

DOKUZ EYLÜL UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS PROGRAM
MASTER'S THESIS

EFFECTS OF THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR
ON THE POLARITY OF THE
INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

Erinç KUZU

Supervisor

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Zuhâl ÜNALP ÇEPEL

2024

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JÜRİ ÜYELERİ

<u>Ünvanı, Adı, Soyadı</u>	<u>Üniversitesi</u>	<u>İmza</u>
Doç.Dr. Zuhâl Ünalp ÇEPEL	- Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi	
Doç.Dr. İrem AŞKAR KARAKIR	- Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi	
Doç.Dr. Sinem ÜNALDILAR	- Ege Üniversitesi	

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DECLARATION

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26/12/2024

Erinç KUZU



ABSTRACT
Master's Thesis
Effects Of The Russia-Ukraine War On The Polarity Of The International
System
Erinç KUZU

Dokuz Eylül University
Graduate School of Social Sciences
Department of International Relations
International Relations Program

The polarity of the international system is defined by the relative distribution of material capabilities among states. After the end of the Cold War, the international system has entered into a unipolar era. Russia has declared its discontent with the unipolar structure of the international system and NATO's eastward enlargement on every major occasion during the last three decades. Thanks to its strategic location, Ukraine has become the zone of system-level rivalry between Russia and the West. Within this context, Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 is the most violent manifestation of its grievances about United States' assertive policies in the post-Cold War unipolar era.

The aim of this study is to analyse the observable effects of the Russia-Ukraine War on the structure of the international system. Therefore, it firstly defines the theoretical traits of polarity, investigates the particularities of unipolarity, and aims to find system-level patterns that account for the durability of unipolarity from a neorealist perspective. Against this backdrop, it historicizes the Russia-Ukraine War within the context of Russia-NATO relations under unipolarity, and provides a qualitative assessment of the interplay between the consequences of the war and systemic determinants. Specifically, it analyses the material capabilities of both the United States and Russia and the extent to which the war in Ukraine has affected them. The study concludes that the war has not transformed the polarity of the international system. Since the balance of power has not changed, the international system has remained unipolar.

Keywords: Russia-Ukraine War, NATO enlargement, Russia-NATO relations, neorealism, international system, unipolarity, balance of power.



ÖZET

Yüksek Lisans Tezi

Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı'nın Uluslararası Sistemin Kutupluluğuna Etkileri

Erinç Kuzu

Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi

Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü

Uluslararası İlişkiler Anabilim Dalı

Uluslararası İlişkiler Programı

Uluslararası sistemin kutupluluğu, materyal kaynakların devletler arasındaki orantısız dağılımı sayesinde belirlenir. Soğuk Savaş'ın bitimiyle birlikte uluslararası sistem, tek kutuplu bir döneme girmiştir. Geçtiğimiz otuz yıl boyunca Rusya, tek kutuplu sisteme ve NATO genişlemesine karşı olan memnuniyetsizliğini her fırsatta dile getirmiştir. Stratejik konumunun önemi nedeniyle Ukrayna, Rusya ile Batı arasındaki jeopolitik rekâbetin bir cephesi haline dönüşmüştür. Bu bağlamda Rusya'nın Şubat 2022'deki Ukrayna işgali Rusya'nın tek kutuplu sistemdeki tehditkâr ABD politikalarına yönelik şikayetlerinin en güncel ve şiddet içeren versiyonunu temsil etmektedir.

Bu çalışmanın amacı Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı'nın uluslararası sistemin yapısı üzerindeki somut etkilerini analiz etmektir. İlk olarak kutupluluk kavramının teorik çerçevesi tanımlanacak ve tek kutuplu sistemin belirleyici özellikleri neorealist perspektiften değerlendirilecektir. Daha sonra Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde tek kutupluluğun devamlılığını sağlayan sistem düzeyindeki faktörler araştırılacaktır. Daha sonra Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı, Rusya'nın tek kutuplu dönemde NATO ile olan ilişkilerinin tarihsel bağlamı içerisinde değerlendirilecek ve savaşın sonuçları ve sistemik faktörler arasındaki karşılıklı ilişkinin niteliksel bir analizi sunulacaktır. Spesifik olarak, ABD ve Rusya'nın materyal güç kapasiteleri ve Ukrayna'daki savaşın bu kapasiteleri ne ölçüde etkilediği analiz edilecektir. Sonuç olarak savaşın uluslararası sistemin yapısını dönüştürmediği savunulacaktır. Uluslararası güç dengesi değişmediği için, sistem tek kutuplu olarak kalmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı, NATO genişlemesi, Rusya-NATO ilişkileri, neorealism, uluslararası sistem, tek kutupluluk, güç dengesi.



EFFECTS OF THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR ON THE POLARITY OF THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABCT	Armoured Brigade Combat Team
ABM	anti-ballistic missile
AUKUS	Australia, UK, US
BMD	ballistic missile defence
BRICS	Brazil Russia India China South Africa
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
COFM	correlation of forces and means
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
DFE	Dynamic Force Employment
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
ERI	Entitled European Reassurance Initiative
EU	European Union
EUCOM	US European Command
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	gross national products
HIMARS	High Mobility Artillery Rocket System
IBCT	Infantry Brigade Combat Team
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INF	Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty
NAC	North Atlantic Council
NACC	North Atlantic Cooperation Council
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCO	non-commissioned officer
NFIUs	NATO Force Integration Units
NRF	NATO Response Force
NRC	NATO-Russia Council
NGO	non-governmental organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PJC	The Permanent Joint Council

PfP	Partnership for Peace
RAP	Readiness Action Plan
RMA	revolution in military affairs
SACEUR	Supreme Allied Commander Europe
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
U.K.	United Kingdom
U.S.	United States of America
U.S.S.R.	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VJTF	Very High Readiness Joint Task Force
VPO	voenno-politicheskaia obstanovka

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INTRODUCTION

According to conventional wisdom, Russia's violent actions in Ukraine, which had been ongoing since 2014 and have finally escalated to a large-scale invasion of the country, represent the increasing tension between Russia and the West (the United States and NATO). Accordingly, Russia's growing grievances toward the international system dominated by the United States (U.S.) culminated in early 2022 and resulted in a full-fledged war that had never occurred in Europe after the Second World War. Therefore, the effects of the Russia-Ukraine War have extended beyond the immediate vicinity of the warzone and rebounded at the international level. Concerning the fact that international systems vary across different polarity configurations, it is argued in this study that there are basically two aspects of the international-system level effects of this war. On the one hand, large number of international relations scholars and military experts in the Western academic community believe that Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine has marked the end of the current unipolar structure of the international system and augmented the transformation toward multipolarity.

For example, David Shlapak (2018: 5), a distinguished military analyst, argued that "along with China's reemergence in East Asia, the return of Russia as a disruptive force on the global stage marks the definitive end of the era of so-called unipolarity—an unprecedented period that was always destined to be a brief and anomalous perturbation of the post-Westphalian norm of a global system." More recently, Michael Mazarr (2022: 2), a prominent scholar of the international politics who mostly has conducted numerous system-level analyses of international relations, predicted that "the invasion of Ukraine is likely to have profound echo effects through the international system." Similarly, the Economist Intelligence Unit (2023: 1) published that "Russia's invasion of Ukraine has ruptured Russia's relations with Western countries and accelerated the transition to a fragmented, multipolar world." The U.S.' reluctance to intervene in the crisis and its refusal to directly confront Russia in Ukraine has been considered as the erosion of its material power and waning of its military preponderance which are the defining features of the contemporary international system.

On the other hand, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union (U.S.S.R), Russian leaders have been fervently advocating the emergence of multipolarity. Russia's bid for multipolarity has gone through several stages. Between 1992-1996, the emphasis was on Russia's great power identity and the concert of great powers in international politics. When Yevgeny Primakov became the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia in 1996, the focus shifted to the balance of power, geopolitical factors, and national capabilities. After Vladimir Putin assumed the Presidency of Russia in 2000, Russian politicians as well as academicians started to emphasize a civilizational aspect of international politics, the principle of sovereignty, clearly delineated spheres of influence, and the natural right of great powers to pursue their national interests in the multipolar world. Still, throughout the entire post-Cold War period, Russian efforts to build a multipolar international system have continued to be predicated on the establishment of Russian influence in its near abroad.¹ For political, geographic, economic, and historical reasons – that will be discussed in detail in the following chapters – Ukraine has always had a special place in Russia's strategy of undermining U.S. unipolarity. The Russian leaders have consistently insisted on Russia's 'privileged interests' in Ukraine. On the other hand, there have been consistent attempts by NATO and the European Union (EU) to integrate Ukraine into their institutional structure. For this reason, the status of Ukraine and the way it relates to the international system in a broader context has become the main issue dividing Russia and the West (Pezard, 2022: 4).

Against this backdrop, it is important to investigate the effects of the decade-long conflict in Ukraine on the dynamics of the international system. Therefore, the author clarifies the main research question of this study as follows: What are the systemic effects of the Russia-Ukraine War at the international level? Contrary to widespread assumptions, scrutiny of both the theoretical concept of systemic polarity and ongoing crises in Ukraine reveals that the war has not brought unipolarity to an end. The eruption of war does not mean that the systemic transformation is underway and heralds the emergence of multipolarity. In terms of the first aspect mentioned above, the studies which claim that there is a relation between the war and the change

¹ Russia's 'near abroad' is defined as the area covered by all of the states that had been part of the Soviet Union before 1991 except the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania).

in the systemic polarity, provide neither a rigorous theoretical construct nor operational definitions of the relevant concepts. In turn, the arbitrary use of theoretical concepts obscures our understanding and prevents us from reaching refined and valuable outcomes about the major occurrences in international politics. Notwithstanding their ostensibly precise conclusions, the academic studies pronouncing the emergence of multipolarity somehow fail to refer to the following issues which will be addressed in this study to reach a valid outcome:

a) What is the common mode of the definition of the international system – whether it should be analysed from the conceptual perspective of polarity, international order, or ‘world politics’? b) Which factors determine this definition? c) Is the current system multipolar, bipolar, or unipolar? d) What are the primary actors in international politics – whether they are sovereign states, international organizations, or individual actors? e) When and under which conditions international system changes?

In terms of the second aspect, as this study will demonstrate in the final chapter, Russian leaders’ insistence on multipolarity represents their hopes and expectations rather than the reality. As Andrew Radin and Clint Reach (2017: 15) argue, while discussing unipolarity and multipolarity, Russian leaders and analysts confuse the balance of power – a component of systemic polarity – with how international affairs are carried out – a factor indicating the nature of existing international order, not the international system. In Russian multipolarity construct, the U.S. is no longer considered as the ultimate arbiter of the global commons, and several emerging great powers have sufficient capabilities to challenge American dominance and redefine the “rules of the game in global multipolar politics” (Tkachenko, 2017: 116). The aim of the Russian grand strategy in a future multipolar would be restricting U.S. power through international institutions and multilateral arrangements.² The leaders in Moscow envision “a future polycentric world characterized by predictability, cooperation, and stability” (Charap et. al., 2021: 28). As Putin (Fars News Agency, 2022) declared, “a multipolar system of international relations has been actively evolving... This democratic, more just world order should be built on the basis of

² Emphasis added.

mutual respect and trust, and, of course, on the generally accepted principles of international law and the UN Charter.”

However, all the quoted factors – international rules, norms, and principles, predictability provided by international institutions, respect for international law, and interstate cooperation – are the components of international order. Their effect on the international system is marginal at best. Instead, the polarity of the international system is determined by the national capabilities and the relative distribution of power. Within this context, this study enlists six a priori assumptions. The methodological observations and theoretical validation of each argument will be provided in the relevant chapters. At this point, the aim is just to outline a logical sequence in order to construct a scientifically valid and empirically falsifiable hypothesis.

First, systemic polarity is a purely material condition, the components of which, according to the broadest definitions, are the economic, political, scientific, geographic, and most importantly, military indicators. On the other hand, order is a more complex and immeasurable phenomenon. It includes – among many others – material, ideological, political, psychological, legal, historical, national and societal factors. In this context, unipolarity must be distinguished from hegemony. Second, military capabilities are the most prominent factor in determining the existing mode of polarity. The economic and technological factors are crucial, but from a systemic perspective, they become decisive only when they are utilized for building a robust military capacity.³ Third, the current international system is unipolar. Although the U.S.’s relative position has been gradually declining since the 1970s, it is still the most powerful country in the world. Daunting U.S. material capabilities is the defining feature of contemporary international politics. Both Russia and China are more powerful than they were in the early 1990s, therefore the balance of power has changed. However, it has not been transformed. Although the gap has been shrinking, by far the U.S. is still the most powerful state in the international system.

³ For example, both Germany and Japan control significant economic resources and achieved high level of technological and scientific development. However, neither during the Cold War nor in the contemporary era they were defined by scholars as independent poles in the system. On the other hand, although serious structural problems in the economy of the Soviet Union were apparent as early as 1970, there has been a consensus among international relations scholars that, thanks to massive Russian military capabilities, the system was bipolar.

Fourth, as neorealism acknowledges, international institutions serve primarily to national interests of powerful states (Waltz, 2002: 45). NATO's official declarations and strategic actions prove the validity of this assumption. Therefore, NATO's first and foremost function is to provide an institutional ground upon which the U.S.' national interests, preponderant capabilities, primacist policies, and global power projection are realized and materialized. It is true that there have been some disagreements among member states on several occasions and U.S. leaders have mostly failed to convince their European counterparts to increase their governments' defence spending. However, in major issues, the gravity of even the strongest members of the Alliance (after the U.S.) – United Kingdom (U.K.), Germany and France – is marginal at best. Fifth, regardless of whether Russia's aggressive actions in Ukraine have been prompted by defensive or offensive motives, NATO enlargement is the most prominent – though not single – factor that has paved the way towards the current crisis in the region. Since NATO is defined as the institutional form of U.S. primacy, U.S.' and Russia's "military capabilities and the capabilities that each side's allies and partners would bring to bear in the event of conflict" are the functional determinants of both states' relative positions in the international system (Charap and Priebe, 2024: 78).

Finally, unipolarity does not refer to the omnipotence of the unipole.⁴ Under unipolarity, the defining principle of the international system is still anarchy, and even the unipole might not get what it wants in some cases. Therefore, unipolarity must also be distinguished from empire.⁵ Given this definition, the U.S.' decision not to intervene in the war in Ukraine and to respond to Russia's aggressive policies does not implicate its material power is somehow eroded and it is not the most powerful state in the system anymore. Apart from the distribution of material capabilities, there are several important variables affecting the decision to resort to military force in specific cases. Some of these variables are the balance of interests, offence-defence balance, the dynamics of the regional security complex, political factors, legitimacy issues, and public opinion. Moreover, although Russia is sometimes defined as a potential

⁴ The term 'unipole' is widely used in the international relations literature to denote the only superpower, or pole power in the unipolar system. For example, see Ikenberry et. al. (2011).

⁵ For the definition of empire, see Doyle (1986a: 11-13).

challenger to American unipolarity, deficiencies of its armed forces have been on display since February 2022.

Overall, the international system has remained unipolar. As Sumantra Maitra (2022: 140) argues, “a Russo-Ukrainian war, while a humanitarian catastrophe, will not alter the balance of power or diminish American preponderance... nor will Russia suddenly acquire the economy or manpower” to challenge U.S.’ relative position in the system by conquering large swathes of the European continent. Therefore, the hypothesis of this study is: that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022 did not result in a change in the structure of the international system. It does not mark the beginning of, or the acceleration of an already existing transformational process, during which the dynamics of the international system evolve and unipolarity gives way to a multipolar structure. As neorealist scholars acknowledge, intentions (which were discussed above) can quickly change, but capabilities (which determine the polarity of the system) do not. The systemic change occurs either through a great power war or the hegemonic decline of the dominant state. As both American and Russian academic forecasts indicate, the international system will remain unipolar at least for the next three decades (Art, 2004; Charap et. al. 2021).

The aim of this study is to conduct a system-level analysis with reference to a specific case. The conceptual toolkit of the analysis provided in this study consists of the precise terms, notions, definitions, and values assigned to specific structural phenomena by neorealist scholars in their academic works. While some quantitative data will be provided on a few occasions in order to illustrate the proposed arguments, the main observation method will be qualitative inference. From a systemic perspective, the study will contextualise the effects of the Russia-Ukraine war within a historical framework. The international system has been unipolar since 1989, which is assumed as the ending date of the Cold War and signifying the dissolution of the bipolar structure of the system. Since polarity affects how states conduct their relations in the international area and how they provide for their security, discussion of Russia’s relations with the U.S. and NATO during the post-Cold War is essential. This discussion mostly draws on secondary resources. Subsequently, Russia’s war against Ukraine will be analysed against the backdrop of this overall process. The purpose is

not present a mere the events in an exact chronological order. Instead, it is to historicise the war from a certain theoretical perspective.

Finally, in order to avoid the endogeneity problem, it is important to reemphasize the causal direction in the hypothesis. Accordingly, the independent variable is the Russia-Ukraine War, and the dependent variable is the change in the international system,⁶ not unipolarity. It is true that Russia's discontent with the unipolarity has motivated some of its foreign and security policy decisions. Ignoring the effect of American unipolarity on Russia's decision to launch a full-scale invasion of Ukraine would not be a wise strategy. However, unipolarity is not an outcome of the Russia-Ukraine war. It has been a defining feature of the international system for the last three and a half decades. It refers to a specific mode of relative power configuration. It is a unique phenomenon since the only unipolar period in the history of the modern state system is the post-Cold War period. On the other hand, changes in the international system "take place all the time, some important, some not" (Waltz, 2002: 30). Therefore, this study investigates whether a change in the system has taken place as a result of the Russia-Ukraine War.

The final aim of this introductory chapter is to provide clear-cut definitions of the two main variables of the study: the change in the international system and Russia-Ukraine War respectively. The most prominent precursor of the systemic change is preventive war by the declining hegemon to arrest the rise of the challenger. Wars are the main drivers of change in international politics. They affect international orders and recalibrate the structure of the international systems (Kutlay and Öniş, 2024: 19). If the hegemon chooses to resort preventive war, it could succeed and eliminate the threat, or it could fail and be displaced as a systemic actor. The second alternative is that the rising power starts war when it perceives its power overwhelms the declining hegemon's. However, the challenger could lose the war, and the hegemon could improve its systemic position (Stein, 2022: 1623). On the other hand, the presence of revisionist states is not necessary in order for the systemic change to take place. Firstly, differences in relative growth rates could create power imbalances, thus allowing the systemic change (Nexon, 2009: 339). Change is an outcome of the shifting distribution

⁶ Change in the system refers shifting distribution of relative power, which means the existing configuration of polarity is altered (Waltz, 2002).

of material capabilities, and uneven growth rate is a primary engine of this systemic transformation (Stein, 2022: 1623). Secondly, significant variations in unit-level variables such as contemporary developments in administrative, military, social, or economic technologies could significantly alter the relative distribution of capabilities and thereby disrupt the systemic equilibrium over time. Even if potential challengers adopt strategies of accommodation with hegemonic power, their increasing capacity to translate crucial resource bases into material power assets could push the systemic distribution of power to significant imbalances. Thirdly, dissatisfaction with the current orders allocation of status, material benefits, or other goods might lead states to enhance their capabilities to challenge a preponderant power while accelerating the processes of hegemonic overextension (Nexon, 2009: 339). The ‘hegemonic overextension,’ or ‘imperial overstretch’ is defined as a process “where hegemons move beyond their ‘loss of power gradient’ and expend greater material and human resources than they gain from wars” (Stein, 2022: 1624).

Russia’s war against Ukraine did actually start in February 2014, when the Ukrainian president escaped from the country and Russia seized the opportunity and annexed Crimea sparked a secessionist war against Ukrainian government in the Donbas Region (Kimmage, 2024). As Frederick et. al. (2023: 4) argues, “the Russian decision to invade Ukraine in 2022 reflected a decision to escalate a long-running conflict with Ukraine specifically, ongoing since at least 2014.” Therefore, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 is the culmination of the events that began with the annexation of Crimea, which includes but is not limited to, Russia’s support to the separatists in the Donbas region after 2014, following economic sanctions, increasing Western engagement in the Eastern and Southeastern Europe, and NATO’s inconsistent approach and destabilizing policies toward the region. For this reason, the focus will be on the systemic dynamics that have been shaped throughout the entire period. On the other hand, instead of providing a chronological order of individual events and describing minor details, analysing the overall process by employing clear-cut concepts will yield more beneficial results. Because the war in Ukraine is less about the domestic and external situation of Ukraine but more about a systemic rivalry between Russia and the U.S.

The literature on the Russia's assertiveness in Ukraine and the effects of the NATO enlargement on these assertive policies is vast. Therefore, examining the three distinct comprehensive reviews of this literature already conducted by the prominent scholars in the field is more useful at this point. Firstly, Elias Götz (2017) distinguishes the academic explanations of the roots of Russia's assertive policies in Ukraine into four level of analyses. At the first level, decision-maker explanations focus on Putin's mindset and his individual experiences. At the second level, domestic-political explanations centre on the imperative of regime survival in Russia and emphasize the processes during which Moscow tries to distract from political and economic failures at home and hinder democratic contagion in Russia's near-abroad. At the third level, ideational explanations focus the national identity and Russia's quest for great power status. Finally, at the fourth level, geopolitical explanations emphasize the foreign threats and opportunities; threats emanating from NATO enlargement and democracy promotion along the Russia's near abroad, and opportunities provided by Russia's strengthening material capabilities and regional and systemic power disparities (Götz, 2017: 230-243).

Secondly, Jan Eichler (2021: 84-92) divides the scholars in the Western academic community into two groups in terms of their attitudes towards the Russia's stance against the NATO enlargement and the annexation of Crimea: the strongly critical authors and the non-critical authors. The scholars in the first group see the annexation of Crimea and Russia's subsequent violent actions in Ukraine as an open challenge to international order. It showcases Russia's unilateralism, disregard for international norms, and militarist policies. Accordingly, the crisis of Crimea is the most challenging security issue in Europe in the post-Cold War era. It highlights the fact that Russia is an imminent security threat for the U.S.' allies in the region. Therefore, the U.S. aim should not be only to deter Russia, but be prepared to and conduct an all-out war if necessary (Eichler, 2021: 84-85). The authors in the second group suggests that Russia's violent course of action in Ukraine has been informed by its legitimate security concerns, exacerbated by the NATO enlargement process. In this context, they express concern about ignoring Russia's reservations on the issue by NATO members could lead an increasing collaboration between Russia and China on security matters. They propose for the U.S. government to abandon to send arms to

Ukrainian government and renounce to pursue the unnecessary and provoking policy of endless NATO enlargement. They believe this will reduce the political and military tension in Europe (Eichler, 2021: 86-88).

Finally, Götz and Staun (2022) demonstrates Russia's offensive policies toward Ukraine from the viewpoint of Russian strategic culture. They argue this strategic culture consists of two main strands. The first one is the Russia's historic sense of vulnerability. To overcome this perceived insecurity, Russia's security and defence officials has long sought to create strategic depth and buffer zones in the Western direction. Götz and Staun (2022: 484-485) further explicate that this perception of deep-seated vulnerability revolves around four interrelated elements. The first one of these factors is the vast geographical reach and long borders of Russia's territory. The second one is about the recurring invasion of Russian mainland throughout the history. The third factor, resulting from the second, is the perception of insecurity and distrust vis-à-vis the West. And the final element is on the focus of interplay between domestic and external security threats. The second strand in the Russia's strategic culture is the Russia's bid towards great power status. For Russians, international system is controlled by a certain number of great powers claiming their own area of privileged interest. Many in the Russian national security establishment consider a sphere of influence as a precondition for attaining great power status in the international system (Götz and Staun, 2022: 485-486).

Comprehensive and informative notwithstanding, the literature on the issue lacks a systemic analysis of the Russia-Ukraine War from a well-informed theoretical perspective. None of the scholarly works in the mentioned areas establish a causal relation between the Ukraine War and its implications at the international-system level. This study aims to fill this gap in the literature and contribute to our common understanding of a current war from a genuine system-level analysis.

CHAPTER ONE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: NEOREALISM

Neorealism is a school of thought which takes anarchy as the main ingredient of its research program. Relations among states take place in an anarchical environment. Anarchy is the operating mechanism of the structure in which sovereign units interact with each other (Viotti and Kauppi, 2016: 56). Anarchy compels states to act rationally and maximize their security. Neorealists think anarchy contributes to the efforts of states to seek power. Power is the main instrument to achieve this maximum level of security. For neorealists, power is a key variable, although it is not an end in itself (Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff, 2001: 80). The focus of this chapter will be on neorealism and its basic premises.

1.1. THE CORE CONCEPTS IN THE NEOREALIST THEORY

1.1.1. System, Structure, and State Behavior

In *Theory of International Politics*, Waltz's aim was to construct a systemic theory of international politics. He suggests that understanding the international system is only possible by constructing a systemic theory. Therefore, neorealism directs its analytical focus to the international system level. It deduces states' behavior in the context of the system-level framework (Schörnig, 2014: 38). In Waltz's writings, the central role has ascribed the structure of the international system. Structure substantially affects the course of interstate relations, namely nation-states (Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff, 2001: 81). The anarchical structure of the system, especially the number of great powers in that system and the distributional mode of their capabilities, shape the patterns of interaction. When structure change, interactive patterns of the members also change (Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff, 2001: 83). Changes in actor behavior, thus, are explained within the framework of shifting systemic dynamics, not on the basis of variations in actor's attributions (Keohane, 1986: 165-166). For Waltz, the structure must be put forward independently from actors, their interests, and interactions. This structure has an autonomous causal effect on units that they act in a

similar manner in certain situations (Schörnig, 2014: 41). States tend to behave mostly in the same way toward certain structural traits (Keohane 1986: 166).

Then, what are those actions? What does it mean to say that states must behave in certain kind of ways? There is no actual guarantee that power management will be successful. The international system sends signals to states to act in particular ways. States that do not respond to these signals, that is to say states that ignore how power distribution affects the international politics, will eventually suffer harm as a result. And in some situations, they could face loss of independence (Brown and Ainley, 2005: 43). States could not venture their very existence; therefore, they would take the necessary steps. Because the international politics is the arena of 'self-help' mechanism. States must take care of themselves, because there is no one else to do it. There is little trust among states. They constantly fear from the actions of their rivals. Because it is almost impossible to fully know other states' intentions (Mearsheimer, 2013: 79). It implies that there is no nightwatchman who can come to help when they are attacked by another state. "When a state dials the emergency services for help, there is nobody in the international system to answer the call" (Mearsheimer, 2013: 79).

This means that states need to be concerned about survival. For this, they must consider other states as potential threats (Brown and Ainley, 2005: 42). Indeed, states' main goal is survival. Because survival is a priori condition for pursuing those other goals (Mearsheimer, 2013: 79). Security is rarely only objective, but more rarely can it be ignored (Jervis, 1998: 981). One of the most devastating examples of this is Kuwait in 1990, which had specialized in wealth and had tried to establish a welfare state, was invaded by Iraq, which had specialized in military power (Doyle, 1997: 128). Neorealism, thus, argues that national prosperity could not be the priority of states. Rather, it is survival that matters most for them (Grieco, 1988: 498). Therefore, states must constantly adjust their relative standing in the world in line with their reading of the power of others and their own power (Brown and Ainley, 2005: 42-43). A state's current ally may become an adversary in the future. And the acknowledgment of that generates most of the constraints that compose the international system because self-help necessitates that states do not wish their friends excessively aggrandized or their enemies excessively degraded (Jervis, 1998: 981).

It comes to a logical conclusion that states are the core units in the international system. Neorealists do not ignore the operation of actors such as multinational corporations, NGOs, and international organizations and the role of bureaucracies. However, the target of these actors' activities are states in most cases, and through domestic and national policies these actors can exert power (1998: 981). Therefore, theoretically, these actors seem unworthy of attention. Because of those processes that realists regard as the key determinants of the international system, these actors have no influence (Schörnig, 2014: 41). The state has proven notably resilient when confronted with these multiple social actors (Jervis, 1998: 982). Equally important is that states are rational actors, which means that they make cost-benefit calculations in their interaction with other sovereign equals. On this account, rationalism means that political leaders will consider their own states' interests as primary concern. Being rational can be understood in a way that state behavior attempts to maximize some consistent utility function (Jervis, 1998: 975). Therefore, the structure of the system can be explained, "...since states determine their interests and strategies on the basis of calculations about their own positions in the system" (Keohane, 1986: 167) In sum, when the characteristics of the international system change, behavior of the rational state actors will also be altered.

Kenneth Waltz (1979: 88-99) defines the structure of the international system in terms of three elements: 1) organizing principle, 2) differentiation of units, and 3) distribution of capabilities. Firstly, Waltz suggests that there are only two organizing principles in political structures – hierarchy and anarchy. Hierarchical relationships exist in domestic politics, in which distinct types of units are organized into a homogenous structure of authority (Brown and Ainley, 2005: 42). These units are formally differentiated from each other by reference to the function that they perform. If the units are different in terms of the authority and the governmental functions they perform, this means that they operate in a hierarchical order (Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff, 2001: 86). Hierarchical orders also guarantee the safety of individual units (Schörnig, 2014: 41). On the contrary, anarchy refers to a condition which lacks such a safeguarding mechanism run by an overarching authority, which corresponds to the decentralized structure of the international system (Dunne and Schmidt, 2011: 91). In an anarchical system, units, which are equal with each other, conduct relations with

one another. All neorealists recognize that the international system is characterized by anarchy. Anarchy is not the equivalent of widespread chaos or disorder. It is an organizing principle and simply means that there is no overarching authority or ultimate arbiter that stands above states (Mearsheimer, 2013: 79). Actors are located in a horizontal shape, and they are formally equal to each other. The distinction between hierarchy and anarchy has utmost importance for neorealists, and the present international system is clearly anarchical.

When the system is more hierarchical, the differentiation of functions is greater; when the system is more anarchical, the similarity of functions among the units is greater (Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff, 2001: 82). This leads us to the second feature of the structure of the international system that Waltz takes into account. It is the functional differentiation of units. For Waltz (1979: 93), states are homogenous actors whose inner life is irrelevant to the study of international politics. For neorealist theory, the domestic organization of states can be disregarded. Each state represents a black box that is left unopened. The anarchical structure of the system eliminates the functional differentiation among units (Donnelly, 2019: 60).

Thirdly, the systemic structure is delineated by the distribution of material capabilities between states. According to Waltz (1979: 97-101), this third tier is of fundamental importance which also determines international outcomes. This third element also signifies the power relations between states (Schörnig, 2014: 42). Capabilities of units are the features of those particular units; however, the relative distribution of material power is a system-wide concept (Waltz, 1979: 98). Reason for that is that the international system is a self-help system. In a self-help system, states are differentiated according to their power. Differences of power affect state behavior much more than, for example, differences in ideology or governmental form (Waltz, 1986: 329).

The structural dynamics of international system is defined by the number of the great powers. In counting, a specific feature of a particular system is determined according to the distribution of capabilities across units (Waltz, 1979: 98-99). The number of great powers is the single most important factor that varies across different international systems. Neorealists seek to provide a rank-ordering of states. That's how they are able to determine the numerical value of great powers in that international

system. In turn, the number of great powers determines the structure of a particular international system (Dunne and Schmidt, 2011: 92). Distribution of power may manifest itself in three possible ways. When there is only one particularly powerful state, the system is unipolar. When there are two particularly powerful states, for example during the Cold War, the system is bipolar. If there are more than two great powers in the system, then the system is multipolar. The next two sections will elaborate on the concepts introduced in this section; the great powers and the structure of the international system – in terms of balance of power and hegemony – respectively.

1.1.2. The Concept of ‘Great Power’

In the literature, especially in terms of security issues, great powers and rest of the actors are separately weighed, since only the great powers are capable of playing a dominant role in the structuring of the international system and the transformation of the world order (Levy, 1983: 2, 10). Therefore, understanding a great deal about international politics requires fully grasping the structure and process of relations among great powers. Goldmann (1972: 39) puts forward this distinction between great powers and other states in following terms: If the power resources in the international system are distributed in such an unbalanced way that some members have far larger resources than others, they can be classified as belonging to a separate formation by themselves. He then calls particularly powerful members as ‘topdogs’ and the rest as ‘underdogs.’

Polarity and great power concepts go hand in hand. Therefore, in international relations literature, there have been a significant number of scholarly attempts to operationalize the existing mode of polarity based on the objective measurement of relative distribution of power in the system. The basic assumption is that polarity is embedded in the third tier of the structure specified in the Waltz’s system definition, which is the relative distribution of power. It is crucial to keep in mind that great power is a comparative concept, denoting the measurement of states’ capacities with relative terms, and designating them to a position accordingly. Then, however, a critical question arises. What are these resources that give some countries a special great

power status and how to measure them? Implicit in this question is the way of how one defines the great powers. In order to elaborate on these concepts, firstly it should be investigated what 'power' means.

To begin with, neorealists think power in politics is like money in economics (Keohane, 1986: 167). In his seminal book, *Theory of International Politics*, Kenneth N. Waltz, unlike classical realists, defines power in terms of capabilities. These capabilities do not only include military capacity; Waltz also points out the other relevant components. These components include economic capacity, population, size of the territory, resource endowment and political stability. According to Waltz, these capabilities are not measured in a disaggregated way, they constitute a whole (Waltz, 1979: 130-131). John Mearsheimer (2013: 78) labels these aspects of power as latent power, which refers to socio-economic components that go into building military power. Ideally, these latent aspects of power must be translatable, which means that they must be convertible to military power to generate security (Doyle, 1997: 128). Therefore, power is a holistic instrument to scale a nation's vigor.

Power has been defined basically in two different ways by the students of international politics. The first approach defines power in relational terms based on the outcomes of interstate interactions. The basic logic of this approach was most famously formulated by Robert Dahl in 1957 as following: "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do" (quoted in Baldwin, 2016: 13). According to this logic, a state is powerful to a degree up to which it can exert influence and determine the outcomes. Therefore, power is a relational concept that takes into account all the units in the interaction process. The second approach defines power in terms of the command of virtual access to material resources and control over the tangible assets. As Mearsheimer (2001: 57) formalized, power "represents nothing more than specific assets or material resources that are available to a state." Accordingly, state's capacity to run a resilient economy, build armies, deploy navies, conquer territory, and exert pressure via diplomatic skills represent its power (Wohlforth, 1993: 4). This approach asserts the main independent variable is the command of material instruments, not control over actors, processes, or results (Hart, 1976). Accordingly, powerful states, even ones that possess

preponderant capabilities, do not always obtain the results they prefer (Ikenberry et. al., 2011: 4).

As with most of the theorists in the neorealist tradition, this study adopts the second approach. Because the first one almost always leads to a tautology. If one tries to infer the amount and relationship of power by observing outcomes, one cannot establish a causal mechanism until after power is practiced. In such a case, it is impossible to separately weigh the power relationship and the outcome generated by that relationship, because the former will have to be derived from the latter. Determining the level of power by observing outcomes and then operationalizing this power level to explain those outcomes seems to be “a dubious analytical exercise”, which is a confusing process with the outcome, according to Wohlforth (1993: 4; Waltz, 1979: 191).

On the other hand, the power-as-material capabilities approach seems to disentangle the actual level of power from outcomes. Scholars adopting this approach enjoy the benefits of analysing real power and international outcomes separately, thus building causal chains more consistently. This approach allows the measurement of the real distributional mode of tangible assets the system objectively and thus provides a solid framework, within which long-term patterns of international politics, war, competition, cooperation, alliance dynamics, order, stability, and constraints and incentives the system offers to states, can be studied, and explained (Wohlforth, 1993: 6/11). Because, as Wohlforth (1993: 2) argues, ever since human groups have begun to be organized into sovereign territorial entities that interact with one another under anarchy, the relative distribution of material capabilities has been the most critical factor conditioning the behavior of sovereign units and determining ensuing outcomes. Therefore, it is important to outline some major efforts to quantify the measurement of power in international relations.

Some scholars identify the status of great power by only looking at economic indicators, mostly gross national products (GNP). These scholars maintain that GNP could serve as a good indicator of national capabilities (Organski and Kugler, 1980: 33). Organski and Kugler (1980: 33) disaggregate GNP into two different variables: i) the fraction of the population of working and fighting ages, ii) the level of productivity. For them, the level of productivity is especially illuminating since high levels of

productivity represent the capacity of a nation to pay for external security. This approach is criticized by Israeli on the grounds that economic power alone cannot account for a state to constitute a polar power status in the international system. Two basic instances may represent the case in point. Firstly, Japan, which is an economic giant, still cannot fulfil the requirements for promoting the great power status. Secondly, the European Union (EU), whose enormous economic capabilities are underrepresented because of the lack of political unity at the supranational level (Israeli: 2019: 183).

Other analysts focus exclusively on military capabilities to determine great power status. It is mostly accepted that a state's military spending and number of troops define its military capability. However, how much military power is sufficient to qualify a state as a great power remains ambiguous among these scholars (Schweller, 1999: 38). For example, Mearsheimer (2001: 83) thinks land formations are the dominant form of military power in gauging which state is more powerful because only armies can occupy territory and defend critical positions. However, William Thompson (1986) suggests that ocean-going naval strength is the most essential indicator of great power status. Moreover, he believes, that by measuring the maritime capabilities, it is possible to measure the overall relative standing of the consequential actors. Because he assumes that naval power is the most salient outcome of the combination of economic and military strength. He offers an index for measuring the worldwide strategic reach capacity in terms of naval strength. Adequate economic capacity and a sufficient industrial base are needed for the creating and preserving global-scale naval power; therefore, Thompson aggregates these two components into one (Thompson, 1986: 592-600). Still, some scholars also suggest the organizational structure of the armed forces, skilful strategy, military doctrine, and political brinkmanship are intangible yet crucial factors determining states' overall military power (Jervis, 2011: 256; Mearsheimer, 2001: 58).

Still, other studies combine the several components generally viewed as crucial bases of power. These studies agree that states must be ranked in terms of their score on various dimensions of combined power capabilities. Three major categories are mostly applied in these studies: demographic component, industrial power, and military capacity. The demographic index consists of the total population and the

number of inhabitants in cities of twenty thousand or more, to determine the long-term potential of a state. The industrial index includes energy consumption and iron/steel production to indicate the potential of a state in the medium range. Finally, military capability refers to expenditures on armed forces and numbers of the personnel of armed forces in order to reflect what is available for use at any time (Moul, 1989: 112). The Correlates of War Project utilizes this index for measurement.

Similarly, according to Brooks and Wohlforth (2008: 12), to qualify as an independent pole at the system level a state must command a considerable portion of resources in order to realize its ends and “excel in all the component elements of state capability.” They draw on Waltz’s classification to define those elements, namely, military capacity, economic capacity, demographic and geopolitical potential, resource endowment, and domestic stability. Indeed, Waltz is confident that great powers are attributed the combination of these capabilities (Waltz, 1979: 131). According to Waltz, the rank of states is measured by how they score on the mentioned items.

Notwithstanding the vast literature, the measurement of power, and thus operationalization of polarity has remained highly elusive in the international relations scholarship. This elusiveness perpetuates because of various reasons, which include, but is not limited to; lack of rigorous elaboration mechanisms and sophisticated indexes, contradictory research designs, inconsistency in definition and measurement of relevant variables, employment of different confirmation criteria, conflicting pieces of evidence and incoherent results, and social and technological change over time affecting the fungibility of power (Kopalyan, 2017: 23-28; Posen, 2011: 320; Wohlforth, 1987: 353; 1993: 1-18).

In general, the first part of this problem is rooted in the lack of consensus on which resources exactly should be included in the measurement of power (Hart, 1976: 290). The point is, which specific capabilities constitute a state’s material power? Simply, the problem is that different scholars usually provide competing definitions of the polarity (Wohlforth, 1993: 8). Waltz (1979: 131) for example, vaguely defines state capabilities as economic power, military capacity, resource extraction, political stability, and size of population and territory. On the other hand, the most parsimonious research designs in the literature measure economic volume and military capacity as the state’s material power (Ikenberry et. al., 2011; Kopalyan, 2017; Wohlforth, 1999).

However, a careful survey of the literature reveals that material capabilities which considered relevant lie across a very broad spectrum, ranging from the level of airliner activity (Mowle and Sacko, 2007) to the number of doctoral degrees in science and engineering (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2008). Therefore, combining such an extensive number of variables practically generates indeterminate research results. Secondly, even when there is agreement on which specific types of capabilities are to be included in the process of measurement of power, the construction of an objective power index for measurement is obscured by scholars' distinct historical background and their various theoretical attachments. Academics who define polarity in an identical manner sometimes still suffer from their differing perceptions about the very same systemic structure (Wohlforth, 1993: 8).

In short, various efforts to coherently measure selected variables ultimately prove either arbitrary or detached from the real dynamics of the international system (Kopalyan, 2017: 28). This led Wohlforth (1993: 306-307) to conclude: "Power cannot be tested; different elements of power possess different utilities at different times... the mechanics of power are surrounded by uncertainty; states possess different conversion ratios and comparative advantages." What Wohlforth actually points out is the issue of aggregation problem. How can one measure the overall combination of state capabilities and quantify it with a single denomination? Waltz (1979: 131) says that it is not possible to disaggregate and independently assess states' military, economic and other material resources. However, contrary to the assumption of the 'lump concept of power', which suggests that all components of national power can be combined into a single overarching indicator, power is not homogenous and fully convertible (Schmidt, 2007: 47). Therefore, it is practically impossible to assign a numerical value to the total sum of one's size of territory, growth of its population, number of military personnel, and value of its economic output; and aggregate them into a single unit of measurement.

Preceding analysis has shown that the very idea of 'real power' is rather vague.⁷ Despite the extensive scholarly efforts, there are no agreed-upon criteria for defining, measuring, and operationalizing power. This poverty in the literature is challenging

⁷ For the most recent analysis addressing this problem, see Mazarr (2022: 52-55).

for those who seek to assess the polarity of any given international system objectively since polarity's configuration is stipulated by the existing distribution of power in the system. However, this conclusion should not prejudice the assumptions and outcomes of our study. These theoretical and methodological challenges do not necessarily mean that it is futile to try to define the polarity of the international system. Because polarity is the manifestation of the relative distribution of capabilities among great powers, and most of the time, the qualitative edge of relative power is observable in the system, facilitating to decision of which states are the great powers (Hansen, 2011:17). As Waltz (1979: 131) argues, specifying the number of great powers of an era is an empirical problem, which can only be solved by applying common sense. For Waltz, "historically, despite the difficulties, one finds general agreement about who the great powers of a period are, with occasional doubt about marginal cases." He argues the number of consequential states has always been small throughout history. Therefore, the international structure can be analysed from the microeconomic perspective, which applies "the logic of small-number systems" (Waltz, 1979: 131).

Therefore, the main argument of this section is that when quantitative measures fail to produce satisfactory results, one can apply qualitative inference based on the 'common sense' of scientific logic of history and politics. As Moul (1989, 115) asserts, in polarity studies, "quantitative evaluations must be qualified." In these qualitative terms, Jack Levy (1983), for example, defines great power as a state that exercise a significant level of influence in global affairs in terms of security issues. According to Levy (1983: 14-16), a great power must be both self-sufficient and invulnerable, besides, in the pursuit of its national interests, it must be able to project power beyond its borders. He sets out five criteria in order to differentiate a great power from other states. First, a great power must possess a considerable amount of military capability in order to prove invulnerable to security threats from other states and project military power globally. Great powers must also be able to resort force or demonstrate power to shape the international system according to their interests. Second, these interests are continental or global, not regional. Their conception of security and stability goes beyond the terrain-focused understanding as to include the global balance of power. As Volgy et. al. (2011: 1) maintains, only the great powers could struggle against anarchy by imposing order and global governance in the international system. They

care about the maintenance of order in the international systems (possible exceptions are the revisionists' great powers), therefore their interests can be called systemic interests.

Third, in order to preserve this balance of power, the great powers employ and operate several alliances and wars in the international system. To maintain that they behave distinctively from other states (Levy, 1983: 16-17). Fourth, a great power is differentiated from another state by cognitive images and perceptual codes. The great powers are considered as such by other great powers and treated as equals regarding negotiations, protocols, alliance agreements, and so on. Equal perception of one another is of critical importance among great powers because, as discussed, no set of objective criteria establishes the conditions for great power rank. Finally, great powers are differentiated from other states by formal criteria, recognition of its status by an international conference, congress, or organization. For example, The Treaty of Westphalia assigned Sweden and France as the safeguards of the diplomatically negotiated settlement. And Congress of Vienna identified five states as great powers, namely Prussia, Austria-Hungary, France, Great Britain, and Russia (Levy, 1983: 17-18).

Great powers represent a distinct category of states. They hold given privileges and certain responsibilities encompassing all the states in the system. Their specific rights and obligations are recognized by other great powers and by all the members of the international society. They behave in accordance with their recognized status. What is striking is that their 'great power identity' is almost always self-evident (Levy, 1983: 10-11). This identity is sometimes formalized by international conferences, organizations or treaties. For example, the Treaty of Westphalia assigned guarantor status to Sweden and France in order to secure peace settlement. The Congress of Vienna clearly defined particular states as great powers and laid the foundation of 19th century Concert. The UN has secured the veto right of five great powers in the Security Council, giving them power to dominate international security affairs (Keersmaecker, 2017: 31; Levy, 1983: 17-18). Consequently, both great powers' recognized status and their overall capabilities shape the political expectations and threat perceptions of leaders in other states. Thus, the structure of the system can be identified by observing

the interactions between states such as economic exchanges, military cooperation, and diplomatic correspondence.

Another indicator of great power status is being able to defend itself against any other nation (Kennedy, 1987: 539). According to Tunsjø (2018:32), the essential point of being a great power is that they do not need to depend on allies. Self-sufficiency and invulnerability in terms of military security provides beneficial relative position to great powers in the system. Relatedly, their strategic behaviors in international arena tend to converge, in a sense that they display strong inclinations to expand and maximize their portion of systemic power (Levy, 1983: 17; Mearsheimer, 2001: 168). This expansion could be territorial, as has been the dominant form throughout history. Alternatively, great powers may prefer expanding commercially and industrially, widening their network, and securing their access to distant markets (Thompson, 2006: 8).

Finally, there is the issue of ‘fungibility of power’, which concerns whether a total amount of power in one type of the material resources could influence other domains. In international relations, fungibility “refers to the ease with which power resources useful in one issue- area can be used in other issue- areas” (Baldwin, 2016: 70). Those who think power is fungible argue that coercion has central role in international politics because the system is anarchic. In this context, they see specifically the military power as the core compound of state’s material capability. Force is an integrative part of the statecraft and useful in most of the different issue-areas. Therefore, it can be utilized across the broad range of international issues (Art, 1996: 8-9). For example, militarily powerful states can gain more leverage in economic bargains or strengthen their positions in diplomatic processes. Thus, even mere presence of military force could help states to improve their overall relative power position in the system. In the same vein, economic wealth is also highly fungible. Fungibility allows politicians to use material capabilities interchangeably among various domains, enabling them to invest in those that they think are of significant value but somehow remained weak (Art, 1999: 186).

The main point in here is that the level of fungibility of power increases when the overall power assets of a state become greater. Power is more fungible for great powers than for smaller states, especially when it comes to military power. To clarify,

the utility and effectiveness of converting one type of power asset into an asset in another issue-area increase when the military capabilities of a state expand. The basic idea is that a state with extensive military capabilities will obtain economic and diplomatic power resources more easily. The fungibility assumption does not exclusively apply for military power. For example, powerful states can more effectively use their economic power for increasing their political and diplomatic power than weak states. However, advantages especially gained by military power can be more easily exploited for obtaining more power in diplomatic, economic and political areas. Therefore, power becomes more fungible for militarily strong states than militarily weak states (Art, 1996: 16).

Accordingly, it can be assumed that the growth of power occurs exponentially since stronger states can acquire different power assets more easily. As state's overall capabilities grow, it will become more difficult to determine which specific power asset is at work in the process of gaining more power in a given situation (Baldwin, 2016: 72). Therefore, when a state's overall capabilities pass a critical threshold, they become "so superior that no one doubts their edge and there is widespread agreement as to who are the great powers" (Hansen, 2011: 16). Moreover, aspirations of a nation expand along with its capabilities, and great powers define their interests globally. Accordingly, in order for a state to be qualified as great power, that state must have the ability to project its power in distant parts of the world in pursuit of its national interests (Jervis, 2011: 257/265; Levy, 1983: 14). Therefore, as the 'fungibility of power argument' demonstrated, the amount of the available resources and the scope of their capacity to utilize these resources for pursuing national interests would be evident for great powers. Consequently, as Art (1999: 185) comments: "In every historical era since the birth of the modern state system in 1648, both the wielders and analysts of state power have been in general agreement about which states qualified as great powers and which did not." For this reason, "you recognize a superpower when you see it" (Hansen, 2011: 16).

Therefore, one can infer the polarity of the international system by looking at the context of, and observing the main processes in, contemporary international politics. As noted, qualities precede quantities in polarity analyses. Actors who define the context that produces expectations of appropriate action for all states are the great

powers. These expectations shape not only relations among great powers, but among all states interacting with each other in the international system (Legro, 2011). As Hedley Bull (1995: 196) observes, great powers are recognized and perceived as equals on possessing particular rights and tasks. For instance, in deciding on the issues which influence the entire international system, such as the matter of peace and war, great powers claim and hold privileged position. More importantly, great powers shape the structure of international order. The existing structure serves most of the political and economic interests of the leading state.

1.1.3. The Balance of Power and Hegemonic Stability

There are two main strands of neorealism that put conflicting propositions regarding the relationship between the relative distribution of power and systemic stability. According to first view, the balance of power mechanism accounts for the formation of equilibrium of power in the system which prevents the emergence of a hegemonic threat. Balance of power is the set of interactional patterns borne out of state efforts to maximize their security, as conditioned by their relative power (Doyle, 1997: 135). In this view, the production and reproduction of this systemic equilibrium becomes a 'natural law', the emergence of which is assured by general tendencies and repeated patterns of the balance of power mechanism. The system exists because states act in a preconditioned way, and states behave in a certain way because system exists and constraints them (Sullivan, 2001: 117). In this context, balance of power politics characterizes all the self-help systems (Waltz, 1993: 68). Accumulation of large portions of material resources by a single state destabilizes the system, because great power war will be more likely as other states assemble their military forces to retain their sovereignty and restore the systemic equilibrium (Wohlforth, 1993: 11-13). Accordingly, the most crucial strategic aim of each state that operates under the self-help condition of anarchy is to prevent any great power from dominating the international system.

On the other hand, however, not all structural theorists share the same view. Scholars who disagree with the advocates of balance of power suggest that if there is excessive concentration of power in the hands of one state, no other state will launch

a war against this dominant opponent, thus the system will be stable (Wohlforth, 1993: 12-13). These theorists maintain that international stability is enhanced by the presence of a hegemonic state acting as the guarantor of peace (Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman, 1988: 2). Accordingly, while diffusion of power among rival states leads to fragmentation of the international system, concentration of power leads to stability. Embraced also by the power-transition theorists (Keohane, 2018; Organski, 1968; Organski and Kugler, 1980), this view suggests that the longevity of peace and stability highly correlates with the durability of hegemony. Therefore, emerging revisionist powers seriously undermine international stability. As the equality in material capabilities among great powers becomes apparent, the threat of a major war in the system will be more imminent. This section will analyse these two different interpretations of the international system. This analysis has utmost importance for examining the concept of polarity.

Scholars who attempt to establish causal links between specific types of systemic polarity and existing balance of power mechanism consider power as ‘control over resources.’ They think that important incidents in international politics such as wars, stability, formation of alliances, or economic development are directly related to relative distribution of material capabilities in the international system (Wohlforth, 1993: 4/11). As noted, Waltz (1979) derives his definition of the international system from virtual instruments that impose structural constraints on states to follow balancing acts. Therefore, he aims to develop a notion of balance of power highlighting the impact of polarity (Little, 2007: 267). Because amount of poles in the system and regularities that define their interactions specify a particular type of balance of power system. Variations on polarities will have differing effects on interactions among states (Viotti and Kauppi, 2016: 54). Ole Wæver (2022: 25) argues that “the main differentiation between different international systems is in terms of polarity. And the main function of polarity is to channel balance of power behavior into distinct patterns.” Therefore, investigating the relationship between polarity and the balance of power is necessary. Only then, we can infer specific patterns of state behavior by looking at the different types of systemic polarity.

Balance of power requires a state to act to enhance its capability when another increases its strength, so that equality in the distribution of power will always be

prevalent (Sullivan, 2001: 119). States' capabilities are decisive for maintaining an approximately equal distribution of power in the system. Accordingly, the common primary goal of states is the avoidance of hegemony. States can adopt a number of ways to balance a preponderant power and avoid hegemony. Crucial among them is the distinction between internal balancing and external balancing. Internal balancing is a domestic augmentation of military capabilities backed up by economic, social, and political mobilization (Levy, 2004: 35). External balancing is the formation of alliances as blocking coalitions against an aggressor. External balancing also includes territorial compensations or partitions for the purposes of redistributing the sources of power. If necessary, threats of force, intervention and even war can be utilized (Levy, 2004: 35).

Waltz's theory of neorealism predicts that states balance against the capabilities of more powerful states in the system (Levy and Thompson, 2005: 13). On the other hand, Stephen Walt, in his book *Origins of Alliances*, has recast the balance of power theory and introduced his 'balance of threat' theory, in which he offers more correct explanations. According to Walt (1987), the intentions of states need to be considered. States do not only balance against capabilities, but also balance against the threats. What matters for a state is the dangers posed by a rival state, not just the capabilities or relative positions in the international system. It is the imbalances of threats that lead to forming alliances against the threatening state. Therefore, Walt argues that independent variable in the research design that attempts to demonstrate balancing behavior of the states must be the level of threat that posed by a rival great power, not its relative power position in the system. The combination of four factors determines the threat perception of a state: Its rivals' aggregate capabilities, geographic proximity, offensive power, and aggressive intentions (Walt, 1987: 21-26/32-33).

Whether states balance against power or balance against threats is a longstanding discussion. While acknowledging the value of both approaches, for now this study will not make a judgement about the empirical validity of neither of them. Because the aim of this chapter is to offer an insight about the logical connection between the general notions of neorealist theory.

As noted, Waltz defines the structure of the system in terms of three components: organizing principle of the system, functional differentiation of units, and

relative distribution of capabilities. Nexon (2009) critically observed that different 'balance of power assumptions' are attributed to each of these three components by various international relations scholars. These scholars attempted to extend the conceptual range of every single tier and investigate the causal chains that connecting all three with each other and articulating them into the broader definition of international system. Firstly, balance of power is defined as structurally conditioned mechanism, which has been brought about by the anarchical organization of units in the system. Secondly, balance of power is attributed to balancing strategies of states. As the 'functional similarity of units assumption' envisions, there are overarching patterns that define state strategies. And the dominant mode of behavior in the system is defined in terms of weaker states' balancing efforts to counter the power of the dominant party.

Finally, balance of power refers to formation of equilibrium in the system, which is directly connected with the relative distribution of capabilities, in a sense that states balance the dominant actor in the system by increasing their relative power (Nexon, 2009: 334-340). Nexon's observation confirms John Ruggie's (1983) argument: Waltz's system definition does not portray an additive mechanism of several kinds of structural properties that can interact with each other in both forward and backward directions. Rather, the three tiers of his system are successive layer, each conditioned by the former. Therefore, it is a sequence. And this sequence ultimately leads us to the concept of polarity.

The first tier of Waltz's definition is the organizing principle. Organizing principle in the international system is anarchy. Anarchy determines the possible courses of action for states in such a way that the international system will be reproduced by the dynamics that lead to a balance of power. Neorealists argue the sources of the systemic balance of power lie in the anarchical nature of international politics. Anarchy doesn't rely on states to pursue specific policies to establish the balance. Instead, the balance of power is the natural outcome of the anarchic system. Anarchy compels states to make systemic distribution of capabilities their main priority (Nexon, 2009: 336). Therefore, "whatever aims individual states may have, the international structure pushes them to pursue policies that result in a balance of power" (Little, 2007: 193). In return, the balance of power carries out the perpetuation

and reproduction of anarchy in the international system. Because anarchy means the logic of self-help and survival operates in the system, this logic produces pressure on states to adopt a range of governmental functions toward sovereignty. Sovereignty is the formal rejection of the hierarchy. If the organizing principle of the system is anarchy, then, by definition, units must be sovereign. Neorealists strongly believe that the balance of power is a practice deeply embedded in the sovereignty of states (Buzan, 2004: 37). Thus, anarchy and sovereignty are mutually constitutive.

The principle of sovereignty necessitates to assume that all states are alike units. This brings us to a second tier of Waltz's definition: Functional differentiation of units. For Waltz (1979: 96), all units perform similar tasks, the logic of anarchy dictates that states are "alike in the tasks that they face". Therefore, there is no functional differentiation between units. Competition and socialization (or emulation) are the crucial factors that nullify the political, ideological, and cultural differences among individual units and compel units to perform similar tasks (Waltz, 1979: 73-78). Anarchy creates competition, and competition generates a tendency towards the sameness of the units. All units, but especially great powers look and act alike. Because in order to survive in the competitive nature of the international system, they need to perform the same security-related tasks.

However, units can differ in capabilities. But as some states adopt useful diplomatic tactics, a strong tendency among other states to emulate such tactics emerges out of concerns regarding falling behind. These tactics include military strategies, weaponry, technological skills, and also administrative and organizational properties. "If others do well in developing effective instruments of competition, a state must emulate its rivals or face the consequences of falling behind" (Layne, 1993: 15). This sameness and emulation produce power balancing, and international system becomes to be governed by the balance of power politics (Sheehan, 2005: 78). For Waltz (1979:121), for a balance of power system to function smoothly, there are two requirements: "that the order be anarchic and that it be populated by units wishing to survive."

This process of competition and emulation is closely linked with the distribution of material power and constitutes a significant dimension of the balance of power (Little, 2007: 198). Because for balance of power mechanism to operate, it

is not enough if states ‘balance against something’. Instead, states must balance “in reference to system-wide distribution of power” (Wæver, 2022: 33). More importantly, the conventional neorealist theory assumes states tend to balance against the most powerful state in the system. “Regularized patterns of balancing [behavior emerge] only against a leading state that controls a disproportionate share of the resources in the system” (Levy and Thompson, 2005: 13). Because it is usually the most powerful state that poses the greatest threat to other states in the system.

If a state’s security is challenged by a more powerful state or a dominant coalition, that state opts for allying with the weaker states in order to restore the systemic power equilibrium and thus raise the cost of aggression for the opposing side (Powell, 1999: 152). Because, all great powers inherently possess offensive capabilities, which give them to opportunities for attacking and destroying each other. Furthermore, intentions cannot be known with full certainty. States’ intentions can change much more quickly than their capabilities. A current ally could become an enemy in the near future. And under anarchy, there is no overarching authority capable of ensuring states’ survival. No one will come to its rescue when a state “dial 911” (Mearsheimer, 2001: 33). Under this condition, states must assume the worst-case scenario under anarchy where the principle of self-help prevails. Therefore, they direct their focuses on material power in order to decide which states are more threatening for them.

The main factor for determining balancing is, then, material capabilities, the amount of which can be measured; and the nature of which can be observed for deciding whether a rival state is a potential threat or not. State policies are conditioned by the distributional mode of systemic power. When power asymmetries become more obvious, the level of fear increases. Therefore, states balance against great powers which control disproportionate amounts of material power in the system (Mearheimer, 2001: 29-45). Because international order is preserved, and stability of international system is ensured only when there is a rough equilibrium in the distribution of power among states. “Only power can check power and this is precisely what balancing entails” (Ikenberry, 2002b: 9).

This brings the third tier of Waltz’s definition into play: the relative distribution of capabilities. Balance of power logic assumes that state systems tend toward a parity

in the distribution of power (Gellman, 1989: 162). For Waltz, balance of power prevails because states respond pressures that emanate from the structure of the system with an analogous manner. Distribution of capabilities and change in the distribution generates two of the most salient ones of these pressures. Competitive relationships among the poles of power, which is conditioned by distribution of power, defines the specific character of the balance of power that is prevalent in the system. The number of great powers in the international system, thus polarity, determines the methods according to which balance of power mechanisms operates (Gellman, 1989: 162).

To sum up, each of the three elements of Waltz's system definition is intimately connected with the balance of power mechanism. Complex factors that associated with the balance of power are organized into the holistic structure of power polarity by Waltz. Waltz has proved that how changes in the polarity or the structure of the international system accounts for different responses and expectations of the constituent states (Little, 2007: 260). Since the structure of the international system is characterized by the number of great powers, when the number of great power changes – therefore polarity of the system changes – the nature of prevailing anarchy undergoes a substantial differentiation. Subsequently, this will result in fundamental alterations in state behaviour.

Richard Little (2007: 192-193) perfectly summarizes this relation between polarity and balance of power as following: "From Waltz's perspective, it is not that 'anarchy is what states make of it', in Wendt's memorable phrase, but rather 'anarchy is what polarity makes of it'. Change the structure, here defined in terms of the number of great powers in the system, and the nature of anarchy can undergo a very substantial transformation." And since the dynamics of balance of power primarily linked with anarchy, when the nature of anarchy alters with the changing numbers of great powers, the concomitant mechanism of balance of power will transform substantially.

While advocates of the balance of power theory believe that, when power is equally distributed in the system the possibility of peace is expanded, not all structural theorists share the same view. This school of thought is mostly called as 'hegemonic stability theory.' There are two distinct versions of this theory explaining the stability of hegemonic systems. Firstly, according to Charles Kindleberger (quoted in Webb and Krasner, 1989: 184), the logic of collective goods explains the hegemonic stability.

He maintains that, since all states benefit from international economic stability regardless of whether or not they contribute to its functioning, it is a collective good. And only a hegemon has enough power to maintain the public good of international economic stability. The logic of collective goods underlies the notion of benign hegemon. And benign hegemon is mostly able to prevent other great powers from balancing against it (Layne, 1993: 12-13). Hegemonic powers are willing to provide international regimes that they favor. They rely mostly on the positive sanctions to enforce adherence to the rules – the provision of benefits to those who cooperate. Hegemonic power provides sufficient benefits to small states to persuade them to acquiesce, by this way it gains the ability to dominate its international environment. By this way, both hegemonic power and other small states will have incentives to cooperate on sustaining the international regimes (Keohane, 2018: 136).

The second version of this theory assumes that, although hegemonic stability is mostly about international political economy, it can be relayed behind economic patterns of international politics. For example, Robert Gilpin accepted Kindleberger's collective goods argument, but his own explanation puts greater emphasis on state power and national security. Gilpin (1981) argued a hegemonic power maintains the rules-based structure of international order. Moreover, it acts to provide security and stability in the international system (Layne, 2004: 113; Webb and Krasner, 1989: 184). Relative power of the hegemonic state must be in a very high position compared to other states if it is to perform these hegemonic functions. A hegemon must be in a very strong position both to provide the collective goods for the management of the international order, and to develop the institutions to support that order (Buzan, 2004: 96). Hegemonic powers seek to organize political and economic relations in line with their security and economic interests. Their success in this depends on their capacity to impose their will on small states and whether small states benefit from and accept their leadership. The benefits of the system they provide must be greater than the associated costs. However, while bringing benefits to themselves, the policies of the hegemonic states are also beneficial to other states in the system (Gilpin, 1981: 144-145).

According to Keersmaecker (2017: 25), the hegemonic power must be a very strong position in order to acquiesce other states to its hegemony. When examining

19th century, he does not ignore the presence of a number of great powers and the multipolar structure of the European system, but he maintains that the U.K. based its hegemony on its power preponderance in comparison with other great powers (Keersmaecker, 2017: 25-26). On the other hand, some other scholars put much less emphasis on the role of preponderance of material capabilities in hegemonic leadership. They draw a clear line between two different definitions of the power, which are 'power as resources' and 'power as influence', or in alternative form, 'control over resources' and 'control over actors and outcomes.' In this context, hegemony is defined as having "the ability to control effectively important international outcomes" (Mastanduno, 2002: 185). Accordingly, the superiority in all kinds of power assets might not result in the prevalence of hegemonic relations in the international system (Hansen, 2011: 26). In the same vein, the hegemonic state doesn't have to have preponderance in the complete portfolio of capabilities. As Gilpin (1981) suggests, rather than the number of great powers, the power relations between them are of significance.

'Power as influence' approach requires both sufficient material capabilities and prestige, or legitimacy. Prestige means the credibility of a state's power and the other states' acceptance of hegemon's willingness to use this power in order to achieve specific objectives (Gilpin, 1981: 31). As Gilpin (1981: 31) acknowledges, "existing distribution of power and the hierarchy of prestige can sometimes be in conflict with one another... Prestige, rather than power, is the everyday currency of international relations." Wohlforth (1993: 12) verifies Gilpin's argument, by maintaining that "the important things that happen in world politics revolve around the struggle for influence." Benjamin Miller (1996: 324) also commented on issue, stating that in the hegemonic systems, "the imbalance in the overall distribution of capabilities among the great powers need not be so marked as to make the system unipolar." A clear-cut advantage of one great power against other states in particular issue-areas could still generate hegemonic stability in the system.

Apart from material capabilities, hegemonic state must also assume the leadership position in the international system, meaning that having the willingness of exercising its the political authority to promote an international order congruent with its national interests (Layne, 2006: 11). Moreover, other substantial states must accept

the legitimacy of its leadership position. For this purpose, the dominant state has to supervise the regulation and operation processes of essential international institutions, rules, norms, and customs. In this way, its ability to control extends beyond the material resources as to include control over the structure of relations between states, actors' preferences, and international outcomes (Mowle and Sacko, 2007: 7-10). This argument assumes that both power and prestige are intangible assets. They cannot be precisely calculated. Their merits can only be evaluated only after they are exerted, especially in winning battles and producing public goods for the post-war international system (Gilpin, 1981: 33-34).

Therefore, unipolarity is not the precondition of hegemonic stability, hegemony of one state could also emerge in bipolar and multipolar international systems, with a single state operating as the accepted system leader (Miller, 1996: 324). For example, the U.K. has never achieved supremacy in military power in Europe in terms of land forces. Its industrial superiority was also challenged by the rise of Germany after its national reunification. However, one of the dominant trends in international politics was colonialism in that era. Since ocean-going naval power had been the most beneficial instrument for developing global reach capabilities (Thompson, 1986), and thus obtaining colonies, the U.K. was able to maintain its hegemony for more than a century. In the same vein, not every dominant state seeks for establishing hegemony.

In a broader context, the U.K.'s hegemonic position is consistent with the three conditions defined by Gilpin (1981: 34), which are necessary in order for a state to be qualified as hegemon. Firstly, a hegemon's legitimacy must be based on its decisive victory in the last systemic war, which has proved its capacity to impose its will on other great powers. International treaties that formalized this legitimacy and rules of the established international order that reflects hegemon's authority would further strengthen its hegemonic position. Secondly, other great powers recognize hegemon's legitimacy if it provides certain collective goods, such as accepted principles in interstate economic exchange and a reasonable degree of stability in international security. Third, hegemon's legitimate position must be reinforced by political, ideological, "or other values common to a set of states" (Gilpin, 1981: 34). With this definition, social and cultural factors have been incorporated into the structural

analysis of international politics. As Joseph Nye (quoted in Mowle and Sacko, 2007: 9) formalized, “attraction of one’s ideas... [and its] ability to set the political agenda in a way that shapes the preferences” of other states appear as crucial intervening variables in analysing system’s durability and international stability.

1.1.4. Relative/Absolute Gains and Cooperation under Anarchy

The discussion of international system and great power concept has made it clear so far that the central mechanism of the international system is the balance of power, and the number and character of the great powers in the system at any given time define the nature of the international system (Halliday, 1994: 33). Since states worry about the balance of power, their external relations have to be informed by relative gains principle regarding international cooperation (Mearsheimer, 1994/95: 12). Neorealists argue that states are mostly concerned with relative gains rather than absolute gains. This means that states in cooperative regulations worry that their partners might gain more from cooperation than they do (Grieco, 1988: 487). Because today’s friend might become tomorrow’s enemy, and that enemy might produce dangerous results against them in a possible war, states must seriously take into account to their partners’ gain (Grieco, 1988: 487). “If an expected gain is to be divided in the ratio of two to one, one state may use its disproportionated gain to implement a policy intended to damage or destroy the other” (Waltz, 1979: 105).

States’ occupation with relative gains is first and foremost conditioned by anarchy. For neorealists, anarchy defines the system, and all units are identical. This means that all states experience the same constraints presented by anarchy (Lamy, 2011: 118; Powell, 1991: 1315). Therefore, adversaries trying to maximize their share of relative power face a ‘zero-sum’ situation. That means more for one state necessarily means less for its partner (or adversary). This competitive logic makes agreement on common principles very difficult to attain. Because there is no overarching authority to ensure that states do not exploit their partners, states that share an interest that could be attained by cooperation, nevertheless cannot count upon the cooperative behaviour of others (Doyle, 1997: 121). International anarchy inhibits

states' willingness to cooperate even when they share common interests (Grieco, 1988: 485).

Neorealism's emphasis on relative gains problem based on its understanding that states in anarchy fear most for their survival. States are positional entities in neorealist understanding. This means that driven by the concern for survival, they are sensitive to erosion of the material basis of their power. Because states' relative positions in the system are the ultimate basis of their security and independence (Grieco, 1988: 498). For this reason, even under the conditions or regulations that provide balanced gains in absolute terms, thus negates any relative gain advantage, a state can defect from the agreement to achieve a relative gain for itself (Powell, 1991: 1316). Again, anarchy permits and even fosters this kind of behaviour. States cheat when they believe doing so would serve their interests (Grieco, 1988: 496; Glaser, 1994/95: 79). Dangers of being cheated mostly prevent any significant cooperation between states, especially security cooperation (Viotti and Kauppi, 2016: 56).

The matter of cheating for some neorealists is provided by the allegory of the stag hunt which can be seen in Table 1. In woods populated with deer and rabbits, a group of hunters stalks a stag, which only their combined skills can capture. Each hunter values his share of a stag [Cooperate-Cooperate / (CC)] more than the value of an entire rabbit. But a rabbit can be caught alone [Defect-Cooperate / (DC)]. A rabbit appears as the hunters stalk the stag. If one hunter defects from the common enterprise, the others will go hungry [Cooperate-Defect / (CD)] or be left scrambling for possible shares of other rabbits [Defect-Defect / (DD)]. So as a rabbit comes within a reach one of them grabs it. The defector's preference ordering should be $CC > DC > DD > CD$. The problem is that the defector has a rational incentive to defect from cooperation because he cannot trust his fellow hunters (Doyle, 1997: 121). The defector satisfies his hunger but at the same time permits stag to escape. His immediate interest prevails over the consideration of his fellows (Waltz, 1959, quoted in Dunne and Schmidt, 2011: 96).

Table 1: Stag Dilemma

		<i>One Hunter</i>	
<i>Other Hunters</i>		<i>Cooperate</i>	<i>Defect</i>
	<i>Cooperate</i>	3 3	2 0
	<i>Defect</i>	0 2	1 1

Source: Doyle, 1997: 119.

Correspondingly, in the international system, even though each state knows that security is relative to the armament levels of potential adversaries and even though each state seeks to avoid excess arms expenditure (CC), they also know that because there is no global guarantee of security, being caught unarmed by a surprise attack (CD) is worse than bearing to costs of armament. Therefore, each tries to arm alone (DC); all are worse off (DD). This is a typical example of an arms race situation (Doyle, 1997: 121).

In sum, neorealism, in essence, encompasses a small number of basic assumptions. First, states are the main actors in international politics. They always attempt to ensure their security. All states first and foremost must rely on their own military capability for protection. There are three alternatives in terms of military capabilities required to meet their security needs: arms build-up, forming alliances and trying to reach arms control agreements (Glaser, 1994/95: 57). Second, the international system provides constraints and opportunities to states, and structural theory uses these components to explain state behaviour. If states don't defend their vital interests or pursue aims that are beyond their capabilities, the international system harshly penalizes them. Hence, states behave as unitary-rational actors (Grieco, 1988: 488). Third, anarchy shapes the motives and actions of states. The structural theory posits that states are living in a self-help world, founding principle of which is the anarchy. In the absence of an overarching international authority, states must look out for themselves. Self-help also means states pursue unilateral, competitive policies.

This tendency towards competition is forged by doubts about the opponents' motives and intentions. This uncertainty prevents states from cooperation. They usually fail to cooperate even if there are common interests (Glaser, 1994/95: 56; Grieco, 1988: 488). Fourth, under anarchy, states' main concerns are power and security. On power and security, Waltz (1988: 616) writes "because power is a possibly useful means, sensible statesmen try to have an appropriate amount of it... The ultimate concern of states [should not be] for power but security."

The tremendous impact of Waltz's Theory of International Politics is evident in the impetus it provided for the development of structural realist thought by other scholars, which led to a conceptual division between 'defensive' and 'offensive' realists. The main issue that split offensive and defensive realists is the question of whether the international system provides incentives for expansion or is more disinclined to offer prospects for aggression. Accordingly, offensive and defensive realists largely disagree on their prescriptions for military doctrine, foreign policy, military intervention and crisis management. They also disagree about the logical implications of anarchy. Thus, they generate different predictions about the fate of the great powers in the international system.

1.2. DEFENSIVE REALISM

According to Charles Glaser and Chaim Kaufmann (1998: 44), defensive realism is a very optimistic theory of international politics because it argues major wars in the system can be avoided and carefully designed arms control agreements can be achieved. Defensive realists assume that security is plentiful and readily available in the international system. They argue that the international system encourages states to behave in a cautious and constrained manner. Thus, the system provides disincentives for aggression and expansion. Accordingly, reckless and unreasonable state behaviour must be found in domestic pathologies of states (Frankel, 1996: 16). Defensive realists think that these basic facts about the international system should be obvious to all states, which will curb their desire for increased power. Otherwise, they threaten their own survival. If all states accept this rationale, security competition should be moderate in the system (Mearsheimer, 2013: 81).

According to defensive realism, under anarchy, many of the methods used by a state to increase its security reduce the security of other states. This situation is called as 'security dilemma.' Although scholars sometimes use the concept through variant contexts, at least a basic definition can be offered. Security dilemma simply refers to a process when means used by a state to increase its security decrease the security of others (Jervis, 1978: 169-170). When the second state responds to this by increasing its own military capacity in order to secure its survival, then this would mean a reduction in the first state's security. This spiral process tends to generate inadvertent mutual hostility and conflict (Taliaferro, 2000/01: 129), therefore, even peaceful states may find themselves in a vicious cycle of arms race that could easily result in war (Bluth, 2011: 1362). Not only between states, but also between individuals, groups, societies and political leaders, this dilemma possibly arises if any of these units interact with its identical unit in an anarchic environment. Thus, anarchy is the prominent factor from which security dilemma emerges (Herz, 1950: 157-163).

Increasing threat perception of one's adversary is a potential problem, not because a state is concerned about the security of its adversary, but because the adversary's insecurity reduces its own security. Because, in response to one's increasing military buildup, the adversary may respond by generating military force in order to increase its security. The adversary's build-up of military force, in turn, may make the state less secure than it had been before it increased its power. Because the adversary's military strength may have ultimately grown beyond what was necessary to maintain an offset with the state's military force (Glaser, 2017: 22). Moreover, if one's new offensive weapons become operational and its adversary counters by obtaining the same or similar system, one's capacity to defend itself will decline, leaving it less secure than before this round of arming had begun (Glaser, 1997: 176).

Consequently, even if armament enhances one's capabilities, the net outcome may be a decline in security. Even though the adversary might have previously been deterred by less potent military capabilities, it may not be deterred by these expanded capabilities since it has now become more difficult to deter. Thus, according to Glaser, states that can gain an advantage militarily should not always pursue this aim (Glaser, 1997: 177). For example, even if NATO enlargement into Eastern Europe increases military capability of the alliance, it would also decrease Russia's security and

therefore makes the Russian aggression against its neighbours more likely (Glaser, 1997: 178).

On the other hand, as Robert Jervis (1978: 170) questioned starkly, why are we not all dead if the impact of the security dilemma is that precise in the international system? It is because, even though eliminating the effect of security dilemma in the system is almost impossible for states, there are occasions to manage the process. The security dilemma is inescapable, but it does not necessarily result in relentless competition and armed conflict (Taliaferro, 2000/01: 136-137). Several factors, chief among them is the offence-defence balance, influence the severity of the security dilemma (Glaser, 1994/95: 54). Offence-defence variable operates as a structural modifier in such situation (Taliaferro, 2000/01: 131). Defensive realists maintain that, beyond the overall distribution of power, structural intervenors such as offence-defence balance and geographical proximity have a greater impact on the likelihood of international conflict and cooperation. Offence-defence balance is the ratio of the cost required by a country to maintain offensive missions relative to the cost of acquiring defensive forces (Glaser, 1994/95: 61-62). Measurement of offensive and defensive capabilities determines whether a state should decide to cooperate or compete, with other states. This measurement basically relies on two variables. First, whether offence or defence has advantageous in a possible case of rising tensions between states and second, whether disaggregation of offensive and defensive military technology is possible.

Glaser (1997: 175) defines military capability as referring to the state's armed forces' operational competence to attain specified mission, not to the manpower under conscription or number of weapons it stores. Defensive realists assume that this decision to shift the theory's focus towards the capacity of armed forces necessarily brings in offence-defence variables, because it is these variables in combination with power, not power alone, that affects a state's competence in conducting military missions (Glaser, 1997: 186). As the offence-defence balance moves in favour of a bigger defence advantage, the detrimental effects of the security dilemma decline. Forces deployed by a status quo power will raise its security more than they will reduce the security of the adversary when the defence is advantageous. From action and reaction cycles, both states will be able to maintain a reasonable level of security, and

the arms race will come to an end. When the advantage of defence is great enough, international anarchy becomes relatively unimportant (Glaser, 1997: 185). On the contrary, states of equal size cannot concurrently benefit from larger amounts of security when the offence has the advantage. Arms races would be intense in that situation. When one country increases its force capability, its adversary will have to make a larger addition to restore the balance. There are essentially two reasons that the superiority of offence makes war more likely. First, victory in a war will be swift and consequential, and so advantageous. Therefore, for 'greedy states'⁸ war become more alluring. Second, the advantage of striking first grows with the increase of offence advantage. Therefore, pre-emptive attacks will be more common (Glaser, 1997: 186). However, defensive realists argue that in most situations defence has the advantage. Thus, any state that strives to gain significantly more power will almost certainly end up waging a number of futile wars. Accordingly, states will recognize that offense is pointless and will instead focus on retaining the positions in the balance of power (Mearsheimer, 2013: 81). Defensive realists recognize that if any great power becomes too powerful, 'balancing' will occur. Specifically, the other great powers will improve their military capacities and form a 'balancing block' that will leave the ambitious hegemon at least less secure.

The degree to which offence and defence are differentiated is the second important factor that affects the severity of the security dilemma, specifically, whether the tools and measures used to defend the state also allow for an attack. Offence-defence distinction mostly negates security dilemma. As it can be seen in the Table 2 below, when a state's forces are entirely differentiated, it can deploy forces that are exclusively helpful for defending its homeland, without reducing its adversary's ability to defend itself. Due to the distinction between offence and defence, it is now possible to enter into arms control agreements that forbid the weapons used in offensive operations, enhancing the defensive capacity of both parties. On the contrary, when offence and defence are not differentiated, as Table 2 demonstrates, a state that buys

⁸ The term *greedy states* is employed by Glaser (1997) and Glaser and Kaufmann (1998), to define states whose power maximization efforts are undertaken by more audacious motivations than simply meeting their security needs.

forces to protect its territory can only choose forces that decrease its adversary's ability to defend its territory (Glaser, 1997: 186-187).

Table 2: Consequences of Offence-Defence Variables

	<i>Advantage</i>		
		<i>Offence</i>	<i>Defence</i>
<i>Offence and defence are differentiated.</i>	No	• Intense arms race. • Expansion is easy. • War is seen frequently.	• Moderate arms race. • Expansion is difficult. • War is seen rarely.
	Yes	• Quantitative arms control is possible and valuable, but risky. • Signalling benign motives is possible and valuable, but risky.	• Quantitative arms control is possible but less valuable, because security is plentiful. • Signalling benign motives is possible, but less valuable.

Source: Glaser, 2017: 21.

Anarchy remains a constant for defensive realists, however, the variation in the offence-defence balance leads to a variation in the extent to which states prefer to compete or cooperate (Glaser, 1997: 189). According to the structural realist account, cooperation can be risky because of the abovementioned reasons. However, defensive realists argue competition can also be risky, too. States cannot predict how an arms race or war will turn out in advance (Taliaferro, 2000/01: 138). As structural realism predicts, uncertainty about the adversary's motives can block some of the strategies a state could employ, however, the adversary will also feel uncertain about the state's motives, which will bring about an offset to the situation, and can pave the way for planned cooperation. Defensive realism assumes that cooperation and self-restraint, under certain conditions, are the best strategies for states (Glaser, 2017: 20). The international system does not make states inclined to competitive policies. States must

evaluate pros and cons of cooperative policies. In terms of military power and security, cooperative policies encompass self-restraint and arms control. In addition to strengthening their military position, cooperative policies can also improve political relations between states, thus increasing their security. By acting in cooperative behaviour, a state could send a message about its intentions. In turn, its opponent will find out that the state is a security seeker. And if the state concludes that its adversary is also a mere security seeker, then cooperative policies will become less risky (Glaser, 2017: 22). Therefore, the effects of the most intractable factor inherent in cooperation processes that always haunt states, namely the relative gains considerations, could be mitigated.

1.3. OFFENSIVE REALISM

Offensive realists argue that anarchy provides strong incentives for expansion. Contrary to defensive realism, offensive realists assert states always seek to maximize their relative power because only the most powerful states can guarantee their survival in an anarchical environment. When the benefits outweigh the costs, states pursue expansionist policies. Only hegemony can satisfy great powers, for only then would they have enough power to ensure survival. For offensive realists, power shifts constantly in the international system and uncertainty about intentions is unavoidable, therefore, war is always a possibility. States that are committed to survival must therefore do all possible to increase their power. As a result, states are constantly looking for ways to defeat or otherwise subordinate or suppress their adversaries. Consequently, states are always on the offensive (Lemke, 2004: 53).

Offensive realism makes five bedrock assumptions. The first is that the international system is anarchic. The second assumption is that great powers inherently possess some offensive military capabilities. These offensive capabilities provide them tools to harm and destroy each other. Each state is a potential danger for others (Mearsheimer, 2001: 30). It is a problem because if statesmen believe that retrenchment is risky, then it will be reasonable to achieve security through expansion (Snyder, 1991: 22).

The third is that no state can be certain that another state will not use its military power for offensive purposes to attack it. This does not mean that states necessarily have malign intentions toward each other. However, uncertainty is unavoidable. No state can be certain that other states do not have offensive intentions towards them. The fourth, key state policy should be ensuring survival. Because it is impossible that a state will be in a position to pursue other goals once it has been conquered, survival takes precedence over other aims. For sure, states can pursue other aims, but security is the most important one (Mearsheimer, 2001: 31). The fifth is that states are rational actors. They are conscious of their external environment and plan their strategies for maintaining their survival in it. They pay close attention to the preferences of other states, how their actions may influence those other states' behaviour, and how those other states' actions may influence their own survival strategy (Mearsheimer, 2001: 31). In a similar vein, a state's bid for overexpansion can be seen as a rational response to the objective constraints of the state's international standing (Snyder, 1991: 22). Moreover, states consider both the long-term and short-term effects of their decisions (Mearsheimer, 2001: 31). When these five assumptions combined, they generate strong incentives for aggression and hostile interstate relations (Mearsheimer, 2001: 32).

Offensive realists assume that for a great power, it is almost impossible to be a status quo power because the international system provides strong incentives for states to seek opportunities to gain influence at the expense of their adversaries. Even status quo states must embark on endless war and expansion to maintain their security (Snyder, 1991: 6). Hegemony is the ultimate goal of a great power in the system. Because only then, survival could be guaranteed (Mearsheimer, 2001: 21/34). Not the individual characteristic of great powers, but the structure of the system leads them to act offensively and seek hegemony. The desire to survive provides incentives for states to think and behave aggressively (Mearsheimer, 2001: 53-54). At this point, Randall Schweller (1996) points out the status quo bias at the heart of the defensive realist assumptions. He asks, if intentions are an important factor in international politics and states are ultimately security-maximisers as defensive realists assumed, why we have witnessed many great power wars and systemic changes throughout the history? Defensive realists argue states could signal their benign intentions to others and there

are genuine prospects of cooperation among them. According to this logic, states can maintain their security without necessarily maximizing their power. Therefore, especially great powers are likely to be status quo powers.

However, according to Schweller (1996: 103-112), if the situation was as the defensive realists portrays, there should not have been any strategic competition among the great powers. Schweller argues since intentions cannot be fully known, there is no way of maximising security but to maximise power, under the self-help condition of anarchy. Consequently, states that benefits from current status quo mostly act in a revisionist manner. Therefore, offensive realists assumes that states are power-maximisers. Fareed Zakaria argues that “states are driven by the system's competitive imperative, which produces what could be termed 'influence-maximizing' behavior” (quoted in Frankel, 1996: 16).

According to offensive realists, influence maximization or power maximization does not lead states to the unmanageable pursuit of more and more power (Frankel, 1996: 18). For offensive realism, power maximization is not an end itself, rather, it is an instrument to provide national security. As mentioned, survival is the main priority for all states (Glaser, 2017: 19). States are unable to assess their level of security. However, they are able to assess one thing: Greater the one's power, larger its security becomes. States become opportunistic in acquiring power as a result of this awareness, and they seize any opportunity to strengthen their position. A state seeks to obtain maximum amount of power not only when there is a known threat to which it must respond, but also as a hedge against unknown risks in an unpredictable future (Frankel, 1996: 18; Mearsheimer, 2001: 34-35).

Mearsheimer's writings about the conditions under which threatened states balance and those under which they pass the buck have critical importance. Mearsheimer (2001: 156) assumes “with balancing, a great power assumes direct responsibility for preventing an aggressor from upsetting the balance of power.” According to Mearsheimer (2001: 156-157), there are three patterns of action that qualify as balancing: first, in order to prove that they are committed to the existing balance of power, threatened states can signal their preferences through diplomatic channels. Second, threatened states can form defensive alliances in order to contain their adversary. This is called as external balancing. Because alliances allow for the

sharing of the costs associated with checking an aggressor, threatened governments place a high value on acquiring alliance partners. This consideration is especially important if war breaks out. Third, threatened states can counter the adversary by deploying more of their own resources. For instance, defence spending can be heightened, and conscription can be implemented. This is called as internal balancing and is the purest form of self-help. 'Buck-passing' is the main alternative to balancing. "A buck-passer attempts to get another state to bear the burden of deterring or possibly fighting an aggressor, while it remains on the sidelines" (Mearsheimer, 2001: 157-158). The buck-passer fully understands the necessity of preventing the aggressor from gaining its share of global power but looks for other states, to which the aggressor is threatening, to carry out this duty. Disagreement among threatened states over how to coordinate a joint effort and over how to share the costs can also accelerate to incentives for passing the buck (Glaser, 2017: 19).

This chapter has followed the footsteps of the main neorealist scholars and introduced basic concepts of this school of thought. It has discussed the balance of power, relative gains, and self-help notions in order to clarify basic premises of neorealist theory. It has explained how these concerns on the part of the states give rise to endless security competition among them. It has introduced some of the important strategies that states may employ through this security competition, such as internal balancing, external balancing, and buck-passing. It has also subsumed neorealist theory into two components: defensive realism and offensive realism. The next chapter will elaborate on polarity concept. It will explore how the concept of polarity is interconnected with the tenets of neorealism. Moreover, it will discuss the other specific state strategies employed within both the competitive and cooperative contexts of international environment and find some generalized patterns of state behavior under different polarity configurations.

CHAPTER TWO

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: POLARITY

Beyond its geographical and physical definitions, the concept of polarity has also a social dimension. Oxford Dictionary of English defines polarity as “the state of having two opposite or contradictory tendencies, opinions, or aspects” (quoted in Keersmaeker, 2017: 16). In international relations, the concept of polarity suggests the presence of great powers that can have a characterizing role in the structuring of the international system. It assumes that the driving motive behind state behavior is to increase power in order to ensure survival (Buzan, 2004: 41-42). Kjell Goldmann (1972) uses the concept of polarity to describe the power distribution between the members of the international system. According to Goldmann (1972: 39-40), to mention polarity is assuming the number of great powers and the distribution of capabilities among these great powers in the international system. Jack Levy (1985) goes more specific and operationalizes the polarity in terms of the distribution of military capabilities in the system. Other scholars also agree with Goldmann, in that polarity refers to the number of great powers and the distribution of capabilities in the system (Thompson, 1986: 598; Waltz, 1964). For Buzan (2004: 31), understanding this power structure that polarity offers is an essential starting point for thinking about international relations.

Therefore, polarity is a realist notion which has been conceptualized to describe specific types of power distribution in international system. Conventionally, power is assumed in terms of material capabilities. When a state possesses a distinctively large amount of material capabilities compared to other states, it constitutes an independent pole in the international system. This amount is calculated with relative measures, not with an absolute scale. Both qualitative and quantitative assessments determine a state's systemic position by assigning a value indicating the extent to which a state's overall capabilities weighs relative to others. Therefore, what determines polarity is the ‘relative distribution of capabilities’ in the system. In this context, the concept of polarity has been employed by neorealist scholars for defining the systemic power structure at international level. This scholarly interest is rooted in the belief that one

can elaborate on the patterns of cooperation and competition that stem from specific configurations of power (Ikenberry, 2011: 249).

Toward this aim, particular attention is given to superpowers and great powers, differences between which will be discussed below. The number of major powers⁹ in the system shapes not only the general conditions through which they interact with each other, but also other states' behavior toward both each other and major powers. As Hansen (2011: 40) argues, "the self-help condition that promotes states to seek security is affected by the variation of the numbers of great powers; consequently, the context in which the non-great powers operate is also affected by variation." Each configuration of power provides the different structures of international system. These structures mark the horizon of states in terms of available policy choices. Therefore, the polarity of the system is an essential component of the neorealist analysis. It affects states' course of action, and more importantly, determines the consequences of states' behavior (Ikenberry et. al., 2011: 5). Transition from one systemic polarity to another alters states' strategic behaviors, foreign policies and security interests, thus leading the emergence of new outcomes in the system (Toft, 2022: 267). Moreover, the balance of power mechanism, and the context in which states interact more generally, varies in line with the number of great powers in the system.

The first section of this chapter operationalizes the main concepts introduced in the first chapter which are essential for the polarity analysis. It will demonstrate the conceptual variations including great power, superpower and polar power. Thus, the mutual relation between the great power concept and polarity will be clarified. After briefly outlining the polarization concept, the section then deals with the role of individual states in the process of determining the dynamics of polarity in the system. Its focus will be on the relative distribution of power among great powers. The second section includes the theory of unipolarity. Structurally inferred discussion of the distribution of capabilities, state behaviors and alliance dynamics under unipolarity will be provided. The third section discusses the foreign policy orientations, strategic choices and systemic position of the U.S. This discussion is essential because under unipolarity, there is a high level of interplay between the dynamics of the international

⁹ In this study, the notion of 'major powers' is employed as a general category consists of both great powers and superpowers, both of which are consequential actors in international politics.

system and domestic processes and political orientations of the unipolar power (Hansen, 2011: 18-20; Ikenberry et. al., 2011: 11; Wohlforth, 1999: 40). As Birthe Hansen (2011: 3/6) argues, in the unipolar system, the political project of the unipole has a crucial role, substantially influencing the rules of security competition between the other states, thus emerges as the main determinant of the durability of the international system. One of the main postulates of this study is that, despite the decline in its relative economic power that has been perpetuating since the 1970s, the U.S. is still world's preeminent power; and it will be so in the near future if one considers the relative distribution of capabilities in the international system. Therefore, its position in international politics, and the specific character of its foreign policy and military strategy has the utmost importance, in determining the outputs of this study.

2.1. THE MAIN COMPONENTS OF THE POLARITY CONCEPT

2.1.1. Great Powers and Superpowers in the Context of Polarity Analysis

Polarity and great power concepts go hand in hand, both theoretically and virtually. Understanding a great deal about international politics requires fully grasping the structure and process of relations among great powers. It is conventionally assumed that each great power constitutes a pole in the international system. Therefore, in the literature, these two terms are mostly used interchangeably. It is crucial to keep in mind that great power is a comparative concept, denoting the measurement of states' capacities with relative terms, and designating them to a position accordingly. The definition of and various methods applied in the measurement of the great power concept has already been provided in the first chapter. The previous chapter has also addressed the poverty of operationalization methods in the literature. The reason for this deficiency, as Larson et. al. (2014: 9) indicates, is that even when dealing with concrete measures, it is almost always impossible to aggregate the different values. At this point, this section aims to advance this discussion and consequently provide an operational definition of the great power concept.

William Thompson (2011: 30) argues that great powers have never been roughly equal in capability and influence at any time in modern history. If one assumes

there is a minimum threshold for great power status, one must also admit that while some great powers' capabilities double or triple the minimum point, some others exceed the minimum only marginally (Thompson, 1986: 596). For example, while Soviet Union had outstanding military capacities, it had a weak economic and technological background. Therefore, one can assume that the Soviet Union could exceed the minimum threshold only slightly in terms of aggregated capabilities. However, at this point, the question emerges as to how to set the boundary of this minimum threshold. Goldmann (1972: 40) suggests a formula as follows: After successfully constructing a power index, "we can first indicate how much power each state has, and rank states accordingly. We can then calculate how much more powerful the most powerful nation, N1, is than the next most powerful nation, N2, by dividing N1's power by N2's; similarly, we can compare N2 with N3, N3 with N4, and so on."

On the other hand, some analysts suggest that the common tendency in the literature to equate the term of great powers with the term polar powers is misleading. According to Mansfield (1993: 105), using the distribution of power to measure polarity leads scholars to this misjudgement. According to him, this usage implicitly requires scholars to assume that nonpolar great powers can be excluded from the systemic analysis of international politics. In his research design, Mansfield (1993) employed the 'power concentration method' instead of gauging distributional capabilities. Similarly, Israeli distinguishes the great powers from polar powers and maintains that states which belong to both of the categories may act independently in the international system. "Each polar power is also a great power, but not every great power is a polar power. For example, in unipolar systems, there is just one polar power but in parallel to it there may be other great powers" (Israeli, 2019: 50). This approach might be useful to separately examine the role of the actors with enormous economic capabilities such as the EU and Japan in the international affairs and their systemic effects. Because most of the seminal studies in international politics measure the distribution of power by simply enumerating the number of poles and assume that nonpolar great powers do not affect the system's structure (Israeli, 2019: 54; Mansfield, 1993: 107-108). Accordingly, neorealism assumes that systemic effects of the behaviors of, for example, China, Japan, and the European Union could be ignored.

One formula to overcome neorealism's ill-suited design comes from Barry Buzan (2004). His '1+X' terminology assumes that in contemporary international relations, the United States is the only superpower, or pole power. Besides, there is no other promoter of superpower status in the near future. On the other hand, there are several great powers. The number of 1 represents the number of superpowers in the current international system whereas the notion of X represents the number of great powers. The distinction between the superpowers and the great powers is key for Buzan. Superpowers have "first class military-political capabilities and economies to support such capabilities. They must be capable of, and also exercise, global military and political reach," while great powers lack such capabilities (Buzan, 2004: 69). What distinguishes great powers from other states is that they are responded to by others on the basis of system level calculations, about the present and near future distribution of power.

This has two implications. Firstly, great powers are capable of claiming a superpower position in the short or medium term thanks to their advanced capabilities in at least one of the four crucial issue areas – economic, military, technological, and political. Secondly, great powers' actions produce not only regional, local, or sub-systemic, but also international systemic, consequences. Their coalition behavior and alliance policies could substantially transform the systemic balance of power at the global level (Buzan and Wæver, 2003: 32/35). Moreover, they could impact the structure of the international system by eroding superpowers' relative position. As Mearsheimer (2001: 5) notes, great powers have robust military capabilities to engage in a total war against the strongest state in the system. They don't have to possess the capability to force the dominant state to an unconditional surrender. But they must hold some reasonable potential of prolonging the battle and turning it into an attritional war that would seriously harm the leading state and degrade its relative position.

At this point, Buzan's approach deserves more detailed examination for the purpose of this study. Because he perfectly captures the significance of the capability gap between major powers in international politics. Moreover, his research design is formalized to account for polarity dynamics and great power politics of post-Cold War international system. And main assumptions of this study will be based on his classification of actors operating at global level. According to him (2004: 69), the

superpower status has been the world's most exclusive one, since superpowers have to possess wide range of capabilities convenient for deployment throughout the globe. As mentioned above, this range of capabilities must include military, economic and political instruments. In addition to these criteria, Buzan (2004: 69) argues that, superpowers also

need to see themselves, and be accepted by others... as having this rank. Superpowers must be active players in processes of securitisation and desecuritisation in all, or nearly all, of the regions in the system, whether as threats, guarantors, allies, or interveners. Except in extremely conflictual international systems, superpowers will also be fountainheads of 'universal' values of the type necessary to underpin international society. Their legitimacy as superpowers will depend substantially on their success in establishing the legitimacy of such values.

Great powers, on the other hand, do not have to command a complete portfolio of capabilities. A great power, for example, can have immense strength in one issue area but poorly perform in another. Secondly, they are not able to involve securitization processes or economic activities of all regions in the international system (Buzan, 2004: 69). However, they are mostly able to operate in more than one region. This factor will further distinguish them from regional powers, which, by definition, are only capable of assigning the polarity of any given regional system (Buzan, 2004: 71). Usually, great power status occupies a high place in the international power hierarchy. It represents a relative position toward which one state rises from a lower position, a degree to be promoted. However, as Buzan (2004: 70) explained, "a second route into the category is countries declining from acknowledged superpower status. Declining superpowers will normally have influence in more than one region, and be capable of limited global military operation."

The concept of polarity conventionally includes the assumption that all of the great powers have the capacity to exercise their capabilities across the entire international system (Buzan and Wæver, 2003: 38). However, Buzan's formulation falsifies this assumption. Only superpowers are competent to meet this criterion. Mere great powers do not have the wherewithal to operate on a global scale. However, as discussed, great powers are taken into account in international system-level calculations. With two types of major powers affecting the systemic polarity at the global level, not just the total number of these powers, but also interactional patterns within and between each category determine the systemic dynamics. As Buzan (2004:

84) maintains, “it is the relationship between and among the superpowers and great powers that defines the operational character of international power structure.”

Finally, an essential contribution to the analysis of the great power concept comes from Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth. They (2015/16) assert that indicating the number of great powers with X means that any number assigned to X notion does not change the system’s basic dynamics. Any country’s rise of great power status or decline from that status does not change the system’s essential dynamics. For that, the number of superpowers matters (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2015/16: 15). Therefore, Brooks and Wohlforth argue that Buzan’s framework needs modification. Because in today’s world, the gap between the capabilities of a great power and a superpower is so large. Therefore, it is essential to separate great powers in a position to bid for a superpower from those that are not. Thus, they offer a ‘1+Y+X system’. In this system, the number of Y represents great powers that have the potential capabilities to rise to superpower status, thus affecting polarity. These states, according to Brooks and Wohlforth (2015/16: 15-16), need to be distinguished from the other great powers. Therefore, they disaggregate the conceptual gap between great power and superpower as follows:

great power → emerging potential superpower → potential superpower →
superpower (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2015/16: 43).

This framework requires distinct stages along the path from being an ordinary great power to being a superpower. The first is when a rising great power has enough economic resources to bid for a superpower status. The second is when the rising great power has vast financial resources to purchase and obtain necessary technological platforms and build a resilient infrastructure that are sine qua non of being a superpower. The third stage is when the rising great power does not only have the latent economic and technological capacity to develop the full range of systems required for worldwide power projection, but has supplied these systems and acquired know-how for their effective employment. The know-how of advanced systems is a requisite for their integrated use and effective command and control in battlefield (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2016: 63). According to Brooks and Wohlforth (2016: 70), this framework provides a means of distinguishing states such as China and Russia from smaller but consequential regional powers such as Iran and Israel.

2.1.2. Polarization and Power Polarity

Polarity refers to the distribution of capabilities whereas polarization addresses the tendency for actors to cluster around the pole. In contrast to Waltz's view, Thompson (1986: 598) insists that polarization should also be viewed as just as much a systemic attribute as polarity. Hart (1976: 303) briefly defines polarization as the process through which actors form blocks or coalitions. In its simplest form, as Rapkin et. al. (1979: 261) suggest, polarization refers to the "tendency for actors to cluster around the system's most powerful states." When two well-defined clusters of states are separated into discrete groupings, the system is highly polarized. In this case, there are many alliance bonds in clusters but no bonds across clusters. As Gregory Raymond and Charles Kegley, Jr. point out, there is a disagreement in the literature as to when the structure of the system may change. Whether the great powers' self-interested unilateral policies or their alignment patterns are the main driver of the system change is at the heart of this debate. According to Raymond and Kegley (1990: 10), the extent to which secondary states cluster around the major powers determines the prospect of the change in the structure of the international system.

Contrary to the polarization concept, the power polarity considers the individual states as relevant in the measurement process of polarity. In this view, states are the only actors that could organize balancing policies in the international system. Because "under conditions of anarchy, alliances will come and go as temporary expedients" (Ikenberry, 2002b: 8). They are just ad hoc instruments through which states resist the emergence of a dominant power. As the distributional mode of material capabilities shifts, alliance patterns transform. On the other hand, states will retain their autonomy and preserve their sovereignty under anarchy. The power accumulation could most effectively be succeeded at a national level, not an international level. The basic argument is that the number of great powers determines the current mode of polarity. The classic example of this argument is the pre-First World War international system. It is conventionally assumed that there were five different great powers in the system such as – France, the U.K., Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia. Although these five states were organized under two hostile coalitions, the international system of that time has always been considered as multipolar, not bipolar.

Therefore, power polarity analysts try to explore the power relations between the great powers in the system. They only take notice of the relative distribution of power among great powers and try to determine its effects on the international system as a whole. In the literature, there have been many attempts to operationally define the polarity, not all of which are necessarily substantiated by a valid measurement method. To offer an exhaustive list of these definitions is beyond the scope of this chapter. For the purpose of this study, the definition provided by Ikenberry et. al. (2011: 5) is the most useful one. Accordingly, a pole refers to

a state that (a) commands an especially large share of the resources or capabilities states can use to achieve their ends, and (b) excels in all the component elements of state capability, conventionally defined as size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capacity, military might, and organizational-institutional competence.

As discussed, both in the first chapter and in the previous section, determining the number of great powers is possible when conditions are permissive, therefore the dynamics of different structural configurations can be analysed at systemic level. Because polarity is connected to system-wide presence of great powers (Wæver, 2022: 35). Subsequently, when capabilities are largely concentrated in one state, it emerges the structure of ‘unipolarity’ in which those capabilities are too great to be counterbalanced. On the other hand, they are not sufficient to produce a global empire. The unipole enjoys a large superiority over the other major powers. It has preponderance in the military, economic, and technological components of power (e.g., the post-Cold War era) (Wohlforth, 1999: 7-9). A system is ‘bipolar’ when the capabilities are concentrated in the hands of two dominant hostile powers. This concentration is separated by a huge gap from all the other major powers, the gap that is large enough for two superpowers to attain autonomy in defending their security alone (e.g., the Cold War period). The balance of power is determined by the distributional mode of power between only these two states (Wayman, 1984: 63). Finally, a system is ‘multipolar’ when the material capabilities are more evenly distributed among a larger number of states. In this situation, there is not a significant capability gap separating the great powers from other states (e.g., 19th century Europe) (Levy, 1985; Wayman, 1984: 63-64). This section will briefly portray the dynamics of bipolar and multipolar systems from neorealist perspective. Unipolarity will be the exclusive focus of the next section.

Deutsch and Singer (1964) argued when power is more evenly distributed in the system, the level of fear will diminish. Because in multipolar systems, interstate interactions follow various and complex patterns. Since there are multiple consequential actors, the range of interactional patterns widens and states' flexibility increases. An enemy on certain areas can also be a partner on some other issues. This cross-cutting cleavages often prevents obstinate patterns of hostilities from developing (Deutsch and Singer, 1964: 393-394). Moreover, as the number of great powers in the system increases, the average available attention of states will decrease, because each actor will have to divide its attention among more states. The less preoccupation of states with a fixed, single issue will make arms race spirals and conflict escalation unlikely (Deutsch and Singer, 1964: 402-406). Overall, multipolar systems tend to be more stable than bipolar international systems.

Notwithstanding Deutsch and Singer's observations, most of the prominent neorealist scholars, following to Waltz's (1964; 1979) findings, consider bipolarity as more stable than multipolarity.¹⁰ According to Waltz (1964), the high level of power concentration in the hands of two prominent states will deter any military attack that they could launch against each other, because of the unacceptable degree of damage that one could impose on the other as a result of retaliation. Thus, each side will adopt restraint on its foreign policy and the level of security will increase. Moreover, in multipolar systems, complex network of interstate relations leads states to lose track of what is essential for their security and national interest. Therefore, the effect of uncertainty exacerbates and preoccupation with multiple tasks with multiple actors results in increased risk of miscalculation. As a result, the probability of interstate conflict will rise (Waltz, 1964; 1979). Based upon Waltz' arguments, there is a number of general, agreed-upon assumptions regarding the distinctive systemic properties of bipolarity and multipolarity in neorealist scholarship.

Multipolarity creates a larger area of manoeuvre for great powers. However, this dynamic environment makes predicting other states' intentions more difficult for great powers and increases the risks of miscalculations. The patterns of state behavior are mostly erratic (He, 2022: 54). It is difficult for states to decide who is friend and

¹⁰ See, for example, Græger et. al. (2022); Hansen (2011); Ikenberry et. al. (2011); Mearsheimer (2001) Mowle and Sacko (2007); Wohlforth (1999).

who is enemy. Therefore, the balance of power could be disrupted more easily because of the uncertainty inherent in observing and predicting the intentions and activities of other states (Mowle and Sacko, 2007: 55). Therefore, alliances emerge as a way of accumulating power and reducing uncertainty. However, the collective action problem inherent in any alliance often obscures any efforts to resort the balance in the system (Labs, 1997: 15). Because incentives for buck-passing is high among states. Since the numerical distribution of the major powers across the system is proportional and material power gap between them is negligible, most of the states tend to believe that one of the others will probably resist the ambitious policies of the revisionist state (Posen, 2011: 318-319).

Moreover, alignment patterns in multipolarity are structurally indeterminate. Because for a particular state, all of the relevant actors are eligible to be either ally or enemy (Snyder, 2007: 18-19). Therefore, states could easily renege on their alliance commitments if they become dissatisfied with existing regulations, or their own interests encourage them to do so. Consequently, since states are highly dependent on their allies for providing their security, 'abandonment' constitutes a major risk factor for great powers under multipolarity (Snyder, 2007: 181; Toft, 2022: 268). A state may try to overcome this problem by extending the scope of binding provisions and increasing the level of its allies' commitment, in order to make sure that its allies will come to its help if that state is attacked. But this high level of commitment will increase the risk of being entrapped by an ally. "Entrapment means being dragged by one's commitment into a war over interests of the ally that one does not share" (Snyder, 2007: 181). As alliance commitments of one state become firmer, that state will be compelled more forcefully to involve in a conflict for defending its ally's interests, even when the war will be detrimental to one's own national interests. Glenn Snyder (2007: 181-182) calls this paradox as the 'alliance security dilemma', in which reducing the worried of abandonment increases the risk of entrapment, both of which eventually undermine the systemic stability.

As neorealist scholars' categorization implies, numbers matter, especially when they are small. Systems with three to five or more great powers can be classified together as multipolar and treated as a single category. But as the numbers drop towards one, distinct system qualities appear, with bipolar and unipolar systems having

their own unique dynamics (Buzan, 2004: 32). The common reference point for neorealist scholars who adopt Waltz's approach is the systemic stability, which improves as number of great powers reduces. Smaller number of consequential actors promotes peace and stability in the system.

2.2. UNIPOLARITY

Unipolarity is the least theorized concept in the neorealist theory compared to other power configurations of the international system. Because the U.S. preponderance capturing the complete portfolio of national power – military, economic, political, geographical – is the only unipolar era in the modern history, characterizing the international system after 1990. As Paul Kennedy (2004) noted: “Nothing has ever existed like this disparity of power; nothing. I have returned to all of the comparative defence spending and military personnel statistics over the past 500 years... no other nation comes close.” For this reason, this historically unique feature of the international system makes theorizing unipolarity a challenging task. It is especially difficult to analyse separately the theoretical dynamics of the general unipolarity from the specific character of the current international system. Because, since unipolarity is a novel phenomenon in international politics, there is no clear consensus among scholars and politicians on how to examine its essential features and implications for international politics. Therefore, instead of providing unified and coherent propositions about the concept, this section will draw on a wide range of theoretical approaches and benefit from the diversity in the neorealist theory in order to integrate the various results and offer a comprehensive account of this current phenomenon.¹¹

As has been the operating mechanism of the international system for three and a half decades, unipolarity has proved that it is not just a ‘moment’ or ‘illusion’, and not a phenomenon that describes the brief transitory stage between the end of the bipolar rivalry and the emergence of a multipolar balance of power system.¹² It is a

¹¹ For justification of the inclusion of insights from various theoretical branches in the study of unipolarity, see Buzan and Wæver (2003); Græger et. al. (2022); Hansen (2000; 2011); Ikenberry et. al. (2011).

¹² For example, see Huntington (1999), Kupchan (1998), Layne (1993, 2006), Waltz (1993, 2002).

different version of the anarchical self-help condition that offers states particular kind of incentives and disincentives through which they ensure their security and advance their interests. It represents a particular version of the relative distribution of power at the systemic level dissimilar to both bipolarity and multipolarity, the one characterized by the accumulation of material resources largely in the hand of a single state.

This specific way of relative distribution distinctively shapes patterns of the interaction among states and produces international outcomes different from other power configurations (Ikenberry et. al., 2011: 3-4). Despite systemic power asymmetry, the organizing principle of the structure is still anarchy and the functional similarity of units as neorealism depicts remains relevant. However, one of the key tenets of the neorealism, the functioning of the systemic balance of power is usually suppressed in unipolarity. Therefore, an in-depth analysis of unipolarity requires reconsidering the operational mechanisms of balance of power as well as states' balancing strategies, reassessing the utility of hegemonic stability and power transition theories, surveying the logic of international competition and cooperation, examining new alliance patterns, reevaluating the structure of political, security and economic relations among states, and carefully observing the roots of potential instability and determinants of a durable peace. This section will proceed in line with these aims.

2.2.1. The Relative Distribution of Material Capabilities

The most straightforward definition of unipolarity so far is provided by Wohlforth (1999: 9). Accordingly, unipolarity denotes an international system whose structure is defined by the overwhelming material capabilities of a single state. These concentration of capabilities in one dominant state makes counterbalancing almost impossible. Layne (1993: 5) stresses the same point. He argues unipole's geopolitically defined preponderance obstructs the creation of a countervailing alliance that would overwhelm its capabilities. Therefore, dynamics of the system's structure become significantly different from either multipolarity or bipolarity. On the other hand, this material power is not so massively concentrated that makes possible to establish a global empire. Empire is the direct and coercive control of the one great power on the internal and foreign affairs of the different political units (Mowle and Sacko, 2007:

17). The subordinate units do not retain their legal sovereign rights. Their authority in both domestic and internal affairs are subjugated to imperial power mostly by formalized arrangements.

However, unipolarity does not indicate the omnipotence of the unipole and does not include any kind of such influence and relationship. Unipolarity, which has distinctive properties thanks to extreme concentration of power in a single state, does not exclude the influence of other major powers in the system and the *de jure* independence of any of the individual nation-states (Monteiro, 2011/2012: 13; Wohlforth, 1999: 9). Other states are free to act independently and could choose to pursue policies contradicting with unipole's preferences. For this reason, unipolarity does not contradict with the logic of neorealism. Because the unipole operates in an anarchical system. Structural pressures affect its international behavior, as they affect any state. It seeks to assure survival, retain its position, and even enhance it in the self-help environment (Hansen, 2000: 116). Therefore, unipolarity is a definitive concept which narrowly depicts the relative distribution of material power among independent states in the international system. In this context, it must also be kept apart from hegemony. The definition of hegemony was provided in the first chapter. In this context, Jervis (2011: 255) asserts the sole superpower's values and interests cannot be seriously challenged by other states in unipolarity. However, unipolarity does not necessarily imply the existence of hegemonic relations between the unipole and other states. Unipolarity is a material condition which indicates one dominant state has disproportioned amount of control over resources. Control over independent political actors and international outcomes may not follow.

Because unipolarity is a material condition in which the relative distribution of capabilities extremely favors a single dominant state, the nature of these capabilities is an essential element of unipolarity. The unipole must possess a complete portfolio of material capabilities than any other great power in the international system (Wohlforth, 2002: 104). A pole is conventionally defined in the literature as a state that commands substantial material resources and excels in all the component elements of state capability, which are military power, economic capacity, size of population and territory and political competence (Ikenberry et. al., 2011: 5; Waltz, 1979: 131). Unipolarity emerges when only one state is able to meet these criteria. If one state's

“overall share of capabilities places it unambiguously in a class by itself compared to all other states”, the system is unipolar (Ikenberry et. al., 2011: 6). Therefore, it is important to note that, state power is not measured on an absolute scale, instead, relative positions of states matter.

More importantly, preponderance of one state relative to others must be prevalent in all the relevant components of material capability. That is to say, concentration of capabilities at the hand of the unipole must be symmetrical (Wohlforth, 1999: 20). As Waltz (1979: 131) acknowledged, in a self-help system, states need to rely on their combined capabilities in order to survive. Their position is not ensured because they are dominant in one aspect or another. Capabilities could not be disaggregated. The point is that if the position of the unipole leans on only one field of power assets, this creates resentment among other states and increases uncertainty. It also increases the incentive for acting as a revisionist for other states. In that situation, other states could try to improve their position by investing on other classes of assets in order to reduce the overall power gap between themselves and unipole. The completer and more integrative the unipole’s capabilities, the less credible other states’ strategies will be. This will also make easier for other states to declare their consent on existing distribution of power and accept the legitimacy of the preponderant power, thereby lengthening the durability of unipolarity (Wohlforth, 2002: 106).

According to Wohlforth (2002), under unipolarity, there is a critical threshold concentration of capabilities – the relative amount of power that must be concentrated in the most powerful state in the system in order for this state to dissuade other states from engaging in balancing policies – that severely constrains the counterbalancing. Once the relative distribution of capabilities in the system goes beyond this threshold, further accumulation of power in the hands of the most powerful state consolidates rather than undermines the balance. In this situation, other states should not be expected to engage in balance of power policies when this would hugely overwhelm their capabilities. The crucial point here is that, for this reason, unipolarity neither contradicts with the assumptions of balance of power theory nor falsifies the causal logic of neorealism.

Therefore, this absence of counterbalancing is what makes an international system unipolar (Wohlforth, 2002: 104). Kopalyan (2017: 28) suggests a similar

criterion for determining system's polarity. For him, in order for an international system to be qualified as unipolar, in addition to unipole's superiority in material capabilities, a system-wide challenger to its dominance and counterbalancing must be absent in the system. He gave the example of the Cold War era. Even though the Soviet Union's aggregate capabilities (especially in economy) was inferior to that of the U.S., the Soviet Union was able to challenge U.S.' global policies and its systemic position. Therefore, the system was bipolar. Accordingly, in a unipolar system there must be no revisionist actor which is able to balance unipole's policies in a global scale. As Wohlforth (1999:29) suggests, "a unipolar system is one in which a counterbalance is impossible. When a counterbalance becomes possible, the system is not unipolar."

2.2.2. Unipolarity and State Strategies

The basic definition of balancing suggests that it is a set of actions that is aimed at creating a challenging and constraining effects against the capabilities and policies of a more powerful state. According to prevailing wisdom in neorealist scholarship, only poles are eligible to balance (Mowle and Sacko, 2007: 32; Schweller, 1999: 40). In general, balancing policies try to match with the power of a stronger state or obstruct its projection of power for attaining system-wide dominance. Mowle and Sacko (2007: 149) defines four different strategies of balancing behavior; establishing formal alliances, increasing military spending in order to match with that of balanced power, developing weapons that could deter the balanced power, and engaging in actions that materially impede the stronger state's global strategic aims. Notwithstanding neorealist expectation that balance of power will eventually be restored, in fact, the essence of the balance of power theory suggests that states try to protect their position and ensure their survival, and the most of time the best option is balancing.

However, the theory does not expect states to adopt balancing policies when they are costly and futile. States preferentially employ balancing act to secure their relative position and advance their interests. Still, balancing behavior is not a deterministic outcome of the system structure, or perceived necessity of politicians under all circumstances (Kopalyan, 2017: 198). The balance of power theory assumes states aggregate their capabilities in order to prevent the strongest state in the system

from attaining world-wide dominance. However, the theory does not suggest any proposition regarding what the states' behavior will be once unipolarity is established (Jervis, 2011: 274). Under unipolarity, balancing efforts could be futile, even dangerous, because of several factors. In the context of both durability of unipolarity and the prospects for systemic change, these factors will be discussed in the final chapter of this study.

Under these circumstances, states are expected to adopt some other structurally determined policies. Bandwagoning is one of these strategies which got most academic attention relative to others. Bandwagoning can take various forms of strategic behavior. However, it is basically defined as a set of policies that support and accommodate the strongest state in the world (Ikenberry, 2003). It refers to strategy of aligning with the dominant or most threatening power that a state faces in the system. It is a tendency of weaker states for neutralizing threats that come from the dominant state and thus enhance its national interests (Walt, 2011: 126). Essential logic of bandwagoning is that if the power gap between a state and its rival is too large in favor of the rival, it doesn't make sense to challenge its demands because it will obtain what it wishes for by force anyway, so the point is to avoid damage that can be inflicted by the opponent, and take share from the spoils if possible (Mearsheimer, 2001: 163). It is consistent with the logic of neorealism because bandwagoning is the strategy of joining the stronger side, and aims to ensure one's survival and increase its power (Mowle and Sacko, 2007: 69). According to Schweller (1994: 93), all forms of bandwagoning strategies are driven by the prospect of making gains, because they rarely involve any cost.

Unipolar distribution of power makes bandwagoning more appealing than what it normally ought to be. Firstly, since a counter-hegemonic alliance is not available in unipolarity, individual states will be unable to affect global balance of power via their own efforts. In the bandwagoning logic, a state could evade from aggression by forging close relations with an external threat. Since all states are vulnerable against the possible aggressive policies of the unipole, they are likely to align with the dominant power (Larson, 1991: 86). Secondly, when the alliances are unavailable, states individually have little deterrent power or defensive strength against the unipole. States

don't have the capabilities necessary to have leverage over unipole's behavior (Walt, 1985: 17; Walt, 1991: 53).

Thirdly, bandwagoning strategy includes developing methods to gain advantages within an international system dominated by a single state (Ikenberry, 2003). Since under unipolarity, the dominant power will be presumably a status quo state which does not have revisionist aims and aggressive intentions, its limited ambitions could best be appeased through bandwagoning (Walt, 1991: 53). On the negative side, bandwagoning points out an unequal exchange. A weaker state which bandwagons with a powerful one makes disproportionate compromises and concedes to be in a subordinate position (Walt, 1991: 55). The weaker state's gains are only relevant on absolute scale, while the dominant power gains more in relative terms. In that case, the new distribution of power yields more beneficial results for the dominant state than it does for the weaker one (Mearsheimer, 2001: 163). For minimizing this inequality, the secondary states could choose to 'free-ride', which is the second available state strategy under unipolarity.

Free-riding strategy denotes a situation in which a state supports to, and even benefits from the unipole's policies, but show unwillingness to pay for the costs. In other words, states which enjoy the benefits of the established security, economic and political order in the international system while refusing to contribute their shares of the costs, are engaging free-riding (Walt, 2005). Aware of the fact that the one benefitting most from the established status quo is always the unipole itself, free-riders choose to perform passive non-cooperation. It is assumed that this situation will erode unipole's relative position in time. On the other hand, the second-tier states would be able to enhance their relative positions vis-à-vis the superpower in the system. Therefore, free-riding strategy has a potential of instigating the redistribution of power in the system since it challenges unipole's relative position (Hansen, 2011: 33-34). Instead of assuming the costs of excessive spending for confronting the unipole, states are likely to free-ride internationally because, thanks to benign international security context, they will be able to enhance their capabilities without provoking a balancer.

Apart from these policy choices, some scholars have identified and incorporated several distinct state strategies into the theoretical lens of balancing concept in order to increase the explanatory power of balancing and adapt it to

contemporary conditions of unipolarity. These scholars have historically observed some regular patterns of state tactics which have been used to cope with the superior power of a dominant state. As Ripsman and Levy (2007: 66) argue, different mechanisms, complementary strategies, or particular combinations of them, all of which constitute a larger strategy of balancing against a threatening hegemon, must also be recognized by scholars. Drawing on the insights of both classical realism and the works of political historians, these scholars who concur with Ripsman and Levy, started to investigate the various means at the disposal of major powers, which have rooted in the 18th and 19th century European international system, to respond to threats emanating from the most powerful state in the system.

For example, conventional neorealism defines balancing as a strategy of increasing the state's own capabilities to prevent disproportionate concentration of power in the hands of a rival state, which would be detrimental for itself, and recognize mostly the military means for serving this purpose. As Schweller (2006: 9) argues, "balancing means the creation or aggregation of military power through internal mobilization or the forging of alliances to prevent or deter the territorial occupation or the political and military domination of the state by a foreign power or coalition." On the other hand, however, rather than emphasizing states' power maximization for its own sake, scholars who prefer to extend the conceptual scope of balancing acknowledge a set of practices that states deploy toward the aim of rectifying security deficit between balancer and dominant state (Nexon, 2009: 344). Moreover, conventional neorealism acknowledges there are only two variants of balancing: external balancing via alliance formation and internal balancing via arms buildup. However, As Levy (2004: 35) outlines, balancing "also includes territorial compensations or partitions for the purposes of redistributing the sources of power and, if necessary, threats of force, intervention, and even war."

In this context, seizing territory can be a crucial method for increasing one's relative power. By incorporating more territory and more people, a state can tip the balance in favor of its own (Organski, 1968: 276). Or if the most powerful state seizes a territory, other states can demand compensation for balancing gains made by the adversary (Wohlforth, 1993: 8-9). The compensation doesn't have to be in the form of acquiring territory or wealth. It also includes to assets obtained formally or from

geographical extension and progress, and even to reputational benefits such as honor, prestige, and status in the world society (Schroeder, 1994b: 7). For example, recognition of spheres of influence is sometimes justified based on this understanding. According to Ikenberry (2003), establishing counter-spheres of influence for denying geopolitical penetration by the dominant state is another form of balancing. In unipolarity, only the single superpower's spheres of influence could extend beyond its vicinity. Under this condition, the strategy of 'buffering' aims to decrease exposure to the superpower's influence by establishing an alternative regional sphere of influence. The main aim is to refrain from the hazards of direct strategic interaction with the unipole. In their own near abroad, states could try to build an alternative international order, based on autonomous military and political capabilities, which would provide them more structural leverage in their global-level interaction with the unipole (Ikenberry, 2003).

Alternatively, and less assertively, in order to avoid direct conflict, buffer zones¹³ – which located between the spheres of influences of great powers, but not dominated by any of them – could be created. Buffer regions, however, will potentially become an arena of great power competition (Menon and Snyder, 2017: 963). Because, in unipolarity, the national interests of the sole superpower are defined globally. In general, states are concerned with developments in their neighbourhoods, and as Jervis (2011: 265) noted, "the world is the unipole's neighborhood." The unipole can consider a distant part of the world as its sphere of influence. And this part of the world can also be proximate to another great power. The unipole's active involvement in this area will probably reduce the value of the status quo for the other great power and increase its incentives to act as a revisionist state (Monteiro, 2011/2012: 25). Therefore, it can choose to confront with the unipole on this region, by challenging unipole's hegemony over region or annexing it outright. Because even if the unipole has no intention of harming it, the other great power cannot be sure about unipole's intentions because of the prevailing uncertainty in interstate relations. And seizing a territory, domination of a region, or articulation of a state into its own alliance system

¹³ Buffering and the creation of buffer zones are distinct strategies. While the former means the creation of an alternative sphere of influence by a secondary power in order to isolate itself from unipole's detrimental activities, the latter refers to legal recognition of neutral buffer states that lie between the spheres of influence of different great powers (Ikenberry, 2003; Menon and Snyder, 2017).

will tilt the balance in favor of the state which will move first – first striker advantage (Organski, 1968: 277; Van Evera, 1998: 5/41). Therefore, the possibility of a military competition in a buffer zone can head toward spiralling great power competition, which would have systemic implication on international level (Menon and Snyder, 2017: 963; Miller and Kagan, 1997: 65).

Relatedly, intervention to weaker states can also be another form of balancing. The difference of this strategy from creating a buffer zone is that, in this situation a great power is not sure of the loyalty of one of its strategically important allies or geopolitically sensitive neighbours. Therefore, that great power could opt for military intervention in the smaller state in order to regain its influence and retain its relative power (Organski, 1968: 278). If this smaller state is a client of the superpower, opposing directly to its position and behaving aggressively against it is one way to counter the superpower (Walt, 1987: 157). In this context, adopting an offensive military doctrine could also function as a balancing strategy. If a state is geographically encircled by the allies of the unipole and its total capabilities are inferior, offensive stance will be especially appealing. In that case, this state would have chance to determine the time and place of war, and advantage to strike first. Instead of risking to wage a total war against a superior alliance, the offensive state would go to war against the most threatening or geographically proximate member of the adversary coalition (Posen, 1984: 70). Therefore, territorial expansion and partition of weaker states emerges as a form of balancing through disproportional aggrandizement (Teschke, 2003: 234).

As noted above, balancing behavior is conventionally defined as a state policy of “adding to the power assets at its disposal” (Art et. al., 2005/2006: 183-184). On the other hand, those scholars who favors the conceptual variety point out the relative nature of power in the international system. In this context, in addition to increasing one’s power, undermining adversary’s power capabilities is also considered as balancing (He, 2012; Nexon, 2009). This means that balancing includes not only the policies aiming to increase one’s power, but also the attempts that decrease the relative power of adversary without increasing one’s own power (He: 2012). Strategies that fall under this category are also consistent with states’ relative gains considerations in international relations. Kai He (2012) identifies these strategies as ‘negative

balancing’, through which a state seeks to enhance its relative position by eroding the power capabilities of targeted state, without increasing its absolute power. The ultimate aim is basic: self-help through reducing one’s vulnerability to political subjugation, preventing loss of territory and refusing to compromise its vital interests (Nexon, 2009: 342). Moreover, this new conceptualisation of balancing also entails non-military strategies. Ryuto Ito (2022) calls the use of these non-military means as ‘hybrid balancing’, which basically consists of political balancing¹⁴, economic balancing and information balancing.

Among these ‘negative balancing’ tactics, the most systematically studied one is the wedge strategy (Crawford, 2008; 2011). Wedge strategy is “a state's attempt to prevent, break up, or weaken a threatening or blocking alliance at an acceptable cost” (Crawford, 2011: 156). It is a form of external balancing, in a sense that it seeks to prevent the formation of, or to lead to dispersal of, opposing alliances (Crawford, 2008: 3). It aims to distort the dynamics within the alliance, and thus, reduce the strength of adversaries. Wedge strategies aim either to ensure the neutrality of an opponent, or switch targeted state(s) from opponent to friendly one. Therefore, implications of a successful wedge strategy would be significant for the results and conditions of war and peace, and power shifts it brings about would have consequences for the trajectory of international politics. Because eroding the strategic alignments of the dominant power would result in a decrease in its relative power, curb its ambitions, and dissuade it from pursuing an aggressive foreign policy agenda. Strategies to disorganize an opponent coalition could be accommodational and confrontational. Whether a state will pursue either of them will vary across its threat perception, “geographical position, strategic priorities, relative capabilities, or ideological claims and pretensions of the members of an opposing alliance” (Crawford, 2011: 162).

¹⁴ According to Ito (2022: 1965), political balancing “in the extreme case, may include the use of limited violence to invade (or possibly subdue) targeted states, an example being the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014.”

2.2.3. Alliances in the Unipolar System

As the discussion above made clear, alliance politics have crucial role in determining the dynamics of systemic polarity. Neorealist literature is rich in terms of the scholarly works identifying the principles of alliance formation under bipolarity and multipolarity (Christensen and Snyder, 1990; Snyder, 2007; Walt, 1987; Waltz, 1979). However, alliance patterns under unipolarity differ significantly from those principles. As discussed above, by definition, unipolarity contains no symmetrical great power alliances. Unlike the other types of systemic structure, in unipolarity, secondary states are not able to leverage of signalling that they will form a counterpoising alliance with a rival superpower that could alter the balance of power (Hansen, 2011: 44). By joining to an alliance, every state relegates some of its autonomy in exchange for an increase in its security (Bueno de Mesquita, 1975: 189). Symmetric alliances mean both allies increase either security or autonomy benefits. Each state receives the same type of benefit. Asymmetric alliances are the one where one ally increases its security and the other one gains more autonomy (Morrow, 1991: 905). Asymmetry in states' material capabilities is generally observed in asymmetrical alliances. They are the alliances that great powers form with secondary states (Morrow, 1991: 914). In alliances that have asymmetrical patterns, the powerful side obtains autonomy and in exchange offers security assurances to its smaller allies (Morrow, 1991: 930).

Asymmetrical alliance patterns are the prevalent ones under unipolarity. Concerns of assuring their survival in the self-help environment raise the incentive for smaller states to align themselves with the unipole. Forming an alliance with the sole superpower will be a decisive factor for them in meeting the challenges of a massive security threat (Hansen, 2011: 37). If one state achieves to secure the formal commitment of the superpower, this will outweigh its opponents, regardless of how powerful its opponents are or whether they are able to combine their resources to form a coalition (Hansen, 2011: 46). Because the sole superpower will offer the greatest amount of security. Moreover, joining the same alliance with the unipole will also eliminate the possibility of facing with threats that could come from other members of the alliance and from the unipole itself (Hansen, 2000: 122; Mowle and Sacko, 2007:

150). In less dramatic cases, aligning with the unipole could improve state's bargaining position against its rivals and increase its relative power by providing political, military and economic advantages (Hansen, 2011: 37). Thus, smaller states enjoy the benefits of political and security architecture built and operated by the unipole (Pedi and Wivel, 2022: 131).

This reduction of uncertainty in the interactions among states comes with a cost. Smaller states will have to compromise on their decision-making processes. They will be compelled to offer concessions to unipole on primary matters. These concessions can include adjustments in their domestic affairs, recalibration of their foreign policies in favor of the unipole, and providing military bases and material sources at their disposal to unipole in order to facilitate its projection of power abroad. These obligations will subsequently result in the loss of their autonomy. However, the political and security advantages coming from aligning with the unipole will be so decisive to the extent that most of the second-tier states will accept this trade-off. Because if they become opponents of the unipole and thus are threatened by it, there will be no available great power sponsor that can support them and no other state to pass the buck. Except the unipole, other great powers in the system have limited ability to project power beyond their own region and will be occupied by maintaining their own security. Because even great powers prefer high level of certainty and strive for self-preservation, though not necessarily through alliances. Therefore, they are highly unlikely to make reliable security commitments to any smaller state. In this situation, the best way to deal with uncertainty in the system for other states is to align with the sole superpower (Monteiro, 2014: 153-154).

Defending its partners' security and protecting them against an aggressor would yield favorable results also for the unipole itself. Thanks both to the absence of a direct threat targeted its homeland to jeopardize its very existence and its sheer preponderance in material capabilities, the unipole has large amount of security. In that case, it could opt for trading some of its enhanced security for greater autonomy by creating or maintaining asymmetrical alliances (Morrow, 1991: 919). This asymmetrical relation patterns will provide the unipole an upper hand in its foreign policy conduct. In this way, it will steer intra-alliance management. By providing its allies credible security guarantees, the unipole convinces them to recalibrate their

foreign policies in line with its own self-interest. It seeks to assign managerial tasks to its smaller allies in order to share the burden and preclude free-riding. It also attempts to spread the managerial costs, the incentive provided by the risk of entrapment (Hansen, 2000: 118). Moreover, the military alliances could function as a vehicle for the projection of unipole's power through building a security order in their vision. Therefore, for the unipole, the benefits of maintaining asymmetrical alliances are twofold. First, it can preserve, even improve its relative position in the system by adding on its material capabilities through combined resources of the alliance. Second, it can spread its policy and promote its world-vision in international system by increasing its autonomy and freedom of action produced by the assistance of its allies.

2.2.4. The Regional Level of Analysis in Unipolarity

Alliances are also useful mechanisms for the unipole in order to prevent the emergence of regional hegemons in the resource-rich, industrial and wealth-producing – that is strategically important – parts of the world. Hypothetically, the only superpower could try to dominate these areas by itself. However, the most viable option would be to rely on its credible regional allies to check the power of potential hegemon and ensure a favorable regional balance of power (Hansen, 2000: 128). For example, Ikenberry (2002b, 24) suggests the U.S.-led alliance system is “the global spinal cord of unipolarity.” The unipole wants no peer competitor should be in a position to undermine these goals. However, if another state could establish its hegemony in a core region, it would be able to use this power to consolidate its global position and challenge unipole's supremacy (Colby, 2021: 9-10).

This situation makes regional factor an important level of analysis under unipolarity (Acharya, 2007; Buzan and Wæver, 2003; Hansen, 2000; Hurrell, 2007; Miller and Kagan, 1997). Normally, neorealism acknowledges three distinct level of analysis – individual, state level and system level – and maintains only the analyses at systemic level can offer a comprehensible account of international politics. However, after 1990, in order to understand great power politics better, scholars have incorporated the regional level into the theoretical lens of neorealism, as supplementary to its analysis of the international system, in a manner that provides a

fourth (regional) level of analysis (Buzan and Wæver, 2003: 11). This modification is warranted because, since the international system is no longer polarized between two or more centralized power camps, great power interference in political-security affairs of other states declined and as a result, world politics started to become more regionalized in nature (Hansen, 2000: 125).

Both neorealism and regionalism prioritize territoriality and state security. However, scholars who investigate regionalist approaches recognize that the systemic dynamics began to be heavily influenced by sub-systemic distribution of capabilities, where the regional stage is turned into either a bastion against world-wide threats, or a springboard for accumulating more power at the international system-level (Hansen, 2011: 6; Buzan and Wæver, 2003: 12). Regions have become sites where most of the interstate conflict and cooperation takes place. As Amitav Acharya (2007: 630) further stressed, acknowledging the interrelationship of the political, economic, and strategic affairs both at the regional and system-wide level remains crucial for a sophisticated analysis of the global affairs.

Presumably, the unipolar power retains a world-wide strategic reach since its interests stretch globally, therefore, its policy choices critically affect the essential dynamics of all regions (Acharya, 2007: 632). For the only superpower, regional factors are essential in determining the consequences of projecting its power globally and enduring its rivalries in the systemic level. On the other hand, as Buzan and Wæver noted (2003: 443), larger the ability of a state to convert raw material resources of the region it dominates into fungible power assets, higher the prospect of becoming a true great power for that state. As discussed in previous sections, except the unipole, in 1+Y+X system, there are potentially other great powers that can strategically act beyond their regions (though mostly in a limited context). These great powers are embedded in their regions, but they have potential to affect the political and strategic functioning of 1+Y+X structure of the international system. Because of these characteristics, their operation link together the regional and international level dynamics.

Regional conflicts, for example, may result in great power intervention, and efforts of regional cooperation may demand great powers' attendance. When there is at least one major power declaring its interest in a certain region apart from the unipole,

their involvement in a regional activity directly influences balancing calculations at the international systemic level (Miller and Kagan, 1997: 65). In that case, any regional outcome will manifest itself as a structural determinant at international level. For this reason, the grand strategic choice of the unipole for sustaining 1+Y+X structure of the international system becomes strictly attached to its relations with the great powers in particular regions (Buzan and Wæver, 2003: 455).

Mearsheimer (2001: 42) argues that when the most powerful state in the system is faced with a peer competitor, it relinquishes its status quo position. Instead, it would put a considerable effort to diminish and destroy its capabilities. Because a rising competitor will be able to extract the full scale of material resources of the region it dominates; which will first, further add on its material strength and degrade the unipole's relative power position, second, increase its influence on the strategically important areas, and third, set a precedent and create a domino effect by revealing that revisionist states cannot be deterred (Montgomery, 2016: 12). Subsequently, the aspiring great power will try to obstruct the unipole's ability to use its overseas assets and disrupt its secure access to global financial markets and strategic military bases located in the core regions. Moreover, it can try to assemble a countervailing coalition that aims to overwhelm the unipole's systemic position. Therefore, no superpower will turn a blind eye such a massive power shift. The likely result will be the unipole which will start to think that international system must be transformed. It will try to confront threats before they deteriorate, while they are still manageable, and start to consider prevention – including preventing war – as an essential instrument (Jervis, 2011: 271). Consequently, with two revisionist states at the centre of the international system, a fierce security competition will emerge, and instability arises.

In this confrontational scenario, the weaker party will have limited range of instruments for dealing with the threat (Hansen, 2000: 125). However, it is important to note that the historical analysis has demonstrated that it has been common among the great powers to exploit threats, bring them into play to extract the best bargain from their competitor, and recalibrate opportunistic strategies to advance their interests further, sometimes even at the expense of any other state rather than the one posing the threat (Schroeder, 1994a: 118). As offensive realism predicts, when great powers are challenged by specific threats, they will respond by increasing their relative power

mostly through expansion. Offense-defence balance would be irrelevant for them because weaponry systems cannot be distinguished as purely offensive or defensive. Furthermore, statesmen persistently attempt to figure out the ways of decreasing the costs of war and make it a feasible option for advancing their state's interests regardless of the overall balance of power (Labs, 1997: 11).

More importantly, however, since the competition will be taking place in the great power's region, it will have more leverage upon its rival because unipole's power projection capabilities are adversely affected by growing distance. The degree of the region's proximity to the great power will highly determine its vulnerability to the political and military developments in that region. Political and security situation in a region tends to affect proximate great powers more fundamentally than distant ones. For that reason, even when the total distribution of capabilities disfavors the continental great power, it can perceive its position as more advantageous and tends to be more coercive in its proximate environment (Miller, 2001: 18). Therefore, under unipolarity, in a security competition between the sole superpower and an aspiring great power, the balance of interests¹⁵ is as important as the overall balance of material capabilities (Miller and Kagan, 1997: 62-63). Therefore, the outcome of a systemic power competition played out at regional level will not be determined solely by the distribution of material power. Instead, the outcome will be in favor of the side which has the firm resolution and effective strategy to operate its military forces to attain its aims.

Consequently, a condition may emerge in which the unipole with sheer preponderance of material power may not be willing to take the risks of such an engagement to deny its peer competitor's hegemonic ambitions. On the contrary, as discussed in detail above, the aspiring great power could resist the primacy of the unipole by organizing, for example, privileged spheres of influence within its proximate region. It may further resist the influence of the unipole by challenging the

¹⁵ According to Schweller (1994: 99/104), at unit level, balance of interests "refers to the costs a state is willing to pay to defend its values relative to the costs it is willing to pay to extend its values... At the systemic level, balance-of-interest theory suggests that the distribution of capabilities, by itself, does not determine the stability of the system. More important are the goals and means to which those capabilities or influence are put to use: whether power and influence is used to manage the system or destroy it; whether the means employed to further such goals threaten other states or make them feel more secure."

position of a state serving as close ally to unipole (Acharya, 2007: 644-645). This challenging could be resorted by coercive means. It could militarily intervene and conquer a large part of the territory of unipole's client state, as Russia did to Georgia in 2008 and to Ukraine in 2022. For some scholars, this kind of action is a classic example of hard-balancing strategy against a materially dominant power (Kupchan, 2011: 169). Because a coercive and militarily threatening policy targeted even only to one of the unipole's global interests reveals a confrontational stance whose ultimate purpose is to demote unipole's relative position and redesign the international system itself (Mowle and Sacko, 2007: 56).

In sum, as discussed, balance of interest theory presumes a passive approach of the unipole in distant regions. On the contrary, Mearsheimer predicts the sole superpower will actively try to prevent the emergence of a peer competitor. However, in either case, the balance of power at the regional level emerges as a significant factor in determining systemic polarity (Colby, 2021: 18). If one state successfully builds its regional dominance, this promotes that state from being a sub-system hegemon to a system-wide actor. That great power then will be able to determine not only the regional polarity, but also the mechanism through which regional dynamics interplay with the international polarity (Buzan, 2004: 72). Because a dominant power in its region will be able to bargain for a new international order, rules and norms of which would favor its new global position (Kopalyan, 2017: 27; Steward-Ingersoll and Frazier, 2012: 163). Otherwise, in the case of active prevention, the system will remain unipolar.

2.3. PERSPECTIVES ON AMERICAN UNIPOLARITY

Although there has been a decline in American economy relative to others since 1970s, in the contemporary era the U.S. still holds the position of world's largest military, economic, and political power. The qualifications which a state must have in order to attain the position of an independent pole in the international system has been discussed in the first section of this chapter. Accordingly, "two states measured up in 1990. One is gone. No new pole has appeared: $2 - 1 = 1$. The system is unipolar" (Wohlforth, 1999: 10). The ambiguities in the literature with regard the quantification

of material capabilities have been addressed in the first section. However, most of the prominent neorealist scholars argue that, even after taking into account to these ambiguities, one can say without doubt that the current system is unipolar. According to Walt (2011: 106), “despite these ambiguities, Wohlforth is almost certainly correct in describing the current structure of world politics as unipolar.” Walt considers power in strictly narrow terms. For him, the system is unipolar because the U.S. is the most economically powerful state and it retains by far the strongest military power in the system (Walt, 2011: 106). On the other hand, according to Mastanduno (1999: 141), “even without precise measurement, to focus on a range of power attributes leads to the conclusion that the United States is now in a category by itself.” Brooks and Wohlforth (2008: 27-28) concur with Mastanduno: “Even when capabilities are understood broadly to include economic, technological, and other wellsprings of national power, they are concentrated in the United States to a degree never before experienced in the history of the modern system of states.”

Therefore, since the only unipolar period in the modern era is characterized by the American supremacy, this section will examine unipolar structure of the international system from the perspective of U.S. foreign policy and grand strategy.¹⁶ The justification for this method has been provided in the introduction of this chapter. As discussed, the foreign policy priorities that the unipole sets for itself, and the particularities of its grand strategy will undoubtedly determine both the durability of the U.S. primacy and other states’ courses of action during the adaptation process to the post-Cold War international setting. As one Russian analyst remarked while speculating on his country’s foreign policy choices, “whether we like it or not, our possibilities in the rest of the world are largely determined by our relations with the United States” (quoted in Braun, 2008: 61).

¹⁶ The concept of grand strategy is used to define which military instruments a state employs to achieve its full range of foreign policy goals. Mearsheimer offers the most restricted definition of grand strategy. For Mearsheimer (1998: 238), grand strategies assess the main security threats for a state and decide how should they be rank ordered. Then, they specify the military forces that this state should employ for challenging these threats. A broader approach discusses the role of a state’s military force structure in, beyond security, achieving its international commitments (Art, 2004). The definition offered by Posen and Ross (1996/1997: 8) goes one step further, arguing that each grand strategy should have also an economic component. Posen (2014: 1) defines grand strategy as “a nation-state’s theory about how to produce security for itself.”

Opposing intellectual reflections on the foreign policy doctrine of the U.S. can be organized around two key positions: primacists and declinists¹⁷. Primacists and declinists sharply oppose each other on the current implications of U.S.' unmatched power capabilities and occasions for the durability and prospects of unipolarity. Although both positions are interested in maximizing U.S. national interests, and the grand strategies they offer are rooted in the same theoretical tradition, namely the neorealism; each prescribe sharply different policy courses.

2.3.1. U.S. Primacy

Having been referred as preponderance by Layne (1997), and dominion by Art (2004), the notion of primacy represents the main grand strategy of the U.S. It is grounded in hegemonic realism and hegemonic stability theory. Those who cling to this view; prominent among them are Joseph S. Nye, William Wohlforth, Stephen G. Brooks, Michael Mastanduno and G. John Ikenberry, claim that the U.S. can be a successful hegemon, thanks to both its overwhelming capabilities, and the lack of reason for balancing on the part of other great powers. Primacists think balance of power systems tend to fail because of the particular reasons such as collective action problem, challenges in accurately calculating other states' relative powers and statesmen's possible misperception, all of which may result in war eventually. Therefore, for them, primacy is the best way to ensure peace in the system without even resorting to war, thanks to deterrence provided by unipole's unmatched capabilities. In order for international system to remain stable, a preponderant power in the system is a must. And primacists believe that, in the current system only a preponderance of U.S. power is able to keep the system peaceful.

The U.S. has reinforced and expanded the liberal international order based on shared values after the Second World War. During the early Cold-War years, the U.S. used its power to build an anti-Soviet alliance. In order for this alliance to persevere, it also promoted an open economic model through which attending states would become increasingly interdependent. Therefore, international order the U.S. has

¹⁷ This classification draws on the discussion provided by Monteiro (2014: 81-86). Same classification is also utilized by Casey and Dolan (2023).

bolstered has encouraged both mutual security and development of a liberal world economy (Gilpin, 2000: 349). What is critical for the primacists is the American strategic imperatives of the bipolar world, which the U.S. has to maintain also after the end of the Cold War, which are preventing security dilemma and relative gains considerations to become an issue among the states in the liberal order, and protecting the states in this order from the contagious effects of instability in the periphery. Primacists attach great importance especially to the first imperative, which is focusing on the critical interplay of security issues and relative economic gains. Because, as neorealist theory informs, relative gains problem could hinder international cooperation. However, primacists suggest that if there is a state assuming leadership in the system, that state will employ its power to ensure cooperating states that one's potential uneven economic advantage will not be turned to military use against another (Art, 2004: 214).

As mentioned above, these primacist accounts are largely informed by the hegemonic stability theory, which basically argues if a hegemonic leader presents in the system, both the level of security and chances for cooperation in that system will increase. Accordingly, when the rules of the game are clarified and rights and responsibilities of states are delineated, peace endures. When these factors are ambiguous, dangers arise (Van Evera, 1990: 12). A hegemonic leader exerting its power to avoid ambiguity, therefore, is essential. Assuming the leadership role in the system is also advantageous for U.S. interests. Because it is the greatest beneficiary of current status quo, and as Waltz argues "if the leading power does not lead, the others cannot follow" (Waltz, 1979: 210). A superpower can maintain its pre-eminence only if it uses its power in defining the rules of the game in order to steer the international system in ways conducive to its interests (Art, 2004: 160).

Before further discussion on the importance of interplay between security and economic factors, it is necessary to realize some of the practical implications of these primacist arguments regarding relative gains and hegemonic leadership. After the Soviet threat disappeared, there were concerns about the possibility that European states would again engage in a security competition, had the U.S. decided to withdraw its military forces. In this situation, relative gains problem would have reappeared and eventually threatened the liberal economic order, of which the U.S. is the biggest

beneficiary. Therefore, primacists have supported a strong American military presence in the continent for providing leadership in order to dampen possible security competition. They believe U.S. military presence in Europe lessens the concern that economic vulnerabilities of a state, which results from relative gains problem, can be turned to adverse military effects for that state (Art, 2004: 217). This allows European states to enhance their integration to liberal world economy, thus making them better customers for U.S. investment and trade. For this reason, primacists support the perpetuation, and even expansion of NATO, since it is the embodiment of American leadership in Europe.

For primacists, expansion of NATO is desirable because it will also enlarge the zone of liberal interdependent states by dampening renationalization fears (Dunay, 2013: 63), thereby creating a political environment conducive to free trade and open economy. This will, in turn, increase the volume of American export to those countries, meaning both the strengthening the U.S. economy and the globalization of world economy. This is crucial because American grand strategy of primacy must acknowledge that the economic, political, as well as security interests of the U.S. lie in a united global economic system. As the former U.S. president Bill Clinton argued in 1997, the U.S. should extend the zone of “open trading system”, because for the U.S., “security is tied to the stake other nations have in the prosperity of staying free and open and working with others, not working against them” (quoted in Mearsheimer, 2001: 9). The U.S. has the biggest share in the world trade, gaining significantly from both exports and imports. This makes it the mostly benefitting country from economic openness, thus making regionalism and trade protectionism serious threats to those interests (Gilpin, 2000: 347). Therefore, the preservation of an open global economy is a highly important American national interest.

Primacists further argue democracy promotion is of concomitant to these efforts. Proponents of American democracy promotion is largely informed by the democratic peace theory, a liberal approach to international security, whose basic assumption is the rare occurrence of war among democratic states. Democratic peace thesis suggests the aggressive nature of authoritarian leaders and totalitarian regimes increases the possibility of war. It further argues liberal states have established a pacific union among each other (Doyle, 1986b). Enhancing the borders of this pacific

union thus increases the prospects for global peace. Therefore, primacists believe the necessity of both transforming authoritarian regimes into democracies and implanting democracy in failed states¹⁸. Because failed states in particular, could cause enormous problems. They could host grand terrorist attacks against U.S. homeland or host some hostile groups that can acquire weapons of mass destruction and use against the U.S, produce tides of migrants, threaten the lives of Americans overseas and reduce trade with the West (Van Evera, 1990: 31). It is important to note that both primacists do not adopt liberalist view of international relations. They simply believe no superpower has existed by following the dictates of the balance of power alone. However, primacists suggest this by relying on the American military supremacy serving to prevent the rise of a peer competitor and the return of great power rivalry. For them, dictates of simple realpolitik require the spread of democracy, especially to those states that crucially affect the U.S. interests (Art, 2004: 71).

This discussion has so far made it clear that, although primacy is a position contending the maintenance of overwhelming American power, in accordance with the hegemonic neorealist theory, it considers this power for remaining committed to the liberal internationalist principles. Posen and Ross (1996/1997: 34) implicitly suggest that for primacists, liberalism, and realism are mutually constitutive at this point: the U.S. must use its preponderant material power to promote free trade, spread of democracy and the rule of international law in the system. In turn, these liberal tenets will provide obstacles to the emergence of new aspiring hegemons and to the return of great power rivalry. Layne (1997: 98) calls this relationship a 'security/interdependence nexus,' which is inherent in primacist accounts. For primacists, the security/interdependence nexus basically means that, in order to be able to promote economic interdependence, from which the U.S. benefits most, the American extended deterrence strategy must be maintained, and even expanded if possible. This extended deterrence includes dissuading the rise of other hegemonic forces, defending America's allies' interests against hostile powers, and preventing disputes among its allies from becoming a violent action against each other. It is

¹⁸ Max Weber (quoted in Dunne and Schmidt, 2011: 93) defines state as "the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory." The concept of 'failed states' has been developed to denote the states that fail to meet with this criterion. In international relations, they are notorious for being a source of instability.

important to note that for primacists causal arrow runs from security towards interdependence, unlike commercial liberals, who defend interdependence as the precursor of peace and security. Accordingly, it is peace, which in practice requires the existence of the international security framework the U.S. has been maintaining, that makes economic interdependence possible. Joseph Nye (1995: 91) argues:

Political order is not sufficient to explain economic prosperity, but it is necessary. Analysts who ignore the importance of this political order are like people who forget the importance of the oxygen they breathe. Security is like oxygen-you tend not to notice it until you begin to lose it, but once that occurs there is nothing else that you will think about.

There are instruments for maintaining the international order and ensuring status quo. Primacists think American military power projected worldwide produces favourable conditions for American products in global trade. Therefore, the U.S. should expand its alliance network. Art argues that, “America’s military alliances help keep the barriers to American goods, services, and investment lower than they might otherwise be” (Art, 2004: 217). Accordingly, the U.S. should extend its military protection to states from which it can win government contracts and wage war if necessary to gain favoured economic treatments. Because economic relations between states are mostly determined by political and security considerations of the states. Although the effects of globalization are significant, great powers do not leave the course of their vital interests such as the distribution of wealth, industry, and power, to the consequences of the interplay of global market forces (Art, 2004: 219-220; Gilpin, 2000: 50-51). For this reason, primacists see projecting military power as the best way to advance U.S.’ economic interests. For them, the example of Japan is illuminating at this point. They argue that the reason for Japan to not to sign on any regional economic arrangement disfavours American goods is that the U.S. has successfully used its security leverage over Japan to make sure that its trade with that country couldn’t be adversely affected. As a further example, Gilpin (2000: 349) suggests major U.S. military presence in Europe prevents the EU to discriminate against American exports and investment.

As noted, the U.S. military power is essential for this system to operate smoothly. It sets the rules of the game and punishes who resist them. Proponents of primacy contend that U.S. primacy discourages security competition among other states and thus creates proper conditions for global trade (Preble, 2019). Other states

benefit from these security and economic orders and therefore do not want to undermine them. Thus, primacists believe that preponderant U.S. power makes the world safer and more prosper. They hold that allowing other states to defend themselves is far too dangerous. If they fail, it will require American interventions at a later date under less favorable circumstances. If they succeed too well, it will unleash an arms race and even nuclear proliferation. Primacists suggest that lessons of history have taught that the initial U.S. indifference towards two world wars made things only worse. They speculate if Germany had recognized the possibility of U.S. intervention to stop its expansion, both world wars could have been prevented (Van Evera, 1990: 9). Since the U.S. eventually felt obliged to intervene at later dates under less favorable conditions, it suffered more in terms of both economic and human lives losses. Therefore, as Samuel Huntington (1993: 83) contends, the lack of U.S. primacy will result in increased violence, contagious disorder and economic recession. Accordingly, U.S. primacy has utmost importance in terms of global security and prosperity.

Primacists do not predict any change in the structure of international system for the foreseeable future. U.S. leaders have not permitted the vanishing bipolarity after the Cold War to precede the establishment of multipolar system. Accordingly, unipolarity is the best configuration of power in the international system. Primacists believe that balancing against the U.S. is highly unlikely. American primacy is expected to meet with global support rather than opposition. Because the U.S. is a benign hegemon (Posen and Ross, 1996/1997: 33). Moreover, the power gap between the U.S. and all other states is so huge that it makes any balancing effort inoperative. Its share of GDP is sufficient to sustain primacy. Its mastery of most advanced military technologies, especially of intelligence and command and control capabilities, ensure its leading position among other states (Posen and Ross, 1996/1997: 35). U.S.' accumulation of the overwhelming amount of material power has negated the 'constraining effects of the systemic properties,' that refer to the key tenet of the balance of power theory which is at the centre of the neorealist analyses (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2008: 3).

Central to these constraining effects of systemic properties is the great power war, according to primacists. War among the great powers is a serious potential threat

to international system. Thus, primacists focus on handling relations among present and potential great powers. They also think rise of a peer competitor to the U.S. is the biggest threat directly affecting American security. Primacists suggests two main reasons: first, the new rising powers could aspire to become hegemon, thereby could pose serious threat to U.S. security. Second, the emergence of new power centres is considered geopolitically destabilizing. Possible renationalization of Japan and Germany for example, could trigger a new security dilemma, dormant in the Cold War period. The mutual distrust generated by this security dilemma would make cooperation more difficult and pose a serious threat to security/interdependence nexus discussed above (Layne, 1997: 95). Therefore, primacists hold that the U.S.' mission is twofold: preserving the peace among great powers by providing its close allies' security as in the case of Germany and Japan, and maintaining U.S. primacy by militarily, politically, and economically outdistancing any global challenger (Posen and Ross, 1996/1997: 32). The second component of this strategy calls for the employment of a revived policy of 'containment,' targeted specifically to Russia and China. This new containment requires retaining U.S. supremacy in military, political and economic domains in order to conduct a fierce global security competition (Posen and Ross, 1996/1997: 36). Even when the U.S. recognizes the legitimacy of regional spheres of influence of other great powers, it is "to be the global hegemon of the regional hegemon, the boss of all the bosses" (Kurth, 1996: 19).

In this respect, primacists identifies three core regions which are vital for the U.S. security interests: the Europe, East Asia and the Persian Gulf. The Europe and East Asia is crucial in terms of security/interdependence nexus because both are the home of developed industrial nations which basically lay the foundation of liberal international order. They are also the regions where a possible future great power war could occur. The Persian Gulf is crucial because of its oil reserves. However, primacists do not restrict American interests to these regions. The U.S., accordingly, must also take into account the periphery, because political instability there could easily spillover to the core regions (Layne, 1997: 94-95). Turmoil in the periphery could also jeopardize the international stability in a second way. In an open global economy, particular spheres in the periphery have the economic potential to affect the policies in the core (Kurth, 1996: 19). These factors could prompt the U.S.' allies to

answer independently the threats spreading from the periphery for recovering stability. This could lead those allies to assume their leadership by acting strategically independent, which could result in the overturn of the established economic and political order. For example, Baltic states and Ukraine are peripheral for the U.S. security interests. However, primacists and some U.S. policymakers argue that the strategy of primacy envisions a pro-active U.S. stand in these regions. Because, in order to prevent its European allies to act on their behalf and simply maintain its credibility, the U.S. cannot ignore the possible implications of Russian aggression towards those states (Layne, 1997: 106). The same logic was also employed to justify the U.S. intervention in Bosnia, that instability in this peripheral region could spillover the core of the European continent and threaten the international security.

To sum up, primacy is a grand strategy emphasizing the American military, political and economic supremacy. It specifically utilizes military power in order for the U.S. to remain the most influential actor in the international system. It is a pro-active, interventionist, unilateralist, and transformational strategy (Art, 2004: 87). It utilizes U.S. military power to affect the transformation towards an international system maintaining and ensuring the U.S.' superior position. It allows U.S. to impose its dictates on international politics. It is not surprising then primacists believe rising of a peer competitor would be the gravest threat to U.S. security and national interests. Informed by this threat perception, prospects for a preventive war against China are sometimes discussed among scholars. It might seem primacist arguments are too preoccupied with economic factors. This is so because primacists believe there is no state in the current international system that is powerful enough to pose a serious threat to American security. Therefore, in this favorable international environment, they look for ways to expand American national interests as much as possible.

2.3.2. U.S. Decline

Some other scholars, chief among them are Christopher Layne (1993; 1997; 2006; 2012), Robert J. Art (1991; 2004), John J. Mearsheimer (1990; 1998; 2001; 2019) and Barry Posen (2014), presaged U.S. decline in the unipolar world. Declinist position is also grounded in the international relations theory, it is based on the key

logic of balance of power theory. Accordingly, a preponderant power always creates a counterforce. Threatened by the unequalled concentration of power, weaker states tend to balance against preponderant power, thus re-establishing an overall systemic balance of power. According to declinist position, which is a part of structural realism, great powers' common security interests are subjected to concerns of who gains more and who pays less – relative gains.

At this point, Layne (1997) points out a dual contradiction in the causal logic of security/interdependence nexus, defended by primacists. Firstly, in order to enlarge to zone of interdependent states, the U.S. has expanded the scope of its security insurances and alliance commitments worldwide. The economic interdependence has increased subsequently, but enlargement of its security commitments makes the U.S. more susceptible to instability and violence emanating both from the core and periphery. Therefore, increasing the economic interdependence has both brought the increased risk of protracted U.S. engagement in 'wars of choice' and a gradual decline in its relative power. Layne (1997: 109) further argues, maintaining the military supremacy of the U.S. as to ensure its position in the system as a predominant power requires a strong economic commitment. However, this commitment in time degrades its economic capacity. Since a robust military power depends on a solid economic background, the U.S. won't be able to sustain its hegemonic position because of its declining relative economic power.

Thus, declinists see American power preponderance as a fleeting historical moment. According to them, new centres of power will inevitably rise as a key tenet of traditional balance of power logic (Layne, 2006; Preble, 2019). Declinists anticipate that other major powers would try to balance against the U.S. as the only superpower. Pointing out the long historical record, they argued that failure is the fate of hegemons because of 'imperial overstretch'¹⁹. All the hegemonic empires of the past were defeated either by the resistance of countervailing coalitions and or the result of their

¹⁹ This notion is frequently employed by Paul Kennedy in his work 'The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers' (1987). He (1987: 515) defines it as an awkward and enduring situation to which superpowers historically have to face when the sum total of their global interests and commitments exceeds their material capability to defend all of them simultaneously. Practical implication of this argument for the U.S. in the current era is that: heavy investment in military forces may bring greater security in short term, but it will erode economic competitiveness of the country in the long term, thereby causing the U.S. to feel less secure.

own strategic overstretch. In a unipolar world, declinists believe, the U.S. will not be immune from these counterproductive forces of balancing act (Art, 1991: 10; Layne et. al., 2012: 412; Lieber, 2012: 29). According to Art (2004: 1-2), in at most three decades, U.S.' considerable superiority over other states will have significantly diminished. Its ability to shape the international developments is at its peak now, therefore its grand strategy must aim to "enhance the chances that, after America's preeminence passes, the next international era will be congenial to American interests" (Art, 2004: 1). Therefore, declinists suggest the U.S. grand strategy should either be offshore-balancing or selective engagement.

The findings of offshore-balancing are mostly irrelevant for this study. However, highlighting the basic assumptions of selective engagement can be informative at this point. Selective engagement is a grand strategy prescribed for the U.S. after the Cold War. Robert Art and Stephen Van Evera are the two prominent advocates of this grand strategy. Selective engagement is mainly informed by the traditional balance of power realism and considers the predictability and stability in great powers' affairs as the highest priority (Posen and Ross, 1996/1997: 17). In this respect, Russia, China, the EU and Japan matter most for American security, because a potential conflict among these powers could bring enormous military and industrial capabilities into play, which would upset the balance of power and endanger international security order. Therefore, selective engagers argue that the U.S. must maintain its peacetime military presence in these core regions (Art, 2004: 8), which are consequential for the polarity of the international system. In this context, Art (2004) calls selective engagement as a hedging²⁰ strategy, advocating a forward-defence posture in core regions.

Therefore, the U.S. military commitments abroad should be directed to the purpose of preventing these great powers from going to war with one another. Selective engagement expects that balance of power will ultimately prevail in international system. However, selective engagers suspect that balancing may be belated, political leaders may miscalculate, misperception may exist, and deterrence could lose its credibility. As Art (2004: 213) suggests, "great-power peace should be

²⁰ Hedging means protecting oneself against a possible loss by creating a range of alternatives beforehand to choose in case of failure in order to minimize its negative effects.

over-determined, not left to chance.” Subsequently, they suggest that if there is a state assuming leadership in the international system, balancing will occur earlier and more easily (Posen and Ross, 1996/1997: 18). In this context, selective engagement adopts a middle course between ‘not doing enough’ and ‘doing too much’ (Art, 2004: 9). It ranks American national interests according to their importance and gives a roadmap for using military power based on this ranking. They want the U.S. to refrain from imperial overstretch. Taking economic component into account, they argue the U.S. should militarily invest only in its highly important interests. Within this context, they think the idea of democracy promotion is ill-advised.

Table 3: Competing Grand Strategy Visions

	Offshore Balancing	Selective Engagement	Primacy
Analytical Anchor	Offensive Realism	Traditional Balance of Power Theory	Hegemonic Stability / Unilateralism
Priority in International Politics	Avoiding entanglement in the affairs of others	Peace among the major power	Avoiding the rise of a peer competitor
Preferred World Order	Distant balance of power	Balance of power	Hegemony
Conception Of National Interest	Narrow	Restricted	Broad
NATO	Withdraw	Maintain	Expand

Source: Compiled by the author.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: THE ROLE OF NATO IN AMERICAN UNIPOLARITY AND RUSSIA-NATO RELATIONS IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA

The previous chapter has emphasized the role of alliances in unipolarity, and the three distinct political doctrine envisioned for the post-Cold War U.S. grand strategy – primacy, selective engagement, and offshore balancing. This chapter argues that all the U.S. presidents after the Cold War employed policies that emphasizing the U.S. primacy. Since the early 1990s, many of the essentials of American foreign policy have remained the same. Every president emphasized the primacy of American power through initiatives that have been replicated across administrations. Since the end of the Cold War, the common assumptions of the U.S. grand strategy have been as following: hegemonic systems are peaceful and stable, U.S. leadership is indispensable in the current hegemonic system, and multipolar systems are unstable and war-prone. Therefore, the U.S. has opposed to reversion of international system to multipolarity by preserving U.S.' superior military capabilities, deterring the rise of potential peer-competitors maintaining and extending U.S. alliances and forward military deployments as a source of stability in key regions of the world, encouraging the spread of democracy, steering globalization and using military force to address the threats to the international system and U.S. interests (Brands and Feaver, 2016/2017: 95; Löfflmann, 2020: 592).

Not every policy choice, however, has been fully coherent with the theoretical assumptions that primacist scholars made. Some presidents favoured multilateralism for example, while others pursued unilateral strategies. Still, unipolarity has been considered by successive American administrations as an existential fact, and maintaining it has been the ultimate aim of U.S. grand strategy (Löfflmann, 2020: 592). In this context, the chapter will examine the role of NATO in American primacy after the Cold War until Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. Subsequently, it will discuss how the U.S. politics of NATO has generated a conflictual relationship with Russia during this period.

It is not only the sheer preponderance of U.S.' material capabilities that defines the basic structure of the international system after the Cold War, its hegemonic aspirations and willingness to assume global leadership role have also significant effects in international politics. By establishing its hegemony, the U.S. has aimed to maintain favorable systemic conditions that emerged by the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Acknowledging that alliances are the best means for providing the ground for legitimate action and translating material power into preferential outcomes, U.S. leaders have prioritized NATO. Thanks to NATO enlargement, the U.S. has maintained the large quantity of forward deployed military personnel for securing stability in Europe, created an intricate network of bases in strategic regions across Europe, and established an infrastructure that could enable effective projection of its power across the globe.

The U.S.' adherence to NATO allies in the post-Cold War era is consistent with the findings of the previous chapter. The systematic evidence has demonstrated that alliances with unequal distribution of power (asymmetric alliances) tend to be more durable (Morrow, 1991). This is because, firstly, for the unipole, alliances can be useful mechanisms especially in employing preventive strategies against the emergence of a regional hegemon, that could disrupt the existing global distribution of power. Because, as discussed, the unipole's unmatched material capabilities do not always produce the desired outcomes. Even the most powerful state in the system is not able to project its power effectively in every part of the globe for coping such a security threat. Secondly, as neorealism acknowledges, international institutions serve primarily to national interests of powerful states (Waltz, 2002: 45). Alliances are useful instruments for the unipolar power to enlarge its control over the international system. It provides security to its allies. In exchange, it increases its autonomy, exerts influence on the policies of its allies and gains strategic access to critical locations in their territories. As one senior U.S. foreign policy official wrote: "NATO provides a vehicle for the application of American power and vision to the security order in Europe." (quoted in Waltz, 2002: 44-45).

After the end of the Cold War, NATO has grown to involve 31 member states in total – from which had been 16 during the last decade of the Cold War. Expansion of the Alliance has been a cornerstone of both U.S.' liberal vision and its worldwide

primacy. In this sense, NATO enlargement has also become a poster child for security/interdependence nexus which deeply rooted in the American foreign policy. As a national security strategy document during the Clinton era addressed in 1996, “the more that democracy and political and economic liberalization take hold in the world, particularly in countries of strategic importance to us, the safer our nation is likely to be” (quoted in Kay, 2020: 7). On the other hand, some scholars and policymakers both in the West and Russia, pointed out the perils of NATO enlargement in terms of its confrontational implications against Russia. They agreed on the role of NATO enlargement in Russia’s violent actions against Georgia in 2008, in Crimea in 2014 and in Ukraine in 2022. Former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates for example, commented in 2014 that “NATO expansion was a political act, not a carefully considered military commitment, thus undermining the purpose of the alliance, and recklessly ignoring what the Russians considered their own vital interests” (quoted in Kay, 2020: 8). Moreover, the Russian leaders have consistently perceived NATO enlargement as a geopolitical threat to Russian security interests. Putin for example, admitted in April 2014 that Russia’s fear of Ukrainian membership of NATO set the stage for Russia’s annexation of Crimea (Wolff, 2015: 1103).

Therefore, for the purpose of this study, examining the process of NATO enlargement in the post-Cold War era is crucial basically for three reasons. First, this process has practical implications for the current European and international security and the structure of the system. Second, the process has significantly exacerbated Russia’s discontent with U.S. hegemony and unipolarity. Third, relatedly, it has incited Russia’s aggression and military intervention in the post-Soviet area. In this context, this chapter argues that the overall course of the Russia-NATO relations has been structurally determined since the end of the Cold War. The systemic imperatives remained as the main determinant of both sides’ policies toward each other.

After the collapse of the U.S.S.R., unchecked material capabilities of the U.S., alongside the significant increase in its relative power against Russia, provided an operational background for the U.S. to pursue its own unrestricted political agenda in the international system. In this context, NATO enlargement became the cornerstone of the U.S. grand strategy of primacy, which is advocating to maintain and strengthen U.S. supremacy in the international system by obstructing the emergence of rival great

powers. The strong commitment of U.S. policymakers to NATO enlargement was the byproduct of their recognition that the U.S. was the only superpower in the system and its primacy would last indefinitely (Shiffrinson, 2023: 107/112). Seeing NATO as a vehicle through which the political efforts of enhancing U.S.' influence in the Europe and the process of projecting its military power could be institutionalized and formalized, the U.S. policymakers sought to extend the Alliance's borders both territorially and ideologically.

Similarly, two main elements that has informed Russia's policy towards NATO after the Cold War have also been shaped by structural determinants. The first component consists of the ongoing Russian efforts to acquire a special status in its relations with NATO. These efforts have been aiming to assure Russia's superiority over other non-member states, in its negotiations with NATO (Smith, 2010: 100). By these efforts, Russian leaders hoped to get NATO's recognition of Russia's great power status, which would have broader systemic implications in the area of international politics. In this context, for Russian leaders, to a certain degree, U.S. involvement in European security affairs is acceptable, even desirable in some cases, but its primacy is not (Sushentsov and Wohlforth, 2020: 436). They saw U.S. military presence in the continent, within limited boundaries, as a guarantor of the stability and the order, rules of which, however, should not serve only to U.S. interests but instead had to be decided multilaterally.

The second element is the persistent Russian opposition to NATO enlargement. Despite some brief periods of tolerance, conventional wisdom in Russia suggests that NATO enlargement poses significant security threats to their country. According to this logic, NATO represents the institutionalization of U.S. hegemony in Europe, therefore, NATO enlargement is a 'zero-sum game', challenging the Russia's great power position. Moreover, Russian policymakers think that NATO has not truly transformed from a military enterprise into a political organization, thus the extension of its zone of commitment means cutting off Russia from strategically important areas. Opting for enlargement, NATO leaders try to redraw the dividing lines of Europe closer to Russia's border and reinvigorate the confrontational logic of the bipolar era. In this sense, some scholars define the last two decade characterized by the growing

tension between NATO and Russia as ‘the second Cold War’ (Mankoff, 2009; Sakwa, 2017).

Informed by this theoretical framework emphasizing the role of the structural factors, the remainder of this chapter consists of two parts. The first section analyses the NATO enlargement debate in the 1990s, and then focuses on how enduring concepts of this debate affected the dynamics of the consecutive rounds of NATO enlargement in the new millennium. In this context, it portrays the U.S. unipolar policies between 1991 and 2014 and discusses their consequences for the European security. The analysis of each U.S. administrations’ policies demonstrates the enduring nature of unipolarity and American primacy in the U.S. grand strategy. The second part of the chapter deals with the Russia’s security policies and Russia-NATO relations during the same period. It aims to contextualise the foreign policy courses and decisions taken by the Russian leaders that led to Russia-Ukraine War. The argument of this study is that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 is the culmination of the series of events that began with the Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014, which includes, but not limited to, Russia’s support to the separatists in Donbas region, following economic sanctions, increasing Western engagement in the Eastern and Southeastern Europe, and EU’s and NATO’s inconsistent and destabilizing approach toward the region. This ongoing process as a whole, which is sometimes called as the ‘crisis in Ukraine,’ is the topic of the next chapter. Therefore, this chapter will only focus on the developments before 2014. In the first section, it covers George H. W. Bush, Clinton, and George W. Bush eras, plus the first half of the Obama administration. The analysis in the second section involves the developments before 2012; the date which, thanks to Putin’s return to Russian presidency, symbolizes the beginning of a new assertive era in Russian foreign policy.

Both in the first and second part, the factors pushing U.S. leaders to initiate NATO enlargement and Russia’s responses to the U.S. policies during the first decade of the post-Cold War era are especially discussed at length, because the issues that currently derails NATO-Russia relations and the conditions leading to Russian military intervention in its near abroad have their root causes in political and military decisions taken in this era. Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, followed by Sweden and Finland’s bids for NATO membership has demonstrated that the U.S.

decision to enlarge NATO after the Cold War generated significant effects which are continuing today, and NATO is still occupied with dealing the consequences of these effects of enlargement decision (Moller, 2023: 460). Overall, decisions and policies of both sides highlighted in this chapter are crucial for understanding both Russia's military actions in Ukraine and the evolving character of European security environment.

3.1. NATO ENLARGEMENT UNDER AMERICAN UNIPOLARITY (1991-2014)

After the Berlin Wall collapsed and fears of Soviet military intervention to Eastern Europe ceased to be a source of concern for Western allies, a fierce national security debate, revolving around the possible NATO expansion, was sparked in the U.S.²¹ This debate was not only regarding extending the security guarantees to the states in Central and Eastern Europe, but had also implications on the U.S.' global vision, its position and grand strategy in the emerging international order, its relations with Russia, and NATO's future aim after the communist threat was gone. The debate was shaped by the ideas on U.S. foreign policy goals in terms of whether it would pursue an internationalist path or retreat into isolationism and unilateralism. Supporters of NATO enlargement proposed three main arguments. First, a firm U.S. commitment to Eastern Europe would deter any revived Russian aggression in the future. This view theoretically hinges on the primacists' arguments about 'extended deterrence' and 'containment'. Locking peace in this region provided by U.S. extended deterrence would allow the U.S. to focus on new challenges in global scale. The Soviet collapse offered NATO allies momentous political and military advantages. And according to this argument, the Western leaders should transform these short-term advantages into long-lasting political gains, by formalizing them while drafting the new security system (Asmus, 2002: 32).

²¹ The enlargement debate is of enduring relevance. As of 2020, this debate was still on the agenda of some academic circles, as the academic journal *International Politics* devoted a full issue to discuss the question of NATO enlargement (see Vol. 57: 3). After Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, this academic debate again gained momentum by Finland's and Sweden's bid for membership. See, for example, Black et. al., 2024.

Second, NATO enlargement would decrease the possibility of conflict among its members. It would alleviate the concerns resulting from security dilemma, and force member states to respect contemporary state borders and accept status quo (Reiter, 2001: 41). Moreover, enlargement would ensure that post-communist states of the Eastern Europe would not seek to establish independent alliances of their own, which would destabilize the region and complicate security relations. This argument is based on the 'reassurance' factor, emphasizing the importance of preventing renationalization of defence policies in the Europe, which is theoretically discussed by Art (2004). The third argument of the supporters of NATO enlargement has been about the democratization process in the Eastern Europe. Since they believe both democratic states are unlikely to fight each other, and NATO enlargement would help to spread of democratization, they argued enlargement would stabilize the region (Reiter, 2001: 41).

This third argument draw theoretically on democratic peace thesis. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Doyle (1999: 41) discusses 'collective unipolarity' of liberal states in the current era. In a very similar manner, Timothy Andrews Sayle (2019: 9) is mentioning 'Pax Atlantica', institutionalized through NATO, existence and enlargement of which have provided peace and stability, and allowed member states to engage in non-security issues in a broader part of the world. Supporters further argued that enlargement and ensuing democratization would help to overcome Europe's Cold War divide. NATO enlargement would erase, the former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said, "the line drawn in Europe by Stalin's bloody boot" (quoted in Asmus, 2002: xxviii).

On the contrary, critics of enlargement suggested that, first, enlargement would further polarize Europe and alienate Russia. Excluding Russia, according to critics, would increase Russian incentives to balance against NATO and the U.S. The opponents of the enlargement maintained that the new international order should resemble to the Vienna Settlement of 1815, not to the Versailles Settlement of 1919, which excluded and alienated a great power, thus caused the outbreak of a world war (Sushentsov and Wohllforth, 2020: 432). They further worried that the logic of the security dilemma could again come into play. Accordingly, increasing the security of the Eastern European states would probably negatively affect Russia's perceived

security and would result in security competition. While Russia posed no threat at the time when the argument was made, critics contended that with NATO enlargement, Russia's perception of insecurity would increase, and it would act defensively. Consequently, Russia would respond NATO enlargement with policy measures that otherwise it would not have employed (Ball, 1998: 45-46). By the same token, Mearsheimer (2014) argued NATO expansion was the root cause of Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014.

Secondly, critics argued that there was no threat of revived Russian aggression directed toward the Eastern Europe. There were no clues indicating that Russia was inclined to reestablish the Soviet mandate in the region by use of force. In the absence of hostile Russian intentions, critics believed enlargement could result in a new Cold War, by derailing Russia-West security relations, compelling Russia to refrain from cooperation on security issues such as nuclear arms control and peacekeeping in the Balkans. Finally, critics argued that none of the NATO candidates had sizable armies or economies, therefore they could exert no effect on maintaining a favorable balance of power for the U.S. For this reason, critics expressed concern about the economic costs of enlargement, that would complicate the decision-making process by diluting the political coherence into alliance unnecessarily, which could result in decrease in its ability to project military power (Reiter, 2001: 42; Asmus, 2002: xxv; Sloan, 2008: 74). Therefore, this section will firstly elaborate on in which ways these opposing arguments informed the policymaking during the successive U.S. administrations and defined the overall context of Russia-U.S. relations until 2014. The policies of Trump and Biden administrations will be discussed in the next chapter. The second section of this chapter will show how Russian leadership corresponded with the specific U.S. policy choices on the issue and examine the process during which the Russian reactions to U.S. unilateral policies and the enlargement of NATO evolved over time.

3.1.1. George H. W. Bush Era (1989-1993)

Establishment of the main elements of the post-Cold War European security structure has taken place during George W. H. Bush's presidency. Especially between December 1989 and December 1991, major Western allies, conferred with their Soviet

counterparts, has laid the foundation of the current international order. Preservation and transformation of NATO was the cornerstone of the concerted Western efforts. It met with no resistance from the Soviet side thanks to assurances Western leaders offered the Soviets regarding the new form NATO would take and the future role it would play in Europe's security.

Dismantling of bipolar international system marked the beginning of a problem of integrating Germany and the Soviet Union into a new Euro-Atlantic security order; an order whose architectures had to take into account the legitimate interests of these two states, both of which had managed through a substantial transformation process in the end of which they have become new states (Hill, 2018: 15). According to the common wisdom, from the very beginning, NATO's main function was not only deterring Soviet threat, but also embedding Germany in the Western system economically, politically and militarily. This situation is sometimes referred as 'double containment'. As then-Senator Joseph Biden remarked in NATO enlargement hearings in 1997, "it was not merely to contain Russia, it was to harness Germany; it was to bring stability in Europe" (quoted in Trachtenberg, 2020: Appendix III: 2). Therefore, throughout the Cold War, thanks to the incorporation of Germany into its structure, NATO had been a source of stability from which Soviets had benefitted as well. U.S. officials tried to convince Soviets that in the post-Cold War period, NATO could play the same role.

This was the logic underlying the diplomatic efforts of the U.S. officials during the negotiations over German reunification while they were trying to convince their Soviet interlocutors to the benefits of unified Germany remaining as a part of NATO. Therefore, in the summer and autumn of 1990, a "cascade of assurances" (Savranskaya and Blanton, quoted in Trachtenberg, 2020: 2) have been offered by Western leaders who aimed to give the impression of a policy agenda for accommodating Russian concerns was being pursued. Beyond the assurances against NATO enlargement, U.S. policymakers promised Soviets that they would not be excluded from the post-Cold War security structures, they would not be strategically isolated, and the U.S. and Western allies would not exploit existing Soviet fragility (Ponsard, 2007: 92; Shifrinson, 2016: 28). Relying on these assurances, Soviets began to withdraw their troops from the Central and Eastern Europe.

Thus, in the European political landscape of 1990, while the Soviet influence in the region was gradually declining, at some point it became clear that the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact was a foregone conclusion. Allied leaders worried that ensuing power vacuum would lead both Germany and the U.S.S.R. to compete relentlessly for influence in the region, that could relapse the cyclical pattern that haunted European political landscape from 1870 to 1945 (Sayle, 2019: 224). Moreover, the leaders in the Central and Eastern European states had already begun to contemplate about the future security and political orientation of their country, including NATO membership (Trachtenberg, 2020: 9/21). In the midst of these dramatic political and systemic changes, the possibility that the major European powers could establish a new security order in the Central and Eastern Europe by ruling out U.S. involvement generated a great amount of concern among the U.S. politicians. Given this political background, Baker asked Gorbachev in a meeting in February 1990:

Supposing unification takes place, what would you prefer: a united Germany outside of NATO, absolutely independent and without American troops; or a united Germany keeping its connections with NATO, but with the guarantee that NATO's jurisprudence or troops will not spread east of the present boundary?

Gorbachev: ... It goes without saying that a broadening of the NATO zone is not acceptable.

Baker: We agree with that.

Gorbachev: It is quite possible that... the presence of American troops can play a containing role... Much in what you have said appears to be realistic (quoted in Trachtenberg, 2020: 18).

The scope of assurances was further confirmed when West Germany's Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, in a joint press conference with Baker on February 2, told the reporters that he and Baker "were in full agreement that there is no intention to extend the NATO area of defense and the security toward the East... this holds true not only for German Democratic Republic, which we have no intention of simply incorporating, but that holds true for all the other Eastern countries" (quoted in Trachtenberg, 2020: 24). Considering the unravelling of the Warsaw Pact, it is clear that these assurances were meant to apply to the entire Warsaw Pact area. As Genscher has further confirmed in that year, "an expansion of NATO territory to the East, in other words, closer to the borders of the Soviet Union, will not happen" (quoted in Trachtenberg, 2020: 13).

Western leaders' aim in giving these assurances were clearly to make it easier for the Soviets to accept the Western terms on the reunification of Germany. Those assurances have been a permanent part of discussions regarding U.S. grand strategy, international relations theory, and the post-Cold War order. From neorealist perspective, although the U.S. ideas of the post-Cold War order expressed during negotiations with the Soviets were ostensibly inclusive and cooperative in design, in fact U.S. politicians were working on building the key pillars of the new international system dominated by the U.S (Shiffrinson, 2016: 11). U.S. policymakers of Bush era conceived NATO's future in the Europe and its relations with Russia in the context of realpolitik. As a commission under Bush administration led by Robert Gates put it in February 1992, "we want the Alliance to have the option of extending security guarantees to the new democracies if faced with Russian aggrandizement" (quoted in Shiffrinson, 2020: 18). This statement shows that realpolitik was the guiding principle of the Bush administration's NATO policies. In this context, Bush was eager to maintain NATO as an instrument for the U.S. military power projection, aimed to hedge against resurgent Russia (Shiffrinson, 2020: 26).

Two prominent national security officials in his administration, Scowcroft and Gates claimed that historically, Russia has always been anxious to extend its control and influence beyond its borders. In this sense, they believed, Soviet policy had been a continuation of czarist policy. Accordingly, Gorbachev's moderate policies couldn't have reversed this trend, and even if the Cold War ended, Russia would again try to exert its influence in the region. They point out the fact that U.S.S.R.'s military forces had not evaporated after the Cold War's end. Even with negotiated troop reductions, Russian army was still the dominant military power in the Eurasia, retaining the capability of inflicting terrible damages on Europe (Sayle, 2019: 218-219). In this political background, Bush decided to maintain American military deployment, including nuclear weapons, in the Europe (Sayle, 2019: 218).

Maintaining American leadership was yet another grand strategic reason for Bush administration to continue and extend NATO's functions. Officials in the Bush administration acknowledged that international system detests power vacuums. They were aware that diminishing Soviet influence had caused a systemic gap in Eastern Europe. NATO was believed to be the most effective tool for confronting uncertainty

and instability, since there has been a consensus on preserving NATO ensures continuing American leadership. By increasing its influence in the region, NATO was to help to institutionalize the security relations among states. In this context, Bush said in February 1990 that NATO was, at the time of the saying, “more important than ever” (quoted in Sayle, 2019: 217).

Beyond security affairs, it would also help to manage changing relations between West and East in the course of an immense systemic change in international politics. Bush believed a strong NATO presence in the Central Europe would provide required stability and conditionality to encourage transition of the states in the region to democracy and market economy (Hill, 2018: 111). Allied leaders also concur with Bush on the idea that American leadership is essential in the continent, and NATO is the best instrument to provide it (Art 2004: 140-141). Allied leaders declared at NATO’s London Summit (July 1990) that international system was transforming and necessity of ‘NATO to carry on and adapt’ was obvious in the given political environment. This led Scowcroft to write that NATO was transformed into “a political instrument of European stabilization rather than one of military confrontation” (quoted in Sayle, 2019: 230). In this context, NATO enlargement was considered as an undertaking to create not only a single security order, but also a single normative order, in which democratic principles and open economies could flourish (MacFarlane, 2008: 39).

In terms of American leadership, one additional motivation which led the U.S. policymakers of Bush era to contemplate about NATO enlargement was to possible problems posed by the ongoing efforts of the European Community (EC) countries to enlarge and deepen their integration, which were epitomized in Maastricht Treaty in 1992. The EC members envisioned, among other things, the creation of ‘a common security and defence policy’ as a key pillar and the articulation of this pillar into the Community’s organizational structure. Officials in the Bush administration thought that if the members of the EC could agree on to build an alternative security structure in Europe, this would undermine NATO’s role, and thus to U.S. dominance in the continent. An independent defence organization of Western European states would, as Scowcroft noted in March 1991, negatively affect the status and functionality of

NATO and reduce U.S.' leverage in European security affairs (quoted in Shiffrinson, 2020: 14).

Therefore, seeking to preclude decline of U.S. dominance in Europe, support for NATO enlargement significantly grew among American politicians. In this political context, incorporating the reunified Germany into an alliance system which U.S. leads would nullify the EC efforts. Accordingly, the U.S. should maintain its leadership in Europe by preserving and extending NATO's role. American policymakers saw NATO as primary platform for coordinating security policies with its major European allies. The U.S. aimed to use NATO leverage to work out common positions with allies on critical security issues, which, more often than not, reflects the U.S. interests. Therefore, it was a hedging strategy aiming to prevent its major allies, which could affect the global balance of power, from pursuing independent foreign policy agenda on significant international issues. That's why the Strategic Concept adopted by NATO in 1991 states that European defence identity would be coordinated with and subordinated to NATO (Hill, 2018: 65).

In this context, the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) was launched at the Rome Summit. The NACC was established to provide a basis for invigorating and structuring a liaison mechanism with the states in the Eastern Europe. It was anticipated by American and West German politicians that this liaison mission would be a first step toward their full membership (Trachtenberg, 2020: 34). Apart from the enlargement issue, Rome Summit was also critical in terms of two basic reasons. Firstly, the Strategic Concept adopted in Rome in November, presages NATO activity not only in the territories of member states, but also especially in the Southern periphery of the Alliance, in order to ensure peace and stability. In this context, it was the first sign of the Alliance's willingness to conduct out-of-area operations. Furthermore, the Strategic Concept considers NATO's security interests in global context by addressing threats like proliferation, terrorism, and disruption in the flow of vital resources; and envisions Alliance response to those threats in global scale (NATO, 1991). It can be argued that this global manifestation attempted to establish NATO's position as a global actor, serving to the U.S. interests, and affecting the polarity of the international system. Indeed, evidence of Bush administration's incentive for NATO enlargement demonstrates the wider and long-term dynamics of

the U.S.' unipolar era. According to Shiffrinson (2020: 6), emerging of this policy choice immediately after the Cold War points out the strong impulse in U.S. foreign policy circles to maintain U.S. primacy and its dominant international position.

3.1.2. Clinton Era (1993-2001)

Although the first round of enlargement has taken place when Clinton was incumbent, the issue itself was hugely controversial in the early years of his administration. The overall context of the discussion and the arguments of the opposing sides were discussed above. In the midst of these exhaustive discussions, partly as a result of the urgent need for restoring peace and stability in the Southeastern Europe, and partly as a result of the motivation of steering the course of future NATO enlargement, Clinton administration introduced the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program, officially adopted by NATO in January 1994. The basic idea of the program was associating other European states operationally with NATO. It was open to all European states as well as Russia and provided an institutional basis for the development of ties between NATO and non-members, without any formal assurance of membership (Goldgeier and McFaul, 2003: 186). NATO leaders envisioned PfP's role as to facilitate participant states' attendance in NATO's political and military branches, and to provide a consultation mechanism on security affairs. U.S. defence officials were largely supportive of the initiative since it provided a foundation upon which institutionalized security relations with the defence bureaus of the former Eastern bloc countries could be built. Since Russian cooperation was essential to ensure a durable peace and restore stability in the Balkans, U.S. military leaders hoped in particular to develop and sustain a military-to-military relationship with Russia that would include operational cooperation in the Balkans and Eastern Europe (Hill, 2018: 112/114).

For some, on the other hand, PfP was a clear indication of the Clinton administration's indecisiveness on the enlargement issue. Because the initiative was not setting a timetable or criteria for full membership of the aspirant countries. According to Warren Christopher, the U.S. Secretary of State, the main function of the PfP was to accentuate the NATO's primacy for European security in the post-Cold

War era, and developing tangible security relations with Eastern states, but not making any decision about enlargement (Asmus, 2002: 51-52). The Visegrad countries were especially disappointed, they thought PfP was a dead end, not a concrete step towards a membership. Their suspicious attitudes stemmed from their geographical proximity to Russia and their historical sense of insecurity. They were especially curious that if the West was hesitant to resist Russia when it was weak, what would happen then if Russia grew strong again (Asmus, 2002: 52).

Still, Clinton's personal desire to expand NATO was evident as early as 1994. As he baldly stated in Budapest, "we must not allow the Iron Curtain to be replaced by a veil of indifference... NATO will not automatically exclude any nation from joining" (quoted in Goldgeier and McFaul, 2003: 191). Later that month however, he stated, "I had to make sure NATO expansion didn't simply lead to a new division of Europe farther to the East" (quoted in Hill, 2018: 116). After January, therefore, Clinton administration's strategy began to take the shape of a 'dual track' policy, the aim of which was enlarging NATO while at the same time creating a new relationship between Russia and NATO based on 'win-win' (Asmus: 2002: 99; Goldgeier and McFaul, 2003: 196).

On one hand, in Warsaw in July, Clinton encouraged alliance partners to get together to discuss what would the next steps be (Goldgeier and McFaul, 2003: 187). On the other hand, he promised Russian president Boris Yeltsin in Moscow Summit in May 1995, that actual NATO enlargement would not take place before the Russian presidential election in the summer of 1996 (Hill, 2018: 132). Clearly, Clinton wanted to enlarge NATO, but his approach was going slowly and cautiously, including concomitant efforts of expanding his administration's efforts to positively engage with Russia. The first reason for such an approach was, commitment to expand NATO into Eastern Europe was a major undertaking, and a formal plan for managing the political and military particularities of this undertaking had not yet existed. Secondly, Clinton didn't want to undermine the process of democratic reform in Russia. More importantly, despite its devastated economy and shrinking military forces, Russia had remained a first-class nuclear power, possessing vast natural resources and great scientific talent. Therefore, Clinton was aware that an autocratic and dissatisfied Russia could become a considerable source of instability for Europe. For this reason,

he had to come up with a cooperative NATO-Russia relationship plan, parameters of which had to be defined within an institutional framework (Asmus, 2002: 99).

Study on NATO Enlargement, published by NATO in 1995 also highlights Russia's crucial role in European security order. It acknowledges that Russia is a key element for security and stability in Europe, and argues maintaining NATO-Russia relations in a constructive and cooperative manner is indispensable not only for these two actors, but also for all other states in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) area (NATO, 1995). The Enlargement Study states that relations with Russia must be based on reciprocity, mutual respect and confidence. On the other hand, however, document makes it clear that NATO decisions "cannot be subject to any veto or droit de regard by a non-member state, nor can the Alliance be subordinated to another European security institution" (NATO, 1995). Simply stated, it explicitly suggests both that Russian concerns could not block enlargement, and that NATO has the supremacy in Europe when it comes to high politics. By then, it became clear that Russia would be unable to disrupt decision-making process within the Alliance.

In this background, Clinton finally took a concrete step toward enlargement in September 1996, by announcing U.S. invitation to the first group of countries to become full members of NATO. In July 1997, gathering in Madrid, NATO heads of states formally invited Czechia, Poland and Hungary, whose accession process to NATO would be completed in April 1999. Meanwhile, it was a serious challenge for Clinton administration to assuage Russian concerns over enlargement. In this political background, Clinton and Yeltsin met in Helsinki in March 1997. In Helsinki, partly in exchange for his full support for Russia's integration into international institutions (epitomized by turning the G-7 into the G-8 by including Russia), Clinton gained Yeltsin's consent for enlargement (Hill, 2018: 136). In order to overcome Russia's resistance to enlargement, U.S. policymaker also gave momentum the creation of a solid framework for the relations between NATO and Russia. For establishing this solid framework, they provided a reassurance to Russia, by promising that in the territory of new members there would be no "additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces... in the current and foreseeable security environment" (NATO, 1997).

Two months later, on May 27, 1997, this framework was officially declared in Paris as the ‘Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation’. With the Founding Act, Clinton administration had finally come up with the draft of an institutional framework mentioned above, within which parameters of a cooperative NATO-Russia relationship would be agreed upon. In general, the Founding Act was the proof of the agreement reached by two sides, on the principles which would govern the relationship between Russia and soon-to-be expanded NATO. It formally reaffirmed that Russia has decided no longer to commit its foreign policy to expanding its territorial reach and West has abandoned the containment logic as a ruling principle of its policy against Russia (Mankoff, 2009: 167-168). As declared unambiguously in the document, NATO and Russia share “a commitment to build a stable, peaceful and undivided Europe, whole and free, to the benefit of all its peoples” (NATO, 1997). The Permanent Joint Council (PJC) had been created to institutionalize political efforts toward this shared vision.

At the time of signing, both sides were in high spirits. As Clinton remarked, “we are determined to create a future in which European security is not a zero-sum game—where NATO’s gain is Russia’s loss, and Russia’s strength is our alliance’s weakness. That is old thinking, these are new times” (quoted in Asmus, 2002: 210). The Founding Act successfully alleviated Moscow’s opposition to the first round of enlargement and created a framework for managing the issues which became common concern of Brussels and Moscow. On the other hand, critics pointed out the lack of legally binding obligations in the document. The Founding Act was not a legal commitment, rather, it was a bureaucratic and strategic document. Consequentially, the provisions in the document were conditioned by a vague statement of “the current and foreseeable security environment” (NATO, 1997), which dependent upon NATO member states’ interpretation. Accordingly, the allies hold the right of reconsidering the certain terms of the document if they perceived security environment would become unforeseen (Hill, 2018: 137).

Indeed, it soon happened. For Allied states, ‘erupting violence in Kosovo’ was the name of the unforeseeable security environment. Crisis in Kosovo and NATO’s subsequent intervention has proved the irrelevance of the PJC (Braun, 2008: 58; Mankoff, 2009: 168). U.S. choice to engage instability in Kosovo through NATO was

a course of action aiming to consolidate the Alliance's role in the post-Cold War European security environment. U.S. policymakers also used their country's predominant position in the organization to exert pressure on allies which were either hesitant about NATO's involvement or in disagreement with the U.S. about the operational strategies of the military intervention. Consequently, the solidarity they came to achieve and their ability to conduct an out-of-area demonstrated the NATO's relevance in the post-Cold War security order (Garey, 2020: 76). In April, this new strategic implication has manifested itself in the NATO's Washington summit, the first of which three new members (Czechia, Poland and Hungary) officially participated. Some scholars defined the process of Washington summit as the 'double enlargement' of NATO (Pouliot, 2010: 195), referring to the extension of both geographical and doctrinal context.

At geographical level, NATO expanded its borders by admitting three new members. The first round of enlargement provided significant geopolitical and ideological advantage to the Alliance. NATO incorporated a territory of 485.000 km², representing the gain of large strategic depth to the detriment of Russia (Eichler, 2021: 47). Moreover, in Washington summit, NATO published Membership Action Plans (MAP), providing invitation to the Baltic countries, Romania and Bulgaria. Thinking in terms of Walt's balance of threat theory, it ignited a dramatic alteration in the balance of security threats with Russia, by increasing the risk of direct military confrontation in Russia's western border. At operational and functional level, on the other hand, by launching an airstrike against Yugoslavia in March 1999, NATO introduced a new strategic understating that was signalling its willingness for providing security to the whole continent unilaterally, extending beyond its borders (Asmus, 2002: 19/305).

Broadly, some (Hill, 2018: 63; Michta, 2009: 369) saw this process, coinciding with the Alliance's Washington Summit in 1999, as the transformation of NATO from a collective defence organization into a collective security organization. Moreover, NATO's double enlargement at that time also had a global dimension, exceeding the continental demarcations. Both the initiative of enlargement and NATO's intervention in Kosovo were the marker of the U.S.' broadening vision of the new world order. Accordingly, NATO was to be operated globally, having repercussions on the polarity

of the international system, materializing the ‘collective unipolarity’ of the liberal democratic states. NATO’s mission against Yugoslavia has proved that NATO could act unilaterally if it needed to do so (Goldgeier and McFaul, 2003: 266; Sakwa, 2017: 89).

Thereafter, NATO would dictate the rules of the new U.S. unipolarity, and Kosovo intervention represented NATO’s first attempt to exert its new security mandate in the midst of a significant international opposition. Violating the principles of the Founding Act signed two years ago with Russia, which promised “refraining from the threat or use of force against any state, its sovereignty, territorial integrity or political independence in any manner inconsistent with the UN Charter”, and assured its “respect for sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all states and their inherent right to choose the means to ensure their own security” (NATO, 1997); NATO leaders felt free to encroach a sovereign state’s security, purely because of their discontent with the methods with which that state chose to manage its internal affair and use its sovereign rights. Therefore, post-Cold Russian-Western agreement on non-violent settlement of disputes, and their efforts to establish an inclusive security community in Europe, had undergone a breakdown process.

3.1.3. George W. Bush and Obama Eras (2001-2013)

The most salient feature of the international security environment after 9/11 was the unipole’s global democracy installation efforts, envisioning to roll over the ‘rough states’ and install friendly regimes. Within days of the attacks, the Bush announced the liberal crusade, and in the following months, the administration officials declared a coherent and compelling scheme of U.S. foreign policy. For Bush, the attacks of 9/11 provided a dominant threat and an overarching purpose that had been absent since the end of the Cold War. Moreover, Bush and his advisors believed that the U.S. could wield its superior military power not simply to defeat Al-Qaeda, but to accomplish far-reaching changes in the global security order. There was a common belief that the international order was highly malleable, and therefore the U.S. could use its extraordinary power to promote rapid and dramatic change (Brands, 2014: 164). On the other hand, some prominent figures both in Bush administration in

the U.S. and Tony Blair's cabinet in the U.K. thought that this new world order could herald the end of some old animosities and building of new bridges (Sloan, 2008: 75). In this sense, the relations with Russia, being imagined by Western leaders in more positive terms, were to be institutionally embedded in a restructured order of international security.

Notwithstanding this pragmatic approach, however, Russia-NATO relations enjoyed only a brief period of progress. Because the strategic proponents of primacy – neoconservatives – during the Bush era asserted that U.S. power could be utilized in the pursuit of liberal change in the international system. This assertion in turn relies on a series of assumptions about the operation of power and coercive force in world politics. Neoconservatives considered the U.S.' omnipotent power and leadership as an essential for an orderly and stable international system. U.S. hegemony is viewed as a prerequisite for international peace and stability (Schmidt and Williams, 2008: 195). Neoconservatives contended that the U.S. should use its military power to reshape the international order compatible with American national interests. According to neoconservatives, commitment to maintenance of unipolar international system must be at the core of the American grand strategy. Therefore, tensions arouse with Russia again when NATO finalized its second round of enlargement in 2004. Soon after it had been completed, the U.S. decided to go ahead with the deployment of anti-ballistic missile (ABM) systems in the territory of the some of its new members, which would further derail the NATO's relations with Russia (Kanet, 2010: 163).

The ground for the second round of enlargement had already been established before Bush came to power (Kanet, 2010: 161). In his final speech as the NATO Secretary General, Javier Solana declared in 1999 that "security is what we make of it" (quoted in Moore, 2007: 35). The global implication of this statement was that NATO would no longer aim only to preserve status quo. Rather, it would construct security which had begun to be perceived as a tangible entity. Although commitment to Article 5 obligations remained core of the Alliance, this new sense of obligation represented an understanding which is less state-centric and deemphasizes the non-intervention. As Solana's successor George Robertson confirmed, NATO had "evolved from a passive, reactive defence organization into one which is actively

building security” (quoted in Moore, 2008: 35). This line of thinking was consistent with Bush administration’s subsequent efforts of ‘democracy promotion.

Throughout 2000 and 2001, debates continued over which states should be admitted. The most controversial ones were Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia, since they were once a part of the Soviet Union. While major powers of the Western Europe opposed their membership, the U.S. and the Central and Eastern Europeans were the most enthusiastic ones about including the Baltic states (Hill, 2018: 200). By war on terror, U.S.’ opinion leaders believed that the U.S. was also acting on behalf of its allies. Their vision was Americans were in the business of extensive global involvement, and believed that they were also in the business of global leadership (Kagan, 2008: 31). 9/11 served as a reinforcement for the logic underlying Solana’s and Robertson’s statements. Since the U.S. was militarily most powerful state in the world, Bush believed that it had the unique and unilateral responsibility to answer terrorist threats, construct global security, and spread democratic values. Therefore, in the wake of the terrorist attacks on September 11, the discussions over enlargement gained momentum within the political framework of reconsidering and redefining the Alliance’s future mission and capabilities (Borsani, 2023: 151).

Regarding this framework, the most crucial change after 9/11 has been the acknowledgment that the Alliance’s role cannot be limited to Europe. Main threats to security of NATO members now began to emanate from outside of the continent, therefore the consensus has been reached that NATO must meet with these challenges if it was to remain relevant (Sloan, 2008: 79). Thereafter, allies have sought to broaden the operational functions of NATO and widen its geographic area of engagement (Simon, 2008: 98). These factors implied not only the adoption of a forward defence posture, but also the promotion of a geographically expanded alliance. As Bush and his advisers believed, U.S. political, economic and security interests would be advanced by the spread of liberal political institutions and values abroad (Monten, 2005: 112).

Against this backdrop, the potential role and functions of, not only the existing members, but also the new candidate states were reconsidered. The period preceding the NATO’s 2002 Prague Summit witnessed that states aspiring to become a NATO member had been assessed in terms of the contributions they could offer in the war on

terror (Moore, 2007: 53-54). As the two assumptions that underlay the Bush Doctrine presuppose, other states will bandwagon rather than balance against the U.S., and that technological change, revolution in military affairs (RMA) and the U.S. military preponderance will allow the U.S. to overcome the hindrances on war on terror and democracy promotion (Monten, 2005: 148). Accordingly, American hegemony and primacy would tie all of the allied states together. A preponderance of the U.S. power is generally viewed as beneficial also by NATO leaders. Consequently, they concurred that the Alliance provides stability to the regions where it has incorporated, therefore, extending the borders of the Alliance would bring more security and stability. Moreover, they acknowledged that new members would also foster NATO's anti-terror capabilities (Dunay, 2013: 53-54). Therefore, they concluded that extending the NATO's borders geographically would help to address the threat of terrorism (Wolff, 2015: 1108). At the Prague Summit in 2002, NATO endorsed the 'big bang' approach, offering membership, which would be effective in 2004, to the Baltic states, plus Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania and Bulgaria.

In this context, the geopolitical consequences of the second round of enlargement were mixed. Advocates of enlargement argued that Russia's dominant position in the Baltics and the Black Sea area has declined after the enlargement. Incorporating the territory of the Baltic and Black Sea states has provided both strategic depth – thanks to their position – and operational advantage – thanks to military bases they could offer – to the Alliance. After the Baltic states have become the members of the Alliance, the heavily fortified district of Kaliningrad has become segregated from Russia by NATO territory (Marten, 2020: 407). The strategic benefits of the second wave of expansion were not only territorial, but also littoral. Baltic states cover the routes of Russian maritime trade in peacetime. In wartime, the location of these states could be utilized for naval operations. In terms of projection of military power to east, they could provide operational bases for allied troops. Simply, their terrain and littoral positions offer significant military advantage to NATO (Eichler, 2021: 49).

In terms of the Black Sea region, with Turkey, Romania and Bulgaria in NATO, Georgia and Ukraine have remained as the only land masses that could provide Russia to access to warm waters (Marten, 2020: 410). Incorporation of Bulgaria and

Romania has also provided new military bases to NATO for projecting power towards southeast from the frontiers of the Alliance. Some of these bases played an important role during Operation Iraqi Freedom (Eichler, 2021: 51). Indeed, the new members were enthusiastic about contributing and joining US/NATO missions in Afghanistan and Iraq. The ultimate aim of their efforts was to demonstrate to NATO that they were not consuming security without “putting money in the bank” (Townsend, 2023: 514). Ensuring the U.S. that they are not ‘free-riders’ would mean that the U.S. would come to their help in the future.

Critics, on the other hand, suggested that moving eastward initiated a geopolitical tension between Russia and NATO. They argued that expansion has fractured European security and led U.S. attention to be incohesive (Van Hooft, 2023: 442). Granting membership to Baltic states deprived NATO’s capability to deter and defend against a possible aggressive Russia. Historically, Baltic countries have always been exposed to aggressive Russian actions. And critics maintained that major European allies such as the U.K., France and Germany had only limited ability to deploy and sustain military forces for the defence of these countries (Van Hooft, 2023: 439). Moreover, new members’ contribution to out of area missions was only marginal (Townsend, 2023: 514). These factors have proved that NATO was and remains a unipolar organization. Indeed, despite these handicaps, the U.S.’ aim to push for the second round of enlargement was to strengthen its position against the emergence of a hegemon that could command continental resources and utilize them for gaining military power that would threaten the primacy of the U.S. as the leading global power (Eichler, 2021: 56).

In the context of NATO’s dual-track policy mentioned in the previous section, years 2000-2001 also witnessed NATO efforts to repair the relations with Russia (Smith, 2006: 99). Thus, Russia-NATO relations were to be institutionally embedded in a restructured order of international security. In November 2001, Secretary General Robertson announced the idea of creating a ‘council of twenty’, which would “involve Russia having an equality with the NATO countries in terms of the subject matter and [it] would be part of the same compromising trade-offs, give and take, that is involved in day-to-day NATO business” (quoted in Smith, 2010: 109). Subsequently, the establishment of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) was announced at NATO’s

Reykjavik summit in May 2002. The PJC was replaced by the NRC. The main difference was that the NRC sessions would be at 20 rather than 19+1, meaning that Russia would negotiate with member states as an equal partner and could bring up its subjects and open them for discussion before member states reach a common position on them (Hill, 2018: 199). However, Robertson defined the main difference between the old institutional arrangement and the new one as a matter of “chemistry rather than arithmetic” (quoted in Sloan, 2008: 76).

On the other hand, enlargement was not included to these issue areas for which joint consultation and decision making were envisaged. Moreover, important circumscriptions were contained in the structure. ‘Safeguard’ mechanism was one of the most crucial provisos. Accordingly, in the NRC sessions, on any subject, any member state could veto the continuation of the discussion. Secondly, if the result was deadlock in the council on an issue because of Russian discord, this would not obstruct member states action in the North Atlantic Council (NAC), without Russian participation. Moreover, the NAC would take the final decision as to whether an issue should be submitted to the NRC’s decision-making process or kept within the usual NATO mechanisms (Sloan, 2008: 76).

After the second round of enlargement, the U.S. continued to seek to extend NATO’s border further to the east and southeast. While applications from the several Balkan countries were at the stage of processing, the most controversial ones appeared as Georgia and Ukraine, both of which had expressed their aspirations toward gaining full membership of NATO. Before the Bucharest Summit of 2008, Bush administration had been pushing the agenda of their membership, however, there was a growing disagreement among allies regarding both the relations with Russia and the possible membership of either of these two countries. French Prime Minister François Fillon, for example, declared in 2008 that, “we are opposed to the entry of Georgia and Ukraine because we think that it is not a good answer to the balance of power within Europe and between Europe and Russia” (quoted in Pouliot, 2010: 223).

Among the Eastern European states, on the other hand, there was a persuading fear of Russian aggressive behavior and the future course of its political developments. Therefore, they sought to contain Russia and saw the enlargement as an essential element of this process. From their point of view, U.S.’ decision to give up pushing

enlargement agenda would mean a tacit recognition of the Russia's spheres of influence in the continent (Stent, 2014: 166). They relied on NATO to negate the threats emanating from a possible aggressive Russia that could undermine their security. Therefore, they consistently highlighted the importance of hard security guarantees, which, according to their view, only the U.S. had capable of providing. Some of Eastern members also insisted on the necessity of a buffer zone. Poland, for example, expressed concern for being squeezed between NATO and Russia. Membership of Ukraine, in their view, would provide an essential buffer zone they needed for (Braun, 2008: 61-63).

In Bucharest Summit in April 2008, in which the accession of Croatia and Albania have been formalized, the Bush administration crafted a compromise proposal that would correspond with the concerns of both sides. While not granting MAP to neither Ukraine nor Georgia, NATO promised to review the situation in December 2008. In the summit, the Alliance declared that "NATO welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO" (NATO, 2008). The possibility that these states would one day become NATO members strategically meant; first, further reduction in the distance between NATO's extended borders and Russian territory, second, deployment of NATO's military personal and equipment in each states' territories that would increase the offensive capabilities of the Alliance, and third, the alteration in the balance of power in the Black Sea region (Eichler, 2021: 68; Kanet, 2010: 166).

Related to these implications was the conflict between Russia and Georgia erupted in August 2008. There is a consensus among scholars that the decision published in the Bucharest Summit provoked Russia to assault on Georgia, by demonstrating that the Alliance would move ahead toward integrating Ukraine and Georgia in spite of Russian warnings that NATO membership of these countries would be perceived as a red line, which, if crossed, would require a total military retaliation (Berryman, 2011: 233-234; Eichler, 2021: 67; Kanet, 2010: 165; Pouliot, 2010: 223; Randozzo, 2023: 81-82; Smith, 2010: 117; Stent, 2014: 168; Wolff, 2015: 1110). Therefore, it was a war over NATO enlargement, and was considered by some scholars (Berryman, 2011: 234) as a proxy war between the U.S. and Russia. In a sense, Russia

has reached its aims. It has effectively prevented NATO's further expansion into the post-Soviet territories (Dunay, 2013: 63). Although some strategically unimportant states have later acquired NATO membership, the 2008 war has decisively stopped the Alliance's eastern enlargement. Membership of Georgia at least, has been swept away from the agenda. The war also proved that Russia was still a major player in European security affairs and the use of force in international disputes was not under the monopoly of the West (Tsygankov, 2019: 202).

When Russia asked for a consultation in the NRC to discuss the situation prior to conflict, the U.S. obstructed the Russian call and instead convened a NAC meeting. In that meeting NATO foreign ministers condemned the Russian disproportioned use of force and decided to freeze consultation with Russia in the NRC (Pouliot, 2010: 223). Improvement of the relations was later initiated by Barack Obama's 'reset' policy. Still, Obama's reset policy did not rule out the possibility of NATO's further eastward expansion. Therefore, Russia's persisting concerns about hard security issues remained unaddressed. Consequently, although it contributed, within the NRC's institutional framework, to the improvement of cooperation with Russia on certain practical issues which have secondary importance at best, the reset policy couldn't succeed in engaging conveniently with Russia on primary matters and resolving long-standing geostrategic disputes between NATO and Russia (Ratti, 2013), which were epitomized in Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. The next section will analyse these geostrategic disputes from Russia's perspective.

3.2. RUSSIAN RESPONSES TO AMERICAN UNIPOLARITY AND NATO ENLARGEMENT

NATO had been initially organized in the early years of the Cold War as to coordinate the West's collective defence efforts against the threat of Soviet aggression. Since the Cold War has ended and Russia had been undergoing a process of transformation towards democracy and market economy, and of an integration with the West, many Russians was not expecting the perpetuation of NATO. And its subsequent expanding efforts further shocked the Russian policymakers. As Yeltsin declared in 1994, "Europe is risking encumbering itself with a cold peace" (quoted in

Goldgeier and McFaul, 2003: 191). Supporters of the democratic reform in Russia couldn't make sense why a democratic Russia was perceived as a threat by the U.S. Russian policymakers thought that NATO expansion toward Russian borders meant that allied leaders did not see a real prospect for success in Russian internal democratic transformation. Moreover, for them, NATO enlargement was equal to violation of the promises made by Western leaders in 1990 while they and Gorbachev team were negotiating the terms of German reunification and its status in NATO.

Furthermore, Russian policymakers considered NATO enlargement as a realist move for extending U.S.' power and influence in Europe. For them, enlargement is a 'zero-sum game', since it was at the same time showcasing Russia's decline as a great power (Goldgeier and McFaul, 2003: 210). The American urge to expand NATO including to former Soviet satellites was seen by Russian leaders as evidence of the U.S.' intent to acquire geopolitical advantage and in a wider context, hegemonic domination of Europe (Hill, 2018: 7). When NATO made it clear in December 1994 that it would enlarge to Eastern Europe some time in the future, Russia saw this as a breach of the three main OSCE principles, which are security is indivisible, mutual and cooperative (Pouliot, 2010: 170). Russian policymakers rightly reiterated that mutual security means one state's security should not be reinforced at the expense of others. For them, enlargement initiative was a relic of the Cold War practices of realpolitik and had to do nothing with the rules of the new order (Pouliot, 2010: 168-169). Therefore, doubts have emerged in Russia regarding Western states' promise of an inclusive, cooperative security order. In this context, this sub-section follows the footprints of the evolution of Russian suspicious attitudes toward the West during the post-Cold War period.

3.2.1. The First Phase (1992-1996): NATO-Russia Honeymoon²²

In the course of 1992, there was an enthusiasm in new Russian leadership for Westernizing their country rapidly. Dismantling the Soviet political and social

²² For the scholarly works that describe this period of NATO-Russia relationship as 'honeymoon', see Pouliot (2010: 175) and Smith (2006: 51-57).

structures and renouncing its legacy²³, Russian policymakers envisioned their country's actual integration with the structures of the Western led international order. Indeed, President Yeltsin and his first foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev believed that Russia, in the emerging structure of international politics, could dismiss the logic of balance of power and geopolitics and instead focus its attention to establish a market-based economy and democratic political system (Ponsard, 2007: 61). Yeltsin and Kozyrev hoped that the West would finally recognize Russia as an equal partner. According to their view, Russia and West were now natural allies and in a post-confrontational world, Russia would hopefully join the 'community of civilized nations' by obtaining a permanent status in the organizations such as NATO, IMF, and G-7 (Tsygankov, 2019: 60-61). As Kozyrev (1994: 59) later noted, integration with Russia was also beneficial for the West since it offered "a historic opportunity to facilitate the transformation of an unstable, post-confrontational world into a stable and democratic one."

In no way, however, these integration efforts were to be enhanced at the expense of Russia's independent role in the international politics. As the Foreign Policy Concept of 1993 acknowledged, relations between the West and Russia should be developed on the basis of Russia's national interest (Monaghan, 2006: 990). There was a growing opinion among Russian circles suggesting that NATO should develop a special relationship with Russia by recognizing Russia's great power (or, for some, superpower) status, before any initiative toward NATO's extension into Eastern Europe was considered. As Yeltsin clarified in his letter to the prominent Western leaders in September 1993, "the relations between our country and NATO should be by several degrees warmer than those between the Alliance and Eastern Europe" (quoted in Smith, 2006: 56). A special relationship, in their eyes, would elevate Russia's position to great power status, and recognize Russia's predominant role in European security affairs. As Kozyrev confirmed in March 1994, "Russian Federation is doomed to being a Great Power... it can only be an equal partner, not a junior one" (quoted in Pouliot, 2010: 178). All these statements were based on the assumption that

²³ In Tsygankov's (2019: 59) words, "the new Russia's leaders saw their country as an organic part of Western civilization whose genuine Western identity had been hijacked by Bolsheviks and the Soviet system."

Russia's integration to the great powers club had to be processed with the recognition of its equal rights (Ponsard, 2007: 62).

Still, the liberal democratic and institutional integration strategy was the prevalent one in the early 1990s. Integrating Russia into global structures, and ensuring cooperation with, and assistance from the West were the order of the day (MacFarlane, 2008: 41). Capitalizing on the Gorbachev's New Thinking, new Russian leadership developed its premises into a full-fledged integration philosophy envisioning Russia's articulation into West's economic, political and security institutions (Tsygankov, 2019: 60). Meanwhile, on the other hand, Russia's bid for being an essential player in European security affairs was again apparent when, for example, they offered to break a deal with Bosnian Serbs in February 1994, led NATO to hold off its planned airstrikes against Serbs. Russia's subsequent military deployment alongside with the NATO forces for peacekeeping in Bosnia was also serving the same purpose, by demonstrating Russia's international power, balancing NATO's weight in the region and maintaining Russia's geopolitical position (Antonenko, 1999: 128).

In general, deployment of Russian troops along with NATO forces in Bosnia had proved that NATO-Russia cooperation was possible and heightened the motivation of increasing institutional and formalised links. By the same token, Russians made it clear that they would not resist NATO enlargement under all circumstances. They circumscribed Russian consent to enlargement by the condition that enlargement must be the first step in the process of a substantial transformation in NATO's purposes, roles and organizational structure. For Yevgeny Primakov, who would become foreign minister later in 1995, extending the zone of NATO's jurisdiction had to be accompanied by the redefinition of its role and modification of its functions in a way that corresponds the contemporary phase of historical development (quoted in Smith, 2006: 57). In this context, despite the domestic criticism, Russian attitude towards the PfP was initially positive. Kozyrev saw the PfP as a fundamental element in the transformation of NATO in the direction of which had been envisaged by Primakov several months ago. Russia signed PfP also in line with the argument stating that non-participation would isolate Russia (Smith, 2006: 59-60).

However, for Russian critics, PfP was a short-term solution to reduce tensions and built at best manageable inter-military relations between Russia and NATO, rather

than being a constructive initiative which could pave the way toward a broader political integration (Mankoff, 2009: 166). In general, pursuing an integrationist strategy toward the West began to be perceived as a flawed policy course (Tsygankov, 2019: 66). These critics played a major role on Yeltsin's decision to dismiss Kozyrev – chief architect of the strategy of partnership with the West – and appoint Yevgeny Primakov as a new foreign minister in 1995. With Primakov's arrive, general rhetoric would begin to revolve around Russia's distinctiveness – as a bridge between East and West – and its solid interests especially lying in its near-abroad (MacFarlane, 2008: 41-42; Tsygankov, 2019: 68).

3.2.2. The Second Phase (1996-1999): The Rise of *Derzhava*

Although Primakov and his supporters did not deny the importance of collaborating with the West, they did not see cooperation as a shaping force in the international politics. Instead, they evoked the historical notion of '*derzhava*,' which is translated by Andrei Tsygankov (2019: 97) as the "holder of international equilibrium of power". *Derzhava* was the notion underlying the emergence of realist ideas among the Russian foreign policy circles. Tsygankov (2019: 99) describes the logic of *derzhava* as following: "The power dictates its rules... [Therefore], the unipolar world was not going to be liberal or democratic, despite the American promises." For this reason, Russia "must use a combination of both cooperation and balancing policies for the purpose of undermining the unipolarity." Thus, *derzhava* has strong realist implications since it portrays international system as an arena of power competition between sovereign states. Accordingly, first, balance of power, not balance of interests, was the rule of the game. Since the system consists of power-maximiser states, the balance of power is the primary mechanism for assuring peace and stability in the system. And second, national, not international, means for pursuing security should be employed (Sergunin, 2016: 92). Therefore, *derzhava* advocates for a stronger role of the state and the reestablishment of Russia's great power status. Primakov personally considered international system in terms of power poles and argued that "geopolitical values are constants that cannot be abolished by historical developments" (quoted in Tsygankov, 2019: 95).

Derzhava consists of two central elements crucial for recovering Russia's great power status: balancing the U.S.' unipolar policies by concerted efforts of globally influential states and increasing Russian activity in the former Soviet territory. In terms of the first element, Russian politicians who cling to derzhava (realists) believed that multipolarity was still achievable and Russia could constitute a power pole in this system (Sergunin, 2016: 98). Primakov was thinking that Russian weakness was temporary, therefore he started to explore the prospects of balancing against the U.S. In his view, Russia could pursue an active foreign policy agenda to regain its former position in the international system (Braun, 2008: 56). This didn't mean Russia should thrust for global influence. Instead, Primakov put the image of Russia as a power holder struggling to sustain its geopolitical interests and areas of influence in the certain parts of the world (Tsygankov, 2019: 97).

In terms of the second aim, Russian realists argued near abroad must be the first regional priority in Russian security policy. The core elements of the Russia's policy towards near abroad were defined by realists as, to forestall the rise of hostile regimes and the eruption of ethnic and religious violence, to establish stable relations with the states in the region, and to protect ethnic Russians' rights (Sergunin, 2016: 95). On the other hand, they warned that Russia's policy towards near abroad should not be shaped by imperial temptations. Accordingly, they argued any Russian attempt to coercively resurrect the Russian Empire in the region would be fraught with danger, and lead to international isolation of the country (Sergunin, 2016: 91). In this context, Russian grievances about the status quo in the former Soviet territories was linked to its long-term insistence on multipolarity – a world order reflecting its main choice for great power parity (Sushentsov and Wohlforth, 2020: 440).

It is important to note that Russian realists were not anti-Western and did not consider the West as naturally hostile to Russia. They mostly avoided to propose foreign policy directions for Russia which can have confrontational implications. On many occasions, they supported to cooperative policies with the West, only having reservations for Russian geopolitical interests and great power status. This situation has caused an intricate controversy in Russian foreign policy course to appear, continuing to define its relations with the West until this day. On one hand, derzhava considers Russia as an indispensable Eurasian power and defines the terms through

which Russia's relations with other great powers takes place on the basis equal partnership (Tsygankov, 2019: 95). The logic of *derzhava* also calls for Russia to engage in balancing act against the U.S., the most powerful state in the system. In this logic, the balance of power is likely to emerge in any international system and Russia had been bearing a historical responsibility for maintaining international equilibrium.

On the other hand, this self-assigned position inherently restricts the prospects of Russian cooperation with the West, and with the U.S. in particular. Primakov assumed integrating Russia too deeply into the West would obstruct Russian aims to relocate itself as a distinct centre of power in the multipolar world (Antonenko, 1999: 129). Accordingly, cooperation efforts of both sides could not go as deep and far reaching as liberals suggest (Tsygankov, 2019: 99). Because the constitutive elements of *derzhava* requires mutually recognised spheres of influence, balance of power, and geopolitical thinking (Pouliot, 2010: 179). Moreover, insufficiency of the material means seriously restricted Russia's scope of action for pursuing an ambitious foreign policy. Therefore, the controversy between positional and dispositional vectors has become apparent in the Russian diplomatic practices (Pouliot, 2010: 182). Consequently, in spite of its efforts to establish a multipolar system, Russian foreign policy itself remained mainly U.S.-centric (Monaghan, 2006: 992). Indeed, Yeltsin administration in general saw the positive relations with the U.S. as the key factor of a successful foreign policy (Sushentsov and Wohlforth, 2020: 434).

In this context, the key focus of Primakov's foreign policy was Russia's attitude toward NATO enlargement. Russian realists, led by Primakov, did not want NATO to dissolve. On the contrary, they recognised its stabilizing effect on the European security. However, they argued that NATO shouldn't enlarge at the expense of Russian security interests. Realist circles considered NATO enlargement as the violation of the reciprocity and the assurances which had been given to them at the end of the Cold War (Sergunin, 2016: 97; Tsygankov, 2019: 105). However, Primakov recognised that Russia had no wherewithal to stop enlargement. Therefore, he galvanized Russia's efforts to restrict it quantitatively and territorially and hollow it out materially (Asmus, 2002: 192). Russia, at this stage, sought to convince NATO not to deploy military forces and built new infrastructure in the territory of newly incorporated states. It also tried to ensure that the activities of the new members remain

restricted to cover only to the NATO's political functions, and sought to prevent new members to join in NATO's military planning structure. Most crucially, Russia sought to maximise its influence over NATO through encouraging member states to establish a mechanism of 'co-decision making' with Russia (Asmus, 2002: 192).

According to Defense Minister Igor Rodionov, NATO was becoming a military organization whose material capabilities could not be matched by any actor in the international system. Therefore, he explained that as NATO was moving closer to Russian borders with these capabilities, Russians became increasingly concerned that it would try to impose its political, military and economic conditions on Russia (Pouliot, 2010: 171-172). In this view, U.S. military deployment in the Central and Eastern Europe was not the problem, its political primacy was (Sushentsov and Wohlfort, 2020: 436). Accordingly, acquiescing U.S. supremacy in Europe would create obstacles for Russian foreign policy, restrict its scope of action, and gradually increase the voice of Western allies in international politics. Remaining indifferent to Alliance's enlargement would suggest that Russia is incapable of playing a constructive role in determining which rules and norms are considered to be legitimate in terms of both framing a security architecture and defining the key elements of sovereignty, in an emerging world order (Sushentsov and Wohlforth, 2020: 445).

Therefore, the basic issue was the positional gap between the Alliance and Russia. In order to narrow this gap, Russia tried to establish closer political and diplomatic relations with NATO. The result was the negotiated document of the Founding Act, details of which have been discussed above. In the beginning, the agreement on the document was considered by Russia as a positive signal that NATO provided a new mechanism to Russia to influence its policies (Ponsard, 2007: 70). Primakov referred to the document as the evidence and best example of the success of the Russian diplomacy (Ponsard, 2007: 70; Tsygankov, 2019: 106). Moreover, on the signing day of the document, Yeltsin announced: "I would never use the word 'compromise'—what we reached is a balanced result" (quoted in Asmus, 2002: 211).

On the surface, through the Founding Act Russia had attained a status of holding a 'special relationship' with the Alliance, because the degree of its representation and the content of its consultation rights with NATO were broader than any other non-member state's (Smith, 2006: 72). Moreover, in the PJC, Russian

representative would hold an equal position with their NATO counterparts. Russians interpreted this as a first concrete step towards the institutionalization of the equal relations between NATO and Russia (Tsygankov, 2019: 106). However, Russian critics began to argue that conditions provided by the Founding Act had failed to meet with Russia's expectations. Because the document did not include binding commitments in jurisdictional sense. Russia had been granted no say in the Alliance internal issues. The PJC mechanism only gave it 'a voice, not a veto' (Ponsard, 2007: 70). Although the document envisions NATO's consultation with Russia on all security affairs affecting Russian interests, it also maintains such consultation mechanism is not to be yield any power or authority to Russia for blocking NATO's decision-making (NATO, 1997).

3.2.3. The Third Phase (1999-2001): Deterioration

Russia had been incrementally disillusioned by its growing disability to influence key U.S. and NATO decisions regarding the security affairs in Europe. However, it was Kosovo and NATO's three months long air campaign against the Serbs that were decisive in determining Russian behaviour towards the West and the continental security order at the turn of the millennium. During the three months of intervention, critics of Yeltsin in Russia embraced the rhetoric of "Belgrade today, Moscow tomorrow" (Hill, 2018: 169), which was indicating the very fact that for the first time after the Cold War, Russians started to seriously consider the possibility of NATO's actual projection of military power into Russian territory (Antonenko, 1999: 133). Indeed, military establishment in Moscow began to express concern that NATO campaign against Yugoslavia might become a model for its future interventions in conflicts within the post-Soviet space or even to Russia.

Haunted by the absence of an institutional and judicial mechanism which could guarantee against such an eventuality, these Russian pessimists speculated on the possibility that a similar campaign could be undertaken by NATO in some time in the future, aiming to their homeland. Indeed, there was no legally binding mechanism which could foreclose 'the Yugoslavization of Russia'. The single mechanism which only principally denoted the institutionalization of cooperation and confidence-

building between Russia and NATO – the PJC – had failed in the very first crises including both of the parties. Officially denouncing the campaign, Yeltsin blamed NATO leaders to stab them in their back, by violating the provisions of the Founding Act. He then announced the withdrawal of Russia from the PJC. Therefore, affirming the Russian critics of the initiative, political arrangements enshrined by the Founding Act had proved vulnerable and unattainable in the end (Smith, 2006: 75; Ponsard, 2007: 72).

Many prominent Russian political figures perceived intervention as a geopolitical aggrandizement, especially because of the concurrent finalization of the first round of NATO enlargement (Hill, 2018: 168). Almost no Russians convinced that NATO conducted Yugoslavia campaign for easing the conditions of humanitarian catastrophe. Instead, they concluded that NATO's cold-blooded *realpolitik* under implementation was actually disguised as humanitarian intervention and democratic value-promotion. NATO's decision to go out-of-area as early as 1994 had already led some Russian officials to think that NATO's efforts to change status quo in Europe was nothing but a part of the U.S. strategy of global primacy. The PJC's failure to operate functionally as an early consultative platform during the critical weeks leading up to the air campaign against Yugoslavia only consolidated this Russian perception. Russians considered the intervention as a calculated effort to secure the NATO's position at the top of the hierarchy in the international security order. As Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov explained, by imposing "its will through NATO bypassing the United Nations, the United States laid the foundation of a unipolar world" (quoted in Hill, 2018: 168).

In terms of relative gains considerations, Kosovo intervention and PJC's subsequent failure also led Russians to calculate the risks of maintaining cooperation with the U.S., which was clearly adopting a defection strategy (Sushentsov and Wohlforth, 2020: 440). Russian policymakers were highly aware that Russia's influence over the course of European and international security would be significantly cut down if Russia failed to hold the U.S. accountable for its actions violating the institutional and formal legalities (Ponsard, 2007: 91). In this context, Kosovo intervention and PJC's failure could become a precedent for NATO allies to define the terms of international security agenda and move ahead without Russian consent, even

on issues at which Russia had key interests (Sushentsov and Wohlforth, 2020: 439). For this reason, whole Russian foreign policy elites reinvoked the notion of *derzhava*, which honours sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-intervention (Pouliot, 2010: 204).

As a consequence, in subsequent official security doctrines drafted by Moscow, new solid threat perceptions began to appear which had never been addressed in the previous papers: Efforts from the side of any party to deny or disregard Russian security interests in resolving international disputes, attempts to oppose the promotion of a multipolar world order of which Russia would be a constitutive actor, and deployment of foreign military forces into the territory of adjacent states without UNSC resolution (Antonenko, 1999: 134; Pouliot, 2010: 206). In this sense, Kosovo crisis was transformed from a local conflict into a new source of East-West tension, which also implied the possibility of military escalation (Antonenko, 1999: 124).

To conclude, Kosovo intervention doubled Russian suspicions towards NATO by demonstrating member states' willingness to go out-of-area. For Russians, Kosovo proved that NATO remained anti-Russian, and its military function was superior to its political and economic dimensions. Russian scholars and policymakers concluded that NATO would no longer circumscribe its use of military force with a UNSC resolution or Russian consent. This meant a new world order was emerging, an order in which NATO would continue to exist as a platform of platform of war, violence, and murder (Antonenko, 1999: 131). Intervention was aimed to strengthen NATO's military presence in the region, by targeting the only state in the region which was not an aspirant of NATO membership. Consequently, Russian policymakers would no longer consent any NATO activity that did not spare any room for Russian influence in decision-making process (Pouliot, 2010: 207).

3.2.4. The Fourth Phase (2001-2008): 9/11 and the Renewal of the Relationship

Despite a brief period of relief in Russia-NATO relations after September 11, – thanks to Putin's pragmatic and multi-vector policy and his offer to provide U.S. strategic assistance in global war on terror – especially with Western support for the

‘color revolutions’ in the post-Soviet area, tensions between two sides began to grow again. As noted, Russian policymakers had been considering maintaining Russia’s influence in the former Soviet territories as a primary foreign policy goal. Therefore, increasing Western involvement in the revolution processes in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine threatened the Russian influence and challenged its dominance. Against this backdrop, with the confidence of Russia’s significant economic growth since the beginning of the 2000s, Putin’s foreign policy began to establish itself on a stronger position, especially when it came to security and stability issues, and Western involvement, in Russia’s near abroad. This regional dimension of the Russian foreign policy was envisioned to establish a core element of Russia’s global policy in broader context. This Russian global vision was aiming to attain Russia a great power role, thanks to which, it would constitute an independent pole in the multipolar system (Tsygankov, 2019: 215). Therefore, in an attempt to assure Russia’s great power status and redefine the security structure and power relations, the Putin and later the Medvedev administrations tried to exert Russian influence in the post-Soviet area (Kanet, 2010: 158).

Although this new strategy by no means implied a confrontation with the West, it aimed to bolster Russia’s position against the West when the vital interests of both sides were in contradiction. According to Russian policymakers, Russia was in a position to challenge unilateral policies of other parties and had sufficient power to pursue its independent interests and shape international relations in this way (Tsygankov, 2019: 178). As Minister of Defense Sergei Ivanov declared in 2006, “Russia has now completely recovered the status of a great power” that holds a responsibility in global affairs (quoted in Tsygankov, 2019: 179). In this context, after a certain point, the course of international events led Putin to think that Russia could no longer pursue its national interests in cooperation with its Western partners and within the structure of Western institutions. Because Russia did not have a right to participate decision-making processes of these institutions on hard security issues (Hill, 2018: 251/270). The strongest criticism was uttered by Putin at Munich Security Conference in February 2007, which heralded both a new Russian independence in applying its own standards in its engagement with the West and a Russian intolerance

toward intervention in its security and sovereignty (Hill, 2018: 252; Tsygankov, 2019: 177).

Several points were highlighted in Putin's Munich speech. Firstly, Putin voiced Russia's frustration with the European security order and its institutions in the post-Cold War era, enlisted the U.S., NATO and the EU as root causes of failure to build an inclusive order. Putin also criticized the U.S. global policies toward creation of a unipolar world in which the only essential centre of power would be the U.S. (Hill, 2018: 251; Eichler, 2021: 66). Most importantly, at Munich, Putin openly declared the revival of its country's hostility towards NATO enlargement. He explained Russia's reservations for the second round of enlargement and its strategic and military implications. He said that "it is obvious that NATO expansion... represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust" (quoted in Wolff, 2015: 1109). He blamed NATO to "put its frontline forces on [Russian] borders" (quoted in Marten, 2020: 410), thereby to break the assurances given in 1990 not to deploy military forces beyond German borders. In this context, he warned about U.S. forward military deployment in Bulgaria and Romania and reiterated that Russia would use its power to obstruct further NATO expansion into the former Soviet territories, especially into the strategically crucial Black Sea region (Eichler, 2021: 66-67; Tsygankov, 2019: 194-195).

Thereafter, Russian policymakers continued to see NATO enlargement as a part of U.S. global strategy aiming at restricting Russia's strategic influence in the European continent. Accordingly, expansion was a zero-sum game, and the U.S. was a greedy state motivated by non-security reasons (Eichler, 2021: 55/73). For Russian policymakers, what eventually matters were capabilities, not intentions. For them, NATO's capabilities to conduct air patrols over the Baltic Sea area was far more relevant for Russian security than the Western declarations underlying partnership and cooperation (Hill, 2018: 264). The Bucharest summit, in this context, represented a culmination in polarization of the relations between NATO and Russia, mostly resulting from the issue of NATO enlargement to Ukraine and Georgia. According to Russian leaders, these two states' possible NATO membership would obstruct the Russian attempts of maintaining its dominant role on the structural power relations of the post-Soviet space. Since these attempts were planned to reestablish Russia's

position as a great power in the international system, this situation would have serious implications for the global balance of power. At Bucharest, Putin declared, “we view the appearance on our borders of a mighty military bloc” (quoted in Hill, 2018: 263).

3.2.5. The Fifth Phase (2008-2012): Medvedev Era

NATO’s commitment to future membership of Georgia and Ukraine in Bucharest provoked Russian aggression against Georgia by demonstrating that the Alliance would proceed with incorporating these countries despite Russian warnings about enlargement. In the immediate aftermath of the Georgia war, Russian president Dmitri Medvedev set out the basic principles that would govern his country’s foreign policy during his era. In this declaration, he defined the unipolar world, in which rules are governed by only one country, as unstable and being threatened by conflict. In this context, he pointed out other states’ obligation to respect the international law and build a multipolar world. More importantly, he asserted that Russia has ‘privileged sphere of interest’ in the post-Soviet territories.

According to Andrei Tsygankov (2019: 215), by introducing this concept, Medvedev hoped to downplay to use of force in the region. Accordingly, Medvedev assumed that Russia has sufficient economic and diplomatic power to exert its influence peacefully on the region. Therefore, what he was referring to was to utilize his country’s soft power in engaging with countries with which Russia shares same historical and cultural roots, and has very similar economic and political systems. Similarly, for Dmitri Trenin (quoted in Berryman, 2011: 238) Russia’s aim was not to restore the Soviet Union or build a tsarist empire. Russia was only aiming “to create a region in which its interests would have precedence over those of any other country.” On the contrary, critics saw this declaration as a clear reflection of the new assertiveness of the Russian foreign policy. Accordingly, having won the Five Days War against Georgia, Russian confidence in protecting its interest and exerting its influence in its near abroad increased. Medvedev’s doctrine of ‘privileged interest’ was reflecting that other states’ engagement in Russian near abroad would be seen as a grave threat to Russian vital interests. And, if necessary, Russia would resort

unilaterally to use of force when it perceives these interests are at stake (Eichler, 2021: 70-71; Kanet, 2011: 206).

Similar in purpose, but broader in context was the Medvedev's new Euro-Atlantic security treaty initiative, which was informed by an understanding of Europe as a whole 'from Vancouver to Vladivostok.' Medvedev's proposal of a new European security structure, whose rules and principles were to be formalized under a legally binding treaty, was a declaration of the Russian understanding arguing that current security structure was not serving everyone's interests equally. Delivering a speech in Berlin in June 2008, Medvedev announced his initiative for establishing a new European security structure, which would solidify international law and go beyond Atlanticism by providing a framework for an equal partnership between the U.S., Russia and the EU. In the same speech, he reiterated the importance of the OSCE and NATO but also pointed out to their failure in building constructive security relations among European states after the Cold War (Tsygankov, 2019: 209).

The core idea of this new initiative was to formalize the 'rules of the game' in a legal document pursuant to international law. The main element of these rules was the indivisibility of security, which means states and international organizations located in the Euro-Atlantic region shall not expand their security at the expense of any other states' or organization's security. Medvedev's initiative envisioned a genuine space for indivisible and equal security, and called for the creation of a mechanism for application (Lomagin, 2011: 185). The main assumption was that the prominent security institutions in the region were ill-equipped to prevent such a conflict. Therefore, a new security framework, which would include mechanisms to minimize the risk of conflict and establish stable and long-term political settlements, had to be defined. Such a pan-European security framework, in Russian policymakers' view, would finally eradicate the legacy of the Cold War (Lomagin, 2011: 186; Tsygankov, 2019: 209). In this context, in November 2009, Russia legally promised not to undertake unilateral use of force in exchange for NATO allies doing to same (Tsygankov, 2019: 209).

On the other hand, rather than handling it within the NATO's institutional framework, Medvedev was aiming to recontextualise the debate on the security of Europe within a new platform which involves Russia as a founding member (Lomagin,

2011: 195). Indeed, by formalizing the reciprocal nature of relationships in a legally binding documents, Russia was trying to acquire an equal partner status in its negotiations on the European security affairs with the West. In the same manner, critics of the Medvedev's initiative considered his proposal in the light of Russia's long-lasting ambition to reclaim its Cold War era great power status and its attempts to maintain its 'privileged sphere of interest' in the post-Soviet territories (Hill, 2018: 292). In this context, by creating a treaty-based regime, Russia aimed to be immune from outside interference in its sphere of interest.

These critics further suggested that there had been a continuity in Russian approach to European security, and Medvedev's proposal displayed core elements of this continuity, in a sense that it sought to create a geopolitical background which restricts the U.S.' and NATO's role in hard security issues. Russian attempts to make the OSCE the primary security institution in Europe had failed in 1990s, and now Russian policymakers were trying to create a new platform that would function in the same way that the OSCE would have operated if the Russian aims through this organization succeeded. These aims included to restrict the freedom of action of NATO, the EU and the U.S. in the Europe. In this context, according to critics, this new proposal was a preventive document, aiming to deny the activities of NATO and the EU in the areas in which Russian interests clashed with Western allies' policies. Moreover, critics pointed out that document's focus was exclusively on security disputes and conflict management and provided no ground for enhancing cooperation and trust-building measures (Hill, 2018: 291-293).

NATO allies' overall reaction to Medvedev's draft were mostly in line with the arguments of critics. Despite their initial sympathy toward the initiative, Germany, France and Italy did not find the proposal satisfactory. The U.S. declared its participation to Russia in its aim of attaining a more secure Europe, but saw no need for another binding treaty. As Secretary of State Hilary Clinton said in 2010, "we believe that these goals are best pursued in the context of existing institutions such as the OSCE and the NATO-Russia Council rather than negotiating new treaties" (quoted in Stent, 2014: 239). Thus, U.S. officials reaffirmed their commitment to NATO-centric security structure and channelled the discussions of the initiative into the OSCE. The East European members of NATO were the ones that had most at stake.

They worried Medvedev's proposal would de facto recognize Russian spheres of interest and thus Russia would become a grave security threat for them. They also voiced concern that the draft would give Russia a veto right over NATO's military operations and would significantly limit NATO's option to invoke Article 5 for the defence of its own members (Stent, 2014: 239; Hill, 2018: 288; Tsygankov, 2019: 210).

To conclude, in a broader context, NATO allies' response to Medvedev's new Euro-Atlantic security initiative was in fact an indication of the structurally determined nature of the NATO-Russia relations. From the neorealist perspective, three consecutive round of NATO enlargement that have taken place by the end of the second decade of the post-Cold War period, have consolidated the U.S. hegemony in Europe. In addition to its superiority in military, economic and technological domains and its advantage of being an offshore power which is located far from the regions of possible military confrontation, the U.S. has gained strategic access to the ports, airfields and military bases located in the new members' territories. This has increased its capacity to project power, thus provided the U.S. a stronger leverage in the European security affairs. Moreover, its strategic reach to these new military stations has provided the U.S. a springboard for the military operations conducted in the other parts of the globe, which are essential for achieving worldwide primacy (Shiffrinson, 2023: 110). In this context, NATO enlargement has facilitated U.S. initiatives of mobilizing its allies' opinion and coordinating their operational capabilities in support of its global military engagements. Apart from that, NATO enlargement contributed to U.S. efforts of extending the zone of free market and liberal democracy in the Eastern and Central Europe, and in the Balkans. This has implied that the increased number of states would thereafter recalibrate their foreign policy in a way that would not seriously conflict with the U.S. interests.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

From neorealist perspective, Russian reactions to NATO enlargement remained mostly structurally determined in nature. In spite of some periodic improvements in its relations with NATO, conventional wisdom of the Russian leaders continued to see NATO enlargement as a major security threat for Russia. For Russian policymakers, U.S. insistence on NATO enlargement was the indication of western betrayal, denial of Russian security concerns, and U.S. encroachment on Russia's sphere of influence (Wolff, 2015: 1103). The fact that the NATO leaders took most of the essential decisions about the European security structure without taking Russia's views into account has led 'zero-sum thinking' to become widespread among Russian policymaker (Mankoff, 2009: 165). NATO's continuing expansion into the areas for which Russia had declared its special concern and its right of influence, contributed the tendency toward this geopolitical thinking. Moreover, NATO's decision to both expand geographically and start to conduct out-of-area operations led Russian policymakers to think that there is a causal linkage between the U.S. strategies for the European security and its policies of global primacy (Sushentsov and Wohlforth, 2020: 440). Overall, expansion of NATO was the indication of Russia's decreasing influence and U.S.' increasing power in the international politics.

This chapter analyses how this trend disfavouring Russia has been reversed throughout the last decade. The return of Putin to presidency in 2012 has marked a beginning of a new era in foreign and security policy areas. Russia has reinvigorated the aggressive stance that had culminated in its attack to Georgia in 2008. In order to secure Russian national interests, Russian policymakers have started to opt for confrontational policy choices in their engagement with their Western counterparts. The goal of Putin administration has been reconstituting the multipolar international system built upon the key pillars of sovereignty, non-intervention in the domestic affairs of individual states, the principal role of the UN, and most importantly, a delicate balance of power which would prevent any individual state from hegemonizing the international system (Defense Intelligence Agency, 2017: 14-15). Considering their country as an emerging great power, Russian foreign policy officials

think that Russia has a special role in rebuilding the global balance of power (Charap et. al., 2021: 20-21).

As will be discussed below in more detail, Ukraine has a vital place in Russian foreign policy. The role it plays in the Russian public as well as political discussions has geopolitical, historical, national and ideational aspects (Radin et. al., 2019: 12). Throughout the post–Cold War period, as the Euro-Atlantic institutions expanded eastward closer to Russia’s borders, the concerns over Ukraine have gradually become more acute, especially after 2008 Bucharest Summit. However, it was the series of events initiated in February 2014 that has demonstrated the extent to which Russia sees Ukraine as an indispensable state for its existential security and national identity, and would not relinquish it without fighting (Frederick et. al., 2017: 30-31). As the widespread public demonstrations against the former Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich grew strong in 2014, for Russian strategic elite, it was not impossible that the protestors would usurp the existing government and the advent of a pro-Western leader would substantially accelerate the NATO membership process of Ukraine (Menon and Ruger, 2023: 182). A Ukraine having legal rights to fully access NATO and EU’s political, economic and military infrastructure would permanently deny Russian great power aspirations and challenge the Russian domestic political system in terms of government’s legitimacy. This was the worst-case scenario that Russian leaders could even think of. Roy Allison (2014: 1257) argues that it was basically this factor that led Russia to flout Ukrainian sovereignty. The Russian leaders absolutely could not turn a blind eye the events occurring in Ukraine in the early 2014.

Therefore, Russia initiated a direct military operation, resulting in the annexation of Crimea. Subsequently, in the summer of 2014, some extremist figures within the ethnic-Russian population inhabiting the Donbas region initiated a military revolt, which was targeting the new leadership in Kyiv, demanding more autonomy and federalization of eastern part of Ukraine in favor of closer relations with Russia. In order to maintain a ‘frozen conflict’ in the region and thus deny the prospect of Ukraine’s NATO membership, Russia consistently support this separatist armed group. Finally, by dramatically escalating the ongoing conflict with Ukraine since 2014, Russia has initiated a massive invasion of the country in February 2022 (Frederick et. al., 2023: 4).

After Russia legally incorporated Crimea into its own territory, academic and political circles in the West have begun to investigate to which degree that Russia's dissatisfaction with both the post-Cold War European security architecture and international balance of power has caused Russia to act offensively in Ukraine. The concepts of great power, international order, and balancing have begun to be widely employed. For example, Charap et. al. (2023: 140) argued that Russia's great power position in the international system is closely connected with its natural right of steering the course of developments in its privileged zone of interest in adjacent regions, especially in Ukraine. In this context, Russia's use of force in its near abroad is a policy choice reflecting the severity of Russian discontent with the international security order of the unipolar era. The descent into the crisis in Ukraine was consistent with this discontent and problematic pattern of the Russia-Western relations of preceding years. At the outset of the Ukraine crisis, the problems were the very same ones with those that had derailed the reset throughout 2009–2013 (Lo, 2015: 178). In this context, Russian grievances toward the Western dominated international system was the main culprit of the Ukrainian crisis. As Richard Sakwa (2017: 136) argues, the crisis in Ukraine is the embodiment of the controversies between Russia and the West in the broader context, at international-system level. Radin and Reach (2017: 18) confirms Sakwa's observation: "The Ukrainian conflict is less a clash for Ukraine... but more for the rules of the international order and relations between great powers in particular."

According to author of this study, the essence of these arguments basically implies that the one of the most important factors that motivated Russia to annex Crimea was demonstrating the world that Russia is capable of independently conducting a large-scale military operation beyond its borders, and thereby reminding the West that further dismissal of its interests would have severe consequences. Relatedly, assigning Russia to great power status by improving its relative position in the international system, thus undermining Western resilience and credibility, was also a significant motivation. Therefore, by reestablishing Russia's position as a great power, Vladimir Putin has attempted to redefine the structure of the international system that Russians think is disproportionately favours the U.S. And in order to reinforce these great power claims, Putin started to have invested in creating a robust

military power. The emerging modern Russian army has been seen as a tool to achieve Russia's aspirations in a multipolar system (Defense Intelligence Agency, 2017: 12-15). As was the case regarding the Russia's position in Ukraine, the Russian foreign and security policy officials tried to get Western leaders' respect by demonstrating Russia's hard power capacities and what Putin refers as its "geopolitical relevance" (Tsygankov, 2019: 225).

Against this backdrop, the remainder of this chapter consists of three parts. In the first section, a useful framework for analysing the systemic effects of the Ukraine crisis will be presented. This framework consists of three elements. First, after outlining the international-system level factors that fuelled Russian grievances, the Russian system-wide assertive policies will be examined. Second, the role of the hard-power, that is the military capabilities, in these policies will be determined. The essential points of NATO's force posture in Eastern Europe will also be highlighted. Finally, Ukraine's importance for Russia and its critical position on the global geostrategic map will be discussed. In the second part, after briefly portraying the events in Ukraine in 2014, the consequences of Russia's annexation of Crimea will be investigated. The focus will be on the balance of power and the risks of Russia-NATO military escalation between 2014 and 2022. The third section will describe the ongoing events in Ukraine starting with the Russia's invasion of the country in February 2022. Throughout the chapter, all the observations and arguments will be presented from a neorealist perspective in order to make inferences about the causal relations between the Ukraine crisis and the polarity of the international system.

4.1. A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSING RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

4.1.1. Russia's 'Assertiveness' in the International System

The crisis in Ukraine was not a reason that has led the breakdown of relations between the West and Russia, on the contrary, it was the symptom of growing Russian discontent with the unipolar structure of the system (Sakwa, 2017: 136). In terms of systemic factors, the tension between the two sides perpetuated particularly in three issue-areas: missile defence, European security architecture, and NATO's out-of-area

operations, all of which has been directly connected with the U.S. global primacy and NATO centrality. In terms of the first factor, strategic parity has been the keystone of U.S.' relations with Moscow since the early Cold War era. It will retain its centrality after the Russia-Ukraine war (Charap and Priebe, 2024: 25). Similarly, American military deployments in Europe have been the key figure of the security relations with the Soviet Union and then Russia since the early Cold War. Since the U.S. has enhanced its military presence in the continent especially after Russia's massive invasion of Ukraine, after the conclusion of war this factor will become even more important for the security environment in Europe (Charap and Priebe, 2024: 26). The third factor symbolizes the overall mistrust of Russia against the U.S.' unilateral global policies.

Firstly, as Putin (quoted in Sakwa, 2017: 91-92) asserted on several occasions, the ABM Treaty had been "the cornerstone of the entire international security system." In 2001, Bush announced the U.S. abrogation of the treaty. Six years later, the Bush administration's declaration to build an anti-missile platform in Poland and a radar in the Czechia brought the issue international agenda again in 2007. This deployment was allegedly to deter the nuclear attacks launched by the nearby rogue states. However, at that time Iran had no long-range nuclear capacity. On the other hand, Russian officials claimed that this deployment was a grave threat to Russia's national security and undermining 'strategic nuclear parity.' (Lo, 2015: 174). According to Russian point of view, the missile systems could also be adjusted as to conduct offensive operations. In that case, a first strike would damage most of the nearby Russian military installations and degrade Russia's retaliatory options (Sakwa, 2017: 91). Indeed, these systems could be easily recalibrated to initiate offensive Tomahawk cruise missile attacks, not just ballistic missile defence (BMD) warheads, targeting Russian homeland, and thus violates the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. Therefore, Russian leaders continued vehemently to resist the plan. Obama's reset policy had envisaged some modifications in the BMD plans, which were aimed at addressing Russian concerns. However, these modifications did not assuage Russian concerns that the system altogether undermined Russia's deterrent power (Marten, 2023: 230).

In the Lisbon Summit on 20 November 2010, NATO head of states declared that these new American BMD systems would be incorporated into the Alliance's overall defence capacities (Marten, 2023: 230). Ten days later, on 30 November 2010, Medvedev declared that the future of Russia's rapprochement with NATO depended on whether the two would achieve cooperation on missile defence (Ratti, 2013: 153-154). However, the failure of the cooperative attempts on BMD has made Russia much more sensitive to issue of further reductions of offensive nuclear systems. Concerns have emerged among Russian military circles that a pre-emptive NATO attack could disrupt Russia's second-strike capacity and subsequent aerospace attacks could destroy vital military and civilian infrastructure (Lalu, 2021: 302). Thereafter, Russia would have to modernize its offensive strategic nuclear capabilities and to install Iskander²⁴ missiles in Kaliningrad. As of 2016, in the context of nuclear escalation, Putin was confident enough to say that "today we are stronger than any potential aggressor. I repeat, any aggressor" (quoted in Sakwa, 2017: 92).

Secondly, Russia has remained marginalized in the contemporary security architecture in Europe. This issue was discussed at length in the previous chapter; therefore, this chapter will not delve into the details again. To outline briefly, Russia has been prevented on every major occasion from meaningfully participating by Western leaders in the most crucial security issues in the continent. Its demands toward the principle of 'indivisible security for all in Europe' has been consistently denied (Hill, 2018; Sakwa, 2015a). NATO's centrality and its expansion has continued to be perceived by Russia as a major source of threat to its national security and its influence in the post-Soviet area. In this context, NATO has also become the main impediment in order for Russia to attain a great power status again (Loftus and Kanet, 2017: 15). The interplay between the Russia's influence in its near abroad and its great power position will be discussed below.

Finally, NATO's 'out of area' missions represent the third major source of controversy between Russia and the West. After Kosovo precedent, the air mission

²⁴ The Iskander is a tactical-level missile system, with a range up to 500 km. Its main task is to destroy enemy's land-based military station, and it is considered by military experts as a war-fighting weapon, rather than as a component of deterrence capabilities (Reach et. al., 2023: 21/50). This technical detail demonstrates that how seriously Russian leaders consider the possibility of a direct military conflict with NATO forces in Europe.

against Libya generated a tremendous anxiety in the foreign policy circles in Moscow. Russia abstained from voting the resolution 1973 in the UN Security Council, mandating a no-flight zone over Libya. However, Putin later criticized mission and accused NATO of having gone beyond the resolution's terms. Russian fears were further exacerbated by the Western involvement in Syria. Russian leaders worried that NATO intervention would strategically deny Russia to the Middle East and become a precedent for future interventions in the post-Soviet territories (Donaldson and Nadkarni, 2019: 415; Ratti, 2013: 155-157). This scenario was especially haunting for Putin because in both Iraq (2003) and Libya (2011), the heads of state were overthrown and killed as a result of the U.S.' superior military power and its breach of the sovereign rights of the legitimate governments.

These outcomes have had a significant impact on Putin's threat perception with regard to NATO and the U.S. Because starting with Kosovo, he noticed the growing Western trend of using military force to challenge state sovereignty and achieve regime change. According to Putin, successive crises in Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya happened because of the lack of a counterbalancing force against the U.S. and its allies that could restrain their attempts to restructure the international system in line with their own images (Charap et. al., 2021: 17-19; Reach, Blanc and Geist, 2022: 55-56). The prominent Russian national interest thereafter would be to constitute balance of power mechanism as the main operating principle of the international system. And after 2012, Russia has started a more vigorous pursuit of this national interest (Donaldson and Nadkarni, 2019: 412).

Throughout 2012 and 2013, the systemic factors discussed above led Russian leadership to believe that the U.S. and NATO were intentionally challenging the Russian security (Radin and Reach, 2017: 28). In this context, Russia has redefined its national interests in terms of resisting the NATO-led military integration in Europe and challenging or transcending American dominance in the international system (Reach, Blanc and Geist, 2022: 1). As noted, Putin's return to the Kremlin in 2012 marked the beginning of the comprehensive efforts to carve out a more favorable position for Russia in the international system by resisting the unilateral policies of the U.S. and NATO (Tsygankov, 2019: 231). In order to reinforce Russia's position and ensure that its national interests could no longer be denied without serious

repercussions, Putin has initiated a massive program of military modernization (Defense Intelligence Agency, 2017: 12-15). Because increasing military assets of NATO are forecasted both as an undermining factor for the international stability and as a regional security problem emanating from the hostile activities in the post-Soviet space (Reach et. al., 2022: 113). Therefore, after 2012, the confrontational policies have become the defining element of Russia-NATO relations. Consequently, the priority of Russian security and defence policies have been redefined as to restructure the power relationships that had emerged with the end of the Cold War (Donaldson and Nadkarni, 2019: 427).

One major result of this redefinition of Russia's national interests has been an assertive turn in Russia's foreign and security policy. Various scholars have defined this doctrinal change in Russian policy by different concepts; including, but not limited to, expansionist (Rosefielde, 2021), revanchist (Toal, 2017), neo-imperialist (Donaldson and Nadkarni, 2019), revisionist (Loftus and Kanet, 2017) and neo-revisionist (Sakwa, 2015a). However, the author will not make a judgement – for now – on what the genuine Russian intentions in fact are, instead, will use the term 'assertive,' or 'aggressive.' Because each of these concepts have different theoretical implications. Moreover, unlike material factors, it is almost impossible to measure the real intentions that shape the visible policy courses. As neorealist theory acknowledge, defensive motives can sometimes give way to offensive actions. In Russian case, as Stephen Kotkin (quoted in Radin and Reach, 2017: 8) maintained, "Russia has felt perennially vulnerable and has often displayed a kind of defensive aggressiveness." Moreover, one top-rank Russian military official (quoted in Reach, Blanc and Geist, 2022: 41) observes that, for critical Russian strategic tasks, offensive and defensive operations have to be integrated. Because the fear of being invaded from abroad sometimes produces aggressive behaviours in Russia (Radin and Reach, 2017: 8).

The assertive Russian policies mentioned above have been committed to reassign Russia to great power status. In Russian conceptualization, the term 'great powers' refers a number of consequential states whose security and national interests have to be appreciated by all states in the system and could not be denied without provoking serious consequences for regional and international stability (Tkachenko, 2017: 116). Therefore, great power status and means for achieving its vital security

interests go hand in hand for Russian leaders. Relatedly, the unipolar structure of the international system is seen as an acute threat to Russia's vital security interest. As the Chief of the General Staff, Valerii Gerasimov argued in 2018, "desire of the United States to not allow the loss of its global leadership and to preserve the unipolar world by any means... is having a decisive influence on the development of the military-political situation" (quoted in Reach et. al., 2022: 89). The term 'military-political situation' (VPO)²⁵ is the main reference point for Russian military and political leaders according to which they shape their official assessments of Russia's physical security, threat perception and military strategy. Therefore, this line demonstrates the degree to which Russia's strategic actions are conditioned by the unipolar structure.

Official research conducted by the scholars of Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO) in Russia projected for 2035 found that security threats from NATO would diminish and the level of tension between Russia and the West would reduce if multipolarity will be established (Reach et. al., 2022: 104). Because in this scenario, every great power would be secure in its immediate neighbourhood and the balance of power mechanism would prevent any state from disrupting the equilibrium. Consistent with this finding, the emergence of a multipolar system has been fervently advocated by Russian officials. The 2013 Foreign Policy Concept, for example, highlighted the aim of "securing [Russia's] high standing in the international community as one of the influential and competitive poles of the modern world" (quoted in Radin and Reach, 2017: 15-16).

In the light of the regional level analysis in unipolarity, the efforts of eroding the U.S. global hegemony are closely connected to the Russian primacy in its near abroad within the context of Russia's security. Russia historically considers its active involvement in its near abroad as the central component of its existential security (Frederick et. al., 2017: 29). There is a consensus among Russian foreign policy experts that Russian strategic behavior is shaped by the interaction between its – cultural, political and economic – leadership among post-Soviet states and its evaluation of the VPO – mostly defined with reference to the U.S. Scholars agree that Russia's security policy is determined by the interaction between its relative position

²⁵ VPO = *voenno-politicheskaia obstanovka* (Reach et. al., 2022: 2).

in the international system and its engagement in the affairs of the post-Soviet states (Clunan, 2019: 4). Because Russia could no longer assume the position of a superpower, whose capabilities allow it to exert significant influence in Latin America, Africa and Asia, as was the case during the Soviet era. Therefore, in order to acquire great power status, Russia must remain the strategic axis of Eurasia (Berryman, 2019: 69). According to this point of view, Russia's great-power status provides particular privileges across its near abroad (Radin and Reach, 2017: 17).

RAND research conducted in 2019 demonstrates the combination of the two main elements constitutes the very essence of Russian security: the Russian views of the unipolar system, and dangers and opportunities emanating from the Russia's near abroad (Radin et. al., 2019). These two factors are not separately weighed and independently assessed by Russian leaders, on the contrary, they are closely interconnected. To begin with, 2015 National Security Strategy enlists Russian Federation as one of the "leading world powers, whose actions are aimed at maintaining strategic stability" (quoted in Charap et. al., 2021: 20-21). Accordingly, stability is the main security priority of Russia. The concept entails domestic as well as external stability. In Russian views, stability necessitates predictability and the elimination of uncertainty inherent in the international system as much as possible. For Russians, the U.S. and NATO constitute the main source of threat. In a broader context, especially U.S.' unilateral actions are seen as the gravest source of international instability and unpredictability, which are directly threatening Russia's security. In global scale, Russia's strategic policy aims to reinforce the states which are challenging the U.S. dominance and dissuade the U.S. from acting in way that detrimental for Russian vital interests (Radin et. al., 2019: 9-13).

Secondly, as mentioned above, one of the main security interests of Russia is to preserve its privileges and to extend its influence in the post-Soviet space, which means becoming the attraction point in the region politically, militarily, economically and culturally. This aspiration requires to detract the image of the West among post-communist countries. Because, firstly, these countries' integration into Euro-Atlantic organizations will result in the deployment of NATO's armed forces and military infrastructure closer to Russia's frontiers. Secondly, according to the Russian leaders, NATO's and the EU's increasing engagement in this area could lead to other 'color

revolutions,’ including Russia. Accordingly, in a more specific context, “stability is defined particularly by avoidance of ‘color revolution’ scenarios” (Radin et. al., 2019: 9). The scenario in which NATO states take advantage of the popular domestic unrest to overthrow the legitimate sovereign governments and install Western-friendly regimes in the region is anything but unconceivable among Russian policy circles.

This perception is consistent with the Russian stance towards public unrests globally. From Arab Spring to the Maidan Protests, Russian officials thought Western governments ignited the public discontent and domestic unrest. Moreover, according to Putin, the West’s indirect involvement in these cases as well as its direct military interventions in Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya that destabilize the international system have been made possible by the preponderant U.S. material capabilities. The single pattern that defined both the Western civil and military interventions in those cases refers directly to the contradictions of unipolarity. As the Military Doctrine of Russian Federation in 2014 states, “the use of military force in the territories of states adjacent to the Russian Federation and its allies, in violation of the Charter of UN,” is a great danger for Russia’s security (Persson, 2021: 358). The one crucial implication of this statement is that Russia was to act pre-emptively and violently in order to avoid from the recurring of what it had witnessed in Yugoslavia, Iraq and Libya.

Based on its grievances toward the system and its threat perception to national security, the demonstration of superior military force has become the essential component of the new Russian assertiveness. For Moscow, the best way to ensure that these possible scenarios would not pose an existential threat to Russia’s security is the “reestablishment of territorial control and the military defeat of the adversary” (Tkachenko, 2017: 125). Again, the implication of this definition is dual, consisting of regional and international-level dynamics. Russia’s relative position in the international system and the ambiguous nature of Russian engagement with its near abroad becomes entangled when it comes to Russia’s vital security interests. On the one hand, historically, thanks to these absolute military defeats of the enemies, Russia has achieved to attain great power position in the international system. The military strength is the *sine qua non* of “greatpowerness” (Smith, 2019: 46). In Russian understanding, a state’s ability to project its military power beyond its borders defines

its great power status (Donaldson and Nadkarni, 2019: 6). Therefore, regardless of whether the current operating mechanism of the international system is balance of power or hegemony, Russian politicians have traditionally seen the military power as an essential tool for playing a dynamic role in international politics.

On the other hand, in the Russian case, the armed forces have also been assigned to task of preserving status quo at regional level. According to one distinguished Russian scholar, Russia would be able to avoid from becoming a vassal state to other major powers only by its robust military power (Charap et. al., 2021: 29-30). In order to be able to compel other states to respect its sovereign rights and 'privileged interests,' a country needs to have both credibility and control over material resources. Russian leaders define these material resources, first and foremost, in terms of military capabilities. Russian foreign and security policy officials traditionally believe that if its armed forces prove vulnerable, Russia will not be able to coerce the possible Western intrusions into its near abroad and, even into its homeland. Because armed forces have the highest operability among other assets of state power in terms of protecting populations, ensuring territorial control, and deterring adversaries (Donaldson and Nadkarni, 2019: 6; Renz, 2019: 825; Smith, 2019: 46-49).

4.1.2. The Role of Military Power

For Russian leaders, in the process of building a multipolar system, the core state asset has been the military power. As Bettina Renz (2019: 826) describes, possessing a robust military force structure is indispensable if the state is to maintain its capacity to manoeuvre independently in the global stage as a discrete pole whose national interests cannot be overlooked. Moreover, according to Russian leadership, only when it reasserts itself as a great power in the system Russia will be totally invulnerable against security threats. Therefore, within the general framework outlined above, the author of this study believes that analysing the trends in the military doctrines, the material developments and force postures of both Russia and NATO is the best method for drawing valid inferences about the process, through which the interplay of the international-system level factors and Russian regional aspirations has

led a crisis in Ukraine. The validity of this method could be established by highlighting the three essential points.

Firstly, and most crucially, the official Russian military documents,²⁶ which explicitly prioritize the missions of the Russian Armed Forces, prove the effects of entangling systemic and regional factors on Russian defence and security policy. Accordingly, acting swiftly and vigorously in strategic locations across its borders in order to avoid from a security crisis (regional component) which has the potential of escalating to a great power war (systemic component) has been the top priority of Russian Armed Forces (Reach, Blanc and Geist, 2022: 78). Ensuring “the agility and the rapidness of the military to perform before other actors intervene” has been the ultimate goal of Russian foreign and security policy officials (Rosefielde, 2021: 220). For example, in 2015, a number of Russian military experts projected a scenario in which the armed conflict in Ukraine exacerbates and/or the territorial disputes in Baltic region deteriorates, both of which result in Russia-NATO confrontation (Reach, Blanc and Geist, 2022: 38). Reach et. al. (2022: 112) perfectly capture how explicitly the Russian official military documents prove that the Russian threat perception at international-system level is strongly intertwined with its defence strategy at regional level. Accordingly, in such a scenario, the main task of the Russian army is to localize a conflict that breaks out in Russian near-abroad by acting swiftly and ensure that it will not escalate to a great power.

Secondly, indeed, Russian politicians and military officials think that a great power war, in which Russia confronts with the U.S. and NATO, is not impossible. This conviction, combined with the Russian leaders’ observation of the growing trends in international system that jeopardize Russian security – including illegitimate intervention and forcible regime changes – has led Russian military strategy to take a specific form, which manifested itself in Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Because according to the Russian leaders, if their observations on global military interventions of the U.S. are true, the U.S. and its allies might well directly attack Russia simply because they are not content with

²⁶ As of April 2024, most of the Russian official documents in the area of military strategy and foreign policy are not available online in English. Therefore, this section draws on the secondary resources including U.S. government documents and academic research reports and articles authored by the scholars and experts who could comprehensively analyse the materials written in Russian language.

Putin's personality, domestic developments in Russia, or the level of democracy in the country (Reach et. al., 2020: 137). And the West had already revealed its aspirations toward the region by supporting color revolutions and promising Ukraine and Georgia NATO membership in 2008 Bucharest Summit. The basic assumption was that NATO allies could initiate and conduct a decisive type of military operation that had been observed by Russian leaders in NATO's previous interventions against more vulnerable opponents. For this reason, especially after Libya, Russia began to closely monitor NATO's force buildups adjacent to its borders, "that resemble force deployments of previous U.S.-led conflicts, which were weighted toward air and naval platforms and long-range strike potential as opposed to large numbers of ground forces" (Reach et. al., 2020: 137). For this reason, it is also important to outline the military postures of NATO and the U.S. in the Europe.

Finally, as the research conducted by the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (2017: 15) demonstrates, upgraded military tactics and modernized military equipment were the decisive factors in Russia's achievement in both annexing Crimea and obstructing Ukraine's efforts to become a NATO member. Indeed, scholars and military experts analysing the official Western and Russian documents largely agree that Russia's full-fledged military modernisation – which began in 2008 – has mostly succeeded (Rosefielde, 2021). According to Eugene Kogan – a prominent defence expert – (quoted in Rosefielde, 2021: 221), this means that the armed forces of Russia "will seize the opportunity to intervene if they see fit." Watts et. al. (2022: 37) also show that, emboldened by their local military superiority, Russian military leaders might not be deterred from conducting destabilizing actions if they think they could achieve decisive results in the initial period of conflict. Therefore, in the second part of this chapter, military strategies and force postures of Russia and NATO will be examined.

4.1.3. The Geostrategic Importance of Ukraine

The crucial place Ukraine occupies in Russian foreign policy is well established in the scholarly literature. For example, Bobo Lo (2015: 107) asserts that "there is no single relationship more important to Moscow than its intimate, but often

fractious, interaction with Kyiv.” Similarly, according to Donaldson and Nadkarni (2019: 187), “no single concern was more basic than preventing Ukrainian membership in NATO.” However, there is no consensus on the root causes of this crucial role. The factors that are mostly cited include strategic, military, political, historical, societal, ethnic, ideational and psychological factors. For the purpose of this study, the role of Ukraine will be discussed narrowly in terms of its strategic effects on Russian security and defence policy. Ukraine has also a special place in American strategic planning. Therefore, from a geopolitical point of view, understanding “the balance of will and interests in areas where U.S. and Russian interests conflict” has utmost importance for analysing the Ukraine crisis (Rumer and Sokolsy, 2019: 31).

Ukraine’s place in Russian foreign policy and strategic thinking can be most effectively analysed from the classic geopolitical point of view. Within this framework, it is important to revisit Zbigniew Brzezinski’s reflections on the issue. His views have been informed by the classical theory of geopolitics. In 1919, the founder of the classical geopolitics, Halford J. Mackinder, denominated the different strategic locations of the world according to their importance. Accordingly, the Eurasian continent is the ‘World Island,’ Russia and Central Asia is the pivot region, or ‘Heartland,’ of this World Island. Using this terminology, he formalized his famous theory as: “Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland: Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island: Who rules the World-Island commands the world” (quoted in Hahn, 2019). This definition has had profound influence on American strategic thinking. A 1996 publication by U.S. National Defense University highlights the enduring relevance of Mackinder’s theory (quoted in Hahn, 2019).

Brzezinski was the most fervent advocate of this view, which led him to argue the neo-containment of Russia. He (1997: 46) wrote that:

Ukraine... is a geopolitical pivot because its very existence as an independent country helps to transform Russia. Without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be a Eurasian empire... However, if Russia regains control over Ukraine... Russia automatically gains the wherewithal to become a major imperial state, spanning Europe and Asia.

Brzezinski (1997: 87) further argued that the main goal of the U.S. foreign policy in the post-Cold War era should be preventing “the reemergence of a Eurasian empire that could obstruct the American geostrategic goal of shaping a larger Euro-Atlantic system.” Similarly, in July 1996, the U.S. Secretary of Defense (quoted in

Brzezinski, 1997: 113) declared that the crucial role that Ukraine plays in maintaining security and ensuring stability in continental Europe cannot be stressed enough. Overall, according to this conceptualization, traditional geostrategic thinking compels great powers to compete for ruling Eastern Europe, the Heartland, and thus the world. Therefore, in the post–Cold War era, U.S. leaders are obliged to prevent the revival of Russia’s influence in the region which would provide Russia instruments for checking global Western hegemony (Hahn, 2019). Because if the heartland is ruled by a continental power like Russia, then it achieves an important part of the strategy of controlling the world.

On the other hand, the effects of Brzezinski’s views in Russia have at least been as strong as they have been in the strategic thinking of the Western countries (Hahn, 2019). For Russian strategists, Brzezinski’s conceptualisation has double meanings: On the one hand, Russia’s geopolitical position makes it vulnerable to external threats, thus makes Russian leaders particularly sensitive in terms of threat perception. Russian aggressive behaviours and aspirations for territorial expansion have usually been motivated by search of greater security. And Ukraine’s territory is located in a critical geostrategic area, this strategic location has been thought as a bulwark against Western military attacks since the Soviet era. On the other hand, this geopolitical location provides Russia opportunities for assertively pursuing its national interests and impose its power and exert its influence over the critical regions of the ‘heartland.’ Geographic factors, such as openness and vastness of Russian territory, and the absence of natural barriers against possible invasions, has led Russia to act offensively in its near-abroad (Donaldson and Nadkarni, 2019: 18/31-32; Rumer and Sokolsy, 2019: 24).

Regarding Ukraine, therefore, what matters most for the Russian leaders is its pivotal strategic location. According to Tsygankov (quoted in Charap et. al., 2023: 129), Ukraine’s territorial frontiers were demarcated by Stalin in order to create a buffer region absorbing the attacks coming from Western direction. Therefore, Soviet decisionmakers had conceived of Ukraine as an indispensable buffer territory lying between Russian mainland and Western Europe. Although the Cold War has ended and Ukraine has declared its independence, many Russian leaders continue to see Ukraine from same perspective (Charap et. al., 2023: 128-130). When the possibility of Ukraine’s membership in the EU and NATO becomes more apparent, Putin began

to utter repeatedly the strategic threats for Russia emanating from the developments in Ukraine. In May 2014, for example, he (quoted in Sakwa, 2015a) said: “Ukraine’s potential accession to NATO... could be followed by the deployment of missile strike systems in Ukraine, including Crimea. Should this happen, it would have serious geopolitical consequences for our country.”

The Russian strategic views regarding the importance of Ukraine seem to be warranted. Because, firstly, Russia and Ukraine share a land border stretching across approximately 2.000 km. Grand Kremlin Palace is 8-hour car ride away from the easternmost Ukrainian city – Sumy. Secondly, Russia-Ukraine border lies across the Volga River, basin of which accommodates the industrial and political heartland of Russia. Thirdly, crucial military, economic and industrial infrastructure are located in the Donbas region, which have become highly disputed after 2014. Eastern Ukraine has crucial place in manufacturing military materials that are vital for the Russian defence sector. By 2014, Ukraine was the sole supplier of the some of these materials. Moreover, Ukrainian-manufactured nuclear materials were especially crucial for Russia’s strategic force posture (Charap et. al., 2023: 133-134). Moreover, the naval positions in Crimea hosts the Russian Black Sea fleet which has strategic, historic, and symbolic value for Russians (Sakwa, 2015a).

Ukraine has also been one of Russia’s most important trading partners. In terms of critically important oil and gas exports, Ukraine has been both a big importer of Russian gas and a transit route for Russian energy towards the European market. Ukrainian lands serve as a gateway for Russian energy export to reach European continent. This is important because oil and gas exports are indispensable for Russian economy. Since the early 2000s, Russia’s economic revival has been possible thanks to its vast energy resources, constituting the 60 percent of Russian exports. Especially during the last decade, Russia has repeatedly used this factor – European states’ dependence on its energy supplies – as a leverage in order to prevent Ukraine from moving closer to Western institutions. (Frederick et. al., 2017: 30-31; Lo, 2015: 107; Rumer and Sokolsy, 2019: 22).

Apart from its geostrategic location, there is also a second systemic factor. The political lines demarcating the legal sovereignty of post-Soviet states after the end of the Cold War had not originally been envisioned as international borders, but had been

designed to delineate the internal division of administrative and political functions within the Soviet Union. According to Berryman (2018: 63), in many cases, these borders had been drawn quite arbitrarily. Therefore, when the boundaries that had been serving to domestic aims were redefined as the international borders defining the territorial frontiers of fifteen different sovereign state at the end of the Cold War, this situation itself has become a political issue of high controversy. The domestic issues of one particular state have suddenly become internationalized, and the domestic policy of that state (Russia) have become intertwined with its foreign policy, as well as the foreign policies of other major actors in the region, such as the U.S. (Donaldson and Nadkarni, 2019: 170).

In this context, for Russia, Ukraine is anything but an issue mere foreign policy issue. For many Russians, the idea of an independent Ukraine separated by Russian mainland is anachronistic and does not make sense at all (Dalsjö et. al., 2022: 18). As discussed in the previous chapter, the security architecture of Europe which was drafted by Western leaders after the dissolution of the Soviet Union has produced deep and enduring controversies spoiling the relations between the U.S./NATO and Russia. Against this backdrop, the deficiencies of this security order have continuously manifested itself in the Russia's near abroad, or what Russian leaders define as their 'zone of privileged interest.' In Roy Allison's (2014: 1269) words, Russia's security competition with the West has generated "a geopolitical fault-line, which Putin [was] prepared to drive through Ukraine by force." Therefore, responding the developments in Kyiv represented the Russia's resistance against the U.S.' assertive policies. The priority was to block Ukraine's accession to NATO, removing U.S. military installations from Ukraine's territory, and securing the access to Russian naval base in Sevastopol, Crimea (Sakwa, 2015a).

In line with the aim of resisting U.S. military deployments in its near abroad, intervention in Ukraine was also serving the idea of challenging American unipolarity in a broader context. As discussed in the previous sections, Russia's enduring aspiration to be a great power, which has the capacity to establish an alternative world order to liberal internationalism; and the Moscow's threat perception and immediate concerns about its physical security, manifested in the attempts to create a buffer area and maintain domestic stability, go hand in hand. When Putin assumed presidency for

third time in 2012, he planned to finalize the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), which will be “capable of becoming one of the poles” in the modern international system that would connect the Eastern and Western civilizations and integrate their distinct political and economic systems (Charap et. al., 2021: 22). Russia is to be a political, economic and military hub around which the former Communist states as well as emerging great powers gather.

As the most populous ex-Communist republic with the second largest economy after Russia, Ukraine was the focal point of Russia’s integration efforts. The EEU was envisioned as an organization that would be able to compete strategically with the U.S., the EU and China at global level (Menon and Rumer, 2015: 73; Loftus and Kanet, 2015: 32). The expectation was that a fully-integrated Eurasian union would allow Russia to employ both necessary instruments for resisting against Western encroachment and policies for improving its systemic position as a great power. As one prominent Russian scholar put it, no great power “walks alone” (quoted in Menon and Rumer, 2015: 73). Therefore, among the Russian leaders, as Berryman (2018: 70) notes, “in the fluid post-Cold War geopolitical environment Ukraine came to be seen as a potential ‘pivot state’ on the Eurasian chessboard.”

Therefore, keeping Ukraine within Russia’s strategic orbit has been the top priority of Russian leadership in terms of military, political, economic and historical reasons. Ukraine has always been on the top of the list of vital Russian security interests. To lose Ukraine would mean to jeopardize the existential security of the Russian state and people (Lo, 2015: 107). Because of this, the traditional idea of Ukraine representing a vital buffer against NATO endures for decades. Ukraine’s accession to Euro-Atlantic organization would mean the deployment of Western hard-security tools in its territory, cutting Russia’s access to its naval base in Sevastopol, and terminating most of the economic ties privileging Russia in terms of gas and oil export. Therefore, from Russian perspective, in 2014, Ukraine was standing in an area of extreme importance for strategic value, sense of security, and economic national interests.

Moreover, Russia’s discontent about its relative position in the international system and American global hegemony was also an important factor motivating its annexation of Crimea and its subsequent decision to resort military force in the Donbas

region. In October 2014, Putin complained from the lack of transparent legal regulations ensuring the respect of all states to basic ruling principles of international politics, natural rights of the individual states, and standards defining a useful framework for regular interstate conduct (Radin and Reach, 2017: 1). In the same year, Putin delivered a speech, which reverberating the broader themes he uttered in the 2007 Munich conference. He blamed the West's for pursuing the neo-containment policy, which is reflecting the Cold War mentality. He (quoted in Charap et. al., 2023: 140-141) further argued that, in Ukraine, Western leaders "crossed the line... acting irresponsibly and unprofessionally." Because "if you compress the spring all the way to its limit, it will snap back hard."

4.2. THE ANNEXATION OF CRIMEA AND RUSSIA-NATO SECURITY RELATIONS (2014-2022)

4.2.1. The Annexation of Crimea

The immediate cause of the Maidan protests was Yanukovich's rejection to sign Association Agreement (AA) with the EU. However, the main concern of the Russian leaders was that a pro-Western figures assuming the critical positions in the Ukrainian government after protests could have resumed the negotiations with the EU. Because moving Ukraine closer to any Western institution could have initiated the process in the end of which Ukraine would become a NATO member (Wolff, 2015: 1110). Russian leaders saw developing institutional ties between Ukraine and the EU as a prelude to Ukraine's NATO membership (Charap et. al., 2023: 130). Allison (2014: 1272) argues Russia's annexation of Crimea was motivated more by the aim of strategic denial of Ukraine to NATO than negating its economic integration with the EU. On the other hand, many prominent scholars view the EU as the civilian wing, or economic auxiliary of NATO (Allison, 2014; Cafruny et. al., 2023; Fernandes, 2015; Sakwa, 2015b). In this conceptualisation, *realpolitik* is the principal doctrine that informs the EU's policies and strategies (Fernandes, 2015: 101; Sakwa, 2015b: 563).

These scholars point out, firstly, the increasing geopolitical character of EU's policies. According to Richard Sakwa (2015b: 553-554), the EU is undergoing a

process through which it gradually ceases to be a civilian project of peaceful ideas and transforms into an ambitious geopolitical actor with its own *raison d'état*. In this context, its policies have become more coercive and discriminatory in nature. For example, Menon and Rumer (2015: 69) argues that the main motivation behind the establishment of the European Neighbourhood Policy was to exert effective influence on the economic, political and even military processes of the geographically adjacent states, even the ones which did not have any reasonable prospect for accession to the EU. Toward this aim, in order to formalize its relations with ENP countries, the EU drafted the AA, the most salient aspect of which has been the assertive free trade provisions. These provisions assign the EU as the superior partner, allowing the union to spread its political muscle by utilizing the economic statecraft (Menon and Rumer, 2015: 69).

Secondly, same scholars underline the ever-decreasing political autonomy of the EU accompanied with the increasing militarization of its territories. As Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov (quoted in Sakwa, 2015b: 575) admitted, Russia had “overestimated the independence of the European Union and even big European countries. So, it’s geopolitics.” Allison (2014), Cafruny et. al. (2023) and Sakwa (2015b) highlights the increasing convergence between NATO and the EU. These two organizational structures institutionalize and formalize the relations among Western states. Combined with American hard power, they constitute the new ‘Atlanticism,’ the ‘grand project’ of the West dominated by the U.S. in the post-Cold War era (Sakwa, 2015b: 554). There is no shortage of proof for the existence of this new Atlanticism. For example, in the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007, the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the EU was envisioned to complement, not compete with, NATO’s military structure. In accordance with the Berlin Plus framework, EU’s military operations would not duplicate, discriminate, and decouple NATO’s missions.

In the end of the process, the EU candidates have been assigned responsible to recalibrate their military structures and defence policies in a way that corresponds with NATO’s policies and priorities. Sakwa (2015b) argues that this has resulted in the actual militarization of the EU. In a similar vein, U.S. military efforts, especially its initiative to deploy BMD systems in Czechia and Poland, has demonstrated both that the EU had only limited strategic autonomy and that it “remained firmly part of a

spatialized and militarized world order” (Sakwa, 2015b: 563-564). According to one Russian scholar (quoted in Sakwa, 2015b: 555-556), the multiplicity of layers in this militarized world order triggered the Russia’s offensive actions across several levels, since the West had been “continuously limiting Russia’s freedom [and] spheres of influence,” while extending its authority in military and political affairs through the expansion of NATO, and its influence in economic affairs through EU enlargement.

The AA, which had been envisaged to sign with Ukraine in November 2013, along with its economic provisions, also covers political and security domains, such as conflict prevention, crisis management and military cooperation. It enshrines to promote incremental integration of the Ukraine’s defence policy and the organization of its armed forces with Western states, aiming to achieve a genuine incorporation of Ukraine into the security architecture of the Europe. More generally, the agreement expects Ukraine to detach itself from Russia’s strategic orbit and recalibrate its foreign, economy and security policy in line with the EU. The EU declined Russian proposal to retain Ukraine’s neutrality and renegotiate the terms of the AA within a trilateral EU-Ukraine-Russia diplomatic framework. After this, Ukraine’s European integration efforts became a zero-sum game for Russia, where the important countries in its near abroad would have to choose either to integrate with the West or cooperate with Russia (Charap et. al., 2023: 130). The clear-cut data presented in Table 4 captures the essence of the Russia’s relative gains concerns and zero-sum mentality.

Table 4: Post-Communist States’ Integration with the Euro-Atlantic Institutions

		Accession Dates to the EU and NATO		
		<i>EU AA Signed</i>	<i>EU Member</i>	<i>NATO Member</i>
Post-Communist States	<i>Bulgaria</i>	March 8, 1993	January 1, 2007	March 29, 2004
	<i>Croatia</i>	October 29, 2001	July 1, 2013	April 1, 2009
	<i>Poland</i>	December 16, 1991	May 1, 2004	March 12, 1999
	<i>Hungary</i>	December 16, 1991	May 1, 2004	March 12, 1999
	<i>Czechia</i>	October 4, 1993	May 1, 2004	March 12, 1999
	<i>Slovakia</i>	October 4, 1993	May 1, 2004	March 29, 2004
	<i>Slovenia</i>	June 10, 1996	May 1, 2004	March 29, 2004
	<i>Baltic States</i>	June 12, 1995	May 1, 2004	March 29, 2004

Source: Hahn, 2019.

In this context, the extension of NATO's military infrastructure to Ukrainian territory was the primary concern of Russia. These fears had already become acute after 2008 Bucharest Summit. They were further exacerbated during the following process. The number of consultation meetings between Ukraine and NATO and cooperation on tactical and strategic operations increased. Between 2008 and 2013, participation of Ukrainian armed forces in NATO peacekeeping missions, Ukraine's support for NATO's logistical operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, reinforcement of Ukrainian military materials by NATO's funding, and training of Ukrainian troops by NATO military officials were accelerated. During Yanukovich's tenure, NATO conducted several military exercises in Ukraine, especially after 2011. NATO's aim in these activities was to extend Western influence in the region, reinforce the coordination between Ukrainian army and its forces, initiate interoperability, and eradicate the Russian footprints in Ukrainian forces – given the long period of time during which they had been a part of the Red Army (Hahn, 2019).

Yanukovich had initially been intended to sign the AA. However, Russian threats mostly in the form of economic sanctions led Yanukovich to renege on his commitment to align Ukraine with Western institutions. Subsequently, mass streets protest erupted in Kyiv and spread all over the country. Effective support of the EU officials to the demonstrators and their apparent discontent with improving ties between Yanukovich and Russia led Russian politicians to suspect that the developments in Ukraine was a Western ploy to install a friendly regime (Menon and Rumer, 2015: 82). As the protests was becoming more widespread, Russia's ability to steer the course of political and military situation in Ukraine began to diminish. Under these circumstances, it was not unreasonable for Russian politicians to fear that the pro-Western figures would assume the leadership in the country and subsequently promote and facilitate the process of Ukraine's NATO membership (Menon and Ruger, 2023: 182).

Russian fears were culminated in February 2014 with the sudden overthrow of Yanukovich government by explicitly Western-oriented elements (Allison, 2014: 1257). Russian leadership began to feel that situation was now totally out of control and Russian vital interests were at stake. Therefore, in Putin's words, "Russia found itself in a position it could not retreat from" (quoted in Charap et. al., 2023: 140). There

were several options to restore status quo in Ukraine. However, possibility of the establishment of a Western-oriented in Kyiv led military operation to outweigh other alternatives and Russia initiated a direct military intervention (Menon and Rumer, 2015: 80-83; Moore, 2023: 381). A direct attack on the capital of the country would have been too ambitious and provoked a military backlash from NATO. Instead, Crimea, the peninsula of a critical geostrategic position, home of a major Russian maritime installation, and densely populated with ethnic Russians, became the prime target for imposing a heavy damage that would erode Ukraine's sovereignty, credibility and territorial integrity (Menon and Rumer, 2015: 83). This move would allow Russia to become the most influential actor in effecting both Ukraine's future behavior and military and political dynamics in the Black Sea Region. Therefore, Putin initiated a pre-emptive military operation in February 2014, conducted by Russian special forces, marine corps and airborne units, resulting in the annexation of Crimea (Allison, 2014: 1278).

As Roy Allison (2014: 1269) argued, the policies expressed in offensive actions do not have to be informed by greedy motives. On the contrary, a state might choose to respond with offensive moves to disruptions in the equilibrium with regard to the balance of capabilities, or balance of interests defined by perceived threats to its security and special national interests in specific areas. In this sense, Russia's intervention in Ukraine has demonstrated the validity of the key neorealist assumptions on this issue (Allison, 2014: 1269). Allison (2014: 1281) also points out the Russia's strategic aims in a broader context, in which Crimea would serve as a crucial base for extensive projection of the Russian military power abroad. A colonel general in Russian air-forces (quoted in Allison, 2014: 1281) said that military assets gained by annexation of Crimea would serve to improve the war-fighting capacity of Russian armed forces and consolidate the positions of Russian troops deployed outside the Russia's territory, allowing Russia to conduct military operations far beyond its borders. Similarly, the Minister of Defence Sergei Shoigu (quoted in Allison, 2014: 1281) announced the one of the Russia's strategic goals was to extend the scope of military activities in certain critical regions around the globe, validated its assertion by mentioning Russian military footprints in Singapore, Nicaragua and Venezuela, and naval presence in Vietnam.

Therefore, the annexation of Crimea was a carefully calculated tactical-level move aiming to achieve some strategic-level goals. Some scholars' reflections on Russia's subsequent strategic behaviour in the Eastern Ukraine lend credence to this argument. As noted, a separatist insurgency arose in the Donbas region after April 2014. According to Berryman (2015), Russia's support for this secessionist movement had been at an indeterminate and ambiguous level. Because Russia has had to continuously recalibrate its tactical-level behaviour in a way that would most effectively serve to the aim of maximizing its strategic-level gains. On the one hand, it made necessary moves for hedging against a total defeat of insurgents. On the other hand, Kremlin was aware that if their geopolitical acquisitions went too far, this would threaten the vital Western interests. For example, any attempt to create a land corridor between Mariupol and Crimea would pose a grave threat to Western energy security, and "might open the door to a 'second Afghanistan.' A possible over-extension of Russia's involvement, with the risk of de-stabilization and regime change in Russia, would thereby snatch defeat at the strategic level from the jaws of victory at the tactical level" (Berryman, 2015: 203).

However, maintaining a 'frozen conflict' in the region would more effectively serve Russia's key strategic goals. Therefore, the level of its involvement in civil war in the Eastern Ukraine has been calibrated in line with the three key strategic objectives. By carefully adjusting the scope of its support to insurgents, Russia firstly sought to conduct a wedge strategy against the West. Apart from generating disagreements among NATO members, Russia tried to disrupt Western unity by blocking Ukraine's NATO membership and obstructing its efforts of integration with the EU. Second, eroding its rival's power and credibility went hand in hand with Russia's simultaneous efforts to improve its own political and economic position in the region. Third, maintaining a territorial dispute serves the Russian security interests by both retaining a buffer zone between itself and NATO and making Ukraine's membership to NATO legally inapplicable (Watts et. al., 2023: 63).

To conclude, the annexation of Crimea had already consolidated the Russian superiority in regional balance of power. The strategic availability of the peninsula provided new military opportunities in the region and beyond (Allison, 2014: 1278). For example, Russia created an army corps which is fortified by a coastal air defence

brigade and other additional aerial and naval assets²⁷ (Vershbow and Breedlove, 2019: 19). Russian military units in the region became physically suitable for integration into specific missions in the southern and eastern Ukraine. Moreover, Crimea became a springboard for Russian armed forces that could serve as a platform for projecting military power abroad. Russia has utilized the geographic location of Crimea to create a second large level system of integrated A2/AD capabilities in the region, by which Russia could hit critically important targets in Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East (Vershbow and Breedlove, 2019: 19). Finally, the uncertainty over Russian rights of deploying naval forces in Sevastopol has been removed. By this way, Russian navy has proved to be the superior force on the Black Sea, outnumbering and overwhelming the Turkish fleet (Allison, 2014: 1278).

Acknowledging the crucial strategic and political position of the peninsula, during a meeting in March 2015, Russian military leaders warned their Western counterparts that any Western attempt to capture Crimea and return it to Ukraine would trigger a spectrum of military responses ranging from asymmetric measures to nuclear capabilities (Blank, 2019: 162). Therefore, the question of the use of tactical nuclear weapons has been evoked during this process. Because Russian nuclear doctrine remains ambiguous in terms of utilizing non-strategic nuclear weapons in theater. These ambiguities imply that NATO forces could suffer from Russia's use of nuclear warheads (Radin et. al., 2019: 76-77). Acknowledging both the systemic effects and the potential dangers of the realization of the mentioned developments and the Russian military officials' threat for international security, it is necessary to examine which Russian material military capabilities do consist of this spectrum, and what are the Russian strategic views regarding their employment. In order to clarify these questions, however, it needs to be addressed the U.S. and NATO military force postures after Crimea first.

²⁷ The coordinated operation of long-range precision munitions, coastal defence forces, and air defence systems to obstruct adversary's power projection in a particular area is often referred to as 'anti-access/area-denial' strategy (A2/AD).

4.2.2. NATO and the U.S. Military Posture in Europe

4.2.2.1. Prior to 2014

During the Cold War, NATO forces had been postured with substantial conventional military formations large enough to defend a contiguous line, relying on the rapid mobilization of reserves and effective deployments of reinforcement units, in order to ensure a massive retaliation against a surprise Soviet attack with short-notice (Boston et. al., 2018: 3). In the post-Cold War era, with fading threat of large-scale military invasion of the continent by a hostile force and increasing pretensions about the merits of being a civilian power, NATO's European members have reconfigured their armed forces with exclusive focus on stability operations and peacekeeping missions, both of which require lighter forces to be easily deployed out-of-area to such places as Kosovo and Afghanistan. Since 2001, the ground military services of most NATO countries have adapted to operations in the Middle East by training and equipping forces optimized for stability operations. These missions mostly demand the effective deployment of infantry units and formations, while heavily armoured and mechanized warfighting groups such as artillery and air-defence formations have generally been sidelined (Boston et. al., 2018: 6).

Making things worse for the most vulnerable NATO members, the scope and relative value of NATO's out-of-area missions has continuously increased since the end of the Cold War. As of 2012, a mere 10 percent of combined size of NATO armed forces had been located in the Central and Eastern Europe. Moreover, approximately 14 percent of main NATO installations had been located in the region. While the total number of U.S. troops located in Europe had been 66,217, only 136 had been assigned to missions in the territories of the Central and East European members (Lucas and Mitchell, 2014: 3). These numbers reflect the early attachment of U.S. political and military leaders to the idea that, thanks to increasing momentum of European integration and the deepening peace and stability on the continent, the smaller U.S. peacetime military presence in the Europe would be sufficient for fulfilling U.S.' commitments to an enlarged NATO (Simon, 2015: 161; 2019: 23). These ideas had been accompanied by the consistent U.S. attempts to convince European leaders to

make more meaningful contributions to efforts of maintaining security in their neighbourhood, mostly through increase their share of defence spending above the level of 2 percent in their countries' GDP. These envisioned revisions, in fact, did not result from a decrease in geostrategic importance of the European continent for Americans, but mostly from changing nature of the global security environment.

Against the backdrop of this emerging security environment, in January 2012 the U.S. Department of Defense published an official document – entitled ‘Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense’ – which is to be at the highest level of political importance for U.S. grand strategy (Eichler, 2021: 145-148; Simon, 2015: 157). This defence policy doctrine stipulated that U.S. military posture in Europe would “adapt to the evolving strategic landscape” by developing “innovative, low-cost, and small-footprint approaches” (quoted in Simon, 2015: 157). The basic idea was maintaining maximum level of U.S. global influence with minimum costs and efforts. This called for retrenchment in the land-based formations with heavy capabilities and augmentation of a more flexible force posture, with lighter naval, airborne, coastal and special-force units dispersed across the European periphery (Simon, 2015: 162). Therefore, the U.S. decided in 2012 to dissolve an army corps-level headquarter, two warfighting units at brigade-level, and several company-level units of air-defence and logistic support. This was consistent with Obama’s ‘smart power’ approach. Smart power reflected a more sophisticated understanding of nature of power in international politics in the modern era. The idea that the U.S. should employ its smart power, to use all of the tools of diplomacy and power available to it, was reflecting the fact that unipolarity doesn’t mean omnipotence (Kitchen, 2016).

It did not imply any lesser importance attached to the military, however, because during Obama administration the U.S. still retained to capability of operating in a global context of power projection capabilities and security interests. At global level, the current American military doctrine shows that the U.S. leaders define their country’s position in the system as a superpower with worldwide interests. Accordingly, the U.S. categorically depends on the effective control over the material resources in the geostrategic locations of the world – global commons – as well as on free access to the global markets. Moreover, the U.S. armed forces are envisioned to

protect these American global interests and take necessary precautions by sending or permanently deploying its forces into regions where these interests are under threat (Eichler, 2021:148). Jan Eichler's (2021: 140-158) careful investigation of all the major security and defence policy documents issued by the U.S. governmental departments during Obama's presidency demonstrates that the American foreign and defence policy officials strongly believe that American preponderance in military and technological domains is crucial in the age of unimpeded strategic and operational reach. They all acknowledge the military preponderance of the U.S. and refer to the competitors not as 'opponents,' 'adversaries' or 'enemies,' but as 'challengers' (Eichler, 2021: 147).

This conceptualisation implies that the U.S. has the global primacy, and the rest of its competitors are weaker than the U.S. They could only 'challenge' the U.S., by complicating or delaying American efforts to project its military power abroad. At best, they could strategically deny the U.S. to specific regions. However, a 'challenger' is not capable of conducting counter-offensive operations aiming to negate the material superiority of its adversary (Eichler, 2021: 147). From military point of view, these documents specifically emphasize the ability of U.S. armed forces to conduct A2/AD warfare. Because U.S. and NATO leaders argued that Russia's strategy of deploying of A2/AD systems is informed by greedy motivations and expansive aspirations (Eichler, 2021: 56). The top U.S. military officials were convinced that Russian military modernisation prioritizing to upgrade A2/AD systems had been initiated by Putin for aggressive reasons (Eichler, 2021: 157). Because A2/AD systems enable the 'challengers' to resist the military superiority of the primary state and complicate its military operations. Within this context, A2/AD capabilities represent more than just a specific type of military capabilities and become a systemic factor. Because they could restrict U.S. attempts to reach so called global commons in certain regions, thereby challenge a liberal principle of the current international order, which is 'free access to the global markets.' Against this backdrop, the relevant documents aim to ensure the operational and logistic supremacy of U.S. military across all domains in any given part of the globe (Eichler, 2021: 140-158).

In this sense, Obama era witnessed the continuation of American political, economic and military hegemony. Foreign and security policies of the U.S. were

reformulated with an activist agenda in order to re-make the world in America's image (Löfflmann, 2015: 309). Eichler's analysis (2021: 158) also shows that, the post-Soviet area, especially its European part, was still vital for the global American hegemonic system. Given the crucial place of Europe for American social and economic well-being, strategic access to the continent remained indispensable for the U.S. (Simon, 2015: 161). Therefore, the U.S. remained dedicated to defence of the Europe's vulnerable flanks and deterrence against Russia (Simon, 2015: 162). And as the military documents mentioned above stress, the military and technological superiority of U.S. armed forces should allow the U.S. to freely access all areas even when challengers resist it by employing A2/AD systems, including Europe (Eichler, 2021: 140-158).

On the other hand, however, U.S. leaders maintained their efforts to convince European leaders to make a greater economic contribution to joint efforts of defending the continent within the framework of NATO. During his presidency, Obama sought to re-appropriate the U.S.' global leadership through wiser decisions about the use of force, mostly enshrined in multilateral institutions. His reformulation of American leadership was centrally concerned with minimizing the risk of military losses and managing the costs. He attempted to incorporate U.S. primacy into a grand strategy of cooperative engagement, burden-sharing and leading from behind (Löfflmann, 2015: 321/327). In this way, the U.S. aimed to decouple itself from overstretched global commitment and sought to delegate some authority to its allies on particular issues, while retaining its prerogative in managing the international affairs generally (Kitchen, 2014: 90). For example, despite their calls for burden-sharing, U.S. leaders preferred European members' armed forces to remain inter-operable with U.S. military and strategic doctrine. As noted, these revisions in the U.S. military doctrine were the result of new global context, and were not representing the diminishing value of NATO commitments or Europe's geopolitical position for U.S. strategic planners. As one U.S. defence official said, "without our infrastructure in southern Europe and the Med, our efforts in places like Libya, Syria or even Mali would be unsustainable" (quoted in Simon, 2015: 164).

From the perspective of NATO, however, things did not seem such optimistic. On the one hand, as Lucas and Mitchell (2014: 4-5) shows, the extended deterrence

provides little utility in facing with military challenges in the 21st century. Article 5 provisions and the U.S. nuclear umbrella are not well-designed initiatives to meet with Russian aggressive behavior, which is embodied in localized, asymmetric and swift tactics employed in Crimea. NATO also suffers from the lack of an effective strategy against the energy cutoffs and economic sanctions. And even after projected U.S. military retrenchment, Europeans failed to take these threats seriously. Ironically, during the post-Cold War period, diminishing U.S. military presence in the continent and curtailing defence budgets of European members were going hand in hand (Lucas and Mitchell, 2014: 4-5; Simon, 2015: 157). On the other hand, Europeans failed to define a solid framework within which they could reach a consensus for, and make concerted efforts toward addressing main security issues threatening the member states. The diversity of different geopolitical directions in the individual states' foreign policies was apparently becoming dangerous. The bilateral security arrangements between the U.S. and different individual member states exacerbated the trends of sub-regionalism and fragmentation in Europe. These trends triggered a strategic division inside NATO, "between clusters of willing and able allies, and those that are left out" (Simon, 2015: 157-166). And the fact that each member states have to face with different level of threat began to strain NATO force structures and military assets that are needed perform military missions in a broad geographic area (Moller, 2023: 483).

4.2.2.2. Western Responses to the Annexation of Crimea

The Russian military intervention in Ukraine in 2014 was unexpected and shocking for Western community. As the German foreign minister said in 2016, "we had thought that peace had returned to Europe for good, [however], the question of war and peace has returned to the continent" (quoted in Sayle, 2019: 245). "The foreseeable security environment" that had been predicated by NATO members in the Founding Act of 1997 largely disappeared. While two more states – Montenegro and North Macedonia – have become NATO members after 2014, the most decisive factor that marked the third decade of the post-Cold War era was the increasing military confrontation between Russia and NATO. The previous section examined NATO-Russia relations in terms of political interactions and institutionalization of mutual

expectations. However, the NRC was convened only two times after 2014. On the other hand, there was a growing number of military incidents between Russia and NATO.

Therefore, instead of focusing diplomatic exchanges, the next two sections will examine the military balance between Russia and NATO allies. Because the strategies and policies of both sides have begun to be predicated on a possible military escalation. On Russian side, military experts and strategic planners have increasingly analysed the main characteristics of a possible NATO-Russia war and tailored the best strategy for Russia during such a war. On NATO side, since Russia's ability to utilize its heavy military capabilities is at its high in the Eastern Europe, the number of expert forecasts and scholarly analyses employing game-theoretic models, scenario-based discussions and various simulations about Russian offensive military operations against the Baltic States and Poland have skyrocketed throughout the last decade.²⁸

Very much like Russia's motives, the NATO's reactions to Ukraine crisis were less about the well-being and security of Ukraine than they were about preserving international order and assuring their allies. A small quote from the declaration of the NATO head of states after the Wales Summit – the very first official NATO summit after the annexation of Crimea, which was in September 2014 – proves this argument: “Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine have fundamentally challenged our vision of a Europe whole, free, and at peace... The decisions we have taken at the Summit demonstrate our respect for the rules-based European security architecture” (quoted in Townsend, 2023: 522). Similarly, Freedman (2014: 9-10) argues that the West's reaction demonstrated that Ukraine was not a key interest. What did matter was Russian behavioral pattern that challenges the established rules of international order and threatens the security of NATO's Central and Eastern European members.

The statement of the one of the prominent U.S. foreign policy officials proves Freedman's argument, as he argues that the Russia's actions in the region was a drawback for the international order, which “changes Europe's security landscape... and causes instability on NATO's borders” (quoted in Ambrosio, 2017: 113). The

²⁸ For example, see Boston et. al. (2018); Boston and Massicot (2017); Lucas and Mitchell (2014); Ochmanek et. al., 2023; Shlapak (2018); Shlapak and Johnson (2016); Vershbow and Breedlove (2019); Watts et. al. (2022).

statement of Philip M. Breedlove (quoted in Ambrosio, 2017: 115), the former Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), furthered these concerns and made the connection between the NATO's regional reservations and its bid for collective security at international system more apparent: "A revanchist Russia... is blatantly challenging the rules and principles that have been the bedrock of European security for decades. This is global, it's not regional. And it is enduring, not temporary." Therefore, reemphasizing the role of NATO as security provider to the members that felt threatened and drawing Russia's attention to the high costs of continuing wedge strategies were necessary. Indeed, NATO's first response to the Russian annexation of Crimea, a territory of a non-NATO nation, was announcing a set of assurance measures for its members.

On diplomatic and political level, The NATO Summit in Wales in September 2014 declared that the prerequisites for a fruitful NATO-Russia cooperation had been no longer present. The declaration of members after the summit announced NATO's continuing attachment to the principles of global-level crisis prevention and cooperative security that had been introduced in the London Summit of 1990. However, the most salient aspect of the declaration was the return of collective defence as the primary function of the Alliance. The member states recognized the threatening developments in the Euro-Atlantic security context. This recognition was reflected in the official declaration as the growing instability, violence and extremism across NATO's borders culminated in the strategic implications of the challenges posed by Russia (Hill, 2018: 364-365). The Wales Summit also recognized the limits of NATO's vision in terms of Alliance's territorial reach. William Hill (2018: 365) argues that in Wales, NATO leaders seemed to realize that NATO reached its geographical limits. After two and half decades of pushing the dividing lines of Europe towards Russian borders, NATO leaders finally realized that their priority should have been the collective defence focusing the countries already on their side of the line. Overall, Wales Summit Declaration represented the reorientation of NATO's policy and strategy come forth by the tectonic shift in its global and regional vision and threat perception resulted from the alarming developments close to its borders (Hill, 2018 364-366).

More importantly, on military and security level, given these reasons, the Wales Summit Declaration called for maintaining a “continuous air, land, and maritime presence and meaningful military activity in the eastern part of the Alliance,” on a rotational basis (quoted in Hill, 2018: 364). NATO heads of state announced the creation of the Readiness Action Plan (RAP), aiming to reaffirm the members perceiving heightened for their security that NATO was taking all the steps what is deemed necessary for honouring its Article 5 commitments. The strategies and capabilities introduced within the context of the RAP cover a wide area of new military materials and programs. The RAP was designed in order to make NATO being capable of responding swiftly and decisively in a crisis threatening its members’ territorial integrity (Moller, 2023: 480). Accordingly, NATO heads of states envisioned the promotion and improvement of the NATO Response Force (NRF) for achieving this aim. The Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) was created and articulated into the structure of the NRF (Hill, 2018: 365).

Most of the capability packages announced with the RAP initiative were aimed at enhancing the security infrastructure of the allies which had most recently become NATO member. Therefore, NATO started the construction of this new infrastructure in the territories of its Eastern European members, in order to substantially reinforce its armed forces’ capacity of “reception, staging and onward movement, prepositioning, and force integration” (Moller, 2023: 480). Firstly, in order to improve the operational capacity, force structure, and level of readiness of NATO units in these countries, the Alliance built eight NATO Force Integration Units (NFIUs), one of each is to be located in Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. Secondly, in order to strengthen its permanent presence and level of readiness across its eastern flank, NATO also decided to establish three new multiple division-level headquarters in Eastern Europe – one in Romania, one in Poland, and one is to be co-located in Denmark and Latvia (Moore, 2023: 382; Moller, 2023: 480-481). Thirdly, in addition to these two permanent initiatives, NATO also decided to implement some temporary projects. Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) has been one of them. By creating four different multinational combat units located in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, eFP became one of the most significant reflections of NATO’s commitment to its Article 5 obligations (Boston et. al., 2018: 6-8).

The combat units deployed under the framework of eFP were to operate on rotational basis. The enhanced context of military exercises has been one of the keystones of this rotational presence. After 2014, the number and scale of NATO military exercises have been extended in order to increase interoperability. Because the credibility of NATO's assurance and deterrence functions relies mostly on the successful integration of all members' armed forces with NATO force structure. And interoperability is focal point of this successful integration, which refers the equal level of effectiveness of all NATO military operations conducted across the entire territory covered by its member states. Therefore, in addition to its importance for alliance-wide interoperability, rotational force deployments and multinational military exercises demonstrate a high level of NATO military presence, which represented its credibility in terms of assurance of its members and deterrence against hostile activities (Hill, 2018: 365; Moller, 2023: 482). As a part of its efforts to ensure that all NATO members' armed forces could conduct joint operations effectively, NATO started to fund the development of logistical infrastructure and facilitated the implementation of numerous "air, port, and rail-facility improvement projects" in the territories of its eastern members (Moller, 2023: 480).

In NATO Warsaw Summit in 2016, the initial decisions taken in Wales Summit were reaffirmed and their implementation process was accelerated. On the other hand, the emphasis on the role of NATO in the Baltic states were more apparent in Warsaw. In this context, the specific locations of four eFP combat units and their multinational character are intended to send a clear message to Russia, that any offensive action would be countered rapidly – not just by local forces, but by NATO's overall military capability. Therefore, the nature of eFP project was representing NATO's adoption to the strategy of 'deterrence by tripwire' (Vershbow and Breedlove, 2019: 25). The logic of this strategy is that, thanks to forward-deployment of small number of multinational military units postured closer toward NATO's eastern borders, Russia, if decide to launch an attack, would be forced to confront with armed forces of the numerous member states. Because those states – whose involvement is assured both by their legal obligation to defend against any attack directing to a NATO member and their need to inevitably respond if their own troops are targeted – will undoubtedly respond against any Russian attack, regardless of the initial consequences of the opening period of the

war. Therefore, forward-deployed NATO combat units in the Baltic area represents the Alliance's firm commitment to defend each of its member states against any type of Russian aggression, which could be range from low-intensity asymmetric incursions to a full-blown invasion (Vershbow and Breedlove, 2019: 23-27; Shlapak, 2018: 7).

Notwithstanding the reaffirmation of these commitment, during the following years the position of the Baltic States continued to challenge political leaders and academic experts in NATO member countries. Because of geographical conditions, NATO's commitment to fulfil its Article 5 obligations become highly problematic when it comes to the Baltic region. The only land connection between the three Baltic States and the rest of the NATO territory is the Suwalki Gap, a 65-km-long land corridor lying on the intersection point of Polish, Lithuanian and Belarusian territories. It is stuck between Kaliningrad, a heavily fortified Russian exclave, on one side and Belarus, the nominal Russian ally, on the other (Marten, 2023: 218). Therefore, given the increased level of readiness and enhanced war-fighting capacity of Russian combat units and formations in the region, Russia has sufficient mobilization capacity "to concentrate forces in time and space" to heavily outnumber – creating a problem what is known as 'time-distance gap' for NATO – the isolated defensive forces located in the Baltic region (Boston et. al., 2018: 7). On the other hand, according to some scholars, NATO's strategic posture introduced by eFP is ill-designed to prevent Russia from overrunning the Baltic States' territory (Boston and Massicot, 2017; Shlapak, 2018; Shlapak and Johnson, 2016). Because the eFP battlegroups – only four battalion-sized combat units, whose portion of heavily armoured and mechanized forces consist of only company-sized units – is spread along an 1100-km-long border involving the three Baltic States, Poland, Russia and Belarus. Even the only one heavy combat unit, a U.S. brigade, is "spread across the region, from the Black to Baltic Seas, in battalion- and company-sized packets" (Shlapak, 2018: 8).

The major challenge for NATO forces in this area is Russia's enhanced A2/AD capabilities, located mostly in Kaliningrad. The strategic location of Kaliningrad provides a unique opportunity to Russia in implementing A2/AD tactics, in order to defend against air-, land- and sea-based military attacks and disrupt any NATO reinforcement to its members and counteroffensive to inflict damage on Russia in the case of a Russian invasion in the region. Russia's enhanced military systems there

allow it to strategically deny Poland and the Baltic States to NATO, by cutting off the region's aerial, naval as well as territorial connection to the rest of NATO territory. This disrupted connection means that NATO will have to endure significant number of casualties if it wishes to prevail in a possible conflict (Marten, 2023: 218; Vershbow and Breedlove, 2019: 31). Russian mobile S-400 systems in particular, make challenging for NATO forces to hold their line and disable Russian air defence systems before reinforcement could arrive, allowing Russia to keep the occupied territory long enough for convincing NATO members to cease military hostilities and begin negotiations with more favorable terms for Russia (Shlapak and Johnson 2016; Vershbow and Breedlove, 2019: 31). Moreover, penetrating Russian A2/AD systems brings the risk of escalation, including nuclear confrontation. Because harming the functioning of Russian defence systems would probably require targeting the military infrastructure within Kaliningrad – a formal part of Russian territory – which could spark Russian retaliation including attacks on the U.S. and West European territory (Vershbow and Breedlove, 2019: 30-32).

Against this backdrop, apart from the abovementioned measures that taken by NATO alliance, in order to reduce this 'time-distance gap' of Eastern members and to be able to compete with Russia more effectively on strategic level, the U.S. announced its individual initiative. Entitled European Reassurance Initiative (ERI), in June 2014 the project was envisioned by Obama administration to be allocated \$1 billion from U.S. federal budget (Simon, 2015: 160). The initiative was consistent with Obama's vision of liberal internationalism and American exceptionalism. He believed there are special responsibilities for the U.S. to take the lead in global affairs, and believed exercising this leadership could best be utilized in conjunction with allies. As he (2007: 4/11) had explained as early as 2007: "the mission of the United States is to provide global leadership grounded in the understanding that the world shares a common security... I intend to rebuild the alliances, partnerships, and institutions necessary to confront common threats and enhance common security." Obama was a liberal internationalist, who assumes that the U.S. strength depends on its relationships with its allies and on building resilient international institutions. The U.S. may take the lead, but always as a member of its alliances and international obligations (Renshon, 2010: 204-205).

Obama sought to renew American leadership capacity by reviving its willingness to address these common security challenges in a consensual and clear-headed manner (Kitchen, 2016). Therefore, the plan envisaged the relocation of some of the present U.S. forces and assets, which assigned for the European theatre, from Germany and Italy to the Eastern Europe. In line with the official changes in NATO's force posture, the U.S. also aimed to increase the number of military exercises, trainings, and military rotations. Since 2014, – including Trump era – the U.S. has continued to gradually augment its military presence in the Eastern Europe, by enhancing the prepositioning of its troops and contributing to build-up of military infrastructure (Vershbow and Breedlove, 2019: 26).

Moreover, the scope of ERI's aim has been extended as to also include an effective deterrence against Russia. Therefore, by the authorization of the U.S. Congress, its name has been rebranded as European Deterrence Initiative (EDI). The emphasis on deterrence was underlined by both forward-based position and swift reinforcement process of combat units. Under the auspices of EDI, the U.S. announced its plan to add approximately 4000 troops to its rotational combat units (Vershbow and Breedlove, 2019: 26). The increased number of rotational forces have been intended as means, firstly, to shorten time-distance gap by giving extra time to U.S. for systematically deploying its combat groups along the frontline in case of a military conflict with Russia in Eastern Europe (Vershbow and Breedlove, 2019: 26). Secondly, these 'measures to reassure allies' have been combined with more general 'adapted measures,' projected as a longer-term deterrence against Russian aggression. Accordingly, it has been intended to enhance deterrence against Russia, by denying it to operationalize its reinforced A2/AD systems to advance its influence, in the areas stretching from the Black Sea to Baltic region (Ambrosio, 2017; 2019).

On the other hand, the debate on the recalibration of U.S. military posture in Eastern Europe after 2014 has always been informed by the scope and aim of global U.S. military missions. This debate is basically about to strike a carefully designed balance between the needs of protecting the entire Europe while at the same time retaining the capability as a safeguard of U.S.' worldwide interests (Vershbow and Breedlove, 2019: 34). While the U.S. officials were discussing the costs and benefits of stationing a heavy combat formation permanently in Poland, the U.S. Congress

assigned the Defense Department to file a careful assessment of the system-wide implications of permanently deploying a combat formation in this size (Vershbow and Breedlove, 2019: 34). Still, business as usual, the U.S. commitment to NATO remained strong during the Trump era. Aware of the fact that NATO is the key institution maintaining U.S. hegemony in the Europe, Trump's security policy was consistently hegemonic. Like his predecessors, Trump took the lead in the adaptation of NATO and utilised the alliance to maintain American hegemony in Europe (Sperling and Webber, 2019: 523).

Therefore, there has been a sense of obligation that the necessary operational flexibility in the U.S. military deployments has to be attained in order to ensure both the U.S. commitment to NATO alliance and effective pursuit of American interests in the other crucial strategic parts of the globe (Vershbow and Breedlove, 2019: 38). For example, the former U.S. Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter asserted in 2016 that the U.S. had to quadruple the budget of the ERI, in order not only to reaffirm its commitment to defence of NATO allies, but also to meet with the challenge of reviving global great power competition. He added that this revival constitutes a big threat, against which the U.S. hasn't "had to devote a significant portion of [its] defense investment for a quarter century, but now" it does (quoted in Ambrosio, 2017: 116). This demonstrates that Trump administration remained committed to geopolitical competition with the greatest military powers of the world and to U.S.' formal alliances (Posen, 2018: 20-21).

Thomas Ambrosio's (2017) detailed analysis of the American threat perception has revealed that the securitization of Russia in U.S. official discourse increased dramatically after 2014. As reflected most blatantly by Breedlove (quoted in Ambrosio, 2017: 115), Russia now "poses a long-term existential threat to the United States." Ambrosio (2017: 108-113) shows that this sense of urgency was absent among U.S. officials during the years following the Russian attack to Georgia in 2008, although it was equally disrupting for European security and international stability. The characterization of Russia's activities as a security threat, in fact, began after the Ukraine crisis. Accordingly, Russia's military modernisation began to be depicted as threat and destabilizing move, targeting both U.S.' security interests in Europe and its relative position in the international system (Ambrosio, 2017: 115).

Consistent with the arguments of this study, Ambrosio's analysis concludes the realist vision of international politics – although disguised under the liberal pretensions – is the dominant one in the U.S. Powaski (2019: 247) describes this vision as 'principled realism.' It is called principled because it emphasized a continuity of commitment to put forwarding American values abroad. It is also called realist because it emphasized the centrality of power in the international system and sought to advance U.S. national interests assertively. This realist worldview is basically informed by geopolitical competition and zero-sum mentality. Accordingly, Georgia is a sparsely populated and economically underdeveloped country which is located on a strategically insignificant territory. On the other hand, Ukraine is the most populated post-Soviet republic. Its economic potential is promising. Its location is strategically crucial because it lies in the middle of vital energy transportation lines and continental invasion routes. Moreover, a Russian ethnic minority represents a considerable part of its population. The combined effect of these factors makes Ukraine the battleground on which the U.S. challenges the Russia's assertive policies and curtails its geopolitical ambitions, and Russia tries to counterbalance the global American preponderance.

Therefore, with regard to Russia's activities in Ukraine, the regional obligations and global pretensions of the U.S. began to converge after 2014. In 2019, a top-rank American military official in an active duty in Europe (quoted in Watts et. al., 2022: 12) depicted the strategic position of Russia as follows:

Russia... wants to advance its own objectives at the expense of U.S. prosperity and security and sees the United States and NATO as the principal threat to its geopolitical ambitions... Moscow seeks to assert its influence over nations along its periphery, undermine NATO solidarity, and fracture the rules-based international order. Russia [is globally] exploiting opportunities to increase its influence and expand its presence.

The authors (Watts et. al., 2022: 12) that quote this statement of the American military official observe two interesting patterns in the U.S. threat assessment. First, the rivalry is defined as a zero-sum game. Russia can pursue its national interests only by subverting "U.S. prosperity and security." Second, Russia's purported goals are wide-range and assertive. Russia does not merely seek to defend itself against the detriments of NATO enlargement or to improve its relative position in the system, but also to discredit NATO solidarity and to rupture the basic rules of the current international order. Moreover, for Russia, military means is hardly the most effective

way of achieving these goals. Russia rather mostly resorts asymmetric measures including diplomatic coercion, wedge strategies, and revisionist policies.

As a response to these Russian destabilizing policies and asymmetric methods, the U.S. has adopted the Dynamic Force Employment (DFE). DFE has been introduced in the 2018 U.S. National Defense Strategy, which favoured a shift toward an increased operational flexibility of U.S. military forces. The posture and activities of U.S. armed forces are envisioned to be reconfigured continuously, in a “strategically predictable, but operationally unpredictable” way (Mattis, 2018: 5). Some experts (Vershbow and Breedlove, 2019) considered DFE as the cost-effective way of achieving U.S. armed forces’ worldwide missions. Because DFE aims to preserve stability and transparency at strategic level (Watts et. al., 2022: 115). Accordingly, on the one hand, through tripwire strategy, including rotational forces and rapid reinforcements, the assurance of U.S. allies and the effective deterrence against Russian aggression is secured. On the other hand, continuously posturing U.S. forces on different locations provides sufficient flexibility in order to carry out military’s commitment to America’s global interests. As the NDS of 2018 (Mattis, 2018: 7) states, the U.S. seeks to deploy military units and formations that could fully mobilize in short-notice in order to sustain a proactive stance in the global strategic landscape while at the same time preserving its preparedness to respond quickly to contingencies and secure its war-fighting capacity in protracted battles.

However, the execution of DFE also aims U.S. adversaries to face with operational unpredictability. Paradoxically, it is also capable of projecting higher levels of strategic uncertainty into U.S.’ adversaries’ calculations. The overseas military presence which is mostly small in extent but is always shifting its posture might result in serious miscalculation. For example, other states could construe U.S. intent as aggressive and perceive increased level of threat when the U.S. maneuvers the substantial combat formations with advanced warfighting capabilities and increases the numbers of military exercises and related activities. The scholarly analysis demonstrated that the possibility that these activities escalate to a large-scale war is more noteworthy than their deterrent value in the initial phase (Watts et. al., 2022: 15/127). Because ‘challengers’ would have to respond quickly to sudden changes in U.S. military capabilities or activities, decisions that are made in limited

time tend to be mistaken and vulnerable against the potential for inadvertent escalation (Watts et. al., 2022: 127). Because as the neorealist theory acknowledge, when at least one of two adversaries believes that the result of a war will probably be decided in the initial phase of the conflict, it might be compelled to act as early as possible in order to have first-strike advantage (Glaser, 1997; Glaser and Kaufmann, 1998).

4.2.3. The Russian Military Strategy and Capabilities

4.2.3.1. Modernization of the Russian Armed Forces (The New Look)

The overall situation of the Russian Armed Forces had been deteriorating throughout the first decade of the post-Cold War period. After the Cold War, while its economy was shrinking and the war-fighting potential of its conventional forces deteriorating, Russia remained dependent on the vast nuclear arsenal inherited from the Soviet Union in order to deter existential security threats. Retaining this superior nuclear force structure was sufficient for avoiding from a war with peer competitor and being invaded by another great power. However, in the course of the first decade of the new millennium, it gradually became obvious that the nuclear warheads have no flexibility and utility in meeting with the indirect threats to Russian national interests that were nonetheless defined as vital – such as maintaining its undisputed influence in the post-Soviet space and imposing costs on the U.S. for its arbitrary use of force. Russian aging nuclear materials and obsolete conventional equipment were functional to be employed neither in regional conflicts and nor for power projection abroad. These shortcomings became more apparent during the war against Georgia in 2008. Russia was able to achieve victory in only five days thanks to its quantitative superiority. However, qualitative deficiencies of the Russian Armed Forces petrified Russian political and military leaders (Eichler, 2021; Renz, 2019).

Secondly, given the current VPO, Russian leaders concluded that the possibility of a great power war should not be ruled out, however, conducting global scale operations against a peer competitor should no longer be the primary contingency for which the Russian military must prepare (Reach et. al., 2020: 118). Therefore, a comprehensive program of military modernization has been initiated, entitled the

‘New Look’, which had been in the security agenda even before the war against Georgia. Although announced in October 2008, major changes in the unit formations, the mode of organization, and the material war-fighting capabilities have begun to be carried out after Sergei Shoigu became Defence Minister in 2012 (Mathers, 2019: 147), also coinciding with the beginning of Putin’s third term as Russia’s president. The New Look was an ambitious initiative that has a broad agenda ranging from arms procurement plans and scientific research and development efforts to strategic revisions in the military doctrine based on the current theoretical and intellectual investigations of military experts (Loftus and Kanet, 2019; Radin et. al., 2019; Rosefielde, 2021). The main goal of the military modernization program initiated in 2008 has been establishing the material basis for successfully implementing the concept of ‘unified strategic operation,’²⁹ within which three key principles of the Russian military strategy – localisation, coercion and deterrence – complement each other.

Deterrence has been the key stone of Russian military strategy and dates from Soviet era. However, it has gained new salience as Russia has developed more acute threat perception because of the arbitrary U.S. military interventions and NATO’s deployment of new classes of weapons and combat units near the Russian borders. Deterrence also calls for preparedness to large-scale great power war, requiring both high level of readiness and mass mobilization. Coercion is defined more broadly. In general, it is intended to discourage belligerent actors across the range of potential conflicts, foreclose harmful results, and yield beneficial outcomes for Russian security interests and aspirations (Lalu; 2021: 294; Radin et. al., 2019: 7-17). Localisation requires both modernized military equipment – light and heavy – and practical mode of organization for permanent readiness. Its exclusive aim is regional dominance through quickly responding “to any form of instability or conflict that may emerge within its near abroad and [retaining] escalation dominance over both regional actors and other external powers” (Radin et. al., 2019: 15).

Therefore, on the one hand, in line with the ‘deterrence’ and ‘coercion’ aims, the long-range precision munitions, air defence system and cutting-edge strategic

²⁹ (Reach et. al., 2023).

nuclear weapons have been improved. During the initial period of the reform process, Russia's military was still reflecting the old-style Soviet force structure. Modern weaponry was representing only a small proportion of the overall military equipment. Therefore, in order to extend the credibility and operational capacity of Russian armed forces, the first step was to complement nuclear capabilities with modern conventional equipment, including cutting-edge technologies for being used in air, sea and ground battles (Renz, 2019: 827). Toward this aim, Russia has begun to improve its conventional precision, C4ISR³⁰, electronic warfare (EW) and air defence capabilities. Those capabilities are also the means with which Russia could challenge NATO's regional and global dominance before the escalation moves to nuclear phase (Reach et. al., 2023: 19). As the former Chief of the General Staff, Nikolai Makarov (quoted in Reach et. al., 2020: 114) predicted as early as 2002, effective deterrence "against states that have nuclear weapons is ensured not only by the capability to inflict 'unacceptable damage' through a retaliatory strike, but also by [conventional] means that provide the capability to prevent 'escalation dominance' by the other side."

On the other hand, what closely related with these factors was the shifting focus away from mass mobilization toward high level of readiness. Because until 2008, a significant number of Russian military personnel consisted of conscripts, and there was a wide mobilization base with low readiness level (Charap et. al., 2021: 86). Therefore, in line with the 'localisation' aim, the number of permanently ready combat units and formations that could operate in a coordinated manner and effectively utilize modern tactical nuclear weapons have been increased (Lalu; 2021: 294; Reach et. al., 2022: 112). However, armed forces' rapid reaction to a security crisis in its near abroad has not only been envisaged to allow Russia to give a flexible and variable response to threatening regional actors. It is also intended to prevent extra-regional great powers from establishing dominance and achieving high-end goals in the initial phase of conflict (Radin et. al., 2019: 15-16/64).

The rationale behind this revision was that, if a great power adversary mobilizes a sufficient number of forces in a short period to launch a massive attack on vital infrastructure of Russia, the armed forces must be able to rapidly respond in a

³⁰ (command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance)

way that imposes an unacceptable damage to belligerent state (Reach, Blanc and Geist, 2022: 56). Because especially after experiencing the war against Georgia and witnessing the operations against Yugoslavia (1999), Iraq (2003) and Libya (2011), Russian security and defence officials were convinced that the armed forces of Western countries have a distinct preference for conducting military operations. The U.S. and its allies were able to attain their political and strategic aims in the matter of weeks. RMA and the absolute superiority of air-forces allowed them to achieve quick victories.

According to Gerasimov, this new way of warfare pushed Russian military leaders to reconsider the methods by which Russia could defend itself against the chain of events resembling what Russia had critically observed elsewhere in globe (quoted in Reach et. al., 2022: 95). This has led Russian military officials to assume that the initiation of wars in the modern era will not be signalled beforehand by massive military buildups and wide range of force mobilization (Reach et. al., 2020: 118). They were convinced that the novel nature of warfare does not permit the extended periods of mobilization, therefore the emphasis should be on the high readiness of the armed forces. As a result, the New Look attempted to achieve a successful transition of Russia's military forces from being mass-mobilized to being permanently ready. For attaining a high level of readiness, Russia required the competent and trained personnel, smaller in number but highly specialized in operating the modern equipment. Therefore, Russian military leaders began to reduce the number of conscripts and dramatically increase the size of contract service. They also restructured the organization of combat units and formations³¹ (Radin et. al., 2019: 43/61; Reach, Blanc and Geist, 2022: 45-46).

For Russians, the mentioned observations have also proved the importance of the aerospace field and long-range precision munitions. As Reach et. al. (2020: 111) observes, "in those conflicts, in the Russian view, the role of NATO air power and the capability to launch massed missile strikes from air-based platforms with precision against key enemy targets was paramount." Subsequently, among other efforts to strengthen the force structures in aerospace domain, one of the most important Russian

³¹ While the combat *formation* refers to military groups larger than a brigade, – consisting of approximately 5000 troops – the combat *unit* includes brigades and the rest of the smaller groupings.

initiatives has been to increase the reliability and readiness of the air defence units and Airborne (Radin et. al., 2019: 61). Apart from deterring attacks to Russian mainland, the most crucial role of the Airborne was defined as to rapidly respond the threatening developments in Russia's near abroad. More importantly, it was aimed that the Airborne would be reinforced by the land-based heavy combat units in case of the confrontation with a more consequential adversary or outnumbering coalition of hostile states. In this context, Russia has also improved the war-fighting capacities of its essential maneuver ground military formations. It has modernized and enlarged its tank armies and increased the number of motor rifle divisions (Radin et. al., 2019: 61-63; Rosefielde, 2021: 226). Because Russian military strategists believe that the 'escalation dominance' over both regional actors and major global powers cannot be sustained unless the force postures of navy, army and air forces, equipped with both nuclear and conventional capabilities, are successfully integrated (Charap et. al., 2021; Radin et. al., 2019).

To sum up, on the one hand, in line with the localisation aim, Russia's force structure configured to meet with regional threats has been significantly improved since 2008. As Reach, Blanc and Geist (2022: 45-46), "having smaller professional forces with the modern weapons and equipment available to quickly begin operations to execute system and force destruction tasks on short notice is the driving objective" of the Russian Armed Forces. On the other hand, in accordance with deterrence and coercion logic, increasing spending for modernizing nuclear weapons has been complemented by improving the deterrence capacity of conventional forces, such as precision-guided munitions, EW, C4ISR, and air defences. This second factor has been intended to explicitly show that a hostile great power that attempts to subjugate or dictate its term on Russia would face with grave consequences (Radin et. al., 2019: 61).

4.2.3.2. The Evolution of the Russian Strategic Thinking since 2014

In the light of the theory of offence-defence balance, which was presented in the first chapter, whether the offence-defence differentiation is possible in terms of particular weapon systems, and politicians' views of whether offensive or defensive

strategies have advantage, determine the states' foreign and security policies. Therefore, from the perspective of offence-defence theory one can make causal inferences about the international systemic outcomes of the states' military strategies and the force structure of their armed forces.³² At this point, for the purpose of this chapter, examination of the two components of Russian strategic thinking within the neorealist framework is crucial. Firstly, Russian leaders believe that, apart from the local and regional security threats, the possibility of a military escalation with another great power that could lead a system-wide war – which could be the spillover effect of a local or regional crisis altogether – must not be ruled out from any consideration. Secondly, the widespread opinion in Russian foreign policy and military circles is suggesting that the most crucial phase in war with a great power is the initial period during which warring parties exchange conventional strikes (Reach, Blanc and Geist, 2022; Reach et. al., 2020). This section will firstly outline the basics of these two arguments. Simply, it addressed the questions of how exactly Russian military and foreign policy officials see, evaluate and process international developments, and upon which strategic arguments they base their views.

The forecast of a decisive or protracted war against a particular kind adversary (stronger, weaker, or peer) has important implications for military posture and strategic planning (Reach, Blanc and Geist, 2022). Based on this argument, the second part of this section will provide a careful examination of the overall effect of these two components of Russian strategic thinking. A conceptual framework of the material modernisation of the armed forces and the strategic insights of the Russian military experts has been provided in the previous section. From this conceptual perspective, the second part of the section will try to provide a further understanding about the systemic effects of Russia's offensive actions in Ukraine. Finally, as noted, the question of the use of nuclear weapons has been evoked after Crimea. This section will also address this question.

Firstly, in terms of the decisive phase of war, as neorealist theory acknowledges, in the security competition between two actors, the relatively weaker one usually seeks to compensate its disadvantageous position by following hard-line

³² See Table 2 in the first chapter.

policies and taking offensive actions (Glaser, 1997; Glaser and Kaufmann, 1998). Moreover, in light of the balance of interest theory, the regional balance of military forces in-theater in the initial phase of a potential war, in addition to leaders' perception of what is at stake in terms of state's security interests, is what matters for deterrence. When these two factors favor one of the opponent states, the leaders of that state tend to believe that, by a *fait accompli*, they can achieve a swift victory before the adversary's allies could send reinforcement (Watts et. al., 2022: 36).

As the Yugoslavia, Iraq and Libya cases demonstrated, without mobilizing massive military forces, thanks to their technological superiority, the U.S. and NATO could resort violent and illegitimate means for achieving domestic regime change rapidly in both Russia's territory and its near abroad. Russian military experts and political leaders observed that the common decisive feature of abovementioned military interventions was the 'correlation of forces and means'³³ (COFM) extremely favouring the U.S and NATO. The most certain outcome of the RMA and overwhelming conventional superiority of the U.S. is that the results of modern wars are now decided during the most crucial initial phase. And in the modern era this initial phase will not be preceded by large-scale force buildups and massive military mobilization (Reach et. al., 2020: 118). However, Russian leaders were also aware that weaker states suffer from destructive results if they fail to observe the hostility and military preparations on the part of stronger states that resemble a preparation for war. This factor makes relatively weaker states especially sensitive to even minor changes in an adversary's policies and military posture (Frederick et. al., 2017: 46). Therefore, Russia had already been assessing the COFM as NATO being the target reference point.

In this conjuncture, Western support for street protests in Russia against Putin's re-election as president, combined with the growing trend of NATO's global intervention that Russian leaders had been observing with growing uneasiness, generated a sense of insecurity in Russia. This sense of insecurity culminated during

³³ The correlation of forces and means refers to the qualitative and quantitative assessment of the military power of a particular actor (mostly state) with reference to its opponent. Quantitatively, it mostly consists of dataset collected by comparing and contrasting the war-fighting potential of military units and formations, the number of weapon systems and, technological indicators. Qualitative factors such as armed forces' mode of organization, force postures, strategic doctrine and geographical conditions are also taken into account (Reach et. al., 2020).

Maidan protests in Ukraine, which plays vital role in Russia's security policy. From Russia's perspective, Ukraine's accession to NATO would mean that its chief adversary deploys its combat formations, establish military infrastructure and install mentioned buildups adjacent to Russia's frontiers, therefore shift the existing COFM at the expense of Russia (Charap et. al., 2023: 128-130). Worried that a pro-Western government in Ukraine abrogate Russia's legal agreements regarding its naval presence in Sevastopol and apply for NATO membership, Putin initiated a pre-emptive strike for evading these scenarios (Charap et. al., 2023: 128-130; Clunan, 2019: 11; Radin and Reach, 2017: 28).

Secondly, in terms of the possibility of war with a major power, if a state decides that its adversary is preparing for a military operation against it, it might be compelled to take pre-emptive actions. Moreover, if that state believes its relative material position in the international system is deteriorating, the risks of militarized and competitive actions will be increasing (Glaser, 1997; Glaser and Kaufmann, 1998). If these actors are major powers, the effects of this factor could spark systemic change. And as discussed above, the certain types of weapons and organizational mode of military forces could provide first-strike advantage and make offence a favorable option. As Russian Military Doctrine (quoted in Reach et. al., 2020: 115) addressed as early as 2000, the military forces and means of achieving military-political objectives "predetermines the particular danger of modern wars and armed conflicts to peoples and states and to the preservation of international stability and peace."

The problem of responding an enemy that could inflict unacceptable damage on Russia with conventional forces has been haunting Russian politicians and military planners since the Soviet era. Today, the specter of large-scale NATO offensive, conducted by long-range strikes and precision munitions continues to be the main problem challenging Russian strategists and military experts (Reach, Blanc and Geist, 2022: 5). The official documents published during Putin era demonstrated that Russia was taking seriously the possibility of a war with a great power (Lalu, 2021). Stephen Blank (2019: 161) writes that "war against NATO remains Moscow's highest priority security threat." In this context, several Russian analyses have highlighted a potential conflict with NATO. Research conducted by IMEMO (quoted in Reach et. al., 2020: 125), for example, found that NATO could attack Russia with a force structure consists

of thousands of air- and sea-based conventional precision munitions, hundreds of aircrafts and cruise missile submarines as well as unmanned aerial systems (UASs), deployed across strategic locations from Scandinavia to Mediterranean.

Russian views were being shaped by observing on global NATO actions and the assumptions about a future war with NATO and the U.S. Putin had already addressed the problematic pattern of Western interventionism as early as 1999: “If we didn’t stop the extremists right away, we’d be facing a second Yugoslavia on the entire territory of the Russian Federation – the Yugoslavization of Russia” (quoted in Pouliot, 2010: 206). As of 2014, both the Western pattern and Russian logic regarding the issue remained unchanged. Russian leaders have continued to believe that NATO could initiate decisive a war against Russia if the sufficient countermeasures are not taken. After observing several regime changes throughout the globe forced by the illegitimate military interventions of external actors, Russian political and military officials “convinced themselves that the critical political transformation in [Ukraine] must have been fomented by western leaders” (Allison, 2014: 1257). At best, increasing U.S. and NATO engagement in areas close to Russian borders has been identified by Russian leaders as a factor that poses a threat to regional peace and stability, “and, at worst, an existential threat to the Russian regime” (Pezard, 2022: 3). Therefore, if the West succeeds, Russia’s national interests in the region will be denied. More importantly, increasing Western influence in the region will be challenging the international and domestic legitimacy of Russian political system. At worst case scenario, Russia’s state system will cease to exist, and a significant portion of Russian population will be decimated.

Therefore, drawing on both their observations regarding global U.S. military interventions and existing NATO force posture in Europe, Russian political and security officials were fully convinced that the U.S. or NATO could directly attack Russia. And the widespread expectation among Russian security and defence officials is that a possible war with NATO would not be initiated by massive ground forces invading the vast territories, like the armies of the revolutionary France in the 19th century or Wehrmacht in 1941. On the contrary, a war with NATO will begin with a massive campaign of “swift, brutal, and intense bombardment,” executed mostly by the American deep-strike munitions and targeting the critically important targets inside

Russia (Reach, Blanc and Geist, 2022: 65). As neorealists suggest, if the leaders of the relatively weaker state believe that its highly important military and civilian infrastructure is becoming increasingly vulnerable against its adversary, that state might invest heavily on military modernization and employ aggressive policies to dissuade its opponent from taking harmful actions (Glaser, 1997; Glaser and Kaufmann, 1998). If the West succeeds in Ukraine, Russia's national interests in the region will be denied. More importantly, increasing Western influence in the region will be challenging the international and public legitimacy of Russian political system. At worst case scenario, Russian existential security will be under threat. As Gerasimov argues, Russia must pre-empt the adversary because strategies adopted by Western countries force Russian military command "to respond to a threat with a threat" (quoted in Reach, Blanc and Geist, 2022: 41).

So far, the effects of the developments in Ukraine on the core ideas of the current Russian military doctrine were outlined. The emphasis was on the two main assumptions of the Russian strategists and military experts, which are about the possibility of a great power war and the decisive phase of modern armed conflicts respectively. The development of strategic thinking is closely intertwined with the assumptions on the nature of the current and future war. And this development do not occur in a vacuum (Persson, 2021: 358-359). As noted, the forecast of a decisive or protracted war with a certain type of adversary has significant effects on both strategic calculations and deciding which type of military material should be invested in. If it is predicted that war will be decisive in nature, a heavy premium will not be placed on mass mobilization efforts. Rather, permanent readiness of forces that could act rapidly to overwhelm the adversary will be more preferable (Reach, Blanc and Geist, 2022: 8). Therefore, the second part of this section will offer a further understanding regarding the certain aspects of these two Russian strategic arguments. The outcomes of this analysis will, in turn, provide a basis for determining the systemic effects of the overall process.

Traditionally, mainstream studies of strategy for the initial phase of great power war have been built on two main concepts: destruction and attrition. Reach, Blanc and Geist (2022: 2-3) provides a concise definition of these concepts:

Destruction prioritizes offensive actions in the initial period of war to decisively defeat the opponent on the battlefield in a matter of weeks or months to achieve

a political objective. Attrition in Russian texts often emphasizes initial defense to exhaust an opponent of advantages and winning a number of small successes in order to combine them in the long run into a general overall victory... Destruction and attrition historically have been closely tied to the balance of power between opposing sides.

Usually, an advantageous balance of military capabilities favours the option of destruction, whereas the opposite situation suggests exhausting the stronger adversary through ensuring the survival after its first-strike and subsequently eroding its will to fight and material strength by both symmetrical and asymmetrical methods in order to ensure the following phase of the war is fought with more favourable conditions (Reach, Blanc and Geist, 2022: 2-3/7).

Despite Russia's overall weakness, however, prominent military experts in Russia, including Gerasimov, concluded that adopting a defensive posture during the opening moves of a war is not a warranted strategy (Reach, Blanc and Geist, 2022: 72). The reason of this inconsistency is pointed out by the most salient aspect of the NATO-Russia military standoff in the Eastern and Southeastern Europe, which is characterized by the "contradictory dynamics of Russian local military superiority and overall inferiority" (Reach, Blanc and Geist, 2022: iii). Analysing these contradictory dynamics and the balance of interests between Russia and NATO in the region therefore has utmost importance for the examination of the systemic effects of Ukraine crisis through the lens of military strategy (Rumer and Sokolsy, 2019: 31).

Through its ongoing comprehensive modernisation program of the armed forces, since 2008 Russia doubled its annual military spending, investing more than 70 billion dollars, ranking the third highest in the world behind the U.S. and China. By reaching the targets of long-term modernisation plan announced in 2011, which includes new arms procurement plans, Russia has become capable of resisting NATO military activities along its east and southeastern borders (Loftus and Kanet, 2019: 67; Radin et. al., 2019: 30; Rosefielde, 2021: 227). Moreover, while Russian leaders are aware of the fact that U.S. military forces are dispersed across the globe and would require some time to concentrate in the European theater for a potential conflict, they regrouped most of the heavy combat capabilities under the Western and Southern Military Districts (Berryman, 2018: 71; Reach et. al., 2020: 122).

Especially after NATO's post-2014 policies against Russia had increased tension in the region, additional assets including "Iskander-M short range surface-to-

surface ballistic missile platforms, S-400 Triumpf anti-aircraft systems and K-300 Bastion-P coastal defence anti-ship cruise missiles have been deployed to create A2/AD bastions in the Crimea and the Kaliningrad region” (Berryman, 2018: 71). Moreover, improvements in the long-range strike capabilities and C4ISR and EW systems have also been essential for Russia to compete with the NATO members and dominate regional adversaries (Radin et. al., 2019: 47). A 2019 RAND report has enlisted six main categories with which Russia could pose a direct threat to its neighbors and NATO members. The first category includes C4ISR and deep-strike capabilities. Secondly, Russia’s enhanced air defence capabilities could impede the NATO air forces and negate NATO’s quantitative superiority. Third, Russian EW capabilities could be utilized in coordination with long-strike and air defence forces in order to degrade direct fire support of NATO allies.

Fourth, Russia is in a more advantageous position in terms of range of indirect fires. Fifth, Russia’s grand maneuver forces is by far the largest and most capable forces in the European continent and is a challenging issue for NATO armoured divisions. Finally, as noted, the ambivalent nature of Russian views on the use of nuclear weapons poses a serious threat to NATO forces (Radin et. al., 2019: 76-77). As a recent analysis conducted by a prominent U.S. non-governmental institution (quoted in Watts et. al., 2022: 37) demonstrates, “U.S. and NATO ground forces could be ‘out-ranged and out-gunned’ by Russian forces, offsetting the traditional superiority of U.S. and allied [conventional] maneuver forces. This could provide Russia a decisive advantage in close combat.” Kogan (quoted in Rosefielde, 2021: 220) argues the meaning of these developments is that “NATO’s famous dictum — an attack on one is an attack on all — appears to no longer be deterring Russia.”

Thanks to its regional superiority, then, Russia began to attach greater importance to the decisiveness of the initial phase of war. This attachment refers to a strategy of destruction in any kind of armed conflict, which favours pre-emptive strikes and deemphasize the role of mass mobilization (Reach, Blanc and Geist, 2022: 57). The reason for this assumption was the Russian experts’ acknowledgment of the non-contact war, whose decisive phase will be waged at great distances, by air forces, long-range precision munitions, EW capabilities, and cutting-edge weaponry technology developed thanks to new physical principles (Charap et. al., 2021: 27). As an official

military document had already addressed in 2009, there had been two trends portraying the strategic operations of military forces in modern warfare. The first trend is about the relatively increasing role of C4ISR and EW capabilities, compared with the conventional combat formations, in destroying enemy's critically important targets. The main role of these capabilities is to degrade the material capacities and willingness of the opponent to resist. The second trend, therefore, consistent with the first one, points out the necessity of shifting the focus from vanquishing the large numbers of adversary's forces to cutting off their supply lines and degrading their capacity to operate efficiently (quoted in Reach, Blanc and Geist, 2022: 40).

Therefore, Russian political and military leaders have been in a situation to inflict sufficient damage to enemy during the opening exchanges of strategic warheads. This strategic reorientation has meant that the attrition period is no longer the most critical phase of a great power war. The vital threats targeting the population, government, critical infrastructure and military command and control centres have to be evaded from the outset. As Makarov (quoted in Reach, Blanc and Geist, 2022: 59) had already warned in 2009, the outbreak of a large-scale conflict will not be preceded by a prolonged period of escalation allowing Russian military command and state apparatus to mobilize sufficient manpower and military stockpiles. As a result, Russian officers are not inclined to 'exhaust' the stronger power to the country's advantages and wait weeks or months for a more opportune time to launch a counteroffensive (Reach, Blanc and Geist, 2022: 41-42/59).

An offensive posture in the process leading up to a war in spite of the overall inferiority of Russia vis-à-vis NATO has also been favored by a second factor. The concerns over NATO intervention in Russia's near abroad where Russia considers to be within its sphere of influence has been as stark as the considerations about the possible massive invasion of Russia's own territory by U.S. led forces. Because Russia saw Western involvement in this area as a part of neo-containment policy which aims to geopolitical encirclement of Russia through intentional provocation of regional instability and domestic unrest within Russia (Menon and Rumer, 2015: 74). In 2017, for example, Gerasimov enlisted a number of NATO military activities, including the deployment of combat formations, establishment of command and control centres, and building facilities for storing military equipment, across Eastern Europe. According to

Gerasimov (quoted in Watts et. al., 2022: 18), those actions were upsetting the balance of power and heighten the risks of military escalation.

In line with Gerasimov's public denouncement, Russian forecasts suggest that any tension in those areas could escalate to a war between Russia and the U.S. In this case, the initial phase of the war would be crucial in terms of Russia's capacity to disrupt NATO's superior force structure and overcome NATO's strategic depth – which has been deepened by successive rounds of NATO enlargement outlined in the previous chapter – by conducting precision strikes to critically important targets (Reach et. al., 2023: 7-10). Because military experts continue to predict that the outcome of a war with a peer adversary up to 2030s will be decided mostly by the conventional capabilities including long-range precision munitions, air defence systems, and C4ISR technologies. For example, if national air defence system collapses, even superiority in other military power assets – especially nuclear – might not preclude a total defeat (Reach, Blanc and Geist, 2022: 36-37).

On the other hand, however, although Russian strategic thinking mostly underlies the decisiveness of the initial phase of war, there are emerging factors indicating that Russia is hedging for the possibility of a protracted major ground war, that would last longer than previous military interventions which the U.S. and its allies swiftly concluded (Reach, Blanc and Geist, 2022: 56). After 2014, tensions increased between Russia and NATO countries because of economic sanctions, boycotts on gas and oil trade, each sides' apparent support to the opposing parties fighting in the Donbas region, and most importantly, increasing military activity of both sides in Eastern Europe and NATO's reaffirmation of its defence commitments. This post-2014 strategic environment has generated an intractable uncertainty and might have shifted the focus of Russian military planning (Charap et. al., 2021: 104). Therefore, Russian military basically has two distinct essential tasks. The first is to deter aggression in its near abroad. The second is being capable of conducting war against an enemy which "is forecast to possess three to five times the military potential of Russia by 2040" (Reach, Blanc and Geist, 2022: 71). Therefore, Russia has had to invest in both defending itself against a stronger adversary and retaining the capabilities for quickly reacting local conflicts in its near abroad (Charap et. al., 2021: 27; Reach et. al., 2022: 92).

As a result, firstly, in addition to preparing to rapidly respond potential eruptions of violence across its borders, Russia began to concentrate on defying the threat of a large-scale NATO attack that could hit critically important targets and key military, economic as well as civilian infrastructure located across a vast geographic space stretching from the Caucasus to the Far East (Reach et. al., 2020: 136). Secondly, Russia sustained the preparedness level of its combat forces. 70 percent of the whole armed forces was planned to be permanently ready. This percentage is assigned after assessing the COFM, which, in this case, aims to make armed forces being capable of matching or exceeding the NRF (Reach et. al., 2020: 49). Thirdly, the importance of the readiness of the reserves was underlined again in case of a contingency in which Russia will need to mobilization of additional forces in a restricted time period. Because “Russian leadership believes that it might need to call on reserves, a portion of whom need to be ready to fight at the outset, while the rest of the mobilization system also needs to be prepared to support a war that could last longer than a few weeks” (Reach, Blanc and Geist, 2022: 62).

Overall, the continuing attachment to a massive-scale armed forces, increasing the level of readiness while at the same time trying to retain mass mobilization capacity by maintaining conscription, the ongoing emphasis on ‘strategic parity’ in nuclear weapons, and most importantly, significant increase on the investment for building up strong conventional capabilities in order to improve the war-fighting capacity of ground maneuver forces, demonstrate that fighting a high-intensity and protracted war with a peer competitor is not a remote possibility for Russian leadership, and Russia must be ready for a major ground war (Lo, 2015: 41; Radin et. al., 2019: 64; Reach, Blanc and Geist, 2022: 36-49).

In case of a regional-level war, the primary mission of Russian Armed Forces is to ensure that the armed conflict remains localized and isolated and deter the intervention of external actors, thus evading from escalation to a wider-scale war that will require high degree of mobilization (Reach et. al., 2022: 93). Russia has superiority on COFM in a short-warning regional-level war close to its frontiers. Because while NATO members reconfigured their armed forces with light combat units in order to conduct more effectively out-of-area missions such as stability operations and peacekeeping tasks, Russia has sustained its heavy forces, which has

been augmented with rapid mobilization capacity and effective firepower capabilities. In its near-abroad, this gives Russia an important opportunity to defeat its adversaries in military conflicts between mechanized forces and heavy-armoured formations (Boston et. al., 2018: 2/5). In terms of land-based forces, Russia has qualitative and quantitative advantage against NATO in key weapon systems that would be available to warring sides in opening exchanges during the initial phase of war (Boston et. al., 2018: 7).

In case of a decisive war with a peer adversary, Russia is capable of disrupting the non-contact warfare and the inflicted damage in the opening period, meaning that it could extend the period of war towards the attrition phase. However, Russian strategists are not prepared to exhaust a more powerful adversary by surviving the brutal and intense strikes that would last weeks or months first and then waiting for an appropriate time to launch a counteroffensive attack (Reach, Blanc and Geist, 2022: 41-42). Because, in terms of aggregate national indicators, NATO's power preponderance provides significant long-term advantages relevant for a protracted war (Boston et. al., 2018: 2). For example, as of 2014, combined NATO defence spending was about \$1 trillion, which is the equivalent of the half of Russia's total GDP and at least eight times larger than the annual Russian defence budget (Lucas and Mitchell, 2014: 4). Therefore, in a scenario which is envisioning a possible conflict between Russia and NATO, sustainment of war efforts becomes a challenging issue for Russia in the long run. Because competing with a technologically advanced enemy requires full commitment across the wide range of areas, including scientific, demographic and economic domains.

However, Russia is dedicated to the aims of attaining great power status in a multipolar world, being capable of projecting its power globally, and establishing hegemony in its near abroad by increasing its influence on the political, economic and military developments in the post-Soviet states. As noted, Russian leaders think Russian vital security needs will be assured only if it becomes a great power. Therefore, these aims – which have manifested in the most brutal form in Ukraine since February 2022 – build on “essential goals of regime survival and territorial security” (Mazarr, 2022: 30). On the other hand, the balance of overall material resources is excessively favoring NATO because of Russia suffers from structural

economic problems, technological backwardness, demographic erosion, and financial limitations (Mazarr, 2022: 30). As Vershbow and Breedlove address (2019: 30), in case of an attritional war with the U.S. and NATO, Russian armed forces would be challenged by significant material shortages. Therefore, in order to retain its ability to inflict serious damage on enemy and dictate its terms, for which NATO has superior capabilities to achieve, Russia has to either sustain its investment in costly conventional precision munitions and C4ISR platforms or, start to rely on in-theater nuclear forces as a deterrent factor (Reach et. al., 2020: 137).

Consequently, Russia has been leaning towards adopting an integrative concept of ‘unified strategic operations,’ that is pre-emptively aggressive and expansive. In this concept of unified strategic operations, integrative use of conventional and nuclear weapons is envisioned. As the Russia’s Military Doctrine (quoted in Persson, 2021: 362) has warranted in 2014, “the Russian Federation reserves the right to utilize nuclear weapons... in the event of aggression against the Russian Federation involving the use of conventional weapons when the very existence of the state is under threat.” In line with the unified strategic operation concept, the Military Doctrine also introduced the concept of ‘escalate to de-escalate.’ It envisages a restricted use of in-theater nuclear forces “in order to de-escalate sources of tension and resolve the conflict situation on conditions favourable to Russia” (Persson, 2021: 363). Implicit in these arguments is the fact that, beyond tactical objectives, the utilization of strategic nuclear weapons for destroying critical targets in both European continent and the U.S. is also a valid option for Russian leaders. Because, although the targets of improving conventional capabilities that was defined in 2011 military modernisation plan has been mostly achieved, Russia’s nuclear arsenal continues to be the defining instrument of regional and global deterrence (Reach et. al., 2023: vi). Three logical conclusions follow.

Firstly, the possession of both tactical and strategic nuclear weapons assuages Russian leaders’ concerns regarding the land invasion of Russian territory by a mass-mobilized army. Because relying on the existence of both type of weapons in its nuclear arsenal, Russian leaders are aware of the fact that the opponent could not decide to deploy massive land forces because of the concerns regarding to use of those weapons on its ground formations (Blank, 2019: 158-59). As noted above, the

significant number of Russian official forecasts have considered and examined a possible war with NATO. Speculating on the options of Russian response against a possible large-scale NATO attack in 2019, one senior Russian military official suggested the use of tactical as well as strategic nuclear weapons. If Russia succeeded to withstand the most crucial opening phase against a NATO offence by utilizing tactical nuclear weapons and respond with the threat, or actual use of strategic nuclear weapons, this would immediately compel NATO leaders to reject escalation option and bring them to negotiation table (Reach, et. al., 2020: 125-126).

Secondly, both Russian and Western military experts believe that Russia's robust tactical nuclear forces compensate deficiencies in its conventional long-range strike capabilities and are effective for countervalue targeting in case of war (Reach et. al., 2022: 111). As one prominent military expert (quoted in Reach et. al., 2023: 17) argued, "the presence of nonstrategic nuclear weapons in Russia's nuclear forces... completely negates the enemy's superiority in certain strategic (operational) areas." It has been widely assumed that in case of a war with stronger adversary, Russia prioritizes the destruction of enemy in the initial phase of the war by using tactical and strategic nuclear weapons. Russian strategic planning considering the nature of a future war acknowledges that the geographical distance between the main forces of NATO and Russia is too large. Because of NATO's strategic depth – thanks to enlarging of its geographical space in the post-Cold War era – Russia suffers from the absence of conventional means which could have damage the distant NATO forces and infrastructure (Reach, Blanc and Geist, 2022: 68-69).

This geographical factor, combined with NATO's preponderance in technologically advanced precision strike capabilities, suggests that any defensive posture aiming at attrit NATO combat formations and exhaust its military resources is not a helpful strategy (Reach et. al., 2023: 4). If a war with NATO will remain conventional over a protracted period, the result would probably be the destruction of strategic defence system and subsequently the total breakdown of Russian government and political system. Aware of the seriousness of the risk, Russian leaders have reoriented Russia's military planning toward 'unified strategic operation,' which includes asymmetric employment of nuclear and conventional capabilities against the critically important targets in the U.S. and continental Europe (Reach et. al., 2023: 4).

Thirdly, although the top priority of nuclear weapons is to deter security threats to Russia, Russian military and foreign policy officials might conceive of a large nuclear arsenal as a tool to ensure Western acquiescence to Russia's assertive global policies at international level (Frederick et. al., 2017: 41). As Stephen Blank (2019: 158) notes, the strategic deterrence of Russian nuclear forces serves to the objectives of dissuading NATO from carrying out enlargement policies and attaining regional hegemony in its near-abroad. Some Russian officials believe that employing nuclear warheads will give them a decisive opportunity of acting coercively during the diplomatic process that would follow the initial phase of conflict. The main concern for NATO leaders is that by highlighting its tactical and strategic capabilities, Russia might try to lower the nuclear threshold and gain escalation dominance, thus fight a conventional war under more favorable circumstances for itself. Russia might undertake a territorial encroachment of the Baltic States and wait for military-political situation and its escalation dominance in nuclear sphere "to validate its position in the ensuing political 'crisis'" (Lucas and Mitchell, 2014: 5). Thanks to Russia's robust tactical nuclear forces, even if Russian officials calculate such an incursion is capable of escalating to a large-scale war, "they may not be deterred from undertaking [it] if they are confident Russian forces could quickly prevail" (Watts et. al., 2022: 37).

4.3. RUSSIA'S INVASION OF UKRAINE IN FEBRUARY 2022

This section explores the last phase of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine War, which has escalated the Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. It analyses the deterioration of Russia's relations with NATO and the U.S. and examines the international developments that have resulted in the outbreak of war. Since Munich Security Conference in 2007, Putin and the Russian foreign and defence policy officials has repeatedly voiced their apprehension about the post-Cold War European security architecture and fiercely opposed Ukraine's accession to NATO. Russia's opposition to this order had culminated after the summer of 2021, and led Russian leaders to begin military build-up across Ukrainian border and draft two legally binding treatments to be separately proposed to the U.S. and NATO. The first part of this section describes the course of developments during this period. The second part

sheds light the evolving situation on the battlefield and the way in which it has affected the war aims and strategies of both sides. It evaluates the conditions since the beginning of war until June 2024.

4.3.1. Prelude to War

In December 2021, Russia drafted two legal treaties, one is about its relations with the U.S. and the other one is for Russia-NATO relations. In a draft presented to the U.S., Russia formally demanded the stop to NATO's further expansion of its eastern borders, dismantling NATO's military infrastructure in the countries that have joined NATO after 1997, ending military support to Ukraine, and restricting INF in Europe (Trenin, 2021). Moscow had long opposed to U.S. military aid to Ukraine and cooperation between Ukrainian armed forces and NATO. However, it couldn't achieve to have a veto power on U.S. and NATO decisions. This time however, the tone of the language used in the draft treaties reflected Russia's determination to employ countermeasures if its demands are not taken into account. Russia gave the West only one month to respond, and in this way, it obstructed the possibility of long negotiations and constructive talks. The fact that it delivered draft treaties both the U.S. and NATO demonstrates that Russia is actually ready to talk, before resorting military violence. The extent of its demands was immense. The maximalist character of their contents can be seen that Russia was preparing for bargaining process, through which it may concede some of them in order to strike a deal (Hunter, 2022: 20; Trenin, 2021).

Throughout the Cold War, most of the security arrangements were concluded between Soviets and Americans, not NATO. In the same vein, Russia still sees NATO as the extension of the U.S. power in Europe. Kremlin's views about the U.S.' role in the alliance seem to be warranted. As of 2024, U.S.' military expenditures constitute approximately 65 percent of the NATO's defence budget. The member states also almost entirely depend on U.S. protection in nuclear sphere. Apart from American preponderance in raw power, U.S.' edge in the advanced technological warfighting equipment, such as C4ISR capabilities and logistical network, overwhelms European capacities (Arnold, 2024). Therefore, the focal point of Moscow's attention was the status of the U.S. In December 2021, Putin complained about increasing U.S. military

involvement in the Eastern Europe and claimed that the U.S. was placing missiles near to Russian borders. He raised the question: “How would the Americans react if missiles were placed at the border with Canada or Mexico?” (quoted in Singh, 2023: 131). In his speech on February 21, 2022, he more loudly uttered the Russian apprehension about these U.S. ballistic and cruise missiles. Emphasizing the crucial role of geopolitics, he noted these precision-guided munitions are capable of hitting critically important targets deep in the Russian territory with a very limited time of warning. He stressed that most of the military infrastructure in Ukraine where these missiles are deployed are very close to Russian borders. “The flying time of Tomahawk cruise missiles to Moscow will be less than 35 minutes; ballistic missiles from Kharkov will take seven to eight minutes. It is like a knife to the throat” (quoted in Götz and Staun, 2022: 489).

Therefore, Russia demanded the formal cessation of American military expansion in Ukraine, Central Asia and the Caucasus. The extension of military infrastructure and deployments of offensive capabilities toward Russian borders was unacceptable for Russia. Because historically, the great powers have always tried to hinder the encroachments of rival major powers in their own spheres of influence. The U.S. for example, had Monroe Doctrine, which precluded to any other great power’s involvement in Western hemisphere. Moreover, since Cuba Missile Crisis, the U.S. has always reacted aggressively when Soviets tried to infiltrate into America’s strategic backyard. In Russian politicians’ view, same tacit rules should be observed also in the Russia’s opposition of Ukraine’s NATO membership. Therefore, with the draft treaty delivered to U.S. diplomats, Russia signalled its readiness to intervene in Ukraine if Western institutions continued to expand eastward (Singh, 2023: 131). As Mearsheimer (2022a) argues, U.S.’ obsession with becoming Ukraine a NATO member have resulted in that Russian leaders began to perceive an existential threat to their country’s security and precipitated the crisis during January and February 2022.

As noted above, Russian diplomats also prepared a second proposal that was to deliver NATO, containing similar issues. With this draft, Russia demanded that the member states of NATO should forgo any further extension of the Alliance’s borders. Similarly, the draft treaty enshrined the Alliance members’ assurance that they will not conduct any military exercise within Ukraine’s borders. Russian foreign minister

Sergei Lavrov argued that the Alliance is “systematically transforming Ukraine into a military foothold against Russia” (quoted in Götz and Staun, 2022: 489). Putin reiterated the same point during his speech in February 2022, asserting that NATO’s military deployment near the Russian borders generated an existential threat for Russia and is totally unacceptable (Götz and Staun, 2022: 488). The draft treaty prepared by Russia, if entered into force, would preclude NATO from carrying out its defence commitments to states which had become members throughout the post-Cold War era – that are Poland, Czechia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Croatia, Albania, Montenegro and Macedonia. Therefore, very much like the Soviet Union did throughout the Cold War period, with this treaty Russia was attempting to drive a wedge among NATO’s members, by weakening their solidarity and eroding Alliance’s cohesion.

According to Gwendolyn Sasse (2023), with these excessive demands, Putin urged NATO members to bring the Russia-NATO relations back to the course of conduct adopted by parties in 1997, by NATO-Russia Founding Act. As discussed in the third chapter, the Founding Act was aimed at establishing a new framework based on mutual trust, cooperation and reciprocity in NATO’s relations with Russia by creating a consultative body and assigning the Russian representative a permanent chair at the NATO’s headquarters in Brussels. One of the key pillars of the Founding Act was “respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all states” (NATO, 1997). More importantly, with the Founding Act, NATO heads of states had promised Russia that in the territory of new members there would be no “additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces... in the current and foreseeable security environment” (NATO, 1997). Therefore, in December 2021, Putin firstly asked NATO leaders to honour this commitment and dismantle the military infrastructure within the territories of NATO’s new members. At this point, Putin also reiterated the verbal assurances that Western leaders gave to Gorbachev during the talks of German reunification in 1990, ruling out NATO’s further eastward extension ‘one inch’ beyond German borders (Sasse, 2023). Within this context, Russian leaders, convincing that Russia has been subordinated to NATO during the past three decades of the post-Cold War era, sought to carve out a prominent role for Russia in European order with the proposal they submitted to the Alliance leaders.

They tried to formalize the acceptance of Russia's equal position with NATO in European security affairs (Puri, 2022: 241).

Equally important, the draft treaty of December 2021 also included the renouncement of the NATO's declaration of intent in Bucharest summit in 2008, envisioning Ukraine's and Georgia's future accession to NATO (Sasse, 2023). As it is clear, Ukraine has always been a 'red line' for Russia when it comes to interstate security arrangements. In 2017, for example, the U.S. had declared its intention to establish a naval base in the city of Ochakiv, within which NATO military units and Ukrainian naval forces could synchronise and coordinate their military exercises in the Black Sea. The establishment was aimed at improving the interoperability of both sides' military operations. However, it was relatively small in size. Still, it generated a fierce reaction from Russian side. One Russian high ranked naval officer asserted the naval base was "an outpost aimed at surveilling Russia's forces in Crimea" and provided a springboard for attacks against Russia" (quoted in Götz and Staun, 2022: 488). Likewise, military experts and strategists in Moscow considered this plan as a firm step towards Ukraine's accession to NATO. In his February 2022 speech, Putin voiced same concerns, claiming that precision-guided munitions deployed in this centre pose a grave threat for both entire Russian naval positions in the Black Sea Coast and specific locations within the Russian mainland (Götz and Staun, 2022). These reactions demonstrate the strategic value of Ukraine's location for Russia's security interests. With the draft treaty Russia officially proposed to NATO, it reiterated its 'red lines' once again, and warned about the consequences if they are ignored.

After the annexation of Crimea, NATO enhanced its military posture in the Black Sea area and accelerated its naval collaboration with Ukraine and Georgia. The main aim was to build a robust Ukrainian military capacity through defence industry reforms, training of troops, and arms procurement. The former President of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko assigned his country's NATO membership as the core of the government's foreign policy agenda and legally incorporated this aim to the Ukrainian constitution. Accordingly, in 2019 an amendment was made in the constitution. In June 2020, NATO leaders decided to assign Ukraine as an Enhanced Opportunities Partner. This position allowed Ukraine to become a part of NATO's advanced military

exercises and reach armament programmes of NATO (Puri, 2022: 239; Sasse, 2023). Most importantly, in September 2020, the National Security Strategy of Ukraine declared the importance of a formal partnership with NATO in the process of Ukraine's ultimate membership of NATO. Moreover, this document identified Russia as a threatening state to Ukraine's security. This categorization was deliberate in order to justify Ukraine's eventual accession to NATO. In June 2021, apprehended by the overwhelming volume of Russian military buildup in Ukraine's borders, president Volodymyr Zelenskyy demanded from Joe Biden to accelerate the process of Ukraine's NATO membership (Singh, 2023: 86). While Biden was initially hesitant about this step, Ukraine's self-confidence was reinforced in 2021 by the Individual Partnership Action Plan of NATO, which promised enhancing Alliance support for Ukraine (Sasse, 2023).

With no doubt, these developments were alarming for Russia. On the other hand, Russia enjoyed the lack of cohesion and political unity among NATO allies during this period. After recalibrating their military force structure for effective stability operations, crisis prevention and humanitarian intervention since the end of the Cold War, the member states collectively were fully unprepared for the swift military and hybrid operations of Russia against both Ukraine and the Western states. According to some scholars (Reach et. al., 2021), it was not the NATO's eastward enlargement, but its weakness, resulting from the collective action problem that surrounds member states, was the main factor that drove Putin to act assertively both in Europe and the Middle East. Between 1991 and 2014, the Western states had mostly ruled out the prospect of a large-scale war between the U.S./NATO and Russia. The level of threat perceived from Russia has dramatically increased in the West after 2014, culminated in the Russia's full-fledged invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Still, the transformation of the NATO's political strategy, military planning, and force posture in Eastern Europe since 2014 has been conducted in a reactive mood, rather than proactive, against Russia. Therefore, the main actor that sets the security agenda of the European states has been Russia, not NATO (Arnold, 2024).

Consistent with this reactive manner, as tensions gradually rose after April 2021, NATO official advisers, military experts, and Western arms and equipment started to pour into Ukraine. In January 2022, the U.S. contributed with \$200 million

to Ukraine's defence efforts and offered further security assistance. The U.S. and the U.K. also gave an ultimatum to Russia about the possible severe consequences of invasion of Ukraine. On the other hand, "for Russia, the escalating military threats were unmistakable" (Trenin, 2021). Putin was especially obsessed with the existence of American ballistic and cruise missiles located in Ukraine's territory, which are capable of hitting Moscow in six to eight minutes. Russian leaders were also suspecting that the U.K. was building a foreign military centre in Ukraine (Trenin, 2021). Therefore, starting with the annexation of Crimea, there has been an evolution of the disposition and allocation of the Russian combat groups and military posture. The size of the armed units in the southwestern borders of Russia was expanded and forces in the Central and Eastern Russia were relocated to Ukrainian border (Reach et. al. 2021: 5). The increasing deployment of Russian infantry and armoured vehicles in the southwestern of the county was aimed at stopping the NATO's further enlargement to the east (Singh, 2023: 130). As of December 2021, Ukrainian intelligence reported that the number of troops deployed along the entire Russia-Ukraine border was more than 90,000 (Singh, 2023: 86). Moreover, as the Russian Defence Minister announced in 2020, the modernization programme of the armed forces had mostly reached its aims. The stock of precision-guided munitions has been extended, 70 percent of the total military equipment has been modernized, and the contract-based, professional troops has outnumbered the conscripted personnel (Massicot, 2023b: 82).

NATO and the U.S. delivered their written response to Russia's ultimatum in January 2022. NATO's answer indicated that there could be a negotiated solution of its military posture and force structure located in the Eastern Europe. However, NATO made it clear that the future course of its geographical enlargement will not be discussed with Russia. Subsequently, Russia accused the alliance of turning Ukraine into a "potential theatre of war" (Sasse, 2023). In a similar vein, U.S. response clearly indicated that the future of NATO enlargement is not a subject of negotiations between Russia and the U.S. Instead, the U.S. declared its readiness to negotiate on arms control and conventional forces in Europe. According to Antony Blinken, the U.S. Secretary of State, the U.S.' answer to Russia "sets out a serious diplomatic path forward should Russia choose it" (quoted in Puri, 2022: 232). He argued that the U.S. and its allies

had been uneasy about Russia's actions in the region, and they are interested in finding a common ground with Russia on security issues.

4.3.2. The Assessment of the Current Situation

On February 24, 2022, Putin announced the beginning of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The invasion began on multiple domains, including land, air, and sea operations. The attacks on the Ukrainian territory began in country's eastern part, including Donbas region. Russia firstly attempted to establish its dominance on the eastern provinces where separatist insurgency had eroded the control of Ukrainian government since 2014. However, apart from annexing territory, Russia's main aim in this invasion was capturing the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, and decapitating the Ukrainian pro-Western government and president. Russian leaders initially relied on a rapid Russian tactical victory and subsequent removal of the existing regime, which was supposed to be followed by instillation of a friendly government and a pro-Russian president in Kyiv (Dalsjö et. al., 2022). The priority of Russian political and military leaders was stopping Ukraine's shift towards the West and ensuring that the country stays in Russian strategic orbit. Russian leaders believed that resistance against the Russian forces would be light, and they would be welcomed by Ukrainian population as liberators. Supposedly, this would allow the military's quick march into Kyiv and secure a swift victory for Russia. Therefore, the combat formations that are assigned for invasion were configured to employ a rapid attack with decisive results in a short period, not to endure a prolonged campaign (Martin et. al., 2023: 7).

However, in a short time, it seemed obvious that the aims of the Russian leaders were excessively ambitious and strategic planning of the military's high command were poor and full of faulty assumptions. The invasion began with Russian surprise attacks on multiple fronts, but without sufficient reinforcement and adequate supply of logistic support. Since Russian leaders and top military officials envisioned that the operation would achieve the assigned goals in a very short time, the huge numbers of troops and resources were not mobilized initially. Therefore, Russian troops were ill-equipped and poorly trained for conducting such a large-scale offensive operation (Martin et. al., 2023: 7). Moreover, strategic planning of the operation from the

beginning was incompetent and skewed. As Dara Massicot (2023a: 5) explains, “the tactics are crude. Any finesse or operational art in their doctrine has given way to brute force and repetitive attacks.” The decision of the invasion was highly confidential until the very last minute. Only a few officials knew Putin’s decision of the invasion. Therefore, troops and officers had no time to prepare for conducting such a large-scale attack. As a result, Russian armed forces have suffered enormous losses. Thousands of armoured vehicles, fighter jets and attack helicopters were heavily damaged and irreparable. The number of casualties was also staggering. The excessive losses of trained and qualified personnel, field commanders, non-commissioned officers and logisticians have reduced the war-fighting capability and combat efficiency of the Russian military (Massicot, 2023a: 3-4).

The failure of the Russian forces to rapidly capture Kyiv and the unexpected resiliency of the Ukrainian resistance have changed the course of war. In March, Russia began to conduct long-range strikes with precision munitions to key Ukrainian military centres, critical infrastructure and large urban areas. In April 2022, Russian leadership shifted its attention from decapitation of the Zelensky government to the conquest of large swaths of territory in southern and eastern Ukraine. Russia had redeployed all the military units around Kyiv. Later that month, Russia initiated a major offence in the eastern Ukraine. In October 2022, Putin formally declared that the four provinces in this region have been annexed to Russia (Council on Foreign Relations, 2024; Frederick et. al., 2023: 33; Martin et. al., 2023: 11).

High ranked Ukrainian officers quickly realized the structural deficiencies in the Russian military and exploited these shortcomings by assaulting Russian forces and compelling them to stay in defence. Russians then, sought to prevent Ukrainian forces from recapturing the territory they initially conquered. Thereafter, the war has transformed into the war of attrition that both sides have to incur substantial loss of material and human resources. Russian aims to adopt this strategy of attritional warfare were degrading the Ukrainian capabilities over time and fracturing the Western unity by staying in the war as long as it takes and waiting for the reduction in the assistance that the West provides to Ukraine (Frederick et. al., 2023: 34; Martin et. al., 2023: 15). Therefore, Russian leaders laid the ground for a protracted war. In October, Russia launched the mass mobilization campaign including the conscription of 300,000 men,

in order to compensate the high rates of casualties. In order to reverse the effects of large material losses, the military began to draw older equipment from strategic reserves, such as T-62 tanks and armoured vehicles of the Cold War period (Martin et al., 2023: 12). Russia has also ramped up the defence expenditure, whose share of the country's GDP has risen from 3.6 percent in 2021 to 6 percent in 2023 (SIPRI, 2023). This increase is especially planned for the production of the material equipment lost in the battlefield and replenishing the depleted stocks of artillery and precision-guided munitions. Therefore, Russia sustained its attacks on critically important targets including civilian infrastructure and air defence systems of the Ukrainian army (Massicot, 2023a: 4).

In January 2023, Gerasimov has been appointed as the general commander of Russian military operations in Ukraine. As discussed in the previous section, Gerasimov was arguing the superiority of offence over defence. In a month after he took the charge of Russian armed forces, he launched localized attacks in the Donbas region. His aim was to attrit the Ukrainian forces and to prevent them from initiating a major offensive against Russian units. The mobilization of October 2022 has provided Russia superiority in manpower against Ukraine. Taking advantage of this superiority, Gerasimov redirected the Russian forces' target toward the Donbas region and deployed thousands of reinforcement units in the region. However, the newly assigned troops that almost entirely consist of conscripts were ill-equipped and poorly trained for conducting those specific missions. Therefore, Gerasimov's strategy fell short of achieving Russia's aims and the conflict between two sides has evolved into a trench warfare, reminiscent of the situation in the Western front during the First World War (Gould-Davies, 2024: 55; Massicot, 2023a: 5).

Although the initial attack on Ukraine during late February and March 2022 failed to achieve the main aim of Russian leaders, the simultaneous military operations achieved to capture and hold a sizable portion of Ukrainian territory. Moreover, Russian military planners have learned from their mistakes and reconfigured the structure of Russian forces and made several consequential adjustments in their strategies (Massicot, 2023b: 81). Therefore, although Gerasimov continued to organize small, inconsequential offensive attacks against Ukrainian units, with large swath of territory under their control, Russian forces largely adopted a defensive

posture, began to install sequential lines of military obstacles and fortifications and close to holes in their defensive lines, and created strategic depth against enemy's assault. The aim was to retain the conquered territories and establish the Russian dominance in these areas. By this way, Russia would be able to hold the advantage and use its possession of important regions as a leverage to pressure on Ukraine and utilize this advantage in the future peace negotiations with Ukraine and its Western supporters.

Against this backdrop, in June 2023, Ukrainian forces launched a large-scale counteroffensive campaign, seeking to make a breakthrough in the battlefield, and thus regaining the control of some crucial provinces in Donbas, which would allow them to create a land corridor towards Crimea. However, because of the reasons mentioned above, Ukrainian forces met a strong resistance and incurred heavy casualties against Russian air defence systems and fortified ground defensive lines. The change in the front line was only marginal and the size of territory that Ukrainian forces reclaimed was minimal. In November 2023, the Ukrainian Chief of Staff announced that the battle had reached a stalemate point. Meanwhile, the fighting in the city of Avdiivka was continuing since October. Under these circumstances, Ukrainian forces have retreated from the city in February 2024, in order not to be entrapped and surrendered. It resulted in a significant strategic gain for Russia (Council on Foreign Relations, 2024).

After almost nine months of attritional war, on 10 May 2024, Russian military launched a massive offensive campaign targeting Kharkiv, a major Ukrainian city located only a couple of miles away from Russian border. Meanwhile, Zelensky had been negotiating with its Western counterparts in order to convince them to lift the sanctions on donated weaponry. Until the beginning of June, Western leaders employed restrictions on the Ukrainian use of their weapons and provided arms supply with the caveat that they are not to be used for hitting targets inside the Russian territory. U.S. president Joe Biden was especially cautious about this issue, trying to avoid a direct confrontation between Russia and NATO allies, which could escalate to a Third World War (Sharp, 2024). Capitalizing on these Western concerns, Russia used this restriction to its advantage, keeping its supply lines of precision munitions and artillery positions within its territory. By this way, Russia achieved significant

tactical-level gains in the first two weeks of Kharkiv offensive. Rather than penetrating deep into the Ukrainian territory, the Russian priority has been to create a buffer zone stretching across the internationally recognized border area between Russia and Ukraine (Detsch, 2024).

During the initial phase of the offensive campaign, Ukraine suffered from the lack of direct fire power. With the shortage of specific kinds and sufficient numbers of weapons that are proper for the missions that Ukrainian forces had to carry out, and lacking the permission to use ones that it already had, Ukrainian officers was compelled to withdraw from their established positions and cede territory to Russia. In the beginning, there were 10 battalions deployed in the frontline, but the troops had no ammunition. Although in April the U.S. Congress passed the bill that confirmed the continuation of American military aid to Ukraine, it will take a long time for material supplies to reach fronts in Ukraine (Detsch, 2024). Therefore, the situation of the Ukrainian forces had deteriorated until the beginning of June. Yet on 31 May, Biden administration has lifted the restriction on the use of American-donated weapons for striking the targets inside Russia. In his speech on Friday, 31 May, Biden has confirmed its support for Ukraine to authorize U.S.-given weapons to target offensive positions beyond the border area in Kharkiv region, for the purpose of self-defence. However, he reiterated that the use of these weapons for conducting longer-range strikes deep into the Russian territory is still prohibited (Sharp, 2024).

Following the suit, other major NATO allies announced their explicit permission for Ukraine to employ their weapon systems for hitting the targets and offensive positions just opposite border. Germany, Poland, Finland and the Netherlands confirmed their approval for this decision (Sharp, 2024). Early that month, British Defence Secretary David Cameron told a Reuters reporter that it is Ukrainians' decision to how to use the weapons that Britain supplied. Cameron said that Ukrainians are defending their country and Britain won't discuss any condition that was put on this issue (Hunder, 2024).

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTS OF THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR ON THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

This chapter tests the validity of neorealist assumptions in explaining the Russia-Ukraine War and examines the effects of the war on the international system from the perspective of polarity analysis. The war has significantly eroded Russia's material capabilities as well as its international prestige. Russia's economy has suffered from economic sanctions and export controls mostly imposed by the U.S.; since a big portion of highly educated males has fled from the country because of mass mobilization and compulsory military service, its human capital has been degraded; and most importantly, its military capabilities has reduced since the big portion of its high-tech weapons has damaged and huge numbers of its skilled personnel has been either killed or wounded in the war, because of poor planning and erroneous strategy. On the other hand, the capabilities of NATO members have also started to erode since enormous sum of money is flowing into Ukraine and ammunition stockpiles are being depleted because of massive amount of weapon and military equipment they send to Ukraine. Against this backdrop, this chapter aims to evaluate the emerging balance of material capabilities as a result of these war-time developments. In the first section, the security policies and defence strategies of both sides will be evaluated in the light of Russia's bid for multipolarity and U.S.' efforts to preserve unipolarity. The second section will provide a net assessment of the distribution of capabilities in the current international system and argue that the system remains unipolar.

5.1. THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR IN THE LIGHT OF NEOREALISM

This section aims to historicize Russian war aims in Ukraine and NATO's adaptation process since the beginning of the war against the background of Russia-NATO relations discussed in the third and fourth chapter. It also aims to contextualise the Russia-Ukraine War within the theoretical framework presented in the first chapter. It does so by employing the conceptual toolbox provided in the second chapter. Therefore, the first part of this section discusses the Russian politics of multipolarity

and clarifies the position in which its war against Ukraine holds within this broader context. The second part briefly summarizes the American policies to keep the system unipolar. The third part looks at the Western and Russian strategies during the war and evaluates the current military balance.

5.1.1. Russia's Quest for Multipolarity

As discussed in the previous chapter, there has been a persistent impulse in Russian leadership for a multipolar international system after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. This quest for multipolarity has always been accompanied by the vision of Russia as a great power. In Russian understanding, the great powers in the international system are a small number of major states whose national interests cannot be ignored without serious consequences. Accordingly, the relations among these great powers should be conducted on the basis of specific common principles, including balance of power, sovereignty, non-intervention, tacitly recognised spheres of influences, and certain great power responsibilities in international affairs. Although Russia's policies toward establishing a multipolar structure are often attributed to diplomatic efforts, declaration of intentions, and building alternative economic, political and cultural blocks against established institutions, the use of force and resorting violent means has also been parts of Russian strategy. In particular, creating privileged zones of influence in its near abroad – either through violence or via international institutions such as the EEU – has been one of the most striking strategies of Russia in order to attain a great power status in the international system.

The most current Russian violent activities in Ukraine also signal the continuation of multipolar politics. From a geopolitical perspective, the Russia-Ukraine war marks the reemerging rivalry for spheres of influence between Russia and NATO aiming at establishing a favorable balance of power for Russia in its Western direction (Ashford, 2023). The conflict in Ukraine is happening in the historical and international-systemic context in which U.S. primacy and NATO centrality is taking the leading role. As Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov noted, the enlargement of NATO was the “root of the systemic problems,” spoiling Russia's relations with the West (quoted in Götz and Staun, 2022: 492). Therefore, the course of the war has had

substantial effects pertaining the international balance of power (Kagan, 2022: 10; Lukyanov, 2023: 5). For this reason, it is essential to shed light on the notion of multipolarity in Russian understanding and methods and policies Russia has employed towards a multipolar structure in the international system.

As discussed in the third chapter, in the early 1990s, Russia was simply too weak to resist U.S. assertive policies in Europe. With its territory shrinking, military power degrading, economy suffering from structural problems and domestic stability becoming suspicious, Russia had to acquiesce West's inconsistent policies even when its strategic interests were at stake. With the arrival of Primakov, a specific strategic vision was incorporated into the Russian foreign policy. Primakov elaborated on the strategic and political conditions to achieve the aim of 'Russia as a great power.' He advocated for an international system resembling the 19th century Concert of Europe, characterised by critical cooperation as well as strategic competition among great powers. Primakov's vision of great power concert relied on two key pillars: political inclusiveness and procedural informality. Inclusiveness was aimed at bringing all the consequential states around the table and ensuring that their voices would be heard in key international developments, ignoring states' regime types and ideological differences. Informality pointed out avoiding from binding agreements and building interstate relations on the basis of genuine political dialogue and effective diplomatic exchange. Instead of legal documents, relations are maintained with good faith and common sense of great power responsibilities in managing global affairs. Thanks to informality, the great powers also recognize each other's' diverging national interests and put realistic limits on their expectations about the potential benefits of cooperation. They also keep the right of intervene should one of them upset the balance of power (Haass and Kupchan, 2021).

Thus, Russia began to diversify its foreign policy measures and establish diplomatic relations with non-Western states. For Primakov, developing constructive relations with several influential states in global arena such as India and China, while maintaining a steady level of coordination with the West was an essential step toward transforming the system into multipolarity (Tsygankov, 2019: 104). Multipolarity of Primakov era was not abandoned in the initial phase of Putin's presidency, rather, it took the form of managing cooperative relations with the essential centres of power in

the world system (MacFarlane, 2008: 44). To be sure, this attempt was being motivated by the Putin's understanding of Russia as a great power. This new pragmatic approach envisaged a strategic partnership with the U.S., in the process of defining a new international security architecture, in which Russia would promote a concert of great powers acting in line with international law within international institutions. The new president Vladimir Putin attempted to frame Russian national interests in consistent with the Western strategic values (MacFarlane, 2008: 44). This redefinition, or restructuring Russian interests with Western terms was a pragmatic step that aimed to prove that Russia shares mutual interests with the West on significant issues, thus should be considered as a major player in international affairs (MacFarlane, 2008: 42; Tsygankov, 2019: 140). Echoing Primakov's vision, for Putin, in this more democratic and inclusive system, each great power will become the strategic hub of their regions, red lines and spheres of interests will be respected, global challenges will be handled collectively, and unilateral policies will be forestalled. In time, accordingly, Russia's relative position in the system would be elevated as its material power increases (Charap et. al., 2021: 28).

On the other hand, in the early 2000s, many Russian leaders became convinced that unipolarity is detrimental for Russia's security, allowing the U.S. to deny vital national interests of Russia. Unless Russia reinvigorates its economic power, political influence, and military capacity, it would remain as a bystander. The former secretary of the Russia's Security Council, Andrei Kokoshin suggested that Russia was unable to pursue strategic independence in its foreign policy, what he sees as an essential part of sovereignty (Charap et. al., 2021: 19). Contrary to many Russian foreign and defence policy officials, Kokoshin argued that, in addition to the size of military and number of strategic nuclear delivery platforms, the state power also includes GDP, demography, and natural resources. Save from its nuclear arsenal, Kokoshin considered Russian systemic position as inferior to the U.S. and China. Kokoshin portrayed Russian status in the global hierarchy of states as great power, lagging behind the U.S. and China which are 'superpowers,' thanks to their exceptional annual GDP, advanced technological capacities, and massive size of their conventional forces (quoted in Reach et. al., 2020: 24-25).

Therefore, notwithstanding the strategic parity in nuclear forces, the overall inferiority in critical domains forced Russia to follow its interests without risking an all-out war with the U.S. and NATO. Russia followed strategic competition with the West from the position of systemic weakness. Maintaining its competitive edge against NATO and the U.S. while keeping the line of confrontation under the threshold of a system-wide great power war represents the main challenge of Russian foreign and security policy. Therefore, Russia always carefully observes global military posture enhancements of the U.S. and regional force posture of NATO, in order to adjust its military deployments (Reach et. al., 2022: 114-116). As Andrew Monaghan (2006: 987) notes, “much of Russian foreign and security thinking, and in many cases Russia’s relations with other states and international institutions, has developed against the backdrop of its relationship with the US and Russian views of the US position in global affairs.”

Since it is so sensitive about systemic position of the U.S. and NATO, even minor adjustments in their force levels evoke concerns in Russia, feeding the zero-sum mentality in its relations with these actors. NATO’s continuing expansion into the areas for which Russia had declared its special concern and its right of influence, contributed the tendency toward this geopolitical thinking. In line with this view, Russia occasionally demonstrated its willingness to resort military power to defend its core security interests. Moreover, NATO’s decision to both expand geographically and start to conduct out-of-area operations led Russian policymakers to think that there is a causal linkage between the U.S. strategies for the European security and its policies of global primacy (Sushentsov and Wohlforth, 2020: 440). In this context, Russia’s use of force in its near abroad was also a policy choice reflecting the severity of Russian discontent with the international security order of the unipolar era.

From the balance of power perspective, Russian policies seem to be warranted. For three decades, the U.S. has ignored Russia’s reservations on NATO enlargement and its discontent with the existing European security architecture. Moreover, it also has underestimated Russian willingness to resort force and employ violent means to protect its security interests in its near abroad (Doris and Graham, 2022: 86). The security order in Europe has been built upon the institutional base of NATO and EU, including the U.S. as formal security guarantor, while relying on the peaceful relations

among European powers. These formal structures excluded Russia, generating a sense of resentment in Russian leaders. This security order ensured the protection of its members, however failed to develop a functional mechanism for constructively engage with outsiders. It simply lacks any method or platform for mitigating the apprehensions and addressing the security interests of other states. Therefore, instead of negotiating solutions, confrontational policies began to emerge (Sakwa, 2015: 570). As Putin (quoted in Radin and Reach, 2017: 1) addressed in 2014, “instead of establishing a new balance of power, essential for maintaining order and stability,” the Western leaders laid the ground for systemic instability and precarious imbalance.

In Russian official view, this imbalance has destabilized the international system. The U.S. is trying to subordinate other states and forcing them to comply its unilateral initiatives in political, military, and economic domains. This instability is threatening the security of some of the principal actors in the world, thus, the balance of power needs to be reestablished (Charap et. al., 2021: 17-18). The internal and external conditions, especially the economic situation, that had emerged immediately after the end of the Cold War gave Russia no room for manoeuvre, pushed it to seek for closer ties with the West. However, both because power has become increasingly diffused across the international system, and Russian economy has successfully integrated global markets while Russian defence industry is gaining autonomy, Russia achieved a high level of self-reliance and reduced its external dependency. Meanwhile, Russia’s sense of urgency about its sovereignty and its threat perception about the future course of international power structure has led Russian leaders to pursue more aggressive policies. Russian leaders started to consider their country’s position as a reviving great power who holds a responsibility to restore stability and establish a delicate balance of power in the international system, whose structure has been transforming from unipolarity to multipolarity (Charap et. al., 2021: 20).

As such, Russia’s opposition to the expansion of NATO has grown stronger as the power gap between the U.S. and other major powers shifted in Russia’s advantage. As its military modernisation programme began to achieve its short and medium-term aims, the perception of its growing power in terms of larger stockpiles and improved fire power, coupled with the view of Russia as a reviving great power, consolidated the military standoff with the West and has culminated in its invasion of

Ukraine in February 2022. As noted, Russian policies of multipolarity range from diplomatic initiatives and constructive efforts to military coercion and the use of force. As the authoritative statement of Dmitry Adamsky (2024) showed, in the Russian strategic culture, all forms of engagement, ranging from signalling intentions through diplomatic channels to demonstration of power and employment of violent methods, serving to a specific purpose, merge into single unified system. The concentration of these tools within a single framework increases the credibility of Russia's coercive actions, justifying the pre-emptive attacks when non-violent methods prove ineffective. Therefore, Russian military coercion of Ukraine and following use of actual violence have been the last phases of its single holistic campaign (Adamsky, 2024: 28-32/103), that has been underway for years and serving to purpose of establishing a multipolar international system. As discussed in the last two chapters, Russia has been seeking to become a regional leader, in order to contribute its great power position, which it sees as a prelude to multipolar system.

Therefore, Ukraine has become an arena of the fierce great power competition conducted at the global level. As Lavrov (quoted in Trenin, 2023) argued in March 2022, the war is “not about Ukraine at all, but the world order.” As Western aid was pouring into Ukraine, Putin pointed out that Ukraine had received military assistance equivalent to \$150 billion, while as of 2023 only \$60 billion had been allocated to global struggle against poverty and climate change. As Russian scholar Dmitri Trenin (2023: 165-166) maintains, the battle in Ukraine is a war between Russia and the West, and is a part of the process that precipitates a transformation of the international system, accompanied by a “transition of the world's economic, technological, and military center from the North Atlantic back to the continent of Eurasia.”

5.1.2. U.S. Politics of Unipolar Primacy

This section argues that all the U.S. presidents after the Cold War employed policies that emphasizing the U.S. primacy. In this sense, in some degree there is a continuity between George H. W. Bush, Clinton, George W. Bush, Obama, Trump, and Biden presidencies. They all seem to believe that U.S. pre-eminence is to last indefinitely. Presidents have changed, but the policies emphasizing unipolarity have

persisted. Since early 1990s, many of the essentials of American foreign policy have remained the same (Löfflmann, 2020: 592).

Every president emphasized this primacy of American power through initiatives that have been replicated across administrations. These initiatives include preserving U.S.' superior military capabilities, maintaining and extending U.S. alliances and forward military deployments as a vanguard of peace and predictability in key regions of the world, encouraging the spread of democracy, steering globalization and using military force to address global threats and national interests (Brands and Feaver, 2016/2017: 95). Maintaining unipolarity has become the main priority of U.S. grand strategy. According to Layne (2002: 131-133; 2004: 111), since the end of the Cold War, U.S. grand strategy has been shaped according to key precepts of offensive realism: hegemonic systems are peaceful and stable, U.S. leadership is indispensable in the current hegemonic system, and multipolar systems are unstable and war-prone. The U.S. has opposed to reversion of international system to multipolarity, and it has sought to reach global hegemony by eliminating potential great power rivals. It has maintained the large quantity of forward deployed military personnel in order to secure stability in Asia and Europe, created an intricate network of bases in those regions, and created a springboard that could support the rapid projection of its power to these regions. Because U.S. aimed for global primacy and aimed to maintain regional stability in these regions. U.S. leaders believed peace in these regions is a precondition for international stability.

The best-known statement of U.S.' intent to maintain its preponderance by preventing the emergence of great power rivals and uphold the unipolarity is George H. W. Bush administration's draft Defense Planning Guidance (DPG) for Fiscal Years 1994-1999. As the DPG stated, "we must maintain the mechanisms for deterring potential competitors from even aspiring to a larger regional or global role" (quoted in Layne, 2002: 135). According to Layne, (2002: 137) rather than pass the buck to others in security realm, the U.S. preferred to keep the buck securely in its own hands. The goal of American grand strategy was to prevent a transition to multipolarity by removing any incentives for its major allies to build the capacity for autonomous strategic action. As the DPG clarified, "we must account sufficiently for the interests of the large industrial nations to discourage them from challenging our leadership or

seeking to overturn the established political or economic order” (quoted in Layne, 2002: 135). American alliance commitments are seen as essential to forestalling a reversion to multipolarity. Given the U.S. provides security for them, Japan and Western Europe will feel no need to build capabilities to defend themselves. The Bush administration made it very clear that the U.S. would not retreat from its military presence and alliance commitments after the Cold War, it would carry out its Cold War responsibilities well into the future. After the Soviet Union has collapsed, the U.S. enjoyed a clear military preponderance, and unrivalled political and economic force. After that, U.S. grand strategy has taken the form of extending and improving this position as long as possible. As DPG reiterated, “our first objective is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival . . . that poses a threat on the order of that formerly posed by the Soviet Union” (quoted in Brands, 2016: 327). Accordingly, the U.S. strategy would focus to reinforce the unipolar order, by controlling the sources of instability that might interrupt it, and by recasting the international political system in the U.S. image.

The Clinton administration also endorsed the grand strategic objective of preserving U.S.’ position as the only superpower in the international system. The Clinton administration’s 1997 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) states that the objective of U.S. grand strategy is to keep things just the way they are by “discouraging a prospective challenger from initiating a military competition with the United States” (quoted in Layne, 2002: 136). U.S.’ forward military deployment was still considered in the Clinton administration as the most reliable barrier against renewed great power rivalries (Walt, 2000: 67). Therefore, by remaining militarily engaged in several regions, Clinton hoped to lessen security competition and to reduce the risk of major war in these regions. In his era, the U.S. held approximately 200.000 troops in Europe and East Asia and maintained its forward military presence in the Middle East (Porter, 2018: 21).

Three premises formed the essentials of U.S. military policy in the Clinton era: a commitment to maintaining U.S. global military supremacy in perpetuity, support for maximizing the utility of U.S. military might by pursuing an activist agenda, and an appreciation of the ultimate purpose of U.S. military engagement (Bacevich, 2002: 128). Clinton deployed U.S. military force more often than most presidents since

Truman (Porter, 2018: 21), with the aim of maintaining international order and enabling the processes of globalization to operate smoothly. His policies reflected a determination to maintain and extend American hegemony on a global scale (Bacevich, 2002: 6). This hegemony necessitated a set of priorities, such as global interdependence as a dominant reality of the international system, a commitment to advancing global openness, and a strong emphasis on free trade and investment. The Clinton administration identified a coherent internationalist vision that was built on commitments to U.S. leadership in collective security, free trade and democracy promotion areas (Dumbrell, 2016: 80). Central to this vision was a commitment to global openness. Bacevich (2002: 88) describes this openness as “fostering an integrated international order conducive to American interests, governed by American norms, regulated by American power, and... satisfying the expectations of the American people.” In the eyes of the officials of the Clinton administration, an open world with a globalized market was a precondition for continued domestic American prosperity. Clinton understood that removing barriers and blocks serves urgent American interests. And the U.S. officials in the Clinton administration concluded that American prosperity is attainable only by unimpeded strategic reach across the globe.

The concept of ‘indispensable nation’ appeared to be a notion legitimizing U.S. dominance in the era of globalization. The concept was a rationalization of the contemporary world in which few global problems could be handled without the active participation of the only superpower, the U.S. (Chollet and Goldgeier, 2008: 147-148). Multilateralism was central to this Clinton’s vision of U.S. leadership. He understood that global challenges required coordinated international efforts that could only be secured by an active U.S. leadership (Kitchen, 2016). Therefore, he presided over a bunch of multilateral agreements, placing the U.S. at the centre of trade regionally. In his era, the U.S. has led to establishment of World Trade Organization (WTO), with strong enforcement powers and mechanisms for dispute settlement. The U.S. has retained a structural advantage in these integrative institutional bodies which has tied states to each other in multilateral frameworks. The U.S. has led these institutions by using its power through establishing multilateral frameworks that bound other states to its own preferences. Therefore, U.S. leadership under Clinton was provided through regulating international order by existing and new international institutions and

alliances (Kitchen, 2016). The result of the Clinton's strategy was increasing American dominance. Because the U.S. has managed to enhance its hard power position by utilizing its soft power. This was only possible because of its encouragement of other states to bandwagon rather than to balance American power. As a result, the U.S. emerged in a position of unipolar dominance with unprecedented degree. The self-perception of unipolarity, in turn, led the U.S. to believe it was the indispensable nation (Joffe, 2001: 144).

After George W. Bush was inaugurated, there was a clear attempt to rebrand U.S. leadership in the international system. After he took office in January 2001, the first thing he did in the foreign policy area was to reassert the U.S. freedom of action in the international arena (Patman, 2016). The Bush administration considered multilateralism and international institutions as a restriction on that freedom of action. The main concern was that an intensive involvement in multilateral initiatives could limit the U.S.' liberty, to the detriment of the country (Dunn, 2006: 1, 8). All of these were an indication of weak multilateralism, defined as a "US-dominated system of alliances whereby the US dictates to allies, controls the UN and global institutions, and imposes its will on the world" (Kellner, 2004: 439). All of these policy changes reflected the Bush administration's idea that the U.S., as the sole superpower, had the right and task to determine the world's future. It was in this mood that the U.S. was to react to the September 11 attacks (Rogers, 2012: 339).

The officials in the Bush administration believed that after the demise of the Soviet Union, the U.S. was the sole military superpower and should use this military power to impose its will and interests. These officials saw military dominance as central to underpinning to U.S. leadership. Accordingly, hard power was the only thing that allies and enemies alike deferred. And countries on both sides would be influenced more by the raw American power. American interests could only be secured by hard power. Therefore, U.S. leadership was seen equal to maintaining a military superiority that was so huge as to ensure that no other great power would flourish to rival U.S. preponderance. As national security adviser Condoleezza Rice stated in 2002, "we will seek to dissuade any potential adversary from pursuing a military build-up in the hope of surpassing, or equalling, the power of the United States" (quoted in Renshon, 2010: 42). Therefore, Bush administration held the traditional view that security of sovereign

states was fundamentally determined by the military means, and enunciated a distinctly American internationalism. Since the U.S. was militarily most powerful state in the world, Bush believed that it had the unique and unilateral responsibility to answer terrorist attacks. By war on terror, U.S.' opinion leaders believed that the U.S. was also acting on behalf of its allies (Kagan, 2008: 31).

In these circumstances, the U.S. should aim for benevolent global hegemony by employing a policy of military primacy and moral confidence, through which the U.S. would expand its interests and spread its values (Brands, 2008: 250). Bush asserted that the U.S. represents the "single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise" (quoted in Monten, 2005: 143). Democracy promotion appeared in the Bush Doctrine as an essential component of U.S. grand strategy. Indeed, democracy promotion was central to the Bush administration's operationalization of war on terror and its overall grand strategy. Bush and his advisers believed that U.S. political, economic and security interests would be advanced by the spread of liberal political institutions and values abroad (Monten, 2005: 112).

This U.S. military policy of pre-emptive strikes replaced the Cold War doctrine of containment and deterrence, with a new field of implementation in Iraq. These strategic proponents of primacy have been identified by the neoconservative movement in the Bush era. Accordingly, American hegemony and primacy would tie all of the other states together. Neoconservatives considered the U.S.' omnipotent power and leadership as an essential for an orderly and stable international system. U.S. hegemony is viewed as a prerequisite for international peace and stability (Schmidt and Williams, 2008: 195). Neoconservatives contended that the U.S. should use its military power to reshape the international order compatible with American national interests. According to neoconservatives, commitment to maintenance of unipolar international system must be at the core of the American unilateralism. Neoconservatives viewed American hegemonic order as superior to balance of power order.

Like Bush, Obama was an internationalist who embraced the idea of a robust U.S. role overseas (Lindsay, 2011: 772). Despite all the differences between the two, Bush and Obama shared a common assumption: a conviction that other states wanted and needed U.S. leadership (Lindsay, 2011: 765). However, in meeting with the

foreign policy challenges, Obama employed America's smart power, which utilized America's hard as well as soft power resources that had long been overlooked by Bush administration. Smart power reflected a more sophisticated understanding of nature of power in international politics in the modern era, and Obama's approach proved that he is not comfortable with the view of American decline as he tried to utilize American leadership in every opportunity in the global arena. The idea that the U.S. should employ its smart power, to use all of the tools of diplomacy and power available to it, was reflecting the fact that unipolarity doesn't mean omnipotence (Kitchen, 2016). Unlike Bush, Obama believed that globalization was remaking the world politics. According to him, globalized world meant that multitude of threats, including terrorism, nuclear proliferation and climate change, crossed the national borders. And American power was insufficient to meet these threats. In Obama's view, during the Bush administration, imperial overstretch, financial crisis and reputational attrition have left the U.S. unable to address global challenges in security, economic and environmental spheres. He sought to renew American leadership capacity by reviving its willingness to address these global challenges in a consensual and clear-headed manner (Kitchen, 2016). He believed there are special responsibilities for the U.S. to take the lead in global affairs, and believed exercising this leadership could best be utilized in conjunction with allies.

As mentioned, Obama was comfortable with the liberal internationalist view, which includes the assumptions that the U.S. strength depends on its relationships with its allies and in building resilient international institutions. The U.S. may take the lead, but always as a member of its alliances and international obligations (Renshon, 2010: 204-205). Obama also reiterated "strong and sustained American leadership is essential to a rules-based international order... The question is not whether America should lead, but how we lead" (quoted in Löfflmann, 2020: 592). Obama revitalized the pre-eminence of the U.S. power, the belief in the superiority of American values, and the belief in American exceptionalism. During Obama administration, American exceptionalism served to underwrite a world view of American hegemony. Obama era witnessed the continuation of American political, economic and military hegemony (Löfflmann, 2015: 309).

Obama sought to re-appropriate the U.S.' global leadership through wiser decisions about the use of force, mostly enshrined in multilateral institutions. This recalibration of the policy of the use of force paved the way towards re-casting the way how the U.S. approach the world (Labouche, 2012: 37). It did not imply any lesser importance attached to the military, because during Obama administration the U.S. still retained to capability of operating in a global scale (Löfflmann, 2015: 327). This strategic shift was for maintaining the U.S. hegemony at less cost, both militarily and financially. The Obama administration understood that the U.S. hegemony had been undermined by Bush administration's hard unilateralism, and this led to a need to renew the diplomatic capacities necessary to produce legitimacy and organize consent (Kitchen, 2014: 88). Therefore, Obama attempted to reconfigure the identity of American exceptionalism, its unique superiority and global responsibility toward a grand strategy of cooperative engagement, burden-sharing and leading from behind. Obama's design to hold the leadership without taking the lead was implemented practically with the 2011 NATO operation in Libya (Löfflmann, 2015: 321). Leading from behind is intended as a model for future operations, with the U.S. playing a complementary role while regional allies take the lead (Kitchen, 2014: 90).

Despite Trump's belligerent rhetoric, much remained the same during his era. The Trump administration sustained many of U.S.' long-held commitments, including those that was the target of his own criticisms. In fact, most of the Trump's controversial foreign policy statements was consistent with established American policy (Kroenig, 2017: 30). Although his rhetoric was occasionally degrading the international order, Trump mostly acted in ways that fulfil the traditional U.S. role in it. His foreign policy continued to move along the tracks of the U.S.-built order (Deudney and Ikenberry, 2018: 23-24). Trump dedicated the U.S. to military preponderance and use of force that characterize American unipolarity. In National Security Strategy (NSS) of 2017, the Trump administration emphasized continued primacy and dominance in key regions. The NSS emphasized the centrality of power in the international system, advanced key US national interests, and asserted that cooperation among sovereign states, rather than multinational institutions, is the best way of achieving international security and peace. Moreover, the NSS promised to maintain a free and open international order. Trump's policy toward Russia and China

was the continuation of containment (Deudney and Ikenberry, 2018: 23; Porter, 2018: 43).

The Trump administration sought to uphold U.S.' superior military and economic capability as a security provider for the most important regions of the world (Posen, 2018: 21; Sperling and Webber, 2019: 513). U.S. policy toward alliances was also marked by continuity rather than change in the Trump era. As the NSS suggested: "Allies and partners are a great strength of the United States. They add directly to U.S. political, economic, military, intelligence, and other capabilities" (quoted in Lynch, 2020: 237). Aware of the fact that NATO is the key institution maintaining U.S. hegemony in the Europe, Trump's security policy was consistently hegemonic. Business as usual, the U.S. commitment to NATO remained strong in his era. Trump's demand for greater burden sharing within NATO and his expectation that the U.S. has a right to lead did not distinguish him fundamentally from his predecessors. Like his predecessors, Trump took the lead in the adaptation of NATO and utilised the alliance to maintain American hegemony in Europe (Sperling and Webber, 2019: 523).

Throughout the first decade of the post-Cold War period, the main challenge that American foreign policy establishment faced was the spreading domestic violence in the newly emerged states and civil wars that could result in the proliferation of failed states in the international system. After 9/11, the efforts of the U.S. leaders began to concentrate on global war on terror. The systemic rivalry with another great power appeared first time in official American texts in 2016 (Congressional Research Service, 2024). However, the risk of a great power war remained unlikely. The most clear-cut adaptation to the new reality of great power competition and military escalation has emerge during Biden presidency, with China's growing assertiveness in Taiwan Strait and Russia's large scale military buildup in Eastern Europe. Joe Biden recognised the necessity of prioritizing U.S. interests and decided to relieve U.S. forces from never-ending conflicts and ordered to withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan.

However, Biden administration's engagement with near peer-competitors has never aimed at establishing a functional balance of power and sustaining a genuine dialogue with these powers. Biden himself has never envisioned developing constructive relations and pragmatic cooperation with China. Instead, the U.S.

government imposed strict export controls on Chinese technology and commodities and concluded defence pacts with East Asian states in order to curtail Chinese interests in the East Pacific. Leoni and Tzinieris (2024: 37-42) argues that Biden administration's objective is the continuation of American global primacy, and its strategy is 'order-engineering', establishing mini-lateral platforms with privileged group of friendly states that have conduct their strategic rivalry with China and Russia disguised as promoters of rules-based order and democracy. Many in the U.S. government now think that Russia's war in Ukraine has emboldened China to act more assertively in the East Asia. Accordingly, while the administration focuses on Ukraine, China could outmanoeuvre U.S. troops in the region make strategic gains that threaten American interests. They even find China's diplomatic proposal to end the fight in Ukraine as a strategic ploy that aims dictate its authoritarianism and undermine the liberal international order (Walt, 2024).

According to Jeffrey Sachs (2023: 15-17), China and Russia policies of Biden administration have confirmed that the hegemonic stability theory remains as the main doctrinal guidance of the U.S. foreign policy. Accordingly, in order to maintain a U.S.-led order, the Biden administration is endeavouring to contain China and encircle Russia simultaneously. The U.S. leaders is trying to secure America's undisputed leadership in the current hegemonic order and rule out the possibility that Russia and China become major geopolitical actors in the international system. This primacist vision manifests itself over the full spectrum of foreign and defence policy issues. The U.S.' support to Ukraine since the very beginning has been one of the most central foreign policy occupations of the U.S. government. Biden himself hastened to make a connection between China's revisionism and Russian violence and declare a democratic crusade against global authoritarian backlash. He announced that if Russia's actions in Ukraine go unpunished, they will set a precedent for the future illegitimate use of force and subjugation of a sovereign state for territorial aggrandizement by other aggressors around the world (Shifrinson, 2022). Moreover, if the U.S. fails to support Ukraine's struggle politically and bolster its capabilities to increase the war-fighting potential of its military, it will openly show that the U.S. is not powerful enough to change the course of the war and have serious implications in the era of great power rivalry (Ashford et. al., 2024).

Therefore, while U.S. leaders have been ostensibly terrified by Russian atrocities in Ukraine however, they have also eschewed any negotiated settlement to be employed for ending the war. Because the main objective of the U.S. in the Russia-Ukraine War is to make conflict prolonged enough that Russia will have to exhaust its resources and be demoted from the great power status. As the U.S. Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin said in a press conference, the administration hopes to see Russian power reduced to the degree that it will never be able to attack and resort violence against a European nation. He further argued that it is in U.S.' interest that the Russia's military machine to become severely damaged to an extent that Russia will never coerce, threaten, or attack to U.S.' allies in the Europe. Austin underlined that American national interests are at stake in this war and the U.S. could not afford to stay in the sidelines (BBC, 2022). Similarly, other prominent figures in U.S. foreign policy establishment agree that the war in Ukraine matters to U.S.' vital interests. The Russia-Ukraine War represents the interlinkage of U.S. interests at the regional and systemic level (Kimmage, 2024).

Because as discussed in the second chapter, avoiding a large-scale war and preserving stability in Europe is central to U.S. grand strategy. Since the Europe is at the heart of world industrial production and global economy, the U.S. security protection and leadership in NATO does not result from altruism, but points out the manifestation of pursuing its national interests. As the largest beneficiary of the international economic order and hegemonic system, U.S. security interests and economic prosperity hinge on a free, democratic and stable Europe. As discussed in previous chapters, NATO has been the backbone of this established order. As the primacist argument of security/interdependence nexus has been justified, the EU is the largest bilateral trade partner of the U.S. The volume of the bilateral trade and investment is the world's largest, and American military-industrial complex heavily relies on the U.S. arms sales to NATO allies. Any disruption in these ties would severely damage U.S. national power and reduce economic prosperity (Wolters and Dailey, 2024).

Therefore, primacist U.S. leaders and scholars suggest that the U.S. should increase the share of its defence budget allocated to the American military assets in the Europe. This spending, argument goes, is not only for honouring the U.S. security

commitments to its European ally, but also the strategic duty of the U.S. to preserve its military and technological preponderance amidst the escalating systemic rivalries. Although some of the NATO members clearly free-rides the U.S. and American leaders usually complains about the unequal burden sharing within the Alliance, the U.S. has never favored a steep increase in European defence capabilities. Because from the perspective of asymmetrical alliance patterns presented in the second chapter, NATO serves as an instrument for exercising American power across the international system, by multiplying U.S. autonomy through its shared platforms for intelligence sharing, basing rights, strategic access to military ports and infrastructure, enhanced interoperability, and policy coordination. Moreover, its broad global network allows the U.S. to galvanize support for its efforts to cope with China and Russia simultaneously (Norrlof, 2024; Wolters and Dailey, 2024).

As Jake Sullivan (2023), the National Security Adviser to Biden administration claims, U.S.' allies and NATO's global ties offer enormous advantages for its efforts defend global American interests and address shared systemic challenges. While the U.S. continues to provide the nuclear umbrella and security assurances to its European allies, enhanced European conventional capabilities, along with the joint missile defence system, allow the U.S. to address the challenges outside the Europe, move its resources across regions, and concentrate on the East Pacific Region in particular. The major NATO allies also start to contribute directly to U.S. military missions in the Indo-Pacific. The U.K., Germany, France, and the Netherlands have committed naval assets to U.S. operations in the region. NATO's formal cooperation with Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and South Korea has facilitated the deployment of these assets (Mazarr, 2023). Overall, U.S.' strategy of global primacy has ensured the centrality of NATO and U.S.' commitments to its NATO allies (Menon and Ruger, 2023: 166).

Given the opportunities provided by NATO and growing security concerns of the East European members, primacists argue that the U.S. must officially finalize a clear timetable for Ukraine's accession to NATO. Apart from the Alliance's role as a promoter of the liberal international order, primacists see Ukraine's membership as a geopolitical gain. Accordingly, Ukraine's NATO membership would provide a significant manpower advantage and a bastion against a future Russian aggression. Together with Poland, a NATO member Ukraine would create the enhanced military

posture of the Alliance in the eastern flank. If Ukraine's manpower and military and territorial assets could be incorporated into NATO, it will significantly shift the regional balance of power in favor of the Alliance and increase the credibility of its deterrence and capabilities for an effective (Michta, 2023). As Wolters and Dailey (2024) argues, military and financial aids sent to Ukraine isn't charity, it is a way of reasserting U.S. leadership. "Support to Ukraine isn't just a good deed, it's also a good dealt."

5.1.3. The Effects of the War on the Military Balance of Power

5.1.3.1. The Evolution of the Russian War Aims

Russia's initial plan in February 2022 was not to occupy the entire territory of Ukraine and subjugate it and make it a part of Russia. In July 2021 and February 2022, Putin repeatedly emphasized that Russia accepts the new geopolitical situation that has emerged after the end of the Cold War and respects Ukrainian sovereignty. However, he also reiterated that Russia cannot turn a blind eye to the political and military developments in Ukraine. He argued that the military developments in Ukraine was not taking place hundreds of miles away from Russia's borders, and addressing to the NATO leaders, he said: "They must understand that we simply have nowhere further to retreat to" (quoted in Mearsheimer, 2022b: 22). Therefore, what was the Russian leaders were trying to do was preventing Ukraine from becoming a springboard for a NATO offensive against Russia.

Russia's military strategy from the beginning of the war and the initial number of troops deployed in the war prove this point. If Putin had aimed to occupy all the Ukrainian territory in February 2022, he would have employed a blitzkrieg strategy including large numbers of heavily armoured combat formations reinforced by a robust tactical air campaign. German occupation of Poland in September 1939 was achieved with 1.5 million troops deployed for the invasion campaign. With only 190,000 troops assigned as invasion force in February 2022, it was obvious that Putin's aim was not capturing all of the Ukrainian soil – which is larger than Poland's territory – and incorporating it into the Russia's territory. Therefore, Russia's aim was to reach the

capital city, Kyiv, remove Zelenskyy administration, and conquer only a limited part of territory in order to coerce Ukraine and prevent it from joining NATO (Mearsheimer, 2022b: 15-16; Singh, 2023: 142).

In addition to size of its forces, Russia's military strategy also lends credence to this argument. According to key precepts of Russian military doctrine that has been discussed in the previous chapter, a war against a hostile state should have begun with a heavy bombardment conducted by aerial attacks and heavy artillery targeting the enemy's critical infrastructure. During this decisive initial phase of the battle, enemy's material capabilities for fighting back are destroyed and its will to resist is degraded. However, since Russian leaders expected a rapid and swift victory, Russian air forces conducted only limited attacks against critically important targets. They hoped a quick regime change, therefore wanted to country's critical leadership facilities to remain intact and its power network to function smoothly, in order for the new government that they would install to be able to operate and govern efficiently (Massicot, 2023b: 83-85). Moreover, Russian ground forces used ballistic missile attacks only occasionally against Ukrainian targets, contradicting with the classical Russian military doctrine. Russian army's kill chain was erroneous and its reload capacity for artilleries was limited, obstructing Russian military's capacity to attack critical targets with the intensity that Russian doctrine prescribed. For comparison, on the first day of the war against Iraq, a single unit of the U.S. Armed Forces launched more than 100 short range ballistic missiles against specific targets, while Russia launched 124 missiles of the same kind totally during the first five months of the battle (Alberque et. al., 2023: 11-12).

According to Russian military doctrine, land forces are sent to the conflict area only after air strikes and artillery units have imposed substantial damage to enemy's critical capabilities. In the beginning of the war, most of the military experts expected that Russian air forces would establish its supremacy in the sky and enable large-scale ground offensive. However, performance of the Russian air force units proved disastrous, leaving ground units and formations vulnerable to Ukrainian counterattacks (Dalsjö et. al., 2022: 10). Russia began to invasion with ground combat units attacking from multiple directions aiming to seize several critical locations in Ukraine rapidly. However, with insufficient air support and disrupted logistic supply, Russian forces

suffered heavy casualties. When Russian troops advanced notwithstanding the casualties and large equipment losses, the supply lines and reinforcement to the units fighting in the front-line of the conflict began to be stretched to the breaking point. The shortages of fuel, ammunition and food became prevalent (Massicot, 2023a: 2).

Moreover, Russian command and control structure functioned very poorly. Russian field commanders failed to coordinate the movements of offensive units in a complementary manner. They also failed to organize land and air operations for successful offensive tactics. Normally, conducting combined-arms battles using large, mechanised formations with high manoeuvre capabilities is considered as one of the strong aspects of Russian armed forces. However, in Ukraine, Russian military largely failed to plan combined-arms, manoeuvre battles utilizing the brigade- or division-size formations (Dalsjö et. al., 2022: 11). As discussed in the previous chapter, with the modernization programme launched in 2012, most of the war-fighting groups of Russian armed forces had been organized into battalions, that are capable of conducting manoeuvre operations independently in order to respond the crises rapidly and localize the conflicts erupted across Russia's borders. However, the war in Ukraine proved that battalion-level formations are not appropriate for conducting combined-armed operations which require concerted activities of air forces and ground troops (Ryan, 2024). Accordingly, in large-scale wars, capturing a land grab and holding it requires superior fire power combined with a credible deep-strike capacity, thus effectively coordinating the mechanized infantry, functional air-defence units, skilful engineers, and large artillery and tank formations into a unified strategic operation (Biddle, 2023: 162).

Following the counteroffensive of summer and autumn of 2022, Russian leaders recognized that the poor performance of the Russian forces in Ukraine was the result of maintaining peacetime military strategies. The first step was to conscription of 300,000 more men, most of which were to be deployed in Ukraine in October 2022. The second step was shifting the organizational size of combat groups from battalion-level to division- and army corps-level. This organizational strategy is more effective in conducting combined-arms operations, which require the integrated use of forces across all domains – air, sea, land, and cyber. The war in Ukraine has proved that large manoeuvre forces with heavily armoured formations are not things of the past and still

have significant role in occupying, holding, and defending large swathes of territory (Barry et. al., 2023: 7). Therefore, Russia's revision of its battlefield strategy has allowed Russian forces to conduct more coordinated and unified operations (Ryan, 2024).

However, especially after January 2023, the nature of the conflict in Ukraine began to shift from a manoeuvre-based war into an attritional warfare. There were basically two reasons for this transformation. The first was the ever-increasing Western military support to Ukrainian forces. Immediately after the invasion began, the U.S. sent large amount of military equipment to Ukraine, including 17,000 anti-tank weapons. In February 2023, the U.K. has dispatched advanced air-defence systems, anti-ship munitions, fifth-generation fighter aircrafts and heavy-armoured infantry vehicles. Similarly, France contributed these efforts with anti-aircraft and radar systems. In the same month, German government agreed to send 24 main battle tanks (MBT) to frontline – sophisticated Leopard 2 models (Singh, 2023: 87-89). As of February 2023, the U.S. military assistance to Ukraine was more than \$26 billion, consisting of armours, night-vision equipment, integrated air-defence systems, artillery, mobilized rocket systems, and precision-guided munitions (Massicot, 2023b: 88-89). The second factor was the proved superiority of defence over offence. The war in Ukraine has demonstrated that modern military equipment, especially precision munitions, drones, autonomous weapon systems, self-propelled artillery, and anti-tank weapons with high mobility make it harder to capture territory than to keep it. This makes manoeuvre battle in offensive operation prohibitively costly, both in terms of material and human loss (Ashford and Grieco, 2024; Biddle, 2023: 159).

After January 2023, Russia adopted a more defensive posture in order to hold territories it had capture theretofore with the aim of deter the West from sending military aid to Ukraine and coerce Ukraine into cease fire and begin negotiation on favorable terms for Russia (Adamsky, 2024: 105). And reorganization of the forces into the formations larger than battalion-size combat groups allowed Russian forces to prepare stronger defensive positions, by creating successive lines of fortified positions and barriers, reducing the gaps between forces and providing strategic depth. On the other hand, with the enormous amount of military assistance provided to Ukraine by Western states, at some it has turned out to be the West's collective war against Russia.

Therefore, since the war has evolved into an attritional war, Russia has had to keep a considerable amount of its battalions in order to adapt. Because wars of attrition have a distinct logic of operation and different material requisites than grand manoeuvre wars (Vershinin, 2024). Firstly, in wars of attrition, states must hold strategic depth geographically, in order to be able to absorb possible battlefield defeats and reorganize the new combat formations behind the line. In terms of this factor, Russian ground troops organized into divisions and army corps, equipped with MBTs, armoured fighting vehicles and self-propelled artillery provided direct fire advantage to Russia.

On the other hand, the critical role that the high-tech weapons play in the battlefield become increasingly dubious in attritional warfare. Because utilizing high-end weaponry in a protracted conflict requires large stockpiles of these weapons as well as sufficient numbers of qualified personnel. In order for these personnel to gain necessary skills and operational experience, a long term training programme is necessary. However, in wars of attrition, there is simply no time for training sufficient numbers of qualified personnel. The professional basis of the armed forces erodes and the importance of initial advantage in terms of the number of qualified personnel starts to wane (Biddle, 2023: 159). States that could mobilize massive manpower that consist of poorly trained personnel, instead of smaller numbers of highly skilled troops, are likely to prevail. Ability to exhaust adversary's resources while maintaining its own provides prominent advantage. As war drags on, the size of armed forces expands rapidly (Vershinin, 2024). This is the point where Russia aimed to seize the initiative. As of February 2024, the number of Russian troops deployed in Ukraine exceeds 500,000 (Watling, 2024).

While the organizational mode of Russian combat groups reverted above brigade-size formations, the high percentage of the losses of trained officers that could have commanded large formations made this transition ambivalent. Meanwhile, the large number of newly recruited troops which received short training and have near-zero experience continued to be organized into battalions. Distinguished as line and storm battalions, these units conduct small attacks to enemy lines in company-size groups which are fighting as distinct detachments. The primary goal of this minor offensive moves is to impose a certain level of casualties on Ukrainian forces, thus turning Russian superiority in manpower to tactical and operational level advantages

(Watling and Reynolds, 2024). With this strategy, Russian forces are trying to maintain constant pressure on Ukrainian troops, keeping them continuously engaged in minor armed struggles, therefore preventing them from regrouping behind lines for conducting major offensive operations (Watling, 2024).

After the failure of its initial strategy and suffering from high rate of casualties, Russian military command started to organize four types of infantry units into combined division-level formations. Distinguished by their functions, these divisions consist of disposable, line, assault, and specialised infantry. In order to overcome tactical challenges of the battlefield that has not been foreseen in official military doctrine, these infantry units have been employed in complementary manner, both in offensive and defensive operations. Line infantry mostly consists of armoured units. They are not specialized in offensive tactics, thus are assigned to defensive tasks, such as providing and enhancing forward defence posture of the Russian army. Recruits assigned to assault infantry units have been given advanced training with special skills. Disposable infantry, on the other hand, has a totally distinct mode of organization and consists of Russian volunteers drawn from occupied areas of the Donbas region, prisoners promised for salvation after serving six months in frontline, and poorly trained Russian civilians drawn from the poorest regions of Russia (Watling and Reynolds, 2023: 1-3).

After battalion tactical groups had proved highly inefficient in conducting combined-armed operations due to lack of cohesion or low-rank officers that are orchestrating attacks,³⁴ Russian army, utilizing its manpower advantage, started to send disposable infantry units to approach defensive enemy lines and hold minor positions for gaining direct power opportunity. These attacks of disposable units are often called as ‘human wave attacks,’ since they are forced to keep the fire contact with enemy groups until killed and shot by their superiors if attempting to retreat. At the expense of lives of these soldiers, Russian units keep Ukrainian forces continuously busy, deplete their ammunition stockpiles, expose the exact locations of their lines, and exhaust the fighting soldiers (Watling and Reynolds, 2023: 4).

³⁴ In the majority of the armed forces in the world, battalions are headed by majors or lieutenant colonels.

Employing this strategy in a consistent manner across multiple lines, provides Russian forces certain advantages. If disposable units find the weak spots of the enemy lines, Russian officers initiate a strong offense with concentrated forces targeting that weak point, breaking out the enemy line, with a classic blitzkrieg strategy. Conversely, if disposable units find out that the defensive line is solid, the exposition of Ukrainian positions provides specialized and assault units a fire advantage, since they could target specific points more easily. As Ukrainians are warding off irregular disposable attacks, more disposable infantry is often sent forward to dig fox holes which are to be used by specialized troops for observing the enemy more closely, setting up heavy weapons, and providing a more efficient fire power (Watling and Reynolds, 2023: 5).

To conclude, Russian armed forces have learned from their initial mistakes, and made consequential revisions, such as reorganizing its combat groups and procuring relevant types of arms to personnel (Massicot, 2023b: 81). Merging battalion tactical groups into brigades and divisions has provided a credible solution to tactical shortcomings.

5.1.3.2. The U.S. and NATO Military Posture After February 2022

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has significantly affected the NATO leaders' threat perception and fundamentally altered the European political and military landscape by challenging European members' territorial integrity and existential security. This situation urged NATO allies to enhance the war-fighting capabilities of their ground forces. Deeply shocked by the massive scale of Russia's military operation against a sovereign state and the Russian atrocities against Ukrainian people, NATO leaders hastily organize a summit on 24 March 2022 in Brussels. The aim of the summit was to discuss the implications of Russia's unprovoked violent actions and elaborate on the contingency plans that was to bolster NATO's deterrence capabilities and strategic defensive plans (NATO, 2023a).

As discussed in the previous chapter, in 2014 Wales Summit, NATO had introduced the RAP and decided to create four rotational eFP units located in Poland, Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia. However, each of these units were in battalion size and serving as a tripwire forces. They heavily depended on massive reinforcement during

a possible crisis or a war. They were the tools of the ‘deterrence by punishment’ strategy, relying on the allies’ commitment to impose an unacceptable damage to aggressor in case of being attacked. However, since all the ground forces that NATO would send as reinforcement have to travel through Suwalki gap, which lies in an area that would be an easy target for Russian A2/AD systems. Therefore, NATO’s this force posture was hardly able to deny a fait accompli, such as rapid Russian incursion into Baltic territory.

In Brussels Summit held under the emergency circumstances, NATO leaders decided to establish four more multinational battalion in Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Slovakia. In this way, NATO’s forward presence would be extended along its eastern flank, covering the entire area lying between the Baltics and the Black Sea. And its number of troops on the ground would be two times more than the pre-invasion levels (NATO, 2023b). Moreover, less than a week after invasion began, allied leaders activated the NRF, mobilizing 40,000 troops and deploying them to NATO’s eastern border (Moore, 2023: 382). Within the NRF framework, Allies have increased the number of principal surface combatants, aircrafts, fighters and ground combat units in order to enhance NATO’s defence posture (NATO, 2023b).

Four months later, in Alliance’s annual summit in Madrid in June 2022, NATO leaders extended their commitment to improve NATO’s defence posture and deterrence capabilities. They reorganized the numbers of the high-readiness forces and reinforcement units in order to be able to deploy more combat-ready troops across Alliance’s eastern border. Therefore, they decided to promote the scale of war-fighting units from battalion-size to brigades. Member states also sought to ensure robust reinforcement capabilities available for these brigades. To that end, they agreed to develop more pre-positioned equipment and extended the volume of ammunition stockpiles, strengthen to improve C4ISR capabilities, and upgrade the regional defence strategies with pre-assigned military units for the defence of Eastern members (NATO, 2023b). NATO leaders also agreed on a new NATO Force Model, which replaced the NRF. With the NRF, the Alliance was able to mobilize 40,000 troops at less than two weeks readiness. With the NATO Force Model, Allies could make available 100,000 troops less than 10 days, 200,000 troops around 10-30 days, and at least 500,000 troops between 1 to six months. This enhanced force posture has been planned to provide

troops at higher readiness across all domains – air, sea, land, and cyber. It assures that the enhanced capacities will be available for Allies to respond for any contingency at very short notice (NATO, 2023a; 2023b).

In Madrid, NATO leaders also published the new Strategic Concept, a guideline document for NATO's long-term strategy. The Concept portrays the current strategic environment as "contested and unpredictable," characterized by perpetuating instability and emerging great power competition. The Concept explains that the most threatening actor for member states' security is Russia, challenging the peace and stability in the Europe (Spechler and Spechler, 2022: 78). Allied leaders argued that an expansionist Russia seeking to subjugate its neighbours and create its privileged sphere of influence is causing disruption in the European security order (Moore, 2023: 390). However, the most interesting part of the new Strategic Concept was the Alliance's reference to Indo-Pacific region which addresses the so-called China threat (Hamilton, 2022; Moore, 2023; Spechler and Spechler, 2022). According to NATO leaders, the security of the Europe and the East Pacific region is becoming increasingly intertwined, while addressing the implications of conventional and new threats in both regions challenges NATO's capabilities (Hamilton, 2022: 138). In Madrid, NATO portrayed China as Russia's collaborator in undermining the values of global order and challenging NATO's interests. Accordingly, China is seeking to realize its ambitious policies through coercive methods. Allied leaders declared that, emboldened by its growing military power and advanced technological capacity, China's "ambitions and coercive policies challenge our interests, security, and values" (quoted in Hamilton, 2022: 132).

Since the mid-1990s, armed forces of NATO members have employed a three-level adaptation measures, in order to address the dual demands of collective defence continentally and stability management globally, increasing the European defence autonomy by shrinking the capability gap between RMA-led U.S. forces and European militaries, and pursue military modernization plans (Van Hooft, 2023: 438). Thereby, NATO has undergone a transformation of its security commitments in every aspect and defined itself responsible from carrying out stability mission at global level. The idea of going 'out of area' became widespread and leaders began to believe that NATO's highly effective capabilities in maintaining security and stability in Europe

for more than 50 years could be reconfigured to address the challenges beyond its borders. But soon after it became clear that this idea was not working effectively in practice. The force postures of European members were not appropriate for conducting global scale operations. While European militaries were trying to adopt the RMA, they also had to conduct counterterrorism and crisis prevention operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Consequently, it proved impossible for them to maintain high level readiness in Europe and deploy troops in faraway regions simultaneously (Moller, 2023). Their military weakness was so apparent even during the low-end counter-terrorism operations, to the extent that the U.S. was eventually having to initiate a financial assistance program in order to promote their participation in NATO missions.

Moreover, there is no common threat perception and agreed-on security interests among allies. Moreover, there is also a lack of consensus on what kind of security measures must be employed against a specific security threat (Muzergues and Pollack, 2022). The annexation of Crimea in 2014 has revealed the vulnerability of Baltic states against a possible Russian territorial aggrandizement. It also unmistakably demonstrated that the major European allies – France, Germany, and the U.K. – do not have sufficiently robust capabilities to reinforce and defend the Baltic allies (Van Hooft, 2023: 439). Making things worse, dysfunctional command and control structure of the Alliance, which operates at consensual basis on every decision, made it difficult for allied states to decide on a common course of action, make concerted efforts and react vigorously to unexpected incidents at short notice. Against this backdrop, the Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 was supposed to be a wake-up call for the European NATO members, heralding 'NATO's return to Europe' (Moore, 2023: 390). However, in Madrid, NATO leaders were busy with "addressing security challenges arising from economic interdependencies and technological advances, and security challenges related to competition in the global commons" (Hamilton, 2022: 138-139). It is ironic that while Russia was committing mass murders only a couple of miles away from its borders and destroying the major residential areas, military establishment, economic infrastructure and cultural heritage of a sovereign, neighbouring state, the attention of NATO leaders was mostly concentrated on the 'systemic challenges' posed by China and the effective measures for addressing them.

In this context, NATO's occupation with China in Madrid demonstrates the extent to which U.S.' national interest dominates the Alliance's agenda and determine its course of action. Allied leaders dedicated to work closely against China threat, through capacity-building, common awareness, increased readiness and societal resilience (Hamilton, 2022: 139). For NATO, global challenges that redefine the strategic context and regional threats to member states' security are becoming increasingly entangled. They pointed out the deepening collaboration between Russia and China and raised concerns about the geopolitical implications of the Russia-Ukraine War for the liberal world order (Moore, 2023: 390). In the light of its dual structure – as a pact of collective defence and the promoter of the liberal international order – despite dramatic changes in its force posture has shifted the emphasis towards its military aspect after February 2022, NATO also reaffirmed its commitment to a stable international order at Madrid Summit. According to Madrid Summit declaration, what is in danger in the Russia's war against Ukraine is the existence of rules-based international order (Moore, 2023: 391). And Strategic Concept clearly indicates that NATO will remain a “bulwark of the rules-based international order” (quoted in Flockhart, 2024: 487).

As discussed in the first chapter, who benefit mostly from existing order and stability in the international system are the hegemonic leaders. Therefore, NATO's consistent emphasis on the stability of international system demonstrates that it has always been a unipolar pact (Menon and Ruger, 2023: 167). Therefore, as Beaumont et. al. (2024: 13) perfectly captures, being the defender of the international rules-based order implies attempting to legitimize urgent actions beyond NATO and organize an alliance of ‘like-minded countries,’” or coalitions of willing. Therefore, it is not surprising that NATO announced in Madrid that it intends to “strengthen... ties with partners that share the Alliance's values and interests in upholding the rules-based international order” (quoted in Moore, 2023: 404). NATO invited South Korea, Japan, New Zealand and Australia to both Madrid Summit in 2022 and Vilnius Summit in 2023. In Madrid, NATO announced its desire to initiate enhanced cooperation, political consultation, and joint efforts for the issues of common concern with these partners (Hamilton, 2022: 132).

According to Malksoo (2024: 487-488), NATO recognizes the need for deepening the collaboration with other like-minded states that are not located in the Euro-Atlantic area. Increasing the policy coordination between allies and other liberal states is necessary in order to stay resilient in the current international structure of power. Within this context, NATO's growing interest for East Pacific reflects the deepening great power competition between the U.S. and China. The U.S. is pursuing a containment policy against China. Unlike the Cold War containment policy relying on the military encirclement of the enemy that the U.S. employed against the Soviet Union, containment against China mostly centred on increasing tariffs, export controls, and disruption of supply chains. The U.S. is employing protectionist economic policies targeting the high-technology Chinese products, limiting the export of semiconductors and their components, and creating alternative trade blocks (Sachs, 2023: 15-16). For example, the U.S. has established the Indo-Pacific Framework for Prosperity, which aims to improve dialogue and formalize economic relations with the 13 partner states in the region, in order to widen trade networks, provide the security of supply chains, and increase the resiliency of high-tech industry (Sullivan, 2023).

In the military domain, the U.S. has established the AUKUS, a defence pact between the U.S., U.K., and Australia. Within the AUKUS framework, allies have established a nuclear submarine fleet for patrolling the South China Sea (Sachs, 2023: 15). Through AUKUS, three allied states have integrated their military-industrial complexes and developed their cooperation on high-tech military capabilities including autonomous weapon systems, artificial intelligence, and EW (Sullivan, 2023). According to Jake Sullivan, National Security Adviser to Biden administration, these are not separate courses of action, but the concerted efforts serving the American primacy in both regions. Sullivan says that the scope of the connective tissue between U.S. alliances in Europe and East Pacific is enormous. "The United States is stronger in each region because of its alliances in the other. Allies in the Indo-Pacific are staunch supporters of Ukraine, while allies in Europe are helping the United States support peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait" (Sullivan, 2023).

However, it becomes increasingly doubtful that whether the U.S. will be able to maintain its primacy in both regions in long-term. While escalating strategic rivalry with China has been pushing the U.S. to allocate more and more of its resources to

East-Pacific, the intensity of the security competition with Russia in the Eastern Europe has been ramped up since February 2022. In Vilnius Summit in July 2023, the U.S. announced that it has added 30,000 more personnel to its military presence in Europe, rising the number of troops from 70,000 to 100,000. The most of this troops have deployed permanently in the Eastern Europe, instead of rotational basis. The U.S. has also relocated its military units' headquarters and command centres from West to the East. It has redeployed its fighter jets from Germany and the U.K. to Poland and Lithuania, theater air defence systems from Germany to Poland and Slovakia, and its 5th Army headquarters and tactical battalion centre from Germany to Poland (Charap and Priebe, 2024: 30). As the U.S. becomes entrenched more deeply in the strategy of 'deterrence by denial' against Russia in the European theatre, it will increasingly strain the U.S. federal budget and military spending. Because since these troops will be at high-readiness level and equipped with cutting-edge lethal weapons, they will draw a larger share from the country's defence budget. Moreover, the U.S. has been providing a substantial amount of security assistance since the very beginning of the war. As of April 2024, total sum of the American military aid to Ukraine was €50.37 billion, €2.5 billion more than the aggregate amount of EU members plus Norway, Switzerland, Iceland and the U.K. (Ukraine Support Tracker, 2024: 6-7).

In order to reduce this gap, NATO leaders finalized the Defence Investment Pledge, pledging to invest minimum 2 percent of their annual GDP in defence. Moreover, in response to Russia's modernization of its nuclear forces and disruptive weapon systems, they agreed to upgrade NATO's advanced conventional forces and increase to investment in new platforms, including fifth-generation fighters, missile defence, area denial and C4ISR capabilities. These are the capabilities that improve NATO's ability to effectively respond to threats across all domains (NATO, 2023c). This modernization plan has been complemented by the revision of the defence plans, including the approval of the most comprehensive and detailed strategies since the end of the Cold War. These new plans are aimed at improving the coherence of the Alliance' collective defensive strategies by assigning specific tasks for each nations' military forces, elaborating on their posture, clarifying the conditions for the use of available capabilities, and increasing the interoperability between national command and control centres. Acknowledging the growing level of threat coming from complex

strategic environment, “these plans direct how NATO will deter and defend against any aggressor from any direction, explaining how, in the event of a crisis, Allied forces would defend forward and defeat complex threats across NATO territory” (NATO, 2023a). Plans also envision “greater logistics coordination and the prepositioning of ammunition and equipment” (NATO 2023c).

Acknowledging the fact that a mass-scale violence could erupt in Europe again, member states have shifted the focus of their defence strategy from forward presence (also known as tripwire strategy, or deterrence by punishment) to forward defence (deterrence by denial). As Estonian Defence Minister Hanna Pevkur (quoted in Kepe, 2024) explained, previously NATO’s deterrence strategy had relied on its collective capacity “to defend and if necessary retake its territory, new defense plans concentrate on not having the luxury of surrendering territory.” This new forward defence approach is a shift from the need to reclaim surrendered territory to defending the territory more robustly in advance against the possible enemy encroachments. The early defence strategies of the Alliance after the annexation of Crimea had been mostly about the reassurance of the threatened members by mitigating their anxieties and consolidation of the intra-alliance cohesion and sense of unity through formal security guarantees. However, as Maria Malksoo (2024: 542-543) explained, Russian atrocities in Ukraine have “driven home the high price of deterrence by punishment” for the East European members of the Alliance. The war has revived the traditional concepts of defence and deterrence, dating back to Cold War era of NATO defence strategy, with a renewed emphasis on forward military posture consisting of massive deployments of high-readiness troops in peacetime. Since the war in Ukraine has proved the superiority of defence over offence, the new defence plans approved in Vilnius have mitigated the Baltic states’ anxiety of having to struggle for reclaiming their lands while watching their civilian populations being tormented under Russian control (Kepe, 2024).

Another significant effect of the Russia-Ukraine on European security architecture has been Finland’s and Sweden’s NATO membership. Finland and Sweden had been nonaligned states historically. Throughout the Cold War, especially Finland enjoyed having constructive relations with the Soviet Union, while also keeping its close ties with the West. However, Russia’s unprovoked invasion and

directly aggressive measures against Ukraine triggered backlash in these two states, ultimately leading them to renounce their neutral positions and seek full membership in NATO. After strategic environment has been substantially transformed as a result of Russia's attack to Ukraine, Finland and Sweden concluded that having the Article 5 guarantees of NATO would be the most reliable way to deter armed attacks and to defend in a possible enemy incursion. Despite its small population, Finland's military capabilities has been impressive. Its army consists of several mechanized brigades, regiments and battalions, equipped with the substantive number of tanks, armoured vehicles, artillery and attack helicopters. The Army has sufficient capacity and resilience for defending its 800 miles border with Russia even during a protracted war. Finland's navy contains amphibious ships, modern corvettes, coastal defence systems, and maritime surveillance vessels. Finnish air force is one of the Europe's best, possessing three fighter squadrons, some of which has long-range firepower (Hamilton, 2022: 134; Ochmanek et. al., 2023: 142/146).

Sweden's capabilities are comparable with Finnish military. There are several war-fighting formations organized into brigades, an airborne unit, and engineer and artillery battalions. These combat groups are mostly equipped with Leopard 2A battle tanks, Patriot air defence systems and new self-propelled artilleries. The navy has sufficient number of attack submarines, surface combatants, corvettes, and patrol ships. In April 2022, Swedish government approved to enhance its force posture in Gotland, deploying additional submarines, surface combatants, and amphibious ships in the island. Moreover, it introduced fifth-generation fighters, which are to supplement the fleet located in the Gripen, collectively constituting six fighter squadron (Ochmanek et. al., 2023: 145). Gotland Island and Gripen located in the Swedish mainland are both strategically critical locations, allowing NATO to deploy sea denial systems and providing a safe passage for NATO marine corps into the Baltic region, degrading Russian A2/AD capabilities positioned in Kaliningrad. Alliance's accession to Sweden's airbases and naval positions, which host advanced war-fighting systems has significantly improved the prospect of successful defence operations in Baltic area and High North.

5.2. DURABILITY OF UNIPOLARITY

One of the most salient aspects of the international system after the Cold War is the persistence of peaceful (not necessarily cooperative) relations, and the absence of power balancing, among the great powers. Despite the dramatic shift in the global distribution of power, international environment remained stable. There has not been any incentive for balancing among other second-tier states. Because, according to some scholars (Monteiro, 2014; Wohlforth, 1999) power is unbalanced because the unipole has an unequalled ability and freedom to project it. After the Cold War, the rise of a unipolar American order has raised particular critical theoretical issues. One debate that has utmost importance is on the conditions and applicability of the realist theory of balance of power. From neorealist perspective, unipolarity is the least durable of the various configurations of power in the international system because of certain reasons. The demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 has contributed the U.S.' pre-existing dominance to become a holder of unprecedented power position and expanded the borders of U.S.-led international order (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2016: 1).

This absence of systemic balancing against the U.S. power preponderance has given rise a fierce debate among scholars. Central to this debate is the question of why, despite the widening power gap between the U.S. and other major states, has a counterbalancing reaction not yet taken place. There are three distinct explanations in the literature. The first explanation pointed out the Eurocentric bias in the balance of power theory. This point of view suggests that the principles of the balance of power theory had mostly operated only in the European continent. The second explanation emphasizes the hegemonic domination of the system by the U.S., thanks to its power preponderance. The final explanation is the balance of threat theory, well known modification of balance of power theory by the prominent neorealist scholar Stephen Walt. Therefore, this section will develop an analytical tool examining why there is no counterbalancing movement on the part of the second-tier states against U.S. supremacy. While doing so, it will draw on the different theoretical perspectives explaining the current pillars of unipolarity.

5.2.1. The Continental Origins of the Balance of Power Theory

The Eurocentric bias, or the continental roots of the balance of power theory is one of the theoretical explanations attempting to shed light on the absence of balancing after the end of the Cold War. It is about the problem of universal applicability of balance of power theory. Balance of power theory's key assumptions about balanced outcomes and balancing strategies are put forward as universal. This means they are applicable to any international system in principle. However, according to Levy (2004: 37-38), few social science theories prevail universally, and no system level theory of international relations is complete without a specification of the system under consideration, the basis and nature of power in the system and the key actors in the system. Some of the balance of power theory's arguments implicitly suggest some propositions that also serve as scope conditions for the theory: "The system is Europe, the basis of power in that system is land-based military power, and the key actors are European great powers" (Levy, 2004: 38). Thus, patterns of balancing against European hegemony cannot be generalized to the current period of the American military, political and economic preponderance. About the Eurocentric bias in the balance of power theory, it is worth quoting Michael Sheehan (1995: 116-117) at length:

The balance of power concept... remained a purely European phenomenon. Its logic was not applied beyond the boundaries of the European continent. It may have been related to the fact that the European balance of power idea was, in terms of its origins, part of a peculiarly European solution to the problems afflicting the European imagination. Its extension beyond the frontiers of Europe was therefore by no means obvious.

The evidence for the balance of power theory draws on the modern European state-system commencing with the Treaty of Westphalia. Its focus is on the golden age of European balance of power in the 18th and 19th century. The assumption that the stability of a balance of power system is improved by an open colonial frontier, and ability of dominant states in the system to increase their power without directly threatening each other's vital interests, clearly reflects the experience of European colonial powers (Levy, 2004: 40). During Pax Britannica in the 19th century, Britain is considered as a hegemon and leader. But according to Levy (2004: 41) this argument is associated with hegemonic stability theory. Although hegemonic theories consider

Britain as a hegemon in the system thanks to its dominance in trade and naval power, balance of power theory see the same country, even at the peak of its strength, as posing little threat to the continental major powers of Europe. For balance of power theorists, the leading threats to the stability of the system over the last five centuries have been posed by European continental powers. Therefore, “no blocking coalition formed against Britain at the peak of its global strength in the 1870s, but one did form against Germany, the leading power on the continent, in the period leading up to World War I” (Levy, 2004: 41-42).

The same logic applies to the U.S. as well. There has been no balancing coalition against the U.S. despite its preponderance in economic as well as naval and air power. Instead, there was against the Soviet Union, whose leading land power in Eurasia poses an existential threat to other European great powers. Because large armies massing on borders threaten the territorial integrity of neighbour states in a way that strong naval and economic powers do not. The absence of adjacent territories removes the direct threats for conquest. While adjacent states with massive armies threaten their neighbours, global hegemonies do not. Global hegemonies have fewer incentives and greater range of strategies for imposing their influence on other states. Global powers and continental powers differ in terms of their interests and capabilities, and this distinction leads to different strategies. The aim of improving financial, commercial and naval power throughout globe do not require political or military control of the massive territories.

Hegemonic powers can impose their will on second-tier states, but mostly through means other than brute military force. The ‘imperialism of free trade’³⁵ was as effective as military force in establishing both British and American dominance successively. In sum, treating balance of power theory as universal is mistaken because it fails to account for the scope conditions of the theory. Counterbalancing policies are not generally employed against leading maritime powers in international systems. And according to Levy (2004: 45), given the nature of power that the U.S. holds as a leading maritime power in the current world system, we should not necessarily expect anti-U.S. balancing coalitions to form.

³⁵ This notion has been employed by Jack Levy (2004: 43).

The role of geography in polarity analyses is well established. Although the insular position of the unipole increase its margin of security, it also degrades unipole's power projection capacity. If the security competition with a potential hegemon takes place in the weaker side's region, it will have more leverage upon its rival because unipole's power projection capabilities are adversely affected by the stopping power of water.³⁶ Continental powers are especially vulnerable to the political and military developments in their region. Therefore, under unipolarity, the core contention can be between an offshore superpower, who has global supremacy and an aspiring great power whose quest for regional hegemony is obstructed by both being land-locked and the already-there superpower trying to subvert its peer competitor's efforts of attaining regional hegemony (Mearsheimer, 2001). In a security competition between the offshore unipole and a continental aspiring great power, the balance of interests is as important as the overall balance of material capabilities (Miller and Kagan, 1997: 62-63). In this case, the outcome of the competition will be in favor of the side which has the firm resolution and effective strategy to mobilize its military's ground forces to attain its aims. It is now necessary to identify how this theoretical argument has manifested on the ground since the beginning of the war.

The continental character of Russian power has also been acknowledged by Western community. They conduct huge number of studies examining the vulnerability of the Baltic States. Some argue that the United States should be postured forward, in the Baltic States, to deter Russia from attempting a fait accompli on NATO's eastern frontier. However, the small size of the Baltic territory makes the deployed troops vulnerable against Russian attacks. The lack of strategic depth precludes any meaningful posture enhancement of NATO. Its strategic location, surrounded by Russia, Belarus, and Kaliningrad makes defending the region excessively costly. Suwalki Gap is the only land corridor through which NATO reinforcement could reach to the area. According to Lithuanian Foreign Minister, lack of strategic depth requires strategic strength, the first step of which could be to promote rotational battalions to brigades (Gramer and Detsch, 2024). Scenario based analyses demonstrate that if Russia decides to make use of its geopolitical advantage and

³⁶ The notion of 'stopping power of water' was first made and discussed at length by John Mearsheimer (2001: 114-128).

conducts a military operation for rapid incursion into the territory, it will take 60 hours at most that Russian forces capture Tallinn and Riga (Shlapak, 2018: 1-7).

As the arrival time of reinforcement prolongs, Russia could make greater territorial aggrandizement in a *fait accompli*, and force NATO to undertake massive mobilization to reclaim the invaded areas. Since the Alliance's decision-making procedure is based on consensus and different allies have distinct interests, it could erode the cohesion and unity of NATO. At best, a successful operation for reclaiming the invaded territory would cause excessive casualties and immense equipment loss, thus further disrupt the Alliance cohesion. Moreover, mobilization in such a scale will take considerable time, allowing Russia to consolidate its gains. Since this will be a ground combat, NATO's technologic edge and air superiority will not make a meaningful difference, to the extent that they did in Iraq, Yugoslavia, Libya, and Afghanistan (Shlapak, 2018: 6-7). However, almost none of the NATO's three million manpower have engaged in enemy without a robust air power, endured heavy artillery shells, conducted a massive tank battle and defended against drone attacks (Arnold, 2024).

After two decades of global expeditionary operations such as peacekeeping missions and crisis-prevention, NATO allies recalibrated their military's mode of organization and type of weapons in their stockpiles for an effective cross-domain control and resilient logistic networks. This transformation neglected large ground formations which are central to the effective firepower in manoeuvre wars (Barry et. al., 2023: 7). Therefore, most NATO members have been challenged by insufficient manpower and depletion of stockpiles. It turned out to be that most members would have to totally consume their munitions in less than one week in case of an intense war against Russia. The ammunition problem in NATO countries has only worsened as the war reached an attritional level. Deploying a brigade in Estonia as a 'framework nation' after the Madrid Summit, British experts now say that the U.K. does not possess a stockpile large enough to arm a mechanized brigade to conduct an intense war. It is assumed that the Germany's reserves would be depleted in two days in a war with same level of intensity as the war in Ukraine. (The Economist, 2022). The main reason is the massive amounts of weaponry donated to Ukraine. After a while, states are compelled to choose between preserving their stockpiles or preventing Ukraine's

defeat. According to one Estonian military expert, NATO has become weaker than it had been before the war. Europe hosts 11 army corps headquarter but most of them suffer from the shortage of missile launching platforms, air defence systems and attack helicopters (Kepe, 2024).

NATO is now discussing how to support members if their stockpiles fall below the levels needed to meet their defense obligations under the North Atlantic Treaty. However, political disagreements and national reservations mostly obscure the resilience and credibility of members' commitment at the Alliance level. British Secretary of Defence Ben Wallace declared at Madrid Summit that the U.K. would 'allocate', not virtually commit a mechanized brigade to Estonia. In a similar vein, Lithuanian foreign minister claimed that although Germany had committed a brigade to his country, German leaders think that it is only a partial deployment, with most of the commissioning battalions and companies staying within German borders. While the U.S. pledged to establish an army corps headquarter in Poland, several divisions of it were dispatched to Poland, with the command center of the headquarter remains in Kentucky (The Economist, 2022). Therefore, the growing commitments of NATO to the Eastern Europe is not a genuine solution of the capability gaps within the Alliance. The U.S. retains its position as the most credible source of reassurance and credible deterrence in the Europe. Conducting a series of interviews with the high command of European grand forces, Allard et. al. (2024) found that high-tech American equipment positioned in European theater such as long-range strikes and air defence system are postured to protect first and foremost the U.S. troops and personnel.

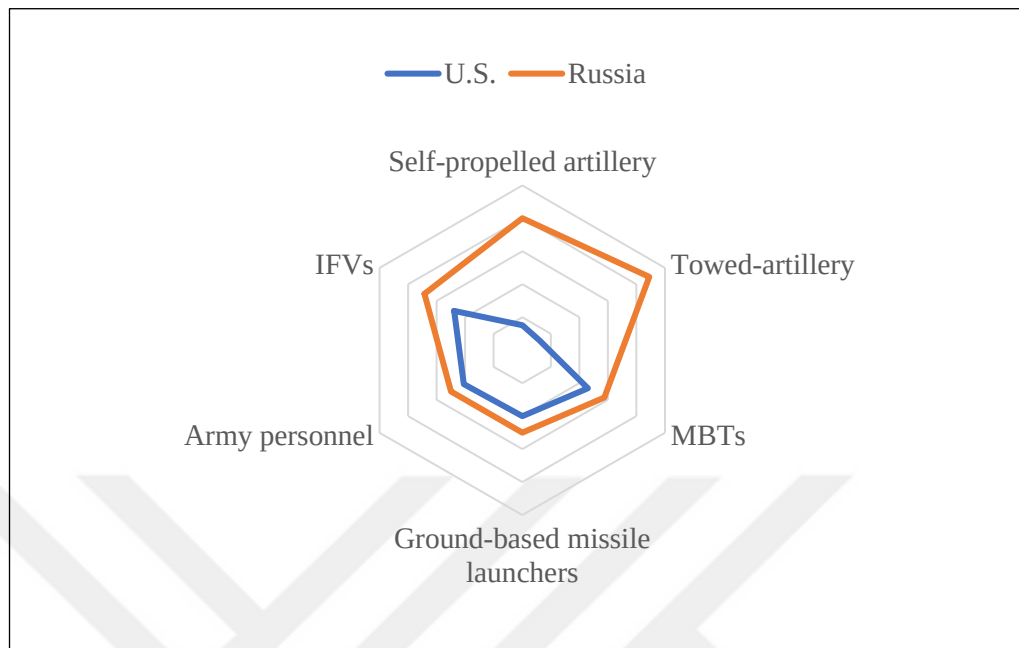
Still, European leaders were reluctant to fulfil their commitment to the Alliance's defence capabilities. Even after one and half year after the Madrid Summit, Alliance leaders were still occupied with the executability of their defence strategies. With ever curtailing ammunition stockpiles and military force sizes during the post-Cold War era, European allies simply deprived themselves of fielding major combat groups with advanced war-fighting capabilities (Moller, 2023). However, these major formations with high level readiness have been central Alliance's new defence plans, especially in the land domain. Because the main source of threat for allies was now a land-locked power, whose army is the strongest service of its armed forces. And the war in Ukraine proved that well-equipped armies with massive manpower at their

disposal are the most critical power assets for continental states. To capture large swaths of territory and defend the ground against the enemy require operational art of effective command and coordination of highly mobile infantry, heavily armoured formations, mechanized combat units, artillery power, effective air defence systems, and skilful engineers (Biddle, 2023: 162).

Conducting this kind of manoeuvre war with combined-armed armies require broad and secure logistic networks, effective command and control and resilient force structure. Europe simply lacks these capabilities. Therefore, the war again showed that the European members continue to rely on robust U.S. capabilities for defending themselves against Russia. On the other hand, in terms of ground forces, U.S. is lagged behind the Russian army. Despite the catastrophic losses in the initial phase of war, Russia has restored its advantages in manpower, military equipment and defence production during 2023. During the last year, Russia has drawn on 1,200 MBTs and 2,500 infantry fighting vehicle (IFV) from store and dispatched the battlefield. Meanwhile, the West could not outpace the production of Russian military-industrial complex. Apart from the pieces Russia draws from strategic reserves, it has also revamped its artillery production. While Russia has recalibrated its economic policies with war-time measures, the West collectively could not respond. While Russia created defensive lines, built solid fortifications, and replenished its stockpiles, Ukrainian troops had to ration their ammunitions because of belated delivery of U.S. supplies and insufficient European aids. Pentagon is planning to ramp up artillery production and targeting to reach annual average of 336,000 shells in 2025. Meanwhile, Russia is firing daily at least 20,000 rounds of artillery in Ukraine (Massicot, 2023a). Figure 1³⁷ illustrates the rate of ground combat assets of the U.S. and Russian army.

³⁷ Figure 1 aims to visualize the comparative ratios of the some of the key material assets. Numerical values were calculated in a logarithmic scale by the author.

Figure 1: Ground Combat Capabilities of the U.S. and Russian Armies



Source: IISS (2024); Global Fire Power

5.2.2. The Power Preponderance of the U.S.

The second explanation as to why there is no counterbalancing move on the part of other great powers is consistent with the hegemonic domination theory. According to Wohlforth (1999: 24), balance of power theory predicts stability as long as the system remains unipolar. He defines unipolarity as a structure in which a particular state's capabilities are too great to be counterpoised. Once capabilities are so concentrated, a structure arises significantly different from either bipolarity or multipolarity (Wohlforth, 1999: 9). In that structure in which one state has already established its material primacy, even if other states are concerned about counterbalancing, Brooks and Wohlforth (2008: 23) argue that balance of power theory yields no such counterbalancing implication. They argue that when a state obtains such a position, it has passed a threshold. When this leading state is the stronger and its dominance is more entrenched, counterbalancing dynamics against it are less likely to emerge and less constraining.

Wohlforth (2002: 98) further contends that balance of power theory does not suggest that counterbalance is likely given today's distribution of capabilities. The U.S. has already passed this threshold during the Cold War era. Because bipolarity has ended by the dissolution of one of the poles, the Soviet Union, the U.S. has emerged by its sheer preponderance in the system. Of the two powers that made up the bipolar system, the Soviet Union collapsed, leaving the U.S. at the centre of the international system. By this way, a situation has emerged in which the balance of power theory's central proposition cannot operate. Wohlforth (1999: 37) argues that unipolarity is a "deeply embedded material condition of world politics that has the potential to last for many decades." Therefore, balancing policies remain prohibitively costly for other great powers. According to Wohlforth (1999: 29), a unipolar system is one in which counterbalance is impossible. When a counterbalance is possible, the system is not unipolar. Thus, unipolarity rests on the sheer size and comprehensiveness of the power disparity separating the U.S. from other states.

Today, the U.S. has a larger and more comprehensive preponderance in the distribution of material capabilities than any leading state in the modern history. It possesses a much more complete portfolio of material capabilities than any European system leader of the past. If the hegemon's portfolio of capabilities is heavy in one class of power assets, second-tier states can be counted on to try to enhance the premium of other kinds of assets. The more complete the hegemon's portfolio of power capabilities, the less credible counterbalancing strategies will be, and easier it will be for others to accept the hegemon's role as legitimate. Indeed, the U.S. enjoys a large margin of superiority over the combination of other following great powers. Furthermore, it is the first leading state in the modern international system with decisive preponderance in all the fundamental components of power: economic, military, technological and geopolitical (Wohlforth, 1999: 7). Other states rival the U.S. in one area or another, but it is the multifaceted character of American power that makes it so commanding and far reaching.

The United States is the only state with global power projection capabilities; it is capable of producing defensive land-power dominance in the key theaters; it retains the world's only truly blue-water navy; it dominates the air; it has retained a nuclear posture that may give it first-strike advantages against other nuclear powers; and it has continued to nurture decades-old investments in military logistics and command, control, communications, and intelligence...

[On defence], it outspends all other great powers combined (Wohlforth, 1999: 18).

Therefore, any endeavour to compete directly with the U.S. is futile, so no one tries. Sheer preponderance of American power prevents a return to balance of power. The U.S. power is so overwhelming that a counterbalancing coalition is not possible. Second-tier states are bandwagoning not because they want to do so because they have no alternative.

One other problem is collective action. States mostly want to have others do the costly work of power balancing, therefore there is an incentive for buck-passing (Ikenberry, 2002b: 14). The costs for balancing are simply too high. The U.S. has already passed the mentioned threshold and once the system is past this threshold, further concentration of capabilities in the hands of the unipole reinforces rather than undermines equilibrium (Wohlforth, 2002: 104). Moreover, there are two geographical dimensions of current U.S. unipolarity. Firstly, the U.S. capabilities are offshore. A systemic concentration of power that is separated from all other great powers by two big oceans is less threatening to others. Secondly, the current international system is global rather than regional. In contiguous international systems such as modern Europe, systemic and local imperatives fuse at a lower threshold than in dispersed systems. A hegemon in this kind of contiguous systems thus needs more power to stave off a counterbalance, since local concerns are less likely to divert other powers from systemic balancing. These two geographical features dramatically alter the relationship between local and systemic imperatives. For example, even if potential rivals attempted to aggregate power to counter the U.S., these states are likely to spark regional counterbalancing reactions that will resist such efforts. They will be entangled in the regional security dilemmas. Therefore, they will be constrained by regional dynamics before they substantially constrain the U.S. (Wohlforth, 2002: 107-108).

From this perspective, 'might makes right', therefore, Russia will not be granted a sphere of influence or privileged zone of interest without demonstrating its power and coercing other actors to cede authority to Russia. Unlike buffer regions, discrete zones of influence are not the products of negotiation, peaceful settlement, inheritance, allowing geographical conditions, or civilizational traditions. They are obtained by the effective exercise of political influence, military power, and economic statecraft. During the early post-Cold War period, Russia's quests for having such a

sphere did not correspond to balance of power on the ground. As the power gap between the U.S. and Russia began to shrink, Russian leaders have voiced their demands more vociferously (Kagan, 2022: 16). Therefore, from the perspective of neorealist power analysis, the conflict in Ukraine is a violent manifestation of balance of power politics. Some scholars claims that Russia has invaded Ukraine to show that the U.S.' global power is waning, and the new centres of power are beginning to impose their influence beyond U.S.' reach, laying the ground for new multipolar international system (Mearsheimer, 2022a; Singh, 2023).

According to these 'multipolarist' accounts, there has been a steady development of rival power centres, and new, carefully-drafted international institutions and norms are envisaged to replace the existing ones. Major non-Western powers, including BRICS, opt for following a policy accentuating their own national interests in international stage. The common principles that lay the ground for their policy are reshaping norms and international institutions with a more utilitarian approach, international organizations operating on a more equal basis, domestic non-intervention, and a foreign policy framework that is predicated on a more realist doctrine. For some scholars, this situation indicates that the systemic balance of power has begun to change (Lukyanov, 2023; Trenin, 2023). "As a result of universal globalization and emancipation, the organizations that set the rules of the game in the economic and security sectors – the World Bank, the IMF, and the UN Security Council – do not reflect the real balance of power" (Radin and Reach, 2017: 34-35). Russia's current foreign policy doctrine considers BRICS members, especially China and India as a united front at the core of Greater Eurasian Partnership, which stands against the established – and allegedly declining – U.S. hegemony in the international system. This conceptualization demonstrates the Russia's bid to restructure the international system on its own terms and to place Russia at the hub of system-level interactions (Watts et. al., 2022: 17).

The current rise of BRICS coincides with the emergence of a parallel bloc in the system, namely 'swing states'. Swing states is defined as states "with significant leverage in international politics but varying preferences for international cooperation. They generally favour multipolarity" (Leoni and Tzinieris, 2024: 42-43). Contrary to accounts that emphasize multipolarity, however, the primary concern of the swing

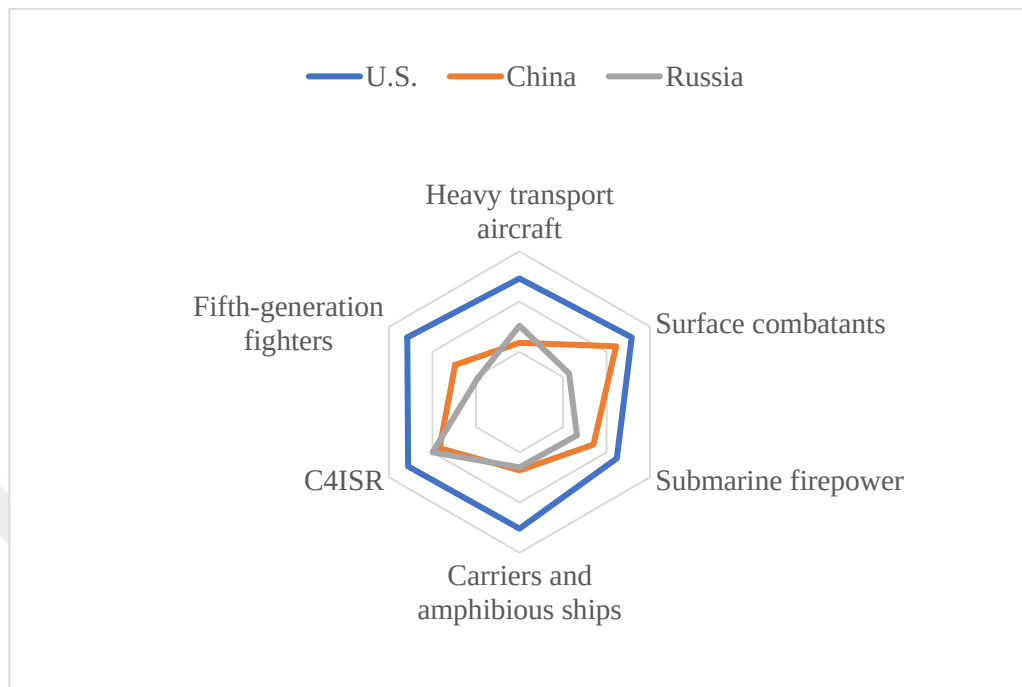
states is economic growth, not geopolitical calculations. Their understanding of multipolarity does not emphasize the discrete power blocks, instead it focuses on intricate networks of separate relationships between different actors which have asymmetrical power (Lukyanov, 2023: 6). They resist against the certain tenets of American unipolarity, however, they align with major non-Western powers only on specific issues, where their national interests coincide. Therefore, it is highly dubious that all of the swing states would buy into Russia's vision of the global affairs, which consists of the assumption that Russia is the driver of the transformation towards a new international order and the role of different civilizations as the essential actors of international politics. For this reason, their coalition is literally a 'marriage of convenience,' an opportunistic group instead of a formal alliance. Swing states do not simply add up to and form a geopolitical actor, thus are capable of exerting only a marginal effect on the polarity of the system (Leoni and Tzinieris, 2024: 43). Their grand strategy is predicated on retaining agency and cooperating selectively with both Western and non-Western states. As the international reactions to war in Ukraine have revealed, most of the states show hinderance against the pressures to pick a side, and remain neutral in standoffs that do not include them directly. As Walt (2022) maintains, their national interests mostly lie in extracting greater benefits by playing off the Western bloc on the one hand, and China and Russia on the other, against each other.

More importantly, a careful investigation shows that it is not the changing balance of power, but the balance of interests (which is also called as balance of stakes or balance of resolve) is the main factor favoring Russia. Western coalition is undoubtedly more powerful than Russia. They could quickly overwhelm Russia in Ukraine, but with a price they would not probably be willing to pay. The U.S. economy is approximately 5 times bigger than Russia's, EU's economy is more than 6 times (World Bank, 2023). However, these two actors reserved average 0.35% of their GDP to fund Ukraine's war efforts, while Russia reserves approximately 6% of its GDP to war efforts in Ukraine (Pinchuk, 2024). These disproportionate total sums explain the Russia's ease with which Russia feeds its war machine in Ukraine without any serious consideration for the possibility of escalation.

Ukraine's allies, meanwhile, have been struggling to overcome ever-increasing ammunition problems. The Germany's stockpiles are presumed to be depleted only after two days in a high-intensity war, not one month stipulated by NATO (The Economist, 2022). Similarly, the U.S.' stockpiles are considered as in the size of providing critical munitions three to four weeks (Detsch and Mackinnon, 2022). According to a U.S. security official, even if the government approves steeping up the production levels, capacity of the American military-industrial complex to produce given amounts is highly suspicious (Detsch, 2024). This situation borne out of the long-term patterns, during the process of which U.S. and NATO had engaged in asymmetric, pre-determined conflicts with absolute cross-domain dominance and high technological edge in places such as, Libya, Iraq, and Yugoslavia (Michta, 2023). While their reliance on the precision strikes and the small number of high-end materials grew higher, they began to curtail the size of their conventional stockpiles gradually.

This U.S. dominance in the area of having capabilities to project power in global scale has been made possible by its preponderance in the 'command of global commons' (Posen, 2003). Expertise in projecting power in long distances and commanding of global commons is a determining quality of superpowers. Global powers could build robust navies, air forces and C2 systems. The significant portion of international trade flows through skies and sea surfaces. Therefore, reigning over global air lines and sea lanes wields a huge amount of influence on global powers (Borges, 2023: 1174). Principal elements of the command of the commons include superior submarine fleets, aircraft carriers, amphibious units, destroyers, precision guided munitions, SAMs, air defence, anti-aircraft, and reconnaissance and command and control units, as well as EW capabilities, a solid military-industrial complex and highly skilled and trained military personnel (Posen, 2003: 10-18). Figure 2 shows the U.S.' capabilities for the command of the commons compared with China and Russia.

Figure 2: Selected Capabilities for the ‘Command of the Commons’



Source: IISS (2024); Lowy Institute Asia Power Index; Global Fire Power

In protracted wars involving both sides’ crucial interests, the more capable side wins (Gould-Davies, 2024: 57). As Figure 2 shows, the U.S.’ margin of power is obvious. However, states do not prevail in attritional wars mainly by their technological and military superiority. Apart from the economic power, military capacity, geography, and demographic resources, it is the strategic choices states make that matter most—how they organize themselves internally, what they invest in, which wars they fought, which they deter, and which they avoid (Mazarr, 2022: 52). If the U.S.’ adversaries have bigger stakes in the outcomes of a war, they will be willing to make greater sacrifices to achieve their ends. States facing a hostile invader or a rapidly deteriorating security situation may have no option but to fight to retain their independence. In these kinds of situations, U.S.’ preponderant power could be negated by its opponent’s superior resolve (Walt, 2024).

After an initial stall, Russian economy successfully mobilized the resources at its disposal and shifted its plans from peacetime economy to war economy. With the striking effects of Western economic sanctions and an unacceptable degree of damage

imposed on its military materials, Russia's GDP declined 2% in 2022. However, transition to wartime economy and diversification of its trade and financial relations has helped to achieve 3% growth in 2023 (International Monetary Fund). The reason behind the resiliency and adaptability of Russian economy, according to Kashin and Sushentsov (2024: 44-46), is that the success of the war-time economy does not only hinge on the capacity of producing large amounts of high-tech weaponry, but also supplying low-end materials with high quality that does not demand advanced scientific sophistication such as transportation vehicles, artillery shells, rifles or uniforms. Moreover, since the high percentage of Western states' GDP consist of the service sector revenues, it does not necessarily mean that every state with large and affluent economies would be capable of adapting war-time production schemes. Implications of this factor on the balance of power have been obvious when more than 50 states providing military assistance to Ukraine are not able to outpace Russia in artillery production (Kashin and Sushentsov, 2024: 57).

As artillery's decisive role in the current situation in the battlefield in Ukraine demonstrates, the necessity of retaining stockpiles in extended sizes has been proven in attritional warfare (Barry et al., 2023:12). Mearsheimer's argument about cruciality of armies was confirmed once more. The Ukraine War has proved the importance of the ability to coordinate and conduct combined arms manoeuvre operations for the future conventional battle between great powers (Gady, 2022). While the high-end military technologies have not provided any meaningful strategic advantage, ground manoeuvre operations conducted with MBTs, IFVs, mechanized infantry units and combat engineers have returned to fields. Moreover, from the military historical perspective, the war in Ukraine was the 'back to the trenches' literally. Two and a half year after war's initiation, the evidence shows that deep and well-prepared defences remain robust, decisive breakthroughs by offensive technological power are rare and hard to achieve (Biddle, 2024). Therefore, the key elements in an attritional battle remain as "being able to move forces, concentrate them and sustain their key supplies of fuel, ammunition and spare parts" (Barry et al., 2023: 12).

Aside from manoeuvre capacity of large formations, the war is also a stark reminder of the importance of numbers, in terms of personnel and material supply. (Barry et al., 2023: 9). The war in Ukraine has highlighted "the enduring centrality of

mass in modern conventional warfare with a near-peer adversary” (Michta, 2023). This means that the outcome of systemic wars will be mostly decided by the belligerents’ capacity to replace lost manpower, rejuvenate the material-industrial basis of the war, and replenish lost munition stockpiles (Taylor and Kofman, 2022: 33). After the Cold War, the U.S. armed forces has prioritized quality over quantity. The qualities that precede the quantities have provided the U.S. armed forces the specialization and necessary material and means for exploiting offensive opportunities in asymmetric conflicts. However, in an attritional warfare such as the one in Ukraine, the contemporary American defence-industrial base is not well-established sustain the losses against a near-peer adversary (Biddle, 2024). For instance, in a hypothetical protracted war against China or Russia, the decisive factor will be manpower and ability to replenish material stock to replace the ones that have been attritted on the field. The U.S. will have to replace its material and human losses faster than its adversary, which will probably lead to producing simpler and cheaper systems (Michta, 2023). If one takes into account that defence is superior to offence, and the balance of interests shifts towards the rival states in their immediate vicinity, then the capacity of the only superpower to project power in vast distances and to wield unchallenged global influence will probably diminish (Walt, 2024).

5.2.3. The Balance of Threat Thesis

Fourth explanation concerning why there is no counterbalancing move on the part of secondary states is about the balance of threat theory. According to Walt (2002: 133), the anomaly of other states failing to balance U.S. power mostly disappear if we focus not only on power but also on threats. Balance of threat theory helps explaining why most of the other major powers did not ally against the U.S. after the Second World War, when the U.S. controlled nearly half of the world economy, had sole possession of nuclear weapons, and possess large conventional forces as well. It also explains why balancing has not occurred in the contemporary international system. Balance of threat theory argues that states form alliances to balance against threats. Threats, in turn, are a function of power, proximity, offensive capabilities and aggressive intentions. An increase in any of these factors makes it more likely that

other major powers will regard the possessors of these traits as threatening and begin to look for some form of balancing. In terms of power, states with great power are threatening to others because other states can never be sure how they will use their capabilities. As a state's power increases other states will worry that it might be able to use its capabilities with impunity, and they will be likely to balance against this.

Therefore, up to a point, increases in a state's relative power will increase the tendency for other states to balance against it. However, as discussed above, Wohlforth (2002) argues that if a state is too powerful and has passed the critical threshold, other states will be dissuaded from challenging its position and may not even try to check its freedom of action. Accordingly, if its power declines, other states might be more likely to balance against the U.S. The U.S. thus has a strong incentive to maintain its material supremacy. Therefore, the U.S.' current primacy worries other states and provides a modest incentive for them to balance, however, after a critical point, it may also inhibit their willingness to take a direct action against it. According to Walt (2002: 136), therefore, the effects of power are probably indeterminate to what other states are likely to do.

In terms of proximity, since the ability to project power declines with distance, states that are nearby pose a greater threat than those that are far away. Thus, the geographic position of the U.S. is a significant asset. It explains why other states are less worried by the concentration of power in U.S. hands. Because it is extremely difficult to project power across water and onto a foreign shore, U.S. power is less threatening to others, and they are less inclined to balance against it. The U.S.' geographic isolation also reduces the likelihood of territorial disputes; since the other great powers lie in close proximity to one another, they tend to worry more about each other than they do about the U.S. (Walt, 2002: 137). In terms of offensive power, states are more threatening when they acquire specific military capabilities that pose a direct threat to the territorial integrity of other states. Accordingly, other states are more likely to balance when states with large material resources acquire these particular specialized offensive capabilities. By contrast, when a state can defend its own territory but cannot attack others with high confidence, their incentive to balance against it will decline.

As discussed, the geographical isolation created by the two vast oceans reduces the direct military threat that the U.S. poses to other states, thereby reducing their likelihood to balance. Therefore, deploying U.S. power in defensive modes is likely to reassure allies without provoking potential enemies (Walt, 2002: 138). In terms of offensive intentions, states are more likely to balance when they believe other states have especially aggressive intentions. Here, the U.S. gains by being perceived as benign hegemon. Most of the world's major powers do not see U.S. intentions as hostile or aggressive. Although some states concerned that U.S. power may be used to undermine their interests, none of the major powers seem to be worried that the U.S. will try to conquer them (Walt, 2002: 139).



CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated the effects of the Russia-Ukraine War on the global distribution of material capabilities, which determines the systemic polarity. According to the neorealist criteria, the Russia-Ukraine War is a regional conflict since it does not involve more than one great power. However, within the framework of regional level of analysis discussed in the second chapter, it can be argued that regional wars could also affect the structure of the international system. In a highly globalised world, it is highly likely that a regional war will have world-wide repercussions, especially if a great power is involved that war. The Russia-Ukraine War has called into question some of the basic principles of the international order (such as sovereignty, territoriality, non-intervention, laws of war), threatened the global food security – which had already been in a vulnerable situation after Covid-19 pandemic, – generated an energy crisis in Europe, transformed global trade patterns, affected international financial relations, reinvoked the security concerns in many adjacent countries, and led American leaders to reconsider their country's grand strategy. Moreover, the war has put a spotlight on China's position in terms of its relations with Russia and its ambitions over Taiwan. The positions of the countries in the Global South, their stance against the war, and their leverage on relations with both Russia and the Western states have also gained importance. Most importantly, the vulnerability of some NATO members in terms of economic and societal resiliency, depletion of the arms stockpiles, and energy dependency to Russia, has been revealed.

Notwithstanding these changes, the distribution of material capabilities at international level has remained intact. Russia's war against Ukraine has not altered the dynamics of international balance of power. In the first two chapters, it has been discussed at length that the distributional mode of material capabilities is the most important factor that moulds the structure of the international system, thus determines the polarity. The size of the economy and military force are the two main factors that constitute the material capability of states. As noted in the second chapter, with $1+Y+X$ method that is employed in the analysis of the current system structure, the U.S. remains as the only superpower in the international system. Accordingly, China is an emerging potential superpower and Russia is a great power. Some scholars

qualify the EU as a great power – an economic giant but political dwarf. If one analyses from this perspective, the war has not triggered the formation of an alliance between Russia and China, which could create a counterpoise against U.S. power. Although economic cooperation between two states has improved since the beginning of the war, it has not resulted in the creation of a legally binding defence pact. Secondly, although the security threat posed by Russia and energy crisis emerged after the war have created some incentives for tightening their political solidarity, the EU members have so far failed to agree on transferring greater amount of their individual sovereign authority to the union.

On the other hand, the war has degraded Russia's capabilities. Its economy is suffering under both the war-time requirements of supplying conflict materials and economic sanctions imposed by Western governments. Moreover, the war-fighting potential of Russia's armed forces has been degraded since the large numbers of its military equipment have been either seriously damaged or destroyed and a great portion of its troops and officer corps have been killed during the war. Meanwhile, the material basis of the U.S.' power has not been significantly affected by the war. Although the U.S. donated more than \$100 billion and provided the biggest weaponry support to Ukraine, the size of its economy is big enough to compensate and absorb this amount and its defence industry is capable of replenishing its national ammunition stocks. The real challenge for the U.S. leaders is that now they have to contain two revisionist great power – China and Russia – in two different regions. While China becomes more assertive, competing with it demands more and more U.S. resources to be allocated to the East Pacific region. While China is the only potential rival that is capable of altering the structure of the international system in medium and long-term, the threat Russia poses is more imminent and requires stronger response.

While China poses a long-term threat to U.S. economic interests, Russian threat is more acutely felt by the U.S.' European allies. While some scholars argue that the U.S. must contain both China and Russia and wage a war on two fronts simultaneously, it is clear that it does not have sufficient capabilities to employ this policy. At this point, American leaders should prioritize the U.S.' national interests and decide which factors challenge them most to achieve those interests. The war has made it clear that European nations lack the will and capacity to provide their own security against

Russian threat in the absence of American security assurances, its military presence in Europe and nuclear umbrella it provides. Still, focusing increasingly to the European theater will reduce U.S.' leaders' ability to coordinate U.S.' and its allies' policies in the East Pacific and compete systematically with China. Therefore, U.S.' policy choice and strategies in terms of dealing with both Russia and China will probably be the most important factor which will determine the distribution of power in the international system.



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