

CRI-MEA

From Regional
and International
Perspectives

EDITORS

FİLİZ TUTKU AYDIN
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SETA

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SETA

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FOREWORD

KADİR USTUN*

In this edited volume, our goal was to understand the international community's response to the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. This watershed event can be considered the beginning of the ongoing war in Ukraine. Although Crimea's annexation amounted to an attack by a member of the international community against another, the reaction of that same international community was largely mute with a few exceptions. After all, a cardinal rule of the international system was being violated and the international community appeared unwilling to do much about it unlike in similar instances elsewhere. The US and European nations responded to the annexation with sanctions against Russia, but these were largely ineffective in either countering or deterring Russia from ultimately annexing Crimea.

Russia's discomfort with the geopolitical situation following the fall of the Berlin Wall has been discussed widely. In the unipolar moment, the search for a new international system remained uncertain. In the absence of a new international security arrangement after the end of the Cold War, many countries including Russia sought a way forward. The instability in the system was apparent and it produced multiple conflicts throughout the world in the form of ethnic cleansing, civil wars, and invasions. As Russia sought to adjust to the new situation, one of the alternatives was to increase influence in the former Soviet space. As Europe and Russia came to compete for economic and political influence in Eastern Europe, Ukraine became one of the most contested grounds. It was clear Russia was not committed to Ukraine's self-determination but preferred a pro-Russian political system next door.

* The SETA Foundation at Washington DC

The political turmoil that was dubbed the Maidan Revolution had come about in the context of a struggle between pro-Europe and pro-Russia political forces in Ukraine. Russia took this moment as an opportunity to invade and subsequently annex the strategically important Crimea. As many in the West saw this eventuality as a direct consequence of the Maidan protests, some strategists were ringing the alarm bells loud enough to alert the international community that this was only the beginning of a conflict between Russia and Ukraine. It was almost as if the international community saw the annexation as a somewhat tolerable cost of Ukraine's inching toward the West. Clearly, this was not a wise assessment. The idea that Russia would have been satisfied with the annexation of strategically important Crimea has clearly proven misguided.

The Western reaction to the annexation of Crimea transpired in the form of limited sanctions which were largely ineffective. The international community including countries like Türkiye never recognized the annexation of Crimea, but the strategic implications of this Russian move did not appear to galvanize the international community to mount a strong response. It was only after Russia's invasion attempt of the Ukrainian capital, Kiev, in February 2021 that the international community came to understand the gravity of the situation. Having failed to respond to the Russian President's gambit to peel Crimea away from Ukraine, the West decided to change its posture this time around largely because the Ukrainian army under President Zelenskiy appeared much more capable and willing to fight back against the invasion.

As the most recent round of the war in Ukraine completed its first year, the fate of Crimea is still under debate as the Ukrainian leadership has so far refused to accept Russian annexation of the peninsula. Moreover, Ukrainian forces are preparing to launch a military effort to liberate Crimea along with the rest of the Ukrainian lands in 2023. However, it is far from certain how long this war will last and how it might end just as it is uncertain if Russia can hold onto Crimea. As such, the final status of Crimea might be in limbo in the years to come as Ukraine and the international community will increasingly challenge the current status quo while Russia will try hard to hang on to this territory. It may all be well for Putin that it remains a disputed territory in the eyes of the international community as long as Russia can control the peninsula and use it for accessing the Black Sea and squeezing Ukraine from the east. Ukraine will not feel secure if Crimea is controlled by Russia but there may not be a settlement of the security dilemma in the region anytime soon especially if the Western support to Ukraine weakens over time.

The scope of this edited volume does not allow us to provide a rigorous treatment of the Crimean issue today but analyzing the international community's response to the Russian annexation in 2014 provide us with important clues as to how the strategic environment might change in the years ahead. Bringing together these chapters has not been easy as many Ukrainian experts have found themselves fighting to defend their country. As we had started to solicit contributions from experts prior to the February 2021 invasion of Ukraine, some of the experts ended up unable to contribute as promised due to the war conditions. Several iterations of the scope and the content of the book needed to take place. We see this as a strength rather than shortcoming since it has pushed us and the contributors to think more dynamically about the subject matter.

Despite the difficulties along the way, we think that the book provides an authoritative survey of the international community's treatment of Crimea's annexation from different country perspectives. At the same time, we have been able to include some interesting analyses of the internal political dynamics inside Crimea as well. We have divided the book into three parts. In the first part, *Crimea between Ukraine and Russia*, two chapters contextualize and provide historical background about the significance of Crimea and the role of Crimean Tatars. Yuliya Biletska discusses the internal political dynamics between Kiev and Crimea with particular focus on Crimean Tatars. Ridvan Bari focuses on how Russia has seen Crimea and what the drivers of Russian policy toward the peninsula.

In the second part, *Regional Implications of Russian Invasion of Crimea*, three chapters discuss security, environmental and geopolitical implications of the Russian invasion and eventual annexation of Crimea. Sezai Özçelik provides a perspective informed by the international and military security considerations regarding the occupation of Crimea. Borys Babin's chapter addresses an issue that is not well-known to outsiders with particular focus on Russian management in the peninsula and how it impacted the environmental situation leading to an ecological catastrophe. Fethi Kurtiy Şahin's exploration of the Turkish policy considerations especially regarding the Black Sea security makes an important contribution to our understanding of Türkiye's long-standing position regarding the annexation of Crimea.

In the third part, *International Reactions to the Russian Annexation of Crimea*, three chapters deal with the reactions of the U.S., the EU, and the international community to the Russian annexation. Lisa Aronsson and Jeffrey Mankoff analyze the U.S. policy toward Crimea's occupation and discuss the question of whether

Washington was able to provide a robust response. Amanda Paul's chapter on the EU's response takes it further by arguing that the weak European response to the annexation of Crimea, in fact, paved the way for Putin's invasion of Ukraine in early 2022. Nedim Useinow's chapter concludes our book by discussing the relationship between the violation of the international law and international community's lackluster reaction to the Russian annexation of Crimea.

We hope that this edited volume will provide the audiences with an informed perspective about the significance of the Russian invasion and annexation of Crimea in 2014. It should not only enrich our understanding of the geopolitical implications of this development but also better contextualize the ongoing war in Ukraine. When Russia set out to invade Ukraine in early 2022, many argued that it was the return of classic geopolitical conflict but perhaps it had never left in the first place. The annexation of Crimea was an important turning point in Russia's efforts to reclaim what it considers its "backyard." It also arguably had precedent in the Chechen and Georgian wars.

The international community's treatment of the war in Ukraine has significantly changed since 2014 but it is not a sure bet that it will be able to reverse Russian encroachments in its neighboring states. We hope that this edited volume will highlight some critical turning points and moments of failure by the international community in the wake of Russia's annexation of Crimea. It should also inform any policy considerations regarding the status of Crimea as well as a potential future settlement of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. The conflict may be a protracted one but the prospects for peace, we hope, will emerge sooner rather than later.

Kadir Ustun
March 2023

INTRODUCTION

FİLİZ TUTKU AYDIN*

Crimea is located at the intersection of many civilizations. The Crimean Tatars, who synthesized Chingizid and Ottoman cultures formed a Crimea-based Islamic civilization on par with Al-Andulus and became a major Eastern European power. Nevertheless, the past two centuries of Crimea is a history of Russian colonization and re-colonization of the peninsula and its people. In this book, to understand the Russian occupation of Crimea since 2014, we would like to locate it in the framework of neo-colonialism. In this introductory essay, we would like to first provide a short geopolitical history of Crimea. Second, we would like to underline the main aspects of the Russian occupation and annexation of Crimea. We argue that the Russian policy has been shaped primarily by a neo-colonial ideology instead of strategy in the case of the Crimea's occupation. Finally, we would like to link the annexation of Crimea to the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine.

CRIMEAN GEOPOLITICAL HISTORY

Crimea is geographically located where many ancient tribes including Sarmatians, Kimmerians, Goths, Hazars, and Greeks have transited or settled. It was considered a strategic place as Chingizid Golden Horde, Kipchaks, Cumans, Pechenegs, Nogays, Byzantium, Italian city-states, and the Ottoman Empire struggled to conquer. However, the historical events that left a more decisive mark on Crimea were the establishment of the Crimean Khanate and the Ottoman-Russian rivalry over the control of the peninsula. The Russian claim for Crimea is an invented tradition as Russians were the only regional ethnic group that did not set foot in Crimea before 1783. The modern history of Crimea begins with a breach of the

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international treaty, Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, by Russia. In this treaty, Russia and the Ottoman Empire guaranteed the independence of the Crimean Khanate. The last Khan of Crimea, Şahin Giray, who dreamt of creating a modern European state out of the Khanate failed to accumulate sufficient political and military power, and Russia proclaimed the annexation of Crimea in 1783. Catherine the Great, the “enlightened” monarch of Russia, promised to respect religious and cultural rights of the Crimean Tatar citizens but did not follow through with these commitments. She distributed the Crimean Tatar land to Russian nobility forcing Crimean Tatars to work for those landlords. The Russian rulers also re-settled a large number of Christian peasants in Crimea to increase the Christian population of the peninsula. The Russian government threatened to conscript Crimean Tatars in continuous fights against their Ottoman brethren. Therefore, a large exodus of Crimean Tatars and Nogays took place following the Russian annexation and the number of Crimean Tatars in the peninsula was severely depleted.

The Crimean War (1853-1856) became the first incident in which the Crimean Tatars were profiled as a fifth column, and the Russian Tsar threatened to deport them all. This threat prompted an exodus of Crimean Tatars towards the Ottoman territories, so much so that only a third of the Crimean Tatar population remained in Crimea. İsmail Bey Gasprinskiy was the first leader who argued that the Crimean Tatars must not leave Crimea but create a modern nation that will resist Russian colonization. In this spirit, Crimean Tatars declared the first democratic Muslim republic in 1917, offering the right to vote for women, which was not given in many Western countries yet. While Bolsheviks killed the first Crimean Tatar Prime Minister, Noman Çelebi Cihan, and practically put an end to this republic, they could only include Crimea in the USSR unless it was an autonomous republic of Crimean Tatars. More than half of the governmental posts were occupied by Crimean Tatars despite the fact that they constituted one-fourth of the population. When Stalin consolidated his rule, he overturned this policy by purging the Crimean Tatar intelligentsia, local leaders, and imams and by creating artificial famine in Crimea as in Ukraine. Therefore, it is not surprising for some Crimean Tatars to try to liberate their homeland from the Soviet rule during the WWII while Germans permitted limited national activity as part of their policy of convincing Türkiye to join the war. Only a small number of Crimean Tatars were engaged in this national activity, as most Crimean Tatar men had to serve in the Soviet army and some women as well as men either joined or helped the partisans.

Despite these facts, on 18 May 1944, all Crimean Tatars were deported from Crimea, on the pretext of collaboration with the Nazis. The loss of Crimean Tatar lives during the deportation was close to the 40 percent of the population. Crimea was also economically devastated by the departure of its indigenous people who knew how to manage the water systems, forests, agriculture, and the whole ecosystem of Crimea by employing methods developed through centuries. There lies the reason why Crimea was taken from Russia and given to Ukraine like a “sack of potatoes” in Putin’s words: Ukraine which has a territorial continuity with Crimean peninsula would manage Crimea’s economy more effectively. Crimea, which is deemed an inalienable part of Russianness by Russian politicians today was quickly demoted to an administrative region and forgotten after 1944.

Once a significant object of contestation between Britain, France, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire, Crimea and the whole Black Sea disappeared from the radar of Türkiye and European states as it became a part of the Soviet Union. Even the deportation of Crimean Tatars was found out a few years after the event. Crimean Tatars, who were deported to Central Asia and Siberia, however, did not forget about Crimea. This sense of belonging initiated the Crimean Tatar collective return movement. The world and the Soviets once again remembered Crimea, as Crimean Tatars started to return to their homeland. Russia and Yeltsin could not care less, as long as nobody asked for any apology or compensation regarding Stalin’s crimes in 1944. The Russian Federation gladly inherited the riches of the Soviet Union without assuming responsibility for any of the historical injustices perpetrated by the Soviet Union. Deciding to invent a tradition of Crimea in 2014, Putin reinforced a myth of continuity from St. Vladimir’s baptism in Crimea to the Black Sea Navy’s defense of the fatherland in the WWII to prop up his electoral ratings and to project his neocolonial identity.

THE PATH TOWARD THE OCCUPATION OF CRIMEA IN 2014

The post-1990 Russian foreign policy was still in contradiction with the West but Russia did not have the economic and political power to pursue an assertive foreign policy in the first two decades following the break up of the Soviet Union. The Western policy up until 2022 can be characterized as wishful thinking toward Russia assuming its historical patterns have completely changed. Russia was accepted to be on the path towards liberal democracy despite occasional bumps on

the road and thereby, on the path towards becoming a strategic partner, and even an eventual ally.

While Russia opposed the NATO intervention in Serbia and harshly dismissed any Western criticism regarding its war in Chechnya, it continued its political cooperation with the West. The West chose to ignore Russian attitudes in these two cases, and Soviet genocides were not topics that would be discussed by the West. Although some Western advisors could be blamed for the recipe of “shock therapy” that resulted in extreme poverty and economic crisis in Russia, Yegor Gaidar, who led this economic program in Russia, explains that Russian liberal decision-makers also agreed with this recipe. They regarded this step not an economic but a political decision. They wanted to make sure that Russia irrevocably transited into liberal capitalism in a short period of time and were scared of a possible relapse into communism. After the 1998 economic crisis, the Russian economy grew largely due to the increasing trade relations with European economies and capital flows from Western countries.

As it became clear, Russia continued accumulating political, military or economic power to challenge the West for a future attempt “to gather the lost territories” of the Soviet Union. Russia regularly met with NATO in the format of Russia-NATO talks and did not comment negatively about NATO’s enlargement to Eastern Europe. Russia also supported the war on terror following the September 11 terrorist attacks, especially focusing on Russian radical individuals traveling to the Middle East. Russia cooperated internationally with post-Soviet states, Europe, the US, and Türkiye in various international platforms from OECD, BSEC, G20, to European Council. An invitation was extended to Russia to participate as a major nuclear power in G7. It appeared as if a constructive relationship with Russia could be built but this viewpoint neglected some of the key drivers of Russia’s geopolitical history.

Once the Russian Federation was able to present itself as a responsible member of the international community and start reaping the economic benefits, it was time for the Russian leadership to assert its internal power. In this context, Putin was able to consolidate his power domestically around 2006. The Russian federal structure became more centralized, and the cultural autonomy of many regions and ethnic groups was taken away, as civil liberties were curtailed and civil society was weakened. With the dethroning of oligarchs, the new elite was not concerned about making Russia a developed country with large welfare policies and developing economic and political relations with other states but

aimed to make Russia's economic and energy power subservient to their geopolitical goals. These goals were making Russia a great power again through military development, political manipulation, and widened means of propaganda in the post-truth age .

In the late 2000s, Putin began to implement the *Near Abroad* policy first proclaimed by the Russian Prime Minister Yevgenii Primakov in 1994. It was almost as if Russia did not know how to exist in the world without being an empire. Toward the goal of reclaiming the empire, Russia utilized frozen conflicts such as in Nagorno-Karabakh to present itself as a peace broker, but in reality, practically perpetuating the need for Russian hegemony in these regions. Accumulation of gas and oil profits thanks to the dependency of European industry on Russian resources, led Russia to invest in its armament industry. Russia also exploited the international institutions it participated in to further its geopolitical goals. Western institutions, eager to integrate oil and gas-rich Russia to the international system appeared oblivious to the growing trend. Despite early signs of Putin's intervention in Ukrainian politics during the Orange Revolution and its gas blackmail against Ukraine, the US under the leadership of Barrack Obama surprisingly declared that it was seeking a "reset" with Russia. Even the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008 was not enough of a warning for the West. The EU also did not suspect that Putin may use its outsized power in the energy markets as an instrument to increase its geopolitical power in Europe.

If we analyze the historical trajectory, it becomes clear that the color revolutions in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine, and the prospect of democratization emerging in the region was the key factor that made Russian FSB elites and *siloviki* wary of similar prospects for Russia. Russia tried to subvert the Orange Revolution by engaging in gas blackmail, to which Ukraine responded by appropriating Russian gas or disrupting its transmission to Europe. Russia supported the election of Yanukovich as a more friendly president and aimed to utilize the Russophone minority to get Ukraine on board with the project of re-establishing Russian hegemony in the former Soviet region in the form of CIS and the Eurasian Economic Union. Yanukovich passed laws to make Russian an additional official language in minority-dominated regions, but he excluded Crimea from the implementation of this law, as Crimean Tatar also had to be one of the official languages in the peninsula. This shows that Yanukovich was less after defending minority rights, than asserting Russian chauvanism. The Russian Federation media increased propaganda and agitation broadcasts to Ukraine.

Neo-Stalinist hate speech against Crimean Tatars in public discourse went into full force. Finally, Yanukovich refused to sign the EU association agreement and instead chose to sign off on a loan from Russia. This led the youth in Ukraine to rise up and occupy Kyiv and many other city squares throughout the country for months, which became the EuroMaidan movement. Yanukovich's order to shoot at civilians led to the killing of more than a hundred people. Eventually, he lost legitimacy and ran away from the country.

THE OCCUPATION AND ANNEXATION OF CRIMEA

Russia prepared the ground for the invasion of Crimea and the rest of Ukraine at least a decade beforehand, if not earlier. Russia eroded democratization efforts in Ukraine, facilitated pro-Russian Yanukovich's election, exonerated Stalin and his policies in Russia, broadcast Russian propaganda to Ukraine, and distributed Russian passports widely to increase the number of Russian citizens in Ukraine and its "near abroad". Russia also developed the capacity to disrupt the information infrastructure of foreign states, heavily invested in conventional armaments. While Russia made these preparations, loud propaganda about Russian and Ukrainian brotherhood and the propaganda about Crimean Tatars posing so-called "Islamic threat" prevented Ukrainian politicians from taking precautions such as stationing real army regiments in Crimea. Ukraine failed to strengthen its defense forces and realize the power and effect of Russian propaganda broadcasted. Kyiv could have employed Crimean Tatars as the cautionary-force in Crimea by placing them in bureaucratic and military positions and prevented corrupt and mafiatric elements in Crimean politics, but the Ukrainian government led by Yanukovich did not have the political will to do any of that. No precautions were taken by Ukrainian leaders despite earlier examples of Russia's instrumentalization of the Russian diaspora in the former Soviet countries. Putin argued that he had planned the occupation of Crimea earlier. An earlier example of the invasion of Georgia constituted a model for the invasion of Crimea, as similar hybrid tactics were deployed, and Russia counted on western indifference to the region.

Putin was not shy about announcing his neo-colonial goals but what surprised the world in the occupation and annexation of Crimea was the full-scale and effective use of hybrid war tactics. It was critical for Putin that no show of dissent would appear in his overtake of the Crimean peninsula. He took advantage of growing information technology which offered immense possibilities for propaganda, dis-

information, and manipulation., and conspiracy theories about imminent fascist threat was propagated by FSB. Russian discourse focused on the so-called “popular will of the Russian majority” against the oppression of “Russian culture and language” by “neo-Nazis in Ukraine.” Russian occupiers lured or threatened people to change sides, created a climate of fear through vigilantes, staged an FSB-orchestrated coup d’etat in the Crimean government, utilized soldiers without insignia, and organized an illegal and illegitimate referendum. Ukraine did not have a proper army before 2014, and the few defense forces in Crimea and the Ukrainian army’s electronic systems were disabled by Russia prior to the occupation. Thus, Putin was able to claim that this was not an invasion as there was not a single bullet used against the occupiers because practically occupiers paralyzed all means of defense early on through hybrid tactics.

It was the Crimean Tatars who disrupted Putin’s plan of quiet takeover as they rallied in front of the Crimean parliament, defying Russian soldiers and pro-Russian politicians. That is why, Putin even called Crimean Tatar leader Mustafa Cemilev (Jemilev) and made various promises to obtain their compliance, including “full rehabilitation”, making Crimean Tatar one of the state languages and offering political positions for Crimean Tatar political leaders. The Russian government even sent Volga Tatars’ representatives to convince them about the possibility of obtaining religious and cultural rights in Russia. Despite the Crimean Tatar boycott, Russian occupiers organized an illegal and illegitimate referendum and annexed the territory. This model first tried in Crimea later became the hybrid strategy of Russia for the occupation of the rest of Ukraine. The referendum despite its failure to fulfill democratic rules and falsified results contributed to creating an aura of legitimacy and consent to Russia’s land grab. Russia loudly broadcast the propaganda that the majority of Crimea are Russians, and therefore, it was only “natural” for them to demand joining Russia. Enabling minorities who constitute a majority in their territories to join with the motherland would mean opening the Pandora’s box, therefore, international community objected to this act. For, supporting Russia’s position would be equal to rejecting the Westphalian principles of the international system, that is, the inviolability of territorial integrity. Russia tried to use the case of Kosovo to support its annexation of Crimea, but the case for severe crimes against humanity and the threat of genocide existed in the case of Kosovo. Moreover, Kosovo did not join any other state but became independent.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE RUSSIAN OCCUPATION OF CRIMEA

After the annexation of Crimea, the Russian government understood that the Crimean Tatars would not cooperate with them. The Crimean Tatar representative organ, Meclis was declared to be a radical organization and was banned. The members of the Meclis were prosecuted. The occupying authorities began full-fledged repression of political activists, by several methods including exile from Crimea, abduction, house search, imprisonment, interrogation, and torture. A cultural genocide of the Crimean Tatars took place by forcing many Crimean Tatars to leave; shutting down Crimean Tatar schools, media, and cultural institutions; damaging historical remnants of the Crimean Tatar Khanate; and prohibiting commemoration of Crimean Tatar deportation. The Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian populations were intimidated and could not even freely speak their language. Discrimination against Crimean Tatars by profiling them as traitors, suppression of religious institutions, and declaration of religious orders as illegal were some of the tactics used. Human rights violations perpetrated against Crimean Tatars by Russia can possibly be considered as war crimes. After the annexation, Russia re-colonized Crimea by settling almost a million Russians in the peninsula according to the Meclis accounts. This aimed at creating new realities on the ground and making Crimea's return to Ukraine impossible. Russia also engaged in identity engineering for the Crimean Tatars, creating cultural policies aimed at Volga-Tatarization of Crimean Tatars.

Crimean Tatars are indigenous people of Crimea, and according to international law and in particular UN Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples, only the Crimean Tatars have the right to self-determination in Crimea. This right is recognized today by several states such as Ukraine, the Baltic states, and Canada. The claim that the Russian minority and culture in Crimea were in danger and therefore demanded self-determination was not true. Russians in Crimea did not constitute a community separate from the rest of the Russian people and there was no evidence of any threat against Russian culture or language. On the contrary, Russian culture has historically suppressed other cultures to the point of extinction due to the assimilation and demographic policies of the Soviet Union. For this reason, surveys before the annexation showed no demand for separation or further autonomy, or any significant discontent with Ukraine.

After the so-called annexation, Crimea was turned into a peninsula-wide military base by Russia. There was no regard for the cultural or touristic identity of

Crimea, its ecosystem oreconomy. Russia sought to use Crimea to project power in the Black Sea, Ukraine, and the Middle East. Crimean infrastructure came under huge pressure with military investments, new population transfers, and the cutting off of water and electricity provided by the Ukrainian mainland. Crimea became an economic burden on Russia, which required huge transfers of funds. Both Crimea and Russia came under Western sanctions after the annexation. Crimea's tourism, trade, and agricultural income decreased, and water scarcity led to desertification of the Crimean land.

After Crimea, Russia supported separatism in Donbas. For the sake of maintaining trade and energy relations with Russia, France and Germany through the Minsk process encouraged Russia in its assertiveness by recognizing claims of Russian "separatists." The "separatism" was, in fact, another FSB tactic and the existence of a significant number of Russian Federation army personnel in Donbas became clear in the affair of the downing of a Malaysian Airlines plane. In 2014, Russia also revived the concept of *Novorossiya*, a project of "taking back" the territory from Kherson to Odesa, which had been conquered by Catherine II from the Crimean Khanate. There was intelligence about several attempts for another hybrid operation in Odesa, shortly after the occupation of Donbas, but these attempts were thwarted by Ukrainian forces.

The neorealist view on the annexation of Crimea, voiced by scholars like Mearsheimer, does not take into consideration the history of colonialism in the region. The Eastern European states, Ukraine and Georgia sought to join NATO more than NATO wanted to take them in as they aimed to escape Russian imperialism for their national future. It is hard to believe the main motivation for Russia in invading Crimea was securing the energy route or economic gains. Ukraine is the most important former Soviet country and its acceptance of the post-Soviet Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) or Eurasian Economic Union was important for Russia. Without Ukraine, neither of these organizations would have significance. The failure to reconstruct Russian civic identity resulted in the return to old repertoires for Russia. For, the recognition of Ukrainian independence would mean a change of all historical narratives for Russia¹. Russian neo-colonialism is a greater danger for the post-Soviet countries and countries in adjacent regions because Russia is a non-democratic country. This means the Russian war

¹ Ayşegül Aydıngün ve Yuliya Biletska, 2020, 332) Bağımsız Ukrayna'da Değişen Rusya Algısı: Bir Kırılma Noktası Olarak 2014. *Sovyet Sonrası Ukrayna'da Devlet Toplum ve Siyaset: Değişen Dinamikler, Dönüşen Kimlikler*, ed. Ayşegül ve İsmail Aydıngün. AVİM ve Terazi Yayıncılık. S. 331-359.

crimes or crimes against humanity have little chance of being discovered, adjudicated, or repented.

While Russian neocolonialism is a great danger in the regional context, it is also a great danger in the global context. It breeds and supports authoritarianism in the former Soviet countries as happened in Belarus and Kazakhstan but also allies with authoritarian governments such as China, Venezuela, North Korea, and several non-democratic African governments. It intervenes in elections in democratic countries such as the US, and allies with authoritarian leaders and movements in those countries such as Trump, fascists in Italy, anti-immigration and racist movements in Germany, Le Pen in France and the radical right in Europe. Through economical, political, intelligence, media, and propaganda tactics, Russia tried to create confusion and disarray in Western countries and create dependency relations with Third World countries to carve a place for Russia again as a great power.

Russian neocolonialism is a great threat to the people of Russia as well. Russia, being the largest country on earth, hosts more than 100 ethnic groups and indigenous peoples. The indigenous peoples of Russia are on the verge of extinction as the state does not consider the well-being of their languages, culture, traditions, lifestyles and their special ways of connecting with the land. Russia, following the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, pursued a policy of assimilation by founding state-sponsored indigenous organizations, excluding communities from indigenous status and practically cutting the ties of indigenous peoples of Russia from the transnational indigenous movement.

The Soviet-provided rights of cultural autonomy of nations and ethnic groups in Russia were gradually taken away since the 2000s, as Russia turned into a sham federalism by taking back regions' and republics' rights and policies of centralization and hierarchical "power vertical" took precedence. Today, the Russian state is back as it overshadows all civil society organizations from the women and labor movements to Muslim muftiates and regional governments. Moreover, the state increasingly breeds a conservative ideology based on state-sponsored Orthodoxy, Russian chauvinism, and disrespect for gender, ethnic, religious, and cultural rights. The prevention of successes of Russian neocolonialism globally and regionally could in turn bring greater democratization and freedoms for the ethnic groups, indigenous peoples, and civil society of Russia.

As Russia was not accountable for the suppression of national rights during the Russian Empire, it continued to commit new crimes against nations for-

We hope that this edited volume will provide the audiences with an informed perspective about the significance of the Russian invasion and annexation of Crimea in 2014. It should not only enrich our understanding of the geopolitical implications of this development but also better contextualize the ongoing war in Ukraine. When Russia set out to invade Ukraine in early 2022, many argued that it was the return of classic geopolitical conflict but perhaps it had never left in the first place. The annexation of Crimea was an important turning point in Russia's efforts to reclaim what it considers its "backyard." It also arguably had precedent in the Chechen and Georgian wars.

The international community's treatment of the war in Ukraine has significantly changed since 2014 but it is not a sure bet that it will be able to reverse Russian encroachments in its neighboring states. We hope that this edited volume will highlight some critical turning points and moments of failure by the international community in the wake of Russia's annexation of Crimea. It should also inform any policy considerations regarding the status of Crimea as well as a potential future settlement of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. The conflict may be a protracted one but the prospects for peace, we hope, will emerge sooner rather than later.

