EU and NATO Involvement in Russian-Ukrainian Conflict

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Institutional Affiliations

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**Introduction**

International organization proliferation is a popular trend of the 21st Century due to the emergence of complex and highly dynamic threats. The process of creating international organizations started immediately after World War II to promote global peace. The International Monetary Fund and United Nations (UN) are crucial international organizations that have consistently depicted their commitment to the promotion of international unity and cohesion. However, some international organizations have been dragged into new global socio-economic and political conflicts. The European Union (EU) and the North-Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have expanded significantly in the early 21st century s because of their involvement in emerging global political and economic conflicts (Machida, 2009). Notably, the participation of the EU and NATO in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict depicts the transformation of the roles of international organizations in international politics.

**Russian-Ukrainian Conflict**

The Russian invasion and occupation of the Crimea region in 2014 marked the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. The attack occurred at the peak of Ukrainian political tension that was characterized by the violent confrontation between protesters and national internal security forces. The protests started in 2013,intending to oppose the President’s decision to prevent the increased integration of Ukraine with the European Union. Viktor Yanukovych had a strong political relationship with the Russian government during his service as the President of Ukraine between 2010 and 2014. Yanukovych was overthrown and exiled to Russia in February 2014, following the political tension in his country (Blackwill&Sestanovich, 2020).

Russia defended its invasion of the Crimean region of Ukraine using political and cultural reasons. Residents of Crimea expressed their interests to join Russia through a majority vote in a controversial referendum held immediately after the Russian occupation. Vladimir Putin, the Russian President, expressed his interest in offering protection to Russian speakers living in the southeastern part of Ukraine and Crimea.

Studies have indicated that Russia also had economic reasons for invading Crimea. Ukraine had expressed interest in exploiting their natural gas reserve through a collaborative process with United States companies. The control of the Crimean gas reserve by the United States was against the economic interests of the Russian government. Researchers have also observed that the Russian invasion of Ukrainian territory was a political strategy employed by Putin to increase his political relevance. President Putin considered that Ukraine offered strong support to the economic endeavors of the Soviet Union from 1920 to 1991 hence, preferred its occupation. Ukraine provided raw materials, including minerals and agricultural products for industries located across the Soviet Union. The invasion of Ukraine is a strategic move that increased Putin’s popularity to 80 percent in the Russian political arena (Amadeo, 2020).

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict has currently escalated into a dangerous international conflict. The conflict has led to the growth of a strong alliance between the Ukrainian government, NATO, the EU, and the United States. NATO, the EU, and the United States have been involved in the military empowerment of Ukraine through the increase of armament and human resources. The US government donating $1 billion to the Ukrainian military since 2014 is an example of this involvement. NATO and the US had also been involved in massive military aviation exercises in Ukraine in 2018. Russia, on the other hand, has been engaged in re-armament exercises during this geopolitical tension period.

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict is associated with numerous incidences that triggered global tension. In 2014, for example, a Malaysian aircraft was struck by a missile leading to the death of 298 people. The conflict also featured a severe terrorist cyberattack on the Ukrainian national power grid led to a blackout that affected over 225,000 Ukrainian citizens.This terrorist attack is a depiction of the complexity of cyberwar in a 21st century, a true threat to security. There was a second cyberattack initiated on Ukraine in 2016.This terrorist attackinterfered with normal economic activities in the Ukraine. In 2017 the Russian government launched the NotPetya cyberattack that caused massive harm to computer systems belonging to the Ukrainian government and businesses.

**Reasons for the EU and NATO Involvement in the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict**

The EU acknowledged the emergence of new complex threats and global challenges in 2003. The member countries also observed that these challenges mainly emerged beyond its borders, transforming its defenses to facilitate mitigation processes. Some European member countries requested an upgrade of the securities system of their organization to protect them from new foreign problems(Bambas,2015). According to the European Security Strategy the main threats facing the EU member nations in the new millennium included organized crime, geopolitical tensions, state failure, nuclear weapon proliferation, and terrorism.

The escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict manifested the current status of its defense system with regards to its responsiveness to the emerging threats. It evidenced that the EU had been using an obsolete system that significantly rendered it irrelevant in the 21st Century.The obsoletesystem loweredthe EU’s ability to influence the international social, political, and economic agenda. Numerous factors evidenced the negative consequences of the weakening of its system, including the disintegration of the European Unity. This disintegration reflected in , reduced political influence, poor performance in international trade, Western-order erosion, and a massive reduction in the defense budget .

The crisis has indicated that the EU had severe weaknesses in various levels of its security system, including internal level, external level, and transnational level. The internal level of the EU’s security system focuses on the threats within the boundaries of the European Union(Bambas,2015). An investigation into the performance of the domesticscale of its security shows that member countries have experienced a reduction in prosperity and stability. Member countries of the EU have experienced a low economic growth rate in the 21st Century, which has been worsened by political, economic, and social fragmentation(Bambas,2015). These nations have suffered severefinancial problems, including youth unemployment and increased poverty levels. The weakness at the internal level of the EU has created significant disunity among the member nations.

This has lead to nations; including Great Britain, Greece, and Germany; to contemplate leaving the European Union. The external level of this security system focuses on its responsiveness to foreign aggression. European Union faces Russian aggression from its eastern side and immigration problems in its southern side because of the ongoing Arab Spring. Fears exist regarding the possible spread of insecurity from North Africa and the Middle East to Europe.

Finally, the transnational security level focuses on issues that include illicit trafficking, cyberattacks, and terrorist threats facing Europe.This level captures security challenges that EU member nations should address through a collaborative process with other non-EU member nations (Bambals, 2015).

**Collaboration betweenthe EU and NATO**

Russia’s success in its invasion occupation of Crimea depicted it as a formidable threat for the entire EU region. Russia has disrupted the tranquility of Europe because of the rise in its military operations in nations located in its eastern and Baltic regions. Member nations of the EU could not ignore the possibilities of an attack from Russia using nuclear weapons. The strengthening of the EU’s alliance with the US and NATO is an effective strategy for dealing with threats from powerful aggressors like Russia.

Federica Mogherini was quick to implement the EU’s idea of collaborating with NATO after her appointment for Vice-President and High Representative position in the EU. According to Mogherini creating a NATO-EU alliance would empower Europe, enabling the member countries to be restored to their former glory. The coalition was eventually created in 2015 based on the shared goal of supporting Ukraine and repelling aggression (Kramer, 2015). The alliance enabled NATO and the EU to approach the Russian-Ukrainian conflict from the perspective of Western supremacy and solidarity.

Mogherini’s urge to establish and create the NATO-EU alliance coincided with the growing concerns of the U.S. government regardingthe increased Russian aggression in Europe. The United States Congress was extremely concerned about the scope and future significance of NATO. Participation in NATO has enabled the US to promote peace and stability in Europe.

NATO, like the EU, has also analyzed the strength of its security system(s) following the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Although NATO has effectively managed territorial disputes featuring European countries; including Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova; the Russian invasion of Crimea stressed its crisis management and military systems. Studies have shown that member nations of NATO failed to consider Russia as a formidable threat to its Euro-Atlantic region.

The member countries of the EU and NATO observed that Russia had been using a strategy of “divide-and-rule” to establish its control in the entire Euro-Atlantic region. Political tensions in Ukraine illustrated the abilities of Russia to introduce divisive politics in European nations, weakening their economies, cultures, and political structures. The introduction of ethnic divisions in Ukraine by Russia is evidenced by tensions in the Ukrainian regions of Luhansk and Donetsk. In 2014, separationist forces supported by the Russian government expressed interests of separating the Luhansk and Donetsk regions from Ukraine. According to NATO and Ukraine, Russia has introduced ethnic conflicts in Luhansk and Donetsk that have led to the death of over 10,300 Ukrainian citizens. Russia is still using the same divisive strategy in Estonia and Latvia by turning minority Russian-speaking residents of these nations against their governments (Larrabee et al., 2017).

The intelligence gathered by the EU and NATO has indicated that Russia has a long-term objective of establishing control over nations in the central and eastern parts of Europe. Currently most countries in the east and centralregion of Europe are important markets for Russian fossil fuel products. Controlling these nations can enable Russia to protect their fossil fuel market from Western counterparts, including the United States. NATO and the EU have a daunting task in protecting the Eastern and Central regions of Europe, considering that Russia has already implemented its strategy of “divide-and-rule” though funding right-wing and left-wing political parties. Furthermore, NATO-EU intelligence has indicated that Russia has introduced its policy of “divide-and-rule” to powerful European nations, including Germany, the United Kingdom, and France. The uncovering of France’s intention to sell a Mistral warship to Russia depicts the role of Russia in creating disunity among member nations of the EU and NATO. Although the Mistral warship business deal between Russia and France was canceled in 2015, Russia entered into a successful agreement with Cyprus in 2015 (Tran, 2015).

Putin’s decision to attack Ukraine in 2014 stemmed from the motivation that Ukraine had not allied. Putin believed that the EU and NATO would not rescue Ukraine after the attack. He planned to launch a continuous strike from land, sea, and air. Russia prepared a contingent of 30,000 soldiers. This contingent was then stationed at the Ukrainian southern border. Russia also used missiles to reinforce the operation of anti-government rebels in Ukraine. Putin believed that he would finally annex Ukraine with ease based on the assumption that it was not effectively affiliated to the EU and NATO.

**Effectiveness of EU-NATO Intervention in the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict**

NATO and EU have participated in defense of the European region on independent perspectives since their inception. The independent operation of the two international organizations led to the separation of security and defense perspectives. Notably, the EU was seen as a security provider in Europe, while NATO was seen as the defender of Europeans. Lack of links between the EU and NATO symbolized mistrust and disunity among the members of the former. This factor triggered excitement and confidence among Russian politicians. However, the formation of the NATO-EU alliance has strengthened solidarity among the EU member countries with regards to regional defense. The collaboration increased capability and resilience among the European nations with regard to solving geopolitical challenges of the 21st Century.

In 2015 the EU and NATO facilitated the Readiness Acton Plan implementation that increased the allies’ military presence in the seas, land, and air in the eastern EU nations. The alliance facilitated the creation of an active troop comprising of four to six thousand soldiers. The partnership facilitated the establishment of control and command centers in six nations in the eastern EU nations. In 2016 NATO, in collaboration with the EU, sent troops through Poland, Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia to counter the advancement of Russian forces. The soldiers received massive reinforcements in 2017 through the introduction of tank brigades from the United States. The alliance also enabled the United States to introduce high-tech and new jet fighters to the fleet participating in the campaign of Baltic Air Policing.

The joint operation between NATO and EU defense forces caused a significant deterrence of Russian aggressions. The two international organizations also increased the Ukrainian ability to handle Russian aggression. Hungary, Latvia, the United Kingdom, and Lithuania jointly funded the readiness and interoperability campaign for Ukraine. The strategy demonstrates the EU's commitment to adopting a useful crisis prevention framework as opposed to focusing on dealing with consequences. The EU-NATO alliance also placed Ukraine under the nuclear umbrella of NATO and the US, ensuring its confrontation against Russia at an equal military power level.

Considering that Russian attacks on Ukraine targeted critical sectors of its economy, including the energy sector, the EU and NATO launched a counter-economic war against Russia. NATO and the EU started a process of economic sanctions in 2014 targeting Russia. The ban aimed at forcing Putin to end his support for the rebel groups in Ukraine. The bans relied on the fact that Russia bombed a Malaysian commercial aircraft, killing 298 innocent people. Economic prohibition disconnected Russian banks from the European region. NATO and EU states also withdrew their technological support from Russian oil rigs in the Arctic regions. The United States also severely damaged the Russian titanium business through hoarding operation. An American-based JPMorgan bank has also announced its decision to terminate its activity in Russia by 2020.

The prolonged period of economic sanctions employed by NATO and the EU has made Russia experience an economic recession. The economic downturn is characterized by an increased inflation rate in the Russian economy. Although Russia has attempted to solve the inflation problem by increasing bank interest rates, its currency has already undergone a meltdown. Investors in the Russian forex market from EU and NATO member nations recovered their funds and re-invested them elsewhere. The economic recession of Russia has forced its Federal Reserve to lower its credit activity in the global market, reducing its income.

The success of the EU-NATO alliance in overcoming Russian aggression evidences the tactical approach to global security issues. The progress of the crisis shows that solving of 21st Century problems require collaboration between nations. The European countries have been engaged in the development of high-tech military gadgets such as cyber defense systems, satellites, drones, and aircraft. The Russian-Ukraine conflict has enabled EU nations to integrate both security and defense factors with their operations. The increased armament process of the EU has enabled it to protect its borders and values and generate proper foreign policies. The increased unity of European nations has shown the Russian government its accountability on global security responsibilities.

Turkey and Japan are two nations in the geopolitically significant countries that have expressed their interests in joining the EU-NATO alliance. Japan is currently ranked third in terms of economic might at the global level. Japan shares norms and values with NATO and EU member states, hence facilitating compatibility. The Russian-Ukrainian conflict has enlightened Japan on the importance of joining the EU-NATO alliance. Japan has already reformed its constitution to facilitate the integration of self-defense and collective defense in dealing with emerging threats. Japan’s decision to join the EU-NATO alliance follows its anticipation of the establishment of the Russia-China alliance in the future. Currently, Japan has been drawn into a new territorial dispute with China over the islands of Diaoyu/Senkaku. Turkey, like Japan, has considered joining the EU-NATO alliance because of the hostile political environments in the neighboring Asian region. Turkey currently spends 2% of its Gross Domestic Products on its defense system. Increasing its military strength and strong integration with NATO and the EU would enable it to overcome terrorism threats and insecurity.

**Conclusion**

The Russian invasion of Crimea took NATO, EU, and Ukraine by surprise. They ignored Russia’s power. The invasion caused a significant tension on the EU defense system in terms of its flexibility, resilience, endurance, and responsiveness. The success of the EU-NATO alliance in overcoming Russian aggression.This is indicated by the evolution of the 21st Century strategies of warfare. The effectiveness of the EU-NATO alliance introduced elements of resilience and flexibility to the EU member nations. It is a strategy that has enabled the EU to design and synchronize defense policies with allies such as NATO. The approach has also exposed the importance of collectively employing corporative security, crisis management, and collective defense in overcoming advanced 21st Century security threats, including hybrid warfare, cyberattacks, terrorism, and nuclear weapons. EU-NATO alliances offers a long-term solution to the problems facing its member nations. International organizations are exploring efforts to increase the number of participants to improve their preparedness against more complex threats in the future.

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