

# The Ukraine Crisis and the Ruinous Contest for Post-Soviet Eurasia

The ongoing crisis in Ukraine has ignited a fierce geopolitical struggle for dominance in the post-Soviet Eurasia region. The conflict has its roots in longstanding historical, ethnic, and political tensions between Ukraine and Russia, but has been exacerbated by external interventions and the broader power dynamics in the region. This article examines the origins and consequences of the Ukraine crisis, and explores the challenges and risks associated with the ongoing contest for influence in post-Soviet Eurasia.

## Historical Background

The roots of the Ukraine crisis can be traced back to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, which left Ukraine and other former Soviet republics facing the daunting task of nation-building. Ukraine's independence brought with it a complex set of challenges, including economic restructuring, political instability, and ethnic tensions. These challenges were compounded by the country's geographic location, which made it a strategic prize for both Russia and the West.



## Everyone Loses: The Ukraine Crisis and the Ruinous Contest for Post-Soviet Eurasia (Adelphi series)

by Samuel Charap

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Russia, as the successor state to the Soviet Union, sought to maintain its influence over Ukraine and the region. Ukraine, on the other hand, aspired to develop its own independent identity and forge closer ties with the West. This tension has been a defining feature of Ukraine's post-independence history.

### **The Rise of Pro-Russian Sentiment**

In the years following the Soviet collapse, pro-Russian sentiment grew in eastern and southern Ukraine, where there is a large ethnic Russian population. This sentiment was fueled by economic disparities between the more prosperous western Ukraine and the industrial heartland of the east. Pro-Russian politicians exploited these grievances to gain support, and Moscow played a role in cultivating this sentiment through propaganda and economic incentives.

### **The Orange Revolution and the Return of Pro-Western Leadership**

In 2004, a wave of popular protests known as the Orange Revolution swept across Ukraine, demanding fair elections and a pro-Western orientation. The protests were successful in bringing to power a pro-Western government led by Viktor Yushchenko. Yushchenko's presidency was marked by efforts to deepen ties with the West and reduce Russian influence. However, his government faced significant opposition from pro-

Russian forces within the country, and his presidency was ultimately weakened by political instability.

## **Yanukovych's Presidency and the Euromaidan Movement**

In 2010, Viktor Yanukovych, a pro-Russian politician, was elected president of Ukraine. Yanukovych pursued closer relations with Russia and shelved plans for Ukraine to join the European Union. This decision sparked widespread protests in Ukraine, known as the Euromaidan movement. The protests erupted in 2013 in response to Yanukovych's refusal to sign an association agreement with the European Union.

The Euromaidan protests grew into a massive popular uprising, demanding Yanukovych's resignation. In February 2014, Yanukovych fled Kyiv, and a new pro-Western government was formed.

## **Russia's Annexation of Crimea and the War in Eastern Ukraine**

In response to the Euromaidan protests and the collapse of the Yanukovych government, Russia annexed Crimea, a peninsula in southern Ukraine with a majority Russian population. This move was widely condemned by the international community, and sparked fears of a wider Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Following the annexation of Crimea, pro-Russian separatists seized control of parts of eastern Ukraine. A low-intensity conflict between Ukrainian government forces and the separatists has continued ever since, resulting in thousands of casualties and displacing millions of people.

## **The Geopolitical Contest for Post-Soviet Eurasia**

The Ukraine crisis has become a flashpoint in the broader geopolitical contest for influence in post-Soviet Eurasia. Russia, the United States, and the European Union have all sought to exert their influence in the region, which is seen as strategically important both for its resources and its proximity to Europe.

Russia has sought to maintain its dominant position in the region by supporting pro-Russian regimes and using military force to assert its interests. The United States and the European Union have sought to counter Russian influence by supporting pro-Western governments and promoting democratic values.

The Ukraine crisis has heightened tensions between Russia and the West, and has brought the possibility of a wider conflict in the region. It has also raised concerns about the future of Ukraine's sovereignty and the stability of the post-Soviet order.

### **Challenges and Risks of the Contest for Influence**

The contest for influence in post-Soviet Eurasia poses a number of challenges and risks for the region:

\* **Increased tensions:** The rivalry between Russia and the West over influence in the region has led to increased tensions, mistrust, and the potential for further conflict. \* **Proxy wars:** The great powers may be tempted to use local conflicts, such as the one in Ukraine, as proxies to fight their own battles. This could lead to wider conflicts and make it more difficult to resolve the underlying issues. \* **Destabilization of the region:** The conflict in Ukraine has already destabilized the region and created a humanitarian crisis. Continued conflict could have even more devastating

consequences for the people of the region. \* **Nuclear proliferation:** The Ukraine crisis has raised concerns about the future of Ukraine's nuclear weapons. There is a risk that the conflict could lead to the use of nuclear weapons or to the collapse of Ukraine's nuclear control system.

The Ukraine crisis is a complex and dangerous conflict with far-reaching implications for the post-Soviet Eurasia region and beyond. The ongoing contest for influence between Russia and the West has heightened tensions, increased the risk of further conflict, and destabilized the region. It is crucial for all parties involved to work towards a diplomatic solution to the Ukraine crisis and to avoid the perils of geopolitical competition. The future of the region, and the security of Europe, depend on it.



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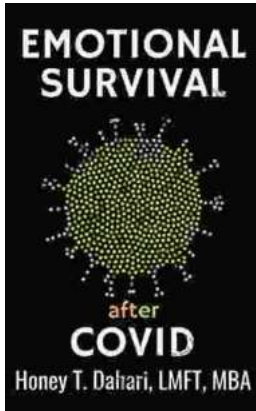
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