

Strategy - From Theory to Practice:
Strategic Thought and Strategic Thinking

Course by

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Final Course Assignment

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The Russian Annexation of Crimea in 2014

Starting with November 21st 2013 and following the surprising declaration by the Ukrainian government not to sign the association agreement with the European Union for the time being civil protests broke out in the Ukraine. In the aftermath of those events demonstrations flared up again later in November and reached their mass character on December 1st 2013. The protesters called for President Viktor Yanukovych's impeachment, early presidential elections and the signing of the Association Agreement with the European Union.^{1 2 3}

The protests ended after Ukraine President Yanukovych fled the country on February 22nd 2014 and the parliament declared President Yanukovych's deposition due to the flight. In the following Oleksandr Turchynov was appointed as interim president and the formation of a transitional government under Arseniy Yatsenyuk on February 26th 2014.^{4 5}

¹ EuroMaidan rallies in Ukraine - Nov. 21–23 coverage. In: Kyiv Post. 25. November 2013

² Ukrainian opposition calls for President Yanukovych's impeachment. In: Kyiv Post. 21. November 2013

³ David M. Herszenhorn: Thousands of Protesters in Ukraine Demand Leader's Resignation. In: New York Times. 1. Dezember 2013

⁴ Florian Kellermann: Bei der Flucht vergaß Janukowitsch sogar seine Brille. In: Die Welt, 25. Februar 2014

⁵ Parlamentssitzung in Kiew Regierungschef Asarow tritt zurück. In: Süddeutsche Zeitung, 28. Januar 2014

During the final phase, Russian annexation of Crimea and the destabilization of Ukraine due to an armed conflict in two eastern Ukraine oblasts began.

Following the political uncertainty in Ukraine in the wake of the protests, separatist efforts resumed in February 2014, with the help of Russian agitators. After armed forces occupied the regional parliament at the end of February 2014, they sealed off the building and only allowed a selection of to enter the building. In a closed meeting, Aksjonow was then appointed new prime minister and a referendum was held on the separation of the Crimea from Ukraine and later the establishment of the Republic of Crimea.⁶

Just one day after the referendum, the head of the voting commission said that there was an approval of 96% of the vote for joining Russia. Prime Minister Aksjonow announced that the next day an application for admission would be made to Russian President Putin.⁷

On March 18th 2014 the Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a Crimea accession treaty to Russia with the Prime Minister of the Republic of Crimea Sergei Aksjonow.^{8 9}

⁶ Simon Schuster: Putin's Man in Crimea Is Ukraine's Worst Nightmare. In: Time. 10. März 2014

⁷ Krim-Referendum: 96,77 Prozent stimmen für Wiedervereinigung mit Russland - Endergebnis. RIA Novosti, 17. März 2014

⁸ Chronik: 13. bis 27. März 2014. In: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung/bpb. 31. März 2014

⁹ Chronologie der Krim-Krise. In: Süddeutsche Zeitung. 7. April 2014

The secession and referendum are in majority not recognized at international level. In western publications the term annexation is mainly used.^{10 11 12}

To analysing this situation, it is important to mention that the main operation base of the Russian Black Sea Fleet is posted in Sevastopol. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Ukraine signed an agreement over the stay of the Russian Black Sea Fleet.^{13 14} Even in the present days and in light of the need of Russia to maintain naval ports in warm water regions this naval bases on Crimea are a major strategic asset for Russia.

The open question that should be answered using some of the concepts introduced, is why was the free western country not able to support Ukraine and why was Russia capable of annexing Crimea. Giving this setup the actors being part are Russia, Ukraine and the western countries like the European Union and the United States of America.

¹⁰ Claus Kreß, Christian Tams: Wider die normative Kraft des Faktischen. Die Krim-Krise aus völkerrechtlicher Sicht. In: Internationale Politik. Nr. 3, Mai/Juni 2014

¹¹ Andreas Kappeler: Kleine Geschichte der Ukraine. Beck, München 2014

¹² Urs Saxer: Der Krim-Konflikt und das Völkerrecht. In: NZZ. 18. März 2014

¹³ Thomas Gutschker: Das Sprungbrett ins Mittelmeer, In: FAZ, 09. März 2014

¹⁴ Hintergrund: Die russische Schwarzmeerflotte. In: Süddeutsche Zeitung, 28. Februar 2014

Looking at the concept of Deterrence, it is obvious that Russia was successful to deter the western countries of intervening militarily due to Russia's own military capabilities. Russia followed a strategy of Deterrence by Punishment. The western countries weren't able to deter Russia from annexing Crimea. The possible threat that western troops could be deployed was implausible. A Deterrence by Punishment wasn't working because nobody really believed that the western world would risk a third world war over the Ukraine. The Deterrence by Denial didn't work out as well. Even if the European Union and the United States put sanctions in place, at that time, those sanction came to late and it wasn't believed they would be effective.^{15 16 17}

The western countries lacked a Realistic Approach to their Strategy. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the free world was expecting the free and democratic way of live to be the only one left. This kind of Idealistic Approach prevented the western world to take pre-emptive measures to this crisis, to enable Ukraine to avert the danger After the Crimea Crisis the approach towards Russia, especially in the NATO countries changed. A good example to

¹⁵ Verordnung (EU) Nr. 208/2014 des Rates vom 5. März 2014

¹⁶ Exclusive: EU approves framework for asset freezes, travel bans on Russia, Reuters, 12. März 2014

¹⁷ White House on Visa Restrictions, Sanctions in Support of Ukraine

a more Realistic Approach is illustrated by the NATO enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in Poland and the Baltic NATO Member States.¹⁸

Describing the situation, it is obvious that Russia was able to surprise the Intelligence Community. This Intelligence Surprise is the explanation for the not adopted strategy. In hindsight the signs are easier to interpret.

This is directly connecting to the Analytical Biases concept. The western world was influenced by the bias that the Soviet Union has been a kind of defeated and this bias was adopted towards Russia.

Even if the planning and design tools are in place in all the western militaries those tools weren't used at the time. Leaving the Ukraine with a strategic problem without proper Planning and Design to deal with it.

The Relevance Gap/ Strategic Offset or drift concept is an excellent tool to explain this encountered situation. The western world countries because of the bias explained before weren't expecting the Russian Federation to act this way

¹⁸ Warsaw Summit Communiqué: Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Warsaw 8-9 July 2016. NATO, 03. August 2016

and this hostile. The expectation was that all kind of conflicts would not be solved by military means but by negotiations. A clear gap to the encountered reality. Giving Russia an opportunity and leaving the western countries without effective tools to deal with the situation.

The National Security Policies of the western world countries, at this time, weren't as focused as necessary on Russia. The main effort was still on the 9/ 11 aftermath and on fighting the War on Terror. The Crimea Crisis is a good example how a known National Security Policy can be exploited.

The Strategic Culture Concept can be used to cover and explain the Russian strategic thoughts. Russia is following the same kind of thinking like the Soviet Union, seeing the whole strategic situation as a Zero-Sum Game. Within this Strategic Culture you can only gain anything if some other actor is losing something.

With this Strategic Culture and using the Opposition/ Difficulty Concept, it is remarkable that Russia was actually using this opportunity. Even if Russia didn't achieve the assumed end state to annex Crimea and to establish a land

corridor between Crimea and the Russia main land. Beside the existing risks and the possible opposition Russia used the opportunity.

On the other side the Ukraine military beside the fact that at that time it lacked the equipment and the training required to effectively deal with the threat, was able to stabilize the situation in the East of Ukraine. This is particularly remarkable in the light of the lacking support from the western countries.

Russia used new procedures in dealing with this conflict. Using the Military Innovation Concept, that is differentiating between Anticipation and Adoption it becomes clear that the Russian Forces were able to successfully use Military Innovation in the form of Anticipation. The new form of hybrid warfighting was very effective in destabilising the Crimea Region and the East Ukraine.

The western countries on the other side had to adopt and used Military Innovation by Adaption, the described NATO enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) Program is a good example for this.

Using the introduced concepts clearly illustrates how Russia was able to successfully annex Crimea without effective countermeasures being taken at that time.

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2016. NATO, 03. August 2016