

The Impact of NATO in the Current International Political Landscape in the Russia-Ukraine War

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Abstract. The Russia-Ukraine war has resulted in a severe humanitarian catastrophe and posed a significant threat to the stability of geopolitical relations. It has also been one of the most tough incidents between Russia and NATO. This paper aims to illustrate the role of NATO in the Russia-Ukraine war by examining the historical interconnectedness between NATO and Russia, the ideological differences between these two entities, and the specific actions of NATO during the war. After closely reviewing previous literature, reports, and official announcements, the paper argues that NATO has provided significant financial aid in security assistance and humanitarian interventions in Ukraine. In addition, it concludes that Russia has long seen the enlargement of NATO as an escalating security concern. In a nutshell, the outbreak of the war was due to a series of long-accumulated clashes. Eventually, Moscow has strategically chosen to initiate military intervention in Ukraine to disentangle it from the association with NATO, guaranteeing Russia's regional security and sphere of influence. However, this study also demonstrates that to achieve the maximal mutual benefits, the war must be ended before it causes further casualties and all other means of loss; it would be beneficial for participants of the Russia-Ukraine war to seek more peaceful and sustainable solutions.

Keywords: Russia-Ukraine War, NATO, geopolitical relations, regional security.

1. Introduction

The ongoing conflict between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Russia, particularly in relation to the Ukraine crisis, has been a major source of concern in global and regional security. This paper aims to examine the root causes of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the subsequent escalation of tensions between NATO and Russia. It also explores the potential implications of further confrontation between the two sides. The analysis presented in this paper is based on a range of sources, including news articles, official statements, and expert opinions.

NATO is an organization that guarantees the freedom and security of other member countries through political and military means [1]. In the Russo-Ukrainian war, the security of Ukraine had a profound impact on NATO member countries because of Ukraine's vital links with the organization in terms of geography and trade. That is why NATO expressed its full support for Ukraine's right to self-defence in this war for the Ukrainian side and severely criticized Russia for this brutal war of aggression.

After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine [2], the alliance launched a NATO defence plan and sent thousands of additional soldiers from the Atlantic coast to defend and guard the country. The impact of the invasion led to security issues becoming paramount in NATO, which made the alliance's role even more important [3], and the political neutrality of Sweden and Finland wavered, giving NATO further strength to carry out peacekeeping in support of Ukraine.

2. The Relationships between Russia, Ukraine, and NATO

The connections between Russia, Ukraine, and NATO have long been intertwined. Before the war, Vladimir Putin had formerly refuted having any intention to invade Russia's neighbouring states [4]. In addition, he had put forth a set of demands to the Western states, encompassing the cessation of NATO's expansion towards former Soviet States in the east and the reduction of military operations conducted by the United States and its allies near Russia [4].

The exclusion of Ukraine from NATO has been a persistent concern for President Putin, who bitterly recalls the years of the post-Soviet Union era under his predecessor, Boris Yeltsin, over the 1990s [5]. As James Goldgeier indicated, such a period, referred to as "a decade of humiliation", was characterised by the believed imposition of Bill Clinton's US perception of European order (including its actions in Kosovo in 1999) while Russia could merely stand by and watch [5]. Similar concerns were expressed in September 1993 by a letter written by Yeltsin to Clinton [6]. Yeltsin acknowledged the understanding that incorporating East European states into NATO would not inherently result in the alliance adopting an antagonistic stance towards Russia. However, he emphasised the significance of considering the potential reaction of the Russian populace to such a step [6].

In order to mitigate these concerns, the NATO-Russia Founding Act was formally ratified in 1997, representing a political accord that expressly stated the absence of adversarial relations between NATO and Russia [7]. Hence, the NATO-Russia Council was formed in 2002 as a follow-up. Nevertheless, it is said that Vladimir Putin resents what he perceives as the alliance's incremental expansion towards Eastern Europe, for instance, the offer of memberships to former Soviet satellite states such as the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland in 1999 [8]. After that, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Romania, Slovenia, Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania joined NATO, respectively, in 2004. During the Munich Security Conference in 2007, Putin expressed his view that the enlargement of NATO lacks neither the connection to the modernisation of the alliance nor to fulfil its goal of enhancing security in Europe [4].

In a nutshell, it is a significant provocation that diminishes the degree of mutual trust [4]. In the subsequent month of April, when the alliance committed to extending future membership to Ukraine and Georgia while disregarding the concerns expressed by France and Germany during a NATO summit held in Bucharest, Putin became even more emphatic, asserting that no leader of Russia would remain indifferent while witnessing actions taken towards Ukraine's accession to NATO membership. Thus, engaging in such an action would be considered hostile against Russia [4]. In short, Vladimir Putin has constantly harboured his grievances, presumably intending to cultivate anti-Western sentiment domestically and solidify his political sphere of influence. As a result, he has vehemently objected to the membership of additional Eastern European nations into NATO [9].

The simmering tensions between Russia and Ukraine along their joint borders eventually escalated into war following Vladimir Putin's declaration of a "special military operation" in the eastern parts of Ukraine. Hence, it verified previous concerns, dating back to December, that Putin was mobilising troops intending to launch an invasion. The Kremlin leader deemed that Russia must undertake decisive measures in response to a threat to its national security [10]. It was stated that Moscow intends to execute a "demilitarisation and de-Nazification" process in Ukraine by ousting its leadership [10].

Moreover, a commitment was made to resolve the ongoing conflict in the eastern Donbas region, where government forces have been battling pro-Russian separatists for eight years [4]. Over the succeeding 16 months, the Russian military launched intense bombarding in cities like Kharkiv and Mariupol, employing tactics comparable to those previously utilised in Chechnya and Syria [4]. In addition, the Russian army has encountered an arduous guerrilla war in the south-eastern area of Bakhmut, causing millions of civilians to flee and seek refuge in neighbouring countries such as Poland, Slovakia, and Moldova [11].

3. The Influence of NATO on International Political Relationships during the Ukraine-Russia War

In light of the heightened tensions between Russia and Ukraine, NATO, under the leadership of the United States, has implemented several measures to increase pressure on Russia. As a result, security from both regional and international perspectives has become notably strained. Since February 24, 2023, the U.S. government has allocated approximately \$3.7 billion to Ukraine for security assistance. The current administration is seeking Congressional approval for an additional \$33 billion in aid to Ukraine. Out of this amount, \$20.4 billion is intended to provide military and security assistance while bolstering U.S. endeavors in enhancing security in Europe alongside NATO Allies and partners [12]. According to the OHCHR, it has been said that the actual casualties are much more significant in magnitude than the recorded statistics provided. Hence, it has been observed that most of the documented civilian deaths may be attributed to the use of explosive weapons with a substantial range of effects.

As indicated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the projected number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Ukraine is at around 5.08 million on June 13, 2023, which indicates a decline in comparison to the figure of 5.4 million recorded on January in the same year. Until August 23, 2023, the number of refugees migrating from Ukraine to Europe was approximately 5.82 million.

In 2022, humanitarian partners successfully provided multipurpose cash assistance (MPCA) to an estimated six million individuals; among these, over \$1.2 billion was allocated to those affected by the war in Ukraine, standing out as the most rapid and extensive cash programming scale-up in the history of humanitarian interventions. Moreover, the Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment that was jointly issued on March 23, 2023, by the government of Ukraine, the World Bank Group, the European Commission, and the United Nations, anticipated that the financial need for the reestablishing and reconstructing efforts in Ukraine has soared to \$411 billion, which the amount is almost 2.6 times greater than the projected gross domestic product (GDP) of the nation for the year 2022.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict can be traced back to Russia's concerns over NATO's expansion towards its borders. Russia perceives NATO's enlargement as a threat to its security interests. Despite Russia's apprehensions, NATO has continued to expand eastward, disregarding Moscow's security concerns. This disregard for Russia's interests has exacerbated tensions between the two sides and served as a fundamental trigger for the conflict.

In response to NATO's expansion and perceived threats to its security, Russia has undertaken countermeasures. NATO's increased pressure on Russia, despite the latter's repeated warnings, has further intensified the confrontation. NATO has been actively supplying weapons and escalating its military support to Ukraine. The scale of assistance has grown from individual air defense and anti-tank missiles to heavy equipment such as tanks, artillery, and armored vehicles. This augmentation of military aid by NATO to Ukraine has significantly elevated the possibility of direct confrontation and an accidental clash with Russia.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has accused NATO of effectively engaging in a war against Russia through proxies and arming Ukrainian forces. Lavrov argues that NATO's objective is to exhaust Russia's military and industrial capabilities through the conflict in Ukraine. If the confrontation between NATO and Russia continues to escalate, the future prospects for stability and security in the region become highly unpredictable.

The intensification of hostilities between NATO and Russia carries considerable implications for global and regional security. The escalating arms race and potential direct confrontation increase the risk of a major conflict with severe consequences. The international community must recognize the urgency of de-escalation efforts and engage in diplomatic negotiations to resolve the Ukraine crisis and address the underlying concerns of both parties. The Russia-Ukraine conflict, fueled by NATO's disregard for Russia's security concerns and subsequent countermeasures, has contributed to the escalation of tensions between NATO and Russia. The ongoing arms buildup and the potential for

direct confrontation pose significant threats to global and regional security. It is imperative for all stakeholders to prioritize diplomatic solutions and engage in dialogue to mitigate the risks and work towards a peaceful resolution.

4. Suggestions

The protracted conflict between Russia and Ukraine has indeed caused immense suffering to countless innocent civilians. The ongoing hostilities have led to devastating consequences, displacing numerous families, damaging infrastructure, and disrupting the lives of ordinary people. In this unfortunate situation, it is crucial to remember that Ukraine did not initiate this conflict. Rather, it found itself in a position where it had to seek assistance from the international community, including the United States, to defend its sovereignty and protect the rights of its citizens.

While it is clear that Russia's initial violation of Ukraine's national sovereignty triggered this crisis, it is essential for both sides to recognize the urgent need to end this conflict. Continued warfare only leads to more casualties and destruction, without offering a lasting solution to the underlying issues. It is in the best interest of both Russia and Ukraine to halt hostilities, minimize further harm to innocent people, and engage in diplomatic negotiations to address their concerns.

In the pursuit of a peaceful resolution, both nations have an opportunity to maximize their interests. Diplomacy and dialogue can lead to compromises and agreements that respect the rights and aspirations of the affected populations. Ultimately, a peaceful settlement would not only end the suffering but also pave the way for stability, cooperation, and the pursuit of shared prosperity in the region. It is the responsibility of the international community to support and encourage such efforts toward a peaceful resolution.

5. Conclusion

As discussed above, NATO's territorial and military defence strategy poses a threat to Russia and influences the attitudes of many European countries towards Russia, leading to sanctions. Furthermore, the accession of some neutral countries to NATO has further strained the relationship between NATO and Russia [12]. Moscow's current priority is to execute a special military operation in Ukraine aimed at strengthening Russia's army, navy, and air force to counter the challenges posed by NATO's plans. Conversely, NATO will condemn Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine in the strongest possible terms and recognize Ukraine as an independent state, supporting its right to basic self-defence. In addition, Russia's firm stance indicates that nothing NATO does will affect Russia's attitude regarding this war [13].

Certainly, it is essential for both NATO and Russia to recognize the severe consequences of an ongoing conflict. As history has shown, protracted conflicts result in immeasurable suffering for innocent civilians, economic devastation, and strained international relations. To foster stability and peace in the region and globally, a diplomatic solution must be sought. Dialogue and negotiations should replace hostilities. The international community, including influential actors such as the United Nations and China, can play a pivotal role in facilitating these discussions. It is through diplomatic channels that longstanding grievances, concerns, and aspirations can be addressed, offering a ray of hope for a peaceful resolution to the crisis. In an era marked by interconnectedness and interdependence, collaboration and understanding should prevail over confrontation and conflict, ensuring a brighter and more secure future for all parties involved.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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