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“RUSSIAN - UKRAINE WAR” INSIGHT AND ANALYSIS



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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

"Russian - Ukraine War" Insight and analysis



VIEW RUSSIA - UKRAINE WAR THROUGH THE EYES OF A FORMER CIVIL SERVANT

THE ARENA OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS OCCUPIES A SIGNIFICANT PLACE IN THE LANDSCAPE OF CIVIL SERVICES PERSONAL INTERVIEW.

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UKRAINE

Conflicts don't happen all of a sudden. Often there are dormant issues beneath and when the time comes, like a volcano, it just bursts out.

By and large the causes or roots of any political-Military conflict can be traced to four factors such as Geography, History, Ethnicity, and Religion. The Russo- Ukraine conflict of 2022 is also no different. One can see the interplay of all these factors in Ukraine, though ethnicity and religion have played much lesser roles.

We really need to go back about 1200 years to fully understand the roots of the present conflict. We will do so. It's bit boring. But bear with me please.

In order to understand the 2022 War, one need to go back to the 2014 unfinished business between Russia and Ukraine.

Again 2014 Crimean conflict cannot be fully understood without going back to the breakup of Soviet Union in 1991.

When you talk about Soviet history, it is but natural to talk about Cold War, Second World War, First World War, and the formation of Soviet Union.

Formation of Soviet Union will make sense only if the context of Russian Revolution and the fall of Czarist Russian Empire is discussed.

Now one cannot discuss the fall of Russian Empire unless one goes into the birth and growth of Tsarist Russia.

Well, by now one starts to get a much clearer picture about the relationship and conflicts between Russia and Ukraine.

By the middle of the Ninth century CE the vast open lands of Russian plains attracted the attention of Ice bound people of Scandinavia and they started moving east to Poland, Ukraine and Russia.

Modern history of Russia starts in 859 or 862 CE when Varangians the Slavic and Finnish immigrants from Scandinavia established their first Rus principality in Novgorod. Soon there were about half a dozen principalities in what is now Russia and Ukraine. In 882, Prince Oleg of Novgorod seized Kyiv another Rus principality and united the Northern and Southern lands of Slavic People. In 988 the principality of Kiev adopted Orthodox Christianity from Byzantine Empire as their official religion by marrying the daughter of the Western Roman Empire and agreeing to convert.

Slowly and steadily Kiev becomes the cultural, political and Religious Centre of Russian People. Though the Russian cities were mostly autonomous or semi Independent the Prince of Kyiv was known as the grand prince and others were just princes who accepted the primacy of Kyiv. In 13th century the Mongols invaded the Russian lands and devastated their most important center of power Kyiv. The grand City lost its importance and preeminent position.

With the decline of Kyiv, the Prince of Muscovy became more powerful and the power Centre of Russian politics shifted to Moscow from Kiev. Moscow started expanding and uniting all Russian Lands under her. Finally she was able to throw out the Mongol yoke in 1480 and became fully independent. In 1547 the grand prince of Moscow declared himself Tsar or Ceaser of Russia and claimed to be the successor of Roman Empire. The throne had become vacant after Constantinople was conquered by Ottoman Turks in 1453 and the Byzantian Christian Empire had ceased to exist. Russia's emotional connection to Kyiv can be traced back to the heydays of Keiv as the Centre of early Russian Culture, civilization and Religion.

We are talking about Ukraine and not about Russia but Ukraine Russian conflict is so much interconnected with the history and culture of each other.



From 14th Century onwards Kyiv, now ruled by the Hetman of Cossacks came under three external powers. The Golden Horde of Mongols who had invaded and subjugated the whole of Russia and their successors, the Tatars, had established a Kingdom in Crimea in the South. This kingdom commonly known as the Khanate of Crimea had raided or expanded to Kyiv on and off. The Polish Kingdom and Lithuanian Confederation or what is known as the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth had dominated western Part of Ukraine and had controlled Kiev. The local Lords of Kyiv the Hetmanate of the Cossacks had earlier allied with Confederation and then a faction of Cossacks allied with Russia in 1654 leading to Polish – Russian wars . in 1686 by the Treaty of Perpetual Peace Eastern Part of Ukraine that is the East bank of Dnieper River came under Russian rule and the western part remained with Polish Lithuanian Confederation.

The Dnieper river runs north south across Ukraine almost dividing the country into two equal parts of east and west. This division will have major repercussions in the days to come. The western part started drifting more and more, not just politically but also emotionally and culturally towards west and the eastern part started drifting more towards Russia. This division and drift will manifest again and again in history on many occasions, especially when there is a war or internal disturbance. The present conflict also has something to do with this deep division among the people.

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No division is permanent. Russia was gaining in strength, people and land. Russia eventually defeated Poland with the support of Austria and Prussia and the first Partition of Poland took place during 1772-1795. Poland would be divided again and again later in its history, but that is another story. But with this victory, Russia became more or less the sole power and owner of Ukraine north of the Crimean Khanate. The Crimean khanate was a military ally and protectorate of the powerful Ottoman Empire and had extended her powers by regular raids into Ukrainian lands. In the meanwhile Empress Catherine of Russia annexed Crimea to Russia in 1783. By this time, unfortunately for the Tatars of Crimea, the once mighty Ottomans had lost

their former glory and were not strong enough to challenge the power of rising Russia.

Peace returned to Ukraine and the rich lands started making progress in all directions, but not for long. Russian expansion to the black sea was continuing, and like now in 2022, the Western powers thought it their duty to check Russians. So we see the first Crimean War. France, UK, Piedmont Sardinia an Italian State, Austria and Turkey joined hands to attack Russia in Crimea. Russia was defeated and when the war ended in 1856 by a treaty of Paris, Russia lost its powers to expand her Navy in Black Sea. This Crimean war would be made famous by the legends of Florence Nightingale in Nursing and the Charge of Light Brigade the Tennyson's famous poem. Things became quite for some more time in Crimea and Ukraine. Again, not for long.

Peace was shattered once again by the outbreak of WW I, and it was followed by Russian defeat at the hands of Germans that led to the Russian Revolution in 1917. Some Ukrainians saw this as an opportunity to break away from Russia and created Ukraine Peoples Republic. On the other hand the Bolsheviks would fight to re unite all Russian lands once again. In 1922 after the end of the WWI and Russians having successfully driven out the invading foreigners and the white army of former Tsarist sympathizers who had made Crimea their base to attack Russia, the USSR was formed. Ukraine Soviet Socialist Republic became a founding member of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics the USSR. With the USSR the Russification also started in right earnest in Ukraine.

World War II started in 1939 and Germany Occupied Ukraine. Some Ukrainians again tried to break away and joined the Nazi Germany to fight the USSR and some other Ukrainians joined USSR army to fight the Nazis. In short the Ukrainians fought for both Germany and USSR but mostly for USSR.

When the war ended, Ukraine was a founding member of the UN and integrated smoothly with USSR till 1991. In the meanwhile Crimea which

was a part of Russian Republic was transferred to Ukraine Republic in 1954 by Khrushchev. He was once the Secretary of the Ukraine Communist Party under USSR and had sympathies for Ukraine culture and language.

Soviet Union, as we all know, collapsed in 1991 and 15 Independent Countries were borne out of the former Soviet Union. Ukraine and Russia were two of those Countries. Ukraine is now independent but voluntarily joined the CIS, the Commonwealth of Independent States created by Moscow to keep together the former USSR states. It was a voluntary economic, cultural and military co-operation. It is important to note that all 15 countries did not join the CIS. The Baltic States of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia who considered their inclusion in USSR as illegal occupation did not join. Georgia pulled out of CIS in 2008 after the Russo-Georgian War and Ukraine pulled out of CIS in 2018.

1991, the year Soviet Union was dissolved is a very important point in the present conflict. During the cold war there were two Military Blocks in Europe staring at each other. NATO the Democratic block of West Europeans led by US was formed in 1949. The Warsaw Pact of Communist East European Countries led by USSR was formed as a counter to this in 1955. They maintained a shaky military balance and equally shaky peace in Europe till 1991. The justification for NATO was that the superior military might of USSR in Europe cannot be matched by any other European powers and only a group of countries could stand up to her. But in 1991 with the dissolution of Soviet Union and end of Communist threat in Europe there was no more justification for continuing NATO, especially after Russia had disbanded the Warsaw pact. NATO should also have been disbanded in 1991 if peace was the real objective. NATO not only chose to keep the offensive and defensive pact firmly, it also started to expand the pact. It took most of the East European Countries as member from 2000s. A militarily weakened and economically ruined Russia could only watch in despair and protest in words. The entry of Baltic Republics of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia into NATO in 2004 was a much deeper blow to Russia. Now from the periphery of former USSR, NATO is absorbing former

members of USSR directly to its old. Anybody could guess who is being targeted by NATO. Again Russia could only protest. But when Georgia tried to join NATO in 2008 Russia put its foot down and send a clear message by starting a war. It will not compromise on its core national security. By that time Putin had established himself in Russia. After Georgia, it was Ukraine who wanted to join NATO. But for Russia the joining of Ukraine in NATO today, is a potential war tomorrow. Why wait for the inevitable tomorrow if you can prevent it today is the Russian point of view.



Ukraine is an independent Country and it has every right to join any international body. Well, that is just theory. In real politics, strong and powerful countries do not wait for a potential threat to materialize into a real threat. They would rather be proactive and remove that threat before it becomes real and strong.

Ukraine, especially Kyiv is the original heartland of Russian Nation and they had let it go voluntarily. Emotionally it was a very high price to pay. Yet

they paid it peacefully. Ukraine is strategically very important to Russia. Two modern invasions of Russia were By French Army of Napoleon and the German Army of Hitler and both of them invaded Russia through the plains of Ukraine. The southern Ukrainian plains between Crimean peninsula and Carpathian mountains is the flat lands through which a mechanized modern army can invade Russia. Loss of Ukraine to NATO is like a dagger to the heart of Russian Lands and no self-respecting leader in Moscow would tolerate it.

By taking over Crimean peninsula in 2014, a Naval Fortress that originally belonged to Russia, Putin had demonstrated his resolve to go to war unless NATO backed off from Ukraine. By occupying the Donbass area and recognizing the self-proclaimed Republics of Luhansk and Donetsk in the east where Russians had been living even after 1991, Putin had made it very clear that Russia cannot and will not compromise on its security.

The invasion is probably not going well for Russia, at least not the way it planned. A surprise attack and a quick victory had evaded Russia mostly due to the public and deliberate Realtime leak of Intelligence by US and the unexpected resistance by Ukrainians who are by now well prepared and dug in deep. Russia is shifting to plan B. Intense Bombardment of infrastructure that includes heavy civilian casualties is the result of this slow moving Russian advance. Cost is going to be high on both sides. Going by past experience, Russians may not stop until they achieve their objective, but that may result in unfortunate loss of many more lives and levelling of many more Urban areas.

The Russians were willing and prepared for a neutral Ukraine like Switzerland or Austria where the Ukrainians could prosper. But they could not tolerate Ukraine becoming part of NATO. And it looked like a fair deal to many neutral observers. But a section of Ukrainians who were encouraged by NATO and EU would have nothing of that. For them nothing short of a full economic and Military Union with west would do. The populism and antics of President Zelensky, goaded by the west only aggravated the situation.

While every country, as mentioned earlier, had full right to join any international organizations, including military alliance for its defense, its impact on one's neighbor can be ignored only at a cost.

US has no strategic interest at all in Ukraine. Even its officially stated policy is to move towards Asia Pacific. This is very evident from the fact that the US has no intention of sending its boots to Ukraine and they have no interest in getting into a military conflict with Russia directly. Why then is US taking such a tough stand on Russia? They went to war with Iraq to protect Kuwait they say, others say to protect their oil supply. May that as it may but Ukraine holds no strategic prize.

There are several reasons why US is acting the way it is doing. First of all US military strategy dictates that no country should be allowed to become more powerful and allowed to dominate its neighbors. And if any regional power, hostile to US, is dominant anywhere, its strength should be reduced, not necessarily by war alone. But use of force is always an option for US. The so called world order means unquestionable US and West domination and hegemony. This is a good lesson for India also. West learned this lesson the hard way with Hitler. US think tank believes that Hitler should have been stopped at Rhineland or Austria or at least in Czechoslovakia. If it had been done, Poland would not have happened and world war II could have been even prevented. US has not always succeeded in containing other countries this way. Vietnam or Afghanistan did not go the way they planned, but it was certainly not for want of trying.

Secondly and most importantly Ukraine is not about Ukraine. It is not about Russia. It is about Taiwan, it is about China. If US shows any weakness in this standoff with Russia, it will encourage China to find a military solution for Taiwan problem. That is the last thing US wants now. US knows very well that China is keenly observing the military performance as well as the diplomatic and other repercussions of Ukraine conflict.

Those who defend Russia points to the Cuban Missile crisis of 1962. When Soviet Union moved her nuclear tipped missiles to Cuba in 1962, President

Kennedy blockaded the communist ally of USSR that was at least 160 miles away from mainland USA unlike Ukraine that is very next door. That the Cuban move was a counter to US move to install Nuclear Missiles in Turkey, a NATO member state in the Russian backyard was not so well known as the so called heroic standoff of Kennedy with Khrushchev over Cuba. The lesson is simple. Powerful countries will not tolerate threat to their security, especially from weak neighbors. Rest is all high talk.

When it comes to self-interest those who have the power of force at their command may not hesitate to use it to protect their interest.



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