



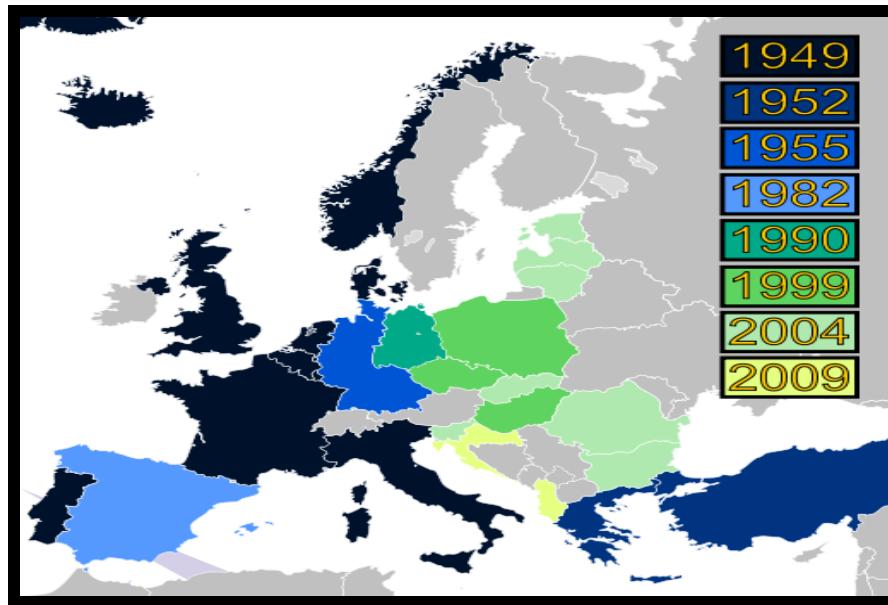
NATO AND THE CRIMEAN CRISIS – A THOUGHT

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NATO, a military alliance, created in 1949, is the only one of its kind today in the world. Proclaimed as an organization of collective defence, it began with the first member states being Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, France, United Kingdom (the states of the Brussels Treaty) and United States, Canada, Portugal, Italy, Norway, Denmark and Iceland¹. Organisational goal stated was ‘to keep the **Russians out, the Americans in and the Germans down.**²’ Since then, NATO has been consistently expanding by way of adding new members at regular intervals. Greece and Turkey joined in 1952, West Germany in 1955 and Spain in 1982³. As a response to the West German inclusion in NATO, the Warsaw Pact was created in May 1955⁴. However, with the creation of the Warsaw Pact in 1955, popular belief had it that NATO was Western Europe’s response to the Cold War **as against the more obvious fact** that it was the Warsaw Pact that was a response to NATO!

Be that as it may, in 1991, post dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union, the reason for the existence of NATO was a favourite topic for discussions in circles that mattered. It was argued that as the principle threat was no longer pertinent, in due course of time, NATO would lose its relevance. However, to the contrary the organization has been growing and expanding in size, numbers as well as scope. When East Germany united with the Federal Republic of Germany, unified Germany became part of the alliance. The fourth enlargement involved the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary in 1999, the fifth involved Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia in 2004. The last round of expansion included Albania and Croatia in 2009⁵.



Source: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enlargement_of_NATO, accessed on May 23, 2014

The image gives out pictorially the expansion of NATO over the years. It makes for interesting study as it is apparent that with each expansion, **NATO appears to be moving closer and closer to Russia!** In fact the organization has already stepped through Russian doorsteps through the East European nations.

How much more? Would the organization continue to grow and expand? Would there be adequate relevance to do so? Could such expansion continue to be justified? A glance at the future prospects reveals that further expansion is **not only a possibility but a plan that exists!** Expansion process is considered under various instruments such as the Partnership for Peace⁶, the Individual Partnership Action Plan⁷, Intensified Dialogue and the Membership Action Plan⁸. Each instrument allows for partnerships at different involvement levels with the final step towards joining NATO being the Membership Action Plan. Therefore the various plans, in the cited sequence, could be considered as the roadmap to joining NATO. Countries that have some such plans in place with NATO are Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan and Moldova (Partnership for Peace & Individual Partnership Action Plan) and Montenegro, Macedonia and Bosnia & Herzegovina with the Membership Action Plan. Georgia is considering proceeding towards the Membership Action Plan in 2014⁹. A glance at the map would indicate clearly that NATO is steadily growing beyond its European mandate and increasing presence in parts of the world not originally envisaged in the charter¹⁰. What of Ukraine?



Source: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enlargement_of_NATO, accessed on May 23, 2014

Ukraine

Ukraine was **the first CIS nation** to get into a partnership with NATO when it joined NATO's Partnership for Peace program in Feb 2005¹¹ and then the Intensified Dialogue two months later¹². In 2008, Ukraine even applied for the NATO Membership Action Plan, however, with assurances to opposition parties that this would not be passed without a referendum¹³. Since then, this issue has been a major focus of debate, with anti NATO sentiments gaining ground, corroborated by the various numerous polls conducted¹⁴. Russian leaders have time and again made it clear that this action plan would never find favour with them. This idea could not have been put more clearly than by the Russian President, Vladimir Putin himself, when he referred to Ukrainian membership as a ‘direct threat’ to his country¹⁵.

Things came to a head with the issue of signing the **EU Association Agreement**, a ‘stabilisation and association’ agreement between Ukraine and the EU¹⁶. The agreement covers a vast canvas and includes commitment on cooperation, policies and legislation, regulation on visa issues, worker rights, information exchange, modernizing of energy infrastructure, so on and so forth. It tends to bring in a Ukrainian leaning towards EU standards and concurrently/consequently, the EU’s security and defence policy. There has been much delay in bringing this

issue to a logical conclusion, whatever the solution might be. A section of people clearly voice their opposition to Ukraine signing the agreement¹⁷, arguing that aligning with EU would indicate an indirect alliance with NATO, whereas others see it as delaying tactics on part of the Russians¹⁸. At present, while Ukraine struggles with the decision, NATO and the EU continue to keep the options open.

In the meanwhile.....

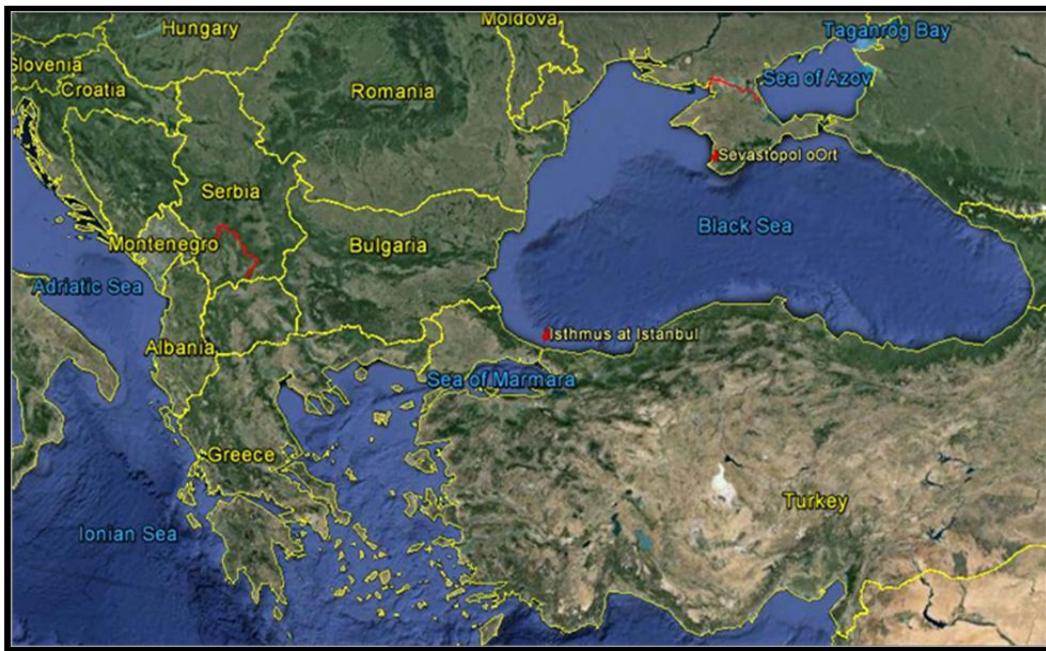
The Crimean Crisis unfolded with protests against the decision of President Yanukovich to postpone the signing of the EU agreement. Amidst violent protests, fatalities, injuries and the overthrow of the President, armed military forces, later identified as Russian military, moved into the Crimean peninsula¹⁹.

So the questions...

What is the NATO intent? Why the insatiable desire to keep boldly going where no one has gone before? From an entity trusted with collective European Defence, it is morphing into a global military alliance, equipped and armed with military technology, which is being used in furtherance of foreign policy. When and where would it all end, if at all it does? Or would the organization continue on the path to a global security alliance, engulfing all and sundry, in the years to come? Purely in the context of Ukraine, what is the Russian perspective?

The Russians

Historically, there have always been strong cultural ties between Crimea, Ukraine and Russia. In fact Crimea was Russian territory till six decades ago²⁰. However, population and its ethnicity cannot be the sole reason for the demonstrated Russian behavior. There are other strategic interests that dot the canvas. The Black Sea provides a few of the minuscule number of warm water ports for Russia. The Crimean port of Sevastopol is considered vital to the Russian naval power. The Black Sea also provides an outlet to the Sea of Marmara and thereby to the Mediterranean Sea. Is the NATO expansion/ EU push for the signing of the Association Agreement being looked at as an infringement into Russian interests?



Source: Google Earth Image, accessed on May 23, 2014

Then there is the issue of Oil and Gas. Of the European demand, almost 40% is the Russian supply. Of this demand, 80% goes through Ukraine. This oil and gas flows westward from Russia, with the majority lines being routed through Ukraine²¹. The pipelines are predicted to further extend to Italy, Austria and Germany, the bigger consumers of Russian fuel. Secondly, there are several onshore as well as offshore gas fields and oil fields in Crimea, totaling to reserves beyond 20 bill cu m²². Would the Russians have read the script as a threat to their investment?



Source: <http://vipmedia.globalnews.ca/2014/03/ukraine-pipelines.png?w=716&h=401>, accessed on 23 May, 2014.

“The steppe and forest-steppe of Ukraine and southern Russia is good agricultural land, but held traditionally by pastoral nomads. Any state that could drive off the nomads and fill the land with tax-paying peasants would expand its power enormously. In 1500–1800 this land fell to Russia”²³. Traditionally therefore and quite rightly so, Ukraine has been referred to as the ‘bread basket’ of Russia and Europe. Ukraine is the 9th largest producer of wheat and the 5th largest producer of corn in the world. 20% of its agro exports are to Russia while 17% goes to Europe²⁴. Could the richness of the land have been a critical factor in shaping the Russian response? Or could it have been, from the Russian point of view, a preemptive play against predictable “Western” behavior?

The Take away....

How the development is likely to pan out is something that would get clearer with passage of time. At this stage however, there are some points to ponder on. It has been a little over two decades since the disintegration of the Soviet Union resulting in Russia losing out in the game to maintain the balance of power. However, under a strong and decisive leadership at the helm of affairs, there could be a defined road map to restore the nation to its erstwhile glory or at least make a mark. Historically, there is no possibility that could be considered improbable and

therefore an attempt to **reclaim what was lost earlier** may forever remain in Russian minds. In the run up to such an eventuality, re drawing the western borders of Russia could be an integral part of the entire journey. EU and NATO on their part are most likely to use such instances to further their own interests, under the garb of **securing the western borders of Russia for Russia herself**. With the membership plan already in place it is only a matter of time before there is a seventh round of NATO expansion. With such a Russian response as demonstrated in Ukraine, it may yet serve to **enhance the diminishing relevance of NATO** as a military alliance committed to "**the good of the greater number**". What is in it for us? Barring the fact that today, an Indian diplomatic mission and some defence related facilities are in Ukraine, and someday, the possibility of an Indian footprint bigger than what exists now cannot be ruled out, as far as India is concerned, let there be just one parting thought – **the onus of resolving our border issues with our neighbours lies with no one else but us**. It would serve us well to do so at the earliest lest other players step in, bathed in their own agenda, to fill in the vacuum.

(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies CAPS)

End Notes

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⁶ North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (2009-12-03). [*"Partner countries"*](#)

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⁸ [*The Membership Action Plan – NATO Handbook*](#)

⁹ http://www.eurasianet.org/, Kucera, Joshua (2013-05-02). [*"Ivanishvili: We Will Get NATO MAP in 2014"*](#)

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²⁰ <http://blogs.ft.com/the-world/2014/03/>

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