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Analysis of the dynamics of the modern Russian-Ukrainian war: historical roots of geopolitical ambitions

Modern Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşının Dinamiklerinin Analizi: Jeopolitik Hırsların Tarihsel Kökleri

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Written by:
Leyla Derviş¹ <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9396-9018>

Abstract


Given the protracted Russian-Ukrainian war, an urgent task is to highlight the preconditions and historical roots of this confrontation. Therefore, the paper aims to highlight the historical basis of Russian-Ukrainian war. The methodology for the paper involves a multi-faceted approach combining historical analysis, geopolitical examination, and comparative studies. The systematic method and content analysis of the literature were used to implement the research objective. In results parallels are drawn between historical tactics and recent events, suggesting continuity in strategies during the Russian annexation of Crimea and the 2014 war. The ongoing war between Ukraine and Russia is not merely a territorial dispute; it represents a complex interplay of historical grievances and geopolitical ambitions. By uncovering historical antecedents, the work contributes to fostering dialogue between involved parties and external actors. In the history of Ukraine, the geopolitical aspirations of the Russian authorities have manifested themselves with such intensity that they have extended to the introduction of language restrictions. Understanding the historical context is crucial for developing strategies aimed at peaceful conflict resolution. These historical narratives highlight the enduring tensions and consequences of geopolitical forces in shaping Ukraine's trajectory. In conclusion, the paper offers insights into enduring geopolitical ambitions shaping the contemporary conflict in the region.

Keywords: historical roots, political ambitions, international relations, Russian politics, Russian-Ukrainian war.

Özet

Uzun süredir devam eden Rusya-Ukrayna savaşı göz önüne alındığında, bu çatışmanın ön koşullarını ve tarihsel köklerini vurgulamak acil bir görevdir. Bu nedenle, bu çalışma Rusya-Ukrayna savaşının tarihsel temellerini vurgulamayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışmanın metodolojisi, tarihsel analiz, jeopolitik inceleme ve karşılaştırmalı çalışmaları birleştiren çok yönlü bir yaklaşımı içermektedir. Araştırma amacını gerçekleştirmek için sistematik yöntem ve literatürün içerik analizi kullanılmıştır. Sonuçlar, tarihsel taktikler ile yakın zamandaki olaylar arasında paralellikler kurarak Rusya'nın Kırım'ı ilhakı ve 2014 savaşı sırasındaki stratejilerde süreklilik olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Ukrayna ve Rusya arasında devam eden savaş, komşu ülkelerin tarihine damgasını vuran olağan toprak anlaşmazlıklarının ötesine geçmektedir. Bu çalışma, tarihsel öncülleri ortaya çıkararak, ilgili taraflar ve dış aktörler arasında diyalogun geliştirilmesine katkıda bulunuyor. Ukrayna tarihinde, Rus yetkililerin jeopolitik istekleri, dil kısıtlamalarının getirilmesine kadar uzanan bir yoğunlukta kendini göstermiştir. Tarihsel bağlamın anlaşılması, çatışmaların barışçıl yollarla çözümüne yönelik stratejilerin geliştirilmesi açısından büyük önem taşımaktadır. Bu tarihsel anlatılar, Ukrayna'nın yörüngesini şekillendiren jeopolitik güçlerin kalıcı gerilimlerini ve sonuçlarını vurgulamaktadır. Sonuç olarak bu makale, bölgedeki güncel çatışmayı şekillendiren kalıcı jeopolitik emellere dair içgörüler sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tarihsel kökenler, siyasi hırslar, uluslararası ilişkiler, Rus siyaseti, Rusya-Ukrayna savaşı.

¹ PhD in History, Associate Professor of the Faculty of Letters of the Department of History of Akdeniz University, Antalya, Turkey.
 WoS Researcher ID: J-3187-2017



Introduction

Research problem

The ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine is not merely a contemporary geopolitical struggle; it is a complex narrative woven with historical threads that extend deep into the annals of time. Amidst the modern dynamics of this war, a peculiar dimension surfaces – Russia's deliberate ascription of certain narratives from Ukrainian history, particularly those rooted in the ancient past. This strategic incorporation of historical narratives adds a layer of complexity to the conflict, highlighting the interplay between history, geopolitics, and national identity. Therefore, the modern Russian-Ukrainian war is not merely a clash of military forces on the battlefield; it is a manifestation of historical grievances, territorial disputes, and competing geopolitical ambitions. The relevance of analyzing this conflict extends far beyond its regional impact, as it holds the potential to reshape the geopolitical landscape and influence international relations. This ongoing war has prompted an increased scholarly focus on analyzing its multifaceted dimensions, seeking to provide insights into the evolving dynamics and contributing factors. In particular, the modern research a novel conceptual trajectory within the realm of war studies, seeking to carve out a distinctive niche in international studies terminology without negating the established meaning of an existing term – proxy war (Kappeler, 2014; Derviş, 2023). It is essential to note that errand war does not vie for precedence with proxy war; rather, it emerges as a derivative construct stemming from a leader's message, artfully framed and presented with an air of arrogant self-importance to the political leadership of an assumed 'subservient' state. Proxy war, in this context, retains its intrinsic definition. The paper by Dapo (2023) introduces an array of glittering elements drawn from warfare and strategic studies, incorporating aspects such as propaganda psychology, tactical mobilization, collective strategization, the politicization of intelligence, and the syndication of multilateral armament.

Research focus

In view of numerous studies of the current events of the Russian-Ukrainian war, it is important to characterize the main reasons and historical roots of the confrontation between Russians and Ukrainians. Therefore, there are not many works in historiography that would be devoted to the prerequisites and origins of this war. This research will try to solve this problem. Hence, the main focus of this study will be directed to the analysis of the main origins of this confrontation through the prism of history and political science.

Research aim and research questions

Therefore, *the purpose of this article* is to examine in detail the historical origins of the Russian-Ukrainian war through the prism of the scrupulous historical relations of these states. Accordingly, the main tasks of the article include:

1. Study of historical relations between Russia and Ukraine
2. Analysis of Russia's policy towards Ukrainian lands
3. Tracing the origins of the geopolitical ambitions of Russia and Ukraine through the centuries against the background of military confrontation.

Hence, the specific, measurable objectives of this analysis are to:

1. Identify the historical events that have shaped the geopolitical landscape between Russia and Ukraine.
2. Describe the historical relations between Russia and Ukraine
3. Examine the strategic objectives and motivations of the involved parties, particularly Russia's ambitions and Ukraine's responses.

By achieving these objectives, this research will provide a understanding of the ongoing war and its broader implications for global stability.

The structure of this article is organized as follows: The first section will explore the historical significance of Kyivan Rus and how it has been used to justify contemporary Russian claims over Ukraine. The second section, will examine the imperial policies and ideological constructs of the Romanov dynasty that have influenced Russia's longstanding ambitions toward Ukraine. The third section, “Soviet and modern Russian

stereotypes about Ukraine as a basis for the Russian-Ukrainian war”, will analyze the stereotypes and perceptions propagated during the Soviet era. The fourth section, “The global response to the Russian-Ukrainian war”, will assess the international community's reactions, including diplomatic efforts, and military support, and their impact on the war.

Literature Review

Given the escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian war since 2022, contemporary scholars have endeavored to comprehend various aspects of its progression. According to Bila and Hrytsenko (2022) the Russian Federation had set in motion its hybrid war against Ukraine long before 2014, with its roots tracing back to the 1990s. The implementation of the hybrid warfare plan began actively as early as August 14, 2013, when Russia systematically and massively discriminated against Ukrainian exports to the Russian Federation, causing economic damage. The objective was to prevent the signing of the Association Agreement with the European Union (EU) and pull Ukraine into the Customs Union (Bila & Hrytsenko, 2022).

In current literature it was noted that, Russia's geopolitical ambitions towards Ukraine have deep historical roots and are shaped by a combination of factors. Understanding these ambitions requires studying historical, cultural, economic, and strategic considerations. The intricate of Russo-Ukrainian relations is woven with historical events, cultural complexities, economic interests, and strategic imperatives that have evolved over centuries. 1. *Strategic Importance*: Ukraine holds significant strategic importance for Russia. The country serves as a buffer zone between Russia and the European Union and NATO. Russia has historically sought to maintain influence in Ukraine to prevent its alignment with Western institutions, viewing such alignment as a threat to its own security (Knott, 2017). 2. *Economic Interests*: Economic considerations play a role in Russia's ambitions. Ukraine has valuable natural resources, including fertile agricultural land and access to the Black Sea. Controlling these resources has economic implications for Russia, influencing its agricultural and energy sectors. 3. *Geostrategic Positioning*: Russia views Ukraine as part of its historical sphere of influence and an essential component of its broader geopolitical strategy (Todorov, 2015). A Ukraine aligned with the West is seen as diminishing Russia's regional dominance and challenging its aspirations for a sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space. Cultural studies also characterize the role of relations between Russia and Ukraine and their impact on the mentality of the Ukrainian population.

At the same time, the paper by Latysh (2023) focuses on the securitization of historical memory in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. This scholar explored how historical narratives are utilized as tools for securitization during the conflict. The work contributes to a nuanced understanding of the war's impact on historical narratives and memory, shedding light on the broader implications for security. Attempts to revise the Soviet-Russian narrative were inevitably perceived in the Kremlin as “encroachments on Russia's sovereignty and intentions to strip it of the title of a victorious state” (Latysh, 2023, p. 182). Similarly, painful were the claims of East Slavic nations to the heritage of Kyivan Rus, as well as attempts to separate national historical narratives from the overarching imperial or pan-Soviet narrative (Kuzio, 2022). These works are important for understanding the complex relationship between Russia and Ukraine. Thus, a dilemma of mnemonic security emerged in Russian-Ukrainian relations – a historical narrative used to legitimize the Ukrainian state and unite the people was systematically denied by Russia. The collective of authors led by B. Lawson has depicted the humanitarian aspects of the Russian-Ukrainian war, with a particular focus on the utilization and interpretation of numbers in the humanitarian context (Lawson, Glasman & Mützelburg, 2023). The collaborative work headed by Lehkodukh et al. (2023) delved into various historical roots and civilizational factors contributing to the Russian-Ukrainian war during the period of 2014-2022. These authors described the complex historical and cultural aspects that could have influenced the course of the conflict. Importantly, their work provides a historical context for the war, offering a deeper understanding of long-term factors that may have fueled the tensions. Derviş (2023) described social and political circumstances of Russian-Ukrainian war. This research is important in terms of the geopolitical component and is of high value for this study, particularly in the context of Ukraine-Russia relations and their impact on geopolitical alignments.

Furthermore, the insights gained from these comprehensive analyses pave the way for a nuanced exploration of the intricate dynamics between Russia and Ukraine during the specified timeframe. By delving into the complexities of nationalism, historical narratives, humanitarian considerations, civilizational influences, and global repercussions, these works offer a holistic framework for examining

the multifaceted nature of the conflict. As this study seeks to delve deeper into the historical and geopolitical dimensions of the Russian-Ukrainian war, it draws upon the methodological groundwork laid by the aforementioned works to provide a thorough and well-informed analysis.

Methodology

The methodological foundation of scientific intelligence primarily rests on the broader scientific-historical cluster. Employing these methods, the aim is to organize and structure the geopolitical aspect of the Russian-Ukrainian war. That is, the research is based on a qualitative approach, this approach is the most appropriate for the coverage of this topic, since only the analysis of available materials and scientific literature can trace the complex relations between Ukraine and Russia. The selection of the scientific and historical cluster as a research design for studying the geopolitical aspects of the Russian-Ukrainian war is due to the complexity and historical depth of the topic. This design allows for the structural organisation of historical and global data, which will promote a comprehensive understanding of the roots of the conflict and its evolution. The qualitative approach is particularly appropriate as it prioritises in-depth analysis of historical narratives, cultural shifts and geopolitical strategies that are important for understanding the multifaceted nature of Russian-Ukrainian affairs.

The methodology for the paper involves a multi-faceted approach combining historical analysis, geopolitical examination, and comparative studies. The research draws on primary and secondary sources to construct a comprehensive historical narrative of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Scholarly articles and analytic studies formed the basis for understanding the evolution of geopolitical ambitions and historical roots.

Data collection

The selection of sources was based on the following criteria:

1. The work describes the course of the Russian-Ukrainian war.
2. The study outlines the causes of the war.
3. The work describes the complex relations between Russia and Ukraine since ancient times.
4. The history of these countries is described in the study.

The historical analysis employs a chronological framework to trace linguistic restrictions, Russification policies, and cultural assimilation during the Russian Empire. Hence, the historical analysis spans from the era of the Russian Empire to the present, focusing on key periods of linguistic and cultural policy enforcement. The examination extends to the strategic implications of industrial development, focusing on the importation of Russian-speaking workers and the subsequent displacement of the Ukrainian language.

Comparative studies are employed to draw parallels between historical events and contemporary developments. This includes analyzing past Soviet tactics during annexations and conflicts, such as Crimea, and drawing connections to similar strategies observed in the initiation of the 2014 Russian-Ukrainian war. The methodology also incorporates a diplomatic perspective, studying the challenges faced by the Ukrainian Central Rada during World War I and the consequences of perceived collaboration with the Bolshevik government.

Results and Discussion

Kyivan Rus as the “cradle of three fraternal nations”: the medieval origins of modern Russian aspirations.

The geopolitical ambitions of Russia towards Ukraine have deep historical roots and are shaped by a combination of factors. Understanding these ambitions requires examining historical, cultural, economic, and strategic considerations. Russia and Ukraine share a long and intertwined history, with Kyivan Rus serving as a common historical precursor. This sentiment is echoed by Zalizniak (2016) who emphasizes the profound influence of Asian despotism on the traditional culture and mentality of the Russian people, distinct from their Ukrainian counterparts. While the Ukrainian people are characterized as a Western people with a rich blend of southern and eastern influences, the Great Russian people, despite Europeanization, remain entrenched in Eastern spirit and culture. The clash of mentalities is underscored by the Russian populace's resistance to European values, as demonstrated through their hostility towards

Ukrainians, who consistently manifest Eurocentric priorities, notably during the Maidans of 2004 and 2014 (Tolstov, 2022). In essence, the historical narratives intertwining Ukrainian and Russian identities not only shape the contemporary conflict but also lay bare the deep-seated cultural and ideological chasm that defines this complex geopolitical struggle (Zalizniak, 2016). The assertion regarding the primordial Eurasian identity of Ukrainians, as propagated by Russian geopoliticians, is far from unequivocal and encounters significant contradictions when subjected to an impartial historical analysis. Rather than a simplistic Eurasian origin, a nuanced examination reveals the ancient and organic ties that connect Ukraine with Europe (Kappeler, 2014). These ties find their roots in the Greco-Roman influences that permeated the Ukrainian territory, a legacy initiated during the Greek era's colonization of the Northern Black Sea in the 7th century. Kyivan Rus emerged along a vital trade route connecting the Baltic to the Mediterranean, representing the eastern segment of the pan-European trade network. Within the ancient Ukrainian territory, European silver coins coexisted with dinars, offering compelling evidence of prevailing trade and economic links oriented towards the west (Zalizniak, 2016). Dynastic marriages of Kyiv princes further underscored the political connections towards the west. The adoption of pan-European Christianity served as a spiritual conduit, assimilating Kyivan Rus into the broader European spiritual community. Contrary to the emphasis placed by Eurasianists on profound confessional differences between Rus and the West, the Christian identity of Kyivan Rus during the era of St. Volodymyr was not Orthodox in the modern sense.

The introduction of Asian methods of production and a despotic state system to Rus in the 13th century originated from China through Mongol influence. The Golden Horde variant of Eastern despotism was actively propagated in Russia, fueled by the influential figure in Russian history, Alexander Nevsky. It is crucial to recognize that the historical narrative of Ukraine's ties with Europe is multifaceted, shaped by diverse influences, and transcends the simplistic notion of a primordial Eurasian identity claimed by some Russian geopoliticians. In the historical narrative, the significance of Alexander Nevsky's victories over the Swedish and German knights in 1240 and 1242 extends beyond mere military triumphs. These victories are argued to have defended the right of North-Eastern Russia to pursue an Asian path of development (Zalizniak, 2016), as asserted by historical sources. A crucial turning point in this trajectory is marked by the initiation of the 300-year Tatar slavery in North-Eastern Russia. In the aftermath of these events, Alexander Nevsky is credited with making a fateful choice that favored the East over the West. The successes of Ukrainian princes were also interpreted in a similar way. For example, in the 1230s, Prince Danylo (known in historiography as Prince of Galicia and Volhynia, or Danylo Romanovych, King of Rus from 1253) defeated the German knights near Dorogochyn. In the textbooks of the times of the USSR, this battle was presented as an element of the anti-German activities of this ruler, which seemed to relate him to Prince Alexander Nevsky. However, this myth about Prince Danylo has been revised: it was about a relatively minor skirmish that was not intended to destroy his alliance with the Teutonic Order. Due to such a policy, textbooks formed a false idea of the history of medieval Ukraine, whose interests were made dependent on the interests of Moscow. The subsequent phase in the evolution of Asian despotism is intricately linked to the figure of Ivan Kalita (1325–1340). Leading a formidable 50,000-strong Tatar army, Kalita gained notoriety for orchestrating bloody pogroms against rebels in Tver, Torzhka, and Kashin. Simultaneously, he assumed a pivotal role in the administration of the Golden Horde along the Upper Volga. Kalita's loyalty to the Khan, demonstrated through the suppression of anti-Tatar rebellions and effective tax collection, earned him the right to incorporate neighboring Moscow principalities into his domain. It was under the patronage of the Tatars that Moscow began the strategic process of "collecting" the cavalry and Rus' lands, establishing a symbiotic relationship with the Golden Horde.

Moscow's imperial ambitions for possession of Ukraine: historical and ideological constructions of the Romanov dynasty

Later, the process intensified during the Romanov dynasty, which from the 17th century, began to annex Ukrainian lands. The Pereyaslav Council of 1654 and Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytskyi's decision regarding Moscow's tsarist suzerainty over the Cossack lands led to the fact that the autonomy of Ukrainian lands was reduced with each subsequent treaty between the Cossack hetmans and the Moscow side. Since then, in the imagination of many Russian ideologues, Ukraine has become an integral part of Muscovy. However, only in 1783, by order of Empress Catherine II, the autonomy of the Hetmanate was abolished, which meant the actual annexation of Ukrainian lands. Until that time, Ukrainian hetmans managed Ukrainian lands relatively independently. Their diplomatic activity was active: Hetman Ivan Vyhovsky returned to the union with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, hetman Dmytro Doroshenko united the scattered possessions under the sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire, hetman Ivan Mazepa became close to the Swedish king

Charles XII during the Northern War. As the vectors of their activities show, they sought political alliances with European states and powerful Turkey (Plokhy, 2018). The Russian policy of collecting “Rus’ heritage” continued after the division of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1772, 1793, and 1795. The name of Ukraine in official usage was replaced by Malorossiya. The southern Ukrainian lands and Crimea captured from the Crimean Khanate (a vassal of the Ottoman Empire) were called Novorossia and the Tavia Region. In the right-wing (imperial) discourse of modern Russian elites, they still appeal to this fact to emphasize the special status of these lands, considering them separate parts of Russia (Kappeler, 2014). The annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the deployment of Russian troops in Eastern Ukraine were partly explained by these historical contexts. In recent statements, the Russian president explained his ambitions to conquer the modern south of Ukraine by the fact that the Sea of Azov has long been the “internal sea” of the Russian Empire (Sirko, 2022). This maritime perspective not only invokes historical claims but also aligns with broader geopolitical strategies, echoing past aspirations seen in the historical evolution of Russian governance. The Sea of Azov, considered by the Russian leadership as an integral part of its historical sphere of influence, adds a maritime dimension to contemporary geopolitical dynamics, shaping the motivations behind the actions in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine.

The geopolitical aspirations of the Russian authorities were manifested with such intensity that they extended to the imposition of linguistic restrictions, including the prohibition of the Ukrainian language in printed materials, official communication, and various spheres. It is noteworthy that the policy of Russification, initially instigated by the Romanovs, persisted even beyond the collapse of the Russian Empire. The imperial administration, in its pursuit of Russification, laid the groundwork for the cultural and linguistic assimilation of urban centers in Ukraine. The other instrument of Russification was Russian Orthodox Church (Hovorun, 2023)².

The imperative for industrial development necessitated an influx of labor, leading to the importation of workers from Russian territories. Consequently, the gradual displacement of the Ukrainian language from urban domains transpired. While scholarly assessments may be deemed as potentially hyperbolic, the prioritization of Russian-speaking workers within the enterprises situated in the central and eastern regions of Ukraine became an integral component of the Russian imperial discourse.

The demise of the Romanov dynasty ushered in only a brief resurgence of statehood for Ukraine. In 1917, the Ukrainian Central Rada in Kyiv emerged as the principal representative body for the Ukrainian population formerly under the Russian Empire. Over time, the nascent Ukrainian government sought alignment with the German Empire, a diplomatic move that proved disadvantageous in the context of the ongoing First World War (Plokhy, 2018). The Entente nations perceived Ukrainian officials as collaborators who, in collaboration with the Bolshevik government, entered into a separate peace agreement in 1918 at Brest. This political impasse significantly hindered the diplomatic prospects of the revitalized Ukrainian state.

Therefore, the ambitions of the Russian authorities regarding Ukrainian lands were based on the principles of assimilation of local elites, incorporation of lands and cultural restrictions for the development of Ukrainian life (See Figure 1).

² The policy of glorifying Russian heroes, conducting sermons and prayers exclusively in Russian has also had a significant impact on Ukrainian society, some of whom are members of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, a kind of “branch” of Russian Orthodoxy in Ukraine. Narratives and theses about the peace that must be maintained during the Russian aggression have become the subject of debate at the level of the Ukrainian legislature and may lead to a ban on the activities of Russian and pro-Russian activists in Ukraine.

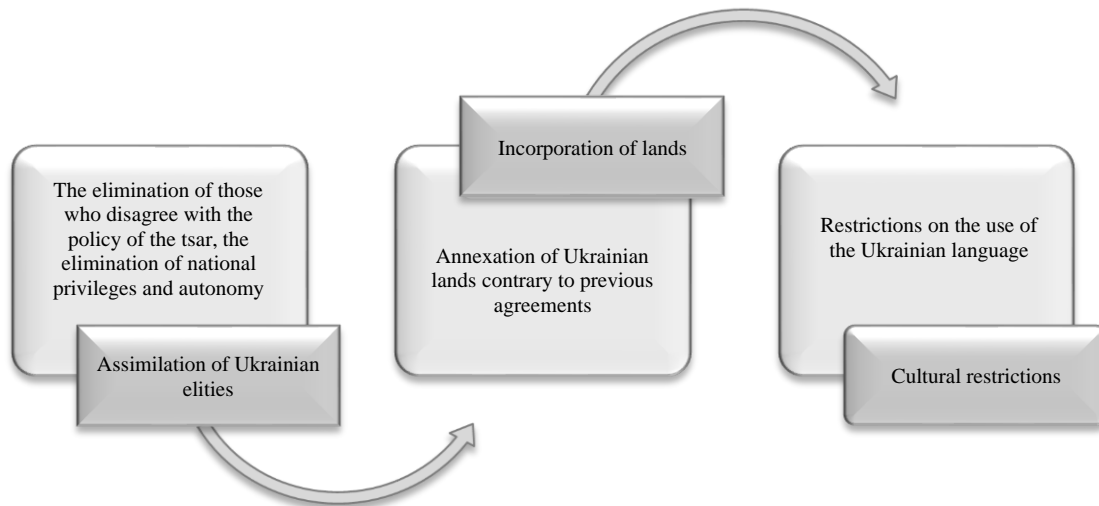


Figure 1. A model of Romanov politics in relation to Ukrainian lands.
Source: author's development.

The fall of the Russian Empire did not lead to the national liberation of Ukraine, which was part of the Soviet Union. In many aspects, the Bolsheviks acted as the continuation of the Romanov policies. First and foremost, it was about foreign policy, but while the Romanov Empire sought to establish control over the Black Sea straits and capture Istanbul (Constantinople) (Plokhly, 2018), the Bolsheviks' goal was to support the world revolution, which quickly grew into a tendency to understand Moscow not as the “Third Rome” but as the capital of the communist international. Although these regimes were not too similar in appearance, they relied primarily on force to achieve their foreign policy goals.

Soviet and modern Russian stereotypes about Ukraine as a basis for the Russian-Ukrainian war

The deconstruction of Ukrainian consciousness during the time of the Russian Empire became a strong basis for the establishment of Soviet power. Flirting with communist ideology led to the erosion of the national foundations of the revived Ukraine: issues of socialist development became more important for the political elites of that time than state security. For this reason, the offensive of the Red Army on Kyiv and other cities was quite successful, since the supporters of the independent development of Ukraine could not organize a reliable military defense (Kyrydon & Troyan, 2022). The Bolsheviks acted by making broad promises that they did not intend to fulfill (for example, the transfer of land to peasants in their ownership). They also formed a puppet pro-Soviet government in Kharkiv - formally, it was he who fought with Ukrainian forces, inviting the Russian Red Army to join them. Similar steps can be seen during the unfolding of the Russian annexation of Crimea and the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014. There is talk of promises of broad material benefits and economic prosperity for the pro-Russian residents of Crimea, the creation of separate paramilitary formations in the East of Ukraine, which have declared themselves independent republics (Khomyakov, 2020). Copying old Soviet “projects” made it possible to divert suspicion from the Russian authorities before the start of an open invasion in 2022.

The Soviet authorities reacted to the "Ukrainian question" much more acutely. Suspicion of “Ukrainian nationalism” became a terrible accusation, for which they could be sentenced to death or long imprisonment in the camps. Many books (especially historical ones) were banned; the history of Ukraine was reduced to a constant desire to “unite” with Russia. Russification intensified, as the Ukrainian language began to be pushed out of official use since the 1930s. In addition, the terrible Holodomor of 1932–1933 led to huge human losses among the Ukrainian peasantry. Instead, immigrants from Russian territories began to be brought to Ukrainian towns and villages. Especially many such immigrants ended up in the Crimea and in the East of Ukraine, in the large industrial centers of the central regions. Even in the western Ukrainian lands, after their accession to the Ukrainian SSR, leadership roles belonged to people who did not come from the local communist elites. Fear of Ukrainian “nationalism” led to the fact that only verified personnel with verified biographies were admitted to the administration.

The developed economic system connected Ukrainian enterprises with Russian ones. This combination contributed to the assimilation of the Ukrainian economy and made its development impossible without Russian markets. Even after the collapse of the USSR in 1991, these ties enabled the Russian political elite to talk about Ukraine as a failed state that is unable to develop independently. Similar views were instilled in Russian society through propaganda and actualization of established stereotypes. First of all, it is said that the largest industrial centres of Ukraine were subjected to severe Russification, which pushed Ukrainian out of communication and replaced it with Russian. The belief that Ukrainian was a rural language began to take hold, while in the cities, which embodied Soviet progress, (Plokhly, 2018) it was customary to speak Russian. This vision of the linguistic picture of the world persisted even after 1991 and was partly fuelled by pro-Russian political and civic organisations.

The current shape of Russian society is largely molded by the tumultuous transformations of the 1990s, marked by widespread neoliberal atomization through consumerism and profound depoliticization. This environment naturally provided fertile ground for the state's "post-truth" propaganda (Datsiuk et al., 2023). Together, these factors have given rise to an exceptionally cynical society, now incapable of meaningful political engagement. The collapse of the Soviet Union instilled a general skepticism toward any ideology and, in fact, any morality-driven politics.

In the political landscape of 1990s Russia, two prominent movements were discernible. One was led by the so-called "people of the sixties," motivated by anti-Stalinist and anti-dictatorship sentiments, supporting value politics grounded in demanding moral principles. The other movement, however, represented a more 'realist,' extremely cynical, semi-criminal, and highly securitized understanding of communal life. The former was exemplified by the towering figure of academician Andrey Sakharov, while the latter found representation in various former KGB officers.

By this point, Russian society had become accustomed to leading a dual life-paying lip service to communist ideals expressed in the grandiloquent "moral codex of the builder of communism," while privately embracing values of consumerism and a pursuit of material prosperity. The shared experience taught late Soviet citizens that morality was ultimately a tool of manipulation serving the interests of the ruling group. Consequently, the swift collapse of communist ideology resulted in the establishment of an exceedingly cynical and amoral society. It's not that the society completely lost its ability to discern morally right and wrong actions; it simply ceased to care. Naturally, truth itself perished alongside morality (Khomiyakov, 2023). As a consequence, Sakharov's noble cause met an inevitable demise. Putin's administration has actively worked to cultivate this mindset (Todorov, 2015). Despite the assertions of various contemporary commentators, regarding the supposed essentialist understanding of the Russian nation, a novel self-perception has emerged, shaped primarily by a profoundly neoliberal approach to governance.

The global response to the Russian-Ukrainian war

According to structural realists, the conflict is seen as a preventive war, strategically motivated by NATO's eastward expansion. However, many scholars argue that Putin's decision-making is characterized by irrationalities that are better understood as overbalancing and hubris in classical realism. Putin's overbalancing can be explained by applying the concept of self-deception from evolutionary psychology, providing a scientific basis for hubris in classical realism (Ito, 2023). The global reaction to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict has caused sharp condemnations and caused indignation in many countries of the world. Russia has become an object of international condemnation for violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and international law. Attempts to resolve the conflict include a wide range of sanctions and restrictions on pressure on the Russian regime (Mustafazadeh, 2022). The international community actively expresses indignation and demands that aggression from Russia. War and deployment of Russian troops in the territory of Ukraine are condemned. The countries have introduced various economic, political and diplomatic sanctions aimed at restoring the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine.

Germany has emerged as a significant player in the global response to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. The German government has taken a firm stance against Russia's actions, emphasizing the importance of upholding international law and condemning the violation of Ukraine's sovereignty. Germany has actively participated in diplomatic efforts and has contributed to shaping the collective European response to the crisis. The country's economic influence and diplomatic weight add a crucial dimension to the international community's efforts to address the conflict. Meanwhile, the United States has been a vocal critic of Russia's

aggression in Ukraine. The U.S. government has swiftly condemned the violation of Ukraine's sovereignty, labeling it as a threat to regional stability. The United States has played a pivotal role in coordinating responses within the NATO framework, emphasizing the alliance's commitment to collective defense. The imposition of targeted sanctions by the U.S. underscores its determination to hold Russia accountable for its actions. Although the war is still far from being resolved and hostilities ceased, the search for historical foundations makes it clear how sudden relapses of the imperial past can be even in the twenty-first century. On this basis, it can be determined that claims need to be grounded before they can be realised. One of the most promising ways to abandon violence is to reject the imperial notion of history, where reality is measured by colonial possessions or a single "world".

Discussion

The obtained results indicate that throughout the centuries, Russia sought to subjugate Ukrainian lands using a diverse arsenal: military, ideological, and coercive-cultural. In particular, the data reveals a centuries-long coercive Russification of the Ukrainian population and the influx of large masses of ethnic Russians, primarily for employment in urban enterprises. It is shown, that the intense geopolitical aspirations of Russian authorities, exemplified by linguistic restrictions and the prohibition of the Ukrainian language, continuing the policy of Russification initiated by the Romanovs. This extended beyond the collapse of the Russian Empire, with a focus on assimilating urban centers in Ukraine (Dolzhenko, 2022). The imperative for industrial development led to the importation of Russian-speaking workers, contributing to the displacement of the Ukrainian language in central and eastern Ukrainian regions. This linguistic shift became integral to the Russian imperial discourse. This result is proven by Ploky (2018), who emphasized the importance of the industrial development of Ukrainian cities for the Russification of the local population. Other aspects of this problem are also proved by Zalizniak (2016) and Kögler (2023).

Mentioning Russia's geopolitical ambitions and Ukraine, it is very crucial to mention how current Russian administration considers "the ethnic Russians", which formed base for the annexation of Crimea and the start for the Russia-Ukraine War. From the other hand, there are other points of view. For example, Dunford (2023) wrote, that the military conflict involving Russia, Ukraine, the United States, and NATO is primarily driven by some factors. Firstly, Russia perceives NATO's expansion as a threat to its security, which it views as a violation of prior agreements made during Germany's reunification and the principle of indivisible security (Dunford, 2023). The same point of view has Lippert (2024). He thought that there is a big confrontation between Russia and NATO. This article applies a mixed methodology to examine the Russo-Ukraine War as a case study of war causation, focusing on the failure of Conventional Arms Control (CAC) agreements (Çalışkan, 2022). It argues that the erosion of security and deterrence for Russia against NATO led to the conflict. The study suggests that the failure of CAC agreements can lead to war, highlighting the need for a comprehensive CAC agreement in Europe to establish and preserve a military balance. His paper contributes to causes of war theory-building by showing how Putin's concerns over Russia's declining military power and standing, combined with NATO's increasing capability and forces in eastern Europe, contributed to the conflict. The failure of these agreements led to Russia's invasion of Ukraine to shift the military balance (Lippert, 2024). While both classical and neoclassical realism have their limitations, they show that realism can provide explanations beyond international power structures. These approaches offer multifaceted accounts of why states, such as Russia, choose to take actions like invading Ukraine (Smith & Dawson, 2022). At the same time, the results of the paper underscore the intentional cultivation of a specific mindset by Putin's administration, which diverges from traditional notions of the Russian nation. The war between Russia and Ukraine can be attributed to several key factors. One significant factor is the radicalization of the Putin regime, leading to increased autocracy and a growing disconnect from the West. Concurrently, Ukraine has been undergoing a process of democratization and aligning more closely with Western values and institutions. These contrasting trajectories have heightened tensions between the two countries, making the outbreak of war more likely. Additionally, these factors continue to influence the dynamics of warfare in the region (Sasse, 2022). Therefore, the investigation of the complex historical causes and geopolitical goals that underlie the current confrontation between Russia and Ukraine constitutes the scientific uniqueness of this work. Understanding the fundamental reasons of the conflict is one of the many elements of practical significance. The study, in particular, contributes to our understanding and illumination of the historical processes that gave rise to the war between Russia and Ukraine. This can therefore pave the way for novel approaches to current problems and aid in the comprehension of the underlying causes of conflict.

However, this study also has a low limitation. Since it is built on the analysis of works available on the Internet. It is possible to neglect those historical works that are not available online. Another limitation is the possible subjectivism present in scientific works. This is a limitation of the author's attempt to verify by validating and comparing the various works and available sources. At the same time, the scientific novelty of this research also lies in promoting dialogue and conflict resolution. By uncovering historical antecedents, the work contributes to fostering dialogue between involved parties and external actors. The main limitation of this study is the consideration of literature written primarily in English. Special attention is paid to works in Ukrainian and Turkish. However, works written in other languages were completely ignored. Another limitation of this work is the emphasis on publications by contemporary authors.

Conclusions

The paper showed the historical origins of the Russian-Ukrainian war through the prism of the scrupulous historical relations of these states. It is shown that the geopolitical ambitions of Russia towards Ukraine have deep historical roots, encompassing a complex interplay of historical, cultural, economic, and strategic factors:

1. The ongoing war is characterized as a significant confrontation with far-reaching implications, extending beyond territorial disputes and reshaping the geopolitical equilibrium.
2. The deep-seated cultural and ideological differences between Ukrainian and Russian identities, explored through historical narratives, underscore the complexity of this geopolitical struggle. It highlights the ancient ties connecting Ukraine with Europe, rooted in Greco-Roman influences, trade networks, dynastic marriages, and the adoption of pan-European Christianity during the era of Kyivan Rus. The Russian strategic collaboration with the Golden Horde shaped the governance structures of Moscow, solidifying the trajectory of Eastern-style despotism in the region.
3. The deconstruction of Ukrainian consciousness during the Russian Empire laid the groundwork for the establishment of Soviet power. The Bolsheviks employed tactics such as unfulfilled promises and the establishment of a puppet pro-Soviet government in Kharkiv, creating a façade of internal conflict while inviting the Russian Red Army to intervene. Similar strategies were observed during the Russian annexation of Crimea and the start of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014, involving promises of material benefits, economic prosperity, and the creation of paramilitary formations in Eastern Ukraine. This echoes past Soviet practices, serving to deflect suspicion from Russian authorities before the open invasion in 2022.

Together, these historical accounts draw attention to the ongoing conflicts and effects of linguistic, political, and geopolitical factors on Ukraine's development. Russification and geopolitical alignments have left a lasting impact on the geopolitical landscape of the modern region, highlighting the complex and long-lasting effects of historical developments on Ukraine's political and cultural scene. All things considered, the Russian-Ukrainian war offers a fertile ground for multidisciplinary study, providing chances to delve further into the aspects of history, geopolitics, sociology, economics, and law. Scholars have the chance to offer insightful opinions as the conflict develops, which can influence international discourse, shape policy, and advance a more sophisticated comprehension of the intricate problems at hand. However, this study opened up new perspectives for research. In particular, it is worth characterizing in more detail the impact of the indigenization policy on the Ukrainian people, since different researchers have different attitudes to this complex issue. Further research should also be devoted to the more detailed origin of Russia and to characterize the role of the Moscow principality in the Middle Ages and its relationship with the Kyiv principality. The author believes that these areas are debatable and will obviously require more research in the future.

The practical implications are quite broad. The study will provide policy makers and diplomats with a deeper understanding of the historical and geopolitical causes of the war, which will help them to make more informed decisions about strategy and tactics in relations with Russia and Ukraine. The results can also help the international community to build support for Ukraine by providing historical evidence of Russia's aggressive actions and their impact on Ukrainian culture and sovereignty.

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