

THE UKRAINIAN CONFLICT AND OPTIONS FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Khan Zeb
Ihsan Habibullah

Abstract

The Ukrainian crisis has historical roots. There are different dimensions and causes of the conflict in Ukraine, which include socio-linguistic, economic, cultural and political aspects that can be traced back into history. The geostrategic significance of the region has not allowed the conflict to remain confined to Ukraine; it has involved various international actors, who want to create space for their own economic, political and strategic gains. At times, conflict resolution necessitates the involvement of international actors, for the conflict is either too difficult to resolve locally or it has international dimensions which cannot be ignored. Such is the case with the Ukrainian conflict. The aim of this paper is to comprehensively analyze the conflict in Ukraine and suggest possible options for conflict resolution. It is analyzed in the light of the Edward Azar's Protracted Social Conflict approach and the general conflict resolution approach.

Introduction

The conflict in Ukraine drew the attention of the international community as it evolved into a crisis situation in Eastern Europe. The conflict was initially sparked by internal causes, but it then assumed international dimensions involving the EU, Russia and the USA. To understand the current issues confronting Ukraine, we must take a peek into the history of Ukraine. Ukraine at various times was part of different states and empires. It was part of Scythia in ancient times, but then Slavic expansion began. Slavic tribes settled in Ukraine in the 5th and 6th centuries A.D. Some Swedish Vikings, who had sailed along the rivers in Eastern Europe in the 9th century, settled in Ukraine. Oleg, a Viking invaded Kiev in 882 and it became the capital of a powerful state- Kievan Rus which disintegrated in the 12th century, when the Mongols conquered southern and eastern Ukraine. Northern and western Ukraine however remained independent until the 14th century, when the Poles and the Lithuanians occupied the area. The Mongols, also known in the region as Tartars were gradually

driven back, but they still held on to Crimea. In the 15th century Ukraine came under the domination of the Turkish Ottoman Empire. In the 15th and 16th centuries, some serfs, under the servitude of Polish landlords, escaped and settled on the steppes of Ukraine. The Kozaky (Cossacks), or freeman, formed communities that were self-governing. They eventually united under the Cossack Hetmanate. In the late seventeenth century, western Ukraine came under the domination of Poland, while eastern Ukraine came under the tutelage of Czarist Russia. Czarina Catherine the Great, however, resolutely stuck to her ambition to absorb the eastern part of Ukraine into Russia. In 1764, the Cossack Hetmanate was finally abolished. By the eighteenth century, the atrophy of the Polish state, allowed Russia and Austria to carve up Poland. In the partitioning of Poland (1772-1795), most of the western part of Ukraine was swallowed up by Russia, with the exception of the small strip in the far west, which was taken by Austria. Russia conquered Crimea in 1783. The famous Ukrainian port of Odessa was founded by Catherine the Great. Though in the nineteenth century Ukraine remained under the control of Czarist Russia, in the middle of the century there were stirrings of nationalism in the country.

After the Leninist revolution in Russia in 1917, the Russian hold over Ukraine slackened. Since Lenin's government was preoccupied with the civil war against the counter-revolutionists, supported by Western powers, in 1918, Ukraine declared its independence. After a civil war, the Ukrainian People's Republic was formed which was internationally recognized. However, the independence was short-lived, for it was followed by the Ukrainian-Soviet war, in which the Russian Red Army defeated the Ukrainian government forces in late 1919. The Ukrainian Bolsheviks, who had opposed the national government of Ukraine, now formed the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, and on December 30, 1922, it became a founding member of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.¹

On the eve of the Second World War in 1939, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union divided Poland between them. Thus, the Ukrainian SSR's territory was enlarged westward. In the words of George Friedman, "From 1914 to 1945, Ukraine was as close to hell as one can reach in life."² When Nazi

¹ Nicholas Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 537.

² George Friedman, "Ukraine on the Edge of Empires", *Geopolitical Weekly, Stratfor Global Intelligence*, 17 December 2013. Available from http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/20101129_geopolitical_journey_part_6_ukraine#axzz3K5cHna62.

Germany launched its invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, Ukraine came under the occupation of Germany. This occupation lasted until 1944.

During the Second World War, Ukrainian freedom fighters fought for the country's independence from both Germany and the Soviet Union. However, after the retreat of Nazi forces, first from the Soviet soil and then from East Europe, the Soviet army reclaimed Ukraine. The Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic became one of the founding members of the newly established United Nations in 1945.

The Soviet Union had initially adopted a liberal policy on languages and cultures of the various republics. Thus, Ukrainian was recognized as the official language of administration and schools. In the 1930s, however, conformity in culture and language, in short 'Russification', was imposed all over the USSR.

After the death of the autocratic Josef Stalin in 1953, at the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, Stalin and his policies were discredited and the new leader Khrushchev adopted a comparatively liberal policy on the components republics of the Soviet Union. In 1954, the Ukrainian SSR expanded to the South, when Crimea was added to its territory. There were intermittent periods of repression all over the Soviet Union while it lasted, and the Ukrainians were affected as were all other nationalities of the Communist giant.

With the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine became an independent state.

Living for centuries on the edge of empires, Ukraine has been exposed not only to the cross currents of cultures but also to the vicissitudes Great Power politics. Its name Ukraine means 'on the edge'³ which may have been given because of its location and history.

Ukraine has linguistic, cultural and political divisions with the result that its people also have varying affiliations and sympathies with the outside world. Quite understandably this causes political and national security issues for Ukraine. The geopolitical location of contemporary Ukraine has

³ Ibid.

changed the nature of its present conflict from an intrastate conflict to an international one. Inevitably, its impact cannot be contained and it has regional and international repercussions. This paper argues that the internal polarization in post-Soviet Ukraine has resulted in conflict. It further argues that the absence of a 'national narrative' in Ukrainian society has also been instrumental in pushing the country into the crisis. It also proposes measures for the conflict resolution process.

Conflict mapping and conflict analysis

To critically analyze the Ukrainian case, Edward Azar's Protracted Social Conflict theory for understanding and resolving conflicts has been kept in mind.⁴ Conflict mapping gives a clear analysis of the nature, dynamics, causes and structure of a particular conflict and possible options for resolving it.

Ukraine, the second largest country in Europe, bordering the Black Sea, and situated between the Russian Federation and Poland, having a population of forty-five million, has been struggling with its identity since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.⁵ The Ukrainians have not been very successful in building strong political and social institutions, nor have they instituted effective economic reforms. Ever since the country gained independence, successive presidents allowed the ruling elite to establish their hold over economic and social affairs, and suppression of dissent has become the norm. Thus, the conflict in Ukraine is the product of two decades of bad governance, a vulnerable economy controlled by oligarchs, chronic dependence on Russia, and apparently unbridgeable linguistic, religious, and ethnic differences between the distinct eastern and western regions.⁶

Nature of the conflict

As already pointed out, the present Ukrainian crisis is owing to domestic political divisions but it has strong international dimensions. Since the

⁴ Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse and Hugo Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution, the Prevention, Management and Transformation of Deadly Conflicts* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 101-108.

⁵ Agnieszka Pikulicka-Wilczewska (eds.), *Ukraine and Russia: People, Politics, Propaganda and Perspective* (Bristol: E-International Relations, 2016), 57.

⁶ Robert McMahon, "Ukraine in Crisis" (25 August 2014), available at <http://www.cfr.org/ukraine/ukraine-crisis/p32540>.

outbreak of the so-called 'Orange Revolution' till the present conflict, the Ukrainian crisis began as an internal power struggle and ended up as a regional level geopolitical crisis. According to Malyarenko, there are five dimensions of the Ukrainian conflict, "institutional exclusion, the separatist conflict, the low intensity conflict, individual terrorism and direct foreign intervention".⁷ The internal polarization and divided nature of Ukrainian society, marked by differences on political and economic policies and the differences among the ruling elite and their relations with regional and international actors, made Ukraine extremely vulnerable to foreign intervention. The absence of a national narrative pushed Ukraine into the hands of the competing powers in the region.

Causes of the conflict in Ukraine

The conflict in Ukraine can be called a systemic crisis involving two models; one is the "post-Soviet Ukrainian statehood" model and the second is "the post- unipolar world model". From this perspective, the causes of the conflict in Ukraine can be perceived as having internal and external dimensions.

Internal causes

The internal causes of the conflict in Ukraine are directly linked to historical, political and economic issues while the external causes are related to the position of internal players vis-à-vis the post-cold war regional and international order. Ukraine has been caught in the vicissitudes of Russia's relation with the West, and the Ukrainian conflict has been greatly impacted by the communications revolution.⁸ Domestically, widening internal political rifts and the failure of governance owing to corruption, nepotism and the capture of the state by oligarchs are just a few issues responsible for the conflict. The conflict in Ukraine did not emerge in a vacuum. Ukraine was a polarized country well before the Euromaidan movement took shape. George Friedman says that "Every country has its regional differences, to be sure, but Ukraine stands apart in

⁷ International Conference on *Caught in a Modern Tug of War: Ukraine's Prolonged Crisis*, 6 June 2014, Budapest. Visit at <http://www.ceu.hu/article/2014-06-16/caught-modern-tug-war-ukraines-prolonged-crisis#sthash.DDlZgG1G.KigcXYBf.dpuf>.

⁸ The Crisis in Ukraine: Root Causes and Scenarios for Future, *Valdai Club Report* (7 September 2014), available at vid-1.rian.ru/ig/valdai/ukraine_eng.pdf.

this regard”⁹. Political, economic, territorial and diplomatic issues posed an existential threat to the country’s integrity, national unity and sovereignty.

The cultural and communal divide

The deep cultural divide between the western and eastern parts of the country has had a strong impact on the country's politics and policy making. Language and culture, architecture and life style depict the differences between communities across the globe. The dominant groups in the conflict are Russian and Ukrainian speaking people and they have their respective empathies with Russia, Ukraine and European countries. Besides the two main ethnic groups, Ukrainian and Russian, Ukraine is home to over 130 ethnicities/nationalities.¹⁰ The linguistic and cultural division, with Ukrainian spoken in Lviv and Russian in Donetsk, makes the regions poles apart in every sphere of life, which consequently impacts on national policies and politics. Even the architecture in the two regions is different, “with classical European architecture lining narrow cobblestoned streets in Lviv and Soviet apartment blocks alongside sprawling boulevards predominating in Donetsk”.¹¹ Both regions have their own heroes, ideals and social norms. These wide socio-cultural and political differences between the two dominant communities have engendered internal and external security issues that threaten the integrity of Ukraine.

Political polarization

The political differences on ethnic lines discourage national narratives. Politicians in power have supported the local narratives of the people or regions from where they derive political support. The Public Choice Theory of Political Science is clearly reflected in Ukraine’s political life. The election results of the past decade reveal a clear split in the voting patterns between southern and eastern Ukraine and those in the western and central parts of the country.¹² In the presidential elections of 2005 and 2010, Yanukovych received an overwhelming majority in the east and

⁹ George Friedman, “Ukraine’s Polarization and the Western Challenges”, *Stratfor Global Intelligence*, 11 March 2014.

¹⁰ Laad a Bilaniuk and Svitlana Melny, “A Tense and Shifting Balance: Bilingualism and Education in Ukraine”, *The International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 11, nos.3-4 (2008), available from https://www.academia.edu/1080543/A_tense_and_shifting_balance_Bilingualism_and_education_in_Ukraine.

¹¹ George Friedman, “Ukraine’s Polarization and the Western Challenges”.

¹² Ibid.

Crimea but only negligible votes in the west. Ukraine does not have "swing states"¹³ which could act as political power balancers.

Geostrategic location

In Ukraine, political and cultural differences are problematic, but its geographic and geopolitical position greatly amplifies polarization. It is located at the Eurasian heartland, forever trapped between Europe to the west and Russia to the east. The geostrategic location of the country at the same time presents both an opportunity as well as a dilemma for Ukraine.

Economic causes

A country faced with political instability, corruption and social polarization can have little hopes for economic stability. The inequitable distribution of wealth and the control of the economy by a few influential families have also contributed to instability and conflict in Ukraine. The country was hit badly by the global financial crisis which struck in 2009, decreasing the GDP growth from 14.8 percent (2008) to its lowest ebb at 0.2 percent and 0% in 2013.¹⁴ Lack of political will on the part of those in positions of power to carry out economic reforms, and their corrupt practices triggered the economic decline of Ukraine.

Corruption and abuse of resources

Independence from Soviet yoke failed to bring about much positive change in Ukraine. In fact, the unprecedented level of corruption and resource abuse reduced the state's ability to perform its basic functions effectively. Those at the helm of affairs used the state machinery for their political and material benefit and the suppression of opposition. Respect for the law and the constitution was completely lacking in the Ukrainian oligarchy. The law was manipulated with impunity to serve their own interests. The pro-Russian Yanukovich repealed the constitutional reforms of the Orange Revolution and handed back executive powers into the hands of the president to establish a Kleptocracy.¹⁵

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Mykola Kapitonenko, "Ukraine: The Political Crisis", in Alina Inayeh, Daniela Schwarzer And Joerg Forbrig (eds.), *Regional Repercussions of the Ukraine Crisis: Challenges for the Six Eastern Partnership Countries* (Washington DC: German Marshal Fund, July 2014). Available at http://www.gmfus.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/1/files/mf/1404920650Inayeh_UkraineCrisisRegionalOutlook_Jun14_web.pdf.

¹⁵ Ibid.

External actors

The crisis in Ukraine is neither about trade nor is it about Ukraine. The most dominant role in the crisis in Ukraine has been that of Russia, the EU and the USA. Their focus has been upon securing their respective interests. They have mostly contributed to the escalation of the conflict. Had they played de-escalatory and even-handed roles, conflict could have been averted.

Russia

Russia has economic and security interests in Ukraine besides a long shared history and similar culture. Ukraine offers Russia two important things: a strategic location and agronomic and mineral products. The first is universally significant, though the latter takes second place in Russia-Ukraine relations. Ukraine is undoubtedly very important to Russia's defence.¹⁶ The Ukrainian ports of Odessa and Sevastopol are of critical importance for Russia, for these provide commercial and military access to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea.¹⁷ The initial post-Soviet policy towards Ukraine was not as overtly interventionist as it has become over the years. Some scholars believe that Putin's main goal is to exercise negative control, in order to prevent Ukraine from harming Russia's interests.¹⁸ Russia is not willing to tolerate Ukraine's alignment with the EU or NATO.

The United States

American goals in the Ukraine are quite different from that of the EU. For Washington, it is not about "getting the Ukraine", it is about not letting the Russians get Ukraine, what Hillary Clinton called "re-Sovietizing" the region.¹⁹ The US wants to maintain the post-cold war unipolar world order dominated by the US and the West.

¹⁶ George Friedman, "Perspectives on Ukrainian Protest", *Stratfor Global Intelligence*, 28 January 2014.

¹⁷ Daniel Hamilton and Gerhard Mangott (eds.), *The Wider Black Sea Region in the 21st Century: Strategic, Economic and Energy Perspectives* (Washington D.C.: Center for Transatlantic Relations, 2008).

¹⁸ George Friedman, "Perspectives on Ukrainian Protest".

¹⁹ Anonymous, "The Geopolitics of the Ukrainian Conflict: Back to Basics" (20 February 2014), at <http://vineyardsaker.blogspot.com/2014/02/the-geopolitics-of-ukrainian-conflict.html>.

The European Union (EU)

Ukraine is often referred to as the “breadbasket of Europe”²⁰. Previously, it was the breadbasket of the Soviet Union. Thus, Ukraine has definite commercial and economic value to the EU. It provides a market for EU’s goods and services. Having a permanent role in Ukraine is also a way to make the EU appear more powerful and more relevant in regional affairs. It can also provide comparatively cheap labour to the EU²¹.

Immediate causes that sparked anti-government demonstrations

- The Verkhovna Rada (Supreme Council of Ukraine) failed to pass a resolution to allow a pro-Western political figure Yulia Tymoshenko* to get medical treatment in Europe. The European Union had demanded that she be given the permission for it. The withholding of permission also infuriated pro-West Ukrainians.
- The opposition capitalized on President Yanukovich’s refusal to sign the Association agreement with the EU, initiated in March 2012²².
- The setting aside of the agreement with the European Atomic Energy Community by the cabinet also provided strength to the opposition narrative.

Conflict actors: their positions and interests

In order to understand the conflict, it is necessary to understand the different actors, their positions and interests. Some scholars believe that the crisis in Ukraine is not only about Russian opposition to NATO’s expansion in Eastern Europe; it also highlights that Russia considers the

²⁰ Peter Marzalik, “Ukraine: Divvying up the Breadbasket of Europe” (27 March 2014), available at <http://registan.net/2014/03/27/ukraine-divvying-up-the-breadbasket-of-europe/>.

²¹ Anonymous, “The Geopolitics of the Ukrainian Conflict”.

* Yulia Tymoshenko co-led the Orange revolution in Ukraine and was appointed prime minister twice. By May 2010, she was under investigation for several criminal acts and was sentenced to seven years in prison in October 2011. During imprisonment she complained of back pain. She received medical treatment in hospital by a panel of doctors from Canada and Germany but was not allowed to go abroad for treatment despite the EU’s appeal. She was released from prison after the Euromaidan coup against the Yanukovich government in February 2014.

²² Peter Marzalik, “Ukraine: Divvying up the Breadbasket of Europe”.

economic integration of Ukraine with the EU as a threat to its geo-strategic interests.²³ However, this view is rejected by some Western circles.

Ukraine has not been a priority on the agenda of the US, though it did support the pro-West opposition leaders in Kiev and encouraged their determination to oppose Russia's annexation of Crimea²⁴, which had aroused considerable international concern. The US, however, avoided exerting military pressure on the Soviet Union. One assumption about the American inability to pressure Russia and resort to the military option was that the US was already bearing the burden of maintaining its military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan. Besides, it was still grappling with the international economic crisis.²⁵ The Ukrainian conflict is no doubt about the big powers' respective geopolitical interests and the maximization of their spheres of influence in the post-cold war world order.²⁶

Actors, Positions and Interests

Actors	Positions	Interests
Pro-West Politicians/Oligarchs	In Government Want Ukraine's integration into the EU. Led the Euromaidan movement (began November 2013).	Alliance with the EU. Liberal market economy. Western values.
Pro-Russia Politicians/ Oligarchs	Divided on the issue of governance. Want pro-Russian government in Ukraine. Separatist/Nationalist.	Alliance with Russia. National Governments in provinces. Interested in joining Eurasian Economic Union and customs union of Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan.

²³ Nicu Popescu, "First Lessons from the Ukrain Crisis", EU Institute for Security Studies, (October 2014), available at www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Alert_41_Ukraine_lesson_s.pdf.

²⁴ Dimitri Trenin, "The Ukrainian Crisis and Resumption of Great Power Rivalry", *Carenege Endowment* (July 2014).

²⁵ This is view of Fareed Zakria in *The Post-American World and the Rise of the Rest* (London: Penguin Books, 2011), 190.

²⁶ Tziarras Zenonas, "Power Struggle over Ukraine: Systemic Observations", *The GWPost*, 2 March 2014.

Donetsk People's Republic (self-proclaimed state in eastern Ukraine)	Autonomy of Donetsk. Receiving Russian aid and backing.	Control over DPR (Donetsk People's Republic).
Lugansk People's Republic (self-proclaimed state in eastern Ukraine)	Autonomy of Lugansk. Receiving Russian backing and aid.	Control over LPR (Lugansk People's Republic).
Russia	Russia annexed Crimea in March 2014. Wanted Ukraine to be member of Eurasian Economic Community.	Promotion of Russian military, economic and geo-political interests.
The United States	Territorial integrity of Ukraine under international law. Smart sanctions against Russia.	Stopping Russia from 're-claiming' Ukraine.
NATO	Concern about the illegitimate annexation of Crimea. A united Ukraine.	Expansion of the Trans-Atlantic security regime. Strengthening NATO's deterrence vis-à-vis Russia.
EU	Economic integration of the Ukraine with the EU. Consolidation of democratic norms. Integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine.	Access to Ukraine markets and energy resources. Access to the breadbasket of Europe (Ukraine produces 25% of agricultural output of Europe).

Impact of the conflict on Ukraine

One very significant impact of the Ukrainian crisis is the annexation of Crimea by Russia. Following the overthrow of Yanukovich in February 2014, Russia began its covert involvement in Crimea in early March which

led to a general referendum to rejoin Russia.²⁷ Crimea, an autonomous republic of Ukraine, is strategically significant for Russia. Having a population of two million, it is demographically divided into Russians (59%), Ukrainians (23%) and Muslim Tatars (12%).²⁸ The referendum result was in favour of joining Russia. In Hall Gardner's view the referendum results "cannot be attributed entirely to the pressures and propaganda of President Putin and Russian pan-nationalism, but were also in response to perceived anti-Russian, anti-Orthodox policies of the Euromaidan movement"²⁹. Justifying the Russian stand on Crimea, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated, "Crimea represents a region as important to Russia as the Falklands/Malvinas is for the UK, and is thus worth fighting for."³⁰ But an even better analogy is the geo-economic importance of Panama and the Panama Canal for the United States, which resulted in US interventions in 1903 and 1989.³¹ The toppling of the pro-Russian president and the geo-economic, security, cultural and historical importance of Crimea for Russia were the major factors that pushed the latter to intervene.

NATO, the EU and the United States have strongly criticized the Russian move and declared its annexation of Crimea as a violation of the Ukrainian constitution and international law. The US pointed out that Moscow had broken the Alma Ata Declaration of December 1991. The leaders of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus had signed the Belavezha Accords on December 8, 1991, which dissolved the USSR and created the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). This event was followed by the signing of Alma Ata protocols, on December 21, 1991. By virtue of these accords, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan agreed to join the CIS. The Alma Ata agreement, thus, included the original signatories of the Belavezha accord and eight other republics of the former USSR. The Alma Ata Declaration sought to build democratic, law governed states. Relations between CIS would develop "on the basis of mutual recognition and respect for state sovereignty and sovereign equality... and non-interference

²⁷ Hall Gardner, "NATO, the EU, Ukraine, Russia and Crimea: The 'Reset' that was Never Reset", *NATO Watch*, 3 April 2014, p.49.

²⁸ Robert McMahon, "Ukraine in Crisis", 25 August 2014.

²⁹ Hall Gardner, "NATO, the EU, Ukraine, Russia and Crimea".

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

in internal affairs, the rejection of the use of force, the threat of force and economic and any other methods of pressure, a peaceful settlement of disputes, respect for human rights and freedom, including the rights of national minorities, a conscientious fulfillment of commitments and other generally recognized principles and standards of international law...".³² The signatories also resolved to recognize and respect each other's territorial integrity and the inviolability of the existing borders.

There was also criticism and condemnation of the Russian intervention for its violation of the 1994 Budapest Memorandum; the 1997 NATO- Russia Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security; the 1997 Treaty of Friendship between Russia and Ukraine as well as the 1997 legal framework underpinning the Russian Black Sea fleet, and the 2002 Rome Accords that established the NATO-Russia Council³³.

Despite the present calm following the storm, Ukraine is still vulnerable to potential turmoil. Potential instability in Ukraine can pose problems at the international and regional level. Trenin Dmitri believes that "the Ukraine crisis has opened a new period of heightened rivalry, even confrontation, between former Cold War adversaries"³⁴ The Ukrainian crisis has engendered regional and global security challenges. The unipolar, West-dominated international politics has changed, giving birth to a new competition between the West and Russia. By annexing Crimea, Russia has posed a serious challenge to the post-cold war European order of alliances. There has been a paradigm shift in the international order. The Ukrainian intervention has increased the feeling of insecurity in Eastern Europe. The economic impact cannot be measured at this time but it could also affect the economic well-being of Europe in the near future.

Stages of the conflict

The chain of events began in November 2013 in Kiev's central square, known as the Maidan (square, ground).

³² "The End of the Soviet Union; Text of Accords by Former Soviet Republics Setting Up a Commonwealth", *The New York Times*, 23 December 1991.

³³ Hall Gardner, "NATO, the EU".

³⁴ Dimitri Trenin, "The Ukrainian Crisis and Resumption of Great Power Rivalry".

First Stage: There were protests against the government which was not only seen as corrupt and inept, but was also perceived as having willfully turned its back on European integration.

Second Stage: This was soon followed by full-scale revolution which forced President Viktor Yanukovich and his close associates to flee the country in February, 2014.

Third stage: Russia's occupation of Crimea in March, 2014.

Fourth stage: At this stage there had been a more protracted skirmish in Donbass, the industrial hub of eastern Ukraine.

Fifth stage: The conflicting parties signed an agreement to end unrest and bring stability into the region.

The main parties in the conflict reached an agreement on September 5, 2014 in Minsk. Representatives of Ukraine, the Donetsk People's Republic, the Lugansk People's Republic and the Russian Federation agreed at Minsk to halt war in the Donbass region.³⁵ Heidi Taglianvini a Swiss diplomat and representative of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Leonid Kuchma, the Ukrainian representative, Mikhail Zurabov, the Russian representative, Igor Plotnitsky and Aleksander Zakharchenko leaders of DPR and LPR respectively signed the agreement/protocol.³⁶ This agreement authorized the OSCE mission to monitor the implementation of the agreement. The conflict has now entered into the peacekeeping stage. It is now the responsibility of the OSCE to demobilize, disarm the rebel or separatist forces and ensure that the ceasefire is not violated. However, there have been violations of the ceasefire by the parties several times. In the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration phase, OSCE is faced by many more challenges. The political legitimacy of the central government, economic stability, rule of law, fair distribution of power and addressing the grievances of all parties to the conflict are the future challenges in Ukraine, besides the external and global challenges.

³⁵ "Chairperson-in-Office welcomes Minsk agreement, assures President Poroshenko of OSCE support", Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Newsroom online, 5 September 2014.

³⁶ "Ukraine Deal with Pro-Russian Rebels at Minsk Talks", *BBC News*, 19 September 2014.

Options for conflict resolution

According to a scholar “conflict resolution is more than the limited definition of peace. It is more than the absence of war”. The parties agree to respect each other and prepare to living together peacefully. However, there are broader dimensions of peace, “such as the presence of cooperation, justice and integration. Conflict resolution may or may not include such larger values. It will depend on the situation.”³⁷

Conflict resolution in post-crisis Ukraine requires reform both to improve governance and revive the economy. Ukraine is the sixth largest consumer market in Europe; it is rich in iron and produces steel. The better use of resources and market expansion will contribute to economic stability. Alina Inayeh suggests that “The EU should develop a new policy for the region that will help to unlock its economic and social potential, while addressing the obstacles that the Ukraine crisis has exposed”.³⁸

The conflict has entered the peacekeeping stage. The OSCE now has the responsibility to demobilize, disarm the rebel or separatist forces and ensure that the ceasefire is not violated, which has already been violated by the parties several times. As already pointed out, in the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration phase, the OSCE is faced with a myriad of challenges. The underlying cultural and structural issues of the state need to be addressed.

According to Galtung, peace building addresses “the practical implementation of peaceful social change through socio-economic reconstruction and development”.³⁹ A mechanism for decentralization of power must be introduced which would take into account the interests of groups which had remained passive during the crisis. An approach which combines power sharing at the national level and autonomy at the local level may lead to peace. “Ballot is the right alternative of the bullet”, is a famous maxim of Abraham Lincoln.⁴⁰ Free and fair elections under the supervision of the international community would be the best way to decide upon the future government in the prevalent circumstances. To

³⁷ Wallensteen Peter, *Understanding Conflict Resolution: War, Peace and the Global System* (Sage Publications, 2002), 10.

³⁸ Alina Inayeh , et.al, *Regional Repercussions of the Ukraine Crisis*, 1-2.

³⁹ Hugh Mail, Oliver Ramsbotham and Tom Woodhouse, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*.

⁴⁰ Mazher ul Haq, *Political Science: Theory and Practice* (Lahore: Bookland: 1991).

avoid future political and foreign policy issues, a national narrative which can protect and promote the interests of the whole nation, must be developed. The protection of human rights and raising the standard of living of the common man, are the other challenges that the Ukrainian government will have to deal with. Creating job opportunities and revitalizing a stagnant economy cannot be done by Ukraine itself. It is the responsibility of the international community to support Ukraine in meeting its economic challenges.

The Ukraine crisis clearly demonstrated that Russia was able to respond to NATO's geo-strategic aims in Eastern Europe and what is seen as the West's political agenda of neo-liberalism. But it is now for Russia to prove to the world that it is genuinely concerned about Ukraine's economic and governance issues. In this regard, some confidence building measures have to be adopted by Russia vis-a-viz Ukraine. This is because after Russia's annexation of Crimea, Ukraine's fears about Russia's intentions towards it are justified. There is also a need for both the United States and Russia to adopt a more altruistic approach with regard to Ukraine in the interest of regional and world peace. This will help the country to establish a stable political order. The EU too has to adopt a similar approach and facilitate conflict resolution. It must encourage multilateral cooperation and cooperative diplomacy.

The perceptions of the parties to the conflict, presently marked by fear, mutual suspicion and anger must change. Cooperation between the government and the separatists is most essential for securing peace. The international actors, i.e the EU, Russia and the US should extend support to the Ukrainian government, instead of taking measures that could lead to an escalation in tensions. Supporting rival groups is lethal for the country, which needs to return to as much normalcy as possible under the circumstances. The big powers have to respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The strengthening of national institutions instead of a few politicians and political parties would help maintain peace in the region. The concentration of power in a few hands previously led to abuse of power and also provided ample opportunity for corruption. The introduction of a balanced power structure i.e. a proper distribution of powers among the executive, judicial and legislative branches of government would install

checks and balances to stop the abuse of power. Constitutional reforms, the establishment of an independent judiciary and measures for ensuring human security and human development at the national level can ensure peace in the region.

An independent Ukrainian foreign policy, based on political engagement with regional actors on an equal basis and aimed at mutual benefit would also promote peace. The new foreign policy should represent Ukraine's national interests and public opinion as against the previous one which had been based on individual and group interests and preferences. Ukraine's previous foreign policy which represented the selfish interests of certain individuals and groups had pushed the country towards turmoil. The international community, especially the external actors involved in the Ukraine conflict directly or indirectly, have to respect international law.

Conclusion

The conflict in Ukraine could be described as a "systemic crisis" involving "post-Soviet Ukrainian statehood" and "the post-cold war unipolar world". The conflict initially sparked off from internal causes, led to a paradigm shift at the international level. However, the dominant role in the Ukraine crisis was played by Russia. Ukraine itself did not have a national narrative to respond to its internal issues, including communal and ethnic divides, bad governance and economic challenges. Despite a peace agreement, the potential for conflict remains. Strengthening of national institutions, an independent foreign policy, a comprehensive economic approach, social integration and a widely-shared resolve to enter into a new social contract based on transparency and reorientation of state expenditures would be helpful in permanently settling the conflict in Ukraine. It is also imperative for major international players, especially the US, the EU and Russia to shelve their respective interests for the sake of a genuine and permanent resolution of the Ukrainian conflict, which would also bring peace and a stable political order in Eastern Europe.