

Russia and Ukraine Crisis: From Geo-Political Confrontation to Putin's Ambition to Regain Lost Grandeur

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Abstract

The article discusses different aspects of the Russia-Ukraine Crisis ranging from geo-political confrontation, to Putin's ambition to regain lost grandeur resulting from Soviet disintegration. Russia's renewed incursion in Ukraine has initiated deadly conflict in Europe and laid down the foundation of new hostilities between Russia and US-led West and the epicentre of confrontation is Ukraine. Ukraine has remained in constant boil for the past many years for various reasons ranging from internal instability, to Western interference and hostile relations with neighbouring Russia. Ukraine has also been hotbed between West and Russia for its abundant natural and agriculture resources as well as its geo-strategic location blessed with close proximity to Black Sea and Mediterranean Sea making it geo-strategically important for Europe and Russia equally. The Ukraine crisis has left World in a chaotic situation and endangered regional and global peace and stability. Crisis has also resulted in global food shortage and economic crisis globally and shattered the pillars of the global economy. The article articulates that only end to conflict will be by positive approach followed both by Russia and the West.

Keywords: War in Ukraine, Nationalism, Geo-politics, Future Outlook of Europe, Consequences

Introduction

The recent Russian incursion of neighbouring country Ukraine started in February 2022 is considered as hallmark of Europe's deadliest armed engagement since World War II. The origin of conflict can be traced back to November 2013, when Euromaidan protests erupted in Ukraine after Russian supported President Viktor Yanukovich rejected the European Union

Association Agreement in favour of loan and gas at lower price with Russia. Eventually, civil unrest escalated and marked people's dissatisfaction with the existing government and prompted Viktor Yanukovich to leave Ukraine (Stan, 2017). Dozens of people died in bloodiest violence and by February 2014, the capital was under control of various European backed opposing parties. Resultantly, Russia shifted its focus to Crimea in the Southern region of the country, with majority of Russian ethnic population. Russia had already stationed its Black Sea fleet in Crimean Peninsula. Russian President Vladimir Putin sent Russian army to Ukraine's border for a startling military exercise. Initially, the Russian President denied the presence of Russian army in Crimea but very shortly Russian Army seized the government buildings and took control of two Crimean airports. In March, Russia conducted a referendum and ethnic Russian majority Crimean population overwhelmingly voted in favour of Russia and on March 21, 2014 Putin annexed Crimea. The US and West called it a sham and illegal referendum and imposed economic sanctions on Russia (clinch, 2022). Technically, if we see there are various factors which contributed to political turmoil in Ukraine which includes ethnic conflict, strategic importance, abundant natural resources and most importantly competition between West and Russia. The United States (US) and its European allies are equally responsible for the crisis. The root cause of trouble was NATO's expansion, a key component of West plan to move Ukraine out of Russia's sphere of influence and assimilate into West. Russia repeatedly raised concerns over the issue and ultimately, Putin responded by taking Crimea, a peninsula which was expected to be used by NATO as a Naval base against Russia. Putin considers western involvement in Ukraine a key strategic threat to Russian sovereignty (Mearsheimer, 2014). Further details of the Russia-Ukraine crisis will be highlighted in ensuing paras.

a. Ukraine: A Constant Boil

The 2014 Russia-Ukraine conflict imitates the patterns of troubled relations in previous decade across the former Soviet Union not only in Ukraine but in Estonia and Georgia as well. The 2007 cyberattacks on Estonia and the 2008 war in Georgia are affluent examples of troubled

relations between post-Soviet independent states and Russia. The previous and recent crisis in Ukraine has become a signal case for post-Soviet independent states. The conflict of status quo and constant boil of uncertainty roiled by internal instability, amplified by external incitements, designed by Putin's expansionist ambitions and west response tends to reverberate across the region. Putin's seizure of Crimea and intrusion of eastern and south-eastern Ukraine caught West off-guard and initiated efforts to respond to Putin's actions in Ukraine (Metre et al., 2015). Crimea, a significant strategic location that originally belonged to Tatars later on, was conquered by the Ottoman Empire and remained under its control till the 18th century. In 18th century Crimea was conquered by Russia and remained as an autonomous part of Russia till 1954. In 1954, Nikita Khrushchev gifted the peninsula to Ukraine as a token of appreciation for the three hundred years' anniversary of Ukraine unification with Russia. At the time it didn't appear to be a big deal for Russia but it became so after the Soviet Union collapse. The complicated background of Crimea has remained a constant boil between Russia-Ukraine confrontation. Later on, during the Joseph Stalin period Crimean Tatars were expelled from Crimea on a charge as German collaborators. Crimean Tatars were not allowed to return back until 1956, resultantly, Tatars inclination extended towards Ukrainian government. All of these factors caused Ukraine and Crimea to stand in a confused state between Russia and West with uncertain identity (Clarke, 2019). Based on the history, Putin always insisted that Crimea fairly belongs to Russia and its annexation would protect Russia. Europe considers Crimean annexation as a land grabbing act of Putin and doesn't recognize Russian annexation. The biggest move in Europe since World War II, triggered years long confrontation and strategic rivalry between Russia and Ukraine (Timsit et al., 2022) which will be briefly explained in the ensuing paragraph. The contested annexed zone map between both countries is attached below.

**Map of the
Conflicted Zone**



Source:

Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc.

b. A Strategic Rivalry between Russia- Ukraine

Russia annexation of Crimea and NATO eastward extensive expansion since 1997 has left Russia unnerved and resulted in strategic rivalry between east and west. Ukraine has emerged as a focal point of confrontation between the US-led west and Russia. Since 1990, NATO has gone through five rounds of enlargement to include former Soviet Union States and various Warsaw Pact states. NATO considers it a strategic partnership while Russia considers its encirclement. Ukraine immediate next to Russia was extensively struggling to join NATO in 2014 and the issue took a central role and Putin sent Russian troops to Crimea. Russia believes Ukraine's addition in NATO an imminent threat to Russia and challenges its security (Glucroft, 2022). NATO's eastward expansion by Russia is seen as direct threat. The provocative acts by NATO and eastward edging towards Russia complicated the situation and left Ukraine in unending conflict. Russian imperialism or NATO expansionism will be the biggest challenges for Europe in upcoming years. Logically NATO expansionist ambitions has endangered small countries on the border of Russia and undermined strategic stability in the region (Suny, 2022). Not only

NATO, Russia also struggled to expand its influence in the region by technological advancements and exerting soft power techniques in the region. Russia also employed digital disinformation campaigns in neighbouring countries especially in Ukraine to sow discord and divide among people. This was mainly done after the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 to promote Russian nationalism. Russian tactics remained decisive for a couple of reasons which included geographical proximity, presence of Russia forces because of the 1997 deal, majority of the ethnic Russian population and Neo-Stalinist policies provided Russia with conclusive results. Later on, the same practices were followed in other countries of the region (Clarke, 2019). Russia has played very smartly in last decade and gained popular support in disputed border region. The fundamental problem for Ukraine and the West is that it is easier for Russia to destabilize Ukraine than for the Ukrainian government even with the West's assistance. Russia supports Pro-Russian ethnic population in border areas by financing and arming them, making it impossible for the Ukrainian government to manage and stabilize the situation in conflict. In the similar way Russia annexed Crimea a key strategic location in 2014 and Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzia in 2022 (Metre et al., 2015). Ethnic and Nationalistic ambitions has further complicated the crisis between both neighbouring countries which will be discussed in ensuing paras.

Roots of Ethno-Nationalistic Identity in Russia-Ukraine Crisis

The Russia-Ukraine crisis resulted because of various internal and wide-ranged geopolitical issues. While discussing geopolitical factors of the conflict nationalistic ideology and ethnic rifts should also be taken into consideration. Russian nationalism and identity played a significant role in transformation of the conflict. Ethno-linguistic division and exploitation of historic memories played an accountable role in transforming conflict. Society is affected by political transformations in any country. Since Soviet disintegration Ukraine was eagerly struggling to escape from the Russian orbit and Russia, and was hesitant to acknowledge eternal loss of Ukraine, was trying to undermine the process by manipulating loyalties and cultural

characteristics of masses in eastern Ukraine. Crisis in Ukraine is more about nationalism rather than an ethnic conflict like Yugoslav. Relating to identity, a number of factors are involved in the Russo-Ukraine Conflict (Harris, 2020). Ukraine has remained under a rule of corrupt political elite and Russia took advantage of this situation. Ukraine tried to democratize political institutions under western influence but were confronted by Russia. Historically, Ukraine acquired gigantic territory from Russia in eastern and southern region and that almost 17 million Russians largest minority living in Ukraine offers Russia reasonable interest making case stronger for the local population that Russian nationalism is beyond the borders. Therefore, in that way, the 2014 annexation of Crimea and now three other regions of Ukraine should not be a surprise for West. In the past, Russia intervention in Georgia and Chechnya are affluent examples of Russian ambitions.

Apart from Western assertions, if we see the Census of 2001, Crimea was the largest region with multi-ethnic and multi-lingual characters (58.3 % Russian, 24.3% Ukrainian and 12.1 % Tatar population. The Ukraine government, Western media and their Western supporters characterized Crimean separatist as having minor support. 97 % of the people in Crimea voted in favour for joining Russia. The Pew Research centre reported that 91% of people viewed referendum as free and fair. The other region Donbas taken by Russia consists of Donetsk and Luhansk has second highest Russian ethnic proportion (38.5%) whereas 72% Russian native speakers also develop fervour for Russian nationalism (Harris, 2020). Similarly, fourth region taken up by Russia is Zaporizhia. According to available 2001 census, the Russian language share in total population was 48.2 % whereas, share of Russian population in total population was 24.7% of total population (Knoema, 2001). Therefore, it is quite convincing that Russian nationalism also played a crucial role in stirring up tension in Ukraine.

Another connotation of Russian nationalistic approach lies on the concept of *Novorossiya* (New Russia), that is the legacy of 18th century. It also expects a reshaped Black Sea region, which consists of Southern region starting from Crimea to Odessa splits from Kyiv and joins Russia.

New Russia is not an exclusively geographical concept by which Russia claims territories lost in 1991. It justifies Russian intensive interference in neighbouring states and reasserts Russia as a great power (Laruelle, 2015). Russia's recovery status and ethnicization of accompanying rhetoric is further complemented by the idea of *Russkii Mir* (Russian World) which tends to unite and support ethnic Russians with in Russia and outside Russia. Putin also launched *Russkii Mir* foundation in 2007 to promote Russian nationalism and preserve Russian cultural identity (Kuzio, 2016). The conception of existing nationalism validates both sides: Ukraine is attempting to preserve the right to exist and its existence should look like (Multicultural, tolerant, democratic and multi-ethnic) whereas, Russia wants to see Ukraine's existence under the Russian hegemony and identity as a subservient state to Russia. Emphatically, the nationalism is main agenda of confrontation for both states. On one side, Ukraine wants to democratize country and on the other Russia considers Ukraine's national architecture as artificially influenced by West and threat to Russian identity. Russia's seizure of Crimea, Donbas and Zaporizhia and its efforts to occupy and fuel conflicts in other region is further proof of its non-consensual approach to Ukraine. Russian authorities believe that Ukraine's contemporary national image has threatened the existence and permanency of contemporary Russian national imaginary. For Putin maintaining a robust influence over Ukraine is way beyond its foreign policy priority and consider Ukraine as integral component of their own country's identity. In 2016, Putin said that Russian nation is emerged from Kyivan Rus via Prince Volodymyr, a Prince proclaimed by Putin as the protector of Russian land and a prescient statesman. Such assertions by Putin presents a submissive Ukraine as essential and existential to Russian national identity (Knott, 2022). The Russian conception of considering Ukraine as an integral component all hinges over the conception that if Ukraine leaves Russian sphere of influence it will be considered as attack on Russia itself. Ethnic nationalism and Russian imperialism are very much relevant to Russian invasion of Ukraine. Russia is deliberately targeting civilian and military to demoralize as much as defeat and a decisive victory. Russia's is indiscriminately targeting civilian population and culture to demolish Ukrainian and Western

cultural identity. Ukraine is struggling to be free from Russian type and somehow Western version of nationalism. Culturally, linguistically, nationally disjointed society looks like as an significant way to study political and social attitudes by disaggregating between language practice and language identity. Ukraine is home to 40 million people and the stands second largest country in Europe after Russia with abundant energy and agricultural resources (Knott, 2022). Geographical location and NATO's enlargement in Europe has a lot to do with other factors which will be discussed in ensuing paras.

Russia's Geo-Strategic Interests in Ukraine

Russia's renewed incursion of Ukraine is subject to many complicated factors ranging from Right versus Wrong, democracy versus authoritarianism, globalization versus protectionism and victory versus defeat. Another aspect of crisis is geo-strategic rivalry more related to expansionist objectives and encirclement of rivals to sustain existing World Order. Undoubtedly crisis in Ukraine has dented global security and peace in Europe. Russia's expanding geo-strategic ambitions in Europe are of critical importance (Hagman, 2022). After the Soviet disintegration in 1991, Russia suffered from territory as well as military loss. Over the time Russia regained strength and started its expansionist ambitions to regain regional grandeur as a regional hegemon. Access to Mediterranean Sea is of crucial importance for Russia. Accessing Mediterranean Sea is a significant component of Russia's military strategy and invasion of Ukraine. Mediterranean Sea will provide Russia easy access to the Middle East, Southern Europe, and North Africa. In Europe Mediterranean region is a jostle of great power rivalry between the US, NATO and Russia. The downfall of Soviet Union resulted in the geopolitical competition in the region. Russia disbanded its fifth Eskadra in 1992 and Turkey emerged as primary Naval actor in Eastern Mediterranean and Ukraine in Black Sea region. Russia is very tactfully playing to pawn NATO's existence in the region and defend Russia's southern flank but still have a lot more to do because Russia doesn't have a strong Navy like the US. Since Russia's annexation of Crimea and Crimean Peninsula in 2014, the Black Sea fleet has added an

expeditionary capability. Now Russia's ambitions are more than about getting control of Crimean Peninsula; they are about accessing the Mediterranean region (Can Kasapoğlu, 2021). Russia's geo-strategic ambitions are not only confined to accessing geographical routes but to harness and exploit Ukraine's abundant Natural reserves as well.

a. Strategic Resources (Agriculture and Energy Resources)

Energy production and exports plays a tremendous role in Russian economy. Both Russia and Ukraine are big players of global energy markets not just in oil but for abundant reserves of natural gas and coal and Europe heavily relies on Russia and Ukraine to overcome its energy needs. Alone Russia is responsible for about one eighth of the world's oil exports (Victor, 2022). Similarly, Ukraine has one of the globally largest reserves of titanium, iron ore, lithium and abundant deposits of coal especially, in Donbas and eastern region. Collectively, Ukraine's natural resources are worth tens of trillions of dollars and if Ukraine loses control of eastern region; it already has lost control of four significant regions will also lose its two third of coal and gas deposits. Ukraine will also lose abundant reserves of rare earth metals essential for high-tech components. According to Canadian geopolitical risk firm SecDev almost \$ 12.4 trillion worth of Ukrainian energy resources, rare earth metals and minerals are in Russian possession. In addition to that, Russia has also seized 11 percent of Ukraine's oil deposit, 20 percent of its natural gas deposits, 42 percent of metals and 33 percent of rare earth metals including lithium. Some of them were taken by Russia in 2014 and remaining are taken in 2022. At the moment Russia is holding 30 billion tons of hard coal deposits cumulative commercial value of \$ 11.9 trillion. Russia has also seized a significant limestone and coal deposit crucial for steel production (Faiola & Bennet, 2022). Statistically, if we see natural gas deposits Ukraine has around 1.09 trillion cubic meters of gas reserves second largest in the world after Norway which accounts for almost 1.53 trillion cubic meters. However, most of the natural resources are untapped because of lack of technical might and infrastructure development. Presently, Russia is largest exporter of gas to Europe accounting for almost 40 to 50 percent of Europe's energy

needs. Germany is the largest consumer of Russian gas almost 55 percent of its need and a huge goes by Ukraine and a transit fee of almost \$ 7 billion is earned every year. As massive gas reserves remain unexploited still Ukraine is crucial for gas transport from Russia to Europe. Russia also set up the Nord Stream II gas pipeline through Ukraine to supply gas to Europe. Ukraine was also 5th largest iron ore exporter in 2019 globally. Similarly, according to estimation up to 20 percent of titanium ores are present in Ukraine. In 2021, China was the one of the largest importer of Titanium ores from Ukraine. Titanium is heavily used in manufacture of aeroplanes (Mohan, 2022).

Another important component of strategic resources is Ukraine's grain basket. Ukraine is also one of the largest suppliers of wheat and corn and it heavily contribute to Ukraine's economy. Africa and West Asia are largest buyers of Ukrainian and heavily rely on Ukrainian cereals. Over 50 percent of Ukraine's wheat and corn shipment heads to Africa and Middle East. A strong Russian hold on Ukrainian mineral and agriculture resources will unnerve Europe and the US. Russian hold on Ukraine will challenge the US and NATO's authority in Europe and Russian influence in Europe could only grow stronger with Ukraine's invasion and by capturing its worthy resources. It will also enable Putin to pursue its years long ambition to build Russian empire in Europe and emerge as hegemon of the region (Mohan, 2022). By capturing strategic positions and abundant natural resources of Ukraine would enable Putin to rule the region and challenge NATO and West dominance in the region.

Putin's Ambitions to Build Russian Empire in Europe

On February 24, Putin shocked world by starting war in Ukraine. This is however, not a something new. Putin has repeatedly used history as an instrument to achieve his policy goals. Putin himself compare with Peter the Great and Tsar. Putin initially used history as inspiration but gradually transformed into weapon. Putin build that narrative deliberately within country and across the border in Ukraine to justify his actions and secure powerful position globally. In initial years of his rule Putin emphasized on the spiritual unity between Russia and Ukraine.

Putin at various occasions claimed Belarusian, Ukrainian and Russian one people. The agenda behind this narrative was to familiarize people with Putin's long term objectives. Putin considers Ukrainian and Russian people one nation (Drost, 2022). In 2021, Putin wrote an article *Historical Unity of Russian and Ukrainian* in which he outlined all his ambitions for a united Slavic identity over the past years. Putin recalled all glorious time and events of past. He considered only true sovereignty of Ukrainian is possible with Russian Unity. Putin in his election campaigns has repeatedly focused on Greater Russia. Putin also said that Russian and Ukrainian has same language and culture and Ukraine is old Russia and on different occasion Putin declared Ukraine as periphery. Putin considers Modern Ukraine entirely a product of Soviet era. Both Ukraine and Russia has formed a single economic system over the decades and centuries. Ukraine was step by step involved in geopolitical game to encircle Russia therefore, all things that untied us and bring together are under threat (Putin, 2021). Putin's remarks clearly indicate his ambitions to regain lost glory.

In June this year, Putin once again in meeting with young Russian entrepreneurs expressed similar feeling in which he compared himself Peter the Great and Russian Modernization Tsar. Putin has long argued that Ukraine don't have legitimate national identity and Ukraine is exclusively puppet of West. By summoning the memory of Peter the Great, it is clear that Putin's aim is driven by sense on historical dynasty and Putin's project of imperialism is not only limited to Ukraine but beyond Ukrainian territories that once belonged to Russia (Hodge, 2022). Putin's ambitions exemplify that Russia will no longer follow the Western World Order especially the US but would position itself as an independent centre of power in Europe and maybe beyond Europe in Mediterranean and African region. Putin is exactly following Primakov doctrine firstly presented by Yevgeny Primakov in 1996. Putin is contributing to the development of multipolar world order as an alternative to US led unipolar World Order. As Russian economy is progressing and Russia is more enthusiastic in pursuing its goals. Growing political division between US and Europe has also strengthened Putin's narrative and has exposed targets for Russian interference. The quest for recognition as a great power has been

both result of Russia's geographical expansion and respective drivers. Geographical expansion in eyes of Russian leaders will be a key driving factor to recognize Russia as a great power. Economic and political restoration in last decade has enabled Russia to re-establish control over its neighbours. It can be seen by 2008 war with Georgia, 2014 annexation of Crimea and invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and may be way beyond Ukraine in future (Gurganus & Rumer, 2019). Russia is utilizing all means to advance its foreign policy and geopolitical objectives. Economic sanctions, International isolation and geo-political encirclement are all failing to control Russia and put a barrier against Putin's ambition to build a Russian empire in Europe.

Recent Developments: Annexation of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzia

In recent years, first Armed conflict in eastern Ukraine erupted in 2014 and resulted in annexation of Crimea. Crimean annexation unnerved western powers. In 2015, France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine initiated negotiations to end violence through Minsk Accord. Efforts to reach a diplomatic settlement remained indecisive. In first quarter of 2016, NATO positioned four Battalions to Eastern Europe, moving troops from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland to deter Russia. Similarly, in next year 2017, US also positioned two US Army tanks brigades in Poland to further strengthen NATO's presence in the region. Furthermore, in March 2018, US approved sale of anti-tank weapons to Ukraine bolster its defence. In October 2018, the US, and seven NATO countries conducted military exercises in Ukraine. Next two years served as stalemate years between both parts because of global pandemic. By the end of Summer 2021, US intelligence reported that Russia is ready to invade Ukraine and finally on 24 February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine and declared it as a special military operation to demilitarize Ukraine and to protect Russians in Ukraine (CFR, 2022).

Initially, Russia tried to seize the capital Kyiv but following its failed attempt, Russia shifted its focus exclusively to eastern Ukraine. Since the summer 2022, most fighting has largely been confined to east and south of Ukraine. By the end of September 2022, Russian backed

authorities in the occupied eastern regions of Ukraine: Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia held referendum on joining the Russian Federation. Annexation was also followed by mobilisation of 300,000 Russian reservists. According to polls in Donetsk and Luhansk over 98% people voted in favour of Russia while in Zaporizhzhia 93% and in Kherson region 87% people voted in favour of Russia (Beaubien et al., 2022). Russian backed leaders of disputed regions claimed that it was necessary as their region was facing constant threat from Ukraine and NATO. During an address Putin also assured Russian support for these regions (PIA Новости, 2022). Russian moves were widely condemned by international community and declared it a sham referendum similar like referendum held in Crimea. Russian ministry of foreign affairs claimed that votes were taken place in accordance with rules and regulations of international law and people of Donbas and Southern Ukraine has used their right of self-determination according to UN Charter. Ministry also claimed that international observers from various countries which includes Italy, Germany, Venezuela and Latvia monitored the referendum and recognized its legitimacy. In result of that referendum Russia also passed various laws which includes Russian citizenship law, introduced rouble as currency and military formations in those regions (Mills & Butchard, 2022).

The recent annexation and referendum of Ukrainian region are meant to signal a clear message to West that Russia has no intention of backing down from its military and political objectives in Ukraine despite the recent setbacks in Ukraine. Ukraine has lost its 40,000 square miles. The referendum has also closed doors for negotiations too and open the possibility to the total liquidation of Ukraine as an independent state because any territory gained by Russia in future could be integrated into Russia. On the other side, Ukraine has expedited the process of joining NATO (Al Jazeera, 2022).

Implications

Putin's ambitions are not only confined to gaining territory in eastern region its way beyond Ukraine as mentioned earlier. It's not end of the game. As US and West are supporting Ukraine

militarily danger of direct clash between West and Russia are expediting. Russia has already warned of nuclear retaliation (Mills & Butchard, 2022). The Russia's planned wave of annexation could also include proxy territories outside Ukraine. Russia could ignite hybrid warfare in Ukraine as it Russia is doing since 2014 against Ukraine. Annexation of Ukrainian land is likely the only off-ramp that Putin interested in. Even this is face saving option as well for Putin as Russia has also suffered a lot in Ukraine. Russia's future aims of complete regime change in Ukraine would be a devastating blow to Ukraine and West. Russia's annexation plans are still not granted to succeed as Russia has to face strong counter offence from Ukraine in coming month and Ukraine has resisted in Lyman region crucial for connectivity in Donbas region. Russia's annexation plans depend upon consolidating control of occupied territory, establishing administrative capabilities and preventing Ukraine from counter offence (Lawlor & Clark, 2022). Ukraine's western partners in future will have narrow window of opportunity to support Ukraine. Their extended support can initiate a direct confrontation between US, NATO and Russia. Ukraine forces must expedite their counter offence efforts to protect other parts of Ukraine. As Putin has annexed eastern Ukraine, Russian can reconstitute its forces and renew invasion of Ukraine in coming years, with greater strength and with more territorial advantage. The West must take threat seriously real as it will expand to European horizons. The ethical and political consequences of longstanding Russian occupation of Ukraine would be devastating and it would necessitate Western support for Ukraine for continuity of counteroffensive operations (Lawlor & Clark, 2022). It will also entirely change future outlook of Europe which will be under discussion in next part.

Future outlook of Europe

Russia's invasion of Ukraine will have retrospective geo-political and geo-economic repercussions for Europe and global community. The looming Russia-Ukraine crisis is not only confined to Ukraine but could escalate to the rest of Europe. The war in Europe is third asymmetric shock in last two decades, first was 2008 financial crisis, then COVID-19 Pandemic

and now war in Ukraine. The war in Ukraine will have adverse impact on neighbouring countries due to the influx of refugees and their extensive reliance on Russia and Ukraine to overcome energy needs. Europe is facing economic crisis and soaring inflation. Europe will also face consequences of this third asymmetric shock for almost next 15 years. War in Ukraine will force European countries to increase defence spending and could increase polarization in Europe (Borrell, 2022).

The unending war in Ukraine has also lowered prospects of post-pandemic economy recovery for developing economies of Europe and Central Asia. Economic activity will remain sluggish in upcoming years especially in next year 2023, with minimal expected growth of 0.3%. Energy price shocks will continue to destructively impact region. Ukraine's economy is estimated to contract by 35 % this year. According to World Bank estimates, social and infrastructural recovery in Ukraine needs at least \$349 billion. Prolonged or intensified war could cause larger economic and environmental loss to Europe (World Bank, 2022). The overall economic costs of the war are still difficult to predict. However, impacts for different member states will be different. If we exclusively see economic and political outlook of Europe, Central and Eastern European countries appears to be more most vulnerable among remaining European countries. These countries heavily rely Russia for energy imports and can see heavy price hike in upcoming years whereas, Germany and Italy are also heavily dependent on Russian gas. Moreover, both countries are largest importers in absolute terms. Energy intensive economies in western and Northern Europe will also suffer disproportionality. To keep political unity and integrity EU has to share burden collectively. EU heavily relies on energy imports from Russia. In 2020, EU imported almost 23% of its oil, 45% of its gas and almost 45% of its total coal from Russia. While trade in other sectors between EU and Russia is declining because of Crimea factor but EU is unable to replace Russia for its energy needs. These direct dependencies will heavily impact Russia and EU relations (Redeker, 2022).

In short run, it will be hard for these countries to find alternative suitable options. As distribution of oil and gas relies on pipelines and other physical infrastructure, import loss will be even more difficult to manage. Import loss vulnerabilities will be higher in Hungary, Slovenia or Latvia. However, it will also cause strain on global energy markets. Rising energy prices in coming years are likely to hard hit in relatively poor cold European countries considerably harder than those of other member states (Redeker, 2022). In response to political and geo-graphical conflict global economic outlook has also worsen and future global economic growth will remain in shambles. Since the conflict started in February 2022, global inflation has risen to over 6 percent its highest level since 2008. The hike in energy and food prices has further triggered inflation (Guénette et al., 2022).

Politically, it's safe to predict this era of crisis will continue for number of years. Geo-political rivalries, political turmoil in neighbouring regions, deep economic and social inequalities and threats of global warming will make a tough environment for EU to keep intact. In Europe, it is largely believed that Crisis are often a crucial stimulant for the development of European integration but it varies from case to case. Up till now, European Union has shown a collective resilience and unity against Russian aggression but as the war continues collateral damage for EU mounts, asymmetries are beginning to emerge. Most countries in Northern and Eastern Europe considers Putin's reaction as direct threat to Russia's national security. It will considerably require a capable political leadership to overcome emerging divisions in Europe and ensure EU's continued unity in confronting Russia (Lehne, 2022). National egotism and Nationalism will limit the capacities of EU. In stressful situations horizons shrinks and immediate concerns take priorities. Governments priorities national interests' despite of collective unity. In case of Europe, trust among EU members will play a central role and a key ingredient will be highly crucial for successful crisis management. In future, EU's internal divide between Northern and Southern European members will be a key challenge for EU to preserve coherence, unity and collective integrity. Therefore, it is crucial to synergize all efforts to address populist and anti-EU movements across the Europe as it could weaken the EU ability

to act together. In future, EU will have to overcome traditional conceptions of national sovereignty and rise to new level of unity. Stronger and deep rooted bondage that were dreamed by Jean Monnet will be the best guarantee of EU's resilience in an era by beset by crisis (Lehne, 2022).

Way Forward

Russia's war in Ukraine is the deadliest armed conflict in Europe since the culmination of WWII. The conflict is the amalgamation of numerous factors which resulted in the series of conflicts and confrontations and left Europe, Central Asia and the rest of the world in a chaotic and vulnerable situation. The legacy of conflict can be tracked back with Soviet disintegration and later on Crimean crisis in 2013. Political, economic, nationalistic and imperialistic factors were the major drivers of the conflict. Europe has a history of troubled relations with Russia and the recent Russian incursion of Ukraine is a clear manifestation of renewed geo-political rivalry between major global powers. A former Soviet Republic, Ukraine is a major bone of contention between Russia and West because of its geopolitical, geo-economic and a strong cultural resemblance with Russia. The Russia-Ukraine crisis reflects patterns of troubled relations in past decade. Russia annexation of Crimea and NATO eastward extensive expansion since 1997 has left Russia unnerved and resulted in strategic rivalry between east and west.

The regional fiasco has also unnerved EU and especially Eastern European countries as the sounds of conflict escalation are resonating beyond Ukraine. Both Russia and the West are equally responsible for the deadliest conflict in Europe. NATO's expansionist ambitions and encirclement of Russia has added fuel to fire. The West is equally responsible for the conflict in Ukraine. Western leaders including the US clung to the provoking policies against Russia and advanced the crisis. Later on, the West tried to deal with Russia with harsh sanctions that had little effect. The crisis has also exposed the fragility of European Union. Germany and Italy have shown concern and resisted imposing economic sanctions. The West has been continuously

supporting Ukraine militarily and financially against Russia and increasing Russian anger. If conflict keeps escalating in the upcoming month Europe can be in a more troubled position.

It is unlikely that Putin will get back from its expansionist ambitions. There is a solution to the Ukraine crisis but the West has to abandon its plans of westernizing Ukraine and make it a non-aligned buffer zone between the NATO and Russia. West must admit the fact that Ukraine is crucially important to Russia and their support to anti-Russian regime will fail. The US and its western allies must abandon NATO's enlargement in Russian sphere of influence. Stable and peaceful Europe is in global interests, as the world is already facing horrific consequences of three crises that have happened in the last three decades. Sticking with existing policy will further complicate Western relations with Russia. The US and its European allies have an open choice either to keep confronting Russia and devastate Ukraine or end hostilities and move towards conflict resolution.

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