

Michał Woźniak

THE UKRAINE CRISIS AND SHIFT IN US FOREIGN POLICY

ABSTRACT: War in Ukraine and the Russian annexation of Crimea are the events that changed the US policy towards Russia. The events in Ukraine forced the United States to take a closer look at Eastern and Central Europe. The United States' policy during the Ukrainian crisis has been limited to sanctions and strong statements so far because in Ukraine there is an asymmetry of interests. Ukraine is much more important to Russia than to the United States. The United States may be willing to support the democratic and western aspiration of Ukrainians but will not risk a major conflict with Russia over it. However the crisis in Ukraine is not only about Ukraine or Russia. It is also about US credibility around the world. Both friends and foes are watching closely the American reaction to the situation. That is why the United States has increased its military presence in those NATO countries that share borders with Russia.

KEYWORDS: Ukraine Crisis, US Foreign Policy, Ukraine, Russia, NATO, European Security.

Introduction

In February 2014, the US Ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul, announced that after two years his mission will come to an end. The resignation of McFaul is much more significant considering the fact that he was the main White House adviser on Russian policy and the author of the famous “reset” in relations between the United States and the Russian Federation at the beginning of Obama’s presidency (Baker, 2011). It is hard to find a clearer evidence that the reset policy has failed and that the Obama administration finally resigned it. Since the announcement of a “reset” by the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov, relations between the two

countries have become more and more strained, and instead of the expected improvement we observed constant deterioration of bilateral relations. Asylum for Edward Snowden in Russia, the protracted conflict in Syria, and the construction of a defense missile shield in Poland and Romania are the most meaningful examples. However, the crisis in the Ukraine and especially the Russian annexation of Crimea, are the events that irreversibly affected the change in US policy towards Russia. For many years since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Europe and United States lived in the belief that in this part of the world everything is settled. The first sign that something is changed was war in Georgia in 2008. It was a sign that Russia would not accept the role western democracies prepared it for. The NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008 did not offer a Membership Action Plan to Georgia and Ukraine but alerted Russia because NATO made an unprecedented declaration that “those countries will become members of the alliance” (Asmus, 2010: 134). Ronald Asmus, one of the diplomats at the summit wrote in his book that: “British Prime Minister Gordon Brown leaned over to President Bush at the Council table and half-jokingly said: I am not sure what we did here. I know we did not extend MAP. But I am not sure we didn’t just make them members of NATO” (Asmus, 2010: 134). It was not long after the declaration at the summit when the war in Georgia started. Russia has shown the world that it is ready to use force to stop the ex-Soviet republics from joining the western organizations. Six years ago Georgia was involved in the conflict with Russia because it wanted to join NATO. Since 2014 Ukraine is involved in conflict with Russia because it wants to join the European Union. The events in Ukraine forced the United States to take a closer look at Eastern and Central Europe. Since the end of Cold War the region became important again and focused the attention of the United States.

Prelude to the Crisis in Ukraine

Ukraine gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. From that moment the process of building a modern national identity started. Ukrainians do not have a long history of having their own sovereign state. Ukrainians were one of the nations of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries and after the partitioning of Poland, became part of the

Russian Empire. After the end of World War I, Ukraine struggled shortly for its own state against Soviet Russia but it was defeated. Western Ukraine became part of Poland and Eastern Ukraine was included in the Soviet Union. The complicated history that is influencing the present divisions among the Ukrainians was described by Samuel Huntington in *The Clash of Civilizations*. Huntington wrote that:

The future conflicts will occur along the cultural fault lines separating civilizations. Western part of Ukraine grew up in the western civilization, while Eastern Ukraine in the Russian Empire and Orthodox faith (Huntington, 1996: 165–168).

That is why the Ukrainian identity is extremely complex. However in a nationwide referendum in December 1991, 90% of Ukrainian citizens voted for independence (Lalpychak, 1991). It showed that Ukrainians are not so divided after all and they prefer to have their own state. In December 1994, the “Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances” was signed by Ukraine, Russia, the United States, and the United Kingdom. It was not a real formal treaty but more like a diplomatic document under which signatories ensured each other that they will respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine as an independent state (Memorandum on Security). The Budapest Memorandum was part of the denuclearization process of the former Soviet republics which were seen as not responsible enough and capable of having their own nuclear weapons. Ukraine agreed to give up its nuclear arsenal, which was third largest in the world at that time.

From the 1990s through 2004, the country was ruled by President Leonid Kuchma whose power was built on the strong support from a powerful groups of oligarchs. Those times can be characterized by widespread corruption, a weak economy, and little effort for economic and democratic development. The first decade of independence was lost for Ukrainians, who were disappointed as its aspirations grew. In 2004, Viktor Yanukovich won the presidential elections and was getting ready to succeed Kuchma. However, the opposition candidate Viktor Yushchenko’s supporters started massive demonstrations claiming the election fraud and took to the streets in what came to be known as The Orange Revolution. The protesters started a blockade of the governments building and demanded another vote. The Supreme Court of Ukraine announced the re-voting and Yushchenko won. The Orange Revolution was

a success of the Ukrainian people demanding a change. Unfortunately after a while “orange political leaders” engaged in a conflict which paralyzed the reforms and disappointed the people for the second time. Soon it became obvious that little remained from the hopes and plans that initiated the Orange Revolution. In the next presidential elections voters decided that Victor Yanukovych should become new president. He won thanks to the support of the Russian-speaking parts of Ukraine in the east and south of the country. His rival Julia Tymoshenko, who was prime minister in Yushchenko government, got many votes in the Western Ukraine.

The new government showed a lack of concern for human rights and democratic reforms. It had a long record of using the judicial system for political revenge, which was symbolized by the imprisonment of Julia Tymoshenko. She was sentenced to seven years in prison for abuse of power while signing a new gas agreement with Russia. The corruption was blooming again and served Yanukovych’ family and associates. The parliamentary elections in October 2012 did not meet the international standards and were criticized by the OSCE Election Observation Mission Final Report (Ukraine Elections).

Yanukovych officially supported closer ties with the European Union but made it clear that the Russian Federation is still the most important partner with Ukraine. From the moment when President Putin announced the plan of creating the Eurasian Economic Union Ukraine was forced to play a very difficult balancing game, squeezed between two powerful organizations. Yanukovych tried to gain as much as he could both from the EU and the Russian Federation without making the decision about which organization Ukraine should be closer to. It was obvious that Ukraine cannot be part of both and staying outside was not an option in the long run. However the moment of decision came and Yanukovych could not hesitate any longer. Until the last moment before the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius (Eastern Partnership Summit). nobody knew what Ukraine’s decision would be. Finally, on 21st November 2013, President Yanukovych’s cabinet decided to abandon the agreement on closer trade ties with EU. Ukrainian MPs also rejected a bill to allow Yulia Tymoshenko to leave the country, which was one of the conditions of the EU. Soon Ukrainians gathered and protested against their president, accusing him of breaking his promise. When the president treated the protests as riots, the protesters demanded the resignation of Yanukovych, and the long lasting occupation of central Kiev’s square called *Maidan* started.

US Reaction to Anti-government Protests in Ukraine

From the beginning of the protest on *Maidan Niezaleznosti* in Kiev the Obama administration urged both sides to find a peaceful and democratic solution to the crisis. President Obama made his first public remarks at a press conference in Mexico on 19th February 2014. He warned President Yanukovych: “not to resort to violence in dealing with peaceful protesters.” He also stressed that: “our approach as the United States is not to see Ukraine as some Cold War chessboard in which we’re in competition with Russia. Our goal is to make sure that the people of Ukraine are able to make decisions for themselves about their future (Obama remarks on Ukraine at press conference in Mexico).” Besides the warning for President Yanukovych about the use of force, the statement was aimed at softening the possible Russian suspicions about the American motives in Ukraine. The White House supported the implementation of political settlement between the opposition and the government in Ukraine. On 21st February, with the help of EU political mediation, President Yanukovych signed a compromise with opposition leaders. However, the very next day the deal was broken by the *Maidan* movement. The protesters did not want any negotiations with the president who has blood on his hands. It was very difficult for the opposition leaders to ease the anger and remain in control of the crowds. Protesters took control of presidential administration buildings and president Yanukovych fled. The Ukrainian parliament named speaker Olexander Turchynov as interim president of Ukraine. Members of the proposed new government appeared before demonstrators, with Arseniy Yatsenyuk nominated prime minister. The elite Berkut police unit, blamed for deaths of protesters, was disbanded. The events met with an angry response from Russia claiming that the agreement had been used by the West as a cover for efforts to overthrow the legitimate president.

The American reaction to the collapse of Yanukovych was positive but cautious. In a statement released by the White House on 22nd February, the president expressed hope that the events could help to de-escalate the violence and be an opportunity to stabilize the political situation in Ukraine. The statement also said that: “United States will work with its allies, with Russia, and with appropriate European and international organizations to support a strong, prosperous, unified, and democratic Ukraine” (Statement by the Press Secretary on Ukraine, February 22, 2014).

US Help for the Newly Established Government

The new interim government in Ukraine started to work with the United States to secure financial aid as a priority for stabilizing the situation. The United States announced that it will work with its bilateral and multilateral partners to ensure that Ukraine has sufficient financing to restore financial stability and continue to growth. The United States declared to help the new government in Ukraine in the most urgent needs. Firstly, US Administration officials stressed that the IMF will provide the lion's share of the rescue package for Ukraine at about \$15 billion. The proposed aid package for the new Ukrainian government included \$1 billion in loan guarantees in order to help "insulate vulnerable Ukrainians from the effects of reduced energy subsidies." Any reduction in subsidizing energy is likely to be the most difficult condition of IMF loan for Ukraine. Secondly, the United States would provide technical assistance conducting free, fair, and inclusive elections. Thirdly, the United States offered help in combating corruption and recovering stolen assets. Washington would also send a team of experts to Kiev to work with their Ukrainian counterparts to identify assets that may have been stolen, identify their current location, and assist in returning those assets to Ukraine. Finally, the United States:

is preparing to provide technical advice to the Ukrainian government on Ukraine's WTO rights with respect to trade with Russia. At the same time the United States is ready to provide assistance and financing to help Ukrainian businesses find new export markets and adjust to trade pressures and to enhance energy efficiency, helping to reduce dependence on imported gas. (Fact Sheet: International Support for Ukraine)

On many occasions US officials showed their support and met with the new interim government of Ukraine after ex-president Yanukovich fled to Russia. Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk was a guest at the White House on 12th of March where he met with Obama who confirmed strong support for the democratic transformation in Ukraine and confirmed political and economic help from the US. On the 25th of May, the presidential election in Ukraine took place and Petro Poroshenko won. On 4th of June, President Obama met with the newly elected Ukrainian president in Poland. Obama confirmed during the meeting that USA will not accept the annexation of Crimea and declared that: "Ukrainian people made a wise selection in somebody who has the ability to lead them through

this difficult period. And the United States is absolutely committed to standing behind the Ukrainian people”. (Remarks by President Obama, June 04, 2014)

US Reaction to Russian Annexation of Crimea

Since the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis the United States has maintained that Russian actions are unacceptable both to the rules of the international order and to the hopes and aspirations of the Ukrainian people. On 3rd March 2014, President Obama said that: “the world is largely united in recognizing that the steps Russia has taken are a violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty.” The president also added that he understands the ties and interests of Ukraine and Russia, but “what cannot be done is for Russia, with impunity, to put soldiers on the ground and violate basic principles that are recognized around the world”. (Remarks by President Obama, March 03, 2014)

Both the US and EU have imposed sanctions on Russia as a consequence of the annexation of Crimea and the crisis in eastern Ukraine. The US published a list of individuals and companies hit by travel bans and asset freezes on 19th and 20th of March. The US extended sanctions on 28th of April (FACT SHEET: Ukraine-Related Sanctions). The EU has also issued its own list of sanctions. Most of the individuals on the sanction lists are prominent figures from the Putin’s inner circle. The sanctions are mild and did not influence the change in Russian policy, but the West declares it is ready to impose more sanctions if Russia continues its aggressive actions in Ukraine.

US Military Reaction and Help to NATO Allies

On the 17th of March the North Atlantic Council released the statement on the Crimea referendum: “We consider the so called referendum held on 16 March in Ukraine’s Autonomous Republic of Crimea to be both illegal and illegitimate. The referendum violated the Ukrainian Constitution and international law, and Allies do not recognize its results (Statement by the North Atlantic Council).” The NATO Council also decided to suspend all the practical civilian and military cooperation with Russia.

Although Ukraine is not a member of NATO it has a considerable contribution to the co-operation with the US and the alliance. Ukraine committed 1,700 soldiers to Iraq and lost 18 of them (Iraq Coalition Casualties). Small Ukrainian forces remain in Afghanistan to this day (ISAF: Key Facts and Figures). So far, the US help for Ukraine's Army is limited to sending non-lethal military aid, such as food rations and night vision goggles. On many occasions US officials underlined that they do not intend to send its own troops or military equipment to Ukraine. However, there is support for efforts to retake control of eastern provinces by the interim government in Kiev. The USA is not expressing any doubts about the Ukrainian anti-terrorist operation in the east of Ukraine, against the separatist supported by Russia. The question is whether Ukrainian forces will be strong enough to defeat all the separatists, who proved to be well-armed and able to shoot down the helicopters. Russia officially denies that there are Russian soldiers or Russian weapons involved. Just like it did before the annexation of Crimea.

Russian actions in the Ukraine triggered immediate response from the United States, which has increased its military presence in those NATO countries that share borders with Russia. The Americans sent six additional F-15 fighters jets and two KC-135 refueling tankers at Siauliai airbase in Lithuania within the Baltic Air Policing Mission and a dozen additional F-16 fighter jets with 300 personnel to Łask airbase in Poland. NATO also sent AWACS, the early warning aircraft to monitor the situation in the region. United States also fielded company sized units of paratroopers for exercises in the Baltic States and in Poland. The US sent about 600 troops from 173rd Infantry Brigade to Poland and the Baltics for training exercises. US Navy sent frigate USS Taylor to the Black Sea for the joint exercises with the Romanian Navy (Operation Atlantic Resolve).

Shift in US Foreign Policy

The United States' policy during Ukrainian crisis has been limited to sanctions and strong statements so far. First and foremost, Ukraine is not the most important partner for the United States. Ukraine is not essential for the USA, neither economically nor militarily. It is the European Union that has more at stake in the case of Ukrainian crisis, but the EU is even more reluctant to act against Russia in deeds not only in words. However the crisis in Ukraine

is not only about Ukraine or Russia. It is also about US credibility around the world. Both friends and foes are watching closely the American reaction to the situation. A weak American response can sow uncertainty in Taipei, Seoul, Manila, and Tokyo and seriously harm the so called "US pivot to Asia." By signing the Tripartite Agreement of January 14, 1994 the USA, UK, and Russia were obliged to support Ukraine in the event that its sovereignty, territorial integrity, or independence is threatened. Both UK and USA are not so eager to act against Russia on the basis of declaration they made twenty years ago in completely different international conditions. Then, during Boris Yeltsin's presidency the West lived in hope for a democratic Russia, closely cooperating with Europe and USA. Today, the United States is also entangled in cooperation with Russia in various areas such as logistical help for the US troops in Afghanistan, space cooperation or Middle East problems. It is important to understand how crucial the Ukraine is for Russia and how determined it will make Vladimir Putin to protect Russian interests even by force. The same cannot be said about the USA. It is not yet clear how far president Obama will go to support the Ukraine against Russia but we can assume that Russia will be ready to sacrifice more than USA or the EU when it comes to Ukraine. In the Ukraine there is an asymmetry of interests. The United States may be willing to support the democratic and western aspiration of Ukrainians, but it will not risk a major conflict with Russia over it. However, the Ukrainian crisis and Russian aggression can give NATO a reason to reorganize itself. The new situation in Europe gives the answer to the frequently asked question: is NATO really needed anymore? At its origin, NATO's goal, as famously stated by Lord Ismay, the first NATO Secretary General, "was to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down." The Ukrainian crisis revealed that in Europe 2014 almost everything is changed. Germany, with its strong economy and leading role in the EU are not down anymore. Russia, with its vast resources of gas and big investments in Europe, are not out anymore. The most important question is whether the US wants to stay in any longer. Berlin is looking at Moscow as an opportunity not a threat. German industry needs Russia and is not willing to place a new Iron Curtain between Europe and Russia. Mitchell Orenstein observed that: "as much as Germany has become disillusioned with Russia and would like to isolate it, it now finds doing so very difficult; Germany is inextricably linked to its eastern neighbor as a result of its geography and years of cooperation. A trade embargo or asset

confiscations would sting Germany more than any other European power.” (Orenstein, 2014: 37) At the peak of the crisis Siemens CEO Joe Kaeser met with Russian President Vladimir Putin and said that: “his firm is supporting a trusting relationship with Russian companies, wanted to honor longstanding business contracts and did not pay too much attention to ‘short term turbulences’ in its business planning” (Siemens chief says...).

After the annexation of Crimea, when Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski proposed stationing two NATO brigades in Poland, it was German Foreign Minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who rejected the idea explaining that: “We shouldn’t give the Russians any cause for accusing us of breaching treaties (Spiegel).” Steinmeier was referring to NATO commitment from 1997 that there will be no large NATO troops in former Warsaw Pact member states. The German government seems to be more concerned that such a move would provoke Russia, as if Russia’s intervention in Ukraine was not provocative enough. The great game is about whether the United States will stay in Europe or will it let Russia and Germany to reconstruct it their way. If the US will decide to back off, it would mean that the fate of Eastern and Central Europe will again be decided by Russia and Germany and that does not bode well for the region.

In this new Europe, the Franco-German engine has been replaced by a Russo-German one: as the European Union moves eastwards, settling its future borders and borderlands, it is Germany and Russia that will decide who is in and who is out and under what terms. (Orenstein, 2014: 39–40)

Among the most important European countries not only Germany has problems with a tough stance against Russia. France shows no intention of canceling the controversial contract to supply Russia with Mistral-class amphibious assault ships, although both Poland and the US asked for it many times. The French government can publicly condemn Russian aggression in Ukraine, but it sees nothing inappropriate in arming President Putin. Eastern NATO members have reasons to be worried with German-Russian cooperation. In March 2014, Germany announced that it had suspended a major defense deal with Russia for an estimated \$165 million. Since 2011, Rheinmetall Defense has been building a modern combined land forces training, simulation, and evaluation center at Mulino, Russia. According to Rheinmetall Defense, the training center was supposed to be finished later in 2014. The Mulino center would have the capacity to train and evaluate up to 30,000 soldiers every year.

The German and French attitude towards Russia means that if the US really wants to stop Russia's aggressive policy it will have to spend more time and resources on helping Poland, Romania, and the Baltic States. President Obama's latest visit to Poland on 3rd and 4th of June marked the beginning of a new US approach to the region. The approach described and suggested by the founder of Stratfor, George Friedman:

If Germany and Russia continue to move toward alignment, then the countries between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea – what used to be called the Inter-marium countries – become indispensable to the United States and its policy. Of the countries, Poland is the largest and the most strategically placed. It is also the one with both the most to lose and a keen awareness of that potential for loss. Membership in the European Union is one thing to the Poles, but being caught in a Russo-German entente is another. They and the other eastern Europeans are terrified of being drawn back into the spheres of influence of one or both of their historic enemies. (Friedman, 2011: 133)

During his speech in Warsaw on the 25th Anniversary of Freedom Day, President Obama answered the growing concerns of Poles and other Central and Eastern European nations:

I know that throughout history, the Polish people were abandoned by friends when you needed them most. So I've come to Warsaw today on behalf of the United States, on behalf of the NATO Alliance to reaffirm our unwavering commitment to Poland's security. Article 5 is clear an attack on one is an attack on all. And as allies, we have a solemn duty a binding treaty obligation to defend your territorial integrity. And we will. We stand together now and forever for your freedom is ours. Poland will never stand alone. But not just Poland, Estonia will never stand alone. Latvia will never stand alone. Lithuania will never stand alone. Romania will never stand alone. These are not just words. They're unbreakable commitments backed by the strongest alliance in the world and the armed forces of the United States of America, the most powerful military in history. (Remarks by President Obama)

On the 3rd of June, at a press conference with Polish President Bronisław Komorowski, Obama announced the new initiative called European Assurance Initiative and that he will ask Congress for a billion dollars for troops rotations, training programs, and exercises that would increase American military presence in Central and Eastern Europe:

We'll increase the number of American personnel Army and Air Force units continuously rotating through allied countries in Central and Eastern Europe. And we will be stepping up our partnerships with friends like Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia as they provide for their own defense. I'm calling on Congress

to approve up to \$1 billion to support this effort, which will be a powerful demonstration of America's unshakeable commitment to our NATO allies. (Remarks by President Obama)

At the same conference President Komorowski announced: "Poland intends to increase the defense budget of our armed forces. Poland is going to increase the funding of the modernization of the Polish armed forces up to the level of 2 percent of the GDP." In this context, it is important to remember that many NATO partners do not spend 2% of its GDP on military, which is required by the Alliance. The Polish president supported the American calls to increase defense spending by Europe. The Polish president also said that Poland does not recognize any limits on the stationing of military forces by NATO countries in Poland. In fact, Poland is making efforts to have more US and NATO forces in its territory for a long time. This is because Poland has had a bad experience with treaties and guarantees only on paper. Poles know from history that declarations and speeches without real help are the greatest danger for their independence. During World War II, Poland was abandoned by their allies who were supposed to start a counter-offensive in case Germany attacked Poland. On the 12th of September 1939, when Poles were still fighting, the Anglo-French Supreme War Council in Abbeville decided to leave Poland without providing any help. Because of this tragic history, Poles are very suspicious and cautious. Polish Foreign Minister, Radosław Sikorski is well aware of the concerns of his nation:

Russia is testing the strength of the international system set up by the United States after World War II. She tested it in Georgia, which was an implied ally of the United States. She has now tested it in Ukraine. And I don't think we can discount the possibility that she will test it again. And therefore our security guarantees have to be credible, which is to say physically enforceable. (Baker, 2014)

If Poland is to play the role of the leader of the region to block the new Russian imperialism it must be sure of the commitment of the rest of NATO alliance to support it and that is why American military presence in the region is so crucial.

The declarations and announcements made by the American and Polish presidents about solidarity and freedom are completely the opposite of what the president of Russia says. Starting from 2005 when, in his annual state of the nation address Russia's President Vladimir Putin has described the collapse of the Soviet Union

as “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe” of the twentieth century. The end of the Cold War, won by the United States and NATO followed by the collapse of the Soviet Union is seen in the Central and Eastern Europe as blessing and marks the end of dark days in the history of the nations that live between the Baltic and the Black Sea. In a Russia led by Putin it is a disaster that ought to be reversed. The nostalgia for the Soviet Union among the Russians is bigger than the West expected. “Over the past months Putin’s approval ratings skyrocketed and 65% of Russians believe that Crimea and eastern Ukraine are Russian territory (Barbashin, Thoburn, 2014: 98–99). Kremlin propaganda really does work on Russian people and there is strong support for Putin’s policy. After the so called referendum in Crimea, Russian president and representatives of breakaway Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol signed a treaty and formally became the subjects of Russian Federation. After the ceremony Putin said that: “The people of Crimea clearly and convincingly expressed their will – they want to be with Russia.”

For Putin, the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991 was great tragedy which left tens of millions of Russians outside the Russian Federation. Whether Europe likes it or not Putin is using the very same arguments that Hitler used in the 1930s. Putin wants to rebuild the Russian empire and now he found a pretext to intervene abroad. If the west is not determined to stop it there is plenty of countries where Russians or Russian-speakers can look for help from the Motherland.

If the United States wants to preserve the world order it has to start with supporting its weakest and smallest allies because they will be the first targets of the powers that want to change the status quo. Walter Russell Mead is pointing out these powers: “In very different ways, with very different objectives, China, Iran and Russia are all pushing back against the political settlement of the Cold War. Rather than challenge the status quo head on, they seek to chip away at the norms and relationships that sustain it”(Mead, 2014: 56). Of course both China and Russia are still not strong enough to stand against the USA and its allies directly but by systematic contesting and provoking the USA to act in many places around the world they are eroding the world order.

The revisionist powers have such varied agendas and capabilities that none can provide the kind of systematic and global opposition that the Soviet Union did. As a result, Americans have been slow to realize that these states have undermined the Eurasian geopolitical order in ways that complicate US and European efforts to construct a post-historical, win-win world. (Mead, 2014: 58)

The liberal world order is still to come because right now it is being questioned by the old nineteenth century balance of power. Mead concludes:

Obama came into office planning to cut military spending and reduce the importance of foreign policy in American politics while strengthening the liberal world order. A little more than halfway through his presidency, he finds himself increasingly bogged down in exactly the kinds of geopolitical rivalries he had hoped to transcend. (Mead, 2014)

The latest crisis is not about the Crimea or part of Ukraine. It is about undermining the norms and international law and discredit the United States in order to reshape the post-Cold War world and change it. The collapse of the system established under the leadership of the US could lead to instability and old threats to countries in Central and Eastern Europe. This makes these countries strong supporters of US presence in their region. It will require increased efforts on the part of those countries, especially military spending and the modernization of their armies. They cannot expect the US to invest in their security if they do not show their determination and willingness to make sacrifices. Central and Eastern Europe and the US have common interests. Through American technological and military involvement it can help to create a stronger sphere of security in the region and balance growing Russian assertiveness.

The crisis in the Ukraine can open new chapter in the US foreign policy towards Central and Eastern Europe. The US can change its cautious attitude for increasing the military presence in the eastern border of NATO and this is not the outcome that Vladimir Putin wants to see. The last thing Russia wants is more US and NATO troops closer to its borders. Maybe Putin expected that his moves will go swiftly just like during the Georgian War but this time it is different and long term military and economic consequences might be much more dangerous for Russia.

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