

Monkey in the Middle

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Abstract

Thucydides introduced the simultaneous inflection point in which increasing and declining bipolarity powers often wage war. Constant escalation and de-escalation of tension and power struggle between global forces, viz. United States (US), NATO, and Russia have resulted in concomitant development in both Russian and global foreign policy following the Cold War. With almost 29% of the European Union's (EU) oil supply acquired from Russia, the threat of energy price-hikes and economic slowdowns continue to limit European reach and opinion in international relations. Meanwhile, crude oil prices have risen by 20-25% as hikes in prices create consequent reactions in the global cost of food, living, and consumer discretionary. Amid the middle of this conflict is the ex-USSR satellite state, non-NATO nation - Ukraine. Geographically bordering the Western border of Russia, Ukraine's economic, cultural, and social-political history has long been intertwined with Russia. With total mining industry output being \$15.3 billion, Ukraine is among the top ten largest producers in the world. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union resulting in Ukraine's sovereignty, Russia has set its eyes on control, internal manipulation, and possible military takeover. While the increase in NATO military and economic capacity has temporarily subdued Russian motivations, weakness in both policy and administration in the West has allowed for advancement in Russian motives.

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Potentially prompted by the greater image of Russia, Ukraine's abundance of natural resources complimented by internal struggles in the West allowed Vladimir Putin to seize the opportunity and amass Russian troops near the Russian-Ukrainian border in late March 2022. Global interactions and altercations between seemingly opposite nations, Russia and the United States have escalated. The uneven development and frailty throughout the capitalist world system are met with Russian nationalist acquisitiveness and imperialism. The "rope" in this three-decade-long global tug-of-war between the West and Russia? Ukraine. As increased hostility and radicalism in Ukraine continue to emphasize Ukrainian/Russian ethnic nationalism and accentuate how this is more just than a war for resources - it is an "ethnicity-focused and culture-focused" conflict (Contextualizing Putin's...2021). Nonetheless, Western Ukraine's resource-dense geographic lands are perhaps a crucial factor for economic and capitalist motivations from wealthy corporations and elites in the West and Russia.

The West's silence speaks volumes on a world stage. Leaders in the West, although supportive of independence and democratic efforts in Ukraine, are limited by clashing agendas or acknowledged consequences and do not want to insert themselves into this conflict by directly supporting Ukraine. Meanwhile, Russia is taking advantage of the West's dependence on Russian crude oil. Through many proxy wars (i.e. Korean War, Vietnam War) have been fought between capitalist and communist core countries, this is perhaps the first time in world history that the capacity and more importantly, the influence of one country (Russia) is far greater while the other (NATO) has much more to lose.

(Background) Russian-Ukrainian Historical Context

Ukraine's rapid social and economic growth has also greatly influenced its national culture. By the start of World War II, Ukraine's industrial output had "increased fourfold, the number of workers had tripled, and the urban population had grown from 19 to 34 percent of the total" (Dialectical Materialism...2021). Still, however, Nazi and USSR occupation in Ukraine split the state in half - some seeing the Nazis as liberators, others, the opposite. Before and after the dissolution of the U.S.S.R in 1991, conflict, division, and culture between Russia and Ukraine have long meshed in world history. Today's ongoing bloodshed, evidently, is a synthesis of historically deep-rooted complications, limitations of international policies, and clashing cognitive beliefs. While each side provides its own excuses, both are motivated by greed and limited by policies.

For Russia, the basis of its actions lies within the greater Russian identity and historical motivations. In his March 2014 speech to the Russian Parliament, Putin noted that Russians and Ukrainian were "one people" with a common history and common political fate (Russia's war...2022). His outlook on a shared political fate can be linked to what Karl Marx recognized as dialectical materialism (Marxist Theory) - history moves through stages with change often prompted by struggle and conflict; coincidentally, the Marxist Theory, "interpretation of history in terms of struggle", was adopted as the official philosophy by the Soviet Communists (Dialectical Materialism...2021).

Thus, in order to understand and justify the motivations behind modern-day Russia, one must look at the philosophies of the Soviet Union. As former Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, Sergi Sazonov mentioned at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 in regard to the Ukrainian nationalist movement, "As for Ukraine, it does not exist... There is a Little Russia,

there is no Ukraine" (Russia's war...2022). Notice how Sazonov's justification of Ukraine is strikingly the same as Putin's, suggesting that the sense of Russian nationalism extends far beyond an individual. Even more, under Stalin there were "thin linguistic and ethnic boundaries between Russians and Ukrainians, and the opportunities for advancement available to Ukrainians who professed a Russian identity" (Russia's war...2022). However, even before Ukraine's independence and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, West-Ukraine influenced by neighboring Germany created an emerging sense of Ukrainian nationalism while East-Ukraine remained relatively faithful to the neighboring USSR. Efforts to "Ukrainify" opposed by efforts to "Russianfy" Ukraine had already put an internal strain on national identity, political outlook, and self-identification decades before its independence (Russia's war...2022). To make matters worse, the rise of extremists on both ends and complicated ethnic/territorial history tore the identity of the Slavic state. With its cultural identity in pieces and the nation split in half, Ukraine's poor social infrastructure has made it a global target for cash cow corporations from both sides to exploit.

Henceforth, it can be understood that Russia genuinely considers Ukraine a part of its former identity; foreign attempts at the westernization of Ukraine can be seen as an act of hostility. Likewise, western social-economic instability, reliance on Russian resources, weak leadership, and attempts at economic gain perhaps all contributed to Russia's recent engagement and attempts to invade Ukraine.

(Background II) NATO & European Union (EU) Policies

As for the West, the US private arms industry has benefited and continues to benefit from global warfare while EU imports from Ukraine have massively improved economic stability and growth in Europe. Yet, in Ukraine's time of need, the West is nowhere to be seen. Since the

formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949, its open-door policy is juxtaposed with requirements for unanimous consent from all NATO nations. Ukraine's membership as part of NATO obligates the respective countries to defend against Russia. NATO seeks to avoid additional conflict with Russia and vice versa; the cost of a halt in Russian exports and potential nuclear war has prompted an overall stalemate regarding NATO involvement (Wong & Jakes, 2022).

From a western standpoint, swift expansion during the late-90s has allowed for the inclusion of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic as members of NATO. Conversely from a Russian standpoint, the act of turning former USSR adversaries into western allies continues to pose a threat to Russia's image - and its power in contrast to Western influences. While proposed agreements between Ukraine and European allies have been shot down during the Obama administration, Ukrainian leaders have flip-flopped around alliances with western unions and Russia: "Former President Viktor Yushchenko wanted entry into the alliance, but Ukrainians became more reluctant after Russia invaded Georgia. His successor, Viktor Yanukovich, dropped any drive for membership and promoted closer ties with Russia " (Wong & Jakes, 2022).

Furthermore, the security policy known as the MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) Doctrine is perhaps the single most significant notion regarding waging war between the West and Russia. While a conventional war between two nuclear countries has yet to be fought, a war between the US and Russia could very likely lead to a nuclear world war. In the current conflict, Ukrainian attempts to become a NATO member or even a formal association agreement with the European Union have been limited by this very doctrine. Rather than what general media on both

ends declare as “moral concern”, nations in the West and Russia are all motivated by national interests - hence, the intersection between realism and class system.

Why? Cognitive Theory: How Individual Nature Change Policies

Actions and policies have underlying rationales; world leaders often act on instinct blurred by individual worldviews which influence international agendas. The cognitive theory seeks to uproot such individualistic qualities and experience with the purpose of acknowledging behavior, accumulated knowledge, motives, decision style, and background to amass a complete profile of political leaders within this conflict.

Take Vladimir Putin, ex-KGB USSR lieutenant colonel during the Cold War, former Prime Minister, and now president of Russia, his deep-rooted sense of nationalism intertwined with his pursuit of the greater Russian image has profoundly influenced his negative attitude towards western influence and expansion. Meanwhile, Putin’s independent orientation towards foreign affairs reflect his diplomatic and foreign policy style. Henceforth, individual leaders like Putin “seek to preserve a state’s individual identity and tend to be somewhat isolationist, viewing contact towards other nations as a slippery slope toward dependence and practicable only under their own specific terms or conditions” (Genest, 2004). Thus, in order to preserve said identity, Putin, in his July 2021 essay, asserts the similarity and unity between Russia and Ukraine as justification for Russia’s obsession with Ukraine. Putin writes, “The wall that has emerged in recent years between Russia and Ukraine, between the parts of what is essentially the same historical and spiritual space, to my mind is our great common misfortune and tragedy” (Putin, 2021). Putin sees Ukraine as fundamentally a part of Russia - hence his emphasis of “our” and “we” throughout his essay.

Moreover, in a 2017 interview by the Ukrainian Research Institute at Harvard with Russian historian Serhii Plokhi summarized, “When Putin pushes the idea that Russians and Ukrainians are the same people, he doesn't mean that Russians are Ukrainians. The underlying argument is that Ukrainians are really Russians” (Contextualizing Putin's...2021). By virtue of his devotion to the Russian image along with increasing western influence, Putin's perception of his reality influenced by his profound nationalist personality has conclusively shaped the actions of the state - as cognitive theory suggests.

By contrast, NATO political leaders notably, US President Joe Biden, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, France Prime Minister Élisabeth Borne, and other heads of government are defined as participatory leaders - ones who encourage political affairs and relationships with other governments. Under the circumstances of the global COVID-19 pandemic, rising inflation rates, prices, and stagflation all contribute to the extreme social, economic, and political instability in the West. Because democratic leadership operates on consensus, decisions are often time-consuming and actions even more stagnant; authoritarian leadership is exceedingly effective during crisis situations, and therefore, Russia's upper hand in the current situation.

Leadership is paramount in the discussion of policy and the rationale behind actions. Revolutions, wars, and genocides all began with individuals who amassed national power and were deeply motivated by their upbringings, nationalism, or prejudice. Cognitive theory, via personality, cognitive facility, and leadership orientation aims to explain why Western leaders opt for a laissez-faire approach in the course of this conflict - all talk, no action. Simply put, the West is terrified. Because participatory leaders often encourage multinational cooperation in times of propensity, extensive reliance particularly on Russian exports in recent years has come back to bite them. Back and forth environmental policies such as the Paris Climate Accords and

the shutdown of the Keystone Pipeline, put forth and enacted by Joe Biden's democratic party and many other western leaders, have not only shifted reliance on Western rivals but also benefitted such free-rider countries like China and Russia who contributed absolutely nothing and allowing them to benefit even more from increased global demand. Of course, the blame can not be put on individual leaders, but on the parties who back, guide, and determine their actions. Clean energy is crucial but not at the cost of weakening infrastructure. Oftentimes, parties specifically in the US rush their agendas for quick results during presidential terms; most enacted policies are filled with loopholes and dependence. Germany, a country that is praised for its clean energy policies, has since reopened its coal plant, truth of the matter is, that green energy technology is not advanced enough to depend on, thus, having dug its own "hole" regarding energy policies, countries like the US must resort to foreign imports from global competitors. Due to the operational realities of western leaders that have been clouded by ignorant and tunnel-visioned party agendas, the West has unfortunately face-planted down the slippery slope of dependence. Not to mention, economic turndown and volatile macroeconomics have provided little stability in recent years in all economic sectors. The foundation of this conflict is ingrained in poor choices during times of prosperity of the West. (Genest 2004)

While cognitive theory uncovers why decisions behind such policies were made, class system theory in the following paragraphs looks to adjoin this idea with a new paradigm - dependency theory. Vulnerability conditioned by distracted figures in the West and nationalist motivated personalities in the East, amid global economic and social unrest, could be considered when providing an explanation to the actions taken by both sides in this global tug-of-war. Conflicts throughout the past centuries have always revolved around the clash or tug between opposites - democracy against authoritarianism, participatory against independent, western

influence against eastern image, groups against individuals. While critics believe cognition/personality is too “narrow” to be applied to a broad international relations perspective, understanding the inclinations and role of individuals is the only way to access the actions of the state in this modern global oligarchy. (Genest 2004)

Why? Class System Theory

On the other hand of the same coin, while other theories emphasize policies and system-level explanations, class system theory introduces dependency and development issues which provide an explanation for the discrepancies from a wealth and reliance standpoint - why Ukraine is in the center of this dogfight in the first place: exploitation (Genest).

With Ukraine’s GDP at a miniscule 151.54 (billion US dollars) compared to Russia’s 1,473.58 and US’s 20,932.75 (billion US dollars), it’s reliance on the international marketplace plays directly into the ongoing conflict and policy making (Knoema 2020). Ukraine’s reliance on the export from raw materials as well as cultural penetration of both western and former USSR influence has become the very cause of many international policies. Economic forces driving advanced industrialized states such as the United States allow capitalist elites to reap indirect benefits of the current Ukraine conflict. Through the class systems theory, Russia’s ulterior motive is revealed - resource. Russian and US corporate multinational companies (MNCs) often act upon self-interest rather than common good, thus, it is only right to assume that copious conflicts are the product of a dominant class attempting to increase influence and exploit weaker markets. Ukraine’s robust mining industry and geographical area perhaps is its most valuable asset - but also presents a striking target on its back to global corporations. Coincidentally, Western Ukraine encompasses nearly all of the raw material output and means of production -

this is also where the conflict is located and where preponderance of Russians troops are amassed.

Though one may think Ukraine is the only dependent state in this situation, policies which forced uneven energy development have disadvantaged the west. Previously identified attitudes and values of national leaders paired with the “superpower conflict”, as identified by Fred Halliday, highlights the socioeconomic struggles and competition between influential nations. Originally the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union, it has evolved into the US, EU, Russia, and a new addition: China. Though military power is often associated with the respective countries, class system theory identifies their vast economic strength and exploitive nature as well (Genest, 2004). While this directly points to semi-periphery countries such as Ukraine with its dense raw materials, current uneven relationships between core countries like the US and Russia has also opened up enormous room for exploitation. In order to maintain their dominant position in global international relations, core countries depend on the raw materials and labor from the periphery; thus, justifying Ukraine's necessity from the west is just as vital to its economic development as from Russia.

Though combined, statistically, much stronger both economically, demographically, and in terms of military strength, Russia's cogent control over the European oil supply amid current global economic unrest has kept NATO, in fear of serious economic collapse, from taking direct action throughout this conflict. NATO's current dependence on Russian exports can only be slowly phased out. Furthermore, amid current economic and worldwide supply shortages, the West can't risk enabling additional resources on warfare.

Results

“History doesn’t repeat itself, but it rhymes”. Global superpower conflicts, often motivated by expansion or reformation of a greater image, consistently result in unintended consequences and destruction of smaller nations such as Ukraine. Time and time again, the clash between capitalism and communism, Western influence and Russian image, participatory and instrumental, and greed itself has justified the exploitation and conflicts. Whether through proxy wars or technological warfare, it is evident that direct conflict is a matter of when, not if. Despite recognizing the potential for mutually assured nuclear destruction, rapidly escalating global tensions between the West and Russia will most likely come down to two outcomes.

Outcome 1: EU/NATO Remains Passive: Treaties/Policies

The most likely approach given the current economic calamity and tension between the West and Russia. If the West decides to continue their passive approach in this conflict, it is to be expected that new global policies will arise - of course, at the cost of millions of Ukrainian and Russian lives. Eventually, the Russian-Ukraine conflict will decelerate and new policies will emerge. A weakened Russian military could tip future conflicts in favor of NATO and NATO allies. However in the long-term, confined by mutual assured destruction, global economic consequences, and global bloodshed, new global defense policies would most likely tip in favor of Russia such as possibly annexing a substantial portion of Ukraine - nonetheless, avoiding mass global warfare.

Outcome 2: EU/NATO Take Direct Action: War

Perhaps less probable but unquestionably more terrifying, NATO’s decision to welcome Ukraine, whether as a temporary or permanent member of the alliance, will lead to all-out world war. Although some researchers believe we are already entering a world war, the likelihood of a war is still far-fetched. Politicians from both ends of the rope will strive to avoid global warfare

by all means. In the best case scenario of a world war, a non-nuclear war; worst case: mass nuclear destruction. Whatever the case, there will be mass casualties, severe social-economic dismantling, and the colossal change in the world as we know it today.

Personal Proposition

De jure/de facto - meaning in law and in fact. What is by law is not accounted for by what is done in practice and vice versa. Global powers have, hopefully, learned from close calls such as the Cuban Missile Crisis and Norwegian Rocket Incident; many of which have implemented global policies i.e. CTBT to avoid further demonstrations and testing of nuclear weapons. Though in spite of that, policies and laws are not enough to avoid global tension and warfare. Rather than focusing on the macro aspects of global warfare and core conflicts, one must look through the lens of symbolic interactionism, how individuals can prevent or start a war - all it takes is a leader and many will conform. Throughout history, time and time again, we see the effects and reach of leaders like Stalin, Roosevelt, and Hitler; it's the same tension, same relation, just different leaders and means of destruction. Coined by MaoZedong, the Three Worlds Theory demonstrates the social and economic contradictions between the worlds imperialism and communism; and off the side, exploited and forgotten, are peripheral/proxy countries like Ukraine the many before it. The conflict between said superpowers is the root of instability with regards to international relations. (Genest 2004)

Conflict cannot be avoided so long as there is exploitation and personal gain; countries prepare for war in times of peace because they know there will be one. What can be avoided is large scale mass, apocalyptic destruction via nuclear warfare, biological warfare, or advanced technology. Even without direct implications of global policies, general practices grow to become ultimately standards. Although governments are not volatile and foolish enough to

engage in mutually assured destruction, leaders are. No matter capitalist, communist, or socialist, human rash decisions are the cause of the close calls throughout the years; more likely than not, sooner rather than later, one rash decision will be responded with all out destruction of our species.

All governing bodies should implement some sort of infrastructure to prevent rash decisions by a single individual. Already amassing an expansive amount of authority, elite class capitalists from both sides crave resources and energy but no one wants direct war. Clashing agendas between internal powerhouses is a creative strategy to control the distribution of power; we see this dyad dynamic throughout history: Roman government and the Catholic Church, Plutocracy in Ancient Greece, modern day capitalism and US government, so on and so forth.

The most advantageous concept could be using economics to impede political power. All core powers operate on some sort of political-economic dichotomy; as Karl Marx identified, the ability to control the means of production controls the economy. Similar to how branches of the US government ensure checks and balances, capitalists can employ checks on governing bodies to some degree. Although these global dichotomic nations do not have a lot in common when it comes to politics, the West and Russian share one common goal: profit. If economic systems can regulate and control development and production, it can in turn keep check on military power no matter the leader. Since capitalists' act based off of profit their allegiance is never to a nation nor affected by rules and regulations - they control the means of production and therefore the stability of a nation. Moreover, capitalists will do whatever it takes to prevent all-out war.

The thing about power is that it has to be tested, leaders have allowed themselves to be wrapped in it. If capitalists in both the West and Russia are able to use and uphold their influence on the world stage, their combined leverage and common goal (profit) will trump rash decisions

by individual world leaders. Nonetheless, rapid escalation in conflict is not something the world has not seen. Perhaps this escalation in Ukraine is preface to what is about to come, if so, the Third World War has come down to a matter of when not if. By then, hopefully, the common agenda and common sense could warrant global warfare can be kept to traditional weapons and means - that would be considered a success.

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