
The BRICS Card: Strategy and Diplomacy in Ukrainian Crisis

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Introduction

International politics has witnessed numerous ups and downs, escalations and de-escalations all the way through history. The Ukrainian Crisis of 2014 also appears to be one of the signposts of international political arena. The crisis which initially was supposed to be a mere regional crisis, eventually opened up to a range of international diplomatic maneuvering. In no time the dispute acquired a new momentum with the West, the NATO forces in particular explicitly supporting the Russian rival. The squabble between Russia and the West intensified even further when countries like China and India along with Brazil and South Africa showed no clear intention of opposing the Russian riposte, which was condemned severely by the West for the breach of international law of non-intervention. The following analysis centers around

the response of the various countries sharing a special relationship with Russia by virtue of being a part of the BRICS grouping.

The recent crisis in Ukraine can trace its roots in February 2014 following successive unrests in the Ukrainian capital Kiev in the aftermath of the ousting of the then democratically elected Ukrainian President, Viktor Yanukovich. His decision of signing a treaty with Russia repudiating the association agreement with the European Union sparked off the turmoil. Russia conceived it as illegitimate to throw Yanukovich out of power and refused to recognise the interim government. In no time after the Crimean referendum*, Russia annexed Crimea and the port city of Sevastopol, deploying thousands of forces near the border of eastern Ukraine and accused the West for inciting the Ukrainian revolution.

Many countries criticised the

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Crimean annexation as an illegal act. The West was in fact prompt enough in imposing sanctions against Russia, in addition to reducing G8 to G7 by deducting the Russian presence. The United Nations General Assembly Resolution on the *Territorial Integrity of Ukraine* of March 27, 2014 was a vital international response to the crisis. By a recorded vote of 100 in favour to 11 against, with 58 abstentions, the Assembly resolution called on States, international organizations and specialized agencies not to recognize any change in the status of Crimea.¹ Astonishingly the countries of BRICS grouping apart from Russia (voted against) abstained from voting more or less positing against the sanctions imposed on Russia. An implicit support of these group members for Russia invoked countless strategic calculations confronting the standoff. Since this grouping includes major powers like Brazil, India, China and South Africa, one cannot help focusing on their stances. It is important to pinpoint at this grouping specifically as it is gradually becoming one of the most successful and prominent groupings of the non-Western world. For Russia, BRICS is one of the key means to posit itself in an advantageous situation in the face of the Western rivalry over Ukraine. By virtue of being a part of the grouping Russia expects other BRICS

members to provide it with some vitality in the face of the vehement criticisms and sanctions. As a result the response of the BRICS grouping is adding a new dimension to the whole phenomenon. Thus Russia holds the potential of using this diplomatic facet as a 'card' to outplay the Western effort.

Therefore, the important question remains here, are these countries allying with Russia against the West? The answer can be a 'yes' only if it is an apparent study of the current geopolitical scenario. Thus the objective of this essay is to show that in regard to the crisis, these countries namely Brazil, India, China and South Africa are inclining towards neither Russia nor the West. In simple terms of realism, the considerations of their national interests seem to be predominant in their strategic calculus. For these countries a healthy and steady relationship with Russia is a crucial factor in terms of economy and energy security in particular. On the other side the West also offers vital impetus to these economies. As a result they have shown indifference to some extent in the ongoing Ukrainian catastrophe.

In order to establish this objective the essay can be divided into different sections. The first two sections of the essay will offer a

historical account of the relationship between Russia and Ukraine evolving over Crimea and give a brief timeline of the ongoing crisis. The questions concerning the legal connotations of the Russian riposte will come next to it. The consequent section will analyse BRICS' response to the crisis, dissecting the positions taken by China, India, Brazil and South Africa as individual countries in this regard. The section preceding the conclusion would summarise the future implications of this response.

Relationship between Russia and Ukraine

The two adjacent countries Russia and Ukraine have been entangled for more than 1,000 years of their turbulent account of the past. Economically, strategically and culturally Ukraine has played a vital role for Russia. From the economic point of view, Ukraine has been one of Russia's biggest markets for natural gas exports. Strategically it has provided an essential transit route to the rest of Europe, and culturally Russia has shared a close bond with an estimated 7.5 million ethnic Russians living in Ukrainian soil, mostly in eastern Ukraine and the southern region of Crimea.²

Historically both shared a common past revolving around the Eurasian

land mass. In between the 9th century to the mid-13th century the first East Slavic state, the medieval empire of *Kievan Rus*, was set up by the Vikings. It stretched from the Baltic to the Black Sea. "Rus" is the Slavic word for denoting the red-haired Scandinavians — who came down from the north in the 9th century to conquer the local Slavic tribes and establish their capital at Kiev. The kingdom transformed to Eastern Orthodox Christianity in 988. This laid the underpinnings of the modern Russian church.³ Consequently the destruction of this already internally fragile Empire was assured by the Mongolian invasion and thus the power focal moved to a small *Rus* trading station namely Moscow.⁴ Catholic Poland and Lithuania dominated the country for hundreds of years.

Since the mid-1400s, Crimea was held as a protectorate of the Ottoman Empire until Katherine the Great annexed it to Russia in 1783.⁵ From 1783 onwards, Moscow used its sea presence to subdue the Ottomans. Moscow's predominant naval presence and assertiveness led to the Crimean War of 1853-56, which was the result of British and French unwillingness to let Russia fully dominate the Black Sea at the expense of the Ottoman Empire.⁶ By the end of the 18th century Imperial

Russia had grabbed most of Ukraine, except for Galicia, which was controlled by the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It was referred to as "little Russia" and attempted to squeeze rising Ukrainian nationalism in the 1840s.⁷

After the collapse of the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires at the end of World War I, the foremost Ukrainian independence was proclaimed in Kiev in 1917, though this was short-lived. Ukraine was forcefully engulfed into the Soviet Union in 1919. Stalin further aggravated Ukrainian restlessness with his *collectivization program* * that ruined lives of millions of peasants during 1930s. Afterwards, Stalin expatriated a huge number of Russians and other Soviet citizens to increase the utility of the resource (coal and iron-ore) rich east.⁸ Crimea contained 58% of large ethnic Russian population (As per 2001 Ukrainian Census Report) who could well relate to their Russian identity. Among the other major ethnic groups in Crimea were Ukrainians (24% of Crimean population) and Tatars (12% of Crimean population). Tatars originated under the Turkic Ottoman Empire. In 1944 Tatars and many other non-Russian ethnic groups were deported to Central Asia and Siberian Camps for allegedly lending support to the Nazis in the

hope of liberation. Roughly half of the 200,000 Tatars who were expelled from Crimea expired on their way.⁹ The remaining ones were permitted to return to Crimea only in the late 1980s.

However, there is one landmark incident that became the basis of all the upheavals in the present day scenario. In 1954 Nikita Khrushchev rewarded Ukraine with the Crimean Peninsula that had been ruled by the Russians for centuries, for Ukraine's commendable contribution in the World War II. As Ukraine was still a part of Soviet Union this transfer was a mere gesture on Khrushchev's part for the better accomplishment of administrative purposes.

Ukraine finally achieved independence in 1991 in the face of a crumbling Soviet Empire. While about 90%¹⁰ of the total Ukrainian population desired its severance from Russia only 54%¹¹ of the Crimean voters wished so. Thus, even after being a part of Ukraine, Crimea acquired a fair deal of autonomy within the country, managing a separate legislature for itself. Nonetheless Russia continued its interference in Ukrainian affairs.

In 1994 the Budapest Memorandum gave Ukraine some security assurances to recompense for

relinquishing its nuclear arsenals. The memorandum, signed by the Presidents of Ukraine, United States of America, Russia and the Prime Minister of United Kingdom, obliged the signatories to “respect the independence and sovereignty and the existing borders of Ukraine”¹² and “refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine.”¹³ In 1997, Ukraine-Russia bi-lateral Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership made the Crimean Port City Sevastopol the hub of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet, as it was during the Soviet reign, without mentioning about Ukraine’s collaboration with the European Union.¹⁴ Gradually, Ukraine has sought cooperation with both Russia and the European Union.

In Ukraine’s 2004 presidential election, the pro-Russian candidate Viktor Yanukovich, who was backed by the Kremlin, was charged for enormous sham in the election, erupting into the Orange Revolution. It kept Yanukovich out of power. The letdown of the succeeding Ukrainian leaders made way for his comeback in 2010.¹⁵ In 2013 Yanukovich’s decision to break the deal of association with the European Union in favour of a closer relationship with Russia eventually led to a mass protest against him that finally took

the shape of today’s Ukrainian Crisis.

The Emerging Crisis

The 2010 Presidential election in Ukraine got Yanukovich back to power that he lost due to the Orange revolution of 2004. Till his 2013 decision of abandoning an agreement of association with the European Union in favour of a closer tie with Russia, things were under control in Ukraine. Gradually in late November 2013 protests gathered pace with thousands of Ukrainians assembling for the demonstration in Kiev, as their hopes for development and job opportunities in Ukraine were crumbled. In December, as a response to the occupation of the Kiev City Hall, the Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed to buy \$15bn of Ukrainian debt and reduce the price of Russian gas supplies by about a third, showing an unprecedented support to Yanukovich.¹⁶

The Month of January 2014 saw Ukrainian Parliament passing anti-protest laws with which the storm of protests gathered further momentum, although at the end of the month the Parliament repudiated these laws and the Ukrainian Prime Minister resigned. Kiev witnessed the worst day of hostility in 70 years with 88 people dying within 48 hours on

February 20, 2014.¹⁷ In spite of signing a compromise deal with his opposition leaders on the next day, the situation was far from being under control. As the Parliament declared about the interim President along with issuing an arrest warrant for Yanukovich, some pro-Russian troops were deployed in Crimea to grab control over the Crimean capital, Simferopol. Getting a nod from the Duma to prevent the alleged violation of human rights and to safeguard the Russian interests, pro-Russian rallies were held in Crimea along with certain other cities of Ukraine like Kharkiv. This surely added to the American apprehensions about Crimea coming under Russian control. Russia's UN envoy reported that the ousted President Yanukovich had requested the Russian president for using force, although on March 4 Putin claimed the encircling troops are not Russian but they are self-defense troops.

On March 6 the Crimean Parliament voted to join Russia deciding over the referendum date as March 16. Russia officially welcomed this decision. March 8 onwards the real flashpoints sparked off between Russia and the West over the Crimean issue, when the West warned Russia of *new measures* against it. The European Commission took no time in offering Ukraine trade

incentives worth around 500m Euros.¹⁸ The US clearly asserted its position in favour of Ukraine.

As per the official results of Crimea's referendum, 97% of voters showed their willingness to join Russia.¹⁹ Thus, on March 18, Putin signed a bill to incorporate the Crimean peninsula as a part of the Russian territory after defending Moscow's move in Crimea. Brussels denounced the Crimean annexation and stretched its hands for further sanctions against Russia, following which US did the same. By an order of the acting Ukrainian President, the Ukrainian troops posted in Crimea were pulled out in response to which Russia assured a *partial withdrawal* from the borders of Ukraine. On March 27, United Nations General Assembly took a resolution on the *Territorial Integrity of Ukraine* condemning the Crimean annexation as illegitimate.

On April 1 NATO foreign ministers deferred all possible civilian and military co-operation with Russia as they claimed to see no intention of Russian withdrawal. As time passed the waves of the unrest also touched some of the Eastern Ukrainian cities like Donetsk, Luhansk and Kharkiv. These cities were also demanding a referendum. The energy giant Russia warned Ukraine of discontinuing the

Russian gas supplies to Ukraine if Kiev fails to pay off its debts implicitly showing its intentions to interrupt gas deliveries to Europe on April 10. Foreign ministers from the United States, the European Union, Ukraine, and Russia issued a joint statement, namely the Geneva accord on April 17 delineating measures to decrease tensions in Ukraine, although it was not as effective as expected. Throughout the rest of April till date the pro-Russian demonstrations continued in a scattered manner in the midst of which the Presidential election in Ukraine took place more or less peacefully. Following the election of the President Petro Poroshenko, Russia called for an open dialogue with Ukraine on May 29. As it seems now the situation would continue to remain under strain for some more time to come, although on June 25 the Duma has terminated its resolution that approved the use of Russian forces in Ukraine. Later, the incident of MH17 crash on July 17, raised new allegations and apprehensions over Russian intentions.

Legal Connotations

The Ukrainian crisis threw light on the critical legal connotations of the Crimean annexation. There are broad legal questions associated with it, viz; did Russia violate article 2(4) of the UN Charter on the use of force? Was

there any ground for their right to self-defense under article 51 of the UN charter? Is Crimea's decision to secede through a referendum legitimate? Is it legally viable for Russia to annex Crimea unilaterally? Are these unilateral Western sanctions lawful?

The article 2(4) of the UN Charter provides that, "All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state...." In spite of the continued Russian denial of the use of force in the Ukrainian territory, it is a fact that pro-Russian troops were deployed throughout Crimea and the borders of Eastern Ukraine. The Ukraine claimed to be in a vulnerable situation due to Russian assertion over the region. Thus, it implies a violation of article 2(4).

It leads to the second question of self-defense on Russian part. Under the Nicaragua case of 1986, The International Court of Justice rejected the US justification of collective self-defense for inflaming the military or paramilitary activities in and against Nicaragua and condemned the act as a violation of customary international law related to the non-intervention in the affairs of another state. Keeping this ruling in mind one can proclaim

that Russia also holds no ground for collective self-defense in this case. Russia gives the logic of safeguarding the interests of the Russians living in Crimea to justify its troop deployment, although there is no such gross violation of human rights in Crimea to back its claim. On the other hand, Ukraine can only have a right of self-defense if it is directly attacked by the Russian force. Pro-Russian force deployments do not mean a use of force by them to validate a Ukrainian retaliation.

In his speech on March 18, Vladimir Putin alluded to the 2010 Advisory opinion of International Court of Justice permitting Kosovo's right to self-determination as a justification for Crimean secession. As per International law a right to secede only can be legally attainable as an expression of self-determination against the colonial subjugation or foreign occupation. Any question of secession must be addressed under national constitutional laws which for obvious reasons grant no right of unilateral secession. Moreover the secession needs to be recognized by the international community. The situation of Crimea resolutely diverges from that of the Kosovan situation. When Crimea seceded, it was still governed by the Ukrainian Constitution which surely authorized

no such action. Furthermore the Russian claim of the violation of fundamental rights of the ethnic Russians in Crimea was meager in comparison to Kosovo. Following the ethos of the Lotus Case, Kosovo's Declaration of Independence was justified under international law only because it did not overrule the existing set of international laws. It clearly indicates insofar as the referendum has no effect on Crimea's secession from Ukraine, international law does not proscribe the referendum. Lastly the question was raised regarding the transparency of the 16th March referendum, conducted in Crimea.

This leads us to the next issue of Russia's unilateral Crimean annexation. Naturally, if the referendum seems to be illegitimate, the annexation would automatically lose its grounds. More importantly this annexation has received little international support and recognition. As a result of which on the March 27 UN General Assembly resolution of the 'Territorial Integrity of Ukraine' 100 out of 193 UN members voted in favour while only 11 showed up negatively along with 56 abstentions.

The question of validity of the Western sanctions becomes another crucial legal concern. Under article

41 of the UN Charter, "The Security Council may decide what measures not involving the use of armed force are to be employed to give effect to its decisions, and it may call upon the Members of the United Nations to apply such measures." In this case Security Council is bound to become paralyzed because of the Russian veto. Although international law only provides Security Council with the mandate of such sanctions, Western powers took up the matter individually or collectively as members of NATO. In fact it is their collective decision to exclude Russia from G8.

Thus considering all these legal intricacies it becomes evident that in the game of strategic calculations and diplomatic maneuvering law plays a secondary role. Countries utilize the legal loophole to satisfy their interests although in the long run they fall short of legitimacy in the eyes of the international community. In spite of the clear violation of international law, the countries of BRICS grouping (apart from Russia) showed an implicit backing for Russia, not giving legality a primacy over the political manipulation. Thus realpolitik has played an upper hand in the considerations of Ukrainian crisis by channelising the BRICS opinion in a particular manner.

BRICS Response

The journey of BRICS started in 2010 with the inclusion of South Africa, although it commenced its first summit in 2009 as 'BRICS'. BRICS is an acronym of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. These countries over the last decade as 'emerging protagonists in international development cooperation'²⁰ have increased both their economic and technical cooperation among themselves and especially with the developing low income countries (LIC). Although BRICS political influence is not as strong as the economic one, BRICS has tried to exert it by bringing about a change in the architecture of international politics. BRICS' association with the LICs questions the traditional supremacy of the Western donors especially that of the European Union, rejuvenating the principle of South-South Cooperation. In spite of the heterogeneity of BRICS, the countries of this grouping are all regional powers with a considerable size of their economies. In fact recent scholarly observations also proclaim that the surging cooperation of this grouping is likely to stick them together, successfully dodging the challenges. Naturally it enhances the importance of BRICS as a grouping. In an interview given to

'The Diplomat' Dr. Oliver Stuenkel asserted that:

"Despite economic difficulties during the past years, the BRICS countries remain crucial contributors to global growth.... We will not return to the distribution of economic power of the late 20th century. As a consequence, BRICS countries have turned into indispensable actors when it comes to addressing global challenges. International institutions have yet to adapt to this new reality."²¹

BRICS as a grouping has not taken any formal position in Ukrainian crisis, although just three days before passing of the resolution against Russia in UNGA, in the BRICS Foreign ministers' meet of March 24, BRICS in a way posited itself in a pro-Russian manner. The Chairperson's statement in this meeting hinted an opposition to the Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop's suggestion to ban Russia from the upcoming G20 meeting of 2014²² by stating that:

"The Ministers noted with concern, the recent media statement on the forthcoming G20 Summit to be held in Brisbane in November 2014. The custodianship of the G20 belongs to all Member States equally and no one Member State can unilaterally determine its nature and character."²³

In fact the statement underlined a subtle condemnation of Western sanctions. It articulated:

"BRICS countries agreed that the challenges that exist within the regions of the BRICS countries must be addressed within the fold of the United Nations in a calm and level-headed manner. The escalation of hostile language, sanctions and counter-sanctions, and force does not contribute to a sustainable and peaceful solution, according to international law, including the principles and purposes of the United Nations Charter."²⁴

It reflects a collective BRICS position in the Ukrainian crisis, which became even more prominent when all these group members barring Russia chose not to vote in the March 27 UNGA resolution. Moreover BRICS countries traditionally bear an anti-Western rhetoric as a point of unification, in spite of a severe lack of shared interests amongst themselves. Since many of the BRICS countries are former Western colonies or quasi-colonies, they are at times extremely distrustful of Western intentions of trampling state's sovereignty by the practices of humanitarian intervention and anti-proliferation imposition.²⁵ Although in this case Russia becomes the invader, these countries are still

showing their good faith in Russia. Thus despite ample secessionist tendencies in diverse countries like China, India and South Africa; they are the last 'card' for Russia to evade a complete political isolation. This collective BRICS position also seems to be an accumulation of the individual interests of the countries concerned.

The Chinese Moves

While taking up individual BRICS countries as points of analysis, China with immense potential, will unequivocally be needed to prioritise. Undoubtedly the West deems China as the prime hindrance in the way of Russia's complete political isolation because China holds greater stakes in its relationship with Russia.

The post-Cold War revival of Sino-Russian relationship took its turn not only with the resolution of some major border disputes but also with an enormous cooperation in other sectors. The combined level of Russian and Chinese exports to each other was \$53 billion in 2010.²⁶ Although it was not at par with expectations, gradually there is an evident surge in their bilateral trade. At the end of 2010 Russia inaugurated an oil pipeline to China.²⁷ Moreover, energy supplies from Russia and

Central Asia have trimmed down grave Chinese reliance upon supplies from the Middle East and Africa through susceptible choke points such as the Straits of Hormuz and Malacca.²⁸ In spite of being the fourth largest oil producer as per 2013²⁹, China's growing demand for energy, forces it to import over 50 per cent of its oil consumption and as per government estimation by 2020 this figure will take a leap to 60 per cent.³⁰ As a consequence of the established oil producers' (Primarily in the Middle East) already formulated long term contracts with Western oil corporations; China is compelled to show greater buoyancy in Russia. As per 2013 Russia is the third largest oil producer (After Saudi Arabia and USA) in the world leaving China behind with a huge margin.³¹ China also relies on Russia for certain primary goods. It even requires some defence equipments from Russia. After the allied victory in the first Gulf war, in the face of Western arms embargo, China had to turn to the Russia for better military technologies. Simultaneously, Russia's tumbling military exports found China as a new consumer. Alongside, China shares ample security concerns with Russia. With the establishment of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2001, both the countries have extended their hands of collaboration

regarding the Central Asian security concerns. Naturally besides being a BRICS partner of Russia, China's considerable dependence on it, shows the reason of its tilt towards Russia even when there is a clear violation of international law in Russia's Crimean annexation.

On March 15 just before the day of Crimean referendum China was the only permanent member of the UN Security Council to abstain from the UNSC voting over the American Draft Resolution declaring the referendum as illegal, which was finally vetoed by Russia. Although China was concerned because of the ethnic breakaway, China showed a complete reluctance on taking an anti-Russian position unlike other permanent members of the Council. In fact even after President Obama's declaration of it as a violation of international law, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Qin Gang promptly responded, "There have been reasons for today's situation in Ukraine".³² "China is deeply concerned with the current Ukraine situation,"³³ he added recommending all sides to look for an apt political solution. Following which the Russian Foreign ministry took no time in appreciating "the coincidence of Russia's and China's positions on the situation in Ukraine".³⁴

'TIME' mentioned Chinese stance in Ukrainian crisis as 'an awkward spot' as it imperils China's own principle of sovereignty by raising uneasy questions on Tibet, Xinjiang.³⁵ But Dr. Oliver Stuenkel wrote in 'The Post-Western World', "Criticizing Moscow would not only imperil a crucial strategic partnership, but also implicitly approve of the West's support of the revolution in Kiev."³⁶

In reality while the Russian Stock Market goes on the verge of a doom's day, it gives China a golden opportunity to negotiate in its own favour cracking any deal as there is no other substitute for Russia. Thus on May 19, 2014 after a decade long negotiation China-Russia have signed a US\$400 billion gas deal for 30 years. Indeed after signing the deal Putin remarked, "Our Chinese friends drive a hard bargain as negotiators."³⁷ As per 'Foreign Policy' report, "The deal — which Putin called a 'historic event for Russia's gas sector' — will lead to the massive development of gas fields in Russia's far east, requiring at least \$50 billion in investment by Russian firms and, Putin said, perhaps \$20 billion in Chinese investment."³⁸

In this way Russia stretched its natural gas arms to explore the Asian

markets. Thus some scholars have also called it an 'Asian Pivot' for Russia. Added to the fact Chinese firms and banks are also sneaking inside Russia for more opportunities. According to Reuters "Chinese investors are committed to financing part of Novatek's \$27 billion Russian gas project..."³⁹ China thus not only blows a fresh air in Russian economy, but also gives Russians a psychological backing. It means that China to some extent made the Western weapons of sanctions ineffective in the battle over Ukraine and the gas deal with China looks like a panacea to Russian wound as it can save Russia from political ostracism. Although Prof. Geodement of European Council of Foreign Relations (ECFR) sees the deal as an overhyped propaganda for mutual support, undoubtedly this deal has had a grave impact on the current global scenario.⁴⁰

China's skepticism about the West's political intention over the spiky concerns of 'unbalanced trade, cyber security and intellectual property rights'⁴¹ etc. is also an additional factor in analyzing the Chinese move. In fact during the days of Syrian crisis China parted with Russia against the Western stance.

China is yet to take a clear stand on

Ukrainian crisis and in near future it will not take one as it sees benefits in maintaining such ambivalence. China is likely to keep on providing Russia with such lifelines to satisfy its own greater national interests.

India's Position

Following the legacy of the Cold War days, India more or less had shared an affirmative relationship with Russia. But since the development of an intimacy with the West, there were ample reasons of Russian apprehensions. However, India had fruitfully maintained a safe distance from the Ukrainian crisis. Nonetheless this Indian attempt also needs a thorough analysis as India is a substantially major power of today's world.

After the Ukrainian ambassador's meet with a senior Indian foreign ministry official, India was in a dilemma to take an official position as India had an immediate concern for the supply of certain military equipments from the Ukrainian factories. No wonder this dependence was nominal and manageable for India. It was later that India's official take on the crisis, was summed up by India's National Security Adviser Shivshankar Menon:

"We hope that whatever internal

issues there are within Ukraine are settled peacefully, and the broader issues of reconciling various interests involved, and there are legitimate Russian and other interests involved.... We hope those are discussed, negotiated and that there is a satisfactory resolution to them."⁴²

Besides, the Indian Government was also critical of the sanctions imposed against Russia and had no intention of supporting the Western backed protests in Kiev. In fact on March 18, over a 20 minutes long telephonic conversation, Putin had shown his gratitude towards the then Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh for taking a 'restrained and objective' position on the Ukrainian situation.⁴³ According to the press release issued by the Ministry of External Affairs elaborating the talk, the Prime Minister had emphasized "the consistent position India had on the issues of unity and territorial integrity of countries"⁴⁴ and "...expressed his hope that all sides would exercise restraint and work together constructively to find political and diplomatic solutions that protected the legitimate interests of all countries in the region and ensured long term peace and stability in Europe and beyond."⁴⁵

Naturally, this backing for Russia

adds up to Western suspicion about India. 'The Diplomat' writes:

"On its face, New Delhi's enunciation of respect for Russia's "legitimate interests" in Crimea is a surprising blow to the prevailing U.S. policy of reaching out to India. As the largest democracy in the world, a burgeoning capitalist economy and an increasingly important military power, India has been viewed as a counterweight to China's rise and an anchor of the U.S.-led international order. India's support for Russia's revisionism in Crimea, then, is something that should trouble U.S. policymakers. In the long run, India's response to the Crimean crisis might even be remembered as one of the more important implications of the whole episode."⁴⁶

In fact, India showed little direct interest in Ukrainian developments because of its preoccupation with the Lok Sabha elections. In fact, Government reports are quite explicit about it. As per the reports of the Ministry of External Affairs on Indo-Russian relations:

"Relations with Russia are a key pillar of India's foreign policy and Russia has been a longstanding time-tested partner of India. Since the signing of "Declaration on the India-Russia Strategic Partnership" in

October 2000 (during the visit of President Vladimir Putin to India), India-Russia ties have acquired a qualitatively new character with enhanced levels of cooperation in almost all areas of the bilateral relationship including political, security, trade and economy, defense, science and technology and culture... During the visit of Russian President to India in December 2010, the Strategic Partnership was elevated to the level of a 'Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership'.⁴⁷

India has had long-standing defence cooperation with Russia which has been stretched to the R&D (research and development) cooperation in defence. As per the 2011 press release of Stockholm International Peace Research Institute India being the largest arms importer in the world gets 82% of its deliveries from Russia.⁴⁸ Moreover, annual ministerial-level defense reviews have been systematically held by India with Russia. Bilateral trade also had grown up steadily amounting to US\$ 6.94 billion in January-September 2013.⁴⁹ Russia is also a major Indian partner for the civilian usage of her nuclear energy. The construction of the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (KKNPP) Units 1 & 2 is a marked upshot of their productive cooperation in this sector.

Alongside India has also

considered Russia as the stabilizing factor in the region. Author T. K. Arun thus opines: "Having an anti-Russian government control, Crimea would erode Russian security and thus stability of the world order, in which the US has overwhelming military superiority but not total."⁵⁰ It is also important to mention that since China also showed its implicit tilt towards Kremlin over the crisis, India could not afford a loosening up of ties with Russia. Besides containing Beijing, New Delhi could also aim 'better' deals with it in the face of the continued Western sanctions against Moscow. In fact being a BRICS partner of Russia had strengthened all these possibilities even more.

Future Implications

In the wake of violation of international law by Russia, a general unanimity was more or less expected from the international community. As a result of which the UNGA resolution against Russia was passed without a major obstacle. Notwithstanding this, those 11 negative votes and 58 abstentions did not go unnoticed. In terms of the undercurrent of international politics it entails many things.

As the crisis unfolded, Russia faced numerous rebuttals through the tightening of the Western sanctions.

It targeted the Russian economy by putting a number of Russian entrepreneurs and companies in the black list. In spite of an alliance over the crisis, between the US and the European Union, their success fell short of expectations. These sanctions were unable to assure a complete isolation of Russia economically. Its economy was affected undoubtedly, but the Russian BRICS partners kept on working relation with Russia, which worked as a boost to Russian economy. In fact the dependence on the Russian energy sector took Russia one step ahead. Although the Geneva agreement provided both the sides with a useful tool to de-escalate the tension in Ukraine, it hardly had provisions for its successful implementation. After the non-execution of the Geneva accord, playing too harsh with sanctions could have amplified the public support for President Vladimir Putin, and might have called for swift retaliations against Western companies and executives. Nonetheless, the chances of an economic boomerang for the European countries surged with an apprehension of hindrances in Russian gas supplies. In today's world affairs it thus proves the significance of these major powers, since US along with its European allies lack the vehicle to run the show on their own in the midst of a

declining American supremacy.

Nonetheless unlike many apprehensions one can be sanguine enough about the impossibility of any full-fledged war. On the one hand US would not afford to invest fully in war which does not entail its direct interest; on the other hand the European Union is not prepared for a massive bloodshed without an American backing. Moreover, as per the doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction, none of the parties would gather enough courage to go for a nuclear war.

This landmark event of international politics has nevertheless reshaped the political calculations of 21st century. As the Ukrainian crisis evolved around the tussle over the European Union and Russia, it narrowed down the probability a Euro-BRICS rapprochement. In fact Obama's 'pivot to Asia' policy seemed to become aimless when a country like India was more willing not to go against Russia. The assertiveness of these BRICS countries going against the Western impulse, made it clear to the world that they are no longer depending upon the whims of the West. Indeed the Russian expression over the crisis hinted at the fact that Russia was keener to set an example for the NATO forces rather than worrying about Crimea. But this does not

necessarily indicate an alliance among the BRICS countries, instead, it affirms a positioning against the Western interest. The accumulation of their own interests has been reflected through BRICS.

However the Russian BRICS partners have astutely dealt with the matter by not being on either side. Thus despite not being pleased with their behaviour over the crisis, the West did not show a bleak reciprocation which would have invited further non-cooperation with them. The crisis in Ukraine raised questions over the pre-conceived notions of Western supremacy in a big way altering the roadmap of world politics.

Conclusion

The crisis in Ukraine being a watershed phenomenon of international politics has altered some of the major political dimensions beyond doubt. A predicament that spurred up as a regional crisis took a grand leap with an international contour welcoming plenty of attention from the international community. A regional crisis invited international diplomacy in it.

As discussed earlier, the two rival sides of the crisis wanted to grab

international support to legitimize their courses of action. Although the United Nations General Assembly unanimously rebuked the Russian action in Crimea, some of the major powers preferred to remain aloof. The fact remains that the Russian act of Crimean annexation was a violation of international legal norms. Despite the Russian BRICS partners have tactfully tackled the question, their primary consideration was not to upset any of the sides and keep things under control at home. Thus they refrained from unveiling their position. Alongside they did not forget to strictly stick to their positions on the territorial integrity of the states. For Russia, the March 24, BRICS Foreign Ministers' meet was a golden opportunity to converge the interests of China, India, South Africa and Brazil and to channelize them on its side over the Ukrainian crisis. But without showing a vigorous inclination the meeting coded an anti-Western position opposing the series of Western sanctions against Russia. This not only provided oxygen to Russian economy but also gave a thrust to the Russian action. The 'BRICS card' turned the game partially on Russia's side.

Additionally, a thorough analysis of the stances of these individual countries has proved the fact that they had individual stakes in

maintaining the ambiguity over their position. Their aim was certainly not to please any of these sides but to retain their own interests intact. For obvious reasons they had no intention to spoil their ongoing bilateral relationships either with Russia or the Western countries, especially the US. Moreover, considering the domestic unease of these countries they are incapable of pledging full support to the secessionist tendencies of Crimea. Thus, the higher individual gains involved in it made these country play as a decisive 'card' by curbing down the effects of Western sanctions on Russia.

If Putin's aim was to maintain the sphere of influence over the Eurasian land mass or to realize the dreams of a Eurasian Union, it might have not succeeded, nonetheless Russia sailed through with a fragmented BRICS to survive the agonies of the face off. Post May 25 elections in Ukraine, a clean sweep of Petro Poroshenko became a moral advantage for the West as it declined the invocations of

nationalist traits of Putin's aggressive foreign policy. In fact for Ukraine, June 27 has been marked for the historic 'association agreement' with the European Union. The future of Ukraine is still in shackles and nobody knows how far it is going to modify the architecture of international politics. Notwithstanding that, over the time this trademark event of this era will remain under the spotlight for some more time to come with its distinctly classified significance.

After all, considering the factors involved, it is not difficult to conclude the increasing significance of the BRICS partners of Russia in today's international politics. Centering around the Ukrainian crisis, the convergence of interests of these countries made them keep a steady ambivalence over their stance. This nonetheless, in a way became a Russian 'card' but the essence of realpolitik remained intact here by heaving the deliberations of national interest and maintaining a safe distance from the intricacies of the crisis. ■

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