T.C.
BAHCESEHIR UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
THE DEPARTMENT OF
GLOBAL POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

HOW HISTORY HAS SHAPED THE RELATIONS BETWEEN RUSSIA AND UKRAINE: FROM PAST TO PRESENT

MASTER'S THESIS

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ISTANBUL 2023

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ABSTRACT

HOW HISTORY HAS SHAPED THE RELATIONS BETWEEN RUSSIA AND UKRAINE: FROM PAST TO PRESENT

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The world has been quite busy with latest political events that have been occurring in various areas. Russia-Ukraine is one of them and plausibly, the hottest topic currently. It all started with Russia's amassing troops near Ukrainian border and started military operations straight away. While most states condemned Russia on account of violence against Ukraine, some argued Russia was right. Still, this conflict was not directly related to dissension between these states, thus, other actors played a critical role before and after the war. This paper examines the whole process from historical perspective to highlight the major reasons why their relations deteriorated. While integrating evidence from politicians' reviews, consecutive actions by these states and organizations involved in, the quantitative study reveals that the relations were historically positive, especially during the USSR period. It argues that expansion policy of NATO was the root of the Russian-Ukrainian War, as annexation of Crimea was also linked with this policy, besides changing political stance of Ukraine played a crucial role in this issue. The findings manifest how demands and attitudes are likely to change in the course of history, since yesterday's friends could turn into today's enemies.

Key words: Russia-Ukraine relations, neorealism, international actors, annexation of Crimea, Kievan Rus state

ÖZ

TARİH, RUSYA İLE UKRAYNA ARASINDAKİ İLİŞKİLERİ NASIL ŞEKİLLENDİRDİ: GEÇMİŞTEN BUGÜNE

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Dünya, çeşitli alanlarda meydana gelen son siyasi olaylarla oldukça meşgul. Rusya-Ukrayna bunlardan biri ve muhtemelen şu anda en sıcak konu. Her şey Rusya'nın Ukrayna sınırına asker toplamasıyla başladı ve hemen askeri operasyonlara başladı. Çoğu devlet Rusya'yı Ukrayna'ya yönelik şiddet nedeniyle kınarken, bazıları Rusya'nın haklı olduğunu savundu. Yine de bu çatışma, bu devletler arasındaki çekişmelerle doğrudan ilgili değildi, bu nedenle savaş öncesi ve sonrasında diğer aktörler kritik bir rol oynadı. Bu makale, ilişkilerinin bozulmasının ana nedenlerini vurgulamak için tüm süreci tarihsel bir perspektiften inceliyor. Nicel çalışma, politikacıların incelemelerinden elde edilen kanıtları, bu devletlerin ve ilgili kuruluşların ardışık eylemlerini birleştirirken, ilişkilerin özellikle SSCB döneminde tarihsel olarak olumlu olduğunu ortaya koyuyor. NATO'nun genişleme politikasının Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı'nın kökeninde olduğunu, Kırım'ın ilhakının da bu politikayla bağlantılı olduğunu ve Ukrayna'nın siyasi duruşunun değişmesinin bu konuda önemli bir rol oynadığını savunuyor. Bulgular, dünün dostları bugünün düşmanlarına dönüşebildiğinden, taleplerin ve tutumların tarihin akışı içinde nasıl değişebileceğini ortaya koyuyor.

Anahtar kelimeler: Rusya-Ukrayna ilişkileri, neorealizm, uluslararası aktörler, Kırım'ın ilhakı, Kiev Rus devleti

To Everyone That Supported Me

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Table of Contents

ETHICAL CONDUCT ..... **iii**

ABSTRACT ..... **iv**

ÖZ ..... **v**

DEDICATION ..... **vi**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..... **vii**

TABLE OF CONTENTS ..... **viii**

LIST OF FIGURES ..... **ix**

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS ..... **x**

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION **1**

1.1. Statement of the Problem 1

1.2. Purpose and Significance of the Study 2

1.3. Research Questions & Hypotheses 3

1.4. Theoretical Framework 5

1.5. Theoretical Analysis 13

CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF RUSSIA-UKRAINE RELATIONS **16**

2.1. 10th-19th Century: Kievan Rus State 16

2.2. Beginning of 20th Century 19

2.3. USSR Period 22

2.4. Post-Soviet Period 24

2.5. Annexation of Crimea 29

CHAPTER 3: MODERN RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT **34**

3.1. Fundamental Reasons of the Current Conflict 34

3.2. Role of the International Actors 36

3.2.1. The EU and Russia Relations 36

3.2.2. The UN and the Russia-Ukraine Conflict 43

3.2.3. NATO and the Russia-Ukraine Conflict 43

3.2.4. The Role of Other Third Parties in the Russia-Ukraine Conflict 46

3.3. The West: Lack of Consensus between the USA and the EU 48

3.4. International Organizations: the Role of the UN and the NATO 50

CHAPTER 4: THE WAR FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF UKRAINE AND IMPACT OF THE CURRENT RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT 57

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION 61

REFERENCES 68

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURES

Figure 1. Kenneth Waltz 8
Figure 2. John J. Mearsheimer 8
Figure 3. Kievan Rus State in the 11th century 17
Figure 4. Ukraine in 1917: socialism and nationalism in a world turned upside down 20
Figure 5. Soviet Ukraine in a Nutshell 22
Figure 6. Act of Declaration of Independence of Ukraine 24
Figure 7. Kuchma and Putin 25
Figure 8. How Russia took Crimea 29
Figure 9. Annexation of Crimea by Russia 31
Figure 10. Expansion policy of NATO 33
Figure 11. Putin-Macron meeting 38
Figure 12. Putin, Van Rompuy, and Barroso during EU-Russia Summit 42
Figure 13. Stoltenberg and Zelensky meeting 51
Figure 14. Who controls what in Ukraine? 57
Figure 15. Victims of the War 61

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
EU	European Union
UN	United Nations
US	United States
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
SWIFT	Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
UNOMIG	United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia
UNMIK	United Nations Mission in Kosovo
IMF	International Monetary Fund

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Russia and Ukraine share a long and often turbulent history dating back to the 9th century when both countries were part of the Kievan Rus state, a major power in Eastern Europe (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2022). The relations between two countries have been complex, tense, and inharmonious throughout history causing conflict and rivalry. In the 20th century, Russia and Ukraine became economically and politically closer to each other, as Ukraine was forcibly united to the Soviet Union. However, Ukraine became an independent country after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the relations between these countries have been controversial ever since. While Russia is reluctant to accept Ukraine's independence and wants to keep it under its influence, Ukraine aims to develop closer ties with the West and considers Russia as a threat to its sovereignty. The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine has profoundly affected both countries, especially leading to a humanitarian crisis in eastern Ukraine. Global concerns have been raised about the stability of the region and international security. To promote peace and cooperative relations between Russia and Ukraine as well as to prevent future escalations, it is critically important to understand the historical context and the root causes of the ongoing conflict between the two nations.

This research study comprehensively examines how history has shaped the relations between Russia and Ukraine and identifies the key factors that deteriorated their diplomatic ties, particularly by focusing on the role of international actors. By analyzing important shifts in political stances, the research aims to explore the major dynamics that transformed the cooperative allies of yesterday into adversarial entities of today. Furthermore, it is aimed to study and evaluate how key international organizations, such as NATO and the European Union have involved and influenced the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Hereby, the problems addressed by this paper cover the root reasons leading to the ongoing conflict between the two nations, the main motive behind Russia's attack to Ukraine, the historical facts related to the current war, and the importance of NATO and the European Union, which have been directly involved in the process. It is important to understand that

the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine is not a product of recent events. The conflict leads back to the 10th century, when Russia claimed Ukraine as its own historical land. According to most politicians, the core reason behind the war is related to NATO's expansionist policy and the historical conflict has been used as an excuse. Russia is a dominant and powerful regional power to the West, therefore, it poses a threat and needs to be weakened (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2022). NATO has tried to surround Russia by collaborating with its neighboring countries and those that are close to Russia. Clearly, Vladimir Putin, the President of Russia, managed to get the picture and decided to start military operations against Ukraine to prevent the West's plan to weaken Russia and send a message to NATO (Cordesman & Hwang, 2022). In short, the Russia-Ukraine conflict is not a short-time event, its roots date back to the early 9th century, and it is important to investigate their relations historically in order to understand the motives behind the ongoing conflict.

1.2. Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to extensively analyze Russia-Ukraine relations from a broader perspective, including the historical context to identify the underlying dynamics of conflict and predict potential risks for future incidents. The research aims to examine the relations between Russia and Ukraine from the historical perspective in order to move beyond recent events and explore the roots of the conflict by tracing back in time. It is evident that the tension between these states is not limited with recent events, and the historical aspect plays a crucial role in understanding the source of this dispute and predict future incidents. Russia is a geographically large state with great political power, and this power has turned Russia into the strongest state in the region. The research will explore how the power dominance of Russia has been perceived as a threat by the West, leading NATO's enlargement its membership through Russia and intensifying tensions between two parties. Both sides put forward contradicting arguments against each-other. Russia claims that NATO's presence in the Baltic region causes a threat to its sovereignty and it is rightful to claim self-defense (Cordesman & Hwang, 2022). On the other hand, NATO asserts that its actions has a purely defensive nature, as Russia has used military force against its neighbors. Another argument strongly supported by Russia is related to NATO's enlargement, as mentioned above. NATO completely

disregards such claim and disagrees with the claim that its presence in the Baltic region is a threat to Russia, since it is a defensive alliance and its main goal is to protect member states, not to surround Russia (NATO, 2022). Thus, Russia tries to justify its actions, particularly in regard to Ukraine, by claiming self-defense against NATO and referring to historical narratives claiming that Ukraine historically used to be a part of Russia. On the other hand, NATO attempts to refute all arguments with evidence.

The importance of this study is that it will investigate Russia-Ukraine relations from the historical perspective, too, where NATO is not involved. In this case, the "self-defense" claim particularly includes history, as Russia claims that Ukraine was a part of Russia in the past. This argument put forward by Russia has been falsified by numerous historians and scholars who argue that the historical entity claimed by Putin to be Russia was called "Rus" and it encompassed a larger collective including Ukrainians, Russians, and Belarusians (Cordesman & Hwang, 2022). Christian Raffensperger, a professor of history and specialist in Russian history, explains this situation by analyzing history with proofs. According to his research, the kingdom of Rus did not consist of only one state, despite the fact that most of the territory is adjacent to modern Ukraine territory. Therefore, it is not correct to attribute Rus to Russia, in view of the fact that all three states share common history in this case (Raffensperger, 2022).

The significance of this study is its contribution to understanding the complex nature of the Russia-Ukraine conflict by analyzing the root causes shaping the relations between the two nations. The research will incorporate historical context and evaluate the validity of historical claims to offer a comprehensive analysis of the relations between Russia and Ukraine beyond the current geopolitical landscape. Hereby, the purpose of this study is to fill the gap between historical and current aspects of Russia-Ukraine relations in order to provide valuable insights for developing proper diplomatic efforts to promote peaceful resolutions and prevent future incidents in the region.

1.3. Research Questions & Hypotheses

The research questions addressed by this study are aimed at comprehensively examining the historical aspects of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the involvement of international actors, such as NATO and the European Union in shaping the

relations between the two nations. The first research question is: To what extent have historical factors influenced the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine? To investigate this question, the study will monitor their historical relations dating back to the 9th century to assess if historical factors have contributed to the ongoing conflict. The first relations between Russia and Ukraine appeared with the common state that they shared in the 9th century, as known as the Kievan Rus state. The early 20th century also marked as a critically important period in the history of their relations, as it is when Ukrainian culture was suppressed by the Russian Empire in order to assimilate Ukrainian people to Russian culture (The Times of India, 2022). The research will also explore the Soviet era, which was positive in terms of Russia-Ukraine relations, nonetheless it was worsened again after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. It also focuses on a claim raised by Russia regarding the state of Kievan Rus and its attempt to justify the attack on Ukraine by using historical narratives. Russia claims that Ukraine used to be a part of Russia during the state of Kievan Rus. However, this historical entity consisted of territories of three states with collective community of Ukrainians, Russians, and Belarussians. By studying historical processes and elements that shape present actions, the study aims to understand and reveal potential motives behind Russia's attack on Ukraine. The reason why it is considered to have a significant role is that historical process and elements are valuable to clarify and describe problems in the past and assist to observe changes that could be ignored in the present. Understanding how history may impact Russia's motives and decision-making will provide a detailed perspective for comparing and contrasting measures implemented throughout the history and in the present time. Such historical investigation will help to develop a deeper understanding about the underlying dynamics to fairly assess if historical factors have contributed to the current conflict between the two nations.

The last question addressed by the study is: How and to what extent have international actors involved in the Russia-Ukraine conflict? This research does not only investigate bilateral relations of Russia and Ukraine, it also highlights how actors, such as the US, NATO, West, EU, and UN have substantial roles in shaping their relations and the overall conflict. Especially, the initial tension occurred between Russia and NATO when NATO began enlargement through Georgia and Ukraine. Russia became concerned about NATO's enlargement by perceiving this as a threat to its regional dominant power and warned NATO about crossing "red lines" for the reason

that Russia never wanted to lose its influence over Georgia and Ukraine. Russia's intervention in Georgia served as a public warning to demonstrate that it was serious in its intentions and Ukraine tends to face the same destiny (Lazarevic, 2009). Such maneuver aimed to reinforce Russia's position on territorial claims and prevent the expansionist policy of NATO aimed at weakening Russia's regional power.

In addition to these research questions, the study also proposes two hypotheses for this research, which are as the following. According to first hypothesis, the deterioration of Russia-Ukraine relations is directly linked to the foreign policy of Ukraine regarding to develop closer ties with the West. The second hypothesis points out the argument that Russia uses the historical factor of "Kievan Rus State" as an excuse to have a territorial claim on Ukraine, while its main objective is to prevent NATO's expansionist policy. The shift in Ukraine's foreign policy towards the West was not approved by Russia because it would lead to Russia losing power over Ukraine and prestige in the international arena. Russia has the dominant regional power and diminishing its influence in Ukraine is not in the best interest of Russia. Since NATO began its enlargement in Georgia and Ukraine, Russia-NATO relations have worsened as Russia claims that the presence of NATO in the Baltic region is a direct threat to Russia due to the fact that it is surrounded by NATO countries and allies. As a response, NATO asserts that their central purpose is to protect the member states. By studying these two hypotheses, the research aims to understand how historical and geopolitical factors have contributed to the current Russia-Ukraine conflict.

1.4. Theoretical Framework

The Russia-Ukraine relations can be analyzed within several theoretical frameworks for different historical periods and course of events taken place throughout their century's long relations. Realism theory focuses on analyzing the role of power and security in international relations (Raffensperger, 2022). In this framework, the reason for invasion of Ukraine by Russia would be linked to its desire to maintain its sphere of influence in the region, as Russia considers Ukraine as a vital part of its sphere of influence. While realism is also considered to be the relevant theory, to understand the underlying dynamics of the current Russia-Ukraine conflict, neorealism is more applicable to interpret their relations and the cause of invasion (Magen & Stein, 2022).

Besides realism, the most relevant theory that can be used to analyze the Russia-Ukraine relations is neorealism. This theory has a more sophisticated approach to analyze the ongoing conflict, as it focuses on the role of institutions and norms in international relations. According to neorealism, Russia occupied Ukraine as a result of rising new security challenges following the breakdown of the post-Cold War (Magen & Stein, 2022). This theory focuses on the international relations and states that anarchy in the international system is a primary cause of conflict. Neorealists believe that each state constantly strives to gain more power, and to protect their own security, they will do whatever it takes. The balance of international security shifted after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and this event created a new security environment in Europe. While the United States successfully achieved to position itself as the superpower of the world, NATO implemented its expansion strategy by building alliances eastward (International Crisis Group, 2020). Russia perceived this as a threat to its security and geopolitical position, and did not feel comfortable with Ukraine trying to build closer ties with the West. Expansion of NATO towards the areas where Russian influence is substantial is a threat to the position of Russia and this has resulted in military operations against Russia (International Crisis Group, 2020). This is the core concept of neorealism. It emphasizes the role of power politics in international relations, and conflict is a permanent feature which gives less possibility to cooperation and agreement. In this context, neorealists can argue that Russia invaded Ukraine as an attempt to reclaim its power and prevent NATO from expanding any further towards the East (Magen & Stein, 2022). Additionally, the invasion also serves to the strategic interests of Russia to protect and maintain its access to the Black Sea. Hereby, the study will apply neorealism as a theoretical framework to analyze the nature of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict and to understand the challenges that may prevent achieving lasting peace between Russia and Ukraine for the future.

It is also important to note that there are other factors that also lead to invasion of Ukraine by Russia. One of the important factors was the rise of nationalism in Russia and the perceived threat Ukrainian government posed on its security. Nevertheless, neorealism allows to analyze the conflict and relations between Russia and Ukraine from a broader perspective by studying the broader security challenges that Russia has been facing in the post-Cold War period (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2022). In this context, neorealists could argue

that there is no central authority in the international politics to enforce order and the system is anarchic. Therefore, each state has to rely on their own power to protect their security and position. If Russia perceived a threat to its security and position in the Baltic region, it is natural for Russia to take necessary political steps to maintain its security. Another reason why neorealism is a sophisticated theoretical framework to study the Russia-Ukraine conflict is related to the security dilemma (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2022). According to neorealism, as states have to compete for power to protect their security, security dilemma is likely to happen when one state tries to increase its security and it results in the decrease of security for other states (International Crisis Group, 2020). In this conflict, while Russia attempts to claim its power and protect its position, Ukraine's security has been threatened and decreased. Moreover, it is no secret that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Europe experienced a power vacuum. As Russia attempts to fill this power vacuum, more tensions have been experienced with the West as both sides wants to gain more power.

The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine remains unresolved and there is no sign of peace to be achieved any time soon. Both countries have clear demands, and neither of them is willing to compromise at the current stage. Finding common ground is challenging, as neither Russia nor Ukraine is willing to compromise. Despite the fact that the conflict has been lasting for a long time, it is elusive to achieve lasting peace between the two nations at the current time. While both Russia and Ukraine have struggled to find a common ground to compromise, third-party efforts have also failed to deliver desired results to maintain peace. Such persistent situation proves the complexities and deep-rooted nature of the conflict taking place between Russia and Ukraine.

Tracking back in the history, Russia practiced aggressive behavior towards Ukraine in the 2000s as well. To analyze the foreign policy of Russia in the 2000s, it would be more proper to use the lens of offensive realism. The underlying reason behind Russia's aggression towards Ukraine and Georgia appears to be significantly related to the fact that both countries tried to get rid of Russian domination by making political shift towards the West (International Crisis Group, 2020). Russia asserted to keep them under its control and wanted to prevent the countries from developing closer ties with the West to distant themselves from Russian control. Consequently, Russia occupied certain territories belonging to those countries, such

as South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia, and Crimea in Ukraine (Kuzio, 2019). This was an attempt to show dominance and protecting the regional interests of Russia. Such aggressive decision reflects the core principle of offensive realism, which asserts that a state must strive for maximum power to maintain its security and survival. From that perspective, it was necessary for Russia to prove its power and influence over Georgia and Ukraine to secure its position as the regional dominant power and a major actor at the international level. Especially, the annexation of Crimea was an attempt to send a global message that Russia was ready to take serious actions that serve to its interests. It is evident that the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine is affected by historical power struggles. The foreign policy choices of Russia in the 2000s that were discussed above complies with the theory of offensive realism. To comprehend the complex nature of the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine and explore potential paths to stabilize peace and find a resolution, it is important to visit the past and understand these dynamics (International Crisis Group, 2020).

Figure 1. Kenneth Waltz

Figure 2. John J. Mearsheimer

Source: https://www.conflictandsecurity.co.uk/kenneth-waltz-a-tribute/

Source: https://newrepublic.com/article/165603/carlson-russia-ukraine-imperialism-nato

While analyzing Russia-Ukraine relations from neorealist perspective, two scholars', Kenneth Waltz's and John Mearsheimer's ideas, approaches, and the way

how they can be applied to Russia-Ukraine relations should be mentioned, as well. Kenneth Waltz's neorealism posits that states are driven by the pursuit of power in an anarchic international system. Applying this theory to the Russia-Ukraine relations, we observe a recurring pattern of power struggles. Russia, as a major global player, seeks to assert its dominance in its immediate neighborhood, including Ukraine. By leveraging its military might and regional influence, Russia aims to maintain its sphere of influence and prevent the expansion of Western influence in the region. On the other hand, Ukraine intends to safeguard its sovereignty, aligning with the West and seeking NATO membership as a means of deterring Russian aggression. This power struggle has intensified over time, leading to the ongoing tensions between the two countries.

Neorealism emphasizes the significance of security concerns in shaping international relations. In the case of Russia-Ukraine relations, security plays a central role. Historically, Ukraine has been a buffer zone between Russia and the West, and any attempts to shift the balance of power in Ukraine have raised alarm bells for Russia. The underlying fear of encirclement and diminished security has fueled Russia's assertive behavior, prompting its annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its support for separatist movements in Eastern Ukraine. From Ukraine's perspective, it seeks security guarantees from the West, viewing alignment with the European Union and NATO as crucial deterrents against potential Russian aggression.

Russia-Ukraine relations have been deeply influenced by neorealist principles, especially in the context of the Ukraine crisis that emerged in 2014. Neorealism helps to outline the key factors driving Russia's actions, such as its pursuit of national security interests and the desire to maintain influence in its near abroad. From the neorealist perspective, Russia's annexation of Crimea and its involvement in the conflict in Eastern Ukraine can be seen as a response to perceived threats to its security and influence.

Neorealism also sheds light on Ukraine's actions within this context. As a state seeking to maintain its sovereignty and territorial integrity, Ukraine has responded to the Russian intervention by aligning itself closer with the West. Neorealism suggests that the balance of power is essential in shaping state behavior, and Ukraine's strategic choice to pursue closer ties with the European Union and NATO can be seen as an attempt to counterbalance Russia's influence.

Furthermore, neorealism highlights the impact of the international system on state behavior. In this case, the Western response to Russia-Ukraine tensions indicates that the neorealist principle of balancing power is at play. The European Union and the United States, driven by their own security concerns and values, have imposed economic sanctions on Russia and provided support to Ukraine, thus altering the balance of power in the region.

It is important to note that neorealism has its limitations when explaining the complexities of Russia-Ukraine relations. Factors, such as historical grievances, cultural ties, and identity politics cannot be fully addressed within the neorealist framework. Moreover, neorealism tends to overlook the influence of domestic politics and individual agency, which are often crucial in shaping the actions of states. It is argued that neorealism oversimplifies the complex factors that shape state behavior. It fails to consider factors such as historical grievances, nationalism, and ideology, which can significantly influence states' actions and attitudes. Neorealism focuses primarily on the international system and neglects domestic factors that impact state behavior. In the case of Russia-Ukraine relations, neorealism fails to fully account for the influence of domestic politics, public opinion, and the aspirations of the Ukrainian people. Waltz's neorealism underscores the importance of structural factors, such as the distribution of power and the nature of the international system, in shaping a state's behavior. In the context of Russia-Ukraine relations, the structural factors are complex. Russia perceives itself as a great power, necessitating a proactive approach to secure its interests. Furthermore, the historical, ethnic, and cultural ties between Russia and parts of Ukraine create a sense of historical entitlement and influence over the region. Conversely, Ukraine aspires to maintain its independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, pursuing closer ties with the West while challenging Russia's regional hegemony. These structural factors contribute to the ongoing power struggles and geopolitical rivalries between the two countries.

According to John Mearsheimer, an American political scientist, international relations scholar, and realist, offensive realism presumes that states should maximize their power as much as they can for their own security and survival (The Conversation, 2022). Mearsheimer explains that the ultimate goal of a state is to achieve hegemony. As a major power and the dominant regional power, Russia is focused on maintaining control over the Caucasus region and would never tolerate to

lose this control. Therefore, it is unlikely to happen that Russia would tolerate neighboring states challenging its interests and influence in the same region (The Conversation, 2022). Throughout history, Russia has pursued offensive realism to establish itself as a power hegemon in the region and to become one of the main actors on the global stage (International Crisis Group, 2020). The collapse of the USSR was against the interests of Russia as this event created an opportunity for many states under its control to gain their independence, claim their sovereignty, and breaking free from its influence. The invasion of South Ossetia and Abkhazia was the outcome of this strategy, thus Russia prevented Georgia to regain the control and guaranteed its security in the region (International Crisis Group, 2020). The annexation of Crimea was even more dramatic, but also a practical example to reveal Russia's offensive realism approach in terms of multiple aspects. The underlying motive behind the annexation of Crimea was claiming power and influence over Ukraine (Kuzio, 2019). As Ukraine was reinforcing closer ties and diplomatic relations with the West, Russia perceived it as a threat to its regional dominance and power security, and therefore, took aggression towards Crimea.

John Mearsheimer's neorealism is a theory that is based on the belief that the international system is a structure that is based on anarchy. This theory is important when attempting to understand Russia-Ukraine relations because it can help to explain the actions of both countries. Neorealism is based on the assumption that all countries are seeking to maximize their power and that they will always act in their own self-interest. This theory can help to explain why Russia has attempted to interfere in Ukraine's affairs, as they are seeking to increase their own power in the region. In recent years, the theory of neorealism, as put forward by John Mearsheimer, has been increasingly applied to the study of international relations, and in particular to the analysis of great power politics. In this respect, neorealism offers a useful framework for understanding the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

Neorealism is based on the assumption that the international system is anarchic, meaning that there is no central authority that can impose order or resolve disputes between states. This anarchy results in a constant struggle for power, as states seek to maximize their own security in a dangerous and unstable world. In this struggle, states are always looking to gain an advantage over their rivals, which can lead to conflict. Applying this theory to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, it is clear that

both states are acting in accordance with their own self- interests, as they seek to increase their power and influence in the region. Russia sees Ukraine as a vital part of its own security, due to its geographical proximity and the fact that Ukraine houses a large Russian population. Russia also wants to maintain its influence over Ukraine in order to prevent it from becoming a Western-aligned state, which would be a major blow to Russian power. Meanwhile, Ukraine is keen to break away from Russia's sphere of influence and move closer to the West, in order to improve its own security and build closer ties with the EU and NATO.

The theory of neorealism, as proposed by John Mearsheimer, holds that the international system is structured such that states are perpetually in conflict with one another. In this view, states are motivated primarily by the desire to survive, and they act in accordance with this goal by seeking to increase their power. This theory has a number of implications for understanding Russian foreign policy.

Firstly, neorealism would predict that Russia would seek to increase its power in order to survive in the international system. This has been borne out by Russian actions in recent years, such as its annexation of Crimea and its involvement in the conflict in Ukraine. Russia has also been seeking to increase its influence in other countries, such as Syria. These actions can be seen as part of a larger effort by Russia to increase its power and influence in the international system.

Secondly, neorealism would also predict that Russia would seek to reduce the power of other states. This can be seen in Russia's actions towards Ukraine, which has been seeking to weaken and destabilize the country. Russia has also been working to undermine NATO, which it views as a threat to its security. These actions are motivated by a desire to reduce the power of states that are seen as threatening to Russia.

Mearsheimer's neorealism holds that the international system is characterized by anarchy, meaning that there is no central authority to keep states in check. In this anarchic system, states must rely on their own military power to defend themselves. This leads to a constant competition among states, as each tries to build up its own military power in order to gain an advantage over its rivals. Russia views Ukraine as a vital part of its sphere of influence. Consequently, Russia has been working to keep Ukraine within its orbit, while the West has been trying to pull Ukraine away from Russia and towards the West. The 2014 crisis was the result of these competing interests.

Another crucial aspect of neorealism is the security dilemma, which occurs when states' efforts to enhance their own security are seen as a threat by other states. In this context, Russia's assertive actions, such as the annexation of Crimea, have triggered fear and apprehension in Ukraine, the West, and neighboring countries. Ukraine, perceiving Russia's actions as territorial expansion and a breach of international norms, has sought support from Western powers, leading to heightened tensions in the region.

Neorealism also emphasizes relative gains, suggesting that states prioritize their own interests and seek to avoid situations where others gain more than they do. In this regard, Russia's concern about Ukraine's potential alignment with NATO and the European Union can be understood as an attempt to prevent Ukraine from gaining a strategic advantage that may weaken Russia's regional dominance. By opposing possible Western integration of Ukraine, Russia aims to maintain its influence over its buffer states and prevent the perceived threat of an expanding Western presence.

Neorealism posits that states strive to maintain or shift the balance of power in their favor to ensure their security and protect their interests. In the Russia-Ukraine context, Russia's assertive actions can be interpreted as attempts to reassert its hegemony in the post-Soviet space. By annexing Crimea, Russia significantly altered the balance of power and effectively consolidated control over the strategic Black Sea region, which holds immense geopolitical and economic importance.

John Mearsheimer's neorealism provides a valuable lens through which to analyze and comprehend the intricacies of Russia-Ukraine relations. The theory's focus on power, security dilemmas, relative gains, and balancing acts aptly applies to the actions and motivations of both Russia and Ukraine. As these dynamics continue to shape the region, an understanding of neorealism can help us navigate the complex landscape of this ongoing conflict and anticipate potential challenges and opportunities arising from the interactions between these two countries. Although offensive realism states that it might be considered necessary for Russia to ensure continuous dominance, defensive realism offers a contrary perspective. Defensive realism argues that states do not necessarily need to maximize their power, as it is likely to cause negative consequences, such as balancing by other states. However, from the perspective of offensive realism, it is often inefficient. After annexation of

Crimea, the West did not come together militarily against Russia, the European Union and the United States simply imposed sanctions on Russia (Ragozin, 2019).

1.5. Theoretical Analysis

The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine has attracted significant attention on the global scale due to its complexities and varied nature with a long history. To identify the reasons leading to the conflict and understand the historical background of the relations between Russia and Ukraine, the most sophisticated theoretical analysis can be provided from the realist perspective. A useful framework provided by realist theory can be applied to understand the motives behind the conflict, power struggles, national interests, and security in international relations related to the Russia-Ukraine conflict (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2022).

From the lenses of realism, the relations between Russia and Ukraine from past to present can be analyzed through power struggles and geopolitical interests. The historical relations between these two countries started in the 9th century, when both of them were included in the Kievan Rus state, which was a major power in Eastern Europe (New World Encyclopedia, n.d.). This state included the modern Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus and it was a major power at the international level. However, as the time passed, territorial disputes aroused and Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus developed their own competing national interests in the region (New World Encyclopedia, n.d.).

According to realism, each state serves to its own interest to maximize its power and security in the international system which has no central power and is anarchic. During the 19th and 20th centuries, Russia was busy with establishing its position in the region by consolidating control over the territories that were considered critical for achieving its geopolitical ambitions to become the hegemon power in the region (Ragozin, 2019). During that time, Ukraine fell under the influence of Russia. While Russia suppressed Ukrainian culture and assimilated Ukrainian people into Russian identity, the Russian dominance was successfully solidified over Ukraine (Ragozin, 2019).

Even though Russia and Ukraine became politically, economically, and culturally intertwined with each other during the Soviet Union, the dynamic of their relations started to shift after the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 (Center for

Strategic and International Studies, 2022). Russia's influence on Ukraine and its regional power were challenged after Ukraine claimed its independence and developed a positive foreign policy towards the West. According to the realist perspective, such change in the dynamics of the relations between Russia and Ukraine created power struggles and triggered Russia's concerns regarding losing its regional influence and control over other neighboring states (Magen & Stein, 2022).

Realists would argue that Russia made a strategic move by annexing Crimea in 2014 to maintain its control over Ukraine and prevent the growing ties between Ukraine and the West (Magen & Stein, 2022). Crimea has a geopolitical, historical, and cultural importance to Russia especially due to the fact that it has a direct access to the Black Sea. By annexing Crimea, a clear message was delivered to both Ukraine and the international community that Russia was willing to exercise offensive force to protect its interests and the geopolitical dominance (Ragozin, 2019).

Moreover, the Russia-Ukraine conflict illustrates the core realist assumptions, which are power struggles and geopolitical interests of rivalries. Despite being under the control and influence of Russia, Ukraine reclaimed its independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union and sought closer diplomatic relations with the European Union and the West. This was a shift in power balance and it posed a direct challenge to the geopolitical interests of Russia, which responded by taking aggressive actions (The Conversation, 2022). Additionally, Russia supported separatist movements in the Donbas region, which is in Eastern Ukraine. This support can also be understood as Russia's attempt to force influence over Ukraine and prevent it from building an alliance with the West.

To analyze the conflict from a more objective perspective, it is important to take into consideration the Ukrainian perspective as well. Ukraine has shaped its perception of the ongoing conflict based on its historical interactions with Russia. Historically, Russia has influenced and dominated Ukraine, especially when both countries were part of the Kievan Rus state (New World Encyclopedia, n.d.). As a result, Russia's intentions have always been clear to Ukraine and therefore, Russia has always been perceived as a threat to its sovereignty and territorial power. Although Ukraine achieved its independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, tensions with Russia started to grow after this event.

From the perspective of realism, when Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, it directly challenged the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine posing threats to the national security of the country (Ragozin, 2019). Crimea has a significant commercial, historical, and cultural importance to Ukraine as well. Therefore, when Russia took an aggressive move and annexed Crimea, Ukraine viewed it as an attempt to challenge its sovereignty. This event evidently consolidated the suspicions of Ukraine about the intentions of Russia and made the country vulnerable in the face of such a powerful neighbor, which was after the regional dominance and influence. Moreover, when the separatist movement started a conflict in Easter Ukraine, especially in the Donbas region, Russia interfered with its internal affairs (Ragozin, 2019). Such interference by Russia heightened the concerns of Ukraine about its powerful neighbor. It became clear for Ukraine that by supporting the separatist movement, Russia wanted to harm its stability and independence through fueling the internal conflict.

In this context, Ukraine has shaped its response to the ongoing conflict by making realist calculations to protect its sovereignty, security, and national interests. To fight back Russia's influence, Ukraine has made a strategic move trying to get closer to the European Union and the West. This step was aimed at ensuring the country's autonomy against the intentions of Russia. Ukraine has also attempted to join NATO to gain a strategic ally against the power control of Russia (NATO, 2022). However, this attempt has been faced with resistance from Russia leading to power struggles between the two neighboring countries.

Hereby, from the lenses of realism, the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine is perceived as power struggles and geopolitical interests by Ukraine. By referring to the historical events, Ukraine has become attentive of Russia's intention in the region and in the country, especially after the annexation of Crimea, supporting separatist movement in Eastern Ukraine, and the ongoing invasion (Ragozin, 2019). Therefore, it has become critically important for Ukraine to protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity with the help of the West. Ukraine is located in a complex geopolitical position and its actions and responses in the current conflict with Russia are realistically shaped by its intention to protect the national interest and security of the country (International Crisis Group, 2022).

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF RUSSIA-UKRAINE RELATIONS

2.1. 10th-19th Century: The Kievan Rus State

The root causes leading to the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine can be traced back to the early history of their relations during the time of the Kievan Rus state. This historical entity has a great importance to analyze the reasons of the ongoing conflict as Russian President Vladimir Putin attempts to legitimize its foreign policy towards Ukraine by claiming that Ukraine historically used to be the territory of Russia back in the 9th century (New World Encyclopedia, n.d.). This is the key element to analyze where their relations started and how it influenced the current war. In this context, it is important to examine the mentioned state and understand the motive behind Russian claim.

The Kievan Rus state was established in 880 and it was a union of three modern states: Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus (New World Encyclopedia, n.d.). This historical entity had a vast territory located at the intersection of East and West. Therefore, it was possible to observe the cultural influence from both cultures in this state. The Kievan Rus state was the largest country in its time which makes it coherent why Vladimir Putin claims it is the Russian state, since it dominated Europe earlier (New World Encyclopedia, n.d.). In addition, in most of the sources, this state is reflected as a Russian state because the territory it surrounds overlaps contemporary Russian territory. Christianity was adopted by Vladimir and it is connected with Byzantine culture which is also an indication of spreading through the West. In view of the fact that the state occupied a large area, traditions were also diverse in different regions to a certain extent. Especially, in North-East of Kievan Rus, culture and tradition incline to Moscow rulers eventually and played a great role to form modern Russian statehood (New World Encyclopedia, n.d.).

Figure 3. Kievan Rus State in the 11th century.

Source: https://www.britannica.com/topic/Kyivan-Rus

Despite the geopolitical power of the Kievan Rus state, as time passed, the positions of the three countries within the union strengthened leading them each having territorial claims. Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus claimed their own territorial claims after the 19th century (New World Encyclopedia, n.d.). However, the relations between all three countries during the 9th to 19th centuries are characterized by Kievan Rus state on account of the fact that they shared the same destiny. Since the 10th century, the state was ruled by the dynasty called Varangian, Viking conquerors. Nevertheless, it lasted 300 years, thus, Rus faced the Mongol invasion in the 13th century (New World Encyclopedia, n.d.). Until that period, Kiev was the capital of the state which was replaced by Moscow later.

Subsequent events were critical in the history of Kiev, as it became a part of multiple unions and confronted historical incidents. After the Mongol invasion, in 1569, Kiev joined the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth that was a federation of two states: the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland (Olszanski, 2001). Kiev was announced as a capital of the first state. It was also considered momentous for Kiev because the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was situated between two

world powers of their time, the Russian Tsardom and the Kingdom of Sweden (Olszanski, 2001).

In 1783, the occasion happened similar to 2014 case, annexation of Crimea. Accordingly, Ukraine was annexed by Imperial Russia, yet that time, the Ukrainian Cossacks willingly joined the Empire, and the mutual relations were positive during that time (Potichnyj, Raeff, Pelenski, Zekulin, 1992). It should be noted that some groups of the Ukrainians attempted to show resistance, but they were either set down or convinced to be a part of the Russian Empire. This event was vital, considering it was an initial step for the Empire to be spread through Black Sea region and the Balkans to become more prominent in international relations. As has been demonstrated, it is fair to claim that the historical elements should be taken into account in terms of Russia-Ukraine relations (Potichnyj et al., 1992). Although their relations are worse than it has ever been throughout the history, they have been quite positive in the past, as it was in 10th-19th centuries. Over the course of time, the world system changes, major powers switch, and ultimately, international relations might become completely dissimilar, which makes today's friends tomorrow's enemies (Potichnyj et al., 1992).

The current conflict between Russia and Ukraine escalated because of three major reasons, which are competing geopolitical interests, power struggles, and territorial ambitions (International Crisis Group, 2020). Russia has made its intentions clear to Ukraine through annexing Crimea in 2014 and supporting separatist movements in Eastern Ukraine, which is an internal affair. Being wary of Russia's intentions to challenge its sovereignty and territorial integrity, Ukraine has shaped its response and actions in the current conflict aimed at safeguarding its independence and security (International Crisis Group, 2020).

Thus, the root causes of the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine relates to the historical elements, especially the Kievan Rus state. Although both countries had positive relations while being under the Kievan Rus state during the 9th to 19th centuries, power struggles and geopolitical ambitions have contributed to the emergence of the current conflict (Potichnyj et al., 1992). Due to the complex nature of the ongoing conflict, understanding the historical context of the Russian-Ukraine relations from past to present is vital to objectively and comprehensively analyze their situations.

2.2. Beginning of the 20th Century

The relations between Russia and Ukraine became significantly deteriorated in the early 20th century following the shift in Russia's foreign policy towards Ukraine (Potichnyj et al., 1992). The roots of this conflict were related to what Russia did in the 19th century. Prior to the conflict, the Russian Empire attempted to assimilate Ukrainian people into Russian culture with the purpose of suppressing the Ukrainian culture. The Russian Empire integrated millions of Russian people into Ukrainian territories to solidify its influence over the local culture and to expand the borders of the empire (Carpenter, 2022). This strategic move led the Ukrainian government to grow weak and be left with no choice other than complying with the Russia's welfare as being a part of the empire. Since millions of Russians assimilated in Ukraine, it became easier for Russia to accomplish its political control over Ukraine owing to the fact that occupying one nation is easier when inside is already taken, and Russia succeeded this by suppressing the culture and artistic expressions of Ukraine (Carpenter, 2022).

Nevertheless, Ukraine did not stop fighting for its independence and sovereignty against the control of the Russian Empire. In January 1917, Ukrainian Council published the "Universal of the Ukrainian People", proclaiming autonomy of Ukraine within the Russian Empire. In November of the same year, Ukraine published "Declaration of Independence of Ukraine" to claim its sovereignty (The Conversation, 2022). In January 1918, the establishment of the Ukrainian People's Republic was officially announced.

Figure 4. Ukraine 1917: socialism and nationalism in a world turned upside down. Source: https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/ukraine-1917-socialism-and-nationalism-in-a-world-turned-upside-down/

Achieving its independence and sovereignty within the Russian Empire in such a short time was not an easy task for Ukraine as Russia was the dominant power in the region. Nevertheless, there were a sequence of events that facilitated Ukraine's attempts to proclaim its independence and establish the Ukrainian People's Republic. One of the critical events was the decision made by Russia to initiate negotiations for peace with the Central Powers in 1917. This event created an opportunity for Ukraine to declare total independence. In 1917, the czar of the Russian Empire was overthrown and Ukraine formed a temporary government and proclaimed itself as a republic within the federated Russia (Carpenter, 2022). The last event enabling Ukraine to declare its complete independence in 1918 was the ascent of Vladimir Lenin to power.

Analyzing the situation from the Ukrainian perspective shows that all these events were the reflection of Ukraine's struggle for sovereignty and self-determination against the established Russian dominance over the country (Kramer, 2022). Ukraine resisted the attempts of the Russian Empire to assimilate its culture

and to suppress their national identity. The response of Ukraine was asserting its autonomy by taking the opportunities that were created by a sequence of events that took place within the empire (Kramer, 2022).

The historical context discussed in the previous paragraphs has played a critical role in shaping the lead to the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine. These historical experiences have made Ukraine be wary of Russia's intentions over its independence and sovereignty. The historical events that took place in the early 20th century have led Ukraine to mistrust Russia, influencing their relations and their current geopolitical interactions in the ongoing conflict. In the current conflict, Ukraine's actions and responses are deeply rooted in their desire for safeguarding their sovereignty, self-determination, independence, and national identity (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2022). Russia's support for separatist movements in Eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea were direct attempts to infringe Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. To protect its national interests and security, Ukraine has developed closer ties with the European Union and the West and this strategy is deeply rooted to the historical context of the relations between Russia and Ukraine (Kramer, 2022).

Consequently, the current conflict between the two nations has been evidently influenced by the historical events that happened in the early 20th century. The dynamics of the Russia-Ukraine relations have been historically impacted by the Russian Empire's continuous attempts to assimilate the Ukrainian culture and Ukraine's consistent fight for maintaining its self-determination and sovereignty. Reflecting on this historical period is important to understand the complexities of the current conflict from the Ukrainian viewpoint.

2.3. USSR Period

Figure 5. Soviet Ukraine in a Nutshell.

Source: https://origins.osu.edu/read/soviet-ukraine-nutshell?language_content_entity=en

In early 20th century, a war took place between Bolsheviks and nationalist forces in Ukraine. This Ukrainian-Soviet war that happened between 1917 and 1921 was the war between the Ukrainian People's Republic and the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2022). The Bolsheviks who emerged victorious in this war established the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) in Kiev. In the following year, Ukraine was united to the Soviet Union as a founding member. It is also agreed that Ukraine's national-state design was the principal element in establishing the USSR. Joining the Soviet Union as a founding member marks a significant importance to Ukraine's history as being a part of a superpower had lasting impacts on the country's politics and culture (International Crisis Group, 2020). It is evident that the current political landscape of Ukraine has been affected by the legacy of the Ukraine's Soviet past.

The formation of the USSR by the Bolsheviks in 1921 profoundly impacted the political structure and administrative systems of Ukraine. Integration to the

Soviet Union led the Russification and Sovietization of Ukraine's politics and culture. This event was also remarkably crucial for the Soviet Union in terms of several factors: first of all, the political and administrative structure of the state was similar to the Soviet Union and this is one of the reasons why Ukraine was easily Russified and Sovietized (La Gloannec, 2015). Moreover, Ukraine had a significant economic importance for the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union sourced agricultural goods and minerals from Ukraine as it was a producing country and there were several important industries located within the territories of Ukraine. Besides the structural and economical importance, Ukraine was also a geographically strategic country for the Soviet Union. As Ukraine located between Europe and the Soviet Union, it acted as a buffer zone where important trade relations and negotiations took place between the two sides (Lazarevic, 2009). Additionally, several Ukrainian cities played strategic importance for the Soviet Union in the 20th century. For instance, Crimea was known as the "All-Union Resort" whereas Kiev was known as the "Mother of Russian Cities" as well as the "Center of the Orthodox World" (Lazarevic, 2009). Another Ukrainian city, Donbas was considered the industrial heartland of the Soviet Union. Other Ukrainian cities Poltava and Sevastopol were enduring symbols of Russian military power, and Kharkov represented European novelty (Kravchenko, 2016). Last but not least, another Ukrainian city Dnipro was one of the main centers for building rockets in the 1950s and 1960s while a major producer of steel in the Soviets was Mariupol city. The Soviet Union also sourced its main grain production from Ukraine (Fowler, 2019).

Considering all the above-mentioned significance of Ukraine for the Soviet Union, it becomes clear that Russia did not only have political interests, but also economic and resource-related interests in Ukraine. Within the Soviet Union, Ukraine was the key state that played an important role for both the survival and the fall of the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, a new union emerged with the participation of East Slavic nations, including Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus (Kravchenko, 2016). However, Ukraine decided to withdraw from the union and proclaimed its sovereignty, which led each state to declare their own independent states.

It is important to note that although a coup attempt in 1991 was the immediate reason why the Soviet Union collapsed, and the Communist Part of the USSR held President Mikhail Gorbachev captive, it was not the only reason leading

to the fall of the union. Even if the coup attempt did not happen, there was a combination of factors that made the collapse of the Soviet Union unavoidable. To cite an instance, increased poverty, stagnant economy, political stubbornness, and the rise of nationalism within the Soviet Union were the critical reasons preparing the end of the USSR (Kravchenko, 2016). Following the collapse of the USSR, countries integrated into the Union seek opportunities to declare their independence and sovereignty, and Ukraine was one of them that decided to become an independent state.

Ukraine declared its independence, pursued its independent foreign policy, navigated the challenges of nation-building, and successfully solidified its national identity at the international level. Ukraine's perception of its relationship with Russia has been profoundly impacted by its historical experience within the Soviet Union. It is evident that the current interactions and tensions between the two nations are rooted in their complex historical and geopolitical ties dated back to the Soviet Union period in the 20th century.

2.4. Post-Soviet Period

2

А К Т

ПРОГОЛОШЕННЯ НЕЗАЛЕЖНОСТІ УКРАЇНИ

Виходячи із сверхтвалої небезпеки, яка нависла була над Україною в зв"язку з державним переворотом в СРСР 19 серпня 1991 року,

- враховуючи тенденції до державотворення в Україні,

- виходячи з права на самовизначення, передбаченого Статутом ООН та іншими міжнародно-правовими документами,

- відповідно Декларації про державний суверенітет України, Верховна Рада Української Радянської Соціалістичної Республіки урочисто

П Р О Г О Л О Ш У Є

Н Е З А Л Е Ж Н І С Т Ь У К Р А Ї Н И та створення самостійної української держави – У К Р А Ї Н И.

Територія України є неподільною і недоторканною.

Відтепер на території України мають чинність виключно Конституція і закони України.

Цей акт набирає чинності з моменту його схвалення.

ВЕРХОВНА РАДА УКРАЇНИ

24 серпня 1991 року

Figure 6. Act of Declaration of Independence of Ukraine.

Source: https://worldhistorycommons.org/act-declaration-independence-ukraine

Withdrawal from the USSR was a critical event in Ukraine's history, as it also freed the country from Russia's control. Nevertheless, this move also had high risks as Russia is the most powerful state in the region and considered Ukraine a significant part of its sphere of influence. If Ukraine adopted a foreign policy opposing the interests of Russia, it could result in serious consequences and suppression by Russia. Moreover, it was also risky for other former Soviet countries to develop close ties with Ukraine as they could be the target of Russia's aggression as well. This situation challenged Ukraine at the beginning of its sovereignty and to ensure the respectful dissociation from Russia, Ukraine tried to join the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries (Fowler, 2019). The unforeseen shift in the foreign policy of Ukraine was not welcomed by Russia. Russia could lose its power and influence in the region and the international arena if other states followed the same path and went against the interests of Russia (Kravchenko, 2016).

Figure 7. Kuchma and Putin.

Source: http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/27821

Despite the fact that Ukraine wanted to gain its independence from Russia to maintain its independence, both Russia and Ukraine paid a price for their actions mentioned above. The abrupt shift in Ukraine's foreign policy against the interests of Russia resulted in the negative outcomes that affected the presidential elections of Ukraine in 1994. While Leonid Kravchuk lost the presidential elections, Leonid Kuchma achieved victory and the main reason for the victory of Kuchma was his foreign policy plans towards Russia. Leonid Kravchuk's foreign policy was aimed at distancing Ukraine from Russia and maintaining independent state with territorial integrity and sovereignty. On the other hand, Kuchma ensured that if elected, he will reestablish closer ties with Russia. Both Ukrainian people and government authorities were against the policies that would lead to conflicts with Russia. Therefore, they voted for the candidate that did not want to worse relations with Russia at the cost of not supporting the independence of Ukraine (Kravchenko, 2016).

While Ukraine's attempt to proclaim its independence from Russia's influence deteriorated their relations, both countries still continued to share common characteristics, including common history, language, and culture as they both were part of the Soviet Union. This was the result of Russification and Sovietization of Ukraine during the Soviet Union period. However, not all parts of Ukraine were influenced by Russia. Especially, regions in the western part of Ukraine were able to preserve their distinct Ukrainian culture from the intervention and influence of Russia. Moreover, Ukraine and Russia had different domestic and international policies during the post-Soviet period. While Ukraine wanted to be an independent and sovereign country, Russia was targeting to become a hegemon country in the South Caucasus region to be able to control and influence the decision-making process of other states in the region (Lazarevic, 2009). As Russia had hegemonic aspirations and a great power in the region, other states wanted to avoid judgments against the interests of Russia to protect themselves.

Ukraine's approach towards Russia in its early years of independence was strict and although Russia did not welcome the desire of Ukraine to become independent, it eventually recognized the country as a fully contributing member of the international politics. To preserve its independence within its borders against the interests of Russia, Ukraine decided to reinforce security partnership relations with the United States (Fowler, 2019). Despite its efforts to distance itself from Russia,

Ukraine still heavily relied on Russia for its oil and gas imports and balancing the cooperation with Russia was a necessary yet challenging mission. Therefore, majority of the Ukrainian people voted for Kuchma in the presidential elections as the country was economically dependent on Russia (Kravchenko, 2016).

During the post-Soviet period, Russia implemented numerous measures in the Ukrainian territory, such as having control over nuclear weapons, submarines, and custody (Fowler, 2019). After the dissolution of the USSR, Russia withdrew nuclear systems from the Crimean Peninsula, yet kept some ships in the navy of Black Sea. After the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia started to deploy nuclear weapons in the Crimean Peninsula again. Despite the fact that their relations deteriorated after Ukraine proclaimed independence and decided to get away from Russian dominance, they still shared common features, including history, language, and culture (Ragozin, 2019). It is evident that they had the same root in the Soviet Union, nevertheless other member states were not as familiar as Russia and Ukraine were. Likewise, post-Soviet period was effective to bring them together politically and economically which would be easier to grasp, if exploring those factors more. To cite an instance, governmental structure was similar in both countries: both presidents aimed at maintaining power by themselves without depending on any other state. The missions of the parliaments were reduced, and political parties did not play an important role anymore except the Communist Party in both countries. In terms of economy, both had the direction of socialist economy and private market economy which minimized position of the state-dominated economy (Ragozin, 2019).

In addition to similarities, their differences in domestic and international level should also be regarded. As mentioned above, their culture and language are quite identical, but there are some parts of Ukraine, especially the western part, that are free from Russian intervention that belong to Ukrainian culture itself. Another difference is that owing to the fact that continuous events occurred in Russia was linked with the federal system, Ukraine did not possess this structure (Kuzio, 2019). Also, their foreign policy strategies vary from each-other. Russia's viewing itself as a great power and hegemony in the South Caucasus region is reflected in the relations with other states and having such a prominent state in the region impacts the decision-making of other region states. Thus, it is contended that no strict judgment tends to be made that is against will of Russia. This makes Russia even more powerful and this is the reason why it cannot permit states, like Ukraine to go against

it and establish political relations with the West which might be considered as one of the enemies of Russia (Simon, 2002).

In the early years of independence, the approach of Ukraine toward Russia was rigid, and this mindset was accepted by Russia, as it delayed the process of recognizing Ukraine as a contributing part of the global society with full rights (Olszanski, 2001). Predominantly, Ukraine attempts to avoid Russian influence within itself to get rid of dependency and to achieve this goal, the most effective way is to reinforce partnership with the US in terms of security (Kuzio, 2019). It is also aware of the fact that it will not be easy to stop cooperation with Russia, as it would damage economy and political presence in the international sphere. Russia is the first country that acquires most of the oil and gas from Ukraine, that is why there is dependence and Ukraine needs to be in search for other customers in case of the war situation which has arrived at the present time (Olszanski, 2001). It is asserted that the Ukrainians were not comfortable with the situation of dependency on Russia and that is the reason why majority did not vote for or support the presidential candidates that continued positive relations with Russia.

In 2014, Peter Poroshenko came to power in Ukraine by taking advantage of the political crisis and his foreign policy was focused on ensuring to develop closer relations with Europe while still maintaining balanced relations with Russia (Kuzio, 2019). This shift in foreign policy of Ukraine damaged the image and prestige of Poroshenko. However, he did not change his decision and implemented the decided foreign policy approach. Poroshenko and his predecessor, Yanukovych had similar goals of establishing the national identity of Ukraine and uniting the country, developing closer ties with the West and gaining access to the European Union, and becoming a NATO member. However, they both were aware of the fact that distancing the country from Russia completely would be quite challenging as Ukraine's economy is heavily dependent on Russia and cutting off the relations between the two states would hurt the economy of Ukraine. Ukrainians voted for Volodymyr Zelensky in 2019 presidential elections and although he lacked political experience, he still reflected the Ukrainians' desire for a different type of leader (International Crisis Group, 2020). Zelensky achieved significant progress in developing Ukraine's relationships with the European Union and NATO while trying to resolve the conflict with Russia. However, time proved that the relations between Ukraine and Russia are complex and Russia will not allow Ukraine to easily become

allies of the West. As a result, Russia did not accept the Ukraine's progress in getting closer with the EU and NATO and decided to apply hard power against Ukraine once again (Gierczak, 2020).

Accordingly, the historical context during the post-Soviet period reflects the complex nature of Russia-Ukraine relations. While Ukraine aimed at gaining independence as a fully contributing member at the global scale and practicing a more diversified foreign policy, it has been quite challenging to maintain balanced relations with Russia while trying to get closer to the West. As Russia and Ukraine navigate their foreign policies in the international arena, their historical ties and geographical proximity keeps shaping their relations under tensions and conflicts.

2.5. Annexation of Crimea

Figure 8. How Russia took Crimea.

Source: https://www.businessinsider.com/how-russia-took-crimea-2015-3

On 18 March 2014, the annexation of Crimea, which is a part of Ukraine, was a clear violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity and international law by Russia (Gierczak, 2020). The underlying motive behind the annexation of Crimea is believed to be related to President Putin's desire to regain global attention and popularity at the international arena. It all started with Putin's decision to join the Russian presidential elections in 2011 to replace Dmitry Medvedev by promising that he can provide a better opportunities for his nation (Ragozin, 2019). Despite the expectations of Putin, his desire to become the President of Russia triggered protests and revolutions all over the country. One of the largest protests against Putin's desire to come to power was the Bolotnaya protest movement. About 50,000 protestors gathered in Bolotnaya Square in Moscow to demand fair elections and the resignation of Vladimir Putin. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, this protest was the largest one that soon spread to other cities in Russia as well and threatened the power claimed by Putin (Gierczak, 2020).

When the Bolotnaya protests kept spreading all over Russia, a similar revolution started in Ukraine. By strategically planning, Putin leveraged the situation and turn it into his advantage. The Bolotnaya protests were quite threatening for Putin which could have ended up losing power, but he successfully used the revolution in Ukraine for his own survival and manipulated with the help of media (Ragozin, 2019). Russian media coverage prioritized the Ukrainian revolution and portrayed it as a more significant event than the revolution occurring in Russia. This strategy served to the interests of the Russian government as it helped to downplay the importance of the protests taking place in Russia and indirectly showed to protestors the potential consequences of their actions. Putin decided to annex Crimea in 2014 with a strategical purpose in mind. Crimea has its historical ties with Russia and Putin leveraged the patriotism level in Russia related to their history. Crimea was not selected randomly, it had Russian roots historically and Putin was already aware of patriotism level in his country which was not going to be the last time he would implement this method, as mentioned, he did the same to justify launching military operations against Ukraine in 2022. The invasion of Crimea by Russia was framed as an act of liberty and the people of Russia was told that the people of Crimea are happy to become the part of Russia again relying on their historical roots. Consequently, instead of violating the international law, Putin framed the annexation

of Crimea as an act of salvation also claimed that people of Crimea were willing to be a part of Russia rather than being dependent on Ukraine (Ragozin, 2019).

Figure 9. Annexation of Crimea by Russia.

Source: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/seven-years-russia's-illegal-annexation-crimea_en

On 16 March 2014, the referendum held in Crimea and 95% of the vote was in favor of joining Russia (Raffensperger, 2022). Although the referendum results were widely criticized for lacking legitimacy, on 18 March 2014, Russia officially announced the annexation of Crimea. The coup in 2014 in Ukraine resulted in the foundation of a new government which would be in power until next elections. This was another chance for Putin to execute his plans to annex Crimean Peninsula arguing that it was negatively affected. However, the main reason is identical to contemporary Russian-Ukrainian war, since Putin was concerned about enlargement

of the West that was the most hazardous obstacle of Russia to regain its hegemony since Soviet period (Ragozin, 2019).

Russia is aware of the fact that the West has always wanted to weaken Russia to prevent it from becoming a hegemon power in the South Caucasus again. As for the sequence of events, it is not evident that Russia-West relations are going to get resolved any time soon. The West is careful about confronting a major international power directly and it is not an easy job to weaken a powerful rival like Russia in a short term. Therefore, the West implements its expansionist strategy towards the borders of Russia by building alliances with Russia's neighboring countries and the ones that have close ties with Russia. It is important to perpetuate expansionism towards Russia gradually. Taking into account that Putin was mindful of the expansion plan of the West, he was willing to prevent the implementation of this plan. For that reason, in different periods of his presidency, namely in 2014 and 2022, Putin initiated military operations against Ukrainian territory. The annexation of Crimea can be considered as the event that was the beginning of the deterioration of the modern Russia-Ukraine relations. Following this event, it became more challenging for the two nations to maintain their positive relations. Concisely, the annexation of Crimea under the name of salvation cannot be justified for several reasons. This event was the violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and the international law.

One of the underlying political reasons of the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine is related to NATO's expansion strategy towards the borders of Russia as it threatens the country's influence and power in the region. Russia has serious concerns that enlargement of NATO in the region challenges its hegemon power. Therefore, Russia started aggressive policies against Ukraine by invading the country. Russia cannot ignore the reality that being surrounded by NATO allies would not only threaten its hegemony in the region, but also bring its end in the international arena. Based on this reasoning, realists would argue that Putin must have felt that he did not have many options other than taking military actions towards Ukraine to protect the geopolitical interests of Russia (De Maio, 2016).

Besides the expansion strategy of NATO posing a threat to Russia, nationalism is another reason of the current conflict between the two nations. Crimea is a part of Ukraine and Ukrainian President Zelensky holds a different view on Crimea compared to Putin. Both presidents represent their nationalist interests over

Crimea. Despite the fact that Putin confronted serious protests and revolutions when trying to come to power, Russian people supported Putin to integrate Crimea to their territory based on the historical ties. Ukraine was trying to disconnect from Russia as much as it can to evidence their sovereignty and dependency, also to demonstrate the West that they are able to stand on their own feet, while struggling to approach and advance relations and cooperation. The attempt to present that they are not under Russian control anymore, such as separating their own language from Russian language, claiming to have divergent culture and history, as well, has damaged Ukraine several times and 2014 crisis is one of the events that had profoundly negative consequences for Ukraine (Kuzio, 2019).

Hereby, the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine resulted from Putin's action in Crimea and the subsequent operations in Ukraine has its historical, political, and nationalist factors. The relations between the two nations have also been profoundly impacted by NATO's expansion strategy as well as Ukraine's efforts to proclaim its sovereignty by developing closer ties with the European Union and the West. From the perspective of realism, the current conflict is quite challenging to be resolved as it is driven by political and strategic interests between Russia and Ukraine.

Figure 10. Expansion policy of NATO.

Source: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-18023383

CHAPTER 3

MODERN RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

3.1. Fundamental Reasons of the Current Conflict

This chapter focuses on examining Russia-West relations concerning Ukraine and presents the necessary historical background to explain the factors that led to the deterioration of the relations between the two parties. This part of the paper will also explore the main objective of Russia in amassing troops near the Ukrainian borders. It is important to acknowledge the fact that before the former Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko was in power, Ukrainian leaders practiced pro-Russian foreign policies as they were willing to reinforce and support the favorable diplomatic relations with Russia. However, after Poroshenko came to power in 2014, he made a shift in the country's foreign policy and sought closer relations with the West to improve and reinforce further relations in various domains (International Crisis Group, 2020). Such unforeseen shift was against the interests of Russia and it was clearly unacceptable as shifting Ukraine's foreign policy towards the West would jeopardize Russia's regional hegemony and control. As the hegemon country in the region, Russia had grown accustomed to be aware of any significant actions taken by other states in the region. Making such a significant shift in Ukraine's foreign policy was perceived as a threat as Russia did not approve the policy change.

As a response, Russia made a major move by annexing Crimea in 2014 to send a clear message to both Ukraine and the West that was trying to expand eastward towards the borders of Russia. Perceiving the friendly relations between Ukraine and the West as a threat to its power, Russia invaded Crimea and this event intensified tensions between the two nations. The annexation of Crime did not only worsen the relations with Ukraine but also impelled Russia to reduce gas deliveries to the West. Since Russia is one of the major gas suppliers to the West, this decision would eventually sour the relations with the West as well. Indeed, both Russia and the West has taken retaliatory measures against each other serving their own

interests. For example, Edgars Rinkevics, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Latvia stated that the West considered cutting off SWIFT, the international payment system for Russia. Russia was confident that sanctions would not harm its economy so hard, as it faced such actions before and is aware of the outcomes. To protect itself from the sanctions of the West, Russia has already developed alternative solutions to every possible risk that might have imposed on the country by the West. However, being cut off from SWIFT would have significant systematic troubles in its ability to conduct international financial transactions (Faulconbridge, 2021).

In order to solve problems and present their demands, the Russian and the U.S. Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lavrov and Blinken, have held a few meetings, and in each of them, the Ukrainian question has been discussed as the central topic. However, despite the long-lasting discussion, both sides have struggled to resolve the issue in satisfying terms or find common ground. Russia has held strict demands from the United States and even requested the withdrawal of NATO troops from Bulgaria and Romania. Nevertheless, this request of Russia was rejected by NATO in one of the final meetings held between the parties (Szucs, 2022).

To support the position of Russia in the ongoing conflict, President Putin relies on two critical arguments. The first argument put forward is that Ukraine was part of Russia back in the period of the Kievan Rus state in the 9th century and Russia's invasion of Ukraine should be justified with this historical "fact". The second argument presented by Russia is that the presence of NATO in the region is perceived as a threat to the regional power and security of Russia as NATO attempts to surround the country by forming alliances with the neighboring states (Szucs, 2022). As discussed above, according to the realist approach, the first argument presented by Russia can be considered as an excuse, whereas the second argument is more likely to be the actual reason why Russia has initiated subsequent military actions against Ukraine.

Concisely, the underlying reason behind the deterioration of the relations between Russia and the West can be explained by the shift in Ukraine's foreign policy towards the West and Russia's response to the eastward expansion strategy of NATO by implementing military actions against Ukraine. Other factors, such as the annexation of Crimea and reducing gas exports to the West by Russia, as well as imposing economic sanctions on Russia have contributed to intensify tension between the two parties. While the representatives of the West and Russia have tried

to meet and find common ground to resolve the conflicting interests, no fruitful results have been achieved as the situation has gained complex nature. Thus, the relations between Russia and the West remains unresolved as each side is not willing to back down from their respective demands, requests, and interests in the region and Ukraine.

3.2. Role of the International Actors

Russia-Ukraine relations have been marked by fluctuations over the past few years, with tensions escalating due to the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine and Russia's annexation of Crimea. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine and Russia have experienced a complex relationship characterized by periods of both cooperation and discord (Szucs, 2022). There are several issues that have contributed to tensions between the two nations, including energy and trade disputes. However, the annexation of Crimea and Russia’s support to the separatist movement in eastern Ukraine have emerged as the major flashpoints in recent times.

Due to the complex nature of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, international actors have engaged in the process to help the sides to find common ground. The role of international actors in this conflict has been significant, with various countries and organizations involved in attempts to resolve the conflict and ease tensions between the two nations. Among the key international organizations playing an important role to meditate the situation and navigate the crises between Russia and Ukraine are the European Union (EU), United Nations (UN), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2022). The mentioned organizations as well as the United States have attempted to de-escalate tensions, enforce ceasefires, and rally support for Ukraine in the wake of Russian aggression. Especially, the EU and the US have shown strong support for Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty. The EU has mediated in the conflict trying to bring both sides to the negotiating table and certain level of success has been achieved. However, by imposing economic sanctions on Russia, the EU has negatively impacted Russia’s economy. As a result, the tension between the EU and Russia has been intensified further.

3.2.1. The EU and Russia Relations

The relations between the European Union and Russia have been profoundly affected as a result of the ongoing the Russia-Ukraine conflict. As a key international organization, the EU has attempted to mediate the conflict. However, by engaging in the process of trying to resolve the conflict, the EU has faced complex challenges and dilemmas. The EU has acted as an influential international actor to navigate the conflict by trying to find a balance between supporting Ukraine to protect its sovereignty and maintaining diplomatic dialogues with Russia Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2022). This part will discuss the dynamics of the EU-Russia relations in regard to the current Russia-Ukraine conflict by analyzing the EU's role as a mediator between the parties.

Prior to the outbreak of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, the relations between the EU and Russia were both cooperative and competitive. While Russia has been an important partner of the EU in several areas, including energy, trade, and regional security; there has been a growing tension between the parties due to Russia's assertive foreign policy and actions in the region. Especially, Russia's aggressive actions in Georgia in 2008 has intensified tensions between the parties (International Crisis Group, 2020).

In 2009, the EU launched the Eastern Partnership (EaP) to tighten the ties with Eastern European countries, including Ukraine. Although the purpose of this partnership was to strengthen and reinforce political and economic ties between the involved countries, Russia perceived this initiation of the EU as a threat to its traditional sphere of influence in the region. Since Ukraine is the most important country for Russia due to geopolitical, historical, and economic reasons, Ukraine's developing closer ties with the EU resulted in triggering strong opposition by Russia. The growing support of the EU over the Eastern European countries, especially with Ukraine, strained the EU-Russia relations for many years (Kramer, 2022). The recent Russia-Ukraine intensified the tension between the EU and Russia. Although the EU condemned Russia for invading Ukraine and imposed serious economic sanctions on the country, it has also tried to achieve peaceful dialogue with Russia to resolve the conflict.

As an international actor, the EU has played a complex and multifaceted role in the current Russia-Ukraine conflict. It is important to note that the EU holds a significant economic power and influence in the international community. Therefore,

it can be an influential actor in helping Russia and Ukraine negotiate peacefully and resolve the conflict with minimum damage. However, the EU has also lost its ability to act decisively with Russia as it is divided on how to deal with it.

Figure 11. Putin-Macron meeting.
Source: https://icds.ee/en/illusions-about-eu-russia-relations-macrons-new-opening-is-destined-to-fail/

Before the escalation of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, French President Emmanuel Macron played a significant role trying to moderate the tension between the EU and Russia through engaging in diplomatic efforts. Macron was in favor of initiating and maintaining dialogue with Russia whereas also acknowledging the need to address the tension and disagreement between the sides. The strategy of Macron was to maintain diplomatic dialogues and preventing the EU-Russia relations from deteriorating further (The Times India, 2022).

Macron encouraged the EU to end Russia's isolation by reopening the diplomatic channels in 2019 (The Conversation, 2022). He pointed at the fact that imposing sanction on Russia and isolating it had not been proved to be effective. Therefore, it is necessary to consider forming a strategic dialogue with Russia to work on regional conflict and security issues to find common ground. However, the EU member states welcomed the intention of Macron with skepticism. Especially, the Eastern European countries being neighbors with Russia did not feel safe with

Macron's proposition. Regardless, Macron continued to try to moderate the tension between Russia and Ukraine and on this purpose, he met with Russian President Putin several times to agree on a diplomatic solution. Nevertheless, his efforts failed, and Ukraine was invaded by Russia on February 24, 2022 (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2022).

As a mediator, the EU has played an important role in trying to achieve a peaceful resolution and de-escalate hostilities initiated by Russia over the Ukraine's territory by using several channels. The first channel used by the EU was diplomatic engagement with Russia by attending high level dialogues and summits. For example, the Normandy Format is a diplomatic platform involving Ukraine, Russia, France, and Germany and this platform has been used for engaging in diplomatic dialogues with Russia to find common ground to resolve the conflict with Ukraine (The Time India, 2022). The second attempt initiated by the EU was imposing economic and financial sanctions on Russia in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The imposed sanctions targeted various sectors, including finance, banking, energy, technology, trade sanctions, and trade bans. These attempts have significantly pressured Russia to show the support of the EU to Ukraine (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2022). Moreover, Ukraine has received military and financial support from the EU. Nevertheless, it has been argued that the pressure imposed on Russia through sanctions have not been tough enough, therefore, have been ineffective.

Despite its desire to help Ukraine against the invasion of Russia, the EU is an international actor and has to maintain diplomatic dialogues with Russia. Therefore, as a mediator in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, the EU will face complex and challenging dilemmas while trying to maintain the balance in its engagement with the two nations. It is also an important matter to maintain the balanced dialogue with the EU member states regarding how to interact and position with Russia.

Transatlantic relations between the US and the EU have a long history, serving as a cornerstone of the global political landscape and shaping international dynamics. Over the years, these relations have influenced several regional conflicts and tensions, including the ongoing crisis between Russia and Ukraine. Through the imposition of sanctions, transatlantic relations have significantly impacted Russia's economy. Following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, the US and the EU imposed several economic sanctions on Russia. These measures restricted access to

Western markets while also deterring foreign investment in Russia. Consequently, the Russian economy experienced a sharp decline, with its GDP falling by 3.7% in 2015 (Schwirtz, 2016). This economic downturn, directly linked to Transatlantic sanctions, has strained Russia's position in Ukraine as it limits its resources and financial capabilities to influence events. On the other hand, Ukraine has benefited from enhanced economic cooperation with the West, bolstering its relationship with Transatlantic partners. The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement signed in 2014 aimed to deepen political ties and support Ukraine's economic integration with Europe (European Union External Action, 2021). This agreement resulted in the removal of tariff barriers, increased trade, and access to EU markets for Ukrainian products. Moreover, Ukraine has received significant financial support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other Western institutions to stabilize its economy and implement necessary reforms (Ryabchenko et al., 2020).

These relations have played a crucial role in deterring Russian aggression against Ukraine by providing military support and security cooperation. The United States has been a key contributor to Ukraine's defense capabilities, providing significant military aid in the form of weapons, training, and financial assistance (Ellyatt, 2021). Through its military cooperation with the United States and other NATO countries, Ukraine has been able to increase its defensive capabilities and enhance its military readiness to counter Russian threats. The strengthening of NATO's presence in Eastern Europe as a response to Russian aggression has influenced Russia-Ukraine relations. NATO's deployment of troops, rotational exercises, and enhanced defense capabilities in Eastern Europe have been perceived by Russia as a direct threat and a clear signal of Western solidarity with Ukraine. These measures have heightened tensions in the region, leading Russia to increase its military presence along its border with Ukraine, elevating the risk of further escalation (Sudakov, 2021).

Transatlantic relations have also affected Russia-Ukraine relations through diplomatic and political pressure. The United States and European Union have consistently condemned Russia's annexation of Crimea and its destabilizing activities in Eastern Ukraine. This unified stance has fostered international isolation and weakened Russia's position on the global stage. Moreover, the combined efforts of Transatlantic partners have supported Ukraine's diplomacy by backing its sovereignty and territorial integrity, intensifying diplomatic pressure on Russia to

find a peaceful resolution (Solovyov, 2018). Additionally, the European Union's expansionary policies in Eastern Europe have influenced Russia-Ukraine relations. The EU's Eastern Partnership initiative, aimed at fostering closer political and economic ties with post-Soviet countries including Ukraine, has been perceived by Russia as an encroachment on its sphere of influence. These efforts have been met with resistance from Russia, resulting in a deterioration of relations with neighboring countries, including Ukraine (Kosterina, 2015).

Below are some of the main challenges that the EU is currently facing as an international actor engaging in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. First of all, there is a division among the member states regarding how to deal with Russia. While Poland and the Baltic states prefer to hold a tough position against Russia, France and Germany favor having a mediatory approach in the conflict. Due to the division of interests among the member states, the EU has not been able to act decisively regarding the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Secondly, although several sanctions have been imposed by the EU on Russia in various sectors, it is critically important to balance the risks. If the imposed sanctions are not balanced, it could escalate the conflict further by triggering the aggression of Russia. President Putin has already made it clear that the West should feel threatened for the sanctions that have been applied on Russia. This poses a risk that Russia could retaliate against the sanctions and cause the conflict spread in the region to other countries as well creating a regional security problem. Thirdly, engaging in the Russia-Ukraine conflict has economic consequences for the EU due to the imposed sanctions. As a result of pressuring Russia in various aspects, the price of energy has increased and the impact has been noticed over the economic growth and the jobs market (Raffensperger, 2022). In the light of these challenges, as an international organization, the EU has to balance its economic interests with its security interests. Moreover, it is critically important to support Ukraine in a way that does not challenge the diplomatic dialogues with Russia as there also has to be a balance. Maintaining balance in both matters is significantly important for the future as the outcome of the conflict will have a defining impact on the wider European security order and the future relations with Russia.

There is no doubt that the conflict between Russia and Ukraine has deteriorated the EU-Russia relations by breaking trust and cooperation between the two parties. The EU has demonstrated an assertive approach towards Russia in response to the

invasion of Ukraine through imposing numerous sanctions and applying diplomatic pressure (Raffensperger, 2022). Due to this, Russia has blamed the EU for supporting a pro-Western government in Ukraine and taking an unfavorable position against Russia in the conflict.

Figure 12. Putin, Van Rompuy, and Barroso during EU-Russia Summit.

Source: http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20113

Even years before the outbreak of the current Russia-Ukraine conflict, the EU-Russia relations experienced a turning point when Russia annexed Crimea in 2014 (Szucs, 2022). The annexation of Crimea was not approved by the EU which imposed sanctions on Russia leading to harming the relations between the two parties. The recent invasion attacks over Ukraine intensified tensions and led the communication and cooperation between the EU and Russia to break down further.

Besides harming the diplomatic ties, the current conflict has also profoundly impacted the energy relations with Russia. Russia is one of the major exporters of natural gas to the EU countries and the outbreak of the conflict raised concerns about the security of Russian energy supplies to Europe. In attempts to diversify its energy sources and reduce heavy dependence on Russian natural gas, the EU had to invest more capital in developing renewable energy infrastructure and finding alternative gas suppliers around the world (Szucs, 2022). As a result, the price of energy has risen following the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict

3.2.2. The UN and the Russia-Ukraine conflict

Moreover, the UN is another major international organization that has engaged in efforts to achieve peace between Russia and Ukraine through passing resolutions against Russian aggression and deploying peacekeeping missions in Ukraine (Szucs, 2022). Moreover, the UN has initiated significant support to Ukraine by providing humanitarian assistance and helping the country to evacuate civilians from conflict zones.

The UN has face global criticism for not doing enough to prevent the conflict and find common ground between the two nations to achieve a ceasefire. Nevertheless, it is important to note that despite being an international organization, the ability of the UN is limited to take decisive action as it is only a political body. Russia is a member state in the UN Security Council and therefore, all resolutions presented by the Security Council have been vetoed by Russia. As a result, the UN has lost its ability to impose any sanctions over Russia while only providing humanitarian support to Ukraine (Kramer, 2022).

Nevertheless, the role of the UN as an international actor in the Russia-Ukraine conflict have been and will continue to be important. After Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, the UN General Assembly issued a non-binding resolution declaring the referendum leading to Russian annexation invalid and calling on countries and international organizations not to recognize Crimea as part of Russia (Kramer, 2022). The UN has also deployed peacekeeping missions to Ukraine, including the United Nations Observer Mission in Ukraine, similar to (the one in Georgia (UNOMIG) and the United Nations Mission in Ukraine, like in Kosovo (UNMIK), to monitor the situation on the ground (van Ham, 1994). While the resolution demonstrated widespread international opposition to Russian actions, it did little to change the situation on the ground and these efforts have largely been unsuccessful, with both Russia and Ukraine continuing to pursue their own interests.

3.2.3. NATO and the Russia-Ukraine Conflict

The role of NATO, a military alliance between North American and European countries, in the current Russia-Ukraine conflict has been more controversial. As

discussed above, Russia had a realist approach about NATO's enlargement towards eastward by perceiving it as a threat to its regional security and power of influence over other states in the region. According to Mearsheimer, within the theoretical framework of offensive realism, each state is focused on increasing their power and influence to make sure that they can survive in an international system where there is no central power, and the system is anarchic. Despite the denial of NATA, Russia believes that NATO tries to expand towards Eastern Europe to build alliances with Russia's neighboring countries to surround Russia, to weaken its regional influence, and destroy its hegemonic power position in the South Caucasus (Magen & Stein, 2022). Therefore, the tensions between NATO and Russia have been heightened and Russia has invaded Ukraine to claim its power and control in the region.

Despite the claims of Russia, NATO leaders have never accepted the accusation that its expansion strategy is directed against Russia. NATO has invited Russia to engage in dialogue and cooperation regarding this matter. However, analyzing the situation from the perspective of a realist, Russia may perceive the reassurance and promises of NATO leaders as only diplomatic attempts to hide the real intention (NATO, 2022). According to Mearsheimer, an anarchic system makes states feel insecure and regardless of the assurances made by other actors, states will focus on maximizing their power to maintain their security in this non-centralized international system.

When Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, NATO as an international actor reacted to the actions of Russia. Crimea has historically belonged to Ukraine and the annexation of the territory by Russia faced condemnation by international actors, including NATO, which strongly opposed the offensive actions towards Ukraine. NATO's response to the annexation of Crimea can be analyzed from the realist perspective. According to realism, NATO may strongly oppose Russia for its actions towards Crimea simply because it is an international organization responsible for being a security guarantor for its member states and opposing Russia in this event was necessary to preserve its credibility in the international arena (Magen & Stein, 2022). Since Ukraine is not a member state of NATO, there cannot be a direct military intervention. However, if NATO failed at opposing Russia for annexing Crimea, the international actors could perceive it as a sign of weakness and Russia could be encouraged to expand its aggressive actions in the region.

After the annexation of Crimea, NATO reassured its member states in the Eastern Europe that necessary measures had been taken to protect them against any aggressive actions of Russia. On this purpose, NATO deployed multinational battalions in the Baltic States and Poland borders (Institute for the Study of War, 2022). Moreover, their military exercise and training were increased to prepare them for any possible attack from Russia. This strategy implemented by NATO can be realistically analyzed as an attempt to protect the member states and collective security from the perceived threat of Russia's aggressive actions.

When NATO reinforced security measures in the Eastern Europe to protect member states against Russia, this enlargement strategy was perceived as a direct threat to the security of Russia. In the past, Russia had agreements with NATO that there cannot be any significant military assets near the borders of Russia and such response from NATO following the annexation of Crimea violated the previous agreements. From that perspective, it can be argued that Russia had a realistic approach by attempting to prevent further eastward enlargement of NATO through invading Ukraine (Institute for the Study of War, 2022). Based on Mearsheimer's offensive realism theory, Russia did what was right as states will always look for ways to maximize their power and security against the anarchic nature of the international system.

Indeed, the relations between NATO and Russia experienced intensified tensions as a result of NATO's attempt to reinforce security measurements in its eastern flank and how Russia responded to its enlargement strategy. When Russia noticed that NATO deployed multinational battalions in the Baltic States and Poland, increased military exercises and trainings, it was perceived as a direct threat and the risk of accidental confrontations between the two parties heightened (Institute for the Study of War, 2022). It is possible to explain this complex situation from a realist perspective. While both NATO and Russia were focused on maximizing their power to maintain their security and influence, the attempts of each side can be perceived as a direct threat on their security leading to heightened tensions between the two sides.

From the perspective of Mearsheimer, NATO's role in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict can be explained within the pattern of a great power competition. Mearsheimer states that every state will seek to maintain their security and maximize their power to make sure that they can survive in the anarchic system (Magen & Stein, 2022). Therefore, although security measurements of NATO in its eastern

flank may threaten Russia, the purpose of NATO could actually be merely to maintain its international credibility as a security guarantor to member states and to achieve collective defense against the predictable Russian aggression in the region (Magen & Stein, 2022).

The fact that Ukraine is not a NATO member state, NATO's intervention in the conflict and attempting to protect the Eastern European countries has played a critical role in the current Russia-Ukraine conflict. NATO's expansion into former Soviet and Soviet-aligned countries is perceived by Russia as threatening to its regional power and the sphere of influence. NATO condemned the annexation of Crimea and voiced support for Ukraine, but no direct military intervention occurred given that Ukraine is not an alliance member. However, NATO has built up its military presence in Eastern Europe to deter Russian aggression more broadly. In general, the actions taken by both NATO and Russia following the annexation of Crimea has significantly affected the dynamics of the current conflict and Russia's approach towards NATO and the West. Russia perceived it as a serious security threat when NATO deployed military power in the borders of countries that have historical ties to Russia (Institute for the Study of War, 2022). From the perspective of a realist, Russia may have seen the expansion of NATO as a strategic move to build alliance to surround Russia in the region and undermine its security. Russia may fear losing its control over the neighboring countries and in the region. Therefore, responding by taking aggressive actions may be the immediate and only option of Russia.

3.2.4. The Role of Other Third Parties in the Russia-Ukraine Conflict

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, where both Ukraine and Russia are member states, established a Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine to help implement ceasefire agreements between Ukraine and Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine (Institute for the Study of War, 2022). However, continued violations of the ceasefire agreement have limited the OSCE mission's effectiveness.

In addition to international organizations, individual countries have also played a significant role in mediating the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The former Soviet countries, such as Poland and the Baltic states, have been strong

advocates for Ukraine and have implemented sanctions to impose diplomatic and economic pressure on Russia following the annexation of Crimea and supporting separatist movements in the Donbass region (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2022). The sanctions regimes put in place by the European Union and United States remain in effect to this day, though some European countries are open to rebuilding economic ties with Russia if progress is made on implementing peace agreements.

Germany and France have taken on a crucial role in negotiations between Russia and Ukraine, known as the Normandy Format, aimed at resolving the conflict. The Minsk agreements, which were the result of these negotiations in 2015, called for a ceasefire, withdrawal of heavy weapons, and restoration of Ukraine's control over its border with Russia (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2022). However, despite these agreements, the conflict in Eastern Ukraine continues and the Minsk agreements have not been fully implemented until today.

China has also been involved in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. China has not taken sides in the conflict, but it has expressed support for a peaceful resolution to the conflict through diplomatic channels. China has also increased its economic ties with Russia and Ukraine, with plans to build a high-speed railway linking Moscow and Beijing. This strategy implemented by China shows the country’s interest in maintaining stability and maximizing economic opportunities between China and Russia (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2022).

The United States is another important international actor that supported Ukraine in this conflict by providing military aid to the Ukrainian government, including weapons and military training. The US has also imposed economic sanctions, including travel bans and asset freezes against Russian officials and businesses on Russia to deter further aggression towards Ukraine. Moreover, the US has been a key player in initiating negotiations between Russia and Ukraine aimed at resolving the conflict and achieving a ceasefire. However, recent changes in the US leadership and policy seems to impact the country's involvement in the conflict going forward.

Finally, neighboring countries such as Poland, Belarus, and Kazakhstan have all been involved in attempts to resolve the conflict. While Belarus and Kazakhstan have taken neutral stances, Poland has been a vocal supporter of Ukraine and has been involved in efforts to broker peace deals and provide humanitarian aid. While

these efforts have not yet led to a resolution of the conflict, the involvement of these international actors highlights the importance of a coordinated, multilateral approach to resolving complex international conflicts.

Various international mediators have worked to negotiate the Minsk I and II ceasefire and peace agreements in 2014 and 2015. While these agreements helped to reduce hostilities towards Ukraine, the full implementation has so far been elusive, leading to sporadic violence in the region (Institute for the Study of War, 2022). The role of international actors in mitigating and resolving the conflict between Ukraine and Russia remains complex and uneven in its effectiveness. Overall, a mix of diplomacy, sanctions, monitoring, and peacekeeping efforts have had marginal effects but failed to overcome the deep-rooted tensions that continue to roil Russia-Ukraine relations.

Thus, the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict has gained international attention and a number of international actors have actively involved in helping the two nations to resolve the conflict and find common ground to maintain peace. Although efforts of some international actors have delivered successful results, the conflict is still not resolved and the complexities continues to persists as both Ukraine and Russia do not want to compromise on their security interests. It is important that international diplomatic efforts and constructive engagement from all parties are maintained in order to find a comprehensive resolution to end the ongoing crisis. Overall, as it is evident from the above discussion, the West and international actors strongly oppose Russia's aggression towards Ukraine and Ukraine has successfully received military, financial, and humanitarian aid from the West since the outbreak of the current conflict.

3.3. The West: Lack of Consensus between the USA and the EU

Russia-Ukraine relations have remained tense since the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and it was a major turning point in this relationship, leading to economic sanctions being imposed on Russia by both the USA and the EU. The conflict has taken a toll on the region, with over 10,000 people losing their lives in the ongoing war in eastern Ukraine (Institute for the Study of War, 2022). The international community has called for an end to the violence, but the situation remains tense. The conflict has also strained relations between Russia and the West, with both sides

accusing each other of fueling the conflict. It has been a contentious issue for years, with tensions rising in recent times due to the lack of consensus between the USA and the EU.

Western nations, particularly the United States and the European Union, have taken different approaches towards Russia regarding the invasion of Ukraine. While the USA has taken a more aggressive stance towards Russia, imposing harsher sanctions and providing military aid to Ukraine, the EU has been more cautious in its approach. This condition has resulted in confusion and uncertainty regarding how best to deal with this ongoing conflict. While both the US and the EU share the same goal of ensuring peace and stability in Eastern Europe, there has been a lack of consensus between these two key players in terms of their respective approaches to dealing with the situation. One of the major reasons for the lack of consensus between the US and the EU regarding to resolve the Russia-Ukraine conflict is their differing geopolitical interests. For the US, the conflict provides an opportunity to challenge Russia's expanded influence in Eastern Europe and strengthen its own foothold in the region. On the other hand, the EU's interests lie in promoting peaceful and cooperative relations with its Eastern neighbor, Russia. Thus, while the US has been more aggressive in its support for Ukraine, the EU has been more inclined towards diplomatic efforts to resolve the situation.

Besides the different geopolitical interests, another factor contributing to the lack of consensus between the US and the EU against Russia is their differing economic interests. Another factor contributing to the lack of consensus is the differing economic interests of the US and the EU. While the US has been supportive of imposing economic sanctions on Russia, the EU has been more hesitant to follow suit. This is because the EU has significant economic ties with Russia, particularly in terms of energy trade. Sanctions could harm the economic interests of EU member states, and hence some member countries have argued for a more cautious and balanced approach towards Russia.

The lack of consensus between the US and the EU has also resulted in inefficiencies and weaknesses in their joint efforts to resolve the conflict. The EU's diplomatic initiatives have not always been taken seriously by Russia, who is more likely to respond to the more aggressive stance of the US. This has made it difficult for the EU to have any significant influence in the negotiations and given Russia more bargaining power (Le Gloannec, 2015). Furthermore, the EU's lack of a unified

stance has resulted in mixed messages being sent to Russia. This has further weakened the EU's position in the negotiations.

The United States and the European Union have imposed multiple sanctions on Russia in response to its actions in Ukraine. These sanctions have targeted Russian individuals, banks, and businesses, contributing to the country's economic downturn. However, these actions have not deterred Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, from continuing to support separatists in eastern Ukraine. He has also denied any involvement in the conflict, accusing the West of interfering in Russia's internal affairs (Institute for the Study of War, 2022).

The lack of consensus between the US and the EU regarding the Russia-Ukraine conflict stems from differing geopolitical and economic interests, resulting in inefficiencies and weaknesses in their joint efforts. This has implications for the global community, as the lack of coordination and consensus undermines the effectiveness of diplomatic efforts to resolve conflicts. It also highlights the need for both sides to find common ground in their approach to tackling global issues. Failure to find a resolution to the conflict increases the risk of further destabilization of the region.

The ongoing sanctions imposed on Russia have not deterred the country from its actions in eastern Ukraine. The lack of a unified stance shows the division between the US and the EU towards Russian relations, with some European countries calling for dialogue while others take a more aggressive approach. Finding a satisfying resolution to address the conflict and to maintain stability in the region still remains as a pressing challenge for the international community.

3.4. International Organizations: The Role of the UN and the NATO

According to NATO, their “open door policy” allows every European state to join the organization, while implementing obligations as member states (Institute for the Study of War, 2022). In this occasion, their performance is likely to be seen as success, due to the fact that membership has expanded from 12 to 31, since 1949. Currently, four states are candidates to join NATO, which are Sweden, Georgia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Ukraine. For Ukraine, joining NATO means increased partnership with European countries and decreasing dependency on Russia. Therefore, Ukraine’s attempts to join the EU and NATO was one of the main

contributing causes leading to the current Russia-Ukraine conflict. NATO maintains that its enlargement merely seeks peace, stability, and cooperation among member states, and non-member states should not oppose countries' decision to the join the alliance ("Enlargement and Article 10", 2023). However, Russia is threatened by Ukraine's willingness to become a NATO member and openly opposes this decision of Ukraine.

At the end of 1996, expansionism policy of NATO was already evident in the global field and according to this, Ukraine began to take diplomatic measures to ensure that the enlargement did not negatively influence its geostrategic position. These actions had the desired effects, and not just in the form of the NATO-Ukraine Charter: under the Western pressure, Moscow accepted to sign the treaty with Kiev, and the three earlier agreements that governed the final division of the former USSR's Black Sea Fleet and laid out the guidelines for the operation of the Russian naval base in Sevastopol (Institute for the Study of War, 2022). This agreement was considered to be a fair agreement for both parties. However, it also ended the fundamental structures in Ukrainian-Russian interstate relations.

Figure 13. Stoltenberg and Zelensky meeting.

Source: https://www.politico.eu/article/nato-jens-stoltenberg-visit-kyiv-ukraine-war-russia/

Those peace treaties were believed to be held by the participation of NATO member states. During his visit to Ukraine, Russian President Yeltsin signed the agreements with his colleague in Sevastopol in 1997. These agreements guaranteed that Russia had the right to maintain a navy station there for quite a long time while reaffirming Ukraine's unwavering sovereignty over the city and the harbor. It is argued that this was a fair bargain for both parties considering profits and costs, and from this agreement both could have acquired more, nevertheless, it was satisfactory for both Russia and Ukraine. This treaty played a major role in their relations, since the fundamental structures in Ukrainian-Russian interstate relations came to an end. In the end, Russia abandoned its plan to cut off Crimea or Sevastopol from Ukraine, but in exchange, it received the Crimean military station which was the main interest of Russia. This also meant Russia successfully discouraged Ukraine to join NATO and meanwhile, its existence in the Black Sea coast (Carpenter, 2022).

Likewise, NATO had a key role in terms of Russian-West relations and its expansion policy was going to be vital to shape the future of the region and global affairs. During the reunification of Germany and the integration to NATO, the US guaranteed that no enlargement would occur towards east. Losing the identity of "superpower" and facing economic challenges were seen as an opportunity for NATO to initiate its plans and discharge Russia as a rival ("Enlargement and Article 10", 2023). After September, 11 events, the US decided to see the loyal partners to act together with them against terror and according to Article 5, "Allies can provide any form of assistance they deem necessary to respond to a situation". In this circumstance, Russia was not willing to worsen relations with the US and considered priority to show support. From Russian perspective, it was coherent: making the relations worse would not help Russia, on the contrary, its image and prestige would go down seriously, while the whole world was on the side of the US. In that case, not being on the same with the US meant being against it which would influence its political and economic condition negatively, considering the fact that most partners are European states that also supported the US, especially through NATO. The political and diplomatic connections got complex, especially after Ukraine and Georgia declared they would like to join NATO. Preventing them to approach the West was not something Russia would ignore and as a result of this strategy, occupation of South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Crimea was inevitable.

Despite the fact that this policy of NATO has led to significant political issues, particularly in terms of Russia, it does not seem to stop, and expansion will continue widening into the Balkans: after Macedonia and Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia are also likely to be member states (Institute for the Study of War, 2022). On the other hand, Georgia and Ukraine were inhibited by Russia, as they are located in the same region and joining NATO was a risk to impose future plans and stay in control of the South Caucasus. According to the leading scholars, these two states could still join the Alliance in three conditions: initially, it is obvious that 31 independent member countries tend to share different ideas, arguments, and national interests, nonetheless, this diversity in multiple topics have not turned into severe disputes among the allies. As long as the members see NATO as an instrument that promotes collective security, they have a tendency to stay together. The second reason is about resistance by Russia. Georgia and Ukraine cannot predict how far Russia could go to inhibit them joining NATO and the best way to avoid such actions is to move with NATO (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2022). The final factor is related to how prepared those states actually are. It is fair to say that they are not fully capable to meet membership requirements. Domestic situations in both countries are unstable and territorial integrity issue in Georgia and lack of domestic support for NATO in Ukraine are the key obstacles. Yet both states are likely to turn things into positive: referendum that would occur in Ukraine about possibility of joining NATO could end up with positive decision and in Georgia, the lost territories seem to return only with the assistance of NATO.

It is believed that Russia-Ukraine relations intensified even more as a consequence of enlargement of NATO. Especially, after Ukraine declared independence, policy change occurred, and they started developing relations with Europe. This is the beginning of modern Russia-Ukraine dispute; however, it was not likely for this conflict to turn into the war. Thus, the key player that triggered this action was considered to be NATO on account of its expansion through Russia. As soon as Russia was aware of the direct threat by NATO, it started serious actions against Ukraine to give a message to both Ukraine and the West. Annexation of Crimea was the beginning of Russia's strict policies and in 2020, military operations against Ukraine served for the purpose of how serious Russia was, when they argued NATO to stop the enlargement, and Ukraine to stop getting closer with the West. According to neorealism, this was understandable, since it would cause Russia to

lose hegemony, influence, and prestige in the international arena. Therefore, if NATO did not insist on going further, Russia was not planning to deteriorate relations with Ukraine and bring it to the war. Neorealists state that perspective of NATO is also coherent: they see Russia as a major threat and throughout the years, they implemented this policy to weaken it that has led to security dilemma. All in all, both sides have the rightful arguments on this issue, despite the fact that Ukraine is not any of the sides, as Russia and NATO would not go to the war directly, Ukraine was harmed most in this process.

Along with NATO, the United Nations has been an important international organization in which both Ukraine and Russia have sought to pursue their interests and resolve disputes. In recent years, the UN has played a key role in mediating the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which has taken the form of armed conflict in the eastern regions of Ukraine since 2014. As tensions between the two nations increased, the UN began to take an active role in the situation. Through various UN resolutions and statements, the organization condemned the annexation of Crimea and called for a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

In February 2015, a humanitarian ceasefire was negotiated by Germany, France, Ukraine and Russia, with the support of the UN that played a role in monitoring violations of the ceasefire and supporting the implementation of the Minsk agreements. This initiative provided respite to the affected civilians and enabled the delivery of much-needed aid. Normandy format and Minsk agreements were notably important in facilitating communication between the two states, laying the foundation for further negotiations and peaceful negotiations. The UN has also facilitated several rounds of peace talks among the warring parties, albeit to limited success. Such peace talks focus on limiting the impact of hostilities in the conflict zone, and addressing wider issues such as the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia. In addition, the UN has supported Ukraine through the deployment of peacekeeping forces in the conflict zone. These forces have helped to maintain security and act as a buffer between the opposing sides, which have at times been involved in violent clashes (Institute for the Study of War, 2022).

Russia and Ukraine have a complex and strained relationship that has been marred by conflict and discord over the years. The United Nations (UN) has played a pivotal role in mediating and addressing the issues between these two nations, with the aim of promoting peace, stability, and international cooperation. This essay will

discuss the role and importance of the UN in Russia-Ukraine relations, highlighting key initiatives, interventions, and outcomes. It will also analyze the challenges faced by the UN in this context and provide recommendations for its future engagements. The role of the UN in Russia-Ukraine relations cannot be downplayed, as it has been instrumental in shaping and influencing the dynamics between these two nations, despite the complexities and difficulties involved.

One of the primary roles of the UN in Russia-Ukraine relations has been peacekeeping and conflict resolution efforts. The UN has facilitated negotiations, brokered ceasefires, and deployed peacekeeping forces to monitor and maintain stability in the conflict zones. One notable initiative was the deployment of the UN peacekeeping mission to Ukraine in 2014, known as the United Nations Assistance Mission for Ukraine (UNAMU). This mission aimed to help implement the Minsk agreements and promote a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The UN's presence on the ground has been crucial in preventing further escalation of the conflict and providing a platform for dialogue between the conflicting parties.

The UN has also played a significant role in upholding human rights and providing humanitarian assistance in the context of Russia-Ukraine relations. The UN has condemned human rights violations, advocated for the protection of civilians, and provided aid and support to those affected by the conflict. One of the key mechanisms used by the UN in this regard is the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), which has been monitoring the human rights situation in Ukraine. The UN has also coordinated humanitarian assistance efforts, providing food, medicine, and shelter to displaced persons and vulnerable populations.

The UN has been actively involved in diplomatic mediation and political dialogue between Russia and Ukraine, working towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict. The UN Security Council, as an important forum for international dialogue and decision-making, has been instrumental in addressing the crisis in Ukraine. Resolutions have been adopted, calling for a peaceful settlement, respecting Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and urging all parties to uphold international law. The UN has also facilitated various high-level meetings, summits, and conferences, which have provided opportunities for dialogue and negotiation between Russian and Ukrainian representatives. These diplomatic efforts have aimed to build trust, foster understanding, and promote peaceful coexistence.

The involvement of the UN in Russia-Ukraine relations brings international legitimacy and credibility to the peace process. The UN is a globally recognized and respected organization that enjoys the trust and support of the international community. Its active engagement in the conflict demonstrates a collective effort to resolve the crisis and ensures that the perspectives and interests of both Russia and Ukraine are taken into account. The involvement of the UN also provides a neutral and impartial platform for negotiations and dialogue, enhancing the chances of reaching a mutually acceptable agreement.

The role of the UN in Ukraine has not been without controversy, however. There have been criticisms that the UN has not done enough to deter Russian aggression, particularly in relation to the annexation of Crimea. Some have argued that UN Security Council resolutions on Ukraine have been insufficient in addressing Russia's actions, due to lack of agreement among the parties. By contrast, others argue that the UN has been too biased in its support for Ukraine and has failed to engage more constructively with Russia.

Finally, the issue of sanctions has played a prominent role in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, with both sides levying economic penalties against the other. The UN has played a key role in this area, through the imposition of sanctions on Russia following its annexation of Crimea. These sanctions remain in place and are likely to continue as long as the conflict persists. The UN has also played a critical role in delivering humanitarian aid to the people affected by the conflict. The organization has supported numerous humanitarian organizations and provided funding for relief operations. The UN has facilitated access to essential supplies such as food, water, and medicine to people in Eastern Ukraine affected by the conflict.

Additionally, the UN has deployed peacekeeping missions to the region to monitor and maintain the ceasefire agreements. UN monitors have played a critical role in ensuring that all parties comply with international laws, protect human rights, and avoid the escalation of violence (Institute for the Study of War, 2022). With the help of international observers, the UN has continuously reported on the situation in the area, providing analysis and recommendations to the international community.

In conclusion, the UN plays a crucial role in mediating the Russia-Ukraine conflict, providing a platform for dialogue, delivering humanitarian aid, monitoring ceasefire agreements, and ensuring the protection of human rights. The UN continues to serve as an important forum for discussion and negotiation between the parties.

Ongoing efforts to bring lasting peace to the conflict will likely require continued UN involvement, as well as cooperation from all parties involved. Achieving a sustainable resolution to the conflict will be a long and challenging process for all involved, but it is only through the dedication and commitment of key international bodies such as the UN that progress can be made.

CHAPTER 4

THE WAR FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF UKRAINE AND IMPACT OF THE CURRENT RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

Figure 14. Who controls what in Ukraine?
Source: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/21/how-will-the-war-in-ukraine-end

From the Ukrainian perspective, the war is a struggle for independence and sovereignty. Ukraine views Russia's annexation of Crimea as a violation of international law, and their support of separatist movements within Ukraine as a clear effort to undermine Ukraine's independence. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky describes the situation as a "war for our territorial integrity and

independence". Ukraine views the conflict as an existential threat to their nation, and the Ukrainian government has maintained a staunchly pro-European and anti-Russian stance. The Ukrainian government has sought to integrate into Western institutions, such as NATO and the EU, as a means of safeguarding its independence and sovereignty. Ukraine's pro-European stance is driven by both historical ties to Europe and a desire to move away from Russian-dominated politics and economics. Ukrainian government officials have repeatedly stated that the conflict is not just a matter of Ukraine but Europe as a whole. According to Anastasiya Krasnosilska, a political analyst at the Ukrainian Institute for the Future, "Ukraine is fighting for European values, not just territorial integrity," highlighting the country's commitment to democratic principles, human rights, and the rule of law. Russia's actions in Ukraine have threatened Ukraine's relationships with European nations, leading many European countries to support Ukraine's efforts to integrate into the EU and NATO. The EU has imposed sanctions on Russia for its actions in Ukraine and has provided significant financial assistance to Ukraine. The United States has also provided military aid to Ukraine to defend itself against Russian aggression. Ukrainians are also keenly aware of the implications of this conflict for their country's long-term economic future. The country's economy has been challenged by the war and a lack of investment, as many businesses are hesitant to invest in a country with unresolved security issues. Therefore, the Ukrainian government sees becoming a part of the European Union as a stabilizing force for the country, with greater access to European markets and investment capital.

The Ukrainian stance in the Russia-Ukraine War is primarily pro-European, with the vast majority of Ukrainians supporting closer ties with Europe. The war has solidified the Ukrainian population's desire to be part of Europe, both economically and politically. The country has made substantial progress in this regard, signing an association agreement with the EU in 2014 and receiving visa-free travel to EU countries in 2017. This progress has been despite the ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine, giving Ukrainian citizens faith that closer ties with Europe are attainable, even while Russia continues to oppose this move. While Ukrainians hold varied opinions on whether the country should join the EU or NATO, the majority of Ukrainians recognize the benefits of close ties with Europe. A poll conducted by the Razumkov Centre in December 2020 revealed that 3/4ths of Ukrainians support EU membership, while 60% support joining NATO. Younger people are more inclined

to support joining Western institutions, with the support rate increasing decidedly with younger generations. Ukraine's support for closer relations with Europe is also evident at the most significant pivotal political events. During the most recent Ukrainian presidential election, both front runners, Petro Poroshenko and Volodymyr Zelensky, centered on improving Ukraine's relations with the EU, strongly focusing on their position that integration with the West would strengthen Ukraine's economy, security, and pro-democracy initiatives. However, some smaller segments of Ukrainian society remain firmly in support of closer ties with Russia, driven in part by cultural and linguistic ties. Regions aligned with the former Yanukovych government in Eastern Ukraine remain staunchly pro-Russian. For instance, people in the enclaves of the Donetsk People's Republic continue to see Russia as an ally, viewing the Ukrainian government as representing Western interests.

The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine has resulted in devastating results for both countries. Besides causing instability and insecurity in the region, the conflict has caused economic problems and a humanitarian crisis that has attracted the attention of the international actors. While millions of Ukrainian people have been displaced from their national lands, the conflict has caused both countries to suffer from economic sanctions and the loss of trade (Magen & Stein, 2022).

Without a doubt, one of the most critical consequences of the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine is the humanitarian crisis that has caused millions of people to be displaced. According to the report shared by the United Nations, since the beginning of the conflict, over 8 million Ukrainians have left their countries whereas more than 6 million Ukrainians have been internally displaced. While international community supports the people coming to their countries, those who have been internally displaced suffer from a lack of food, water, and shelter while being at risk of violence by the aggressors (The Times of India, 2022).

Moreover, the conflict keeps causing a significant impact on the economies of both countries. Both Ukraine and Russia have faced economic sanctions and their economies have experienced the loss of trade due to the continuous war. However, Russia has suffered the economic sanctions the most as majority of the international political actors as well as international companies have imposed sanctions on Russia and left the Russian market by ceasing their services. On the other hand, Ukraine’s manufacturing activities have been interrupted and the country has experienced a

significant loss of international trade. Even if the conflict ends soon, the damage caused to the economy of both countries will likely last for many years.

Another impact of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict is that it is threatening not only regional stability but also international security. As the paper discussed, one of the main reasons why Russia started aggressive actions towards Ukraine was NATO's enlargement policy. If the tension between Russia and NATO become heightened, it is possible that the war can spread to a winder region, especially to Europe. To avoid the risk of spreading the war to a wider region, it is critically important to maintain the balance in diplomatic dialogues with Russia and helping Ukraine to stand on its feet against the oppression.

Despite the negotiations, meetings, and all the attempts of international actors to find common ground to resolve the conflict with peace, the future of the current Russia-Ukraine conflict is quite uncertain. Both countries are not willing to compromise on their interests and their relations keep gaining more tensions. While Ukraine wants to maintain its sovereignty and develop closer ties with Europe, Russia sees this decision as a threat to its regional power and influence and do not want to accept Ukraine's decision to become the EU and NATO member state. Otherwise, the power of Russia would be threatened at both regional and international level. It is likely that the conflict between Russia and Ukraine will not end any time soon and it is not clear how it can be resolved. Since the West keeps supporting the Ukrainian government with military aids and humanitarian assistance, the limited resources is less likely to interrupt the conflict as more supplies are provided by the West.

From all perspectives, the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict is one of the most devastating and complex events of the recent time. While the conflict has damaged the economies of both countries, security implications of the conflict hold the risk of spreading to a wider community by causing political instability in the region and Europe. Although it is quite difficult to predict the future of the conflict, it is clear that the consequences of the conflict will have profound and long-lasting impacts on not only Russia and Ukraine but also on Eastern Europe.

In summary, the Russia-Ukraine conflict has caused three main impacts at the regional and international level. First of all, the conflict has triggered the rise of nationalism in both countries and this event can have negative long-term impacts on both countries' economy and political stability. Secondly, the tension between Russia

and the West has been heightened and the trust between the two sides has significantly declined. From the realist perspective, both Russia and NATO consider each other's security measures as a threat to their own security and power. Therefore, neither side can trust the other one during the negotiations. The loss of trust between Russia and the West can negatively affect the future cooperation between the parties, including the discussions on climate change or nuclear proliferation. Since the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine is quite complex and multifaceted with historical roots, it is important to understand the impacts of the conflict at both regional and international levels in order to develop satisfying and comprehensive resolutions.

Figure 15. Victims of the War.
Source: https://www.denverpost.com/2022/03/07/russia-ukraine-war-what-to-know-march-7/

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine has deep historical roots as well as complex geopolitical dimensions. Both countries share close ethnic, linguistic and cultural ties, and have a common history dating back to the Kievan Rus state. Kievan Rus state was the union of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus that was one of the most important states of its time. Although Russia tried to justify its invasion of Ukraine by claiming that the Kievan Rus state was the Russian state and Ukraine historically used to be part of Russia, many scholars dispute the validity of this claim and believe that it is only an excuse to justify the actions of Russia. One of the popular claims made by the Russian President Vladimir Putin is that because of Kievan Rus state, Kiev and accordingly, Ukraine was a part of Russia in the past, and he attempts to restore Russian territories, despite the fact that the truth is different.

Neorealism is the most appropriate theory that explains Russia-Ukraine relations best in order to highlight policy of Russia and stance of Ukraine. The main reason why it is considered to be the more applicable theory is that it analyzes the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, focusing on the role of institutions and norms in international relations. Neorealists argue that anarchy in the international system is the primary cause of conflict, and states that each state constantly strives to gain more power and protect their own security. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 created a new security environment in Europe, and NATO's expansion strategy threatened Russia's security and geopolitical position. According to the theory, the primary goal of the hegemons is to maximize their power, and in that case, considering the fact that Ukraine followed an opposite policy against Russia, the situation left no choice for Russia. Losing control and prestige in the region was not acceptable and it was likely to motivate other states to act the same way. Neorealists argue that Russia invaded Ukraine to reclaim power and prevent NATO from expanding further towards the East. The invasion also serves Russia's strategic interests, protecting its access to the Black Sea.

Kenneth Waltz's neorealism suggests states pursue power in anarchic international systems. In Russia-Ukraine relations, Russia asserts dominance by using military might and regional influence, while Ukraine seeks NATO membership

to protect sovereignty. This power struggle intensifies over time, causing ongoing tensions between the two countries. According to Waltz, neorealism highlights the importance of security concerns in shaping international relations, particularly in the context of Russia-Ukraine relations. Ukraine has historically been a buffer zone between Russia and the West, and any attempts to shift power in Ukraine raise alarm bells for Russia. This fear of encirclement and diminished security has fueled Russia's assertive behavior, leading to its annexation of Crimea in 2014 and support for separatist movements in Eastern Ukraine. Ukraine seeks security guarantees from the West, viewing alignment with the European Union and NATO as crucial deterrents against potential Russian aggression.

John Mearsheimer's offensive realism theory suggests that states should maximize their power for security and survival. Russia, a major power in the Caucasus region, has pursued offensive realism to establish itself as a power hegemon and become a major global actor. The collapse of the USSR allowed many states under its control to gain independence and claim sovereignty. Russia's invasion of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and the annexation of Crimea were examples of this strategy. Mearsheimer's neorealism theory, based on the belief that the international system is anarchy, can help explain Russia's interference in Ukraine's affairs and its pursuit of hegemony. This theory has been increasingly applied to the study of international relations and great power politics, providing a useful framework for understanding the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

Neorealism has limitations in explaining the complexities of Russia-Ukraine relations, as it overlooks factors like historical grievances, cultural ties, and identity politics. It also overlooks domestic politics and individual agency, which are crucial in shaping state behavior. In the context of Russia-Ukraine relations, neorealism fails to account for domestic politics, public opinion, and the aspirations of the Ukrainian people. Structural factors, such as Russia's perceived great power and historical, ethnic, and cultural ties, contribute to ongoing power struggles and geopolitical rivalries between the two countries.

The role of the West has been a significant factor behind Russia’s actions towards Ukraine. Especially, NATO’s enlargement policy in its Eastern European flank has been perceived as a threat to Russia’s security and regional power leading Russia to believe that the West was trying to surround its territories. To prevent the enlargement strategy of NATO, Russia decided to launch aggressive actions towards

Ukraine. Additionally, another major reason leading to the outbreak of the current conflict was the shift in Ukraine's foreign policy towards the West. Ukraine tried to become the EU member state while also considering to join NATO. If Ukraine became an official ally of the West, it would enormously damage the regional power and influence of Russia in the region as well as in the international arena. The shift in the foreign policy of Ukraine towards the West was risky for Russia as this move could also encourage other states in the region to implement the same strategy and to distant themselves from the Russian control and influence. Therefore, by attacking Ukraine, Russia has been able to send a direct message to both Ukraine and the international community about the consequences of such decision. In other words, Russia implemented aggressive actions towards Ukraine to prevent the enlargement policy of NATO and to protect its regional power and influence over the neighboring states.

Both during the Soviet era and after Ukraine gained its independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has always wanted to control Ukraine and include it under Russian sphere of influence. Since the beginning of the 19th century, the Russian Empire began to suppress Ukrainian culture to assimilate Ukrainian people to Russian culture and as a consequence of this policy, numerous Russians integrated to different cities of Ukraine. The central aim was to expand the border and make the country more devoted. During the Soviet era, Russia and Ukraine had a complex and evolving relationship. The two nations were united under the Soviet Union, which was established in 1922. While the Soviet Union was officially a federal state, in practice, it was dominated by Russia, which held the lion's share of political and economic power. Ukraine played an important role in the Soviet Union. It was one of the most important industrial and agricultural regions of the country, and its position on the Black Sea made it a key strategic location. Ukraine also had a distinct language and culture, and its people had a long history of resistance to Russian domination.

Throughout the Soviet period, there were tensions between Russia and Ukraine. These tensions were rooted in a number of factors, including economic disparities, cultural differences, and historical grievances. One major source of tension was language policy. While Russian was the dominant language in the Soviet Union, Ukraine had a large population of Ukrainian speakers who resented the imposition of Russian culture and language. Another source of tension was economic

policy. Ukraine was an important agricultural region, but it also had a significant heavy industry. During the Soviet period, there were frequent disputes over the allocation of resources between Russia and Ukraine, with Ukraine often feeling that it was being shortchanged.

The post-Soviet period has been marked by intense relationship between Russia and Ukraine. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine became an independent state, and the two nations struggled to define their relationship in the new political landscape. One of the main sources of tension between Russia and Ukraine has been the status of Crimea, which had been transferred from Russia to Ukraine in 1954. After Ukraine's independence, Russia continued to maintain a naval base in Crimea, and tensions over the region simmered for years. In 2014, Russia annexed Crimea, a move that was widely condemned by the international community. Ukraine responded by seeking closer ties with the West, and the conflict between Russia and Ukraine escalated. Russia has been accused of supporting separatist movements in eastern Ukraine, and there have been ongoing clashes between Ukrainian forces and separatists backed by Russia. The conflict has had a significant impact on Russia-Ukraine relations. Russia has been subject to economic sanctions by the West, and Ukraine has sought closer ties with Europe and the United States. In addition, the conflict has fueled anti-Russian sentiment in Ukraine and led to a deterioration in cultural ties between the two nations.

One of the main obstacles to improving Russia-Ukraine relations has been the role of outside actors. The conflict has become a proxy war between Russia and the West, with Europe and the United States supporting Ukraine and Russia backing separatist movements in eastern Ukraine. This has made it difficult for Russia and Ukraine to resolve their differences on their own terms, as outside actors have a vested interest in the outcome of the conflict. Another obstacle has been the issue of identity. Ukraine has sought to distance itself from its Soviet past and reassert its independence and national identity. This has included efforts to promote the Ukrainian language and culture, which has been seen as a challenge to Russian influence in the region. Russia, on the other hand, has sought to maintain its influence in Ukraine and has portrayed itself as a defender of Russian-speaking Ukrainians. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine has had significant consequences for both nations. Ukraine has suffered from a weakened economy and

ongoing violence, while Russia has been subject to economic sanctions and increased isolation from the international community. In addition, the conflict has fueled nationalist sentiment on both sides and led to a deterioration in cultural ties between Russia and Ukraine.

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine has attracted the attention of a number of international organizations and countries, including the United Nations, NATO, the European Union, and the United States. These organizations and countries have played a significant role in shaping the conflict and attempting to resolve it. The UN has been involved in the conflict since its early stages. In 2014, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution affirming Ukraine's territorial integrity and condemning the annexation of Crimea by Russia. The UN has also been involved in efforts to broker a ceasefire and a political resolution to the conflict, although progress has been slow and difficult. NATO has also been involved in the conflict, although its role has been more limited than that of the UN. NATO has condemned Russia's actions in Ukraine and has increased its military presence in the region in response to the conflict. In addition, NATO has provided support to Ukraine in the form of training and equipment. However, NATO has stopped short of direct military intervention in the conflict. The EU has been a major player in the conflict, particularly in its efforts to impose economic sanctions on Russia. The EU has also provided significant financial assistance to Ukraine and has worked to promote political and economic reform in the country. In addition, the EU has been involved in diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict, although progress has been slow and difficult. The US has been a key player in the conflict, particularly in its support for Ukraine. The US has provided significant financial assistance to Ukraine, as well as military aid in the form of equipment and training. The US has also imposed economic sanctions on Russia and has been a vocal critic of Russia's actions in Ukraine. In addition, the US has been involved in diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict, including hosting talks between Russia and Ukraine.

The role of these organizations and countries in the conflict has been a source of controversy. Russia has accused the West of meddling in its affairs and has portrayed itself as a victim of Western aggression. Some observers have also criticized the West for its role in the conflict, arguing that its support for Ukraine has only fueled the conflict and made it more difficult to resolve. Despite these criticisms, however, the involvement of these organizations and countries has been

important in shaping the conflict and attempting to resolve it. The UN has played a key role in affirming Ukraine's territorial integrity and promoting a political resolution to the conflict. NATO has provided support to Ukraine and has increased its military presence in the region as a show of solidarity with Ukraine. The EU has imposed economic sanctions on Russia and has provided significant financial assistance to Ukraine. The United States has been a vocal supporter of Ukraine and has played a key role in diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict.

It is crucial to recognize the historical complexities and sensitiveness involved in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. To maintain a constructive dialogue and resolve the conflict peacefully, it is important to understand the historical, political, and geopolitical factors that triggered the conflict between the two nations. International actors can contribute to develop a sustainable resolution by maintaining a balanced and inclusive approach by objectively considering the perspectives and interests of Russia and Ukraine.

Although it is quite uncertain what will be the future of the conflict, the future cooperation between Russia and Ukraine remains challenging and important for maintaining regional stability and prosperity. As discussed throughout the paper, Russia and Ukraine has a long history dated back to the 9th century characterized with tension, conflict, and strained relations. However, by leveraging several steps it might be possible to improve the relations between the two nations and resolve the conflict in the future.

First of all, it is crucially important to engage in balanced diplomatic efforts to navigate the conflict and find common ground to compromise the demands and interests of Russia and Ukraine. Despite the intensified tensions during the ongoing conflict, Russia and Ukraine have met several times to engage in diplomatic dialogues trying to find ways to resolve the conflict. Although their efforts have not been successful till today, diplomatic dialogues are important steps for addressing sensitive issues and finding resolutions peacefully for satisfying both sides.

Secondly, Russia and Ukraine share a common history and culture and these two factors can help them to develop mutual understanding at a foundational level. The dialogues can be built on reinforcing a sense of common identity and cooperation for the future relations of the two nations. Celebrating shared heritage and recognizing distinct cultural and historical legacies can create opportunities in various areas, including education, art, and literature.

Moreover, another important factor that can lead the resolution of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine is creating economic interdependence. Throughout the history, both countries have enjoyed strong economic ties which have driven their economy. Since the current conflict keeps damaging the economy of both countries, reconsidering to reinforce economic ties between Russia and Ukraine may create opportunities to cease the conflict and start cooperation. Creating economic interdependence can also reduce the risk of future conflict between the two nations.

In conclusion, although it does not seem to be any time soon, the future cooperation between Russia and Ukraine can still be achieved. To resolve the current conflict, both sides are required to invest in a committed and sustained efforts to initiate fruitful dialogues and find common ground. The parties can figure out to end the conflict by focusing on their shared economic, cultural, political, and historical ties.

Thus, the purpose of this research study was to comprehensively examine how history has shaped the relations between Russia and Ukraine and identify the key factors that deteriorated their diplomatic ties, particularly by focusing on the role of international actors. By analyzing important shifts in political stances, the research aimed to explore the major dynamics that transformed the cooperative allies of yesterday into adversarial entities of today. The significance of this study is its contribution to understanding the complex nature of the Russia-Ukraine conflict by analyzing the root causes shaping the relations between the two nations. The research incorporated historical context and evaluated the validity of historical claims to offer a comprehensive analysis of the relations between Russia and Ukraine beyond the current geopolitical landscape. Hereby, the this study served to fill the gap between historical and current aspects of Russia-Ukraine relations in order to provide valuable insights for developing proper diplomatic efforts to promote peaceful resolutions and prevent future incidents in the region.

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