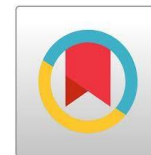


Geopolitical Rivalries: The Ethnic Dimensions and Global Implications of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict



Persaingan Geopolitik: Dimensi Etnis dan Implikasi Global Konflik Rusia-Ukraina

David Obukokhwo Ovuede^{1*}, Uwomano Benjamin Okpevra², David Lenin Ovuede³

¹ Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, Ministry of Interior, Abuja & Senior officer, Peace and Conflict Resolution Unit, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, Ministry of Interior.

¹ Ministry of Interior, Federal Secretariat Complex, Phase III, Shehu Shagari Way, Central Area, Abuja, FCT, Nigeria

² Delta State University (Nigeria)

² P.M.B. 1, Abraka Delta State, Nigeria

³ Faculty of Law, University of Benin

³ P.M.B. 1154, Ugbowo, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria

ovuede@gmail.com¹; ubokpevra@gmail.com²; dayvo4real@yahoo.com³

* Corresponding Author : ubokpevra@gmail.com^{*1}

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| <p>Keywords Russia-Ukraine Conflict; Geopolitical Rivalry; Ethnic Nationalism; Globalism; NATO</p> | <p>ABSTRACT This paper investigates the Russia-Ukraine conflict as a nexus of historical legacies, ethnic nationalism, and US-Russia geopolitical contestation, rooted in the aftermath of the Soviet Union’s dissolution. By synthesising historical analysis, policy documents, through a mixed-methods framework, the study positions the war as a proxy struggle shaped by competing globalist and irredentist agendas. Four interconnected drivers emerge: Russia’s resurgence as a counterweight to US-led unipolarity; NATO’s eastward expansion as a catalyst for Russian security anxieties; energy geopolitics influencing regional dependencies; and de-Russification policies amplifying ethnic tensions in Ukraine’s divided sociopolitical landscape. The findings revealed the conflict transcends Ukraine’s sovereignty, reflecting broader systemic rivalries where external powers exploit historical grievances – such as Soviet-era identity fractures and contested territorial narratives – to advance strategic aims. These dynamics have entrenched Ukraine as a battleground for ideological and resource dominance, fuelling ultranationalism and internal discord. The analysis highlights the interplay between structural forces– great-power competition, alliance militarisation – and localised factors, including memory politics and economic disparities, which collectively hinder diplomatic resolution. The study critiques the humanitarian consequences of proxy warfare, particularly civilian displacement and infrastructural collapse. It further underscores the role of digital disinformation and economic sanctions as hybrid tools of modern conflict.</p> |
| <p>Kata Kunci Konflik Rusia-Ukraina; Persaingan Geopolitik; Nasionalisme Etnis; Globalisme; NATO;</p> | <p>ABSTRAK Makalah ini mengkaji konflik Rusia-Ukraina sebagai titik temu antara warisan sejarah, nasionalisme etnis, dan persaingan geopolitik antara AS dan Rusia, yang berakar pada pasca-keruntuhan Uni Soviet. Dengan menggabungkan analisis sejarah dan dokumen kebijakan melalui kerangka kerja campuran, studi ini memposisikan perang sebagai pertarungan proxy yang dibentuk oleh agenda globalis dan irredentis yang saling bersaing. Empat faktor saling terkait muncul: kebangkitan Rusia sebagai penyeimbang terhadap unipolaritas yang dipimpin AS; perluasan NATO ke timur sebagai pemicu kekhawatiran keamanan Rusia; geopolitik energi yang memengaruhi ketergantungan regional; dan kebijakan de-Russifikasi</p> |

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| | <p>yang memperkuat ketegangan etnis di lanskap sosio-politik Ukraina yang terbelah. Temuan menunjukkan konflik melampaui kedaulatan Ukraina, mencerminkan persaingan sistemik yang lebih luas di mana kekuatan eksternal memanfaatkan keluhan historis – seperti retakan identitas era Soviet dan narasi teritorial yang diperebutkan – untuk mencapai tujuan strategis. Dinamika ini telah mengukuhkan Ukraina sebagai medan pertempuran untuk dominasi ideologis dan sumber daya, memicu ultranasionalisme dan ketidakharmonisan internal. Analisis ini menyoroti interaksi antara kekuatan struktural – persaingan kekuatan besar, militerisasi aliansi – dan faktor lokal, termasuk politik memori dan ketimpangan ekonomi, yang secara kolektif menghambat penyelesaian diplomatik. Studi ini mengkritik konsekuensi kemanusiaan dari perang proxy, terutama pengungsian warga sipil dan keruntuhan infrastruktur. Ia juga menekankan peran disinformasi digital dan sanksi ekonomi sebagai alat hibrida dalam konflik modern.</p> |
| <p>Article History Send 3th March 2025 Review 14th May 2025 Accepted 13th August 2025</p> | <p>Copyright ©2026 Jurnal Aristo (Social, Politic, Humaniora) This is an open access article under the CC-BY-NC-SA license. Akses artikel terbuka dengan model CC-BY-NC-SA sebagai lisensinya.</p> |



Introduction

This paper focuses on the complex interplay of ethnic nationalism, globalist interests, and geopolitical strategies surrounding the Russia-Ukraine conflict. It encapsulates the themes of rivalry between superpowers and the ethnic factors that have influenced the ongoing crises in Ukraine. The ongoing wars in Ukraine stem from a complex interplay of ethnic nationalism and geopolitical rivalry between the U.S. and Russia. The paper, therefore, analyses the origins of the Russia-Ukraine conflict as a spillover effect of the Soviet Union's collapse, highlighting four key dimensions: the U.S.-Russia struggle for global supremacy, NATO expansion, energy security concerns, and the push for de-Russification in Eastern Europe. It argues that these conflicts are not solely about Ukraine's strategic interests but reflect Russia's existential concerns as a resurgent superpower and America's quest for dominance. The study reveals how historical grievances and foreign interventions have shaped Ukraine's political landscape, creating an environment where ultra-nationalism thrives. Ultimately, this research contributes to an understanding of how external powers exploit local conflicts to achieve broader geopolitical objectives, positioning Ukraine as a battleground for competing global interests.

Significantly, the research calls for rethinking multipolar conflict management, advocating for interdisciplinary studies on the long-term impacts of sanctions, the ethics of foreign intervention, and the efficacy of international institutions in mediating asymmetric disputes. Future scholarship should prioritize localized voices in contested regions, examine emerging technologies' militarization, and explore pathways for reconciling historical trauma with contemporary security frameworks to mitigate escalation in Ukraine and analogous conflicts globally.

The collapse of the Soviet Union triggered waves of ethnic nationalism. In Ukraine, nationalist movements were instrumentalised to facilitate the transition from communism to a capitalist global economy, exploited by neoconservatives. While the fall of the Soviet Union remained unfinished business due to the persistence of Russian culture, military, and economic networks entrenched across former Soviet states, few inroads were left for American and Western influence. Russia, despite being a resurgent global force, struggled with an economy in transition, limiting its ability to sustain influence over former Soviet states whose economies were in decline, enabling Western powers to directly intervene in these quasi-republics.

Ukraine had its share of Soviet troubles. It was a mosaic of diverse ethnic nationalities, governed by corrupt oligarchs. "Since Ukraine's independence, the national and

international communities have discussed the importance of corruption. Based on assessments by analysts and entrepreneurs in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), calculated by the global non-governmental anti-corruption organisation Transparency International, Ukraine ranked 116th out of 180 countries in 2022" (Kravtsov et al., 2024). In 2000, Transparency International's Corruption Index ranked Ukraine third out of 90 countries, behind only Nigeria and Hungary as the most corrupt (Kalman, 2004). Ideologically, it was divided between its western-leaning European regions and the Russian-speaking eastern regions, which remained closely aligned with Moscow, including Crimea, home to the Russian Black Sea Fleet. While Ukraine emerged as the second-largest European state, endowed with natural resources and possessing the third-largest nuclear stockpile in the world, its struggling economy could not sustain these weapons. This presented an immediate threat to Russia, as Soviet nuclear weapons and missile technology could fall into Western hands and alter the nuclear balance. With Ukraine's overtly pro-Western ultra-nationalists, Russia asserted its right as the sole successor of the Soviet Union in claiming Soviet weapons, while an international security guarantee was offered by Russia, Britain, and France. This formed the basis of the Budapest Memorandum.

NATO's expansion into former Soviet states exacerbated Russia's fears, and their inclusion in the European Union deepened these concerns. The implication was that Russia needed to be contained through NATO's military encirclement and economically restrained by the European Union. This was necessary to exert soft power over the nuclear-armed federation. While this was part of America's broader strategy to entrench its global dominance as the sole world superpower, Russia viewed European geopolitics as a direct threat to its strategic interests and survival. These fears were heightened as the Baltic States and western Balkans joined NATO. Ukraine, the largest Eastern European state bordering Russia, with a shared frontier of over 1,200 miles and a population exceeding 40 million, became a military bulwark and counterforce against Russia in Eastern Europe. The potential expulsion of the Russian navy from Crimea in 2000 alerted the Kremlin to the possibility of NATO fleets replacing it.

Russian apprehension intensified with the 2014 Euromaidan protests led by Ukrainian ultra-nationalists, who called for the rejection of Russian influence and attacks on ethnic Russians. "Fundamentally, the inconsistencies of Ukrainian policy towards minorities had much to do with the competing interests of the Ukrainian elite (i.e. the Dnipropetrovsk and Donetsk clans)" (Terzyman, 2002). While attacks on ethnic Russians in the Donbas triggered a civil war, calls for foreign intervention to restore public order served as

Moscow's justification for its military deployment—commonly referred to as "Little Green Men"—in Crimea. Russia's diplomatic efforts to restore peace within Ukraine's territorial integrity were pursued through the Minsk Agreements. However, these agreements were abandoned by Kyiv in 2022 following an escalation in attacks on the Donbas and a declaration to reclaim Crimea by force. Ultra-nationalist factions advocated for NATO membership as a security guarantee, and Ukraine's NATO aspirations triggered Russia's Special Military Operation (SMO).

Historical invasions of Russia through Ukraine, such as Napoleon Bonaparte's and Nazi Germany's campaigns, offer context for Russia's geopolitical apprehensions. Grant and Temperley (1982) note that Napoleon's invasion took place through Ukraine, while Nazi Germany advanced along three lines: "through Southern Poland into Ukraine, through White Russia towards Smolensk and Moscow, and through the Baltic States into Leningrad" (J.A. Westwood, 1993) states that Napoleon's Grande Armée invaded Russia with over five hundred thousand men, yet by December 1812, he retreated with only one-fifth of his forces (p. 5). Alexander II of Russia took control at Vilna, leading his victorious army to liberate Europe. Fisher (1955) notes that Russia bore the brunt of the Mongol invasion and saved Europe from annexation. The collective impact of these historical invasions on Russia's perceptions of Ukraine's NATO ambitions necessitates further study.

Against the backdrop of the above an exploration into the background and theoretical framework is a necessary prelude to understand the issues that are involved in this research. Grant and Temperley (1982) trace the origins of Russia and Ukraine to Kievan Rus in the 7th century. Fisher (1955) notes that the divide in Europe was religious, as professing Christianity meant that one's sins were forgiven. Russia's first rift with Europe stemmed from its acceptance of the Orthodox faith. The implications of Orthodoxy on Western perceptions shed light on the ecclesiastical discord between the Euromaidan regimes and Moscow. While Westwood (1993) examines the rise of Bolshevism and its ideological differences with America and the collective West, he also highlights early demands for an independent Ukrainian state and the collapse of the Soviet Union. He discusses the invasion of Russia by America, Japan, and Western forces after World War II. Fisher (1955) and Grant and Temperley (1982) examine the Napoleonic invasion of Russia as well as the Mongol conquests. These scholars discuss the shaping of Ukraine through various conquests and waves of settlements by the Swiss, Poles, Hungarians, Galatians, Roma, and other European peoples, among whom the Slavs proved resilient. The impact of these invasions on Russia's perception of its security remains a subject for further discussion. However,

Coughlin (2002) contends that America's invasion of Iraq was part of the unfinished business of the Cold War. This contention extends to examining Ukraine's place within the vortex of Russia's irredentism and America's globalism.

Theories of imperialism and systems theory are explored to examine America's globalism, while the theories of primordialism, constructivism, and instrumentalism explain Russia's Special Military Operation (SMO) in Ukraine. Primordialism is defined as a sentiment or affect-laden set of beliefs that perceives an essential continuity from group ancestry to progeny (perceived kith and kin), symbolically located in a specific territory or place, whether or not it is the group's current residence (Weinreich, Bacova, and Rougier, 2003:119 in J. Coakley, 2017). While primordial sentiments were invoked by the Donbas to secure Russia's intervention, this was driven by deeply rooted grievances over perceived ethnic persecution by Kyiv. However, primordialism was only constructed and instrumentalised for secession and reunification with Russia.

Nonetheless, systems theory views the world as an organic whole with interdependent components that interact through input and output processes. These mechanisms explain how American policies have far-reaching effects on the global community. According to Lenin (1939 in Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff, 1981:102-125), imperialism is capitalism in its stage of development where monopolies and finance capital dominate, the export of capital becomes significant, the division of the world among international trusts begins, and the territorial division of the globe among the great imperialist powers is completed. This theory explains the creation of spheres of influence by America and Russia as a cause of global conflicts. The drive to secure export markets by the EU for its industrial enterprises is also cited as a trigger for Euromaidan and the Ukrainian war. Here, the theory of imperialism provides a framework to interrogate US global domination through the establishment of international institutions and consortiums.

Method

Due to the historical nature of the conflict, data was sourced from existing literature and journal reports, which were carefully analysed. As mentioned in the abstract above the paper employed a mixed-methods framework analysis using descriptive and narrative approaches. This entailed rigorous analysis and synthesis of data from different sources to achieve a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

(a) Irredentism: A policy advocating the restoration of a country's perceived historical lands or territories formerly belonging to it. (b) Globalism: A policy that advocates

the use of a country's economic and military power to establish a system of global dominance.

Result and Discussion

Soviet Unionism and American Globalism

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) emerged in 1917 from the remnants of Imperial Russia following the regicide of Tsar Nicholas II and the royal family in 1918. The eleven victims at Ekaterinburg included the Tsar, his family, their doctor, cook, valet, and housemaid (Westwood, 1993). The Bolsheviks inherited an empire whose core was Slavic but was composed of ethnically diverse peoples spanning Europe and Asia and bordering the American continent. The Republics of Russia, the Transcaucasian Soviet Federated Republics, and the Ukrainian and Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republics emerged from the territories of the former empire, with Moscow as their eternal capital.

The foundations of communism rested on rural ownership of peasant farms and state control of all means of production and distribution. This ideological framework, though republican and democratic, marked a stark departure from the tenets of Pax Americana, which championed private ownership of production and distribution. This ideological divergence was instrumentalised to gain allies across the globe and challenge the world order upheld by monarchs and private entrepreneurs. Furthermore, the export of communist socialism through the establishment of Soviet councils across Europe and the world sought to undermine American capitalism. The USSR's confederation repudiated American republicanism and European monarchism, promoting collectivism over global capitalism. The spread of communism posed a major threat to the American concept of governance. Communist Russia's withdrawal from World War I and its peace treaty with the Central Powers drew the aversion of the Allied Powers, on whose behalf it had prosecuted the war against Germany. Western animosity worsened following the execution of Nicholas II and the Bolsheviks' agenda of universal communism.

While Russia nullified the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which had ended its war with Germany, the collapse of Imperial Germany at the end of World War I—following decisive US intervention—introduced America as a dominant force in European affairs. Nonetheless, the establishment of the Comintern in 1919 sought to catalyse a permanent global revolution, alienating Britain, which resented communist anti-colonial propaganda disseminated by Comintern agents (Westwood, 1993). Western and American powers viewed the USSR with apprehension, and America only formally recognised it in 1933. However, Russia's descent

into civil war led to the emergence of the Soviet Red Army against the Tsarist White Army. Russia's withdrawal from World War I (the Great Patriotic War) turned the Allied forces against the Soviet Red Army.

In Russia's far north, British, French, and US forces occupied Archangel, while a Japanese-supported regime emerged in Kolchak. British troops invaded and occupied the Caucasus. According to Westwood (1993), US troops were deployed in Russian territories at the end of the war to monitor other interventionist forces, with Churchill and Foch arguing that Bolshevism threatened Europe. French and British warships were stationed in Odessa, the Baltic, and Turkmenistan. A lesser-known reality is that America and its allies occupied Russian territory as an intervention force. The previous camaraderie between Tsarist Russia and the United States—evident in Russia's sale of Alaska to the US, its support against Napoleon's Continental System, and its informed neutrality during the American Revolution—had dissipated with the rise of the Bolsheviks, initiating a global rivalry.

This ideological divide split the world into two blocs, gaining currency both tactically and spatially. Soviet literature and architecture gained global influence, distinguishing themselves from Western and American culture. Between 1919 and 1936, Russia sought international recognition, with its Red Army occupying the Baltic states in 1919 and Georgia in 1921. Its New Economic Policy aimed to foster peace and international legitimacy, culminating in US recognition in 1933 and Soviet admission to the League of Nations in 1934. Despite the Tripartite Pact with Czechoslovakia in 1935, Russia signed a Non-Aggression Pact with Germany in 1939. Notably, the Russo-German Pact contained a secret protocol to partition Poland.

While Russia signed the Soviet-Japanese Pact in 1941, Germany soon invaded, advancing towards Leningrad, Moscow, and Ukraine. This mirrored Napoleon's 1812 invasion, with Ukraine again serving as the gateway. During World War I, anti-Russian sentiment in Ukraine was strong enough that some inhabitants welcomed the German invaders (Westwood, 1993). The ideological rivalry between communist Russia and the Western Allied forces intensified after the war, culminating in militaristic terms and the deployment of intercontinental nuclear missiles. The detonation of atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki was widely perceived as a warning to the Soviet Union, further entrenching the Cold War rivalry.

However, in 1957, Russia's rivalry with the US extended into space with the launch of Sputnik, followed by the launch of the first Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) in 1958. With space becoming the new battleground for these two rivals, all of humanity was

in danger of a global conflagration. Tacitly, the US launched its own ICBM in 1959, and China followed suit some twenty years later. With the threat of war and the intensification of nuclear tensions, the Cuban Missile Crisis brought the world to the brink of annihilation. To curb the threat of mutually assured destruction (MAD), the SALT I (Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty) and SALT II agreements were signed between 1969 and 1979, limiting the deployment of nuclear weapons and restricting nuclear testing (Department of State, n.d.).

Unsurprisingly, China embraced Maoism, an indigenous synthesis of communism, which fostered cohesion with Russia. Effectively, this created the grounds for the global polarisation of the world into the Soviet bloc and the West. Soviet allies spanned from North Korea to communist sympathisers in Ghana, the Congo, the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, Cuba, Latin America, China, and socialist Yugoslavia. The quest to secure allies led to Russian support for the decolonisation of Africa and Asia from the grip of colonial Western Europe. One outcome of the decolonisation of the British Empire and French colonies was the possibility of non-colonial trade, which opened newly independent states to political freedom and offered a platform to become Soviet allies and economic partners. New markets were opened for Soviet weapons and technology, while European powers became increasingly marginalised.

Further efforts at acculturation included Soviet scholarship programmes and literature. The East-West rivalry led to the emergence of dictators such as Augusto Pinochet and Saddam Hussein, as well as the assassination of General Murtala Muhammed. Notably, the assassins accused General Murtala of attempting to implement communist policies (Ojiako, 1979).

Saddam Hussein, however, was anti-communist but became entangled in the vortex of Russian-American rivalry when, in the 1970s, he supported the nationalisation of the Iraqi oil industry, which had been controlled by BP, Shell, Esso, Mobil, and Compagnie Française des Pétroles (CFP), companies owned by the US, Britain, and France. Iraq had a production potential of 11 million barrels per day and a reserve of 130 billion barrels (Coughlin, 2002). His attempts to circumvent pressures from Washington through an alliance with Moscow—the 1972 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, which requested coordination with Moscow in foreign policy and allowed Russian jets to use Iraqi airfields—incurred the ire of the collective West. America's tacit support against Saddam and his Ba'ath Party fuelled the Kurdish uprising in Iraq, which remains a volatile regional issue. His attempts to balance relations with both the West and the Soviets to serve his national interests led to accusations

of being a brutish survivalist in pursuit of nuclear weapons. The 1991 bombing of Baghdad and its 2003 occupation by a coalition led by the US fits into America's strategy of encirclement and establishing military bases near Russia's borders. The US deployment of Tomahawk cruise missiles demonstrated America's military dominance, while the execution of Saddam Hussein underscored its uncompromising approach.

In pursuit of global dominance, the US and NATO bombarded Belgrade, a Russian ally. Serbia was divided with the creation of Kosovo, threatening Russia's allies and challenging its sphere of influence. While the Iraqi and Serbian conflicts serve as examples of US-led military interventions resulting in the installation of pro-American regimes, Ukraine has become the latest battleground between the West and Russia, with limited regard for the national interests of the Ukrainian people.

The Collapse of the Soviet Union and the Emergence of the Republic of Ukraine

Undoubtedly, the Soviet Union was an amalgam of diverse ethnic nationalities, many of which had been conquered during Russia's imperial expansion and acquired at the end of World War II. Many of these states had cultural affinities with Germany and Western Europe, fostering a desire for independence. More an act of political sabotage than a failure of the economic system, the collapse of the Soviet Union—described as the greatest geopolitical tragedy of the 20th century—was spearheaded by Belarus and Ukraine, culminating in its dissolution in 1991. With the collapse, the Soviet territories were fragmented into 15 quasi-independent states: Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Armenia, Moldova, Mongolia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Russia, Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania. Many of these states retained significant ethnic Russian populations, and the Russian language remained widely used.

Ukraine, in particular, contained a substantial ethnic Russian population that predated the establishment of the Ukrainian state. Kyiv was the first capital city of Kievan Rus. Grant and Temperley (1982) suggest that Kyiv was established in the 7th century as a Slavic settlement, marking it as the first capital of the Slavs. According to Fisher (1952), Prince Vladimir (980-1015 AD) made Kyiv a Christian city, earning it the title "Queen of Russian Cities" (pp. 376-379). Following the Mongol invasion, Muscovite Russia, emerging from the town of Suzdal in the 12th century, became more enduring than the Kievan confederacy. Between 1315 and 1377, Lithuania invaded the Dnieper region and subjugated Kyiv, while the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Poland formed a union to rule the city. By the 14th century, two distinct Russian identities had emerged: the western Russian influence

of Lithuania and Poland, with Roman, Jewish, and Greek elements, and the eastern Muscovite Russia, which remained deeply Byzantine. Moscow, by force of circumstance, became the capital of the Greek Orthodox Church, with its princes seen as heirs to the Byzantine Caesars (p. 384). Russia's adherence to Greek Orthodoxy instead of Latin Christianity played a crucial role in shaping its historical relations with the West.

Despite its deep-rooted historical connections, Ukraine sought separation from Russia. Unlike other former Soviet states, Ukraine had a large Russian population living in contiguous territories. It housed Russia's Soviet-era pipeline network and served as its economic gateway to Europe. This economic interdependence predated the establishment of modern Russia and Ukraine and was not fully severed with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Ukraine also hosted the Antonov jet manufacturing plant and possessed over 6,000 Soviet nuclear missiles. Critical Soviet technologies and the largest energy plants were located in Ukraine. However, post-independence, Kyiv fell into the hands of corrupt oligarchs, leading to economic mismanagement. While Western European states, with their vast capital resources, sought to exploit Ukraine's assets, its institutions remained Soviet in structure. Russia, meanwhile, was preoccupied with economic reforms and political instability during the Yeltsin era and lacked the economic leverage to counter Western investments in Ukraine. The risk of Russian missile technology falling into Western hands through Ukrainian partnerships necessitated the Lisbon Protocol between the US and Russia in 1991. Under the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), all Soviet nuclear warheads in Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan were to be transferred to Russia or dismantled. This agreement formed the basis of the Budapest Memorandum in 1994, wherein Ukraine surrendered its nuclear weapons in exchange for security guarantees from the USA, the UK, and Russia under the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The Budapest Memorandum ensured that Ukraine did not emerge as a sixth nuclear power.

America's Eastward Expansion and Russian Resurgence

The Berlin Wall, which symbolised the East-West divide between Russia and America, fell in 1990. While assurances were reportedly given that NATO would not expand eastward, a significant Western-influenced economic and military movement emerged. Between 1994 and 2004, several Balkan states joined NATO. The Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary became members in 1999, followed by Latvia, Bulgaria, Romania, Estonia, and Slovenia in 2004, Albania and Croatia in 2009, Montenegro in 2017, and Finland and

Sweden in 2024, encircling European Russia. This expansion reinforced Russian perceptions of US strategic encirclement and heightened its suspicions of Western intentions.

As a counterweight to the European economic alliance, Russia formed the Eastern European Economic Union and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in 1991 with a free trade area. Its members included Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Moldova. This was a sequel to the Belovezha Accord between Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine in 1991, which declared that the Soviet Union had ceased to exist and proclaimed the CIS in its place (Voitovich, 1993:405). Additionally, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) was signed by Russia, Belarus, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan in 2002 as a coalition for mutual defence, serving as a replacement for the Warsaw Pact and a counter to American eastward expansion. However, the military engagements of the CSTO were limited to the projection of power in Peace Support Operations (PSO) within Eastern Europe and the former Soviet states. The PSO had been engaged in the Kazakhstan and Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis. In reality, Moscow had carved out a regional role and could project power in support of Russian interests. This regional force mirrored the ghost of its Soviet might, and Russia's quest to retain influence in Eurasia appeared to be more of an illusion of the Cold War superpower that was in no position to craft the principles of the post-war era. Undoubtedly, with an unprecedented number of nuclear weapons, it was perceived as a threat by the US.

Undeniably, after the defeat of Nazi Germany, a mutual feeling of mistrust existed between Russia and America. Russia perceived the Bretton Woods institutions as an extension of Pax Americana and the International Criminal Court (ICC) as a mechanism under American dominance. However, in seeking normalisation with the US-led global order after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia acquiesced to membership of the IMF. Thus, the IMF replaced one non-member state with 15 ex-Soviet states (Boughton, 2012:50). However, the decoupling of Yugoslavia in 1995 with airstrikes by American-led NATO in Russia's backyard created new apprehensions in Moscow. Furthermore, sixty days into the NATO bombing of Serbia, the ICC for the former Yugoslavia indicted President Slobodan Milosevic as a war criminal. Nonetheless, these trials were seen as kangaroo courts to prosecute those who had been vanquished (Grosscup, 2004). The Balkanisation of Yugoslavia was construed as an American template for the dismembering of Russia. This former Soviet satellite was divided into semi-quasi states after a brutal civil war that left their economies comatose. These small states were incorporated into NATO and the

European Union, which was seen as an affront to Russia, which had hitherto been the dominant power in Eastern Europe and the symbol of the pan-Slavic nation. The threat of imminent dismemberment of Eastern European states and their incorporation into NATO and the EU—as its economic wing—was exacerbated by the invasion of Serbia and the establishment of Kosovo as an independent state. While Russia had protested against the collective bombing of Serbia, the creation of Kosovo initiated the concept of attaining strategic goals through brute force.

Undoubtedly, the Serbian economy was crippled by sanctions, and its critical national assets were destroyed. This militaristic approach by Washington and NATO left little role for the UN. While President Slobodan Milosevic was incarcerated, a pro-Western government was installed in Belgrade and brought under the ambit of the EU. Nonetheless, it is fitting to note that Serbia's application for EU membership was coerced through its bombing and made a precondition for its reconstruction. The subtlety of bombing a nation into submission meant that these states not only accepted US policies but were also compelled into an economic and military coalition against Russia. It is notable that America's militaristic approach to mediating international disputes saw not only the bombing of ex-Soviet satellite states but also continuous intimidation and war practices in several theatres across Europe and Russia's near abroad in the Middle East. America's militaristic approach was further exemplified by the bombing of the Iraqi army out of Kuwait without clear UN authorisation. The morality of this operation remains subjective; however, what is clear is that it demonstrated an American-led coalition attack with modern weapons—cruise and Tomahawk missiles—against a sovereign state. This show of force was practically an act of intimidation towards Russia.

The establishment of American and NATO bases was a legitimate concern for Russia as it furthered the US strategy of encirclement and globalism. Certainly, the US pursued a similar policy by stationing nuclear missiles in Turkey before the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1963. Russia's agreement to dissolve the Soviet Union was not mirrored by the dissolution of NATO. Since NATO's existence had been justified by the threat of a Soviet invasion of European states, its collapse should have necessitated NATO's dissolution. However, new roles had to be found in pursuance of US imperial goals of global dominance, but this organisation bore the relics of its imperial days with little relevance to current global realities. No event in human history so thoroughly undermined the US and NATO's justification for their 2003 attack on Iraq. The only logic appeared to be to make battle-ready an American-led army with global outreach. With American and NATO bases and satellites

stationed in the Baltics and the Balkans, the concept of a Russian sphere of influence was vanquished. The invasion of Afghanistan only added to the perception of the strategic encirclement of Russia. Although out of necessity, Russia had paired with the coalition to combat terrorism and provided transit to US and NATO forces, the reality remained that strategic goals were being attained through force, reinforcing Russia's sense of encirclement by the US.

For Russia's compliance with the US and NATO's acceptable conduct, it was compensated with several economic benefits and trade deals. While Germany and other European industrial nations maintained expanded trade ties with Russia, the Russian economy remained reliant on Soviet infrastructure and was largely susceptible to US and EU sanctions. Several Soviet pipelines ran through Ukraine, delivering hydrocarbons to European industrial centres. With Russia and many ex-Soviet states embarking on economic reforms and implementing capitalist fiscal programmes, Russia sought to maintain energy dominance in Europe through diversified gas pipelines. This initiated the Turkish Stream and the Caspian Petroleum Consortium, which delivered Kazakh oil through Transneft to the Caspian Sea. This masterstroke-maintained Russia's dominance of European energy supplies, outwitting America's Chevron and Western investors. Russian gas giants such as Gazprom, Rosneft, and Transneft established deals securing state assets and paying transit rights to host nations. While Ukraine benefited from transit rights and discounted Russian oil, it became the gateway for Russia's gas trade and economic development with Europe.

The illusion that new transit routes would not be found was dashed as Russia needed to expand trade to meet existing European demand. While Ukraine was plagued by extreme corruption, with its oligarchs plundering state resources and striking deals with international cartels, it emerged as one of the most corrupt countries in Europe and possibly the modern world. This situation became even more relevant in the context of the reunification of Germany, which regained its industrial might and emerged as an industrial superpower requiring cheap Russian gas to sustain its global rise. However, German aspirations and Russia's economic forecast were sabotaged by oil thieves and incessant leaks on its pipelines across Ukraine, possibly due to state-sponsored theft and vandalism. This was exacerbated by Ukraine's failure to make timely payments for its domestic oil imports from Russia. Consequently, Russia sought lower-risk routes for its gas transit and established the Nord Stream 1-2 and the Power of Siberia pipelines to China.

Additionally, the US had observed a resurgent Russia under Putin, massively investing in its war machine. Russia's relentless engagement in military drills such as

ZAPAD-West and Eastern drills signalled readiness for a military confrontation with the US in Europe. Furthermore, Russia's innovative research to modernise its ageing weapons with hypersonic missiles, Borei nuclear submarines, the Iskander, Sarmat, Kinzhal, and Avangard missiles indicated that its economic growth was funding its military resurgence in Europe. Globally, Russia expanded its naval presence in Syria with its port at Tartus. Here, Russia had initial success in thwarting attempts at overthrowing ex-President Al Assad and stemming the tide of war against him. This projected Russia as a trusted ally against American-Western-supported regime change. Russia not only challenged the attempts to overthrow Assad, but also demonstrated the effectiveness of its military doctrine and fighter jets in countering organised terrorist groups and Western-backed rebels. In Libya, Russia's support for General Haftar was an affront to US and Western influence. A wealthier Russia became more confrontational, positioning itself as a resurgent superpower. With an economy exceeding a trillion dollars, vast natural resources, and vital technology, it had become a formidable power seeking to restore its superpower status.

While the US deprecated a more confrontational Russia, emboldened by its burgeoning economy, its strategy was to curtail further Russian economic expansion into Western Europe through its gas pipelines. A willing partner was found in an embittered Ukraine, sidelined by alternate pipelines and facing the prospect of losing substantial transit fees. Ukraine's vast industrial capacity, a relic of its Soviet past, was left to deteriorate. Instead of investing in modernisation, it relied on leveraging concessions, transit fees, and international loans. However, its abundant reserves of titanium, uranium, and its strategic location, as well as the port city of Crimea, made it valuable to major powers. As Russia's gateway to Europe and home to Russia's Black Sea fleet—its only freshwater port—Russia was compelled to preserve stability in Ukraine and had often been a victim of its political manoeuvring. In this instance, Russia swiftly offered Ukraine a grant of \$15 billion as an economic package to prevent its economic collapse and deter it from seeking funds from rival economic powers such as the EU (Sarna and Wierszbowska-Maiza, 2013). The objective was to prevent an influx of European and American goods into Russia through Ukraine.

Attracted by Ukraine's natural resources and its potential role in containing Russia militarily and economically, the EU—led by Germany, which sought new markets for its industrial products—championed the Maidan uprising in Ukraine. The significant implication was that a democratically elected European government had been removed from power by a colour revolution. Unsurprisingly, the Maidan Revolt took on an ethnic

dimension, with Yanukovich fleeing to Crimea, a city dominated by Russian military personnel, and requesting intervention to restore peace and order in Ukraine. This same appeal was made to Berlin, whose reluctance to intervene perhaps indicated complicity in the disturbances in Kiev. Consequently, Russia's intervention to restore order was perceived as an effort to protect Yanukovich, a Russian speaker. The coup leaders, masquerading as revolutionaries, directed the anger of the protesters against Donbas and Crimea, both of which had significant ethnic Russian populations. Ukraine, plagued by numerous issues and a failing economy, had become the "sick man of Europe." However, its strategic geopolitical location, fertile agricultural lands, and critical resources made it a concern for global powers. With vast reserves of titanium and uranium, Ukraine holds much of the critical raw materials necessary for the future. It has the largest titanium reserves in Europe, one of the largest lithium reserves, and is the leading producer of gallium—essential for semiconductors—and a major supplier of neon gas, providing 90 per cent of semiconductor-grade neon for American chip production. In 2021, Ukraine supplied 43 per cent of the EU's steel plate imports (Buchkovska, 2024). This formed part of the Western calculus to install a pro-Western regime in Kiev and secure critical resources for its industrial sectors. Titanium is essential for modern aviation, and lithium powers electric and solar batteries. The West's drive to secure these resources was a significant incentive for its intervention in Ukraine, especially as the US and its allies sought to reduce their dependence on Russian oil in pursuit of green energy. The urgency of securing titanium and lithium in Ukraine was heightened by the fact that Zimbabwe, another major resource holder, was heavily sanctioned, pushing it further into Russia's sphere of influence. Undoubtedly, a covert rivalry exists to secure critical resources, and Russia has taken a strategic approach by securing Nigeria's Ajaokuta steel plant and strategic ports in the Horn of Africa. The US-China rivalry over rare earth minerals and other next-generation resources has also driven closer ties between Russia and China under their "No Limits Friendship" agreement. Russia's strategy to circumvent American sanctions and reassert its global influence has included the establishment of BRICS and the introduction of M-BRICS, supported by gold. Unquestionably, most resource-rich countries are currently under American sanctions, highlighting the geopolitical struggle for dominance.

Dissecting the Wars in Ukraine

The complexities surrounding the armed conflict in Ukraine necessitate a thorough analysis of the wars being fought on its territory, the underlying issues, and the immediate

triggers crucial for resolution. Firstly, Ukraine's origins as a mosaic of ethnically diverse peoples and its historical incorporation of vast territories during the Russian Empire made it a melting pot of European cultures and a flashpoint for confrontation. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, ethnic Russians became a minority in Ukraine and other ex-Soviet states. As noted by Aram Terzyan (2022), "On the other hand, Russians, Hungarians, Romanians, and other ethnic minorities living in the country are not considered indigenous people as they have a state outside the borders of Ukraine."

Clearly, the immediate trigger of the war was the armed attack on ethnic Russians in Donbas. President Viktor Yanukovich's eastern background fuelled perceptions that he was pro-Russian. This challenges the view that the Euromaidan protests in Kiev were purely a popular uprising against an unpopular regime. The ethnic dimension becomes evident when considering that Yanukovich's administration had successfully secured a grant from Russia that was more favourable than an EU loan—a decision beneficial to both Ukraine and Russia. Russia's concern was that an EU loan acceptance would expose Ukraine to the European market, potentially enabling Western goods to flood into Russia. While Russia's effort to protect its internal market may not constitute protectionism, it aligns with the "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) policies of the Trump administration.

However, the eruption of Euromaidan, accompanied by widespread arson and calls for the elimination of President Viktor Yanukovich, compelled his flight to Crimea and led to the collapse of his government. Notably, President Yanukovich had formally invited Russian intervention to restore civil order. An extract from his letter reads:

I, therefore, appeal to the President of Russia, V.V. Putin, to use the armed forces of the Russian Federation to restore law and order, peace and stability, and to protect the people of Ukraine" (Thomas D. Grant, 2015).

While the 2014 Maidan Protest was hijacked by ultra-nationalist forces, it bore the hallmarks of an ethnic war. President Yanukovich's flight to Crimea from the armed rebellion in Kiev saw the attackers marching to the gates of Crimea. These attacks were based on ethnic identification and the victimisation of Russian speakers in Kiev and the Donbas. It must be emphasised that European history is replete with ethnic wars, which gave rise to the current European states of the Balkans and the emergence of Kosovo from Serbia. It is misguided to dismiss the ethnic reality of the Ukrainian conflict, given the broad acceptance and overwhelming support in the Crimean referendum to reunite with Russia, reflecting the people's security concerns in the face of ultra-nationalist movements in Kiev. Unsurprisingly, Ukrainian generals and naval heads in Crimea willingly switched sides,

aligning with their Russian counterparts, reinforcing the unbroken Slavic brotherhood (Memmott, 2014). Except for the Tatars, the entire population of Crimea showed no resentment towards living under Russian protection, with its "Little Green Men" patrolling its streets.

This situation was not resolved under President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's regime, which had campaigned on a platform of restoring peace under his Servant of the People party. It was rather absurd that his government did not reverse the autocephaly granted to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine from Russia by President Poroshenko, which proscribed the use of Russian as an official language in Ukraine (Terzyan, 2022); it was instead replaced with English. Certainly, this constitutes cultural aggression, an identity war against Russian speakers, and a provocation. Following sustained attacks on Russian speakers and hostilities in the Donbas by ultra-nationalist forces, the people of Donetsk and Luhansk invoked the right of self-determination and preservation, seceding to form two independent republics recognised by Russia on 21st February 2022. While the question of sovereignty under Article 2(4) of the UN Charter regarding the use of force against a state's territorial integrity is understandable, the right to self-determination remains inalienable. It is undeniable that Russian is more than just a language; it is an identity, with Russian speakers existing beyond Russia's modern borders.

Covertly, an ethnic and cultural war was underway in Europe. The reality is that Russian culture is both tangible and intangible, present in its language, traditions, and the deeply ingrained beliefs of the Russian Orthodox Church. Kiev's moratorium on the Eastern calendar and its Christmas Day worship, aligning it with the Western calendar, were acts of pacification. However, this move, lacking political acumen and historical awareness, undermines claims that the conflict was not rooted in ethnic tensions. Kiev's ill-conceived policies significantly escalated tensions, leading to the funneling of arms across the eastern borders into the Donbas.

Furthermore, attempts at Ukrainisation, disregarding the country's multi-ethnic composition, resulted in tensions with Hungary as these policies also affected ethnic Hungarians. This transformation into a cultural battle against everything Russian endangered millions of ethnic minorities across Europe. The possibility of replicating the Ukrainian model elsewhere presents an existential threat to Russia. Notably, Western support for Kiev appeared unrestrained, even as over 13,000 ethnic Russians were killed in the Donbas. Shockingly, the US blamed these deaths on Russia (Mills, 2021). To prevent an influx of refugees, Russia facilitated the Minsk agreements between the eastern secessionists and

Kiev, effectively freezing the conflict. This was a crucial de-escalation effort that held prospects for a peaceful resolution. However, in 2019, the Zelenskyy regime abandoned the Minsk agreements, portraying them as coercively imposed by Russia. This assertion is absurd, given that Germany, France, and the OSCE co-facilitated the Minsk agreements, signed in September 2014 and February 2015 (Kimmage, n.d).

Kiev's renegeing on the Minsk agreements was further exacerbated by the long-standing rivalry between Moscow and Washington. While Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 angered the Obama administration, the US has consistently pursued a policy of containing Russia through encirclement. Russia's actions in Crimea and its recognition of the breakaway territories of Luhansk and Donetsk are comparable to the creation of the quasi-republic of Kosovo from Serbia—a demonstration of its superpower status. It would be naive not to acknowledge Russia as a military and resource superpower with the capability to wage a global existential war. Although the US presented itself as a guarantor of the Budapest Memorandum, it did not exhibit passivity towards Kiev's actions, which bordered on genocide. However, American support for Kiev primarily served the strategic goal of weakening Russia. Additionally, Russia's advancements in hypersonic missile technology, capable of reaching major European capitals and the US within minutes, rendered existing missile defences obsolete, driving the West's appetite for missile installations in Ukraine as a countermeasure.

Secondly, Ukraine positioned itself as a pawn in the great power struggle. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine has been involved in several US-led operations and supported American-backed rebel groups in Africa. The formation of the GUAM Accord with Moldova, Azerbaijan, and Georgia in 1991 aimed to establish a counter-security bloc to Russia, aligning Ukraine more closely with trans-Atlantic institutions (Zhunisbek, 2017). Predictably, this entangled Ukraine in the vortex of superpower rivalry. Ukraine supported and participated in US-led Operation Desert Storm and was accused of supplying weapons to Charles Taylor's rebels in Liberia and facilitating Sierra Leone's blood diamond trade (Cheeseman, 2008). In response, Russia sought to weaken the GUAM bloc by supporting Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia and the Soviet-backed Transnistria regime in Moldova under the guise of protecting ethnic Russians, with annexation as a possible outcome. Behind this irredentist drive, Russia aimed to undermine American influence in Eastern Europe. However, Ukraine's involvement in global Russo-American rivalries has led to its participation in terrorist activities, such as attacks on the Malian army, as American and French forces were expelled from Niger and replaced by Russia's Wagner forces.

Additionally, Ukraine's support for anti-Assad armed groups in Syria and its disruptive activities in West Africa reflect its ongoing geopolitical alignment.

Ukraine's predicament mirrors that of Cuba under the Castro regime, which was in constant opposition to the US. However, Ukraine's bid for NATO membership and the potential deployment of US missiles on its territory resemble a "Cuban Missile Crisis 2.0." While the original crisis was resolved with the withdrawal of American missiles from Turkey and Soviet missiles from Cuba, Ukraine's actions have reignited Cold War-era tensions. The longstanding US-Russian rivalry dates back to the Bolshevik Revolution when the US supported the monarchist White Russians against the Soviet Red Army. This rivalry only temporarily subsided during WWII and resumed when Russia defeated Nazi Germany with significant Allied aid. The perceived threat of communist expansion and the potential dismantling of capitalist structures led to the establishment of NATO in 1948 as a collective defence mechanism against Soviet Russia.

Thirdly, Ukraine's constitutional demand for NATO membership poses a significant threat to Russia. This threat intensified as Kiev became increasingly Russophobic, with over 13,000 ethnic Russians killed in the Donbas. With NATO membership, the risk of an emboldened Kiev engaging in ethnic cleansing in the Donbas and provoking Russia became a tangible concern. The US finds strategic benefits in NATO expansion, as it degrades Russia's economy and military capabilities. With a population exceeding 40 million and a 1,226-mile border with Russia, Ukraine serves as a valuable asset in America's expansionist aims through NATO. Ukraine's geostrategic location, particularly its Black Sea coastline and the port of Sevastopol—home to Russia's Black Sea Fleet—further compounds this security dilemma. NATO's gradual encroachment on Russia's borders has heightened tensions, and Ukrainian neutrality could have served as a crucial assurance of regional stability.

However, Kyiv's macabre acts of genocidal proportions championed a brutal policy of crushing resistance movements in the Donbas. America's quest for global dominance through NATO's expansion was a trigger for war in Ukraine rather than a fundamental need to provide Ukraine with allied protection. In Kyiv's quest to attain an apocalyptic outcome through militaristic means, it abrogated the terms of the Minsk Agreements and reneged on the tenets of a peaceful resolution. This was only possible because Germany, Britain, and France, key US allies in Europe, admitted that their participation in these agreements was intended to afford Ukraine time to build a NATO-oriented European army.

Furthermore, behind the laconic reticence of European leaders, there is a hot war of technological superiority in which Ukraine is the testing ground for modern weapons (Volpicelli, Melkozerova, and Kayali, 2024). This cynical reality has seen American ATACMS, Patriot Missiles, and British Storm Shadows tested against Russia's Iskander variants, S-300, S-400, Zircon, and Avangard missiles, as well as the formidable and now dreaded Oreshnik Intermediate-Range Ballistic Hypersonic missile equipped with manoeuvrable independently targetable re-entry warheads. American and Western drones, as well as the Turkish Bayraktar, have competed for Ukrainian skies with Russian and Iranian Shaheds and aviation technologies. The Russian Black Sea Fleet has suffered significant damage from British sea drones. While this fuels the military-industrial complex in Washington, a latent interest is to test American weapons in actual combat against the most modern Russian military inventory in an isolated European war in Ukraine. This aligns with its policy of containing Russia and maintaining global hegemony and supremacy. However, this risks direct US involvement as these weapons rely on US targeting systems. It is appropriate to state that there is also a sanctions war being fought in Ukraine, with the US and its Allies using sanctions against Russia and perceived American rivals.

Here, the EU serves practically as an economic wing of NATO for an economic war against US rivals. A clear understanding is that EU sanctions operate *pari passu* with the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). The idea is that sanctions are more effective when adopted by a larger group of countries; to this end, the EU cooperates with the US in particular (Russell, 2022). This American federal law has imposed sanctions on Iran, North Korea, China, and Russia. Undeniably, CAATSA applies to designated American adversaries. While sanctions have been instrumental in enforcing conformity, with over 16,500 sanctions imposed on Russia following its Special Military Operation (SMO) in Ukraine (BBC, 2024), this represents an economic war. In 2022, a ring of European states, in liaison with America, was determined to deliver a crushing economic blow to the Russian economy. These assumptions were based on Russia's dependence on its pipeline exports of hydrocarbons to Europe. The question is, who benefits from sanctions on Russia's oil? It is pertinent to state that the US, through fracking, is an oil giant in search of overseas markets in Europe. However, Russia has dominated the European market and remains a leading supplier to China and India as a founding member of OPEC+.

North Korean Casualties in Ukraine: A Grim Reality

The conflict in Ukraine has taken an unexpected turn with the involvement of North Korean soldiers fighting alongside Russian forces. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky accused Russia of deploying these troops with minimal protection, highlighting their expendability in battle. The presence of North Korean soldiers in Ukraine represents a significant escalation in the conflict. Western allies and Ukraine claim that North Korea has deployed thousands of troops to support Russia's military efforts. This development adds a new layer of complexity to the ongoing war that began with Russia's invasion in 2022 (Sunday, 2024).

Ukraine estimates that nearly 3,000 North Korean troops have been killed or wounded, particularly in the western Kursk border region. This has led to International Reactions. The White House has corroborated South Korea's assessment, stating that North Korean soldiers are being deployed in dangerous and futile assaults, with commanders treating them as "expendable". This treatment has reportedly led to some North Korean soldiers taking their own lives rather than facing capture, fearing reprisals against their families back home (Sunday, 2024).

This tragic situation sheds light on the human cost of the conflict and the complex geopolitical dynamics at play in the Ukraine-Russia war. The involvement of North Korean troops not only raises questions about international law and alliances but also highlights the desperate measures being taken by various parties in this prolonged conflict.

The global political dynamic reveals a convergence of interests regarding Ukraine — bypassed by the Turkish and Nord Stream pipelines — to disrupt Russian energy flows and secure European markets for expensive American oil. This is perhaps in exchange for easier NATO membership and to sustain its economy, which depends on Russian payments for oil transit rights. Before the 2014 Maidan uprising, Ukraine had engaged in acts of sabotage against Russia's pipelines and several gas transit disputes, necessitating Russia's pipeline bypass. However, this act of monstrous ecological disaster, by all standards an environmental crime, has not been condemned by the US. This pipeline war witnessed the destruction of Russia's Nord Stream 2 pipelines. While America distanced itself from this terrorist act, Ukraine's special forces claimed complicity—something that could not have been achieved without the support of a more technologically advanced country. What is noteworthy is that the destruction of Nord Stream is part of the larger pipeline wars fought over Syria and an attempt to cripple China's Belt and Road Initiative. The Syrian war is believed to be, in part, a result of pipeline competition running through Syria (Szenasi, n.d.).

Certainly, as the global political order is reshaped by the rise of China and its Belt and Road Initiative, prospects of its One Belt, One Road initiative running through Ukraine are in jeopardy as the war hinders its implementation (Smortrytska, 2020). This initiative, under the Free Trade Zone with the EU, hangs in the balance, with limited prospects for Eurasian-Chinese integration, thereby maintaining American dominance. Nonetheless, the effect of American and European sanctions on Russian oil has led to a German recession and the collapse of several European governments, which are currently under austerity measures. This has driven a rise in global oil prices and accelerated the emergence of a multipolar world championed by BRICS.

Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that the war in Ukraine is a phase in the historic rivalry between Russia and America, dating back to the Bolshevik era, as both seek exclusive global supremacy. It lays bare the implications of the Ukrainisation of Ukraine without recognition of its ethnic diversity as an immediate cause of the war. It exposes American globalism through NATO as well as European regional and global institutional frameworks. The immediate and latent causes of Russia's SMO in Ukraine are analysed as part of a broader war over the US quest for global dominance in the face of a resurgent Russia seeking to secure its existential rights.

The paper concludes that four wars are being fought in Ukraine: the US vs Russia war for global dominance, the Russia vs NATO war, the pipeline wars over Europe's energy, and the war for the de-Russification of Eastern Europe. Modern NATO weapons, including British Storm Shadow missiles, American Patriot systems, Abrams tanks, and German Leopard 2 tanks, have been provided to Ukraine in its confrontation with Russia.

While Russia justifies its SMO through the referenda of the self-governing Luhansk People's Republic and the Donetsk People's Republic — recognised as sovereign by Moscow — its intervention was coloured by an irredentist agenda to reclaim lost historic lands. It was driven by the perceived need to protect ethnic Russians and preserve Mother Russia from NATO's encirclement, particularly from Russophobic and genocidal regimes in Kyiv. While Russia currently suffers from adverse population growth, the extermination of ethnic Russians with NATO weapons raises concern that the Ukrainian approach could be mirrored in former Soviet states.

The Biden administration's approach to the long-standing Russian-American rivalry for global supremacy aims to deplete Russia's population through an endless war, vanquish

its elite forces, liquidate its finances through an arms race, and confiscate its international reserves. This strategy limits Russia's economic and military development through proxy wars.

Ultimately, Ukraine remains caught in the vortex of Russia's irredentism and American globalism, serving as a battleground for a new multipolar global order. The war in Ukraine is a multifaceted hydra – rife with subjective narratives – that harbours the potential for an irreversible trajectory towards nuclear disaster and global catastrophe.

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