RUSSIA'S EFFORT IN GETTING CRIMEA BACK

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Abstract

Conflict in Crimea was once a focus of international sphere in 2014. The conflict was triggered by the tendency of Ukraine to join European Union. Crimea, a peninsula located in southern, was one of the regions that prefer Ukraine join Russian Federation to European Union. Crimea has Russian-speakers as the majority population in this area. They did protest and demonstrations in the end of 2013 until early 2014. The protests were not responded very well. Ukrainian parliament simply accused them as separatist movement. This paper will analyze the causes of the conflict and the effort of Russia to get the Crimea back. However, we have to understand first that there are three major factors that might be the cause of the conflict. Gurr (2001) stated that those three factors are local, national, and international contexts. Thus, this journal will analyze more on the international context.

Keywords:

Conflict in Crimea; Crimean peninsula; Ukraine; Russian Federation; ethnopolitical conflict

Introduction

Crimea is a peninsula located in the south part of Ukraine between the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov; the narrow Kerch Strait separates it from Russia to the east. Crimea peninsula was once the subdivision of the USSR (Soviet Union) for about 200 years before Crimea went under the Ukrainian administration. This peninsula became the part of Ukraine in 1954 after given by General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union who was also Russian Premier, Nikita Khrushchev, as a gift for commemorating the 300th anniversary of Ukraine's unifying with Russian kingdom/tsarist. The transfer of jurisdiction was done at that moment as it was hard to predict about the future. It was unforeseen that Soviet Union then collapsed in several decades later, which means that Soviet Union would be divided into different separated states and the borders needed to be renegotiated. As the result, Ukraine was coming back as an independent state.

In several months in early 2014, Crimea was considered as one of the part of Ukrainian section within the citizens who did not agree with Ukrainian joining the European Union. They preferred the reunification with the previous motherland, Russia, rather than joining the European Union. Over the commotion, Crimea finally did the referendum on March 16th, 2014. The referendum allowed Crimean people to either join Russian Federation or desire restoration of 1992 Constitution and Crimea's status was still as the part of Ukraine. The legitimate final from the Autonomous Republic of Crimea was 96,77 % voted that Crimean wanted to join the Russian Federation. Mikhail Malyshev, the head of the Crimean Election Commission, stated that no "provocations" had been reported at polling stations. People have not gotten intimidated and they made their decision. Ukrainian parliament then was doing a prompt presidential election for Ukraine in May 2014 (*Liputan6*, 2014). A day after Crimea referendum, on March 17th, 2014 President Putin confirmed a declaration recognizing Crimea as part of Russia. For many Crimeans, this is their desire that has become fulfilled. After the voting, the voters said to each other that they were coming back home to Russia.

According to Gurr (2001), the factors which influence Crimea's separation in 2014 are local, national, and international contexts. Local and national contexts are important factors in this case. However, the third factor, international context, is the most influential factor that encouraged Crimea to take the further step and do the referendum. Without the interference of Russian Federation in Crimea's movement, Crimea might still stay under Ukrainian administration because its referendums were not recognized, just like how it was in around 90s years. In the other hand, it is inevitably to think that Russia has its own interests in Crimean peninsula. There are many reasons why Russia wanted to annex Crimean peninsula.

The journal will learn about the interests of Russian Federation. It is about why they wanted to annex Crimea, as well as how they did such efforts. The efforts even already started long time ago before the occasion in 2014.

In his theory of ethnopolitical conflict, Gurr (2001) states:

"A great many international factors help shape the aspirations, opportunities, and strategies of ethnopolitical groups. They also affect state policies toward minorities. Moreover, the nature of international engagement is a major determinant of whether ethnopolitical conflicts are of short duration or long and whether they end in negotiated settlements or humanitarian disaster."

It must be admitted that more or less, Russia's interference in Crimea gave the encouragement and guidance for the people. Moreover if Russian government itself gave

direct support and funding such as in military armed forces and donations. According to Gurr (2001), intervention from other state may define how long the conflict will be, and how it will be ended, whether in bloodshed or in peaceful harmony.

Russia's Interests in Crimea

It is already stated before that Russian interest was mostly in cultural terms. Russia focused on protecting Russian ethnic majority in Crimea. It conscripted so many troops in order to guard Russian-speaking citizens who have the same historical background and similar cultures. This action surely costed so many charges and energy. And since Russia's supports were so strong, it is not impossible for Russia to have other interests. Those other interests can be as follows:

Political Interest of Russian Federation to Gain More Power

Russia may do anything to stay as the great power in every single field. It will gather powers and controls as many as possible, especially from its neighborhood and its ex-regions. The eagerness was getting stronger under Putin's command. He wanted to gather back the regions which were the parts of Soviet Union, especially when the trigger has sparked.

Russia wanted to take full control of Ukraine and the other post-Soviet regions. It wanted to use Crimea for destabilizing Ukraine and for taking influence in Ukraine's development, including forcing Kiev to adjust an entirely new model of governance. Russia wanted Ukraine to become a confederated republic (Konończuk, 2014). Before EuroMaidan has sparked, Ukraine has done good balancing so far in keeping good relations between Russia and Europe. Ukraine had good relationship with Europe, and good friendship with Russia. But then, as in this case, Russia took action because its ally, all at once was post-Soviet region, Ukraine, turned into supporting the West and having tendency to become the member of European Union. Russia was not in ready-to-war position before it happened. However, with Ukrainian government's current tendency, the situation then has changed.

As stated by a Kremlin-linked analyst, Sergei Markov, Putin put down some conditions to western leaders, such as the warranty that Ukraine's acting government involved a coalition of all political power, including Yanukovich's Party of Regions, the termination of all armed revolutionary factions, and to make Russian language as Ukraine's official state language. If those had happened, he said, Crimea would still be part of Ukraine. However, those conditions were viewed by the Western leaders as unwarranted interfering in the internal affairs of a sovereign state. Putin might become realistic as he thought that it was unfair to

accuse Russia of violating the norms of international law, while the west and its allies did the same things without any bad impression; it seemed like they came into their 'exclusivity and exceptionalism' in international system. In the other side, he also became a realist when he thought that no one would listen to Russia if he didn't strengthen his position. So, he strengthened it (Luhn, 2014).

As a former 'owner' of Crimean peninsula, Russia still had the feeling that Crimea is supposed to be the part of Russian Federation as it should have been. As stated by expresident of Ukraine Yushchenko, Putin marked his attitude very clear that his mission was to restore the Soviet Union. Yushchenko said straightly that Putin, as the president of Russia, had a mindset which was "The greatest tragedy of the last century was not the holocaust and the murder of millions. It was not World War I and the deaths of millions. It was not World War II, which also saw the deaths of millions. It was the collapse of the Soviet Union." By saying that, according to Yushchenko, Putin had the goal to make Russia become re-united, as big as it was before it collapsed. Putin would not stop only in Crimea; he would still annex the other ex-Soviet Union's regions. Crimea was a dramatic step in Putin's policy to build a new empire (Schofield, 2014).

Crimea Plays Significant Roles in Russia's Security

Crimea, in fact, has long history with Russia. It was the part of Soviet Union even where many wars happened, when Ukraine was still under Soviet Union. Crimea brought back Russia's nostalgia at the time when the former Russia fought for defending its regions from the others. It was even assumed that Crimea was the important region for Russian pride. Meanwhile, the naval base at Sevastopol, at the southwestern part of Crimean peninsula, was the warm water naval base and its main means of extending strength through the Mediterranean. To make it simple, Crimea's naval base is one of the tools for Russia to be a global military power (Satell, 2014).

Crimea holds important part in terms of Russia's security. Russia put many military bases and vessels in Crimea. Russian naval was there until Khrushchev gave Crimea to Ukraine. In the middle of the Soviet Union's collapse, in 1997, Russia and Ukraine signed a determining treaty about the fate of the military located in Crimea. Russia even acquiesced paying 526,5 million dollars to Ukraine's government just for getting 81,7 % of the fleet's ships.

On Crimea's territory, in accordance with the treaty, the Russian navy was allowed up to 25.000 troops, 24 artillery systems with a caliber smaller than 100 mm, 132 armored vehicles,

and 22 military planes (Drachev, 2014). In Sevastopol, the southern Crimea, Russia has one overwhelming strategic asset, which is the Black Sea naval base. Russia put coastal forces consisting of Separate Anti-Aircraft Missile Regiment and the Marine Brigade, and stationed five naval units in the port city. Putin's main aim in Crimea might be to maintain that base at all costs (Friedman, 2014). In addition, Russia also had two airbases located in Crimean peninsula; they are in Kacha and Gvardeysky.

Crimea Increases Russia's Economy

After the Soviet Union collapsed, Crimea then went under Ukrainian administration. Meanwhile, Russian military forces were still stationed in this peninsula. The Partition Treaty was signed in 1997 between Russia and Ukraine to decide the fate of these bases and vessels. The treaty made Russia pay so many fees in order to maintain Crimea and Sevastopol within its naval bases. Russia needed to pay 526,5 million dollars to keep its military bases and vessels. Russia must also wipe off Ukraine's debt annually in amount 97,75 million for compensating the Black Sea Fleet's environmental impact and for using Ukrainian waters and radio frequencies (Drachev, 2014).

Meanwhile, Crimea also has other splendours. Crimea has the prize in its region, which is rich of oil and gas. Bloomberg, a popular American mass media, estimated that extraction from these fields could have the substantial potential, up to 7 million tons yearly of production capacity. In addition, the pillar of Crimea's economy was its lively tourist industry, which attracts 6 million tourists per year during the summer season (Drachev, 2014). In addition, Crimea also has good factories for heavy industries.

There are so many profits Russia may get from annexing Crimea. First, Russia will not need to pay any million dollars to Ukraine anymore for keeping its naval bases. Before Crimea's referendum, Russia had been paying million dollars to compensate Russia's naval base in Sevastopol. However, after the occupation, it is not necessary for Russia to spend any cent anymore. Second, Crimea is rich with the oil and gas. It may increase Russia's economy significantly. It is such a good prize for Russian economic development. Third, Crimea is also well-known with its tourism. Crimea has wonderful sceneries in which many tourists are coming to enjoy it. It will also increase Russia's GDP and the growth of the economy. With the growth of economy, Russia can also raise its power. By looking at those advantages, it is clearer to see why Russia holds such persistence to defend Crimea and make it become the part of Russia.

Russia Supported Crimea in 90s to Join Russia

As stated before, the approval of Crimea's transfer to Ukraine was an uncertainty. It was decided one-sided by Khrushchev only, without the permission from Russian parliament, whereas the decision without Russian parliament was considered as illegal. Then, in 1992, Crimean transfer was condemned by Russian Foreign Ministry and parliament. This resolution was supported by some Russian nationalists and communists in Crimea. (Chronology for Crimean Russians in Ukraine, 2010).

Russian officials, who were annoyed by Ukrainian independence and its consequences, interpreted the dispute between Kiev and Simferopol as a promising signal. In January 1992, the chairman of the Russian parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs, Vladimir Lukin, proposed that the purpose of pressuring Ukraine to give up was its claim to the Black Sea Fleet. Russia should ask about Ukrainian control over Crimea. Through the investigation of Crimea's transfer from Russia to Ukraine in 1954, the Russian Parliament then passed a resolution in May 1992 announcing that the transfer was illegal. A year later, in February 1993, the Russian Vice-President at that time, Rutskoi, said that International Court of Justice should resolve whether Crimea belonged to Ukraine or Russia. Rutskoi's statement was supported by Leonid Smulyakov, Russia's ambassador to Ukraine. He said that the press conference held in early 1993 gave results that about 20.000 requests for Russian citizenship were from Crimeans. He also stated that if Crimea shall vote for becoming independent, the Russian government would support the move (Zaborsky, 1995).

In the end of November 1994, Russia started to unilaterally organize dual citizenship for citizens in many post-Soviet regions, or also known as Commonwealth of Independent State member countries. There was a wide concern that it may provide Russia with greater influence in Crimea, as Crimea allowed the use of dual citizenship since July 1994 (Chronology for Crimean Russians in Ukraine, 2010).

In the middle of April 1995, Ukrainian people and Crimean Tatars tried to rise up Ukrainian flag in Simferopol, near the city council. But then a huge group of Russian blocked their way. There was no report about blatant violence. Russian president at that time, Yeltsin, declared that he would not sign a partnership agreement with Ukraine until Ukraine resolve its dispute with Russian people in Crimean region. His statement was followed with the warning from Russian Foreign Minister, Kazyrev. He said that Russia was prepared to use force to protect the rights of Russian ethnics who lived in the former Soviet Republic.

Thousands people gathered in Simferopol, shouting slogans defending Crimea's right to independence. It was in May 1995, so it was marked as May Day. They condemned Ukraine's effort to foil Crimean separatism. The same protest also occurred in March 1997 when thousands of Crimean protestors stormed the parliament building in Simferopol during a demonstration calling on Ukraine's authorities to cut off relations with NATO and for the return of the peninsula to Russia (Chronology for Crimean Russians in Ukraine, 2010).

In August 1998, Moscow's mayor, Yuri Luzhkov, constructed housing for Russian military in Crimea and opened a Russian school with the fund of Russian Federation. The school was meant for the children of the servicemen of the Russian Black Sea fleet. He declared that it would toughen the belief that "Sevastopol will return to the lap of Russia" (Luzhkov Blasts Ukraine, 1998).

There were still many exertions done by Russia to make Crimea become closer. Such attitudes were done because Russia thought that Crimea was still part of Russia and would be part of Russia again; and Russia wanted Crimea to think the same thing. The efforts were paid off successfully in 2014, when Crimea finally held referendum to separate from Ukraine and join Russian Federation.

Russian Federation Permitted and Supported to Crimea in 2014

Announcement of the plan of referendum from Crimean parliament was proposed when the European Union's stake holders, United States', and Russian Federation's held a meeting in Brussels, Belgium. Crimea's leader stated that Crimea would hold the referendum if Russia supports it and permits Crimea to join Russian Federation. Meanwhile, the meeting itself was to discuss the response that would be taken relating Russian troops in Ukrainian territory.

The additional troops were sent to Ukraine because Russia's parliament approved Putin's request to intervene militarily in Ukraine, after he read the situation. Few days afterwards, the troops were finally sent to occupy two Russia's air bases in Crimea, Kacha and Gvardeysky, protecting the ethnic Russian minority in Crimea. For several days, military troops already occupied Crimean peninsula. Meanwhile, Ukraine's parliament in Kiev emphasized that Crimea's intention in joining Russian Federation was unconstitutional, breaking Kiev's rules. In agreement with Crimea's Supreme Council chairman, the government in Kiev was doing everything not to come into dialogue with Crimea, ignoring the concerns of its population

and simply accusing it of separatism (Ukraine's revolution and Russia's occupation of Crimea: how we got here, 2014).

On March, 16th, 2014, the referendum was finally held, and two days later the tractate was signed by President Putin, Crimean Prime Minister Sergei Aksyonov, Crimea's Head Parliament Vladimir Konstantinov, and Sevastopol Vice-Major Alexei Chalily. It was done in Russia on 18th March 2104. Some of tractate's contents are "for the sake of the people Crimea will always be the part of Russia; Crimean and Sevastopol people have their rights to use their own languages, so that they might have 3 official languages which are Ukrainian, Russian, and Tatar. Currency in Crimea will use ruble, instead of hryvna, its previous currency." Ukraine asked for support to European Union and United States since the beginning of the Crimea's crisis. This referendum decision was condemned by United States and its allies. Using many justifications and reasons, United States, European Union and also several other states were ready to give sanctions in many terms for Russia. Though so, President Putin was not affected. He was ready and prepared to face all this risks (Crimea Resmi Bergabung ke Rusia, AS Siapkan Sanksi, 2014). Even before the referendum was held, United States sponsored a resolution that would have mentioned the reaffirmation of Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity and declared that referendum in Crimea this time could not have the validity. However, the resolution in March 2014 that would have marked the referendum illegitimate for Crimea peninsula was vetoed by Russia, which means that United States' resolution could not be adopted (Forbes, 2014).

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