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**The Changing Nature of the Balance Of
Power and the Real Game of Thrones:
From Ukraine, to beyond the borders of
Middle Earth**

Marios-Panagiotis Efthymiopoulos

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The Changing Nature of the Balance Of Power and the Real Game of Thrones: From Ukraine, to beyond the borders of Middle Earth.

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Dr. Marios-Panagiotis Efthymiopoulos is the CEO and Founder of Strategy International and he is currently a Visiting Scholar at the Harriman Institute at the University of Columbia in New York. In the past, he held positions as visiting scholar at the Center for Transatlantic Relations at SAIS Johns Hopkins University in Washington DC as a visiting senior research scholar at George Washington University, Business School, EU Center for Excellence, Washington DC. He also held positions as Southeast Europe Policy Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington DC USA, and visiting Lecturer at the Department of Social and Political Sciences, University Of Cyprus, Nicosia Cyprus. Dr. Efthymiopoulos is a constant invited guest at the Joint War College of Greece, the NATO Maritime Interdiction Operation and Training Center (NMIOTC), the NATO training corps in Kilkis, Homeland Police Security and Training of National Hellenic Police in Athens, and the NATO Deployable Corps in Thessaloniki Greece. He is a graduate from the NATO Defence College (NADEFCOL) senior course 105, 2004-2005, Rome, Italy. He was appointed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Greece at NATO in Rome, worked at the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in the Biotechnology and Biosafety issues and as a Political/Financial Analyst at the Cook County's Treasurer's Office in Chicago Illinois USA. He holds a PhD from the University of Crete, Greece, a senior civilian and officers diploma by the NATO Defence College, Rome Italy, a Masters Degree from the University of Vienna -The Diplomatic Academy of Vienna- in Advanced International Relations (MAIS) (2002-2003), Vienna Austria & MSc in Russian and Post-Soviet Studies at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), London, UK, (2001-2002), and BA (Hons) in International Relations and Politics by the University of Lincolnshire and Humberside, (1998-2001), Lincoln, UK..

Abstract:

A “real Game of Thrones” is being developing at the region and countries surrounding the Black Sea but also beyond in the so called (middle earth), including the Arab world (MENA Region) and possibly the Middle East. A Crisis has been developing within Ukraine’s South and South East region as a starting point. That is a focal point which pragmatically calls for change: “A shift in the power balance” between leading and peripheral states both in the Black Sea but also beyond. The article explains the changing nature of the current balance of powers through analysis of strategic changes and tactical alliance options, through fictionary but used as a communication tool of wording. A detailed analysis was presented in June during the Hellenic EU presidency in of 2014, as part of the Ministry of Defense and Foreign affairs objectives and goals at the European levels of Foreign and Security policies. The place where the detailed briefing and analysis was made was in Athens.

The Changing Nature of the Balance Of Power and the Real Game of Thrones: From Ukraine, to beyond the borders of Middle Earth

Marios-Panagiotis Efthymiopoulos

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Introduction

The crisis in Ukraine, is just the start of something grander.¹ A larger crisis that will lead to grave changes through constantly emerging new challenges. It will question current and future alliances. It will alter the balance of power between regional and power states.²

This paper argues that geopolitical and strategic changes actually occur in the geographical area that we will name and locate as “Middle Earth and Beyond”. Changes will expand and result to a new balance of power among leading and peripheral states in both the Middle Earth and beyond. Ukraine, as being part of this Middle Earth region that we will explain, is just a starting point. The crisis will expand. It will expand in greater areas of interest with constantly changing alliances. That is also why this paper is titled as “The Changing Nature of the Balance of Power and the Game of Thrones”.

This paper considers mostly primary information and research of the author³. It reflects ethical questions and analyses through the prism of pragmatism and alliance creation. Most information derives from very recent on-site research in Ukraine, in the oblast of Donetsk

¹ O’ Neil Jim, (18 April 2014), “Ukraine crisis shows global governance is in a mess, and the West knows why”, Telegraph: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/comment/10775158/Ukraine-crisis-shows-global-governance-is-in-a-mess-and-the-West-knows-why.html>

² Scally Derek, (8 March 2014), “Ukraine crisis alters balance of power in eastern Europe. Former members of eastern bloc alarmed at historical parallels”, Irish Times: <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/ukraine-crisis-alters-balance-of-power-in-eastern-europe-1.1713954>

³ Primary research of the author on stability, security and strategy in the East and South Europe, the former Soviet Space and the MENA region. Primary source of information includes meetings in the Russian Federation in between May 26th to 30th 2014, Primary information in between September 18th and 26th 2013 in Donetsk, Marioupol and the Region of Crimean and oblast of Luhansk, in both official research visits of Strategy International and later Columbia University. Spoke with academics from the Russian University of MGIMO, the Political Science Association of Russia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Embassies meetings. Most meetings were closed sessions, but lecture provided at MGIMO was officially made to Students of International Relations.

and the autonomous region of Crimea, but also information provided through field work made in the Russian Federation but also the USA and the EU through the academic prism of academic researcher at the Harriman Institute, university of Columbia in New York USA⁴ and as head of the think tank Strategy International in Greece⁵. This paper is a portion of a greater research that is to be presented by January 2015 at Columbia University in New York. It is also a portion of the detailed analysis that was presented at the EU framework of the Hellenic European Union Presidency in June 2014, in Athens at a closed session meeting.

Secondary information is presented hence forth, through articles published, journals and newspapers. Secondary information is currently been published amidst the crisis in Ukraine, which has started officially almost 9 months ago.⁶

Objectives

This paper projects, the region of instability as the “Middle Earth and Beyond”.

The first objective of this paper to clarify what is the Middle Earth region and Beyond and what is the “Game of Thrones”. We need to comprehend a true and pragmatic extent of the crisis. Where will it extent to. What will be the new balance of power and who are the actors that will swift and create new alliance formations.

The second objective to this paper, is of pragmatistical essence. It estimates and projects a geographical and geo-strategic game change. The crisis shall extent at a far larger scale than the region of today’s Ukraine. Extended instability and possibly border change in the region will be noticed.

A third objective is to actually understand the line of conflict between powers. A fine two lines in the form of a cross are seen to be drawn. From top to bottom and from the left to the right. From the **North** (from Belarus), to the East and south-East of today’s Ukraine, to

⁴ Harriman Institute, Columbia University, Russia, Eurasia and East European Studies, Marios Efthymiopoulos (<http://harriman.columbia.edu/people/marios-panagiotis-efthymiopoulos-0>)

⁵ Strategy International (www.strategyinternational.org)

⁶ Shuster Simon, (31 December 2013), “*Putin’s Latest Moves Tip the Balance of Power Toward Russia Moscow’s diplomatic victory in Ukraine was a thumb in Brussels’s eye. It’s all part of the Kremlin’s emboldened foreign policy*”, TIME magazine: <http://world.time.com/2013/12/21/putins-latest-moves-tip-the-balance-of-power-toward-russia/>

the *South* of the Black Sea (including the South-East of the Black Sea to the autonomous region of Abkhazia and the autonomous area of Adjara a Georgian Coastal sea line).

A fourth objective is understanding the extent and length of game change that exceeds 'Beyond the Middle Earth's border line'. The region to the South of the Black Sea, may extend to Turkey (Turkey's North and to the Pontos Mountains, the Kurdish region in the South-East, and in the far West of Turkey, seen still as South of the outer borders of the Middle Earth, the Bosphorus Straights and the Asia Minor, today known as the coastal line of Turkey bordering the Greek Aegean Sea and possibly the Middle East, extending as far south as to the Mediterranean eastern sea side areas of Syria and the sea lines of Lebanon, Israel and Cyprus).

From the West, from Romania's East of the Carpathian Mountains, to the region of Trans-Dniestr or Transdnestr, a break-away state from Moldova, going East, not to the Ural Mountains, but to the borders as far as East of the Sea of Azov with the Russian Federation.

A fifth objective is to understand the power 'actors' and their interests. These are leading global powers, regional powers and primary local actors who hold currently economic, military, trade and negotiating power and ability to lead but also to revolt. This is actually a multi-level, new game of chess. It is part of the unfolding of the "Game of Thrones", in which it will be explained who controls or will control what, at what level, depending on several variables.

In essence, we are amidst a new strategic reallocation of borders, societies and rulership, along with which we see the reallocation of foreign policy strategies of leading powers and regional powers national objectives, vis a vis neighboring states or traditional competitive states.

The "Game of Thrones" all in all, as we will describe is a game planner, but also a game changer. It affects not only the region of Ukraine and the Crimea, but at a first glance the Azov Sea, the Black Sea. At a later stage, the Bosphorus Straights and the East of the Mediterranean Sea. It also alters the role of leading powers and regional states.

The final objective of this paper is to draw some conclusions from the current crisis in Ukraine and the emerging effects in the region from a global view. Keeping in mind, the importance of locality and the strategic planning for stability, security, trade and social development and alliances between competitive states and peripheral powers.

Pragmatism, Practicality, Ideology and the Game of Thrones

Pragmatically, the crisis in Ukraine includes a far greater challenge⁷, than solely the stability and security of the country. If such an argument stands out, then there is a need to foresee how the future looks like in terms of stability in both the region of Ukraine and all around it. What options are there for lasting peace, stability and actual development in the region? We need to estimate constructively. We need to look at the wider perspective of a balance of power change. We need to examine issues from a global perspective of interests both regional and international. We need to examine the crisis as a wider phenomenon that is already spreading in the region. We need to dream, visualize and realize a new world in this “middle earth and beyond”. How it should look like, stable, secure and developed. How it should look like in a few years, time but also in a 100 years, time taking into account the wish of leading powers to overview and exercise leadership.

Practically, we are at the verge of yet another historical change in the balance of power between states, in this global game of chess that currently unfolds. New concepts and ideologies for the 21st century regional stability, unfold. We live in an age of redemption and solitude. An age of renewed emerging alliances. An age where a “Game of Thrones” between powers is being currently established.

In this 21st century “Game of Thrones”, *new ideologies and comprehensions emerge* from various sides engaged. They give rise to opportunity but also populism. Those two last facts, project change at all levels. They project regime change and a new ‘establishment of

⁷ Blanford Nicholas, (15 May 2014), “Is Ukraine crisis just part of a broader Russian strategy? (+video)

At the GLOBSEC security conference in Europe, participants confronted a stark assessment that Russia is excelling at creating divides between Western powers over the crisis”, Christian Monitor:

<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2014/0515/Is-Ukraine-crisis-just-part-of-a-broader-Russian-strategy-video>

rulership' in both Ukraine and beyond, through possible new and explained as 'democratic processes'.

There is among others a new *nationality and statehood comprehension* for the dawn of a new era that is forthcoming post this crisis. In this new statehood comprehension, there are questions that need to be answered, such as: How will Democracy look like in these parts of the world post-war? Can Democracy be practically administered in such areas with or without nationhood, as an alternative to the current rule of law that simply does not work in its elitist or oligarchic form? How and if and at what level is morality actually part of the social establishment of the societies affected by the crisis or will morality be established in a form of governance. What will be the economic order of 'things'. Who will rule the lands? elitists? Under capitalist forms and/or corporatist forms? Will these new societies include value for 'ethos' and dignity in matters of social justice? Or will value be counted for, or solely be doing business as usual? Will a new society ideology be based on trade interests such as energy trade and raw materials exports? What will be the current and forthcoming leading religions in the region? What will be the obstacles and challenges of current religions in a post-traumatic era of quasi-civil war currently with foreign troops engaged from either sides?

Practically, will these new 'micro-states' lead the way towards the 'western' international organizations values and norms such as the EU and NATO or will they be offered a new kind of 'deal' to project confederation and or economic ties with the newly established EEU⁸ (led by Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus and with Armenia and Abkhazia awaiting membership?). These are questions that need a political answer through leadership and agreements. There is a need for understanding the new balance of power that is being created.

⁸ The Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), also known as the Eurasian Union (EEU) is an economic union which is planned to be established by a treaty signed on 29 May 2014 between the leaders of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia. The Union will go into effect on 1 January 2015 if the treaty is approved by the parliaments of the three countries. There will be followed by Armenia to join the Treaty and in 10 years time from the date of approval and ratification of the Union members will be discussing according to sources in Moscow, a common and joined currency.

Beyond the Borders and the New Ukraine

The independent region of Crimea, was according to leading academics of the Russian Federation's, a "historical mistake that needed to be corrected"⁹. It seems this was the case, as there is not much to be said or analyzed. It is now an independent internationally unrecognized 'micro-state'.

Such is the case of the unlawful area controlled by Turkey in Cyprus, awaiting to be recognized. The differences however are great. A confederation with the Russian Federation, according to Russian professional sources will come to being, while the Crimeans are in majority Russians, not even Russophones or Russophiles. Unlike the invaded part of Cyprus that is controlled by Turkish troops and inhabited partially by ethnically eastern Anatolians and not indigenous Cypriots.

The future of *the south and south-east side of the 'old Ukraine'* that waits to be named, starts from the oblast (Ukrainian provinces) oblast of Donetsk (Donbass area) including the coastal city of Mariupol, oblast of Luhansk & the oblast of Zaporizhzhya and in it the city of Melitopol, areas located or bordering the coastal line of the Azov Sea. They also border directly or indirectly through sea, the independent (formerly autonomous) Crimea in the west. In the East, they border the Russian Federation province of (Oblast) Rostov.

For *the South and South East of the old Ukraine*, regional elites, seem to be gaining slowly, the status of a wider autonomy. This in turn will lead to a future independence. It is all a result of the 'domino effect', of a mostly enlarging crisis. It's a result of the independence of Crimea that ignited the wish for change of borders. This crisis will expand in other areas as we show below.

For *the New Ukraine*, it is the start of something new. It will give rise to enlargement of the EU and NATO. The regions from the north and West, the new Ukraine will be closer to the western interests: Closer to the ideas of a European Ukraine and a Transatlantic Ukraine!

⁹ Professor of Political Science, whose name wishes not to be made public and leading personality in Moscow's foreign and defense policy affairs, when I addressed the question of what does Crimea constitute, provided me with the picture of the Crimean bridge which was made in honor of the people and region of Crimea and its unity with the Russian People. It was "a mistake that needed to be corrected as to being provided to the Ukrainian back then SSR. In the actual region that majority of the people constitute Russians rather than Russophones as I personally noticed.

A New Ukraine, stable and secure as it will be known for the wider “international audience”. It will be included at the Alliance framework and the economic later on Union of the EU, through a Troika level of engagement that already includes the IMF and the EU and possibly the World Bank in a post crisis Ukraine¹⁰.

EU and NATO look eastward. That is now a clear objective. They will enlarge in the next four years to come. They will include the New Ukraine. It will be included in “group project” of the Northern States and or Ukraine with Georgia separately with Moldova gaining a more stable role to NATO and a trade agreement with the EU¹¹.

EU leading states, such as Germany, France and the UK and peripheral states such as Poland and Romania will be come closer with Ukraine. Through a projection of cultural exchanges and joint trade, mass investment, energy hubs and use of land, Religious commonalities through Christian Catholicism and Orthodoxy¹².

The Russian Federation will assert a new level of approached relations with this New Ukraine. It will have however, to re-examine posture and national security objectives, through the prism of trade relations and effective cultural and language engagements bilaterally and possibly at a future common trade-agreement relationship to emerge in the

¹⁰ Andre de Nesnera, (3 April 2014), “Will Ukraine Join NATO Anytime Soon?”,Voice of America:

<http://www.voanews.com/content/will-ukraine-join-nato-anytime-soon-/1885749.html>

¹¹ By Klusmann Uwe , Schepp Matthias , and Wiegrefe Klaus , (2 May, 2014), “NATO’s Eastward Expansion: Did the West Break Its Promise to Moscow?”, Global Research: Translated first by the Der Spiegel Germany (26 November 2009): <http://www.globalresearch.ca/natos-eastward-expansion-did-the-west-break-its-promise-to-moscow/5380144>

¹² Inter-religious dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Christian Church is ongoing, otherwise both known as the Western Church and the Eastern Roman Church of the Roman Empire, according to Roman and Byzantine laws, has started over 50 years ago back, celebrated during the first week of June of 2014, both the Pontific of the Catholic Church and the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church at a joined pray in Jerusalem, The summit marked “the 50th anniversary of the meeting in Jerusalem between Pope Paul VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople that ended 900 years of mutual excommunications”.

<http://www.christianpost.com/news/pope-francis-patriarch-bartholomew-pray-at-holy-sepulchre-church-to-promote-christian-unity-120353/> . Later on to continue the joined prayers and meetings of the two churches in the Vatican but possibly also in Constantinople (otherwise known in the international wording not the Byzantine as Istanbul who’s meaning means: “at the City of Constantine=Constantinople). Referring to the case of Ukraine and the surrounding areas of the Black sea, we can discover a variety of interfaith dialogue meetings and youth meetings discussing the future of faith in the region and problems faced with extremism of foreign faiths, when manipulated.

near future and a direct fund of support through the newly established office of development and support.

Other, *beyond the middle earth regions* and “small unrecognized internationally states” including Transnistria in Moldova, will have to face new realities. Join the confederation of Russo-speaking countries and “mikro-states” or face a new series of questions. They have already asked the Russian Federation to join as members of the Federation of Russia¹³. Will they find a balanced solution for actual recognition at the level of EU and maybe NATO as far as western recognition and cooperation?

What will be done for areas looking eastward in the coastline of Georgia, revolting areas such as Abkhazia and Adjara in such case?. for the future of Georgia itself looking for more integration with NATO first and the EU later in a post Russian invasion in 2008?

What will be the energy future stability and trade relations between the Russian Federation and Turkey? Considering the development of ties based on investment and trade relations mainly? What is to be done in the Kurdish areas and the Pontos Mountains?

What is to be done in the East Mediterranean region by the Syrian civil-war, affecting strategically both Russia, Turkey and Greece and along the lines of questions raised about the energy future of Israel and Cyprus, which have been embarking in a long range of security dialogue and of shore issues at the waters of the Eastern Mediterranean¹⁴? What about the control of the Bosphorus straits that yet again is deemed as important to the western interests and the control from the Black Sea to the Aegean Sea? Acknowledging the Russian ‘eye’ access to the Aegean Sea? What will be the role of Greece in a post fiscal crisis era?

¹³ Rogin John, (23 May 2014), “*Is Putin’s Next Target?*”, The Daily Beast: http://www.google.gr/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=10&ved=0CIUBEBYwCQ&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.thedailybeast.com%2Farticles%2F2014%2F05%2F23%2Fis-this-putin-s-next-target.html&ei=CMeUU4WZKeqJ7Aa574HoDg&usq=AFQjCNH4i6OkbjZNtuqjedYkDw_9NSiARw&sig2=WIRwVKig1R0usdrMXy-huQ&bvm=bv.68445247,d.ZGU

Voltaire Network (April 2014), “*Transnistria seeks to join Russian Federation*”, Voltaire Network: <http://www.voltairenet.org/article182939.html>

¹⁴Yossi Alpher, (8 May 2014), “*The Ukraine/Crimea crisis: ramifications for the Middle East*”, Open Democracy.org: <http://www.opendemocracy.net/arab-awakening/yossi-alpher/ukrainecrimea-crisis-ramifications-for-middle-east>

Outcomes

Power effectiveness, power projection and methodology of all actors involved, will eventually render all sides to a more concrete negotiating table in establishing a new form of relations at all levels from the beginning. A new balance of power will be eventually created. A clear, fine line of influence and interests will be created. In essence, this may not lead to the already named as cold-peace, that Vladimir Putin is being blamed for by the West¹⁵. It will shift power balance between all competitors that seek access to seas and seek protection of interests in trade affairs such as energy and transport.

The crisis is not over yet. It actually still unfolds. Many are the issues and the questions that need to be answered. A new template of rule of law is to be implemented in these lands. ‘Middle Earth and Beyond’, is a very interesting area that engages ‘conflict of interests’ between the West and the East.

There is a clear shifting in foreign policy objectives of leading powers and national objectives of regional, peripheral powers. We are yet to see the commonalities that will bring together competitive parts, rather than shift them away, from a new and leveled alliance or working alliance that will be eventually be created both in the West and the East.

Concluding Remarks

The attempt of this paper was to project the changing nature of the power balances in the area that we have name the “Middle Earth and Beyond. We have examined the areas geographically, through interest politics and at the level of great and regional powers. We have also crossed fine lines describing the “Real Game of Thrones”¹⁶ in an areas, East of the Carpathian Mountains to the West of the Urals, to the North of Belarus and to the East Mediterranean Area affecting Syria, Turkey, Cyprus and Israel. This article has set new questions in pragmatic political affairs between leading states. It has also leveled this crisis to a new balance between powers and alliances that will be created.

¹⁵ Eric Engle (2 April 2014), “A New Cold War? Cold Peace. Russia, Ukraine, and NATO...”, Independent: http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2419414

¹⁶ Efthymiopoulos Marios Panagiotis & Okunev Igor, (3 March 2014), “Tactical Moves. The Real Game of Thrones in Ukraine”, CNNi: <http://ireport.cnn.com/docs/DOC-1099749>

The future looks engaged. The future will settle old issues and will consider new checks and balances. It will alter foreign policy objectives and will give rise to new issues, among leading and neighboring states. That seems to be the order of new things. That is the shifting in old alliances and new interest formations based on geographical interests and possible trade agreements.

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