



Russia- Ukraine War (RUW): Critical Overview

Dr. Shakti Pradayani Rout

Geo-strategy between Ukraine and Russia

The history and geography of Ukraine and Russia are vastly intertwined. Ukraine is second only to Russia in size and land mass. It is a connecting link between Russia and Western Europe and has been appreciated for its unique existence by both sides. Previously, it was with Russia, and it is now in the process of joining the European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). If we go deep into the history of Russia, we can realize that during the medieval period, modern-day Kyiv was called 'the cradle of Russian civilization'. Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus are traditionally considered ethnically Russian and occasionally referred to as 'little Russians'(Singh: 3). The Russian leader believes that Ukraine is not just a neighboring country, but an inalienable part of Russian history, culture and spiritual space and that modern Ukraine was entirely created by Russia (Kuzio, 2018). However, Ukraine has preserved its distinct identity through its language and uniqueness. With the eruption of the Russian Revolution in 1917-21, the Communist Party of Ukraine joined hands with the Communist Party of Russia, willingly merged and formed the USSR in 1922. It was ruled by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union at the time and known as the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. Russian was the official language there. The countries of East Europe were known as satellite countries of the Soviet Union.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, almost 70 years later, Russia and Ukraine became independent nations in 1991. Ukraine inherited a vast stockpile of nuclear weapons, the third largest in the world, with over 1,700 warheads and 3,000 tactical nuclear weapons that were left behind on its soil (Singh: 4). However, Ukraine surrendered its entire arsenal in 1994, in return for security guarantees from Russia, USA, and Europe. It became a non-nuclear state. At the same time, it became a liberal, democratic country.

During the 1990s, Russia and Ukraine had a tight strategic alliance and mutual aid relationship with the US. Like all other post-soviet countries, Ukraine was also heavily aided by the USA. Similarly, during the 1990s, the then President of Russia, Yeltsin, was also interested in maintaining a friendly relationship with the US and NATO. In 1997, NATO and Ukraine signed a charter on Distinctive Partnership. Likewise, Russia also signed a partnership treaty with NATO. The competition between Russia and the USA was lesser. Yeltsin, as President, was more focused on establishing liberal democracy and connecting the Russian economy to the liberal economy. Almost all the East European countries were struggling to consolidate democracy. Russia was also busy strengthening its economic and strategic positioning during that time. In May 2002, Ukraine declared that joining NATO was its strategic goal (Das: 17).

Why Ukraine is significant for Russia?

Ukraine is the connecting link between Europe and Russia. It is the major transit country for Russian oil and gas. These days, energy security has emerged as a major security concern in Europe. This became a crucial issue when Russia began to use varied prices concerning its gas supply. The unlawful annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, along with its war against Ukraine, has given NATO's energy agenda a significant new focus. At the same time, it has also provoked Russia and its existential well-being in the European market.

Changing dynamics between Ukraine and Russia: Post-Orange Revolution

The Orange Revolution also prompted Russia to become suspicious of Ukraine's internal politics. Relations became complicated when Russia failed to establish a pro-Russian democratic government in Ukraine. With Putin as the next and proceeding President, Russia is inclined to reassert its power across the neighborhood.

At the same time, Ukrainian politics also underwent transition since the orange revolution. Looking at its strategic geopolitical location, Russia tried to keep an eye on Ukrainian internal politics. That tactically meant that Russia wanted a pro-Russian government in Ukraine. The relationship between the two was undoubtedly stable till the government of Ukraine was pro-Russian. In the post-Yanukovich period, the Euromaidan protests were massive in Ukraine. Ukraine was strongly willing to join the European Union and NATO. Which eventually triggered Russia to intervene in Ukrainian internal politics. Russia was considering the eastern part of Ukraine as 'part Russia' as most of them speak the Russian language and ethnically considered them loyal to the Russian state and institution. This becomes a 'sponge board' for Russia to intervene based on humanity.

Ethnic and linguistic Complexity

In the end, let us discuss the most complex and critical aspect of RUW, the politicization of ethno-lingual identity in post-Soviet space. It was crystal clear that the Soviet Union had covered dozens of nationalities, ethnicities, and ideals of self-determination under the blanket of 'universal brotherhood' of communist countries. For many political analysts and thinkers, the idea of nationalism remains 'the most potent force in the breakup of the communist regime,' and for some writers, 'Truly, the East European revolutions of 1989 have been a rebirth of nations. Scholars like Smith described the changes in Central European countries as 'proliferation of nationalism' (2001: 121) and rebirth of ethnic nation-states. However, policies like *perestroika* and *glasnost* in the former Soviet Union had opened the floodgate of national cleavages and ethnic aspirations in European space. Thus, the territories of all these states either experienced divisions or unification. The 'proliferation of a nationalism' has extended itself to Georgia to east of Ukraine.

In the ongoing war, the pro-Russian demonstrations in the Donbas region of Ukraine were supported by the Russian government, and still, the conflict is unresolved. The situation on the part is becoming precarious. At the same time, rising nationalism in Russia under the leadership of Putin under the banner of *Russia Mir* has also fueled the Donbas separatists to see Russia as the savior of Slavic Russian Orthodox culture and spiritual beliefs. With the rise of the Euromaidan mindset, 'returning to the common European home,' the eastern region has provoked an ethnolinguistic identity among Russian speakers. These Russian speakers demanded that the Ukrainian government promote the local majority language of 'Russian.' As Russia didn't want Ukraine to join NATO, it fueled the separatist movement and intervened. Thus, strategically, Russia made Ukraine a state with an ethnic and democratic crisis, where it loses the basic eligibility to join NATO. However, the ongoing crisis undervalues the established international world order and structures like UN and other mediating agencies to facilitate the process of ending the war. RUW as a litmus test for the rule based international order's durability. The international order is not collapsing—but evolving under pressure.

Integration of Crimea to Russia: Triggered Donbas separatism

The foremost reason for the conflict was the expansion of NATO military infrastructure to Russia's borders, the accession of new states to the alliance, and an increased indulgence in the Russian 'strategic area' that triggered the Russians to see Ukrainian accession to NATO as a serious threat. At the same time, the Russification of Crimea leads to more threats to Ukraine. Crimea was declared independent and formally unified with Russia on 18th March 2014. At the same time, there was incited unrest in the Russian-speaking eastern provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk (Donbas region) of Ukraine. Russia tried to intervene and aid the separatist group as 'humanitarian aid'. The civil war was going on between Donbas and the Ukrainian forces and neither side was gaining control.

During this time, Ukraine and the separatists of Donbas went to sign an agreement to stop the civil war. Both the parties signed the deal at Minsk. The agreement was between representatives of Ukraine and Russia, as well as the Luhansk People's Republic and Donetsk People's Republic. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) initiated the agreement in September 2014. The initial protocol had failed to bring the civil war to an end. The Agreement at Minsk had failed. There was a revision of an agreement in 2015 (Minsk II) to bring a ceasefire, release prisoners, and grant self-government to certain areas of the Donbas. The Donbas region became the 'frozen conflict' zone. Ultimately, the tension over there has yet to be resolved.

In the post Presidential Election in Ukraine, the relationship between Ukraine and Russia went to the lowest of its phase. The new President, Volodymyr Zelensky, was elected President of Ukraine; he promised to end the fighting. As a pro-European and western leader, the President declared that Ukraine would join NATO to end the civil war of pro-Russia in the Donbas region. Despite his promises, the peace talks with separatists in the eastern region have failed seriously. By the end of 2019, both sides accused each other of violating the Minsk Agreements. The issue again arose when the Russian government started issuing passports to the residents of the Donbas. Ukraine saw this as the prime step towards annexation and violation of Ukrainian territorial sovereignty. This also forced Ukraine to take complete shelter under the security umbrella of the NATO security regime. By annexing Crimea and east of Ukraine, Russia wanted to reassert and reclaim its ethnic Slavic connection within the neighborhood. The USA and allied European countries severely criticized this primordial, nationalist connection as an offensive act against Ukraine.

NATO's Expansion: Insecure Russian border

In the next place, Ukraine had applied for full membership in NATO, though NATO didn't accept it. But for Russia, if Ukraine joined NATO, it would bring the alliance to the doorstep of the Russian border. To Russia, NATO expansion right up to Russia's border was a direct threat to the territorial integrity of Russia. Putin insisted that Ukraine be prohibited from ever being a member of NATO. Other than this, Russia has no right to establish a sphere of influence or trying to control its neighbors, and Ukraine's relationship with NATO is a matter for Ukraine and NATO. It need not be evaluated by third-party intervention. However, till now, Ukraine has not been a fully-fledged member of NATO. Thus, implementing the lifeline of the alliance-making of NATO, Article 5 of collective defense shows the immature and containment mentality of the US.

Ukraine and its accession politics to NATO remain the greatest security threat to Russia. Ukraine desired to be a part of NATO. Meanwhile, Ukraine serves as Russia's primary transit nation to access the European market. However, one of the key issues that must be resolved is the monopolies over the prices of gas and oil in the European market. A better supplier than Russia must be found, or an alternative must be brought to the market for sustainable energy efficiency.

War and veracity of impact

The present war has created a situation where to establish peace you need to have a war scenario in global politics. War is punctuated by occasional cease-fires and periods of violence. In the beginning, Russia had thought of a short war and thought of capturing the east of Ukraine quickly, but the war lasted for many years. The war has weakened it economically and militarily, diminishing its rapport with West alliances. At the same time American Foreign policy has 'renovated' the idea of Harry Truman's doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and the containment theory. The multilayered sanctions on Russia and helping of Ukraine were evident that 'the Biden administration knows as much yet remains intellectually indebted to the past: its 2022 National Security NSS is the close intellectual heir to Truman-era ideas' (Ettinger, Survival: 104).

However, NATO's gradual expansion was maintained through a series of enlargements that brought its military installations closer to Russia's borders. Russia's aggression was more frustrating after the Georgian war (2008). Including Finland and Sweden in NATO shows that small Nordic states are also very reluctant to aggressive Russia. The rising TINA (There is No Alternative) tendency leads them to join NATO. Now, NATO has become the legitimate security provider to the small states of the Nordic region. This forced Russia to act aggressively as NATO's enlarged sphere is touching the doorstep of the Russian border and the sphere of influence. Thus, the Russian invasion of Ukraine was not an overnight event; instead, it was the direct outcome of Russia's resistance to Ukraine's years-long ambition to join NATO.

The Ukrainian government sees the Russian stance as an assault on its sovereignty. In addition, Ukraine has received assistance from NATO in its battle with Russia. The protracted political conflict resulted in Russia's military invasion on 24th February 2022, instantly affecting the global financial markets.

Global sanctions, diplomatic fallout till 2025

At present, in the Ukraine war, US media proclaimed that Russia is offensive. The communication warfare between them led to the failure of internet banking, the slowdown of servers, and cyber-attacks. Russia has used a GPS to jam the internet of Ukraine since the war began. The warring countries are jamming networks, distorting information, and misinforming the audience of the victim country. The hybrid wars, the latest IT technologies, became an important weapon, and battlefields comprise social networks and cyberspace in general, as they are the arena of modern information wars and the means of supplementing various military, information, and political processes initiated in the interests of a particular side. This tool makes it possible to solve two closely related tasks: capturing information platforms and influencing the audience within various virtual communities. At the same time, information is collected and processed, and quasi-disparate groups are coordinated. (Mikhlin, Military Thought: 4). Thus, the war in Ukraine has not only impacted the territorial integrity of it but also churned the very basic concept of traditionalist notion of war and security.

The war in Ukraine has also united the European states to work under NATO. The war between Ukraine and Russia brings out another new dimension to the strategic thought of war and attrition. The newness of it lies, for example, Private Military Companies (PMCs) like Wagner became the integral, most importantly, legal component of the groups of troops (forces) in planning and conducting operations at all levels. The practical results of Wagner's Russian PMC are vivid confirmation of this (Mikhil, Military Thought: 3). However, the Russian leadership has denied the fact that the PMCs are involved in the war.

Russian Isolation: Rise of Cancel Culture

In the ongoing process, the failure of diplomacy indicates that Russia is overtly isolated from the West. The West officials, media, and publishing houses aggressively expressed their opposition to Russia. The Russian activities are

aggressive and undemocratic. Likewise, the Russian Foreign minister Lavrov complained against the restrictions imposed on Russia. As he quoted 'they are primarily expressed as so-called 'cancel culture', unilateral restrictions, and unprecedented sanctions, and demonstrate that the golden billion "has truly decided that an undeclared hybrid war is being waged, and it is a life-and-death struggle" (Chumakov, International Affairs: 22).

As many say, Russia's war in Ukraine is a global contest between autocracy and democracy. Condemning Putin's gross violation of international norms, democracies across the globe come together realistically to preserve and reset the liberal world order set by the 1990s. The war, no doubt, is vastly impacting Russia's economy, along with its immediate neighbors and the rest of Western Europe. There is a decline of trust and empathy against Putin's authoritarian, non-democratic regimes, which do not identically satisfy the terms and conditions of the USA, leading towards disasters like the Ukraine and Russia wars. Here, the US identifies Russia and China as powers' that layer authoritarian governance with revisionist foreign policy'(Eittinger, Survival: 104). Russia has vehemently criticized this as gross violation of internationally acclaimed sovereignty and territorial sanctity.

Debates on Sovereign Equality of Ukraine

The war has strained the age-old idea of the rule of law and sovereign equality. It certainly invalidates the role of the UN and other global institutions to limited utility. The establishment of a rule-based international order also becomes restricted. For example, powerful nations like Russia and the USA can act in their interests without facing any severe consequences. For instance, Russia is facing sanctions for its actions in Ukraine. This inconsistency undermines the credibility of the international system. Peaceful co-existence is now a very relative term in world politics. Non-intervention in the internal affairs of the states is a very questionable aspect now. With all these interventions in Gorgia, Ukraine, still Russia, could not have much impact on the strategic space that Soviet Russia had a complete control of. The ongoing Ukraine war has tested the potentiality of Russia over the former sphere of influence.

If a state is powerful and economically capable of holding a war for many years, then there is a possibility of justifying the war over their national interest without looking at the problems of civilians on the spectrum of human rights. Thus, powerful states always justify war and showcase their influence. As was being done by the US in Afghanistan, Iraq; likewise, Russia is intervening in Georgia and Ukraine. Amidst the turbulence, China, the Asian giant, is intervening in Taiwan. Interventions in the name of protection, establishing a democratic regime, guaranteeing human rights, and leading the world towards the crossroads of 'might always is right'. Concepts like sovereignty, territorial integrity, peaceful co-existence, and mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs became the bookish views of the global political spectrum.

The wars certainly shaken the foundations of the United Nations (UN) and other mediating bodies like the EU and OSCE. The persisting war indicates diplomatic failure, non-initiation of talk, and no international medications are initiated, showcasing that neither side is interested in establishing a peace formula to end the war. The West is blaming Russia for its aggressive interference; at the same time, Russia is blaming the West for provoking Ukraine to 'afford the war.' Amid war and failure of diplomacy Switzerland had hosted another round of the Ukraine Peace Summit on June 15-16, 2024; this brought Russia, Ukraine, and NATO to the negotiating table, but the talk has shown hardly any positive result. The summit was attended by the high-level dignitaries from France, Germany, Italy, Canada, Poland, Sweden, Japan, the UK and USA. They appealed to Russia to suspend the aggressive behavior and stop the war.

At the same time Putin demanded Ukraine not to join NATO and cooperate with Russia. However, we can conclude that cooperation is the most efficient and pacifist approach to avoid war. In the ongoing situation, we can see how the age-old initiatives of the UN and other mediation are being halted. In this aspect, Russia is blaming the West for

wanting to eliminate it as a significant geopolitical competitor. At the same time, Russia also wanted to create a just world with a multi-polar world order. It also wanted to 'revive the capacity of the UN to assume a central role in harmonizing the interests of its member states'(Lavrov, International Affairs: 2). However, in the meantime Putin also proposed a peace plan to end the war. This has been denounced by the Ukrainian side as absurd and impractical. With this plan Ukraine may lose a huge part of its territory to Russia including strategic places like the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions.

Destruction of civilian and military infrastructure

The war has destroyed the civilian and military infrastructure and dwindled the global financial governance. The rise of oil prices and food grain is leading to inflation. There is a possibility that Russia forced different countries to pay for their trade in their currency. For example, India pays the price of oil in rupees, and China trades in yuan. We can conclude that, in this hybrid War. The economies of both countries are severely affected. With the sanctions, Russia became the most sanctioned country in the world. It also affects the European and Asian markets. This is leading towards global recession and stagflation. Post-COVID situation, when the global economy was on a path to revive and grow with an upward side, the Ukraine War changed its momentum backward. In this situation, the US-led West wanted the emerging Russia to suffer from multidimensional challenges. In the words of the Foreign Minister of Russia, 'we face the pressure of unprecedented sanctions. Using a carrot-and-stick approach, the Americans are attempting to dissuade our partners from engaging in economic and any other form of cooperation with Russia. Blatant sabotage is being employed, as seen in the case of the explosion that damaged the Nord Stream gas pipelines on the floor of the Baltic Sea. Despicable attempts are also being made to 'disengage our country from mechanisms of international collaboration on culture, education, science, and sports'(ibid). Thus, the prime issue of the RUW has not only challenged the territorial integrity of the Ukraine but challenged the foundational values of UN, EU and other collective bodies which advocate peace and cooperation among nations. This is the time we must revive the culture of diplomacy and cooperation over war and attrition.

At the same time, Russia is also badly hurt by the war. The war has strained Russia's resources. Real incomes are falling, Russia has recorded its second-highest budget deficit since the breakup of the Soviet Union, and nearly a million highly educated citizens have fled the country. At the same time, war fueled federal spending, which rose by 58.7% over the year. Nearly one-third of federal government spending will be devoted to defense and domestic security (Gould-Davies, Survival: 25). Many analyses like this have emphasized peace over war. Some people from academic and civil societies suggest going back to a diplomatic solution to the problem. The war has increased the 'systemic vulnerability of the global financial system.' The sanctions caused a systemic spillover effect across Europe and all over the globe.

Like Russia, Ukraine also needs long-term, robust support from NATO. Thus, Ukraine wanted to be a permanent member of the alliance. Frustrated by the ongoing 'hybrid' war, it needs more arms and humanitarian aid. It is demanding effective help from across Europe, and major countries support the war. Alliance needs more unity, air deployment and drones, and defense. In the word of J. Mearsheimer, Ukraine is already in a grave situation. This may be prolonged if the USA-led alliances do not initiate talks and dialogues during the process. Ukraine, which has already suffered grievously, is going to experience even greater harm. Essentially, the United States and its allies are helping lead Ukraine down the primrose path.'(Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development: 13).

Conclusions

The lesson that is very imperative learned from the Russian and Ukrainian war is that security is based on the concepts of self-help, self-preparation, and self-establishment. It can be outsourced to privately owned farms.

However, in the 21st century, if the state is not able to manage unprecedented security requirements, it can outsource it to any organization company that effectively provides the same type of security and military supplies, as provided by Wagner Group to the Russian government. However, from a realist and neorealist perspective, outsourcing the military requirements of any state during war time is not reasonable. It is required through analysis of resources and winning strategies. However, the main objective of foreign policy of any state should be based on negotiation and strategic alliance-making. Many states (European or Asian) are not self-reliant in the sphere of security. They are dependent on external powers. Some accept unequal alliance treaties and withstand the realist concept of self-help during crisis periods.

Second, looking at the attack on nuclear reactors and other critical infrastructure like communication lines may lead to nuclear war in the future. Russia's strike on Zaporizhzhia and the Ukrainian nuclear reactor turned the region into a nuclear risk. Thus, war must be opted for as a last resort for any type of diplomatic failure. Third, it would increase the Refugee problem in adjacent countries, which may escalate situations like the availability of medical facilities and other humanitarian issues like food scarcity, shortage of drinking water, and access to educational infrastructure. Human Rights are denied to civilians and severe loss of life and infrastructures. These scenarios are forcing us to think about a world order justifying wars and mimicking each other to secure their bare national interest. Fourth, the overall use of hi-tech warheads, drones, missiles, and tanks leads to global warming. Fifth, the rise of oil prices across the globe. Sixth, the sanction on Russia would heavily damage the Russian economy and society. The sanctions on Russia by the US and alliance countries also seriously affect the Russian economy.

REFERENCES

The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (mid.ru)

Das, Nevedita Kundu (2008), Russia and its Near Abroad, Strategic Dynamics, Authors Press, New Delhi

Erika Harris (2020) What is the Role of Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Russia–Ukraine Crisis?, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 72:4, 593-613, DOI: 10.1080/09668136.2019.1708865 <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2019.1708865>

Gould-Davies, Nigel (2023), How the War Has Changed Russia, *Survival*, vol.65 no.2, April-May, Pp 23-26.

Javier Cifuentes-Faura, Economic consequences of the Russia-Ukraine war: a brief overview, *Espazo e Economia* [Online], 23 | 2022, Online since 19th July 2022, connection on 06th February 2023. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/espacoeconomia/21807>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/espacoeconomia.21807>, accessed on 15/5/2024

John J. Mearsheimer, *Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development*, SUMMER 2022, No. 21 (SUMMER 2022), pp. 12-27

Kuzio, T. (2016). Nationalism and authoritarianism in Russia: Introduction to the special issue. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 49(1), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2015.12.002>, accessed on 16/05/2024

Kuzio, T. (2018), Russia-Ukraine Crisis: The Blame game, geopolitics and national identity, *Europe-Asia studies* 70(3), Pp 462-473

Qureshi, A., Rizwan, M. S., Ahmad, G., & Ashraf, D. (2022). Russia–Ukraine war and systemic risk: Who is taking the heat? *Finance Research Letters*, 48, 103036. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.frl.2022.103036>

Singh, Ajay (2023), Russia- Ukraine War: The Conflict and its Global Impact, Pentagon Press Ltd., New Delhi

Smith, Anthony D (2001), Nationalism: Theory, Ideology and History, Cambridge: Polity Press

Shumilova, O., Tockner, K., Sukhodolov, A. *et al.* Impact of the Russia–Ukraine armed conflict on water resources and water infrastructure. *Nat Sustain* 6, 578–586 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-023-01068-x>, accessed on 3/5/2024

NATO at 75: Curb the Celebrations to Focus on Looming Security Challenges | Royal United Services Institute (rusi.org)

Why is Russia reluctant to endorse the Indo-Pacific strategy? - Washington Times, accessed on 3/7/2024

EPRS BRI (2023) 751398 EN.pdf (europa.eu)

Impact of Russia–Ukraine armed conflict on water resources and water infrastructure Nature Sustainability

NATO Responds to Russian Undersea Threats, Bolsters Defense of Vital Communications Infrastructure (msn.com)

Ukraine | Situation Reports (unocha.org), Humanitarian Bulletin, accessed on 3/5/2024

Russian undersea pipeline attacks pose billions in threat to Europe and America — NATO, Yahoo Singapore News, Thu, 25th April 2024 01:07:58 GMT

Russia’s private military contractor Wagner comes out of the shadows in Ukraine war, The Guardian, Russian Private Military Companies Thriving Due to War with Ukraine - The Moscow Times, 14 June 2024, accessed , 23rd March 2025

Text of Speech of Putin at NATO Summit, Bucharest, 2008, Available at [Analysis: Russia prepares for lengthy battle over Ukraine | UNIAN](#), accessed on 21st May 2024

[Major Ukraine summit ends with fresh plea for peace but key powers spurn final agreement | CNN](#)