

## Russia-Ukraine Conflict: The Emergence of New Geopolitical Rivalry in Eurasia



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### Article's History

**Submitted:** 17<sup>th</sup> March 2025

**Revised:** 25<sup>th</sup> May 2025

**Published:** 29<sup>th</sup> May 2025

### Abstract

**Aim:** The crisis in Ukraine has become a pivotal event in the resurgence of geopolitical rivalry in Eurasia. Following the end of the Cold War, NATO began its eastward expansion, which raised deep security concerns for Russia. The dissolution of the Soviet Union transitioned the world from a bipolar to a unipolar structure, creating a power vacuum in Eurasia that allowed external players to intervene in the region. The primary objective of this study is to understand NATO's expansion in Eastern Europe, particularly focusing on geopolitical rivalry between Russia and United States and its implications for Russia after 1990.

**Methods:** This research employs qualitative method. It focused on thoughts, behaviors, and social contexts to examine the Ukraine crisis from a geopolitical perspective. The main aim is to determine when NATO's expansion into Eastern European countries began.

**Results:** From Russia's perspective, the Ukraine crisis is viewed as a proxy war aimed at containing Russian influence. This research identifies, that the crisis in Ukraine has been started since 1990 with the expansion of NATO to Eastern European countries.

**Conclusion:** The main parties that could be held responsible are the United States, Russia, EU and NATO.

**Recommendation:** The study recommends that diplomatic efforts should be made by both sides to address Russia's security concerns and reconsider NATO's expansion to Eastern European countries. This will help to reach peace and de-escalate the current conflict.

**Keywords:** *Geopolitical rivalry, NATO, US, Eurasia, Russia, Ukraine.*

## INTRODUCTION

The term geopolitical rivalry refers to the competition between great powers to expand their influence in the world, therefore, great powers concentrate their focus on creating international diplomatic, political, economic, and military institutions, led by them, to line up, join, and find more friends, more importantly, they consistently try to reduce gradually influence of their rivals over certain regions to balance power between them (Service, 2023).

After the outbreak of the Cold War European and American nations because of the growing influence of communism in Europe, established a security organization (NATO) based on the collective security theory. In fact, “George Frost Canaan” an American diplomat, politician, and historian, was one of the first pioneers to establish such a military pact, someone who in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century became an inspiration for the Truman Doctrine and a famous politician to control Russia (Bahareh, 2012).

Despite the collapse of the Soviet Union that ended the bipolar system, serious other changes took place internationally, and these changes led NATO to an identity crisis<sup>1</sup>, that’s why it was necessary for NATO to accommodate itself with the international atmosphere and justify its existence, at the same time military analysts believed that these changes, as already mentioned, did not remove the threat that was imposed to the security of Europe, but just changed the nature of the danger, that pave the way to retain NATO (Bahareh, 2012).

It is worth mentioning that NATO’s enlargement was planned in 1992 (Micheal, 2023), and particularly, Brzezinski in *The Grand Chessboard* (1997), emphasized that the U.S. must maintain its dominance by preventing any one power from controlling Eurasia. He advocated integrating Central and Eastern European countries into Western institutions (like NATO and the EU) to stabilize the region and limit Russia’s resurgence, although NATO’s enlargement was not officially based on Brzezinski’s theory, but his ideas strongly influenced by him. Brzezinski, suggests the West should expand its control to the areas, that are geostrategic ally important to limit Russia’s domination (Maria, 2023). Therefore, Russia always opposes the enlargement of NATO and the unipolar world order led by its geopolitical rival United States. She says that it is time to stop the enlargement of NATO and bring changes in the global order (Sahakyan, 2022), so undoubtedly war in Ukraine, human rights, and democratic values are considered as the driving factors over norms of the world order that had escalated tensions between Russia and the United States (Sahakyan, 2023).

The crisis in Ukraine has deepened roots in the expansion of NATO to the Eastern European countries followed by the geopolitical interests of the United States and EU (Anderson, 2023). The United States quite literally uses NATO as a hegemonic tool to consolidate its global leadership. From Russia’s perspective, the expansion of NATO had intensified after the dissolution of the former Soviet Union and considers the current conflict as a proxy war to contain Russia and a natural response to the restoration of the geopolitical consolidation of Russia’s influence in the post-Soviet space (Singh, 2022).

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<sup>1</sup> Identity crisis: the main objective behind the creation of NATO was to counter and limit Russia’s influence worldwide, therefore when the Soviet Union disintegrated, some analysts believed that there was no need to the existence of NATO, in this context, NATO faced with identity crisis, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/zelensky-trump-NATO>.

## **Purpose of the Research**

This study aims to analyze geopolitical dimensions of the Russia-Ukraine conflict to understand how this conflict was a catalyst for the reemergence of new geopolitical rivalry between Russia and the United States. Specially, this study focused on the end of the Cold War and its broader implications for regional powers.

## **Hypothesis**

The hypothesis posits that the Russia-Ukraine conflict has intensified existing geopolitical rivalries and created new dynamics in Eurasia, driven by factors such as NATO's expansion toward eastern Europe. This rivalry is seen as a response to the perceived threat to the national security and influence of Russia in the region.

## **Importance**

The significance of this research lies in its potential to enhance understanding of the complex geopolitical landscape in Eurasia. By examining the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the study highlights the broader implications for international relations, security policies, and regional cooperation. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for policymakers, analysts, and scholars aiming to navigate the challenges posed by shifting power balances in Eurasia.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Understanding the Russia-Ukraine conflict requires a review of the historical context of Ukraine's relationship with Russia and the West, and extensive analyses of Ukraine's complex history, emphasizing its role as a borderland between East and West. The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and Ukraine's subsequent independence set the stage for ongoing tensions between pro-Russian and pro-Western factions within the country. Although several researchers conducted research in this regard, which covers different dimensions and aspects of the war in Ukraine;

A central theme in Chopra's article is the struggle for geopolitical dominance in Eurasia. The war in Ukraine is framed not merely as a regional conflict but as part of a larger "big game" between global powers. NATO's eastward expansion is presented as a trigger for Russian insecurity, rooted in historical and strategic concerns. This aligns with the theme of great power rivalry—especially between the U.S. and Russia—over control and influence in strategic regions like Eastern Europe.

Another The study's title, "*A Dialogue Between the Deaf and the Dumb*," itself introduces mutual misunderstanding and communicative breakdown between Russia and the West. This metaphor suggests that both sides are speaking past each other, deeply entrenched in their own geopolitical worldviews, which contributes to the escalation of the conflict. A key theme is the contrast between Western and Russian geopolitical interests. The author explores how these divergent perspectives are embedded in each side's foreign policy objectives. The West views Ukraine through the lens of democratic expansion and security, while Russia perceives NATO's presence as a direct threat to its sphere of influence and national security. This ideological and strategic divide fuels tension and shapes each actor's response to Ukraine's position.

Research describes the war in Ukraine as a paradoxical geopolitical struggle influenced by the great power politics. The Paper examines bilateral and regional dimensions of the conflict that put Russia in a risky war. The findings of the study show that based on the old issues Russia-Ukraine conflict cannot be considered a bilateral war, rather than a new identity and affinity with the West

to join NATO, which automatically changes Ukraine's position to become a strategic friend of the US and EU against Russia, which are great power rivals.

Another similar article, the Ukraine crisis or the revival of the Grand Chessboard's geopolitics, in this article the author describes the purpose of the war in Ukraine in accordance with Brzezinski's theory Grand Chessboard, in this theory the importance of the geostrategic position of Ukraine have explored as a key Eurasian geopolitical pivots, which suggest that control over Ukraine's territory is considered as domination over the world, that's why Russia's interests are confronted with US ones. Therefore, if Russia wants to become a regional hegemonic power or Eurasian empire and strengthen its position on the international stage, needs to keep Ukraine close to itself. Finally, the research finding shows that competition over Ukraine in Eurasia emerged from the crisis with Russia, on account of both EU and NATO enlargements since the 1990s.

Hafeznia (2023), a Professor of the Political Geography Dept. of Tarbiat Modares University, explores the crisis of Ukraine under the title of Scenarios for the Future of the World in Light of the Ukraine Crisis, in this article, he indicates that internal political change(Russia's support of separatist from Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic in the Donbas) and the establishment of a pro-Western state in Kyiv led to the war in Ukraine, furthermore, Ukraine's plan to join NATO and other western-led institutions enhanced Russia's security tension to save guard its national security around its borders, main ally focusing on the dual geopolitical structure of the world, which is a product of the geopolitical transitional period(GTP) since 1991.

A study by Lord Mark (2023), shows that Russia's invasion of Ukraine is unlawful, which permits Russia to strengthen across the entire Black Sea, also the study illustrates the best posture for NATO in the Black Sea Region (BSR), particularly on the troubled waters of the Black Sea. The development of Russia in the black sea made members of NATO to reconsider their position and create new ways to reassure regional alliance in the BSR. The report clarifies that much more needs to capable Ukraine to block Russia's access in the Black Sea. Furthermore, the report advocates a focused strategy for the BSR countries to modernize air and missile defense systems for vulnerable partnerships.

The war in Ukraine has not only reshaped the political landscape of Eastern Europe but has also rekindled geopolitical rivalries reminiscent of the Cold War era. This literature review examines discourse on the Russia-Ukraine, focusing on its implications for geopolitical dynamics in the Eurasian region. What makes the current research different from others is that it illustrates the crisis in Ukraine from a geopolitics perspective. This study provides a sufficient argument that the expansion of NATO started in 1990 to the Eastern European countries, marks the emergence of new geopolitical revelry in Eurasia. This study will described jjustifications behind the existence of NATO after 1990, it will analyze the strategy of the US and the expansion of NATO to Eastern European countries, it will explain the emergence of new geopolitical rivalry in Eurasia, it will discuss the challenges and ramifications of great power rivalry and provide possible solutions.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Research methodology is a vital part of the study, which is a road map for the researcher to understand what data needs to be collected and where it should be collected. Also, research methodology is a systematic way to find the solution for the research phenomenon. This study employs a qualitative research method to analyze the role of the expansion of NATO to Eastern

Europe in the emergence of a new geopolitical rivalry in Eurasia, to conduct in-depth studies it is needed to study specific events or developments within the Russia-Ukraine conflict, their impact on Eurasian geopolitics and find the key factors leading to the conflict Ukraine, how has the crisis in Ukraine influenced the geopolitics of great power and dynamics in the Eurasia region, therefore the role of NATO's eastward expansion will be analyzed using secondary sources, with attention to the geopolitical strategies of the involved actors.

Secondary Data (books, scientific and scholarly article, media reports) regards the expansion of NATO to Eastern Europe, were analyzed through the discourse method to identify common trends and divergent opinions regards the mentioned issue. Indeed, the research explores the reason behind the expansion of NATO to Eastern Europe, how does Russia view and responded to the expansion of NATO, the legal status of the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, the strategy of the US toward Eastern Europe, and finally the implications of this geopolitical rivalry on Eurasia. which marks the emergence of a new geopolitical rivalry between the United States and Russia.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Expansion of NATO to the Eastern Europe**

NATO is a military organization of the Cold War era with collective security, alliance of values, and democracy as its three main pillars (Anderson, 2023). Through its open policy, (Chopra, 2022), has been admitting more member countries since 1949 (Irib, 2022) and almost granted membership to sixteen countries including eight member countries of the USSR in different periods<sup>2</sup>.

In the 1990s, the strategy of the US and NATO were to promote a US-centered world order and observe the Warsaw Pact. Therefore, as soon as the Soviet Union ended the strategist in the Pentagon, the CIA and the white house immediately began to plan the expansion of NATO (Micheal, 2023). So again, the US launched several wars to overthrow Russian allied governments<sup>3</sup> around the world, Americans realized that Russia could do nothing in response (Anderson, 2023).

After the disappearance of the USSR, opponents of NATO had serious observations over the existence of this organization; they said that there was no need for the existence of such a military alliance, due to the purpose and danger, for which it was created, and disappeared (Bahareh, 2012). Unfortunately, these observations were ignored, despite the observation the United States skillfully retained NATO to achieve its geostrategic goals; which included influencing Europe, strengthening its global leadership, containing Russia, and continuing geopolitical competition around the world (Bahareh, 2012).

In the early 1990s, when for the first time NATO in its history took part out of Article Five and launched an air strike on Kosovo that escalated tensions among great powers, Russia and China criticized NATO for interfering in Serbia's internal affairs (Schake, 1998). Since then, the world

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<sup>2</sup> On five occasions (1999, 2004, 2009, 2017, and 2020) granted membership to eight Eastern European countries, just Ukraine, Finland and Sweden are hoping to join NATO, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3731771/pentagon-welcomes-sweden-finland-in-ceremony-marking-nato-anniversary/#:~:text=Finland%20officially%20joined%20the%20alliance,NATO's%20newest%20member%20in%20March.>

<sup>3</sup> Iraq, Syria, and Ukraine are countries that were previously considered as an alliance of Russia, [https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2013/02/the-mythical-alliance-russias-syria-policy?lang=en&center=russia-eurasia.](https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2013/02/the-mythical-alliance-russias-syria-policy?lang=en&center=russia-eurasia)

has had a dual geopolitical structure of alliance; in this period, strong geostrategic competition began among rivals to expand their own space of influence over Eurasian to follow its geopolitical interests and take control of global affairs, which automatically allowed these rivals to manage global politics in its favor (Zreik, 2022).

Instability in Eastern Europe, weapons of mass destruction and chemical weapons, terrorism, hegemonic powers such as China, and fears of a resurgence of Russia, therefore, changes in the nature and quality of threats necessitated appropriate reforms in the structure of NATO to respond to these threats (Maria, 2023), therefore strategists revised and reformed NATO's strategy, what became important in this reform was the expansion of NATO to the Eastern Europe, which took place during the decline of Russia power under Boris Yeltsin (Felgenhauer, 1997).

In terms of geopolitical rivalry, to limit the United States' activities in its traditional sphere of influence and prepare itself as a geopolitical rival to have the capacity to compete with other global geopolitical competitors. In another way Russia started to line up its former allies and as well as to take countermeasures to avoid United States engagement in the region or at least minimize its effects (Lewis, 2022).

Simultaneously Russia at the beginning of the 21st century, after successfully managing its domestic affairs, focused on its foreign policy to restore its influence in Eurasia (Hlosek, 2006), to have a comprehensive contribution to the development of the region, through creating diplomatic, political, military, and economic platforms and mechanisms<sup>4</sup> with its traditional ally China and other member countries of the former Soviet Union (Kim, 2021).

This development has been world widely considered Russia's big diplomatic victory to integrate and expand its Regional cooperation for Comprehensive Economic Partnership as the only dominant player in the region (Kobenko, 2016), undoubtedly working closely with these institutions will give an upper hand to Russia to prevent the fragmentation of its economy, which is already affected by the sanctions imposed by the US after Ukraine war (Putin, 2023). Furthermore, this close partnership is seen as an opportunity for Eurasian countries to stabilize their economic growth, even though many other countries, such as China, India, the United States, and the European Union, also have such contributions to the region (Sahakyan, 2022).

### **How Russia View the Expansion of NATO**

Russia's response to NATO's enlargement into Eastern Europe has been consistently negative and increasingly aggressive, viewing it as a direct threat to its national security and regional influence and Russian leaders, including Vladimir Putin, warned that NATO's presence near its borders was unacceptable, and so modernized its military and stationed more troops and weapons near NATO member states. Russia is one of the three countries<sup>5</sup> that always opposes the United States growing influence in their respective regions (Mazza, 2023).

In December 2000, when Vladimir Putin came to power, the country's foreign policy dramatically changed, he sought to rebuild his country's relations with NATO through a pragmatic approach,

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<sup>4</sup> These institutions include the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and the commonwealth of an independent states (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and (the BRICS).

<sup>5</sup> Iran, China, and Russia are the three countries that oppose the liberal world order,  
<https://globaltaiwan.org/2023/12/the-axis-of-disorder-how-russia-iran-and-china-want-to-remake-the-world>.

which was well received by members of NATO (Ashimbaev, 2003). Nevertheless, he is deeply saddened by the development of NATO to the east and by the fate of the end of the Cold War, in which Russia lost its power, territory, and influence (Rosenberg, 2022).

In this context, Russia also changed its strategy with its neighbors in the Eurasian, maintaining close economic and political ties with the republics that were part of the Soviet Union, thus Asia and Eurasia once again found an advanced position in Russia's foreign policy (Mankoff, 2016). That's why granting NATO membership to Ukraine and Georgia had received a negative response from Moscow. Recently Russia has openly stated that it will not tolerate the presence of Western troops on its borders, considering it a threat to its national security (Euronews, 2021). This movement comes after when Viktor Yanukovich rejected the negotiations with Europe on the trade agreement and promised that Ukraine would not join NATO or any Western military alliance, in exchange, he was toppled by the Orange Revolution organized by the West and soon Ukraine introduced its prime minister Timoshenko to parliament to lead his country to join NATO, "In response, Russia deployed troops to Ukraine, officially stating that the move was intended to protect Russian citizens (Foundation, 2014), before to this development Russia has always resisted to prevent Ukraine's membership in NATO. Russia considers the Orange Revolution in Ukraine as a Western conspiracy organized by the West, which aims to follow its regime change policy and install a pro-western liberal democracy through soft power (Qaisrani, 2023).

At the time of announcing the attack, the Russian President accused NATO of threatening a historic future as a nation. Vladimir Putin has attributed part of the reason for his decision to attack Ukraine, is the expansion of NATO into Eastern Europe. He had previously said that his country "has no more room to retreat; they (NATO) think we will sit still?" Ukraine was looking for a definite time to join NATO, and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Yaakov said; "...it is essential for us to make sure that Ukraine will never join NATO. In a lengthy text published last year, Mr. Putin called Russia and Ukraine "one nation" and described the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 as "the break-up of historic Russia" (Hasan.Shokouhi, 2022). He claims that Communist Russia founded modern Ukraine from the ground up, but now it has become an untouchable country in the West. Putin said, "Imagine Ukraine joining NATO and launching a military operation, should we go to war with NATO? Does anyone have an opinion on this? It is clear that "Russia's attention is not limited to Ukraine; it wanted NATO to return to its pre-1997 borders (Kirby, 2022).

Following Russia's move to annex the Crimean Peninsula showed that Russia was serious about preventing Western intrusion into its European borders (Afshari, 2022). In 2007 Putin also warned Western countries "We are very concerned we do not want you on our border", the United States ignored that, and in 2008 the United States committed to enlargement of NATO, Putin said no don't do that, that's our red line, don't cross it, and at the same time he called to stop NATO's military operations in Eastern Europe and the United States ignored that. In the same year, the US ambassador to Russia, Bill Burns, who is now the director of the CIA, wrote a secret cable to Washington that his secret memo got leaked by Wiki leaks; this memo opposes NATO's enlargement. Pro-Putin and anti-Putin did not matter all Russian political classes did not want NATO on Russia's border, but all was ignored (Sachs, 2023).

In 2021, the Russian Security Council met, and President Putin asked the foreign minister to report the status of your discussions with Americans; he said have received a formal reply of no

negotiations over NATO, and then three days later what happened that we are now witnessing (Sachs, 2023). In January 2022, the US gave a formal reply to Putin, and a formal reply was NATO enlargement is none of your business, that is our policy. Furthermore, Russia wants no further eastward expansion of NATO, Putin accused the West is “coming with its missiles to our doorstep”, and asked, “How would Americans react if we put our missiles on the border between Canada and the US....or put our missiles on the border of Mexico and the United States (Chopra, 2022). President Putin wants NATO military infrastructure and forces to be dismantled from countries that have been members of NATO since 1997, and its military equipment not to be close to Russia’s borders (Rosenberg, 2022).

President Vladimir Putin has argued that Western leaders promised not to expand NATO eastward following the Cold War - a claim that, while not formally documented, remains central to Russia’s opposition to NATO enlargement (Felgenhauer, 1997). He has voiced concern over NATO’s growing presence near Russia’s borders, particularly in Ukraine, and has called for legal guarantees to halt further expansion (Euronews, 2021). From a geopolitical standpoint, scholars such as (Hlosek, 2006) view Russia’s actions as efforts to maintain influence over former Soviet republics, which it considers vital strategic pivots in Eurasia. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 can thus be interpreted as part of Russia’s broader ambition to reassert itself as a dominant regional power. Supporting this view, neo-realist theorists like Mearsheimer argue that NATO and EU expansion since the 1990s has contributed significantly to the crisis in Ukraine (Didier, 2017).

### **Russia’s Response to the Expansion of NATO**

Taking into account, from Putin to all Russia’s political class have this intention to create a greater Russia with their traditional imperialistic and new imperialistic idea addressed by Aleksandra Dugin, suggests Russia take full control of Eurasia, if she wants to become a global power (Hafeznia, 2023), to achieve this goal, Russia had reformulated Greater Eurasia Partnership with his strategic partners China (Zreik, 2022), to integrate the EEU and OBOR, on the other hand, these two traditional partners had defined new norms for a more comprehensive framework of Eurasia’s integration, to make it an economic power block, as they have already introduced a new currency in the EUEA to by-pass the US dollar (Tuter, 2023).

From 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea, until the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, heavy sanctions have been continued by the West against Russia, in retaliation to destroy European economies, Russia stopped its gas supply to Europe, and as a result, European countries faced with energy crisis (Putin, 2023). In December 2021, President Putin put on the table a draft US-Russia security agreement that had very correct points:

#### ***Firstly: Stop NATO Enlargement to our Borders***

In this context, Russia as it did in the post-soviet era, now still regards Central Asia and other countries close to its border as a security buffer zone against external security threats, and does not allow any of these countries to join any military alliance, therefore concerning the Russia-Ukraine War, Russia had repositioned itself strongly in Greater Eurasia by using military force (Tuter, 2023). In terms of military cooperation to keep camp in the region, Russia allocates a strategic focus to Eurasia through the Collective Security Treaty (CSTO).

Russia and China have a common view About the expansion of NATO, which is not to expand US-led NATO towards the East, therefore in 2014 tension increased between Moscow and Kyiv

after the US supported the Orange Revolution in Ukraine to overthrow the Russia-backed government in Ukraine that just tried to keep calm, neutrality and delayed to sign the agreement with the European Union (Maria, 2023).

***Secondly: Russia wanted to Restore its Influence Over Eurasia, so it Started to Reintegrate Former Members of the USSR With Itself***

In this regard, Brzezinski and Mackinder stipulated that one with control over Eurasia dominates the globe (Maria, 2023), and Eurasia is the world's most advanced economic zone (Diate, 2021). Historical experiences also indicate that powerful states often seek access to the sea and control of trade outlets, and according to Spykman's speech; whoever rules Eurasia will control the world (Nicholas , 1939).

***Thirdly: Russia and China with its other Partners are Challenging the Liberal World Order***

The greater Eurasia project, alongside other regional organizations such as SCO and BRISC, seems to turn into a new powerful geopolitical space that could pose a fundamental challenge to the US-led liberal international world order" (Lewis, 2022). Simultaneously China and Russia are the countries that always promote the narrative of a multipolar world to replace it with the US-led liberal world order (Sahakyan, 2022).

Additionally, as we already mentioned, developed countries want to become part of the above organization, that's why they are interested in setting up regional blocs<sup>6</sup> (Kobenko, 2016). Therefore these institutions are better places to enhance their cooperation, in reaction, President Biden said "Do not let the Sino-Russian relationship spread its influence in Europe and Asia", so the current contention among the United States, Russia, and China is to recreate a new multipolar order in Eurasia and the entire world (Sahakyan, 2022).

**The Legal Status of the 1994 Budapest Memorandum**

According to the provision of the 1994 Budapest treaty, Ukraine became a sovereign and independent state (Assembly, 1991), in this memorandum, Russia alongside Britain and the United States committed that if Ukraine gave up its nuclear weapons, in exchange they would provide a security umbrella for Ukraine (Borda, 2022). Furthermore, by signing the Budapest agreement, Ukraine officially joined the NPT treaty and declared to denuclearize its nuclear weapons, which provided a better environment for investing in the peaceful nuclear power industry, taking into account, that the justification behind this decision was to reduce the threat and increase the possibilities for the development of a peaceful nuclear industry in the country (Disinfo, 2021).

The illegal annexation of Crimea and the aggression of Ukraine by Russia marks a violation of the Budapest Memorandum and the international Principe of territorial integrity (Borda, 2022), American analyst David Yost, believes the same, he further adds that such a violation of international law will undermine the credibility of major power for security assurances, and can put a negative impact on the nuclear nonproliferation regime and future disarmament (Simpson, 2022). At the same time, analysts believe that Russia had never violated the Budapest memorandum as these documents do not oblige Russia, and they say that this is just a manifestation

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<sup>6</sup> Russia intends to create projects such as Greater Eurasia, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Eurasian Economic Union, and Association of Southeast Eurasia, to restore its influence through soft power in the countries and to connect East Asia with Near East, [https://ecfr.eu/article/essay\\_eurasian/](https://ecfr.eu/article/essay_eurasian/).

of anti-Russia propaganda (Disinfo, 2021). Russia argues that after 2014, a new state was established through the Orange Revolution, and Russia had not signed any binding document regarding this new state.

On the contrary, Some political analysts believe that in 2002, the United States signed a treaty with Poland and Romania, and installed the anti-ballistic missile system in the mentioned countries (Purple, 2024), by this act the United States walked away from the anti-ballistic missile treaty unilaterally, in response to that President Putin said this is intolerable for us, US unilaterally left a treaty and didn't negotiate with Russia, it marks a violation of the Budapest memorandum (Sachs, 2023). On the other side, Pumping weapons from the West to Ukraine to defend itself against Russia, stressing the military solution, and, more importantly, designing the environment for Ukraine to join NATO are the signals that show the violation of the Budapest agreement (Hafeznia, 2023).

At the same time, a new poll that has been conducted in Germany and France shows that a majority of people agree that the United States and NATO are responsible for starting a war in Ukraine. Remarkably, these polls were conducted by the Anti-corruption Foundation, run by Alexei Navalny, one of the leading critics of Putin (Norton, 2023).

### **The Strategic Importance of Eurasia from a Geopolitics Perspective**

The Heartland Theory and Rim Land Theory are two influential geopolitical theories explaining certain geographical region's strategic importance in global power dynamics. These theories were developed in the early 20th century and have been used to understand power distribution and influence among nations. From the perspective of geopolitics, Eurasia can easily create a balance of power for the benefit or loss of the world's great powers, after the Second World War when Europe was divided, and Great powers turned their attention to this region.

Therefore, traditional and modern geopolitics have paid special attention to the effects of Eurasia on international politics. Halford Makinder posits the key to global dominance lies in controlling the central part of Eurasia, which is roughly the area of modern-day Russia. He stated that the Eurasia region is the axis of world politics. This region has an advantage that naval forces do not have access to it. If any country dominates the region, it will gain world empire. Additionally, arguing that it is the most strategically important region in the world due to its vast resources and central location. Therefore foreign policy of the United States during the Second World War was to prevent the spread of communism and the establishment of Russian military bases in the region. During the cold war his foreign policy focus was on maintaining Eurasia, and after 2009 his entire focus is on the Pacific Ocean and controlling China for this purpose. The United States has created three branches of NATO: the European branch, the Arab branch to protect Israel against its regional enemies and the Asian branch<sup>7</sup>, which controls China.

The United States should adopt a policy that works for its influence in the crescent-type region. Cohen suggests that this vast and strategic area was occupied as a result of conflict between the great powers over their conflicting interests. Based on the above ideas, the great powers and the big industrial countries were in fierce competition with each other in this region until they had

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<sup>7</sup> QAUD or Quadrilateral Security Dialogue Organization, which was created in 2007 in the indo-Pacific Ocean to secure countries around China, [https://www.business-standard.com/about/what-is-quad#goog\\_rewarded](https://www.business-standard.com/about/what-is-quad#goog_rewarded).

many conflicts and created crises among themselves to gain control of this region. Therefore, America cannot remain indifferent to the changes in Eurasia to maintain its high position, fulfill its mission in the international system, and protect its national security and interests. The United States considers Eurasia as an axis to shape a new global system (unrivaled) in the global arena, where some states are at the head of the wicked and notorious states, which are considered to be the heartland (center) of terrorism. The United States competes against national and regional players in the prevention framework (Papava, 2017).

### **The Role of the Black Sea in the Current Russia-Ukraine Conflict**

It should not be forgotten that any analysis of war in Ukraine cannot be analyzed without addressing the role of the black sea (NATO, 2023). From very post time, Hydro politics and access to warm water have had a special place in Russia's foreign policy, as Peter<sup>8</sup> Said, "A ruler who only uses land force he has one hand, but who has a navy, has both", therefore it is been considered Russia's driving factor in building relations with regional and international partners, due to most of the year, Russia's northern sea ports are frozen and it is hard to be used for commercial and military purposes, such condition cut much of its efficiency, so that's why Russia focuses on accessing in southern (black and Caspian Sea) seaports(Sahakyan, 2023).

Considering that Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Georgia, and Turkey are connected to the Mediterranean and the Atlantic Ocean through the black sea, three of the countries (Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey) are members of NATO (Didier, 2017), and recently Ukraine and Georgia shown their willingness to join NATO, that's why officials in Kremlin seen themselves as have been surrounded by this rival defense pact in the black sea, so doing on they decided to take countermeasures to avoid Ukraine from becoming a member of NATO because if Ukraine joins NATO (Mark, 2023), it will cut Russia's access in the black sea, due to vital geostrategic location of this sea, which enable Russia, as only maritime route to international waters, therefore Russia does not want to lose (Mazaheri, 2021).

On the one hand, if the United States strengthens its military presence in the Black Sea, it will create difficulties for Russia to transfer its energy to international consumers through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, additionally, Russia will try to dominate the northern part of the Black Sea, which will allow Russia to free itself from strategic and geopolitical bottlenecks (Emre *et al.*, 2019). On the other hand, having access to the black sea will pave the way for Russia to have the upper hand to use it as a tool of pressure to implement its future plans, which includes preventing the export of energy through the Black Sea to Europe, or at least to raise its cost (Mazaheri, 2021).

### **US Aims and Strategy Toward Eastern European Countries**

The strategy of the United States toward Eastern European countries is to free these countries from Russian influence (Olimat, 2017) to make these countries US satellites, and from the other side to contain Russia, part of the US strategy is to keep Russia busy in a destructive and endless war, which will push Russia back to its previous weak state (Chopra, 2022), and at the same time wants to step-down economy of Russia and China, to achieve this goal they use every possible way to prevent the reunification of China and Russia (Kobenko, 2016).

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<sup>8</sup> Peter the Great, who was a powerful tsar in the history of Russia, <http://www.saint-petersburg.com/royal-family/Peter-the-great/>.

In general Western countries view, Putin as an imperialist, who is committed to erasing Ukraine from the world map<sup>9</sup>, and intends to create a Greater Russia or recreate the Soviet Union with its former members, but some analysts believe that there is no such evidence to support this argument, furthermore, they say that Russia is not in a position to do so, as she does not have the capability to do it. Based on the reasons on the ground, it's quite clear that the West is trying to turn Ukraine into a Western bulwark as an existential threat to Russia (Mearsheimer, 2023).

From a geostrategic point of view, Ukraine's position is an important country for great powers<sup>10</sup>, as a transit hub or gate position between Europe and Asia or a broken state between East and West, where the rivalry and confrontation of great powers could happen (Kobencko, 2016). On the other side, it has a valuable economic and nutritive position, as a grain depot, including the strategic maritime position in the Black Sea and means of controlling Russia by geostrategic value (Afshari, 2022). Generally, the United States has a plan to establish and expand its military presence (NATO) in the region to consolidate its global leadership, therefore it is always defending Ukraine against the interests of Russia (Sedaghati, 2022).

First, the main objective of the US is to expand NATO to the Eastern European countries to develop its bilateral relationship<sup>11</sup> with the US. This aims to cut gas, oil, and raw materials trade with Russia making Europe dependent on US suppliers with much higher prices. Therefore, the geostrategic important position of Eurasia is a driving factor that the US follows, to reduce Russia's economic and political presence in the region (Mankoff, 2016).

Second, the whole idea behind the creation of NATO was to curb any group that would seek independence from the US world order. To accomplish this goal, the US planned to force a military solution in Ukraine to break away from Russia's ability to support China, Iran and Syria and other countries (Micheal, 2023).

Third, from the US/EU perspective, the expansion of NATO to Eastern Europe, means to construct a new gas and oil pipelines around the territory of Russia (Ashimbaev, 2003). Such transit route will be located free from Russia's influence, as the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Yaakov recently said: "The United States and its allies have long used the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline as a tool to put pressure on Moscow" (Hasan Shukohi Nasab, 2022). On the other side, by promoting the narrative of an independent Taiwan, the United States sought to isolate China. As President Biden said "China is the number one enemy of the US". Right now, the US cannot go against China because it already has so much support of Russia and other countries, that's why they should first break away its potential ally in Russia (McDonnell, 2022).

<sup>9</sup> In fact, Ukraine is the first stop on the train line, when Russia is going to moves to other Baltic states like Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and maybe Poland but Putin is an imperialist at heart he's an aggressor who's interested in building an empire, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2022/03/30/why-the-us-and-nato-have-long-wanted-russia-to-attack-Ukraine/>

<sup>10</sup> Such as Russia, the United States, China and the European Union, Turkey, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317806677\\_Ukraine's\\_Geopolitical\\_Position\\_Between\\_East\\_and\\_West](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317806677_Ukraine's_Geopolitical_Position_Between_East_and_West)

<sup>11</sup> United States wants to breakaway Europe's close economic relationship with Russia and China relationship on the mutual economic gain between Germany and other European countries trading and investing with Russia for low-cost raw materials and with china for low manufacturing, <https://ecfr.eu/publication/keeping-america-close-russia-down-and-china-far-away-how-europeans-navigate-a-competitive-world/>.

Fourth, the United States started efforts to implement the idea of a regime change policy in Russia by weakening the economy and position of President Putin through economic sanctions to defeat Russia (Mearsheimer, 2023). Without a doubt, the war in Ukraine had made it clear that the West wants Russians to rise against Putin and apply its regime change policy, to bring another Boris Yeltsin-type Western-oriented president. But the reality has been surprising, because Russian speakers are under attack in Eastern Ukraine. The tendency of population is really behind the leader and so that's why Putin popularity is gone up to 80% much higher than any other American or European leader (Micheal, 2023).

Fifth, to satisfy European nations' energy demands<sup>12</sup>, huge competition in constructing new pipelines in the region is high among great powers. One of these competitors is, the United States trying to find a new gas supplier, which might be an alternative to replace Russia. As we have already mentioned, a substantial amount of gas, which goes from Russia to several European nations and the rest of the world, passes through Ukraine (Chopra, 2022).

Sixth, the number one goal of the US is to cut relations between Russia and Europe<sup>13</sup>, to economically weaken Russia, and to free Europe, and other member countries of the USSR from Russia's influence. Due to the oil and gas operation will become less dependent on Russia's transit routes. On the other side, Russia also wants to search for alternative markets and consistent consumers for its gas and oil sector, due to the sanctions imposed by America and Europe (Olimat, 2017).

Seventh, the long-term military presence of the United States in Afghanistan was to escape the Central Asian countries from Russia's influence by finding alternative ways<sup>14</sup> to deliver oil and gas and open the southern part of central Asia for transportation of energy to international markets (Ashimbaev, 2003). Finally, looking at the points as mentioned above, it is worth mentioning, that supplying energy to Europe is an opportunity for Russia to put pressure on Europe. Therefore, the United States, as a strategic partner of Europe, does not allow Russia to find a strong foothold to undermine their strategic partnership, so she is looking for alternative ways to supply the energy demands of Europe, to put an end to this situation.

### **Implications of this Geopolitical Rivalry to the Eurasia Region**

Eurasia is a key region to understand that Russia is repositioning itself in the region as a global power, therefore assessing the ramifications of geopolitical rivalry for power and influence in Eurasia can be seen as follows:

First, the most obvious implication of this geopolitical rivalry in Eurasia is to end the traditional domination of the US as the only power in the region, and pave the way to multipolarity and democratization of international relations (Kobenko, 2016). This will open the door for external

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<sup>12</sup> 40 % of European countries' oil and gas depends on Russia, a source of the economic growth of Russia and an instrument of pressure on Europe, to get its demands, <https://www.marshallcenter.org/en/publications/occasional-papers/europes-dependence-russian-natural-gas-perspectives-and-recommendations-long-term-strategy-0>.

<sup>13</sup> Nord stream one and Nord stream two, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2022-09-29/sabotage-nord-stream-1-and-nord-stream-2-pipelines>

<sup>14</sup> They designed the TAPI project because the implementation of this and other projects can put economic pressure on Russia. Historically oil and gas pipelines of former USSR countries are shipped from Russian territory to international markets and consumers, so from this point of view, these countries are under Russian influence, <https://jamestown.org/program/revival-of-tapi-pipeline-project-brings-serious-geopolitical-implications-for-russia/>.

players to play a constructive role in the development of this region, following the intensification of sanctions against Russia, the Western world establishes block relations with its allies and Russia with its allies (Chopra, 2022).

Second, considering different countries in the Eurasian region are affected by the current destabilizing situation, these countries depend on Russia's economy. The continuation of the competition between the rival great powers and the sanctions will destroy not only the economy also politics, energy and food security of the region. As some researchers have expressed their deep concerns regards the current instability, which will lead to new direct conflict between Russia and NATO (Bank, 2022). In the last three years, the war destroyed everything in this country, which made it difficult for Ukraine to join NATO in the foreseeable future (Mearsheimer, 2023).

Third, when the war in Ukraine began, one of the biggest concerns<sup>15</sup> of the Eurasian countries was security, so this geopolitical rivalry will intensify the desire for the creation of a new alignment, due to these countries being highly dependent on the West and East (Anderson, 2023). Dispute the fact, that these countries are considered independent, but still do not have enough capabilities to exercise their independent foreign policy, which is a serious challenge to the leadership of these countries as sovereign states (Qaisrani, 2023).

Fourth, there is uncertainty on the war in Ukraine, as nobody can estimate when this war will end. That's why, this will return the region to the battlefield for proxy wars, because none of the countries in the region can remain neutral in this war, due to the need to decide either with the West or Russia (Sahakyan, 2023). as the US already shown its auspices to growth its close political and security relations with the region (Kim, 2021).

Fifth, strategic advantages to the Eastern European countries that are hoping to join NATO is, that they will be saved from Russia's territorial expansionism and restoration of influence, these countries were previously forced to join the "Warsaw Treaty"<sup>16</sup>, therefore, soon after the disintegration of the former Soviet Union, these countries made decisions through the democratic process to voluntarily join NATO (Afshari, 2022).

Sixth, the only country that can benefit from this geopolitical rivalry and sanctions imposed on Russia's energy sector is China. Although European countries were its largest trading partner of Russia before the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, which will soon shift to China, this will take some time; because the Power of Siberia 2 gas pipeline, which is connecting Russia to China is still under construction (IRNA, 2022).

Seventh, the US/NATO has failed to achieve its because most governments disagree with the war and sanctions imposed on Russia by the West. They said they want an end to the war; they want the two sides to negotiate practically speaking China, Brazil, India, South Africa, those countries are major vices for peace and negotiations. These countries should continue to clearly say that their

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<sup>15</sup> The war in Ukraine, which started on February 24, 2022, security was the top concern of the Members of the Russia-led military grouping, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, therefore 141 members of the United Nations including members of the EAEU voted for a measure demanding that Russia withdraw unconditionally, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/369845153\\_Multipolar\\_World\\_Order\\_20\\_and\\_Colliding\\_Interests\\_in\\_Ukraine\\_Russia\\_the\\_EU\\_the\\_US\\_and\\_China](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/369845153_Multipolar_World_Order_20_and_Colliding_Interests_in_Ukraine_Russia_the_EU_the_US_and_China).

<sup>16</sup> Moscow and Beijing also succeeded in establishing international In these new international organizations, Moscow and Beijing unite with their allies and partners and ease tensions between members for creating a new multipolar world order.

vision is not to side with one side or the other side, but to side with negotiation and peace (Sachs, 2023). So what's happened is that instead of NATO breaking up China, Russia, and other countries seeking to pursue their policy, it is driving them all together, the need to protect their economies from the US sanctions and the US plan to break them up, but the United States comes readout says China is our enemy, Russia is our enemy all their allies are our enemy hardly by surprise the enemies get together, so the result is that NATO, instead of isolating the members of BRICS and global majority of Eurasia with global south driven all them together (Micheal, 2023).

### **Russia's Demands from the US and Europe**

Since 1997, most of the Eastern European countries have joined NATO, so Russia always criticizes and opposes the open policy of NATO for accepting new members, furthermore, Russia wants NATO to return to its pre-1997 borders (Putin, 2023). The following are the demands of Russia from the West:

First, a guarantee, perhaps even written in the Ukrainian constitution, that the country does not intend to join NATO in the foreseeable future; NATO security guarantees are a matter of life and death for Russia. Russian Presidential spokesman Dmitry Pskov said, "Providing security guarantees by NATO was a matter of life and death for Russia" (Irna, 2021), Although Russia strongly opposes Ukraine's accession to NATO, Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky is pursuing a specific timetable for joining NATO.

Second, Russia's foreign ministry has reportedly submitted two drafts to Western countries that include conditions for a reduction in border forces with Ukraine. Among the conditions set out in the draft are the restriction of the activities of Eastern European NATO member states and the rejection of Ukraine and Georgia's application for membership in the alliance. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Yaakov insists there is no other option, as the current state of relations between Russia and the West contains complete distrust (Euronews, 2021).

Despite Russia's concerns, NATO emphasizes arms support to Ukraine and says the Western NATO military alliance is defensive. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has said that any NATO support for Ukraine is within this framework (Anderson, 2023). Moscow says the only reason that seems to prevent the war is the continuation of the current balance of power and the avoidance of a military confrontation, which will have unpredictable consequences for Europe (Irib, 2022).

### **CONCLUSION**

After the Second World War, and especially following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the international system was theoretically shaped by liberalism. Liberal theory emphasizes global cooperation, the role of international institutions, and mutual interdependence among states. However, in practice, most members of the international community continue to follow realist principles in their foreign policies.

Realism focuses on the pursuit of national interest, power politics, and security competition. For realism to function as a guiding framework, certain structural conditions must be present. These include the use of international organizations as tools for national interest, possession of military capabilities, and a clear separation between domestic and foreign policy. Additionally, the absence of a centralized global authority, the presence of conflicting interests among states, and the ongoing competition for power and influence are essential elements.

Research shows that at the beginning of the 1990s, the primary strategy of the United States and NATO was to dismantle the Warsaw Pact and expand NATO into Eastern European countries. This marked a shift in the post-Cold War order, with the West seeking to increase its influence in regions formerly aligned with the Soviet Union. During this time, the United States launched several military operations aimed at removing governments that were allied with Russia in different parts of the world. These actions signaled to both the U.S. and its European allies that Russia, weakened after the collapse of the Soviet Union, was not capable of mounting an effective response.

This imbalance of power led to a new geopolitical rivalry between the United States and Russia. The United States aimed to extend its global influence, particularly in Eurasia, in order to consolidate its leadership and contain any potential resurgence of Russian power. America's broader geopolitical objectives included expanding its influence in Europe, maintaining global leadership, and preventing Russia from reemerging as a great power. By doing so, the U.S. sought to manage international politics in a way that favored its own strategic interests. In response, Russia gradually began to rebuild its strength and reassert influence over former Soviet republics. It aimed to restore its regional authority in Eurasia and push back against what it perceived as Western encroachment on its traditional sphere of influence.

On one hand, some military analysts, particularly those who were opponents of NATO, believed that NATO should be disbanded due to the purpose for which NATO was created, disappeared. On the other hand, the United States and their European allies consistently said that the threats such as instability in Eastern Europe, weapons of mass destruction and chemical weapons, terrorism, hegemonic powers like China, and fears of a resurgence of Russia, were not removed, just the nature and quality of threats changed, in this context, it was necessary to respond to these threats, therefore but the United States is entitled to retain NATO to remove the threats, as already mentioned.

Finally, the result of this study showed that NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe led to the crisis in Ukraine, which occurred in several stages after 1990; as a result of geopolitical competition between the United States and Russia, this conflict provoked war unilaterally started by the United States against his own Second World War ally.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The only possible solution to this war is, that the US and its allies should learn and respect the security interest of Russia, recognize the sphere of influence as a great power around its borders, to which Russia is entitled.

The United States should stop the policy of expansion of NATO to Eastern Europe countries and return to the borders before 1997 and Pumping weapons by the West, which is not acceptable to Russia, and stressing the military solution is the worst-case scenario to solve the current conflict, as it marks the break of the Budapest agreement.

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