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TITLE: KEY ASPECTS TO A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE STRUGGLE OF UKRAINE IN HISTORY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the profound impact of Russian imperialism on Ukraine's geopolitics, exploring the historical legacies and contemporary challenges that have shaped Ukraine's political landscape. It analyzes the historical context, including the Soviet era, the annexation of Crimea, and the ongoing full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. It provides a comprehensive understanding of the geopolitical dynamics at play. The research draws upon a combination of primary and secondary sources, including scholarly articles, books, news, and reports, to shed light on the multifaceted relationship between Russia and Ukraine and its implications for regional stability. The thesis also delves into the international relations theories of realism and liberalism to analyze the motivations and actions of the involved parties. The findings reveal the enduring consequences of Russian imperialism on Ukraine's national identity, territorial integrity, and aspirations for European integration and rapprochement with the West. The weak international support and limited effectiveness of sanctions on Russia following its invasions of Ukraine in 2014 and 2022 are also examined, highlighting the complexities appearing as a consequence in terms of global security and global partnerships. This thesis seeks to contribute to a better and deeper understanding of the interplay between Russian imperialism and Ukraine's geopolitics by presenting a comprehensive analysis of historical events and current challenges. It provides a basis for a deeper understanding of the roots of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia and, looking forward, advocates for the need to analyze and better understand states' foreign policies and motivations to ensure regional stability and peaceful relations among states.

Keywords: Ukraine, Russia, Politics, Geopolitics, International Conflicts, War, Imperialism, Realism, Liberalism

RESUMEN

Esta tesis investiga el profundo impacto del imperialismo ruso en la geopolítica de Ucrania, explorando los aspectos históricos y los desafíos contemporáneos que han configurado el panorama político ucraniano. Analiza el contexto histórico, incluida la era soviética, la anexión de Crimea y la actual invasión rusa a gran escala de Ucrania. También proporciona una comprensión global de la geopolítica en juego. La investigación se basa en una combinación de fuentes primarias y secundarias, incluidos artículos académicos, libros, noticias e informes, para arrojar luz sobre la polifacética relación entre Rusia y Ucrania y sus implicaciones para la estabilidad regional. La tesis también profundiza en las teorías de las relaciones internacionales del realismo y el liberalismo para analizar las motivaciones y acciones de las partes implicadas. Las conclusiones revelan las consecuencias duraderas del imperialismo ruso sobre la identidad nacional, la integridad territorial y las aspiraciones de integración europea y acercamiento al Occidente de Ucrania. También examina el escaso apoyo internacional y la limitada eficacia de las sanciones impuestas a Rusia tras sus invasiones de Ucrania en 2014 y 2022, destacando las complejidades que surgen como consecuencia en términos de seguridad global y asociaciones globales. Esta tesis pretende contribuir a una mejor y más profunda comprensión de la interacción entre el imperialismo ruso y la geopolítica de Ucrania, presentando un análisis exhaustivo de los acontecimientos históricos y los retos actuales. Proporciona una base para una comprensión más profunda de las raíces del conflicto entre Ucrania y Rusia y, de cara al futuro, defiende la necesidad de analizar y comprender mejor las políticas y motivaciones exteriores de los Estados para garantizar la estabilidad regional y las relaciones pacíficas entre Estados.

Palabras-clave: Ucrania, Rusia, Política, Geopolítica, Conflictos Internacionales, Guerra, Imperialismo, Realismo, Liberalismo

INDEX OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Acronym	English	Spanish
USSR	United Socialist Soviet Republics	Union de Repúblicas Socialistas Soviéticas
USA	United States of America	Estados Unidos de América
UN	United Nations	Naciones Unidas
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization	Organización del Tratado del Atlántico Norte
EU	European Union	Unión Europea
BC	Before Christ	antes de Cristo
UPR	Ukrainian People's Republic	República Popular Ucraniana
IRC	International Rescue Committee	Comité Internacional de Rescate
SWIFT	Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication	Sociedad para las Comunicaciones Interbancarias y Financieras Mundiales
G7	Group of Seven	Grupo de los Siete
GDP	Gross Domestic Product	Producto Interno Bruto
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development	Organización para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo Económicos
IMF	International Monetary Fund	Fondo Monetario Internacional
WB	World Bank	Banco Mundial
NUC	NATO-Ukraine Commission	Comisión OTAN-Ucrania
SSR	Soviet Socialist Republic	República Socialista Soviética
IEA	International Energy Agency	Agencia Internacional de la Energía

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1. INTRODUCTION

Ukraine has a vast and intricate history, represented through periods of self-determination and independence as well as intimidation and subjugation at the hands of foreign powers. Ukraine's history of suffering was particularly impacted by Soviet and Russian rulers, who have sought to take advantage of Ukraine's resources, suppress its culture, and subjugate its people. Ukraine's experience with suppression has been shaped by multiple, complex factors, including its strategic position at the crossroads of Asian and European trade routes, its soil rich in natural resources, and its diverse ethnic and linguistic features (Rasiulis, 2021).

Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, during Soviet rule and after Ukraine's independence in 1991, Ukrainians have endured famine, war, and political repression, all while fighting for their rights and freedoms as a sovereign nation. A critical point that changed the previously unstable relations between the Soviets and the Ukraine SSR (Soviet Socialist Republic) was the Holodomor in the early 1930s. Soviet leader Joseph Stalin perpetrated a human-made famine to crush a rising Ukrainian resistance to Soviet rule resulting in the deaths of nearly 4 million Ukrainians (Applebaum, 2017, p. 263). The Holodomor has since been widely recognized as a genocide, and the impact of the famine on Ukrainian society and culture remains heartfelt to this day. The trauma of the Holodomor profoundly influenced Ukraine's relations with Russia and the perceptions of Ukrainian history and identity, which have been overshadowed by the USSR (Applebaum, 2017, p. 250).

In addition to genocide, Ukrainians have witnessed and experienced a wide range of suffering under Soviet and Russian oppression. These consisted of political repression, forced deportation, forced collectivization, and the suppression of Ukrainian language, culture, and religion. The Soviet Government aimed to keep a tight grip and control on the populations of the different republics of the Soviet Union, which led to several policies that would profoundly impact Ukrainian society and limit Ukrainian culture. Despite the harsh Soviet policies, the Ukrainian identity and culture prevailed,

pushing the desire for more autonomy and independence away from Russian influence (Masters, 2023).

The Soviet Union was an empire composed of various languages, ethnicities, and religious groups that would undermine Soviet rule through nationalistic movements and resistance. During The Soviet Union, Russifying the republics through the imposition of Russian language and culture was a popular policy to help impose order and unify the USSR, known as Russification (Weeks, 2010). The Soviet Union's policy of Russification had an intensely tenacious impact on Ukraine. Ukrainian culture and Ukrainian language were marginalized, forcing many Ukrainians to adopt Russian as their first language as the Ukrainian language was erased from the streets and public institutions. This cultural censorship and assimilation policy has laid strong roots in the conflicts and tensions between Ukraine and Russia, as Russia still attempts to appropriate Ukrainian culture and history today (Panasiuk, 2022).

Following the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine experienced a turning point in its dark and perpetual history. For the first time in over 300 years, Ukraine reached complete independence and freedom from Russian rule. However, the legacy of Soviet imperialism continued to grasp Ukraine's geopolitics as Moscow continued to challenge its sovereignty. Russia desperately strove to keep its influence and power in the region to maintain itself at the forefront of international geopolitics and keep the former republics of the Soviet Union dependent on Russia and its economy (Gorin, 2022).

Since Ukraine's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, it has had difficulty settling upon an appropriate strategy for international politics due to heavy corruption and constant interference from Russia. The Orange Revolution of 2004 marked the start of Ukraine's struggle for self-determinance when the Presidential elections revealed that Viktor Yanukovych, a pro-Russian candidate, had fraudulently defeated Viktor Yushchenko, who supported the West. Chaos promptly broke out nationwide, with demonstrators taking to the streets of Ukraine's larger towns, demanding an electoral

recount. The country's highest court consented to the people's wishes by approving a recount, which eventually endowed Viktor Yushchenko with the new Presidential role. At the start of 2013, an event commonly known as Euromaidan triggered another but more impactful demonstration. The tragic protests on Kyiv's central square spurred over a hundred casualties. It was an act of Ukrainian civilians urging for more democracy and transparency within governmental institutions and their spending. President Yanukovych, who held office at the time, was responsible for commanding the killing of the "heavenly hundred." This helped trigger the 2014 Revolution of Dignity, a revolt aimed at forcing out the incumbent President, who had abandoned his intention to build deeper links with the European Union in favor of developing a stronger connection with Russia (Bertoa & Enyedi, 2022).

The Revolution of Dignity was one of the crucial steps in Ukraine's endeavor for political independence from Russia, demonstrating to Moscow that Ukrainians were unwilling to be part of the "Russian world." As Ukraine was recovering from the transition period after the 2014 Revolution, Russia, under Vladimir Putin, invaded and annexed the Crimean Peninsula in March 2014. This event was swiftly succeeded by Russia's arming and support of separatists in the Donbas regions of Ukraine, as Putin felt it would lose its grasp on Ukraine due to the former republic's rapprochement with the West. Russia's violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity was only a renewed beginning to Ukraine's loss of life and significant human suffering at the cost of Russia's imperialistic ambitions, which pushed for a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24th, 2022 (Center for Preventive Action, 2023).

The conflict between Ukraine and Russia, now intensified by the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, is a manifestation of the historical and ongoing imperialist ambitions of both the Soviet Union and Russia, which have shaped Ukraine's geopolitics today. This thesis aims to reveal the deeply-rooted impacts of Russian imperialism and policies of Russification, how these have impacted Ukraine's current geopolitical situation, and the multiple challenges they have brought to its independence, identity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. For the reader to effectively

understand the struggle of Ukrainians through time under Soviet rule and Russian aggression, it is essential to analyze Ukraine's history, its relationship with Russia and the Soviet Union, and explore the social and political impacts the Russians have caused to Ukraine through war, exploitation, and subjugation. This pushes historians and academics to dive deeper into their research, further scrutinizing and challenging various sources that may have misleading information derived from Soviet actions to appropriate the culture and history of former Soviet republics as exclusively belonging to Russia.

1.1. Research Subject and Justification

This thesis will explore the multiple impacts and sufferance the Russian and Soviet Governments and their foreign policy have imposed on Ukraine and its population throughout time. The main question that will be answered throughout the continuation of this piece is: How has Ukraine suffered from the Soviet Union's and Russia's imperialistic ambitions, and to what extent has this impacted Ukraine's geopolitics and the direction of the war? The main idea of this question is to explain the suffering of Ukrainians in the past and how this has impacted Ukraine's politics today. Furthermore, it seeks to emphasize and explain the importance of Ukraine's fight for independence from Russia and how it is represented in the war with Russia today.

This research question has been put together with extreme subtlety. Using the word "suffered" demonstrates the pain and struggle of Ukraine and how the misconception of Ukraine and Russia being "brotherly nations" has to be re-evaluated. The use of the word "imperialistic" is a way to demonstrate that Russia has always been an empire that has often taken advantage of the populations it ruled over and could be compared to the colonialism of other European countries in Africa and South America.

The answer to the research question may prove of vital importance, as it is a matter that continues to plague us today. The war between Ukraine and Russia began in 2014; however, its economic and political repercussions have only begun to be really felt outside Ukraine in 2022 after the full-fledged Russian invasion of Ukraine. This

conflict has been labeled a major threat to global politics and security, as Russia persists in menacing the West with the threat of nuclear warfare. The direction of the war and its ultimate outcome are critical factors that will affect geopolitics and shape the future of the global order.

In order to properly analyze this expansive topic, this report will pay particular attention to the history of Ukrainian lands and populations. This paper examines the history of Ukraine and its battles for autonomy over the years, spanning from the 1900s and the establishment of the USSR until, more recently, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In addition, this paper also looks back into earlier periods of history to understand better the origins of Ukrainian culture and events that could have exacerbated present-day tensions. The analysis of the origins of the conflict is a fundamental element in gaining a good understanding of Ukraine's fight for freedom in the context of the issues presented. A fact-based investigation is crucial for preventing people from making quick and simple deductions.

This war, unfolding at the heart of Europe, is a central issue affecting politics and international relations today, especially in the liberal framework of Western countries. It puts tremendous and - to some extent - unexpected pressure on global security and defense. In some parts of the world, a desperate need is felt to ensure that Ukraine and Ukrainians have a voice today and, in the future, ensure that Russia's propaganda, media, and dominance are not met with success.

1.2. Objectives

This research is conducted as part of the Global Bachelor in International Relations final project. This project's primary goal is to understand better the roots and bases behind the conflict between Ukraine and Russia and to use this knowledge to explain why Ukraine has fought so hard for its freedom and independence. This study also seeks to clarify various misconceptions about Ukrainian history and shed light on the core differences between Ukrainians and Russians, which have become notably

apparent in the ongoing conflict. Additionally, this work highlights the harsh past and the struggle Ukrainians went through under the Soviet regime. It also delves into Ukraine's response to Russian aggression, exploring its various strategies to defend itself against the Russian onslaught. This essay will assess the consequences of the domestic and international conflict and consider its repercussions on Ukraine's geopolitical position, its relationship with Russia and the West, and its implications for regional and global security implications.

1.3. Methodologies

The following research is implemented through a variety of methodologies, such as using various types of research to fit the topic displayed, choosing the type of sources to be analyzed to conduct the study, and carefully selecting numerous types of research techniques to help focus on information and reports relevant to this work. The methodologies will include comparative analysis to contrast the relationship of Ukraine with Russia and the USSR and how the impacts of imperialism have shaped Ukraine's geopolitics. This report's research is focused on qualitative research, as understanding social behaviors is attributed to historical events. This examination will gather considerable historical research to help understand the historical context of Ukraine's relationship with Russia, policy research to evaluate all the actors involved in the conflict, and empirical research to gather data on casualties, the economy, and public opinion. This research will be conducted by examining primary and secondary sources to gain vital documented knowledge from scholars, politicians, and historians through historical documents, treaties and agreements, academic books, articles, reports, interviews, speeches, and investigative journals. The research techniques used in this piece will include content analysis to analyze primary and secondary sources to identify matching patterns in the information portrayed, discourse analysis to examine the language and rhetoric employed by politicians and government officials, and statistical analysis to analyze data related to historical figures and conflict.

2.   THEORETICAL CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The International Relations theoretical framework that will be applied to analyze the impacts of Russian aggression on Ukraine and the effects it has caused in the war today will include Realism and Liberalism. Realism is a necessary framework to analyze the arguments portrayed in this essay as it provides a valuable view to analyze the war between Ukraine and Russia and the shift of Ukraine's geopolitical position concerning Russia and the West. Realism places the nation-state as the leading actor in international relations. This international relations theory stresses the importance of power, security, maintaining influence, and prioritizing self-interest in shaping a state's reactions and behavior with other states (Antunes & Camisão, 2018). The Russian Federation and its invasion of Ukraine, as well as its policies with other former Soviet republics, puts Realism at the forefront of this essay. According to Kenneth N. Waltz, an American political scientist who originated the neorealist theory of international relations (Munro, 2023), realists argue that states are rational actors that seek to secure their national interests, even if it means engaging in conflict or using military means (Waltz, 1979). According to Waltz's ideology, Russia seeks to safeguard its national interests and keep its influence within Ukraine to extend its global reach and power.

Within the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Realism can pose a theoretical ground to help explain Russia's initial motivations to invade and annex the Crimean Peninsula and arm and support separatist forces in Ukraine to destabilize the country, resulting from Kyiv's desire to form alliances with Western partners. From a realist perspective, Russia's actions could be understood as a response to the perceived threats to its security as well as to its loss of influence on Ukraine. The Russian Government portrays Ukraine as a critical buffer zone between its land and the West and is in a desperate search to demilitarize all the regions of Ukraine it claims to have annexed in 2022 (Reuters, 2023). Realism can also benefit in explaining Ukraine's foreign policy of aligning with the West and its hope to one day become a member of the European Union (EU) and NATO to counter Russia's imperialism and influence.

In this context, Realists argue that the Russian Federation's aggression and Ukraine's will to align with the West are the countries' reasonable attempts to protect their national interests. Russia wants to maintain its sphere of influence on the former Soviet republic and preserve its national interests, pushing for its military involvement. Ukraine wants to align with the West and NATO to ensure its security and protect its national interests from Russian aggression.

Realism can also portray the extensive geopolitical development in the region through the European Union's and the United States' role in the conflict. Theoretical realists like Kenneth Waltz argue that superpowers attempt to obtain a balance of power in the international system in which military force may be employed to protect strategic interests, such as the respect of International Law and International Treaties (Steinsson, 2014). As viewed from a realistic perspective, the European Union and the United States' economic and military support for Ukraine can be portrayed as a counterbalance to Russia's power and influence in Eastern Europe and to maintain a balance of power that falls more in their favor. The West has recently achieved a balance of power, but China's support of Russia in the Russian-Ukrainian War may dismiss this accomplishment. If China were to step in on the side of Moscow, it could dangerously alter the developed equilibrium.

Realism provides a pertinent and insightful theoretical framework to analyze the war between Ukraine and Russia, as well as helping to understand Ukraine's geopolitical positioning in relation to its neighbors in the East and the West. Exploring realist perspectives is essential to understanding each actor's goals, motivations, and reactions when facing the dispute, thus aiding in identifying effective methods of reconciliation and establishing peace in the area.

Another theoretical framework that can be analyzed to explain further the struggle of Ukraine in relation to Russia's aggression is the idea of liberalism. Liberalism is another crucial theoretical framework and perspective in international relations because it emphasizes the significance of democratic governance, individualistic rights,

and free markets (Doyle, 1986, p. 1151). The liberalist viewpoint relates to the hostilities between Ukraine and Russia as Ukraine desires stronger ties with the West, which actively promotes liberal values and democratic institutions. Ukraine's partnership with nations based on democratic values reveals its intent of disassociating from Moscow's sphere of influence and implementing a form of government reputed with democratic structures such as freedom, market liberalization, and the rule of law.

Liberalism has also been depicted as a groundbreaking ideology focusing on international cooperation and interdependence between nations (Keohane & Nye, 1987, p. 747). When analyzing liberalism through this statement, the Russo-Ukrainian conflict would be described as a failure to ensure peace, global order, and cooperation between states. Russia's invasion and aggression of Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and four more Oblasts (Administrative regions of Ukraine) in 2022 can be seen as Russia's denial of the liberal global system and a shift towards a more authoritarian way of dealing with the relationship of states. On the contrary, the actions of the US and European countries towards Ukraine can be interpreted as a display of eagerness to establish close and supportive ties to uphold the foundations of the liberal global system (Szewczyk, 2019).

Several academics have put forward the idea that the conflict in Ukraine came from a confrontation between liberal and non-liberal worldviews (Stent, 2019, p. 46). This approach suggests that Russia's war on Ukraine may have emerged from ideological resistance towards liberal views and values and a societal regression to authoritarianism and self-interest.

On the other hand, Ukraine's choosing to connect and move closer toward the West can be interpreted as an attempt to safeguard liberal ideologies and establishments from the Russian threat. Overall, liberalism is also an essential theoretical framework to aid in comprehending the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. Analyzing this conflict through the eyes of liberalism can provide a broader scope of the

ideological and normative aspects of the altercation and how it could affect the future of global affairs.

This text will frequently make mention of the term "Russification," which is a unique term. Russification designates the assimilation of cultures, languages, and religions that were not Russian within the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. This process imposed the Russian language, Russian orthodoxy, and Russian culture on the populations within the territories controlled by the USSR and Russian Empire. Leaders frequently used force and intimidation by prohibiting native cultures and languages in an attempt to promote Russian nationalism (Weeks, 2010).

3.   CONTENT OF RESEARCH
3.1.   Historical Background

To gain a better insight into the turbulent dynamics of Ukraine's geopolitical landscape and the ongoing war between Ukraine and Russia, a thorough review of the countries' past interactions through Moscow's rule under the Soviet Union and present-day Russia is necessary. Specifically, looking into the aggressive "Russification" policy is fundamental to a more robust understanding of what today's Ukraine and Russia are perpetually contending with. Ukraine, located at the crossroads between Eastern and Western influences, has a rich history of connections to traders across the European and Asian continents. Its unique geographic position, highlighting its centrality in trade, has allowed for affluent commerce and cultural exchange opportunities. The country's central location and arable land have made it a coveted territory, resulting in numerous invasions, conflicts, and power struggles through time (Rasiulis, 2021). The Dnipro River flanks and the Crimean Peninsula shores housed many early civilizations, including the Greeks, Scythians, and Persians, in the early centuries Before Christ (BC) (Subtelny, 2000, p. 13). These civilizations started to disperse with the emergence of Slavic groups in the northern slopes of the Carpathian Mountains in the early 7th century, forming new civilizations (Subtelny, 2000, p. 19).

The Empire of Kievan Rus', more recently referred to as Kyivan Rus,' emerged in the 9th century and had a meaningful impact on Ukraine's political and cultural identity formation. The empire has long been claimed to be the early beginnings of different Eastern European ethnic groups, such as Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Russians (Raffensperger, 2022). Due to the empire's comprehensive territorial outreach, spreading as far north as Finland and northern Russia, mainland Ukraine in the south, and small portions of Russia and Poland in the east and west, many historians have clashed on the ancestry of the empire. Professor Christian Raffensperger argues that the Kingdom of Rus was not Russia, but it is also not exclusively Ukraine or Belarus. The medieval Kingdom of Rus can be considered the origin of all three countries, and the kingdom's history is shared collectively among them (Raffensperger, 2022). This statement was challenged by Canadian historian Orest Subtelny, who noted the similarity of the East Slavic language of Kievan Rus to the Ukrainian language. He also mentioned that the term "Ukraine" first appeared in the year 1187 to designate the geographical lands surrounding "Kiev," the capital of Kievan Rus (Subtelny, 2000, p. 23). Mr. Subtelny continues by adding that the origins of the term "Rus" were never confirmed and that this "lack of knowledge" incited Soviet scholars to mark Kievan Rus as the early beginning of Russian civilization (Subtelny, 2000, p. 23). The modifications of historical circumstances by the former Soviet Union have extended Vladimir Putin's statement that Russians and Ukrainians constitute "one people" and that Ukraine can exist only when under Russia's rule. These claims stirred up a great deal of controversy. Some viewed his claims as an attempt to legitimize Russia's imperial ambitions and undermine Ukraine's sovereignty. The idea that Ukraine only exists because of Russian rule has been fiercely rejected by many Ukrainians, who view their nation as an independent and distinct entity with its own unique culture and history (Lenoe, 2022).

The fall of Kievan Rus was marked by the invasion of Mongols in the 13th century, leading the empire to fragment and form self-governing communities. The Zaporizhia Cossacks appeared in the 15th century and developed a strong affiliation with people of Ukrainian descent. These Cossacks were seen as true fighters ready to protect and secure their right to independence. Nothing stood in their way of obtaining

autonomy. They included a varied selection of people: ex-aristocracy from Kievan Rus, runaway serfs, villagers, and nomadic tribes (Plokhy, 2015, p. 62). Between the 16th and 18th centuries, the Cossacks formed independent societies in present-day Ukraine. Zaporizhia Sich enjoyed a self-sustaining and democratic tradition where governing leaders were democratically elected (Düben, 2020). The Cossack leaders were political and military masterminds, staging a significant rebellion against the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth, which was trying to rule over their land in 1648. As the Cossack's reputation for their prowess in battle and unwavering commitment to preserving their autonomy grew, their influence expanded. It started to attract more settlers who wanted to become part of the city-state and contribute to its strength. Throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, the Cossack movement gained significant recognition thanks to its crucial role in defending Ukrainian territories and resisting foreign subjugation (Plokhy, 2015, p. 67).

However, due to immense pressure and the power of their neighbors, the Cossacks needed to align with neighbors to keep themselves afloat. Cossack leaders formed a treaty of alliance with the Tsardom of Russia in 1654 and nearly signed an alliance with the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth. The treaty with the Polish counterparts failed, creating divisions within the Cossack ruling class about whether to side with Poland or Russia. These internal divisions gave way to several civil wars among the Cossacks, essentially bringing them closer to an end to their civilization. In 1667, the geopolitical configuration of the region started to transform. The Polish Lithuanian commonwealth was forced to give away part of their land in present-day Eastern Ukraine, including Kiev (Now called Kyiv), to the Russian Tsardom. After that, Cossacks were compelled to rebel against the Russians, who started invading their land. This event forced Cossack leader Ivan Mazepa to fight alongside Sweden in the Great Northern War to attempt to oust the Russians from their territory. Without success, Russian forces obliterated Zaporizhia Sich, breaking apart the Cossack autonomy and absorbing most Ukrainian territory within the Russian Empire (Düben, 2020).

Investigating Zaporizhia Cossacks, the origins of Ukrainians of today, introduces a great collection of questions regarding the beginning of the struggle between Ukraine and Russia and when its challenges first appeared. The presence of the Cossacks on the Dnipro River, who strived for self-determination, initiated the battle between the two populations during ancient times, the effects of which are still felt today. Around that time, people faced a common dilemma deciding whether to form ties with Russians or Poles. This created an obstacle that needed to be either adaptively negotiated or worked around. After the fall of the Kievan Rus, Zaporizhia Cossacks emerged to form their own city-state with a certain autonomy as they fiercely fought for its self-determination. The Cossacks are a clear example of the spirit of Ukrainians that can be felt today. The legacy of the Cossacks has lived throughout various centuries, and their contribution to the history of Ukraine remains an integral part of its identity. In contemporary Ukraine, Cossack ancestry is celebrated through various festivals and traditions. These celebrations represent the poignant memories of Ukrainian heritage and the spirit of resistance, which has been vital to Ukraine's motivation to fight Russian aggression (Matychak, 2019).

Ever since most of Ukraine's territory was incorporated into the Russian Empire at the end of the 18th century, Ukraine's ability to exercise self-governance has been challenged for multiple generations. For the ensuing 120 years, Ukrainian territories were under the control of the Russian Empire. The Russian Imperial Government actively persecuted Ukrainian culture throughout this period and persistently attempted to eradicate the Ukrainian language (Düben, 2020). Orest Subtelny contrasts how the Ukrainian language and culture were perceived within the Russian Empire and the city of Lviv (Present-day Ukraine) of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He examines these situations side by side to see if there were noticeable changes. Orest mentions the important presence of the Ukrainian language within Lviv, which included Ukrainian societies, schools, newspapers, political parties, and the Ukrainian National Council within the Austro-Hungarian Government. This was compared to the situation in Kyiv, within the Russian Empire, where publishing a book in Ukrainian was forbidden and severely punishable (Subtelny, 2000, p. 335). The Russian Empire, particularly under

the rule of Tsar Nicholas II and Alexander III, wanted to implement new policies to suppress nationalistic movements within the empire. During the 19th century, policies of Russification emerged around the empire to assimilate and erase the local culture and identities of the non-Russian territories within the Russian Empire. One of the targets of these policies was the rise in Ukrainian nationalism, which threatened the rule of the Tsars and the stability of the empire (Weeks, 2004, p. 475).

Ukrainian nationalism became a powerful movement after the fall of the Cossacks and its absorption into the Russian Empire. Despite the Russian efforts to suppress Ukrainians, a wave of Ukrainian nationalism gained momentum and strengthened within the 19th century, particularly among the educated elites who pushed for the promotion and use of the Ukrainian language (Düben, 2020). Ukrainian intellectuals such as Taras Shevchenko, Ivan Franko, and Mykhailo Hrushevsky played a crucial role in motivating Ukrainian nationalism and encouraging the desire for self-determination within the Russian Empire (Subtelny, 2000, p. 305). Russians suppressed Ukrainian culture and language as a way to impose dominance and influence throughout the empire. Once again, Ukrainians would not give up on their background and culture by promoting the Ukrainian language and customs, which were taught and fostered through private groups away from the sight of the Russian authorities. The Russian policies of Russification under the Russian Empire significantly impacted Ukrainian society and greatly contributed to the accentuation of Ukrainian resentment towards Russian rule. Although the Russian authorities were determined to suppress Ukrainian culture, Ukrainian nationalism persevered and became a driving force in Ukrainian's struggles and fights for independence through time.

The turbulent era surrounding World War I and the ensuing Russian Revolution provided a critical opening for Ukraine to declare independence (Düben, 2020). Amid the disarray caused by the revolution, Ukraine seized a rare opportunity to declare independence and establish its own sovereign state. In 1917, as the Russian Empire began to collapse, the Central Rada, a Ukrainian nationalist governmental body led by renowned figures such as Volodymyr Vynnychenko and Mykhailo Hrushevsky, declared

Ukraine's self-governance. The Central Rada aimed to guide Ukraine to self-determination by creating a democratic and inclusive state to mark the path for the future of Ukraine (Plokhy, 2015, p. 136). This groundbreaking declaration marked a watershed in Ukrainian history. It represented a newly-established freedom away from centuries of external domination and foreign rule while laying the foundation for a new era of Ukrainian statehood and independence. However, these acclamations sought to be short-lived.

In January 1918, as the Bolsheviks overthrew the Russian Tsardom, the Central Rada took a bold step towards independence by declaring the Ukrainian People's Republic (UPR) as an independent state, separate from both the collapsing Russian Empire and the emerging Soviet Union. The UPR swiftly attempted to create its Parliament as well as a Democratic Government, adopting a reformist constitution that prioritized the political rights and civil liberties of the population of the UPR (Subtelny, 2000, p. 350). Despite this beginning full of promise, the UPR was confronted with numerous challenges. The Republic expanded to the current Polish border in the west, to parts of the Caucasus mountains in present-day Russia, and incorporated the Crimean Peninsula in the south (Sanborn, 2022). The challenges emerged when the UPR was forced to fight on many fronts. Primarily, it found itself fending off attacks from the Russians, who wanted to bring all of Ukraine under Soviet rule. Moreover, Poland saw the struggle of Ukraine as an opportunity to expand its borders by attaining parts of the country. The Polish Republic fought against the UPR to try to take power in Western Ukraine (Plokhy, 2015, p. 138).

In the midst of political and social instability in Ukraine, newly-proclaimed Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin and the Bolsheviks saw the opportunity to expand Soviet control and power over the territory that was formerly part of the Russian Empire. At the beginning of 1919, the Bolshevik army, also known as the Red Army, set in motion a military offensive to recapture Ukrainian territory and force Ukraine into subjugation. Despite the resistance of the Ukrainians, the Red Army captured strategic Ukrainian cities, such as Kharkiv, where Bolsheviks had grown their presence and influence since

the early beginnings of an independent Ukraine (Plokhy, 2015, p. 147). As Ukraine attempted to reach new military alliances with Poland to fight Russian aggression, their efforts to prolong their sovereignty were short-lived. By the beginning of 1920, the Soviets had effectively taken control of most of Ukraine, bringing the region under the control of the Soviet Union and marking the way for a new timeframe under Communist governance (Porter, 2023). With extreme devotion and a commitment to Marxist ideology, Lenin and his army overthrew the existing democratic and political order Ukraine had established to incorporate a remodeled socialist state, basing its principles on collective ownership and proletarian rule (Guy-Evans, 2023). Despite the harsh Ukrainian resistance the Bolsheviks faced, Lenin remained determined to achieve their governance of a communist utopia. Soviet-style communism and governance profoundly impacted inhabitants in Ukraine and other areas of the USSR.

The Bolsheviks pursued a multi-tiered strategy to maintain power in Ukraine, combining negotiation and coercion (Astrov, 2021). In December 1922, the Soviet Union was established to promote its objectives, such as expansion and domination. It created a centralized government system facilitating the control of the republics under its jurisdiction. Ukraine, therefore becoming the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR), became subordinated to the rule of the Soviet Union, putting Ukraine's political, social, and economic affairs subject to the control of Moscow (Rudnytsky, 1972). The creation of the Ukrainian SSR within the Soviet Union was a significant blow to Ukrainian self-governance, initiating a dark period of Soviet surveillance and control. This entailed quashing separatist efforts and nationalist movements by implementing initiatives to assimilate Ukrainian people into Soviet control. Despite this, Ukrainians remained loyal to their traditions and nationality, endeavoring to resist the oppressive restrictions applied by the USSR.

The relations between Ukraine and the Soviet Union have been complex and multifaceted throughout history. After Lenin died in 1924, Joseph Stalin became the new leader of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union's time under Stalin, lasting from the late 1920s until the early 1950s, became known as the Stalinist era. That era had an

extreme impact on Ukraine and the livelihoods of Ukrainians. Stalin implemented numerous policies affecting Ukraine's agricultural sector. One of the notable policies utilized during this period was forced collectivization, which focused on changing the agricultural landscape and heightening Moscow's policy control over resources (Institute of National Remembrance, 2022). In the late 1920s, "collectivization" referred to establishing state-controlled collective farms known as "kolkhozes." These farms were created using the land lots distributed to peasants to gain Bolshevik support during and after the revolutionary wars. The implementation of these programs marked the conclusion of the New Economic Policy, which restricted state intervention to major industries while permitting certain aspects of the market economy in agriculture, light industry, and services (Plokhy, 2015, p. 158). Collectivization in Ukraine was confronted with strong opposition from farmers who perceived it as an attempt to eliminate their traditions and jobs. This dispute led to divergence and extreme starvation, called the Holodomor (*Holodomor*, 2018).

Between 1932 and 1933, a catastrophic famine was designed by the Soviet authorities, tested and directed by Joseph Stalin. The Holodomor (meaning: "death directly caused by starvation") initiated with the starving to death of most rural farmers and villagers, which in the 1930s composed nearly 80% of Ukraine's population. The famine rapidly intensified, causing many farmers to try to leave Ukraine and look for food elsewhere. In response, Stalin and Molotov (one of Stalin's advisers) changed Russia's orders in January 1933, prohibiting any citizens from exiting the country and completely blocking off Ukraine. The Soviet Government endeavored to stop Ukrainian farmers from leaving their villages in search of food by instituting internal passport regulations, essentially halting the movement of Ukrainians. Obtaining government permission was necessary for Ukrainians to take any journey by train. Removing the freedom of movement was also enacted in the Kuban region, situated in current-day Russia, which at the time, was composed primarily of Ukrainians (67%). During the Holodomor, more than one-third of the villages in the country faced severe repercussions for their inability to meet grain quotas. These villages were placed on "blacklists" and subjected to a merciless blockade. Troops encircled the villages,

preventing residents from leaving or receiving any outside food or aid, effectively condemning Ukrainians within those villages to collective death (*Holodomor*, 2018).

During this immense tragedy, millions encountered rapid losses, based mainly on the living being strangled for food. While it is impossible to determine the precise number of victims of the Ukrainian genocide, most estimates by scholars range from roughly 3.5 million to 7 million (with some estimates going higher). Historical experts have put the estimated deaths during this genocide at 3.9 million people and acknowledge that the exact amount will unlikely ever be established correctly (*Holodomor*, 2018). Professor Andrea Grazioci, from the University of Naples, stated: "In the case of the Holodomor, this was the first genocide that was methodically planned out and perpetrated by depriving the very people who were producers of food of their nourishment (for survival). What is especially horrific is that the withholding of food was used as a weapon of genocide and that it was done in a region of the world known as the breadbasket of Europe" (Graziosi, 2004). Graziosi, in her statement, explains the horrendous intentions behind this genocide and how the effects of the Holodomor have created such a profound impact on the lives of Ukrainians, including a life-long scar that would be implemented in the back of their minds for centuries to come.

The disastrous outcomes of collectivization went beyond the agricultural industry and left lasting influences on social life and population composition. Farmers were driven off their ancestral lands and forbidden to socialize communally, destroying traditional communal systems and weakening family bonds. These instigated displacements ultimately intensely affected Ukrainian society, creating isolationism persisting long after the Stalinist era had ended (Institute of National Remembrance, 2021). Moreover, the policies under the Stalin regime greatly impacted Ukraine's cultural and national heritage. The Soviet regime aimed to suppress the Ukrainian language, culture, and traditions to impose Russian on the population, banning Ukrainian from educational and governmental institutions (Flier & Graziosi, 2014).

Consequently, Ukrainian writers, artists, and intellectuals became frequent targets of censorship, persecution, deportation, and imprisonment. The stifling of creativity and innovation, combined with the loss of numerous talented individuals, profoundly impacted Ukraine's cultural development, depriving the nation of its brightest minds and dampening its artistic potential (Kuzio, 2017, p. 292). Overall, the impact of the Stalinist era left an indelible mark on Ukraine's history, leaving a lasting imprint on Ukraine's history and shaping its political, social, cultural, and economic landscape for decades to come. The repercussions of this traumatic period endured well beyond Stalin's demise, and the ongoing discussion and interpretation of Stalin's legacy remain a source of controversy. These continue to be intensely debated in contemporary post-Soviet societies.

According to Taras Kuzio, a British political expert, it is essential to analyze the clash between how Russians viewed the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin and how Ukrainians viewed this time. Taras states, "Ukraine and Russia have viewed Stalin and his legacy in diametrically opposite ways," Russian nationalists within the Soviet Union and in independent Russia have actively fostered a cult around Joseph Stalin, emphasizing his role in modernizing a historically underdeveloped nation and transforming it into an industrialized and nuclear-armed superpower. This glorification of Stalin's achievements often focuses on his leadership during World War II and the Soviet Union's victory while conveniently downplaying or justifying the grave atrocities and crimes against humanity committed under his regime (Kuzio, 2017, p. 289). "Ukrainians in the homeland and diaspora have viewed Stalinism critically. This is particularly true of the 1932 to 1933 artificial famine (Holodomor), which is an emotional and highly charged question for Ukrainians" The historical experience of Ukraine under Stalin's Government has implanted a severe and lasting impact on the Ukrainian collective memory. Ukrainians, particularly those affected by the Holodomor, Soviet policies of Russification, and forced collectivization, have harbored deep resentment and a strong sense of injustice (Kuzio, 2017, p. 290).

After analyzing Taras Kuzio's rhetoric on how Stalin and his actions were viewed differently between Ukrainians and Russians, it aids in further understanding the importance of nationalistic pride within Russian society. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine today and the widespread news of war crimes, civilian deaths, torture, and deportations, it can still be observed that a majority of Russians are supporting the war Vladimir Putin initiated on Ukrainian territory. This could be interpreted as due to the importance of a strong leader within Russian society, as was Stalin for the Russians in the past. On the other hand, the Ukrainian community, local and abroad, has a critical view of Stalinism characterized by a dedication to exposing the truth, justice, and acknowledgment of past suffering. In order to prevent such atrocities from being forgotten and to entrust future generations with creating a more inclusive, democratic, and just society based on a complete awareness of their past, Ukrainians are tackling those atrocities. Ukrainians' repugnance for Stalinism serves as a potent reminder of the value of preserving the memory of past injustices and striving for a future free from oppression and totalitarianism.

After more than 60 dark years of Soviet rule, the late 1980s and 1990s marked a period of significant political changes within the Soviet Union. The communist regime, which had been in power for numerous years, experienced increasing tension from internal and external actors pushing for reformations and democratization. These circumstances culminated and melded into the multiple steps that resulted in the USSR's dissolution in 1991. Throughout this transformation, Ukraine played a pivotal role in determining its destiny within the Soviet Union. The Ukrainian citizens had not been content with their position as a republic within the USSR for several decades. Therefore, they gradually began speaking up to increase their autonomy and self-rule. Concurrently, as changes took place in the Soviet Union, momentum emerged behind Ukraine's bid for freedom (Kravchenko, 2016).

Ukraine's independence from the Soviet Union was a difficult and tedious journey filled with multiple political and social modifications. In the late-1980s, the head (leader) of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev, introduced the policies of glasnost and perestroika,

both of which prompted an upsurge in nationalist inclination among Ukrainians and other populations within the Soviet Union. This led to the establishment of the Ukrainian People's Movement for Restructuring (Rukh), a political organization advocating for increased autonomy for Ukraine within the Soviet Union (Kuzio, 1998, p. 159). Gorbachev's flexibility and close relationship with US President George Bush hindered Ukraine's capacity to become independent during his tenure. Academic consensus suggests that Bush urged Ukraine to remain within the Soviet Union rather than empowering Ukraine's will for independence and self-determination. As a result, Ukraine's politicians were divided on the idea of independence. As a shift in the political climate of the Kremlin emerged, spurred on by the actions of Boris Yeltsin, aiming to remove Gorbachev from power, the sentiment for Ukrainian sovereignty was reignited (Plokhy, 2015, p. 197).

On August 24th, 1991, the Ukrainian Parliament declared independence, making Ukraine one of the first republics after the Baltic states to break away from the Soviet Union successfully. In December of the same year, Ukraine held a historic referendum on independence from the Soviet Union, with an overwhelming majority of the population voting in favor of secession. The turnout reached 84 percent, with more than 90 percent of voters supporting independence (Plokhy, 2015, p. 198). Nonetheless, the path to liberty was confronted with numerous difficulties.

During this period, the Soviet Union was experiencing significant turmoil, including a failed coup attempt in August 1991 orchestrated by communist hardliners seeking to halt the country's dissolution. The coup ultimately collapsed, weakening the central Soviet Government (Plokhy, 2015, p. 198). In its aftermath, the Soviet Union disintegrated. The global community, the United States included, officially acknowledged Ukraine as an independent nation and, without delay, set up bilateral diplomatic relations with the newly-established nation (*Policy & History*, n.d.).

These hardships Ukraine has experienced because of Russia's domination through history have influenced Ukrainian feelings and emotions stirred by recollections

of the Holodomor, deportations, and Russification up to this day. These emotions can be particularly understood through President Zelenskiy's words to address the world, expressing the repetitive impacts and pain caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine today: "We see what is happening today in the world, what is happening in Ukraine. They want to destroy us with bombs, bullets, cold, and hunger again" (Myre, 2022). Analyzing the history of the relations between Ukrainians and Russia is highly impactful to further understanding the deeply-rooted issues between the populations and how these problems are resurfacing in the present day. The quarrels between the former Soviet states have greatly influenced the present geopolitical goals of Ukraine, which has been trying for several decades to align with democratic countries and reduce its dependency on Russia. Looking back at the pain and damage Ukrainians have felt and inflicted at the expense of Russians clears the way for conclusions and a better understanding behind Ukraine's will to fight for their right to survival, self-determination, and independence.

3.2. Russia's Imperialism and Ukraine's Response

The desperate search for an explanation behind Russia's invasion of Ukraine has been a topic of intense debate and speculation among scholars and political experts. The media has covered the invasion of Ukraine from diverse angles, including psychological, political, strategic, and historical. Some experts have argued that Russian President Vladimir Putin's megalomania and fear of democracy were the driving forces behind the invasion. Others have pointed out that the expansion of NATO and the reconstruction of the Russian Empire were also factors in the conflict. Despite being overshadowed by other developments, it is essential to note that Russia has continually tried to destabilize Ukraine's political system and attack its democracy since the country became independent in August 1991. These repeated attempts have substantially impacted the country's political landscape. Russia has been accused of employing cyberattacks to meddle in Ukraine's elections and sow division between political parties. Numerous problems were also noted surrounding Russia's possible interference with Ukraine's media and government bodies, thereby threatening its democratic principles and hampering its ability to form a stable government. Similar

interferences have been observed in the newly established democracies after the collapse of the Soviet Union, such as in Moldova, which has seen a rise in support of pro-Russian political parties since 2001, and in Georgia, which was invaded by Russian forces in 2008, after the pro-Russian political party was defeated in the Presidential elections (Bertoa & Enyedi, 2022).

Of all the democracies emerging after the fall of the Soviet Union, Ukraine has been the one suffering the most from Russian interference. Its democratic history can be traced back to three distinct periods. The first period, from the first presidential elections in 1991 to the Orange Revolution in 2004, was characterized by significant institutional instability. During this time, the country underwent several changes in the electoral system, and political parties did not have a strong presence in society. The Communist Party stood out as the only significant opposition party in legislative elections while many independent Members of Parliament vied for office. In 1994 the Parliament comprised 168 independent members, dropping to 105 in 1998 and declining to 66 in 2002. The lack of discipline within the parties made it very difficult for the government to implement laws and reforms successfully. After Putin arrived at the forefront of Russian politics in 1999, the political scenario of Ukraine became increasingly meddled with. Putin wanted to push Ukraine to tighten its relations with Russia. The Russian pressure within Ukrainian politics marked the second period from 2004 until 2013 (Bertoa & Enyedi, 2022).

In Ukraine's democracy's second phase, the political parties separated into two unified bodies: one headed by the Party of Regions, which had become partners with Putin's party "United Russia" in 2005, and another minded towards a more progressive and democratic goal led by Yushchenko-supported liberal-conservative "Our Ukraine" party. Due to the increased pressure of Russia on Ukraine's political system, the Russian-speaking populations in the East of Ukraine started to become more indoctrinated to vote for the Pro-Russian candidates. This was rendered by the heavy Russian influence and propaganda, which often based their political campaigns on false statements. Such statements included claims that the "Our Ukraine party" would

exclude the Russian speakers of Ukraine, which comprised more than 40% of the population at the time. The Russian involvement created prominent cleavages within Ukrainian society, as it endeavored to impair the Ukrainian Government from within (Bertoa & Enyedi, 2022).

Contrary to the first and second phases of Ukrainian democracy, dominated mainly by nationalistic forces, the third phase came with a new approach to Ukraine's politics, suggesting that the Ukrainian democratic system was amplifying. Ukraine's 2019 presidential and parliamentary elections were dominated by a new political party called the "Servant of the People," founded by Volodymyr Zelenskiy. Despite Russian claims of widespread neo-Nazism in Ukraine as a reason for the invasion, the election results during this phase showed that Ukrainians had rejected extreme right-wing ideologies and instead opted for a moderate and pragmatic governing force. This was a significant blow to Putin's ambitions of maintaining control over Ukraine and keeping it within Russia's sphere of influence. The emergence of new, young, inexperienced politicians running on anti-corruption platforms was what Ukraine felt it needed to focus on the unification of the country after Russia annexed Crimea and instigated a civil conflict in the east of the country. The restructuring of Ukraine's Government was a significant source of apprehension for Putin, and according to some analysts, it may have helped prompt Russia's attack on Ukraine (Bertoa & Enyedi, 2022). Despite facing numerous challenges to its political and economic autonomy, Ukraine has persevered and created an environment conducive to establishing long-term democratic structures. Ukrainians are preserving these structures, safeguarding Western values, and ensuring they will be available for future generations, despite Russian aggression.

Understanding the geopolitical landscape of Ukraine is complex, owing to its history of instability and foreign intervention. To more effectively scrutinize it, one is foremost required to consider significant developments, like the Euromaidan Revolution and the consequent Russian seizure of Crimea in 2014, standing out as key episodes together with their additional offshoot events, with the war in the Donbas leading to the ensuing full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

It is undoubtedly clear that Russia has exerted its influence numerous times in Ukrainian politics, leading to the stirring of mass protests and uprisings from people within Ukraine in hopes of motivating a transformation in their current government. The first protest that instigated an initial turning point in Ukrainian politics was the Orange Revolution of 2004. This revolution was caused by fraudulent elections, which saw Pro-Russian candidate Viktor Yanukovych defeat a Western-leaning candidate, Viktor Yushchenko. Swarms of demonstrators assembled around the country, imploring for a review of the results with international monitors present. The protests increased dramatically in magnitude and obstinacy, resulting in a near-national strike. After multiple demonstrations of disapproval, the Ukrainian Supreme Court revoked the election results and called for a re-vote, in which President Yushchenko came out victorious (Hale, 2015, p. 189).

About a decade after the 2004 tensions, unrest appeared in Ukraine again when Viktor Yanukovych won the election with pledges to consolidate the country's relationship with Europe that did not materialize as promised. In late 2013, the Euromaidan protests ignited as Yanukovich's Government turned its back on the European Union by not signing the EU Association Agreement and opting instead for a deal with Russia (Diuk, 2014, p. 11). The demonstrations rapidly evolved into a widespread movement demanding political and economic reforms, transparency, and greater alignment with European values and institutions (Hale, 2015, p. 234). The protests intensified as altercations between protestors and the Berkut police (anti-riot police) became more violent, strengthening the motivations behind the protests. As the protests gathered closer to the Presidential palace, special police snipers positioned on roofs killed more than 100 protestors under the direct orders of President Yanukovych (Danilova, 2014). The catalyst for change occurred when President Viktor Yanukovych was deposed from his post in February 2014 after fleeing to Russia. This marked a critical turning point in the geopolitics of Ukraine, which sought further Ukrainian independence and European integration, away from Russian influence both politically and economically, to link more profoundly with the EU. After the protests, the interim

government initiated several procedures to realize this goal. It signed the Association Agreement with the EU, deepening the political and economic relations between Ukraine and the EU (Pifer, 2019). Additionally, with the help of the Council of Europe, the government passed numerous political and economic reforms to strengthen democratic institutions, raise governmental transparency, and counter corruption (*Project Ukraine*, n.d.).

The repercussions of the Euromaidan Revolution, often referred to as the Revolution of Dignity, reshaped Ukraine's foreign policy and geopolitical status. This included reconfiguring their ties with Russia, Europe, and beyond. Subsequently, the developments from within and after the revolution greatly influenced how Ukraine changed its geopolitical positioning towards an extension of alignment with the West.

The events of the Euromaidan revolution directly impacted Ukraine's relationship with Moscow. The Kremlin perceived the revolution as a challenge to its interests. Yanukovych fleeing Ukraine to Russia exposed the involvement of Russia within Ukraine's political system, creating a momentum Moscow could not reverse. Russia perceived that Ukraine's signing of the Association Agreement with the EU was treason for its relations and partnership with Russia. The European partnership also increased Putin's fear of Ukraine joining NATO, which could reverse the Kharkiv Pact, allowing Russia to use Ukraine's military base in Sevastopol on the Crimean Peninsula. Many scholars believe the quick succession of events of Ukraine becoming more closely aligned with the West after the Euromaidan Revolution resulted in Russia's response to annex Crimea in March 2014. Additionally, Russia instigated a proxy war in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine to destabilize the country and block a future NATO accession due to the active conflict within Ukraine's territorial borders (Rutland, 2015). This sequence of events profoundly affected the strained relationship between Ukraine and Russia, which had previously been ruled under the same government during the Soviet era (Pifer, 2019).

Kataryna Wolszuk, a professor of Eastern European Politics (*Kataryna WOLCZUK*, n.d.)**,** argues that Ukraine's move to establish operational ties with the EU by increasing its legal domain irritated Russia. Russia expected the Ukrainian geopolitical boundary to remain aligned with Russia's security and economic agreements. "The prospect for Ukraine's economic integration with the EU was therefore perceived as violating these boundaries and, therefore, a violation of Russia's legitimate geopolitical interests" (Wolszuk, 2016, p. 58). Kataryna emphasizes that Russia's loss of influence in Ukraine's Government and the loss of control regarding the legal bases of agreements it had previously signed with Ukraine instigated a primary Russian reaction that would defy international law and covenants. Nevertheless, Professor Wolszuk additionally mentions how Western leaders, such as Angela Merkel and Barak Obama, attempted to reassure Russia to deter a possible intervention in early 2014 by insisting that Ukraine would not be a candidate to join NATO (Wolszuk, 2016, p. 60). Wolszuk's analysis gives insight into Russia's fear of NATO expansion. It also gathers evidence to explain how Russia took an unnecessary step further to establish its strength and presence in global geopolitics and deny Ukraine's territorial integrity and right to self-determination.

Furthermore, Russia's annexation of Crimea highlighted Europe's fragility of post-Cold War security. It highlighted how the principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty, which had been guiding European security since World War II, were threatened by Russian aggression. This led to the need for a collective European security framework, providing a more appropriate reaction to the unstable security environment the continent would face (Burkhard, n.d.).

The international community's response to Russia's annexation of Crimea and the military conflict in the Donbas region was weak, mainly from European states, partly due to their extensive economic ties with Russia and their reliance on Russian energy. According to data from the International Energy Agency (IEA), from 2014 to 2019, Europe's reliance on Russian gas soared from 35% to 47%, offering a significant amount of funds to fund any Russian military projects in the future (IEA, 2023). Many

analysts explain how the initial economic sanctions placed on Russia, which only increased after the shooting down of commercial airliner flight MH17, helped slow down further military involvement by Russia in 2014. However, the situation did not indicate Europe's intent to decrease its reliance on energy. The effects of the sanctions imposed on Russia ultimately declined as time passed. In the next few years, Russia succeeded in bypassing international sanctions. As the 2014 events moved further into the past, the international community gradually resumed business with Russia (DuBard, 2022), essentially conditioning the Kremlin for its future attacks.

In February 2022, the ongoing uncertainty between Russia and Ukraine reached a boiling point as Russian forces launched a full-scale assault on the country. Tensions had been growing for months before the invasion due to the build-up of more than 200,000 Russian forces along Ukraine's borders, including within Annexed Crimea and within Belarus, due to Lukashenko's relationship with Putin, allowing the stationing of Russian troops within its territory. On February 24th, Ukraine's sovereignty was violated once again, and global security reached a point of critical endangerment as Vladimir Putin posted a televised address to the nation marking the start of his so-called "Special Military Operation" as Russian troops stormed Ukraine in masses across the Northern, Eastern, and Southern borders. In his address, Putin claimed that the operation's goal was to demilitarize and "denazify" Ukraine because the Ukrainian Government was supposedly committing genocide of Russian speakers within the country. Nevertheless, many experts claimed that the invasion was part of Russia's broader geopolitical ambitions and will to reassert its regional influence. Furthermore, the Russian President threatened Western powers with nuclear warfare if they were to get involved, which has become a deterrent for direct Western involvement till today (International Crisis Group, 2022).

The reasoning behind Putin's invasion of Ukraine has been highly debated by various political experts worldwide. Hein Goemans, a professor of political science and an expert on international conflict, states that "Putin wants to reestablish a Russian Empire and at the same time prevent a democratic encirclement around Russia."

Professor Goemans explains his reasoning by analyzing the breakup of Yugoslavia, which resulted in the quick emergence of democracies, mainly instigated by civilian revolutions. He believes that Putin wants to prevent these revolutions in former Soviet Republics, as a Democratic encirclement could be dangerous to his political survival (Goemans, 2022). Vladimir Putin has been methodically focusing his foreign policy on Ukraine since assuming the Russian Presidency in 2000. He intended to maintain control of Ukraine, as he had already accomplished with Belarus. However, the developments in Ukraine pushed for a move toward Western powers that prompted Russia's preposterous attempts to subordinate it using barbaric methods, defying countless international laws and treaties (Sarotte, 2022).

The Russian invasion has inflicted destructive and far-reaching consequences for Ukraine and its inhabitants. The turmoil and violence inflicted on Ukraine have caused a significant loss of life, the splitting of families, and the destruction of communities. Additionally, significant structures such as residences, hospitals, and universities suffered severe damage leaving countless individuals without homes and unable to find medical aid or access to education (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.). The 2022 invasion of Ukraine effectively compelled Ukrainian citizens to endure a return to the challenging conditions which characterized a long and devastating history of Russian imperial influence.

Through all this pain endured at the expense of Russia's imperialistic ambitions, many social norms around the identity and culture of Ukrainians started to change. Although nearly 40% of Ukrainians speak Russian as their first language, more exclusively in the Eastern and Southern regions, the Russian invasion of Ukraine revised their views toward the Russian language. The 2022 events accentuated Ukrainian nationalism throughout the country, with Russian speakers effortlessly switching from interacting in Russian to entirely in Ukrainian. Notably, Putin claimed he wished to protect the Russian-speaking population in Ukraine. However, the 2014 attacks seemed to result in the beginnings of more vigorous opposition to the Russian language. Furthermore, several pro-Russian Ukrainian political figures have switched

their allegiances since February 24th, 2022, as they began to view Russia as an opponent of their nation instead of an ally (Walker, 2022). The detrimental impact of the Russian aggression on Ukrainians is clear, and its effect on Ukrainians can be noticed on multiple levels, both personally and politically. These changes in attitude result from attempts to re-evaluate the Ukrainian lifestyle and nationalism in consideration of Russia's brutal invasion.

Many states worldwide have expressed their disapproval of Russia's actions by instituting sanctions and demanding a ceasefire. These responses have been collective and emphatic, showing the international community's will to stand firm against Russia's aggression. Despite such actions, the occupation is still ongoing, and the situation shows no signs of resolving itself quickly and easily. In addition to the devastation and pain, the invasion of Ukraine has created a humanitarian crisis. Over 15 million Ukrainians have been forced to abandon their homes, seek refuge in other countries, or be internally displaced across Western Ukrainian regions. The fleeing population has been put in extreme circumstances, enduring issues such as limited provisions, scarcity of potable water, and lack of shelter, requiring significant efforts from humanitarian and international organizations (UNHCR, 2023).

The path towards its geopolitical goals, peace, and integration into Europe has been particularly demanding for Ukraine, composed of endless challenges. The country has struggled with a legacy of corruption and authoritarianism, alongside the immense difficulties caused by Russia's forceful annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, the subsequent launch of separatist movements in the Donbas regions, and the resulting full-scale invasion in 2022. These factors have presented significant obstacles for Ukraine and its Western allies in their attempts to achieve a peaceful resolution.

Despite these challenges, Ukraine has remained committed to aligning itself with Europe and the West. This determination has led the EU to adopt new policies and sanctions on Russia, with far-reaching consequences for the Union's economy and security. These measures are likely to have a lasting impact for years to come.

The international community has widely condemned the invasion of Ukraine, recognizing it as a violation of international law and a blatant breach of the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The situation remains a cause of deep concern, with continued calls for a peaceful resolution and restoration of stability in the region.

3.3.   Geopolitical Impacts

Russian influence and power in Ukraine date back to Russia's imperial efforts. Russia's imperialism has had a highly significant impact on Ukrainian geopolitics, political systems, and alliances. Russian hegemony over Ukraine has been observed through the rule of the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and, more recently, by Russia under Putin. This impact can be seen in diverse forms, such as political control, economic superiority, and direct military intervention.

Since independence, Ukraine has always encountered a stormy relationship with Russia, mainly due to Moscow's view of the country as a substantial component of its sphere of influence. When the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991, Ukraine attained sovereignty, yet Russia continued to display its control over the Government via numerous methods. Ukraine has progressed over time and bolstered its strength, often managing to restrict Russia's influence. These retaliatory responses by Ukrainians to Moscow's rule caused resentment from Russia, who refused to relinquish their grip on the former Soviet state.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine was an unprecedented and ruthless war that profoundly impacted the lives of Ukrainians and strained Ukraine's politics, economy, security, and society. February 2023 marked one year of a highly militarized and bloody war at the heart of European soil without the capacity to foresee an unambiguous ending. Millions of Ukrainians cannot return to their homes, and numerous civilians who cannot afford to leave the combat zones have no access to basic needs such as food, water, or electricity. According to the International Rescue Committee (IRC), it is

believed that Russia's missile strikes have left around half of Ukraine's energy infrastructure in ruins, with expected repair costs surpassing $113.5 billion. Aside from hitting the energy sector hard, Russian forces have also destroyed water resources, depriving more than 16 million Ukrainians of safe drinking water and proper hygiene facilities (International Rescue Committee, 2022).

In addition to the effects felt within Ukraine, the war has caused significant damage worldwide, reaching beyond Ukraine's borders. Impacts of the terrible event can be spotted across the globe, further jeopardizing other substantial world problems, like famine. Blockades in Ukrainian grain exports have negatively impacted food availability in the world's most impoverished regions. Despite ongoing attempts by the international community to reinitiate grain exports, food shortages are still likely to persist, with a projected 349 million people across 79 nations suffering from dire food insecurity by 2023. These problems have been amplified throughout East Africa due to a severe water shortage, the Russian blockade on Ukrainian grain, and the global economic impacts caused by the invasion (Nahorska, 2023).

In the wake of the Russian Federation's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its supported insurgency in the Donbas, a wide array of international responses was launched to deter future attacks. Principally, economic and political sanctions had been put in place against Russia. Nevertheless, these have been unable to reduce Russia's influence in these spheres. Various other nations voiced opposition through diplomatic measures, though with minimal impact. At the time, sanctions were implemented in succession with Russia's annexation of Crimea but were solely directed toward Russia's activities within the peninsula. The sanctions mainly targeted people and organizations connected with the military proceedings in Crimea and anyone intending to conduct business operations in Ukraine's invaded territory. Economic sanctions on Crimea resulted in significant restraints on commercial transactions, creating possible economic issues for Russia in the long run, but showed mere effects on the Kremlin's actions (DuBard, 2022).

Despite the Russian Federation violating numerous international accords and covenants, including the UN Charter, the international community failed to impose severe sanctions against Ukraine's aggressor. As a member of the United Nations, Russia is bound by Chapter 1, Article 2 of the UN Charter, stating: "All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations" (United Nations, 1945). Russia flagrantly disregarded the legally binding contract signed by the members of the United Nations. Despite being rebuked and urged to withdraw by the UN General Assembly on countless occasions, Russia persisted with its operations in Ukraine (United Nations, 2023).

International sanctions were relatively inefficient and only intensified after an international catastrophe with the downing of flight MH17. The shooting down of the plane demonstrated that the impact of the Russo-Ukrainian war extended well beyond Ukraine, resulting in the premature deaths of hundreds of Dutch and Malaysian citizens. Consequently, the United States and the European Union took increasingly punitive solid measures. These included blacklisting government-associated financial establishments, banning the sale of weapons, and prohibiting trading technology used for Russian oil production. Despite the addition of a multitude of economic sanctions on Moscow, it is believed they were unsuccessful at pushing Russia to withdraw from its positions (DuBard, 2022). These claims were argued by Daniel Fried, a United States diplomat, who asserted that sanctions eased the hostility of the conflict and kept Russia from further invading the nation. However, he conceded that economic restrictions could have intensified further and focused more deeply on the Russian Government (D. Fried, personal communication, September 6, 2018). The international sanctions placed on Russia in 2014 are said to have caused some strains on the Russian Government. However, many experts believe these sanctions were not poignant enough to isolate Russia from the rest of the globe. When the 2022 invasion began, the international community acknowledged its past mistakes, forcing European countries to initiate swift

changes to reduce the outflow of Western money toward Russia. One of those changes included Germany terminating the Nord Stream 2 pipeline deal (Ray, 2022).

Beginning on February 24th, 2022, the United States launched a substantial number of restrictions intending to isolate Russia from the international monetary system, reduce the profits from its energy industry and diminish its military power. The US sanctions made it more challenging for Russian banks to get resources from overseas or make purchases in American Dollars by cutting off their access to foreign markets. These sanctions were explicitly implemented to limit Russia's capability to fund its "special military operation" and weaken foreign investments in the country (Berman & Siripurapu, 2023).

To weaken the Russian financial sector, the United States imposed a series of sanctions on Russia's central bank and other financial institutions, including banning them from the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT). The US Treasury Department implemented restrictions that blocked the trading of particular Russian assets and impeded President Putin and other sanctioned persons from utilizing their wealth stored in American banks. Additionally, The US has adopted policies that have decreased the benefits generated by Russia's energy sector, which is a primary contributor of income to the nation. Washington implemented hefty sanctions on the sale of oil, including a ban on importing Russian natural gas, coal, and petroleum and implementing further limitations on investment in most Russian energy companies. In conjunction with the other Group of Seven (G7) nations, the US settled on capping the price of Russian crude oil at a maximum of $60 per barrel to further damage the Russian economy. However, the US has failed to establish sanctions on Russia's nuclear energy sector and still imports Russian uranium, which accounted for 14% of US uranium imports in 2021. As for the sanction on military technology, these accounted specifically for exports of high-tech products, including aircraft components and semiconductors. Items from other nations generated with American technology are also subject to similar export restrictions to reduce Russia's military infrastructures (Berman & Siripurapu, 2023). The sanctions imposed by the United States on Russia

indicate the deteriorating state of relations between the two countries. This is a dramatic shift from the relatively cordial relationship that the two countries attempted to keep since the Cold War. The sanctions are designed to put economic and political pressure on Russia and to compel the country to alter its course of action in Ukraine and other regions. It is expected that the sanctions will cause considerable disruption to the economies of both countries and that the geopolitical implications of these sanctions will be felt continuously for the unforeseeable future.

The Western world formed a meaningful coalition in response to Russia's move to take over Ukraine; they strove to uncover ways to prevent further aggression from Russia. The US, European Union, and their allies imposed severe sanctions against Russia as countries like Estonia, Finland, and Poland worried that Moscow might advance the invasion beyond Ukrainian borders. The EU has taken resolute action against Russia's attack on Ukraine while taking into consideration the potential risk imposed on its members. These punishments included banning travel from Russia and blocking access to assets for high-level figures like President Putin and Foreign Minister Lavrov, in addition to oligarchs backing Putin's campaigns. However, the bloc's sanctions on Russian gas, oil, and energy have lacked unity due to its hefty dependency on Russia and the uncertainty of the future implications these bans may cause to the EU's economic well-being and security (Berman & Siripurapu, 2023).

This lack of unity has been especially evident in Hungary's opposition to the sanctions by President Viktor Orban, who has been unable to denounce Putin on the invasion clearly. Prior to Russia's full-scale invasion, in the first quarter of 2022, Moscow supplied the EU with more than 40% of all its natural gas imports and 30% of crude oil. These numbers demonstrate that the sanctions would drastically affect the European Union's energy supply, leaving it in a very vulnerable position. Furthermore, the sanctions could also damage the European Union's economy, as the potential loss of trade with Russia would significantly impact the bloc's prosperity. Therefore, the European Union has hesitated to push for heavy sanctions since 2014, as the potential consequences could be catastrophic for the bloc's economy. Despite the challenges, the

European Union still decided to implement these sanctions, as the fear of further Russian aggression within the EU has taken precedence (Berman & Siripurapu, 2023).

The dependence of Hungary on Russian energy sources is prevalent, with around 85% of its gas and more than 65% of its crude oil coming from Russian sources. This has made it challenging for the European Union to decide unanimously on sanctions against Russia, as Hungary has heavily criticized and opposed them. Prolonging more than one year after Russia invaded Ukraine, the EU continued to impose numerous bans on Russian energy and refined oil products such as diesel and gasoline. Nevertheless, Hungary continues to oppose the sanctions. For more than a year, this opposition has hindered the capacity of the EU to carry out decisions and decree policies against Russia (Berman & Siripurapu, 2023).

The EU is unable to effectively take action against Russia due to Hungary's drastic reliance on Russian energy sources. Hungary must look for other suppliers and rely less on Russian fuel to ensure a powerful image of collective unity within the EU. This is a challenging goal for Hungary, considering the significant dependence is already present. Despite that, the EU must maintain its pressure on Budapest to seek further energy alternatives. Hungary needs to reduce its dependence on Russia, ensure there are no susceptibilities down the line, and secure its alignment with Europe.

The attenuated complications within the EU following the invasion of Ukraine have demonstrated the difficult path that lies ahead surrounding its future relations with Russia and Ukraine and how a drastic shift in geopolitics has taken place. The US and EU adopted sanctions against Russia over its activities in Ukraine in an attempt to persuade the country to sustain compliance with international law. Nonetheless, the potency of these sanctions proved controversial, with several individuals expressing concern about their ineffectiveness in reaching desired objectives.

The European Council affirms that the multiple sanctions imposed on Russia have had a far-reaching impact on the Russian economy. However, global institutions

such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank (WB) have yet to determine the prospects of Russia's economy with certitude. In 2022, Russia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) dropped more than 2% as a repercussion of the newly established sanctions. Nonetheless, the prospects for 2023 vary from a 2.5% decrease forecasted by the OECD to a 0.7% increase predicted by the IMF (European Council, 2023).

Politicians and scholars are particularly concerned about the effectiveness of international sanctions. Though the sanctions have brought some difficulties for Russia's economy, they did not bring about total economic failure or end the war in Ukraine. Some experts argue that the ineffectiveness of sanctions suggests an issue with the types of sanctions as these generally impose significant economic hardships on its population without succeeding at changing the behavior of the targeted governments. It has been proven challenging to tackle the Russian economy at its core, as its strength derives from multiple essential global resources. Russia built new alliances with ease to replace the ones vanishing due to the sanctions. A well-known illustration of this is India, which has drastically increased the amount of Russian oil purchased since the invasion began and substantially increased its general economic partnerships with Russia (Berman & Siripurapu, 2023).

According to Ken Heydon, a senior member of the OECD Secretariat, sanctions have an increased potential to be unsuccessful when multiple indicators are present. When a targeted country has a substantial international economic influence, it may bypass sanctions while causing financial strain for those imposing them. Additionally, sanctions are said to be less successful when the country targeted is an authoritarian regime, giving it stronger resistance to economic collapse. Mr. Heydon declares that a powerful nation experiencing high tension from foreign sources will likely abstain from making arrangements to remove sanctions to preserve its ability to negotiate in the future if deemed necessary. This has been observed in the case of Russia, which has been committed to creating disruptions within international energy and grain markets to increase its leverage in negotiations (Heydon, 2023).

The Western financial sanctions imposed on Russia have been unable to cease the hostilities and Russian aggression against Ukrainian civilians. However, they have been successful at establishing limitations on the foreign policy goals of Russian President Vladimir Putin. The effects of sanctions have resulted in a sharp decrease in Russian imports and exports, causing Russian corporations and the military to look for alternative suppliers who are costlier and less functional. The G7 nations need to continue and augment their efforts to weaken Russia, consequently taking and allocating the stockpiled assets of the Central Bank of Russia for Ukraine's reconstruction. Jeffrey J. Schott, a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, proclaims that maintaining coherent and coordinated sanctions against large and powerful target countries is critical for their effectiveness. Western policymakers must balance the costs of sanctions suffered by the targeted country and themselves to sustain political backing over time and prolong the synergy behind the sanctions (Schott, 2023).

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has created significant shifts in geopolitics across the region, including by forming new alliances in support of Ukraine. In addition, it has defined Ukraine's relationships with those countries currently providing them with economic and military aid for their fight for self-determination. The immense support will lay the foundation for lasting relationships that will benefit the future of Ukraine's position in international relations.

Despite all that Ukraine has been put through due to Russian imperialism, the recent connection between Moscow and Kyiv typically consisted of a cordial tone. The relationship between these nations became highly strained after the 2014 invasions of the Crimea and Donbas regions. In spite of this, they continued to converse openly, primarily discussing cease-fire agreements and energy provisions. On the morning following Russia's invasion on February 24th, 2022, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy announced that Ukraine was severing all diplomatic ties with Russia. This marked the first break in relations since Ukraine and Russia became respective

sovereign nations after the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 (*Ukraine Cuts Diplomatic Ties*, 2022).

The new shift in diplomatic relations, brought about by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, has caused Ukraine to drastically shift its geopolitics and strengthen its ties with the West, notably Europe and the United States. This shift has been marked by an increase in diplomatic dialogue between the nations, as well as an increase in financial aid, military aid, and investments from Europe and the United States. In addition, Ukraine has become a more vocal advocate for democratic principles, human rights, and the rule of law, a stance highly embraced by Europe and the United States, who have evolved to view the war in Ukraine as a primary fight for Democracy.

The revolutionary period Ukraine traversed in 2004 through the Orange Revolution bolstered the eastern nation's inclination towards a much more Western geopolitical standpoint. This stance became particularly apparent as a consequence of Russia entering into war with Ukraine by sparking off tensions in Crimea and Donbas around the time of the Euromaidan Revolution in 2014. The geopolitics of Ukraine can be mainly analyzed through its relationship with NATO since 2014. In the three years following Russia's insurgency on Ukrainian soil, Ukraine witnessed growing public support for joining NATO. In a survey conducted in April 2017, nearly half of Ukrainians clearly expressed their approval of NATO membership versus nearly 30% who disagreed. This data contrasts the survey of March 2014 that noted 43 percent opposed being part of NATO while only 34% voiced support. During decades prior, polls to join NATO rarely surpassed 25%. This marked transformation clearly describes a drastic change in the people's will caused by Russia's aggression on the country and the livelihood of its population (Pifer, 2017).

Although Ukrainian polls have demonstrated the will of the people, NATO and some of its members have disregarded Ukraine's desire to join the organization for over a decade out of concern for further Russian military operations. Only after Russia launched several assaults on Ukraine in 2022 did NATO seriously consider welcoming

Ukraine into the organization in light of Ukraine's successful attempts to counter Russian assaults on the battlefield. Since 2014, ongoing dialogues have been held in the NATO-Ukraine Commission (NUC) due to Russia's danger to Ukraine's sovereignty, legitimacy, and safety. Nevertheless, NATO's support for Ukraine became mainly apparent after Russia's invasion. In the 2022 NATO Summit, the allies agreed to strengthen the financial support of Ukraine's defense while providing Ukraine with immediate, short-term, non-lethal military assistance. Additionally, NATO has begun several training initiatives and tasks to train Ukrainian troops in military procedures and combat tactics (NATO, 2023b).

Russian politically motivated sources close to the President have been increasingly accusing NATO's expansion of being responsible for their interference in Ukraine. However, Russia's invasion has renewed interest in countries joining NATO. Finland, formerly part of the Russian Empire, and Sweden were the latest countries interested in becoming members of the alliance out of the worry that Russia may expand its aggression further throughout Europe. On April 4th, 2023, Russian leader Vladimir Putin expressed no objections or angst when Finland joined NATO, making it the thirty-first member (NATO, 2023a). This disavows the idea posed by theorists and political experts denouncing NATO enlargement as an impetus for Russia's intervention in Ukraine.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has considerably impacted Ukraine's future standing in world affairs. Ukraine greatly longed to reinforce European unity, prioritize rights such as Democracy, and remain safeguarded under assurances from the West. Western and allied governments have taken expressions of intensifying economic support to Ukraine and punitive actions against Russia for its invasion in 2022. By February 2023, the US had provided $50 billion in aid to Ukraine, including weaponry such as missiles, helicopters, drones, and tanks fit for military operations. Other nations part of NATO were also sponsors for similar types of support. As mentioned, the surveys collected prior to 2022 showed indecisiveness within the Ukrainian community over accession to the EU and NATO. Over half (excluding citizens under Russian rule in Crimea and

battleground regions in the East) favored joining the European Union. Shortly following the invasion, President Zelenskiy approached the EU regarding Ukraine's path to membership through an accelerated process. In June 2022, Ukraine officially changed its status to EU candidate. Nonetheless, specialists have argued that finalizing their admission may take several years. President Zelenskiy requested that Ukraine join NATO in September and hoped for rapid enrollment. Still, numerous Western advisers believe joining NATO is unlikely in the short term, similar to its bid for EU membership. The ongoing struggle in Ukraine makes it practically inconceivable for Ukraine's admission into NATO (Masters, 2023).

The invasion of Ukraine by Russia in 2022 had a prominent mark on global politics. This incident severely harmed Russia's relations with the West, provoking concern about Russia's intentions and fueling anxiety over other countries' safety nearby. President Zelenskiy's administration was placed under enormous strain trying to handle a humanitarian crisis and an economic recession while coordinating crucial military decisions against Russian hostility. The conflict boosted Ukraine's objective towards NATO and EU accession, thus highlighting the importance of joint security measures. It also raised concerns about Russia's foreign policy and political goals and the potential impetus these may have for further conflicts beyond Ukrainian borders. Russia's aggression implicates grave consequences which have extended to an international level. This has created massive effects in Ukraine and Europe, pushing for the adjustment of Ukraine's international geopolitics.

4. CONCLUSION

This research has found that Ukraine's quest for autonomy has been a recurring theme over time, especially throughout the last 120 years, with Moscow's ambitions often standing in the way. From the time of the tsars and emperors, Ukrainians have sought to assert their independence but have faced numerous obstacles from Moscow. Beyond the genocide committed against Ukrainians during the Soviet period, the Russian Government has continued to seek influence over Ukrainian politics and assert

dominance, thus compromising Ukraine's sovereignty, especially after it regained independence.

Based on the findings of this research, it became clear that scholars must be familiar with numerous theories of international relations to adequately analyze international conflicts and reflect thorough explanations for their statements. In this case, related to the war between Ukraine and Russia, two primary streams of thought are crucial. Liberalism, on the one hand, emphasizes Ukraine's right to self-determination, giving it the right to choose its alliances and the right to aspire for democracy and the values and institutions pertaining to it. The liberalist theory facilitates the comprehension of Ukraine's connections with Western countries and organizations which embrace democratic values and principles in their practices. On the other hand, realism offers alternative thinking and, to some extent, explains or even legitimizes Russia's steady grasp on Ukraine. Realism focuses on past achievements and, in this case, Moscow's continued influence on former territories it used to rule over and secure its national interests via military force. The realist theory is reflected through Russia's countless military insurgences on the territories of Ukraine and other nations. Russia's armed offenses are used as a way to secure itself from external threats, such as a possible NATO expansion, and keep the Ukrainian Government hostage to Moscow's influence and policies. Liberalism and realism are vast and distinct theories instilling contradicting approaches to the conflict. Despite the current majority stand of the United Nations General Assembly, there is nevertheless a need to consider all sides of the conflict and all the issues at stake, not only for an ample understanding of the matter but also for its sustainable resolution.

All things considered, scholars must assess both ends and should conclude that the clash between Ukraine and Russia, culminating in Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, must be traced through both theories stated in the report. Realism will help to frame the constant and often imperialist desires of Russian and Soviet rulers and their policies of Russification throughout history. In contrast, liberalism will help to

provide a more current view on the shaping of Ukraine's geopolitics of today and the overall dynamics that made this happen, notably over the past 30 years.

A majority of the international community has condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The actions taken by Moscow have been declared to violate numerous international laws, covenants, and Ukraine's territorial integrity. The Russian Federation's actions in Ukraine have drawn ire from numerous entities, including the United States, the European Union, and the United Nations. Nevertheless, whether the Russian Federation's interference at various levels of the Ukrainian Government, its illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, the subsequent conflict in Eastern Ukraine, and its full-scale invasion in 2022 can all be seen as an extension of Russia's historical pattern of imperialism is a question unanswered by these condemnations. With this research and the arguments presented, there is a strong case for this assumption to stand based on the historical facts analyzed throughout this work. However, it is essential to keep a door open to justified doubts based on different viewpoints, such as those led by realists. Analyzing both sides of the story is an arguably more suitable framework for peace talks that will have to be held at one point to avoid a lose-lose situation for all involved parties and even the whole world.

The research conducted throughout this piece indicates that the theory of liberalism has an edge over the theory of realism. As the evidence portrays, Russia's imperialism and its policies of Russification have had an immense impact on shaping the geopolitics of Ukraine and its alliances and the will of the people. Ukraine's determination towards a rapprochement with the West and its will to remove Russian influence can be examined through the various revolutions Ukrainians organized to counter Russia's meddling in elections and their determination to fight against the Russian invaders today.

This conclusion stands even against current perspectives, such as, for example, whether the economic sanctions that the Russian Federation is subject to have an effect in the longer term. These sanctions alone will already have induced some shifts in the

established equilibriums of the early 21st century since it has already led to the restructuring of many foreign trade and international partnerships, not only of Ukraine and Russia. Given the circumstances, scholars should look deeper into the repercussions of sanctions in general and their effects on the Russian economy to determine more precisely the lasting effects they may have in the years to come.

The conflict in Ukraine has had a detrimental impact on the nation's financial sector and infrastructure, resulting in significant losses and damage. The ongoing fighting has also resulted in many fatalities, causing tremendous hardship and suffering for Ukrainians. Despite these challenges, Ukraine has made notable advancements in recent years, mainly through further integration with the European Union and other international alliances. This includes signing the Association Agreement with the EU in 2014 and the ongoing efforts to deepen economic and political ties with other countries in the region. These developments demonstrate Ukraine's commitment to pursuing a path of greater integration and cooperation with the international community despite the significant challenges it continues to face.

Russia's aggression in Ukraine has also been a growing political concern, especially when compared to the situation in other former Soviet states, such as Georgia, Moldova, and Belarus. These sovereign nations have all experienced Russian influence since gaining independence. Significant portions of their populations are protesting and striving for a new geopolitical direction involving a significant rapprochement with the West, which embraces democratic values, the rule of law, and freedom. However, Moscow has consistently attempted to derail these progressive changes and initiatives. Russia's aggression has taken the form of military incursions, cyberattacks, and economic sanctions, all of which have been used to stifle the independence of these nations and maintain Russia's dominant presence in the region. These events demonstrate that what happens in Ukraine goes beyond the conflict focused throughout this investigation. With the help of legally bound documents and covenants, the international community will have to take the necessary steps to ensure that territorial integrity and international law are respected regarding Ukraine or any

other conflict around the globe. Ensuring all states' security and territorial integrity will determine the necessary steps to achieve global peace.

The overall impacts of the conflict, which have been detrimental to Ukraine's citizens and society, the human rights violations, and the numerous war crimes committed by Russia, must also be more thoroughly analyzed. For now, the protracted armed discord has caused a devastating humanitarian crisis and displaced a large portion of the population. This displacement has resulted in many being unable to access basic necessities, such as food, water, and medical care. Against this backdrop, Ukraine has to rely, more than ever, on economic and political support from foreign actors. In conjunction with these issues, it is essential to create strategies to ensure the long-term safety of those affected by the conflict. This may include the provision of safe housing, access to education, and job training. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of all parties to work together to bring about a lasting solution to the conflict that respects the rights and dignity of the Ukrainian people.

From a Western standpoint, Ukraine has been a beacon of hope in the face of Russian aggression, standing firm against the oppressive forces of the Kremlin's imperialism. Despite the heavy toll taken by the conflict, Ukrainians have continued to safeguard the values of their Western allies and have become a growing symbol of democracy, freedom, and peace.

When analyzing and reaching conclusions in the war between Ukraine and Russia, scholars and politicians should take into consideration Russia's violation and disregard of numerous international treaties and covenants, such as the UN Charter, and its engagement in countless war crimes. Moscow's credibility in its will to follow international treaties could become highly fragile in decades to come, putting an enormous strain on the international collaboration which created them. These violations could instigate a continuation of the West's support towards Ukraine through economic, diplomatic, and military assistance to ensure that the party violating the treaties is not rewarded.

The global community should acknowledge the importance of Ukraine's predicament and take the necessary steps to address it. In order to respond to Russia's aggression and deter any potential future attacks on another sovereign nation by any state, the international community needs to unite in its imposition of sanctions on Russia. This is crucial to demonstrate the inviolability of international treaties and provide reasoning for the support towards Ukraine. Furthermore, for Ukraine to ensure its prospective security and complete the shifting of its geopolitics, it must strengthen its ties with the West in order to facilitate its progress toward European integration and NATO membership.

Despite the continuous attempts to create a prosperous and secure future for Ukraine, the ongoing conflict with Russia has presented a significant challenge to these efforts. There is much concern about the potential long-term implications of the conflict, including the threat of a nuclear disaster, along with the complications surrounding the search for a viable and peaceful resolution. Due to the recurrence of Russia's imperialistic ambitions throughout the history of Ukraine, it is challenging to identify a straightforward solution that would ensure lasting peace in the region without the continuous support of international actors. Ultimately, only through sustained engagement and cooperation will it be possible to achieve lasting peace in this complex and challenging region of the world and prevent the resurgence of tension for generations to come.

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