

# The Political Reasons for Russia's Preference for Taking Control Over Ukraine

Xiaotong Jing<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Business School, Exeter University, Exeter, EX4 4QG, United Kingdom

\*Corresponding author. Email: 20171111121690@stu.hubu.edu.cn

## ABSTRACT

The conflict between Ukraine and Russia has been escalating since the Ukraine crisis in 2014. In 2020, the tension between these two states reached its culmination. This conflict not only refers to Russia, Ukraine and the Western power, it also poses a threat to international security. This paper tends to analyze the factors that provoke Russia to intervene in Ukraine, specifically from a political perspective. It is expected that the analysis of this issue could contribute to future research in the relationship between these countries, and to understand the actions taken by Russia. For analyzing the problem more compressively, this literature searched for articles from 2000 to present on Google Scholar and JSTOR, and through screening according to keywords, a total of 23 articles were selected. In summary, there are three main factors summarized in this article, in terms of domestic political stability, geopolitical strategy, and national defense industry development.

**Keywords:** Geopolitical Strategy, Russia, Ukraine, Armed Conflict, Politics.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine becomes a focus to which international communities pay attention [1]. President Putin has opted to bring Ukraine issues to the top of the political agenda. Over the last seven years since the Ukraine crisis in 2014, appropriate solutions to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, a serious international issue recognised by the international community, have not been provided [2]. So far, the topic of Russia's policy concerning Ukraine has become the hotspot in academics. Researchers from different states seek to analyse factors that exacerbate the conflicts between Ukraine and Russia from geopolitical, ideological, and economic perspectives. They also want to explore solutions to the conflicts through developing a conflict model. Kinds of research try to explain the consideration behind the Russian policy against Ukraine through analysing relations between Russia, Ukraine, and the Western powers (including European Union, the United States, and NATO). However, analysis of factors that stimulate Russia to intervene in Ukraine from a more comprehensive political perspective remains unclear. This article concludes by discussing the political causes for Russia's aspiration of taking control over Ukraine, in terms of domestic political stability, geopolitical strategy and national security, as well as the modernisation of the

defence industry. The meaning of this analysis is to understand Russia's actions against Ukraine and to prepare for further research in the relevant academic field, including international relations, the relationship between Ukraine and Russia, and conflicts. The methodology used in this paper is searching kinds of literature from 2000 to present on Google Scholar and JSTOR based on the specific keywords, including 'Russia', 'Ukraine' 'Reasons For Conflict', 'Russian Geopolitical Strategy', 'Control Over Ukraine'. A total of 23 reports and articles were selected for the analysis of this paper after screening.

## 2. POLITICAL REASONS FOR RUSSIA'S PREFERENCE FOR TAKING CONTROL OVER UKRAINE

The Russian Federation is concerned about at least three major issues involving Ukraine. The first one refers to domestic political stability and consolidation, geopolitical strategy and national security can be regarded as the most essential factor, and the last one concerns the modernisation of the national defence industry. This paper will categorise and summarise the existing articles filtered based on specific words from three perspectives as mentioned before. The classification of the articles can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Analysis of 23 papers containing the phrase “Reasons for Russia’s preference for taking control over Ukraine” (in an electronic search of the full-text papers)

Number of Papers	Context of “Reasons for Russia’s preference for taking control over Ukraine”	References
8	Domestic political stability	[3], [4], [5], [6], [7], [8], [9], [19]
11	Geopolitical strategy and national security	[7], [10], [11], [12], [13], [14], [15], [16], [17], [18], [19]
7	National defence industry	[9], [20], [21], [22], [23], [24], [25]

### ***2.1. Ukraine Is Critical For Maintaining Domestic Political Stability***

Maintaining domestic political stability is one of the most essential reasons for Russia focusing on the relationships with Ukraine and deploying troops on the border [3]. For domestic political stability and consolidation, Russia tends to take control over Ukraine and prevent it from becoming joining NATO. According to the research carried out by Akos Lada, if two states share similar cultures and identities but have different domestic political systems, a war could be easily triggered [4]. A country with a less democratic regime will be affected by another state who has a similar culture but poses more liberal and democratic institutions. The explanation for this phenomenon is that citizens from repressive regimes can be influenced by the more democratic development road selected by culturally-similar states, and then turn to claim for the reformation for the domestic political system to become more democratisation [4]. This type of political-ideological threat can also be regarded as a spill-over effect.

When applying the phenomenon mentioned above to the relationship between Russia and Ukraine, the actions taken by the former can be better explained. The desirable economic and political national development system chosen by Russia and Ukraine is at opposite poles [5]. In Ukraine, compared to authoritarianism, a state system in Russia, a liberal and democratic institution is accepted by more national citizens [6]. Democratic and stable Ukraine could pose a political-ideological threat to the durable construction of Russian domestic politics [7]. Moreover, the ouster of former Ukrainian president Yanukovich and the establishment of a new regime by radical nationalists with a pro-western government provides an alternative to authoritarian institutions

dominated in Russia [8]. The most dangerous hazard of this pro-Western institution can be a contagion, which means populations from Russia might tend to pursue a similar system contradicted to the “managed democracy” model in Russia [9]. Thus, to minimise the spill-effect of the establishment of pro-western administration and the prevalence of democratic choice in Ukraine on the stability and security of Russia’s regime and political stability, the Russian Federation tends to control at least Eastern Ukraine in which lots of Russian-speaking inhabitants live.

### ***2.2. Ukraine Is Critical For Russia’s Geopolitical Strategy And National Security***

Russia’s aspiration of taking control over Ukraine can be interpreted as a reaction to the geopolitical competition between Russia and the Western powers. The dominant position over post-Soviet areas is regarded by the Russian Federation as a necessary guarantee for national security. Territories of those post-Soviet states are of vital importance for Russia; meanwhile, they are also regarded as decisive criteria determining Russian status in the world [10]. Thus, Russia cannot bear the risk of the eastward expansion of its hostile Western forces, in terms of NATO [11].

Ukraine, in specific, is strategically significant as a buffer state for Russia to prevent EU and NATO eastward expansion [12] and to strengthen the control over the post-Soviet area [13]. For a sovereign and independent state, a fundamental characteristic is to defend its territory, since it directly relates to national security. However, the notion of territory for Russia is slightly different from other states, it not only refers to border areas but also involves near abroad [12]. From this aspect, the expansion of NATO, which means Russia’s sphere of influence will be encroached by the West, can directly threaten national security and authority [14]. If Ukraine becomes NATO membership, the geographic distance between the Moscow and military infrastructure of NATO will be shorter substantially [15]. Thus, the geopolitical position of Ukraine, lying on the border between the West and Russia, is vital for geopolitical strategy and national security.

Ukraine is also significant for Russian military deployment [14]. If Ukraine joins NATO or has a pro-Western administration, it could threaten the military deployment of Russia in The Black Sea and Sevastopol specifically, two areas in which the Russian naval base is established. The essential role of Ukraine in this regard can be interpreted from two aspects. Firstly, Russia could shape projections and conduct military exercises across the Mediterranean Sea. Secondly, because the NATO charter prohibits memberships from hosting military bases in other states’ territories, Russian military forces can be regarded as a deterrent to the eastward expansion of the West [12]. As long as the conflict between Ukraine

and Russia still exist, the Western states would not increase the security cooperation with the former without a hitch, since it would provide an opportunity for Russia to expand or reignite territorial conflicts [16]. Thus, military forces operations taken by Russia could reduce the possibility that Ukraine becoming a NATO member.

Additionally, as a critical role in the Russian project of constructing a Eurasian Union, Ukraine is important for Russia to realise the strategy of regaining its identity as a Eurasian power [7]. Lack of Ukrainian participation, the objective of building this union, a chance regarded by Russia to expand the influence in post-Soviet areas, cannot be realised. Furthermore, the strategic balance in Central Europe would be broken once Ukraine is closer to the West, and it would directly affect Russia's sphere of influence in Eurasia. Russia wants to increase the sphere of influence with the pro-Russian government in power while its hostile Western forces seek to convince these post-Soviet states to establish a pro-Western regime by supporting the uprising. For example, the United States tends to break the border between the West and Russia by establishing a pro-western government and expanding NATO to this eastern euro area [14]. The direct consequence of this strategy is that Russia will be contained in geopolitics and national security. Colour revolutions, which can be regarded as a new way for the Western states to wage war against Russia [18], promoted by the United States in pro-Soviet areas, including Ukraine and Georgia, can be quoted to interpret this geopolitical strategy. The influence of the U.S. in these areas has been increasing, which also means Russia's sphere of influence was shrunk [18].

In general, from Russia's point of view, the objective of deploying troops along the border and taking control over Ukraine is to safeguard its national security since a vital role of Ukraine played in Russian geopolitically strategy. It refers to taking control over post-Soviet states and minimising the possible threats generated by the expansion of the EU, NATO, and the sphere of influence of the U.S. [19].

### ***2.3. Ukraine Is Critical For Russia's National Defence Industry***

Ukraine plays a unique role in Russia's national defence industry. The suspension of providing defence products and services from Ukraine would undermine the Russian goal of sustaining and improving the modernisation of the defence industry [9]. From 2009 to 2013, Russia remained the third-largest buyer of defence-related facilities produced by Ukraine. Some products imported from this state cannot be substituted by alternative exporting countries, which means Ukraine is the only exporter for Russia. Moreover, about 30% of military goods imported from Ukraine cannot be manufactured by Russian domestic enterprises [20]. Nearly half of the components and parts of the state's

intercontinental ballistic missiles were delivered by Ukraine [21]. The Aerospace and Defence Industry is also an example to reveal the high dependence of Russia on the Ukrainian national defence industry. The modernisation of naval equipment in Russia relies on the Ukrainian supplies of defence products [22]. In Russia, naval procurement is frustrated by the weak domestic shipbuilding industry and the sanctions imposed by the U.S. [23]. The acquisition of key components imported from Ukraine is also significant for Russia's delivery of Gremyashiy-class corvettes, a backbone for corvette fleet modernisation [22]. The original plan of 6 Grigorovich-class frigates coming into service by the 2020s was also delayed due to the breakdown of defence-industrial cooperative relations between Ukraine and Russia.

Russia relies on Ukraine's industrial and manufacturing enterprises for some kinds of military-related equipment to modernise its own national defence, and before the Ukraine crisis in 2014, this dependence had reached an unimaginable high level [24]. For example, aircraft engines used in Russia were made by Motor Sich, helicopters were produced by Progress Design Bureau, Antonov enterprise manufactured transport aircraft, gas turbines, which is used to equip naval frigates, were supplied by Zorya-Mashproyekt. Although the plan of import-substitution program enacted by the Russian Federation indicates that 85 percent of defence-related equipment imported abroad will be replaced by domestic production by 2025 [25]. Full implementation has been postponed and constrained due to the lack of microelectronic components and machine-building tools. For a long time, Russia will be heavily dependent on Ukraine's supplies of military equipment.

The deterioration of the relations between these two states can lead to the breakdown in cooperation in the defence industry, which would further compromise Russia's weapon system, an integral part of the state's strategic nuclear forces, due to lack of suppliers of defence-related equipment, subassembly, and services. If Russia could get control over Ukraine, military industries established in these areas could be utilised to improve its modern armament program, and further national defence [24].

## **3. CONCLUSION**

In summary, based on the classification and analysis of selected studies, this paper draws a conclusion that the reasons for Russia's aspiration of taking control over Ukraine can be summarised in three aspects. For domestic political stability and consolidation, Russia tends to minimise the impact of the spill-over effect generated from a country that has a similar culture but establishes a more democratic and pro-Western regime. For Russia's geopolitical strategy, Ukraine is a critical buffer state to prevent NATO and EU expansion and

ensure its own national security. Additionally, Ukraine is also essential for Russia's national defence industry because the latter relies on Ukraine for imports of military-related products and services. The analysis of this paper about Russia's behaviour towards Ukraine aims to contribute to studies in the field of international relations to interpret Russia's policy against post-Soviet states and others near abroad. In future studies for the actions taken by Russia towards Ukraine, geopolitical strategy can be the focus of attention since it is closely related to national security. In addition, exploration in this field could promote researchers to analyse the problem from a comprehensive perspective because the conflict between Russia and Ukraine not only refers to these two states themselves but also involves the relationships between Russia and the Western powers.

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