

# Investigating the Divergence of Strategic Interests in the Russian-Ukrainian Conundrum

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## ABSTRACT

The Russian-Ukraine conundrum represents a complex geopolitical challenge that profoundly impacts the strategic interests of the West and Russia. The Russian-Ukraine conflict presents a complex array of issues and implications that transcend regional boundaries and impact global stability. Hence, this study ascertains the extent of the strategic interest of the West and Russia and how it has resulted the avoidable Russian-Ukraine conundrum. This study presents a systematic review and qualitative study conducted to investigate the complex dynamics of the conflict between the West and Russia in Ukraine. Over a span of six years (2019-2024), articles and journals were meticulously examined using manual thematic analysis to elucidate the problem statement, objectives, methods, findings, implications, and recommendations. The analysis revealed multifaceted factors driving the clash of interests, including geopolitical competition, economic considerations, historical legacies, and ideological contestation. The implications of the conflict for regional stability, international security, and global governance structures were also highlighted. Based on these findings, recommendations are proposed for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners to address the conflict and promote peacebuilding efforts in Eastern Europe. Overall, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the Ukrainian conundrum and underscores the importance of considering various factors in conflict resolution efforts.

**Keywords:** Conundrum, Security, Global Governance, Russian-Ukraine Conflict

## 1.0 Introduction:

The Russian-Ukraine conundrum represents a complex geopolitical challenge that profoundly impacts the strategic interests of the West. At its core, this conflict stems from historical, cultural, and geopolitical factors, with Ukraine's strategic location between Russia and Europe serving as a focal point. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine's independence left unresolved questions about its orientation—whether it would align with the West or maintain closer ties with Russia. This ambiguity laid the groundwork for the current conflict, as competing interests vie for influence over Ukraine's future direction.

One of the prevailing issues in the Russian-Ukraine conundrum is the geopolitical struggle between Russia and the West. Russia sees Ukraine as part of its historical sphere of influence and seeks to maintain

control over its neighbor, while Ukraine aspires for closer integration with Europe and the West. The annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 and the ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine highlight the territorial disputes that remain unresolved, exacerbating tensions between the two nations. Additionally, energy dynamics play a significant role, with Ukraine serving as a crucial transit route for Russian natural gas supplies to Europe, leading to energy disputes that further fuel the conflict. In addition to Russian fear of possible political and trade dominance of the region by Western economic and military forces like NATO, who might use Ukraine as entry point to the bloc.

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There are pointers to this Russian apprehension, for instance, the Ukraine bid for NATO membership has been irritating Russia since the 2008 Bucharest Summit where agreement between NATO Allied countries were reached to admit Ukraine into NATO upon its submission of membership application to the Membership Action Plan (MAP). However, Russia has maintained several attacks against Ukraine aimed at keeping it from submitting the required membership application form as to activate the process. Further, this Bid was reinforced at the 2023 Vilnius Summit, where NATO Allies reaffirmed their commitment to Ukraine membership and even reduced the membership process from two steps to one (NATO Report, 2024). Thus, Ukraine as a strategic member of the international community, is also threat to the Russian pursuit of international political and economic hegemony. This is the heart of the conflict which in 2014 resulted the Russian annexation of Crimea and further plans to weaken Ukraine by supporting separatist elements in various regions of the country in order to break it into smaller powerless units, just as the West did to the old Soviet Union.

Further, it should be noted that after the February 2022 full scale attack of Ukraine by Russia, the Ambassadors of Finland and Sweden to NATO who had previously maintained partnership with NATO out of fear simultaneously submitted their letters of applications for membership. The membership processes have been concluded and by 4<sup>th</sup> April, 2024 Finland was pronounced full member. Previously, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 2024, Sweden became a full member (NATO Report, 2024). Consequently, these facts attest to the global impacts of the Russia-Ukraine Conundrum.

The consequences of the Russian-Ukraine conflict reverberate globally, affecting European unity, energy security, and global stability. European countries, in coordination with the United States, have imposed sanctions on Russia in response to its aggression in Ukraine, demonstrating a unified stance against Moscow. Efforts to diversify energy sources in Europe have gained momentum, reducing dependency on Russian gas and promoting renewable energy alternatives. However, the conflict has also disrupted trade and investment flows, particularly in Eastern Europe, leading to economic contraction and humanitarian challenges in affected regions.

The foregoing has produced a global economic downturn as Ukraine is known to be a major producer of grains and industrial hardware which are supplied world-wide. With its workforce conscripted into the military, production capacity has dropped and thus

resulting global rising costs. On the Russian side, the sanctions have affected their economic vibrancy in terms of reduced oil and gas shipment to other parts of Europe and the world at large. In order to balance this trade deficit, within the past two years, Russia has increased its economic interest in Africa where it has been selling all forms of *protection diplomacy* (Antwi-Boasiako, 2022).

Under this form of protectionist pseudo-colonialization strategy, State sponsored Russian military contractors and conflict mercenaries like the Wagner group have been positioned in conflict thorn areas in Africa and Middle East that possess heavy concentration of commercial solid minerals resources. Thus, in the bid to provide protection to government, they exploit these resources in exchange. The colonial-like exploitation of these resources, further creates jobs and wealth for the Russians and this keeps them stable and busy as to continue to support President Putin, whom according to United States Secretary of Defence, Lloyd J. Austin III is fighting “a war of choice” (NATO Report, 2024). Thus the economic implication of Russia participation in these conflict regions over the years have left these African countries more impoverished than when Russia intervened (Siegle, 2021 and Marten, 2019).

The conflict's humanitarian fallout cannot be overstated, with thousands dead, millions displaced, and widespread devastation in Eastern Ukraine. The ongoing displacement, infrastructural damage, and socio-economic disruptions require sustained international assistance and reconstruction efforts. Moreover, the conflict has raised concerns about the erosion of international norms and the resurgence of great power competition, impacting global security dynamics. Beyond Europe, the conflict has implications for regions such as Africa, as noted by scholars like Madziba (2023), who discuss unintended collateral victimization due to the Russia-Ukraine war.

The clash of interests between the West and Russia in the context of the Ukrainian conundrum is a pivotal geopolitical issue with far-reaching implications. This conflict arises from historical, cultural, and strategic factors, reflecting a struggle for influence over Ukraine's future orientation. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine's independence left it at a crossroads, torn between alignment with the West or maintaining close ties with Russia. The annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 and the subsequent conflict in Eastern Ukraine have exacerbated tensions, highlighting the divergent aspirations of Ukraine and the strategic interests of the West and Russia.

The West, particularly the European Union and the United States, seeks to uphold Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, viewing the country's alignment with Western institutions as crucial for regional stability. Sanctions imposed by the West on Russia in response to its actions in Ukraine demonstrate a commitment to defending international norms and deterring further aggression. Moreover, the West aims to support Ukraine's democratic reforms and economic development, offering assistance and diplomatic backing to counter Russian influence. However, Russia perceives Western involvement in Ukraine as a threat to its own security and interests, leading to a clash of agendas and geopolitical maneuvering in the region.

The consequences of this clash of interests are profound, affecting not only Ukraine but also broader European security and global stability. The conflict has spurred efforts to diversify energy sources in Europe, reducing dependency on Russian gas and promoting renewable energy alternatives. Moreover, the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Eastern Ukraine underscores the human toll of geopolitical rivalries, with thousands dead, millions displaced, and widespread devastation. As tensions persist, the Ukrainian conundrum remains a focal point of contention between the West and Russia, shaping the strategic landscape of Eurasia and beyond.

Specifically, the Russian-Ukraine conundrum is a multifaceted challenge that shapes the strategic interests of the West and has far-reaching consequences for global stability. Addressing this conflict requires concerted diplomatic efforts, support for Ukraine's sovereignty, and a commitment to upholding international norms and principles of territorial integrity. The ongoing conflict underscores the importance of dialogue, cooperation, and conflict resolution mechanisms in managing geopolitical tensions and promoting peace and stability in the region and beyond.

### 1.1 Problem Statement

The prevailing problem statement surrounding the Russian-Ukraine conflict encompasses a multitude of interconnected issues and implications that extend beyond regional boundaries. At its core, the conflict stems from geopolitical rivalries, historical grievances, and divergent aspirations of the involved parties. For instance, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia has not only violated international norms but has also exacerbated tensions between the West and Russia, leading to a broader geopolitical standoff. This conflict has polarized regional dynamics, with Ukraine caught in the crossfire of competing interests,

as highlighted by Ishchenko (2023) in their study on the 'East/West' divide within Ukraine.

One of the prominent issues arising from the Russian-Ukraine conflict is its devastating economic impact, particularly on agricultural sectors and food security. The disruption of supply chains and trade routes has led to food grain shortages and economic hardships, as evidenced by Ali *et al.* (2023) in their comprehensive analysis of food grain shortages and economic impacts. Moreover, the conflict has created a humanitarian crisis, with millions displaced and infrastructure devastated, further exacerbating socio-economic challenges in affected regions. This has not only strained local economies but has also resulted in unintended collateral victimization, as observed by Madziba (2023) in the context of Africa.

Furthermore, the Russian-Ukraine conflict has geopolitical implications that reverberate globally, affecting security dynamics and strategic interests beyond the immediate region. For instance, the conflict has prompted shifts in foreign policy behavior, as seen in Nepal's response to great power politics, as analyzed by Bhattarai and Pulami (2022). Additionally, the conflict has implications for energy security and nuclear proliferation, as discussed by Vajriyati *et al.* (2022), highlighting the broader ramifications of regional conflicts on global security. The clash of national interests and the resurgence of realism in international relations, as noted by Oyosoro and Bassey (2023), further complicates efforts to resolve the conflict and mitigate its consequences.

Basically, the Russian-Ukraine conflict presents a complex array of issues and implications that transcend regional boundaries and impact global stability. From economic disruptions to humanitarian crises and geopolitical rivalries, the conflict underscores the interconnectedness of contemporary security challenges. Addressing the underlying causes and finding sustainable solutions to the conflict require concerted diplomatic efforts, adherence to international norms, and a commitment to promoting peace and stability in the region and beyond.

### 1.2 Research Questions

Based on the problem statement, the following research questions are formulated to guide this study:

How do the strategic interests of the West align or diverge from those of Russia in the context of the Ukrainian conflict?

What are the key geopolitical, economic, and security factors driving the clash of interests between the West and Russia regarding Ukraine?

### 1.3 Research Objectives

- i. To assess how the strategic interests of the West align or diverge from those of Russia in the context of the Ukrainian conflict;
- ii. To identify the key geopolitical, economic, and security factors driving the clash of interests between the West and Russia regarding Ukraine;
- iii. To assess the historical, cultural, and ideological factors that contribute to the divergence in interests between the West and Russia in the Ukrainian conundrum; and
- iv. To ascertain the implications of the clash of interests between the West and Russia in Ukraine for regional stability, international security, and global governance structures.

### 1.4 Significance/Justification of The Study

The significance of studying the clash of interests between the West and the Russian-Ukraine conundrum lies in its profound implications for regional stability, international relations, and global security. Stakeholders such as policymakers, diplomats, and analysts stand to benefit from a deeper understanding of the underlying factors driving this conflict, enabling more informed decision-making and strategic interventions. By unraveling the complexities of the clash of interests, this study can contribute to efforts aimed at conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and fostering cooperative relationships among stakeholders. Moreover, the study holds relevance for scholars and researchers in the fields of international politics and diplomatic relations, geopolitics, and security studies, providing insights into the dynamics of contemporary conflicts and their wider ramifications.

### 1.5 Scope of The Study

The scope of this study encompasses a systematic review of literature published between 2019 and 2024, drawing upon qualitative analysis of articles and journals to explore the multifaceted dimensions of the Russian-Ukraine conundrum. By focusing on recent scholarly contributions, this study aims to capture the evolving nature of the conflict and its implications over time. Qualitative data collected from diverse sources will facilitate a comprehensive analysis of the clash of interests between the West and Russia, shedding light on its drivers, consequences, and potential pathways for resolution. Through this approach, the study seeks to offer valuable insights into the complexities of geopolitical rivalries and their impact on regional and global dynamics.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Russian-Ukraine Conundrum

The Russian-Ukraine conundrum refers to the ongoing conflict and tensions between Russia and Ukraine, characterized by historical, cultural, and geopolitical complexities. One of the central issues revolves around the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, particularly following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. This annexation, widely condemned by the international community as a violation of Ukraine's sovereignty, has fuelled ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine, where pro-Russian separatist forces continue to clash with Ukrainian government troops. According to Matveeva (2022), the conflict in the Donbas region of Eastern Ukraine has resulted in significant casualties, displacements, and infrastructural damage, exacerbating human suffering and deepening regional divides.

Moreover, the Russian-Ukraine conundrum has broader implications for regional stability, European security, and global geopolitics. The conflict has strained relations between Russia and Western countries, leading to sanctions, diplomatic tensions, and military posturing. For instance, the European Union and the United States have imposed economic sanctions on Russia in response to its actions in Ukraine, impacting trade relations and geopolitical alliances. Additionally, the conflict has sparked debates about NATO's role in Eastern Europe, with member states bolstering defenses and conducting military exercises in the region to deter further Russian aggression. As noted by Yıldız (2023), the conflict has also raised questions about the future of the European security architecture, highlighting the need for diplomatic solutions and multilateral cooperation to address the underlying grievances and achieve lasting peace in the region.

### 2.2 Russian-Ukraine Conundrum: A Myth or Fact

The conundrum surrounding the relationship between Russia and Ukraine is not a myth but a complex geopolitical reality with profound implications. The Russian invasion of Ukraine, which began in 2014, has triggered a myriad of consequences across various domains including politics, economics, and security. This invasion has been extensively studied and analyzed, with scholars like Ádám (2023) highlighting how it has impacted right-wing populism in Europe. Moreover, the conflict has exacerbated tensions not only between Russia and Ukraine but also among other global powers, as evidenced by the study conducted by Kozyrev (2024) on the war's impact on the US perspective of Europe. Additionally, the war has resulted in significant

economic repercussions, particularly in terms of food grain shortages and devastating economic impacts on agriculture, as discussed by Ali *et al.* (2023).

Furthermore, the Russo-Ukrainian conflict has reverberated beyond the immediate region, affecting countries as far as Africa, as pointed out by Madziba (2023), who identifies Africa as an unintended collateral victim of the war. The conflict has also raised ethical questions about its impact on states like Nigeria, as explored by Olorunsola *et al.* (2023). Moreover, the conflict has triggered discussions on security dilemmas and economic impacts, extending to regions such as Central Asia, as analyzed by Siddiqui and Din (2023). Hence, it's evident that the Russo-Ukrainian conundrum is not a myth but a multifaceted reality with far-reaching implications that transcend national boundaries and impact various aspects of global affairs.

### 2.3 Causes of Russian-Ukraine Conundrum

The causes of the Russo-Ukrainian conundrum are multifaceted and deeply rooted in historical, cultural, political, and economic factors. One of the primary causes is the historical legacy of the Soviet Union, where Ukraine was a significant component. The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 left Ukraine in a precarious position, struggling to assert its independence while facing pressure from Russia, which viewed Ukraine as part of its sphere of influence. This historical context laid the groundwork for tensions between the two countries, as Russia sought to maintain its influence in the region, as discussed by Matveeva (2022).

Moreover, the issue of identity and language has played a crucial role in exacerbating tensions between Russia and Ukraine. Ukraine's efforts to assert its national identity, particularly through promotion of the Ukrainian language and culture, have been met with resistance from segments of the population with ties to Russia. This linguistic and cultural divide has been exploited by political actors in both countries to further their agendas, thus, contributing to the escalation of conflict. The annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, for example, was partly motivated by concerns over the status of Russian speakers in the region, as analysed by Kuzio (2018).

Furthermore, geopolitical considerations, particularly Russia's strategic interests in maintaining control over key territories and access to resources, have played a significant role in driving the Russo-Ukrainian conundrum. Ukraine's strategic location, as well as its vast natural resources, make it a crucial battleground in the struggle for influence between Russia and the West. The desire to assert dominance in the region and prevent Ukraine from aligning with Western

institutions such as NATO and the European Union has fuelled Russia's aggressive actions, including military intervention in Eastern Ukraine. This geopolitical dimension has complicated efforts to resolve the conflict and has led to continued instability in the region, as discussed by Yıldız (2023).

### 2.4 Western Interests in the Russian-Ukraine Conundrum

The Russo-Ukrainian conundrum has sparked significant interest and involvement from Western countries, primarily driven by strategic, political, and economic considerations. One of the key interests for Western nations, particularly the United States and European Union member states, is upholding the principles of international law and sovereignty. The annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 was widely condemned by the West as a violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty, leading to the imposition of sanctions against Russia. This response underscores the Western commitment to defending the rules-based international order and deterring further aggression in the region, as highlighted by Ramos *et al.* (2023). Additionally, Western countries have a vested interest in promoting stability and security in Eastern Europe, which is crucial for regional and global security. The Russo-Ukrainian conflict has the potential to destabilize the entire region, leading to increased tensions and the risk of further military escalation. Western support for Ukraine, both diplomatically and militarily, is aimed at bolstering its ability to defend itself against Russian aggression and maintain stability in the region. For example, the United States has provided military assistance to Ukraine, including weapons and training, to help strengthen its defense capabilities, as discussed by Kozyrev (2024).

Moreover, Western countries also have economic interests in the resolution of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, particularly regarding energy security and trade. Ukraine is a crucial transit country for natural gas supplies from Russia to Europe, and any disruption to the flow of energy through Ukraine could have significant economic consequences for European countries. Therefore, Western nations have a stake in ensuring the peaceful resolution of the conflict to avoid disruptions to energy supplies and maintain stability in the region. This economic dimension further underscores the importance of Western involvement in efforts to address the Russo-Ukrainian conundrum, as analyzed by Albatayneh (2023).

## 2.5 Theoretical Review

The theories used for this study provide valuable frameworks for understanding the motivations and actions of Western countries in response to the Russo-Ukraine conundrum, highlighting the complex interplay of power dynamics, democratic norms, and international stability. In the context of the strategic interests of the West and the Russo-Ukraine conundrum, two salient specific theories that can be applied are Balance of Power theory and Democratic Peace theory.

### 2.5.1 Balance of Power Theory

The Balance of Power theory, first proposed by European political philosophers such as Niccolò Machiavelli in the 16th century, posits that stability in international relations is maintained when power is distributed among multiple states rather than concentrated in one dominant power. According to this theory, states seek to maintain or restore a balance of power by forming alliances, engaging in military buildups, or intervening in conflicts to prevent any single state from becoming too dominant.

In the context of the Russo-Ukraine conundrum, Western countries, led by the United States and supported by NATO, have sought to uphold the balance of power in Eastern Europe by supporting Ukraine against Russian aggression. For example, NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe and the provision of military assistance to Ukraine can be seen as efforts to counterbalance Russia's influence in the region.

### 2.5.2 Democratic Peace Theory

Democratic Peace theory, popularized by scholars such as Immanuel Kant and Michael Doyle, argues that democracies are less likely to go to war with one another and are more inclined towards peaceful conflict resolution. This theory is based on the assumption that democratic governments are accountable to their citizens, have peaceful mechanisms for resolving disputes, and share common values and norms that promote cooperation and peaceful coexistence.

In the context of the Russo-Ukraine conundrum, Western countries, which are predominantly democratic, have shown solidarity with Ukraine and have condemned Russia's annexation of Crimea and intervention in Eastern Ukraine. The support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity can be viewed through the lens of Democratic Peace theory, as Western democracies seek to uphold democratic norms and prevent authoritarian aggression in the region.

### 2.5.3 Power Transition Theory

Power Transition theory, proposed by A.F.K. Organski and elaborated upon by others like G. Modelski, suggests that wars are more likely to occur during periods of power transition, when the international system is undergoing a shift in the distribution of power between dominant and rising states. According to this theory, rising powers often challenge the dominance of established powers, leading to power struggles and conflict. In the context of the Russo-Ukraine conundrum, Russia's assertive actions in Eastern Europe can be seen as attempts to assert its influence and challenge the existing power structure dominated by Western countries. Western responses, including economic sanctions and diplomatic pressure, can be understood as efforts to manage and mitigate the risks associated with power transition in the region.

## 2.6 Interrogation of the Strategic Interests of the West and Russia in the War in Ukraine

### 2.6.1 Western Interests in the Russia-Ukraine War

The war in Ukraine has been shown to exceed the rhetoric of mere conflicts which resulted from interference of geopolitical interests of the main actors- Russia and Ukraine. Accordingly, Mefford (2023) made an observation of Ukraine proceeding with the war under a sense of "cautious optimism". However, Kuzio (2023) pointed that the military and economic assistance from the United States of America and NATO has been the major sustaining force for Ukraine, which has prevented it from surrender. In this light, Kuzio (2023) further pointed that although the West have invested heavily in supporting Ukraine to defend itself, it has done so with anticipation of certain benefits which significantly accentuate their interests. These benefits are as follows:

- i. It serves the interest of USA and its NATO allies to use the Russia-Ukraine war to destroy Russia's military potentials and capability; thereby removing Russia from international world power politics. When they have succeeded, it will allow USA and its NATO allies to concentrate on further weakening of China, North Korea and Iran. Consequently, Kuzio (2023) further pointed that in the early days of Joe Biden's presidency he had indicated an interest '...that the US should "park Russia" in order to concentrate on the far more serious foreign policy challenge posed by Beijing'. This Russia-Ukraine conundrum is the singular means of achieving that ambition. Thus, as Kuzio pointed, this fact is the core interest of the United States of America and its NATO allies in the Russia-Ukraine war. It was a trap that Russia fell

into, and has mainly maintained its attacks on civilian structures, while Ukraine under the guidance of the USA and its NATO allies have maintained strategic attacks at Russian critical national economic assets and core security backbone such as refineries, oil fields and strategic military bases.

- ii. A defeat of Russia in Ukraine would downgrade Russia's military capability and reduce it from the ranks of the world's superpowers. And due to the infrastructural devastations, Russia would be left with no choice than rebuild its national assets which would take a long time and would definitely impact on Russia's ability to voice its position in international affairs. Thus, by tacitly supporting Ukraine, United States and the West are well intentioned to reduced Russia's military capabilities without infringing on any international conventions or deployment of their own military personnel or sustaining casualties for their soldiers.
- iii. The support for Ukraine will in the future strategically make the West not to bother with a weakened Russia; this enhances the planning of its foreign policy. In this regard, Kuzio (2023) further pointed that the observation of former US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, is crucial. In her view, "The way to avoid confrontation with Russia in the future is to help Ukraine push back the invader now. This is the lesson of history that should guide us, and it lends urgency to the actions that must be taken, before it is too late." Thus, a militarily weakened Russia, connotes a peace of mind for the United States of America and its NATO allies.
- iv. It serves the interest of the West to keep Russia weakened. This is because a win for Russia in the Ukraine war will embolden Russia to carry on more attacks on NATO members within the Baltic region; such NATO members as Poland and Finland would be destabilized.
- v. Western support for the war in Ukraine is to maintain the "liberal international order." As opined by Shifrinson (2022), by using Ukraine to push Russia back, the liberal international order would imply making Vladimir Putin and the rest of the Russian Republic pay the price for bad behavior as to deter them or any other dictator in the future.
- vi. The United States and its NATO allies understand that Putin is driving an expansionist agenda which aims at forcefully reintegrating all the breakaway countries of the former Soviet Union. This move is detrimental to the global interests of the United States and its NATO allies and as such, Ukraine must be supported to stop Russia.
- vii. Ukraine's proximity to Western Europe makes the conflict a matter of European security. The West seeks to prevent further territorial disintegration because of its dare security and economic implications. It thus wants to ensure that the sovereignty of neighboring countries is maintained.
- viii. Ukraine serves as a transit country for Russian natural gas supplies to Europe. Ensuring Ukraine's stability prevents disruptions in energy flows and reduces Europe's dependence on Russian gas. This means that the West aims to limit Russia's influence over European energy markets and thus, diversify the sources of energy.
- ix. Supporting Ukraine aligns with Western values of democracy, human rights, and territorial integrity. The West seeks to prevent the erosion of democratic norms and uphold the principles of international law. Hence, backing Ukraine sends a message that aggression and territorial annexation are unacceptable in the 21st century.
- x. The West aims to prevent Russia from further expanding its sphere of economic and military influence. A stable and independent Ukraine acts as a buffer against Russian territorial ambitions in respect of economic might in Europe. The conflict in Ukraine is part of a broader struggle between democratic and autocratic systems, with implications beyond the region.
- xi. There are also speculations that the war is fuelled by the need for weapon manufacturers to reduce their stockpiles of weapon as evidence show that some of the weapons sent by the USA and its NATO allies to Ukraine are almost 30 years old and are still very efficient, although they had never been deployed or used (Mefford, 2023); so the need to evacuate these weapons that are becoming obsolete is a core reason for the escalation of the war.
- xii. The cost of reconstruction of a destroyed Ukraine is a possible reason for the sustained aggression. Goldman (2023), pointed that the war will provide development partners a reconstruction and investment opportunities that would cost Ukraine over one trillion dollars. This means that this huge cost that will run for several years and keep Ukraine in a financial bondage is a likely root of the escalated war. The reconstruction effort will make every Ukrainian a debtor for a long time.

- xiii. The supply of weapons is from defense manufacturing contractors who are based in these countries where Ukraine is sourcing for military assistance. The implication is that these weapon suppliers/ contractors will ensure that their businesses continue to flow and flourish, thereby encouraging the escalation of the war.

### 2.6.2 Russia Interests in the Russia-Ukraine Conundrum

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February, 2022 has ignited one of the bloodiest conflicts in Europe since World War II. Hence, understanding Russia's motivations and objectives in this war is crucial for comprehending the dynamics of the conflict and why it is staying beyond Russia's original plans. In view of the foregoing, Russia's strategic interest and objectives could be seen as follows:

- i. **Russia's interest could be said to be reminiscing of their past glories in the present, while anticipating a future that looks like their past. In this vein,** Russia's interests are multifaceted and often representative and conflated with those of its leader and elites. It therefore implies that the current conundrum is Russia's attempt at recolonizing Ukraine and through it reacquire the remaining breakaway republics, having re-acquired Crimea in 2014 and has sustained a war with Ukraine since that time for acquisition of more Ukrainian territories.
- ii. **Russia seeks to use the conundrum to re-lunch itself as a superpower. This means the war is Russia's way of seeking** to reclaim or reassert its status as a global superpower. From the outset, the invasion of Ukraine is framed as a "special operation" to achieve Ukraine's "demilitarization and denazification." (Damjanovic and Bozin, 2022). However, in reality, the war is an intention to overthrow the Ukrainian government, which Putin perceives as having led Ukraine toward Western liberalism and socioeconomic crisis that has also affected Russian interests.
- iii. Russia's orchestrated efforts at **reconstructing Ukrainian history and identity is a major interest in the this 'war of choice'. Thus,** Russia aims to reshape Ukrainian identity, by forcefully linking it inexorably with Russian identity, and by this falsehood, maintain the Putin's ideology of 'one people'. It should be pointed as observed by Holder (2024), that "there is ample evidence that eradicating all traces of Ukrainian identity remains a core Russian war aim". Interestingly, this historical revisionism serves its broader geopolitical goals for Russia. In this vein, Holder affirmed that "there is ample evidence that eradicating all traces of Ukrainian identity remains a core Russian war aim". Further, according to Holder (2024), Alexandra Xanthaki a UN rapporteur who spoke to *the New York Times* in December 2022, pointed that Russian target is not simply to capture Ukrainian territory, but to accomplish the full but gradual demolition of Ukraine's cultural life. She concluded by saying "One of the justifications of the war is that Ukrainians don't have a distinct cultural identity,".
- iv. **The Russia is using the war to demonstrate its willingness to use military force in order to achieve its objectives. This thus account for its incessant use of military force against Ukraine and** the deliberate destruction of Ukrainian cities and civilian casualties underscore this show of its military might.
- v. **Russia has geopolitical economic interest and want to use the war to achieve, expand or influence** it. Thus under the Soviet Union, the Black Sea region which included Crimea provided access to many opportunities including access to warm water ports. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 allowed Russia to secure its naval base in Sevastopol, which is strategically important for its Black Sea Fleet. The war is therefore intended to expand these geopolitical and military opportunities and Ukraine is a significant neighbor, and controlling parts of its territory allows Russia to project power in the region.
- vi. **Russia is concerned about the security of its interests in the region; thus, Russia** views Ukraine as a buffer zone between itself and NATO. This means that enlargement of NATO closer to Russia's borders is perceived as a security threat. In this regard, by destabilizing Ukraine, Russia aims to prevent its full integration into Western institutions like EU and NATO. Further, maintaining a military presence or foothold in eastern Ukraine allows Russia to exert pressure on Kyiv and influence Ukrainian politics.
- vii. The regional economic interest of Russia is crucial to its survival and parts of Ukraine forms the energy transit routes to convey Russia's natural gas supply to Europe. Thus, by controlling parts of Ukraine, Russia can influence energy transit routes and maintain leverage over European energy security.
- viii. Further, Ukraine has economic ties with Russia, including trade and investments in many areas of both economies. This means that ensuring favourable economic conditions in Ukraine benefits Russian businesses and industries.



- ix. **Studies have shown that there are problems in Russian domestic politics, the continuation of this war will** divert attention from internal problems within Russia. It allows the government to focus public sentiment on external enemies rather than addressing domestic challenges. In addition, a strong stance on Ukraine enhances President Vladimir Putin's image as a defender of Russian interests and bolsters his popularity in the face of daring internal opposition forces.
- x. Since, Ukraine believes that being a member of the EU and NATO serves its national interests, Russia sees that as a threat to its position. In this vein, Damjanovic and Bozin (2022) pointed that after the pro-Russian government was removed, Ukraine made a significant strategic move towards the West by signing its membership agreement of EU in 2014 and making efforts to join NATO. These acts have increased Russia's apprehension and as such, Ukraine is currently facing an existential threat from Russia.
- xi. Russia intends to use the aggression against Ukraine to achieve its *multipolar world order* as opposed to USA and NATO subscribed *unipolar world order*. It should be noted while USA maintains its stand on unipolar world order where it leads NATO members, Russia on the other hand believes that a *multipolar world order* where power and influence are distributed among several major players rather than being dominated by a single superpower is necessary for modern international relations. In this context, it means that multiple countries or regions have significant roles in shaping global affairs, and no single nation holds unrivalled supremacy. In the views of Pazzanese (2022), the final result of this multipolar world ideology which has partly resulted this conundrum will make Russia a pariah state like North Korea and the 30 years of inclusion in world trading relationships would have been wiped away.
- xii. Russia has used its strategic oil and gas production capacity as a leverage to determine the direction of energy security of the countries they supply in Europe. They therefore intend to use this war as a means of strengthening their energy diplomacy in terms of using these resources as a placard to obtain support. In this regard, Chaousovsky (2022) re-echoed Preident Zelenskiy's call for increased energy supply participation from the Qatar's Doha Forum of oil and gas producers. In Zelenskiy's view, this move will checkmate Russia's control antics and create a sense of energy supply balance security in Europe.
- xiii. Conclusively, Russia's strategic interests in the Russian-Ukraine war extend beyond mere territorial gains. They involve historical narratives, geopolitical aspirations, and the desire to assert dominance. Balancing military force with international relations remains a delicate challenge. It is therefore essential to recognize that these interests are complex and interconnected. The conflict impacts on regional stability, international relations and the lives of civilians caught in the crossfire.

## 2.7 Research Gaps

Despite extensive research on the strategic interests of the West and the Russo-Ukraine conundrum, several research gaps remain. One significant gap lies in the exploration of the long-term implications of the conflict on regional stability and global security dynamics. While existing studies have analysed the immediate consequences of the conflict, such as economic sanctions and military interventions, further research is needed to assess the enduring impact of the conflict on the geopolitical landscape of Eastern Europe and beyond.

Additionally, there is a need for more in-depth analysis of the role of non-state actors, such as transnational corporations and non-governmental organizations, in shaping the outcomes of the conflict and influencing Western policy responses. Furthermore, there is a lack of research on the perspectives and experiences of ordinary citizens in Western countries who are directly impacted by the conflict, highlighting the need for more research that incorporates diverse voices and perspectives to inform policy decisions and promote peacebuilding efforts.

## 3.0 Methods and Materials

In the research approach and design section, the study adopts a combination of inductive reasoning and interpretivism philosophy, which is well-suited for exploring complex human behaviors and perceptions related to strategic interest of the West and the Russian-Ukraine conundrum. Utilizing a secondary data approach aligns with the focus on existing data, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of strategic interest of the West and the Russian-Ukraine conundrum engagement trends. Archival research methodology is employed, involving the examination of historical documents, journals, and data sources to understand trends and patterns in the strategic interest of the West and the Russian-Ukraine Conundrum. This method enables the researcher to uncover valuable insights not readily accessible through other means, contributing to a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

For data description and sources, the study conducted an in-depth analysis of secondary data sources spanning from 2012 to 2023, including company reports, surveys, and academic research. The rigorous selection criteria ensure that materials directly discussing connections between strategic interest of the West and the Russian-Ukraine Conundrum, and international corporations receive attention, enhancing the validity of the findings. Exclusion criteria are applied to filter out sources lacking relevance or methodological robustness, maintaining the study's rigor and integrity. Adherence to PRISMA standards enhances transparency and methodological rigor, providing a structured framework for conducting systematic reviews of the literature, thereby ensuring the validity and replicability of the

research findings while offering guidance for future researchers.

### 3.1 Search Strategy

A comprehensive review searched through electronic databases using keywords to find relevant literature on the topic, following the method of Kitchenham (2007) and Atkinson and Cipriani (2018). The search covered the period from 2019 to 2024 and included sources such as journals, government publications, and highly relevant websites from journal database such as: Google Scholar, DOAJ, Inderscience, Taylor and Francis, Scopus, etc. to reflect assess to strategic interest of the West and the Russian-Ukraine Conundrum as shown in the table below. The review used a systematic approach to select the publications that met the inclusion criteria (See Table 1).

**Table 1: A 11-Year Search**

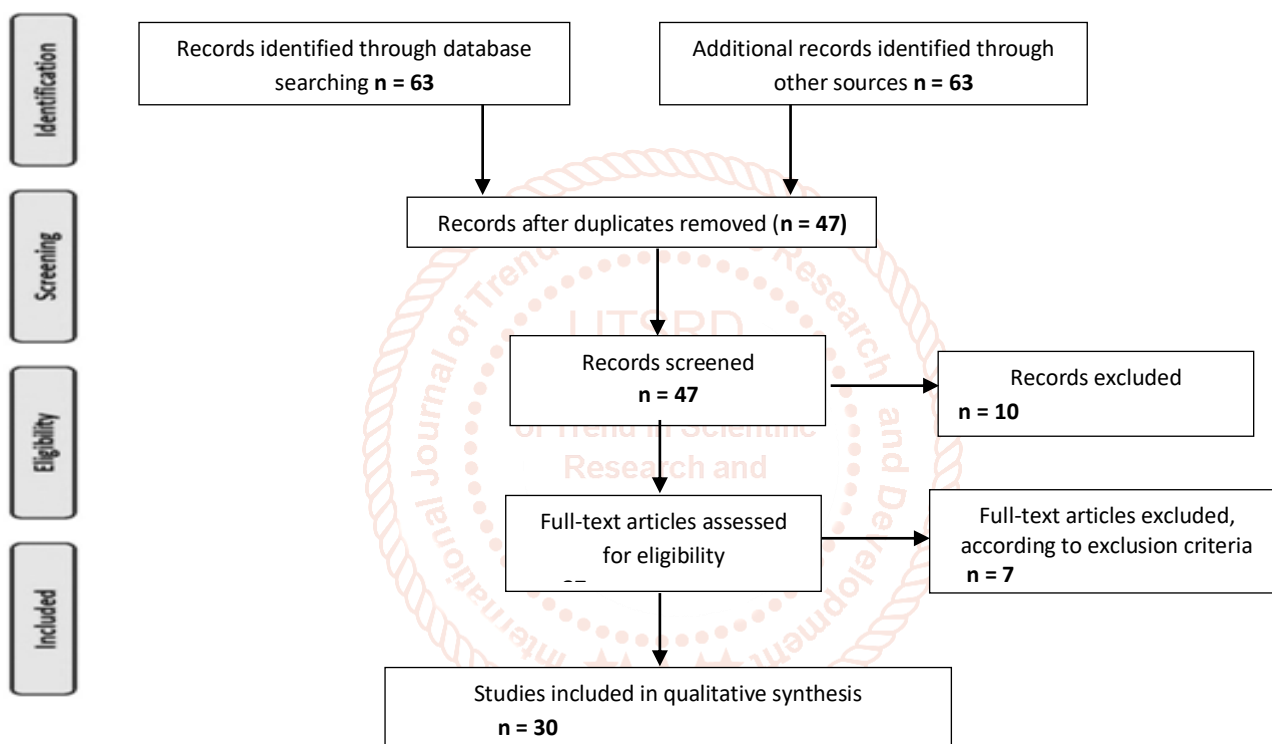
Year under review	2019 -2024
Search Terms	These terms are used in combination using Boolean operators (AND, OR) to create search strings for databases like Google Scholar, DOAJ, Inderscience, Taylor and Francis, Scopus. The search strategy was adjusted based on the specific requirements of each database and the focus of the study. This search term encompasses the key elements of interest: strategic interest of the West and the Russian-Ukraine Conundrum. Researchers can utilize this term to identify relevant literature, studies, and articles that examine: Western strategic interests Ukraine conflict; NATO response Russo-Ukraine conflict; European Union stance Russian-Ukraine conflict; US foreign policy Ukraine crisis; Western military assistance Ukraine and Geopolitical implications Russo-Ukraine conflict. By employing this search term, researchers can access valuable insights and empirical evidence to inform their conceptual framework and study design in investigating the strategic interest of the West and the Russian-Ukraine Conundrum
Sample Journals	<i>Energy Exploration &amp; Exploitation</i> <i>Nepal Public Policy Review</i> <i>European Societies</i> <i>Southern African Journal of Security</i> <i>RUDN Journal of Political Science</i> <i>European Politics and Society</i> <i>Tourism Review</i> <i>Journal of Advanced Education and Sciences</i> <i>International Journal of Politics and Security</i> <i>Desafíos</i> <i>Insights of Pakistan, Iran and the Caucasus Studies</i> <i>Journal of Social Political Sciences</i> <i>East/West</i>
Database	Google Scholar, DOAJ, Inderscience, Taylor and Francis, Scopus

The study initially identified 71 articles related to the relationship between human resource analytics dimensions and employees' engagement, but after applying inclusion/exclusion criteria, 28 articles were excluded. After further filtering and skimming the full contents, and about 43 relevant articles were retained for review on the assessment of the strategic interest of the West and the Russian-Ukraine Conundrum.

**Table 2: A 11-Year Assessment Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Studies published between the period of 2019–2024	Studied outside the domain of the strategic interest of the West and the Russian-Ukraine Conundrum
Studied within the domain of the strategic interest of the West and the Russian-Ukraine Conundrum	No full-length peer reviewed studies
Full-length peer reviewed studies	Not published in the English language
Published in the English language	Duplicated
Available in selected electronic databases	

The systematic review flow diagram, based on PRISMA guidelines, will display the number of records identified and included as depicted in Fig 1 below.



**Fig 1: Systematic review flow diagram based on PRISMA guidelines**

Only journals that are indexed in respected database such as Google Scholar, DOAJ, Inderscience, Taylor and Francis, and Scopus were selected for this study as demonstrated in Table 3:

**Table 3: No of Selected Publications**

SN	Publisher(s)	No of Papers Assessed for Eligibility [N=71]	No of Papers Selected for Qualitative Synthesis [N=43]
1	Google Scholar	17	17
2	DOAJ	12	5
3	Inderscience	6	2
4	Scopus	10	4
5	Taylor & Francis	8	3
6	Springer Nature	7	2
7	International News Items/ Information	10	10
<b>Total</b>		<b>71</b>	<b>43</b>

#### 4. Analysis of Research Questions

Two research questions were established to guide this study, delineating the scope of inquiry and objectives. These questions serve as focal points for investigating various dimensions of the strategic interest of the West in the Russian-Ukraine Conundrum.

The research questions for this study are as follows:

- i. How do the strategic interests of the West align or diverge from those of Russia in the context of the Ukrainian conflict?
- ii. What are the key geopolitical, economic, and security factors driving the clash of interests between the West and Russia regarding Ukraine?

##### 4.1 Analysis of Research Question 1

Two themes for answering the research question on the alignment or divergence of strategic interests between the West and Russia in the context of the Ukrainian conflict are:

##### Theme 1- Territorial Sovereignty and Regional Influence

This theme explores how both the West and Russia perceive the Ukrainian conflict as a battleground for asserting territorial sovereignty and regional influence. The West, comprising the United States and European Union member states, emphasizes the importance of upholding Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty, viewing Russian intervention as a threat to stability in Eastern Europe. Conversely, Russia sees Ukraine as within its sphere of influence, and its actions in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine are driven by a desire to maintain control and prevent Ukraine from aligning with Western institutions. This theme aligns with the findings of research by Yıldız (2023), which examines the historical background of relations between the European Union, Russia, and Ukraine.

This view is better understood in the light of the position of Holder (2024) who relying on the interview of Alexandra Xanthaki a UN rapporteur who spoke to *the New York Times* in December 2022, opined that Russia is doing all it can to eradicate all traces of Ukrainian cultural and historical identity, leaving only concerns that link both nations together in the former Soviet Union and that President Putin is embarking on this gradual demolition of Ukrainian cultural life under an ideology of “one people” (Holder, 2024).

##### Theme 2- Security and Defense Alliances

This theme delves into the role of security and defense alliances, such as NATO, in shaping the strategic interests of the West and Russia in the Ukrainian conflict. The West, particularly NATO

member states, views the conflict as a challenge to the collective security of the alliance and has provided military assistance to Ukraine to counter Russian aggression. Conversely, Russia perceives NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe as a threat to its security interests and has responded by bolstering its military presence along its western borders. This theme is supported by the findings of research by Kozyrev (2024), which examines the impact of the Ukrainian conflict on the US perspective of Europe.

##### Theme 3- Economic Interests and Energy Security

This theme explores the economic interests and energy security considerations that influence the strategic calculations of the West and Russia in the Ukrainian conflict. The West seeks to diversify energy sources and reduce dependence on Russian natural gas, viewing Ukraine as a crucial transit country for energy supplies to Europe. In contrast, Russia uses its control over energy resources as a tool for exerting influence over Ukraine and other European countries, leveraging energy diplomacy to advance its geopolitical control objectives. This theme resonates with the submission of Albatayneh (2023), which examines the energy-food dilemma for utilizing biofuels in low-income communities amidst the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. The relative importance of this point could be seen in the position of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy who on the 26<sup>th</sup> of March, 2022 spoke from Kyiv virtually to the world's leading energy producers summit at Qatar's Doha Forum, where he drew attention to the need for energy producers to contribute to the stability of Europe by taking progressive steps that guarantees peace. He pointed that there is need for them to: “increase energy production to make Russia understand that no state should use energy as a weapon and to blackmail the world.” (Chausovsky, 2022). The position of Zelenskiy is that if energy producers like Qatar could increase their participation in Europe, then the monopoly of Russia and its associated consequences would be broken. This is how to guarantee energy security for European countries.

##### Theme 4- Ideological and Geopolitical Competition

This theme investigates the ideological and geopolitical competition between the West and Russia in the Ukrainian conflict. The West promotes democratic values, human rights, and the rule of law, framing its support for Ukraine as a defense of liberal democratic norms against Russian authoritarianism. Conversely, Russia views the conflict through the lens of geopolitical rivalry with the West, seeking to challenge the liberal international order and assert its

alternative vision of multipolar world order, which the paper has found, according to Pazzanese (2022) will only set Russia back by 30 years, thus leaving Russia as a pariah state, like North Korea. This theme supports the findings of research by Ádám (2023), which examines the impacts of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on right-wing populism in Europe.

In summary, the strategic interests of the West and Russia in the context of the Ukrainian conflict reveal a complex interplay of territorial sovereignty, security alliances, economic considerations, and ideological competition. While the West emphasizes upholding Ukraine's territorial integrity, promoting democratic values, and ensuring regional stability through security alliances, Russia seeks to assert its influence in its perceived sphere of influence, challenge Western hegemony, and safeguard its strategic interests in energy resources and security. The diverging interests between the West and Russia underscore the challenges in finding a peaceful resolution to the Ukrainian conflict and highlight the importance of diplomatic efforts, dialogue, and cooperation to address underlying grievances and mitigate tensions in the region.

#### 4.2 Analysis of Research Question 2

Four themes for answering the research question on the key geopolitical, economic, and security factors driving the clash of interests between the West and Russia regarding Ukraine are:

##### **Theme 1- Geopolitical Competition and Sphere of Influence**

This theme explores the underlying geopolitical competition between the West and Russia over Ukraine's strategic location and its implications for regional influence. The West, comprising the United States and European Union member states, seeks to expand its sphere of influence into Eastern Europe by supporting Ukraine's integration into Western institutions such as NATO and the European Union. Conversely, Russia views Ukraine as an entity within its traditional sphere of influence and opposes Western encroachment into what it considers its backyard. This theme is supported by the findings of research by Yıldız (2023), which examines the historical background of relations between the European Union, Russia, and Ukraine.

Consequently, it is the aim of the West to prevent Russia from any further expansion of its sphere of economic and military influence. To the West, a stable and independent Ukraine is a buffer stopgap against Russian territorial expansionist ambitions, and this bid will obliterate what Damjanovic and Bozin (2022) retorted as; “special operation” to achieve Ukraine’s “demilitarization and denazification”. The

conflict in Ukraine is part of a broader struggle between democratic and autocratic systems, with implications beyond the region.

##### **Theme 2- Economic Interests and Resource Control**

This theme delves into the economic factors driving the clash of interests between the West and Russia regarding Ukraine, particularly in terms of energy security and resource control. Ukraine's strategic location as a transit country for Russian natural gas exports to Europe makes it a crucial battleground in the competition for energy dominance. Thus, as observed at 2.6.1 above, Ukraine’s position as a transit country for Russian natural gas supplies to Europe will serve Russia’s best interest if it controls Ukraine policy directives in respect of international trades. This means that, influencing Ukraine’s economic and political stability directly prevents disruptions in Russia energy flows and same time results increase in Europe’s dependence on Russian gas.

Consequently, as observed by Mefford (2023), **President Zelenskyy’s leadership** style has enhanced Ukraine’s resilience not to fall to the Russians as earlier projected. As an antidote, the West aims to limit Russia’s influence over European energy markets and thus, diversify the sources of energy by using the war as a launching pad. The West seeks to diversify its energy sources and reduce dependence on Russian energy supplies, while Russia aims to maintain control over energy transit routes and leverage its energy resources for geopolitical influence. This theme is consistent with the findings of research by Albatayneh (2023), which examines the energy-food dilemma for utilizing biofuels in low-income communities amidst the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

##### **Theme 3- Security Alliances and Military Posturing**

This theme explores the role of security alliances and military posturing in exacerbating tensions between the West and Russia regarding Ukraine. NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe and its support for Ukraine's defense capabilities are perceived by Russia as security threats, leading to heightened military tensions and brinkmanship in the region. The West, on the other hand, views Russia's military interventions in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine as violations of international law and as provocations that warrant a strong response. As was observed under section 2.6.1 above, the Western support for Ukraine aligns with its values of democracy, human rights, and territorial integrity. Thus, the West seeks to prevent the erosion of these democratic norms and

uphold the principles of working together to prevent a violation of international law. Conclusively, backing Ukraine militarily sends a message that unprovoked aggression and forceful territorial annexation are unacceptable in the 21st century. This theme resonates with the submission of Kozyrev (2024), which examines the impact of the Ukrainian conflict on the US perspective of Europe.

#### Theme 4- Normative Competition

This theme investigates the ideological contest and normative competition between the West and Russia regarding Ukraine, focusing on the clash of values and norms underlying the conflict. The West promotes liberal democratic principles, human rights, and the rule of law, framing its support for Ukraine as a defense of these values against Russian authoritarianism. Russia, in contrast, advocates for a multipolar world order and opposes what it perceives as Western hegemony and interference in its sphere of influence. This theme is supported by the findings of research by Ádám (2023), which examines the impacts of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on right-wing populism in Europe.

Basically, the clash of interests between the West and Russia regarding Ukraine is driven by a complex interplay of geopolitical competition, economic considerations, security alliances, and ideological contestation. This position is clearly observed under 2.6.1 above which dealt with the economic ties between Ukraine and Russia. These ties include trade and investments in many aspects for which Russia significantly benefits. This means that ensuring favourable economic conditions in Ukraine, has beneficial consequences for Russian businesses and industries.

#### 4.3 Interrogating the Russia-Ukraine Conundrum Using Thematic and Factual Analysis

It should be noted that due to the nature of the study, and the method of research that was adopted, facts based analysis shall be applied in four thematic areas to establish the impact or otherwise of the imbroglio; instead of the use of field data analysis. This method of analysis shall adequately respond to the thematic postulations designed for the purpose of analysing the components of two research questions.

##### (i) *The Struggle for Territorial Sovereignty and Regional Influence*

This study found that Russia has over the years maintained its territorial claims and control over Crimea, which it annexed in 2014. Despite international condemnation, Russia continued to assert its control over the region. Further, in Eastern Ukraine, the conflict between Ukrainian forces and

Russian-backed separatists have persisted for a very long time. Thus, Russia's support for the separatists and its military presence in the Donbas region has significantly contributed to the ongoing tensions.

The study also found that the Kaliningrad Oblast, a Russian exclave situated between Poland and Lithuania, has remained a point of contention between these countries and Russia. Its strategic location and military infrastructure raised concerns among neighbouring countries. Using *military aggression and force diplomacy*, Russia has maintained its territorial control on all sides. (European Parliament Resolution of 17 January 2024 on the EU Strategy on Central Asia (2023/2106(INI)). On regional influence, the study found that Russia has continued to exert significant influence in several Eastern European countries through political, economic, and military means. This dominance of Moscow account for why Belarus, a close ally of Russia, has continued to align its policies with Moscow. The two countries have been conducting joint military exercises and have maintained strong economic ties. Conversely, Moldova has been facing internal divisions and protests from pro-Russian apologists regarding its alignment with the European Union and the West. Russia has continued to support its pro-Russian political forces in Moldova in order to retain regional control and gradually reintegrate all former members of its Soviet Union, who are now breakaway countries (Lutsevych and Pasha, 2024).

The study further show that Serbia has maintained a delicate balance between its EU membership aspirations and historical ties with Russia. For instance, in respect of Russia's unprovoked war against Ukraine Serbia has refused to impose any form of sanctions against Russia in accordance with EU foreign policy directives for its member states (Hoxhaj, 2022). Thus, Hoxhaj (2022) further pointed that Serbian support for Russia is anchored on the fact that if Russia succeeds to win its 'war of aggression' against Ukraine, then Serbia will carry out same offensive attack with Russia's backing against Kosovo its breakaway republic, and this is due to their historical ties as relatives, and as such, they should stay together as one country.

Consequently, Russia's continuous investments and cultural connections have played a role in shaping Serbia's foreign policy directions. It should also be noted that Bulgaria, Hungary, and Slovakia has varying degrees of engagement with Russia and continued to be influenced by Russia due to their energy dependence and its economic and security implications, should they do otherwise.

*(ii) Challenges of Security and Defence Alliances*

The interrogation of this study in respect of how the West has used its member states alliances to support Ukraine without a direct confrontation with Russia indicate that the West and indeed the global community has spoken with one voice. This strategic move was supported by the **European Parliament Resolution 2023/2106(INI)**; where the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the EU strategy for Central Asia on January 17, 2024. The study observed that the resolution recognizes Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and its implications for Central Asian states and further encouraged its member states to comply with the pending directives of the EU in respect of the war.

*(iii) National Interests and Global Energy Security*

**The study found that over the years, NATO-Russia relationship has diminished, as cooperation** between the NATO military alliance and the Russian Federation have been established since 1991. In 1994, Russia joined the Partnership for Peace program, and in 1997, the NATO–Russia Founding Act (NRFA) was signed, enabling the creation of the NATO–Russia Permanent Joint Council (NRPJC). However, despite efforts to promote cooperation, relations have become severely strained over time due to post-Soviet conflicts and territorial disputes involving Russia. These conflicts include the Russo-Georgian War in 2008 and the Ukrainian Orange Revolution in 2004–05; other conflicts with Azerbaijan, Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine, Syria, and Kazakhstan have been recorded. A remote purpose for these aggressive behaviours was Russia's attempt at controlling the global security and energy infrastructure.

These squabbles were all Russian attempts at exercising superiority and control over its neighbors. Interestingly, Russian earlier alliance with NATO turned sour when it carried its offensive against Ukraine and annexed Crimea in 2014; and NATO suspended all cooperation with Russia. This move has further strengthened NATO and the USA to tactically move against Moscow in its attempts at the destruction of Ukraine.

*(iv) Geopolitical Economic Interests and Resource Control*

According to IEA (2022) reports, as at 2021, Russia begun cutting back on its piped gas supply to the EU market, although it was yet to complete its demand. However, the war in Ukraine has forced its supply from an average of more than 80 mcm/d in December 2021 to just 36 mcm/d in the first seven weeks of 2022, and gas shipments to Slovakia via Ukraine have decreased. IEA (2022) has further reported that the total amount of gas flow from Russia through Ukraine

averaged 55 mcm/d, in 2021 which is significantly less than the 109 mcm/d contractually authorized capacity.

In addition, IEA (2024) pointed that as of the first half of **2023**, the physical gas transit from Russia through Ukraine to Europe has been averaging **40 million cubic meters per day (mcm/d)**, which is equivalent to nearly **15 billion cubic meters (bcm)** on an annualized basis. Out of this, approximately **33 mcm/d** is shipped to the European Union (EU) member countries, equivalent to **12bcm** annually, and **7mcm/d** goes to Moldova, equivalent to **2.6 bcm** per year. However, this volume is only a fraction of the average **90bcm** per year that Ukraine transited between **2008 and 2019** when it served as the primary conduit for Russian pipeline gas to Europe. The war is taking a deep toll on Russia and the prosperity and wellbeing of the countries whose economies run on these supplies.

The current deliveries are also considerably lower than the **40 bcm** annual volume that Gazprom committed to transit through Ukraine between **2021 and 2024** under the **2019 gas transit agreement**. Consequently, both Russia and Ukraine have indicated that the renewal of the current five-year gas transit agreement is extremely unlikely, which means that regular transit flows through Ukraine could cease after the end of **2024 (IEA, 2024)**. The position above is further clarified from study Fig. 2 & 3 in the Appendix, which indicates decline in transmission of gas from Russia through Ukraine to other parts of Europe, while study Table 4 indicates that Russia has not been able to meet up with its gas supply obligations to six countries since the commencement of the war.

From the foregoing it is clear that these details also apply for Russian oil supply to its clients. The implication of this decline is that energy security of the European countries that are dependent on Russia has been threatened by these war, hence demonstrating that core strategic Russian economic interest has been significantly affected. In terms of human capital casualties, Aljazeera (2024) reports that Russia has lost over 50,000 soldiers so far. But, President Zelenskiy stated that over 180,000 Russian soldiers had been killed and tens of thousands injured. However, UK Ministry of Defense places the figure at 350,000 soldiers; including, personnel casualties, heavy losses of military arsenals and assets, including 2,600 tanks and 4,900 armoured vehicles, in Ukraine since February 2022 (Allison, 2024). This war with huge cost on all the players could have been avoided if Russia was strategic enough to maintain soft diplomacy without threatening its neighbours.

Using commercially available supply lines, other pipeline providers, such as Algeria, Azerbaijan, and Norway, have consequently expanded their deliveries into the European market during the heating season in comparison to the previous year. Increased liquefied natural gas (LNG) inflows, which rose by 63% year over year through October, have somewhat offset lower Russian pipeline flows. At an all-time high of 13 billion cubic meters in January, LNG inflows to the EU and the UK exceeded Russian pipeline flows by over three times and by around 70%. This is a huge loss for Russia due to their wrong politico-economic assumptions.

(v) *Ideological and Geopolitical Competition in Europe*

The **Ukrainian war** has significantly impacted both **Russia** and the West as represented by **NATO**, thus, reshaping their geopolitical strategies and relations. In particular, for the **EU-Russia Relations**, the war has **shattered the post-Cold War European security order** and fundamentally altered EU-Russia relations. Accordingly, Meister (2022), pointed that, previously, economic and energy interdependence formed the bedrock of these relations. However, the conflict has led to a **securitization** of all aspects of interaction and EU has adopted comprehensive sanctions against Russia, systematically cutting economic ties. Germany, Russia's key trading partner in the EU, witnessed a **34% drop in exports to Russia** in the first half of 2022. Due to this war, the **Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project** from Russia to Germany was suspended, thereby prompting EU member states to explore alternative energy sources. **Further, on the other side, it was found that the war has revived NATO** by refocusing the alliance on deterring Russia. This means that allies have strengthened troop deployments along the eastern flank to enhance deterrence. As Bond and Scazzieri (2022) pointed out, NATO's role in European security has been accentuated, emphasizing its centrality in countering Russian aggression.

The struggle for influence over Ukraine's strategic location, energy resources, and political orientation has intensified tensions between the two sides, leading to military posturing, economic sanctions, and diplomatic standoffs. Despite efforts to find a peaceful resolution, the underlying factors driving the clash of interests remain deeply entrenched, highlighting the challenges in achieving a lasting resolution to the Ukrainian conflict and the importance of continued diplomatic engagement and conflict resolution mechanisms.

## 5. Conclusion and Policy Implications

The Ukrainian conflict serves as a pivotal arena where the strategic interests of the West and Russia intersect, yet often diverge significantly. Western interests, particularly those of the United States and European Union, prioritize upholding international norms, supporting democratic governance, and expanding their influence in Eastern Europe. In contrast, Russia seeks to maintain its sphere of influence in the region, safeguard its strategic interests, and counter perceived encroachments by Western powers. This misalignment of interests is underscored by NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe and Russia's military interventions in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. The findings of various studies, such as those by Yıldız (2023) and Kozyrev (2024), highlight the clash of interests between the West and Russia in the Ukrainian conflict, emphasizing the need for nuanced diplomatic engagement to address underlying grievances.

Geopolitical, economic, and security factors play pivotal roles in driving the clash of interests between the West and Russia regarding Ukraine. Geopolitically, Ukraine's strategic location as a buffer state between Russia and the West makes it a focal point for competition and power projection. Economically, control over energy resources and transit routes in Ukraine influences the strategic calculations of both sides. Security considerations, including NATO's expansion and Russia's desire for a buffer zone, further exacerbate tensions. The findings of research by Siddiqui and Din (2023) and Makkaveeva and Huang (2023) shed light on these key factors, highlighting the complex interplay of geopolitical dynamics driving the clash of interests in the Ukrainian conflict.

Historical, cultural, and ideological factors contribute significantly to the divergence in interests between the West and Russia in the Ukrainian conundrum. Historical legacies, such as the Soviet Union's dissolution and previous conflicts in Eastern Europe, shape perceptions of security and influence strategic interests. Cultural identities and linguistic affiliations further complicate the situation, with ethnic tensions fuelling divisions between Ukraine's Western and Eastern regions. Ideological contestation between liberal democratic values and Russian assertions of sovereignty and multipolarity adds another layer to the conflict. The findings of research by Ishchenko (2023) and Ádám (2023) provide insights into how these factors contribute to the divergence in interests between the West and Russia, emphasizing the need for a nuanced understanding of historical and cultural contexts in conflict resolution efforts.



The clash of interests between the West and Russia in Ukraine has far-reaching implications for regional stability, international security, and global governance structures. The conflict undermines regional stability in Eastern Europe, poses threats to international security, and challenges existing global governance mechanisms. Moreover, the economic and humanitarian consequences of the conflict highlight the urgent need for concerted multilateral efforts to address the crisis and promote peacebuilding initiatives. The findings of research by Vajriyati et al. (2022) and Ali et al. (2023) underscore the importance of global governance in mitigating the implications of the clash of interests in the Ukrainian conflict, emphasizing the need for coordinated diplomatic engagement and conflict resolution mechanisms.

## 6. Contributions to Knowledge and Suggestions for Further Studies

The analysis of the strategic interests, key factors driving the clash, historical-cultural influences, and implications of the conflict between the West and Russia in Ukraine provides valuable insights into the complex dynamics shaping international relations in Eastern Europe. This research highlights the multifaceted nature of the Ukrainian conundrum and underscores the importance of considering geopolitical, economic, historical, and ideological factors in understanding and addressing conflicts in the region. The findings contribute to existing knowledge by elucidating the intricate interplay of interests and dynamics driving the conflict, providing policymakers, scholars, and practitioners with a deeper understanding of the complexities involved.

Further studies could explore the role of non-state actors, such as transnational corporations, civil society organizations, and diaspora communities, in shaping the conflict dynamics and influencing policy outcomes. Additionally, comparative studies analyzing similar conflicts in other regions, such as the South China Sea or the Middle East, could provide valuable insights into common patterns, differences, and potential solutions for conflict resolution. Further, longitudinal studies tracking the evolution of the Ukrainian conflict over time and examining the effectiveness of various peacebuilding and diplomatic initiatives could offer valuable lessons for mitigating tensions and promoting stability in conflict-affected regions. By addressing these research gaps, scholars can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the Ukrainian conundrum and inform evidence-based policy responses to promote peace and security in Eastern Europe and beyond.

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## APPENDIX 1



Discourse on the Russia-Ukraine Conundrum

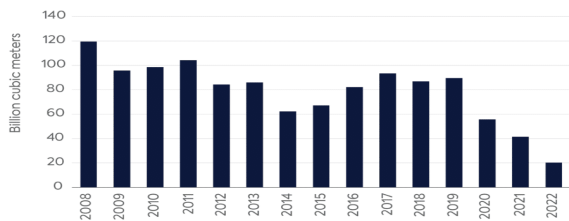
**APPENDIX 2**



Russia-Ukraine Mapping

**APPENDIX 3 (study Fig 2)**

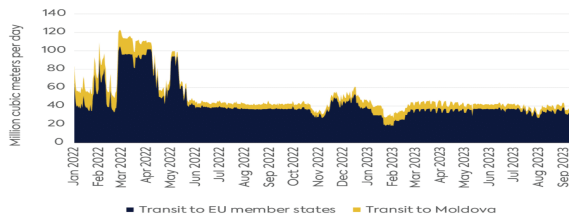
Figure 1: Annual gas transit volume through Ukraine



Source: Naftogaz.

**APPENDIX 4 (study Fig 3)**

Figure 2: Daily physical gas flows through Ukraine since January 2022



Source: Gas Transmission System Operator of Ukraine (GTSOU) Transparency Platform.

**APPENDIX 5 (study Table 4)**

Table 1: Russian gas supply contracts in force along the Ukrainian transit corridor during the July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023 period

Importing country	Importing company	Annual contract quantity (bcm)	Deliveries in the last 12 months *	Contract end year
Italy	Eni	23.5	3.5	2035
Slovakia	SPP	6.5	1.8	2028
Austria	OMV	6.0	5.1	2040
Hungary	MVM	1.0 **	0.5	2036
Croatia	PPD	1.0	0.4	2027
Slovenia	Geoplina	0.6	0.2	2023 ***
Moldova	Moldovagaz	3.3	2.2	2026

\* Last 12 months covers the period from July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023.  
 \*\* Hungary's total contracted volume is 4.5 bcm, but only 1 bcm of the total volume is delivered through the Ukrainian transit corridor (via Slovakia and Austria).  
 \*\*\* Expired on January 1, 2023.

Source of Figs 2 & 3 and Table 4: Centre for Global Energy Policy. Available online at:

[1] <https://www.energypolicy.columbia.edu/qa-russian-gas-transit-through-ukraine>. Visited 18<sup>th</sup> April, 2024

