

Ukraine and Russia: From Civilized Divorce to Uncivilized War

Paul D'ANIERI

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Hüsna Taş Yetim

Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations, Ankara Medipol University, Ankara

E-Mail: husna.tas@ankaramedipol.edu.tr

Orcid: 0000-0002-8581-0656

Russia's ongoing military intervention in Ukraine since February 24, 2022, has attracted considerable attention from International Relations specialists, analysts, intellectuals, and academics. Russia's decision to go to war has been interpreted in a variety of ways. Some scholars have linked it to the country's imperial and Soviet history (Mankoff 2022; Rojeck 2022; Trenin 2022; Timothy 2022; Van Harpen et al. 2023), while others have seen it as a deliberate distraction from internal problems (Torbakov 2022).

Paul D'Anieri's second edition of "Ukraine and Russia: From Civilized Divorce to Uncivilized War", which consists of ten chapters, challenges prevailing views by providing a comprehensive analysis of the historical context of the conflict. D'Anieri contends that the origins of the Ukrainian war of 2022 go beyond the immediate crises of late 2021 or the events of 2014. Instead, he identifies three post-Cold War dynamics - the security dilemma, democratization, and domestic politics - as the primary drivers of the war. According to D'Anieri, these factors strained ties between Russia, Ukraine, and the West, leading to the conflict (pp. 2-3). Chapters three, four, and five meticulously dissect each dynamic, offering a detailed analysis of the intricate relationships between the United States (US), Russia, Ukraine, and Europe from 1989 to the present conflict.

D'Anieri claims that the primary cause of the war was the post-Cold War security dilemma faced by Russia, the West, and Ukraine. This dilemma arises when one state's efforts to strengthen its security inadvertently become a threat to others. After the end of the Cold War, states around the world took steps to enhance their security that, despite attempts to provide reassurances, caused concern among other countries. A notable example was the expansion of NATO, which was intended to reassure Eastern Europeans in the face of concerns about Russian revanchism. Russia did not express concern about a possible NATO invasion. However, the expansion of NATO led to the accession of several European countries, an action over which

Russia had no authority. In addition, Ukraine and Western countries perceived Russia's desire to restore its "great power" status and dominate its neighbors as a security threat. The policies of Russia caused concerns among the US and Western countries, as they were seen as attempts to exert control over Ukraine. As a response, Ukraine and Western Europe sought to enhance their bilateral relations, leading to Russia feeling increasingly marginalized. As a result, the end of the Cold War triggered a security crisis between Russia, the West, and Ukraine, which led to increased mistrust and ultimately to the war in Ukraine (pp. 29-55).

D'Anieri argues that the process of democratization in post-Soviet regions was another significant factor that contributing to the invasion of Ukraine. Governments in these areas actively pursued membership of Western organizations in order to establish and strengthen democratic systems, improve governance, enhance ties with Europe, and increase security. The enlargement of NATO and the EU is often seen as a Western-led initiative to support democracy and promote peace. However, this approach has sometimes disregarded Russia's concerns, leading to challenges to the established order and a decline in Russian influence. Ukraine's democratic nature naturally led it to seek partnerships with Western nations. However, Russia perceived Ukraine's democracy as a threat, while Ukraine saw Russian influence as a threat to its own democratic system.

The author identifies domestic political constraints in the US, Russia, and Ukraine as the third cause of the Ukraine-Russia conflict. The book's findings suggest that leaders in all three countries faced persistent challenges in implementing security-enhancing policies due to domestic political factors (pp. 5-8). Despite the perceived benefits of democracy in enhancing global security, leaders often faced challenges driven by public opinion, as evidenced by the struggles faced by US presidents in the 1990s. During this period, presidential elections, particularly those of George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton, created obstacles to financing Russian economic reform.

The impact of domestic politics was also heightened in Russia, where Boris Yeltsin faced opposition from both communist and nationalist factions from the beginning of his administration. These two segments argued that Yeltsin's foreign policy practices had failed to stabilize Ukraine, regain Ukraine, and resolve disputes with the West (p. 102).

The political climate in Ukraine also made reconciliation difficult. The adoption of the policy of "multivectorism," which involves building relations with several great powers rather than aligning with a single one, gained prominence. This approach received significant support from actors seeking to establish robust relations with Russia, the US, and Western states. The policies of Ukrainian presidents perceived as pro-Western or pro-Russian did not deviate significantly from what was considered politically pragmatic. For example, although Viktor Yushchenko was portrayed as a pro-Western politician, he signed a major gas agreement with Russia. Similarly, while Viktor Yanukovich was defined as a pro-Russian leader, he made efforts to secure the EU Association Agreement (pp. 170-185). Nevertheless, Ukraine's vulnerability to Russian interference and its dependence on external financial assistance were consequences of the country's political divisions and widespread corruption. In short, these domestic dynamics in all three countries contributed to the complexity and challenges of managing the Ukraine-Russia conflict.

In summary, D'Anieri's book explores the persistent factors behind the 2014 and 2022 invasions, emphasizing Russia's perception of itself as a great power and its persistent desire to regain Ukraine, Europe's security concerns, and the democratization process. D'Anieri concludes the book by emphasizing that identifying the roots of the conflict is crucial for three reasons. The first rationale is based on the notion that the way we articulate the conflict significantly influences our perceptions of its resolution and subsequent actions. The second argument is that the factors that precipitated the conflicts of 2014 and 2022 began early in the post-Cold War era and became more prominent as time passed. Finally, the roots of Ukraine's status conflict, which have contributed to the war, existed before the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

In sum, D'Anieri's book, by making the above-mentioned arguments, provides invaluable and compelling insights for scholars, researchers, students, and international relations professionals seeking a thorough understanding of the Ukrainian war. First, the book takes a distinctive approach by emphasizing the need to look beyond attributing the conflict solely to Vladimir Putin or Russia's domestic politics. Instead, it meticulously explores the intricate factors and root causes that contribute to the development of conflict, highlighting the complexity inherent in international relations and emphasizing the need for a comprehensive understanding of the factors that trigger conflict. The complexity of international relations that the book highlights underscores the importance of a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted elements involved in the outbreak of conflicts. In addition, the book encourages readers to reflect on the intricacies of conflict prevention and resolution, recognizing the persistent and deeply rooted origins of these issues. Furthermore, D'Anieri provides deep insights into the factors that led Putin and the Russian leadership to perceive armed confrontation as a necessary means to achieve their goals. Last but not least, by shedding light on the deep and enduring causes of the war, the book not only enriches historical analysis, but also provides critical insights for formulating future strategies and policies. This knowledge is crucial for solving similar geopolitical issues and improving diplomatic and strategic strategies.

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