

Article

Russia as a Rising Isolated Power and the W(r)est: Wrestling Ukraine from the West and the New Euro-Atlantic Puzzle

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Abstract

There is a temptation to separate Russia – *the East* – from the rest of the world when going deeper inside the acute security discourse. “The rest” of the world in the light of what can be best known as “Ukraine crisis” is, first of all, a *collective West* – the U.S., the EU, and NATO. The author argues, that current relations between East and West which are going through a period of a direct clash of principles and interests on all systemic levels, have been turned into an asymmetric conflict. It tends to be compared with the risk of the “new” Cold War. Such risk directly touches upon sustainability of the Trans-Atlantic security architecture what endangers to preserve the post-Soviet space as a space of turmoil and of total Russian aggressive domination. By punishing Ukraine for its Western aspirations, Moscow openly expressed its geopolitical will to become a global, but isolated power. In this respect, Russia has voluntarily used the scarecrow of the “wicked” West to hide its imperial needs what is discussed further below.

Keywords

Russia, Ukraine, EU, NATO, USA, Crimea

‘...one of the ways he defines the success of his policy
is not by results on the ground
**but the level of the discomfort
he can create in the rest of the world**
and show to his people as the point of his policy.’
– *Ash Carter, the U.S. Defense Secretary, 6 January 2017*

Introduction

An annexation of Crimea, followed by the hybrid war in the East of Ukraine, is a landmark tragedy that split the time for Ukraine to what was “before” and what is “after.” Moreover, 2014 became a Rubicon-year for the global system of international relations which overstepped the final point of the post-bipolar destination and stepped into the new post-post-bipolar period (Glebov 2014). Even 9/11, with all its pain and global solidarity, was not sufficient to open the door to a new international epoch (Glebov 2014, p. 105). The global centers of power did not enter significant confrontation neither because of the war in the former Yugoslavia in the late 1990s, nor because of the Five Day war between Russia and Georgia in August 2008. In both cases the Russian Federation and the West renovated their relations up to the stable level to allow them to cooperate as before. Moreover, just after less than one year after the Five Day war was over, in March 2009, already under President Obama and President Medvedev, the U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and her Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov quite symbolically were pressing this clumsy “Reset” button.

The situation has changed dramatically since then. In general, an aggression of the former superpower – the Russian Federation – against sovereign European state – Ukraine – has split the time to what was “before” and what is “after” also for the vast majority of the rest of the world initiating a U-turn in perceiving Russia as a reliable security partner. In a result, one of the main outcomes of a geopolitical fault in 2014 was an emerging of a dividing line to separate Russia from those 100 countries, who condemned Russian aggression over Ukraine openly. It is enough just to take a look on to the list of these countries voted in March 2014 in favor of General Assembly’s Resolution 68/262 “Territorial integrity of Ukraine” and to those only 11 (*Kremlin’s Eleven*) which rejected it in order to realize, that Russia stepped into a slimy road of self-isolation from those whom Russia officially stated it was an integral part of.

Ukraine and the West: Conceptualizing Russian Security Identity

Ironically, but exactly one year before Russian masked troops invaded and occupied key Crimean locations while executing direct Kremlin’s order, Russian President approved a previous foreign policy concept. There Russia has identified itself ‘as an integral and inseparable part of European civilization’ and claimed it had ‘common deep-rooted civilizational ties’ with ‘the Euro-Atlantic states’ (*Foreign policy concept of the Russian Federation (approved by president of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on 12 February 2013), s. IV, para 54-56*). Obviously, before 2014 Russia had a clear passion at least officially to personify itself with the West – this collective wealthy and attractive phenomenon of the “Euro-Atlantic states”, which reflected a conceptual unity between liberal conglomerate of the demo-

cratic countries and values-oriented communities. Far before 2014 and nowadays they are basically represented by G7 and by the member-states of the EU and NATO. At the same time, for the current political regime in Russia which pretends to be one of the equal designers of the new world order to be *with the West* does not mean to be *part of the West*.

Thus, according to the new acute *Foreign policy concept of the Russian federation* (approved by president of the Russian federation Vladimir Putin on 30 November 2016), s. II, para 5 where is acknowledged, that ‘the world is currently going through fundamental changes related to the emergence of a multipolar international system’, while ‘the cultural and civilizational diversity of the world and the existence of multiple development models are clearer than ever’, Russia has chosen its own pass towards ‘formation of new centres of economic and political power.’ Claiming in this *Concept*, s. II, para 5 that ‘global power and development potential is becoming decentralised, and is shifting towards the Asia-Pacific Region, eroding the global economic and political dominance of the traditional western powers,’ Kremlin even much earlier made a bet ultimately on its military capabilities in order to get back on top of the international politics as a new center of global power.

If not surprisingly, but in the Russian perception as of 2016, there was this “Euro-Atlantic region”, namely NATO (what was not new) but also the EU (!) which threatened Russia’s intention to be back on top as one of the centers of power in the multipolar system by pursuing ‘geopolitical expansion’ (*Foreign policy concept of the Russian Federation* (approved by president of the Russian federation Vladimir Putin on 30 November 2016), s. IV, para 61). This was the first time when the EU was openly accused in the “geopolitical expansion” by the Russian official document. Russia has clearly blamed the West ‘in a serious crisis in the relations between Russia and the Western states’ because there were NATO and the EU which refused, to Kremlin’s mind, ‘to begin implementation of political statements regarding the creation of a common European security and cooperation framework...’ (*Foreign policy concept of the Russian Federation* (approved by president of the Russian federation Vladimir Putin on 30 November 2016), s. IV, para 61). In other words, to our mind, Russia has finally signed off in its approach towards itself as to the “victim” of the monopolar – post-bipolar – world which has unilaterally been treated unequally by the Western civilization. Thus, Russia inevitably met a need to confront, as it turned out, those whom Russia yet in the *Foreign policy concept of the Russian Federation* (approved by president of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on 12 February 2013), s. IV, para 54–56 had been treated as counterparts: a) in ‘building up a truly unified region without dividing lines through developing genuine partnership relations between Russia, the European Union and the United States’; b) in ‘creating a common space of peace, security and stability based on the principles of indivisible security, equal cooperation and

mutual trust'; and in c) 'creating a common economic and humanitarian space from the Atlantic to the Pacific.'

Choosing the option of setting off the West towards itself in its strategy of becoming a rising global power in a multipolar world, Russia has rolled down to a suicidal tactics of being isolated, *but* the global power at any price. The reason of the emerged contradictions between West and Russia is also clear: opposite strategic interests what was only confirmed later by a military campaign of Russia in Syria on the side of Bashar al-Assad, massive cyber attacks against the U.S. and by propaganda and information warfare with the West. Anyway, taking into consideration, that a question on whose strategic interests are "correct" is rather rhetoric one, an epicenter of such contradictions finally shifted towards Ukraine, which found them "correct" on the side of the West. By choosing not Russian, but Western vision of what is known as "*the democracy*," but not as "a sovereign democracy" what in general is fundamentals of the Russia-West contradictions (Glebov 2009a), Ukraine inevitably appeared on the way of the Russian global aspirations again. By Revolution of dignity and *Euromaidan* Ukraine has confirmed its independent and sovereign will to succeed with its strategy towards at least European integration, but not on the side of the Russian Federation with its integrative units in the former-USSR geopolitical space. Yes, the quality of such official position and sincerity of the real steps towards internal reforms and European integration of the so-called "Ukrainian political and economic elites" is another story (Glebov 2015), though it gives no right to Russia to intervene into internal affairs of a sovereign state as the same pattern Russia declines any intervention into its internal affairs. However, the die was cast what motivated Kremlin to act aggressively in order to have Ukraine if not with it, but definitely wrestled off the West in the burden of the hybrid war. Anyhow, Kremlin was eager to ban Ukrainian European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations by initiating and preserving a bleeding fireplace at least in Donbas to keep Ukraine out of Europe and in the post-Soviet space by Russian domination; while successful, democratic and Europeanized Ukraine in the future could pose a danger to Russia (in case, of course, Ukrainians succeed by themselves).

In fact, Russia never departed from its imperialist ambitions after 1991, and remained a superpower in the post-Soviet space; want we or not, but this post-Soviet space has been always associated with Russia and "the rest" where Moscow was successful in making enemies, but not friends; to Russia, the space of global superiority just narrowed and declined from the top level to the regional, what Moscow cannot accept even today. Such ambitions dictate a tough policy towards Russia's "near abroad," including Georgia and Ukraine, in Putin's aspiration to restore the global superiority of the times of the USSR and even earlier. The case of Ukraine is top-instructive (with all respect to Georgia) in the light of Brzezinsky's

well-known thesis on the specific role of Ukraine in such a process, also known much earlier as Lev Trotsky's "There is no Russia without Ukraine" (Олейник 2012). If paraphrase it these days, there could be Russia as a global power even without Ukraine in case Russia is democratic sometime in the future, but there is just isolated Kremlin with Ukrainian Crimea nowadays.

Russia's Foreign Policy Defiance and European Response

It will not be an exaggeration to say, that relations between Russia and the USA, Russia and the EU, Russia and NATO for the last three years are being tested for solidity by the sharpest confrontation between "West" and "East" since the times of the Cold War. Under such circumstances, not only the idea "of a common European security and cooperation framework" faced a powerful knock-down. A hypothetical world order based on multipolarity Russia has been insisting on since the break-up of the USSR (in the frame of the UN Charter and under its superiority) appeared under a potential military clash. Paradoxically, but a direct threat of its destruction was expressed exactly from the side of Russia. Such an inadequate and humiliating policy of Russia in the UN became not only evident, but also appeared to be the subject of strong criticism from the vast majority of the UN Security Council members when discussing the situation around Ukraine. There were Russia's colleagues in the UN Security Council which were no longer ready to tolerate a quasi-diplomatic behavior from the side of the Russian UN representatives. As Ambassador Lyall Grant, UK Mission to the UN clearly stated at the Security Council Meeting on Ukraine on August 28, 2014, 'Violating international law and the UN Charter in such a brazen manner is not compatible with Russia's responsibilities as a permanent member of the Security Council' (Gov.uk. 2014). At the same time, that means that the UN community simply has no adequate diplomatic instruments to influence Russia at least diplomatically because of Russia's aggressive unilateral decisions.

In this context, annexation of Crimea by Russia with the further Russian hybrid aggression over the Eastern part of Ukraine and cynical behavior in the UN Security Council entered the global agenda. This agenda has been shared by all sides involved; it has been best known as the "Ukraine crisis". Even though the author of these lines is not in favor of the loose term of "Ukraine crisis," which tends to be adopted in the world-wide discourse as something "internal Ukrainian," its origin dates back to the Russia-Ukrainian dialog on the Black Sea Fleet of the former-USSR in the 1990s.

It is essential to remind in this context, that a Treaty on friendship, cooperation and partnership between Russian Federation and Ukraine with its principles of mutual respect for territorial integrity and state sovereignty are being now totally ignored was signed exactly after Ukraine has agreed to keep Russia's part of the

Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol until 2017 due to corresponding package of Agreements on the Black Sea Fleet of the former USSR signed just few days before on 28 May 1997. It was clear, that without military presence on the territory of Ukraine having Sevastopol and Crimea at least in a capacity of the formal land lease until 2017, Russia was not able to recognize Ukraine's sovereignty, existing borders and integrity as of the independent actor and as of a subject of international relations with whom Russia officially was ready to establish "friendship, cooperation and partnership" (Glebov 2007b).

Nevertheless, the position of Ukraine was clear from the very beginning: it was Russian military intervention into Ukraine in February 2014 which resulted in the annexation of Crimea – the 'formal act by which a state asserts its sovereignty over a territory previously outside its jurisdiction' as The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia defines term "annexation" (Infoplease.com. 2017). The position of Russia gave no alternative as well: it was peaceful reunification. Meanwhile, the *Charter of the United Nations* (UN.org. 2017) in its chapter 1, article 2, and paragraph 4 forbids any threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations. At the same time, as to the practical position of the West, it is not even of the paramount importance what are both Ukraine and Russia doing in "their" post-Soviet "internal showdown". The most important question is where the West finds itself within this conflict.

For example, the position of the EU was also clear and called no doubts where the EU stands in this crisis. Yet on 13 March 2014 the European Parliament in its *Resolution on the invasion of Ukraine by Russia* (Europarl.europa.eu. 2014) firmly condemned 'Russia's act of aggression in invading Crimea, which is an inseparable part of Ukraine and recognised as such by the Russian Federation and by the international community...', called 'for the immediate de-escalation of the crisis, with the immediate withdrawal of all military forces present illegally on Ukrainian territory,' and urged 'full respect for international law and existing conventional obligations.' Later on 20-21 March 2014 the European Council meeting in *European Council Conclusions, para 29* confirmed, that the European Union remained committed to 'uphold the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine' and did not and would not recognize neither 'the illegal referendum in Crimea', nor 'illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol to the Russian Federation.'

One may accept or not accept a term "annexation", but it is more important in our context, that this is the EU which accepts this term in its official position. Anyhow, all these diplomatic and political rhetoric in 2014 resulted in real sanctions against Russia the EU alongside with the United States enacted. Obviously, some of the EU member-states are not happy from the need to keep sanctions

against Russia for different reasons. For example, quite inspiring for the Russia was a message by the President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker which Russian media enjoyed a lot, when he admitted in Passau on 8 October 2015 that the EU ‘must make efforts towards a practical relationship with Russia. It is not sexy but that must be the case, we can’t go on like this’ (BBC News 2015a). Moreover, in this speech Mr. Juncker when referring to the current tensions in EU-Russia relations admitted, neither more nor less, that ‘we can’t let our relationship with Russia be dictated by Washington.’

In fact, both Brussels and Moscow (the EU tactically, the RF strategically though) have been always concerned by the American factor and to some extent still may be interested in minimizing American impact towards their bilateral relations. Both the EU and RF could be potentially seen as global centers of power in the multipolar world under new world order to narrow American domination in some future (in case the EU is in general intending to become a global power (Glebov 2007a), while the RF is definitely yes). It is even possible to presume that without such tendency towards limitation of America’s influence to elaborate effective mechanism towards possible reapportionment with Russia will be an unresolved task; if in principle getting rid of the US gives any positive effect for the EU strategically. Of course, the volume of this “anti-American” interest and a scale of minimization are obviously different for each of them. At the same time, the EU should not underestimate Russian intentions towards itself: while Kremlin is seeking a chance to set off American and European interests towards each other, Russia in parallel is trying to weaken the EU from within. Let us also not to forget, that those Juncker’s statements were made before Russia initiated massive airstrikes on Aleppo and before Donald Trump was elected as a president of the USA. Both events, besides the “Ukraine crisis,” made the EU worry as to the future Euro-Atlantic unity and American presence not only in the Euro-Atlantic security space. Nevertheless, having this test by Ukraine, and after by Syria, and President Trump, the EU’s policy towards Russia strategically remains in line with the EU’s official vision. President of the European Commission when continued the “Passau speech” did not forget to urge Russia to make a “massive” policy shift, by saying that ‘the way they have acted in Crimea and eastern Ukraine is not acceptable’ (BBC News 2015a). While choosing between regional interests vis-à-vis Russia and own European and common Euro-Atlantic security, the EU has been doomed to make an existential choice in favor of the latter.

That means, that having Crimea in the very focus of conflict between the EU and Russia, Brussels is doomed to have it in mind and on the table of negotiations with Russia as to the future model of the already changed relationship.

Asymmetric policies: Normative vs. *Realpolitik* and Political narratives of self-isolation

In fact, such risks like direct clash of value-based political and interest-based military strategies both of the EU and Russia towards each other has been reproduced exactly from the post-Soviet space. The first serious alarm in bilateral relations revealed itself during the Five Day war between Russia and Georgia. For example, Joenniemi and Prozorov (2010) suggest that:

...the war between Georgia and Russia in August 2008 revealed that Europe lacks a coherent joint system of security. Not only did the current system fail to prevent the war, it also fared poorly in the task of mediation. Even more importantly, it turned out that there was little common ground as to the very principles on which European security was to be founded.

As it became clear afterwards, the EU was not ready to confront with Russia due to economic and political reasons. Even such foreign policy mechanism like economic sanctions against Russia was not on the table 9 years ago, not talking about any military rivalry both from the side of NATO and its European allies inside the EU. Finally, the constantly growing crisis in bilateral relations with all basic features of the open non-military conflict inevitably took place in February 2014. The city of Simferopol once appeared in the gunpoint of the “polite” “little green men” localized confrontation between the EU and Russia over principles and interests exactly in the Crimean peninsula.

It is essential to outline, that with these “green man” invasion, who appeared to be the main providers of the annexation from the very beginning, the EU-Russia relations’ crisis turned bilateral relations into conflict which could be also identified as “asymmetric”. That means, that Moscow openly expressed its political will and made it clear to the EU and the rest of the West, that Russia was ready to achieve its goals defending national interests by military instruments of its foreign policy.

Instructively, at first President of Russia Vladimir Putin denied any involvement of Russian Armed Forces, saying, that ‘those’ men in green ‘were local self-defense units’ (President of Russia, Official Web Portal 2014). That denial was understandable: by acknowledging the opposite, the act of direct aggression from the side of the UN Security Council constant member would come on the surface of the global politics, taking into account the definition of the “aggression” by the 1974 UN 3314 *Declaration on the Definition of Aggression*. Just to remind, that Article 3 in the paragraph “a” fixed a principle, that regardless of a declaration of war:

...the invasion or attack by the armed forces of a State of the territory of another State, or any military occupation, however temporary, resulting from such inva-

sion or attack, or any annexation by the use of force of the territory of another State or part thereof was qualified as an act of aggression (UN General Assembly, UN.org 1974).

Actually, that was not an unexpected outcome: the issue of Crimea as well as of the Black Sea Fleet and Sevastopol accompanied by aggressively attacking policy of Russia was always on the table of the Russia-Ukraine relations. Here is enough just to remind the decision of the Russian Parliament – Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation – to adopt on 9 July 1993 a decree *On the status of the city of Sevastopol* (BC PΦ, Bestpravo.ru 1993), which de-jure and de-facto has been Ukrainian. The decree cited ‘Russian federal status for the city of Sevastopol within the administrative and territorial borders of the city district as of December 1991’ and entrusted appropriate parliamentary committee to incorporate federal status of Sevastopol into the Russian Constitution (BC PΦ, Bestpravo.ru 1993). Just to remind, this first attempt to incorporate Sevastopol into Russian Federation was completely rejected by the UN and failed under the leading role of the UN Security Council with its President Sir. David Hannay in July 1993 (UN Security Council, UN.org 1993). One should not also forget that a risk of a military clash between Russia and Ukraine in Kerch strait was also on the table of bilateral concerns back to 2003 crisis over Tuzla Island.

As it was already mentioned, “Ukraine crisis” had no chance, but to regain both the West and Russia into the diplomatic battlefield. The war of words and meanings simultaneously formed base and background of the so-called “hybrid war” in Ukraine world-wide. It became clear, that an existing until recently quite reliable post-bipolar paradigm of the diplomatic communication and responsibility for the outspoken statements decreased the level of interstate trust dramatically since the end of the Cold War.

The behavior of the Russian president is quite instructive in this sense. First pretending that there was nothing to do with the Russian involvement, Russian president, during a question-and-answer session on 17 April 2014 with Russians in a studio audience, had to confess twice in the end, that those “little green man” in Crimea were Russian soldiers:

‘Of course, the Russian servicemen did back the Crimean self-defence forces. They acted in a civil but a decisive and professional manner’ and later repeated once again: “Russia did not annex Crimea by force. Russia created conditions – with the help of special armed groups and the Armed Forces, I will say it straight – but only for the free expression of the will of the people living in Crimea and Sevastopol’ (Washingtonpost 2014).

There could be no other way around. Yet speaking in the trailer to a forthcoming

Russian TV documentary on the return of Crimea to Russia lately on 15 March 2014 shown on Russian TV, 'Vladimir Putin has admitted for the first time that the plan to annex Crimea was ordered weeks before' (BBC News 2014) the so-called "referendum on self-determination" on 16 March 2014. On 18 March 2014, Mr. Putin signs a bill absorbing Crimea into the Russian Federation, but the decision 'to begin the work to bring Crimea back into Russia,' as documentary "Crimea. The way back home" says, was made during 22-23 February 2014 overnight meeting of the Russian top-officials with Putin after failure of Yanukovych's regime in Ukraine (BBC News 2014).

And one more thing without additional comment: as to the "decisive and professional manner" of the Russian servicemen to take into consideration when dealing with current Russian methods of conducting foreign policy. Being puzzled by Putin's "human-shield", a contributor to Forbes.com Paul Roderick Gregory reflecting Vladimir Putin's press conference on 4 March 2014 stressed out quite instructive quotation to have it here:

In his incredibly frank press conference, VVP called for a highly unorthodox way of protecting Crimean civilians in the following exchange: Putin: "Listen to me carefully here! (interrupting reporter). I want to be very clear on that. If we make this decision we'll do it to protect Ukrainian citizens. And we'll see afterwards if any of their servicemen will dare to shoot on their own people who we'll stay behind, not in front, but behind! I dare them to shoot women and children – I'd like to see who would give such an order in Ukraine (Gregory, P. R. 2014).

In general, such unprecedented case of clumsy attempt to hide annexation as a key feature of the political rhetoric from the side of the Russian president (not even touching upon statements by Russian Ministry for foreign affairs and Constant representative of the Russian Federation to the UN) leaves less hope that dialog between the West and Russia could be easily restored soon on the basis of common understanding of bilateral problems for the sake of common possible solutions. If there is no common and value-based diplomatic ground for understanding, there are no bilateral solutions, only compromises and dangerous concessions to lead for a zero sum game to exclude "win-win" result. It is obvious, that both the West and Russia are heading now to a "loss-loss" outcome.

"The Black Sea-Balkan" insecurity hole of the Euro-Atlantic: Russia vs. NATO

There is no need to discuss, why NATO matters. As it is stated in the acute "after-annexation" *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation (approved by the President of the Russian Federation on 25 December 201, No. Pr.-2976)*, among the main external military risks on the first place is:

build-up of the power potential of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and vesting NATO with global functions carried out in violation of the rules of international law, bringing the military infrastructure of NATO member countries near the borders of the Russian Federation, including by further expansion of the alliance (s. II, para 12a).

In his “Natofobic” speech on 24 August 2015 for Educational Youth Forum on Klyazma River, the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov actually confessed, that because of NATO and “NATO-centrism” which, to Lavrov’s mind, did not allow cooperating with Russia, the war in Ukraine became possible:

‘... the only way is dialogue, respect for a negotiating partner’s interests, and the desire to find consensus, which inevitably implies compromises without diktat or ultimatums... I think if the same principles were accepted by our Western partners, there would have been no confrontation over the advance of NATO’s military infrastructure towards Russian borders despite earlier promises to the contrary, nor would there have been the Ukrainian crisis, if things were done through the search for generally acceptable compromise rather than ultimatums, or a “black-and-white” understanding of developments, or the either-with-us-or-against-us dichotomy... Thus, they gave up on the concept of a single and indivisible space of equal security in the Euro-Atlantic area, which had been proclaimed by their leaders. This NATO-centrism, this attempt to preserve the divides represent a systemic problem, while the rest, including the tragedy in Ukraine, is derived from this division into friend or foe.’ (En.mid.ru. 2015).

This is not the right place to give a critique on Russia’s approach towards “the concept of a single and indivisible space of equal security in the Euro-Atlantic area” and to discuss who is responsible for the fact that this concept had failed in practice. This is another important discourse, the nature of which had been reflected by the author of this chapter some time ago when proposing a concept of the “New Euroatlantism” yet in 2009 (Glebov 2009). At the same time, that was not a secret, according to the *Foreign policy concept of the Russian Federation (approved by president of the Russian Federation Dmitry Medvedev on 15 July 2008)*, that Russia maintained:

its negative attitude towards the expansion of NATO, notably to the plans of admitting Ukraine and Georgia to the membership in the alliance, as well as to bringing the NATO military infrastructure closer to the Russian borders on the whole, which violates the principle of equal security, leads to new dividing lines in Europe and runs counter to the tasks of increasing the effectiveness of joint work in search for responses to real challenges of our time... (s. IV).

As far as Russia prefers to refer to “NATO enlargement” strategy as to “the ex-

pansion of NATO” (what makes difference in Russian language) there is a direct link between “NATO expansion” after-1991 syndrome and annexation of Crimea in 2014. As it turned out, an annexation of Crimea in February-March 2014 was partly justified by Russian President Putin when introducing NATO and its ephemeral intention to expand as a motivation to have Crimea “back home”:

If we don't do anything, Ukraine will be drawn into NATO sometime in the future. We'll be told: "This doesn't concern you," and NATO ships will dock in Sevastopol, the city of Russia's naval glory... if NATO troops walk in, they will immediately deploy these forces there. Such a move would be geopolitically sensitive for us because, in this case, Russia would be practically ousted from the Black Sea area...' (Washingtonpost.com 2014).

It is important to stress out, that at the beginning of 2014, contrarily to 2008 though, the issue “of admitting” Ukraine to the membership in the alliance was not and could not be on the table at all (Ukraine even officially possessed a “non-aligned” status since 20 July 2010 until 23 December 2014). Abovementioned “explanation” by Russian President Putin had to be dislocated by existing reality, but in contrast to this turned into rational once being incorporated directly into Kremlin’s “anti-NATO” discourse primarily for the Russian audience and adepts of the “Russian spring” outside. Anyway, there is a fear, that this is Russia which is considering Crimea as “an impregnable fortress” (TASS Russian News Agency 2015b) and the bridgehead against NATO. There is a clear interest in Kremlin to turn the peninsula into colossal military base as the one integral fortress of the “Russian world” with its spiritual Orthodox cradle against NATO “expansionism”, Americanism and Westernization. Symbolically, but this frontier between “us” and “them” exactly found its epicenter in the ancient Chersonese – now City of Sevastopol where Christianity was spread towards Eastern Slavic lands centuries ago. Thus, when dealing with NATO “expansion/enlargement” case, one should not underestimate the role of Russia within current NATO-Montenegrin relations and its influence on the regional and Euro-Atlantic security in general.

The case of a political disorder in Montenegro with anti-government protests in Podgorica on 24 October 2015 and one year later in October 2016 was not accidental. Once Montenegrin Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic accused Russia of supporting Serbian nationalists in a bid to force a regime change in 2015 (Themoscowtimes.com 2015), situation has changed dramatically. As it turned out, NATO again appeared in the focus of the Russian strategy in the Big Mediterranean. As it was reported in October 2015, ‘Djukanovic referred to three past Russian Foreign Ministry statements to support his claim that Russia opposes the country’s political course, including its bid for accession into the NATO military alliance’(Themoscowtimes.com 2015). Nevertheless, a formal invitation was issued by the Alliance on 2 December 2015, with accession negotiations con-

cluded with the signature of an accession protocol in May 2016. NATO Deputy Secretary-General Rose Gottemoeller says that she expects that the tiny Balkan country will become a member in spring 2017 after all 28 NATO member states and Montenegro ratify the agreement in their parliaments (Foxnews.com 2016). At the same time, Montenegro officials have accused Russia of standing behind an alleged coup on Election Day in October 2016 to topple the pro-Western government because of its NATO bid (Foxnews.com 2016). This time things went in more dangerous way. A Montenegro prosecutor has accused Russians of planning to assassinate Montenegro's premier. Police arrested 20 Serbian nationals during October's 2016 elections, including a former commander of Serbia's special police forces (DW.COM. 2016). There are also allegations that Russia has backed the opposition and protests against NATO which also accompanied October's 2016 elections in Montenegro against pro-NATO government. So, it looks like now the car with the title "Montenegro" replaced Georgia and Ukraine on the track to NATO, what inevitably led to the meeting with the "Russian rising locomotive" at this track.

At the same time, putting such discourses aside which are subjects for another deep research, and according to such logic of accusations in "NATO-centrism", there is a clear signal from the Russian Federation to be taken into consideration, that Russia is ready to wage hybrid wars and launch preemptive hybrid attacks against any country, including those NATO-members neighboring Russia, which dared to express its security needs opposite to Russia's expectations (Glebov 2016a). In this respect, a special focus should be made on a Turkish-Russian regional knot. Its further development should be fixedly monitored on the permanent basis for the known reasons what has been also analyzed recently (Glebov 2016b), including the outcomes of the Ambassador of the RF Andrey Karlov's assassination in Ankara in December 2016.

Russia as a rising security challenger to the U.S.

From just verbal cross-fire with the West as an element of the "soft-offensive" foreign policy practice, Russia from the very beginning of the annexation started to flex its muscles in a "hard" security manner with a long-run confrontational perspective both at global and regional levels. This touches upon not only jeered provocations with groups of Russian warplanes conducting large-scale maneuvers in international airspace against NATO member-countries all over the Black, Baltic and North seas and the Atlantic Ocean, or strategic plans of Kremlin towards Crimea. This is also not just an attempt to rely on the Kremlin's invented style of the loose "import substitution" response against economic sanctions on the way to self-isolation *a-la* Stalin's autarky policy during the times of *Industrialization*. Kremlin seems to be ready to confront the West conceptually on the top of the world politics (even though unlike Stalin, Kremlin with its kleptocracy has

nothing to contrapose even to a felonious *Industrialization* of 1930s to strengthen the state from within to confront a “hostile” external environment of the XXI century).

In his speech at the Valdai International Discussion Club on 22 October 2015, Russian President Putin took as ‘absolutely natural’ ‘competition between nations and their alliances’ if ‘this competition develops within the framework of fixed political, legal and moral norms and rules’ (President of Russia, Official Web Portal 2015). As President Putin pointed out:

‘Otherwise, competition and conflicts of interest may lead to acute crises and dramatic outbursts... What, for instance, could such uncontrolled competition mean for international security? A growing number of regional conflicts, especially in ‘border’ areas, where the interests of major nations or blocs meet’ (President of Russia, Official Web Portal 2015).

By saying this, Putin actually justified the right of great powers to wage wars “especially in ‘border’ areas, where the interests of major nations or blocs meet.” Ukraine and the Black Sea region appeared exactly the same “border” area where “such uncontrolled competition” takes place. By saying all these, such approach from the side of the Russian President exactly justifies the right of the Russian Federation to attack Ukraine, because it was a victim of the aggressive policy of NATO, of course, as Putin pretends to be sure. It simply works in a manner “we attacked Ukraine, because America pushed us to do this.” Even if we accept the phenomenon of the “uncontrolled competition” as the one, which looks like inevitable in international relations nowadays, could annexation of the territory of the foreign independent state be an excuse being itself the act of destruction of the set of previously “fixed political, legal and moral norms and rules”? That means that Ukraine as well as some other states is doomed to become hostages of the global competition between West and Russia. There is a strong need to answer a question on who is responsible for breaking down those “fixed political, legal and moral norms and rules.” There is a question to the U.S. and its allies if they believe that great powers have a right to wage wars, what actually opens a new discussion which brings us back to the Interwar period and General Treaty for Renunciation of War as an Instrument of National Policy, best known as a Kellogg–Briand Pact of 1928.

Obviously, the USA for many reasons cannot stay away from such developments and new American President Donald Trump has to give right answers sooner or later. A new American leader has to take into account that it was Russia itself which securitized the American factor to introduce it into a security discourse over Ukraine. That had happened from the very beginning when Putin’s regime blamed the U.S. for the “Ukraine crisis”. In the documentary, which marked a year

since the referendum that saw Russia take control of Crimea,

Mr. Putin described the Ukrainian revolution to oust Viktor Yanukovich in February 2014 as an armed coup “masterminded by our American friends” with the readiness to use nuclear weapons “if necessary” (Withnall 2015).

‘We were ready to do that,’ Putin said when asked in a documentary film about Russia’s takeover of Crimea if the Kremlin had been prepared to place its nuclear forces on alert. The Russian leader said he warned the U.S. and Europe not to get involved, accusing them of engineering the ouster of Russian-backed Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich. ‘That’s why I think no one wanted to start a world conflict’ (Meyer 2015). There are almost no doubts, that ‘Russia’s retaking of Crimea could give it a crucial head start in the event of a global conflict’ (Kureev 2015). Later in the acute *Russian National Security Strategy of 31 December 2015, s. II, para 17* Russia officially stated, that ‘the support of the United States and the European Union for the anti-constitutional coup d’etat in Ukraine led to a deep split in Ukrainian society and the emergence of an armed conflict.’

When talking about global effects already made by security outcomes of the “Ukraine crisis,” an issue of nuclear safety and non-proliferation regime should be discussed immediately.

One should not underestimate a threat of the on-going nuclear rivalry in the Black Sea region as a Russian trend towards nuclearization of the peninsula. Crimea is not just conventional “Russian impregnable fortress,” but may become a nuclear one soon. As Mikhail Ulyanov, the head of the Foreign Ministry’s non-proliferation department, said in March 2015 ‘Russia can deploy nuclear weapons in Crimea as the peninsula is part of its territory’ (TASS Russian News Agency 2015a).

One should not also forget, that the act of direct aggression from the side of the 1994 Budapest Memorandum’s on Security Assurances signatory who confirmed, that it would ‘respect the independence and sovereignty and the existing borders of Ukraine’ and ‘refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine, and that none of their weapons will ever be used against Ukraine’ (Msz.gov.pl. 1994) ruins not only general principles of the international relations and existing system of international law, but also global nuclear deterrence system. For instance, in the interview for RBC-Ukraine different Members of Parliament from EU countries identified the issue of the Russian nuclear weapons in Crimea as the most challenging for NATO and the USA (Шпайхер 2015).

The deployment of nuclear platforms within striking distance of NATO forces including Iskander tactical ballistic missile systems to the Kaliningrad region,

highlights the role of nuclear weapons in Russia's national security strategy, said Michaela Dodge, a policy analyst at The Heritage Foundation (Peterson 2015). As BBC News defence and diplomatic correspondent Jonathan Marcus admits, that 'Russian President Vladimir Putin has placed a renewed emphasis upon his country's nuclear arsenal' not accidentally:

'This is in part a reflection of Russia's continuing conventional military weakness... What most alarms the West is the renewed emphasis in Russian rhetoric on nuclear rather than conventional forces. Threats to deploy short-range nuclear weapons in Crimea have been accompanied by veiled warnings of nuclear targeting against NATO members who might host ballistic missile defences' (BBC News 2015c).

Even out of the global multilateral conventional and strategic military context, "Ukraine crisis" has targeted US-Russia bilateral strategic cooperation in the space field. As NBC with an American space journalist and historian James Oberg alarmed in September 2014,

'As the International Space Station gets ready for a routine change of crew using Russia's Soyuz spaceships, the Russian government seems to be initiating a subtle gambit to force the United States into a diplomatic trap over the status of Russian-occupied Crimea. Here's how it works: Either the United States acknowledges the legitimacy of the recent Russian annexation of that Ukrainian province, or it will be forced by existing agreements to disqualify NASA astronauts from flying aboard Russia's spaceships, which currently provide the only means to get astronauts to and from the space station...' (Oberg 2015).

It looks like Russia has additional global trumps in its hands to blackmail the USA in order to enforce the White House to be manageable in the issue of Crimea and wider in more "pro-Russian" way; as James Oberg (2015) concluded, 'no Crimea trip, no space trip.' Expanding this to the rest of the bilateral US-RF agenda, the U.S. did face a challenge in face of Russia which will be bulldozing President Trump in a way "no Crimea trip, no global peace". The ball is on the Trump's side: let us trace what Donald Trump's team responds in America's turn to all Russia's security challenges.

Conclusion

Russia, when crossed the red line with Ukraine in February-March 2014, became the first former superpower, the first nuclear state with the second largest nuclear arsenal in the world and the first constant member of the UN Security Council to capture the territory of a neighboring country to integrate it into itself. Sacralization of the fashioned "soft-power" approach and illusion of the omnipotence of

normativism in Europe made tanks and cannons almost not eligible and out of the context of the international dialog, including with Russia before 2014. In fact, Russia has used quite successfully such Western geopolitical purblindness. Moscow, in its turn, openly expressed its geopolitical will and made it clear to the West that Russia was ready to defend its security interests and satisfy own geopolitical ambitions by using military power neglecting international law.

The case of annexation of Crimea showed up not only different strategies, but also resources to pursue purposes and defend interests. While the EU as a “normative” power has limited “soft” instruments of confront “hard” power, the most radical among which are economic sanctions, Russian Federation saw no UN and OSCE diplomatic barriers and ultimately relied on military force. Besides, by using it directly against Ukraine, Russia showed no reverence for the EU and the rest, because it looks like Moscow did not worry too much about outside reaction being in the epicenter of the strong international atmosphere of suspicions about Russian invasion in Crimea. They were only confirmed by Russian president Putin without any reliable chance to hide Russian involvement from the international community.

The war imposed on Ukraine and Russian military aggression brought us decisively back to the times of the Cold War and revived the days of triumph for the neo-realists. This fact requires a profound resetting of the whole system of global and regional security architecture taking into account a military threat coming from Russia’s conventional forces and its nuclear bravado the UN, OSCE, the EU, or even NATO cannot handle. All this is rather dramatic, given that Russia is still an actor expanding its global influence. Paradoxically, but potentially remaining one of the global centers of the future multipolar world, Russia made its “best” to block it. Instead, Russia on the way to multipolarity in the frame of the UN has already ruined fundamentals of the multipolar world order when initiated “Ukrainian” campaign. Any kind of world order based on multipolarity should presume, to our mind, sustainability of the global development and stability of an international system under mutual security guarantees which exclude direct military clash between those centers of power. Otherwise, it will not be an order, but permanent chaos on the edge of the global war; what actually is taking place nowadays in the world, which has been splinted into just two confronting centers – East and West with a “wait and see” attitude so far from the potential competitor to both of them – China.

Thus, Russia remains a great power, though already isolated one. Abovementioned observations, however, are launching even more dangerous scenario of the future developments as far as Russia, being entrapped by global dispraise, and in a state of security stress and political despair has been motivated to find the way out by all means in a way “the empty vessel makes the greatest sound”. At the same time,

Kremlin has finally separated itself from the West and discarded Russia from the further discourse on creation of a common European and Euro-Atlantic security and cooperation framework. On the way to self-isolation, Kremlin in its orientation to the “greatness” of the USSR risks to repeat its geopolitical destiny. Current military campaign in Syria, danger to lose word competitions, including possible boycott of the Football World Cup 2018, and total militarization in response to the West fully corresponds to the military campaign of the USSR in Afghanistan, boycott of the Moscow Olympic Games-80 and Star Wars military expenditures provocations to facilitate dissolution of the USSR in the end.

All these give no perspectives for the further rapprochement between East and West if not Ukraine is sacrificed by actual and rising global powers for the sake of deceptive peace between two of them. Even in this case all sides involved obtained another red line not to cross in order not to be associated with an isolated aggressor: the United Nations General Assembly on 19 December 2016 voted for a resolution on human rights in Crimea, which became the first international document designating the Russian Federation as an occupying power and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol as a temporarily occupied territory; the resolution confirmed the territorial integrity of Ukraine and reaffirmed the non-recognition of the annexation of the Ukrainian peninsula (UNIAN Information Agency 2016).

Bio

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