THE PATH TO WAR: UKRAINE'S NATO MEMBERSHIP

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Abstract

The Russia-Ukraine War shocked Europe and led to radical transformations in its security architecture. This article has been prepared in order to contribute to the literature in terms of understanding the impact of the events from the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit to the present on the dynamics of the Russia-Ukraine War. Although the studies in the literature are based on Russia's national security strategy documents, the first time that Ukraine's white papers in the process are analyzed together adds originality to the article. We examined ten of Ukraine's White Papers and three of Russia's national security strategy documents to reveal the threat perceptions of the warring parties and the effects of leader changes on the war in light of the balance of threat and neoclassical realism. Following the end of the Cold War, Russia suspiciously acted toward NATO and its unilateral expansion eastward. NATO's enlargement moves, which took place between 1999 and 2004, were perceived as a serious threat to its "near abroad". It is understood that the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit, which gave green light to NATO's membership in Ukraine, was an important turning point on the path to war. A possible Russia's large-scale military action was foreseen in the examined Russian and Ukrainian documents. Russia's and Ukraine's military capabilities are incomparably different. Ukraine's White Papers stated that Ukraine's NATO membership was indispensable for its security but, NATO has not taken any concrete steps. It is concluded that NATO, the United States of America (USA), the changing international structure, and the different priorities of leadership in Ukraine are the main factors and dynamics of this war.

Keywords: Neorealism, neoclassical realism, the balance of threat, Russia-Ukraine War, White Paper

Introduction

NATO's decision to invite Ukraine to join the Alliance in the 2008 Bucharest Summit was a major mistake, having caused Russia to feel surrounded by an ever-expanding NATO (Askew, 2022). Russian President Vladimir Putin defined that invitation as "a direct threat" to Russia's security (Cook and Mcgrath, 2022). NATO is an expanding political community rather than an alliance based on American deterrence, even after the Cold War (Ratti, 2006, p.81). At the 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest, references to the accession of Ukraine and Georgia to NATO (2008) were not agreed upon by all NATO members. Germany and France approached this issue cautiously and stated that it would be an unnecessary action against Russia (Erlanger and Mysers, 2008). For Russia which claimed in the past East Mediterranean region as its politico-economic zone of influence, Georgia's and Ukraine's NATO membership can't be approved. The reason is that these memberships have an absolute potential to blockade Russia's maneuverability even in Black Sea.

Following the end of the Cold War, Russia had acted suspiciously towards NATO and its unilateral expansion eastward. The Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland joined the NATO Alliance in 1999. Romania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, and Slovenia joined in 2004. NATO's enlargement moves, which took place between 1999 and 2004, were perceived as a serious threat to its "near abroad" (*blizhneye zarubyezhe[1]*) (Litera,1994, p.45). This term represents states and peoples neighboring but outside Russia, which used to be parts of the former Soviet Union. Andrei Kozyrev argued that with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, there occurred a power and security vacuum in the former USSR regions, and this gap could be filled against Russia. Therefore, the protection of ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking people who have been left outside Russia's borders should be a security priority (Litera,1994, p.51).

NATO 2008 Bucharest Summit witnessed Ukraine and Georgia's invitation to the alliance. Russian leaders have made many consistent declarations against NATO's expansion toward the East. At the Munich Security Conference in 2007, Putin pointed out the difficulty of a unipolar world by expressing that the combined gross national products of China and India exceeded those of the USA (Munich Security Conference, 2007). In the continuation of his speech, Putin stated that the enlargement of NATO had nothing to do with the modernization of the alliance, on the contrary, it was an alerting provocation that weakened mutual faith. He also referred to former NATO Secretary General Worner's statement on 17 May 1990,

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[1] The Russian term "near abroad" is an essential element of the Kozyrev Doctrine.

regarding the security guarantee given to the Soviet Union not to deploy NATO outside Germany (Munich Security Conference, 2007). In another speech in 2014, he stated that a written peace agreement with open and transparent agreements was not signed despite the end of the Cold War, in addition, the victors of the Cold War acted unilaterally according to their own needs and interests (Presidency of Russia, 2014). Putin once again touched upon the same issues in his speech two months before the war.

"...at least there should be legally binding agreements and not verbal assurances. We are aware of the value of such verbal assurances, words, and promises. Here, we can turn to recent history, to the events of the late 1980s and the early 1990s, when we were told that your worries about NATO's possible eastward expansion were groundless. And then five waves of NATO expansion to the east followed."
(Presidency of Russia, 2021 December 21).

Putin stated shortly before the war in February 2022 that despite the apparent ignorance of Russia's sensitivities, they would give an answer to NATO and the United States to keep the dialogue channel open on the security of the Eastern Europe, and Ukraine's possible NATO membership would pose a potential an existential threat to Russia (Troianovski et al, 2022). In this context, NATO's *fait accompli* approach and enlargement process without considering into account Russia's sensitivities constitute the first of the main reasons for the current tragedy in the north of the Black Sea.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. After a theoretical review of the topic, the data of Russia and Ukraine from 2007 to 2021 will be examined in light of the balance of threat theory. Concepts such as threats, geopolitical descriptions, and the use of military power are terms that invite realism from international relations theories. In this article, the post-Cold War national security strategy documents of Russia and Ukraine are analyzed in the light of Stephen Walt's 'balance of threat' theorem, to elaborate the causes of war chronologically from first-hand documents. National security strategy documents are first-hand documents that not only analyze the past but also shed light on the future, including the mind of the state. Strategy documents are real written documents that guide the planning of the armed forces of political decision-makers selected according to the threat situation perceived by the countries.

Although the studies in the literature are based on Russia's national security strategy documents, the first time that Ukraine's white papers in the process are analyzed together adds originality to the article. Next, we will address the dynamics within Ukraine and whether leadership decisions are binding and effective, within the assumptions of neoclassical realism theory. In this context, we will also discuss the impact of leaders on defense spending. The

investigation of defense expenditures for the analyzed period will add depth to the article by including objective findings. To add depth to the article and to understand the transformation of Russia's policies towards Ukraine, NATO and Western countries on the path from peace to war, Russian foreign policy concept documents of 2008, 2013 and 2016 are also analyzed. Obtained findings are expressed in the conclusion section. The fact that some post-war Russian documents are not accessible through open access is among the limitations of the study.

I. Theory and Methodology

The main research question of this article is to understand the impact of the events from the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit to the present on the dynamics of the Russia-Ukraine War. What is the impact of Ukraine's possible NATO membership on the war? What is the responsibility of Ukrainian politicians on the path to war?

Shortly before the war, in the meeting in Moscow between Russian President Putin and French President Emmanuel Macron, Putin is disturbed by the fact that Ukraine refers to Russia as an enemy in its strategy documents (NTV, 2022). Putin's reference to strategy documents on the path to war is an important basis for this article's theoretical background and methodology. In this study, we examined ten of Ukraine's White Papers and three of Russia's national security strategy documents of the period 2007-2021 to understand the dynamics leading to the war and also to reveal the threat perceptions of the warring parties and the effects of leader changes on the war in the light of the balance of threat and neoclassical realism. The article also investigates the military expenditures of Russia and Ukraine and the ratio of military expenditures to Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Kenneth Waltz, one of the most prominent scholars of neorealism, argues that one should first examine the structure of the international system in which states interact to understand international politics (1979, p.80). In the anarchic structure, the behavior of the states is determined by the relative power distribution because there is no supreme authority above the states to solve problems in the international system (Waltz, 1979, p.97). All states must be prepared to defend their countries or prefer to live at the mercy of their powerful neighbors (Waltz,1979, p.102) The leadership and internal political differences of states do not have a significant effect on their behavior (Waltz, 1967, p.14). The global order, which was bipolar during the Cold War, turned into a unipolar structure under the leadership of the USA with the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Stephen Walt argues that alliances are formed as a response to threats (Walt,1985, p.4). Alliances are built according to the balance of threat rather than the balance of power, and the

threat is a set of offensive intentions, geographical proximity, aggregate power, and offensive capabilities (Walt,1985, p.9). He also claims that security studies are defined mainly as threat studies and the use of military force (Walt,1991, p.212). Security studies intend to find out the conditions that cause war, and policies that states pursue to prevent, and prepare for it (Walt, 1991, p.212). Although neorealist Walt's threat of balance theory (Walt, 1991, p.212) provided a valid theoretical basis for Russia's security concerns, neoclassical realism theory was also included, considering that this would not be enough to explain the causes of the Ukrainian war.

Neorealism theory assumes that international structure is more important than the internal parameters of states in explaining international relations agenda. However, considering the events of the 21st century, we witness that heads of state follow different strategies concerning international institutions. Former U.S. President Bill Clinton defined the post-Cold War era as "the cynical calculus of pure power politics simply does not compute. It is ill-suited to a new era." (Reuters, 1992, p.21). Mearsheimer argues that institutions had little promise for stability in post-Cold War security architecture (Mearsheimer, 1994, p.7). Despite the USA's claim to global hegemony between 1991 and 2008 after the Cold War, especially after the global economic-financial crisis in 2008, with the moves of China and Russia against the US dollar as the international reserve currency, the EU's goal of becoming a global player by expanding, and the recent predominantly left-leaning rulers' coming to power in Latin America states can be considered as the signs of the evolution of the international structure towards a multipolar system.

While respecting the assumptions of structural realism, the theory of neoclassical realism emerged with the claim that the internal dynamics of states also affect international relations toward a certain path. The external policies of states can be explained by their military doctrines, alliance preferences, and preferences to conduct belligerent or friendly diplomacy (Taliaferro, 2000, p.135). Strategic plans are prepared according to leaders' perceptions and beliefs (Hermann and Hagan, 1998, p.126). To understand the relationship between power and foreign policy, it would be useful to examine both internal dynamics and international structure (Rose, 1998, p.152). Leaders are not only affected by external realities and international distributions of power but also by domestic structure and dynamics.

The Cold War ended between the USA and the former Soviet Union, but it became a hot war on Ukraine's soil. Ukraine stayed between two opposite sides, NATO, and Russia; while its social cohesion has also been fragmented by two opposite ideologies. Pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovych won the presidential election in 2010 against then Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko. Yanukovych did not support Ukraine's NATO membership and preferred close

cooperation with Russia. In November 2013, then President Yanukovych did not sign Ukraine–European Union Association Agreement, and consequently, Euromaidan protests began in Kyiv. The Revolution of Dignity in February 2014 caused a radical transformation in Ukraine. Then President Yanukovych was impeached by the Ukrainian Parliament decision of being accused of abusing his power and he flew to Russia. Pro-Russian demonstrations began in Crimea on 23 February 2014 and were followed by the annexation of Crimea by Russia. The USA and Ukraine condemned Russia for violating Budapest Memorandum to recognize Ukraine's territorial integrity including Crimea through its unilateral military actions in Ukraine. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 2014). They also criticized Russia's hybrid actions arguing these undermined the global security architecture in addition to endangering European security (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 2014).

Documents published by states have been a key element in qualitative research for many years, and document analysis as a qualitative research methodology is a systematic procedure for examining or evaluating government reports (Bowen 2009, p.28). Documents can offer critical data for the research context and help understand changes in the system (Bowen 2009, p.30). In this context, we adopted the qualitative document analysis method by examining Russia's and Ukraine's national security documents in light of the balance of threat and neoclassical theories in this article.

II. Russia's Security, Foreign Policy Documents, and Defense Expenditures

A. Russia's Security Documents

Regarding Russian national strategy documents, we studied one document belonging to the period of 2007-2014, and two documents after the annexation of Crimea by Russia belonging to the period of 2015-2021. In this context, we analyzed the 2009 National Security Strategy up to 2020, the 2015 National Security Strategy, and the 2021 National Security Strategy. It has been clearly stated in documents that Russia's greatest fear, from the Cold War to the present, is that NATO extends eastward to its "near abroad". Russia's definition of near abroad coincides with the geographical proximity parameter of Walt's threat balance function. Russia's threat perceptions are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Threats in Russian security documents (2007-2021)

Year	Threats /perceived threats
2009	No country has been identified by name as a threat. It is stated that NATO's plans to extend its military infrastructure to Russia's borders and efforts to give NATO global

functions contrary to international norms are unacceptable for Russia (Presidency of Russia, 2009).

2015   The definitions concerning NATO are used in a similar way as stated in the 2009 document. In addition, NATO's further enlargement and convergence of its military infrastructure to Russia's borders pose an existential threat to Russia's national security (Presidency of Russia, 2015).

2021   In Article 35; it states that NATO's military infrastructure, intelligence activities, and military exercises with wide participation near the Russian borders pose a military threat to the Russian Federation (Presidency of Russia, 2021).

In the 2009 National Security Strategy Document, the concepts of economic, financial, and cultural security were also mentioned, and the world was asked to pay attention to Russian history. From these statements, we understand that Russia feels pressured, both in terms of its geopolitical and social structure. Although the name of any country was not clearly stated as a threat, it was stressed in the document that Russia is disturbed by private services and organizations of foreign countries' activities. The report emphasized that relations with NATO should be based on equality. Article 42 of the document states that high-tech and multi-purpose border facilities are required to establish border security, including the borders of Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan. These four countries are among Russian "near abroad" perception countries.

The statements regarding NATO in the 2009 National Security Strategy Document were also included in the 2015 National Security Strategy Document. The necessity of the equal relation principle with NATO was repeated, and it was stated that Russia was trying to be surrounded in terms of politics, economy, military, and information. It was also stated that the USA and its allies were trying to hinder Russia's independent foreign policy. Article 17 contains statements only about Ukraine (Presidency of Russia, 2015). It is stated that the West's integration process has increased tensions in the Eurasian region, and has negative effects on Russia's national interests, the unconstitutional coup of the USA and the EU has divided Ukraine and invited armed conflict, and the Ukrainian people have shaped by ultra-nationalist ideology, and Russia has been regarded as the enemy. Intelligence and other activities of foreign countries' special services are considered among the main threats. International non-governmental organizations with their financial and economic structures, and activities, are aiming to erode Russia's religious and moral values by using "color revolutions" (Presidency of Russia, 2015). In the 2015 Document, it was also clearly stated that due to Russia's

multinational nature, foreign cultural and informational expansion would weaken the traditional Russian spirit and moral values. From these statements, we can deduce that besides the military anxiety about NATO's enlargement, there is also a concern that autonomous states with different identities within the borders of the existing Russian Federation will be adversely affected.

In the 2021 document, NATO's activities are clearly stated as the biggest threat to Moscow. In Article 20, it is written that "unfriendly countries" aim to destroy the internal unity of the Russian Federation by trying to use the existing socioeconomic problems of the Russian Federation and use indirect methods as a means of provocation (Presidency of Russia, 2021). Although the names of France and Germany as countries are not clearly stated, it is stated that the cooperation based on mutual interests with both countries evolves towards an uncertain future. It is also stated that Russia will deepen its multidimensional cooperation with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and countries within the scope of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) (Presidency of Russia, 2021).

There is a path dependency in all three documents examined; Ukraine has not been mentioned as a threat, but NATO's expansion will pose an existential threat to Russia, and the intervention of the West, the USA, and the EU in Ukraine with internal coups and "color revolutions" triggered civil war in Ukraine, and enabled armed conflict. From these statements, it is understood that Russia blames NATO, the USA, and partially the EU.

B. Russia's Foreign Policy Documents

Since political power is the will that directs military power, we analyze the foreign policy change in the three Russian Foreign Policy Concept documents toward Transatlantic states. The 2008 concept is approved by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev (Russian Presidency, 2008). It is stated in the document that Russia is "rethinking the priorities of the Russian foreign policy with due account for the increased role of the country in international affairs". (Russian Foreign Ministry, 2008, p.1) In the document, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Norway, and Finland are mentioned by name only once and in the same paragraph, emphasizing the importance of developing relations within the scope of mutual benefit (Russian Foreign Ministry, 2008, p.16). While the USA is featured three times in the document, it is mentioned that Russia's concrete vision with the USA, should turn into a strategic partnership based on mutual respect (Russian Foreign Ministry, 2008, pp.17-8). In the 2013 document, a more careful style is chosen compared to the previous one. In Article 54 of the 2013 Concept, it is stressed that Russia prioritizes relations with Euro-Atlantic countries due to its deep-rooted civilization

and historical ties, and is in favor of developing real partnerships with the USA and the EU (Russian Foreign Ministry, 2013). While the green light is given to multilateral cooperation with the USA on nuclear disarmament, legal assurances are demanded that the USA's global missile defense capabilities are not against Russia (Talukdar, 2017). In the 2016 concept, it is stated that the said capability of the USA is a threat to Russia's national security and that Russia reserves the right to take all kinds of measures against that policy (Talukdar, 2017). In this context, it is a radical policy change that the 2016 document explicitly states the USA as a threat. In Article 56 of the 2016 Concept, Russia states that it is ready to provide all kinds of support in the civil war in Ukraine, with the desire to cooperate with Ukraine in political, economic, cultural, and religious domains. (Russian Foreign Ministry, 2016). In Article 61, the USA is mentioned by name and it is emphasized that the USA and its allies follow a containment strategy against Russia. (Russian Foreign Ministry, 2016). Since the containment strategy is the strategy followed by the USA against the Soviets in the Cold War, we evaluate that these expressions imply that the competition with the USA in the Cold War has turned.

C. Russia's Defense Expenditures

This study examines Russia's defense expenditures in two stages; from 2007 to 2014 as the first stage, when Russia annexed Crimea, and from 2015 to pre-war 2021 as the second stage. Table 2 shows defense expenditures both in the current nominal value in GDP percentage.

Table 2. Russia's Defense Expenditures (2007-2014)

Year	Defense Expenditures (Current billion USD)	Military expenditure (% of GDP)
2007	43,53	3,1
2008	56,18	3,1
2009	51,53	3,9
2010	58,72	3,6
2011	70,24	3,4
2012	81,47	3,7
2013	88,35	3,9
2014	84,7	4,1

Source: World Bank

The apparent increase in Russia's defense expenditures from 9.23 billion dollars in 2000 to 56.18 billion dollars in 2008 is quite striking. From these data, we can conclude that Russia

has been preparing against NATO's eastward expansion not since the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit but since the end of the Cold War. Russia increased its defense expenditures through internal balancing. We can also claim that Russia predicted that NATO would not pay attention to its sensitivities.

Table 3. Russia's Defense Expenditures (2015-2021)

Year	Defense Expenditures (Current billion USD)	Military expenditure (% of GDP)
2015	66.42	4.9
2016	69.25	5.4
2017	66.91	4.2
2018	61.61	3.7
2019	65.2	3.8
2020	61.71	4.3

Source: World Bank

When we examine Table 3, which shows the defense expenditures after the annexation of Crimea, we found that although the ratio of Russia's defense expenditures to GDP is close to the previous period, the nominal value has decreased. The increase in oil and natural gas prices in the 2000s resulted in an increase in Russia's national income, which facilitated the growth of defense expenditures, and the outflow of foreign capital. On the other hand, the decrease in oil and natural gas prices after the annexation of Crimea in 2015 led to a decrease in Russia's GDP. This led to a nominal reduction in defense expenditures.

III. Ukraine's White Papers and Defense Expenditures

A. Ukraine's White Papers

We investigated ten Ukrainian White Papers published between 2007-2021, and we identified three important dates to find any systemic change. The first is 2007; one year before from 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit. The second one is 2010; the year pro-Russian Prime Minister Yanukovych won the presidential race against then Prime Minister Timoshenko. The third date is 2014 when thousands gathered for a heated protest against Russia's annexing Crimea, and also intervened in separatist violence in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in the same year. Ukraine White Papers are prepared periodically according to the legislation of Ukraine to inform the public about the activities of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, the risks and threats of the Ministry of Defense, and the solutions (Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, 2008).

The documents show until 2014 no particular state was addressed as a threat, and after 2014, Russia was explicitly defined as both a threat and an enemy. Table 4 shows that there was no mention of any state threat or threat perception until 2014.

Table 4. Threats in Ukrainian security documents (2007-2014)

Year	Threats /perceived threats
2007	No country or concrete threat was mentioned in the document (Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, 2008).
2009	No country or concrete threat was mentioned in the document. (Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, 2010) The goal of the Ukrainian Armed Forces was to create highly professional and modern armed forces to overcome any threat to the territorial integrity and the sovereignty of the country (Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, p.3).
2010	No country or concrete threat was mentioned in the document (Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, 2011). Unlike the previous ones, the non-bloc status of Ukraine and its leadership's preference is specified; "…the State leadership and aimed at solving defense problems under non-Bloc status…" (Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, p.5).
2011	No country or concrete threat was mentioned in the document. It was stated that high-level meetings were held with Russia, including defense ministers so seven high-level meetings were held between the Ministers of Defense of Ukraine and the Russian Federation (Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, 2012, p.56).
2013	The relationship with NATO was reduced to a lesser extent, and that strategic partnership with Russia gained importance. The annual "Fairway of Peace" Exercise between the Ukrainian Navy and Russia's Black Sea Fleet was relaunched (Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, 2014, p.33).
2014	The annexation of Crimea by Russia and the separatist violence in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions showed its effect in the document. "Today, the Armed Forces of Ukraine are fighting against a well-armed and trained enemy." (Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, 2015, p.3).

In the 2007 White Paper, the concepts of restructuring the Ukrainian Armed Forces, civil-military relations, determination of jurisdictions between the Ministry of Defense and the General Staff, and transition to a professional army are emphasized. In the 2008 White Paper, then President of Ukraine and Commander-in-Chief Yushchenko states in the preface that the basis of Ukraine's security is integration into NATO, which is also included in the military

doctrine, and this process is irreversible (Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, 2008, p.3). Former President Yushchenko's statement on Ukraine's NATO integration as Ukraine's security basis is included in the preface of the 2009 White Paper as well (Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, 2010, p.3).

Although the preface texts of the two previous White Papers were signed by the then President and the Minister of Defense, the 2010 White Paper was signed by the then Minister of Defense and the Chief of General Staff. The statement of Ukraine adopting a non-bloc status differs from previous ones (Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, 2010, p.5). This finding shows the effect of leadership on alliance preferences and strategic military doctrines. In the 2013 White Paper, we see that the relationship with NATO reduced to a lesser extent and that strategic partnership with Russia gained importance. The annual "Fairway of Peace" Exercise between the Ukrainian Navy and Russia's Black Sea Fleet was relaunched (Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, 2014, p.33). Seven high-level meetings were held between the Ministers of Defense in a year, and Ukraine-Russia military relations improved. (Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, 2014, p.56).

The annexation of Crimea by Russia and separatist violence in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions were reflected in the 2014 White Paper. The ongoing process with Russia was included in the document as a war with an open enemy, out of the threat; "Today, the Armed Forces of Ukraine are fighting against a well-armed and trained enemy." (Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, 2014). Ukraine also repealed the non-bloc status enacted in 2010.

Table 5 shows Ukraine's intense efforts and intentions for NATO membership since 2015, foreseeing a possible large-scale war with Russia. While a more careful tone was used against Russia in 2015, the military build-up on the borders just before the war and the possible war with the enemy are mentioned.

Table 5. Threats in Ukrainian security documents (2014-2021)

Year	Threats /perceived threats
2015	The Russian Federation has been defined as Ukraine's military adversary, and the greatest military threat to Ukraine's national security is the high probability of using large-scale military force (Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, 2016, p.8) Ukraine's NATO membership aspirations are highlighted (Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, p.116)
2017	The term "enemy" is used 14 times without explicit implication to Russia. The activities carried out since 2014 are classified as terrorist activities with the

	support of Russia.
2018	The term "enemy" is used 17 times. It is stated that the enemy has increased its military capabilities by focusing on the East of Ukraine (Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, 2019, p.31).
2019-2020	It is stressed that Ukrainian Armed Forces focused on the East of Ukraine to overcome Russian armed aggression (Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, 2021, p.9).
2021	The first sentence written by the Secretary of Defense reveals the magnitude and immediacy of the threat; "The Russian Federation openly threatened with a large-scale armed escalation, concentrating troops near Ukraine's state border." (Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, 2022, p.5).

In the foreword written by then the Minister of Defense in the 2015 White Paper, the goal of NATO membership was emphasized again (Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, 2015, p.4). The Russian Federation has been defined as Ukraine's military adversary and the greatest military threat to Ukraine's national security was perceived as the high probability of using large-scale military force (Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, 2016, p.8).

In the preface of the 2017 White Paper, the goal of EU and NATO membership was expressed after the Minister of Defense stated that Ukraine has made many efforts to join the Euro-Atlantic Security Alliance (Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, 2018, p.3). In the 2018 White Paper, the "enemy" term was used 17 times. The statements that Ukraine focuses on Eastern Ukraine in the 2018 and 2019-2020 White Papers can be considered strong signs of the footsteps of the upcoming war. The first sentence of the 2021 White Paper, written by the Secretary of Defense, reveals the magnitude and immediacy of the threat; "The Russian Federation openly threatened with a large-scale armed escalation, concentrating troops near Ukraine's state border." (Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, 2022, p.5). This White Paper begins by writing various quotes on the first page by the President in her capacity as commander-in-chief, as in the previous 2019-2020 White Paper. In the name of the footsteps of the approaching war, approximately 234,000 reservists were called to duty to ensure the rapid replenishment of Armed Forces units by reserves in the event of a direct enemy attack (Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, 2022, p.34).

In the documents examined, the leadership in Ukraine has presented an effective manner in defining threats and prioritizing national strategies. Although Yushchenko, President, and

Commander-in-Chief in 2008, stated in his 2008 White Paper that the basis of Ukraine's security was integration into NATO and that this was an irreversible process (Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, 2010, p.3), Yanukovych, elected as president in 2010, changed the sea. Ukraine became a neutral state (Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, p.5); in addition, its strategic cooperation with Russia became Ukraine's defense priority (Ministry of Defense of Ukraine,2012, p.56). In the 2015 White Paper, the importance of NATO for Ukraine was emphasized, and it was predicted that the probability of a war with Russia arising from the use of large-scale military force increased.

Ukraine's vision for NATO membership in the 2009 White Paper was annulled with the election of the pro-Russian president Yanukovych. The non-bloc status of Ukraine, received by the Ukrainian Parliament, was included in the White Papers for the period 2010-2013. In the same period, defense expenditures were reduced, and military bases were closed since military relations with Russia were developed. Although it was stated in the 2015 White Paper that Ukraine's NATO membership is indispensable for its security and that a possible large-scale military action by Russia is expected, NATO has not taken any concrete steps. At the beginning of the war, the President of Ukraine repeated the application for NATO membership in 2022. Although nine countries among the Baltic States, Romania, and Poland supported the application made by Zelenskyy for NATO membership in September 2022, a consensus has not yet been reached among other NATO countries (The Japan Times, 2022).

B. Ukraine's Defense Expenditures

This study examines Ukraine's defense expenditures in two stages as well. Ukraine's then President Yanukovych believed that a weaker military was good for Ukraine and argued that Russia was a close friend to provide security when needed (Ayres, 2014). In addition, the Yanukovych government transferred 25 military bases to local governments between 2010 and 2013 (Ayres, 2014). When we look at the ratio of Ukraine's defense expenditures in GDP, we can see in Table 6 that the lowest figures were between 2010-2013 under Yanukovych Presidency.

Table 6. Ukraine's Defense Expenditures (2007-2014)

Year	Defense Expenditures (Current billion USD)	Military expenditure (% of GDP)
2007	2.88	2
2008	3.39	1.9
2009	2.32	1.9
2010	2.59	1.9
2011	2.5	1.5
2012	2.84	1.6
2013	2.9	1.6
2014	3	2.2

Source: World Bank

We can understand from Table 7 that both the military expenditure ratio in GDP and defense expenditures almost doubled from 2015 to 2021 after the annexation of Crimea by Russia. From these data, it is understood that Ukraine's leaders are also effective in increasing defense expenditures and determining threat perceptions, in addition to changes in the international structure.

Table 7. Ukraine's Defense Expenditures (2015-2021)

Year	Defense Expenditures (Current billion USD)	Military expenditure (% of GDP)
2015	2.96	3.3
2016	2.94	3.2
2017	3.25	2.9
2018	4.17	3.2
2019	5.42	3.5
2020	5.92	4.1

Source: World Bank

As the military capabilities of Russia and Ukraine are incomparably different, NATO, the USA, and the changing international structure are understood as the main factors in the war. In the bipolar world of the Cold War, while the common enemy of Europe and the USA was the Soviet Union, Europe was at the forefront. Despite the USA's claim to global hegemony between 1991 and 2008 after the Cold War, especially after the global economic-financial crisis

in 2008, with the moves of China and Russia against the US dollar as the international reserve currency, the EU's goal of becoming a global player by expanding, and the recent predominantly left-leaning rulers' coming to power in Latin America can be considered as the signs of the evolution of the international structure towards a multipolar system. U.S. 2018 National Security Strategy (NSS) defined China and Russia revisionist powers (U.S. Department of Defense, 2018, p.2). China implemented an assertive policy on South China Sea and has steadily increased its naval and air force capabilities as the signs to project military power when needed. The USA has given strategic priority to the Pacific Region to balance rising China and this prioritization has increased European states' responsibility and also has made Ukraine's NATO membership more complicated.

Conclusion

Although the studies in the literature are based on Russia's national security strategy documents, the first time that Ukraine's white papers in the process are analyzed together adds originality to the article. In Article 61 of the Russian 2016 Foreign Policy Concept Document, the USA is mentioned by name and it is emphasized that the USA and its allies follow a containment strategy against Russia. Since the containment strategy is the strategy followed by the USA against the Soviets in the Cold War, we evaluate that these expressions imply that the competition with the USA in the Cold War has turned. This caused the most important change point effect that ignited the war.

We conclude from Russian national strategy documents that NATO's expansion to its "near abroad" from the Cold War to the 2022 Russia-Ukraine War would be considered the biggest point of concern for Russia. We can also deduce that besides the military anxiety about NATO's enlargement, there is also a concern that autonomous states with different identities within the borders of the Russian Federation will be adversely affected. In the history of Russia, these events also have both cultural and geographical codes. Despite the Westernization movements of Russia, which has both Asian and European geography, the Russian perception that it was not accepted as an equal member of the European family has always caused him to act with suspicion towards the West. The need to protect different cultures and nations over a wide geography; causes both a constant sense of fear and vulnerability, and the need for expansion and, within it, military strength. Russian culture; leadership from a strong authoritarian legacy, political power associated with military power and authority, and the perception of the outside world Russia cause Russia to prioritize protectionist reflexes. Russia's definition of near abroad coincides with the geographical proximity parameter of Walt's threat

balance function. The geographical proximity parameter is an effective factor in determining threat perception.

The post-Cold War NATO eastward expansion occurred in the US-led unipolar international structure. NATO's enlargement waves between 1999 and 2004 caused serious threat perception in Russia. However, since Russia was in a relatively weak situation at that time, it could not adequately respond to these moves. The election of Barack Obama as the president, who was explicitly against US military operations in Iraq, and his shift of the US weight center to the Pacific Region were taken advantage of by Russia. Russia has turned its attention primarily to its immediate geography and mostly to Ukraine.

The most valid strategy for Ukraine against its very powerful neighbor Russia was the search for alliance through external balancing through NATO as assumed in neorealism theory. In this context, it is understood that the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit, which gave green light to Ukraine's membership in NATO, was an important turning point on the path to war. Russia's possible large-scale military action was foreseen in the examined Russian and Ukrainian documents. we conclude that there is a path dependency in all three Russian documents examined; Ukraine was not mentioned as a threat, but NATO's expansion was evaluated as an existential threat to Russia. The intervention of the West, the USA, and the EU in Ukraine with internal coups and "color revolutions" is said to be triggering the "civil war" in Ukraine. From these statements, we can claim that Russia blames NATO, the USA, and partially the EU for their unfriendly strategies in Ukraine.

Although it is claimed that the leadership and internal political differences of the states do not have a significant effect on their behavior, we have concluded that the heads of state with different views in Ukraine were effective in determining strategic decisions, especially their defense priorities. In the Ukrainian documents examined, the leadership in Ukraine was presented effectively in defining threats and prioritizing national strategies. Although Yushchenko, the President, and Commander-in-Chief in 2008, stated in his 2008 White Paper that the basis of Ukraine's security was integration into NATO and that this was an irreversible process; Yanukovych, elected as president in 2010, changed the sea. Ukraine became a neutral state, in addition, its strategic cooperation with Russia was among Ukraine's defense priorities. In the 2015 White Paper, the importance of NATO for Ukraine was emphasized, and it was predicted that the probability of a war with Russia arising from the use of large-scale military force increased.

Ukraine's vision for NATO membership and evaluation of the process in the 2009 White

Paper were annulled with the election of the pro-Russian president Yanukovych. The non-bloc status of Ukraine, received by the Ukrainian Parliament, was included in the White Papers for the period 2010-2013. In the same period, defense expenditures were reduced, and military bases were closed while military relations with Russia were developed. Although it was stated in the 2015 White Paper that Ukraine's NATO membership is indispensable for its security and that a possible large-scale military action by Russia is expected, NATO has not yet taken any concrete steps.

Although Russia allocates a significant share of its GDP to its defense, the decline in defense spending over the years indicates that its economy has weakened. This finding suggests that Russia cannot sustain a long-term and large-scale economic war. At the beginning of the war, the application for NATO membership was repeated by the President of Ukraine, yet there has been no consensus among NATO members regarding Ukraine's membership. Ukraine's NATO membership is going to be a tough decision as it bears the potential to start a nuclear war between NATO and Russia, which has the most prominent nuclear stock in the world. The fact that the decision has not yet been finalized confirms the sensitivity of this issue.

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