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The Struggle of Great and Regional Powers in the War of Ukraine: Russia's Perspective

Ukrayna Savaşı'nda Büyük ve Bölgesel Güçlerin Mücadelesi: Rusya'nın Perspektifi

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Abstract

This study investigates the Ukraine-Russia War, which started in February 2022, from the perspective of Russia. In the study, why Russia declared war on Ukraine, Russia's policies, official documents and official discourses were examined. Despite the end of the Cold War, enlargement of NATO, which is a military structure, and the Eastern European enlargement of the EU as an economic-political structure has been closely followed in Russia since the Yeltsin period. In the Putin period, it was reflected in the official documents that this was a threat. At this point, it was deduced that this war emerged not only with the influence of Russia's but also the West's policies. Ukraine-Russia War had global effects, for this reason, it has been inferred that Ukraine has become a battleground of major and regional powers. Another finding of the research is that Ukraine is subject to a war that is a reflection of a struggle between great powers. As a result of the research, it was concluded that Russia declared war on Ukraine due to a threat perception coming from the West, especially with the expansion of NATO, its struggle with the USA, and its efforts to preserve its influence in the former Soviet region.

Keywords: International Security, Russia, Ukraine, Territorial Conflict, Conflict Resolution

Özet

Bu çalışma Şubat 2022'de başlayan Ukrayna-Rusya Savaşı'nı Rusya perspektifinden değerlendirmektedir. Çalışmada Rusya'nın neden Ukrayna'ya savaş ilan ettiği Rusya'nın politikaları, resmî belgeleri ve resmi düzeyde söylemleri ele alınarak incelenmiştir. Soğuk Savaş'ın bitmesine rağmen askerî bir yapı olan NATO'nun ve ekonomik-siyasi yapı olarak AB'nin

Dođu Avrupa geniřlemesi Rusya'da Yeltsin döneminden beri yakından izlenmektedir. Putin döneminde ise bunun bir tehdit olduđu resmî belgelere yansımıştır. Bu noktada bu savařın sadece Rusya'nın deđil Batı'nın politikaları etkisiyle de ortaya çıktıđı çıkarımı yapılmıştır. Ukrayna – Rusya Savařı'nın küresel çapta etkileri mevcuttur, bu nedenle de Ukrayna'nın büyük ve bölgesel güçlerin bir mücadele alanı hâline geldiđi kanısına varılmıştır. Ukrayna'nın büyük güçler arası bir mücadelenin yansıması olan bir savařa konu olduđu da araştırmanın bir diđer bulgusudur. Araştırma sonucunda Rusya'nın özellikle NATO'nun geniřlemesiyle Batı'dan gelen bir tehdit algısı, ABD ile olan mücadelesi, eski Sovyet bölgesindeki nüfuzu koruma çabası nedenleriyle Ukrayna'ya savař ilan ettiđi görülmüştür.

Anahtar kelimeler: Uluslararası Güvenlik, Rusya, Ukrayna, Teritoryal Çatıřma, Uyuřmazlık Çözümü

Introduction

In this study, the war in Ukraine was analyzed and the reasons for Russia's intervention in the region as an external actor were evaluated by analyzing the struggle between the great powers. The subject has been examined from Russia's policies and perspective. More precisely, the main question of this study was determined as "Why did Russia declare war on Ukraine in February 2022". In addition, the policies of the United States of America (USA) in this period were perused and the role and influence of this country was included in the subject. Thereby, the struggle between the great powers and the policies of Russia will add up more clearly.

Tensions between the parties peaked in 2014; Russia annexed Crimea following the protests and subsequent events. Separatist groups took action in these regions. In the same year, people's republics were established in Donetsk and Luhansk by referendum. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) was trying to play an active role in the region. However, the Ukrainian central government opposed the referendum to be held because the region was unstable, and Russian control was intense. Forasmuch as the pro-Russian supporters were increasing their power in the region and the demographic structure of the region was changing in the process. Donbass was the region with the most Russian population in Ukraine. The conflict in the aforementioned region has been the longest ongoing conflict in Europe since the Second World War. There are also experts who state that the war will not end anytime soon, even that it is a long-term danger (Mearsheimer, Ukraine war is a long-term danger , 2023).

In 1997, an important development took place between Russia and Ukraine. Presidents of the two countries Boris Yeltsin and Leonid Kuchma signed The Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership. This treaty was extended for 10 years in 2008. At that time, the war between the two states was neither predicted nor expected by anyone. However, as will be discussed in this article, the mispolicies implemented and the global situation reversed the expectations. Protests and clashes in Ukraine since 2013, first in Crimea, then in Donetsk and Lugansk regions, have been the first indicators of the war. Tensions between Ukraine's pro-Western governments and its supporters and pro-Russian supporters fueled the annexation of Crimea and territorial conflicts in Donetsk and Lugansk oblasts (Donbass region).

To what extent should this war be studied? It is clear that the war that

took place cannot be considered as a war between two countries that only affects them. Because both the location of the region and the fact that one of the parties (Russia) is a great power necessitates this. The war in Ukraine is a war that needs to be studied on a global scale. Other regional and great powers are also on one side of this war. In this study, the importance of the war for Russia will be examined and the issue will be associated with its regional and global reflections. Because, as a great power, Russia wants to maintain its place in the race between great and regional powers such as the USA, China and India. If the Ukraine issue and Russia's war on this country are examined without taking these into account, the subject would be incomplete. What is tried to be done here is to reveal Russia's reasons for starting the war by associating it with this issue.

At one point, the war had its reflection on the relations between the great powers. In addition, the effects of the war can be observed in the field of global relations. Although China and India seem to support Russia, this does not mean that they are allies. In addition to the border problems between China and India in the 2020-2021 period, India is also involved in a security cooperation (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue-Quad) in the Asia-Pacific, of which the USA, Japan and Australia are a part (Li, 2023).

In addition to these two countries, Turkey, France, Germany, Israel, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia have also developed policies at different levels regarding the war situation between Ukraine and Russia. Although China emphasized the territorial integrity of Ukraine, it did not take a direct stance against Russia. NATO's enlargement also highlights the organization's confrontation with Russia and China (Beal, 2023, p. 59). In this case, these states seek separate solutions for the Russia-Ukraine conflict in line with their own interests. This is among the reasons that prolong the resolution of the issue.

The Evolution of the War and Russia's Responses

External actors generally intervene in a territorial conflict within these three categories: military, economic and political-diplomatic (Uyar, 2021). In addition to the technological developments and the types of interventions related to the cyber space, an "irregular warfare" strategy, a "hybrid" method are as well applied by Russia in the region. As evident in the Ukraine crisis, Russia has implemented all of these intervention types. Finally, Russia declared war and took all its tools to the field. To put a finer point on it, Russia is no longer an external actor, it is the main actor in the issue, it is a side of the war.

Russia has traditionally intervened in the events in Ukraine after 2004, with the annexation of Crimea. As for the Donbass region, although there is no military intervention in the traditional sense, it has intervened within the framework of irregular warfare and new military technology. Russian soldiers, who did not have any military uniforms and signs, supported the pro-Russians in the aforementioned region. In particular, significant efforts were made to support the militias in the region. In addition, a military concentration was made to create pressure in the border region. The operations held every year have been advanced contemporaneously.

Russia does not want other countries to interfere in the conflict politically and diplomatically. It also reacts, and produces policies against Ukraine's accession to the EU (Wierzbowska-Miazga and Iwański, 2013). It also uses it for political and diplomatic interventions. Russia states that it sees the conflict in the Donbass region as Ukraine's internal business. Clashes continue between the central government and pro-Russian separatists in the southeast of the region. However, the fact that former President Yanukovich fled to Russia after the Orange Revolution shows how strong Russia is in the political sense. On the other hand, at the point of signing an agreement between the EU and Ukraine, it warned both the EU and Ukraine over natural gas.

Russia also uses the fact that there is a Russian population close to 40% in the Donbass region. The region has the highest Russian population in Ukraine. It also supported holding a referendum in the region in 2014. Similar to what happened in Crimea, the central government did not want a referendum under conditions of conflict. Another noteworthy situation is the simultaneous pro-Russian protests in Donetsk, Lugansk, Odeas and Kharkiv between March and May 2014. It is thought that Russian-supported social media users have an impact on their emergence. In addition, Russia has also stated in the conventional and social media that a Western-backed coup was carried out and that it was a fascist situation.

In 2015, Ukraine proposed the establishment of a UN mission, but this was rejected. In 2017, President Putin took the initiative and proposed the creation of a UN force on the border, but this would not be met (Oldberg, 2020, p. 12). The offer was not accepted due to a change in circumstances. The momentum now turned in favor of Russia and Russia would be effective in a UN force to be formed. Thus and so, as the Russian separatists grew stronger in the region, Russia was also

realizing a ring in its conflict resolution method: a sign of goodwill to the international community.

Another important difference in the peace process is which of the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) organized by the OSCE and the Normandy Group will be effective. In the Trilateral Contact Group, Ukraine, Russia and the Donbass region would be parties. The Normandy Group included France, Germany, Ukraine and Russia. Naturally, Russia preferred the latter. Russia also tried to show its influence in the peace process. Thus, it would maintain its influence in the process, including security issues, because the separatists were also parties in the negotiations.

The final point reached in the peace efforts is as follows: The Minsk Protocol was signed on 5 September 2014 by the representatives of Ukraine, the Russian Federation, the Donetsk People's Republic, the Luhansk People's Republic and the OSCE in order to end the conflict in the Donbass region of Ukraine, or rather to stop it. It was an agreement led by the OSCE in Minsk, Belarus. Other attempts were made to stop the conflict in the region, but they were unsuccessful. This protocol established an emergency ceasefire. The conflict could not be stopped with this, and a new package of measures, called Minsk II, was agreed on 12 February 2015. But this was not successful either. Yet these failed Minsk agreements were accepted as a basis for the Normandy Group. Stating that the Minsk II Agreement has not been successfully implemented in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, some scholars state that Russia will not invade in 2022 (Waslekar, 2023, p. 1). However, scholars such as Alexander Dugin, who stated that Russia should return to its former power, indicate that the state will work for this. (Bremmer, 2023) (J. Burbank, 2022). In other words, the implementation of the Minsk II Agreement would not have changed anything.

Another point that should be evaluated within this framework is Russia's accusations against the West. Referring to the history of the Ukraine crisis, Putin emphasizes that they speak the same language and are one (Putin, Ukraine, 2020). Putin, targeting the West, which fears the union of Ukraine and Russia, sees them as one of the reasons for the division with Ukraine. At the same time, he also accuses Ukrainian nationalists that they have forgotten history. It also sees the West as an obstacle to the development of Ukraine. With such statements, Russia, in a sense, sends a message to Ukraine, warns them not to follow a pro-Western policy and continues its political interventions. On the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Crimea is

demonstrated as part of the federation (Russian Federation, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.) (Russie, Le Ministère des affaires étrangères de la Fédération de, 2020).

Judging by the economic interventions, the importance of Ukraine for Russia's economic security is obvious. In addition, Russia is important for Ukraine in terms of both economy and energy. When Russia could not convince Ukraine to join the Customs Union established between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan in 2013 and pro-Western Viktor Yushchenko was elected as the president in 2014, its economic pressures intensified. Cutting off natural gas and embargo on Ukrainian goods are examples of Russia's economic interventions. Russia specifically used its energy card against former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, and it was alleged that the former prime minister was in efforts to harm Gazprom and took bribes (Kuzio, 2015, p. 513). One of the important economic intervention tools used by Russia in conflicts is to cut off energy exports. It also carries out activities to develop economic activities and apply pressure in the region and in Crimea. Efforts are underway to connect Crimea and Russia in the Kerch Strait. The use of nuclear weapons in war has always been the subject of debate. Even if the use of these weapons does not occur, explosions at nuclear power plants and the shift of war to those points create an apprehensive situation.

The hybrid warfare should also be noted that in the conflicts in Ukraine, which Russia has started to use frequently in recent years to intervene in territorial conflicts (Menkiszak, 2014, p. 2). Russia uses information warfare, political and economic pressure and irregular warfare methods as well as mass propaganda through television programs, news and especially social media. Russia is trying to influence the elections held in the national and conflict regions of Ukraine by using them. It is claimed that it gave more money to the militias than its own soldiers and trained them, as in the Donbass region (Oldberg, 2020, p. 8).

Conflicts in Ukraine turned into a war with the attack of Russia on February 24, 2022. The war between Ukraine and Russia continues. It is predicted that this war will continue if Russia follows the old policies of the USA, NATO and the EU. In the following topics, the reasons why Russia started this war were discussed, and the causes of the war were examined from the Russian front at the level of regional and global relations.

NATO Enlargement

Many realists, like John Mearsheimer, argued that NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe would pose significant problems (Mearsheimer, 2022) (Mearsheimer, 2023). Henry Kissinger also suggested that Ukraine stay out of NATO (Kissinger, 2014). There were many more researchers who stated that the expansion of NATO and the continuation of the Cold War mentality would increase the tension between them (Fraser, 2014). The issue also has a political dimension as well as a military and security dimension. The Eastern European enlargement of the European Union (EU) continues. In this context, the following question arises: Could Russia tolerate Ukraine's relations with the EU if Ukraine stayed away from NATO? Would Crimea have been occupied in 2014? There are those who answer this question in the negative. Russia is clearly opposed to NATO's Eastern European expansion, as we will evaluate in this study.

NATO's enlargement to Estonia, Latvia, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia in 2004 and Albania and Croatia in 2009 were developments that Russia followed very closely. Especially the 2004 enlargement was a very difficult situation for Russia to accept. In a sense, the expansion into the sphere of influence of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was taking place. This created a bad impression on Russia's prestige and influence in other regions, especially in energy security. Russian officials questioned why NATO, a legacy of the Cold War, was still expanding. The Cold War was over, but this legacy (NATO) continued. This created a bad impression on Russia's prestige and influence in other regions, especially in energy security. Russian officials questioned why NATO, a legacy of the Cold War, was still expanding. The Cold War was over, but his legacy continued.

When Putin founded the Eurasian Economic Union, his aim was to assume the leadership of the former Soviet countries and to create a new power in the multipolar world. Russian elites were concentrated in the former Soviet area. This policy was reflected in 1993, 2000, 2010, 2014 Military Doctrine and 1993, 2000, 2008, 2013, 2016 Foreign Policy Concept documents (Krickovic and Pellicciari, 2021, p. 86). In addition, Putin's speech at the 2007 Munich Security Conference was a turning point. This speech was a clear message against Europe and the USA (Putin, 2007). Russia's move from a great power to a leading world power is reflected in official Russian documents, as clearly detected in Putin's speeches. In this case, the Ukraine crisis becomes more meaningful from the Russian point of view (President of the Russian Federation,

2015). According to leaked information, then-CIA Director Williams J. Burns told the then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice that Russia's stance against NATO's expansion to Georgia and Ukraine was clear (Burns, 2008). Europe is an important power multiplier for the USA on a global scale, especially against China and Russia. But the same is also true for Russia.

US Repression and the Impact of the Struggle Between the Great Powers

As Lavrov stated, would the world be a safe place if the great powers agreed to influence their spheres of influence, as in the 1815 Congress of Vienna? From a realist point of view this can be considered true. However, the USA and Russia are disrupting this balance by acting with different dynamics of interest in Eastern Europe. Russia is in a struggle with the great powers, especially in the former Soviet sphere of influence and Ukraine. Also, the Ukraine-Russia War is far beyond a European crisis (Chester A. Crocker, 2022, p. 184). The crisis examined is a global crisis in which global and regional actors (such as the USA, Turkey, United Nations (UN), BRICS countries) are actively involved. It affects many areas from energy to grain chain, migrant crisis, nuclear security.

The fact that the war between Ukraine and Russia will last for a long time does not surprise the Realists and remains on the agenda as a high probability. Because this ongoing war, beyond the Ukraine-Russia War, is a reflection of a geostrategic conflict in Eastern Europe with Russia, with the USA and the EU on one side. NATO's military expansion, the EU's political and economic expansion to Eastern Europe has been one of the important causes of the war. After the collapse in 1991 and the end of the liberal unipolar system of the USA, Russia resumed an active policy, especially during the Putin era.

Another situation to be evaluated for Russia is this: Increasing military expenditures in European countries, especially Germany, and US pressure in NATO may lead to a new strategy, autonomy discussions for the EU (B. M. Szewczyk, 2022). Russia may face a new actor. How beneficial would this be for Russia? While the USA, as a global hegemonic power, tries to encircle and limit Russia from all sides, it implements its main move in Europe.

Brzezinski emphasizes that Eurasia is very important for American hegemony. From Portugal to Japan to the Pacific, this region is indispensable for the fight against Russia and China. The struggle with Russia is also reflected in the USA's struggle with China (Brzezinski,

1998, p. 97). Eastern Europe, one of the three important geostrategic regions of the world, continues to maintain its importance for the USA, which is a great power. The fact that its close allies European countries are located in that region and their commercial ties are effective in this. It is clear that Europe continues to form the cornerstone of US strategies (Beal, 2023, p. 57).

According to the West, the purpose of economic sanctions is based on cutting off the energy export of the “draconian” regime in Russia (Haass, 2022). Russia is trying to overcome this energy dilemma through Türkiye and the countries in its close geography. Russia’s location in this region is one of the most important reasons for this. The USA continues to suppress Russia in this war by using its tools, including economic sanctions.

Ukraine’s Geostrategic and Geopolitical Position

The elites who influenced American foreign policy from Mackinder to Brzezinski put Europe and Russia at the center (Mackinder H. , 1996). This also includes the process of Ukraine’s admission to NATO. Why was Eastern Europe so important? Mackinder saw Eastern Europe as the key to controlling Russia. Brzezinski, along with others, agreed. Mackinder’s conclusion that whoever rules Europe rules the world is still one of the main points for American political elites.

Russia’s desire to keep the region under control will reduce the USA’s influence in the region. Strategic industries will shift away from the US, again as the US has no physical contact, its influence on the roads will decrease, and new financial instruments will conflict with the dollar-based Bretton Woods system on which the US laid the foundation (Diesen, 2021, p. 25). One of the reflections of this is the Ukraine-Russia War (Mackinder H. J., 1996). Russia and Eastern Europe, which see a land bridge between the Pacific, Central Asia and Europe economically, have a critical place in world politics from a geopolitical point of view. This is one of the important transit points of China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). As such, as will be discussed below, China is also closely interested in the issue.

Russia also took them into account. The importance of Ukraine for Russia is revealed here (Beal, 2023, p. 57). The USA is trying not only to fight against Russia, but also to break the power of Europe and to maintain its influence in the region economically and especially militarily. The weakness of the military wing of the EU and the fact that NATO is much

more active in the region are indicators of this (Horstmann, 2022). In the Ukraine-Russia crisis, again, the dominant role was played by the US and NATO wing in the military sense.

Luce described the 20th century as the "American Century" in 1941 (Luce, 1921). In the 21st century, important powers, China and Russia, came up against the USA. The Ukrainian-Russian War is also a pointer of this. Ukraine is an important example in terms of the appearance of the conflict between the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union. Kissinger and Brzezinski advocate that this country be a member of both unions.

The main reason for starting this war by Russia is NATO's expansion to Eastern Europe. In 2004, NATO and the EU implemented a policy of large-scale enlargement towards Eastern Europe and new members were accepted. Russia perceives these enlargement policies in the region, which it considers as its own area of domination, as a threat to its national security and interests.

It is clearly stated by Russia that Ukraine is a geostrategic and geopolitically important country for Russia. The fact that Ukraine is a necessary part for Russia to become a great power is emphasized and reflected in politics from Yeltsin's period to this time. This is an accurate approach for Russia in terms of security as a state. Even preventing attacks from the West and ensuring the security of the Western side is a security policy kept in the foreground by the Russian rulers (Kortunov, 1996, p. 148).

Russia's Efforts to Preserve Its Security and Influence

Russia perceives the West's NATO enlargement and the EU's enlargement towards Eastern Europe as threats. From Lenin and Stalin to Putin, Russian expansionism was strategically defensive while tactically expansionist. This situation did not necessitate the destruction of Ukraine. However, it is important in terms of revealing the share of the EU and the USA in the outbreak of the war (Rezvani, 2020). As in 1993, NATO enlargement was cogitated as a potential risk-danger or threat in Russian security documents, while the Russian Military Doctrine of 2014 and 2021 saw NATO enlargement as the main risk. In the Color Revolutions in 2003 Georgia, 2004 Ukraine, 2005 Kyrgyzstan, Russia's efforts to replace pro-Russian leaders after the Soviets, not only in its own country, are included in Russian strategic thought. Again, the Ukraine Square events in 2014 show this (German, 2020).

The Vladimir Putin era is a period when Russia pursues a more active

foreign policy. In terms of both Ukraine and Russia, changes in their national policies began to be produced and implemented more clearly. Between 2000 and 2004, Vladimir Putin also finished the first presidential term and was about to start the second. Putin intended to create policies for Russia to be more effective in the Soviet sphere of influence. Attacks on Russia from the West are mostly carried out through Ukraine but also through Belarus. Kyiv is pondered as the historical capital for Russians and the cradle of Russian civilization. The two important situations mentioned are also included in the discourses of the Russian administrators. These discourses were used much more frequently during the Putin period (Götz and Staun, 2022, p. 486).

In this case, when Ukraine took a pro-EU stance and took political action, it brought Russia to the point of intervening in Ukraine, albeit implicitly. In a sense, Russia was drawing the border with the West, and *the specter of the iron curtain* had emerged. In addition, Russia was escalating the conflict and systematically introduced hybrid warfare methods. When Viktor Yushchenko (president 2005-2010) came to power, Ukraine's balance policy had shifted in a pro-Western direction. After this date, it was understood that the tension between Russia and Ukraine would increase.

The enlargement of NATO in 2004 gave the first signals of tension. Viktor Yanukovich, on the other hand, announced that he gave up on rapprochement with Russia and signing the agreement with the EU. Ukraine would then become the center of protests. These actions, which will be called the "Euromaidan protests" (*Yevromaydan*) would also be the beginning of the unstable days in Ukraine. Russia was effective in these actions.

The protests that started in Ukraine in the last months of 2013 and called the "Orange Revolution" rose to their most violent level in 2014. Russian rulers also described these revolutions as a coup d'état (Götz and Staun, 2022, p. 485). They were also included in Russia's Military Doctrine, Security Strategy and Foreign Policy Concepts in 2014, 2015, 2016. Even after the Euromaidan protests, the Poroshenko and Zelensky governments continued to pursue a pro-Western foreign policy. In the same year, the President of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich, fled to Russia. These events and this situation of Ukraine were not accepted by Russia (Putin, 2021).

The coup attempt against Viktor Yanukovich in 2014 and the fall of the government were considered the beginning of hostility towards

Ukraine. It is claimed that Victoria Nuland, who was responsible for European and Eurasian relations during the Obama era, was behind this coup (Leupp, 2021). Putin accuses the perpetrators of this coup as neo-Nazis and claims that the Russians in the Donbass region are oppressed (Darden and Way, 2014). This discourse would continue in 2022, when the war escalated.

Russia invaded Crimea the same year, and a referendum was held in March in the middle of the conflict. Ukraine's EU membership was thought by Russian officials to lead to the country's NATO membership. This discourse was also used by the Kremlin to legitimize Russia's invasion of Crimea (Götz and Staun, 2022, p. 487). The first uprisings and clashes in the Donbass region began in April 2014, and pro-Russian groups turned to secession movements.

These conflicts continue on a 400-kilometer line. The outbreak of a crisis in the Donbass region also prevented Ukraine from technically entering NATO. According to NATO rules, if there is a territorial and ethnic-political conflict in a country, that country cannot be a member of the organization (NATO, 2008). In 2021, conflicts in the Donbass region escalated, but were not completely out of control. However, the conflict went beyond those regions and turned into war. Strategic depth, which is important for Russia, is commented by some scholars as the only way to defend the country. As in the case of Ukraine, the approach of the West and the enlargement of NATO are considered as a threat to Russia's strategic depth (Lukyanov, 2016, p. 36).

Russia has tried to keep Ukraine in its sphere of influence by using many political, economic and military tools. Ukraine's negotiations with the EU, which started in 2009, were followed with suspicion by Russia. NATO enlargement, which is parallel to the political development of the EU in Eastern Europe, has also brought about a situation for Russia to attach more importance to the issue (D'Anieri, 2019). As we mentioned, Henry Kissinger also recommends that Ukraine stay out of NATO (Kissinger, 2014). The Russian Institute for Strategic Studies interprets the cooperation of Ukraine with the USA and NATO as the country's de facto entry into NATO (Götz and Staun, 2022, p. 488). In addition to this military threat, it does not want the region, which it sees as its sphere of influence, to get out of its control economically. In addition, in the economic context, Ukraine has a critical geostrategic importance in terms of Russia's control over the natural gas lines. In addition, Russia, which wants to increase its bases in the Black Sea, wants to keep

control in the Sea of Azov. Along with these, Russia wants to revive its influence in the former Soviet Union region in terms of its own prestige. This flank is the primary threat area for Russia, as NATO and the USA always attacked from the West in Napoleonic France (1803–1815), Nazi Germany (1941–1945), and in the Cold War.

Putin states that they will not be late as in 1940 and 1941, and they will not make the same mistake again (Vladimir Putin, 2022). In a sense, he is trying to make a preemptive strike. Russian officials evaluate the enlargement of the EU and NATO from this perspective. All this shows the importance of Ukraine's geostrategic position both in Eastern Europe and in the Black Sea. Russia's close relations with Serbia and Hungary also demonstrate the division in Europe. Russia is trying to develop these relations. Statements of support for Russia came from both countries during the Ukraine War.

The most important country for Russia's Eurasian project is Ukraine. From the economic potential of this country to issues related to historical ties and security, its importance for Russia is clear (Krickovic and Pellicciari, 2021, p. 91) (Lo, 2015). Obviously, for the post-Soviet one country in Eurasia, namely Ukraine, is more important than the others. This makes it easier to understand why the war broke out in Ukraine.

Struggle in Eurasia

Eurasia is at the center of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). One of the consequences of the Ukrainian war, and arguably one of the major motivations of the US strategy that produced it, is the disruption of the Eurasian component of the BRI (Beal, 2023, p. 66). Eastern Europe is of critical importance for the stable and secure continuation of Russian-led institutions such as the Eurasian Economic Union. The connection to Europe is one of the clearest reasons for this. While Putin stated that the efforts for the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union will continue, it is understood from his words that this is a union that will rival the EU (Putin, 2021).

It would be appropriate to say that the importance of Eurasia is also due to Russia's strategic culture (Adamsky, 2018) (Jonsson, 2019). Minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov also states that NATO is systematically preparing Ukraine against Russia militarily (Lavrov, 2021). Russian policymakers and security experts view joint military exercises and training between Ukraine and NATO as security threats (Götz and Staun, 2022, p. 489).

Besides its anti-Western attitude, Russia has a privileged relationship with its neighbors in Eurasia. In addition, Russia creates a buffer zone by using its terrestrial size. Russia uses all these advantages and does not want to lose it. In this context, rhetorically radicalized discourses have emerged in Russia against Ukraine (Götz and Staun, 2022, p. 483). Tensions in Ukraine and the Black Sea are gradually rising. This was basically a reflection of the tension between the USA and Russia. The announcement that the US would establish a naval operations center in Ochakiv (a city between Odessa and Kherson) was immediately met with a harsh response by Russia (Herzenshorn, 2022). Both the navy commander and Putin stated that Russia would increase its power in the Black Sea with the thought of balancing the powers. For Russia, Ukraine is important not only for the Western land border, but also for the security of the Black Sea. That's why Russia closely monitors USA's military cooperation with Ukraine, and immediately responds. The establishment of the Yaroriv Training Center, where the USA and NATO soldiers train Ukrainians is an example of this (Wezeman and Kuimova, 2018).

Is the USA's main objective to dominate Europe? At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries this was quite obvious (Johnstone, 2021). This was revealed in the US struggle with the Soviets and now with Russia. The USA is trying to push Europe into this war with its intense propaganda. Putin has described NATO's takeover in Ukraine as "knife to our throat" (Putin, 2022). The fact that the Tomahawk missiles there can easily hit Moscow, and the ballistic missiles reaching Russia within seven to eight minutes from Kharkov are among the examples Putin gave for the security threat.

In his article written in 2021, Putin described Kyiv as the mother of all Russian cities. This rhetoric and influence of Russia paved and accelerated the way to war, like its attempts in Donbass (Putin, 2021). President Biden also accused Putin of pursuing the perspective of imperial aspirations. The United States had taken a clear stand against Russia since its first attacks (The White House, 2022).

Putin expects a change in contact with the United States. Trump may be a better option for Russia. Trump is in a sense accused of lacking imperial power perspective (Cohen, 2020). Trump, who says he will end the war in one day, continues to blame Biden for prolonging the war. NATO members also supported Ukraine by sending weapons, financially and diplomatically. The United States has made it clear, in

another statement, President Biden stated that this war was “the great war between democracy and autocracy” (The White House, Remarks by President Biden on the united efforts of the free world to support the people of Ukraine, 2022). If this war was a war between democracy and autocracies, as Biden said, are Brazil and India not democracies just because they are pro-Russian (?) (Hirsh, 2022). Countries that support Russia can act differently from that organization even if they are in an organization.

Some of the ASEAN member states, for example Myanmar directly and openly support Russia, while Singapore openly calls Russia the invader and Ukraine the victim (Kliem, 2023, p. 4). ASEAN countries and much of the non-Western world have no desire to isolate Russia and exclude it from participation in global and regional governance mechanisms. The Ukraine-Russia War can also be seen as a reflection of different global relations networks. On the other hand, Russia is trying to supply energy to the EU, including through Ukraine. In this way, it shows that it is a reliable partner and continues to make a profit for itself (TASS, 2022). Russia uses its energy card to the fullest both politically and economically.

Conclusion

The greatest damage, especially social, economic, cultural and military, of the war on the territory of Ukraine is to Ukraine. Ukraine has literally become a battlefield. As claimed in this article, war was expected in Eastern Europe, one of the three tension zones.

In this article, which focuses on the causes of the war from the perspective of Russia, the reasons for the emergence of the war have been tried to be evaluated. In particular, it was objected to the assessments that the USA and NATO were not responsible for the outbreak of this war. Russia felt trapped as a reflection of a struggle for great powers. The USA was increasing the pressure on Russia, especially through NATO. As we have evaluated above, many Americans opposed this expansion of NATO, and experts stated that a war would break out in this case. It would be appropriate for Ukraine to carry out a balance policy.

Russia's attacks in Ukraine have war violations and crimes. However, the West and NATO must not escape their responsibility. It is clear that they had a share in the outbreak of war and the escalation of tension. In fact, Russia also uses this as the main argument, as reflected above in its military doctrines, strategy documents and the discourses of the authorities.

For good measure, Russia has used conventional and non-conventional tools that can be used by an external actor in order to gain control over Ukraine. Russia also uses relatively new methods such as disinformation, intensive use of social media, energy card, pressure on governments, and irregular warfare. Thus, it tries to ensure that the peace process follows a path in its favor. In other words, it is a very effective actor in both conflict and peace process phases.

Its purpose is to prevent the expansion of NATO and the EU in Eastern Europe and to give a message to the countries of the region, especially Georgia. It also wants to increase its dominance in the Donbass region and the coastal area of the Azov Sea, because the region has a coast to Azov. The Crimea and Donbass region is a geopolitical and geostrategic issue for Russia. It would be wrong to think that Russia will retreat to the background in both regions.

Russia's attack on Ukraine should be evaluated from an ideological and historical point of view, as well as from a national and international point of view. Beyond these, it tries to maintain its place in the great power struggle with the USA. In addition to the crisis between Ukraine and Russia, it has also been inferred that the power struggle between the USA and Russia, together with the conflicts in Crimea and Donbass, is a reflection on Eastern Europe. The struggle of the great powers in the region is experiencing its hottest periods after the Cold War.

An important reason for the territorial conflict in Ukraine to occupy an important place on the world agenda and its prolongation is the involvement of a great power like Russia in the conflict as an external actor in the region. The Ukraine-Russia War is, in a sense, a proxy war in which USA expects Russia to break its resistance against it. Although the war is limited to Ukraine in the military sense, it causes important problems in economic terms due to energy and food supply, politics and immigration (Beal, 2023, p. 57). In this proxy war, the USA gives military support to Ukraine, in addition to the sanctions it has imposed and enforced on Russia. In particular, economic sanctions push Russia the most.

Ukraine, which is stated to have to maintain a balance between the West and Russia, managed to achieve this during Leonid Kuchma's term (Presidential period 1994-2004). In fact, when Ukraine surrendered its nuclear weapons in 1994, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (including Russia) came to an agreement that guaranteed the country's independence and national integrity.

In addition, the US and Russia, or rather Putin, had gains in the war. Putin has strengthened his own position. With the enlargement of NATO, the USA began to be more effective in Europe and had the opportunity to direct European countries against Russia. The war, which we do not expect to last long, has led to the formation of a camp against the West, in which Russia is supported by Iran and China. NATO also included Sweden and Finland. This clearly shows the impact of the war on European and world history.

In this article, in which the Ukraine-Russia War is evaluated from Russia's perspective, it is clear that Ukraine is important geopolitically and geostrategically for Russia. This was one of the biggest reasons Russia started this war. Since Yeltsin, from the rhetoric of the presidents to the strategy documents, Russia has been cautious against an attack from Ukraine and the East. They do not want to experience the situation in the Second World War.

The prolongation of the war and its global impact can also be contemplated at the point of revealing a polarization. Although China is against the war, it shows its stance on Russia's side. This war also affects global trade and energy policies as a war that directly affects China's Belt and Road Initiative on the Eurasia - Central Asia line.

As a result, Russia should not be considered as the cause of the Ukraine-Russia War. The long-term policies of the USA, NATO and the EU had an impact on the start of this war. This war took place as an expected war when it clashed with NATO and EU enlargements and Russia's policy of influencing the Soviet sphere of influence.

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