

CHAPTER III

THE BEGINNING, THE BRINK, AND THE CURRENT SITUATIONS OF UKRAINE CRISIS

For a millennia human fought each other harrowingly and it simply because humans cannot cope with various differences that they possessed ever since they are born, by the desire to have more and more, to get a throne and power, to subjugate and condescend another race. As Plautus wrote in his well-known play *Asinaria* "A man is a wolf, not a man, to another man which he has not met yet." which pretty much saying that human is horrible and devilish by design. Some like to help others on the flip side some just wanted to see the world burn, so crisis, wars, conflict, an arms race will always be inevitable. The number of crisis, wars, conflict is extremely humongous, not to mention Ukraine crisis.

It is been 6 years since the conflict in Ukrainian peninsula erupts and ever since that time, the circumstances have not changed pretty significantly. The conflict still undergoing, the hatred and resentment between the eastern and western part of Ukraine ethnically and linguistically still exist. Therefore, the author will point out three division in examining Ukraine crisis as the beginning, the brink of the crisis, and current situation.

A. The Beginning of Ukraine Crisis

To understand Ukraine crisis thoroughly, some history check should be initiated, Ukraine crisis has roots, and it happened a long long time ago. In terms of national independence, Ukraine does not have really interesting things to be discussed since historically, Ukraine only has a short period of national independence. The term Ukraine terminologically means "the borderland" in ancient Slavs language but on the flip side it also means "the homeland". Ukraine also used to be mentioned as "the Ukraine" but after the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991 and Ukraine moved away,

another alteration is made to "Ukraine".³⁶ Ukraine could be called as "the Ukraine" nevertheless, for some reason Ukraine is referred as a region than as a sovereign state.³⁷

Moreover, if some comparison is made, one in six Ukrainians is Russian-descendant, one of three Ukrainians use the Russian language on a daily basis, the media that operates is in the Russian language, that is why for some reasons there are two sides of a coin in seeing Moscow, the first side is Moscow seen as something that slowing down Ukraine attempts to be more sovereign while on the flip side the influence of Russia is seen merely as the sense of sharing historically and culturally.³⁸

Ukraine is divided into eastern part and western part. On the western part of Ukraine, people are predominantly Russian-speaking and Russian Descendants it is because, in the 19th century, Tsarina Catherine the Great decided to do a program called "Russification" in which she puts Russian people in Western part of Ukraine. Most of the people in the western part of Ukraine have an immense cynical view towards Russia, significantly seeing Russia as a tyranny, and they preferably wanted to be the part of Europe, it can be seen by their eagerness in cast a vote to every pro-European candidates. On the other side, the people in the eastern part of Ukraine are a hundred percents fond of pro-Russia candidates in which they think that there is a certain connection between Russia and eastern people because they think they are connected by historical means, and they even have Vladimir Lenin statue to commemorate his greatness.³⁹ That is why Russia is dominating Ukraine for a century because of the

³⁶ Vox. (2014). *Everything you need to know about the Ukraine Crisis*. Vox. Retrieved on March 31, 2018. From Vox: <https://www.vox.com/cards/ukraine-everything-you-need-to-know/is-it-ukraine-or-the-ukraine>

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

history of Ukraine, and Russia domination is immensely inseparable. This historical event somehow has a domino effect towards what happens in the present times.

Viktor Yanukovych former president of Ukraine that widely known for his controversial decision in rejecting such huge possibilities for Ukraine to join EU is basically one of Russian speaking Ukrainian and came from the eastern part of Ukraine.⁴⁰ Unsurprisingly, this cultural background that reflects his decision is understandably made sense since he probably more comfortable in maintaining a good relationship with Russia instead of creating a bigger opportunity to join the EU.⁴¹ However, it creates a complexity towards the crisis in Ukraine.

When Russia decided to backed Yanukovych in the crisis while on the opposite the US and Europe supported the protesters is undoubtedly unsurprising, that is how the international politics works because "The enemy of my enemy is my friend". His decision to received 15 Billion Dollars bailout from Russia instead, the fact is most of Ukrainians prefer to receive that economic aid that will help Ukraine economically and thinks that having closer ties with EU is more intriguing. that led to the anti-government protest called the "Euromaidan", the name is derived from local landmark Maidan Nezalezhnosti or Independence Square in English that happened on November 21, 2013.⁴²

Aside from deal rejection, Ukrainians also think that Yanukovych somehow autocratic and obnoxiously corrupt and coined as Russian crony. The protesters then examine their request to "sign the EU deal" to "Yanukovych must step down". Euromaidan usually consist of the far-right ultra-nationalist group that extremely violent that makes Russian

⁴⁰ BBC. (2014). *Profile: Ukraine's ousted President Viktor Yanukovych*. BBC. Retrieved on March 31, 2018. From BBC: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25182830>

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Vox, Loc. Cit

government and Russian speaking east that did not sympathize with Euromaidan, think that Yanukovych should remain in power saw the protest as an act which separating them from Russia.⁴³

Therefore, Yanukovych did not remain silent towards this protest, he deployed "berkut" internal security forces to taking care of the situation, creating laws that strictly violating the freedom of expressions of the Ukrainians. Nevertheless, the parliament stood together against him by voting to eradicate his administrations and finally, the administration of Yanukovych was dismissed and the government restoration was conducted to alternated his administration with a more pro-EU administration under Petro Poroshenko.⁴⁴ Basically, Yanukovych violated most of Ukrainians, not to mention his own backers, he clearly abuses his power by treating the Ukraine economy in a wrong way and erupting Euromaidan.⁴⁵

B. The Brink of Ukraine Crisis

Russia saw the Yanukovych administration dismissal as a threat towards their influence over Ukraine and led to an annexation in Crimea in March 2014 and in April 2014 some groups which widely known as the pro-Russia rebel are conquering and sitting in most of eastern part of Ukraine.⁴⁶ The war in eastern Ukraine occurred in some sort of lower tempo, and the belligerents are Ukrainian military and pro-Russian separatist rebels. The pro-Russia separatist rebels attempt to take down some Russian-speaking town in eastern part in April 2014 was successful and later on triggered an undeclared war between Russia and Ukraine, Russia invaded Crimea and deployed some of their armies without insignias,

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid*

separatist rebels moved to an eastern part of Ukraine afterward and took Sloviansk and Donetsk located in Donbas region.⁴⁷

The sense of separation among eastern Ukrainians is immensely obvious and Russian government were allegedly accused of supporting the rebels. Igor "Strelkov" Girkin the rebel leaders is actually Russian citizen and retired military veteran and leading the armies without insignias which operate in eastern part of Ukraine. Approximately thousand of Russian troops marching on the border crossing through the rebellion that occurred over there. Ukraine however, did not act aggravatingly against the rebels and Vladimir Putin did not give an obvious action because there are lots of consideration. Ukraine starting to fight back in early July in which they initiating an offensive strategy against the rebels.⁴⁸

As the retaliation, Russia provided high-tech surface-air-to-air missiles which identified as Buk or SA-11, the rebels actually had demolished two Ukrainian military plans a week before the shooting down the flight 17 and killed approximately 298 people which dragging an attention and condemnation internationally. Shortly afterward, the rebels decide to prohibit any activities in regard to observation in the crash site, they did not allow any activities to evacuate the bodies and obnoxiously letting people around to plunder the belongings of the victims. Eventually the surrender the black box and allowing the evacuation activities on the crash site tho in some sort of peculiar way.⁴⁹

This horrifying event led the US and Europe to drop excruciating sanctions on Russia, after that Ukraine army decide to increase aggressive aggression towards the rebels, and the rebels were overshadowed and starting to lose, it forced Russia to legitimately supported the rebels by sending official army, and this time, with insignias. Nonetheless, Russia did not admit that it was an invasion though it is

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

obvious. Ukraine officials said that their army is blocking Russian tanks on August 15.⁵⁰

On the next day, the leader of pro-Russia rebels said that they got an extra power of 1,200 Russian troops. On August 21, there is an alleged satellite image that showed Russian artillery proceeding heavy fire towards Ukrainian forces.⁵¹ Lastly, in the next five days, some raw footage showed how Russian tanks passing the town. The strong force of Russian military constantly attacking Ukrainian troops and forced them to retreat. However, there is uncertainty about their new plan, it could be to invade eastern Ukraine just like what they did to the Crimean peninsula or to backing-up the rebels fought there.⁵²

Crimea is known as a vast region that widely recognized as Ukraine region that has robust Russia influences and has been under Russian control. Crimea is located in the Black Sea that extremely important, Ukraine and Russia have been fought over its legitimacy for centuries. Crimea is an autonomous region compare to other counterparts of Ukraine just like in Yogyakarta, Vatican, or Aceh. On Crimea, there are Russian military bases that operate, it used to be counted as the part of the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union and has Russian passport holder that lives there.⁵³

There are numerous controversial events that took place in Crimea. On late February 2014, when Yanukovich administration was dismissed, a number of armed personnel were controlling several governments buildings in Crimea. Even though Yanukovich was extremely despised in the Western part of Ukraine but in Crimea, there was a rally done by the people who live there to show their devotion to the toppled-down president. On the other hand, the rally was meant to demand the Russia-Crimea unification and on March

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

16, some votes to were made and most of the people agree to be the part of Russia.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, an international reaction seemed to be cynical to that plan because obviously, it occurred under heavy Russian influence militarily, there was an absentia of international supervisions and not to mention there are a lot of reports of Russian military that force the people to did so, and it is pretty clear that it is unofficial because there was no clear legal basis of that. The EU alongside with the US then imposed economic sanctions towards Russia as a warning for Russia. Unfortunately, Russia did not pay any attention and does not really cared that much towards the sanctions.⁵⁵

C. Current Situations

On January 31, 2017, based on Vadim Karasyim the political analyst that operates mainly in Kiev report, the turmoil is actually beneficial for both Ukrainian government and the separatist. “Kiev is eager to win support of the new Trump administration, and for this they need to show that separatists and the Kremlin are derailing the peace accords,” he said. “For the Kremlin, it’s important to show that it holds war and peace in its hands; if the new U.S. administration wants peace in Ukraine, it needs to offer something in return.”⁵⁶

Approximately 8 people are dead while several others wounded caused by the artillery battling between Ukrainian troops and the separatist decide to moved out of Avdiyika, Donetsk, with the unexistence of water and electric supply. Both belligerents throwing dirt to each other in the brink of the skirmishes. Later on, Petro Poroshenko stated that that the surge in violence demonstrates the need to keep sanctions in place “to bring the aggressor to justice.” On the other side, the

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ CSIS. (2017). *The Ukraine Crisis Timeline*. CSIS. Retrieved on April 2, 2018. From CSIS: <http://ukraine.csis.org/index.htm#514>

spokesman of Vladimir Putin stated that the "aggressive actions" of Ukrainian government were done for the sake of blocking the fact in domestic issues from the eye of the public. The US Department of State called and the EU further recalling the immediate end to violence: "To avert a larger humanitarian crisis, we call for an immediate, sustained cease-fire and full and unfettered access for OSCE monitors," State Department spokesman Mark Toner said in a statement.⁵⁷

On February 1, 2017, Petro Poroshenko signalling their intentions in joining NATO in which he stated "Four years ago, only 16 percent (of the Ukrainian people) favored Ukraine's entry into NATO. Now it's 54 percent," German media group Funke Mediengruppe quoted Poroshenko statement in one of their interviews. "As president, I am guided by the views of my people, and I will hold a referendum on the issue of NATO membership." Furthermore, he stated "do all I can to achieve membership in the transatlantic alliance".⁵⁸

On February 7, 2017 The president of Russia commanded an air defense training or a snap air drill in which almost 200 anti-aircraft followed by 45,000 troops that operated the anti-aircraft aforementioned. The drill drawing an attention because there was no announcement that made that could inflicting the status-quo.⁵⁹

State news agency Tass denounced that Putin and Sergey Shoigu the Russian ministry of defence held the snap drill by stating "In accordance with the decision by the Armed Forces Supreme Commander, a snap check of the Aerospace Forces began to evaluate readiness of the control agencies and troops

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Walker, Peter. (2017). Vladimir Putin calls snap Russia air-raid drill involving 45,000 troops and 150 aircraft. Independent UK. Retrieved on April 3, 2018. From Independent UK: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/vladimir-putin-air-raid-drill-russia-45000-troops-150-aircraft-planes-helicopters-a7570811.html>

to carry out combat training tasks, special attention should be paid to alert combat, deployment of air defence systems for a time of war, and air group readiness to repel the aggression.” Deputy defence minister Alexander Fomin adding “the government did not need to give any formal notice under the Vienna Document.”⁶⁰

On February 8, 2017, Mikhail Tolstykh, the highest leader of the pro-Russia rebels that widely-known after his achievement in the battle for Donetsk airport was killed in an identified explosion in his own office in Donetsk. However his death causation is still debatable. Russian presidential spokesman Dmitry Peskov stated that his death was an attempt by the Ukrainian government to “destabilize the situation” in eastern Ukraine while news agency which labelled as a separatist agency consider the obituary as “a continuation of the terrorist war launched by the Kiev authorities” and there are several prejudice that his death caused by the continuation of Russian-back rebels and the Russian government rivalry.⁶¹

The deputy in Ukraine’s parliament and blogger on military affairs Dmytro Tymchuk, said Tolstykh death was “inevitable” because he is an influential and strong leaders and Russia seen it as threat and probably in the future he could turn back against Russian government and somehow can damaging such peace negotiations. In addition, his death is somewhat resembling the death of another leader like Arsen Pavlov in 2015, he also killed by a bomb which installed in an apartment elevator where he used to lived.⁶²

On February 18, 2018 In Kiev, a rally that meant to demand Petro Poroshenko to surrender his administration occurred with approximately 10,000 people partook in the activity. The protesters were caught holding the picture of Petro Poroshenko stained with crossed-pattern on his face

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

while the protesters shouting "impeachment", "resignation", "Poroshenko is a thief."⁶³

⁶³ The Guardian. (2018). *Thousands march in Kiev calling for Ukraine's president to quit*. The Guardian. Retrieved on April 3, 2018. From The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/18/saakashvili-supporters-march-in-kiev-calling-for-president-to-quit>