

Classical Realism and Ukraine: Constructing the Causes

Evan Yoak

ABSTRACT

In February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine once again, this time starting a conflict of a scale not seen in Europe since WWII. The classical realism model of international relations provides insight into Russia's actions, while a social constructivist perspective can further refine that insight. Historically, the initial positive post-Soviet relations between Russia and the former Soviet states gave way to more fraught relations as Russia expected to maintain those states as a border security bulwark. The West failed to integrate Russia into a post-Cold War security structure, while at the same time, Russia took aggressive actions against neighbours such as Chechnya and Georgia, inciting states in the region to look to the West and NATO. Russian actions, properly understood, represent the archetypal realist state attempting to improve security, but they can also be understood in terms of the socially constructed identities of the nation and of Vladimir Putin himself and their quest for "great powerness" (*derzhavnost*). Likewise, the West's response represents a realist method to reduce the power of an adversary, but the magnitude and unity of the response also suggest that more is at stake than mere security: the backlash comes from the affront to the European norm against wars of aggression. It is likely that the conflict will last for quite some time, though the chances of nuclear war, while scary, are slim in light of Russian nuclear doctrine and how they employ nuclear rhetoric.

Keywords: classical realism, Russia, social constructivism, Ukraine.

Published Online: March 31, 2023

ISSN: 2796-1176

DOI: 10.24018/ejpolitics.2023.2.2.73

E. Yoak*

Florida State University, Panamá
(e-mail: eey22a@fsu.edu)

*Corresponding Author

I. INTRODUCTION

On February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine and began the largest European conflict since World War II. Understanding this conflict requires understanding post-Soviet Russia's position in the world and within Eurasia; Vladimir Putin; and both Russia and Putin's views of themselves. As a traditional war of aggression, this crisis can best be analyzed through the lens of the classical realism school of international relations, but by adding in a bit of constructivism, the effects of Russia's, Europe's, and Putin's identities on the crisis can be analyzed more precisely.

Classical realism offers a useful approach because it assumes that states are focused principally on their security interests via balance of power mechanisms. The background to Russia is replete with balance of power issues, and Russia's motivations often align perfectly with what realism would expect. Furthermore, realism takes the state to be a rational, unitary actor, which applies to Russia quite well: the government consists of a personalist authoritarian regime, so all the major decisions come from a single source in the form of Vladimir Putin, and thus there is not a plethora of domestic actors confounding this assumption. Finally, classical realism assumes a state of anarchy in which there is no overarching authority. Neither the United Nations nor any other international organization can do much to stop or even shape the war, so this assumption holds true in this crisis.

As to the nature of state and human actors, the pessimism of classical realism matches up nicely with many of the decisions of the principal actors. Nonetheless, more nuance, as well as a better understanding, can be achieved by applying some constructivist concepts regarding identity. Certainly, the baseline of self-interested human beings and, by extension, self-interested states is a good one, but the world is more complex than that, and some actions in the crisis are hard to understand without this more nuanced view of identity.

The following analysis starts with a background to the conflict; provides a brief summary of events during the conflict; analyzes a variety of causes; and finally ends with projections into the future.

II. BACKGROUND

There is always a temptation to go farther and farther back in history to explain later events, but in this case the deep causes of the current crisis can be traced to a specific historical occurrence, the collapse of the Soviet Union. In 1991 the superpower broke up, and on August 24th of that year, Ukraine declared its independence as a nation, which Russia recognized in December. The two nations continued to cooperate, signing the Budapest Memorandum in 1994, which guaranteed the collective security of Ukraine on the part of the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, and Northern Ireland, in exchange for Ukraine giving up its nuclear arsenal (the third largest at the time), and signing the Non-Proliferation Treaty (Budapest Memorandum regarding Ukraine, 1994). Then, in 1997, the two nations signed the Russian-Ukrainian Friendship Treaty, recognizing the sanctity of their borders and providing equal rights for the other nation's citizens residing in their territory. In that same year, in spite of calls from the now-dominant ethnic Russians in Ukrainian Crimea for autonomy or integration into Russia, they also signed an agreement that partitioned the vital Black Sea Fleet and leased the port of Sevastopol to the Russians, while once again reiterating respect for Ukraine's sovereignty, including Crimea (Curtis, 1998, p. 453). Though some economic disputes created tensions between the two countries, relations were generally quite good throughout the 1990s and early 2000s.

Nevertheless, post-Soviet Russia has sought to defend its borders by using former Soviet republics as buffer states. For example, in 1993, when it was clear that Russia lacked the wherewithal to guard its entire border, which is long, open, and historically vulnerable, Moscow declared that it would defend the outer borders of the Commonwealth of Independent States (Curtis, 1998, p. 570). This organization consisted of primarily former Soviet States, and so the new Russia Federation was already attempting to maintain its former sphere of influence.

Beyond influence, there were those nationalists who still longed for an empire, in addition to those who were concerned for the well-being of the 25 million ethnic Russians now living abroad. Moreover, in the 1990s there were plans to place military bases in these newly independent states (Curtis, 1998, pp. 447–8). In sum, Russia has always viewed former Soviet states, including Ukraine, as part of both its zone of interest and its defensive security bulwark.

Russia began its expansion by annexing Crimea in the beginning of 2014. After the Euromaidan protests and the Revolution of Dignity, in which the pro-Russian president was ousted, Russia took advantage of pro-Russian protests in the peninsula in order to justify an annexation. While a majority of Crimeans did support joining Russia according to multiple independent Western polls (though far fewer than supposedly voted to do so in the 2014 referendum), and while the history of what country owns Crimea is rather complicated, there is no doubt that the annexation and referendum were illegal (Wikipedia, 2022b). Interestingly, Putin used the declaration of independence of Kosovo (the so-called Kosovo independence precedent) as justification for the declaration of independence of Crimea (which lasted for all of four days before becoming a part of Russia) (Wikipedia, 2022a). Considering that Putin condemned the independence of Kosovo, and that Russia did not ever recognize it as a country, one could see this justification as grand hypocrisy. In fact, it is nothing more than what realism would predict, namely, that laws and precedent do not matter, only interest. Just as it was not in Russia's interest to recognize Kosovo as independent in order to stand with its ally Serbia, it was in Russia's interest to take over Crimea. The strategic port of Sevastopol, previously shared with Ukraine, provided a particularly strong incentive to carry out the operation.

Hard on the heels of the Crimean annexation came the conflict in the Donbas. As opposed to the former, which constituted a purposeful takeover, the latter constituted more of an influence operation that inadvertently expanded beyond its initial scope. As analysts Igor Sutyagin and Justin Bronk theorized in 2017, "Moscow's ultimate political goal there is to insert the 'red republics' back into the fabric of the Ukrainian state while maintaining full control over them. This would force Kiev to accept the rebel territories' de facto right of veto over Ukrainian policy" (Crowther, 2022, p. 19). In other words, Russia did not want to annex Donetsk and Luhansk, but rather maintain a degree of control over Ukraine: that is, Russia would maintain Ukraine within its sphere of influence via control of its proxies, the Luhansk, and Donetsk People's Republics (LPR and DPR respectively). Russia's actions throughout the conflict support this interpretation. At the beginning, Russia did not order the operation but rather approved it tacitly (Crowther, 2022, pp. 20–21). Then, when the DPR held a referendum, the separatist region planned to ask if residents wanted to be annexed by Russia, but the latter refused to offer annexation as an option and the referendum instead was on either "independence" or "self-rule," depending on the translation (Crowther, 2022, p. 22). Finally, the 2015 Minsk II agreement, which froze the conflict and led each side to withdraw beyond certain lines of control, called for the "reintegration" of the two separatist territories back into Ukraine "under a new decentralised system" (Crowther, 2022, p. 27). It seems likely that Russia at this time did not see the need to maintain Ukraine as a vassal state, but rather wanted to bring it back into the Russian fold so as to maintain once again a "friendly" defensive buffer.

III. SUMMARY OF THE CRISIS

When Russia launched the current operation against Ukraine in 2022, the initial plan was to seize the capital, Kyiv, eliminate the Ukrainian government, and replace it with pro-Russian leadership. At the same time, Russian, LPR, and DPR troops would occupy much of the remainder of the country. Regarding the political operation, the plan was that “the pro-Russian faction within the parliament would be encouraged to form a Movement for Peace, which other parliamentarians would be encouraged and coerced to support. This Movement for Peace would ban resistance in the name of preserving peace” (Zabrodskiy *et al.*, 2022, p. 11). This quick decapitation attempt failed as Ukrainians proved both far less supportive of the Russians than expected and far more capable as a military force. Nonetheless, Russian forces struck far into the country, managing to capture the *oblast* capital of Kherson and surround the historically important port of Mariupol.

Russia continued pushing against Kyiv, but as this offensive petered out, it refocused efforts on seizing territory in the Donbas as the war entered a new phase. Russia forces captured Mariupol, as well as other key cities in the Donbas. Nonetheless, the war would enter a third phase when Ukraine undertook successful counteroffensives around Kharkiv and Kherson. As winter set in, the two sides focused their efforts on an attritional fight in the Donbas, while Russia began a strike campaign against critical Ukrainian infrastructure. Most recently, Russia launched a series of offensives in an attempt to seize more territory in the Donbas.

IV. CAUSES

As with all major historical events, the causes are inevitably multifaceted and intertwined, with no easy way to point at a single cause and declare, “It was that!” Nonetheless, we can start to break down a variety of causes and tease out their interactions.

To start with the deep structural causes, it is impossible to ignore the failure to balance the accounts of power after 1991. As discussed, Russia lost its border security buffer, but it also lost its influence over what it saw and sees as its sphere of influence as a great power as well. As Renz and Smith put it, “Great Power identity or ‘greatpowerness’ [derzhavnost] is deeply embedded in Russian strategic culture,” and the country assumed that it would maintain its role as such within its regional sphere; in the event, other former Soviet states did not automatically acquiesce to Russia but instead only entered into partnerships when it ‘benefitted them materially’” (2016, pp. 15, 18). Part of the issue is that balancing power correctly is difficult in the post-Cold War nuclear age, in that nuclear weapons give a state a huge amount of coercive power, but a state may have nuclear weapons without possessing the wide range of other capacities that are needed for great power-hood. Put another way, possession of nuclear weapons is necessary but not sufficient to be a great power. Furthermore, in the case of post-Soviet Russia, there was perhaps a degree of miscalculation as to how great their power was in the post-Cold War world order. Russia continued seeing itself as it had always seen itself; when states in the region did not act in concordance with this self-image, Russia then attempted to take actions to bring the world more in line with these beliefs. It is worth noting that this process could be seen through a constructivist or realist lens: in the case of the former, Russia was attempting to maintain its identity, whereas in the case of the latter, Russia simply updated its power calculations imperfectly in 1991 and then tried to correct the situation, not by accepting its weakened position relative to other states, but rather by increasing its own power.

Beyond the Russian sphere, however, Europe also failed to re-balance after the Cold War. Europe never really attempted to integrate Russia into the European security structure after 1991, and so Russia went its own way (Kofman & Radchenko, 2022). On the other hand, as the Russia military analyst Michael Kofman put it, Russia is now trying to “re-litigate” the post-Soviet agreement (Kofman & Radchenko, 2022). It unilaterally abrogated the Bucharest Memorandum and Russian-Ukrainian Friendship Treaty (among others) and is now trying to improve its geopolitical position because it determined that those deals did not provide what it perceived as appropriate power.

Having not been integrated into European security arrangements, did NATO expansion cause Russia to expand in turn? This is a bit of a chicken-or-the-egg question. Did Russia start expanding because NATO was getting too close, or did countries like Georgia hope to join NATO because Russia was expanding? Certainly, as early as 1994, Georgia felt its sovereignty threatened by Russia’s backing of separatists in Ossetia, and by 1999 had withdrawn from the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (Khutshisvili, 1994). By then Russia had invaded Chechnya twice, a fact that neighboring countries like Georgia could not have ignored. One could assume that President George Bush’s comments in early 2008 about Georgia (and Ukraine) joining NATO led to Russia’s intervention in Georgia later that year, but that simplistic chronological deduction ignores both why Georgia wanted to join NATO in the first place, and the fact that Georgia has continued to seek membership but has not been invaded by Russia again. Indeed, this contrast demonstrates why classical and not structural realism can provide more insight in this crisis:

the deterministic nature of the latter only explains that Russia is reacting to its perceived security situation, but it does not explain why Ukraine specifically and not Georgia, which also possesses Russian proxy territories and also continues seeking NATO membership, was invaded. The point, rather, is that Russia sees the accession of its neighbors to NATO not necessarily as a direct military threat but more as an indicator that those neighbors are turning away from its sphere of influence and looking elsewhere.

This Russian view seems to have held with varying degrees of force through the 1990s and early 2000s. Indeed, the Founding Act between NATO and the Russian Federation, which the two sides signed in 1997, states that “NATO and Russia do not consider each other as adversaries” (Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation, 2009). Of course, realism tells us that such documents do not matter much when interest is at stake, but Russian and NATO conducted a joint military exercise as late as 2011. Joint military training is not something enemies do together, so while the NATO-Russia relationship was far from warm, neither was it the completely adversarial relationship that it would become in 2014 after Crimea. NATO-Russian relations deteriorated most critically, then, because of Russian expansion.

The other aspect of the NATO question relates to disparity in geopolitical ideas. We have already seen how Russia sees itself as a great power, and as the Russian security affairs and Putin expert Mark Galeotti puts it, Putin thinks about geopolitics like a 19th century leader (Alperovitch & Galeotti, 2022). For such a state and such a leader, control is paramount, and (neo)colonialism is normal. The 19th century geopolitical perspective sees the power game in zero-sum terms, so if a lesser state is not under one great power’s influence, it surely must be under the influence of a different great power. Likewise, Putin believes that if Georgia or Ukraine is not under its influence, it must be under the influence of the West. Talk of NATO accession only increases that belief.

The West, on the other hand, does not think in terms of 19th century power politics. Without a doubt, the West does care about security and influence and the balance of power, as the realist outlook does not go away, but it engages with those matters through the lens of liberal democracy; social construction has an effect. Europe in particular maintains a different perspective on the balance of power. For example, Germany is not going to invade Albania because China has too much influence there. European countries undoubtedly engage in balance of power politics, but the ideational lens refracts those power politics passing through it, leading to a less direct approach to power.

What this disparity in geopolitical outlook means is that the two sides misunderstand each other. The West sees NATO as a defensive alliance and thus harmless to Russia because ideologically it does not engage in offensive expansion (though of course in practice this is not always true). Russia, on the other hand, assumes that offensive expansion is *de rigeur* for a great power, so any great power that is expanding its influence is doing so offensively. In sum, it would be a mistake to ignore NATO expansion as causal to the current conflict, but it would likewise be a mistake to assign NATO expansion monocausality and assume that none of this would have happened if NATO had not expressed willingness to accept new members who sought NATO membership.

Regarding the latter point, much of Russia’s early actions against Ukraine had more to do with regaining power and/or influence there. To reiterate, NATO expansion into Ukraine was indicative to the Russians of Western influence in “their” zone, but certainly not the cause of the 2014 events. Indeed, polls show that Ukrainians on average were against joining NATO throughout the 2000s, even after the 2008 Russian operation in Georgia, and even into the first few months after the Revolution of Dignity in 2014 (Wikipedia, 2022c). It was not until some months after the annexation of Crimea and the invasion of Donbas that polls started to demonstrate support for Ukraine’s accession to NATO. Thus, rather than NATO providing a *raison de guerre* for Russian intervention, Ukraine’s general turn away from Russia during Euromaidan and the ousting of pro-Russian President Yanukovich, not to mention the aforementioned strategic interest in Sevastopol, led to these interventions.

To come to the present instantiation of the Ukrainian conflict, one can see the same structural issues of regional power and influence, as well as more proximal causes reflecting the Russian and Putinian approach. Since 2015, a stalemate with low-grade conflict has existed along the line of control in Donbas, but in spring of 2021, Russia started building up large military forces on Ukraine’s border. They initiated this build-up partly in the hope that Western governments would put pressure on Ukraine to continue the Minsk II negotiations, which would essentially alter the Ukrainian constitution and give Russia two puppet *oblasts* within Ukraine through which to influence the country (Zabrotskyi *et al.*, 2022, p. 7). This result did not occur, but the Russians took another lesson away that ended up leading to the 2022 invasion: the international community did not respond to Russia’s build-up because countries assumed it was a military exercise, so the Russians realized that they could build up for an actual invasion more quickly than Ukraine’s allies could respond. As the RUSI report puts it, “The Kremlin’s confidence that it could invade Ukraine without significant international interference was an important reason for undertaking the full-scale invasion” (Zabrotskyi *et al.*, 2022, p. 7). Thus Russia’s original, realist-motivated plan was to increase its regional power without becoming embroiled in an international imbroglio.

This concept of a short, quick operation offers another understanding of the precipitating causes of the war. Russia's intelligence analysts determined that Ukrainians were "politically apathetic," concerned mostly with the economy, distrustful of their political leadership, and generally pro-Russian (Zabrodskiy *et al.*, 2022, p. 7). In effect, Russia presumed that an easy operation like that in Crimea in 2014 could be carried off, for which the costs would be low and the gains in power high. Leadership therefore determined that a quick regime change operation, in which much of the country's heating, electrical, and financial infrastructure would be controlled, would be sufficient to cow the population while pro-Russian Ukrainians took charge of the government. Thus Russia's actions constitute those of a rational actor, an element important to our realist understanding of the crisis, in that the decision to invade made sense given the prior beliefs. The result may seem irrational, but only because the prior beliefs were so horribly miscalculated.

Given the obvious failure of the initial plan, one may ask why Putin nonetheless continues to prosecute the war. To understand those causes, Putin himself must be analyzed. While such analysis is perhaps at the limit of classical realism in light of its view of the state as unitary actor, Putin's regime is a personalist authoritarian one, so in some sense Putin *is* the state. No major decision is undertaken without his say-so: his motivations, therefore, are key to understanding why the conflict continues.

Many analysts, including Galeotti, have surmised that an aging Putin is looking toward his legacy as a great Russian historical leader. Putin often compares himself favorably to various great leaders of the past, though he does not seem to think of himself as any one of them, only that he deserves a place in that "pantheon" (Galeotti, 2022). Of course, any such personality assessments are speculative, but this one seems reasonable: an authoritarian ruler does not come to power and stays there for over two decades without an outsized helping of ambition. That ambition, combined with the Russian great power self-image, surely had something to do both with the decision to "take back" Ukraine, as well as the desire to keep the war going in order to achieve some positive result.

Legacy aside, carrying on with the war contains a practical consideration for Putin as well. Putin naturally is obsessed with security, both for himself and for his regime, and an ignominious retreat from Ukraine would undermine the legitimacy of his regime, perhaps leaving himself exposed to a coup (Morell & Weiss, 2022). Putin must be able to declare some sort of "victory" (more on that briefly) so as to ensure his regime's stability: a classic realist motivation.

Ukrainian and Western motivations are also quite simple. Ukraine is facing an existential threat, and so it fights. From a purely realist standpoint, the Western states continue arming and supporting Ukraine because the war is bleeding their antagonist Russia's military and economy at no human or territorial cost to themselves. Nonetheless, a constructivist viewpoint is worth assuming briefly in order to understand the unity and forcefulness of the Western response, as such unity is not usually something one expects from so many countries. Europeans see theirs as a peaceful continent, one in which state sovereignty is paramount, aggressive wars are unacceptable, and negotiations offer the only legitimate tool for conflict resolution. Thus, when a European state Russia initiates a war of aggression, thereby threatening the European order and identity, the backlash is much stronger. Naturally, the realist perspective still holds: if it were not in the interests of the West to back Ukraine, they would not have done so (or at least not to the same extent), regardless of European identity. But that identity does provide an augmenting and facilitating force to the realist policy response.

V. PROJECTIONS

Where does the conflict go from here? Presently it seems that the conflict is likely to drag on, possibly resulting in a stalemate. As Kofman puts it, neither side is close to achieving its "minimal war aims" (Alperovitch & Kofman, 2022). Regarding the Russian side, for much of the war, Putin left himself the option of declaring victory at a moment of his choosing because the operation's objectives were never clearly defined: so long as some territorial objectives were achieved, such a result could be spun to the Russian public as a victory. Now, however, he has committed Russia to the course by performing a military mobilization, which is a very costly political decision, and declaring four Ukrainian *oblasts* (which Russia does not completely or even mostly control) as Russian, making it far more difficult to justify a retreat or to spin a minor territorial gain as a victory (Alperovitch & Kofman, 2022).

As for the Ukrainians, having won back territory, and having seen the results of the occupation, they will not desist until they have regained as much of their country as possible within the context of the support they receive. They are currently winning militarily, though it is something of an open question as to how far (Western) European and U.S. support will go. In the near term, European support may dwindle if their energy and inflation situations prove unbearable for the populace. In the long term, U.S. support may dwindle if major political changes take place, such as the election in 2024 of a president less interested in helping Ukraine. From a classical realist standpoint, either or both of these results is entirely feasible: the direct security of neither the countries of Western Europe nor of the United States is threatened, while the

war has already set the Russian military back many years, so their security objectives have been achieved. Contrast these attitudes with those of Poland and the Baltic States, which are not in question. They have no plans to stop supporting Ukraine: since they share land borders with Russia and/or its ally Belarus, their direct security is much more at stake.

A negotiated settlement of some sort is very likely to happen eventually: most wars do not end with unconditional surrender, and it is difficult to see either side needing to surrender unconditionally in the future (Alperovitch & Kofman, 2022). One side or the other, however, must revise its minimum war aims to allow that to happen. Part of the issue with negotiations presently is that Russia miscalculated so badly that their present predicament is far worse than what their latent power theoretically merits. Put another way, Russia has a lot more potential power, not to mention actual power (due to nuclear weapons), than Ukraine, so it should be negotiating from a position of strength, but its dramatically poor military situation means that it would be negotiating from a position of weakness. Naturally Russia will not negotiate from the latter position, so it will wait until its situation improves.

Nuclear weapons constitute the other major unknown. Despite all the rhetoric, the chance of nuclear use seems small. Vladimir Putin has a habit of trotting out the geopolitical N-word as a rhetorical device without following through on it. For example, apart from the numerous nuclearly suggestive comments during the present conflict, he declared in 2018 that nuclear “aggressors” would be “annihilated” and would “just drop dead,” while in 2019 he declared that Russia would “target” the United States if the latter deployed nuclear weapons in Europe, though the latter statement makes little sense in light of the fact that the United States has never stopped maintaining nuclear weapons in Europe (not to mention the fact that Europe contains two nuclear powers anyway) (Lardieri, 2019; Reuters, 2018). Moreover, as CNA analysts put it, “Russia’s strategy of deterrence by fear-inducement when under military threat makes heavy use of nuclear signaling, which serves to create the impression that the country is far looser with its thinking on nuclear use than is actually the case” (Fink & Kofman, 2020). In other words, Russia specifically attempts to prevent other powers from taking action against it by to a certain degree pretending to be wild and crazy in its use of nuclear armaments. At the same time, it does not cost them very much since, despite not following through on these threats, other states continue to fear the threats.

Thus, it would seem that much of the nuclear language is just that, language, and not necessarily a strategy to be carried out. Furthermore, as a response to this language, China, one of Russia’s main allies, has already warned it against playing the nuclear card: Russia must take into account the repercussions from its friends as well as its enemies.

That is not to say that the risk is zero, and of course the outcomes could be unspeakably bad if nuclear escalation occurs. Again, however, such escalation is not an immediate result of tactical nuclear use as “the Russian military does not believe that limited nuclear use necessarily leads to uncontrolled escalation” (Kofman & Fink, 2020). If Russia uses a tactical nuclear weapon, it does not signify that it intends to expand to strategic nuclear weapons. Similarly, NATO’s response to the deployment of tactical nuclear weapon is not necessarily itself nuclear (and probably is not): NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg has not specified what it would consist of, only that there would be “serious consequences” for Russia and that “[t]he circumstances in which NATO would use nuclear weapons are extremely remote (Stewart, 2022). With so much of Russia’s conventional force already committed and, in many cases, beleaguered, the state would have difficulty defending itself from a massive multi-nation conventional response. Of course, Russia could then escalate further with nuclear weapons if it believed this response to be an existential threat, and so this line of thinking follows the realist path of balancing deterrence versus escalation risk. The West wants to maximize its aid to Ukraine while avoiding passing a threshold that would cause a nuclear response. Russia in turn wants to minimize Western aid to Ukraine via nuclear threats while avoiding having to carry out those threats. Let us hope that these states can continue to utilize this realist path insofar as it is useful to maintain the balance and avoid catastrophe.

Finally, to end on a positive, constructivist note, Ukraine will likely come out of this conflict much stronger as a nation. The West will in all probability help to rebuild the country, if nothing else out of a realist desire to support a counterweight against Russia. Recent Western nation-building efforts have left something to be desired, to understate it grossly, but in the case of a European nation surviving an existential war, the prospects for a successful reconstruction are vastly greater. Furthermore, problems like corruption that Ukraine has experienced will likely diminish: a liberal would suggest that the strings attached to reconstruction loans and aid from institutions like the International Monetary Fund and World Bank will require a reduction in corruption, but perhaps the constructivist view will take hold as the Ukrainian identity, having emerged from the terrible crucible of war, changes for the better.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Thank you to Dr. Adolfo Leyva for encouraging me to attempt to publish this paper, and to Dr. Carlos Guevara-Mann for suggesting where to submit it.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author has no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

- Alperovitch, D. & Galeotti, M. (2022, December 2). *No way out: Why negotiations won't end the war soon*. [Audio podcast episode.] In Geopolitics Decanted by Silverado. Silverado Policy Accelerator. <https://podcasts.apple.com/td/podcast/no-way-out-why-negotiations-wont-end-the-war-soon/id1614010500?i=1000588524045>.
- Alperovitch, D. & Kofman, M. (2022, December 12). *New phase of the war: Ukraine faces tough decisions*. [Audio podcast episode.] In Geopolitics Decanted by Silverado. Silverado Policy Accelerator. <https://podcasts.apple.com/cz/podcast/new-phase-of-the-war-ukraine-faces-tough-decisions/id1614010500?i=1000589889177>.
- Budapest Memorandum regarding Ukraine*. (1994, December 5). Northern Ireland-Russia-Ukraine-United Kingdom-United States. https://policymemos.hks.harvard.edu/files/policymemos/files/2-23-22_ukraine-the_budapest_memo.pdf?m=1645824948
- Crowther, E. (2022). *War in Ukraine volume 1: Armed formations of the Donetsk People's Republic, 2014-2022*. Helion & Company Limited.
- Curtis, G. E. (Ed.). (1998). *Russia: A country study* [PDF file]. Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. Retrieved from <https://www.loc.gov/item/97007563>.
- Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation. (1997, May 27). *NATO-Russian Federation*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_25468.htm.
- Galeotti, M. (2022, November 13). *Putin's decision-making; and Russia's organized crime after the invasion* (No. 83). [Audio podcast episode.] In In Moscow's Shadows. <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/in-moscows-shadows-83-putins-decision-making-and/id1510124746?i=1000586007396>.
- Khutshishvili, G. (1994, February-March). Intervention in Transcaucasus. *Perspective*, IV(3). <https://web.archive.org/web/20181108020715/http://www.bu.edu/iscip/vol4/Khutshishvili.html>.
- Kofman, M. & Fink, A. L. (2020, June 23). *Escalation management and nuclear employment in Russian military strategy*. War on the Rocks. <https://warontherocks.com/2020/06/escalation-management-and-nuclear-employment-in-russian-military-strategy/>.
- Kofman, M. & Radchenko, S. (Hosts). (2022, December 5). *Russia at war: A historical perspective*. [Audio podcast episode.] In The Russian contingency with Michael Kofman. War on the Rocks.
- Lardieri, A. (2019, February 20). *Putin threatens to target U.S. if it deploys nuclear weapons to Europe*. U.S. News & World Reports. <https://www.usnews.com/news/politics/articles/2019-02-20/putin-threatens-to-target-us-if-it-deploys-nuclear-weapons-in-europe>.
- Morell, M. & Weiss, A. (2022, December 7). *Accidental czar: The life and lies of Vladimir Putin with former White House Russia expert Andrew Weiss*. [Audio podcast episode]. In Intelligence Matters. CBS News Radio. <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/accidental-czar-the-life-and-lies-of-vladimir/id1286906615?i=1000589170683>.
- Renz, B. & Smith, H. (2016, January). Russia and hybrid warfare-Going beyond the label. *Aleksanteri Papers*, 1/2016, 15–21. https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/175291/renz_smith_russia_and_hybrid_warfare.pdf?sequence=1.
- Reuters. (2018, October 19). *'Aggressors will be annihilated, we will go to heaven as martyrs,' Putin says*. The Moscow Times. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2018/10/19/aggressors-will-be-annihilated-we-will-go-to-heaven-as-martyrs-putin-says-a63235>.
- Stewart, D. (2022, October 13). *Stoltenberg avoids revealing NATO's response to a Russian nuclear attack: "It would have serious consequences."* MSN News 360. <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/stoltenberg-avoids-revealing-nato-s-response-to-a-russian-nuclear-attack-it-would-have-serious-consequences/ar-AA12VrGB>.
- Wikipedia. (2022a, November 10). *Kosovo independence precedent*. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Kosovo_independence_precedent&oldid=1121112529.
- Wikipedia. (2022b, November 30). *2014 Crimean status referendum*. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=2014_Crimean_status_referendum&action=history.
- Wikipedia. (2022c, December 13). *Ukraine-NATO relations*. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ukraine%E2%80%93NATO_relations&oldid=1127227390.
- Zabrodskiy, M., Watling, J., Danylyuk, O. V. & Reynolds, N. (2022, November 30). *Preliminary lessons in conventional warfighting from Russia's invasion of Ukraine: February-July 2022*. RUSI. <https://static.rusi.org/359-SR-Ukraine-Preliminary-Lessons-Feb-July-2022-web-final.pdf>.