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The History and Lessons of Crimea's "breakaway"

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SUMMARY

Immediately after the disintegration of the USSR, Russia began activities to restore its control over Crimea and Sevastopol. This area has had great importance to Russia as a "window to Europe" since 1774. During the Soviet era, the geopolitical significance of Crimea increased as a staging point to project power to the Mediterranean Sea and beyond. In addition, the military history of Sevastopol had great ideological value for the Russian leadership. They couldn't reconcile themselves with the fact of the loss of such an important territory. Thus, since the early 1990s, Russia commenced an intensive engagement plan to retain its influence on Ukraine's Crimea and Sevastopol. These activities and subsequent investments laid a solid foundation for the illegal occupation of the peninsula in 2014.

Crimea's "breakaway" was organized and executed by Russia. The cumulative peak of this process, sometimes described as the "Russian spring" in Crimea in 2014, was planned and prepared well in advance. The "Revolution of Dignity" in Ukraine in November 2013 - February 2014 only triggered an operation that had already been in preparation for a long time. The Russian plan of "returning" Crimea had different options, depending on the level of their progress in wearing down Ukrainian sovereignty and the level of Ukrainian resistance - spanning from letting Crimea remain under Ukrainian jurisdiction, Crimea gaining the status of an independent republic, to Crimea being an integral part of Russia. The ability of the armed forces of Ukraine to defend the country against a Russian invasion and subsequent occupation (or lack thereof) was one of the key decision factors in Russia's plans. Having worked for years to ensure that Ukraine lacked both the will and ability to resist, Russia executed the active phase of the operation on 20 February 2014.

This paper aims to analyse what strategic and tactical tools were employed to bring the Russian occupation into being in 2014. It covers Russia's impact within the military, economic, diplomatic, socio-cultural and historical, demographic and ethnic, and informational areas of life in Ukraine's Crimea and Sevastopol since 1991. The history of Crimea's "breakaway" (i.e. Russian occupation) may be divided into 3 consecutive stages starting from the building of Ukrainian state institutions in Crimea and their later development and further modernization to Western standards. Ukraine's process of European and Euro-Atlantic integration (that included Crimea) were considered unacceptable to Russia.

The naval base in Crimea was crucial to the Russian operation. It not only offered ample cover for Russia to strengthen its military presence under disguise, but also allowed for extensive influence operations to shape the battlefield in advance of the occupation. Russia decided to exploit the Ukrainian vacuum of state power that occurred on the eve of the "Revolution of Dig-

nity" in February - March 2014. The Russian military forces already in place in Crimea, the positioning of numerous Russian Battalion Tactical Groups along the Ukrainian border supported by Russian air power, and the Ukrainian uncertainty concerning the allegiance of personnel in its security and defence forces on the peninsula allowed Russia to act quickly and decisively and offer Ukraine a "fait accompli": Ukraine could

fight an overwhelming military force and risk losing all of Ukraine, or instead it could surrender Crimea and still survive as a state.

This analytical paper will provide lessons learned from Crimea's "breakaway". Apart from the Government of Ukraine and its Crimea Platform partners, the report will also be relevant for other international actors affected by Russia's influence.



OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION

After the disintegration of the USSR in 1991, Russia inherited 75% of Soviet territories but lost significant access to the sea. In the Black Sea region, the length of the coastline controlled by Russia decreased from about 50% to 7-10% of the total coastline.

Russia needed the very important Crimean Peninsula with its geostrategic location to project power to the Mediterranean Sea and beyond in order to counteract the United States and NATO. **Russia is also afraid that the Euro Atlantic aspiration of Ukraine may result in the eventual deployment of NATO forces in Crimea.** Also, Russia's cultural heritage connected with the baptism into Christianity of the Kyiv Rus (Chersoneses, 988) and the history of numerous wars that Russia was involved in over the centuries gave the City of Sevastopol irreplaceable ideological value in the eyes of the Russian leadership. They could not reconcile themselves with the fact of the loss of such important and symbolic territory.

Over the last seven centuries of Crimean history, the largest ethnic group living on the peninsula has been the Crimean Tatars [1]. According to the Russian Imperial Census of 1897, Tatars dominated in Crimean demography with 35.55% of the population. Russians were 33.11%, and Ukrainians – 11/84% [2]. This ratio changed dramatically during World War II. In Stalin's opinion, the entire community of Crimean Tatars was not loyal enough, and he ordered their total deportation in May 1944 – removing nearly a quarter of a million people from Crimea, mostly to Uzbekistan. Almost half of the deported Crimean Tatars died during the next 2-3 years due to starvation and disease [3]. The population of the peninsula decreased to 380 thousand people. Agriculture suffered especially heavy losses. In 1950, compared with the

previous decade, the production of grain fell almost five times, tobacco production fell by three times, and the production of vegetables halved [4]. The Soviets needed to restore a ruined Crimea, but faced a heavy shortage of resources, especially in people and water. Exhausted by the war, the economy of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) was the custodian for Crimea's restoration. Even though Sevastopol was included among the 10 Soviet cities prioritized for rebuilding, it took 13 years to do so. Sevastopol was fully reconstructed to its pre-war size and settings only in 1957 [5].

The transfer of Crimea from the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1954 mostly created expectations that Ukraine would

develop the economy and agriculture of the peninsula more quickly. Ukraine was connected to Crimea via land, and so could provide greater amounts of working labour, food, water, and electricity. The Northern Crimean water channel from Kherson district in Ukraine to Eastern Crimea was built between 1957 and 1971, with a total length of 403 km. This is the longest manmade water channel in Europe and it resolved the shortage of water supply for Crimea by providing 85-90% of its total water needs [6]. Farmers from the Southern districts of **Ukraine helped to increase cultivation in Northern and Central Crimea.** Some of them moved from Ukraine to the peninsula for residency in the 1950-80s. The unique subtropical climate of the Southern Crimean coast made it a popular resort area for the Soviet political and military elite.

The Cold War and Nuclear Arms race returned Crimea to its primary strategic role – a giant military base with many secret facilities and even "closed cities" like Sevastopol. The local economy was mostly connected to the supply and maintenance of military facilities and resorts in Crimea. By the end of the Soviet period in 1991, the Black Sea Fleet numbered about 100 thousand personnel and 60 thousand workers and other employees. It had 835 ships and vessels of almost all existing classes, including 28 submarines, 2 anti-submarine cruisers, 6 missile cruisers, 20 frigates and destroyers, about 70 corvettes, about 70 minesweepers, 50 landing ships, and more than 400 aircraft for naval aviation. The Black Sea Fleet was a force generator for the 5th Mediterranean squadron which kept 50-70 warships in constant full combat readiness. The Black Sea Fleet had an extensive network of bases stretching from Izmail on the Danube to Batumi in

Georgia, with its core facilities in Crimea. The value of all property of the Black Sea Fleet, including warships, exceeded \$80 billion US dollars (in 1992 prices) [7]. Soviet military personnel from different parts of the USSR came to Crimea to serve. The normal practice was to send conscripts far away from home for their compulsory military service. Most conscript sailors in Crimea came from the Caucasus and Asian republics of the USSR and Russia. The officers, considering the geography of the Soviet Navy Academies, came mostly from Russia. Many of them, after active duty, selected Crimea as their retirement place. This fact also contributed to forming the process of Crimea's Pro-Soviet/Russian inclination. In 1989, on the eve of the end of the USSR, most of the Crimean population was Russian – 67%; Ukrainians made up 26% and Crimean Tatars – 1.6% [8].

The disintegration of the Soviet Union was accepted in Crimea without protests and disorder. After declaring independence on August 24, 1991, all local power in Crimea was integrated into the legislative, executive and judicial branches of the Ukrainian state architecture. Polls conducted at the time showed that local populations were more loyal to Ukraine and mostly concerned with their common economic problems caused by the economic crisis of the post-USSR environment. All units of the Land and Air Forces of the Soviet military based in Ukraine in 1991 came under the control of Ukraine. Only the former Soviet Black Sea Fleet appeared to be an exception. Due to the Russian influence on the Black Sea Fleet leadership, they kept their indefinite status under the Soviet Navy flag until 1997. After some political and diplomatic friction between Moscow and Kyiv, in June 1992 the Presidents of Ukraine and Russia decided that the for-



mer Soviet Black Sea Fleet was the subject of dual subordination until its division between the two countries. Russia also received some promises that their Black Sea Fleet would use Crimea and Sevastopol facilities under the status of a long-term lease. **Ukraine's dependence on Russian energy supplies was behind Kyiv's decision to let Russia keep their military presence in Sevastopol and Crimea.** The Russian military bases in Crimea and Sevastopol were decisive factors in the preparation of the "Russian spring" of 2014.

To understand all the processes of the Crimean "breakaway" it is worth considering the following areas of the Russian impact on Ukraine's Crimea and Sevastopol: political, military, ethnic, informational and socio-economic. The 23 years between

Ukraine gaining its independence and the Russian occupation of Crimea can be divided into three stages.

During the first stage, between 1991-1997, Ukraine established and secured its state attributes and instruments of sovereignty in Crimea. Despite formal and informal resistance from Russia, Ukraine could defend the sovereignty of the peninsula and neutralized some **Russian political initiatives that were focused on the revision of the 1954 transfer of Crimea to Ukraine.** Some instruments of national power were built by Ukraine to protect its sovereignty. The Ukrainian Navy was formed in April 1992 with its headquarters in Sevastopol and units located around Crimea. In the same year, the units of the 3rd division of the National Guard of Ukraine were deployed

in Simferopol, Sevastopol, and Kerch. **This period is also remembered for the creation of numerous pro-Russian organizations actively promoting the return of Crimea under Russian jurisdiction.** In October 1993, the "Russian community of Crimea" was created, which later became one of the largest organizations of Russian "compatriots" [9]. However, during this time the situation in Crimea remained peaceful. The Ukrainian Constitution adopted on June, 28th 1996 formally recognized that "the Autonomous Republic of Crimea shall be an integral constituent part of Ukraine" (article 134). During this period the repatriation of Crimean Tatars back to their homeland in Crimea significantly intensified. They massively returned to Crimea from the former Soviet Asian republics. From approximately 38,000 in 1989 their population in Crimea became 113,000 in 1991 and reached 235,000 in 2001 (10.2% of the Crimean population). Meanwhile, the concerns of normal Crimean people at that time were around their personal security and economics: job loss, economic crisis, rising crime levels, massive inflation in both Ukraine – 10155% (1993) and Russia – 2505% (1992) [10] [11].

Organized crime in Crimea reached its maximum peak at the end of the 1990s. Later these criminals legalized their capital and went into official business and also into Ukrainian politics under the banners of pro-Russian parties. Many of them (like Aksenov, Konstantinov, etc) committed treason during the "Crimean spring" and became puppet leaders of occupied Crimea.

The dependency and growing debt from oil and gas from its north-eastern neighbour made Ukrainian politics very vulnerable. This factor helped Russia to achieve

desirable effects in disputes with Ukraine. Three Interstate Agreements between Ukraine and the Russian Federation regarding Crimea and the Black Sea Fleet were signed by both presidents on May 28th 1997. This was the starting point of the second stage (1997-2004) of the Crimean "breakaway". These Agreements set up parameters for the division of the former Soviet Black Sea Fleet, the status and conditions of Russian Black Sea Fleet bases on the territory of Ukraine in Crimea, and the order of financial settlements between the two countries. Ukraine received 18.3 % of the warships of the former Soviet Black Sea Fleet. 2/3 of these were decommissioned in the following five years mostly due to their unsatisfactory technical condition and their age. It is also interesting that the Russians moved 95 vessels from Crimea to areas outside of the Black Sea from September 1991 to August 1992, just after Ukraine declared independence. Another 263 vessels were decommissioned and scrapped by them later, but again without any agreement with Ukraine between 1992-1997 [12].

During the second period, Ukraine tried to develop and strengthen its institutions in Crimea. The economy stopped collapsing and began a slight recovery. By 2014, the Northern Crimean canal covered from 80% to 87% of the freshwater needs of the peninsula. Crimea was also dependent on the supply of gas, electrical power, food products, and other vital resources coming from continental Ukraine. About 64% of the Crimean budget outlays were covered by the state budget of Ukraine [13].

In the spirit of the NATO Partnership for Peace Program, the first international exercises were conducted by Ukrainian Navy in Crimea during this period: "Sea Breeze"

(with the US Navy, since 1997) and "Cosack step" (with the Royal Navy, starting in 2000). The Ukrainian Navy introduced its own professional holiday on August 1st, separately from Russia. They conducted their own parade with an impressive live show Sevastopol in 1997, with the presence of thousands of local people and tourists. However, later it was decided to combine the parades of both fleets in Sevastopol during Russian Navy day – the last Sunday of July. This idea came in the form of an order from Kyiv, probably after some talks with Moscow [14].

The overall mood of the population in Crimea, particularly in Sevastopol, was pro-Russian. **Russia engaged all political and diplomatic tools to slow down and hinder Kyiv's cooperation with NATO, particularly in Crimea and Sevastopol.** When in June 1999, at NATO headquarters in Brussels, a Ukrainian option for conducting the NATO exercises "Cooperative Partner" in Crimea was announced, Russia immediately sent diplomatic notes to Kyiv with protests and stated that "they consider it unacceptable to hold NATO exercises near the main base of Russian Black Sea Fleet". These exercises took place, but not in Crimea (they took place in Odesa instead).

Russia started an extended number of social programs aimed at keeping the sympathies of elders and winning over the minds of the young generation in Crimea. They invested budget money to renovate and build monuments dedicated to Russian history in Sevastopol, particularly in connection with the 150th anniversary of the Crimean war of 1853-1856 and the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Sevastopol during World War II (May 9th, 1944). In Soviet times, in the 1970s, there was

only one school with Ukrainian language teaching on the peninsula. The opening of even a few Ukrainian schools in Crimea after Ukraine got its independence was frequently accompanied by complaints about "enforced Ukrainization" [15]. Crimea and Sevastopol saw numerous visits of Russian officials and businessmen. Formally, they were mostly concerned with activities connected with the Russian Black Sea Fleet, but they had a much broader effect in building a feeling of the economic and social dominance of Russia in comparison with Ukraine in the minds of the Crimean people.

The third stage started with 2004's Orange Revolution. Russia miscalculated the ability of Ukrainians to effectively protest, which resulted in the defeat of the pro-Russian presidential candidate Yanukovich in the Presidential elections of 2005. Russian leaders carefully studied lessons learned and found novel ways to influence Ukraine through politics and corruption, Ukrainian oligarchs, and disinformation. **Russia focused its efforts on undermining the Ukrainian economy, slowing down and degrading Ukrainian efforts to integrate into the European and Euro Atlantic community.**

In 2006 pro-Russian protests with the help of the Russian media and Ukrainian members of parliament from the pro-Russian "Party of Regions" disrupted the multinational exercises "Sea Breeze" that was scheduled in Crimea. The political reaction of Ukrainian officials was very ambiguous and weak. The Ukrainian Armed Forces lost a significant opportunity to conduct exercises on their ranges in Crimea. More and more pro-Russian sentiments were gaining ground in the peninsula.

The ageing Russian Black Sea Fleet primarily played the role of a "Trojan horse" for active Russian psychological influence in the region, particularly after the Russian MOD significantly increased the salaries of their military. Since 2012, the **Russian military in Crimea was paid 5-7 times more than Ukrainians at the same pay-grade level.** In 2013, in per capita terms, **the Crimean Growth Regional Product (GRP) was 3.9 times lower than in Russia,** the average salary was 2.6 times less, and investments – 3.2 times less.

Thus, many of the 677 thousand Crimean pensioners (30% of the peninsula's population) were eager to receive Russian pensions using different mechanisms that existed between Russia and Ukraine, retired military servicemembers in particular [17]. Many of them, especially retired Russian and Soviet military servicemembers, welcomed and supported the "Russian spring" in 2014 as they were promised a pension increase. The aura of prosperity and prestige of being Russian assisted the widening of further Russian cultural and informational expansion in Crimea.

Many combined Ukrainian and Russian cultural activities were linked to the 225th anniversary of the founding of Sevastopol and the Russian Empire's Black Sea Fleet. In June 2008 a monument to Catherine II was opened in Sevastopol. The annual holidays of Victory Day (on May 9th) and Navy Day (at the end of July) with emotional parades became more and more sympathetic to the common Soviet past and showed the role of Russia as the legal protector of the USSR's legacy. During some of these events very high officials from both Ukraine and Russia (including both presidents in 2013) were present in Sevastopol. These events were signals

demonstrating Russia's confidence in its influence in Crimea. **They persistently invested money and strengthened Russian education in Crimea:** opened Russian schools, and branches of their leading universities. **They prepared in advance the cadres needed to serve Russia after occupation.** Russians continued to invest in many socially important and culturally significant spheres of the Crimean and Sevastopol economy, and tried to legalize the operations of Russian business, including state owned businesses, in the peninsula and their ability to own property by using some "grey zones" in Ukrainian legislation. These activities helped them to realize the plan for the occupation of Crimea in March of 2014.

It is important to understand the long-lasting, very adaptive and flexible mechanisms of the annexation of sovereign territory by Russia. Since a Hybrid War starts years before the start of open aggression, strategic awareness needs to be far more broad and forward-thinking, and deterrence needs to be far more proactive than against a conventional threat. Events in **Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine, and other former Soviet Republics** now seeking closer ties with the West, demonstrate Russia's ability to adopt different methods to impose its influence abroad. It extensively uses the methods of hybrid warfare to advance its political goals in the Southern-European region [18].

Also, the **Baltic countries of Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia** are thought to be vulnerable to this threat, which is best understood as the use of covert or deniable activities to influence the domestic politics of target countries. Estonia and Latvia are NATO members that border Russia and have sizable Russian minorities. Russia could



hypothetically gain influence in the government in these Baltic countries, support a separatist region, or capture territory, thereby demonstrating the failure of the alliance's commitment to its easternmost allies, undermining the larger agenda of Euro-Atlantic enlargement, and damaging U.S. credibility more widely [19].

Moscow sees its influence in the geographical location of the **Western Balkans** at the crossroads of a united Europe and a hydrocarbon route running from south to east as a major asset. Unlike with the post-Soviet zone, Russia is, however, incapable of entering this territory. Instead, it tries its utmost to ensure the region's neutrality and to draw it away from the EU and NATO. This is why Moscow attaches profound importance to the situation in

Serbia, Bosnia, and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Macedonia, and is striving to exert considerable hybrid influence on the events in Serbia, the Serb-dominated part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Montenegro. Owing to historical and cultural preconditions, these countries are said to be most exposed to Russian pressure [20].

So, these **many similarities in hybrid Russian expansion over the European continent make it important to study their tactics and strategies in Crimea** in order to prevent the same things from happening again in the future. Also, this study should be relevant for Ukraine and its international partners on the path of de-occupation and the reintegration of Crimea back into Ukraine.

The Crimea "breakaway": ANALYSIS AND EARLY WARNING SIGNALS

This section will investigate different areas of the Russian hybrid impact within the military, economic, diplomatic, socio-cultural, historical, demographic and ethical, and informational areas of life in Ukraine's Crimea and Sevastopol more deeply. All these hybrid activities that took place in Crimea between 1991-2014 were well-coordinated processes in its general lines of efforts and aimed at Russia's desired outcomes.

Constant political and diplomatic pressure from Russia on the Crimean issue

When considering the aspects of Russia's political and diplomatic pressure on Ukraine concerning Crimea, it is worth looking at the dynamics of the tectonic shifts in the Soviet space in the late 1980s. Gorbachev's "perestroika" somewhat opened up the possibility of democratic change in the USSR and the countries of the socialist camp. In 1988, the Baltic republics of the USSR, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, announced their intentions to achieve independence from the USSR. Such sentiments began in other Soviet Union republics as well. Former countries of the socialist camp such as Poland, Hungary and Germany quickly changed their internal political structure and foreign policy views. Weakened by the arms race of the Cold War, the USSR, which had built

a gigantic arsenal of nuclear weapons that could destroy the entire globe many times over, was sliding into an economic abyss amid falling world oil prices. The just-ended war in Afghanistan, ongoing political strife, and the intransigence of the leaders of the USSR and of Russia added fuel to the fire of the problem. However, during this period, evidently in the minds of Moscow's strategic analysts, fears were born that **in the case of a Ukrainian declaration of independence, the ideologically and historically attractive Crimea would also fall out of Russia's grasp. They began work on how to prevent this or reverse this over time.**

Events in the sphere of political and diplomatic contacts between Ukraine and Russia in 1991-2014 (with tough economic

and then military pressure from Russia) shows **systematic efforts to return Crimea and Sevastopol to Russia.** Their strategic goal was clear, but the means were changed depending on the situation. Politico-diplomatic pressure on Ukraine became the primary instrument to realize Russian ambitions starting from the 1990s which were particularly challenging periods of life for the Russian economy and Russia's security.

The first idea of "returning" Crimea to Russia was formulated in November 1989 when the Soviet Supreme Council declared in a resolution that "the restoration of the rights of the Crimean Tatar people cannot be realized without the restoration of the autonomy of the Crimea through the formation of the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) as part of the Ukrainian SSR". This fact should already have been a warning to the proponents of an independent Ukraine, and it was further fuelled by some phobias of the Russian inhabitants of the peninsula's population who were scared of Ukrainian nationalism.

In the summer of 1990, first the Russian and a month later the Ukrainian Parliaments (in these times the Supreme Councils of the respective Soviet republics) adopted the Declarations of State Sovereignty of each republic. It was an important step toward independence. Understanding that the situation was not in their favour, the pro-Russian (and pro-communist) majority in the Crimean Oblast Council decided to conduct a poll to discuss an initiative to "restore" the autonomy of Crimea. The referendum was conducted in January 1991 and immediately sparked a conflict between its organizers and the national movement of Crimean Tatars. Their repatriation was just

at the mid-phase. Leaders of the Crimean Tatars even called on their people to boycott the poll. It became clear that the initiative did not support the Crimean Tatars nor the Ukrainians living on the peninsula. The question of the poll was a clear indication of the goal to restore autonomy: the poll concerned the ability to sign the Union Treaty on equal terms with Ukraine and be independent of Kyiv thereafter. In response to the poll results, months later Kyiv recognized the upgrade of the Crimean Oblast to the Crimean ASSR with the reservation that their restored autonomy still remains a part of Ukraine. This decision was a concession and allowed the legalization of pro-Russian autonomy in Ukraine, but possibly prevented an armed conflict similar to what happened in Moldova, Georgia, and Azerbaijan.

After the failed coup in Moscow on August 24, 1991, the Act of Declaration of Independence of Ukraine was signed. This decision was approved by 90.3% of votes at the All-Ukrainian Referendum on December 1, 1991. In Crimea, the idea of an independent Ukraine was supported by 54.2% of voters. Ukraine elected its first president on the same day. Crimea supported the candidate Leonid Kravchuk, who won the election. On December 8, 1991, leaders of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus declared the dissolution of the Soviet Union [20].

Pro-Russian forces in Crimea and their mentors in Moscow followed these new circumstances. In early April 1992, the Vice-President of the Russian Federation Alexander Rutskoy visited Sevastopol [21]. During a meeting with Black Sea Fleet officers in the Sevastopol officers house, he stated that "Russia will never give up efforts to return Sevastopol and Crimea to Russia".



The announcement of the Republic of Crimea as an autonomous entity inside Ukraine, as a confederation, marked the next attempt to leave Ukraine. The Parliament of Ukraine reacted to this and abolished this decision of the Crimean authorities. The political struggle between Kyiv and Simferopol spread to the level of Crimean city councils. Some of them declared their intent to join the Taurica region of Ukraine (an old Oblast in Southern Ukraine) if Crimea left Ukraine. In September 1992, amendments suggested by Kyiv were incorporated into the Crimean Constitution. This formalized the distribution of powers between Crimea and Ukraine. This fight was won by Kyiv.

The next flare-up between Simferopol and Kyiv was connected with the election of the pro-Russian politician Yuriy Meshkov as President of Crimea in 1994. He revived the separatist agenda and promised to promote the secession of Crimea from Ukraine. Despite influential supporters in Russia, Meshkov and his plans failed. An-

other factor that limited Russia's desire of taking Crimea was the signature of Russian president Yeltsin to the Budapest memorandum together with the United States of America and the United Kingdom, obliging these powers to support the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine in its new non-nuclear status. In May 1995, after the Crimean President position was dissolved, Meshkov left Crimea for Moscow. The New Constitution of Ukraine of June 1996 finished attempts to break Crimea out of Ukraine through the manipulation of the immature legislation. After a few months the Crimean Constitution was in line with the Ukrainian one: the Autonomous Republic of Crimea was a part of Ukraine [22].

Russia lost the first round of its political struggle for Crimea because they suffered an economic crisis and the Chechen War (resulting in a low international image and limited resources). But Russia's leadership **never stopped working and generating new political tactics to reach the strategic goal of the occupation of Crimea.**

After the division of the Black Sea Fleet and the signing of a friendship treaty between Ukraine and Russia in 1997, there was a marked thaw in relations. Both countries tried to revitalize their economies. Russia did not officially interfere with Ukraine's self-determination regarding its Euro-Atlantic future. The end of the Yeltsin era even saw Russia's participation in exercises with NATO countries on the territory of Ukraine (but not in Crimea). As an example, Russian Black Sea Fleet units participated in the Ukrainian-American naval exercises Sea Breeze in 1998, 1999 and 2001. However, this changed with Putin's rise to power. **Russia increasingly began to declare to the public that it was claiming control over the former Soviet republics. Crimea within Ukraine was the priority territory of Russian interest.** The possibility of a "soft" or (as it later became known) **"hybrid" return of Crimea was tested in the fall of 2003 during the Tuzla confrontation.** Ukraine found arguments to stop Russia, but President Kuchma had to agree to certain concessions, which were soon realized. The statement about joining NATO as a strategic goal of Ukraine was excluded from Ukraine's Military Doctrine in July 2004. Instead, it was supposed to deepen cooperation with the Alliance. Plus, the 32nd Army

Corps of the Land Forces of Ukraine was disbanded, and the unit was significantly reduced to a brigade-size unit. (This unit's combat potential had deterred Russia seizure of the Tuzla)

With the growth of the Russian economy **since the mid-2000s, there has been a strengthening of their armed forces and more active diplomacy to prevent more former Soviet republics from joining NATO, primarily Ukraine and Georgia.** At this time, many civic organizations appeared in Crimea that actively supported this policy of Russia. Ukraine's dependence on Russian gas and oil also became an instrument of high politics. At the same time, Crimea received special interest from Russian politics. **The ageing Black Sea Fleet in Crimea** (the 1997 treaty prohibited the replacement of ships and vessels) **had not so much a military but a political significance for Russia and had a strong psychological effect on the already pro-Russian population of the peninsula.** Internal problems and the relative weakness of Ukraine, coupled with the short-sightedness of the West, allowed Putin, having accumulated sufficient military, political, and economic capacities, to seize Crimea by "hybrid" methods in 2014.

The Russian Naval base as a "Trojan horse" of Crimea's "breakaway".

The location of the Black Sea Fleet in Crimea multiplied its significance as a guardian of the "window to Europe" at Russia's southern borders since the times of Catherine II. Most importantly, Sevastopol was the only non-freezing Russian port with a favourable climate. Infrastructure developed during Soviet times synergized fleet strike capabilities with the aviation and coastal defence combat potential located on the peninsula. After the collapse of the USSR, Russian control over the Black Sea seriously weakened. **Russia lost Crimea and Sevastopol.** If the Black Sea Fleet had been forced to relocate to Mainland Russia, its ambitions as both a regional and global power would have been seriously undermined.

By 1997, the former Soviet Black Sea Fleet had undergone a significant fall from 800 surface ships and 28 submarines to no more than a tenth of this quantity. The economic crisis caused a significant reduction of the "days underway" of its warships: from 100+ days at sea per year in the late 1980s (including training and deployments) to only a few days per year by the middle and late 1990s. Some of the warships were not at sea a single day during the year. Overall, the combat potential of the former Soviet Black Sea

Fleet dramatically decreased. The situation in the Ukrainian Navy was similar, with the same 3-12 days at sea, mostly gained during international exercises (when fuel was provided through assistance from the United States).

The status of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Crimea didn't allow them to replace their warships or to bring in new ones. This factor and the financial constraints of the Russian military budget in the 1990s for maintenance also seriously undermined the combat readiness of the fleet. The flagship of the Black Sea Fleet, the cruiser "Moskva" (formerly the "Slava"), spent 8 long years in the Mykolaiv shipyard. To settle accounts with the Ukrainian shipyard in 1999, the command of the Russian Black Sea Fleet decided to pay through barter – through separate mechanisms and some of the cruiser's weapons. In particular, the cruiser's 30 mm weapons systems AK-630 were dismantled and left at the shipyard.

Thus, the main tasks of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Crimea, especially in the 1990-2000s, were less military than political and informational ones, to prepare the local environment for the annexation of the peninsula. The following three main Rus-

sian Black Sea Fleet tasks can be identified which Russia executed sequentially in Crimea. They had some overlap with one another over a two decade interval.

The first task was **to keep the presence of Russia on the peninsula** with a minimum combat-ready military force, but with strong political and diplomatic cover. This could be first seen in the 1990s.

During the 2000s, under conditions of improved economic support from Russia, The Black Sea Fleet built up its combat potential with the remnants of the ageing warships and **focused its activity on achieving maximum pacification among military and politicians of Ukraine, to degrade the psychological power of the Ukrainian military to resist potential aggression.** This time is well remembered for the different exercises of both Russia and the Ukrainian military in Crimea, combined military parades and historical holidays outlined past ethnic and cultural commonality. The Russian Black Sea Fleet always was a "centre of gravity" of this activity.

In the 2010s, after the reformation of its Armed Forces and with its military budget increasing 10x since 1996, the primary task of the Russian Black Sea Fleet shifted to the **identification and control of possible points of resistance by the Ukrainian military in Crimea in case of the activation of the annexation operation.** Victor Yanukovich and his office politically supported this mission after he was elected President of Ukraine in 2010. Russia was removed as a potential military adversary in the Ukrainian Armed Forces Strategic engagement plan. Some Ukrainian military reforms were annulled. The Joint Operation Command and Logistic Command

of the Armed Forces of Ukraine were dismantled by Defence Minister Yezhel, a move openly supported by Moscow [23]. The goal of integration with NATO was again replaced by "strengthening cooperation with Alliance". The "Kharkiv" agreement allowed Russia to keep the Black Sea Fleet in Crimea until 2042 [24].

As a result, the Russian Black Sea Fleet became a "Trojan horse" during the events of February-March 2014. It was a vehicle that supported and secured other Russian instruments of hybrid aggression and a disabler of significant Ukrainian military forces in Crimea. 75% of the former Ukrainian military in Crimea defected to Russia, poisoned with promises of a better life and common "Slavic" values [25]. It looked very hypocritical that the Russian Black Sea Fleet showed public concern about the cancellation of meeting in Sevastopol of the BACKSEAFOR group (whose task was to ensure the security and sovereignty of the countries of the Black Sea basin) in early March 2014, when Russia had already seized the buildings of Ukrainian state authorities in the peninsula and blocked in Ukrainian military units.

The primary lessons from "Russian spring" in Crimea is that **Russian military presence abroad should always be considered an instrument for gaining much broader influence, including the potential occupation of foreign territory.**

Socio-cultural, demographic, and historical manipulations of Russia in Crimea

The USSR had an extensive background in developing different ways and means of propaganda. **Russia succeeded the USSR's heritage of covert activities with its own activities, and also exploited ethnic factors and religion-related issues.** The end state of these activities was aimed at generating synthetic problems in order to reach desired political, economic, or military objectives.

The strong pro-Russian sympathies of the Crimean population was the primary pre-conditions allowing Russians to accomplish their "Russian spring" in 2014. Since the 1990s, Ukraine gradually lost the support of a significant portion of Crimea's population due to passive and reactive methods of socio-economic and informational policy on the peninsula.

Pro-Russian proxies in Crimea were much more active and motivated in promoting the "Russian World" ideology with the Russian language as the main attribute of culture [26]. This Russian ideology smoothly unified the Ukrainian and Russian populations as a single Slavic nation united by the Russian language and a common history. As the result of this ideology, Ukrainians and the many other ethnic minorities of Crimea by 2014 were under the pressure of cultural assimilation under the umbrella of the "Russian World".

Significant demographic changes in Crimea during the 70 years before the occupation were related to external factors created by the former USSR leadership's decisions. In 1944 Stalin had deported all Crimean Tatars and some other minorities from the peninsula to Asia. After the decision on the inclusion of Crimea into Ukraine in 1954, the peninsula was populated significantly from the southern Ukrainian regions to restore the peninsula after World War II and to build the local economy.

The Russian Federation recognized the independence of Ukraine and of Crimea as an integral part of Ukraine on the 5th of December, 1991. Crimean Tatars and other minorities started to return to the peninsula. From 1991 to 2013 more than 260 thousand people returned to Crimea. Since then, the ethnic makeup of Crimea's two million strong population was approximately 60-63% Russian, 22-25% Ukrainian and 12-14% Crimean Tatar [27]. Since Ukraine's independence, Russians have tried to influence the mindset of these three groups, engaging in deception, propaganda, coercion, and corruption. As an example, Russian TV channels were openly broadcasting fake news with anti-Ukrainian content in Crimea well before the "Russian spring" and were particularly active during occupation [28].

Taking into account the historic past of the peninsula's population, the national minorities in Crimea have been subject to systematic research into abuses of their rights by different international and domestic organizations before the occupation. The statistics show a significant number of violations in Crimea regarding the Crimean Tatar minority: in the areas of religion, the right to education in the native language, and other linguistic and cultural rights. Hostility and discrimination in both the public and private employment sectors significantly affected Crimean Tatars' ability to settle in Crimea after their return from exile [29]. As a result, all these factors made impossible any constructive dialogue between the apathetic Russian majority and the Crimean Tatar minority. All these relations hampered the full integration of Crimean Tatars into the political, social, and economic life of Ukrainian Crimea.

The Crimean authorities did not demonstrate much commitment to the protection of the human rights of Crimean Tatars and other minorities living on the Ukrainian peninsula. This can be attributed to Russian propaganda, and criminal and shadow-business activities, which were more active and profitable.

Attention from Kyiv toward the problems of Crimeans was limited. The national strategy for forming Ukrainian and Crimean identities based on multinational ethnicities and a common vision and values did not exist before the occupation. Additionally, the effect of international involvement was sabotaged by the integration of a Russian fifth column at all levels of government. A significant worsening of the situation concerning perspectives of inclusive national dialogue happened

during the rule of President Yanukovich's pro-Russian government.

The threat to the Russian language and ethnicity in Crimea from Ukrainian nationalists was a propaganda myth generated and actively disseminated by the Russian proxies before occupation. In reality, the Crimean population demonstrated tolerance to multinational visitors, as it hosted millions of tourists from many countries annually.

With Russian ethnicity dominance, the Crimean government and parliament had a less-than-proportional representation of other minorities. For example, Crimean Tatars held only 3% of senior positions in local government while constituting 14% of the local population. Crimean Tatars also had only 7 seats out of the 100-member Crimean parliament. Therefore, the influence of ethnic minorities on public policy in Crimea was severely limited.

Education from the Russia Federation, including linguistic education, was a part of the hybrid toolbox, aimed at the support of long-term Russian geopolitical, political, and economic interests - as can be inferred from the Concept of the Education of Foreign Students in Russian Educational Establishments, approved by Putin in 2002 [26]. This concept also had a very remarkable goal of educating foreign intellectual elites in order to promote Russian national interests.

The Russian efforts of expansion into education in Crimea were consistently conducted before the occupation through branches of Russian educational establishments that have been historically located and sponsored on the peninsula. They advertised easier conditions

for entering studies in comparison with Ukrainian institutions. This helped Russia to attract, select, and indoctrinate thousands of Russian speaking Ukrainian youth, as they could get a valuable diploma recognized by both Ukraine and Russia. This is another demonstration of Russian language expansion through education and the reason why ethnic minorities facing high competition could not get a proper education in their native languages. Speaking the Ukrainian language, therefore, was not a priority skill for the Russian-speaking majority in Crimea.

The Russian propaganda machine was able to bring the language issue into Ukraine's discourse in order to exploit it for the promotion of the concept of the 'Russian World', anti-NATO, and anti-European rhetoric. Pictures of violence against peaceful protesters and killings on the Maidan in Kyiv were rapidly exploited by Russian mass media in order to blame Ukrainian nationalists and promote pro-Russian ideas. The effect generated by propaganda was enough to get the required support from the part of the Russian speaking population on the peninsula during the active phase of the Russian military invasion in 2014. The unprecedented use of communication channels and tailored rhetoric were focused specifically on the hearts and minds of the Crimean population. In order to control the human domain, Russia had to achieve an effect on the population in the main cities and also in the small towns with Ukrainian military bases.

We can only guess how successfully Ukrainians and the Russian speaking population were targeted by propaganda. The referendum results were fabricated but additional evidence to understand the

real extent of Russian propaganda success is currently not available. However, we can assume that the communication of propaganda, coercive threats to families of military personnel, and the blockades conducted by the Russian Special Forces worked perfectly well for the invaders. Theatrical reinforcement was also provided through representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church and local proxies, such as groups of Cossacks and women. We can also assume that the Crimean Tatars, as the indigenous people of Crimea who were long ago vaccinated against the virus of Russian propaganda, were therefore able to take a more visible and proactive pro-Ukrainian position than other minorities on the peninsula, including the Ukrainian minority [30].

From the ethnic perspective, the Ukrainian population of Crimea is facing a long-term threat of full ethnic extinction through mixed marriages and the indoctrination process of the young population into the Russian/Soviet values system. This indoctrination includes the promotion of distorted versions of history and the dominance of the Russian language and Russian cultural supremacy. Crimean Tatars with different religion and cultural values are better protected from Russian indoctrination but are more vulnerable to physical and legal oppression instigated by the Russian government and supported by the national-patriotic organizations growing in Crimea. The changing landscape of ethnic groups of Crimea due to forced migration from Russian regions will accelerate this process.

The Shadow Economy of Crimea in the Hands of Russian Godfathers

The hybrid occupation of Crimea in 2014 showed the importance of protecting all domains, not just the military one, in order to defend the territorial integrity of Ukraine. During the last two decades before the annexation, **Russia directly, or through its proxies in Crimea, conducted a consistent policy of shadow-control over multiple spheres, including economic and informational domains, that were critical to the peninsula's democratic, effective, and efficient development within Ukraine.** The Ukrainian government did not focus enough efforts and resources on protecting its national interests on the peninsula from Russia's destructive interference in local business and processes as a part of its hybrid aggression. As a result, **Russia and Russian proxies provided the required support for the initial needs of the Russian military during the occupation of the peninsula in 2014** by using well-established connections and privately-owned capitals and assets in Crimea [31].

The official representatives of Ukraine provided poor management and did not realize the significant potential of the economic development of Crimea (including in Sevastopol) since 1991. **Russian proxies, corrupt government officials, and criminal clans were the main driving forces in such**

situations. They synergized efforts and de-facto transformed the peninsula into a "grey economy zone" with mafia-style full control of the informational domain to avoid intrusions from democratic institutions. It became a critical success factor for the preparation and execution of the Russian occupation.

Since 1991 the economy of Crimea has evolved in response to changing external and internal factors. They were quite dynamic and chaotic during the first decade of Ukraine's independence and nation-building process. New conditions caused by broken business connections, disintegrating supply chains, the shadow privatization of government property, and the multi-layered redistribution of power created a complex and complicated context for the Crimean business environment. Many economic activities were carried out both within the peninsula, across other regions of Ukraine, and internationally. **The criminal networks of Crimea were also developing in parallel with the state businesses and exploiting emerging opportunities of connections with official representatives.**

The total annual input of Crimea to the national GDP was estimated as on average

3% through the last decades. The importance of Crimea to the Ukrainian economy also can be shown by the \$5.8 billion Gross Regional Product (GRP) produced in 2013 with a forecast of annual 2.6 % growth, which reflects official statistics of all goods and services produced on the peninsula during the year before the occupation. This measurement ranked Crimea at number 10 among all the regions of Ukraine [32].

Crimea's main GDP generators before the occupation were industry (18%), services (18%), trade (14%), transportation and communication (10%), agriculture (10%), and hotels and restaurants (4%). As of 2013, Crimea had economic connections with around 100 countries worldwide. The annual export of goods from the peninsula (minerals, chemistry products and engineering products etc.) was around \$800 million, and the import of goods (machinery, electrical engineering etc.) reached around \$1 billion. During the years before the occupation, Crimea received direct foreign investments (DFI) of \$1.5 billion, most of which came from offshore sources which were usually of Ukrainian or Russian origin. The unemployment rate of Crimea in 2013 was the second lowest in the country (6.8 %) and the human development index ranked number six among all regions of Ukraine [33].

Neither the taxes generated on the peninsula nor other sources of local income were ever enough to cover all planned expenses. In response, the central government had to provide around 30% of the annual budget of Crimea to cover social payments, including pensions for around 700 thousand pensioners. As an example, the last approved budget of Crimea before the occupation was \$1.044 billion, includ-

ing a \$372 million budget subsidy from Kyiv. The potential of natural gas exports of Crimea from Black Sea fields can be estimated as a total of \$200-300 billion during the next decades. There are also many other business opportunities related to the natural resources available for the extractive and chemical industries of Crimea [34]. The agriculture in Crimea was based on the supply of water from Ukraine (85% of all needs) as the only way to be feasible and sustainable. In 2013 Ukraine supplied 82 % of Crimea's electricity, with the rest generated on the peninsula. Industry and agriculture consumed 17% of electrical power and the population - 82% - a total of 6.8 terawatt hours.

The task of viewing a complete picture of the structure of the Crimean economy before the occupation was impossible to imagine without highlighting some basics of the shadow economy on the peninsula, as it was instrumental for the Russian occupation through providing infrastructural, financial, human and other resources. Unfortunately, the available open-source statistics can provide only the magnitude of the illegal activities and tax evasions on the peninsula before the occupation, but even they can help draw important conclusions.

In order to map the main stakeholders of shadow economic activities, it is necessary to return to the establishment of the Crimean shadow-business climate and its evolution after the USSR collapsed in 1991 till February 2014.

During the 1990s around 50 criminal groups [35] operated in Crimea with different specializations, mostly tourism-centric, as around 4-6 million tourists continued to visit Crimea through

the summertime and tens of thousands during winter. This allowed criminals to generate resources through tourist businesses that were poorly controlled by local authorities and also through criminal activities (such as drug trafficking, racketeering, prostitution) [36].

For the first time since 1991, 2014 brought Russian business and their proxies expected high risks when forecasting the possible outcomes of the Revolution of Dignity. These would come in the form of European integration with all the associated projected changes to illegal and shadow activities. It would result in a domino effect on the direct resourcing of pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian activities and organizations

in Crimea. The propaganda machine would need another resourcing model with higher risks and less than optimal outcomes. Taking into account the "skin in the game" of Ukrainian pro-Russian politicians, criminals, and shadow-businesspersons, they readily assisted the Russian occupation by all available means. The current positions and wealth of the former Russian proxies on the peninsula show a direct correlation in the form and level of their support to the illegal annexation. This is applicable in most cases to former high-level government officials, parliament deputies, leaders of different veteran and pro-Russian organizations, and shadow-businesspersons located in Crimea who assisted the Russian invasion in February 2014.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusions and recommendations of this analytical paper aim to support the process of the de-occupation of the Crimea peninsula based on the main lessons identified from the Russian occupation. Apart from the Government of Ukraine and its Crimea Platform partners, the recommendations of this report may also be relevant to the international community, especially to those countries suffering from or that are the focus of Russian influence. The Russian Hybrid War is not limited to Ukraine, but it is a part of an aggressive foreign policy with a global impact.

CONCLUSIONS

Russia planned Crimea's "breakaway" since the disintegration of the USSR. Russia could not reconcile with the geopolitical and reputational reverberations of the loss of Crimea and Sevastopol. This area has had great importance to Russia as a "window to Europe". Russia also needed Crimea as a giant military base to project Russian power into the Mediterranean Sea, the Middle East, and North Africa. The cumulative peak of this discontent with the status quo was the "Russian spring" in 2014.

Since the mid-2000s, Russia has worked on an ambitious plan to restore its status as a world military superpower. The restoration of control over the post-Soviet space and Eastern Europe became an important geostrategic task for Russia. Ukraine and Georgia, two countries aspiring to NATO membership, have become Russia's primary targets.

The Sevastopol naval base in Crimea became the centre of gravity for Russian influence in Ukraine, extending much

beyond its purely military effect. The Russian Black Sea Fleet became a "Trojan horse": it channelled Russian instruments of direct and hybrid aggression in 2014 and disabled Ukrainian military forces in Crimea. Any Russian military presence outside Russia's borders should always be considered as preparation for Russian occupation of the foreign territory that welcomes them.

The strong pro-Russian sentiments of the Crimean population was the primary

pre-condition that allowed for Russia to accomplish the "Russian spring" of 2014. The Russian propaganda machine is able to promote the 'Russian World' concept and anti-NATO and anti-European rhetoric through significant areas around the world. Export income from oil and gas plus the exploitation of liberal rules and laws in the democratic world give Russia the ability to sustain this gigantic propaganda system.

Russia, directly and indirectly, suppressed the recovery and development of Crimean Tatar culture and values on the Crimea peninsula after the "breakaway". Russian leaders considered the Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian minorities, their unity and distinct national cultures, as incompatible with the "Russian World" and acted accordingly.

Economic and energy dependency on Russia, in particular in oil and gas, made Ukrainian politics very strategically vulnerable. The Ukrainian dependency on Russia's energy supplies has given the latter the upper hand in all bilateral disputes and conflicts. This vulnerability has been reinforced by the active use of non-military means, including information operations, pro-Russian political forces, corruption, and other means.

Russia invested money and strengthened Russian education in Crimea. Russia prepared cadres in advance that were needed to serve Russia after the occupation.

Therefore, we reiterate that the pre-occupation phase included the following hybrid tools and methods:

- Political pressure while the Ukrainian state made its first steps: providing autonomy to the Crimea as a step to a managed "independency", establishing the institution of the President of Crimea with the support of pro-Russian politicians, the blocking Ukrainian NATO aspirations;
- Military threats: the Tuzla confrontation of 2003, the use of the Black Sea Fleet as a "Trojan horse" with multidimensional impact, psychological pressure on the Ukrainian military and state authorities, the advance identification and neutralization of points of resistance in the Ukrainian military;
- Socio-cultural pressure: the promotion of cultural and historical, engineered demographic change to ensure a Russian majority, the hampering of the reintegration of Crimean Tatars, Russian linguistic and educational impact on the intellectual elite in Crimea;
- Economic management and meddling: the shadow control of the economy and destructive interference in local business, the leveraging of oil and gas to create and shore up political loyalty.

The Russian occupation of the Crimean Peninsula was triggered by the "Revolution of Dignity" and was concluded in less than a month. The occupation was, however, planned and prepared years in advance. Since a Hybrid War starts years before the start of open aggression, strategic awareness needs to be far wider and more forward-thinking, and deterrence needs to be far more proactive than what is needed against a conventional threat.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis of the key elements of Russia's hybrid influence that led to the possibility of the temporary occupation, the following recommendations should be taken into consideration by the Government of Ukraine within the process of the de-occupation and further reintegration of Crimea to minimize the further negative influence of Russia:

1. Russia took Crimea through a complex hybrid approach. Therefore, Ukraine should develop robust whole-of-government capabilities, including in the cross-functional decision-making process, in order to be proactive and adaptive towards multi-domain threats generated by Russia. The national resilience to hybrid influences should be built as an inclusive ecosystem like the balance of interests between government representatives, civil society, parliamentarians, and media professionals. Such a pragmatic approach should be equally extended to the Ukrainian population on the occupied territories as hostages of a situation artificially created by Russia. We welcome the newly approved Strategy of Crimean De-occupation [37] which is an important roadmap. From now on, the main focus should be on the development of practical, sustainable and resilient implementation steps.

Ukraine, together with partner countries, should organize and synchronize a Hybrid Defence. Russia's parallel and synchronized use of both military and non-military means requires a similar response. Ukraine (and the West) needs to establish a platform for Hybrid Defence, enabling a cross-sectorial response; instead of stovepipe decision-making processes all entities must contribute to and maintain similar situational awareness. For example, by developing a mechanism which could help governments and international institutions to distinguish Russian hybrid influencers from victims. It can include the creation of an open database of Russian government institutions, NGOs, businesses, media, political parties, diaspora institutions, academic entities and other proxies and affiliated individuals used as tools by the Russian hybrid machine, as well as particular cases of hybrid influence, including propaganda

activities, for further analysis and appropriate actions, including national and international sanctions.

2. Ukrainian authorities must demonstrate an active commitment to the human rights protection of Ukrainians, Crimean Tatars, and other minorities living in the peninsula, as well as to provide practical support in defending the interests of vulnerable groups. Crimean platform partners should actively advocate for the establishment of an international human rights monitoring presence in occupied Crimea for collecting and disseminating information on the real human rights situation in occupied Crimea, using UNESCO mechanisms, UN Special Procedures, and other mechanisms.

3. IDPs, including minorities, who left Crimea as a result of the occupation, should be integrated in the process of the preparation for de-occupation and encouraged by the Ukrainian Government to return home after the Russian Federation leaves Crimea. Such an approach can start the process of renewing the population balance in the peninsula, as well as to guarantee more rapid informational and mental de-occupation of Crimeans influenced by Russian propaganda.

4. Ukraine should study the experience of other similar cases and develop a policy on the restoration of the population balance, including an approach to restore citizenship. It should include specific information on Russian citizens who migrated to Crimea from Russia after the occupation of March 2014, as well as assets or property there, and about further legal consequences after de-occupation. Such an approach can

influence the further migration process happening now in Crimea.

5. Ukraine must actively work for the de-occupation of the Crimean Peninsula through non-military means. The hybrid war can be effectively countered with a more aggressive and coordinated approach in the fields of diplomacy, the economy, energy, law, information, cyber, and security to inflict non-military costs to Russia of a scope that is unacceptable to the aggressor. The present strategy of blocking the water supply, electricity and transport to occupied Crimea should be duly kept and expanded with the immediate sanctions on all flights and vessels arriving in Crimea.

6. Ukraine should enhance its efforts to bring Russia to justice and seek redress in international and regional courts. Ukraine should elaborate an overarching international and regional adjudication strategy and develop the specific international and regional proceedings on the basis of this larger vision. Ukraine should also encourage private persons and businesses who suffered from the occupation of Crimea to bring collective or individual suits against Russia before the relevant foreign, regional, or international courts, which have the jurisdiction to consider such cases. All activities in the regional and international judicial domain should interplay with diplomatic and political efforts for the de-occupation. The cumulative effect of court rulings in favour of Ukraine or its citizens and businesses can significantly raise the economic, diplomatic and political costs of the Russian occupation of Ukrainian territory, including Crimea, for the Russian leadership and populace. As one of the outcomes, it can strengthen

the Ukrainian position in countering the Russian propaganda activities in Ukraine.

7. Military power remains an essential element of the overall hybrid warfare activities of Russia in Ukraine and in other countries of interest, including Georgia, Moldova, and Syria. Having demonstrated the will and the ability to use military power to ensure its strategic aim and objectives, the military threat alone had a tremendous impact on Ukraine and Ukrainian society. Any counter-strategy must aim at reducing Russia's military options. Ukraine needs to reform and modernize its Armed Forces and close critical vulnerabilities (e.g. in the Navy and Air Force). The reform should focus on the capabilities needed to meet future escalations within areas that have the biggest impact on both the Ukrainian economy and psyche. The state should also work for an increased international presence in the Black Sea, as well as to negotiate regional

military alliances for strengthening the use of joint efforts which can compensate for the lack of resources for the rapid development of the capabilities of the Ukrainian armed forces.

8. Ukraine should develop and disseminate proposals to strategic partners on the planned multi-domain international and national de-occupation efforts before the next NATO Summit. It can provide a better understanding of Ukraine's intentions in the framework of the Crimean Platform and explain the vision and goals of the updated national agenda, including the recently-published strategic documents (NSS, NMS, SDB, the De-occupation Strategy, etc.). The concrete whole-of-government proposals (the road map) can include, inter alia, Crimean Platform activities, proposals for NATO policies towards the Black and Azov Sea region, and other common activities to mitigate the threat to Euro-Atlantic security in hybrid forms posed by the Russian Federation.

LESSONS OF CRIMEA'S "BREAKAWAY" FOR OTHER NATIONS

It is highly recommended to critically consider Russia's intention to deploy military troops on any sovereign territory or open military bases. The reason why Russia deploys their military on foreign territories must be considered in a much wider context than only its military goals. Such a potential deployment should always be considered as their strategic approach and part of their complex influence on foreign territory, including negative influence of the minds and the readiness of the local defence forces.

Hybrid War is about influencing people to make conscious or unconscious choices that are beneficial to the aggressor. It's the battle of minds and it's a fight for influence. The population and key decision-makers and policymakers are the main targets of what must be seen as a continuous, ongoing, and aggressive Russian foreign policy with a global impact. This means that anyone affiliated with Russia (e.g. NGOs, media, political parties, academia, and experts) must be considered as a potential risk. They might be either victims or agents of the Hybrid War.

Dependence on trade or critical supplies, including energy and raw materials, as well as close economic links with Russia or Russian-affiliated businesses, leaves sovereign nations vulnerable. This dependency may help Russia to achieve a desirable effect in political disputes and influence the political and business elite, as well as inject corrupt approaches and grey-economy values into the society.

Representatives of Russian speaking communities, as well as ethnic minorities, especially in countries bordering Russia, are among the most vulnerable groups targeted by Russian propaganda. A government should pay special attention to identifying popular sources of information in such communities, as well as to monitoring public attitudes in order to protect the nation from destructive informational influence.

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NOTES

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Fellow, Centre for Defence Strategies

Having served over 35 years at sea and ashore: aboard surface warships (Kinda, Kara, Krivak III), at Ukrainian Navy HQ on maritime tactics and PfP exercises, as defense and strategic planner, worked on Ukrainian Navy transformation into Euro Atlantic standards and contribution to NATO-led operations and NATO Response Forces.

As planner or coordinator, Andrii Ryzhenko organized and carried out more than 100 multinational Crisis Response Exercises, including the US-Ukrainian naval exercises Sea Breeze, guided and consulted Naval units for different NATO and EU operations, NATO Response Forces and EU Battle groups.

He was a manager at Ukrainian Navy HQ for the development of the Strategy of the Navy of the Armed Forces of Ukraine until 2035 (2017-2018), design of new Navy C2 structure based on NATO principles(2019). In February-March 2020 he served as Assistant Minister of Defense of Ukraine working on Maritime security and Policy on Ukrainian Navy development.

Andrii completed the following educational studies: Sevastopol Naval Academy (1990), International Surface Warfare Officer School in Coronado, CA, US (1996), US Naval War College, Staff Course, Newport, R.I. (2000), Sevastopol Naval Institute with Master degree in military art (2004), US Naval War College, Command Course, Newport, R.I. (2013).

Andrii Ryzhenko retired from the Armed Forces of Ukraine in 2020 with rank of Navy Captain.



Oleksii Pavliuchyk

Fellow, Centre for Defence Strategies

Oleksii has more than 26 years combined of the military (retired Colonel) and the civilian career. He left the civilian service in the Ministry of Defence in 2020. During his military career he served in the Western OC (G5), the Land Forces Command and the General Staff (J3). During the last 10 years he occupied positions in the Ministry of Defence, including the Acting Chief of the Strategic Assessment Branch, the Deputy Chief International Cooperation Department and the Deputy Chief Strategic Planning Department.

He was deployed multiple times to peacekeeping operations in Lebanon and Iraq.

Oleksii is an alumnus of the Kharkiv Military University (Master degree in IT Systems), Canadian Forces College (JCSP), NPS (MS in Management), NATO School (DRM), Marshal Center (SES) and the DRMI.

During the last seven years Oleksii was directly involved in the reform of the defence sector of Ukraine. Before his departure from the Ministry of Defence, he was leading the transformation efforts on the HRM System of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and coordination of the strategic resource planning.

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