CONTEMPORARY REFLECTIONS OF POLITICAL REALISM: THE CASE OF CRIMEA

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Summary

In early 2014, Russia Federation annexed Crimea Peninsula from its adjacent Ukraine. In legal dimension, Russia’s aggressive movement was a flagrant violation of international law as Russia used its military preponderance to subjugate the territory of a sovereign state. This study aims to evaluate Russia’s expansionism toward Crimea with searching out political realism’s linkages with conflict. From past to present, realism has always occupied a notable ground in international relations theories. Besides political realism, originated by Hans J. Morgenthau in his masterpiece ‘‘Politics Among Nations’’, assesses politics by centering upon interest. Since this study endeavours to show how can political realism be used so as to understand a contentious incident which ended up with Crimea’s annexation to Russia, necessary information is procured with high caution and consistency. To unfold the academic arguments in a well researched and structured way, the authors provide an introduction and explanation of realism and detailed information on political realism of Hans Morgenthau. In addition, both crucial points and connections of Crimea Conflict and political realism are scrutinized and finalized with an appropriate conclusion.

Key Words: Political Realism, Morgenthau, Russia, Annexation, Crimea.
Introduction

Crimea Crisis has nearly been raging since three years in international arena. The more Russia began to claim sovereignty over Crimea the more the West united against Russia. Nevertheless, scientific literature is relatively weak in regard to political realism’s traces on this conflict. In this sense, constructing a work grounds under the shadow of theory and practice was the main impulse that encouraged the authors so that they could write this article. “Contemporary Reflections of Political Realism: The Case Crimea” has been constituted to wipe a loophole out of international relations studies. This study aims to demonstrate how can political realism be used so as to understand a contentious incident of Russia’s annexation of Crimea which was regarded as an aggressive movement.

Method of this work is based on reciprocal complementary relationship between theory and practice. During the following pages, knowledge was followed by historical examples and evaluations to make things more precise. In order to make study fit for the purpose, “Politics Among Nations” written by Morgenthau was picked by the authors as the main source of information. Especially in the second chapter which is called as Defining Political Realism, given work became the only reference. Additionally, other prominent thinkers such as Machiavelli, Kenneth Waltz has also been mentioned in first chapter so as to put realist theory across to readers. Secondary source of this study was written by Amstutz. In his book “International Ethics: Concepts Theories and Cases In Global Politics” he focalizes the international ethics as well as realism. To draw a picture of realism’s characteristics, authors chose this book in first chapter – Introduction of Realist Tradition. For an academic study that was envisaged to tell the story of the connections between political realism and annexation of Crimea, final chapter is of capital importance. To formulate the relevance, steps of annexation period and facts discussed in second chapter has been tied. Conclusion part is the place where this study ends. Brief analysis of each chapter and authors’ answer to the key question of work can be seen within the conclusion.

Realist Tradition

It is likely to presume that elucidating a rooted and sophisticated theory such as realism would be a simple task. In fact, realism is the embodiment of coherent set of ideas which contribute to the international relations department. Realism points out the predicaments on politics imposed by human nature and the lack of international governing body. Together, they make international relations largely a phenomenon in which a perpetual struggle of power and interest is taking place (Donnelly 2000: 6-9). Despite significant discords among its different representatives, realism presents an intellectual political worldview, deeply influencing the nature of decision making process. Some of the tradition’s most crucial common characteristics are; a pessimistic view of human nature, the priority of power in developing and maintaining political order, the prominence of the state in global affairs, the anarchism of international society, and the importance of consequences in making ethical judgments (Amstutz 2013: 39). Now, we are going to investigate each trait.

First, state centric attitude is the most momentous feature of realism. According to realist thought, states are prevailing and thus autonomous of each other; no inherent system or organization
can arise or even exist to arrange relations between them. Just because only through power can states defend themselves and hope to survive, realism ponders over power in a variety of means (militarily, economically, diplomatically) but ultimately concerns closely with the distribution of forcible material capacity as the main determinant of international politics (Slaughter 2011: 1-2). However, states are not identical. That’s why their involvement to international relations oftenly depends on the power or influence which they have. Realists regard that nation-states are generally selfinterested and rational and survival is the top selfinterest of a state in this regard. Moreover, realism generally does not embrace global cooperations or global normative standards (Canestaro 2007: 119-120). Morgenthau notes that all nations have not at all times to the same extent taken part in the international arena. The degree of their involvement may run all the way from the maximum at present attained by United States or former Soviet Union during the Cold War, through the minimum involvement of such countries as Switzerland, Luxembourg, or Venezuela, to the complete noninvolvement of Liechstenstein and Monaco (Morgenthau 1993: 30).

Second, realist view assumes that human nature is mainly motivated by self interest. Just because the individuals and groups incline to seek their own interests first, they generally neglect the interests of others. For this reason, founding a just and peaceful order is nearly impossible. To surpass this hurdle, in realist opinion, political actions should be directed by how human beings are most likely to behave rather than on how they ought to behave. Although realists hold a pessimistic thought on human nature, they believe that the development of order and justice in the anarchic global community can be advanced through policies based on power (Amstutz 2013: 39). Third, realism presupposes that international community is a decentralized, anarchic environment that is based on a self help system. In Kenneth Waltz’s opinion, such a system is one “in which those who do not help themselves, or who do so less effectively than others, will fail to prosper, will lay themselves open to dangers, will suffer”. As the absence of an international authority in the world is precise, each state’s survival and well-being depends on its own abilities and resources. Furthermore, insecurity feeling compels states to perceive the survival of country as the most fundamental issue of national interest. Although there are numerous means by which states can promote their interests in the international relations, realists attach great importance to military power (Morgenthau 1993: 52).

Furhermore, political realism is deeply interested in anarchic international arena. Hans Morgenthau suggests two different concepts to identify power struggle among states; policy of status quo which tries to maintain established system and policy of imperialism which tries to overthrow the same structure. For instance, alliance treaties, in particular, frequently have the function of preserving the status quo in certain respects. For this reason, after the war victory that led the way for Germany’s establishment in 1871 against France, Chancellor Bismarck tried to protect the newly dominant position of Germany in Europe by alliances in an attempt to hamper France from taking revenge. In following years, Germany and Austria concluded an alliance for mutual defence against Russia, and, in 1894, France and Russia formed a defensive alliance against the German-Austrian combination. State of anarchy oftenly enforces nations to take some measures in order to forestall potential security threats (Morgenthau 1993:52) Besides, Edward. H. Carr indicates that there is a sharp differentiation between utopia and reality in his seminal work “The Twenty Years’ Crisis”. In Carr’s opinion, utopia is associated with free will, theory, law, naivety and radicalism; reality conversely, with determinism, practice, power, sterility, and conservatism. Realism is suitable for reality. Carr also puts an idea forward by spelling out the connection between motives and outcomes. Without doubt, realist school oftenly thinks that idealistic values might be useless in anarchic political environment (Jones 1998: 54).

Fourth, realism is characterized by its reliance on consequential ethics. Realism is often
condemned as being an amoral approach to international politics because power is regarded as the main instrument of foreign policy and national security as its principal end. One scholar, for example, argues that realism’s excessive concern with national security, another suggests that the realist tradition simply excludes morality from foreign policy. As Kennan wrote that “Government is an agent, not a principal. Its primary obligation is to the interests of the national society it represent its military security, the integrity of its political life and the well-being of its people. These needs have no moral quality. They are unavoidable necessities of national existence and therefore are subject to classification neither as good or bad” (Amstutz 2013: 40). Finally, Hans Morgenthau, arguably the most influential post WW2 international relations scholar, views politics, whether domestic or international, as essentially a struggle to acquire more and more power. Not surprisingly, Morgenthau views statesmen as officials who ‘think and act in terms of interest defined as power’. Moreover, because there is no central authority to ensure the existence of nation-states and the promotion of their national interests, Morgenthau puts that if statesmen disregard power, they will become the victims of those who have learnt to obtain and use it (Amstutz 2013: 39).

**Defining Political Realism**

This chapter purports to explain political realism produced by Morgenthau. To clarify the theory, key points connected with Crimea conflict are written down. These points can be enlisted as; Six Principles of Political Realism, International Politics, Status Quo, Imperialism, Prestige and Balance of Power. This chapter is useful so that author could tie the conflict and theory in following chapter.

First principle of political realism is the objective laws that have their roots in human nature. To Morgenthau, human nature reified itself as selfish and ambitious since its creation and this remained intact for ages. Since political realism believes that politics is ruled by objective laws that have their roots in the dark sides of human nature, in order to improve to society we must understand the laws by which society lives. For political realism, theory consists in ascertaining facts and giving them meaning through reason. Besides, according to Hans Morgenthau, originator of this brand of realism, objective laws must be interpreted by rational actions. He believes also, when the politics is distinguished from the realm of utopia, rational information supported by evidence and illuminated by reason is the most desirable kind of knowledge (Morgenthau 1993: 4).

Second, the concept of interest defined in terms of power. This concept presents the link between reason trying to comprehend international politics and the facts to be understood. It sets politics as an autonomous sphere of action and understanding apart from other spheres, such as economics (views interest as wealth), ethics or religion. The concept of interest defined as power imposes intellectual discipline upon the observer, infuses rational order into the subject matter of politics, and thus makes the theoretical understanding of politics possible. On the side of the actor, it provides for rational discipline in action and creates that astounding continuity in foreign policy which makes American, British, or Russian foreign policy appear as an intelligible, rational continuum, by and large consistent within itself, regardless of the different motives, preferences and intellectual and moral qualities of successive statesmen (Morgenthau 1993: 5).

Third, political realism assumes that its key concept of interest defined as power is an objective category which is universally valid, but it does not endow a fixed mean to the concept. The idea of interest is indeed of the essence of politics and is unaffected by the circumstances of time and place. Great historian Thucydides’ statement, born of the experiences of ancient Greece, that ‘identity of interests is the surest of bonds whether between states or individuals’ was taken up in the
nineteenth century by Lord Salisbury’s remark that “the only bond of union that endures among nations is the absence of all clashing interests”. The same observation is valid for power too. Its content and the manner of its use are determined by the political and cultural environment (Morgenthau 1993: 10-11).

Fourth, political realism is capable of mulling over the moral significance of political action. It is also aware of the ineluctable tension between the moral command and the requirements of successful political action. For this reason, political realism is reluctant to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of a moral policy. Hans Morgenthau offers a solution that necessitates the maintenance of universal moral principles’ exclusion from actions of states due to morality’s abstractness. To apply moral principles, they must be filtered through the concrete circumstances of time and place (Morgenthau 1993: 12).

Fifth, political realism refuses to identify the moral aspirations of a particular nation with the moral laws that govern the universe. As it distinguishes between truth and opinion, so it distinguishes between truth and idolatry. All nations are tempted- and few have been able to resist the temptation for long- to clothe their own particular aspirations and actions in the moral purposes of the universe. To know that nations are subject to moral law is one thing, while to pretend to know with certainty what is good and evil in the relations among nations is quite another. Concept of interest defined in terms of power saves us from both moral excess and political folly. For if we look at all nations, our own included, as political entities pursuing their respective interests defined in terms of power, we are able to do justice to all of them (Morgenthau 1993: 13).

Last principle specifies the difference between political realism and other schools of thought. According to Hans J. Morgenthau, the most discernable element that builds a wall between political realism and others is political realism’s profoundness. However, much of the theory of political realism may have been misunderstood and misinterpreted, there is no gain saying its distinctive intellectual and moral attitude to matters political. Intellectually, the political realist maintains the autonomy of the political sphere, as the economist, the lawyer, of the conformity of action with legal rules. The economist asks: “How does this policy affect the wealth of society, or a segment of it?” and the political realist asks “How does this policy affect the power of nation?” (Morgenthau 1993: 13).

One should realize that Morgenthau accepts that states act in the pursuit of power both at home and abroad. All politics, domestic and international, reveals three basic patterns; that is, all political phenomena can be reduced to one of three basic types. A political policy seeks either to keep power, to increase power, or to demonstrate power. Policy of status quo is one of the ways to attain power. A nation whose foreign policy tends toward keeping power and not changing the distribution of power in its favor pursues a policy of the status quo. The concept “status quo” is derived from status quo ante bellum, a diplomatic term referring to the usual clauses in peace treaties which provide for the evacuation of territory by enemy troops and its restoration to the prewar sovereignty. Therefore, the peace treaties with Italy and Bulgaria terminating the Second World War provide that “all armed forces of the Allied and Associated Power shall be withdrawn” from the territory of the particular nation “as soon as possible and in any case not later than ninety days from the coming into force of the present Treaty”. In a nutshell, the policy of the status quo aims at the maintenance of the distribution of power which exists at a particular moment in history (Morgenthau 1993: 50-51).

Policy of imperialism has a reverse situation. A nation whose foreign policy aims at acquiring more power than it actually has, through a reversal of existing power relations whose foreign policy, in other words, seeks a favorable change in power status pursues a policy of imperialism. According
to Morgenthau, due to its nature, imperialism aspires to disrupt status quo. In “Politics Among Nations” Morgenthau focuses on three types of imperialism. First, victorious war occurs if a nation entangles in full scale war with another nation and gets victory. In that case, victorious nation seeks to alter power relations permanently in its own benefit. The “Carthaginian Peace” by which the Romans changed their power relations with the Carthaginians permanently in their favor, has become the byword for the kind of peace settlement which tends to perpetuate the relation between victor and vanquished as it exists at the conclusion of hostilities. Second, lost war or status of subordination may easily engender in the vanquished a desire to turn the scales on the victor, to overthrow the status quo created by hostile’s victory, and to change places with him in the hierarchy of power. The typical example of imperialism conceived as a reaction against the successful imperialism of others is German imperialism from 1935 to the end of the Second World War. Last type of imperialism is weakness. Existence of weak states or politically empty spaces attracts the attention of powerful states. As a consequence, power vacuum is filled by a superior state. Imperialism growing out of the relations between strong and weak nations is concreted by the relations between the Soviet Union and the nations of Eastern Europe (Morgenthau 1993: 66-67).

The policy of prestige has rarely been recognized in modern political literature for what it is: the third of the basic manifestations of the struggle for power on the international scene. In “Politics Among Nations”, Morgenthau states that two specific instrumentalities serve to express states’ prestige: diplomatic ceremonial and display of military force. Besides the practices of diplomacy, the policy of prestige uses military demonstrations as means to achieve its purpose. Since military strength is the obvious measure of a nation’s power, its demonstration serves to impress the other with that nation’s power. For instance, USA’s invitation of foreign observers to the two atomic bomb tests in the Pacific in 1946 was intended to serve this purpose (Morgenthau 1993: 84-90).

Eventually, our last topic in this chapter is balance of power among nations. In order to grasp the weight of balance of power in interstate affairs, Korea is a tangible sample. Because of its geographic location in the proximity of China, Korean peninsula has existed as an autonomous state for most of its long history by virtue of the control or intervention of its powerful neighbor. Whenever the power of China was not sufficient to protect the autonomy of Korea, another nation, generally Japan, tried to gain a foothold on the Korean peninsula. However, when Japanese power began to crumble after the concomitant defeats of Second World War, United States replaced Japan as a check upon Russian ambitions in Korea. Thus, for more than two thousand years, fate of Korea has mainly been under control of a dominant patron (Morgenthau 1993: 193).

The Crimea Case

The chapter facilitates to tender the main idea of this study. In this chapter, authors give in-depth-knowledge on ongoing Crimea conflict and its strong ties with political realism theory. 2014 was a year of turmoil in Ukraine. In February of 2014, following Euromaidan, a massive wave of protests in Kyiv, Ukraine’s capital was broke out and as a result President Viktor Yanukovich had to be removed from office and an interim government was put in place. Shortly after, Russian army appeared in Crimea and controlled the military buildings, governmental buildings and other strategic facilities (Matzek 2016: 1). In March 2014, in a referendum, the people of Crimea were asked whether they wanted to join Russia or stay as a part of Ukraine. After the positive result, Crimea and Sevastopol city councils declared independence of Crimea from Ukraine in order to join Russia and Russian President Putin asserted that he had to take care of Russian communities outside of Russia. Putin argued that Ukraine accepted an anti-Russian policy and did rally with the West (Moiseev

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John J. Mearsheimer (2014) asserts, in his essay published in Foreign Affairs, that the Crimean crisis was not the reflection of Russian aggression due to Moscow’s desire to revitalize the Soviet empire but the fault of the West. He claims that the probability of Ukraine joining NATO, the potentiality of Ukraine joining the EU and supporting the pro-democracy movement in Ukraine in 2004 were the reasons that motivated Russia’s actions in Crimea as Russia has opposed the westernization and enlargement of Ukraine to NATO. Mearsheimer argues that “When there was a coup in Ukraine to oust pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovych, Putin responded by taking Crimea, which he did in part out of a reasonable fear that Crimea, if admitted into NATO, could one day host a NATO naval base”.

However, the reasons of Russian Federation’s behavior are rooted deeply in the common history of Russia and Crimea. The history of Crimea is long and diverse leaving the peninsula with many ethnic groups from Greeks, Jews and Crimean Tatars, once the dominant ethnic, to Ukrainians and Russians. In 1774, Crimean Khanate gained its independence from Ottoman Empire but long before it was absorbed by Russia in 1783. The same year, russification process of the peninsula commenced. Tatar population has undergone notable decrease during nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century due to prosecution and emigration related to Crimean war, russification and Soviet deportation of Crimean Tatars to Central Asia during the final stages of the Second World War. According to the data from the research done by State Statistics Committee of Ukraine in 2001, the structure of Crimean population is as follows: Russians: 58.5%, Ukrainians: 24.4%, and Crimean Tatars: 12.1%. At the same time, 77% inhabitants regard Russian as their native language (Matzek 2016: 1-2).

In order to bring to an end the historical and demographic motives of Russian aggression, we should note that Nikita Khrushchev, general secretary of the Communist party of the Soviet Union, ceded the Crimea to Ukraine by unilateral decree of Presidium of the Supreme Soviet in February 1954. After the dissolution of USSR in 1991, Crimea became, as a result of an all-Ukraine referendum, an autonomous republic within Ukraine (Matzek 2016: 2). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine became one of the main areas of competition among Russia, United States and the EU, especially Germany. Russia considered Ukraine as its backyard for a long time, because it transports gas and oil via Ukraine to Western countries. Due to this fact, Ukraine’s loyalty was crucial for the Russian economy when its economic interests were at stake. The proximity of Ukraine naturally provides for lower oil and gas prices in comparison to other European countries. Nowadays, apart from being under political and economic pressure, Ukraine is suffering from Russian aggression as a result of occupation of large parts of East Ukraine such as Donetsk and Crimean peninsula (Girgin 2015: 21-24).

It is no secret that the Middle East’s proven oil reserves are not sufficient to meet the increasing hydrocarbon needs of European and American economies. Finding new supply channels is of the utmost importance. Many countries have therefore begun to focus on the Caspian basin energy resources. In this regard, Caspian Sea region has vital importance to Russia in order to export gas and oil to Europe. However, militarily, Ukraine is also important to Russia as a buffer state, and it is home to Russia’s Black Sea fleet, based in the Crimean port city of Sevastopol (Girgin 2015: 21-24). On the other hand, annexing the Crimea serves Russia’s main purpose, which is reaching the Mediterranean region. As soon as Russia establishes navy power in this area it will be the most important Black Sea country. In that sense, strategic location of Sevastopol influences Russia’s foreign policy in a positive way. Furthermore, Crimea’s air defense condition is getting better and that it also functions as the control point for Russia’s southern borders which enhances its capacity.
NATO plays a significant role in terms of decreasing Russian naval power in the Black Sea region. In this regard, Russia looks forward to preventing a widening of NATO’s influence and its strategy of improving the security shield around countries like Georgia and Ukraine, both of which had good chances to become members of the European Union and NATO before the Ukraine-Russia crisis erupted (Girgin 2015: 21-24). At this point, recalling the Morgenthau’s six principles is helpful in order to link the theory with motives of Crimea’s invasion. Abovementioned factors are completely related with Russian economic, military and strategic interests. According to Morgenthau’s first principle, politics is governed by objective laws that have their roots in the human nature. As human nature tends to act egoistically, each state contemplates and moves self-centredly like Russia for our case. An another connection can be created by the help of second principle. In the second principle, Morgenthau argues that political realism observes international politics as a scene which is based on interest defined in terms of power. In the light of information I have given above, annexation of Crimea soared Russia’s economic, military and strategic power. For instance, it increased the military power of Russia as Ukraine’s stability has been damaged by internal disorders and this fact made Russia unrivaled within the Ukraine.

Besides, third principle points out the interest as an objective category which is universally valid, but it does not endow that concept with a meaning that is fixed once and for all. While Russia wants to increase its influence in Eastern Europe with the invasion of Crimea and indirect control of Eastern Ukraine, EU and USA wants to delimit its power by keeping Ukraine close to the Western bloc. In its simplest expression, each side has a different plan sharply differs from other sides. Moreover, fourth principle declares that political realism is aware of the moral significance of political action. It is also aware of the undeniable tension between the moral command and the requirements of successful political action. Hence, infringement of Ukraine’s state sovereignty by a foreign power was completely illegal in terms of international law. On the other hand, from Russia’s perspective, it blocked NATO and EU from restraining Russian influence in the region by annexing Crimea and supporting separatists.

Fifth principle refuses to identify the moral aspirations of a particular nation with the moral laws that govern the universe. All nations are tempted-and few have been able to resist the temptation for long- to clothe their own particular aspirations and actions in the moral purposes of action. Just before the annexation of Crimea, Russia declared that it had a responsibility to protect Russian origin Crimeans from country-wide skirmishes. Ethically, one might debate that states have to protect their sympathizers’ life security but just because Russia annexed the peninsula and cut its ties with Ukraine, we can conclude that Russia went beyond its ethical purposes. Last principle apart political realism from other realist traditions. In Morgenthau’s opinion, political realism is always profound and real. A political realist always asks “How does this policy affect the power of nation?” . When we ask “How did annexation of Crimea affect the power of Russia”, the answer is simple: Russia overran a strategically important peninsula, found an opportunity to boost its naval presence in the Black Sea, diminished the EU influence in Eastern Europe, broke the NATO siege as it prevented Ukraine’s accession. Now, annexation process is going to be explained in detail.

Tension rose in the aftermath of former president Yanukovych’s refusal to sign the association agreement with EU in November 2013 and crisis led the way for Russian military intervention to Crimea. External divisions among Ukrainian citizens on foreign policy and ethnicity found an internal corollary in a division of Ukraine’s population: while Eastern Ukraine is predominantly Russia-oriented with Russian native language of a huge part of the population, the population of the Western part is more oriented towards the European Union. Apart from Russia’s
interests in Ukraine, EU sees country as a potential candidate in future (Marxsen 2014: 367-391). Pro-European segments of inhabitants started a wave of anti-governmental and pro-EU public demonstrations which is known as Euromaidan in a reaction to pro-Russian president Yanukovych’s veto. When Yanukovych fled the Ukraine on 22 February 2014, the country remained in a political crisis. On 26 February 2014, pro-Russian protests occurred in Simferopol, Crimean capital. Next day, armed masked individuals seized government buildings in Crimea including military facilities, airports and media. Long before, they blocked the traffic connecting Crimea with Ukraine (Matzek 2016: 2).

Although fugitive president Viktor Yanukovych has been replaced by a reform-minded businessman -Petro Poroshenko, Ukraine’s political crisis signalled the Ukraine’s departation from Kremlin’s orbit. As a direct result, Russia took the action in an attempt to forestall the danger. Russian Special Forces’ commandoes and naval infantry marines’ appearance in Crimea on 27 February 2014 marked the start of a process that culminated in the first major land grab in Europe since World War Two (Foxall 2015: 2-16). Aided by local Berkut riot police, Russian flags over Crimean parliament and the Council of Ministers was raised by separatists. On the same day, the Supreme Council- regional parliament dissolved the Council of Ministers and appointed Sergey Aksyonov, leader of the minority Russian Unity Party, as prime minister. On 1 March 2014, Aksyonov declared that his de facto government was in charge of all of Crimea’s military and police, and appealed to Putin for help in ensuring peace on the peninsula. Puting promptly received authorisation from Russia’s Federation Council- the upper house of Russia’s parliament- to intervene militarily in Ukraine, “until the normalisation of the socio-political situation in that country”. By 2nd March, Russian troops- still operating without insignia- had moved from their naval base in Sevastopol, where the strong Black Sea Fleet was headquartered, in order to exercise complete control over Crimea (Foxall 2015: 2-16).

On 6 March, the Supreme Council announced that it considered Crimea to be part of Russia. In addition, referendum date on peninsula’s future was proclaimed as 16 March. Though the international community condemned Russia’s actions, the vote went ahead as planned. On 16 March, Crimeans voted on their future, surrounded by heavy armed soldiers in a state, and decided to join to Russia Federation as 96.7 percent of voters approved the integration. Three days later, on 21 March 2014, the annexation of Crimea was ratified by Russia’s parliament’s both houses (Foxall 2015: 2-16). Western world reacted against the incorporation of Crimea to Russia. In March 2014, EU, US and most other OECD countries imposed economic sanctions on Russia. To enumerate the penalties, a list can be compiled; Western states and their allies, freezed the assets of several dozen high ranking government officials and barred them from getting visa, prohibited doing business with a number of Russian firms and banks – including a ban on Visa and MasterCard to deal with these banks. Sanctions also targeted some state-controlled oil companies of Russia such as Rosneft, Novatek and banks like Gasprombank, Vnesheconombank, VTB and defence sector companies in the US market. Punishments hit Russian technology hard at the same time; a ban on sales of defence-related technologies and deep water oil and gas-drilling equipment have also been put into effect (Black vd 2016: 129-130).

Russia counterattacked by adopting different sanctions on West. In August 2014, ban on food imports, totalling $9 billion annually from EU, US, Canada, Australia and Norway was an obvious response. Russia efforted to hinder economic worsening but Western sanctions led to lower trade and greater outflow of capital from Russia. Oil prices started to plummete from about $100 a barrel in 2011-13 to $50 by the end of 2014-early 2015 and crippled Russian economy (Black vd 2016: 129-130). Moreover, the first part of the association agreement that was signed in March 2014
directed the EU and Ukraine towards closer political and economic cooperation. Russia, on the other hand, opposed that development sharply and feared for its political influence in Eastern Europe. The number of non-Nato and non-EU states in Eastern Europe has declined significantly over the last two decades and Russia strictly defies that the remaining neutral states become part of these organizations as well (Marxsen 2014: 367-391).

As Morgenthau points out, policy of status quo always tries to protect established order. In this regard, policymakers who favor status quo often defend effectiveness of intergovernmental organization, signed treaties and so on. On the other hand, policy of imperialism in the struggle for power does its best in order to give rise to the fall of status quo. In this regard, we can infer that Ukraine is torn between EU and Russia as it has been an important aim for clash of interests I have mentioned in detail between its two powerful neighbours. Since order of status quo necessitates a lasting power struggle in Ukraine, both Western and Russian sides tried to have upper hand under the pretext of political, military or economic partnership. When Russia unleashed a ground incursion to protect its interests in the region, it became tangible that Russia conducted an imperial foreign policy based on aggression. In other word, Russian expansionism’s ultimate aim was to overthrow status quo.

The hastily arranged 14 March referendum was no more than a justification attempt to legalize the annexation as it was held under the shadow of weapons. However, simultaneously, we can conclude that Russia’s operation was also launched to change the balance of power in its own benefit. As a direct consequence, EU took a step by association agreement with Kyiv administration so as not to lose its interests while Russia was gaining advantage. As soon as a change in the balance of power is loomed, both actors acted in accordance with their interests. Recalling the second principle of political realism which supports the interest based political action, neither EU nor Russia focused on the goodness of Ukraine. They took decisions and implemented them only various interests were put in jeopardy after the actions of competitor. When Russia defied the international law and absorbed Crimea peninsula, EU alarmed to preserve its interests by the help of the agreement. As Morgenthau puts in his seminal work ‘‘Politics Among Nations’’, there are three types of imperialism; victorious war, lost war and weakness as have been discussed above. Russian imperialism in Crimea resembles with weakness type of imperialism. Ukraine’s relative economic, military and political vulnerability in compare to Russia and EU made it a place where two powerful rivals have oftenly confronted after the vanishing of Soviet Union. Therefore, each side constantly wanted Ukraine to comply with its interests. To ensure this, Russia involved in some conspiracies like supporting the separatists in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea during the annexation period whereas EU worked to forge Ukraine to be a member of Union.

Daily life in Crimea is remaining unstable. In August 2016, Russia has blamed Ukraine in “state terrorism” and started massive military drills along Ukrainian border. On August 15, the situation escalated due to Russian dispatchment of troops on Ukrainian border. In Ukraine, this move directly reminded the large scale Russian military exercise ‘‘Kavkaz-2015’’ along the Russian-Ukrainian and Russian-Georgian borders with the participation of 95,000 troops, 7,000 vehicles and 150 jets (Andreyuk vd 2016: 1). Military power demonstrations might be usual in a conflict. For instance, in June 2014, NATO stepped up its support when ten member countries kicked off military exercises in the Baltic States with a unit which was comprised of 47,000 soldiers and 800 military vehicles. Russia viewed NATO’s buildup as a sign of aggression and deployed additional warships and bombers to Kaliningrad in retaliation (Grigas 2016: 169).

According to Hans J. Morgenthau, policy of prestige appears in two different forms; display of military force and diplomatic ceremonial. For our case, display of military force is the reasonable
focal point as the representatives of two blocs – Russia and NATO- flexed their military muscle by organizing military exercises. Such things are done in order to earn international esteem in the eyes of world public and intimidate the rival countries. When one side carries out an action in the realm of policy of prestige, other side quickly responds. After the annexation, Russia repeatedly conducted military drills on Ukrainian border to show its strenght. Conversely, NATO reacted against the annexation of Crimea since early 2014. Please note that the reaction motives may differ in accordance to time and place as third principle of political realism supports.

**Conclusion**

This study aimed to evaluate Russia’s expansionism toward Crimea with searching out political realism’s linkages with Crimea conflict as realist theory has always occupied a notable ground in international relations. As a result, we set sight on explaining the theory known as realism and one of its subsidiaries- political realism- with the connections of absorption of Crimea in early 2014. Hence, key question of this study was “How could political realism be used to evaluate a contentious political incident of Russia’s annexation of Crimea?” To answer the question, we divided our study into three relevant parts; Introduction of Realist Tradition, Defining Political Realism and lastly Contemporary Reflection of Political Realism: The Crimea Case. First part set out to concretize realist tradition. Related with this purpose, we have given the main idea of theory with references from other representatives of realism. It is possible to come up with the idea that realist tradition put the security, interest, power and bleak view on human nature in its center. From its emergence to our age, realism has been an ardent supporter of such values. Since realism gives weight to palpable terms, it becomes one of the most useful tools to do research on political events from a scientific perspective.

For this reason, political realism, a realist subcategory developed by Hans J. Morgenthau, grew into the main theme of second part. As this study has been written in order to assess the case of Crimea in the light of political realism, authors had to give the key concepts of political realism related with Crimea crisis. Therefore, six principles of political realism, policy of status quo, imperialism, prestige and balance of power have been carefully analyzed. Hans J. Morgenthau who fled Germany due to Nazi’s ferocious policies against Jewish community published “Politics Among Nations”’ in 1948. As he believes that political realism bolsters theory with practice and experience, his brand of realism is more profound than other international relations theories in his opinion. Finally, last part has tied the political realism with Crimea conflict. Previous chapters were fulfilled with theoretical background. Because of this fact, third part of study has paved a way for assessment of annexation of Crimea by the help of political realism. It is suffice to say that all topics that mentioned in second part have been used in final part.

To sum up, as far as we are concerned, state centric approach, security dilemma, power struggle and pessimism are still valid in political affairs. By this study, we tried to present a plausible work capable of meeting the expectations for both in the realm of theory and practice. In this regard, we do believe that our work is able to provide with persuasive arguments on the complex structure of politics and political realism in order to understand the nature of crises that affect mankind. In conclusion, political realism, an influential branch of realist theory, can be utilised by researchers in the search of assessing a conflict or crisis taking place at present.
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