

The Profiteering of Ukraine

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Abstract

The conflict in Ukraine seems to be split into two opposing sides: the invading country of Russia and the supporting West, primarily the United States. Although elements of realism can be based on the historic competitive rivalry between the U.S. and Russia, the underlying stench of capitalism says otherwise. Evidence of how the operations of the military-industrial complex work and the relationship it has with either's governmental officials reveal the striking relationship between war and the upper class. In that, no change in governmental policies is ever met due to how profitable war is to these individuals. Thus, describing the conflict in Ukraine as a primary class system theory that is fueled by some elements of realism theory.

Keywords: class system theory, realism theory, military-industrial complex, NATO, Russia, Ukraine, United States of America, upper class

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Money was invented for trade / But now those bits of paper twist hearts, make slaves / Turns a saint into a sinner, a child into a killer / His finger on the trigger of a money game

- Ren Gill | Money Game

The rivalry between Russia and the United States has been a long series of geopolitical conflicts and “peaceful” wars ever since the end of World War II. Today, tension remains high between these two major powers, with their current conflict of interest being Ukraine. Initiated by Russia’s attack on Ukrainian soil in 2022, the United States, among many other countries, swiftly came to Ukraine’s aid. This military aid fell in the form of providing supplies and funds to aid Ukraine in its fight (Masters & Merrows, 2023). This promoted the depiction of the United States as a financial hero and fighter for democracy in the global sphere. However, it is this same chain of support that reveals a glimpse into the true machine that drives the foreign affairs of the United States with its allies and rivals alike.

This machine, whose main source of power is none other than the private military corporations of the United States, has only one goal: monetary profit. That machine is known as the Military-Industrial Complex (MIC). It is a system that was first popularized by President Eisenhower and is described as a “network of individuals and institutions [corporations] involved in the production of weapons and military technologies” whose intended effect provides monetary profits for their members (Military-industrial complex, 2023). This complex has been feeding off the back of the United States’ desire to be a dominant state in the global sphere. As a result, it has continued to profit off of conflicts and accentuate the United States’ dominance as a global power. Thus, the current conflict in Ukraine is best explained by class system theory with elements of realism theory through the profiteering and exploitation of the U.S. military-

industrial complex, as well as the desire to diminish Russia's power. This is simply because the main source of power and dominance the United States has in the world is the money corporations thrive for.

Theory, MIC, and History

Under capitalism, class system theory follows the idea that the world of geopolitics is driven not by citizens or the government themselves, but by the upper elite class that runs the major corporations (Genest, 2002). Although most of these people do not have a seat in government, they find ways to influence the decisions of politicians and officials in various ways. The most common and direct way is the act of lobbying, defined as an "attempt by individuals or private interest groups to influence the decisions of government" through either gifts, money, letters, or just general harassment (Lobbying, 2023). The second, and more discrete, option is funding donations to a politician's campaign or party. Both of these methods have historically been ways that corporations found themselves an unofficial, yet influential seat in governmental affairs, with the MIC using both tactics to enact policies and decisions that benefit the private military companies (PMCs). Although politicians deny that these donations influence their decisions, there is significant evidence to the contrary that will be explored later. However, in addition to this theory, another one could explain other elements that influence U.S. foreign affairs that the corporations and MIC advantage of. And that theory is realism.

The international relations theory of realism essentially believes that the behavior of all states is to maximize their power in the global sphere by lowering others (Genest, 2002). Furthermore, the theory assumes that the states are of rational mind seeking the lowest cost to gain more power, primarily through the means of the military. This seems to be a possible explanation for political affairs with the United States and them being involved in the Russo-

Ukrainian War. Especially when put into the context of the historic rivalry between the United States and Russia. Ever since the end of World War II (WWII), the U.S. and Russia, formerly the Soviet Union at the time, became major superpowers in the world. Because of their opposing economic views, tension formed and grew between these two nations, resulting in a history of competition for influence and power. Particularly, this competition manifested in the series of proxy wars that took place during the Cold War (Towards a new..., n.d). The most well-known of these wars is the Vietnam War, where the U.S. and Soviet Union supported South and North Vietnam respectively with military assistance.

Although the Soviet Union's military involvement was minuscule compared to the United States, with the U.S. sending 2.7 million troops and the Soviet Union sending only 3,000 troops during Vietnam, it is still symbolic of the indirect, competitive battle the two superpowers continually faced (Combs, 2021). A key factor to note is that these wars were said to primarily ensure that either the United States or the Soviet Union had another country to follow their form of government and economy, but they also served as battlegrounds to test and sell their military technologies. One astounded veteran noted how "the sheer range of weapons dropped on the peoples of Southeast Asia in those years — from conventional bombs and napalm to defoliants [...] Vietnam was a testing ground for technologies of every sort," (Astora, 2022). This explains why there were considerably more weapons brought over to South Vietnam than would seem necessary, which were distributed by the U.S. military-industrial complex. The same can be said regarding Russia's MIC, where they too were distributing weapons, food, and ammunition directly to North Vietnam, instead of merely giving loans, which would be a more traditional means of aid (Combs, 2021). This concept is further supported by the increased reliance on private military companies (PMCs) that Mumford noted in an article about proxy warfare in

2013. The article also states that the use of PMCs is to “circumvent the difficulties created by a latter-day Vietnam Syndrome,” because “there are no repatriation ceremonies for those private military contractors... Thus PMCs accept the political risk that states ordinarily run in deploying their own troops to foreign wars in their stead,” (Mumford, 2013). This means that governments of nations, especially the United States and Russia, now have an avenue to shift the blame of who sends soldiers into battle. These companies can then not only make a profit off sending their employees into war but also create a dependency on these countries to ensure business continues. All of this shows that the MIC takes advantage of these conflicts that utilize realism to push along an agenda of profiteering through a government’s spending on military support. And the same can be said about the conflict in Ukraine.

Although the conflict in Ukraine has very deep roots in history, it all boils down to the decline of the Soviet Union and Russia’s cultural and political interests in Ukraine. Various Russian leaders, including Vladimir Putin, have stated that the EU and the United States have on multiple occasions broken the promise of no NATO Alliance expansion after the Two Plus Four treaty (Masters, 2022). Contrastingly, however, many leaders argue that no such promise was made, and if there were any, it was only focused on the NATO expansion of East Germany, which the treaty discussed. One of these people included former Soviet Union President, Mikhail Gorbachev, who “denied that the issue of NATO enlargement came up at all in the early 1990’s” (Roininen, 2017). Nevertheless, an argument can be made that Russia had an implied agreement upon that treaty. The tension over this treaty was brought up because the Soviet Union feared that their enemies, the West, were expanding their military forces through alliances built by NATO, which seemed to increase in activity during the decline of the Soviet Union (Masters, 2023). This fear was likely passed on from one Russian leader to the next. This would be like

having a rival promising to not have their friend move closer to one's house, only for that same rival to then slowly move other friends as well as weapons adjacent to the person. That was the situation Russia faced; these militaries were too close for comfort. To top that, Ukraine has consistently shown a desire to be part of NATO, despite deep cultural and political ties to Russia. This all added more fuel to the flame that resulted in the invasion of Russia in 2022.

However, tying this back to proxy wars, the war in Ukraine is a unique example of one, in that the rival of the U.S. is directly involved in the conflict. This not only opens doors of opportunity to directly hurt Russia's political and economic power but also represents another war from which the MIC can profit.

The Workings of the MIC

The exact means of how the MIC operates its profiteering is relatively complex. As mentioned earlier, lobbying and political donations encourage the government to act in a way that benefits military firms. However, the funding these firms get is significantly higher than one might expect. According to Jacobin, the Pentagon has consistently spent more than half of its yearly budget on military contractors since 2002 (Semler, 2022). This means that of the \$800 billion budget projected by Jacobin, approximately \$400 billion went towards military contractors. Although many politicians deny the influence of these companies in their spending decisions and policies, the same Jacobin article has noted that "House members who voted to boost military spending to \$778 billion for FY2022 [fiscal year 2022] received three times more money from military contractors than members who opposed it." This clearly indicates a relationship between the money given and donated by companies to politicians, thus indirectly affecting the decisions these politicians make. The reason why lobbying and political donations carry so much influence is simply because campaigning in government is expensive.

The reliance politicians have on that money to continue their campaign in the next term is mostly due to convenience and subliminal reliability of the “you scratch my back, I scratch your back” relationship (Santos, 2022). This ensures that the MIC continually profits year after year, while also ensuring the politicians that they have the funds to have a shot at their desired seats of government in the next term. This, in turn, creates a monetary symbiotic relationship that has continued to fester in the seats of government. And, logically, the spending increases dramatically for as long as war is in the picture. This explains why the United States immediately invested resources into the Russia-Ukraine War. This would seem to suggest that the declaration of support for the sake of democracy and fighting the “enemy” is all a ruse so that the MIC can simply profit off of it through government spending.

The U.S. has always had an interest in Ukraine and has fought for its allegiance and influence for many years. As evidenced by the film “Ukraine on Fire”, many of Ukraine’s civil wars and internal conflicts had some backing and support from the United States, as they also had Russian support. However, a much more striking revelation is that some U.S. officials have had a conversation about instilling a replacement leader for Ukraine that fits the goals of the United States after the conflict has been resolved (Lopatonok, 2016). This indicates a desire to have Ukraine be puppeteered by U.S.-backed leaders to combat Russia’s influence, something the United States does not want to make public knowledge. With a situation like this, there are plenty of possible reasons for the U.S. to continue its attempts to influence Ukraine. But one seems more clearly evident than the rest: it was a means to provoke Russia.

Allowing Russia to make the first step into battle, as seen in 2022, would then give the U.S. the heroic edge to get involved. This same behavior was also seen in the “War on Terror” campaign against Afghanistan, where the U.S. fought under the guise of combating terrorism

following the events of 9/11 but was just a means to obtain and control oil in the country. That heroism-like demeanor is what led citizens to support the United States into that war, only for them to regret the country's actions years down the line. This same means of scapegoating can also be applied to Russia, or more specifically its president, Vladimir Putin. This thereby follows the state behavior of realism theory by diminishing the power of Russia through villainizing them while the U.S. increases its power as a result.

This is why most of the current mainstream media has focused more on villainizing Russia and its president rather than taking an objective look at why the conflict has occurred. For instance, an article from the Wilson Center detailing reasons to support Ukraine illogically used LGBTQ+ issues as a point of contention against Russia. It specified how Russia inhumanely investigates LGBTQ+ citizens and soldiers while Ukraine lets them operate in the military openly (Syzov, 2023). Some may argue that this was to showcase how Russia commits human rights violations, as the same paragraph mentions how ordinary people who oppose the war are punished. However, this was the only time it was mentioned in the article, and it would seem to have dissonance as they explicitly call out the LGBTQ+ community. Knowing that the Wilson Center has an audience and bias to the Democratic left, which usually advocates support for the LGBTQ+ community, this seems more like a blatant attempt to declare Russia as an "evil nation" by displaying opposition against a commonly supported group. This behavior of the mainstream media has not gone unnoticed, as a Scheerpost article references the aforementioned "War on Terror" and how that "ended up being a tragic failure. So now the Western mainstream media jumped at their next big chance by depicting Putin as the bad guy," (Hedges, 2023). This showcases that the people of the United States are at least somewhat aware of this propagandizing tactic.

Nevertheless, the assertion of a defined “enemy” has proven to be very effective and has allowed the U.S. to mobilize its military, and thus the MIC, involved with Ukraine without much opposition. This has driven the force of political realism and left room for the upper class to take center stage.

The Profits of the Upper Class

As mentioned before, the MIC has used lobbying and donations to influence the decisions of politicians and government officials in the name of profit. For the Ukraine War, the main source of business is not actually on mercenaries, as one may believe. Of the U.S. industry’s 2.1 million employees, only about 1.37 million are on active duty around the world, stationed mainly in Europe (Cook, 2023b). And an alleged handful are acting as mercenaries on Ukraine’s behalf as fighters or strategic directors. The main source of profit that we know of and is directly connected to Ukraine is actually in the selling of military arsenal: guns, missiles, anti-missile equipment, etc. About \$50 million of weaponry and equipment was sold to Ukraine in 2021 (Guyer, 2022). This indicates that the business of arms with U.S. military companies is being conducted in Ukraine, even when there is a noticeable lack of U.S. soldiers or mercenaries on the battlefield. Despite that, the ones who do make the rest of the profits in this whole ordeal are the civilian employees that consist of the rest of the aforementioned 2.1 million employees of the MIC, as well as those in association with them. Most of whom, should be noted, are nowhere close to the sites of battle.

According to a former NASA worker who claims to have had experience with MIC personnel, those involved with the MIC “never do a lick of honest work” despite these 700,000 workers making a total of \$70 billion in revenues (Cook, 2023b). Cook then goes on to reference those who are in contact/associated with the MIC, such as members of Congress, contractor

employees, CIA and FBI members, lobbyists, retirees, managers of retirees' accounts, and many others who have taken a slice of profits from the money that the federal government of the United States funded the industry with. And these companies are, in fact, thriving during Ukraine's war. Not only have stocks of various military firms such as Lockheed spiked up 38% in 2022, but various others like Raytheon continue to receive contracts of over \$1 billion to continue their weapons manufacturing (Guyer, 2022). But the United States is not the only country with a military industry.

Russia themselves has an MIC, and they too seem to be profiting off this war. Various articles from mainstream media have talked about Russia's dependence on its MIC to continue the fight in Ukraine. This could be interpreted as an attempt to deface the country, as it showcases the lack of support that Russian citizens and soldiers have for the war. Regardless, the private military companies are thriving off Russia's aggressiveness. Wagner and other PMCs have reported growth and active use in Russia's military efforts in Ukraine, with about 50,000 Wagner mercenaries (Bauer & Mueller, 2023). Russia's military dependence on PMIs is very evident as Prigozhin has threatened to withdraw their troops, showcasing the leverage that they have over the war effort. Further analysis can also show that the increased taxation by the Russian government on their businesses and citizens is an attempt to fund the MIC industry. Notably, "a record [of] RUB [rubles] 9.4 trillion (US\$117 billion)," which is about 60% more than in 2021, was spent on the army and security forces alone (Miroshnychenko, 2023). This was achieved by heavier taxation of businesses, citizens, and banks, with a reported 80% increase in tax claims by the authorities after the start of the war. This has been what allowed Russia to maintain a substantial amount of soldiers to fight on their behalf in Ukraine, at the cost of their own diminishing economy. And despite that, these PMCs continue to profit and thrive because of

Russia's desperation. This desperation, in turn, is driven by realism because the war on Ukraine was at least partially caused by Russia's need to reclaim its power and status in the global sphere. And if these companies are thriving, then that must also mean the MIC they are a part of is also thriving. This perfectly demonstrates how both sides of this conflict, whether winning or losing the war itself, have winners in the form of profiteers of these companies. These profiteers then distribute all that profit through their upper workers who, without a doubt, are part of the higher class based on the massive influx of revenue alone. It is significant, however, that even the companies not directly involved in the military are profiting from this war.

Many Western companies, despite sanctions, are still operating in Russia. With the current top 25 foreign businesses staying in Russia, 5 of them are U.S.-based companies: with Philip Morris and PepsiCo taking the top 4 spots (LeaveRussia.org, n.d.). Although many of them have stopped selling their big-named products, they remain in operation through their lesser-known products and/or factories, as indicated by the notes of each company on the Leave Russia website. Particularly, there are "about 1,000 Western companies in Russia [...] earning tens of billions of dollars in revenue and paying taxes" that are continually financing Russia's military budget (Miroshnychenko, 2023). Pepsi, for example, in 2021, made a revenue of \$4.1 billion in Russia alone, with \$810 million going to the Russian state budget (B4Ukraine.org, n.d.). Although this article also references that Pepsi has stopped selling Pepsi-brand products in light of Russia's invasion, LeaveRussia.org reiterates that they are still in operation using their lesser-known brands. This shows how, despite having sanctions placed on them by the governments of their home countries and others, some companies find a way to continue business regardless of the ethical or political dilemma of where their money is going. To them, a

profit is still a profit. And that stream of revenue is going straight to the upper class, those who are not directly affected by the conflict.

It is also a relatively known fact that companies have a majority of working-class citizens under their employment. Another piece of common knowledge is that the majority of a company's funds and profits are not being redistributed to the working class, but instead are being dispersed disproportionately to those in the upper echelon. This includes the members of the upper management, such as the CEOs. As stated by the Economic Policy Institute, "in 2022, CEOs were paid 344 times as much as a typical worker" creating this huge economic disparity between the two classes (Bivens and Kandra, 2023). Although anyone can lobby for policies, since the upper class has a much higher payout, they are logically given higher spending and influential power in lobbying compared to the average citizen. This trend is further supported by the lobbying of private military companies in the United States MIC. The aforementioned Lockheed and Raytheon companies have lobbied \$13.8 and \$10.7 million respectively in the year 2022, with a majority of those efforts going into issues of defense (Lockheed Martin Lobbying...; Raytheon Technologies Lobbying..., n.d.). This means that as Lockheed, Raytheon, and many others continue to profit from the war, they are continually influencing the government to enact policies that benefit the MIC. And since most of those policies, at the end of the day, have relations to military-based activity, it is safe to say that the government may very well be prolonging the war itself.

As many critics pointed out, there have been opportunities for negotiations with Russia to end the conflict. General Mark Milley, a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the U.S.' Department of Defense has stated that "there may be a political solution where, politically, the Russians withdraw," but was met with swift criticism by both the Biden Administration and

other media outlets (Scahill, 2022). Essentially, they threatened his job for what he said and interpreted his words to mean that he opposed Ukraine's independence as a result. This backlash just demonstrates how dead set the government is on continuing its involvement in Ukraine no matter the cost. The national security advisor, Jake Sullivan, claimed that "the administration's goal was ensuring the invasion was a 'strategic failure' for Putin" and that "Russia [will] pay a longer-term price in terms of national power," (Marcetic, 2023). This idea feeds into the realism theory as he makes it out as a need to diminish the perceived power of the Russian state. Yet again, that theory only fuels the class system theory further. As evidence in previous paragraphs has demonstrated, the profits of the upper class, which the administration is a part of, seem to be the real driving factor for these policies. In short, because war is so profitable, they aim to maintain the continuation of the conflict as long as possible. And this trend is revealed more from the unchanging set of foreign policies from one presidential administration to the next.

Biden has claimed that his administration is different from Trump's administration and would be focused on "repudiation of Trump's 'America first' legacy (Editors, 2023). This is essentially a claim that he would undo the worst parts of the previous president's administration. A part of this attempted change has been taking a different approach in the Committee of Foreign Relations. Although Biden's CFR seems diverse and meant to represent the middle class, a quick analysis of his members quickly demonstrates how this is not the case. As Shoup points out, a majority of this committee primarily consists of individuals with strong ties to wealthy families or individuals who have been involved in the CFR before (Shoup, 2021). Since they have strong relations with previous, older members of the CFR, and it is these relationships that got them the position, it would be unlikely that policies may actually change. The lack of experience and being of the upper class means that their perspective on various issues is more restricted to their

points of view. They may as well just be doing nothing, saying that they are doing something different, and just being paid for it. And this does bleed into a change of administration. Biden's foreign policy seems to be very against Russia and is consistently providing aid to Ukraine in the hopes of containing Russia's influence on their state (Poust, 2023). However, Poust continues to make a point that Trump's foreign policy would have acted similarly. Poust argues that Trump may have seemed more friendly toward Putin, but Trump's opinion of NATO was consistently positive. He quotes that Trump believed that "NATO serves a great purpose" in 2019 and that the relationship between the U.S. and NATO was "ironclad." And despite his friendship with Putin, he recognized that the Russian president wanted Ukraine and affirmed to him that "You can't do it. You're not gonna do it," (Gedeon, 2022). This strengthens the viewpoint that policies throughout administrations seem to remain the same, so long as they provide profit for them. And as the current policies continue to reflect, the influence of these corporations and the MIC may never change. Because if they were to, it would diminish the United States' economic power in their currency.

The very thing that remains consistent and powerful throughout all the activity of the MIC is the use of the United States Dollar (USD). The decline of the value and power of the USD has been a topic of growing discussion. Despite 90% of the foreign exchange markets being invoiced by USD, its decline seems to be followed by two trends: the constant overspending by the U.S. government and the continual increase of the United States debt ceiling by Congress (Lahiri, 2023). All of these factors create a sense of unreliability and mistrust in the USD value. Logically speaking, if a country's money is fruitlessly tossed around and always being borrowed or used carelessly, is there really value to that currency? Some countries are concerned with this issue, as evidenced by the establishment of BRICS.

BRICS is the acronym for the economic organization that consists of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, which aims to be an alternative to the Western currency and, by proxy, their control (Chen, 2023). This replacement seems logical because as you use someone's currency in economic activity, you are immediately giving them economic value and power through their money. The formation of this group has not only been a threat to the USD and Western currency but has also shown signs of growth and strong establishment. This may be in part because they do not limit themselves to a single currency and instead trade through the currency of their country members. As they continue to grow, along with other organizations like ASEAN, they may not only bring more power to their means of economic exchange but also weaken the power of the established Western countries, including the U.S. (Cook, 2023b). But some may ask why the world still uses USD even today. And the simple answer is there is currently no alternative (Lahirir, 2023). However, the threat of the USD decline is a frightening prospect for America's international power and status. For if it does decline, so will America's control over the world. And since Russia and China, two of the United States' main "enemies" are part of BRICS, there is a very clear threat that those two may surpass the U.S. in terms of power ranking. This may explain this desperation in wars, especially in Ukraine.

As evidenced previously, war is clearly a means of great monetary gain for the United States. It promotes trade with United States companies and, by proxy, reestablishes the value of the USD. By getting their MIC involved in conflict after conflict, it not only doubles as a continuous trail of profits but a display of its military might. The Ukraine conflict is simply a convenient front that the United States was able to manipulate into being invaded by Russia. Thus, Ukraine was turned from a battlefield for democracy into a money-profiteering machine that both reestablishes the value of the U.S. and Western currency and diminishes the power of

the opposing side: Russia. Yet, despite all the grand displays of military power, the underlying reason is maintaining the economic power of the upper class.

Conclusion

The world has always seemed like it is a constant battle for the acquisition of power between states of government. It creates rivalries and tension that seem to result in violent conflicts if not resolved. Ukraine just happens to be one of these conflicts. Caught in the middle of a historic rivalry between the United States and Russia. Although it may have elements of realism theory sprinkled throughout, the true masterminds are the upper class who have manipulated those elements to affix their own agenda. By riding on this constant battle for power, corporations, both military and not, have found ways to profit and thrive in a conflict-driven world. The Ukraine War is then best described by class system theory that utilizes elements of realism driven by the declining power of the USD. It is simply a consistent, desperate attempt by this upper echelon of the United States to maintain its influence. For if the United States loses its power, so does the United States dollar, and so will they.

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