Can Russia's Quest for the New International Order Succeed?

By Mamuka Tsereteli

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Abstract: *A genesis and development of the conflict in Ukraine demonstrated fragility of the international security system and its inability to guard sovereignty of the smaller or weaker nations. By creating and then manipulating conflicts, Russia is gaining leverage over the decision making on political and economic development, governance issues, and the external alliances of those countries. By challenging sovereignty of smaller states, and forcibly changing their borders, Russia is challenging existing international order and the basic principles of Helsinki Final Act on Security and Co-operation in Europe of 1975, to which the Soviet Union, and its successor state, Russian Federation, are signatories. For the interests of global stability, it is a priority to bring Russia back to the framework of the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) without any concessions on principles of sovereignty for all OSCE member states.*

At the core of the conflict between the West and Russia is the fundamental disagreement of the current Russian leadership with the post-Cold War European order. Russia is changing realities on the ground to create conditions that will lead to negotiations on a new security architecture for Europe and the entire Northern Hemisphere. The Russian idea of this new system of security is to limit the sovereignty of the countries in its neighborhood and prevent the penetration of Western hard and soft power, as well as its system of values and governance, in the former Soviet space, an area that Russia considers as its sphere of strategic interest. Russian leadership has on several occasions communicated this message to the international community.[1]

President Vladimir Putin, in his widely publicized 2007 speech at the Munich Security Conference, expressed Russia's dissatisfaction with the existing "unipolar" character of the world order. He followed with a harsh criticism of the Organization

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[1] "The Draft of the European Security Treaty," Official Internet Resource of the President of Russia, Kremlin, Nov. 29, 2009, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/6152.

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for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and Western countries in general. He had already criticized the West's push to fulfill all the conditions of the 1999 revised treaty on Conventional Arm Forces in Europe (CFE), including the removal of all Russian forces from Georgia and Moldova. But most importantly, he stated that "we have reached that decisive moment when we must seriously think about the architecture of global security."[2]

While the speech was publicized widely, world leaders did not take Putin's statement seriously enough. The Russian leader had a plan that could lead to new realities, forcing others to pay more attention to Russian statements and actions. Implementation of that plan continues to this day. The Russian Federation took the first significant step to shake the existing European status quo in 2007 when Russia officially suspended its participation in the CFE treaty. This move was followed by the events in Georgia in 2008 when the Russian military invaded the territory of the sovereign country and maintained its military presence there after active conflict ended. Russia simultaneously recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia, two regions of Georgia, as independent states. All of these actions were publicized as a Russian response to recognizing Kosovo's independence against the will of Serbia. The same argument was used in 2014. Russian leadership considered NATO's commitment to Georgia and Ukraine at the 2008 Bucharest summit as a threat to Russia's security interests.

The immediate objective of the Russian Federation was to stop the Eastward expansion of European security and economic institutions. Its long-term goal was to push for a new security arrangement with NATO, the EU, and United States which would recognize Russian supremacy over the sovereign rights of the countries in Russia's neighborhood. Under the premise of protecting its own sovereignty vis-à-vis supra-national organizations and "universal" values,[3] the Russian Federation has sought arrangements with Western powers designed to limit the sovereignty of neighboring states. Russia considers this process a legitimate method of ensuring its own security.

Sovereignty in this context is understood as the supreme authority within a territory which is exercised in both internal development and external relations.[4] The current international relations system is based on the sovereign rights of nation states, both internally and externally sovereign, to ally, trade, conclude agreements, open borders, etc., as well as on the Westphalian premise that interfering in other states' governing prerogatives is illegitimate.[5] The Russian Federation is using military force, coercion, and economic and energy supply disruptions to limit the sovereignty of

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[2] Vladimir Putin, Putin's Prepared Remarks at 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy, Munich, 2007, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/12/AR2007021200555.html.

[3] Alexander Dugin, *Counter-Currents*, July 2012, https://www.counter-currents.com/2012/07/interview-with-alexander-dugin/.

[4] Dan Philpott, "Sovereignty," in Edward N. Zalta, ed., *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* Summer 2014, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2014/entries/sovereignty/.

[5] Alan James, "The Practice of Sovereign Statehood in Contemporary International Society," *Political Studies*, vol. 47, no. 3 (1999), pp. 457–473.

other countries to prevent their integration into Western led institutions. Russia's status as the prevailing military power is an essential element of Russian strategy. For Russia, asymmetry in power is a source of asymmetry in sovereignty.

Experience of Russian policies vis-à-vis its neighbors, as well as military invasions in Ukraine and Georgia, demonstrates that today's Russia aggressively pursues power politics to restore control over former Soviet Union space. The West needs a clear strategy to bring Russia back into the system of international norms, and rules and power politics should be part of it. Matching Russian military power in the Black Sea region will send a message that Moscow will understand. Ultimately, various sides need to come back to the basics of the Helsinki process, and the sovereignty of the nation states should remain as a fundamental principle of the stability in Europe.

The Anatomy of Conflict in Ukraine

The trigger for the conflict in Ukraine in 2014 was the earlier decision of the pro-Russian leader of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovych to reverse his own policy of being associated with the European Union through a so-called Association Agreement (AA). The AA is an agreement about introducing a rule of law-based political and economic system to countries willing to improve their system of governance and to trade with the European Union. The AA is neither a membership agreement nor an agreement on military or security cooperation.

By November 2013, before the planned date for signing the Association Agreement, Ukraine already had committed itself to a nonaligned status and had accepted a long-term agreement with Russia on the status of naval bases in the Black Sea port Sebastopol. The agreement allowed Russian control of the base until 2035. These were significant concessions that Ukraine made under Russian pressure, and the international system, including international organizations such as the UN, OSCE, and NATO, did not oppose this pressure for the sake of "stability" in the region. Russia, however, did not view those decisions as concessions, but rather as entitlements.

The sequence of events in Ukraine unfolded in the following manner: a Russia-oriented leader of Ukraine, former President Yanukovych, wanted to sign the Association Agreement with Europe while Russia, the Russian Federation, and President Putin personally did not allow this to happen. This lack of agreement led to internal turmoil which pushed Yanukovych out of power. This action, in turn, led to more aggressive Russian actions—the military invasion and annexation of Crimea, and then the Russian supported proxy war in Eastern Ukraine. In addition to violating the UN charter, Russia's actions violated the four-party Budapest Agreement of 1994, where Ukraine gave up its significant nuclear arsenal in exchange for guarantees of security and territorial integrity affirmed by the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Russian Federation. Russia's aggression in Ukraine is a logical continuation of its violation of international obligations in an effort to change the security status quo in Europe.

Viktor Yanukovych

Paradoxically, some experts and diplomats attempted to link the escalating situation in Ukraine to the Western "attempt to force" Ukraine into the European institutions, which led to the Maidan movement and the forced change of the government of Ukraine. In reality, the escalation started when Russia forced Ukraine to reverse its decision to sign the Association Agreement with the EU on the eve of the Vilnius Summit of the EU's Eastern Partnership in November 2013. The great majority of the Ukrainians found this development surprising, and they resisted it.

In this context, the question is whether sovereign nations have the right both to security and for the rule of law based on a political and economic system designed to raise living standards and grant more political and economic freedoms. Some experts believe that while these innocent desires of nations are legitimate, they still result in a potentially dangerous confrontation with Russia and therefore need to be resisted. The European Union was blamed for its willingness to accommodate the Ukrainians' desire to join the Association Agreement. Henry Kissinger, former U.S. National Security Adviser, wrote in the *Washington Post*, "The European Union must recognize that its bureaucratic dilatoriness and subordination of the strategic element to domestic politics in negotiating Ukraine's relationship to Europe contributed to turning a negotiation into a crisis."[6] John Mearsheimer wrote in *Foreign Affairs* that liberal delusions provoked Putin to aggressive actions.[7]

While Kissinger recognized that "Ukraine should have the right to choose freely its economic and political associations, including with Europe," he also said

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[6] Henry Kissinger, "To Settle the Ukrainian Crisis, start at the end," *The Washington Post,* March 5, 2014*,* https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/henry-kissinger-to-settle-the-ukraine-crisis-start-at-the-end/2014/03/05/46dad868-a496-11e3-8466-d34c451760b9_story.html.

[7] John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault," *Foreign Affairs*, Aug. 18, 2014, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-08-18/why-ukraine-crisis-west-s-fault.

that Ukraine should not join NATO, clearly implying to Russian resistance to that development scenario, thus recognizing limits to Ukrainian sovereignty. Coming from deep realist roots, Kissinger also sets Finland as a model for Ukraine's international relations: "That nation leaves no doubt about its fierce independence and cooperates with the West in most fields, but carefully avoids institutional hostility toward Russia."[8] He avoids an analysis of the cost that Finland paid to the Soviet Union after the 1940 invasion of Soviet troops: one-third of Finland's territory and strict limits to its sovereignty which has lasted to this day. He also ignores multiple concessions by Ukraine to accommodate Russian interests. In addition, both Kissinger and Mearsheimer neglect the legality of the Russian actions in Ukraine. Russia had no legal ground for its intervention in Crimea and other regions of Eastern Ukraine. There was no political separatism or movement for self-determination in those territories that could create any ground for political, let alone military, intervention. The conflicts were manipulated by the Russian Federation to create an artificial post-factum pretext for the intervention.

In this context, it is important to look at the legal context of the conflict in Ukraine. Analyzing Mearsheimer's arguments that "liberal delusions" led the West to adopt "provocative policies" and that these "precipitated the crisis in the first place," Robert Grant from the University of Cambridge makes an important observation. He writes:

> Mearsheimer's thesis rests on the assumption that 'strategic interests' trump vested rights. But rights are the mainstay of law. To say that one thing trumps another without considering the force and effect of that other thing is, at best, sloppy thinking. Russia has no right cognizable under law against the territorial integrity of its neighbors. In truth, Russia does not even have a *claim* against its neighbors—none, at least, was articulated before 2014, and the opposite was articulated often. Russia repeatedly, by treaty and by practice, virtually since 1991, and without reservation, acknowledged the sovereignty of its neighbors within the borders that they inherited upon independence."[9]

And then Grant quotes the International Court of Justice judgment:

> A prohibited intervention must . . . be one bearing on matters in which each State is permitted, by the principle of State sovereignty, to decide freely. One of these is the choice of a political, economic, social and cultural system and the formulation of foreign policy. Intervention is wrongful when it uses methods of coercion in regard to such choices, which must remain free ones. State sovereignty evidently extends to the area of its foreign policy, and there is no rule of customary international

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[8] Kissinger, "To Settle the Ukrainian Crisis, start at the end."
[9] Robert Grant, "Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: What does International Law Have to Say?" *Lawfare,* 2015, https://www.lawfareblog.com/russias-invasion-ukraine-what-does-international-law-have-say.

law to prevent a State from choosing and conducting a foreign policy in co-ordination with that of another State.[10]

Thus, debate, initiated by respected scholars and statesmen, intentionally or unintentionally, leads to recognition of asymmetry in the sovereignty of states based on their size and military might, a reality that will have consequences for stability, not only in Europe, but also elsewhere in the world.

Russia clearly saw division in the ranks of Western politicians about their approach to the sovereignty and independence of the former Russian satellites and has capitalized on it since 2008, in the aftermath of the Russian-Georgian war. This divide created an uncertainty toward the future of Europe's security system in an environment where the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the states are no longer respected.

Russia views current developments as a success of its permanent war strategy, which implies that war does not stop, but it occurs continuously in the form of preparation for wars with varying intensity and centers of gravity. This is a war where exerting political, economic, and cultural influence leads to organized chaos, direct influence over an opponent, and eventually, internal collapse.[11] The primary targets of this new warfare strategy are Russia's immediate neighbors in the Black Sea region, Ukraine, and Georgia, as well as Moldova. But other Caucasus states, Baltic countries, and even Belarus and Kazakhstan, the closest allies of Russia, are also on the target list.

The West's uncertainty about how to deal with Russia before the Ukraine crisis was driven by the desire of European allies, predominantly Germany, to use unilateral concessions to accommodate Russian interests and avoid escalation. Even with Russia's annexation of Crimea, invasion of Ukraine's Donbass region, and provocative military patrols over allied territory, NATO's response remains within the framework of international obligations, including the commitment to 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act, which implies limiting the "permanent stationing" of troops in Eastern Europe in the "current and foreseeable security environment."[12] The fact that the "security environment" has drastically changed is not yet fully reflected in the Western strategy. And while scale of military presence in NATO's Eastern flank member states has increase since 2016, the troops are there on a rotational basis, since Western alliance still considers itself bound with 1997 Founding Act and CFE treaty.

Russia is confident that the West's uncertainty gradually will lead toward the "necessity" of negotiations on a new European security treaty, or a "new security architecture," to use Putin's terminology. In this new European order, Russia will have a veto right for EU and NATO expansion. In fact, by gaining territories and creating new conflicts with its leverage, Russia is improving its position for the negotiations that Moscow believes will take place. These Russian actions are a reflection of the West's

[10] Grant, quoting Judgment from *ICJ Reports,* June 27, 1986, pp. 14 and 108.
[11] George Tsereteli, "Russia's Warfare Strategy and Borderization in Georgia," *The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, 2015, http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13254-russia-warfare-strategy-borderization-georgia.html.
[12] Marik String, NATO Unleashed: Stopping Russia in its Track, *The National Interest*, March 5, 2015, http://nationalinterest.org/feature/nato-unleashed-stopping-russia-its-tracks-12363

strategic retreat from the former Soviet space: first Russians stopped NATO and Western hard power presence through its war in Georgia, and after "punishing" Ukraine Russia tried to stop Western soft power influence by preventing countries from having Association Agreements with the EU.

Global reflection on the events in Ukraine is also important. While the West at least introduced sanctions against Russia for its actions in Ukraine, countries like China, India, and Turkey chose essentially to stay silent. The strategic implication of that silence is that power may be used by other states in other parts of the world to limit the sovereignty of smaller and weaker neighbors.

In considering the global significance, undoubtedly some countries with the potential for nuclear development will look at Ukraine and make their own strategic calculations. Treatment of Ukraine by Russia and by other guarantors of the Budapest Agreement will serve as a stimulus for smaller nuclear nations to keep their nuclear arsenal, and for others to develop it.

Russian Gains vs. Russian Losses over Conflict in Ukraine—Snapshot of 2017

The Russian annexation of Crimea and its enhanced military presence on Georgian soil, predominately in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, has improved Russia's strategic position and its negotiation power with the West.

After annexing Crimea in 2014, Russia exponentially increased its military presence in the area and established a platform for power projection there.[13] This power projection was aimed not only at the Black Sea, but also at the Mediterranean. Since 2014, Russia has moved a significant number of anti-air and anti-surface missile systems onto the peninsula, systems that could hit targets in most of the Black Sea region. Russia already has deployed advanced Bastion missile systems on the peninsula, systems that would allow Russia to destroy practically any target in the Black Sea. Russia seeks military dominance, limiting space for NATO's naval presence, as well as individual members of the alliance. This aggressive posture impacts the NATO member states of the Black Sea—Turkey, Romania, and Bulgaria—as well as non-NATO members—Georgia and Ukraine. Any country on the Black Sea is a potential target, and any moving object or infrastructure installation can be targeted. This aggression poses a serious risk and creates cost implications for Black Sea trade and transit. Increased Russian military presence in the Black Sea potentially threatens the functioning of the trade corridor between Asia and Europe, which has significance not only for the littoral states, but also for greater global trade.

Increased Russian military presence in Georgia also gives Russia strategic advantages. Prior to the conflict in 2008, the only military base that Russia had in the South Caucasus was in Gumri, Armenia. In times of potential crisis, providing

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[13] Department of Defense Press Briefing by Gen. Breedlove in the Pentagon Briefing Room, February 25, 2015, https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/607020/department-of-defense-press-briefing-by-gen-breedlove-in-the-pentagon-briefing/

logistical support for the base from the nearest Russian bases in North Caucasus was challenging. With a total of 7,000 troops and several military bases in both Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, Gumri is now much easier to reach. In addition, a military presence standing in close proximity to the main East-West highway in Georgia, as well as the railroad line which connects the Caspian Sea to the main ports on the Black Sea, also gives Russia strategic advantage.

But Russian actions also have had negative consequences for Russian interests in the region. With his action in Ukraine, Putin ended the Western perception that Russia was an actor that respected the post-Cold War order. He also shattered the perception in Western Europe and the United States that Russia no longer represents a strategic threat to the West.

In his July 2015 confirmation hearing to become the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Joseph Dunford told the Senate Armed Services committee that "Russia presents the greatest threat to our national security."[14] This concern represented a dramatic shift in strategic thinking in the United States and Europe since the late 1990s. If the Russian invasion of Georgia was perceived as an episode, the Russian annexation of Crimea and manipulation of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine have transformed strategic thinking.

By raising the temperature in relations with the West, Russia has forced military planners to consider containment plans. The paradox is that instead of pushing NATO away from its borders, Russia, in fact, has invited more NATO troops closer to its border, and for more pro-active actions on the West's part. Russian aggression in Ukraine already has caused Ukraine's decision to abandon its nonaligned status and may lead to greater NATO-Ukrainian cooperation. Another interesting development is an opening of the joint NATO-Georgia training center in Tbilisi that brings Georgia one step closer in the long process of NATO integration. The cooperation and multiple joint exercises can further promote institutional integration and comparability of the Ukrainian and Georgian military forces with the Euro-Atlantic security arrangements. Although this development does not guarantee future membership, it certainly leads to greater collaboration. Today, due to NATO member states' fear of Russian threat, there are more U.S. and NATO troops in the Baltic states, Poland, and Romania than ever before. And in the context of Ukraine and Georgia, by the end of 2017 the U.S. Department of State had approved sales of anti-tank Javelin missiles to Georgia and Ukraine, the decision that Georgia was asking for since 2008, and Ukraine - since 2014.[15]

[14] Jamie Crawford, "2015 Joint Chiefs nominee: Russia greatest threat to U.S.," *CNN*, July 10, 2015, http://www.cnn.com/2015/07/09/politics/joseph-dunford-russia-greatest-threat/.
[15] US Says it will Enhance Ukraine's Defensive Capabilities; Russia Derides Move, *RFE/RL*, December 23, 2017, https://www.rferl.org/a/us-ukraine-enhanced-weapons-javelin-missiles-russia-separatists/28934551.html, and US Department of State Approves Possible Sale of Javelin Missiles to Georgia, *Defense Blog*, November 21, 2017, http://defence-blog.com/army/us-department-of-state-approves-possible-sale-of-javelin-missiles-to-georgia.html.

The Case of Kosovo—An Important Element of the Russian Narrative

The West's recognition of Kosovo's independence is at the core of the Russian narrative for justifying the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008, as well as the annexing Crimea in 2014. The strategic, political, and security implication of recognizing Kosovo's independence in February 2008 against the will of Serbia is an important subject for analysis. This action became the alleged trigger for Russia's very aggressive actions toward its neighbors, aimed at limiting sovereignty and preventing integration of former Soviet Union states into the European and Transatlantic economic and military-security institutions. Against the backdrop of the West's emphasis on the "uniqueness" of the Kosovo case, Putin and members of his government threatened to use the "precedent" of Kosovo and apply it to conflict areas of the former Soviet Union.

In January 2006, while speaking at an annual press conference in the Kremlin, Putin declared that a "universal principle" should be applied when dealing with "frozen conflicts," and Kosovo could serve as a model for resolving conflicts in post-Soviet space. "If someone thinks that Kosovo can be granted full independence, then why should we refuse this to Abkhazians or South Ossetians? We know, for example, that Turkey has recognized the Republic of North Cyprus."[16]

In March 2006, the Speaker of the Federation Council Sergey Mironov mirrored Putin's words: "We are closely watching what is happening in Kosovo. The situation there is very similar to South Ossetia, and they are heading toward the establishment of an independent state."[17]

Russia then qualified the recognition of the independence of Kosovo as a violation of international law. Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov, in a November 2006 interview with the news magazine *Itogi,* indicated that "When we're saying that unilateral actions regarding Kosovo would create a precedent, we act just so as to prevent a violation of international law and the creation of such precedent. We are perfectly aware what consequences this may have for other unrecognized territories."[18] Putin continued this theme in harsh terms days before the declaration of Kosovo's independence by the regional government there. On February 15, 2008, the press reported Putin's position that any declaration of statehood by Pristina would be "illegal, ill-conceived and immoral. Other countries look after their interests. We consider it appropriate to look after our interests. We have done some homework and

[16] "Tbilisi Fears Russia's Policy of 'Universality,'" CIVIL.GE, Feb. 2, 2006, http://www.civil.ge/eng/_print.php?id=11688.

[17] "Russia Sees Kosovo as the Answer," *The Moscow Times,* March 29, 2006, http://www.themoscowtimes.com/sitemap/free/2006/3/article/russia-sees-kosovo-as-the-answer/205957.html.

[18] Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov Interview with Weekly News Magazine *Itogi,* Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Nov. 26, 2006, http://archive.mid.ru//bdomp/brp_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b43256999005bcbb3/ac2f66757c3a2c25c32573a20038456d!OpenDocument.

we know what we will do."[19] At the time, these threats clearly were aimed at Georgia and its sovereign rights in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region.

A few days later, the Russian Foreign Ministry issued a statement: "Kosovo's Provisional Institutions of Self-Government declared a unilateral proclamation of independence of the province, thus violating the sovereignty of the Republic of Serbia, the Charter of the United Nations, UNSCR 1244, the principles of the Helsinki Final Act, Kosovo's Constitutional Framework, and the high-level Contact Group accords." The statement further indicated that Russia fully supports Serbia's territorial integrity and that they expect that both the UN and NATO would "take immediate action to fulfill their mandates as authorized by the Security Council, including voiding the decisions of Pristina's self-governing institutions and adopting severe administrative measures against them."[20]

The West's, and predominantly the United States', decision to recognize Kosovo's independence was made without adequate understanding of the potential consequences for the areas of "frozen conflicts" in the former Soviet space. It appears now that Western calculations of the Russian response did not include the radical actions of Russia in Abkhazia or other conflict areas. If there were any mitigation strategy for that potential outcome, then it clearly did not work. The reality is that while Russia used "frozen conflicts" in Moldova, Georgia, and Azerbaijan for its own benefit, Moscow used them as a justification for maintaining its presence and control over these countries for almost two decades. Russia never recognized any separatist territories' independence before the West's recognition of Kosovo. It was naïve to expect that Russia would accept the uniqueness of the Kosovo case and continue to stay in the legal framework in its own neighborhood after Kosovo's independence.

Another important factor impacting Russia's decisions on recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia's independence is the legal aspect of Kosovo's recognition. There is a perception gap on the legality of that decision outside of the UN Security Council framework: while the West focuses on the legality of the protection of human lives in the context of all the atrocities conducted by the Slobodan Milosevich regime in the former Yugoslavia, Russia is focusing on the UN role in the decision-making process. And with a lack of Security Council support for Kosovo's independence, it seems that not enough was done to reduce that gap.

Ambassador John Bolton, former U.S. envoy to the UN, in a February 2008 presentation, indicated one aspect of the process: by setting up the deadline for negotiations on Kosovo's status and by indicating that failed negotiations would mean the independence of Kosovo, no incentives were set for Kosovar Albanians to agree on anything other than full independence from Serbia in their negotiations with the Serbian government. There are different opinions for what really drove the rushed decision on Kosovo's independence. Among others, those are: President George W. Bush's promise to Albanians; the context of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and a desire in the U.S. administration at the time to take a positive step towards the Muslim

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[19] Luke Harding, "Kosovo breakaway illegal, says Putin," *The Guardian*, Feb. 15, 2008, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/feb/15/russia.kosovo.

[20] Statement by Russia's Ministry Of Foreign Affairs On Kosovo, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Russian Federation, 2008.

communities outside the war zones. Kosovo was seen as an opportunity for creating a new Muslim state in Europe. This action was supposed to demonstrate to the world the nonbiased and just nature of decision making in Washington and major European capitals.

After Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the Kosovo card re-emerged in the Russian narrative in the Ukraine context. On March 18, 2014, President Putin called for the Russian Duma to support the annexation of Crimea and said that Crimea's secession from Ukraine was just like Kosovo's secession from Serbia. Any arguments otherwise were viewed as just attempts to bend the West-advocated rules that were applied to the Kosovo case. "Our Western partners created the Kosovo precedent with their own hands. In a situation absolutely the same as the one in Crimea they recognized Kosovo's secession from Serbia legitimate while arguing that no permission from a country's central authority for a unilateral declaration of independence is necessary." Putin also mentioned in that speech that the UN International Court of Justice agreed to those arguments. He dismissed the contention that Kosovo was unique due to the many victims during the Balkan wars. He also dismissed the allegations that Russia was violating international law with its actions in Ukraine. "Well it's good that they at least recalled that there is international law. Thank you very much. Better late than never."[21]

Obviously, there are serious inconsistencies in Russia's position. As some experts indicate, what Putin did in Ukraine "is in part retaliation for what the United States did in Kosovo over Russian objections. But that is quite different from claiming Kosovo constitutes a precedent."[22] Russia always has argued about the importance of UN approval for any decision on Kosovo. But Russia ignored the UN's position on Georgia and Ukraine. While there was major international involvement in Kosovo, Russia prohibits any involvement by international organizations, including the UN, on issues related to Crimea or Eastern Ukraine. In fact, in the Kosovo case, Russia played an active role in urging Milosevic to yield control of Kosovo to NATO.

The key argument for why NATO intervened against Serbia was to protect Albanians from ethnic cleansing, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. There were no atrocities committed against Russian speaking populations of Crimea or in Eastern Ukraine. This reality makes the Kosovo comparison inadequate. And in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, ethnic cleansing was conducted against the Georgian population of both regions.

Another important argument against using the Kosovo precedent is that neither the United States nor any other major power had any intention of annexing Kosovo. Meanwhile, Russia has annexed Crimea and has initiated a campaign of revival for the term "Novorossiya," the eighteenth century Imperial Russian term for the territory north of the Black Sea that includes the East and South of Ukraine and

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[21] "Putin: Crimea similar to Kosovo, West is rewriting its own rule book," *RT*, March 18, 2014, http://www.rt.com/news/putin-address-parliament-crimea-562/.
[22] Daniel Sewer, "Putin's Petard," *Peacefare,* Jan. 28, 2015, http://www.peacefare.net/2015/01/28/putins-petard/.

parts of Moldova. The parallel exists though between the policies of Yugoslav President Milosevich and President Putin's policies in the Russian neighborhood. Russia is engaged in the same pattern of creating problems in order to control territory—starting with "protecting of minorities" and ending with military presence, occupation, or, as the Crimea case shows, annexation. This is a strategy of destabilization and control which starts with ethno-political manipulation that evolves into using military and paramilitary means. "The pattern is a familiar one: exaggerated reports of mistreatment, organization of militias to protect against largely fictional mistreatment, provocation by those militias against legitimate state forces, then intervention to protect co-nationals from any efforts to restore law and order."[23] This was a scenario in Abkhazia, Transnistria, and South Ossetia in the 1990s, and again in 2008, prior to the Russian military intervention into Georgia. This was the scenario in Ukraine as well.

Bottom line: there was not a new reality on the ground, with the potential of Moscow recognizing the independence of several newly created illegal state entities, again using the "precedent" of Kosovo. The Russian narrative in Ukraine is similar to the Russian narrative in Georgia since the early 1990s: Ukrainian "nationalists" target the "peaceful" Russian minority in Eastern Ukraine and thus Russia is forced to take action. One may expect similar developments in Kazakhstan, Baltic states, or elsewhere, where Russia finds it suitable for its own interests to apply the "Kosovo" model.

Russian Interests and Changing Strategic Dynamics in the Black Sea Region

The Black Sea today represents the interests of multiple global and regional actors; these interests are transforming the geopolitical environment of the Black Sea region.

The Novorossiysk Commercial Sea Port (Wikimedia)

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[23] Sewer, "Putin's Petard."

The Black Sea is an important import and export gateway for the Russian Federation. The Novorossiysk Commercial Sea Port is one of the largest transportation hubs in Russia. It has the largest cargo turnover among Russian ports and the fifth largest in Europe. Novorossiysk port handles approximately 20 percent of all export and import cargoes shipped via Russian Sea ports. The port cities of Novorossiysk and Tuapse are also major oil export outlets, with Novorossiysk playing an increasing role in the export of Ural and Siberian light crude oil.

Russia already exports about 13 billion cubic meters (BCM) of gas to Turkey via Blue Stream pipeline and is building another pipeline, Turkstream, with an initial capacity of 16 BCM. The construction of the pipeline was commenced on May 7, 2017 in the Black Sea near the Russian coast. On June 23, 2017, the docking of the shallow and deep-water parts of the TurkStream gas pipeline took place, and the laying of the deep-water section began. While increasing Turkish dependence on Russian gas, this pipeline is clearly harming Ukrainian, Moldovan, and other downstream and transit market interests. Turkstream will also compete with the South Caucasus Pipeline-TANAP (Trans-Anatolian Pipeline)-TAP (Trans-Adriatic Pipeline) pipeline system, connecting Azerbaijani Shah-Deniz field, via Georgia, Turkey, Greece, and Albania to Italy, with a link from Greece to Bulgaria. The South Caucasus pipeline and TANAP are mostly completed and will be able to transship Azeri gas already in 2018, thus improving energy security for Turkey, Bulgaria, and others. But Turkstream will give Russian Gazprom an opportunity for price wars and other manipulations vis-à-vis Azerbaijani gas.

Overall, Russia has strong current and future commercial interests in the Black Sea and undoubtedly is not interested in a radical escalation of conflict with the West in the area. This situation gives NATO and the United States an opportunity to lead towards strategic co-existence in the region, working with other actors who are also interested in the stability of the area.

Sanctions were the West's major policy answer to the Russian annexation of Crimea. Only after Russia began to move military equipment into Crimea did NATO and the United States start to enhance their deterrence capabilities in the Black Sea, while at the same time avoiding escalation and confrontation with Russia. In line with these strategies, NATO and its allies held several military exercises in 2016-2017 in the Black Sea region, sending cautionary signals to Moscow that Russian actions are on notice.

Turkey and Russia

Turkey is an actor with traditional interests in the Black Sea region. It is a major NATO member and a Black Sea state. In fact, Turkey was the frontline country during the Cold War and served as a major balancing power in the Black Sea region vis-à-vis Russia after the Soviet Union's collapse. But due to increased tensions with its Western allies, as well as its economic priority of deepening profitable trade and economic ties with Russia, Turkey has retreated gradually from its position as the vanguard of the Western strategic interests in the Black Sea.

Turkey had a cautious reaction to Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008, as well as the escalation of conflict in Ukraine in 2013-2014. While Turkey did not recognize Russian rights over Crimea and condemned the annexation, it passed on joining international sanctions against Russia. The later escalation of the Russian-Turkish tensions over the downed Russian military plane at the Syrian border, and the follow-up Russian pressure on Turkey created different dynamics in the bilateral Turkish-Russian relationships. Russia clearly came out as the winner in this confrontation. Turkey was forced to apologize for the downed plane and has signed on to the Russian plan to build the new Turkstream pipeline, which competes with the strategically important TANAP pipeline which Turkey strongly supports.

In addition to energy cooperation, Turkey recently conducted several naval military exercises with Russia, which may be another reflection of Turkey's desire to keep economic ties with Russia. But all these compromises have geopolitical costs which may not be understood fully today. Turkey cannot be blamed solely for the concessions it was forced to make in the Black Sea region. The uncertainty of U.S. policies over Syria and the conflict's escalation in the past exposed Turkey's vulnerabilities. Russia exploited those vulnerabilities due to a lack of coordinated strategy between Turkey and its Western allies.

Despite all these issues, Turkey understands the threat of an increased Russian domination in the Black Sea and is willing to accommodate increased Western naval presence there. That is why Turkey is an active part of the naval exercises in the region, including the largest Sea Breeze exercise in history in 2017. The exercises included the United States, Ukraine, Georgia, Bulgaria, and Romania, as well as ten other countries. Yet, it will be difficult to expect pro-active independent moves from Turkey in the process of balancing Russia.

Asian Countries and the Black Sea

There is a growing interest in the Black Sea from Asian countries. Trade between Europe and Asia is growing, and Asian producers and European importers are looking for faster ways to deliver business orders to European consumers at competitive prices. The Black Sea is destined to play a larger role in the Asia-Caucasus-Europe trade and transit corridor. One potentially attractive option is the multimodal transportation network from Kazakhstan or Turkmenistan via the Caspian Sea through Azerbaijan, then to Georgia's Black Sea ports or Turkey's transportation system to Europe and the Mediterranean. The countries of Central Asia and the South Caucasus are making significant investments in developing their infrastructure. Afghanistan and Iran also are looking at different options for transportation investment in an effort to improve trade with European countries.

The new railway line between China and Aktau, a port on the Caspian Sea, reduced the time of transshipment via Kazakhstan. Developing port infrastructure in Aktau, Turkmenbashi, and Alat near Baku should improve connectivity in the Caspian Sea. The expansion project in the port of Poti and the development of the new deep water port Anaklia in Georgia will make it easy to service the increased flow of cargo. By connecting Georgian ports to ports in Ukraine, Romania, and

Bulgaria and by creating preferable commercial terms, Black Sea countries will attract significant volumes of cargos.

China: New Actor in the Neighborhood

Discussion about the new strategic environment in the Black Sea region cannot be completed without considering the impact of the new actor in this region: the People's Republic of China. China is looking at the Black Sea as a natural extension of the One Belt One Road Initiative. China already has $60 billion in trade with Central and East European (CEE) countries and has initiated the so-called 16+1 group with 16 Central and East European Countries, which includes two Black Sea littoral states, Bulgaria and Romania.[24] This group already has a secretariat, organizational structure, and a fairly active life.

At the most recent Riga Summit of the group in 2016, China's Prime Minister Li Keqiang and CEE leaders agreed to enhance pragmatic cooperation and increase people-to-people exchanges to unleash each other's advantages. The leaders reaffirmed their support for the cooperation initiative involving the ports on the Adriatic, Baltic, and Black Seas, and along the inland waterways. Beijing views the Black Sea as an important channel for cooperation with Central and Eastern European countries.

China's European and global ambitions were well demonstrated in the joint Chinese-Russian naval military exercises in the Baltic Sea, called Joint Sea 2017. And while Beijing has no immediate plans for a security presence in the Black Sea region, China's economic presence will have strategic implications.

Strategic Option: Symmetry in Power Politics

Despite some signs of strength, Russia is a declining power, with poor demographics and a stagnating economy. More importantly, however, Russia is a country with a weak and corrupt government that can offer little to other nations regarding innovation and progress. Even countries that are heavily dependent on trade and remittances from Russia are trying to escape from Moscow's influence. While the European Union under the NATO security umbrella offers stability and prosperity to the citizens of the countries who voluntarily want to join, the Russian Federation is forcing countries into the Eurasian Union, offering as an alternative confrontation, dismemberment, instability, and corrupt governance.

Developments in the conflict areas of the Black Sea-Caspian region indicate that there is a clear attempt by the Russian Federation to limit the sovereignty of Ukraine, as well as Georgia, Moldova, and other states. By creating and then

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[24] The 16 countries include 11 EU Member States and 5 Balkan countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Macedonia), http://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/policy/multilateral-relations/cooperation-between-central-and-eastern-european-countries-and-china.

manipulating conflicts, Russia is gaining leverage over the decision making on political and economic development, governance issues, and the external alliances of those countries. Russian policy is directed at institutionalizing the asymmetry of sovereignty between the Russian Federation and its neighbors. This policy limits small nations' ability to exercise their sovereign rights on integration in international organizations. Simultaneously, it gives Russia the right to decide the level of sovereignty possessed by each of its neighbors.

The international implication of this process, if allowed to prevail, establishes a twenty-first century "Monroe Doctrine" precedent in the Russian neighborhood. It also tempts other global or regional powers to copy the "doctrine" in their own regions, leading to other small or larger conflicts. The capacity of small countries is not enough to resist this process. The international community needs to mobilize to resist these attempts to destroy the international system based on the sovereignty of nation states and to prevent deeper destabilization around the globe.

Looking Ahead

It is in the interest of global stability to bring Russia back into the system of international norms and rules. This goal can only be achieved by understanding what President Putin and current Russian leaders are thinking and operating based on Cold War paradigms. Russia understands the language of great power politics. One scenario that may lead to Russia's return to the OSCE framework (the framework that was created with participation of the Soviet Union and then Russia) is for United States and NATO declaring a temporary hold on the CFE treaty and the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act limitations on the size of troop deployments and equipment in Central and Eastern Europe, and deploying military forces in the Black Sea to match the Russian military power in the area in terms of the size of forces and type of equipment. These forces should remain in the area until Russia removes its military equipment and personnel from the conflict areas in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, including Crimea.

This scenario is not risk free. There is always a possibility of tensions escalating which may lead to conflict, but it is not in Russia's military-security, or political and economic interest to escalate relationships with the West in the Black Sea area.