relevant countries need to address their national problems while the external forces involved in the conflict work to restore the balance of interests (Andreev, 2014: 8).

According to the prevailing wisdom in the West, the Ukraine crisis can be blamed almost entirely on Russian aggression. Russian President Vladimir Putin, the argument goes, annexed Crimea out of a long-standing desire to resuscitate the Soviet empire, and he may eventually go after the rest of Ukraine, as well as other countries in Eastern Europe. In this view, the ouster of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich in February 2014 merely provided a pretext for Putin's decision to order Russian forces to seize part of Ukraine. Nevertheless, this account is wrong: the United States and its European allies share most of the responsibility for the crisis. The taproot of the trouble is enlargement, the central element of a larger strategy to move Ukraine out of Russia's orbit and integrate it into the West. At the same time, the expansion eastward and the West's backing of the pro-democracy movement in Ukraine—beginning with the Orange Revolution in 2004—

were critical elements, too. Since the mid-1990s, Russian leaders have adamantly opposed enlargement and in recent years; they have made it clear that they would not stand by while their strategically important neighbor turned into a Western bastion. For Putin, the illegal overthrow of Ukraine's democratically elected and pro-Russian president—which he rightly labeled a “coup”—was the final straw. He responded by taking Crimea, a peninsula he feared would host a naval base, and working to destabilize Ukraine until it abandoned its efforts to join the West. Putin's pushback should have come as no surprise. After all, the West had been moving into Russia's backyard and threatening its core strategic interests, a point Putin made emphatically and repeatedly. Elites in the United States and Europe have been blindsided by events only because they subscribe to a flawed view of International politics. They tend to believe that the logic of Realism holds little relevance in the twenty-first century and that Europe can be kept whole and freebased on such liberal principles as the rule of law, economic interdependence, and democracy. Nevertheless, this grand scheme went awry in Ukraine. The crisis there shows that realpolitik remains relevant—and states that ignore it do so at their own peril. U.S. and European leaders blundered in attempting to turn Ukraine into a Western stronghold on Russia's border. Now that the consequences have been laid bare, it would be an even greater mistake to continue this misbegotten policy (Mearsheimer, 2014: 1-2).

### **Ukraine crisis and resolving the Iranian nuclear crisis**

Unlike in Crimea and in Syria, Russia does not have decisive advantage in the Iranian



contest. Identifying advantage is key because Putin's first instinct is always to see where he can press and exert his will without risk.

However, even if Russia had a lot of advantage over the Iran contest, Moscow's objectives are not as divergent with the West's as they are regarding Ukraine and Syria. Russia really does not want Iran to acquire nuclear weapons. Putin would prefer that somehow Iran would live up to its commitments not to acquire nuclear weapons and at the same time would continue to have terrible relations with the United States and the West. These preferences give Russia plenty of room to allow diplomacy with Iran to proceed.

In terms of advantage, Moscow could undermine enforcement of existing sanctions and thereby relieve economic pressure on Iran. Nevertheless, the Iranian government wants a breakthrough in relations with the United States, the relief of banking and other financial sanctions, and an end to isolation.

Russia cannot provide these gains—the United States and the EU can. Russia could have more advantage when diplomacy with Iran breaks down. Then, Russia could block the imposition of new UN sanctions. This would add to the general rupture in Russia's relations with the West. Depending on where things are with Ukraine, the West could then feel added impetus to ratchet up sanctions on Russia. Conversely, if Russia wanted, it could quietly make its cooperation in tightening sanctions on Iran depend on the West not tightening sanctions on Russia (Perkovich, 2014).

In the event that Putin ups the ante on Iran, the United States and its allies are well positioned to counter him. The more determined and convincing Washington is in limiting Tehran's nuclear weapons potential and meeting Russian challenges in Ukraine and

elsewhere, the less likely it will have to deal with a new Russian gambit on Iran or other issues. However, if the West tries to deflect Putin's mischief by going soft on Ukraine sanctions, he will just be encouraged to go rogue in the Gulf.

Accordingly, the United States should build an alternative international consensus to support its moves in the absence of new Security Council measures, exploiting the fact that Putin has made him increasingly vulnerable by violating global norms. This includes using energy and other global economic tools to deter and contain Russian adventurism. Washington should also be solicitous of China on Middle Eastern issues, even though Beijing's Crimea-like behavior in its own near abroad is worrisome.

Finally, Washington should make two things clear. First, resolving the Iranian nuclear question in a manner supportive of U.S. and allied security is a core American interest. Second, the United States will use massive military force to achieve that end if a cooperative diplomatic alternative is rendered impossible by Russian meddling. For these and many other reasons, job one for the Obama administration is to reestablish faith in — and fear of — America's willingness to use its overwhelming military strength (Jefrey, 2014).

### **Effects of the Ukraine crisis**

The crisis has had many effects, both domestic and international. According to an October 2014, estimate by the World Bank, the economy of Ukraine contracted by 8% during the year 2014 because of the crisis. Economic sanctions imposed on Russia by western nations contributed to the collapse in value of the Russian ruble, and the resulting Russian financial crisis. There is a new geopolitical play emerging for Russia following the

beginnings of a new transatlantic fault line. This fault line was created as the US prioritizes rebuilding its internal strength and re-balancing its global role in the Asia-Pacific. President Barak Obama's administration is hardly in favor of a greater military role in Europe, but it has been driven to revive its NATO stance to reassure Poland and the Baltic countries. This re-establishes a kind of renewed European military dependence on the US even though very little is changing. Further confrontational policies towards Russia will reinforce Europe's drive to diversify its energy imports. This would open an emerging market in Europe for US shale gas exports to replace Russian gas. Revenue from gas exports is vitally important for Russia's economic viability. The preferred outcome for the US would be to contain Russia as a regional power without regenerating a global competitive relationship. For Europe, continental stability will require a joint endeavor to stabilize the intermediate zone between Russia and the EU. The aim will be to avoid further deterioration of Russia's economy and to keep Europe's hands free to enhance its competitiveness on a global scale. The current responses to Russia's increasingly assertive approaches during the Ukraine crisis demonstrate a precarious lack of Western options and symbolic unanimity. Russia's economy is clearly under pressure, irrespective of Western sanctions. The threat of losing gas and oil markets will affect modernization. This should help to keep options open for some continental framework within which associations with the EU could become compatible with a Russia-led Eurasian Union. This would meet European interests for continental stability without over-extending its membership as it would support Russia's

economic fortunes. Russia could move to more confrontation with the US and Europe in critical regions and to a greater anti-American, if not anti-Western alliance with China. This could increase Russia's dependence on China; reduce its dependence on Europe, and free China's hands in the evolving global competition - with the US newly entangled in a distant quagmire. The world is undergoing thorough geopolitical change. An unprecedented kind of global competition is unfolding. In addition, it is creating unique conditions for Europe. Its societal model and its strong, though underused technology-base could provide it with the ability to dominate future global competition, provided it succeeds in alleviating internal tensions and increases its ability to compete globally as a united Europe ([www.shiftfrequency.com/crisis-ukraine](http://www.shiftfrequency.com/crisis-ukraine)).

Forming a geopolitical bridge between Russia and the rest of Europe, Ukraine has yet to choose its affiliation and pave its development path. While the Euromaidan revolution demonstrates the will of the Ukrainian people for integration with the EU, common ties are also to be found between Ukraine and Russia. Geographical proximity, energy interdependence, economic trade is all factors which make cooperation between the two countries necessary. The lack of a diplomatic solution regarding the conflict in Eastern Ukraine has affected the nature of their alliance. With Moscow refusing to recognize its involvement in the war and Ukraine not striving for negotiation with the pro-Russian insurgency in Eastern Ukraine, the situation has now reached a deadlock.

Political instability and the annexation of Crimea saw the triggering of a deep economic crisis in Ukraine. While economic issues can partly be attributed to the existing hybrid



war, they also remain the result of large-scaled corruption stemming from previous kleptocratic rule. The Ukrainian economy currently finds itself on the verge of default. Conflict in Eastern Ukraine has led to destruction of the country's infrastructure, especially within the metal and coal industries, which are mainly concentrated on the territory of the Donbass. Certain mines have been destroyed, whilst others have simply ceased to operate. To put this into context, the Ukrainian Ministry of Energy notes that for the last months Ukraine has lost approximately 12 million tons of coal. Now Ukraine is in the unfortunate position of having to import coal, due to the shortage of resources, which causes it to become even more energy dependent on Russia.

Another implication of the conflict is reflected in the dispute over gas between Russia and Ukraine. Since Russia has been acting as the principal supplier of natural gas for Ukraine and forms one of the biggest suppliers for the EU through Ukraine, it now exerts constraints on Ukraine as a response to the EU association agreement, where cutting off access to gas is used as a political tool. Nonetheless, it should be remembered that Russia's economy is similarly dependent on transit of natural gas to Europe through Ukraine's pipelines. Hence, the economies of both states find themselves dependent on the transit of Russian gas to the EU. Irrespective of the sanctions imposed by the West on the Russian Federation, experts suggest that the EU will remain a priority partner for Russia when it comes to gas sales. Sanctions and recent economic isolation saw cooperation emerging between Russia and its long-term ally – China. Consequently, the signing of a thirty-year contract between Gazprom's and the China National Petroleum Corporation, which is set to supply gas for China from

2018 offers a viable economic alternative to the Russian Federation.

Nonetheless, the sanctions imposed on the Kremlin damage the country's economy. In response, Russia has been imposing counter-sanctions on the EU and the US, albeit such actions may derail its economy even further, owing to possible extra transaction costs of finding new suppliers. With Russia banning EU imports, it is likely that the latter's member states will face slight economic slowdown. Still, it is possible that Serbia, Turkey and other CIS economies will in fact take advantage of the current situation by becoming alternative partners in trade with Russia.

Recent decline in oil prices as dictated by the USA and Saudi Arabia also affects the economy of the Russian Federation. During his last press conference, Putin made promises that the Russian economy would recover within two years' time, despite not indicating concrete measures and feasible steps for recovery. In the interim, Kremlin does not accept that Russia is facing a crisis, although the value of the rouble has significantly decreased. There is ongoing debate over and speculation concerning Russia's economic crisis and whether it might indeed be the tool to change Putin's foreign policy towards Eastern Ukraine. Meanwhile, Russia continues its supply of heavy weaponry and troops to the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, with the clear intention of invading and destabilizing the region. This indicates that even sanctions, which greatly affect the Russian economy, are not sufficient incentives to holding the Kremlin back from continuing its hybrid war against Ukraine.

A political reality arising out of the Ukrainian crisis is the weak unity and poor consolidation of EU member states, as well as the Euro skeptic feeling spreading within Eastern European countries. EU states choose

to apply light sanctions on the Russian economy, instead of taking a strong stance by condemning the annexation of Crimea and the resulting conflict in Donbas. While this is economically understandable due to the EU's dependency on natural gas supply from Russia to Europe, this prioritization of economic interests is likely to affect and undermine the national security of Eastern European states as well as NATO's capabilities. The Ukrainian crisis has become an indicator for Western powers that Russia is capable of shifting borders in Eastern Europe unilaterally, even when such actions lack legitimacy and compliance with international law.

The Ukrainian crisis is inexorably linked to national security for other post-Soviet states. If before the annexation of Crimea, the Turkish sea fleet dominated the region of the Black Sea, the 2014 events gave leeway to Russia's fleet to take over in a hegemonic capacity. Putin's idea of creating a *Novorossiya* encompassing regions of whole Eastern and Southern Ukraine and Transnistria is another plan we need to be wary of. Implementing this expansionist policy would allow Putin to supply gas directly to the EU. Moreover, Russia would thus gain full and uncontested control over countries of the Eastern Partnership and the Black Sea region. Baltic States also expressed concerns regarding their security due to the vocal presence of Russian-speaking minorities (Guz, 2015).

Finally, the "Ukraine Crisis" will have various repercussions for international relations beyond Eastern Europe. The crisis, in connection with the devaluation of Ukraine's 1994 Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances, is undermining worldwide efforts against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. It is having an increasingly

salient negative impact on Russia's economy and position in the world, and will thus inflict lasting damage on an important actor in international affairs. The "Ukraine Crisis" is preventing the further European integration of Russia, and thus the creation of a Greater or Wider Europe, as well as a common trade and security area from Lisbon to Vladivostok. The currently popular idea that Moscow would be able to replace its partnership with the West by a Sino-Russian alliance is unsustainable. In view of Russia's declining economic weight and China's growing geoeconomics' might, a mutually satisfactory, close partnership between Russia and China is unlikely. Russia's economic recession and political isolation weakens it in its relationships not only with the West, but also with Asia. Moscow's "turn to the East" has little prospects for success.

### **Conclusion:**

The Ukraine crisis that erupted in early 2014 has ended the post-Cold War status quo in Europe. Russia, feeling betrayed by its Western partners because of their support for regime change in Kiev, has stepped forward to protect its vital interests—, which the West saw as aggression by a revisionist power. The ensuing conflict will last long and have an impact far beyond Europe. The Ukraine crisis has ushered in a period of U.S.-Russian rivalry, even confrontation, reminiscent of the nineteenth-century Great Game, a fight for supremacy between the Russian and British Empires. The competition is asymmetrical and highly unequal. This conflict is being waged mainly in the political, economic, and information spheres, but it has military overtones as well. It differs from the Cold War in that human contact, trade, and information

flows are not completely shut off, and there is a modicum of cooperation. Russia is openly challenging the U.S.-dominated order, having seen its own vital security interests challenged by U.S.-friendly forces in Ukraine. Moscow will not back off on issues of principle, and Washington cannot be expected to recognize Russia's sphere of influence in Ukraine and elsewhere in Eurasia. The United States will also refuse to treat Russia as an equal. Most importantly, the elements of trust that existed in U.S.-Russian relations in the 1990s and that reemerged briefly in the 2000s have been fundamentally shattered. The relationship has become essentially adversarial, as in the days of the U.S.-Soviet Cold War or, more to the point, the Russo-British Great Game. In other words, intense and dangerous turmoil provoked by the breakdown in Russo-Ukrainian relations has escalated into a crisis that now afflicts both European and global affairs.

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