THE 2022 RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR: REASONS AND IMPACTS*

Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı 2022: Nedenler ve Etkileri

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Abstract

Ukraine after its independence in 1991, has mostly pursued a foreign policy tailored to the US and the EU. But, Russia deems Ukraine within her sphere of influence and has been infuriated at Ukraine's nearness with the West and her desire to join NATO or the EU. On the other hand, the West under-estimated the geopolitical importance of Ukraine for Russia, while Russia, viewing the West in economic decline and American defeat at Afghanistan, attempted to reestablish Russian hegemony at the former USSR territory. Hence, Russia attacked Ukraine, despite the West's warning. Therefore, this paper aims at analyzing the Russia-Ukraine war in terms of reasons and implications.

Keywords: *Russia-Ukraine War, Geopolitics, Reasons, Impacts, Humanitarian Aid.*

Öz

Ukrayna, 1991'deki bağımsızlığından sonra, çoğunlukla ABD ve AB'ye uygun bir dış politika izlemiştir. Rusya, Ukrayna'yı kendi etki alanı içinde görüyor ve Ukrayna'nın Batı'ya olan yakınlığından ve NATO veya AB'ye katılma arzusundan rahatsız olmaktadır. Öte yandan Batı, Ukrayna'nın Rusya açısından jeopolitik önemini hafife almıştır. Batı'yı ekonomik gerileme ve Afganistan'daki Amerikan yenilgisi içinde gören Rusya, eski SSCB topraklarında Rus hegemonyasını yeniden kurmaya çalışmıştır. Dolayısıyla Rusya, Batı'nın uyarısına rağmen Ukrayna'ya saldırmıştır. Bu nedenle bu makale, Rusya-Ukrayna savaşını sebepleri ve sonuçları açısından incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı, Jeopolitik, Nedenler, Etkiler, İnsani Yardım.*

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INTRODUCTION

The peaceful period established by the so-called 'benign hegemony', the US, after the end of the Called War, has been destabilized both by America and Russia. The Russian Federation (RF) has been trying to remake Russia global power like the heydays of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR -Soviet Union). She has also desired to establish full control in newly independent states of the Soviet Union. For these purposes, she has been conducting overt invasions, destabilizing political stability, forcing to change governments etc., through her 'near abroad doctrine'.

Ukraine, as one of the successor states after the collapse of the USSR, has mostly avoided being a partner of any Russian politics, economics and security initiatives. Since her independence in 1991, Ukraine has mostly pursued foreign policy toward the US and the European Union (EU). On the contrary, RF hardly sees Ukraine as a separate and independent state, sees her as a part of Russia in terms of ethnics, historical and religious similarities and common culture. Since her independence, Ukraine has had problematic relations with Russia in terms of controlling nuclear weapons of the USSR, the status of Crimean Peninsula, the share of Black Sea fleet of Soviet Union, price of natural gas, Russian minorities living at the Eastern Ukraine, the status of naval ports at Sea of Azov etc. Following her independence, Ukraine experienced two popular uprisings, the 2004 Orange Revolution and the 2014 Revolution of Dignity which forced Moscow-led governments to be ousted.[1]

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1 Please see the detail about the 2014 Russian-Ukrainian crisis in Sertif Demir, "Ukrayna Krizi: Yeni Küresel Politik Düzenin Başlangıcı", Hasret Çomak et al., der., *Uluslararası Politikada Ukrayna Krizi,* Beta, İstanbul 2014.

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Aftermath of the Euromaidan movement and the Revolution of Dignity in 2014, the pro-Russian government collapsed and pro-Western government came to power. Following this coup, Russia implemented a pre-planned occupation of Crimea in 2014 and triggered an uprising in Donbas in which the majority of people speak Russian. Those aggressive acts and the Crimean occupation by Russia has jeopardized the Ukrainian territorial integrity and the political union. Therefore, Ukrainians has urgently needed NATO protection. When Zelensky became president of Ukraine in 2019, he further developed relations with the US and NATO and requested a crucial NATO membership for Ukrainian independence. Besides, the US/NATO/EU have had some lessons learnt from the 2008 Georgia and 2014 Crimean crisis, and kept preparing Ukraine against any Russian aggression, training Ukrainian army, providing military support and strengthening its infrastructure.

Russia deployed around 100.000 forces along the Ukrainian border in May 2021, but she did not dare to occupy or attack Ukraine because of unfavorable situations. Additionally, she did not prepare a pre-war design or scheme. But Russia recommended to deploy her army along the Ukrainian border in November 2021.[2] It deployed over 150.000 military force, weapon systems and capabilities along Ukrainian borders. At the same time, Russia began to conduct psychological campaigns tailored for war preparatory. Along with other pretext, Russia started to invade Ukraine on 24 February 2022, despite serious American warnings.

Given these explanations, this paper tries to analyze the in reasons of Russia-Ukraine War and its impacts in general perspective. For this study, a qualitative and narrative research methodology was preferred to employ via scholarly studies and newspapers.

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2 Claire Mills, "Ukraine: Russia's "Red Line"", *Commons Library,* 940, 18 February 2022, p. 2.

THE DEVELOPMENTS/REASONS THAT LED TO RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

The peaceful period established by the so-called 'benign hegemony', the US, after the end of the Called War, expected to live forever as asserted by American political scientist Fukuyama. It was anticipated that liberal-world order would prevail under American hegemony. Nevertheless, this presupposition has not actualized as America has herself disregarded presumptions of liberal and liberal institutionalism values and norms, through Iraqi Wars in 1993 and 2003, the Afghanistan occupation 2001-2021 and changing or destabilizing the internal politics of several countries via overt and covert operations, economic sanctions and isolation policies etc.

On the other hand, Moscow has been trying to remake Russia as global at the lands of the former USSR. To do this, she founded the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) instead of Soviet Union, ignited the frozen problems/conflicts between the old Soviet Republics, established The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CTSO) based on common security understanding, became founder of Shanghai Cooperation Organization[3] with China to prevent the US' influence in the region and finally, seeded foundation The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). RF wants to sustain its hegemony at former Soviet Union lands through politics, economics and security pacts, agreements and collaboration. Besides, Russia wants to return pre-1997 when NATO expansion was actualized toward east and NATO and Russia signed a cooperation agreement.

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3 Please see the detail about Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Sertif Demir, "Şanghay İşbirliği Örgütünün Evrimleşmesinin Analizi ve Türkiye Açısından Değerlendirilmesi", Hasret Çomak-Caner Sancaktar, der., *Türk Dış Politikası,* Beta, İstanbul 2013; Sertif Demir-Ayca Eminoglu, "Küresel Rekabetin Karşilaştirmali Bir Analizi: Kuzey Atlantik Antlaşmasi Örgütü (NATO) ve Şangay Işbirliği Örgütü (ŞIÖ)", Erciyes Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi, 52, 2018, p. 115-142.

Ukraine, as a new state after the collapse of the USSR, has mostly avoided being a partner of any Russian politics, in economics and security perspectives. Instead she turned her face to the West, trying to access the membership of NATO and the EU to maintain her political and economic independence. But, RF never sees Ukraine as a separate and independent state, instead sees her a part of Russia in terms of ethics, historical and religious similarities and common culture. So, the reasons that led to war have grown slowly in the last thirty years.

Thus, the reasons that led to war can be categorized into four groups: strategic rivalry between the West (NATO, the US, the EU), geopolitical concerns, Putin's leadership role, and the disputes between Russia and Ukraine.

STRATEGIC RIVALRY BETWEEN RUSSIA AND THE WEST (NATO, THE US, THE EU)

The strategic rivalry during the Cold War between the Soviets and America/NATO resulted in the collapse of the USSR and disband of Warsaw Pact. RF emerged as the main successor state following breakdown. Therefore, she sees herself as a historical heritor of the Tsarist Empire of 19th century and Soviet Union Empires of 20th century. Today's Russia deeply misses 'the old brilliant' days of the Soviet Union as it was considered one of the two big powers in the bipolar world. Thus, Putin claims the collapse of the Soviet Union as 'the biggest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century' in his many interviews and talking.

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Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia experienced a period of chaos, economic recession, internal separatist movements, widespread poorness while transforming herself from a 70-year-old communist rule to liberal capitalist system under the Yeltsin presidency. She was in a fragile situation to react to new political, security and military design in Europe.

With the disappearance of the Warsaw Pact and then the Soviet Union in 1991 it brought a significant change in the East-West balance.[4] Emerging as sole superpower in 1990s, the US expanded its sphere of influence globally, reshaped European security architecture through enlarging NATO and limiting the influence of RF in the Eastern Europe. Moscow, in missing the good old days, has been trying to remake RF global power like the heydays of the former USSR. But, until the 2000s, Russia was relatively weak as she experienced a huge turmoil with the political transformation. And she had not well reacted to American's restructuring the European security structure and the EU's expansion toward the East, almost until 2007.

After the disbanding of the USSR, both Gorbachev and Yeltsin desired to be treated as an equal partner as was in the past. But, this was not actualized. Because, Russia almost lost half its population, a third of its territory, and its unified ideology and client states with the collapse of Soviet.[5] She also did not display a robust reaction to NATO expansion, NATO operation in Balkans in 1990s and watched the Serbian breakaway in 1990s. All these demonstrated the existence of the geopolitical marginalization[6] of Russia in global politics since 1991.

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4 Ünal Çeviköz, "Rusya-Ukrayna Krizini Türkiye Çözebilir mi?", *Politik Yol,* https://www.politikyol.com/ukrayna-krizi-ve-turkiye/, (Date of Accession: 12.03.2022).

5 Peter Rutland, "An Unnecessary War: The Geopolitical Roots of the Ukraine crisis", Agnieszka Pikulicka-Richard *Sakwa, eds., Ukraine and Russia: People, Politics, Propaganda and Perspectives*, E-International Relations, Bristol 2015, p. 129-140.

6 Rutland, *op.cit.*, p. 129-140.

After Putin came to power in Russia in 2000, his priority was to put emphasis on economic and political problems within Russia and steps that would reinforce the internal integrity of the Russian Federation. Then, he started to attach more importance to foreign policy and security issues.[7] Unfortunately, the West did not pay attention to the speech he made during the Munich Security Conference in 2007, giving the clear message that the former USSR territories are considered inviolable for Russia, by mentioning the concern about NATO's expansion towards the former USSR territory and especially mentioning Georgia and Ukraine.[8]

Overall, history, when examined well, is a very important source in terms of foretelling the arrival of certain events. Although the Cold War ended, the strategic rivalry between major powers has never ended. Russia, as the main successor state of the disbanded USRR, has never accepted the political and military changes that occurred at the expense of Russia after the 1990s. Although she lost its power in military and economic perspectives, she has never forgiven its major power role in the world. With the help of increasing energy prices, Russia revived in the 2000s economically and resurgent Russia sought to reposition herself an equal power of the US and reclaimed its heydays. This has been one of the presumptions that facilitated the Russian attack on Ukraine.

On the other hand, Russia, China, India and Brazil altogether formed the BRIC organization to protect their economic interests and expand their influence as well as create an economic power to compete with the US. It goes without saying that the Western economic superiority has been abating for the last two decades, the US's global political influence also diminishes through the years. Russia also wanted to utilize this weaning. Thus, America's global decline was likely to influence the

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7 Çeviköz, *loc.cit.*
8 *Ibid.*

Russian's decision to attack Ukraine. She hypothetically pondered that America would hardly give a robust reaction or any military response to her Ukrainian occupation. But, although America did not respond with military actions, Russia encountered, so far, the heaviest economic, political, cultural sanctions that have ever never been implemented in the word.

Finally, Russia was likely to miscalculate the post-American defeat in Afghanistan. She probably thought America's reaction would be similar to Crimean crisis. It is true that the US can hardly conduct an overseas operation due to trauma that she lived in Afghanistan for a certain period in future. But, it is still the largest power in the world which portrays a global power projection. She is still the leader of liberal world and can deploy military capabilities to any point in the world in a shortly. She was also very successful in unifying the disorganized Western world against a potentially hostile country.

Overall, the global competition between the US and Russia has been a long struggle and resulted in the decline of Russia. Ukraine has become a new venue of global competition. Russian attack on Ukraine has resulted from   the desire to gain 'renewed global power status' based on imperialistic motives.

GEOPOLITICAL CONCERNS OF RUSSIA

Russia's historical objective has been to assure her geopolitics concerns, such as accessing 'hot waters' referring to free access to open seas, avoiding direct neighboring with major powers referring to have a buffer zone between them, preventing middle or short range-range missiles from deploying in her neighboring countries with NATO and preventing Ukraine and Georgia from NATO membership. After the disbanding of the Soviet Union, Russia has put emphasis on the 'near abroad' policy which aims

at regaining control of old Soviet land.[9] This means that Russia still sees those newly independent states of the old Soviet Union as her backyard and does not permit any third powers to create a sphere of influence in those countries.

In this perspective, Russia sees NATO expansion toward the east a major geopolitical concern for her national security. But, the political and military involvement in the NATO side have developed contrary to what Russia desired. Following the end of the Cold War, there were arguments about the future of NATO after the Warsaw Pact dissolved. The survivability of NATO was in danger as the main enemy disappeared. But, NATO quickly adapted itself to the new international conjuncture, widening threats to cover non-conventional such as political uncertainties, frozen conflicts, terrorism, energy security, cyber security, migration etc.[10] But NATO also displayed itself as a 'security hope' for newly independent states gained their independence from the disbanded Soviet Union. First, NATO, led by the US administration, established a new organization called the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) to which all former Warsaw Pact countries embraced. Aftermath, NATO adopted and implemented an 'open door' policy to the newly independent countries after the Soviet Union. The new NATO initiative, announced in Brussels in 1994, was named the Partnership for Peace (PfP) and the NACC was replaced by this new concept and partnership relationship.[11] NATO major open door policy took place twice in 1999 and 2004, in 2009. Almost all Eastern European countries were included in NATO.[12]

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9 Please see the detail about the Russian 'near abroad policy' in Sertif Demir-Mehmet Seyfettin Erol, "Rusya'nın Orta Asya Politikası", Sezgin Kaya, der., *Rusya Federasyonu Dış Politikası*, MKM Yayıncılık, Bursa 2013, p. 311-341.

10 Please see the detail about the NATO in Sertif Demir, 21. "Yüzyılda Barış ve Güvenliğin Tesisinde NATO'nun Rolü", *Gazi Akademik Bakış,* 9(18), 2016, p. 235-252.

11 Çeviköz, *loc.cit.*

12 Please see the detail about NATO's transformation in Sertif Demir, "Stratejik Konseptler ve NATO'nun Dönüşümü", Mehmet Seyfettin Erol, der., *Sıcak Barışın Soğuk Örgütü: Yeni NATO,* Barış Platin Publishing, Ankara 2012, p. 57-114.

Although Russia became a member of the NACC and then the PfP, it could not psychologically digest losing its status as a global superpower with the collapse of the Soviet Union. That is why he insisted on seeking equality with NATO. The result was the creation of the NATO-Russia Founding Act in 1997 and the Permanent Association Council established with it. Five years later, this structure was renamed the NATO-Russia Council in Rome.[13] After the Russian occupation of Crimean Peninsula in 2014, NATO-Russia Council suspended and still is dysfunctional.

Russia opposed NATO enlargement, emphasizing that the Warsaw Pact had been disbanded. But, Russia thought that NATO's expansion referred to that NATO still perceives Russia as a potential enemy, despite the fact that the West says this was not the case. In order to give the assurance to Russia NATO provided special status with her.[14] A Permanent Joint Council was established in Brussels In 1997 per the NATO-Russia Founding and the NATO-Russia Council was formed in the Rome summit in 2002.[15] The NATO-Russia Founding Act is an important document which establishes a balance between NATO and Russia and aims to be one of the building blocks of the European security architecture.

It will never prevent NATO from recruiting new members. It notes the understanding that Russia will not have a veto power on this issue, even if a country wishes to become a member of NATO.[16] However, Russia's acceptance and signing of this document was only possible with the aim and understanding of preventing NATO from posing a threat to its own security.[17] Bear in mind that NATO-Russia Council suspended in 2014 owing to Russian aggression to Ukraine in 2014.

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13 Çeviköz, *loc.cit.*
14 Rutland, *op. cit.*, p. 129-140.
15 Çeviköz, *loc.cit.*
16 Çeviköz, *loc.cit.*
17 Çeviköz, *loc.cit.*

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Russia believes that the NATO expansion toward the East is an existential threat to its national security. Given these facts, Russia sees Ukraine as the buffer zone between the West and itself. After, NATO decision to provide a likely NATO membership with Georgia and Ukraine in the 2008 Bucharest Summit, Russia understood this step as an 'alarming' threat to its security. Russıa has repeatedly declared her opposition to NATO enlargement since 1990s.[18] She thought that *'the West had been moving into Russia's backyard and threatening its core strategic interests.'*[19] Russia has clearly expressed that a likely NATO membership would lead to a conflict with NATO in future, fearing from NATO intervention in any dispute with Ukraine.

Russia has thought the unresolved Crimean and Donbas issues remained from 2014 will deter Ukraine from the desire of being NATO membership. Because she became successful in deterring Georgia. Russia took military action against Georgia in summer 2008, utilizing the pretext of protection of Abkhazia and Ossetia from Georgian attacks. Indeed, Georgia's dream of NATO membership has faded away and postponed it to an uncertain future.

On the contrary, after the 2014 Ukrainian crisis, Ukraine has become a new strategic venue for global competition between the West and Russia. Ukrainian desire for NATO membership has been incredibly inflamed and it was included in the constitution as provision. This meant Russia has not attained in deterring Ukraine from the desire of NATO membership.

On the other hand, *'the West's triple package of policies—NATO enlargement, EU expansion, and democracy promotion—added fuel to fire waiting to ignite.'*[20] Russia asserts these policies as threats to its national security, viewing authoritarian characteristics of its regime.

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18 John Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault", *Foreign Affairs,* September/October 2014, p. 1.
19 *Ibid.*
20 *Ibid.*

However, NATO and American relations with Ukraine progressed. These close relations were also present in the past. For example, after the 'Orange revolution' took place in 2014 pro-Russian leadership was replaced with pro-Western government. Since 2004, RF utilized the political quagmire in Ukraine in 2014 as a pretext to occupy Crimean Peninsula and destabilize the Donbas Region of Ukraine. Ukraine became the primary front line between Russia and the West.

On the other hand, Moscow is looking for tangible guarantees from America/NATO that Ukraine will not be granted a NATO membership. Besides, she also requests no military power or infrastructure deployed in the Ukrainian lands.[21] Therefore, on 17 December 2021, Russia declared her intention to sign a new security pact with the US and NATO, demanding no deployment forces and weapons to the countries granted NATO membership after May 1997. Reviewing the past, the Alliance had not intended to station significant combat forces in the new members lands which were either formerly members of the Warsaw pact or breakaway from the former Soviet Union until 2014.[22] As for the Nuclear weapons policy the Alliance's policy was clear, it had *'no intention, no plan, and no reason' to deploy nuclear weapons on the mentioned new members'* territory.[23] Indeed, NATO, practically, had not deployed troops or equipment in new member states from 1997 to 2014[24], until Russian aggression in Crimea and the Eastern Ukraine.

Russia wanted to return the pre-1997 European political and security structure and to end further NATO expansion to prevent Georgia and Ukraine becoming NATO members. She also asserted that NATO expansion to East Europe was a violence of promised words and

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21 Mills, *op. cit.,* p. 2.

22 Steven Pifer, "Russia's Draft Agreements with NATO and the United States: Intended for Rejection?", *Brookings,* https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/12/21/russias-draft-agreements-with-nato-and-the-united-states-intended-for-rejection/, (Date of Accession: 12.03.2022).

23 *Ibid.*

24 *Ibid.*

assurances from James Baker, the US secretary of state, to the Soviet leader, Mikhail S. Gorbachev after German unification in 1989. According to RF, NATO's eastward expansion is a unilateral act threatening their security. For this purpose, RF sought legally binding agreement with the West/NATO/the US.[25] This means Russia wants no more confrontation with the West for NATO expansion toward Ukraine and Georgia. Russia also wanted to establish direct lines with NATO and revive NATO-Russia Council in its draft agreement. In fact, NATO has suggested to leave open dialogue channels such as relaunching NATO-Russia Council meetings, although RF suspended the relations with NATO in October 2021.[26]

On the other hand, it seemed that Russia may desire the refusal of a draft treaty by the US and NATO which she might use as another pretext for military action against Ukraine. Because there were improper provisions in the two draft agreements, the Russian government quickly publicized them and finally the authoritative terms were used in draft agreements.[27] These unaccustomed wording and provisions in a treaty definitely require its rejection as done by the US and NATO.

NATO and the US did not accept such Moscow's enforcing demands as the Russian proposals were seen as unilateral dictates on Allied decision mechanisms and their willingness. Bear in mind that Although NATO still maintains an open door policy and has close cooperation with Ukraine and Georgia, it seems to have no intention of granting NATO membership to those countries in near future, considering the realpolitik of the region. But, despite no membership position, Ukraine received a huge amount of economic and military aid from the US, the EU and NATO after 2104. Western Allies did not want to face the similar Russian aggressions as were in the past. They, this time collectively, attempted to take the pain of not being able to prevent Russia's behavior in Georgia

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25 *Ibid.*
26 *Ibid.*
27 *Ibid.*

in 2008 and in Ukraine and Crimea in 2014. In fact, the current level of war progress demonstrates that the West made Ukraine well prepared for the potential Russian aggression. Expectation was that the war would end shortly as the Ukrainian army would not resist Russian forces. On the contrary, all Ukraine from leadership to individuals have displayed a huge resolution to defend their country heroically. Bear in mind that major Western powers have enormously supported the Ukrainian army for military preparedness.[28]

Furthermore, America signed a new defense cooperation agreement with Ukraine in November 2021[29] which led Russia to think over her security in under eminent threat. All these military aids, training military army, upgrading military infrastructure of Ukraine by the US annoyed Russia.

Overall, Russia contemplates Ukraine within her sphere of influence and has feared from her potential NATO or the European Union membership[30] which might lead to a likely conflict with NATO forces. This has been considered a major geopolitical concern for her survival.

THE PROTRACTED RUSSIA-UKRAINE DISPUTES

Since her independence, Ukraine has had problematic relations with Russia in terms of legitimacy of Ukrainian state, controlling nuclear weapons of the former USSR, the status of Crimean Peninsula, the share of Black Sea fleet, natural gas, Russian minorities living at the Eastern Ukraine, the status of naval ports at the Sea of Azov and her prospect for NATO and the EU membership.

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28 *Ibid.*

29 Mearsheimer, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

30 "An Analysis of the Russia/Ukraine Conflict", *HHS Cybersecurity Program*, https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/an-analysis-of-the-russia-ukraine-conflict.pdf, (Date of Accession: 12.03.2022).

Key problem is that the nationalist elites of Russia hardly recognize Ukraine as an independent state. According to them, Ukraine was artificially created by Lenin, founder of the Soviet Union, for their participation to Communist union. Historically, a state called Ukraine never existed. This idea was also verbalized by Putin in a TV speech just one day before the Russian attack on Ukraine. Furthermore, Putin's Russia has hardly seen the newly established countries post-dissolution of the Soviet Union as independent formation. This mostly relates to Ukraine, Georgia or Moldova as those they are close Russian identity and remaining within her sphere of influence.[31]

Historically, Ukraine has become the lands of Slavic states. The first eastern Slavic state, Kyivan Rus, was established and enlarged in the 10th century in the present Ukrainian lands. Until Mongol invasion in 13th century, Kyivan Rus had become almost one of the powerful states in Europe. Indeed, the legacy of Kyivan Rus paved the way for further development of Ukrainian identity and culture at following ages.[32] On contrary, Russia sees Kyivan Rus as its ancestor.

Therefore, Russia does not want to see Ukraine as a different nation, instead, asserts Ukraine was a theatrically created state. But the emerging Russian Empire occupied all Ukrainian lands from the late 18th century until 1917 Communist revolution. 'After Russia invaded Crimea and established its sovereignty in Ukraine, it put into effect the project of building a 'great Russian nation', which included Ukrainians and White Russians. Despite this project, Ukrainian intellectuals and political elites also focused on building a separate Ukrainian nation with its own history, language and culture'.[33]

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31 Sylwia Demedziuk, "The New Dimension of War-The Ukraine Conflict", *Security&Defence*, 1, 2017, p. 96-97.

32 "Summary of Ukrainian History (From Various Sources)", *Vanderbilt,* https://www.vanderbilt.edu/olli/class-materials/Summary_of_Ukrainian_history.pdf, (Date of Accession: 12.03.2022).

33 Celalettin Yavuz, "Soğuk Savaş'tan Sıcak Çatışmaya mı?", *Yeni Şafak,* https://www.yenisafak.com/dusunce-gunlugu/soguk-savastan-sicak-catismaya-mi-3729605, (Date of Accession: 12.03.2022).

Although Ukraine remained independent for three years (1917-20) after the revolution,[34] the Red Army ended this state's existence as the Tsarist White Army stationed and used Ukrainian lands against the revolution. This status had continued until the disbanding of the USSR in 1991. Ukraine regained her independence which is currently problematic issue in the eyes of Putin.

Reviewing historical facts, there are some clues that prove the existence of Ukrainian identity. However, both Russian and Ukrainian are very similar nations in terms of history, culture, religion and ethnicity. Indeed, the defeat of Ottoman Armies by Russian Army in 1783 allowed the Russification of Crimean Peninsula.[35] This also facilitated the Russification of Ukrainian lands.

Other problematic issues are the prolonged conflicts in Donbas region and the status of Crimean Peninsula illegally invaded by Russia in 2014. Crimea strategically is very important for Russia and Ukraine. Historically, it was the home of Turkish originated people. However, after invasion by Tsarist armies in 1783, the Crimean Peninsula was Russified. There was a mass exodus or expulsion Tatar Turks living in Crimea for almost two centuries. They returned to Crimea after 1991 but they still have not been compensated for the losses of life and property.

Crimea was attached to Ukraine by Khrushchev in 1954 as a gift for the 300th anniversary of unification of Ukraine[36] with the Russian Empire. This annexation was reluctantly recognized as Ukraine was part of the Soviet. Bear in mind that Russia has dreamed of annexing Crimea since the disbanding of the Soviet. For example, the Russian Parliament Duma adopted a resolution outlining Sevastopol as Russian territory in

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34 "Summary of Ukrainian…", *loc.cit.*

35 Anton Bebler, "Crimea and the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict", *Romanian Journal of European Affairs,* 15(1), 2015, p. 37.

36 Bebler, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

June 1993. Besides, Eurasian intellectuals and geo-strategists had been debating a likely disintegration of Ukraine and the absorption some parts of her by Russia.

After the dissolution, the Soviet nuclear weapon stocks in Ukraine were resolved with the US auspices. The deal in the 1994 Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances between two countrıes was that Kyiv would hand over all former Soviet nuclear weapons stocked in Ukrainians territory to Russia, in return, Russia would recognize Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.[37] The US and United Kingdom also became signatures of this deal. That means the Putin's claims are baseless, considering the 1994 deal between two countries.

The Azov Sea in the peninsula provides safe haven with any fleet in Black Sea. Peninsula also has critical ports for trade and military purposes. Although the Black Sea Fleet was shared between Russia and Ukraine after the Soviet's breakaway, the use of Sevastopol naval base was resolved with the 1997 Treaty on friendship, cooperation and partnership between two countries. Ukraine accepted to give Sevastopol naval base for 20 year lease for the Russia's Black Sea Fleet.[38] But, for Russia it was very hard to accept such an agreement, as she thought of Crimea and Sevastopol within her sovereignty. The extremists in Russia requested the whole Peninsula instead of leasing.

Regarding Donbas region, it hosts heavily Russian-speaking people. Russia accused Ukraine to ban speaking Russian language where Russian majority live. Russia has dissatisfied with the such practices claimıng such practices as human rights violation. Russia even put claim on Ukrainians employing 'neo-Nazi tactics' implemented by extreme rightist group in Ukraine. Bear in mind that at the Second World War, people living

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37 Rutland, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
38 *Ibid.*

in western Ukraine were accused of collaborating with Nazis. Russia now uses the same arguments, reminding the memories of the Second World War.

The governments coming to powers in Ukraine have not pursued a balanced policy between the West and Russia. They fully supported either Russia or the West. There was no midcourse. After the Euromaidan movement and the Revolution of Dignity in 2014, the pro-Russian government collapsed and pro-Western government came to power. After the government changed in Ukraine, Russia implemented a pre-planned occupation of Crimea in 2014 and triggered an uprising in Donbas in which the majority of people speak Russian. Those aggressive acts and the Crimean occupation by Russia have jeopardized the Ukrainian territorial integrity and the political union.

Therefore, Ukrainians urgently needed NATO protection and the EU membership. When Zelensky became president of Ukraine in 2019, he further developed relations with the US and NATO and requested an urgent NATO membership for Ukrainian independence. Along with other pretext, Russia started to invade Ukraine on 24 February 2022.

Considering all above, Ukraine wants to integrate with the West independently with its own free will, and to become an EU member as well as to benefit from NATO's defense umbrella. Russia, on the other hand, is trying to become an imperial and global power and is trying to tear Ukraine apart piece by piece with the 'Gerasimov Doctrine'.[39]

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39 Gerasimov doctrine is Russian new warfare doctrine which redefines the conflicts among states and sees military power equal with political, economic, informational humanitarian and other non-military activities. It was conceptualized by Russian Chief of staff, Valery Gerasimov in 2013. See for detailed information: Riana Teifukova-Mehmet Seyfettin Erol, "Russian Hybrid War: From Theory to Practice", *Uluslararası Kriz ve Siyaset Araştırmaları Dergisi,* 1(2), 2017, p. 33-67; Yavuz, *loc. cit.*

PUTIN'S PERSONALITY AND DREAMS

The character, behaviors, education, gender and ideology of leaders are also scholarly scrutinized in international relations to explain struggles, wars and conflicts among nations. It goes without saying that the roles of Hitler and Mussolini cannot be ruled out in causing the Second World War and the death of millions of innocent people. Similarly, as for the Ukraine-Russian War, the role of Putin has never been disregarded.

Putin has been ruling Russia through an autocracy in which the decision making system is exercised via Putin and his close colleagues. Putin has overly criticized the Western type liberal democracy and deemed it as one that is unfit to Russia. He asserts that liberal democracy is a threat to Russian political people. In the last decade the world has been witnessing the increasing number of far right, nationalist, populist and autocratic leaders. Putin is a prominent example of all such leaders. As a powerful autocratic leader, gathering and exercising all authority, decided to conduct an operation to stop NATO expansion, disrupt Ukrainians' dream of NATO membership and finally resolve the Donbass and Crimea issue with a heavy blow for ever.

Although the West disregarded Russian geo-politic concern and Ukrainian President Zelensky relentlessly sought protection sanctuary via NATO and the EU as well as ignored the 'Russian phobia' of NATO expansion toward Ukraine. On the other hand, Russian leader Putin consciously chose the way of war. He tried to shape a suitable environment that can be an excuse for the final blow to Ukraine to resolve Donbass problem and the Crimean annexation forever. Since the establishment of internal political integrity through harsh measures, Putin has taken actions to regain geopolitical losses of the 1990s. These actions are as flows: not withdrawing its forces from Moldova per 2004 Istanbul OSCE

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Summit, imposing economic sanction on Ukraine in return, 2004 'Orange Revolution', attacking and occupying Georgia 2008, establishing artificial states in occupied Georgian territory, invading Crimea and destabilizing Donbass.

Although Russia annexed Crimea, most of the world did not recognize this annexation, claiming it illegitimate. Although the 2014 and 2015 Minsk agreements were the base for to end conflict and attain a political solution in Donetsk and Luhansk, however, the agreements were mainly unimplemented by both sides.[40] Despite the Minsk Agreement to resolve problems in Donbass, the crisis never ended. Putin wanted to resolve these problems with a decisive whole or partial invasion. Because he thought Ukraine would not resist invasion and the West would not react to invasion as usual. But this was not the case. He miscalculated Ukrainian resistance to invasion, training level and war preparation of Ukrainian army and finally the unanticipated West support to Ukraine, before and during the war.

In summary, Putin's leadership characteristics have played an important role in taking the decision to attack Ukraine.

THE IMPACTS OF RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

The Russia-Ukraine war has unprecedented outcomes in terms of humanitarian tragedy. This war caused the death of many innocent people, the displacement of millions, the destruction of cities and individual properties. Over 4,5 million people[41] have become refugees in neighboring and other countries including Turkey. The majority of those fleeing Ukraine are women and children. This is the fast growing humanitarian crisis that

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40 Mills, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
41 "Ukraine Refugee Situation", *United Nations,* https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine, (Date of Accession: 12.03.2022).

occurred after the Second World War. There is an urgent requirement for humanitarian aid operations both in the neighboring Ukraine and in Ukraine. All international aid organizations, non-governmental organizations, the UN, the EU and NATO need to coordinate humanitarian aid operations for all refugees and internally displaced people as well as for the ones remaining under the siege. Of course, this will ease the problems of people needing the humanitarian aid.

This war has drastically altered fundamental principles, norms, values that agreed at the peace period lived post-1990s. This war has also disrupted the belief of no more war at the European territory after the 1990s. Bear in mind it has been the first time a country uses force to change agreed borders of another country following the Second World War. Hence, the political and security architecture of Europe has deeply shaken and deepened fault lines between the West and Russia.

According to Mearsheimer, following the end of Cold War, most liberals in American administration preferred NATO expansion as they assessed that international politics were deeply transformed from the realist logic, being used to govern Europe, to liberal one.[42] Hence, liberal logic would provide a new look at the European international politics. The allies in Europe willingly supported the discourse of American liberals, both stuck to the notion that geopolitics no longer mattered and that liberal order could maintain peace in Europe.[43]

However, the West under-estimated the threat perception of Russia with the NATO expansion and the inclusion of all Eastern European states to the EU. As long as NATO expanded and the EU enlarged toward the East, Russia's geopolitics concern has deepened. This has reminded us of the term security dilemma conceptualized by American political scientist

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42 Mearsheimer, *op. cit.,* p. 7.
43 *Ibid.*

John Herz in 1950. As long as NATO expands to the East, Russia will feel insecure. In order to increase its security, it takes security measures which, in return, decrease the security of any country being candidate to NATO membership, notably Ukraine. Russia might imitate a war, countering further steps of rivals which might increase its insecurity. Russian logic of initiating a war lies at those concerns. Otherwise, Russia will confront with NATO in any crisis with Ukraine if she becomes a NATO member. Hence, the West underestimated the importance of Ukraine to Russia. Bear in mind that Moscow perceived the post-1990s world system as threats to its national interests.[44] Along with Putin's willingness to break the rules of the post-1990s,[45] Russia attacked Ukraine to decrease NATO's expansion to the East, thinking of protecting its national interest.

Indeed, the war has made us rethink the validity of international relations (IR) theories trying to explain the international politics among nations post-1990s. The common belief was that realist theory was unfit to describe the world around us after the end of the Cold War. Hence, realism remained weak to read the politics among nations. In fact, liberal its derivatives IR theories such as liberal institutionalism and dependence theories have assumed an explanatory role in articulating politics among nations. These theories have oriented to explain struggle among nations within liberal values, rule-based norms and institutions, Furthermore, dependency IR theory further put forward that economic dependency in our age would abate the war risks among nations. Similarly, commentary IR theories such as constructivism, normative, gender IR theories try to explain power struggle among nations through identity, norm, values and gender perspectives. These subjective values and norms seem to be vague and weak to express the Russian attacks. It is quite clear that

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44 Rutland, *op. cit.,* p. 66-88.
45 *Ibid.*

Russia's geopolitical concern is the major force behind this attack. But, this war has indicated that geopolitics is the main dynamics to influence the states' behaviors. This means realpolitik and realism have returned.

Russia has miscalculated the West's reaction to the invasion of Ukraine. Moscow has not anticipated such wide and complex sanctions. Indeed, the West has, except for the use of military force, imposed unprecedented sanctions on every field. Because, the West anticipated a Russian attack and warned Putin that he would face unprecedented heavy economic sanctions. The West is likely to feel guilty for not taking enough measures to prevent the 2008 and the 2014 attacks. Therefore, almost all West are in a race to provide all kinds of aid to Ukraine. This indicates that the West has desired to extend the war and invasion to degrade Russian power and to deter it from any likely aggressive act in future.[46]

Europe has entered a new international politic that foresees the power projections in maintaining peace and security in the Continent, after the Russia-Ukraine war. Therefore, Germany has declared to allocate a 100-billion-euro budget for modernization of its military capabilities. The war will also implicate Russian-American relations concerning not only in Europe but also in other parts of the world.

Last but not least, the West has implemented a wide variety of economic sanctions on Russia that has never applied to any country before. There is huge frustration across the world against Russia for attempting such an invasion and death of many innocent people for nothing. Russia has been isolated from the West because of heavy sanctions. It is very sure that the world will never be the same when the war ends.

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46 Celalettin Yavuz, "Rusya Ukrayna Barışı Yakın mı?", *Yeni Şafak,* https://www.yenisafak.com/dusunce-gunlugu/rusya-ukrayna-barisi-yakin-mi-3794331, (Date of Accession: 12.04.2022).

On the other hand, although Turkey is in the Western bloc and a NATO member, it did not participate in any economic sanctions on Russia. Therefore, it has acted as a mediator between two warring states and hosted meetings of both parties in Turkey to achieve a ceasefire. It is quite a good logic for Turkey not to give full support to any warring party as Turkey is and will be the lasting neighbor of both. Additionally, Turkey has potential risks of confrontation with Russia in conflicts in Libya, Syria and the Nagorno-Karabakh. Therefore, Turkey must act carefully in ongoing war, considering both the necessities of NATO membership and potential risks of neighboring warring states.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the Russia-Ukraine war has brought a deep change to international politics in Europe. This war has drastically altered fundamental principles, norms, values that agreed at the peace period lived post-1990s. This war has also disrupted the belief of no more war in European territory after the 1990s. The Russia-Ukraine war has unprecedented outcomes in terms of humanitarian tragedy since the Second World war, causing death and displacement of countless innocent people, the destruction of cities and individual properties. Over 4,5 million people have become refugees in neighboring and other countries including Turkey. Ukrainian infrastructure has been degraded day by day by Russian attacks.

Russia deems Ukraine within its influence of domain and has become annoyed at the Ukraine's nearness with America/NATO/EU and a likely NATO and EU memberships.[47] Hence, it started a war to deter NATO's further expansion to include Ukraine, to annex the Donbas region to Russia as well to secure Crimean invasion forever. Putin used the pretext of protecting people subjected to annihilation in Donbas as well as the

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47 "An Analysis of…", *loc.cit*.

"demilitarization and de-Nazification" of Ukraine.[48] Indeed, the West under-estimated the geopolitical importance of Ukraine for Russia. They hardly regarded Russian opposition to NATO expansion, the EU enlargement and promotion of democracy activities in the so called Russian sphere of influence.

The current progress of war has displayed the Ukrainian resistance and determination to defend their country, therefore, the Russian occupation has hardly gained any physical territory so far. The West has determined to strengthen Ukrainian defence capacity, which might trigger military confrontation with Russia.[49] Currently, possessing nuclear weapons by Russia and America has discouraged any escalation and confrontation between the West and Russia.

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48 *Ibid.*

49 Tyson Wetzel-Barry Pavel, "What Are the Risks And Benefits Of Us/NATO Military Options In Ukraine?", *Atlantic Council,* https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/the-big-story/what-are-the-risks-and-benefits-of-us-nato-military-options-in-ukraine-our-strategic-risk-calculator-has-answers/, (Date of Accession: 12.03.2022).

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