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Round Table Discussion on **Ukrainian Crisis – Implications for Geo- Political Scenario**

Organized by
MUSLIM Institute - UK Chapter

The research based think tank MUSLIM Institute's UK Chapter organized a Round Table Discussion on "Ukrainian Crisis – Implications for Geo-Political Scenario" on Saturday, 14th June 2014 at Birkbeck, University of London. Various students, researchers as well as professionals in the related field attended the round table discussion.





Mr. Hamza Iftikhar

Moderator

Mr. Hamza Iftikhar began the Round Table Discussion by welcoming all the participants and introducing the panelists. He then started off by introducing MUSLIM Institute, that it is a non-governmental, non-political and not for profit research based think-tank dedicated to promote peace, stability, prosperity and leadership in the World, particularly in Muslims. He told about MUSLIM Institute's inception in 2012 at Islamabad, Pakistan and highlighted that the Institute has carried out several such discussions on various related issues and crisis. However, the Institute does not restrict its activities on contemporary crisis and conflicts but also propagates advocacy in other socio-economic & cultural issues. Mr. Iftikhar also notified about the activities of MUSLIM Institute – UK Chapter initiating in January 2014 with the inaugural event being held in Luton on the forgotten issue of Kashmir that hosted numerous parliamentarians as well as Lords. Concluding the introduction, he briefly updated the participants regarding the new initiative by MUSLIM Institute, 'The Muslim Debate', which is an online Oxford-Style debate platform that engages different intellectuals, academics and professionals in a dialogue to determine a course of action in resolving issues faced by the Muslim community.

Mr. Fahim Khalid

Research Associate MUSLIM Institute

Mr. Fahim Khalid briefly highlighted the current ongoing crisis in Ukraine. He explained how former President Yanukovich's backtracking on a trade agreement with EU in November, 2013 led to three month protests resulting in violent clashes and President's abrupt departure in February, 2014. After holding a "referendum" on 16th March, 2014, the Crimean people urged to join Russia. Despite condemnation of the "referendum" by Ukrainian government, the EU, the US and UN General Assembly, President Vladimir Putin went ahead and annexed the Ukraine's Crimean peninsula, claiming the "referendum" to be completely legitimate. The crisis however did not culminate there, till date violent clashes between Ukrainian authorities and separatists are going on in the eastern province of Ukraine.





Mr. Abdullah Shahnawaz

Senior Research Associate MUSLIM Institute

Talking on some of the Geo-Political implications, Mr. Abdullah Shahnawaz stressed on few particular implications. One of them being Ukraine as a crucial geographical pathway for the gas supply to Europe as almost 15% of the gas used in Europe comes from Russia via Ukraine. “If Ukraine crisis weren’t to be neutralized soon, there could be a crucial impact on the energy supplies in Europe”, he said. Mr. Shahnawaz elaborated a bit more on financial perspective, by telling that should the crisis spread further and sanctions implemented, financially it will hurt not only Russia but Europe as well. He claimed that in the past, sanctions have proven to be counterproductive, as recent as last month Russia signed a \$400 billion gas deal with China. “Since the beginning of the crisis, the renewed outcry in Europe to wean itself of Russian energy is falling on deaf ears in Moscow”, he told. While talking about the immense reserves of hydrocarbons in the Black Sea, Mr. Shahnawaz shed light on the geo-strategic location of the Crimean peninsula. He told how the annexation of Crimea by Russia has given it access to the additional territorial space in the Black Sea for further exploration of hydrocarbons, which will also exert more influence over the region. Ending his statement, he also talked about the dilemma Pakistan is in due to this crisis. “Ukrainian ambassador to Pakistan has urged Pakistan to play a more vital role in resolving the crisis, we should also keep in mind that Pakistan has its defence dealings, especially relating tank engines and its upgrades, with Ukraine. On the other hand, with Russia, Pakistan is paving way for new arms deals and MI-28 Havoc, MI-35 and MI-17 Gunship helicopters. So Pakistan is in a predicament either way it decides to move on the Ukrainian issue”, he said.





Dr. Ruth Deyermond

Lecturer & Co-Convener of Russian & Eurasian Security Research Group at King's College London

Emphasizing on the severity and ever wider geo-political implications of this situation, Dr. Ruth Deyermond pointed out that one of the causes to the contemporary Ukrainian crisis laid in the history of Ukraine itself. She explained, before the demise of Soviet Union, its neighboring satellite states, especially Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Lithuania, Estonia, Georgia as well as Azerbaijan were not built upon their populations' will. Rather it was the decisions of the Soviet leaders. One example to this, she added, was Nikita Khrushchev, former Soviet leader, who himself was a Ukrainian and thus gifted Crimea as a present to Ukraine. This is one of the reasons why this legacy of joining back into present Russia still stands among the people of these neighboring countries, and Ukraine is no different. She also said that Russia was already worried about the United States, EU and United Nations by-passing the laws laid down, for example, in the case of Iraq War as well as Kosovo Conflict. Hence, Putin felt necessary to reestablish Russia's authority when it came to Ukrainian crisis to avoid such by-passing again. Moving on, Dr. Deyermond added that, "Although it's a domestic crisis, originally is also a crisis that is produced by tensions between Russia & the US, and tensions between Russia & the EU. This means any solutions to the crisis is absolutely dependent upon Russia, the US and the EU being involved", she said. In addition to what Mr. Shahnawaz said earlier about Crimea's geo-strategic importance, Dr. Deyermond added "Crimea is the home of the Black Sea fleet, which was one of the major arms of the Soviet Navy and continuing to be one of the major arms of Russian Navy. This is important for Russia because it means in effect that Russia has control of the very large section of the Black Sea, and because of the way Crimea sticks out in the Black Sea, it makes the entire Ukrainian coast vulnerable to Russia." Towards the end of her statement, Dr. Deyermond said that United States recognizes it has to work together with Russia in order to solve this conflict and vice versa. But problem is, she says "Everybody outside Ukraine wants to resolve this, the problem is the actors inside who are less responsive to this as there are some really extremists people on both sides." As a solution, she proposed "All the parties will have to try to control and contain their partners inside Ukraine if this is going to work." She stressed that the Ukrainian crisis are on a very serious stage and thus need to be resolved as soon as possible. She advises that a united Europe response is very important for a solution to the Ukrainian crisis, a united Europe response, she thinks however is very challenging at the moment.

Question & Answer Session



The discussion then moved onto its Question and Answer session in which participants asked many related questions to the panelists leading to a lively discussion before conclusion. To one question regarding Russia's intentions when it comes to the possibility of invading other neighboring countries such as Poland, Dr. Deyermond replied, "...if Russia invaded Poland, it would be an attack on an Article 5 state and that would mean, under the NATO treaty, that the United States, Great Britain, France, Italy, Germany, they all have to regard it as an attack on them. Russia does not want to get into a war with America and any of those states, as it would be a disaster for everyone, particularly for Russia."

On another question relating to the recently signed China-Russia \$400 billion gas deal and Russia using its energy resources as a weapon against European Union, Dr. Deyermond explained, "Russia has a very shaky economic base, its economic base mainly relies on its energy." She said that Russia's power is also tied up with its energy exports, so even if it signs a billion dollar deal with China, Europe still remains its big customer. Hence, the impact would not only affect Europe, but also will have a considerable impact on Russia's economy. Therefore, Russia should be careful when deciding to use energy as weapon towards Europe.