

Civil War in Ukraine: Ethnic Conflict, Authoritarian Leadership, and Outside Involvement

James W. Peterson, Sarah Kuck

Abstract: *Ukraine broke out into civil war in 2014, with the Russian absorption of Crimea and with the restlessness and attacks of Russian militias in eastern Ukrainian regions such as Luhansk and Donetsk. The violence took over 3000 lives, and an additional 296 died during the shooting down of the Malaysian commercial airliner in mid-July of the year. Keys to understanding the tragedy and outlining steps for the future include a focus on authoritarian leadership, ethnic conflicts, and the role of outside powers. Victor Yanukovich exemplified the authoritarian leadership style after his election in early 2010. The event that initiated the demonstrations in Kiev was his decision to stop working towards potential membership for Ukraine in the European Union and his acceptance of the Russian offer of \$25 billion in assistance. This decision activated the key ethnic conflict in Ukraine as well, for he represented the Russian minority in a nation with an ethnic Ukrainian majority. Reactions by outside powers were immediate, as Russia provided support for the separatists in both Crimea and eastern Ukraine. At its Wales Summit in early September, NATO set up a new Rapid Reaction "Spearhead" Force of 4,000 troops, a move that followed relocation of troops from Italy to the Baltics and Poland. Thus, authoritarian leadership, ethnic conflict, and mobilization by outside powers constituted the key elements of the crisis as well as the items needing attention by the political community in the future.*

Keywords: *Ukraine, Crimea, Luhansk, Donetsk, ethnic conflict, crisis, authoritarian leadership, European Union, Russia*

Introduction

It is clear that the Ukrainian civil war has been very disruptive to the international system, tragic for the citizens who suffer within that nation, and in need of both new thinking and innovative solutions. Attention to three problems can point toward future stability: ethnic conflict, authoritarian leadership, and the role of outside powers. Victor Yanukovich centralized control in his own person and elite in Ukraine after his presidential victory in 2010. Ukrainian society had been rife with ethnic conflict, and it was little help that the entrenched leader from 2010 to 2014, was a member of the Russian ethnic minority group whose numbers were far less than those of the Ukrainian majority. This combination of an authoritarian leadership model and membership in a minority group became a lethal mix. There are also smaller groups such as Tatar Muslims in Crimea that floated within this complicated Ukrainian ethnic equation. The role of the international community has been twofold. On the one hand, Russia played a disruptive role in 2014, with its support for ethnic Russians in Crimea through the medium of its naval base in Sevastopol at the time of the Crimean referendum on separation. After annexation of Crimea, President Putin then positioned tens of thousands of soldiers on the eastern Ukrainian border in support of the declared Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk. On the other hand, western countries provided support for Ukrainian autonomy while upgrading their security position in the Baltic nations and Poland. It is imperative to explore the above themes of ethnic conflict, authoritarianism and the role of the international community in an initial effort to understand the complexity of the problem and future needs.

Research Question

There are three key research questions that will guide this study that applies social/ethnic conflict theory and authoritarian theory to analysis of the plight of Ukraine in the early 21st century.

1. To what extent did social/ethnic conflicts and, in particular, rule by the minority group inflame domestic conflict in Ukraine in the period after its 2010 elections?
2. To what extent did the authoritarian leadership pattern displayed by the leader elected in 2010 exacerbate existing internal turmoil within the country?
3. Did the involvement of nations outside Ukraine act as an external variable that compounded the inner tensions, or did that engagement point towards a healing process?

Social and Ethnic Conflict

In many ways ethnic struggle is the root of the simmering civil war in Ukraine. Attention to the general nature of such conflicts provides a useful starting point to analysis of the political situation in the country and a stepping stone for evaluation of the role of internal leadership and external involvement by outside powers. The existence of a plurality of ethnic groups within a country is not a guarantee that conflict will eventually take place. In fact, there may be considerable competition among groups, but the relationship among them may never actually result in civil war. It is also true that violence can erupt in certain multi-ethnic societies without being rooted in the diversity of groups. Level of economic development and the nature of the political regime are two variables that also bear the potential to inject conflict into a variegated social setting. Thus, it is critically important to assess “what it is that turns a dispute into an ethnic conflict” (Dion 1997: 645–648).

Certainly, the break-up of the large communist-ruled federations in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia was a powerful factor in the unleashing of ethnic conflict in the geographic space of both large entities. Centralist communist rule, especially in the Soviet Union, had kept such conflicts from racing to the surface for many decades. In part, the implosion of the Soviet Union then “released conflict potential,” that had been simmering for some time. In part, the ambiguous process of the post-communist transition bore bitter fruit as well (Hughes and Sasse 2009: 2). Emergent Russian nationalism in that later period sparked resistance and violence in areas such as Chechnya, Moldova, and Ukraine (Sadkowski 1998: 16–17). Some concluded that widely-publicized concepts in the region such as democracy and capitalism were rather weak bases for inspiring newly freed peoples, in contrast with more fiery and edgy liberation nationalist ideologies (Ethridge and Handelman 2004: 526–527). Overall, a new and unsettling sense of uncontrolled change steamed forward with the collapse of centrally controlled federations that had generally been suspicious of widespread transformations.

It is not surprising that ensuing social and ethnic unrest tempted strong-minded leaders to take things into their own hands and adopt an authoritarian leadership style. In some situations the centralist trends were simply extensions of patterns in the times of the Soviet and Yugoslav federations (Sadkowski 1998: 19). Going further, Robert Tucker asserts (Tucker 1987: 15–16) that there is a strong and reciprocal relationship between leadership and socio-political movements. On the one hand, individually noteworthy persons in a nation often are the ones who breathe life into groups rooted in the various sub-cultures or ethnic groups. On the other hand, governmental controls may be weakened after transitions that accompany events such as the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the resulting vacuum, group leaders themselves may become more vocal and demanding so that their followers will have

representation in some way, albeit in an informal way. In this maelstrom, forceful leaders may adopt either reform or revolutionary tactics. Reformers will nurture their social groups to push for gradual changes within the evolving framework of the new political order. In contrast, revolutionaries may aim to create “the sustaining myth of a new society” (Tucker 1987: 20–27). In both cases, leadership often becomes authoritarian due to the compelling need to galvanize newly liberated ethnic groups in purposeful ways that can further agendas that they never dreamed could come to life. In the next section, theoretical material on authoritarian leadership will expand the framework that will enable assessment of the role of such leadership in Ukraine.

In seeking to get at the heart of the ethnic drives that reverberate so profoundly throughout selected transitional societies, Vanhannen introduces the concept of “ethnic nepotism.” In a study that included 186 states from 1990–96, he concluded that ethnicity is at its heart kinship. Thus, ethnic feeling really has its roots in “extended kinship groups,” and therefore the interactions among them bear the signs of nepotism (Vanhannen 1999: 55–56). However, the conflicts have the potential in unstable situations to spread into other political, economic, and social arenas. There is always the possibility that the players or rivals on those other issues will look at them through the ethnic lens and intensify those divisions. In many countries, the common denominator of ethnicity percolates through different racial groups, units based on “linguistic, national, or tribal differences,” and “stabilized old religious communities.” The higher the degree of overlap among such ethnic categories, the more intensely does ethnic nepotism dominate the activities of a social order (Vanhannen 1999: 59–64).

As ethnic hostilities build and solidify, they have the potential to become “distinctive political sub-cultures.” Instead of focusing only on developing instruments for promoting their own unit, they may transcend their group and generate debate and conflict on the meaning of the nation’s history, on what the borders of the nation should be, and even on what political coloration and ideology the regime itself should adopt (Almond 2008: 48–49). It is difficult to predict when these raging currents cross the boundary into conflict, but there are pointers to that transition. Conflict is more likely when the number of groups is many, when the groups are close to one another, and when relationships among them have been adversarial in the past (Payne and Nassar 2003: 300–301). Obviously, conflicts that are born within a group that shares only kinship ties can germinate and blossom into existential differences about the meaning of the state.

Internationalization of ethnic conflict can certainly compound the dimensions of the growing internal stress points, and this is particularly evident in former Soviet and Yugoslav space (Hughes and Sasse 2002: 12). One expression of globalization entails flows of population from the outside into a particular nation, as waves of immigration affect nearly every continent in the globe. As new groups settle in, they

may increase the numbers of their minority in the state or they may enter as a totally new group (Vanhanner 1999: 67). One example germane to this study is the flow of Tatar Muslims back into Crimea after the end of the Cold War. Their property demands often alienated the Russian majority on that peninsula and became a continuing source of conflict and discussion. A second expression of globalization, one more pertinent to the Soviet and Yugoslav cases, includes pressures from inside one county out into others. For example, Russians looked out in protective ways to the new Russian minorities in states such as Latvia, Moldova, and Ukraine. Similarly, Serbs in the shrunken Yugoslavia actually waged wars to protect their fellow Serbs in Slovenia, Croatia, and especially Bosnia. As the ethnic conflict spilled over into the neighbors, a powerful kinship tie injected “a transnational dimension to the (ethnic) polarization” (Forsberg 2008: 283). It is clear that the potential for escalation of such crises is enormous, and one writer characterized these situations as ones of possible “conflict contagion.” If a group is part of a “nested minority” in one locale but part of a majority “in a wider geographical sense,” then contagion can be a distinct possibility, especially when the general atmosphere is one of uncertainty and anxiety (Forsberg 2008: 284–286). The ideas of contagion and nested minorities are powerful analytical tools for scrutinizing selected conflicts.

Implicit in the above assessment of spill-over and containment is the role of territorial issues in intensifying the conflict. The worst situations often emerge when “a territorialization of difference” occurs among some of the key opposed groups (Hughes and Sasse 2002: 8). Such intra-national situations make it possible for the minority to claim sovereignty over geographic units within the state, and this may become the foundation for either a demand for a special status of autonomy or for actual independence. Returning Tatars had old homesteads that were previously in their families in Crimea, even though those pieces of property did not really add up to an intact territory that could be claimed. Further, the Crimean Peninsula was itself a distinct territorial unit only linked to Ukraine by a narrow land passage. Russians on that piece of land were clearly a nested minority in Ukraine, and as such they clamored early on for a special status and eventually won separation and integration into Russia. Similarly, the Serbian minority in Bosnia utilized military assistance from the Serb majority in neighboring Yugoslavia to expand their territorial unit in Bosnia until checked by NATO intervention and the Dayton Agreement in 1995. Thus, the injection of territorial claims into a situation of domestic conflict gives the nested minority a concrete and tangible goal. The presence of an outside player of consequence and similar ethnic background transforms the domestic issue into a regional one. Evidence to support that latter proposition includes Russia in relation to Crimea, Yugoslavian Serbs in connection with Bosnian Serbs, and Iran in the Alawite/Syrian case.

What can offer hope for unraveling this mix of ethnic, international, and territorial ambitions in ways that are positive for future stability? Some analysts have focused on such brutal conflicts by analyzing how the actual cleavages in the social order relate to one another. On the one hand, cleavages may be cross-cutting in the sense that groups of differing ethnicity may discover that they share a common economic status or religion that links sizeable numbers of persons across the groups. Stability is more likely if conflicting groups have points of commonality that connect them across the ethnic divide that separates them. On the other hand, cleavages may be reinforcing with the disparate groups in a society arrayed against one another on every dimension. In such situations, creating mutual understanding across the groups is next to impossible (Hughes and Sasse 2002: 7–8). If the cleavages are reinforcing, one documented way of working towards stability is creation of a consociational governmental structure. Inclusion of key members of each group in a grand coalition or cartel of elites can at least provide a picture of representation for each at the top level of the political system. This can be a workable solution in divided societies, as it takes the pressure off political leaders in the short run to create harmony among the groups at the grass-roots level. In fact, consociationalism may work best if contacts among the multiplicity of groups are kept to a minimum (Lijphart 1992: 264–270).

Traditionally, Switzerland has exemplified this approach by establishing a balance of power among its French, German, and Italian populations. Another illustration is the collective presidency established in Bosnia after the Dayton Agreement in 1995. Muslims, Serbs, and Croats all had seats in the Presidency, although the Muslim served as Chair due to the plurality status of that group in the population. Another example would be Iraq after 2005, for Shiites, Sunnis, and Kurds each possessed a share of power. While the substantive Prime Minister position has gone to the Shiites due to their majority position within the population of the nation, the Speaker of the House job has been in the hands of Sunnis. The more ceremonial position of President has been a locus of power for the minority Kurds. However, this illustration of consociationalism has not prevented constant bloodshed among the groups. In particular, the 2014 negotiations over who should fill the positions of Prime Minister and speaker of the house in Iraq have been problematic. Further, the rise of ISIS in Iraq and Syria has pushed aside all earlier preconceptions about the basis for stability in that geographic space. Perhaps this model of shared elite power could be one consideration after the hostilities end in Ukraine, but it would call for considerable restructuring of political forms and processes.

Role of Authoritarian Leadership

Having displayed at least some of the nuances of the ethnic dimension in analyzing the Ukrainian political situation, it is now imperative to examine the divisive role that authoritarian leadership can play in such situations. For example, in 2014 President Victor Yanukovich resisted sentiment within the country to look west and move more closely to the European Union. Instead, he agreed to accept \$25 billion worth of assistance from Russia. Protests broke out in Kiev, and an unexpected civil war that initially centered on Crimea but later in eastern Ukrainian cities exploded with a vengeance. Bitter feelings within the country were exacerbated by the fact that an authoritarian leader who represented the Russian minority was guiding the decision to orient Ukrainian policy towards the east. Just as a look at some of the variables that contribute to ethnic conflict enlightens key aspects of the Ukrainian crisis, it is appropriate to examine briefly the nature of authoritarian leadership to better understand how it can also compound group misunderstandings and hatreds.

Authoritarian regimes have a legacy that is imprinted on the corresponding society, and the implications must be explored. Former authoritarian societies must address and resolve the “baggage” that is inherited from an authoritarian regime especially when nation states seek stability. It is important to understand that there are various forms of authoritarian rule that exist on a continuum, but they all have basic concepts or shared aspects including: government exercises arbitrary control over the polity; polity has very little control over political decisions; and personal liberties of the polity are minimal or do not exist. There are many factors that are encompassed by governments that have a legacy of authoritarian rule, and nation-states must consider the factors when navigating political transition, seeking political stability, or when external actors are considering intervention.

Enduring authoritarian rulers have several fundamental challenges that they must constantly navigate including maintaining power amongst those that rule, if power is not singularly vested, and sustaining control over the people that they rule. Svoboda explains the nature of authoritarian leadership as in need of equilibrium, and he further notes that it is imperative that the dictator and the broader ruling coalition must have a balance of power in order to thwart any potential opposition or coups (Svoboda 2009: 482). It is the balance of power among the ruling elite that is the most delicate aspect of authoritarian power to maneuver. Authoritarian regimes must stay poised and navigate the challenges that are inherent to maintain control and authority within their geographic limits. The methods that are used by the central governing authority to ensure control can have a direct impact on the resulting society and those that are governed. Svoboda further notes that that the role of repression is a central tool for authoritarian rule, and force must be used to preclude a popular uprising

invoking regime change (Svolik 2009: 477). In an attempt to better understand the impact authoritarian leadership can have on the broader society, a theoretical framework will be incorporated to the discussion of authoritarian power to provide a more comprehensive analysis of authoritarian leadership in addition to a general discussion of the societal characteristics that are associated with authoritarian rule. The literature on authoritarianism has great attention paid to the role of political institutions and the cultural and societal sectarianisms that are present within nations that have a tendency towards a central, authoritarian form of government.

Hannah Arendt, through her analysis of Nazi Germany and Stalin's Russia, provides insight into the nature of totalitarian rule (Arendt 1951). Arendt asserts that racism can serve as the basis of an ideology, and she uses anti-Semitism as a prime example connecting racist ideology to the rise of totalitarian rule; additionally, the ideology of racism can serve as justification for imperialism, and both can serve as conducive factors for the emergence of totalitarianism (Arendt 1951). There are some clear connections between the case study and Arendt's theory. Race is a fundamental distinction within Ukraine and is only superseded by familial connections. The exploitation of racial divisions that exist within each state by a minority-led authoritarian ruler is inherent and appears purposeful to promote totalitarian rule. Imperialism is also relevant to the case study nations, but exists conversely with Ukraine resisting the imperialist expansions of Russia's encroachment in Crimea. The literature on authoritarianism has great attention paid to the role of political institutions and the cultural and societal sectarianisms that are present within nations that have a tendency towards a central, authoritarian form of government. These themes will be explored in the context of Ukraine.

A fractured polity is often a result of authoritarian rule because a divide and conquer leadership style results in fragmenting society. Phillips notes that the divide-and-rule technique can be used in various methods to maintain control over the polity including social, but also economic means (Phillips 2012) The legacy of authoritarian rule can exacerbate the cleavages that may exist within a polity and cause inherent distrust of the groups that then only rely on nepotism for interactions as a trustworthy source of resources and civil interactions. The focus on economic and ethnic fracturing directly detracts from the ability of a polity to focus on the necessity of political change or the willingness to coordinate efforts across ethnic or socio-economic lines to promote institutional change. The role of a fractured polity is essential in an authoritarian state such as Ukraine where the leader is of a minority ethnic group. The leader of the minority ethnic party must maintain vigilance toward the majority ethnic groups and focus their attention on the cultural issues between the groups to ensure that support does not build for an upheaval, and in some ways ensures that the majority ethnic groups is grateful that a more despised group does not seize power.

Government institutions inside an authoritarian nation are relevant to understanding the overall societal snapshot. Government structure is very commonly missing in authoritarian forms of government; rather, informal methodologies of ruling are instituted that lack clear policy or protocol. In addition, government corruption is a common result of political authoritarianism. The lack of institutional checks and balances or separation of powers that are relied upon as imperative in Westernized nations are foreign to authoritarian forms of government, and thus, make the government unreliable especially among ethnic groups that are not represented in the governing framework. Duplicate payments to government officials and multiple transactions to have access to government distributed goods and services makes the polity very weary of government and makes them accustomed to the corrupt nature of governance. In addition, economic cronyism is often relevant to the government institutions as they favor certain targeted ethnic groups with unlimited government funding and programs. In essence, the citizens are accustomed to widespread corruption with an authoritarian state and as a result they rely on family connections or nepotism (Kuran 2013). A decline in social trust and the existence of rampant corruption requires the continued reliance on family connections. Social fracturing and corruption both contribute to the reliance upon kinship or nepotism for fundamental needs and further negates any legitimacy in the governing institutions.

It is difficult to properly define civil society, but much easier to describe the factors that make up civil society. Non-governmental or social institutions play a role in the development of society, and the ability of the people to experience freedom of association are certainly factors that contribute to a nation's civil society. Organizations that are non-governmental do not exist in many authoritarian nations. Social organizations are not allowed to thrive; thus, institutions that would represent them are non-existent. Salamey and Pearson argue that the strong coercive forces of an Authoritarian form of government against a weak civil society can ensure that collective action will not grow and the continued dominance of Authoritarian regimes often relies on the continued force of military and secret service — type institutions that control civil life and impede the non-state media (Salamey and Pearson 2012). Alvarez-Ossorio concurs and notes that authoritarian regimes have been very hostile to the growth or development of an independent civil society for fear that they may ultimately develop into an organized opposition group to state power (Alvarez-Ossorio 2012: 23). The careful control over civil society assists the authoritarian leadership to monitor dissenting voices and deter the development of opposition groups. Puddington focuses on civil liberties and political rights, and he notes in his recent study that associational rights have declined in every region of the world, but are in specific pressure in the Middle East, North Africa, and the former Soviet Union (Puddington 2009: 70). Clearly, Ukraine falls within the geographical areas of the international arena that are noting marked declines in freedom of association.

A theme of authoritarianism within the case studies of minority led- authoritarian regimes demonstrate a strong focus on ethnic sectarianism that is promulgated to retain stability and power of the regime. The framework of nationalism will be applied to authoritarian rule in order to further analyze the ethnic and social sectarianism that can prevail within authoritarian polities to provide some insight into the implications of sectarianism in spite of or in the eventuality of regime change. Nationalism can be a very controversial topic that encompasses a wide range of both definitions and sentiment. Some can view nationalism as a “Western construction” that serves little use or purpose in international theory, but to support the Western perspective. At any rate, nationalism theory is a framework that looks at the role of nationalism or shared identity that can unify the polity within a nation-state. Anderson asserted that nationalism is an imagined sense of community or shared identity based on past experiences (Anderson 1991). Nationalism can serve to pull together disparate identities that can incorporate various ethnic identities and groups, and explains how groups come to identify themselves as members of a specific nation despite clear ethnic, religious, or economic differences.

A sub-theme within nationalism literature focuses on the impact of globalization on nationalism. Conversi compared the impact of globalization on long-distance nationalism through the use of technology, and she notes that nationalism is a process of boundary protection and boundary creation (Conversi 2012: 1358). Ethnic groups that are dispersed across international boundaries have the ability to connect via technology and serve to further their ethnic groups’ cause in their native nation-state. As previously discussed, globalization can have the impact of causing internationalization of ethnic conflict especially in the case of “nested minority” groups seeking support from wider geographical ethnic associations. In the context of minority ethnic authoritarian rule, sectarianism is a reality and the refugees and radicals that are seeking stability or change can be connected back to their native nation state through the use of technology and can spur and support ethnic conflict. In addition, Eriksen built upon existing nationalism and communication theory to advance a theory of internet nationalism that concedes to the role of globalization and technological advancements, and views nationalism in a more constructed manner (Eriksen 2007). Eriksen’s work allows one to view nationalism through a more global perspective thanks in large part due to available technology and resources. Depending on the definition of nationalism, the impact of globalization can certainly cause an intervening factor. Globalization, which is the growing interconnection of nations, economies, and cultures through the exchange of goods and services, can have an impact on the development of nationalism. The introduction of a method to compare one’s political situation to other nations and the ability to organize into an opposition force against the state caused some significant progression towards instability throughout the Arab Spring Nations. Through the process of globalization and

the distribution of technology, the authoritarian polity was able to compare their political structures with a more democratic form of government; thus, the comparative desire for reform was inherent (Hartman 2013). It is plausible to view nationalism as a product of one's perceived community or as an imagined sense of community as Anderson noted, but could be problematic when the community is heavily fractured as in the case of Ukraine (Anderson 1991).

It seems that Mark N. Katz's theory of nationalism is most relevant to the discussion of authoritarianism and the legacy of sectarianism, divide and rule leadership, poor government institutions, and lack of civil society. It is certainly difficult to develop a sense of nationalism within a nation-state that has experienced a divide-and-conquer leadership style, which would put ethnic groups purposefully at odds to detract attention from the central governance structure. Katz notes that resulting from authoritarian rule such as in the former Soviet Union, the polity whether they are members of the ethnic minority or ethnic majority identify themselves as a member of their ethnic group first and then secondly, if at all members of the nation or common state interests (Katz 1994: 330–331). Authoritarianism can impact the sense of nationalism within a polity and thus serve to cause a decline in the aptitude to develop cross cultural relations within a society and thus cause lasting conflict and fragmentation, which would certainly impede the ability of democracy to be established easily, if at all. Katz theory of nationalism supports the previously explored Van Hannen's assertions of "ethnic nepotism" (Katz 1994: 330–331; Van Hannen 1999). The ability of nationalism to provide commonality amongst divergent ethnic groups is desirable but unlikely in nation-states that are riddled with ethnic strife.

The Case Study of Ukraine

As noted above, Ukraine was afflicted by both serious ethnic conflict and the presence of an authoritarian leader in 2013–14. It is fair to conclude that the ethnic conflict and the persistence of authoritarian leadership were inbuilt to the political system created after the achievement of independence in 1991. One analyst depicts the country as in fact a "state of regions." In part, it is a Central European state with historical links in the west to Poland, Hungary, and other European powers. At the same time, it is also a unit of East Europe with Russian populations in cities east and south of Kiev. Further, Ukraine is one of six Black Sea nation-states and participates in a number of defense and cultural organizations with the littoral states of Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, Georgia, and Russia. Finally, prior to 1954, Crimea was actually part of the Russian Republic in the Soviet Union and before that of the Russian Empire from its capture by the forces of Catherine the Great in 1791 until 1917 (Sasse

2002: 69). It is no surprise that multiple cultural perspectives would characterize the state and that a number of key issues would be territorially based.

The 1996 Ukrainian Constitution established a federal system but one that provided for an “asymmetric institutional autonomy arrangement in Crimea” (Sasse 2002: 70). Ukraine would include twenty-four individual regions, but Crimea would have the status of a separate republic. Two Ukrainian cities would also possess “republican jurisdiction,” and those were the capital of Kiev and Sevastopol in Crimea (Sasse 2002: 73). The uniqueness of Sevastopol lay in the fact that a large Russian military base was located there, and Ukraine accepted that reality in return for reduced natural gas prices even after winning its own independence. In light of Ukraine’s character in reflecting at least four different regions, the new government had established a Council of Regions earlier in 1994. The selection process used by that Council for choosing the regional leaders entailed a principal of federalism itself. Appointment lay in the hands of the Ukrainian President, the mayor of Kiev, the mayor of Sevastopol, and the Deputy Prime Minister of Crimea (Sasse 2002: 77). Clearly, two of the four voting units in the Council were from the Crimean region that had the special federal status. There were other key events in 1994, among which was passage of a referendum that established Russian as the second state language throughout Ukraine and as the official administrative language in Crimea (Sasse 2002: 86). Then, in 1997, Russia and Ukraine signed the “Big Treaty” that permitted Russia to keep the naval base at Sevastopol until 2017. In return, Ukraine obtained part of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet as well as reduced natural gas prices (Malgin 2014: 1). There is no question but that Crimea offered the biggest challenge to state-building in Ukraine, and it was unclear at the end of the 1990s whether the political keys provided would keep a secure lock on the inbuilt ethnic conflicts or not.

It is next vital to take a more careful look at the political situation within Crimea as part of an independent Ukraine. In spite of its special status, Crimea was the target of unexpected intervention from Kiev. In March 1995, the secret services of Ukraine surprisingly removed Crimean President Meshkov from power due to their discontent with him. State leaders in Kiev were also constantly concerned about the activity of criminal clans on the Peninsula, and so in 1998, President Kuchma of Ukraine took forceful action to knock them out. A by-product was a reduction in the power of local authorities in Crimea and lessened autonomy for the region (Malgin 2014). Authoritarian leadership in Kiev had emerged again.

While Crimea struggled continuously to protect and extend its own autonomy within the Ukrainian state, the local leaders were more reluctant and quite authoritarian with their own Muslim Tatar minority. In earlier decades Soviet leaders had moved this group further east into republics such as Uzbekistan. However, after independence in 1991, about 270,000 Tatars migrated back to their former homes in Turkey but also in Crimea (Malgin 2014). In the early 1990s, the Tatars were

suspicious of Crimean aspirations for more autonomy, as they feared a result would be restriction of their own. However, they later supported Crimean efforts in the belief that an eventual focus on their own desire for autonomy might be a natural consequence (Sasse 2002: 82). In some ways the Tatar aspirations for autonomy possessed an intensity that was even greater than that of the Crimean Russians. For example, they had experienced genocide in former decades, and this experience led them to seek justice for themselves and their families in the new setting. When the authorities eventually established and elected a Crimean Soviet in 1994, they allocated 14 of the 98 seats to the Tatars. Armenian, Bulgarian, German, and Greek communities received one seat each (Sasse 2002: 89).

Eventually, Crimea received the right to rewrite its own Constitution. After Ukrainian President Kuchma removed Crimea's presidential office in 1995, he called upon the regional parliament to draft a new constitution. Their new Constitution came into effect in June 1996, and it cemented the fact that Crimea was a special or autonomous republic in Ukraine. As such, they would have their own representative assembly and executive branch. Following the elections of 1998, Crimean leaders decided to revise the 1996 Constitution. The newly rewritten document came into being on December 23, 1998 (Sasse 2002: 93–94).

The 1998 Constitution made clear that decisions in Crimea had to be in conformity with the laws of Ukraine as a whole. In fact, the President of Ukraine retained the right to suspend any acts of the Crimean Supreme Rada that were not in conformance with the Ukrainian Constitution and laws. The eventual arbiter in any such conflicts emanating from the Crimean Rada would be the Constitutional Court of Ukraine, but the state president also had the separate power to repeal problematic decisions made by the Crimean Council of Ministers (*Constitution of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea*).

It is important to note that the Constitution also gave considerable powers to Crimea, such as actual control by its government of the protected city of Sevastopol. In light of the events of 2014, it is extremely significant that a referendum was the device outlined in the Constitution for any future territorial changes in Crimea, although the Crimean legislature had to approve referendum results as well. Simferopol became the capital city, while Crimea attained the right to have its own symbols such as an emblem, flag, and anthem. Language rights received attention too, and protection for Russian, Tatar, and other minority languages received special constitutional mention. Russian would be the language used in all official communications, but minorities retained the right to have their children educated in their own languages. All official documents such as birth certificates would be published in both Ukrainian and Russian. If Tatars requested it, they could have the appropriate documents published in their Crimean Tatar too. Importantly, legal documents would be in the state language Ukrainian, but they could also be in Russian upon request. Overall,

the Constitution contains an upbeat tone about “preservation of the diversity of cultures” and their “mutual enrichment” (*Constitution of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea*).

What happened that tore all these carefully laid plans to shreds in 2014? How could the celebration of Olympic athletes at Sochi been followed so closely by the detachment of Black Sea neighbor Crimea from Ukraine and its reattachment to Russia?

During early 2014, President Victor Yanukovych negotiated with Russia’s leadership for a \$25 billion loan, in light of the need to boost the Ukrainian economy out of a very difficult situation. For example, there had been no economic capability to accomplish major infrastructure repairs to the road system. The highway leading from Kiev airport to the heart of the city was wide and beautifully landscaped, and those coming in from abroad were impressed. However, the parking lot behind Tavrida University in Simferopol, Crimea was barely navigable safely by car due to ditches and huge chunks of concrete. Yanukovych had been narrowly elected in a tight race with former Prime Minister Julia Timoshenko in 2010, after losing to the Orange Revolution candidate and future President Victor Yushchenko in the 2005 re-run of the 2004 election. Yanukovych was the only one of the three principal presidential candidates in those years who was from the Russian ethnic group in eastern Ukraine. Although he pledged to be fair to all ethnic groups, one of his first visits after inauguration was to Moscow. Soon, he signed an agreement that cut the price of natural gas from Russia to Ukraine in return for giving permission to the Russian Navy to use its base at Sevastopol for twenty more years after the expiration of its lease in 2017. Such pro-Russian inclinations and policies grated on the nerves of the Ukrainian majority and created a tense climate at the time of his negotiations with Russia at the beginning of 2014.

Riots and demonstrations occurred almost immediately after his acceptance of the loan from Russia in early 2014, as many Ukrainians had hoped for firming up links to the European Union, and this unexpected outreach to the east seemed a betrayal of those expectations. During the Euro-Maidan demonstrations in Kiev, the protestors made their demands explicit. In Egyptian fashion, the President sent in the troops and about one hundred persons lost their lives. Ukrainians later referred to them as the “100 angels.” The President went into hiding after being removed from office, as the protestors were eager to hunt him down and bring him to justice. Eventually, he escaped by helicopter into Crimea. No doubt, the Russian troops there spirited him away into the safe haven of southwest Russia. He occasionally surfaced to preside over press conferences during which he denounced the opposition. Many in Russia referred to the Kievan demonstrators as neo-Nazis, and this made some in the region recall the experience of the 1940s, when Ukrainian nationalists had brutally murdered thousands of citizens from surrounding countries such as Poland.

At the time of the Sochi Olympics, the Crimean pot was boiling, for the 60% Russian majority there was demanding a referendum that would ask citizens if they would be better off being part of Russia rather than Ukraine. Eventually, newly appointed leaders in Crimea permitted the referendum to be held, and the decision was overwhelming to join Russia. There was a real problem of legitimate leadership throughout Ukraine, for the President and Prime Minister in Kiev were also appointed, after Yanukovych's departure. President Putin later admitted that troops from Russia entered Crimea and worked with those at Sevastopol to create the climate for a pro-Russian vote in the referendum. Eventually, the Russian troops surrounded each base in Crimea and took them all into their control. Some Ukrainian military personnel joined up with Russia; some were relocated back to Ukraine; and others retired and moved into civilian jobs in Crimea. President Putin sponsored legislation in Russia immediately to make Crimea a republic in Russia, and the transition in currency and other practical matters began soon thereafter.

Unfortunately, the separatism spread soon to other predominately Russian cities in eastern Ukraine. Battles raged in cities like Luhansk and Donetsk, the heart of Ukraine's industrial strength and another region with basically Russian majorities in the population. By late October, control of the airports of those two cities had become the center of the battle. It is not clear what the link was between those Russian militias and the formal military in Russia proper. However, the Russian defense leaders did choose this time to emplace nearly 40,000 troops on the Ukrainian border for exercises but also as a show of force. Western leaders were much chagrined by all of this and eventually put economic sanctions on key businesses and individuals in Russia who had responsibility for stirring up the hornets' nest among the eastern Ukrainian cities soon after the absorption of Crimea. Eventually, Ukraine held a formal election, and Petro Poroshenko became President. He had been an independent businessman who made great wealth in the chocolate business in a corruption-free way. President Poroshenko quickly reached out to all sides while maintaining that Crimea was justly part of Ukraine.

In the summer of 2014, hostilities intensified to the point that the casualty count included several hundred deaths and more than one thousand wounded. By fall of the year, the casualties had mounted to over 3,000. The Russian militias took over government buildings in the key cities, and Ukrainian troops moved in to free them up. Casualties resulted from those battles, but the Russian rebels were also able to shoot down several planes utilized by the Ukrainian military. Many persons fled to Russia for sanctuary, and the United Nations and western leaders were anxious to inject some sort of a plan to create more security. In the midst of all of this, nearly 300 persons lost their lives when a Surface to Air Missile (SAM) brought down an innocent Malaysian commercial airliner on its way from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur (*USATODAY*, July 17, 2014). Evidence pointed towards responsibility by

the Russian militias in eastern Ukraine, and world leaders were then poised to take more serious action to bring about an end to the war. That atrocity was comparable to the use of chemical weapons by Assad in Syria, but its impact on global public opinion was probably much greater. The tragedy certainly demonstrated how the “contagion” of ethnic conflict had the potential to spill over borders and impose huge costs on the international community.

Between late July and late October, the West continued to develop capabilities that would counter and deter the Russian aggressiveness that was on display in Ukraine. Poland offered the NATO alliance a new base in Stetina (iDNES 2014a). This was a follow up to the relocation by the alliance of 600 troops from Italy to Poland and the three Baltic states. This shift also included an upgrading of fighter aircraft to a dozen F-16s in Poland alone. Scandinavian non-NATO states such as Sweden and Finland perceived a greater sense of threat too, and they asked for a closer relationship with the alliance (SME 2014, sueddeutsche 2014). A critical event was the fall NATO Conference in Wales on September 4–6. President Poroshenko of Ukraine attended the conference, and members endorsed the plan to set up a new Rapid Response “Spearhead” Force that would maintain a continuing presence in East Europe. That force would include 4,000 troops, 25 % of which would be British. Member states would rotate their participants in that group, and they would develop the capability to respond to a crisis within 48 hours (NYTimes 2014, USATODAY 2014a, USATODAY 2014b). Finally, the key parties to the conflict met in Minsk in early September and agreed to a ceasefire that the Organization for Security and Cooperation Europe (OSCE) would monitor (USATODAY 2014c). The fact that the battle continued after the cease-fire over the key centers of the Russian militia in eastern Ukraine underlined the need for continued attention by outside powers.

Role of Outside Powers

In the Ukrainian civil war, there were both positive and negative effects in the actions that outside powers took during the hostilities. The West greeted Russia’s take-over of Crimea, via a local referendum that was coordinated with Russian military involvement, with great dismay. At the same time, Russia was equally incensed by the Euro-Maidan protests in Kiev against Janukovych and actually provided him with sanctuary in Southwest Russia. The West refused to accept the absorption of Crimea into Ukraine and continued to talk as if they had the power to undo it. Escalation of the conflict to include eastern Ukrainian cities such as Luhansk, Odessa, and Donetsk brought constant posturing and rhetoric by outside powers. Russian leaders put the blame on Ukrainian leaders, even after the election of Petro Poroshenko. Western leaders depicted the Russian nationalist militias as the provocative

force and called upon President Putin to exercise leverage with them to pull back. The West also imposed sanctions on key industries, banks, individual leaders, and even oil companies in Russia to compel change. Generally, the United States and its leadership adopted more strict sanctions than did the key figures in the EU. The latter continued to be dependent on Russia for critical deliveries of natural gas and did not want to jeopardize that valuable resource. In July 2014, two other nations became inadvertently and indirectly involved in the civil war. President Putin visited Cuba and announced cancellation of the vast majority of their debt, and he also got them to provide access to Lourdes base that possessed the capability for listening in on communications within the United States. Sadly, Malaysia experienced the crash of an airliner in Ukraine that may have been the result of a missile fired by one of the sides in the civil war. Both Ukraine and Russia blamed each other for possessing the SA-11 capabilities, and tragically the Russian militias desecrated the crash scene and did all possible to prevent international investigators from carrying out their missions in a timely and humane way.

How can the outside powers develop plans to deal with the spiraling crisis and the unraveling of the Ukrainian state? What can stop the stand-off between the West and Russia, with the virtual isolation of President Putin and the Russian system? The Ukrainian crisis has intensified at a point when Russia and the West had increasingly gone their separate ways on critical issues relating to regional stability. In the previous five years, there had been sharp disagreements over missile defense proposals of the West in 2008–09, over the NATO intervention in the Libyan Civil War in 2011, over the underlying nature of the Syrian Civil War after 2011, and over Russia's crack-down on dissent both during its 2012 presidential elections and prior to the 2014 Sochi Olympics (Legvold 2014: 74–75). By mid-2014, after six months of a continuing but changing East-West struggle over Crimea and Russian militias, the intensified Ukrainian crisis seemed “to have taken on a momentum of its own” (Legvold 2014: 84). Many policy makers and observers emphasized the importance of strengthened sanctions that would really pinch Russian society and press the leaders for adjustments in policy. On paper, sanctions often make sense as serious actions that are short of war itself, but that can be gradually escalated to higher levels. However, sanctions may hurt Russian citizens and consumers more than they do oligarchs and political leaders. As a classic BRICS state, President Putin has consolidated political controls over the key oil and natural gas sectors. Sanctions will not touch or undercut that pattern of political controls. Neither will they reduce the profits of those mega-companies, given the thirst for their products in fellow BRICS countries like China and India. Further, the Russian President is easily able to redirect income from those government-dominated companies to the defense sector with a highly negative impact on regional stability (Gaddy and Ickes 2014a).

Regional security organizations could also play a more active role in resolving the tragic crisis. After the Dayton Agreement of 1995, NATO in conjunction with the UN brought a measure of stability to a Bosnian nation that had experienced three years of civil war and 200,000 casualties. In late 2004, that military alliance turned over security operations to the EU, and the peace generally held. In the Ukrainian crisis, the OSCE sent in observers to get close to the scene of the airliner crash, and additional international teams of specialists carefully examined the scene for evidence that would explain what exactly happened. Russia pushed for involvement by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) instead of Ukrainian authorities. NATO is a more powerful organization than other units in the region, but a number of observers argue that injection of more alliance troops and repositioning of ones already in Europe only remind the Russians of the West's hostility during both two decades of NATO expansion east and tensions over the Bush Administration's Missile Shield Proposal (Gaddy and Ickes 2014b).

At one point, President Poroshenko considered requesting the U.S. to take the lead in declaring Ukraine to be a "Major Non-NATO Ally" in the same category as nations like Australia and Israel (VZGLYAD 2014). On the very same day, President Putin announced that Russia would be strengthening its military power in reaction to increased activity by NATO in Europe. He declared that the western military alliance was becoming more active by strengthening its presence in the former communist states of East Europe, the Baltics, and the Black Sea region. He also reminded his listeners of U.S./NATO past provocations such as admission of former communist countries in Central Europe as well as proposals for a missile defense that he claimed was directed primarily against Russia. Further, he characterized the western sanctions as "tightening the screws" on Russian society. He would never permit the spread of more color revolutions into Russian society, and in that sense he was invoking memories of the unrest in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgystan in the first few years of the 21st century. In particular, he underlined the significance of educating Russian youth on the importance of the homeland and their responsibility for its future destiny (iDNES 2014b). Such contrasting statements from Ukraine and Russia brought the NATO issue back into the conversation but in a way that could intensify the crisis.

Conclusion

This focus on ethnic conflict, authoritarian leadership, and outside powers can help explain the underlying nature of the Ukrainian crisis. Further, a return to the original research questions can bring to the surface and highlight the key problems

that need attention, if there is to be of a new foundation of stability that can improve future prospects.

With regard to the first research question, there is no doubt but that the election of Victor Yanukovych in early 2010 inflamed the ethnic tensions between the Ukrainian minority and Russian minority based in the east and Crimea. However, it was not just the late 2013 — early 2014 decision of the President to steer the nation in the direction of further dependence on Russian economic assistance rather than towards engagement with the EU that tipped the balance. Yanukovych had been involved in the highly contested presidential election in 2004/2005, and initially he had been declared the winner. Questions about the fairness of that election from observer groups and from the Ukrainian population forced a rerun and the eventual election of Victor Yushchenko, the representative of Ukrainian interests. Following the 2010 elections, the new government put the opposition candidate Julia Timoshenko on trial for corruption, and an indeterminate jail sentence resulted. This kind of history between the two groups kept the ethnic pot boiling for a full decade before the critical events of 2014.

In connection with the second research question, it is also clear that the leadership style of President Yanukovych was out of tune with the democratic spirit of the 2004 Orange Revolution. That revolution followed a full decade of scandal and leaders who failed to adhere to the equally democratic aspirations of the non-communist revolution of 1991, a series of events in which the Ukrainian Republic very much took the lead in the break-up of the Soviet Union. Early efforts by Yanukovych after the 2010 election to cultivate Russian President Medvedev set the tone for his regime. Additional evidence of the out of touch Ukrainian President emerged with the deal struck to permit Russian troops to stay at their base in Sevastopol for several more decades in return for a sharp reduction to Ukraine of the cost of Russian natural gas. For the Ukrainian community, this reciprocal decision cemented the sense of betrayal of democratic aspirations awakened both in 1991 and again in 2004.

In light of the third research question, actions of outside nations had an enormous impact on the inner Ukrainian tensions connected with the ethnic conflict and authoritarian leadership patterns. The decision of President Putin to collaborate with ethnic Russians in Crimea with the resulting detachment of it from Ukraine and reconnection to Russia was a clear violation of Ukrainian sovereignty. That act also aroused concerns within Ukraine and the outside world about the fate of the eastern section of the country that also was inhabited by a Russian majority. To what extent would Russian leaders probe in those directions to shrink even further the sweep and jurisdiction of the government in Kiev? It was not only Russia that involved itself in the political affairs of Ukraine. Other nations in the west responded with offers of assistance to Ukraine, particularly after the July 17 shooting down of the Malaysian airliner. In addition, NATO repositioned some of its forces further north in case Rus-

sian probes took place in the Baltic nations or Poland. In fact, the September NATO Summit in Wales largely focused on what further steps that alliance might need to take in order to assure European security. In the short run, this level of outside engagement made the internal tensions smolder even more, but the magnitude of the crisis did raise some hope that leaders would think rationally and work together in order to reduce the damage and prevent further erosion of the situation.

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