

Ukraine Crisis; An Old-and the New Conflict between Democracies and Autocracies and Footsteps of Russian Imperialism

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Abstract: *The Ukrainian crisis is not one of the simpler economic power struggles and separatist understandings it seems. The Ukraine crisis is the latest example of the centuries-old conflict between democracies and autocracies, and the winner of this war will determine the future of the world. From this point of view, countries should look at the Ukraine crisis as an important turning point that will determine whether democracies or autocracies will dominate the future of humanity and should think more seriously and in a longer term. This article aims to look at the Ukraine crisis as a conflict between democratic and autocratic regimes. If the crisis is not approached from this perspective today, it is inevitable that it will turn into a third world war soon or victory of autocracies. If NATO refrains from fighting Russia's invading attempts, then its establishment and its necessity are also debatable.*

Keywords: Ukraine crisis, Putinism, Russian Imperialism, NATO, Conflict, War

1. Introduction

E. Williams wrote in 1938 as “in 1917 we went to war to make to world safe for democracy, but today the world is more unsafe for democracy than it has ever been” (Williams 1938). We should think about this, after more than 80 years if our world is safer for democracy.

Freedom House reported that political rights and civil liberties around the world deteriorated into their lowest point in 2018 (freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018, January 2022).

In the first decade of the 2000s, pessimistic views on democracy increased. In 2015, terms such as “Democracy in withdrawal”, “Democracy Under Stress”, “Democracy in Recession”, “Democracy on Hell's Edge” were used and recorded as the “Age of Worry of Democracy” in 2015 (Greyling 2018). Because of the weakness in democracies, autocratic regimes dare to act more aggressively.

Autocratic regimes are extremely eager to engage in armed intervention, to create war and mayhem. Thus, they reduce the visibility of the contradictions they contain in their own power. Immanuel Kant explains that the most important fact that distinguishes democratic regimes from autocratic regimes is whether they are inclined to war or not (Orend 2004). According to Kant, governments are morally obligated to pursue peace. By a “state of war” Kant did not mean continuous violent conflict but rather the continuous threat of such conflict. In autocracy, very disagreement can be used for war and conflict. It is very typical that war and conflict are used to support and maintain political power (Frantz 2018).

Democracies need peace, while autocratic regimes need turmoil to maintain their power (Mintz 1993). Autocratic leaders feel compelled to maintain unrest and turmoil to maintain their power in domestic politics, and this is often done using a perception of an external enemy. The imperial

powers' testing of their power in foreign countries is for both political and economic reasons.

According to Freedom House report, Russia is among the “not free” category.

The world is aware of the crisis when the Russian armies reach the border of Ukraine, but the people of Ukraine fear a second Holodomor.

Putinism

Arnold Beichman argued that Putinism in this century became as an important code of Stalinism. "Putinism" was used first time in the article by Andrey Piontkovsky on 11 January 2000 in *Sovetskaya Rossiya* and then *Yabloko* website on the same day. Putinism is the basis of Russian foreign policy nowadays. In this ideology imperial aspirations from the past and new countries to be obtained in the future determine the imaginary foreign policy (Applebaum 2012). Although it is called an ideology, Brian Taylor is also argued that Putinism is a code system rather than an ideology (<https://www.ponarseurasia.org/the-code-of-putinism-d5>). The main factors in Putin's foreign policy are used to support the populist approaches in Putin's domestic politics and the lies of foreign threats.

Putin and his inner circle do not seriously fear NATO military attacks, but they fear popular discontent, public questioning of their personal wealth, open criticism of the basic tenets of Putinism and, of course democracy and revolution opinions. Under the heavy burden of the Chechnya War and a serious economic crisis in August 1999 Vladimir Putin has been appointed as a prime minister and then with Yeltsin's resignation, Putin has been appointed as President of Russia in March 2000 (Çalışkan 2019). Russia, with Putin, has tended to follow a pragmatic foreign policy based on the New Euroasia Doctrin, and has shown its longing for the former Soviet empire at every step (Tsygankov 2020, Glaser 2021).

Liberal and nationalist hybrid mentality of Putin supported good relations with USA after 9/11 attack against terrorism. Putin perceived the changes in the way of independence in the neighboring countries known as former Soviet republics as a threat to support the opposition democratic activities to his own power inside Russia.

In 2003 in Georgia, in Ukraine in 2004 and in 2005 Color Revolutions in Kyrgyzstan, in addition to the European Union (EU) and NATO's Baltic Region and Eastern Europe Policies have been considered as Western policies of squeezing and containment of Russia by Putin (Tsygankov 2009). In 2008 Crimea crisis was Putin's intimidation to the democratic world. Putin thinks that "if there is somebody in the border of Russia it must be Russian supporter otherwise enemy".

Although Russia's foreign policy priorities seem to be shaped and prioritized for the benefit of the country, one of the important issues is Putin's effort to maintain his power in domestic politics.

Putin was elected in 2000 and 2004, he replaced Medvedev in 2008 to become the President again. He became the President again in 2012 and 2018 by theatrical elections. Finally, with the changes made in the electoral system, it paved the way for him to be president until 2036. Such a system has not been seen in real democracies. Putin sees real democracy understanding and aspirations as a threat to himself. What happened to opposition leaders is an example of this.

To evaluate Putin's attitude towards Ukraine, it is necessary to evaluate the changes in Tatarstan together at the same time. Recently The State Council of the Republic of Tatarstan did not accept the proposal from Moscow that would abolish Rustam Minnikhanov's title of presidency. Tatars are the second largest ethnic population in Russia after the Russians that they depend on their own independency (mgu-russian.com). It is necessary to evaluate this critical issue while dealing with the Crimean crisis.

During the critical domestic political problems, Putin drew attention to continuous external crises such as Chechnya, Georgia, Ukraine, Crimea, and Syria and Libya such as other autocratic leaders in the World.

Possibilities, Consequences and Solutions

Partition or full occupation of Ukraine will increase Russia's ambitions in the peripheral countries. Since socialism has disappeared in Russia, the establishment of the Union of Former Soviet Socialist Republics will only be a perception. Despite people's unhappiness and feelings of independence, Imperial expansion will help Putin and his circle maintain their interests and power.

Ukraine crisis is Putin's war. But USA and NATO are not innocent bystanders. Necessary measures should have been taken long ago and Ukraine should have been included in NATO. Ukraine should have worked to eliminate the unrest in the separatist region.

The events show how correct the idea of Ukraine's admission to NATO is.

In the Laws, peace, not war, is presented as the aim.

With compelling international agreements, the security of European countries should be guaranteed, Russia's expansion ambitions should be prevented, countries' energy and economic dependence on Russia should be reduced, and democratic movements in Russia should be encouraged.

Unfortunately, the presence of very weak governments in America, England and Ukraine, and Germany's energy dependence on Russia may cause the autocracy to prevail. We will see in the coming days how much democracy the democratic world has embraced.

2. Conclusion

Enmity, divisiveness, marginalization, exclusion is easy. The challenge is to be on the side of peace and democracy. Those who try to unite people and stand by democracy and universal human rights have always paid a price in world history.

Why are some countries so strong at making war but weak at making peace? The answer has to do with how real democracy is and how much it is claimed.

Only real democracies will bring peace.

If Ukraine is not taken into NATO as soon as possible, Russia's ambitions will continue. However, it is important that the solution is more advanced than military and that it works to spread democratic freedoms. If NATO refrains from fighting Russia's invading attempts, then its establishment and its necessity are also debatable. Another important question is; If NATO did not want to face Russia, why was it organized in Eastern Europe and encouraged Ukraine to join NATO?

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