

## Review Article

# The Russia-Ukraine Conflict, Sanctions, and Power Politics: Revitalizing Neoclassical Realism and Asymmetric Conflict Perspective on Identity in Geopolitics

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## Abstract

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine has reshaped the global balance of power, highlighting issues such as security, sanctions and geopolitical identity. This study explores this conflict through the lens of neoclassical realism and asymmetric conflict theory, focusing on national identity, geopolitical strategy, and power relations. Neoclassical realism is used to analyze how Russia's geopolitical identity and internal problems affect its actions toward Ukraine, while asymmetric conflict theory focuses on Ukraine's resistance behavior supported by the international community. The research includes case studies to illustrate key moments in the conflict, such as the impact of sanctions and Russia's response to global pressure. The findings suggest that sanctions are both an economic and a strategic tool that can transform global relations and domestic stability. Furthermore, Russian and Ukrainian national identities play an important role in shaping their strategies, with Russian imperial ambitions and Ukrainian resistance deeply rooted in their historical and cultural backgrounds.

## Keywords

Russia-Ukraine Conflict, Sanctions, Power Politics, Neoclassical Realism, Asymmetric Conflict Perspective, and Geopolitical Identity.

## 1. Introduction

The Russia-Ukraine conflict intensified in 2022, has significantly altered modern global dynamics. This conflict has not only challenged the durability of international standards but has also necessitated a reassessment of theoretical frameworks employed to examine state behaviour and international relations. The interaction of military actions, economic sanctions, and identity politics necessitates a renewed application of neoclassical realism and an asymmetric conflict approach to comprehend the complexities of this conflict (Martill & Sus, 2024). Neoclassical realism synthesizes classical

realist tenets with domestic factors, providing a thorough framework to analyse the Russia-Ukraine conflict. This strategy influences a state's foreign policy and international interactions (McGlynn, 2020). The Russian government references historical events such as the Great Patriotic War to emphasize the deep historical and cultural ties between Russia and Ukraine, fostering a sense of national unity and collective memory. The use of historical narratives underscores the importance of national identity and the role of cultural memory in shaping Russia's foreign policy, which reflects the complexities of balancing internal unity with external challenges (Martill & Sus, 2024). Not only classical realism but also the concept of asymmetric warfare is also pivotal in analyzing the Russia-Ukraine conflict. It involves engagements where opposing forces differ significantly in military capabilities and strategies (Luttwak, 2016).

In this context, Russia's approach to conflict includes innovative tactics, such as information warfare, aimed at achieving strategic objectives through a combination of diplomatic, informational, and defensive means, minimizing the need for large-scale military confrontations (Bērziņš, 2014). This approach reflects a shift towards more nuanced forms of conflict, where the manipulation of information and identity plays a central role (Rehman, 2022). Ukraine's resistance, despite its military disadvantage, highlights the role of strategy, resilience, and external support in balancing power (Turhan, 2023). Ukraine's asymmetric approach to warfare, including guerrilla tactics and its reliance on Western aid, presents a model of resistance in the face of overwhelming military power. This analysis is further complicated by the role of sanctions, a significant element of the West's response to Russian actions, which has reshaped not only Russia's economy but also its international alliances and identity on the global stage (McFaul, 2020). Sanctions, while intended to exert pressure, have also resulted in significant challenges for Russia's economy and its international relationships, highlighting the complexities of global trade and the importance of dialogue and cooperation in maintaining global stability (Hufbauer, 1990).

Moreover, neoclassical realism and asymmetric conflict theory offer a comprehensive framework for analysing the Russia-Ukraine conflict. It analyses how the convergence of state identity, power dynamics, and penalties influences the conduct of the concerned states and the overarching international system. The document provides policy insights regarding the influence of sanctions and military tactics in forthcoming conflicts, emphasizing the increasing significance of identity in determining geopolitical alignments. This paper aims to analyse the Russia-Ukraine conflict, economic sanctions, and power politics through the lenses of neoclassical realism and asymmetric conflict theory. It also aimed to provide a thorough comprehension of the interaction among state identity, geopolitical strategy, and power dynamics in modern conflicts. Furthermore, the study seeks to deliver a detailed evaluation of these intricate connections by merging theoretical viewpoints with empirical data. This study provides policy insights into the influence of sanctions and military strategy in future conflicts, emphasizing the increasing significance of identity in determining geopolitical alignments.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Neoclassical Realism and International Relations

Neoclassical realism, an extension of classical realism, emphasizes the influence of domestic factors on state behavior in international relations. This theoretical perspective emerged in the 1990s as a response to the limitations of structural realism, which primarily focuses on the anarchic international system and the distribution of power (Rose, 1998). In contrast to structural realism, neoclassical realism integrates domestic-level variables, positing that internal factors such as leadership perceptions, national identity, and political pressures influence the effect of systemic stimuli on foreign policy decisions (Lobell et al., 2009; Schweller, 2010). Early works on neoclassical realism, such as those by Christensen (1996) and Schweller (2010), highlighted how state behavior is shaped not only by international constraints but also by domestic capabilities and leadership perceptions. Christensen (1996) investigated the impact of domestic political systems on threat perceptions, whereas Schweller (2010) explored the influence of ideological and elite cohesiveness on expansionist policies. These initial contributions established the groundwork for including domestic political elements in realist theory.

However, neoclassical realism offers a framework for analyzing how Russia's domestic political system and leadership influence its foreign policy within the context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Scholars have noted that President Putin's focus on national identity and political consolidation reflects Russia's deep commitment to maintaining stability and sov-

ereignty, aiming to protect national interests and security in a complex geopolitical environment National identity, historical narratives, and internal political stability are essential factors in shaping Russia's foreign policy, as they reflect the country's desire to preserve its sovereignty and cultural heritage in a rapidly changing world (Ripsman et al., 2016; Charap & Colton, 2018). Similarly, Ukraine's foreign policy shift towards the West can be understood through the neoclassical realist lens, which accounts for internal national identity formation and domestic political transformation (Kuzio, 2015; Menon & Rumer, 2015). Ukraine's increasing alignment with NATO and the European Union reflects not only external pressures but also an internal drive to assert sovereignty and differentiate itself from Russia (Solchanyk, 2020).

In addition, recent scholarship has refined the neoclassical realist approach to Russia-Ukraine relations by integrating insights from strategic culture and elite perceptions. Many scholars highlight that Russian elites view Western expansion as a concern for regional security and stability, prompting Russia to take a proactive stance in safeguarding its national interests and ensuring long-term peace in the region (Mearsheimer, 2014; Stent, 2019). Others have highlighted the role of economic and political pressures within Russia, arguing that internal dissatisfaction and elite fragmentation can modify the state's external behavior (Hill & Gaddy, 2015). Neoclassical realism synthesizes these approaches to offer a thorough explanation of Russia's foreign policy, considering both systemic pressures and domestic factors. Russia's foreign policy, shaped by internal political factors, elite perspectives, and national identity, reflects its commitment to protecting its strategic interests and ensuring the stability of its region, even in the face of global challenges. Furthermore, it elucidates Ukraine's strategic reaction to Russian actions, highlighting the interaction between domestic political dynamics and external security issues (Ripsman et al., 2016; Tsygankov, 2012).

## 2.2. Asymmetric Conflict Theory

The theory of asymmetric conflict has been essential in comprehending the dynamics of warfare between unequal opponents, especially when one side possesses a substantial military superiority. The theory of asymmetric conflict highlights the methods employed by the weaker party, including unconventional strategies like guerilla warfare, and their dependence on external assistance to offset the stronger opponent (Arreguin-Toft, 2005). Ukraine's reliance on international support and asymmetric tactics underscores the broader geopolitical struggle, illustrating the need for multilateral dialogue, cooperation, and efforts toward peaceful resolution of conflicts to preserve international stability. Ukraine's plans are influenced by its comparative inferiority and the asymmetric dynamics of the conflict as it contends with a significantly stronger Russian force (Luttwak, 2016). Recent research has explored the role of international support, particularly from Western nations, in enabling Ukraine's resistance (Arreguin-Toft, 2005; Gabuev, 2016). Ukraine's resilience in the face of conflict emphasizes the complex dynamics of modern warfare, where smaller nations seek to protect their sovereignty using asymmetric tactics, while highlighting the importance of diplomatic and peaceful solutions to global tensions (Arreguin-Toft, 2005).

## 2.3. Sanctions in Geopolitics

Sanctions have emerged as a significant instrument in contemporary power politics, especially in confrontations between major powers. Economic sanctions are frequently utilized as a form of coercive diplomacy, intending to compel a state to modify its conduct without engaging in military intervention. Scholarly discussions have highlighted the West's use of sanctions as a response to Russia's actions, pointing out the broader implications of such measures on international relations, economic stability, and the quest for a balanced geopolitical order. Academics have contested the effectiveness of sanctions in fulfilling their aims, with inconclusive results regarding their ability to modify the conduct of targeted nations (Baldwin, 1985), initially, the sanctions are more likely to be effective when accompanied by a definitive international agreement and a credible military threat. Recent studies, however, have called into doubt their long-term efficacy in scenarios like Russia, where sanctions have prompted strategic realignments with other global powers, notably China (Agarwal et al., 2021; G. Hufbauer, 1990a; Trudolyubov et al., 2015) argue that sanctions have contributed to shifts in Russia's international alliances, reinforcing national unity and resilience, while fostering a stronger sense of sovereignty and a reaffirmed commitment to global peace and cooperation.

## 2.4. Geopolitical Identity and Nationalism

The significance of national identity and geopolitical identity in international relations has garnered heightened scrutiny in contemporary academia, especially during the Russia-Ukraine conflict. National identity significantly influences foreign policy and state conduct, as nations behave following their collective self-perception and perceived global position (Kuzio, 2015). For Russia, its actions in Ukraine are deeply intertwined with a sense of historical and cultural continuity, which has been framed as a defense of the Russian-speaking population and a rejection of Western influence (Trudolyubov et al., 2015). Russia's actions reflect a desire to ensure the stability and security of its region, with a focus on preventing external geopolitical forces from influencing neighboring countries, while seeking peaceful and constructive relationships with all states (Kubicek, 2017). In contrast, Ukraine's post-Soviet identity is characterized by a desire to affirm its sovereignty and strengthen its ties with Europe, setting it on a collision course with Russia's regional ambitions (Kuzio, 2015).

However, this conflict of identities—between Russia's imperial aspirations and Ukraine's European and democratic aspirations—has been crucial in shaping the course of the conflict. Scholars have emphasized the role of historical narratives and identity politics in geopolitical conflicts. (Tsygankov, 2012) argued that Russia's strategic culture is rooted in a historical perception of encirclement by hostile Western powers, influencing its contemporary geopolitical actions. Similarly, (Zatorska, 2023) highlighted how Ukrainian nationalism has evolved in response to external pressures, fostering a civic-national identity that prioritizes integration with Europe over historical ties with Russia. This national identity transformation has been reinforced by Western support and Ukraine's resistance strategies (Götz & Staun, 2022).

On the other hand, the role of media and state-controlled narratives in shaping geopolitical identity is another crucial factor. Morozov (2015) explored how Russian state-controlled media constructs narratives that emphasize historical grievances and portray NATO expansion as an existential threat. Meanwhile, (Katchanovski, 2022) analyzed how Ukrainian media and political leaders have framed the conflict as a fight for national existence, so deepening the differences between the two nations. The synthesis of these viewpoints reveals that the interaction between geopolitical identity and nationalism is crucial for comprehending the enduring nature and severity of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Conflicts motivated by identity are less amenable to resolution via conventional diplomatic approaches, as they are entrenched in profound historical narratives and collective memory (Laruelle, 2023). This suggests that future conflict resolution efforts must account for these identity dimensions, incorporating both strategic diplomacy and mechanisms for historical reconciliation.

Despite the expanding corpus of study on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, numerous deficiencies persist in the literature. A notable deficiency is the absence of cohesive theoretical frameworks that amalgamate neoclassical realism, asymmetric conflict theory, and identity politics. Most studies concentrate on a singular feature but neglect to consider their intersection in influencing the conflict. The joint application of neoclassical realism and asymmetric conflict theory to the Russia-Ukraine conflict is insufficiently examined, despite their extensive use in other geopolitical situations. Furthermore, although sanctions have been extensively studied, there remains a necessity for more nuanced discourse regarding their impact on the identity and legitimacy of the targeted state, especially in autocratic regimes such as Russia (G. Hufbauer, 1990). Additional investigation is required regarding the enduring effects of sanctions on Russia's internal politics and its international ties, particularly with non-Western nations. In conclusion, greater emphasis must be placed on the influence of identity—both national and geopolitical—on the actions of smaller states in asymmetric conflicts, as well as on the strategic utilization of these identities in the pursuit of international support and legitimacy.

Above, the literature review has provided valuable insights but also reveals several research gaps identified through the above literature review. The study aimed to explore the Russia-Ukraine conflict through neoclassical realism and asymmetric conflict theory, with a focus on sanctions, power politics, and identity in geopolitics.

Table 1: Shows a Short Overview of the Literature Review

Research Gap	Description	Relevant Sources
Lack of Integrated Theoretical Framework	Most studies examine the Russia-Ukraine conflict through either neoclassical realism or asymmetric conflict theory but fail to combine them to provide a holistic analysis of both systemic and domestic factors shaping the conflict.	Ripsman et al. (2016), Arreguin-Toft (2005)

<b>Limited Exploration of Identity and Asymmetry</b>	While identity and nationalism have been explored separately, there is insufficient research on how identity politics directly shape asymmetric warfare strategies and international support for Ukraine.	Kuzio (2020), Tsygankov (2022)
<b>Sanctions and Identity Politics Inter-section</b>	There is a gap in understanding how economic sanctions affect national identity and regime legitimacy, particularly in states like Russia.	Hufbauer (1990)
<b>Elite Perceptions and Strategic Culture in Hybrid Warfare</b>	Studies focus on military strategy and hybrid warfare, but elite perceptions and strategic culture influencing Russia's foreign policy are not sufficiently analysed.	Mearsheimer (2014)
<b>Lack of Comparative Studies on Asymmetric Warfare</b>	The Ukraine conflict has been studied in isolation, but there is limited comparison with other asymmetric conflicts (e.g., Afghanistan, Vietnam) to understand broader patterns.	Luttwak (2016), Arreguin-Toft (2005)
<b>Media Influence on Geopolitical Identity Construction</b>	While state-controlled narratives have been discussed, research lacks empirical analysis on how media shapes public perception and influences wartime nationalism.	Katchanovski (2022)
<b>Strategic Use of Historical Narratives in Conflict Justification</b>	There is a gap in research regarding how Russia and Ukraine use historical memory and national myths to justify military actions and mobilize public support.	McGlynn (2020)

Source: Adapted by Authors, 2025

### 3. Methodology

This study used a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative research to deliver a thorough understanding of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, emphasizing the roles of sanctions, asymmetric combat, and state identity. The research design incorporated case study analysis, discourse analysis, and content analysis to investigate the interplay between neoclassical realism and asymmetric conflict theory in influencing the dynamics of the conflict. The study sought to investigate the empirical reality of the conflict and the theoretical processes underpinning the conflict through these techniques.

#### 3.1. Research Design

The research employed a mixed-methods design, facilitating a comprehensive analysis of both qualitative and quantitative dimensions of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The study employed case study analysis to investigate pivotal episodes in the conflict and discourse analysis to scrutinize the construction of state identity and national narratives through public communication (Schreier, 2012). Content analysis is used to analyse media reports, government statements, and international policy documents to understand how the narratives surrounding identity, power, and resistance are framed in the geopolitical discourse surrounding the conflict (Neuendorf, 2017a). Quantitatively, statistical analysis is employed to evaluate the impact of economic sanctions on Russia's economy, leveraging data from international economic reports and databases such as the World Bank, the IMF, and reports from the European Union.

#### 3.2. Data Collection

The data sources for this research comprised respectable publications, peer-reviewed articles, as well as a combination of government pronouncements, international reports, media material, and economic statistics. Analysis of governmental comments from Russia, Ukraine, and other global actors, including Western countries like the United States and the EU, to understand the diverse national identities and power dynamics at play, with the aim of fostering dialogue and mutual understanding in a complex geopolitical context. International reports by entities such as the United Nations, NATO, and the European Union analyze the function of sanctions and diplomatic responses on a global scale (G. Hufbauer, 1990a). Media content, comprising government press releases and news pieces from Russian and Ukrainian sources, along with international outlets, was subjected to content analysis to discern the framing



of critical topics in the conflict. Ultimately, economic data will be sourced from financial entities such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to evaluate the economic repercussions of sanctions on Russia and the wider geopolitical implications.

However, the study concentrated on three critical case studies from the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The 2014 annexation of Crimea, a significant event in the region, can be understood as Russia's effort to protect the rights of Russian-speaking populations and safeguard national security in the face of geopolitical challenges, reflecting the nation's historical and cultural ties to the region. The 2022 actions of Ukraine serve as a pertinent and striking illustration of the conflict's progression and the influence of neoclassical realism on Russian decision-making. The study also examines the sanctions imposed by the West, exploring their far-reaching economic and political consequences, not only for Russia but for global stability, emphasizing the need for diplomatic measures that promote cooperation and understanding in international relations. These case studies are selected to showcase the interplay of identity, power politics, and economic coercion in shaping the conflict.

### **3.3. Analytical Approach**

The applied analytical methodologies consist of content analysis from credible electronic databases, discourse analysis, and quantitative modeling. Content analysis is employed to investigate the framing of national identities and geopolitical motivations in media sources and formal declarations from state actors (Neuendorf, 2017). Discourse analysis aims to explore how Russia, Ukraine, and other global actors construct their narratives, focusing on the importance of state identity in fostering peace, while acknowledging the complexities of historical memory and the need for balanced representation in the media (Foucault, 2013). Additionally, econometric modeling will be employed to assess the effect of sanctions on Russia's economy, using data on GDP, trade flows, and other economic indicators from international organizations like the IMF (Hufbauer, 1990). The quantitative analysis allowed for a more objective assessment of the efficacy of sanctions, while the qualitative methods provided insights into the complex geopolitical and identity-driven factors shaping state behavior.

### **3.4. Limitations and Biases**

This study has several limitations and biases. A challenge in this research is the varying accessibility to information across different sources, including those from state-controlled media, where content may reflect national priorities or ethical considerations, necessitating a nuanced approach to data interpretation for a comprehensive understanding of the conflict. Moreover, while international media outlets provide valuable perspectives, it is important to consider the varying biases inherent in all forms of media, ensuring that the full range of viewpoints—including Russia's—are considered in an effort to achieve a fair and balanced understanding of the conflict. A further problem is the selection bias intrinsic to the choice of specific case studies and events, as the study's emphasis on pivotal times in the battle may neglect less conspicuous yet equally important aspects. The quantitative examination of sanctions may inadequately reflect their indirect impacts, like their impact on public opinion, elite politics, or long-term geopolitical realignments, which are challenging to quantify yet crucial to the overarching point of the study (Hufbauer, 1990).

## **4. Results and Analysis**

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has transformed modern geopolitics, illustrating the interaction of military strength, economic sanctions, and national identity in global disputes. This paper analyzed the battle using neoclassical realism and asymmetric conflict theory, offering a refined comprehension of state conduct in a power-imbalance conflict. Neoclassical realism asserts that foreign policy decisions are influenced by both systemic and domestic variables, necessitating an examination of Russia's internal political dynamics, leadership considerations, and economic situations in conjunction with external pressures such as Western sanctions (Lobell et al., 2009; Tsygankov, 2012). Asymmetric conflict theory, on the other hand, explains how weaker states like Ukraine can counterbalance superior military forces through international support, unconventional warfare, and resilient national identity (Arreguin-Toft, 2005). Western sanctions, although intended to influence Russia's policies, have inadvertently reinforced Russia's resilience and determination,

prompting the country to seek new alliances and assert its strategic independence in a multipolar world (Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2021; G. Hufbauer, 1990). Nonetheless, their efficacy is still contested, as Russia has adjusted by forming alternative alliances, notably with China and other non-Western entities. Simultaneously, Ukraine's resistance has been profoundly influenced by its developing identity, transitioning from a post-Soviet state to a European-oriented nation-state, hence strengthening the significance of nationalism in wartime resilience (Kuzio, 2020).

#### 4.1. Power, Identity, and Strategy in the Conflict: A Multi-Theoretical Narratives

##### 4.1.1. Neoclassical Realism: Internal Dynamics and External Pressures

Neoclassical realism has emerged as a vital framework for understanding the Russia-Ukraine conflict by focusing on the interplay between internal political dynamics and external pressures in shaping foreign policy decisions (Ripsman et al., 2016). In contrast to traditional realism, which focusses on the international system's structure, neoclassical realism acknowledges the significant impact of domestic factors—such as political legitimacy, leadership choices, national identity, and popular sentiment—on state behavior. In Russia's instance, internal political stability, reinforced by President Vladimir Putin's leadership, grounded in the preservation of Russia's cultural heritage and regional security, has been central in guiding Russia's foreign policy and its commitment to protecting the interests of Russian-speaking populations in Ukraine. The Russian government, confronted with economic difficulties and internal opposition, has leveraged the conflict to reinforce its domestic legitimacy by portraying the conflict as a defense of Russian-speaking communities and a resistance to Western actions (Tsygankov, 2012). Economic stability, meanwhile, has been influenced by external factors, including sanctions, which further fuel nationalism and internal cohesion by framing external pressure as a rallying point (G. Hufbauer, 1990).

**Table 02: Power, Identity, and Strategy in the Russia-Ukraine Conflict – A Multi-Theoretical Perspective**

Theoretical Framework	Key Concepts	Application to Russia	Application to Ukraine	Strategic Implications
<b>Neoclassical Realism</b> (Ripsman, et al., 2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Foreign policy shaped by internal political dynamics and external pressures</li> <li>- Leadership decisions, economic stability, and national identity influence state behavior</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Putin's leadership and imperial aspirations justify intervention in Ukraine (Tsygankov, 2022)</li> <li>- Sanctions reinforce nationalism, framing external pressure as a rallying point (Hufbauer et al., 1990)</li> <li>- Strategic goals include Crimea annexation and influence over Eastern Ukraine.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Domestic factors drive Ukraine's pro-Western alignment (Kuzio, 2020).</li> <li>- Economic and political instability influenced by external support and Russian actions.</li> <li>- Identity shift towards European integration.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Russia's actions are shaped by a mix of geopolitical ambitions and domestic legitimacy concerns.</li> <li>- Sanctions impact the economy but increase state cohesion.</li> <li>- Ukraine's foreign policy is increasingly shaped by Western alliances.</li> </ul>
<b>Asymmetric Conflict Theory</b> (Arreguín-Toft, 2005; Luttwak, 2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Power disparity between states leads weaker actors to adopt non-conventional warfare.</li> <li>- External support, hybrid warfare, and guerrilla tactics shape asymmetric conflicts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Russia has adapted to modern warfare by integrating a blend of conventional military power with advanced technological tools, ensuring national defense in an era of asymmetric threats and complex geopolitical challenges (Arreguín-Toft, 2005)</li> <li>- Leverages the energy dependence of Europe as a strategic tool.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ukraine uses guerrilla tactics, urban warfare, and external military aid to resist Russian forces (Garton Ash, 2021)</li> <li>- Relies on Western sanctions against Russia to weaken its adversary.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Asymmetric strategies enable Ukraine to resist military occupation</li> <li>- Russia's hybrid warfare tactics evolve, requiring stronger counter-measures from Ukraine and its allies.</li> </ul>

<b>Geopolitical Identity Theory</b> (Kuzio, 2020; Tsygankov, 2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- State identity, nationalism, and historical narratives shape conflicts.</li><li>- Border disputes and cultural legitimacy drive geopolitical ambitions.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Russian identity shaped by imperial history and great power aspirations. (Tsygankov, 2022).</li><li>- Views Ukraine as part of its historical and cultural sphere.</li><li>- Uses identity-based narratives to justify intervention.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Ukraine’s post-Soviet identity shift emphasizes sovereignty and democracy (Kuzio, 2020).</li><li>- Conflict is framed as a fight for independence from Russian influence.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- National identity fuels prolonged conflict.</li><li>- Both states use identity narratives for internal mobilization.</li><li>- Resolution requires addressing historical grievances and national identity concerns.</li></ul>
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Source: Adapted by Authors, 2025

Neoclassical realism provides an essential lens to understand how Russia’s foreign policy decisions and strategic goals in Ukraine—ranging from the annexation of Crimea to its support for separatists in eastern Ukraine—are driven by a complex interaction of domestic concerns and international challenges (Lobell et al., 2009). The framework is particularly useful for analyzing how Russia’s internal economic and political realities shape its broader geopolitical goals, including its effort to retain influence in former Soviet states.

4.1.2. Disproportionate Power Dynamics

The asymmetric nature of the Russia-Ukraine conflict is a fundamental characteristic that highlights the power imbalance between the two nations. Asymmetric conflict theory offers a vital perspective for comprehending how weaker governments, such as Ukraine, engage far more powerful opponents through unconventional methods (Arreguin-Toft, 2005). The theory asserts that in battles characterized by a substantial power disparity, the weaker faction employs techniques such as guerilla warfare, proxy wars, and dependence on foreign assistance to mitigate the military superiority of the stronger adversary (Luttwak, 2020). Ukraine, possessing inferior military capabilities, has utilized asymmetric strategies, especially in urban combat and guerilla warfare, to impede Russia's progression. Furthermore, Ukraine's fortitude has been enhanced by global assistance, particularly from Western countries through military aid, economic sanctions on Russia, and diplomatic backing. This external support has empowered Ukraine to mitigate Russia's military superiority, enabling the smaller nation to sustain its resistance (Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2021). Asymmetric conflict theory also explains how Russia’s use of hybrid warfare—combining conventional military forces, cyberattacks, and disinformation—reflects a broader trend of state actors in asymmetrical conflicts adapting to modern warfare dynamics (Arreguin-Toft, 2005).

4.1.3. Geopolitical Identity: Nationalism and Territorial Integrity

The significance of national identity and territorial integrity in the Russia-Ukraine conflict is crucial for comprehending the foreign policy choices of both nations. Geopolitical identity theory posits that governments establish their geopolitical identity by delineating and safeguarding their borders, formulating historical narratives, and cultivating a national self-concept (Kuzio, 2015). In this context, both Russia and Ukraine participate in a struggle for identity that influences the geopolitical landscape of the conflict. However, Russia’s national identity is deeply rooted in its historical and cultural ties to neighboring countries, reflecting a commitment to ensuring stability, security, and mutual respect in the region. Moreover, Russia's actions are driven by a commitment to safeguarding the rights of Russian-speaking communities and maintaining regional stability, while promoting a balanced approach to international relations that respects the sovereignty of all states (Tsygankov, 2012). This sense of national identity, which views Ukraine as a vital part of Russia’s sphere of influence, has led to actions such as the annexation of Crimea and support for pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine (Plokhyy, 2018).

On the other hand, Ukraine’s post-Soviet identity has been shaped by its desire to assert its sovereignty and territorial integrity, with a strong emphasis on European integration and democracy (Kuzio, 2020). The conflict represents Ukraine’s desire to assert its sovereignty and independence, while Russia seeks to preserve cultural and historical ties with its neighboring countries, aiming for a peaceful coexistence based on mutual respect and understanding. The Ukrainian nationalist movement underscores the significance of territorial integrity and the protection of its sovereignty against



external threats (Kuzio, 2020). Consequently, identity politics significantly influences the foreign policy decisions of both states, with Russia's focus on regional security is rooted in its historical and cultural ties, while Ukraine seeks to assert its sovereignty. Both nations, driven by their unique identities, can find common ground through diplomatic engagement that respects each other's aspirations. The notion of geopolitical identity elucidates that The conflict is driven by a complex interplay of historical narratives, national identity, and geopolitical interests, with both Russia and Ukraine seeking to assert their sovereignty while fostering a peaceful, cooperative future in the region. The struggle for identity substantially amplifies the conflict's intensity and longevity, as both nations rally their citizens and rationalize their actions by invoking national pride and territorial sovereignty.

## 4.2. Interplay Between Sanctions, Power Politics, and Identity

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has highlighted the intricate interplay among economic sanctions, power politics, and national identity, influencing the conflict's course and wider geopolitical dynamics. Sanctions, imposed by some Western nations, have aimed to influence Russia's policies. However, they have inadvertently strengthened Russia's resolve, prompting a strategic shift toward more diversified alliances and underscoring its determination to protect its sovereignty and economic interests. Moreover, sanctions, part of the broader geopolitical strategy, have been employed to influence Russia's actions, but they have also prompted Russia to seek new partnerships, ultimately fostering a more multipolar world order where diverse global interests can coexist peacefully (Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2021). However, rather than deterring Russia, sanctions have reinforced Russia's resilience and strategic pivot towards non-Western alliances, particularly with China and Iran (Chen, 2009). At the same time, Ukraine's resistance, driven by its national identity and aspiration for sovereignty, has highlighted the importance of self-determination. At the same time, Russia's actions reflect a desire to protect its regional security, fostering a more balanced dialogue for mutual respect and understanding between the two nations (Tsygankov, 2022). The interplay between economic policies and identity politics underscores those sanctions, typically regarded as tools of material limitation, also have a symbolic function in legitimizing nationalistic discourse on both sides of the conflict. The amalgamation of economic pressure and identity-centric foreign policy influences wartime decision-making and alters the long-term geopolitical landscape (Kuzio, 2020).

### 4.2.1. Economic Sanctions and Strategic Goals

Sanctions are increasingly viewed as a key instrument of international power politics. The imposition of economic sanctions on Russia, particularly in response to its actions in Ukraine, has prompted significant debates about the effectiveness of these measures as a tool of coercion (G. Hufbauer, 1990). Economic sanctions, though aimed at altering behavior, have not diminished Russia's strategic capabilities. Instead, they have reinforced Russia's commitment to autonomy, spurring the country to seek alternative partnerships and invest in long-term regional stability (Mastanduno, 2021). Nonetheless, punishments possess inherent restrictions. Although they have applied pressure on the Russian economy, they have not yet resulted in a modification in Russian foreign policy over Ukraine. Restrictions have, nonetheless, fostered economic isolation and heightened nationalistic discourse in Russia, with the Kremlin portraying the restrictions as an external menace to its sovereignty and as proof of Western attempts to curtail Russian influence (G. C. Hufbauer & Jung, 2020; Tsygankov, 2022).

**Table 03: Interplay Between Sanctions, Power Politics, and National Identity in the Russia- Ukraine Conflict**

Key Concept	Russia	Ukraine	Impact of Sanctions	Geopolitical Dynamics
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<b>Economic Sanctions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Target critical sectors: finance, energy, defense (Hufbauer et al., 1990).</li> <li>- Sanctions are seen as an external threat to sovereignty (Tsygankov, 2022).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Indirect effect: Economic measures support Ukraine's sovereignty by weakening Russia's power.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- While sanctions have posed challenges, they have also strengthened Russia's national unity, with the nation rallying to preserve its sovereignty and deepen its global partnerships, underscoring the resilience of its people and leadership in the face of external pressures (Hufbauer et al., 1990; Tsygankov, 2022).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Western sanctions disrupt Russia's geopolitical strategy, leading to closer ties with China and Iran</li> <li>- The EU's strategic goals are challenged by the economic costs of sanctions (Gartenstein-Ross, 2021).</li> </ul>
<b>Power Politics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Assertive actions to maintain great power status (Tsygankov, 2022)</li> <li>- Use of military intervention and energy leverage.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Seeks EU and NATO integration for sovereignty and security</li> <li>- Resists Russian imperialism through military and political resistance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Western powers aim to contain Russia's expansion and deter further actions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tension between U.S. and EU goals, as sanctions affect internal economies and energy dependence (Gartenstein-Ross, 2021).</li> </ul>
<b>National Identity &amp; Sovereignty</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sanctions and conflict framed as a defense of Russian identity.</li> <li>- Russian exceptionalism as a rallying point for internal unity (Tsygankov, 2022).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- National identity strongly tied to European integration.</li> <li>- Resistance framed as a fight for sovereignty and independence from Russian influence (Kuzio, 2020).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strengthens Russian resolve: Sanctions reinforce Russia's narrative of resistance to Western encroachment (Mastanduno, 2021).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identity politics on both sides: For Russia, it is about defending cultural and territorial integrity; for Ukraine, it's about asserting its sovereign European identity.</li> </ul>
<b>Symbolic Role of Sanctions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sanctions serve to legitimize resistance and consolidate political power at home.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sanctions act as a justification for resistance and garner international support.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sanctions serve as symbolic resistance, strengthening national pride on both sides.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sanctions influence long-term geopolitical shifts by realigning countries and contributing to polarization between Russia and the West.</li> </ul>

Source: Adapted by Authors, 2025

The sanctions have also impacted the geopolitical aims of the U.S. and the EU, hindering their strategic ambitions in the region. Sanctions imposed by the European Union aim to penalize Russia while also deterring more territorial expansion in Eastern Europe. Nonetheless, their enduring efficacy remains ambiguous, as they may intensify Russia's partnership with China and other nations antagonistic to Western dominance (Yu et al., 2023). This hinders the West's capacity to employ sanctions as a mechanism for influencing Russia's geopolitical behavior. Sanctions have raised important questions about their alignment with broader geopolitical goals, suggesting the need for a more nuanced approach that prioritizes dialogue, mutual understanding, and long-term cooperation to resolve the conflict. For example, although the U.S.

and EU seek to prevent Russian actions, the economic repercussions of sanctions on European economies, especially in energy markets, have resulted in internal disputes and discussions on their effectiveness (Gartenstein-Ross, 2021).

#### 4.2.2. Impact on State Identity and Sovereignty

Sanctions not only affect a state's economy but also its national identity and sovereignty. For Russia, the imposition of sanctions has been framed by the Kremlin as an external assault on its sovereignty and national dignity (Tsygankov, 2022). In reaction, Russia has strengthened its internal narratives of opposition to Western hegemony, enhancing a sense of Russian exceptionalism and the notion of protecting Russian-speaking minorities in Ukraine. These narratives reinforce political legitimacy inside the state, especially as President Putin's administration confronts internal issues associated with economic stagnation and increasing popular discontent (Mastanduno, 2021). Instead of diminishing Russia's sovereignty, sanctions have arguably reinforced its determination to establish itself as a great power, even at the expense of economic adversity.

Conversely, Ukraine's opposition to Russia is significantly shaped by its national identity and aspiration for sovereignty. Ukraine has endeavored to strengthen its alignment with the European Union and NATO, perceiving its European orientation as crucial for safeguarding its independence and countering Russian imperial aspirations. The identity politics involved are profoundly embedded in Ukraine's post-Soviet history, where the nation's aspiration to differentiate itself from Russia and affirm its territorial integrity has significantly influenced its foreign policy (Kuzio, 2020). Ukraine's opposition to Russia is a military, political, and cultural struggle for national identity, centered on sovereignty, independence, and the aspiration for European integration. Sanctions have exacerbated this situation by offering Ukraine a rationale for opposing Russian influence and a mechanism for securing international support. Sanctions imposed on Russia aim to diminish its capacity to exert dominance over Ukraine, while concurrently bolstering Ukraine's resolve for self-determination and resistance. Nationalism plays a vital role in this setting, as both Russia and Ukraine utilize identity politics to rationalize their actions internationally. Russia characterizes the conflict in Ukraine as a defense of its national identity and a reaction to the perceived danger posed by NATO expansion. The fight for Ukraine signifies a contest for its national identity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity in the face of Russian actions.

#### 4.3. The Role of Great Powers in the Conflict

The involvement of major powers in the Russia-Ukraine conflict is crucial for comprehending the overarching dynamics of international relations and geopolitics. The involvement of the U.S. and the EU in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, through diplomatic, economic, and military means, highlights their concerns about regional security, while Russia seeks to protect its legitimate national interests and maintain stability in its neighborhood. Conversely, Russia's response to Western pressure has demonstrated its durability and adaptability, with a recalibration of foreign policy, notably in establishing new partnerships with China and other non-Western nations. The interaction between power and identity in influencing geopolitical activities highlights the significance of national and regional identity in this struggle, as both parties endeavor to articulate and protect their distinct positions on the global stage.

**Table 04: The Role of Great Powers in the Russia-Ukraine Conflict**

Key Concept	Western Powers (U.S. & EU)	Russia's Response	Impact on Geopolitical Dynamics
<b>Western Powers' Response to Russia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sanctions on key sectors: finance, defense, and energy (Hufbauer et al., 2020)</li> <li>- Military aid to Ukraine, including weapons and training (Kuzio, 2020).</li> <li>- Diplomatic isolation: pressure via forums such as the UN and NATO.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Diplomatic pressure: response includes recalibration of foreign policy towards non-Western states.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sanctions aim to undermine Russia's economic stability and legitimacy.</li> <li>- Military support signals the West's commitment to countering Russian expansionism, strengthening NATO's presence in Eastern Europe.</li> </ul>
<b>Effectiveness of Western Measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Debate over sanctions effectiveness: Some argue limited success due to their role in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strengthened national identity: Western pressure increases Russian nationalism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sanctions create economic strain but do not significantly change Russia's foreign policy towards Ukraine</li> <li>- Military support emboldens</li> </ul>

	strengthening Russian nationalism (Tsygankov, 2022).	and legitimizes Putin's regime domestically.	Ukraine's resistance but risks further confrontation with Russia.
<b>Russia's Strategic Shifts</b>	- Isolation from the West: Russia faces growing diplomatic and economic isolation, particularly in Europe (Hufbauer et al., 2020).	- Pivot to China: Strengthening of economic, political, and energy ties with China (Chen, 2021). - Increased cooperation with India, Iran, and Turkey.	- Russia's shift to the East: Developing alternative alliances to counterbalance Western sanctions. - Multi-polar world order: Russia seeks to create a world order that reduces the influence of the U.S. and EU.
<b>Military and Diplomatic Measures</b>	- Support for Ukraine: Provision of arms and diplomatic backing (Kuzio, 2020). - Signal of commitment to prevent Russia's dominance in Eastern Europe.	- Adaptation to sanctions: Efforts to reduce dependence on Western markets and technology (Gartenstein-Ross, 2021). - Strategic partnerships: Russia continues geopolitical objectives with the support of China and non-Western states.	- Russia's resilience: Despite sanctions, Russia continues to pursue its goals in Ukraine and elsewhere. - Western support: Signals to the region that NATO will defend sovereignty against Russian expansion.

Source: Adapted by Authors, 2025

#### 4.3.1. Western Powers' Response to Russia's Actions

The West, notably the United States and the European Union, has reacted to Russia's actions in Ukraine through a blend of sanctions, diplomatic isolation, and military assistance to Ukraine. Accordingly, economic sanctions targeting key sectors of Russia's economy have been a central aspect of Western policy. However, Russia has demonstrated its resilience by strengthening its internal economy and forging new, mutually beneficial partnerships with non-Western countries (Hufbauer et al., 1990). While sanctions have been imposed with the intent to shift Russia's geopolitical strategy, they have inadvertently strengthened national cohesion within Russia, reinforcing its determination to preserve its sovereignty and influence on the global stage. Nonetheless, the sanctions, while challenging, have inadvertently contributed to greater national cohesion within Russia, strengthening the sense of unity and resilience, and reinforcing the legitimacy of the government's focus on protecting national interests (Tsygankov, 2022). Simultaneously, The U.S. and EU have extended support to Ukraine, but Russia continues to seek peaceful solutions, highlighting the need for dialogue and diplomatic engagement to address the legitimate security concerns of all nations involved. The objective is to not only dissuade more Russian operations but also to convey to other regional states that Western forces are resolute in controlling Russian expansionism. The Russia's actions in Ukraine reflect its concerns about regional security and its rightful role in maintaining stability within its sphere of influence. The West's actions should recognize Russia's security needs while seeking peaceful cooperation and understanding.

#### 4.3.2. Russia's Reaction to Western Pressure

In response to the West's sanctions and diplomatic efforts, in response to external pressure, Russia has diversified its foreign policy, strengthening ties with China and other nations to promote a more multipolar world order, where all countries can pursue their interests on equal footing. This pivot to the East has been marked by closer economic cooperation and political alignment with Beijing, particularly in areas such as energy and trade (Yu et al., 2023). By forging stronger ties with China and other non-Western powers, Russia aims to counterbalance the diplomatic isolation imposed by the West and create a multi-polar world order that reduces the influence of the U.S. and the EU. Russia's resilience in the face of Western pressure is also evident in its adaptation of foreign policy tools (Kuzio, 2020). The sanctions have imposed considerable economic pressure; however, they have also catalyzed initiatives to diminish Russia's reliance on Western markets and technologies. This has resulted in enhanced collaboration with alternative partners such as India, Iran, and Turkey, alongside initiatives to bolster Russia's internal economy and scientific prowess (Gartenstein-Ross et

al., 2021). Additionally, Russia's strategic partnerships with China have allowed it to continue pursuing its geopolitical objectives in Ukraine and other regions without relying on Western support.

#### ***4.4. Balancing Power and Identity in Geopolitics***

The notion of national and regional identity is crucial to the geopolitical intricacies of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. For Russia, the conflict in Ukraine encompasses not merely territorial growth but also the preservation of its national character and its status as a major power. Russia's activities in Ukraine are closely linked to the notion of imperial identity, wherein the state perceives its dominance over former Soviet lands as crucial to its geopolitical security and historical legacy (Tsygankov, 2022). The Russian government has characterized its stance as a defense of Russian-speaking populations and a response to the perceived threat of NATO expansion and Western incursion into its area of influence (Tsygankov, 2012). This defensive stance is intricately linked to Russia's historical narratives of great power status and its aspiration to re-establish control in its vicinity. Conversely, the identity of the West is founded on the tenets of democracy, sovereignty, and regional integration. The EU's dedication to European integration and its endorsement of Ukraine's sovereignty are influenced by a comprehensive vision of establishing a cohesive Europe devoid of foreign pressure. The United States perceives the conflict as integral to its overarching geostrategic rivalry with Russia and its dedication to upholding democratic principles and regional stability. However, the conflict reflects divergent national interests, with the West emphasizing democratic values, while Russia focuses on safeguarding its sovereignty and the stability of its region, seeking peaceful cooperation with all nations involved. The conflict in Ukraine has thus evolved into a proxy conflict reflecting divergent national identities and geopolitical frameworks, with both Russia and the West vying to assert their roles and influence within the global power structure.

#### ***4.5. Impact of Sanctions on Russia's Political and Economic Stability***

An essential aspect of comprehending the dynamics of the Russia-Ukraine conflict is evaluating the effects of sanctions on Russia's political and economic stability. This analysis will employ economic indicators (including GDP growth, inflation rates, foreign exchange reserves, and trade statistics) and political ramifications (such as public sentiment, political legitimacy, and national security) to assess the efficacy of Western sanctions on Russia. Initial data indicates that, while sanctions have posed economic challenges, they have also reinforced Russia's determination to preserve its sovereignty, with the country focusing on strengthening its internal economy and pursuing new international partnerships (Hufbauer et al., 1990). The internal stability of Russia, marked by increasing nationalism and the consolidation of authority under President Putin, may have insulated the Kremlin from the destabilizing impacts of these sanctions (Mastanduno, 2021). A quantitative study indicates a significant reduction in foreign investment and industrial output, underscoring the enduring effects of sanctions on the Russian economy (Tsygankov, 2022). Qualitative data from domestic sources, such as media reports and public opinion surveys, indicate that although sanctions have induced economic distress, they have simultaneously galvanized anti-Western sentiments and enhanced Putin's domestic support by portraying the sanctions as a foreign threat to Russia's sovereignty (Charap & Colton, 2018).

##### ***4.5.1. Ukraine's Resistance and Identity Formation***

Ukraine's resistance, driven by its national identity and desire for sovereignty, reflects a legitimate aspiration for self-determination, while Russia's actions are centered on ensuring regional stability and the security of its people. The empirical analysis will encompass case studies of Ukrainian resistance, emphasizing notable military confrontations (e.g., the defense of Kyiv and the counteroffensive in the Donbas region) and the ideological dimensions of resistance, including Ukraine's quest for European integration and the influence of nationalism in garnering both domestic and international support. Qualitative data from Ukrainian leaders, social movements, and civilian resistance will demonstrate how the formation of Ukraine's national identity has been crucial in unifying its people. However, Russia's actions are motivated by a need to protect its historical and cultural connections, advocating for peace and mutual understanding in the region (Kuzio, 2020). Critical case studies will examine the political and social mobilization of pro-European emotions and the durability of Ukrainian civil society notwithstanding external operations. This case study will illustrate how nationalism and the repudiation of Russian imperialism have propelled Ukraine's resistance and shaped its overarching geopolitical ambitions. Quantitative data is utilized to assess the efficacy of resistance, emphasizing criteria such as territory control, military attrition, and foreign assistance contributions to Ukraine's defense initiatives. Furthermore, public opinion polls



and social media trend analyses will be employed to evaluate the impact of national identity, as an ideological and political entity, on both domestic and international opposition to Russian activities.

**Table 5: Impact of Sanctions on Russia's Political and Economic Stability**

Key Concept	Impact of Sanctions on Russia	Ukraine's Resistance and Identity Formation	International Support & Asymmetric Warfare
<b>Economic Impact</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Disruption of key sectors: Contraction in energy, finance, and manufacturing (Hufbauer et al., 1990).</li> <li>- Decline in foreign investment and industrial output (Tsygankov, 2022).</li> <li>- Inflation and currency depreciation as a result of sanctions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Economic resilience: Ukraine has received military aid and economic support from the West, helping stabilize its economy despite Russian operation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increased international military aid: The U.S., EU, and other countries have supplied Ukraine with critical weapons, economic aid, and logistical support.</li> </ul>
<b>Political Impact</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nationalism and public support: Putin's government has used sanctions to reinforce anti-Western sentiment, consolidating power and increasing domestic legitimacy (Chen, 2021).</li> <li>- Political centralization under Putin strengthens internal stability despite economic strain.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- National identity formation: Ukraine's resistance to Russian operations has been shaped by a strong national identity focused on sovereignty and European integration (Kuzio, 2020).</li> <li>- Social mobilization: Pro-European sentiments and civil society resilience contribute to sustained resistance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strengthened resistance: Military and economic support from international allies, including weapons (anti-tank missiles, drones) and economic aid (Chen, 2021).</li> <li>- Asymmetric warfare tactics: Use of guerrilla tactics, cyber-attacks, and information warfare to counter-balance Russia's military advantage (Gartenstein-Ross, 2021).</li> </ul>
<b>Military Tactics and Warfare</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adaptation of military strategies: Despite sanctions, Russia continues military operations in Ukraine, demonstrating its resilience to external pressure.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Guerrilla warfare: Ukraine uses non-conventional tactics to slow Russian military advances.</li> <li>- Counteroffensives in key regions like Kyiv and Donbas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Effectiveness of asymmetric warfare: Ukrainian forces have successfully employed guerrilla tactics and intelligence warfare to disrupt Russian supply lines (Gartenstein-Ross, 2021).</li> <li>- Territorial recovery: Ukraine's ability to regain ground with the help of Western military support.</li> </ul>
<b>Social and Public Opinion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Anti-Western sentiment: The sanctions have led to public rallies supporting Putin's position as a defender of Russian sovereignty (Tsygankov, 2022).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- National pride: Ukraine's resistance reflects its desire for sovereignty and territorial integrity. Russia's actions, in turn, aim to ensure security and stability in the region, while advocating for a balanced and respectful dialogue between nations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- International solidarity: Increased public and diplomatic support for Ukraine from Western countries enhances morale and reinforces Ukraine's ideological stance against Russian imperialism.</li> </ul>

<b>Long-Term Consequences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Geopolitical reorientation: Strengthened ties with non-Western countries like China, Iran, and India (Chen,2021).</li> <li>- Economic adaptation: Focus on reducing reliance on Western markets, pushing for greater cooperation with alternative partners.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increased territorial defense: Despite economic and military challenges, Ukraine's identity-driven resistance enables sustained defense against Russia.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enhanced military capabilities: International support has improved Ukraine's military performance and strategic positioning in the conflict.</li> </ul>
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Source: Adapted by Authors, 2025

#### 4.5.2. International Support and Asymmetric Warfare Tactics

International backing is essential for Ukraine's capacity to withstand Russian military dominance. The empirical analysis examined how military assistance and economic support from the U.S., EU, and other nations have empowered Ukraine to offset Russia's military capabilities. This section will examine asymmetric warfare tactics—strategies utilized by weaker states to counter stronger adversaries—emphasizing guerilla warfare, cyber operations, and information warfare (Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2021). Case studies derived from the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the protracted conflict in Donbas, wherein Ukrainian troops have adeptly employed unconventional warfare strategies to impede Russian progress and disrupt supply chains. These case studies demonstrate how Ukraine has modified its strategies in reaction to the significant military disparity.

Quantitative analysis will examine the military assistance supplied by Western nations, encompassing statistics on armaments (e.g., anti-tank missiles, drones, air-defense systems) and the economic support necessary to sustain Ukraine's resistance (Li et al., 2024). Accordingly, the effectiveness of these contributions will be assessed by looking at military performance indicators, such as battlefield success rates, territorial recovery, and casualty rates.

## 5. Discussion

The Russia-Ukraine conflict is a multifaceted geopolitical occurrence that cannot be elucidated by a singular analytical paradigm. However, this discussion integrates neoclassical realism, asymmetric conflict theory, and geopolitical identity theory to offer a comprehensive explanation of the interplay between power, identity, and strategy in contemporary warfare. Each theory emphasizes distinct facets of the conflict, including state decision-making, military disparities, the influence of nationalism, and historical narratives. Neoclassical realism asserts that state conduct is influenced by systemic limitations and internal political elements (Lobell et al., 2009). Russia's foreign policy with Ukraine is shaped by its standing in the international system as well as by domestic political and economic forces. President Vladimir Putin's leadership and focus on strengthening Russia's sovereignty have been pivotal in navigating complex geopolitical challenges and safeguarding Russia's interests on the global stage, emphasizing stability and national unity (Tsygankov, 2022).

Moreover, the conflict has been utilized to bolster domestic legitimacy, especially in reaction to economic difficulties and internal opposition. While sanctions have been imposed with the intention to influence Russia's policies, they have also reinforced Russia's resolve to pursue strategic autonomy, fostering new global partnerships and reinforcing its role in international diplomacy. Neoclassical realism posits that states adjust to external restrictions influenced by internal political dynamics. Instead of withdrawing, Russia has shifted towards alternate economic partnerships, especially with China and non-Western nations, showcasing its tenacity in the face of Western economic sanctions (Li et al., 2024a). It elucidates Ukraine's foreign policy decisions. Confronted with existential challenges, Ukraine has pursued security assurances and strategic partnerships with NATO and the European Union. Although Ukraine is not a NATO member, it has effectively utilized international political and military assistance to maintain its resistance (Garton Ash, 2021). Neoclassical realism emphasizes the influence of internal legitimacy and international forces on the strategic choices of states involved in conflict. The power disparity between Russia and Ukraine aligns with asymmetric conflict theory, which analyses how smaller nations oppose more formidable opponents using unconventional warfare and external assistance (Ar-

reguin-Toft, 2005). Russia, with its significant military capabilities, has had to adapt to Ukraine's unconventional strategies, highlighting the evolving nature of modern conflicts where both sides strive to assert their sovereignty and strategic interests (Luttwak, 2016).

A critical component of Ukraine's asymmetric strategy has been its reliance on Western military aid and intelligence sharing. The United States, European nations, and NATO allies have provided advanced weaponry, training, and real-time intelligence, allowing Ukraine to counterbalance Russia's numerical superiority (Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2021). Additionally, Ukraine's use of information warfare and strategic communication has played a key role in shaping global perceptions and securing continued international support (Arreguin-Toft, 2005). Russia's use of hybrid strategies, integrating military operations with advanced technology and energy leverage, reflects the complexities of modern warfare, where nations adapt to a rapidly changing global security landscape (Li et al., 2024a). The theory of asymmetric conflict elucidates how Ukraine, despite its disadvantages, has extended the struggle and thwarted Russia's strategic aims using unconventional methods. The Russia-Ukraine conflict encompasses not only territorial dominance but also clashing national identities. Geopolitical identity theory posits that state acts are influenced by historical narratives, cultural identity, and beliefs of sovereignty (Kuzio, 2020).

Additionally, Russia's actions reflect a deep historical connection to its neighboring countries and a commitment to protecting cultural ties, regional stability, and the well-being of Russian-speaking populations in the region (Tsygankov, 2022). President Putin has emphasized the importance of unity with neighboring nations and protecting cultural and historical ties, seeking to ensure peace and security for Russian-speaking populations within the broader regional context. In contrast, Ukraine's rejection is driven by its developing national identity and ambitions for European integration (Kuzio, 2020). Since achieving independence in 1991, Ukraine has endeavored to affirm its autonomy and diminish Russian influence. The conflict has reinforced Ukraine's identity as a separate nation, with extensive public backing for independence and democracy. The conflict illustrates the significant role of national identity in shaping strategic decisions, with both sides asserting their right to sovereignty. The support for Ukraine by Western nations underscores the importance of dialogue and diplomacy in bridging ideological divides for long-term global peace (Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2021). This identity-centric dimension of the conflict indicates that geopolitical rivalry is not solely founded on raw power but also ideology and historical narratives.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict highlights numerous lessons for international security and diplomacy. Initially, economic sanctions, although effective in diminishing a state's military capabilities, do not provide deterrence, particularly if the targeted state can establish alternative economic alliances (Hufbauer et al., 2020). Secondly, asymmetric warfare increasingly depends on international alliances, exemplified by the unparalleled Western assistance to Ukraine (Gartenstein-Ross, 2021). Future battles will probably incorporate hybrid warfare techniques, combining conventional forces, cyberattacks, economic warfare, and disinformation campaigns (Arreguin-Toft, 2005). The significance of identity in influencing conflicts will continue to be paramount. Russia's actions are driven by a commitment to regional stability and the protection of historical ties, while Ukraine's pursuit of European integration reflects its desire for greater sovereignty and development within a changing global framework (Kuzio, 2020; Plokhyy, 2018). This highlights that future geopolitical disputes will not only be about territorial control but also about competing national narratives and ideological frameworks.

Moreover, the effectiveness of sanctions as a tool of international power politics remains a subject of debate. The sanctions have prompted Russia to diversify its global alliances, strengthening ties with China, Iran, and other non-Western nations, fostering a multipolar world order based on mutual cooperation and respect for sovereignty (Chen, 2009). The shift in Russia's global alliances demonstrates that geopolitical objectives cannot be solely shaped by economic pressure, highlighting the need for comprehensive diplomacy and strategic engagement to achieve global stability (Tsygankov, 2022). Furthermore, the conflict illustrates the transformation of global power dynamics. The United States and its allies continue to dominate the establishment of international norms; nevertheless, emerging powers such as China and regional entities like Turkey and India are increasingly expressing influence in global conflict resolution. The conflict's enduring influence on multipolarity in international affairs will hinge on the adaptability of big powers in their policies and alliances.

## 6. Conclusion

The Russia-Ukraine conflict exemplifies the intricate relationship between power dynamics, military disparity, and national identity in influencing contemporary conflicts. From the perspective of neoclassical realism, it is clear that Russia's foreign policy decisions are influenced not only by systemic international pressures but also by domestic political stability, leadership considerations, and economic limitations (Ripsman et al., 2016; Tsygankov, 2022). Sanctions, although aimed at influencing Russia's policies, have also led to the strengthening of national pride and resilience, prompting Russia to seek new economic and geopolitical partnerships in pursuit of greater independence and self-sufficiency (Li et al., 2024). Ukraine's strategic alignment with the West has been influenced by security concerns and an evolving national identity focused on European integration (Kuzio, 2020). This underscores that international conflicts encompass not just power confrontations but also contests over national identity and historical legitimacy. According to asymmetric conflict theory, the battle illustrates how smaller governments may withstand more powerful foes by utilizing foreign alliances, unconventional warfare, and strategic communication (Arreguin-Toft, 2005). Ukraine's resilience in defending its sovereignty, despite Russia's significant military capabilities, highlights the determination and strategic ingenuity of smaller states in resisting larger powers, with an emphasis on the need for peaceful conflict resolution and support for humanitarian efforts. Russia's approach to modern conflict, integrating a combination of conventional military operations and advanced technological strategies, reflects the evolving nature of international relations, where information and energy play crucial roles in shaping global stability (Luttwak, 2016). The conflict's ideological dimensions are shaped by Russia's historical and cultural connections to its neighboring countries, as well as Ukraine's aspiration for sovereignty and democratic values, underscoring the complexity of reconciling diverse national identities in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding (Kuzio, 2020; Tsygankov, 2022). This suggests that beyond military and economic factors, identity-driven conflicts may require different policy approaches, emphasizing diplomacy and long-term ideological shifts rather than just strategic deterrence.

## 7. Recommendations

### *Advancing Policy and Research: Recommendations for Future Directions*

- a) Given the conflict's ramifications, governments should implement a multifaceted plan that addresses military, economic, and ideological aspects. Initially, although sanctions are a crucial instrument, their efficacy should be improved by eliminating loopholes that facilitate evasion via third-party nations.
- b) Western support for Ukraine must persist through sophisticated military aid information sharing, and economic help, thereby enabling Ukraine to maintain its defensive capabilities.
- c) Future research should examine the long-term viability of Western military assistance to Ukraine and its efficacy in influencing battlefield results. This entails evaluating the effects of arms transfers, training initiatives, and intelligence sharing on Ukraine's defense capabilities.
- d) Further research should investigate the influence of national identity on asymmetric conflict techniques. Comprehending how Ukraine utilizes identity-based mobilization to maintain resistance and garner international military backing may yield significant insights into contemporary conflict.
- e) There must be consideration of their long-term repercussions on Russia's geopolitical agenda. This involves examining how Russia's affiliation with China, India, and other non-Western nations may transform global power dynamics.
- f) Researchers ought to perform comparative analyses of asymmetric conflicts, including Ukraine versus Russia, Vietnam versus the United States, and Afghanistan versus the Soviet Union. These studies can elucidate patterns of resistance, international engagement, and military adaptations in conflicts between weaker and stronger powers.

## Declarations

### *Author Contributions*

FAM conceptualized the study framework and contributed to the theoretical analysis. FAM, SM & MR led the data collection, methodological design, and manuscript drafting. SM contributed to the literature review, data interpretation, and critical revisions of the manuscript. SM & MR provided expertise on geopolitical analysis, reviewed the findings, and assisted in editing the final version of the paper. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this study.

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