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Ukraine: Another victim of geopolitical rivalry between West and East

By Alexandr Kim

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The Ukrainian crisis is seemingly discussed by everyone these days. We are dealing with a variety of different opinions and views over the issue. It can be difficult for some to be objective. The golden mean in this complicated situation would be to carefully analyze the conflict which is ultimately Russia vs the West. We have to, at least, try to judge the current events fairly.

We can observe now that the whole nation of Ukraine is in total chaos. In fact, social cleavages have already divided the country into two blocks. Mass protests have sparked as a response to quite an unexpected decision of former president Victor Yanukovich to decline joining the European FTA.

As a result, the Ukrainian people, who had been in favor of the European integration, started to protest (known as Euro-Maidan). It ended up with the overthrow of legitimate President Viktor Yanukovich, who subsequently had to flee to Russia in search of political asylum.

However, now it is obvious that it was only the beginning and we still don't see the end of the current disturbances.

There are still many pro-Russian citizens within the state, who seem to be unsatisfied with the new government, particularly in the south-east of the country.

The international community is divided on the Ukrainian issue too. In short, there is a bi-polar position toward the situation. The first one refers to the West that sympathizes with the new government. This contrasts with the Russian position that considers that the previous government was changed unconstitutionally. But what is important to realize is that both of them are limited to just pragmatic interests.

To begin with the Western prospective, it is important to notice that since the very beginning of the Ukrainian protest, Europe, as well as the US, made colossal efforts to support the opposition. As Yanukovych's policy suddenly turned toward Russia, the West, in turn, intensively started to prevent Ukraine from gaining unfavorable closeness with the Russian Federation.

The main criticism of the West refers to the so-called 'double standards policy,' which means that the West tends to foster democracy only in those countries where it is beneficial for the West. But for some undemocratic states its policy is completely opposite. Saudi Arabia would be a perfect example of such a double-sided approach. We all know that the political system of Saudi Arabia is officially based on Sharia law. Yet, we close our eyes to this because we know that Saudi Arabia is an ally of the US.

The official Kremlin position gives us another strong argument against the Western bloc. Russia blames the EU for its interference in the internal affairs of Ukraine. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said: "We gave concrete examples of what we do and what our European partners do. They (EU officials) go to Kiev and Maidan, hand out cookies and say that the Ukrainian people must make a free choice in favour of Europe. If the choice is free, let the Ukrainian people decide".

"Imagine if I went to Germany [and] walked among protesters who support parties calling for Germany to change its relationship toward the EU," he said.

On the other hand, we should be also realistic about the Russian position. It follows its own interests no less than the West.

Before sending troops to the Crimean peninsula 'in connection with an extraordinary situation in Ukraine', President Putin explained the necessity of the military invasion by making an excuse

that numerous ethnic Russians, who form about 60 percent of the population of the Crimea, might be threatened by aggressive Kiev nationalists. But there is a big question mark on his motivations to protect those Russians from the opposition's radical groups. It would be naïve to suppose it was his real concern.

In reality, Putin was simply conscious of the potential danger of the Ukrainian integration in NATO, which would exclude any form of Russia's military presence inside Ukraine. However, as long as there are Russian navy bases in the Crimea, Russia remains influential in the Black Sea region, which has been an object of strategic importance for many centuries.

For the politicians from both Western and Russian sides, Ukraine is just another field to realize national interests. However, such an intention to expand spheres of influence within Ukraine has de facto led to the division of the country. People from one country are ready to kill each other only because of political convictions. The civil war in Ukraine has already started.

Ordinary people, who are involved in the conflict, do not understand that they are no more than puppets in the hands of the players. On the other hand, the Western bloc is also at fault for its naïve principle, that is, 'if it works here, it will work everywhere'.