

# Russia-Ukraine Conflict:

## A Theoretical Analysis of Geopolitical Power Struggles, Sovereignty Assertions, and Security Paradigms

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### Abstract

This paper undertakes a comprehensive theoretical analysis of the multidimensional Russia-Ukraine conflict, drawing insights from the disciplines of international relations, political science, and security studies. Through a meticulous examination of the profound historical antecedents, the intricate web of geopolitical interests, the far-reaching economic ramifications, and the potent socio-cultural narratives undergirding the crisis, the study seeks to elucidate the intricately interwoven dynamics of power, sovereignty, and security imperatives. Employing relevant theoretical frameworks, including power transition theory, security dilemma theory, economic statecraft, and identity politics, the research aims to deepen our understanding of the complexities inherent in this conflict and explore potential pathways towards a durable and equitable resolution.

### Methodology

This study employs a multidisciplinary approach, integrating insights from the fields of international relations, political science, and security studies. It involves a systematic review of historical records, an in-depth analysis of geopolitical strategies and power dynamics, a rigorous examination of the economic impacts and the efficacy of economic instruments, and an exploration of the socio-cultural dimensions that have fueled the escalating tensions. Theoretical frameworks, encompassing realism, constructivism, and critical security studies, are judiciously applied to elucidate the underlying

dynamics and inform potential resolutions to this multifaceted conflict.

**Keywords:** Russia-Ukraine Conflict; Geopolitical Power Contestations; Sovereignty Assertions; Security Paradigms; International Relations; Political Science; Conflict Resolution; Power Transition Theory; Security Dilemma; Economic Statecraft; Identity Politics; Multidisciplinary Approach.

### Introduction

The escalating conflagration between Russia and Ukraine, erupting into full-scale warfare in 2024, represents a seminal inflection point in the contemporary geopolitical landscape, ushering in tectonic shifts whose reverberations extend far beyond the immediate theater of military engagement. This multidimensional crisis is the apotheosis of an intricate confluence of evolving power dynamics, assertions of national identity and sovereignty, and deep-seated anxieties regarding security architectures and spheres of influence. A holistic elucidation of this conflict necessitates a multidisciplinary approach, delving into the profound historical antecedents, the labyrinthine web of geopolitical desiderata, the profound economic ramifications, and the potent ideological and cultural narratives that have catalyzed tensions between these two nations.

The genesis of this conflagration can be traced to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, an event that precipitated a seismic reordering of the geopolitical landscape, leaving in its wake a vacuum of power and influence. In the ensuing years, Russia, once a preeminent global

superpower, found itself grappling with a diminished sphere of influence, while Ukraine, having shed the shackles of Soviet hegemony, embarked on a quest for self-determination and a more pronounced integration with the West.

This clash of competing visions has been exacerbated by a complex web of geopolitical machinations, wherein both nations have sought to leverage their economic and military might to assert their respective agendas. Russia, keenly aware of its dwindling clout on the global stage, has embraced a revisionist foreign policy posture, seeking to reassert its dominance in its near abroad and counter the perceived encroachment of Western influence. Conversely, Ukraine, buoyed by its burgeoning ties with the European Union and NATO, has strived to emancipate itself from Russia's orbit and forge a distinct national identity predicated on Western liberal democratic norms.

Furthermore, this internecine conflict has been exacerbated by the profound economic implications that have reverberated across the region and beyond. The imposition of stringent economic sanctions by the West, coupled with the disruption of vital energy supply chains, has had far-reaching consequences, not only for the belligerents but also for the global economy at large.

Ultimately, this crisis is a microcosm of the broader tensions that have defined the post-Cold War era, wherein the world order has been thrust into a state of flux, giving rise to new power dynamics and ideological fault lines. As such, a comprehensive analysis of this conflict demands a nuanced exploration of the multifaceted historical, geopolitical, economic, and cultural underpinnings that have coalesced to precipitate this watershed moment in international relations.

## **1. Power Dynamics and Sovereignty Assertions: Theoretical Perspectives on**

## **the Lingering Shadow of the Soviet Empire**

The genesis of the ongoing conflagration can be traced back to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, marking the emergence of independent states, among them Ukraine. From a theoretical vantage, power transition theory (Organski, 1958; Kugler & Lemke, 1996) provides a salient prism through which to fathom this seismic transformation and its cascading repercussions. This theory postulates that alterations in the distribution of power among states may precipitate conflict as ascending powers challenge the prevailing order. For Russia, the erosion of influence and control over territories once firmly ensconced within its imperial orbit denotes a profound reconfiguration of power, stoking deep-seated resentments and a resolute determination to reassert dominion in the region (Kuzio, 2018a; Kuzio, 2018b). The annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the overt backing of separatist factions in eastern Ukraine can be construed as unequivocal manifestations of Russia's steadfast commitment to upholding a sphere of influence over neighboring states, thereby safeguarding its perceived stature and sway in regional power dynamics.

Moreover, the theoretical construct of sovereignty and territorial integrity, fundamental pillars of the Westphalian nation-state paradigm (Krasner, 1999), furnishes invaluable insights into this conflict. Ukraine's quest for autonomy and affirmation of sovereignty over its territory, including Crimea, has been perceived by Russia as a direct affront to its historical assertions and sway in the area. The conferral of autocephaly (ecclesiastical independence) upon the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in 2019 exacerbated this tension, epitomizing a symbolic assertion of Ukraine's cultural and spiritual autonomy and contesting Russia's deeply ingrained narratives and assertions of spiritual primacy (Ponomariov, 2019; Demydova, 2019).

This clash of competing visions and assertions of sovereignty is further elucidated through the lens of the security dilemma, a theoretical construct that posits that measures taken by states to enhance their security may paradoxically engender insecurity and hostility in others (Jervis, 1978; Glaser, 1997). Russia's actions, ostensibly aimed at preserving its sphere of influence and buttressing its security, have been perceived by Ukraine as a direct threat to its sovereignty and territorial integrity, prompting a countervailing response and a deepening of ties with Western powers and institutions. Conversely, Ukraine's overtures towards the West, including aspirations for NATO membership, have been viewed by Russia as an existential threat to its security, fueling a vicious cycle of mistrust and escalating tensions.

Furthermore, the theoretical paradigm of economic statecraft (Baldwin, 1985) illuminates the role of economic instruments in furthering geopolitical objectives. Russia's leverage over energy supplies and trade relationships with European nations has served as a potent tool in its efforts to assert influence and shape the geopolitical landscape. Conversely, the imposition of stringent economic sanctions by the West has been a means of exerting pressure on Russia and bolstering Ukraine's position, underscoring the intricate interplay between economic and political power dynamics.

Ultimately, this conflict represents broader theoretical debates regarding power transitions, sovereignty assertions, security dilemmas, and economic statecraft, reflecting the multifaceted challenges and tensions that have defined the post-Cold War era.

## **2. Security Paradigms and Alliance Formation: Theoretical Perspectives on the NATO Conundrum**

The specter of Ukraine's integration into NATO has been a profound source of consternation for the Russian government, which construes such a development as an egregious encroachment upon its vital security interests (Feklyunina, 2016). Security dilemma theory (Jervis, 1978; Glaser, 1997) posits that measures taken by one state to bolster its security may be perceived as menacing by another, engendering a vicious cycle of insecurity and potential conflict. Russia's assertive maneuvers can be interpreted as a resolute endeavor to forestall Ukraine's alignment with the West and to uphold a strategic buffer zone between its borders and NATO forces, thereby safeguarding its perceived security perimeter.

Furthermore, the theoretical framework of alliance formation and balance of power theory (Waltz, 1979; Walt, 1987) intimates that states may forge alliances to counteract perceived threats or alterations in the distribution of power. From Russia's standpoint, the encroachment of Western influence and military presence upon its doorstep, via the conceivable accession of Ukraine to NATO, constitutes an intolerable infringement upon its security perimeter, evoking ominous recollections of historical invasions and existential challenges to its territorial integrity. Russia's assertive maneuvers can be construed as a resolute bid to sustain a balance of power and forestall the emergence of a potentially adversarial alliance on its borders.

This theoretical lens elucidates Russia's deep-seated apprehensions regarding NATO's eastward expansion, which it perceives as a direct threat to its sphere of influence and a potential staging ground for future encroachments upon its sovereignty. The specter of NATO forces and military infrastructure being stationed near its borders has been a source of profound unease for Russia, which has sought to counter this perceived threat through a combination of diplomatic

maneuvering, economic coercion, and, ultimately, the use of military force.

Conversely, from the perspective of Ukraine and its Western allies, the pursuit of NATO membership is viewed as a legitimate exercise of sovereignty and a means of safeguarding its territorial integrity and security in the face of Russian aggression. The theoretical construct of the security dilemma is equally applicable to Ukraine's perspective, as its overtures towards the West and aspirations for NATO membership are perceived as defensive measures aimed at ensuring its survival and independence, while Russia interprets these actions as provocative and threatening.

This theoretical quagmire underscores the profound complexities and tensions that have fueled the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, with each side invoking the principles of security, alliance formation, and balance of power to justify its actions and strategic calculations. Resolving this conundrum will inevitably require a delicate balance of competing security interests and a willingness to engage in constructive dialogue and compromise, lest the escalating cycle of mistrust and conflict spiral further out of control.

### **3. Economic Interdependence and Coercive Diplomacy: Theoretical Insights into the Maelstrom and Global Ramifications**

Beyond the confines of geopolitics and security, the Russia-Ukraine conflict has unleashed a maelstrom of economic turbulence for the directly involved nations and reverberated across the global economy at large. The theoretical underpinnings of economic interdependence (Keohane & Nye, 1977; Gartzke, 2007) posit that deepening economic ties among states can serve as a deterrent to conflict, as the costs of disruption become prohibitively high. However, in the context of

the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the rupture of trade routes, the imposition of sweeping economic sanctions, and the volatility in energy markets have fostered economic instability and ambiguity (Ben Hassen & El Bilahi, 2022; Bounou & Yatié, 2022; Chortane & Pandey, 2022), challenging the foundational tenets of interdependence theory.

This conflict underscores the limitations of economic interdependence as a deterrent to conflict, particularly when other factors, such as geopolitical rivalries and ideological contestations, supersede economic incentives. Russia's willingness to absorb the economic costs of sanctions and disruptions to trade relationships with Western nations underscores the primacy of its strategic objectives in the region, underpinned by its perceived existential security imperatives and assertions of sovereignty.

Moreover, the application of economic sanctions against Russia can be scrutinized through the prism of coercive diplomacy theory (George, 1991; Baldwin, 1985), which posits that economic pressure can be wielded as a potent instrument to compel a state to alter its behavior or accede to specific demands. However, the efficacy of sanctions remains a contentious subject, as they may inadvertently bolster the resolve of the targeted state and exacerbate extant tensions, precipitating unintended consequences that could prove counterproductive to the desired objectives (Pape, 1997; Hufbauer et al., 2007).

The theoretical lens of coercive diplomacy highlights the intricate interplay between economic statecraft and political objectives, with sanctions serving as a tool of coercion aimed at influencing Russia's behavior. Nonetheless, the potential for unintended consequences, such as the solidification of Russia's resolve and the exacerbation of tensions, challenges the effectiveness of this approach. Furthermore, the

economic ramifications of sanctions extend beyond the immediate actors, with ripple effects across global supply chains and energy markets, underscoring the intricate interconnectedness of the global economy.

Complementing these theoretical perspectives, the liberal economic theory of complex interdependence (Keohane & Nye, 1977) provides insights into the multifaceted nature of transnational interactions and the diffusion of power across multiple domains, including the economic, political, and security spheres. This framework suggests that the Russia-Ukraine conflict's economic dimensions are inextricably linked to broader geopolitical power dynamics, challenging traditional notions of state-centric power, and underscoring the need for a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between economic forces and strategic imperatives.

Furthermore, the theoretical construct of asymmetric interdependence (Hirschman, 1980) elucidates the power dynamics inherent in economic relationships, wherein one party may possess a disproportionate level of leverage or influence over the other. In the context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Russia's control over vital energy resources and its strategic positioning as a dominant energy supplier to European nations confer upon it a degree of asymmetric economic leverage, which it has wielded as a tool of coercive diplomacy.

Ultimately, the economic dimensions of the Russia-Ukraine conflict underscore the intricate interplay between economic interdependence, coercive diplomacy, and broader geopolitical power dynamics. Resolving this conflict necessitates a nuanced understanding of these theoretical frameworks and a recognition of the complex interrelationships between economic, political, and security imperatives in the contemporary global landscape.

#### **4. Soft Power and Identity Politics: Theoretical Perspectives on Religion and Cultural Narratives**

Beyond the realms of geopolitics and economics, the Russia-Ukraine conflict has been profoundly influenced by the interplay of soft power, religion, and deeply ingrained cultural narratives. Soft power theory (Nye, 2004; Gallarotti, 2011) contends that a state's capacity to allure and assimilate others through cultural, ideological, and institutional avenues can wield considerable influence in advancing its interests. Russia has long leveraged the notion of a "Russian World" (*Russkiy Mir*) as a potent soft power instrument, exerting sway over neighboring nations with significant Russian-speaking populations (Feklyunina, 2016). This narrative has been bolstered and magnified by the Russian Orthodox Church, espousing a vision of "Holy Russia" and its spiritual and cultural supremacy over regions such as Ukraine (Suslov, 2014; Richters, 2012).

Furthermore, the theoretical construct of identity politics (Huntington, 1996; Katzenstein, 1996) underscores the significance of collective identities, cultural narratives, and symbolic representations in shaping political conduct and conflict dynamics. The conferral of autocephaly (ecclesiastical independence) upon the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in 2019 represented an emphatic challenge to Russia's deeply ingrained cultural and ideological narratives, heightening tensions between the two nations and underscoring the pivotal role of identity and cultural hegemony as intrinsic facets of this multifaceted crisis.

This interplay of soft power and identity politics has manifested itself in Russia's concerted efforts to cultivate and perpetuate a narrative of historical, cultural, and spiritual primacy over Ukraine, leveraging the shared Orthodox Christian heritage and linguistic ties as instruments of influence. Conversely, Ukraine's

pursuit of autocephaly for its Orthodox Church and its growing embrace of Western liberal democratic norms can be interpreted as a counternarrative aimed at asserting its distinct national identity and emancipating itself from Russia's cultural and ideological orbit.

These theoretical lenses illuminate the profound complexities inherent in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which transcend mere geopolitical and territorial disputes and delve into the realms of identity, culture, and ideological hegemony. Resolving this crisis will inevitably necessitate not only a delicate balancing of security and economic interests but also a reckoning with the potent forces of identity politics and competing narratives that have fueled the escalating tensions between these two nations.

## **5. The Complexities of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict: A Call for Comprehensive Solutions and Future Research Avenues**

### **5.1. Towards a Holistic Paradigm: Navigating the Nexus of Digital Sovereignty and National Security in the Age of Cyber Conflicts:**

This multidisciplinary study has shed light on the intricate interplay between digital sovereignty, national security imperatives, and Russia's strategic priorities in the context of the multifaceted Russia-Ukraine conflict. The findings underscore the paramount importance of developing a nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in modern warfare in the digital age and the pressing need to adopt comprehensive approaches to address the multidimensional security challenges that have emerged.

This research contributes to the existing body of literature by providing a nuanced analysis of the multifarious dimensions of

conflict and illuminating the significance of digital sovereignty as a critical aspect of national security in the contemporary geopolitical landscape. By synthesizing insights from diverse theoretical perspectives, including power transition theory (Organski, 1958; Kugler & Lemke, 1996), security dilemma theory (Jervis, 1978; Glaser, 1997), economic statecraft (Baldwin, 1985), and identity politics (Huntington, 1996; Katzenstein, 1996), the study offers a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics shaping contemporary conflicts. Furthermore, it suggests avenues for further research in this domain, including the exploration of cyber warfare, information warfare, and the role of international norms and regulations in governing cyberspace (Gartzke, 2007).

Notably, the study underscores the pivotal role of digital sovereignty in the context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, as Russia seeks to assert its dominance in the digital realm and safeguard its national security interests in the face of perceived encroachments by Western powers and institutions (Feklyunina, 2016). The implications of this conflict extend far beyond the immediate theater of military engagement, reverberating across the global economy and exacerbating existing fissures within the international community (Keohane & Nye, 1977).

Ultimately, this research serves as a clarion call for policymakers, academics, and stakeholders to adopt a holistic and multidisciplinary approach to addressing the intricate challenges posed by the evolving nature of warfare and the imperative of safeguarding digital sovereignty in an increasingly interconnected and technologically dependent world. By synthesizing insights from diverse theoretical frameworks and disciplinary perspectives, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics underpinning contemporary conflicts and chart a

course towards sustainable and equitable resolutions that respect the sovereignty and security imperatives of all nations (Waltz, 1979; Walt, 1987).

This comprehensive theoretical exploration has illuminated the intricate and multifarious nature of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, emphasizing its profound complexity rooted in the interplay of shifting power dynamics, existential security imperatives, economic interests, and deeply ingrained cultural narratives. It is an intricate tapestry woven from these disparate yet inextricably intertwined threads, all contributing to the escalation of tensions and the perpetuation of hostilities. Addressing this crisis demands a comprehensive and nuanced approach that acknowledges the myriad factors at play and seeks a negotiated solution that addresses the legitimate concerns and security imperatives of all parties involved.

Drawing upon the theoretical frameworks examined, it is evident that attempts to resolve this conflict through unilateral action or a narrow focus on specific issues are unlikely to yield a durable and equitable resolution. Such approaches fail to account for the intricate web of interconnected challenges fueling the crisis. Instead, a holistic and multilateral approach is imperative, recognizing the complex interplay of geopolitical, economic, and cultural factors. This approach seeks to address them through patient diplomacy, mutual understanding, and a steadfast commitment to finding a sustainable and equitable resolution that respects the sovereignty and security imperatives of all nations.

Failure to adopt such a comprehensive and nuanced approach could have far-reaching and catastrophic consequences, not only for the region but for global security and stability at large. The escalation of tensions and the perpetuation of hostilities could precipitate a cascading effect, destabilizing regional alliances, disrupting global supply chains, and

exacerbating existing fissures within the international community.

The study has revealed a multifaceted understanding of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, highlighting its complex nature rooted in shifting power dynamics, existential security concerns, economic interests, and deeply ingrained cultural narratives. Key findings emphasize the interplay of theoretical perspectives such as power transition theory, security dilemma theory, and soft power theory. Additionally, the examination of economic interdependence and coercive diplomacy theories sheds light on the economic ramifications and diplomatic maneuvers influencing the crisis.

## **5.2. The Enigma: A Multidisciplinary Exploration of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict**

The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine represents a geopolitical quagmire that defies simplistic explanations and necessitates a nuanced, multidisciplinary analysis. This comprehensive study delves into the intricate interplay of shifting power dynamics, security imperatives, economic interests, and deeply rooted cultural narratives that have fueled escalating tensions between the two nations.

By drawing upon theoretical frameworks from international relations, political science, security studies, and digital conflict discourse, this research illuminates the profound complexities inherent in the crisis. Concepts such as power transition theory, security dilemma theory, economic statecraft, and identity politics provide a robust foundation for untangling the complexities and informing potential pathways toward a sustainable and equitable resolution.

The digital domain has emerged as a critical arena in this conflict, with cyber operations and disinformation campaigns reshaping the battlespace. Both Russia and

Ukraine have released national cyber strategies that underscore digital sovereignty as a prime security imperative, reflecting the urgency of establishing robust cyber defenses and resilient digital infrastructure amid escalating cyber threats.

This study explores the nexus of digital sovereignty and national security imperatives, emphasizing the need for a holistic paradigm to navigate the complexities of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Such an approach acknowledges the interconnected challenges and underscores the importance of patient diplomacy, mutual understanding, and a commitment to finding solutions that respect the sovereignty and security imperatives of all involved parties.

Through a comprehensive review of the historical context, evolving geopolitical strategies, economic consequences, and socio-cultural dimensions, this analysis sheds light on the multifaceted nature of the conflict. By synthesizing diverse theoretical perspectives and advocating for a multidisciplinary approach, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the crisis and pave the way for future scholarly investigations into this complex geopolitical theater.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict serves as a compelling case study, highlighting the intricate interplay of power dynamics, sovereignty assertions, and evolving security paradigms in the digital era. It underscores the imperative of a comprehensive and nuanced approach to address the multifarious dimensions of this enduring crisis, one that respects the complexities at hand while charting a judicious path toward lasting regional stability.

### **5.3. Implications and Future Research:**

The study's findings carry significant implications for Russia's digital sovereignty and national security. The increasing reliance on

digital technologies in modern warfare underscores the importance of safeguarding digital sovereignty as a vital component of national security. Future research could delve into the specific strategies employed by Russia to assert and defend its digital sovereignty, as well as the implications of digitalization on traditional security paradigms.

Furthermore, potential areas for future research in this domain include exploring the role of cyber warfare and information warfare in contemporary conflicts, analyzing the effectiveness of international norms and regulations in governing cyberspace, and examining the impact of technological advancements on state sovereignty and security. Additionally, future studies could investigate the interplay between digital sovereignty, economic statecraft, and the dynamics of asymmetric warfare, shedding light on the evolving nature of conflicts in the digital age.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In essence, the economic facets of the Russia-Ukraine conflict unveil the intricate web of limitations and complexities inherent in economic interdependence and coercive economic diplomacy amidst modern geopolitical rivalries. While once heralded as a stabilizing force and deterrent against conflict, the current crisis lays bare how factors like sovereignty assertions, security imperatives, and ideological contests can override economic incentives for collaboration.

The sweeping imposition of economic sanctions against Russia, though intended to compel behavioral change, has wielded a double-edged sword. While inflicting economic strain and disruption, these measures have inadvertently fortified Russia's resolve, cementing its position and intensifying rifts with the West. Moreover, the global repercussions of these sanctions, including disruptions to energy



markets and supply chains, underscore the intricate interconnections of the world economy and the potential for unforeseen fallout.

This conflict underscores the imperative for a more nuanced comprehension of economic statecraft and coercive diplomacy, acknowledging the intricate interplay between economic tools and broader geopolitical power dynamics. Theoretical frameworks such as economic interdependence, coercive diplomacy, and complex interdependence accentuate the multifaceted nature of transnational interactions and the diffusion of power across the economic, political, and security spheres.

Addressing this crisis necessitates a comprehensive strategy that recognizes the limitations of narrow economic coercion and grasps the intertwined nature of economic, political, and security imperatives. Sustainable resolutions must tackle the crux issues of sovereignty assertions, security apprehensions, and ideological divisions while simultaneously mitigating economic repercussions and fostering enhanced economic collaboration and interdependence.

Ultimately, the Russia-Ukraine conflict serves as a stark reminder that economic bonds alone are insufficient to forestall conflict in the face of deep-seated geopolitical rivalries and clashing visions of power and influence. Navigating this crisis demands a delicate equilibrium, employing economic instruments judiciously while pursuing diplomatic avenues and tackling the root causes of conflict through patient dialogue and mutual comprehension.

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