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RUSSIAN REASSERTION EFFORTS IN POST-SOVIET SPACE: THE UKRAINE DILEMMA

Abstract

Russia has been trying to regain its erstwhile predominant position in the post-soviet space (East Europe, Central Asia, Caucasus) through various efforts. But these are causing profound strains between Russia with countries therein and external powers involved. Irredentism has been influential behind this trend; Russia opines it reserves rights to intervene in countries who belonged once to the Romanoff Empire and USSR. It thus intervenes alleging to protect rights of ethnic Russians living there. One such country is Ukraine who has been at war with Russia since annexation of Crimea in 2014; latest expansion began in February 2022. These are pushing many parties into serious dilemmas: EU countries are openly backing Ukraine but remain reliant on Russian energy supplies. There can be opinions if Russia will occupy Ukraine or not. Even if it can, controlling Ukraine effectively will be challenging given Russia's multifarious weaknesses, turbulent history of its presence in and eventual withdrawal from there, Ukrainian counterattacks, foreign powers' involvement, Russia fighting on with little support from allies, rising mistrust, antagonism towards the country and its people.

Keywords: Russia, Irredentism, Post-soviet Space, Ukraine, Russophobia.

1. Introduction

After the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) disintegrated and countries belonging to the union emerged as independent, including Russia, also called the Russian Federation, the most powerful constituent, could not exercise its predominance over former holdings, let alone beyond borders or in international sphere. The country was in grave chaos domestically, with an economy in shambles, most ex-Soviet members assumed membership and thus strongly anti-Russian which also meant NATO had reached up to Russia's

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doorsteps. But things began to change gradually after Vladimir V. Putin came into power. He lifted the country and placed it into an honourable position in the global arena; additionally, former president and prime minister Dmitry Medvedev has vital contributions in this regard. Russia does not remain silent about or unwillingly compliant with Western actions anymore, but voices its disapproval and concerns nowadays, a stance it could not pursue until Putin took office.

Unlike the USSR, Russia curtailed global engagements visibly and placed extensive focus on its earlier possessions in the post-Soviet space, i.e., countries that emerged after the USSR's dissolution. During Putin's rule, Russia become more conservative. Significant features of this shift are: growing irredentism, actions against neighbours, interventionist support in conflicts, in some cases, even far beyond own borders (e.g., Syria). First came the Russo-Georgian War (2008), then Annexation of Crimea (2014), and now the ongoing war in Ukraine (February 2022-to date). Trend of irredentism has been embraced and widely promoted by the *United Russia* party laying claims of Russian jurisdiction over erstwhile possessions of the Romanoff empire and the USSR¹ in the Caucasus, Central Asia and East Europe. Putin regularly expresses deep admiration for the two bygone polities and there are views suggesting he wants to revive them.² These are not mere rhetoric, rather buttressed by strong contemplation as can be seen in Russian actions mentioned just earlier. Russia follows both hard and soft policies (though hard ones, including threats, energy resource weapon, force display or real military campaigns and cyberattacks, disinformation, propaganda etc., are used in most cases) to re-establish influence in previous domains. In addition, it often dissuades, threatens, and undertakes punitive measures on them, if they "try to join the European Union (EU) or North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)."

Ukraine has been the latest instance in these regards after Russia launched "military operation" in late February 2022. But origins of this may be traced back to early 2000s when Colour Revolutions were taking place in some ex-Soviet countries (e.g., Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus, etc.) resulting in pro-Russian administrations or leaders being removed from power and replaced by anti-Russian administration or leaders. In Ukraine likewise, the *Orange Revolution* saw pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovych (then prime minister)

¹ Chaim Shinar, "Vladimir Putin's Aspirations to Restore the Lost Russian Empire," *European Review* 25, no. 4 (October 2017): 642.

² Zofia Strudzińska, "How Russia, Step by Step, Wants to Regain an Imperial Role in the Global and European Security System," *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 14, no. 4 (Fall 2015): 24-36.

ousted and pro-West Viktor Yushchenko coming into power. These events added into Russia's discomforts aside from NATO expansion and the repetitively volatile Russia-West relationship. In the Russo-Georgian War (2008), Russia used the plea of liberating Abkhazia and South Ossetia from Georgia which it succeeded in doing. Later was Ukraine's turn; in March 2014, Russia annexed Crimea under a similar argument of protecting rights of ethnic Russians therein; afterwards, conflicts erupted in southern and eastern Ukraine, namely Donbass and Luhansk, two regions where Russia had openly been backing pro-Russian separatists; it is still not clear what the country in reality wants by establishing puppet regions and regimes carved out of sovereign nations. Almost eight years later in February 2022, a "military operation" was launched into Ukraine which rages on violently albeit Russia remains under tough sanctions since the war with Georgia, yet not forfeited control of Crimea. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has been severely destabilising global energy and food markets while the world is to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and economic downturn yet. Developing countries are already feeling various kinds of pressure as well, especially Bangladesh which has nuclear cooperation agreement with Russia. Like Cold War days moreover, an arms race is being witnessed as Russia is frequently bringing its new weaponry into battlefield alongside upgrading current ones, whereas NATO is providing Ukraine with theirs.

In light of brief discussion above, some questions come up. Why is Russia trying to reassert its past ascendancy in post-Soviet space? How did the Russia-Ukraine crisis begin? Shall Russia annex whole Ukraine and are ex-USSR nations under threat of further Russian expansion? If so, how may the West or others respond? The main argument here is, even if Russia can occupy Ukraine, retaining control will be a very difficult undertaking due to its own vulnerabilities on multiple fronts.

This article will endeavour for providing answers to those questions. It has six sections. After the introduction, the second section will provide some theoretical understanding as well as why Russia is trying to reassert itself over its former realm, the post-Soviet space, i.e., East Europe, Central Asia, and the Caucasus. The third sheds light on the country's various efforts in that regard. In doing so, it will discuss four organisations, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), Russia-Belarus Union State, and Russian policies concerning some individual countries (Moldova, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan). The fourth section talks about emergence of Russo-Ukrainian conflict and situation to date. Fifth one discusses whether Russia will annex entire Ukraine or

not, other ex-USSR nations also face Russian aggression, including possible response from Western or other countries in that case. The last section concludes the paper. It is qualitative in nature and will use secondary sources, e.g., books, journals, newspapers, magazines, institutional/organisational documents, e.g., research or working papers, online news portals, etc. Russian and Western scholarly works will be consulted for obtaining views of both sides and maintaining objectivity of the work. Unfortunately, there remain limitations concerning Russian sources because of their rarity and those available also lack suitable English translations.

2. Theoretical Understanding

To explain Russia's growing interest and involvement in its erstwhile domain, two concepts of Political Science may be useful—1) irredentism, and 2) balancing. Starting with irredentism, it can be in simple terms, defined as an approach undertaken by a country through which it attempts to regain or at least lays claims on territories and population which once were under its control or it was a part of those itself. Thomas Ambrosio says, “the concept arose as a movement in the 19th century Italy where revolutionaries sought for restoring Italian-speaking regions and populations to Italy from the Habsburgs. Modern usage of the term denotes territorial claims based on a national, ethnic, or historical basis. The importance of irredentism in international relations is based on the intersection between nationalism and the causes of war; because such a movement invariably means taking land from another state, irredentist claims have been known to provoke ethnic conflicts and territorial aggression”³ Another definition is provided by David Siroky and Christopher Hale—“irredentism represents a continuum and has been discussed as everything from soft rhetorical territorial claims all the way up to military action. It is a state's use of military force against a neighbouring state to annex ethnic kin and capture territory. Irredentism is a central government decision to add a region to its current state on the basis of ethnic similarity using military force and to simultaneously remove that region from the proprietorship of another country.”⁴ Irredentism often involves different nationalist elements—widespread use of mythmaking, historical revisionism, aggressive behaviour, that in turn, drive countries towards territorial expansionism; therefore, if the two definitions mentioned above are analysed, one can find those facts in prior instances: Nazi Germany wanted to

³ Thomas Ambrosio, “Irredentism,” *International Encyclopedia of Political Science* 1 (September 2011): 1346-1347.

⁴ Christopher Hale and David Siroky, “Irredentism and Institutions,” *British Journal of Political Science* 52, issue 3 (July 2022): 01-18.

restore German pride in Europe on ethno racial-political-territorial-linguistic basis, while Mussolini was adamant on re-establishing the Roman Empire with all greatness. Hitler's claims included lands that were not even German by any means, e.g., Eastern Europe. Similar features are quite evident in Russia's rhetoric and actions as regards the post-Soviet space too. It ruled them as the Romanoff Empire and the USSR, competed with the Ottomans, Habsburgs, other European powers, fought a number of wars with them in different eras, for about 500 years. Through this long presence, it has left profound mark over these regions, in terms of culture, politics, religion, language, demographics, military affairs, etc. In Russian foreign policy, they consist of its near abroad, once ruled by Russia. Here, Ambrosio becomes pertinent again when he adds, "In many cases, an irredentist movement is referred to as creating a "Greater X," with the "X" being the name of a nation or state—for example, the quest for a Greater Serbia was in part responsible for the Wars of Yugoslav Succession during the 1990s, and the Greater Romania project was partially responsible for Romania siding with the Axis powers during World War II."⁵ For some years, Eurasia has attained regular, increasing focus resulting in emergence of neo-Eurasianism. Putin also describes Russia as a Eurasian country.⁶ The term 'greater X' has materialised as the idea of *Greater Russia*—building a Russia encompassing numerous territories that were once ruled by both the Empire and the Union.⁷ Several influential politicians and thinkers in Russia have bolstered this thought. In doing so, the country has indeed entangled itself in gory wars.

Secondly, there is the balancing approach. During the Cold War, both the West and the USSR were engaged in continuous balancing of each other through various means—military, political, economic, intellectual—all; however, end of that era left Russia vulnerable to Western predominance, which came in the form of losing superpower position vis-à-vis independence of USSR constituents, NATO-EU expansion, growth and spread of anti-Russian sentiments in those states and many more. In response, Russia undertook initiatives to form corresponding yet opposite institutions modelled on Western ones. There were lacks unlike the Cold War era to exert economic or political muscle; nevertheless, the country was not silent in expressing its disapproval of Western supremacy, as can be seen in stern opposition towards NATO intervention in Yugoslavia and US invasion of Iraq. Moreover, rising energy prices in the mid to late-2000s brought substantial economic clout back. After this recovery, Russia began to exert itself

⁵ Ambrosio, "Irredentism"

⁶ Xavier Le Torrivellec, "A Century on from 1917: Russia as a Eurasian Power in a New World," *Hérodote* 166-167, issue 3-4 (2017): 10.

⁷ Monika Eriksen, "Assessing Russia's Doctrine of Realpolitik as Strategic Recontouring of Regional Power Balance in the Post-Soviet Periphery," *Politeja* 13, no. 2 (2016): 315-316.

in regional affairs, e.g., the Russo-Georgian War. Exercise of power spread beyond regional affairs in opposing Western stances on Cuba, Venezuela and the Iran nuclear deal, etc. Formation of regional bodies serves different purposes: restore Russian position as the prime actor concerning affairs in its vicinity or areas considered as sphere of influence, sending a clear message to other powers for refraining from expanding or assuming greater role there, deter regional nations from joining competitor organisations. In almost all these efforts, the idea of Eurasianism is projected with higher significance. An unusual strategy of balancing has been to promote pro-Russian sentiments abroad, that is, increasing outreach to Russian diaspora or those sympathetic to Russia; while Russia has on one hand, become vocal about upholding and protecting Russians and their interests abroad, countries having considerable numbers of ethnic Russian populace, powerful pro-Russian people and groups, often have seen statements or activities in support of Russia, including separatist conflicts, on the other. Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan are some examples. When it comes to influencing compatriots in the Baltics, Russia uses exaltation of the Romanoffs and USSR, containing nationalistic elements and symbolism.⁸

2.1 Russian Reassertion: Irredentism or Survival?

Why is Russia trying to reassert itself in the post-Soviet space? Is it because of irredentism or survival? The answer may be both. How is that? Russia-West mistrust and antagonistic relations go back long way. Even before the USSR emerged and the WWI still raging, various Western powers intervened in the Russian Civil War (November 1917-October 1922) in support of the monarchist or anti-communist White Russians. The Cold War era saw worldwide ideological rivalry between the two blocs, that culminated into indirect conflicts (no real battlefield face-off albeit in some cases, they were on the verge of real war, e.g., the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962) including proxy wars waged by parties of their choice. After the USSR's fall in 1991, Russia found itself steadily becoming surrounded by unfriendly governments who some years ago were its colonies and thus would pose no threat. But everything had changed now and Russia, owing to these bitter experiences which in turn, deepened its sense of insecurity (that prevails) began to complain of this encirclement. This is not an anomaly, as almost every country will be concerned and protest about others interfering in what it considers as vicinity or sphere of interests. With former constituents assuming EU and NATO membership, Russia did not engage in direct combats with them, which would almost invariably invite strong Western reactions.

⁸ European Union, *Facing Russia's Strategic Challenge: Security Developments from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea* (Brussels, Belgium: Directorate General of External Policies, 2017), 14.

Instead, the country began slowly to re-exert itself in the post-Soviet space. Chris Alexander, former minister of citizenship and immigration, Canada, said, “Since the USSR’s dissolution, Russia has been a hotbed of irredentism, in the years immediately before and after 1991, Moscow began to seize and occupy territory anew—this time in the form of enclaves within several non-Russian Soviet republics that became independent states after 1992.”⁹ British political scientist Richard Sakwa differs and says Russia’s behaviour is nothing exceptional; rather what it is doing is simply defending national interests and sovereignty.¹⁰ Judging from these two contrasting viewpoints, it can be argued what Russia doing is normal response to balance. Would the EU or US accept Russian advance in their spheres of interest, e.g., in the Americas, or the Mediterranean Sea? Most probably not. Then, why Russia, the third largest empire in history (after Britin and Mongolia), Cold War superpower, retaining very large nuclear and conventional arsenals, a P5 member, accept Western influence in its vicinity? It undertook formation of various institutions to counter their preponderance as Cold War era ones were gone and no counterbalance existed, although their efficacy and strength are not at par with them yet. In its efforts to ensure survival moreover, against continuing and many-sided pressures from the West, the country seems to be following a combination of irredentism and balancing.

3. Russia’s Reassertion Efforts in Post-Soviet Space: CIS, CSTO and EAEU

Fall of the USSR came as a debilitating shock for Russia which not only lost landmass, manpower, resource bases and superpower status, but also witnessed former members of the bloc becoming independent, and steadfastly hostile towards the successor state, i.e., the Russian Federation. Besides, NATO and EU had extended up to Russian borders; such “disgrace” went on as the country could no longer express its disagreement on Western actions or policies, while open opposition and power exertion unlike Cold War era, were far away. However, Vladimir Putin, the strongman of Russia,¹¹ after assuming power and consolidating hold on the state apparatus, did not sit silent amidst continual Western supremacy. He singlehandedly crushed Chechen separatism and initiated various reforms that propelled the country into position of a respectable power again within short time. After regaining domestic stability, Russia under Putin,

⁹ Chris Alexander, “Borders, Irredentism & Russia,” *Behind the Headlines* 68, no. 8 (CIC, September 2020): 4.

¹⁰ Richard Sakwa, “Greater Russia: is Moscow out to Subvert the West?,” *International Politics* 58, issue 3 (June 2021): 336.

¹¹ Angus Roxburgh, *The Strongman: Vladimir Putin and the Struggle for Russia* (Salem Road, London, United Kingdom: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2012), 6.

focussed on spreading influence and wield muscles beyond its national boundaries. To that end, the country came up with forming organisations of political, military and economic nature i.e., the CIS (political grouping, covers different areas, and remains an umbrella organisation for several Russia-led initiatives), CSTO (security alliance; a prospective counterbalance to NATO), EAEU (economic bloc; to counter the EU) and the Russia-Belarus Union State. It should be noted that all three groups originated from the CIS.

3.1 *Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)*

CIS was the first organisation in post-Soviet space after the USSR's demise, it was formed in December 1991 by Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and contains several other members, e.g., Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. It received significance by Russia from the beginning. According to Mark Kramer, Director, Cold War Studies Programme, Davis Centre for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University, both Yeltsin and Putin attached strong importance to this regional bloc and expansion of its functions. The Russian Foreign Policy Concept of July 2008, signed by then president Dmitry Medvedev, said, "Russia, like other (great powers) in the world, is entitled to privileged interests in certain key regions, notably the CIS."¹² Georgia was previously a member which joined the group in 1993 but withdrew in August 2008 when war began with Russia.

The CIS is a multilateral and an intergovernmental organisation. Article 1 of its charter says, "The Commonwealth serves the further development and strengthening of relations of friendship, good neighbourhood, international harmony, trust, mutual understanding and mutually beneficial cooperation between member states. The Commonwealth is not a state and does not hold supranational powers." It also has a free trade area. Albeit, CIS might have seemed a regional body for cooperation among some ex-USSR countries, given Russia's overwhelming superiority in economy, politics, military power and global stature, it was no wonder that there would at some point of time, be fracas between Russia and others. Before quitting the CIS, Georgia quit the CIS Council of Defence Ministers in February 2006 after expressing plans to join NATO.¹³ It was obvious to anger Russia and so did accordingly. Two years later, Russia fought Georgia supporting Abkhazian and South Ossetian secessionism, violating

¹² Mark Kramer, "Russian Policy toward the Commonwealth of Independent States: Recent Trends and Future Prospects," *Problems of Post-Communism* 55, no. 6 (November/December 2008): 3-4.

¹³ Jakob Hedenskog and Robert L. Larsson, *Russian Leverage on the CIS and the Baltic States* (Kista, Stockholm, Sweden: Swedish Defence Research Agency, July 2007): 19.

the CIS charter's Article 3 which says, "... respect of the sovereignty of the member states, the inalienable rights of peoples to self-determination and the right to determine their fate without outside interference" and Article 17 about peaceful resolution of conflicts between or among members. Similar violations (after alleged plea by Russians in Crimea for liberating them) happened with Ukraine which was one of the founders, but not a formal member. It still has to withdraw officially from the organisation. Aside from meddling in other members' internal matters, Russia has been pushing for official status of the Russian language in the CIS, though it already has that in Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, co-official in Transnistria (Moldova), Abkhazia and South Ossetia.¹⁴ It is an official language in Moldova's autonomous Gagauzia region. Article 35 of the CIS charter makes Russian as the working language of the bloc too. Hence CIS, although not much functional yet, may be considered as Russia's primary platform to recover lost prestige it once enjoyed over countries in this region.

3.2 *Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)*

By 1991, the Warsaw Pact came to an end and Russia had no military alliance for dealing with threats from NATO. It therefore, embarked upon to fill this blank and in 1992, the CSTO was born consisting of Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Azerbaijan, Georgia and Uzbekistan were also members but later withdrew themselves (Uzbekistan twice left; first in 1999, then again in 2012 and since has not rejoined). It has many similarities with NATO; e.g., Article 4 of its charter says, any attack against a member of this bloc will constitute as an attack against all members and they all should come out in collective defence against that threat. This is corresponding to Article 5 of the NATO charter. CSTO has the Collective Rapid Reaction Force (CRRF), Peacekeeping Force and regularly holds military exercises. Russia has military bases in all other existing members. Back in 2007, Iran was invited as well to join the bloc.¹⁵ In 2008, Nikolai N. Bordyuzha, the then Secretary General of CSTO, termed the organisation as being a single security space.¹⁶ However, Russian predominance continues over remaining members. It is the chief arms supplier for them, notwithstanding at subsidised rates. This is done to stop

¹⁴ Konstantin Zamyatin, "A Russian Speaking Nation?" in *The Politics of Multilingualism. Europeanisation, Globalisation and Linguistic Governance*, eds. Peter A. Kraus and François Grin (Amsterdam, the Netherlands: John Benjamins Publishing Company, September 2018), 55.

¹⁵ Dadan Upadhyay, "Iran may Join Security Group Led by Russia," *The Indian Express*, May 15, 2007.

¹⁶ Zrinka Štimac and Indira Aslanova, "The Role of Securitization in the Relationship between State and Religion—the Example of the Kyrgyz Republic" in *Between Peace and Conflict in the East and the West*, ed. Anja Mihr (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, August 2021), 125.

Western and Chinese firms from entering arms market of those countries. CSTO is headquartered in Moscow and most employees are Russian. In 2017, Russia pressed Belarus to retain cooperation and also aided modernisation of Tajik armed forces to deter Afghan insurgents from reaching Russian borders.¹⁷ In line with Russia's unwavering support for upholding the Iran Nuclear Deal, all CSTO members expressed their own views through a statement in 2019.¹⁸ Deployment of CSTO forces has remained limited so far to regional conflicts and on small-scale. For example, to quell anti-government protests in Kazakhstan (January 2022), proposals for sending peacekeepers to Donbass (in 2015 and in 2022). During the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict of 2020 between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Russia was trying to mediate there, without any assistance from or deployment of CSTO forces.

3.3 *Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)*

This is another Russian enterprise intended to expanding bilateral relations, economic cooperation, integration, connectivity and growth among states. Being led by Russia, it is viewed as an alternative to the EU.¹⁹ Other members are—Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Kazakhstan proposed it first in 1994, but Russia has been the leading advocate of bolstering the bloc. Moldova and Uzbekistan are still observers while the latter will hopefully become a member soon. It was inaugurated in January 2015; its formation, several organs and operation procedures are somewhat analogous to those of the EU, e.g., the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council (SEEC), Eurasian Intergovernmental Council, Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC), EAEU Court, and Eurasian Development Bank (EDB). Its membership is open to all, including countries from other regions, has trade agreements and memorandum of understanding with various influential parties, like China, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR-South America). Many countries had shown willingness to join it, e.g., India, Iran, Israel, Cambodia, Singapore, Serbia, Egypt, etc. It has another advantage: members are located along the Silk Road, a vital component in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), many of whose routes pass through or touch them. Their good relations with China can be a useful opportunity for them to achieve the bloc's goals. Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Donetsk and Luhansk expressed their

¹⁷ Richard Weitz, *Assessing the Collective Security Treaty Organization: Capabilities and Vulnerabilities* (Carlisle Barracks, PA, USA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College): 26-27.

¹⁸ "Post-Soviet Security Bloc CSTO to Help Preserve Iranian Nuclear Deal — Statement," *TASS Russian News Agency*, November 28, 2019, accessed Jul 7, 2022.

¹⁹ Andrey A. Kinyakin and Svetlana Kucheriavaia, "The European Union vs the Eurasian Economic Union: Integration Race 2.0?," *Przegląd Europejski (European Review)* 2019, no. 3 (2019): 136-137.

desire to join the EAEU, in spite of lacking wider diplomatic recognition. President Putin said the bloc would be extended gradually to all ex-USSR states, but not the Baltic republics.²⁰ Meanwhile, Armenia in 2013, also stepped back from signing an association agreement with the EU after being pressured by Russia.²¹

3.4 *Russia-Belarus Union State*

Russia has established the Union State with Belarus aimed at facilitating broader political, defence, security, and economic integration between these two countries. It was undertaken in December 1991 and formally launched in December 1999. Among Russia's initiatives, this one is unique and also has no Western equivalent or counterpart. Presently, comprising of two members, there have been proposals of expanding this entity to include other states and regions, e.g., Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Transnistria, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia. Russian and Belarusian are official languages of the union while Russian is a working language here. Russia is the main business partner of Belarus, accounting for nearly 49 per cent of the country's foreign trade. In 2021, their mutual trade reached US\$40.1 billion. Russia also has the largest share of foreign investment in Belarus, which amounted up to 42.6 per cent (US\$ 3.7 billion) in that same year. Citizens of either country have equal rights, can move freely, work, settle in the other and need not go through any passport or customs control. The Union State has a joint armed force, coordinates air defence alongside a number of bilateral defence and technical cooperation agreements.²² At the Union State Council of Ministers meeting held in September 2021, they signed a number of documents to take the integration process forward and strengthen the union.²³ The union proved somewhat beneficial for both countries: Belarus receives oil and gas at subsidised prices while Russia succeeded in preventing the country from turning to the West.²⁴ Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenko, the last autocrat of Europe, has been able to hold onto power only due to open support

²⁰ Yaşar Yakiş, "Eurasian Union and Turkey," *Valdai Discussion Club*, January 10, 2017, accessed July 8, 2022. <https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/eurasian-union-and-turkey/>

²¹ Paul Stronski, *There Goes the Neighborhood: the Limits of Russian Integration in Eurasia* (Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington D.C., USA: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 2020), 5.

²² "Cooperation between the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation in Trade and Investments," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus*, accessed July 8, 2022. <https://mfa.gov.by/en/bilateral/russia/regions/economy/>

²³ "Meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Union State," *News-The Russian Government*, September 10, 2021, accessed July 8, 2022, <http://government.ru/en/news/43232/>

²⁴ George Polglase Korostelev, "The Union State: a Changing Relationship between Belarus and Russia," *Journal of the Belarusian State University (International Relations)*, no. 2 (2020): 40.

for Russia. During the anti-government protest of 2020 in Belarus, Putin issued stern warnings to the protestors there and promised military assistance to Lukashenko if needed. Nonetheless, there have periodically been frictions flaring up between the two members. Belarus' policies about and relations with Russia are quite unpredictable in spite of being a close ally and receiving assistance in various regards. The same can be said of Russia's actions. The country often halts energy resource supplies to Belarus on which the latter is heavily reliant; this happened in 2004, 2007 and of late in 2020. During the 2020 halt, Lukashenko blamed Russia of using energy supplies as a tool to force for greater economic integration with that country; the US then sent oil supplies to Belarus; later, Saudi Arabia, Norway and Azerbaijan also sent theirs.²⁵ On the other hand, Belarus has supported the Russian military campaign of 2022 in Ukraine and even allowed its own soil for that purpose.²⁶

3.5 *Policies in Relation with Moldova, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan*

Russia's involvement in Moldova has long history spanning Romanoff and USSR days. It still maintains sizable military presence and an arsenal in Transnistria, a secessionist region of the country amidst Moldova's repeated calls for withdrawal. The Transnistrian conflict has seen Russia supporting separatists but it officially does not recognise that region; separatists from therein urged for annexation into the (Russian) Federation.²⁷ There are pro-Russian parties and people in Moldova, e.g., former presidents Vladimir Voronin and Igor Dodon, the *Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova*, *Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova*, *Our Party*, *Collective Action Party–Civic Congress*, etc. In July 2021, Russian sponsorship of them was alleged.²⁸ During the Russian expansion to Ukraine (2022), Moldovan government banned use of Russian military symbols. Pro-Russian politicians (notably Dodon) condemned this ban.²⁹ Russian plans about Moldova suffered a deep setback, when Maia Sandu's pro-European *Party of Action and Solidarity* won the presidential election of 2020 and parliamentary election of 2021. This did not go well with Russia. Leonid

²⁵ "U.S. Sends Oil to Belarus, Seeking to Diversify from Russia," *The Las Vegas Sun*, May 15, 2020.

²⁶ Amanda Coakley, "Lukashenko is Letting Putin Use Belarus to Attack Ukraine," *Foreign Policy*, February 24, 2022.

²⁷ Damien Sharkov, "Moldova's Transnistrian Separatists Urge Russia Annexation," *Newsweek*, September 9, 2016.

²⁸ Henry St. George, "Operation Morkovka: Moscow Finances Pro-Russian Parties in Moldova," *Eureporter*, July 8, 2021, accessed July 9, 2022.

<https://www.eureporter.co/world/moldova/2021/07/08/operationmorkovka-moscow-finances-pro-russian-parties-in-moldova/>

²⁹ Madalin Nescutu, "Pro-Russian Moldovans Condemn Ban on Symbols Backing Ukraine Invasion," *The Balkan Insight*, April 8, 2022.

Kalashnikov, Chairman of the Russian State Duma Committee for CIS Affairs, Eurasian Integration and Relations with Compatriots, said he was doubtful of Moldova-Russia ties improvement, accused Moldova of drifting more towards NATO, EU, destabilising and endangering Transnistria which might land it in troubles.³⁰

Regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, Russia has been playing role of a mediator and yet supports the breakaway Republic of Artsakh, which is internationally recognised as a part of Azerbaijan. In 2021, it helped for a ceasefire between these two sides; afterwards, Russian peacekeepers were deployed in Nagorno-Karabakh. The country remains Azerbaijan's main arms supplier, and ally of both warring parties simultaneously. In February 2022, Russia and Azerbaijan agreed on developing military-technical cooperation. Azerbaijan has been sending humanitarian and logistic aid for Ukraine since Russian offensive actions commenced in. Meanwhile, Russia accused Azerbaijan of violating the Nagorno-Karabakh ceasefire after the latter's troops entered that region.³¹

Russia and Kazakhstan are founders of the CIS, CSTO and EAEU. It has been supportive of Kazakh government's autocratic policies.³² They are working on various infrastructure and connectivity projects as well. Even so, there are statements and positions of Russian leaders and lawmakers that can signal something else. For example, president Putin in March 2014 said during his Duma speech, "Kazakhstan never existed as a state before 1991"³³ and recently, by two Duma deputies in December 2020 condemned Kazakhstan.³⁴ Northern Kazakhstan has a substantial Russian-speaking population and the region witnessed separatism. The Kazakh government barred a peace rally in March

³⁰ "MP doubts Moldova-Russia Ties will Improve after President Sandu's Party Wins Legislature," *TASS*, July 12, 2021, accessed July 9, 2022. <https://tass.com/politics/1312995>.

³¹ "Russia Accuses Azerbaijan of Violating Ceasefire Deal in Karabakh," *Dawn*, March 27, 2022.

³² Victor Tregubov, "The Putin Doctrine: Russia defends autocrats from Belarus to Kazakhstan," *The Atlantic Council*, January 17, 2022, accessed July 10, 2022, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/belarusalert/the-putin-doctrine-russia-backs-autocrats-from-belarus-to-kazakhstan/>

³³ Stephen Blank, "The Intellectual Origins of the Eurasian Union Project" in *Putin's Grand Strategy: The Eurasian Union and Its Discontents*, eds. S. Frederick Starr and Svante E. Cornell (Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington D.C., USA: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, 2014), 18.

³⁴ Bruce Pannier, "An Old Refrain: Russian Lawmakers Question Kazakhstan's Territorial Integrity, Statehood," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFERL)*, December 16, 2020, accessed 10 July 2022. <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-lawmakers-question-kazakhstan-territorial-integrity-statehood/31003732.html>

2022 that planned for protesting Russian offensive actions in Ukraine, but is now worried about the ongoing war.³⁵

4. Russo-Ukrainian War: Emergence and Situation to Date

Roots of the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war, as mentioned earlier, go back to the *Orange Revolution* (late November 2004-late January 2005) in Ukraine, following the presidential elections of 2004. Russia viewed this revolution with utter hatred and suspicion as it was among several identical events taking place in its vicinity or erstwhile colonies, resulting in removal of friendly regimes and growth of anti-Russian sentiments instead. The Orange, in particular, was seen as intrusion into its sphere of influence orchestrated by Western-backed Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and international organisations, even US embassies were being accused.³⁶ Ukraine also supported Georgia's territorial integrity during the Russo-Georgian War, sent humanitarian aid, prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko and president Yushchenko visited Georgia to express solidarity, even warned the Russian Black Sea Fleet would be denied from accessing their bases in Ukraine (at Sevastopol, Crimea).³⁷ The country was planning to sign an association agreement with the EU and that process began in March 2012, but Russia was and remains against that. It wanted Ukraine to join the EAEU instead which Ukraine did not. Pro-Russian Yanukovich who had become president in 2010, did not sign the EU association agreement and Russia welcomed this decision.³⁸ Conversely, for Ukraine, it brought in further turmoil as mass protests known as the "Euromaidan Protests" or "Revolution of Dignity" (18-23 February 2014) erupted throughout the Poltava against the Yanukovich government; in addition, there had been pro-Russian demonstrations (which were reportedly fomented and backed by Russia) in eastern and southern Ukraine (home to large numbers of ethnic Russians) against the new Ukrainian government. As a result of the revolution and ensuing anarchy, Yanukovich was ousted for the second time (after 2004), escaped from his homeland and sought asylum in Russia which he eventually

³⁵ Christopher Rickleton, "Ukraine War strains ties between Kazakhstan and Russia," *The Moscow Times*, June 24, 2022.

³⁶ Graeme P. Herd, "Russia and the "Orange Revolution": Response, Rhetoric and Reality?" *Connections: The Quarterly Journal*, 4, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 15-16.

³⁷ "Ukraine Threatens to Bar Russia's Black Sea Fleet from Ukrainian Bases," *Kuwait News Agency (KUNA)*, August 10, 2008, accessed 10 July 2022. <https://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=1930343&language=en>

³⁸ Ian Traynor and Oksana Grytsenko, "Ukraine Suspends Talks on EU Trade pact as Putin Wins Tug of War," *The Guardian*, November 21, 2013.

received.³⁹ A month later in March 2014, Russia invaded and annexed Crimea without bloodshed. On 11 March, the region along with Sevastopol City, declared independence. A referendum was held after five days, where an overwhelming number of votes was cast in favour of incorporation with Russia.⁴⁰ On 21 March, the Federation Council of Russia (upper house of the parliament) approved accession of Crimea and Sevastopol as federal subjects. Amid this, conflict broke out in Donbass starting in April where Donetsk and Luhansk, in openly pro-Russian stand, announced independence from Ukraine. Referenda were also held in those two with indecisive results and separatism went on viciously. In all these, role of Ukrainians of Russian ethnicity and pro-Russian Ukrainians was expressly noteworthy. Russia came under heavy sanctions, but neither returned Crimea to Ukraine nor ceased backing separatists in the country and rather, maintained prominent role in the conflict.

4.1 Russian Invasion of Ukraine 2022 (late February—Ongoing)

Russia's latest "expansion," also called the Russo-Ukrainian war, began on 24 February 2022 when Russia launched a massive military campaign into Ukraine. Around March 2021, Russia began to increase military buildup in Crimea and near Russia-Ukraine border. Putin had for long been questioning the legitimacy of Ukrainian state, accusing the country of Russophobia and even waging genocide on ethnic Russians or Russian-speakers there. In an article in July 2021, he repeated these claims saying modern Ukrainian authorities were promoting neo-Nazism, distorting history, and portraying Russia as an enemy.⁴¹ With time, military buildups were strengthened. In December, there had been demands to NATO from Russia with a view to ensuring its security which included end of the alliance's expansion eastwards, removal of troops and missiles close to Russian borders, barring NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine. NATO also proposed Russia to withdraw its troops from Ukraine border. Needless to say, neither side complied with each other's demands.⁴² By February 2022, conflict in Donbass intensified; on 21 February, Russia recognised the Donetsk and Luhansk People's republics as independent states

³⁹ Marek Dabrowski, Marta D. Jiménez, Georg Zachmann, "Six years after Ukraine's Euromaidan: reforms and challenges ahead," *Policy Contribution*, no. 14 (June 2020): 2.

⁴⁰ Olena Podolian, "The 2014 Referendum in Crimea," *East European Quarterly*, 43, no. 1 (March 2015): 116-119.

⁴¹ "Article by Vladimir Putin 'On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians,'" *Kremlin. Ru*, July 12, 2021, accessed 13 July 2022. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>

⁴² Wolfgang Richter, "NATO-Russia Tensions: Putin Orders Invasion of Ukraine," *SWP Comment*, no. 16 (March 2022): 1-2.

and sent military forces to Donbass.⁴³ Three days later, Russia physically invaded Ukraine after Putin’s address titled “On conducting a special military operation” on television where he said it would aim to protect civilians there, demilitarise and free the country from Nazis.⁴⁴ Attacks began from Mariupol and Odessa, with clashes gradually spreading into other parts of Ukraine. As of late July 2022, about 5,237 civilians have been killed and 7,035 injured.⁴⁵ A mammoth refugee crisis has emerged as Ukrainians continue fleeing to other European countries who are already facing such crisis since 2015; according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), almost 10 million Ukrainians fled their country by this same time.⁴⁶ Combatant casualties are staggering too, albeit their veracity is not confirmed as there are differing opinions; president Zelensky said, up to late July, about 40,000 Russian soldiers died. On Ukrainian casualties, his adviser Mykhaylo Podolyak in June said, Ukraine had been losing 100-200 soldiers daily since the invasion began.⁴⁷ Oleksiy Arestovych, advisor to the Head of Ukrainian President’s Office, put the tally at 10,000.⁴⁸ Russia lost several high-ranking military officials, including major generals and lieutenant generals. Foreign fighters joined the war for Russia and Ukraine alike; many of them died while some have been captured by Russia or its allies—Luhansk, Donetsk, Belarus, etc. Belarus has been closely supportive of Russia; Lukashenko allowed Russia to use his country in launching the current invasion,⁴⁹ and likewise, came under sanctions from the US, EU, UK, Canada and Japan. A month after the war began, there had been ceasefire proposals, but all failed. Although Ukraine has been receiving sophisticated weaponry from Western countries, Russia keeps up threatening them over this. Fearing possible Russian aggression, neutral Scandinavian nations Finland and Sweden also decided to join NATO.

⁴³ Courtney Subramanian, Matthew Brown and Joey Garrison, “Putin Orders Troops to Two Ukraine Regions after Declaring their Independence,” *USA Today*, February 21, 2022.

⁴⁴ Andrew S. Bowen, “Russia’s War in Ukraine: Military and Intelligence Aspects,” *Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report R47068* (Washington, D.C., USA, April 27, 2022), 2-3.

⁴⁵ “Ukraine: Civilian Casualty Update 25 July 2022,” *Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)*, July 25, 2022, accessed 28 July 2022. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/07/ukraine-civilian-casualty-update-25-july-2022>

⁴⁶ Ukrainian Refugee Situation—UNHCR Data Portal, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), July 26, 2022, accessed 28 July 2022. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

⁴⁷ Jake Thomas, “Nearly 40,000 Russian Occupiers Killed in Four Months of War: Zelensky,” *Newsweek*, July 26, 2022.

⁴⁸ “Arestovich for the First Time Called the Number of Losses of Ukraine in the War,” *The Odessa Journal*, June 11, 2022.

⁴⁹ Amanda Coakley, “Lukashenko is Letting Putin Use Belarus to Attack Ukraine,” *Foreign Policy*, February 24, 2022.

The war continues to generate cavernous tumult in global food, energy and other commodity markets. After it began, many companies shifted their operations from Russia. Being a major energy supplier and main energy source for Europe, Russia reduced supplies and raised prices; Gazprom recently said that they would be unable to guarantee gas supply to Europe via the Nord Stream 1 pipeline⁵⁰ and afterwards, did it.⁵¹ Germany particularly has been hit hard owing to reliance on Russian gas. Oil prices have also been fluctuating. Russia took advantage from growing prices and sold oil at cheaper rates which China and India took benefit of. EU nations are now trying to lessen dependence on Russian energy supplies and find alternative sources. Ukraine and Russia are two of the largest producers of wheat and oilseeds; price and supply of these two have become highly unstable due to this war which has been disrupting food production, with many importers facing food shortage and famine threats loom large in many parts of the globe, e.g., Middle East, North and West Africa. These have been worsened further by economic slump, COVID-19 pandemic, unprecedented environmental crises and soaring fertiliser prices. Several countries introduced food and energy rationing. International currency market has been another victim of mayhem created by the war. Russian ruble reached its all-time peak against US dollar in June.⁵² But gains from energy sales and a strong ruble could not save Russia from default on foreign debt payment, a crisis the country did not experience since 1918.⁵³ On the contrary, nonstop rise in US dollar exchange rate against other currencies has been troubling many economies as trading expenses and product costs are rising exponentially. In several countries, US dollar reserves are not enough to pay for imports.

5. The Ukraine War and Related Questions

The ongoing war in Ukraine has been affecting involved parties (belligerents included) and rest of the world pretty deeply. However, the invasion is not going totally as planned. Ukraine is nowhere as strong as Russia, one of the top military powers on earth, yet is putting good resistance up; of course, Western assistance plays vital role here. Russia's actions and rhetoric,

⁵⁰ "Russia's Gazprom Says Cannot Guarantee Gas Supply to EU Buyers," *Al Jazeera*, July 19, 2022, accessed July 22, 2022. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/7/19/gazprom-tells-european-buyers-gas-supply-halt-beyond-its>.

⁵¹ David Sheppard, Polina Ivanova and Harry Dempsey, "Russia Cuts Gas Deliveries to Europe via Nord Stream 1," *The Financial Times*, July 25, 2022.

⁵² Al Masry al Youm, "Russian Ruble Rises against the US Dollar, Hitting Highest Level since 2015," *The Egypt Independent*, June 22, 2022.

⁵³ Giulia Morpurgo & Libby Cherry, "Russia Defaults on Foreign Debt for First Time since 1918," *Time*, June 27, 2022.

for some years, have been alarming other ex-USSR countries, who deem these as signal of aggression. This chapter discusses if Russia will occupy or annex entire Ukraine, possibilities of attacks on ex-USSR countries, alongside potential Western and others' response; Russian irredentism in Putin's era that continues to influence the country's warlike behaviour, will be discussed also. Here, the main argument is, Russia may occupy whole Ukraine by dint of its vastly superior military strength, but establishing and exercising full authority over the country will be further challenging, which may even bring far more predicament for Russia rather than gains. As these issues are interlinked, some statements will seem repetitive.

5.1 *Will Russia Annex Whole Ukraine?*

Russia's direct intervention in Ukraine began with annexation of Crimea in 2014; afterwards, Russian-backed separatist conflicts erupted in southern and eastern Ukraine. The Minsk Accords were signed amid existing tensions, but the invasion of February 2022 rendered them void. With the war entering sixth month, gory battles all over Ukraine, Russia's gradual advance despite Ukrainian resistance, involvement of different parties—continue to complicate this war. Speculations have been widespread if Russia will occupy the entire country. There can be arguments both in support and opposition of such a scenario. This section will examine both sides; it starts with reasons against Russia's case of attacking Ukraine.

Russia, though annexed Crimea and currently is fighting in Ukraine, will not occupy the whole country. The plan may be only to create some allies or puppet states in the face of Western expansion, because unlike the Cold War era, it may not be possible to physically occupy a whole country these days, rather, creating satellites may yield more benefits; in the war with Georgia, Russia aided secessionist regions, but later, did not occupy whole of Georgia. The same can happen with Ukraine where two regions joined Russian side with recognition as independent states; southern and eastern Ukraine have large numbers of ethnic Russian speakers, but other parts are not so. In those seemingly Russophile regions too, people protested against Russian attacks. Even if Russia takes possession of pro-Russian parts, that may not confirm total security. The country is fighting with Belarussian support. Both are under stern punitive actions with Russia bearing the heavier brunt. The economy has been in considerable disarray since 2008. Other EAEU or CSTO members have not expressed solidarity with, nor are fighting alongside Russia. Hence, how long Russian bellicosity, backing for secessionists and autocrats will last, can be questioned; long time military involvement in, let alone occupying Ukraine will surely put strain on or offset

advantages from mounting commodity prices and add further burdens instead. Ukrainian Russophobia has quite long history, e.g., series of Cossack rebellions against the Romanoffs, Ukraine-Soviet War (1917-21), anti-Soviet Resistance (western Ukraine; 1944-60) are noteworthy. Ukrainian nationalists during the Romanoff era fervidly opposed “Little Russians (*malorosiy*)” label for themselves.⁵⁴ These sentiments prevail, and are surging in severity due to Russian aggression on Ukraine. Is Russia ready or capable enough to quell ensuing rebellions, insurgencies, and bloodbath after capturing Ukraine? Besides, foreign parties’ backing for Ukraine in this war is unlikely to cease and will increase, overt, covert or both, making occupation of Ukraine a liability; that can discourage Russia.

Conversely, Russia will try to occupy whole Ukraine to prevent it from leaning closer to EU and NATO, whose steady expansion near its borders through inclusion of ex-USSR states, military activities and attempts (e.g., the Eastern Partnership) to admit remaining countries, have been recurring irritation and Russia remains vociferously critical of these. It also considers Ukraine as an indivisible part of itself and essential plinth for advancing integration projects in former Soviet sphere, notably the EAEU. Occupying whole Ukraine will help deter others (who are still not EU or NATO members) of its former domains from joining the two competitor organisations, reminding them of Georgian and Ukrainian instances. Then come the Black Sea and Russian Black Sea Fleet. After the USSR’s collapse, an agreement in 1997 divided this fleet between Russia and Ukraine; it was renewed in 2010 extending lease of Sevastopol to the fleet up to 2042.⁵⁵ The fleet is assigned for operating in the Black, Azov and Mediterranean Seas; in recent times, it played crucial role in three Russian military campaigns—Georgia, Crimean annexation, and now, to invade Ukraine. As regards the Black Sea, it is Russia’s primary outlet into the Mediterranean and the country has for long been at odds with other powers here, namely Turkey and (occasionally) other NATO members. Being the predominant actor in this region and with Crimea incorporated, it may hardly be any wonder Russia will try to occupy Ukraine with a view to projecting more muscle, reducing hostile presence and subsequently, concerns on one front at least. Other important purposes include prevention of possible future attacks: some deadly ones have come through or taken place in Ukraine, starting since

⁵⁴ Mark Bassin, Sergey Glebov and Marlene Laruelle, eds., *Between Europe & Asia: The Origins, Theories and Legacies of Russian Eurasianism* (Pittsburgh, PA, USA: University of Pittsburgh Press, June 2015): 119-120.

⁵⁵ Igor Delanoe, “Russia’s Black Sea Fleet: toward a Multiregional Force,” *Occasional Paper*, Center for Naval Analyses (CAN, Arlington, VA, USA: June 2019), 9.

the Kievan Rus⁵⁶ times: Rus-Byzantine Wars (1024 and 1043; Rus defeat), Battle of the Kalka River (1223; Mongols destroyed the Rus), Battle of Poltava (1709; Tsardom of Russia won), Crimean War (October 1853-March 1856; Romanoff loss), Polish-Soviet War (February 1919-March 1921; Bolshevik Russia lost), Battles of the Kerch Peninsula (late December 1941-mid May 1942; Soviet defeat), and Kiev (November 1943; Soviet victory) are some among many. During WWII, several Ukrainian groups and people collaborated with the Nazis. Occupying Ukraine may provide Russia with some buffer zone against NATO and EU expansion. It was the USSR's main agricultural as well as a vital industrial production hub; the country remains a net food exporter to this day. As the current war has endangered global food security, occupation can benefit Russia which too is a food exporter. Another motive is to avert perceived insecurities such as the Colour Revolutions, including that of Ukraine.

5.2 *Threats to Other ex-USSR Countries?*

Putting Georgia and Ukraine aside, some other ex-USSR countries harbour deep mistrust and constant fear of Russian aggression, namely Moldova, the Baltic republics, Poland and Bulgaria. The current Ukraine war has renewed these anxieties as they think of themselves to be next for facing Russian attack.

Moldova has legitimate reasons to fear Russian intervention. The Transnistria war broke out in late November 1990, went on till July 1992, and resulted in Transnistrian victory. Russia sided with these secessionists. Russia also imposed ban on Moldovan exports after the latter signed association agreement with the EU in 2013 and 2014.⁵⁷ Moldovan Russophiles have several times initiated their country's merger with Russia, e.g., the (double) referendum of September 2006, Mikhail Burla's (speaker, Transnistrian parliament) proposal to Russian State Duma for annexation (March 2014), Transnistrian president Vadim Shevchuk's statement in this regard (December 2019), etc. In Transnistria and Bender, there is substantial population of Russian speakers/ethnic Russians. Russia's plans to build a corridor linking Transnistria to Crimea is another cause of concern for the country.⁵⁸ In March 2022, Moldova applied for EU membership. Before this application, some leaked images

⁵⁶ The Kievan Rus was a mediaeval state in parts of Eastern and Northern Europe, formed of city-states (duchies and principalities), in what are today's Ukraine, Russia, Belarus.

⁵⁷ Kamil Cahus, "Russian Sanctions against Moldova: Minor Effects, Major Potential," *Commentary* 152, Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW, Warsaw, Poland, November 6, 2014): 1-3.

⁵⁸ Brendan Cole, "Russia Targets Moldova Invasion Next as They Seek Land Corridor via Ukraine," *Newsweek*, April 4, 2022.

reportedly showed president Lukashenko explaining a battleplan map to invade Moldova.⁵⁹ Mysterious attacks took place in Transnistria from April to June. In late July, opposition parties' rallies in the Russophile Gagauzia region, demanded early elections in Moldova, normalisation of relations with Russia, resignation of Maia Sandu and prime minister Natalia Gavrilița.⁶⁰ Also, Gavrilița has expressed worries of a possible Russian invasion of her country.⁶¹

All three Baltic states have large number of Russian populace. In Latvia particularly, there have been extensive controversies over use of Russian language in education. In 2018, Russia threatened economic embargo on the country when it initiated language reforms in public secondary schools and chose to make teaching in Latvian compulsory;⁶² ethnic Russians in Latvia had earlier protested parallel reforms back in 2004 as well.⁶³ Similar to Moldova, there are pro-Russian people and political parties in this country. In 2020, Russia again alleged Latvian persecution of Russian minorities therein. These can provide ample ground for Russia to attack Latvia. Estonia may suffer equal fate as it has many commonalities with the Latvian situation: language and citizenship issues, Russophiles, territorial disputes, information and cyber warfare by Russia (e.g., Estonia blamed the 2007 cyberattacks on Russia), accusations of discrimination against ethnic Russians, etc. Putin's speech in June 2022 during celebration of Czar Peter the Great's 350th birthday alarmed Estonia.⁶⁴ Kaja Kallas, the prime minister of Estonia, has asked for more NATO troops to be stationed in her country. After the attack on Ukraine, Lithuania banned goods trade in and out from Kaliningrad. When Russia threatened Lithuania for these bans, it lifted them.⁶⁵ In light of such strains and existing

⁵⁹ Jesse O'Neill, "Belarusian Dictator Appeared to Show Russian Plans to Invade Moldova," *The New York Post*, March 1, 2022.

⁶⁰ "Protesters in Gagauzia Demand Moldova Resume Relations with Russia," *TASS*, July 31, 2022, accessed August 2, 2022. <https://tass.com/world/1487123>

⁶¹ Liv Klingert, "No One is safe: Moldova PM Fears Russian Invasion of Transnistria," *The Brussels Times*, July 26, 2022.

⁶² "Russia Threatens Sanctions over Latvian Language in Schools," *BBC*, April 3, 2018, accessed July 28, 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-43626368>.

⁶³ Nils Muižnieks, ed., *Latvian-Russian Relations: Domestic and International Dimensions* (Riga, Latvia: University of Latvia Press, 2006), 19.

⁶⁴ Alexis Carey, "Russian President Vladimir Putin's Chilling Threat to Neighbour Revealed in Speech," *news.com.au*, June 11, 2022, accessed 28 July 2022. <https://www.news.com.au/world/europe/russian-president-vladimir-putins-chilling-new-threat-to-neighbour-revealed-in-speech/news-story/7eeca25f300993977b2478d08c261dfa>

⁶⁵ "Kaliningrad Row: Lithuania Lifts Rail Restrictions for Russian Exclave," *BBC*, July 22, 2022, accessed July 30, 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-62274474>

fissures within Baltic nations, Russia may try to destabilise them, if not attack outright.

Poland's apprehensions about and confrontational narratives with Russia received additional momentum with the Ukraine war. The country has been enthusiastic in supporting Ukraine, with arms, logistics and most significantly, welcoming refugees. In June 2022, Radoslaw Sikorski, former Polish foreign minister and currently Member of European Parliament (MEP), suggested arming Ukraine with nuclear weapons; Russian foreign ministry said they would reply by nuclear strikes on Poland and whole of Europe.⁶⁶ Besides Russia, allies Belarus and Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov threatened Poland. Contrarywise, Polish prime minister Mateusz Morawiecki said Poles were ready to fight against Russia in case of an attack. Like all post-USSR states, there are Russians in Poland but extent of Russian influence on them is not clear yet and many oppose the Ukraine war. The ruling *Law and Justice Party*'s Euroscepticism and national conservatism philosophies may have equivalents in Russia, however, invading Poland may not still be possible.

Bulgaria-Russia relations have degraded much; the 2022 invasion prompted Bulgaria to sanction Russia and later, Russian diplomats were expelled. Russia warned of breaking diplomatic ties and then, cut gas supplies off. Dmitry Rogozin, previous chief of Russian space agency, said that Russia would use nuclear missiles on Bulgaria, Romania and Montenegro after closing their airspace for his plane visiting Serbia.⁶⁷ Bulgaria remains hesitant regarding its ties with both the West and Russia. A poll in mid-2022 showed these divisions.⁶⁸ Russophilia (parties like *Attack, Revival*) and pro-Russian disinformation are rife.⁶⁹ To date, Russia has not hinted of attacking Bulgaria or any intention as such, but possibilities can neither be ignored; Vladimir Chizhov, Russian envoy to the EU, in mid-February 2022 said that Russia would not invade Ukraine, which eventually occurred though. He, in 2006, also commented that Bulgaria could be used as Russia's Trojan horse in the EU.⁷⁰ Therefore, what may happen with Bulgaria is unclear.

⁶⁶ "The Foreign Ministry of Russia Threatens Poland with Nuclear strike," *Pravda*, June 12, 2022.

⁶⁷ Will Stewart & Ryan Farley, "Vladimir Putin's Space Chief Issues Wild Satan-2 Hypersonic Missile Threat," *The Daily Mirror*, June 6, 2022.

⁶⁸ "Poll: Twice as many Bulgarians Prefer Alliance with NATO and EU to One with Russia," *The Sofia Globe*, June 30, 2022.

⁶⁹ "Russia Ordered Propaganda for Opinion Leaders in Bulgaria," *The Odessa Journal*, July 19, 2022.

⁷⁰ John R. Haines, "The Suffocating Symbiosis: Russia Seeks Trojan Horses inside Fractious Bulgaria's Political Corral," *E-Notes* (Philadelphia, PA, USA: Foreign Policy Research Institute, August 5, 2016), 2.

Russia attaches high importance to Central Asian countries which hold such places in its policies, especially integration projects. Both sides are common members of different regional fora. There have been occasional tensions, like Putin's comment on Kazakh statehood, Russian allegations of violating the Nagorno-Karabakh ceasefire by and Mikhail Delyagin's (deputy chief, *State Duma Committee on Economic Policy*) threat of nuclear strike on Azerbaijan resulting in lawsuit,⁷¹ etc. However, the Ukraine war is widening rift between and among them. In February 2022, Kazakhstan rejected Russian request of sending troops to Ukraine.⁷² In May, it cancelled the annual Victory Day Parade (May 9) protesting the invasion. In June, Azerbaijan and Russia blocked several news outlets from each other, with accusations of broadcasting pro-Armenian and pro-Ukrainian materials.⁷³ Uzbekistan warned its citizens not to join the Ukraine war for any side. Putin travelled Tajikistan and Turkmenistan in the same month. Considering Central Asia's position in overall Russian policy framework and their interdependence, the country's strong backing for autocracies, growing extra-regional involvement here and surrounding regions, presence of China, Russia's neo-Eurasianism vis-à-vis Turkey's Pan-Turkism, Central Asian states are not likely to face Russian invasion soon.

5.3 *The Ukraine Dilemma: For Russia, Ukraine and Others*

The present war in Ukraine bears wide range of ramifications for Russia, Ukraine and others. The phrase dilemma has been used because multidimensional crises will affect the warring parties, their allies, enemies, even for countries not involved in this war at all; a lot of those crises have already been witnessed. For Russia, it can produce serious dilemmas. As Western monetary, humanitarian and military aid is pouring in, the war will drag on and cost Russian economy progressively. Global energy market is often unstable and Russian profits from selling oil at cheaper rates may not be enough to keep on fighting amid economic pressures. Except for Belarus, other CSTO members have not joined Russia; continuing with the war in absence of allies can be burdensome despite ordering forces to intensify attacks all over Ukraine and announcing expansion of goals in this war.⁷⁴ Russia occupied Ukraine several times in the past. Although Russophobia was not so widespread back in those

⁷¹ Heydar Isayev, "Russian MP Threatens to nuke Azerbaijan," *Eurasianet.org*, March 30, 2022, accessed August 2, 2022. <https://eurasianet.org/russian-mp-threatens-to-nuke-azerbaijan>

⁷² Asher Notheis, "Russia Ally Kazakhstan Denies Request to Join Attack on Ukraine: Report," *The Washington Examiner*, February 25, 2022.

⁷³ Heydar Isayev, "Azerbaijani, Russian State Media in Tit-For-Tat Attacks," *The Caspian Post*, June 14, 2022.

⁷⁴ "Russia declares Expanded War Goals beyond Ukraine's Donbas," *The Hindustan Times*, July 20, 2022.

days' unlike today's, Russian authority was constantly challenged by long-drawn insurgencies and rebellions. Ultrationalism and anti-Russian sentiments are growing in Ukraine; subjugation and sufferings under the Romanoffs and USSR, e.g., Ukrainian-Soviet War (1917-21), Soviet Invasion (1919), Ukrainian Liberation War, the *Holodomor* (famine of 1932-33 in Soviet Ukraine; blamed on Soviet negligence, or sometimes as deliberate orchestration), Chernobyl Disaster are discussed regularly to arouse such emotions. In addition, there has been surge in glorification and reverence of nationalist anti-Russian groups, like the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), Ukrainian Insurgent Army, their anti-USSR struggles (1944-60), activists and leaders such as Stepan Bandera, Symon Petliura, Roman Shukhevych, etc. The war already has seen Russophobia rising beyond Ukraine, e.g., Latvian loyalty test,⁷⁵ EU refusal of visas to Russians,⁷⁶ which may spread further. If Russia can capture Ukraine, there are risks of ethnic conflicts; because, starting since the Colour Revolutions and afterwards, the Russo-Georgian War, distrust on Russia and its people became commonplace in Ukraine, Georgia, the Baltic republics and several EU nations. Capture will direct racial dislike against ordinary Russians and Belarusians as well, which may culminate into conflicts. Just like Ukraine has ethnic Russians, there are Ukrainians in Russia, sharing longstanding racial, cultural and other affinities. There is no guarantee that they will not start pro-Ukrainian insurgency. This fear is not unfounded; many ethnic Russians⁷⁷ and Belarussians are fighting for Ukraine, including a number of Russian soldiers.⁷⁸ Intra-religious clashes cannot be disregarded. Russia, Ukraine, Belarus—all are Eastern Orthodox and racial clashes can encompass religious dimensions. Chechen warlord Ramzan Kadyrov's forces are fighting for Russia. However, two of his battalions joined Ukrainians.⁷⁹ Russo-Tatar hostilities have occurred for centuries. Crimean Tatars who underwent mass deportation after 2014 for opposing the annexation took up arms against Russia. There can be conflicts between Muslim Tatars and Chechens. Large numbers of Tatars and other Muslims live in Russia and nearby countries, who may try to join. It will be almost impossible for Russia or allies to identify rebels or insurgents from every community or area, given the

⁷⁵ Oksana Antonenko, "Russian speakers in Latvia told to pick sides in test of patriotism," *BBC*, August 19, 2022, accessed August 24, 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-62592714>

⁷⁶ "A Clear Signal": EU Presidency Backs Visa Ban for Russians," *The Daily Sabah*, August 13, 2022.

⁷⁷ Amie Ferris-Rotman, "The Russians Fighting Putin in Ukraine," *Time*, April 4, 2022.

⁷⁸ "Switching Sides: the Elusive Russian Legion Fighting with Ukraine," *The Moscow Times*, August 8, 2022.

⁷⁹ Aliss Higham, Francesca Edwards and Jack Walters, "Ukraine: Putin Humiliated as Rebellious Chechen Soldiers Join Fight against Russia," *The Express*, July 20, 2022.

multicultural features of these countries themselves. Because, they will require in that case, to wage massacres, which will be another catastrophe.

Ukraine launched counterattacks on Russia (including territories held),⁸⁰ admitted of such attacks in Crimea while Russian border areas are more vulnerable.⁸¹ Near Moscow, influential political theorist Alexander Dugin's (Putin's philosopher) daughter, Darya Dugina, a vocal supporter of the war in Ukraine herself, was killed in a car bomb explosion recently. Russia instantly blamed Ukraine which denied any role.⁸² Russian allies too, have not been spared; there have been attacks in Donetsk and Luhansk. In July, Ukraine fired missiles at and also warned Belarus to stay away from this war. As Georgia and Ukraine lost their territories to Russia, inhabitants of these regions (who sought secession and welcomed Russian interference) became enemies; it will be nothing unusual if there are initiatives to take them back into their original respective states. Here, the Russian logic and actions, i.e., aiding regional secessionist struggles against parent countries, can backfire. How may that happen? Georgia and Ukraine can try to stir up separatism in those lands snatched by and inside mainland Russia; not all Crimeans opted for or were in favour of joining Russia and there were oppositions in that country against this annexation. Russia itself has armed separatist movements or struggles going on in the Caucasus; there are possibilities that foreign powers may use all opportunities to provoke these and exacerbate things. In its present situation, will the country be able to fight on more than one front concurrently, that is also for protracted period of time? Does not seem feasible. Irredentism, under Putin's rule has grown strong in Russia, but can also be used against it, especially those losing or ceding their lands to Russia, who threatens to occupy other countries that belonged once to the Romanoff Empire or USSR. Ukraine can lay claim on Russia and Belarus as Kiev was the seat of historical Kievan Rus state which later evolved into these three countries. Tatars and Mongols vanquished the Rus and ruled vast swathes of today's Russia, Ukraine, Belarus for over two centuries. The Swedish Empire ceded many of its possessions to Romanoff Russia in battles; hence, Russian irredentist claims can encourage others to raise their own against it.

⁸⁰ Max Seddon, "Russia Blames 'Sabotage' For Explosions in Northern Crimea," *The Financial Times*, August 16, 2022.

⁸¹ Namita Singh, "Belgorod: Three Dead as Dozens of Buildings Hit by Blasts in Russian City near Ukrainian Border," *The Independent*, July 3, 2022.

⁸² Andrew Roth and Martin Farrer, "Daughter of Putin Ally Alexander Dugin Killed by Car Bomb in Moscow," *The Guardian*, August 21, 2022.

For Russia, dilemmas expand also to Central Asia. These nations distanced themselves from the war. If they choose to cease cooperation due to intimidation by Russian leaders,⁸³ its integration projects and security (suffered weighty blows by now for the invasion) can be jeopardised even more. Russia's neo-Eurasianism may collide with pan-Turkism of Turkey, which is now deepening bonds with countries here. Its role is somewhat ambiguous; on one hand, it is providing military aid for Ukraine openly, sheltered anti-war Russians and Ukrainians,⁸⁴ while keeping cordial ties with Russia and assisting the Russophile Gagauzia region⁸⁵ in Moldova on the other. Moreover, Turkey has now reconciled with Syria,⁸⁶ another Russian ally, which it had been attacking for quite some time. Both countries are ruled by strongman, populist leaders; Russian occupation of Ukraine can bolster Turkish pan-Turkism and neo-Ottomanism regarding Central Asia, which may not be comfortable for Russia.

Besides territorial, demographic and economic losses, there can be other negative consequences for Ukraine. First comes the refugee issue. Poland may have sheltered lots of Ukrainian refugees and been assisting the country, but in the global wake of right-wing populism and xenophobia, how long this sympathy lasts, cannot be said for sure. OUN's carnage of Polish civilians in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia during WWII remains as an irritant in Poland-Ukraine relations. The event was remembered in Poland in July this year. Polish far right groups are speaking out against Ukrainian refugees citing these issues and economy.⁸⁷ Britain accepted substantial numbers Ukrainians, but now there have arisen problems too; many are unwilling to take responsibilities anymore. The country has itself been going through deep recession, living and other costs are rising; its energy sector particularly has been hit hard. A report says, Ukrainian refugees face various risks in host nations.⁸⁸ These will complicate situations to higher degrees for Ukraine with the European refugee crisis showing no sign of receding. Alongside strengthening Russian presence and

⁸³ Zaina Alibhai, "Putin Threatens Actions against ex-Soviet States If They Defy Russia," *The Metro*, June 19, 2022.

⁸⁴ Ece Çelik, "Some 14,000 Russians Flee to Turkey after Ukraine War," *Hurriyet Daily News*, March 21, 2022.

⁸⁵ "Turkish support for Gagauzia priceless: governor Vlah," *The Daily Sabah*, February 22, 2021.

⁸⁶ Martin Chulov, "Turkey's rapprochement with Syria leaves regional refugees fearful," *The Guardian*, August 23, 2022.

⁸⁷ Dariusz Kalan, "Polish Nationalists Weaponize History in a Bid to Remain Relevant," *Balkan Insight*, June 15, 2022.

⁸⁸ Charles Lawley, *Warm Welcomes, Lurking Tensions* (Uxbridge, London, UK: World Vision International, August 2022), 11.

intimidation, freedom of movement and activities in the Black Sea can come under restrictions for the country.

Apart from Britain, other European countries will face multifaceted crises. The aforesaid refugee crisis and economic downturn have been taking grave tolls. Almost all of them are at loggerheads with Russia and support Ukraine, which also expose them to possibilities of bigger confrontation with the earlier. Russia has a crucial advantage here, as it remains their main energy supplier. This often bars them from being tougher against that country. Even in the current war, they are trying to secure Russian energy supplies. Opposition politicians in these countries are not in favour of arms supplies to Ukraine, e.g., Jeremy Corbyn (Britain), Marie Le Pen (France), and some lawmakers in Germany called for starting negotiations with Russia. Hungarian premier Viktor Orbán is a known Russophile, who in late August 2022, approved of two nuclear power plants to be built in his country by Rosatom of Russia. Therefore, similar to Poland and Britain, how long EU countries can and will assist Ukraine while simultaneously opposing Russia and relying on its energy supplies, remain to be seen.

Several EU countries had been focussing on development of green energy before Russia invaded Ukraine, reducing dependence on coal; some nuclear power plants were phased out. This war has renewed interest in nuclear power, but there has appeared another shocking scenario. Heavy fighting rages on at Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant (ZNPP), biggest in Europe and among the biggest in the world. It was temporarily delinked from national power grid though, dangers of a Chernobyl-scale nuclear calamity are there, as the establishment experienced shelling. There is more: Tobias Ellwood, Chairman, Defence Select Committee, UK House of Commons, has said that if Russia causes a deliberate accident at the ZNPP, that will be taken as an attack on NATO,⁸⁹ which indicates the alliance will enter this war. If attacks go on and cause any damage, even leakage, that will spell total devastation for not only Russia or Ukraine, but rest of Europe and the whole world as well.

From arguments above, it can be surmised that Russia may be able to capture whole of Ukraine, but keeping the country under effective control will be a very problematic task. Numerous factors contribute into that: history of Russian occupation of Ukraine and withdrawal, current Russophobia and threats of insurgency, analogous vulnerabilities at home vis-à-vis a weak economy,

⁸⁹ "The West Considers Applying NATO's Article 5 in Response to Possible Accident at Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant," *Pravda*, August 20, 2022.

overt and covert foreign intervention, risks of engaging on more than one front, etc. Ukraine and Moldova are now on their way of becoming EU members; that means Russia will have to deal with occupying or militarily confronting an EU nation in either case. Its woes do not end there; hitherto nonaligned Finland and Sweden have also applied for NATO membership; Russia's fears of encirclement are becoming real. Consequently, it will have to lose more than gain by trying to occupy Ukraine.

6. Concluding Remarks

Russia has been trying to regain its long-gone preponderance in the post-Soviet space, i.e., East Europe, Central Asia, and the Caucasus. In doing so, it has resorted, on regular basis, to establishing various enterprises, namely the CIS, CSTO, EAEU, Union State with Belarus, etc., with a view to promoting integration of countries that emerged after the USSR's dissolution. Besides, there are diplomacy, open intimidation and irregular attacks against individual countries, when they try to develop broader relations with or join western organisations, like the NATO and EU. It fought with Georgia, helped secession of two regions (first projection of power in post-USSR era), then invaded and annexed Crimea under the plea of liberating persecuted ethnic Russians there, and launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in late February 2022. After Vladimir Putin's assumption of power, irredentism has become highly influential in Russia, and efforts to reassert itself are producing confrontation with the West.

When the USSR dissolved, Russia had no stand for countering Western dominance; it felt increasingly becoming encircled through NATO and EU expansion into its vicinity. The Colour Revolutions signalled rising of more anti-Russian feelings. Frictions with Ukraine are not new for Russia, rather continuing for long decades. The present crisis began with annexing Crimea in 2014 where irredentism played vital role. With the latest invasion, many ex-USSR countries have become more distrustful and worried about Russia, pondering over who may come under Russian attacks next, as various factors prompting it are actively present in them too. Alongside, there come up some important questions, e.g., whether Russia shall or not occupy entire Ukraine, what threats ex-USSR nations face from Russia, dilemmas posed by this war for Russia, Ukraine and others etc. Reasons exist for and against Russian occupation of Ukraine alike and several ex-USSR nations like Moldova, Poland, the Baltic republics, Central Asian nations have genuine concerns about Russia's narratives and actions. Simultaneously, Russia has equal, if not more, issues of its own to be concerned about, which include its vulnerabilities at home, historical and modern tensions with

neighbours, a weak, undiversified, sanction-hit economy, regional competitors, global rise in Russophobia, continuing Western assistance for Ukraine and fears of their possible intervention (overt or covert) etc. Even if Russia can take over whole Ukraine, ensuring total control will be very troublesome in light of past occupations, growth of Ukrainian nationalism, dislike of and rebellions, insurgencies, wars against Russia, leading to Russian departure. These aspects have become intricate further nowadays and accordingly, occupying or staying in Ukraine for long will yield mostly bad results for Russia. Ukrainian counterattacks and attacks inside Russia can be cited as examples. Belarus is fighting as Russia's ally, but that camaraderie is waning too.⁹⁰ Other members of Russia-led initiatives have not joined the war and expressed reservations instead. With some, there have emerged conspicuous rifts while tensions are mounting with ex-USSR constituents which became EU and NATO members. Under such inhospitable circumstances, continuing to fight in or capturing Ukraine can prove calamitous.

The invasion and ensuing war have been creating yawning commotion in food, fuel, finance, other goods and services supply chains on a global scale. There are multifarious dilemmas involved for the two belligerents and others. For Russia, dilemmas will be more than others. Its economy has been in severe disturbance, and the longer this war runs, the more miseries it will invite; profits made from selling energy resources at steep discounts amidst unstable market may be exhausted. Growing antagonism towards Russians can produce ethnic conflicts as Russia accuses other countries of persecuting Russians there and goes to protect or liberate them; such hatred and violence can extend against people of occupied or secessionist regions who hailed Russian intervention. Many Russians and Belarusians joined Ukraine against their own homelands. What if Ukrainians in Russia demand secession and incorporation with Ukraine? Religious elements of likely ethnic conflicts should not be ignored. Countries who lost their territories or were subjugated by Russia in the past, can use irredentist claims against Russia. Its integration projects and security in post-Soviet space will come under considerable uncertainty. This war prompted previously neutral Scandinavian nations to become NATO members, which means Russia's fears of encirclement are materialising.

For Ukraine, main dilemmas are its territorial, demographic and economic destructions; other crucial dilemmas are, albeit European countries (Britain too) have been sympathetic to Ukrainian refugees, some groups are

⁹⁰ Benjamin Brimelow, "Putin's Only Ally in Europe is Keeping His Distance from Russia's War in Ukraine," *The Bvlusiness Insider*, September 1, 2022.

unhappy about their huge numbers and the pressures being inflicted on societies. EU countries still depend on Russian energy supplies and some influential figures are suggesting more diplomacy with that country. Possibility of NATO entering this war has come up, especially due to fighting around the ZNPP that risks a Chernobyl-like nuclear explosion. Furthermore, EU countries are showing interest in returning to nuclear power to meet energy needs. It is unclear how far their support sustains for Ukraine in face of energy shortage, refocus on nuclear power, economic slump, growth and spread of populism.

The Romanoff Empire had much larger landmass, resources, manpower than today's Russian Federation; the USSR was even more powerful with its formidable military, nuclear weapons and status as one of the two superpowers. But their choice of going into wars beyond borders proved cataclysmic—joining WWI in support of Serbia (Romanoffs), and the Soviet-Afghan War (USSR); massive casualties on battlefields, grievous chaos back home overstrained their resources, capabilities, ending the Romanoff dynasty, and the USSR, respectively. Internal weaknesses, e.g., lagging behind in economic performance in spite of various reforms, played equally, if not more, damaging role in bringing down two well-regarded powers in their own rights. Another thing is, Russia's acquisition of territories may be substantial for a certain time, but when it suffers losses, those prove far dearer as well; for example, the Romanoff Empire was 24.7 million square kilometres which came down to 22.4 million sqkms in the form of the USSR after the Revolution of 1917 and resulting in the Empire's downfall. This massive area was reduced, after 1991, to 17.1 million sqkms. Russia presently has been fighting another war beyond own state boundaries with diverse odds to counter: an ailing economy, very little support from allies, involvement of other global powers, separatist movements inside itself, recurrent anti-government unrest, Ukrainian counterassaults, and so on. Comparable factors were also evident before demise of the Romanoffs and USSR. Russia may capture Ukraine, but will encounter lots of tough challenges in controlling it and that can draw in graver predicaments.