
UNDERSTANDING THE CRIMEAN EPISODE

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UNDERSTANDING RUSSIA: WHY RUSSIA EXPANDED IN THE 19TH CENTURY

Before anyone comments on Russia's actions in Crimea one way or the other, Russia's history must be understood, and it must be realised that Russia's reasons for expansionism in the 19th century and afterwards go back 800 years, to the day that Chengiz Khan's hordes invaded *Rus* in what was a full-scale campaign from 1237-1240. Having crossed the Volga River in 1236 and taking a year to defeat the Volga Bulgarians, Batu Khan demanded the surrender of Yuri III of Vladimir. Receiving none, Batu Khan completely annihilated the city of Ryazan, squarely defeating Yuri's sons in an ensuing battle, and followed this up by burning Kolomna and Moscow. Within days, he burned the capital of Vladimir, where Yuri III and the royal family perished in the fire.¹

The rapacious hordes consequently ransacked 14 cities of Russia in lightning raids, merciless and successful in every attack. In 1238, they invaded Crimea, and Kiev in Ukraine was stormed in 1240, utterly devastating Kiev so badly that it would take centuries to rebuild. Having reached the Black Sea, or the "Great Sea", as the Mongols believed, the

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1. Boris Rybakov, *Kievan Rus' and Russian Princedoms in 12th and 13th Centuries*, (Moscow: Nauka, 1993. ISBN 5-02-009795-0).

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Mongols were quite content not to go further west than Eastern Europe. They now ruled from the Pacific Ocean to the Great Sea. The Mongols set up their headquarters in the city of Sarai at the Volga river, near Azov on the Black Sea, brutally extracting tribute from Russian states for three centuries, subjugating them completely, and ruling oppressively as lords and masters over every individual, further taking for marriage or pleasure any woman they desired, with beautiful women being part of their booty in every war.² In addition, vassal kings usually resorted to brutal oppression of their own people to collect the tribute for their Mongolian masters, thereby creating a deeper wound in the Russian psyche.³

RUSSIA'S LIBERATION FROM MONGOL RULE

In a fit of rage, it is said, Ivan the Great of Muscovy in 1480 trampled on a portrait of Ahmed Khan, leader of the Great Mongol Empire in Europe. Insulted and infuriated, Ahmed Khan marched his army upon Moscow, determined to teach the rebellious vassal a lesson he would never forget.⁴ To his utter stupefaction, he found a large and well-equipped Russian force awaiting him at the river Ugra. Hesitant to confront an army equal to or more than theirs, both sides lost nerve and turned around – the ingloriousness of the Russians matched only by the shame of the Mongols, no longer the dreaded horde. Clearly, the Great Horde had lost its stomach for war. Nevertheless, this event still left Kazan, Astrakhan, and Crimea in the latter's grip.⁵

It was left to Ivan the Terrible to storm Kazan in 1553. With thirstful

2. It is not without reason that a large proportion of those living today in the area covered by Genghis Khan's vast empire from the Pacific Ocean to the Black Sea share Mongolian genes – and that includes many people in northern India, Pakistan, Tibet, and Afghanistan. See John Man (2004) below.
3. John Man, *Genghis Khan: Life, Death and Insurrection*, (Bantam Books, 2004).
4. Sounds like the phrase the Chinese used against India in 1962, Vietnam in 1978, and are now using against Japan.
5. Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game*, (Kodansha International, 1992).

vengeance, his forces slaughtered the defenders of Kazan like the Mongols had done centuries earlier. Astrakhan met a similar fate two years later, and the capital of the Golden Horde, New Sarai, in the Astrakhan province, was completely destroyed in 1556, thus, forever ending the Mongol sway over Russia. Only Crimea survived because it was by then protected by the Ottomans. Thus, the Mongol yoke over *Rus* ended 300 years after it had started. Vowing to never let their land be occupied again, Russia swooped upon the remaining parts of the erstwhile Mongol Empire, starting with Siberia. Now, Russia had the empire from the Urals to the Pacific Ocean that the Mongols had. But not Crimea – and not the Black Sea – both of which would come later.⁶

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RUSSIAN EXPANSIONISM

Peter the Great, ruling from 1692 to 1725, was the monarch who transformed Russia into a great empire. Worried that the Ottomans controlled the Black Sea while the Swedes controlled the Baltic, he needed control over both to implement Russia's power as a great force. The first was action against Crimea. As part of an agreement with Poland, Kiev was ceded to Russia. But, as a result, Peter was compelled to go to war against the Crimean Khan and the Khan's overlord, the Ottoman Sultan, otherwise control of Kiev would be imperilled. His first objective was to capture Azov, at the northeastern end of the Black Sea, but his first attempt was unsuccessful. So Peter redirected his attention to building ships, being a great carpenter and strong man of great height. Within three years, he had manufactured 30 ships, mobilised them for war, and captured Azov in 1698.⁷

On the northern front, the Swedish Emperor, Charles II, an aggressive and warring king, sought to march upon Moscow in 1708, but was forced

6. Dustin Hosseini, "The Effects of the Mongol Empire on Russia, *The Journal of Russian and Asian Studies*, December 12, 2005.

7. Compared to an India that is presently making only about 45 ships in a span of six years. Even 300 years ago, Russia could build naval ships faster than India can do now.

to abandon that idea after losing the battle of Riga in modern day Latvia. However, instead of withdrawing, his ego pushed him on to invade Ukraine that had come under the influence of Russia. But, overstretched due to the distance between Sweden and Ukraine, Russia was able to deprive him of supplies and, thus, defeated his army. Thereupon, Charles II escaped and sought exile with the Ottomans, giving Russia an excuse to invade the Ottoman Empire in 1710. The effort and purpose notwithstanding, the invasion was a disaster for Peter, and he was forced to pull back to Azov⁸. Significantly, this cemented the seeds of animosity between the Ottomans and the Russians that ultimately led to the Crimean War of 1854-56.

Peter the Great was also the first to wish to capture all the remaining parts in Central Asia that belonged to the erstwhile Mongol Empire, which had come under the control of internal warlords. The Khanate city of Khiva first sought Peter's support against unruly neighbouring tribes, but Khiva at that time apparently had no idea of what happens once you let the fox enter the henhouse, or if it did, it apprehended greater peril from the unruly tribes. Peter's expansionist eyes had also turned towards the gold of India, which he knew was being taken by the shipload by the European traders and looters – supported fully by their respective emperors and kings. Peter also realised that Khiva was about halfway between Russia and India. It seemed ideal for him to slowly erode and eventually take control of the Central Asian states in an attempt to reach India.⁹

Thus, first against the Mongol barbarism, and then for a share in the wealth of India with the Western powers¹⁰, Russia sought to protect its citizens and gain wealth. This was a sentiment absolutely no different to that of people anywhere else, including England and France. In the case of Russia, the desire for self-preservation had been sharpened by the brutal Mongolian suppression, and it would never allow that to be repeated. So, much like the USA waiting to keep wars away from its homeland by

8. Nicholas, Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, 6th edition, (Oxford University Press, 2000).

9. Hopkirk, n.4

10. If Britain, France, Netherlands, and Portugal could come to India from so far away and take away the riches of India, why couldn't Russia do so, as well, when it was much closer to India and had a much closer overland route to India?

maintaining frontlines in Europe and East Asia, Russia wishes to keep its Russian people secure by maintaining the borders from Siberia to the Black Sea. In this regard, the USA must not think that Russia is hypocritical or unreasonable.

THE TATARS OF CRIMEA

The Tatars are the original inhabitants of Crimea. They are originally a Turkic ethnic group. But soon after Mongolian rule started there, they converted to Islam. Through seduction, rape and inter-marriage at the hands of the Mongols, many of the descendants of Crimea carry Mongolian blood, thus, becoming a Turkic-Mongol ethnic group¹¹. The Crimean Tatars emerged as an independent nation during the reign of the Crimean Khanate, born out of Mongolian rule. It was a centre of the Islamic civilisation in the 15th century, having as many as 1,600 mosques and religious schools. Ingloriously though, the Khanate's main source of income and claim to fame and notoriety was the flourish of their slave trade. They mostly raided Ukraine and Russia to capture and sell slaves to the Turks and Middle East^{12, 13}. Note that Russian slaves were also held in Central Asia by Khiva and Bokhara.¹⁴ This entire matter of capture and bondage of Russian citizens as slaves was repulsive and abhorrent to Russians. While it was a direct excuse for the Russians to invade Khiva and Bokhara, it played a role in the attacks and annexations of Crimea. No right-minded nation can logically be expected to tolerate insult to its citizens, for which remedial action and avenging the insult are justified moral actions.

After Russia defeated the Ottomans in the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-1774, and under the ensuing *Treaty of Kucukin* 1774, Crimea ceased to be an Ottoman protectorate and became independent. But after a period of political unrest in Crimea, Russia violated the treaty, interfered in the civil war there, and annexed the Crimean Khanate in 1783, under the leadership

11. A common Russian proverb goes, "Scratch a Russian, and You will Find a Tatar," implying that the ominous force of the Tatars was upon every Russian.

12. Mikhail Kizilov. *Slave Trade in the Early Modern Crimea From the Perspective of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Sources*, (Oxford University, 2007).

13. Raids were also made into Belarus and Poland.

14. Hopkirk, n.4.

of Queen Catherine the Great^{15,16}. Under the pressure of Slavic and Cossack colonisation that followed, the Tatars began to emigrate from their homes in Crimea in increasing waves of emigration. But, there is more to the Tatar story.

SACKING OF MOSCOW BY THE TATARS, 1571

In May 1571, a 120,000-strong Crimean and Turkish Army led by the Khan of Crimea crossed the Ugra river and surprised a 6,000-man Russian Army. Unable to stop the invasion, the Russian Army retreated to Moscow, hoping they would be safe there. But the Crimean Tatars pursued them, and they looted and burned the suburbs of Moscow. The fire spread by a strong wind, and within three hours Moscow was razed.¹⁷

The Crimeans, apparently satisfied with their loot -- which included 150,000 Russian captives taken into slavery -- returned home.¹⁸ But, emboldened by this victory, the Crimean Khan planned a full invasion of Russia the next year. Still, he was nothing compared to his ancestors -- the violent Mongolian Hordes -- who had conquered Russia with only 35,000 soldiers. This time his 120,000-strong army was roundly defeated by the Russians.

History shows that after Genghis Khan, a foreign nation can attempt to seize Moscow and win against the Russians to start with, but is always unable to press home its advantage. The Russian bear -- and the Russian winters -- are apparently no match for any invading army.

CRIMEAN WAR, 1854-56

In 1854, British, French, and Turkish troops landed in Crimea to battle Russia. At the centre of the dispute was the issue of who would administer the churches in the Holy Land controlled by Turkey -- the Orthodox Christians or Catholic Christians? The former had the support of Russia and

15. Alan Fisher, *Russian Annexation of the Crimea: 1772-1783*. (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

16. However, Catherine failed to add either Constantinople or India to her empire, as was her dream.

17. Alan W. Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars*, (Hoover Press Publication, 1987).

18. Robert N. Bain, "Slavonic Europe: A Political History of Poland and Russia from 1447 to 1796."

the latter the support of France. To help the Ottomans take a decision, the French Emperor, Napoleon III, sent a French naval ship, *Charlemagne*, into the Black Sea as a show of force. The *Charlemagne* could travel at 8.5 knots and was superior to everything the Ottomans had in their naval arsenal. Quickly getting the message from the use of the *Charlemagne* as a military diplomacy tool, and understanding that a France on their side against Russia sounded more favorable than a Russia on their side against France, the Ottomans declared the churches in favour of Catholic Christians.¹⁹ This was unacceptable to Russia, which promptly invaded Moldavia and Wallachia (modern-day Romania), and destroyed the Turkish naval fleet in the battle of Sinope in 1853.²⁰ Britain promptly sided with France to protect their interests in the Near East.²¹

Another reason for the Russians to invade the Ottomans was to gain control the Black Sea in its entirety, and, hence, the Mediterranean and Suez through which British ships sailed to India. If Russia could block the Suez, they would weaken Britain's supply lines to India and increase the cost of operations for the British.

A small victory in the Battle of Alma in Crimea in the autumn of 1854, after amazing blunders by both sides, gave the Allies some confidence, given that planning and logistics had been disastrous throughout the campaign. Moving into the Battle of Balaklava, a reserved and wavering British Field Marshal Lord Raglan supposedly ordered 700 cavalymen of a light brigade into a suicidal charge against well positioned Russian guns. Only 195 were reported to return, and 500 horses were lost – a dismal failure; the overall

19. Amarjit Singh, "The Fall of Crimea," CLAWS Website, Article No.1176, April 5, 2014.

20. "What the Original Crimean War was all About," *The Economist*, March 18, 2014.

21. Hopkirk, n.4.

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battle was a draw.^{22,23}

However, while the Allies eventually captured Sevastopol a year later, with peace declared a little later in February 1856, the Allies had lost more soldiers to disease than to action. Lord Raglan himself died in the Crimea at the age of 67. A total of about 220,000 Allied soldiers died—80,000 to action, 40,000 to wounds, and 100,000 to diseases such as diarrhea and cholera. Thus, it was that Florence Nightingale gained fame in Crimea serving the ailing and injured soldiers.

Despite such a loss, the Crimean War is hailed as the beginning of modernism and reform in militaries. The sale of commissions came under scrutiny, and was subsequently abolished in Great Britain and the USA; the concept of staff colleges was promoted; medical and supply services were improved; army welfare, education, sports, recreation, and physical training came into being as a result. It was the evolution of the modern, professional army, with various regimental arms of multiple areas of expertise, the Crimean War paved the way for journalists to report from the front.²⁴ The Victoria Cross was established as a result of sentiments after the war.

The Crimean War was the first in which the telegraph was used, and journalists were allowed to report from the front

The peace *Treaty of Paris*, March 1856, restored areas conquered by both sides, with Sevastopol and Balaklava returned to Russia, although Russia was allowed no naval presence in the Black Sea. Moldavia and Wallachia

22. But the commander of the charge, Maj Gen James Brudenell, Earl of Cardigan, became a national hero and darling of England. He returned to England for celebrations and speeches, his picture in every shop window and biography in every noteworthy newspaper. Merchants sold a woollen jacket such as he wore, naming it the “cardigan”, which remains synonymous to the sweater to this day. Lord Alfred Tennyson immortalised the charge of the light brigade in a poem by that name, the words “half a league, half a league, half a league onward” reverberating hypnotically the single-minded gallop of thundering hoofs against an entrenched enemy, passionately inspiring generations of youngsters with courage, emotional heroism, sense of duty, and patriotism.

23. Cecil Woodham Smith, *The Reason Why*, (Smithmark, 1953).

24. Ibid.

became autonomous under Ottoman rule. Russia landed so heavily in debt due to the war that it sold Alaska to the USA in 1867 to raise money. However, the treaty stood only until 1871 when Prussia defeated France. Supported then by Otto von Bismarck, the iron-fisted chancellor of Germany, Russia renounced the treaty and declared war on the Ottoman Empire in 1877, following from which Romania, Bulgaria, and Serbia were freed.²⁵

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CRIMEA AND THE SOVIET UNION

So profound was the impact of Stalin's policies on Crimea that it deserves a section of its own. During World War II, the Crimean Tatars sided with Nazi Germany, hoping that by so doing, they could free themselves of Soviet hegemony. A Tartar legion served in the Nazi Army, and Crimean religious and political leaders collaborated with Germany. This provided an excuse for the Soviets to accuse all Tatars of collaboration against Soviet Russia.^{26,27}

However, the Crimean Tatars were aggrieved by the Soviet policies which led to widespread starvation in 1921. It was reported that more than 100,000 Crimean nationals starved to death, while tens of thousands of Tatars emigrated to Turkey or Romania. Again, Russian oppression did not stop there, and thousands more were deported and slaughtered during the collectivisation in 1928–29. These government campaigns were followed by another famine in 1931–33. No other Soviet nationality suffered the type

25. Let us not outright condemn all wars: with wars comes liberation in many cases. World War II resulted in the freedom of many colonised countries around the world, including India.

26. Aurélie Campana, Sürügün: "The Crimean Tatars' Deportation and Exile," *Online Encyclopedia of Mass Violence*, June 16, 2008.

27. This was actually not as bad as the USA accusing all people of Japanese origin in Hawaii and mainland USA of collaborating with the Japanese enemy in World War II, thereby interning many of them in camps. But, after the Pearl Harbor attack, a Japanese pilot who crash-landed his airplane on Niihau was helped and assisted by Japanese workers. A Hawaiian home was burned by the pilot and his accomplices. In due course, there were gunshots, death of the pilot and one Japanese accomplice, and two injured Hawaiians. This triggered the internment of all Japanese-Americans. Details are given in "Niihau Incident," Wikipedia.

of hardships imposed on the Crimean Tatars; between 1917 and 1933 nearly half the Crimean Tatar population had been killed or deported.^{28,29}

In 1944, after the Soviets retook Crimea from the Nazis, Stalin deported the Crimeans in the tens of thousands to other parts of Russia to work as slave labour in the Gulag as a form of collective punishment, many of them simply dying en route.³⁰ This echoes the relocation of native American tribes in the USA during the Trail of Tears, when an estimated 33-50 percent of Cherokee, Chickasaw, Seminoles, Choctaw, and Muscogee Creek died in transit.³¹ To fill the vacancy in Crimea, Stalin brought in Russian-speaking people to Crimea, to till the land, establish businesses, and make a living. This mass movement of ethnic communities would be illegal today under United Nations resolutions, but as a *fait accompli* is grandfathered from those clauses. Today, there are 1.45 million Russians in Crimea, as opposed to 245,000 Tatars.³² The bigger question is: what is one to do with the situation at hand today?³³

THE IMPORTANCE OF CRIMEA TO RUSSIA

Russia subsequently restarted the build-up of its Black Sea Fleet, with its headquarters in Sevastopol. A naval fleet in the Black Sea is essential for Russia to monitor the sea lanes east and west of the Suez, through which a sizeable portion of world trade flows. Even the Nazis occupied Sevastopol in World War II, understanding the great damage a Black Sea Russian Fleet could cause its bases in the Mediterranean.

While the USA would naturally wish to deprive Russia of access to the Crimea, Russia has played hardball before. It has been at the receiving end of international opprobrium many times in the past 200 years and has

28. n.26.

29. Orest, Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, (University of Toronto Press, 2000).

30. The Russians dropped the charges against the Crimean Tatars in 1967, followed much later by the USA in 1988 that granted reparations for the internment of Japanese Americans.

31. Gloria Jahoda. *Trail of Tears: The Story of the American Indian Removal 1813-1855*. (ISBN 978-0-517-14677-4).

32. All Ukrainian Population Census 2001, <http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/nationality/>, accessed April 2014.

33. In 1954, Nikita Khrushchev allowed Crimea to be placed under the Ukrainian SSR in what was supposedly a gesture of goodwill; but, some report this action had to do with Khrushchev's somewhat Ukrainian roots.

developed a thick skin. Through the 19th century it played the “Great Game” with Great Britain, where Russia slowly but systematically swallowed one Central Asian nation after the other in its march to India, while diplomatically throwing dust in Great Britain’s eyes time after time.

HOW RUSSIA ATE UP CENTRAL ASIA ONE BITE AT A TIME

Every sultanate and khanate in Central Asia was won by Russia using virtually the same tactic or excuse: that it was sending troops temporarily to restore order, often at the invitation of a sultan, and would stay there only as long as needed. The British Foreign Office watched Russia’s creeping imperialism without being able to do anything except complain diplomatically, for all the Central Asian lands were far too distant for British troops and military intelligence. From Turkestan to Khiva to Khokand to Bokhara to Tashkent to Samarkand or Merv, Russia used the same diplomatic lines and lies over and over again. Each time, there would be an exchange of letters between the British Foreign Office, and reassurances by the Russians that this intrusion was temporary, thus appeasing the British who could do nothing militarily. Fortunately for the Russians, they knew where to stop. For Britain, there were two major red lines: Constantinople and Afghanistan. If these bastions were to fall, Britain would go to war against Russia. Short of these, Britain was content with diplomatic pressure and demarches only. The Viceroy of India, Sir John Lawrence, had advised that the Russians should be warned not to interfere in Afghanistan or any other state sharing a frontier with India. Further, it was to be made clear to St. Petersburg that “an advance towards India, beyond a certain point, would entail her in war, in all parts of the world, with England.”³⁴ Lord Clarendon, the British foreign secretary, proposed to Prince Gorchakov, his Russian counterpart, that they should establish a permanent neutral zone between their two expanding empires. Gorchakov immediately suggested that Afghanistan would serve that purpose. And, thus, it remained for a century.

And on the western front, Queen Victoria had herself laid down the red

34. Hopkirk, n.4.

line as Constantinople: she had written to Disraeli: "[I]f the Russians reach Constantinople, the Queen would be so humiliated that she thinks she would abdicate at once."³⁵ Hence, any time Russia came close to Constantinople, Britain was ready to take action. However, Russian double-talk – and British acquiescence – had started way back in 1844. Tsar Nicholas had himself told the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Aberdeen, during a visit to England that "he only wanted peace, and that he had no further imperial ambitions in Asia, and none whatsoever towards India."³⁶

After swallowing the Khanate of Khokand, Russian Foreign Minister Prince Gorchakov sent a sermon to his British counterpart claiming the moral imperative of civilised states to intervene in the affairs of half-savage nomads -- but that having consolidated the frontier with Khokand, Russia did not intend to advance any further. Within a few months, however, they were advancing into Tashkent.³⁷

Upon the fall of Tashkent, Russia braced itself for Britain's inevitable protests. To soften Britain's language, Russia declared in St. Petersburg's newspapers that the occupation of Tashkent was temporary, and insisted that it had been undertaken to protect Tashkent from Bokharan annexation. Once the danger was to pass, Tashkent would be restored to its own Khan. The protest of Britain came as expected, claiming that Tashkent lay far beyond the frontier of Russia's southern limits that Russia had itself once laid down. But, as usual, no one was going to take these protests seriously. Without a serious military threat, words carry little weight. And Russia was not going to stick by its statements. Count Milyutin wrote in classical style:

[I]t is unnecessary for us to beg the forgiveness of ministers of the English Crown for each advance we make. They do not hasten to confer with us when they conquer whole kingdoms and occupy foreign cities and islands. Nor do we ask them to justify what they do.

Soon, the British became accustomed to similar Russian placations. In

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

the summer of 1871, Russia launched an expedition against Ili, a Muslim principality northeast of Kashgar. The principality had only recently shaken off Chinese rule, but the Russian commander annexed it “in perpetuity” on behalf of St. Petersburg. But soon, St. Petersburg corrected that language to declare that the occupation was merely temporary.³⁸

And so the drama – and great game – continued decade after decade. Each time, Russia put up a smoke screen to hide its real intentions. Each time, Britain, the superpower at that time, could do little.

CRIMEAN EPISODE TODAY

This brings us to the current Crimean episode, where Russia has purposefully and intentionally annexed Crimea on the grounds that Russian Crimeans, and the sovereign Crimean republic, requested it. Fearing no military retaliation by the West, this opportunity was too easy to pass up. Besides, the legal build-up to the annexation can hardly be considered illegal.

What was surely illegal, which the Western powers have failed to admit, is the overthrow of Victor Yanukovych, the duly elected president of the Ukraine, by a militant mob. Whereas it can be conceded that his decision to fire upon and subsequently kill 88 Ukrainian protestors was immoral and dictatorial, his removal was definitely unconstitutional under the democratic Constitution of the Ukraine.³⁹ In any event, that’s what most revolutions do – they go against the law and the status quo by declaring the law itself illegal. Even Russia had its own revolution, and so did the USA against Britain’s laws on search and seizure of weapons.

Though the current crisis was precipitated by the decision of Yanukovych not to sign an association agreement with the European Union, the tug-of-war between Russia and the USA for the soul of Ukraine had been ongoing in the presidential terms of Victor Yanukovych and his predecessor, Victor Yushchenko, oscillating from leaning towards Russia and the West, respectively. Yushchenko belonged to the Ukrainian-speaking majority, while Yanukovych belonged to the Russian-speaking groups. In addition, the

38. Ibid.

39. Daisy, Sindelar, “Was Yanukovych’s Ouster Constitutional?,” Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, February 23, 2014.

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election of Yushchenko in 2010 was not without its troubles: Yushchenko won in a runoff vote that had to be repeated due to excessive election fraud by Yanukovych—which led to the *Orange Revolution*, where the citizens of Ukraine demanded justice through civil resistance⁴⁰. Earlier, in 2004, there had been an assassination attempt on Yushchenko; and later his political party claimed that their opponents had tried to poison Yushchenko with dioxins, a setback that he survived, though it caused his facial disfigurement. The tactics of Yanukovych and the Russians were never moral, even stooping to uncivilised methods to gain power.

In the 1994 *Treaty of Budapest*, which was more a memorandum rather than a treaty, Ukraine agreed to give up its nuclear weapons in exchange for guarantees that Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States would never threaten or use force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine, and nor would they use economic coercion to subdue Ukraine.⁴¹ For Ukraine – at that time a fledgling nation more intent on securing its sovereignty than becoming the battleground of the superpowers – this was a great memorandum. Yet this was simply the best it could do in the wake of superpower pressures.

Clearly, Putin has carried out his annexation perfectly. He outperformed his adversaries by making the Russian citizens of Crimea ask for annexation. Meanwhile, it is not quite clear that he violated the 1994 *Treaty of Budapest*. The Russian Crimeans have acted knowingly and willfully—there is no evidence they have been coerced. That 97.4 percent of the votes were cast in favour of merging with Russia is quite true and quite likely, because the Ukrainians and Tatars boycotted the vote. There has been no evidence of vote rigging. Moreover, few can deny that there is a moral justification for

40. Andrew Wilson, "Ukraine's 'Orange Revolution' of 2004: The Paradoxes of Negotiation", in Adam Roberts and Timothy Garton Ash, eds., *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-violent Action from Gandhi to the Present*, (Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 295–316.

41. Ron Synovitz, "Explainer: The Budapest Memorandum and its Relevance to Crimea," Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, February 28, 2014.

a nation to come to the assistance of people who claim to be part of it but are not presently so, such as with the Crimean Russians.

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PUNISHMENTS AND SANCTIONS

The economic sanctions imposed by the West on Russian ministers are less than a slap on the wrist for a great nation like Russia. The ejection of Russia from the G-8, which had no formal membership body, is meaningless from any economic perspective. Yet one can claim that Obama and Putin have both done what they should have. Obama cannot meaningfully go to war or push the Russians to despair; and neither can Putin ignore the opportunity to grab Crimea that is militarily necessary for its global defence. Giving up Crimea is similar to the Indians deciding to give up Siachen Glacier in Kashmir. Similarly, giving up the Haji Pir Pass on two occasions has come under tremendous criticism in India.

On the contrary, Russia holds the trump cards in Europe with its supply of gas. Putin, however, does not wish to use gas as a weapon because it will push the Europeans – and Germans in particular – to despair. Much like the series of protests by the British during the 19th century, the West has to protest in some way or the other, otherwise they would fail the ego test. Similarly, to avoid the shame of being dubbed as toothless, the West has to impose mild sanctions. On the other hand, the West and Russia have to stop short of driving each other to despair, or else the situation can escalate out of control.

Nevertheless, the West cannot afford to stay silent, as that may simply embolden Russia more to intervene in Eastern Ukraine, Eastern Belarus, and Eastern Moldavia, which too have a sizeable Russian population. Still, it must be realised that Russia acts in its interests, and worries little about threats or unrelated consequences. In this respect, the formation of an Eastern Economic Union that could be threatened by actions in East Europe is far from the mind of Putin. If Russia does not focus on the task at hand,

it could lose both the present and future tasks.

Attempting to impose stricter sanctions on Russia will simply backfire on the Europeans, because Russia can turn off the gas supply virtually overnight. While Russia, with its vast resources, could survive an economic war with the West, Europe would not easily survive the denial of gas that warms their houses and cooks their food. In other words, Russia could starve Europe into capitulation.

Hence, the present war of words is where the West wants to leave it. Words are cheap and no lives are lost. Consequently, Obama has sought to belittle Russia by calling it a “regional power.” Right or wrong, these words fall off Russia like water on a duck’s back.

POPULARITY OF OBAMA AND PUTIN

Putin is a third-term president, and it is amazing that his popularity in Russia stood at 71 percent on the eve of the annexation. The present Crimean crisis increased his popularity at home, and after the annexation, it was reported that his popularity was at 80 percent⁴². This is altogether expected, for whenever the leader of any nation wins in war or battle, his or her popularity increases. This is evident in every part of the world, from the beginning of time. The Russian Lower House of Parliament, the Duma, authorised the annexation of Crimea by a thumping majority, 443-1. All over Russia, citizens are happy with the actions taken by Putin.

In contrast, Obama’s popularity stands between 40-49 percent, depending on which poll you choose. His popularity fell markedly after the Crimean crisis, and was at about 41 percent as of March 15, 2014.⁴³ While the Republicans thought Obama was being soft, independent voters also felt that US strength had been compromised. Even though Obama probably took the most optimal and reasoned action under the circumstances, it did not stop his popularity from falling.

In fact, Russia under Putin has excelled economically in the past 15 years, unlike the USA. Though many will not agree with Putin’s methods,

42. National Public Radio (NPR), Honolulu, April 4, 2014

43. “Obama Job Approval,” Huffpost Pollster, <http://elections.huffingtonpost.com/pollster/obama-job-approval>.

strategies, and tactics, consider:

[I]n his first ten years in office, real incomes rose 2½ times, unemployment and poverty more than halved, the Russian economy rose for eight straight years, GDP increased six-fold, a flat income tax of 13% was introduced, there were large-scale police and military reforms, the automotive industry has boomed as a result of foreign investment, new land and legal codes were introduced, and Russia is now affirmed as an energy superpower. His [Putin's] approval rating is very high within Russia and he is considered to be a cultural icon.⁴⁴

Such leaders don't show up regularly in the timeline of nations. Thus, Putin has something special going for him. The action in Crimea was approved by 90 percent of Russians, with 86 percent believing that Crimea is part of Russia.⁴⁵ Putin would be foolish to ignore such sentiments. If a leader will not deliver what the people want, how can that leader succeed in his country, let alone be called great? Putin has delivered for the Russians -- for now at least.

US PRESIDENTS AND NATO

Russia has played hardball many times before. And each time, future events have repaired or changed the feelings. Britain and Russia were face-to-face with daggers drawn before World War II, but Hitler's aggressions united them. Russia invaded Hungary in 1956 to set right the student-led revolt against the Russian-backed government, but neither President Eisenhower nor the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) responded militarily to that invasion, even though NATO was strong in Europe at that time. Legally, Russia was simply sending troops to its own backyard, as the Eastern Europe nations were considered then after World War II. In 1968, Russia sent troops under the Warsaw Pact into Czechoslovakia to suppress the reforms led by Alexander Dubcek, leader of Czechoslovakia.

44. Malvin Artley, *The Pisces Festival* 2014, March 17, 2014.

45. Anna Arutunyan, "Putin's Move on Crimea Bolsters Popularity Back Home," *Special for USA Today*, March 19, 2014.

But Lyndon Johnson, US president at the time, was busy in Vietnam, and did nothing except shoot off a series of protests against Russia. Neither could any sanctions of any type, including the 1980 boycott of the Moscow Olympics by Jimmy Carter, deter Russia from the invasion of Afghanistan. It was only when Ronald Reagan armed the Mujahiddeen in Afghanistan that Russia was given a shake. Yet, despite all these events, the West drew close to Russia upon the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Later, George Bush II could do nothing to deter the Russian invasion of Georgia, when South Ossetia and Abkhazia broke away from Georgia with Russian help, and Russia promptly recognised South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent countries. These examples go to show that Russia takes measured steps, as it did in the 19th century in Central Asia, by acting only when it is sure that its adversaries can do nothing.

The USA has sought to mock Russia, by alleging that Russia is using 19th century tactics in a 21st century world, but these are only the words of losers. Power has been the rule of the world in perpetuity, and there is certainly no indication that this is going to change in this, or any, century.

CLOSURE

While Russia has extracted its pound of flesh from both Georgia and Ukraine, the West and Ukraine need to count their blessings. Whereas, a full-fledged annexation of Ukraine by Russia is highly unlikely, the West and Ukraine can now be thankful that they have a large chunk of their territory that can become a democratic country and one day join the European Union. Ukraine can afford to let Russia have Crimea, though there is definite danger that Russia may one day creep into Eastern Ukraine and Eastern Belarus to “help” its Russian-speaking people there. It is easy to understand that Russia is more likely to invade Eastern Ukraine if the hostilities and rhetoric escalate. Even then, there is nothing to stop the Russians from entering Eastern Ukraine at a later date.⁴⁶ After all, we saw how conveniently Russia broke the *Treaty of Paris*.

46. A Russian leader before the 19th century said words to the effect “The Russian flag must be raised wherever it has once flown.” (Hopkirk, n.4). *Chauvinistic words, indeed!*

However, Ukraine claims to be a democratic country that respects the will of its people, so why would it want to keep the Crimean Russians against their will as a part of Ukraine? It sounds immensely hypocritical for the West to claim that the will of people is uppermost, but yet deny the will of the people in Crimea, only because Crimea voted to go into the arms of its adversary, Russia.

On the other hand, why would any sovereign country not wish to stop the social fragmentation of its society into independent areas based upon their ethnicities? Because that is what sovereign countries have to do to retain their sovereign integrity. One should realise, however, that hypocrisy is standard operating practice in diplomacy and international relations, and might even be the secret of success for nations. The vote in Kosovo, for instance, was hailed by the West as representing the will of the people when such a vote was not constitutional. Some nations do not allow votes to decide if a province wishes to secede. India, for instance, does not allow secession of any state; and, therefore, a vote on Kashmir is unconstitutional under Indian law. Nevertheless, a vote for freedom is a strong signal, and carries immense moral respect.

Thus, a wise decision at this time for Ukraine and the Western world might be to accept a partitioned but free Ukraine that can in due course join the European Union, in exchange for a much smaller Crimea that wants to be a part of Russia. Ukraine has since been promised a much needed \$19 billion in aid, while it is \$145 billion in debt. Ukraine probably needs all the financial help it can get at this stage. A more than fair bargain is always a great deal. This can be a simple win-win situation for both sides that can retain the peace for time to come. There are bigger fish to fry.