
On the Clausewitzian Challenge in Eastern Europe

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Abstract

This article evaluates contemporary growing tensions to geopolitical changes in Eastern Europe. The current Eastern European geopolitical situation is labelled as a crisis that has been generated by the Ukrainian conflict for more than one year already. In light of the described crisis, the military option has been discussed as a meaningful political tool. This notion has provoked the necessity to evaluate growing tensions in the region through the lens of a traditional Clausewitzian challenge that should define a solution for effective force tasking aimed at the achievement of firm political goals. More than that, the analysis of this article is based on theoretical notions of neoclassical realism suggesting that foreign policy is dependent on international incentives and on domestic evaluations of political entities.

Introduction

War-fighting capability has been a topic of growing interest in Eastern Europe since March 2014. This is due to changes in international relations and power postures in the named region. These changes are defined by the aggressive foreign policy attitude by the Russian Federation. Voices suggesting that the Cold War has never stopped have been rising recently, suggesting the necessity to re-evaluate the international order and security environment. Besides, an intensifying military build-up and international exercise events around the Baltic Sea in 2014 and 2015 have facilitated significant changes in regional affairs.

This article analyses the necessity to observe and evaluate contemporary power distribution and war-fighting capabilities in Eastern Europe. A series of sharp foreign affairs have been shaping regional tensions in this part of Europe. By stating “sharp” one should bear in mind the hasty military build-up in Crimea, annexation of that part of Ukraine and the developing military build-up by NATO

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on the Alliance eastern frontier. This situation might seem like a Cold War period scenario. That is why a more detailed evaluation of current foreign affairs is needed. Second, this article uses an approach based on classical warfare notions that Carl von Clausewitz described in the 19th century.

Neoclassical realism is the basic theoretical approach applied for analytic purposes in this article. Neoclassical realism is usually defined as the mind-stream following neo-realism. This mind-stream does not highlight the single outstanding role of material power to influence foreign policy decisions. Instead, neoclassical realism offers a unit-level power's close association with indirect institutional power and its possessions in international surroundings¹. This suggests an overwhelming promotion of the multi-polar international system and its suggested capabilities by implementation of collective foreign policy initiatives. However, this article is based on a more complex assessment of foreign policy initiatives. Neoclassical realism serves as the best approach for the analytic base of current foreign affairs in Eastern Europe because one of the leading authors, Gideon Rose, has stated that: "scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities"². As it is shown in the article, this theoretical approach could find sound reflections to multiple warfare notions described by Clausewitz.

The term "material power" is replaced by the definition of a structural power in this article due to its direct association with internal power factors that usually lead to gains of external influence. In other words, a structural power assessment should highlight the importance of key gains as dominating factors of each entity's, collective or national, foreign policy but through the prism of facilitation of internal power capabilities that are associated with foreign policy perception at the entity's level. The dominant "key gains" of national or collective entity should be associated with material power elements such as economical benefits, development of power and influence or maintenance of strong trade relations. The difference is that the term "structural power" is based on a broader definition suggesting that the entity's internal facilitation of material power elements should be developed, as significant tools in pursuit of strategic objectives, through the definition of political will, alienation of popular support and the development of multiple tools of foreign affairs. Following that logical path, it should be stated that tensions at the beginning of the Ukrainian conflict should have served the interests of at least

¹ Guzzini S., "Structural Power: The Limits of Neorealist Power Analysis", *International Organization* 47 (3), 1993, p. 443-478.

² Rose G., "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy", *World Politics* 51 (1), 1998, p. 145.

one of the regional players, the Russian Federation. Provocation of tensions and promotion of different interests has been serving as the latest example of gaining and employing Moscow's structural power in the Ukrainian conflict. Further on, this article aims to highlight the key elements of facilitated structural power that have been employed in the escalation of the current conflict.

The Ukrainian conflict has brought on an outstanding precedent regarding the fragility of the European security system. Significant promotion of Eastern Neighbourhood initiatives by the European Union has been sharply overrun by the aggressive foreign policy intentions of the Russian Federation that led to the annexation of Ukrainian territory and escalation of the destabilizing internal conflict in that country. This is an alerting scenario that is asking for a broader contemporary analysis of power factors and war-fighting notions.

Hence, the main objective of this article is to assess the structural power capabilities of the opposing geopolitical players in Eastern Europe and to evaluate utilization of traditional war-fighting notions in the wake of the currently developing regional crisis. In order to achieve the main objective, contemporary structural power elements of the named region will be discussed in the first part of the article. The second part will shift attention to the analysis of traditional war-fighting notions that are being applied once again in the course of history in Eastern Europe.

This goal is supported by the principal methodology of neoclassical realism as unit-level internal power factors and systemic incentives are correlated in order to analyze war-fighting initiatives. In fact, regional power escalation in the wake of the Ukrainian conflict has been leading to military build-up efforts evidenced not only by the ambitiously aggressive Russian Federation, but by collective Western powers under the framework of NATO as well. This tension in foreign relations has been present within the Baltic Sea region and the broader Eastern European context for more than a year already. That is why any possible military reaction to systemic incentives based on the employment of structural power instruments is considered an important factor of this analysis. Additionally, the definition of the "Clausewitzian challenge" should be emphasized in order to define possible military build-up initiatives and relevant effects to structural changes in the geopolitical arena of Eastern Europe³. Hence, this article offers an overview of geopolitical reality in Eastern Europe that is based on structural assessment and comparison with traditional war-fighting notions that have been historically important in the region.

³ John R. Ferris, *Intelligence and Strategy: Selected Essays*, Routledge, 2005, p. 282-283.

1. Structural power elements in Eastern Europe

The term “structural power” includes not only unit-level material power capabilities but also emphasizes the ability to gain superior dominance over neighbouring players and execute its dominance in certain areas, usually by employing favourable preconditions for this. If this sounds like a grim abbreviation, more common examples should be mentioned. The example of Russia’s attitude to the development of internal tensions in Ukraine is the most recent and relevant example. As tensions in Kiev have been rising, Moscow has started to act as an active provoker of these internal tensions.

The seizure of momentum and involvement in Crimea has become another outstanding example of how boldly the sovereignty of a European country can be disrupted. This is a modern precedent of how advantages in structural power were employed in the most brutal form. More than that, the current conflict offers the opportunity to assess what structural power elements have been decisive in forming hasty and aggressive Russian foreign policy in the region. In this part of the article, the most decisive power elements are highlighted in order to focus attention on enabling factors of militarized strategy.

As the recent Ukrainian conflict highlights a rapid employment of dominance over internal tensions, external factors leading to this dominance should be discussed too. According to the neorealist assessment, dominant elements of structural power are economical capabilities, trade relations, holding an energy monopoly and, of course, military capabilities. It is obvious that these four power elements could be defined as elements of *Innenpolitik* that are the leading factors in shaping entities’ foreign policy ambitions⁴. In that sense, sovereign countries are acting in order to implement and facilitate their economical benefits, strong and effective trade relations, and stable energy supplies. These are interconnected preconditions for rapid and stable development. In the case of the Russian Federation, these preconditions are leading directly to the build-up of strong military capabilities⁵. Additionally, neoclassical realism is paying attention at how the political elites of each entity are able to facilitate structural power at the internal level. Here one could define the fundamental difference between contemporary Western collective entities representing democracy and the Russian authoritarian regime. The latter one is able to employ an institutionalized power structure in the mobilization

⁴ Rose, (note 2) p. 154-155.

⁵ Petraitis D., *Russian Military Reform 2005 – 2020*, lecture conducted at Lithuanian Military Academy, November 2014.

of complex structural power elements to serve the national hegemonic interests defined by a narrow governing group.

The previously mentioned geopolitical entities that are making a decisive influence in Eastern Europe could be defined by plotting contemporary structural power entities in Eastern Europe. The region could be defined by two structural powers: the Western Alliance with the dominance of the US and a common definition of NATO versus the Russian Federation that has gathered the Eurasian Union under its influence. There are several territories of still undefined influential dominance in between those two powers. Today these potential territories could be defined as Ukraine, Moldova, the Balkans and South Caucasus⁶. Being even more critical, Samuel Huntington's definition of the "clash of civilizations" could be applied in the understanding of this contemporary situation as well⁷.

A significant difference should be stated concerning the structural power elements of the Russian and Western powers. All the power elements of the Russian Federation are in the possession of the same political regime. The Kremlin has considerable energy dominance in Eastern Europe, and has developed significant economical and trade relations with neighbouring entities. More than that, it is able to accumulate significant financial sources and stimulate selected political players over the range of political entities in Eastern and Western Europe. Accumulation of structural power elements in Moscow has provoked a significant modernization of armed forces. The best illustration of these efforts could be taken as the project to acquire modern naval assets and the modernization of various technologies or structural reforms of the Russian armed forces⁸. Although these modernization efforts are highly dependent on economical wealth and the rise of GDP in the Federation, their benefits are already in effect despite recent declarations of Russian economical shortages⁹.

On the other hand, Western countries are lacking solid possession of all structural power elements as individual entities. Dispersed military power assets are identified as NATO assets in the military power structure. The same should be applied to common economical policy and energy market initiatives in the framework of the EU. That dispersion or collectiveness of structural power does not mean ineffectiveness. Contrary, collectiveness leads to the spread of a common

⁶ Friedman G., "A Net Assessment of Europe", *Geopolitics weekly*, STRATFOR, <<https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/net-assessment-europe?utm> >, 26 05 2015.

⁷ Hoge J.F., ed., *The Clash of Civilizations: The Debate*, Council on Foreign Relations, 2010, p. 1-32.

⁸ Petraitis, (note 5).

⁹ IMF, *Russian Federation. Fiscal Transparency Evaluation*, IMF Country Report No.14/134, May 2014, <<http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2014/cr14134.pdf>>, 16 05 2015.

political culture and formation of stable power elements based on broad initiatives. A common political culture developed according to Western democratic standards could serve as a preventive measure to minimize the assertiveness of pro-Russian political players. The core difference between these institutionalized power structures is based on achievement of a consensus and ability to provide a rapid powerful response.

2. Power-enabling instruments

The two previously defined powers are creating a confrontation of interests in Eastern Europe. The case of the Ukrainian conflict has become the defining example of the situation when the possible influential outcomes of each of the powers could define a certain path of evolution for one of the largest nations in the region. In that case, the Ukrainian context opens another essential issue – power-enabling preconditions. What are these enabling factors that led to this clash of power and influence? A list of these preconditions might be a changing issue but the most important highlight in the Ukrainian context consists of internal factors that have been utilized to the advantage of a particular external player. Here, neoclassical realism could be applied as it suggests not only internal power facilitation capabilities, but also assesses the capabilities to influence other foreign entities¹⁰. According to that theoretical approach, mobilization of institutionalized power at the unit level is the leading factor in expansion of security and foreign policy interests beyond the entity's internal framework. Hence, the ability to influence foreign players shows up as another key enabling factor that should be highlighted as creating the possibility for bold strategic choices. This has been the exact scenario in the development of Russian foreign policy ambitions over Crimea and certainly over eastern Ukraine.

The theoretic approach and practical development of the Ukrainian conflict suggests that influence over foreign entities could be achieved by taking advantage of certain enabling factors.

First, the popular support of internal communities should be discussed. The enabling factor for internal disputes and open civilian clashes in Ukraine has risen from diversified popular support for pro-European and pro-Russian political paths. More so, Ukraine, prior to the events in Kiev's central square, has been described

¹⁰ Schweller R., *Unanswered Threats. Political Constraints on a Balance of Power*, Princeton University Press, 2006, p. 46-67.

as a country of diversified regions with different ethnic majorities and social diversities¹¹. Such a diversified socio-political situation could be a leading factor in forming a favourable precondition for exploitation of pro-Russian popular support seeking an affiliation of goals. In case of the diversified population in Ukraine, the statement of Mr. Zbigniew Brzezinski needs to be remembered. In 1994 the famous US National Security adviser stated that “without Ukraine Russia ceases to be an empire”¹².

Second, a wide window of populace vulnerability could be defined in Ukraine just prior the crisis. This vulnerability was caused by a concentration of national minority groups in particular areas and social inequalities provoked by widespread corruption in Ukrainian regions. These social factors were leading to limited governmental response and, of course, decreasing support for governing authorities. One should remember that the regime of president Yanukovich earned definitions such as a “dysfunctional system of sultanistic rule [with] the government and parliament [turned] into rubber-stamp institutions”¹³ during its final governing phase. This definition was a strong uniting factor among the Ukrainian people as tens of thousands started to gather at Kiev central square.

As the crisis evolved, numerous internal destabilization factors were exploited by the neighbouring external player, who had a large interest in exerting influential dominance over Ukraine. In that particular case, all possible means were used to meet the goal of influence and dominance. The opposing power appeared to be slow in reaction as Western capitals could not achieve a firm common position on the growing military crisis. This is the outstanding example of how international and multi-institutional structural power was not able to react properly to sharp changes in the geopolitical reality.

The geopolitical confrontation that has arisen over the annexation of Crimea could be defined as the gain of strategic momentum by the authoritarian Russian regime. This momentum has been gained due to the capability to accumulate unilaterally vast resources of the entity’s institutionalized power elements and to enable a wide range of financial, economic, mass media and, of course, military tools for setting favourable preconditions to engage aggressively on the Ukrainian frontier.

¹¹ Bugajski J., “Ethnic Relations and Regional Problems in Independent Ukraine”, in Volchyk S., Zvighyanich V. eds., *Ukraine. The Search for a National Identity*, Boston: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000, p. 171-173.

¹² Brzezinski Z., “The Premature Partnership”, *Foreign Affairs* 73 (2), 1994, <<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/49687/zbigniew-brzezinski/the-premature-partnership>>, 17 11 2014.

¹³ Motyl A., “Yanukovych Must Go”, *Foreign Affairs*, 11 12 2013, <<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/140491/alexander-j-motyl/yanukovych-must-go>>, 16 01 2014.

On the other hand, the Western allies who make up the opposing power under the NATO framework have needed to develop reactive preventive measures since the annexation of Crimea. These reactive measures have been facilitated on NATO's eastern frontier in the Baltic region over 6 or 7 months. This period has been defined mostly by initialization of collective structural power elements. Western preventive capabilities were slow but constant: from the start of the operation "Atlantic Resolve" to strengthening the Baltic airspace police mission, boosting collective military presence in the Baltic region and declaration of the development of NATO reaction forces. Although the later initiative still needs to be materialized, the overall preventive response of the Western power has been effective because of two reasons. First, the Alliance has shifted firm strategic attention to eastern neighbouring geopolitical areas, which is what the initial purpose of NATO's creation was based on. Second, a reactive stand-up to Russian aggressiveness in foreign policy has provoked wider public support for strategic choices of the Western alliance, not only inside Western entities but among the societies of previously defined clash zones of interests as well¹⁴. Thus, since February 2014 it has been obvious that a passive strategic stance would lead to a geopolitically lost *terra nullius* on the Western alliance's frontier. Ukraine, unfortunately, has become the case with challenges of proper security policy options emerging once again in European history.

3. On the Clausewitzian challenge

The time frame of the Ukrainian conflict that has been lasting for longer than a year already opens a possibility to re-evaluate the outcomes of this crisis. The situation in this country has quickly evolved into an armed conflict. The evolution of the conflict could be described by the principle "actions – reactions – counter reactions", as it is usually evaluated by military mindsets. This principle should be applied not only to military decisions but diplomatic initiatives as well. It is important to highlight that the traditional warfare notions that have been introduced in European political culture in the 19th century meet with reality again. These notions could be described by the classical "Clausewitzian challenge" definition that offers insights of war-fighting means and purposes¹⁵.

¹⁴ Simmons K, Stokes B., Poushter J., "NATO Public Opinion: Wary of Russia, Leary of Action on Ukraine", Pew Research Center, 10 06 2015, <<http://www.pewglobal.org/2015/06/10/1-nato-public-opinion-wary-of-russia-leary-of-action-on-ukraine/>>, 21 06 2015.

¹⁵ Rose G., *How Wars End*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010, p. 278-280.

The contemporary Eastern European geopolitical arena is the clash zone of power and influence where coercive and constructive war-fighting aspects should be assessed once again¹⁶. Power enabling instruments of national and social differentiations have previously been highlighted as possible coercive war-fighting means. There is a broader variety of coercive and constructive warfare means that the two opposing powers could possess in Eastern Europe. Hence, the second part of this article offers a discussion leading to evaluation of more active military initiatives that have been gaining a new role in changing the geopolitical environment.

War-fighting traditionally has an association of a coercive act or will to act. It is a powerful factor that brings degradation, collateral damage and leaves many social groups affected by atrocities. The second aspect of war is the constructive one. It is strongly related to extended capabilities to gain desired effects of foreign and security policy initiatives without employing a decisive power engagement. The mantra of collective security suggests that war-fighting capabilities bring the key of success in assurance of collective deterrence and promotion of regional stability¹⁷. Certainly, the constructive role of war-fighting is the most effective if an actual fight has not been provoked.

Carl von Clausewitz stated that war is never an isolated act and that it provides perceptions of coerciveness and constructiveness in many different forms in various spheres of social life¹⁸. Now is the exact moment to evaluate coercive and constructive aspects of war in the context of the contemporary geopolitical situation in Eastern Europe. First, coercive war-fighting has been evident in continuous news coverage from Crimea and the Donbas Region. The initial phase of the Ukrainian crisis has revealed a wide variety of coercive warfare methods: employment of socio-political fragmentation, covered and intensive support to the separatist movement or even utilization of military assets during operations of “silent engagement”¹⁹. The growing evidence of “silent engagement” by Russian forces without declaring *casus belli* is another coercive factor that brings precedents of disagreement, misbehavior and unreliability into international relations. To some extent, the current “silent

¹⁶ Rose G., *How Wars End*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010, p. 3-11.

¹⁷ Morgan P., “The State of Deterrence in International Politics Today”, *Contemporary Security Policy* 33 (1), 2012, p. 91-92.

¹⁸ Clausewitz, C., *Selections From On War*, Sweet Water Press, 2006, p. 21, 55-56.

¹⁹ The term “silent engagement” has not been defined by any active think-tanks or official declarations. This is the term that could be defined as the opposing notion to the widespread definition of “hybrid warfare”. “Silent engagement” is meant to define active provocation of local or regional tensions by providing military assistance, logistic or weaponry support and, what is obvious in Ukraine, deploying military units on the ground without any announcement of war-fighting intentions.

engagement” has become the *casus belli* itself for growing economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation towards Moscow from numerous Western states.

On the other hand, coercive factors of warfare initially have been implemented more effectively by Moscow. This was achieved due to the exploitation of unpredictability at the beginning of the Ukrainian conflict. The rapid use of coercive power has made important gains in annexation of the Crimea peninsula and maintenance of separatist control in the Donbas Region. That is why the successful coerciveness of war-fighting should be associated to initially unpredictable tactics of “silent engagement” that were employed by the Russian Federation. Contrary, after the loss of initial war-fighting momentum in Crimea, the Western powers could provoke coercive warfare acts by providing military support for selected war-fighting groups inside Ukraine. The fact is that any decisive military support for fighting Ukrainian forces has initially been mentioned only in December, 2014 by the US government²⁰.

The second Clausewitzian notion would lead to the assessment of possible constructive war-fighting aspects. A non-bias approach to the contemporary Ukrainian conflict requires the need to assess strategic war-fighting aspects that opposing power vectors are facing in Eastern Europe. Regarding the US interested NATO, it is quite easy to identify constructive war-fighting aspects in this confrontation. As it was mentioned above, collective defense capabilities could be named as a growing uniting factor for the large coalition forces. In the face of ongoing conflict in Ukraine Western countries are gaining a common understanding of what the Russian coercive power factor is. Additionally, sound opinions of leaders of the Baltic States and Poland have initiated a broader assessment of how to deal with coercive actions employed by Moscow’s decisions. That is why a current NATO military build-up in Eastern Europe should be assessed as the constructive cooperation initiative enabling more foreign and security policy options. These options are related to a wide variety of war-fighting capabilities, including such non-kinetic capabilities as cyber security, information operations or spread of civil resistance and, of course, growing kinetic capabilities in terms of joint operational development. All these trends provide a contemporary illustration of the Clausewitzian idea that “war is a mere continuation of policy by other means”²¹.

²⁰ Baker P., “Obama Signals Support for New U.S. Sanctions to Pressure Russian Economy”, *New York Times*, 16 12 2014, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/17/world/europe/obama-signing-russia-ukraine-sanctions-bill.html>>, 17 12 2014.

²¹ Clausewitz, (note 18) p. 40-42.

Contrary to NATO collective initiatives, constructive war fighting capabilities of the opposing power should be discussed as well. From Moscow's perspective, the main gain of this power and influence collision on the Ukrainian frontier could be defined as the effort to establish and maintain its own geopolitical area of influence²². This goal could be established by consolidation and maintenance of strong structural power capabilities. Moscow's requirement to assure that NATO would cease any plans of expansion into Eastern Europe has clearly highlighted the need to maintain a defined pro-Russian area of geopolitical influence²³. In that case, a constructive aspect of war-fighting becomes the demonstration of war-fighting capabilities itself. The foreign policy attitude that is based on war-fighting initiatives serves in favour of several objectives.

First, Russia is able to develop expeditionary military capabilities that are essential for contemporary Moscow. This is the tool that keeps the Belorussian military closely integrated, and military bases in the Baltic and Black sea regions highly operational in order to maintain active promotion of regional power and influence. Second, this military build-up leads to a certain restructure and check of war-fighting capabilities. It is obvious that Russian military involvement in Georgia in 2008 and today's involvement on Ukrainian soil differs in equipment, integration of forces and tactics²⁴. Third, promotion of regional influence serves well for the legitimacy of the Kremlin's regime as the tool to alienate public support and to consolidate efforts to disperse unity of the Western powers.

The initial assessment of Clausewitzian challenges in the contemporary Ukrainian conflict reveals some important trends. A constructive role of war-fighting capabilities is essential for both powers that are active in Eastern Europe. NATO countries are experiencing an essential time of common military build-up in the area that was a clash zone during the Cold War. On the other hand, Russia is promoting its own interest of dominance and structural power by developing warfare capabilities as one of its strongest tools.

Coerciveness of war-fighting has been effectively implemented by the Russian side due to fast and precise "silent engagement" that was initially unpredictable to Western players. Many reports and satellite images provided by different institutions or agencies have confirmed the actual involvement of Russian Federation armed forces. Due to this engagement without declaring an actual war,

²² Mankoff J., "Russia's Latest Land Grab", *Foreign Affairs* 93 (3), 2014, p. 64-66.

²³ "Putin's War of Words", *New York Times*, 4 12 2014, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/05/world/europe/vladimir-putin-war-of-words.html>>, 14 12 2014.

²⁴ Petraitis, (note 5).

the campaign is gaining the name of “hybrid warfare”. The question is whether this is really a new phenomenon. Conduct of expeditionary military campaigns without declaring *casus belli* is a well-known option usually used during the Cold War period. The offensive posture of Russian Military doctrine has a well-defined path towards a systemic engagement utilizing a lot of different power tools through various escalation steps²⁵. All this offers to re-evaluate war fighting notions that are officially declared and have already been practically applied by the Russian Federation.

Hence, the definition of the “Clausewitzian challenge” should be closely associated with the strategic choices of security policy development. It is obvious that since the rise of the Ukrainian conflict, the military option has become a leverage tool among foreign and security policy decision makers. In this context the “Clausewitzian challenge” re-emerges with renewed concern as to whether coercive or constructive factors of war-fighting initiatives should be promoted in order to find the best way towards crisis solution. As the brief analysis of utilization of war-fighting factors suggests, both opposing powers are adjusting military capabilities to meet the changing geopolitical realities in Eastern Europe. Indeed, any sound declaration of using direct military action is not a bold strategic choice in the immediate future. Nevertheless, the Ukrainian conflict has caused a serious crisis in Eastern Europe that needs to be dealt with in constructive and complex ways.

4. Preventive steps ahead

The contemporary situation in Eastern Europe and especially in Ukraine suggests that the ongoing military build-up in the region should be viewed as a necessity. On the NATO side, a declared creation of rapid reaction military force should serve as a solid tool of institutionalized structural power²⁶. It is worth mentioning that the current military build-up in Eastern Europe was initiated as a reaction to initial bold steps made by the opposing power vector in Crimea and eastern Ukraine. The potential success of the dominance of the Western powers in the region would depend on their capabilities to gain the preventive

²⁵ *The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*, approved by Russian Federation Presidential edict on 5 February 2010.

²⁶ More details on NATO Reaction Force could be obtained on Alliance official website: *The Readiness Action Plan*, <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_119353.htm?selectedLocale=en>, 19 06 2015.

initiative and apply constructive decisions on foreign and security policy agendas. In this case, the identification of some essential lessons from the opposing decisive player's *modus operandi* could be helpful.

The Russian perception of war-fighting could be evaluated through notions of the Military Doctrine published in 2010 by the Ministry of Defence²⁷. Planning and reaction in advance to any possible “silent engagements” in the future could lead to winning efforts in this grand chess game. Effective preventive steps in Eastern Europe would be gained only if two strategic preconditions are met: potential aggressive courses of action would be evaluated and dealt with in advance and, even more importantly, the strategic interests of opposing power would be understood and deals of mutual constructive assurance would be achieved.

First, the preventive dealing with any potential aggressive course of action needs to be assessed. This is the real challenge in the wake of the contemporary crisis that requires complex decisions based on the opponent's capabilities. The nature of war-fighting initiatives consists of three main preconditions that Carl von Clausewitz has named as “a wonderful trinity”²⁸. These three outstanding elements are: a) passion for actual engagements, b) courage of conduct and c) a political will to initiate the act of war. Each of these elements could be associated with the populace, armed forces and political elite respectively. An effective prevention of war-fighting initiatives should be based on the degradation of adversaries' “wonderful trinity”. In that way preventive steps to decrease popular support, political will and courage of conduct should be discussed by paying attention to the identified *modus operandi* of the current Ukrainian conflict.

The scenario in Ukraine has already highlighted that Russian forces have been promoting enabling preconditions and escalating tactical engagement in the conflict without any clear declaration and anticipation of this move by other entities. This silent engagement on a foreign frontier once again could be explained by the notions of the Russian Military Doctrine, to some extent. The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation has a definition of potentially offensive campaigns that should be conducted in 5 different phases²⁹. All these phases should be associated with escalation of a conflict that grows from potential social or political disagreements to an active, full-scale warfare campaign. More than that, the latest Russian Military Doctrine, most probably influenced by the Ukrainian conflict in its final drafting

²⁷ The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, (note 25).

²⁸ Clausewitz, (note 18) p. 46.

²⁹ The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, (note 25).

phase, has introduced a reference to non-nuclear deterrence³⁰. In other words, the strategic perception of war-fighting declared in the pages of this document have highlighted a potential will to act and courage to conduct. More than that, the will and courage have also been demonstrated by increasing military budget allocations in the Russian Federation. During the period of 2007–2013, military spending in the Russian armed forces has increased more than twice³¹.

On the other hand, the Western nations have only come to realize the potential of growing warfare courage in Russia quite late in the game. Initial momentum was lost during the annexation of Crimea in March, 2014. A finalized political will to act was declared only in September, 2014 during the NATO Summit in Wales. The reactive decision has declared broader regional preventive measures of military force that followed a logical escalation after initiation of economic sanctions. The reactive path of the Western powers provides a practical example of how slow in response institutionalized structural power really becomes when meeting an influential opposing power. The initial momentum of the Ukrainian conflict has already been lost once. There is no assurance that in another potential scenario like this, an initial loss of momentum could be avoided. In order to prevent this, the Western countries should implement longer-term preventive steps to target “a wonderful trinity” of Moscow’s power.

Contemporary military campaigns are based on strong influence of information operations that carry the military definition of INFOOPS. The Ukrainian crisis has shown an active role of information operations on both opposing sides. NATO has solid experience in this field that was achieved during prolonged military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. The key of dealing preventively with targeted audiences and key leaders on the field could be based on counter-insurgency experience. To make this clearer, multiple streams of experience in dealing with the civilian interests of Mesopotamian villagers or multiple groups of mountain peasants should be shaped in line with the contemporary realities and socio-political requirements of the East European, Balkan and Caucasian nations. There is a wide range of national and ethnical entities in the named regions that could be alienated by pursuing their local demands and interests. Of course, all this should be done effectively by the local governing authorities. The key here is that those authorities need to maintain legitimacy through their legal establishment and proper governance. That is the field where counter-insurgency experience should be applied to the

³⁰ The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, (note 25).

³¹ Russian military expenditure data, information from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), <http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/milex_database>, 15 12 2014.

regions of Eastern Europe, the Balkans or the Caucasus. Currently two groups in the Ukrainian nation can be identified: the social extremists supporting separatist initiatives and a more united, proactive civilian majority that has been strongly influenced by the ongoing conflict³². Dealing with the social and political issues in between these groups throughout the country would be another demanding task for the legitimate government.

Popular support could have a strong impact on the political will to act. This is evident in democratic societies. In the case of a developing democratic society, assurance of the main requirements, enforcement of stability and peace serves to grow popular support. And vice versa – intolerance or a corruptive form of governance would lead to socio-political fragmentation that decreases the legitimacy of the governing authorities. This entire logical path reveals that the political will to act should be closely associated with popular support. The prevention of possible silent engagements in the future should first of all be orientated to decreasing efforts of potential socio-political fragmentation in countries located in the geopolitical area of interest of Moscow's power.

The courage to conduct could be prevented only through long-term decisive initiatives to build military capabilities and develop operational interoperability. Despite the growing operational presence of the opposing powers in the Baltic region, the military factor is a constructive choice as well. The widening military cooperation between the NATO allies serves as a preventive measure in a few ways.

First, accumulation of joint military assets demonstrates a clear will to act. By doing this, the Alliance strengthens capabilities to react to any initiatives of potential opponents. And this would serve as a success on the NATO side in gaining strategic military momentum. Further on, the momentum should be empowered by continuous development of collective capabilities. A smart defence initiative in the framework of NATO could serve this purpose, especially as military expenditures by new NATO members are set to rise. Second, a proper information campaign should incorporate the precedent of military build-up to the local populace in order to promote ideas of stability and development in societies. That would be a way towards stable environment secured from power enabling factors that played a destructive role in Ukraine.

The second preventive precondition in Eastern Europe points to a capability to understand opposing strategic interests and to establish mutual reassurance of non-

³² Brzezinski Z., "Putin's Three Choices on Ukraine", *Washington Post*, 08 07 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/zbigniew-brzezinski-putins-three-choices-on-ukraine/2014/07/08/ba1e62ae-0620-11e4-a0dd-f2b22a257353_story.html>, 24 10 2014.

violent conduct. This precondition depends on a multitude of initiatives: political, diplomatic, economic ties and military incorporation as well. It is difficult to suggest that the military option could be ruled out in future relations between the two opposing powers in Eastern Europe. Current geopolitical trends clearly suggest that war-fighting capabilities will remain as the active option of security policy initiatives. The root of geopolitical confrontation in the current Eastern European crisis could be defined by different perceptions of opposing interests. Contrary to Moscow's interests in defending and maintaining its areas of geopolitical interest, the US is seeking to prevent any formation of a single hegemonic power in Europe as a grand precondition for stable and prosperous foreign relations in the future³³.

Any preventive success of the Clausewitzian challenge in that confrontation would depend on the potential opponent's behaviour, or course of action, that could be defined in accordance with international treaties, bilateral agreements and standard operational instructions. In other words, the defined and anticipated *modus operandi* applicable during peace-time and expected in case of conflict is the constructive war-fighting aspect that would help to establish mutual reassurance of non-violent foreign affairs. In that regard, the current foreign affairs conducted by the Western allies and the Russian Federation are shifting in-between realism and idealism, providing a developing scenario to test competing theoretical approaches of international relations.

The current Ukrainian conflict and Russian military activities in the Baltic region illustrate a shift to realistic notions being implemented on foreign and security policy agendas. There are no proper defined procedures in the reported Russian land force engagement in Ukraine or even air force or navy operations from Kaliningrad in the Baltic Region. That is why countries on the geographical frontier of the Russian Federation are facing increased tensions regarding how to avoid becoming part of the geostrategic influence zone managed from Moscow. The implementation of mutual reassurance would require common willingness to conduct multiple efforts over a prolonged period of time. This is the moment when the named Clausewitzian challenge could strongly play as the constructive power-enabling instrument in the hands of Western capitals. As Edward Lucas has stated on the Eastern European crisis, "we are losing not because we are weak but because our will part is weak"³⁴. To sum up, the active engagement by all necessary means in the framework of the Western powers governmental organizations and

³³ Friedman G., "Viewing Russia from the Inside", *Geopolitical Weekly*, STRATFOR, <<http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/viewing-russia-inside>>, 20 12 2014.

³⁴ Edward Lucas' speech at the conference "Civil Defence in Hybrid Warfare", conducted by Lithuanian Armed Force Riflemen Association, Vilnius, 21 11 2014.

institutions would form decisive steps in preventing any power enabling factors that proved to be so coercive in Ukraine and should be avoided anywhere else in the current Eastern European crisis.

Conclusions

The Eastern European crisis has been chosen as the dominant geopolitical focus point in this article. The epicentre of current geopolitical shifts in the region is located between Moscow and the separatist districts in eastern Ukraine. This trend has resulted in the active and agile conflict on Ukrainian soil. This conflict is influencing a broader regional crisis as the prevention of any additional agile foreign policy initiatives is at stake. Hence, the hundred-year anniversary of World War I has brought the reality of militarized political choices into the backyard of Europe once again.

The choice of neoclassical realism as the favourable theoretical approach to the named conflict serves the purpose of shifting attention from the previously dominant US – European Union – Russia dialogue possibilities to the re-emerged national ambitions and decisions based on structural power in the region. The contemporary reality of growing regional tensions suggests that Eastern European foreign policy has been affected by war-fighting perceptions. War-fighting initiatives in the foreign policy agenda in Eastern Europe have been provoked by offensive moves of the Russian Federation in Crimea. Offence has been chosen as the favour of warfare and practically applied to foreign policy. This outstanding example of offensive policy conducted in Europe's backyard suggests that offence has been chosen after evaluation of the domestic variables and systemic incentives. This article provides an analysis of the dominant structural power elements as well as a reasonable definition of power enabling instruments. Analysis of this article has proved that the Kremlin has calculated all the favourable preconditions for the execution of an offensive foreign policy on the Ukrainian frontier. More than that, there is still a possibility that the same calculations might be conducted once again if the opposing institutionalized structural power does not take preventive measures in Eastern Europe.

Every offensive action should be followed by the opponent's reaction. This is a bold truth of military thinking. That is one of the reasons why in terms of military engagement, competition between the operational presence of the Russian Federation and NATO forces has been growing in Eastern Europe. This tendency could be associated with theoretical notions of neoclassical realism as implication of

military force in foreign policy is dictated by rapid changes in geopolitical initiatives and reactive internal policy adjustments. The positive side of these initiatives is that the widening military cooperation between the NATO allies is accumulating the constructive aspect of warfare. And this is serving not only as a powerful crisis solving option but also as the unification factor of collective decision makers. To put it in other words, the necessity of rapid and solid collective decisiveness is currently being evoked through military initiatives.

Promotion of military initiatives in foreign policy stands as the core reason of the re-assessment of the classic Clausewitzian challenge in this article. The Clausewitzian challenge is about stating clear goals and defining efficient political as well as military means to meet these goals effectively. The goals of the current military build-up are quite clear. These build-ups are serving in favour of expansion of geopolitical influence and reassurance of effective collective defence. The core issue is that the effectiveness of the militarized option would depend on the effective exploration of traditional competing warfare aspects, coerciveness and the constructive role of power. Both of these aspects have been discussed in the previous pages. Indeed, coerciveness has played a primary role in the Ukrainian conflict. Any ongoing broader military initiatives would require a longer-term engagement that could lead towards constructive implementation in seek of national or regional political objectives.

To sum up, a geopolitical confrontation in Eastern Europe could be defined by the clash between two different structural power elements: the institutionalized, multi-polar Western power and Moscow's ambitious regime seeking expansion of regional power. Both powers are conducting reactive initiatives in various fields of structural power: from economic sanctions and trade embargos to demonstration of military capabilities. Despite the fact that Moscow has not initiated a large-scale invasion into Ukraine, the sponsorship of separatist groups was not terminated after running self-proclaimed elections in the eastern regions of Ukraine. In that way even more coerciveness has been conducted in foreign affairs on Moscow's behalf. The Western allies at that point have been responding in a more constructive way by consolidating their military power capabilities to assure the security of NATO members. The NATO Alliance is facing a renewed Clausewitzian challenge with a collective task to prevent any possible invading initiatives by the opposing power. This should be considered as an operational and strategic shift from missions conducted in Afghanistan or other far-away frontiers. Time flowing beyond the one hundred year anniversary of World War I has yet to reveal if the Clausewitzian challenge has been properly met to prevent escalation of another crisis in Eastern Europe.