

Russia's Special Military Operation in Ukraine: Before, During, and the Morning After

Rey Ty¹

ABSTRACT

Russia's special military operation has been going on since February 24, 2022, though armed hostilities have started since 2014 and Russia's mistrust of NATO commenced right after the end of the Cold War since 1991. The world is faced with the problem of having one-sided explanations regarding the origin of the conflict. This paper queried the following issues: What are the origins in current history of the armed hostilities in Ukraine? How do key players react to end Russia's special military operation? The purpose was to discuss the key events of the special military actions and the ways in which the key players seek to end it. When related literature was reviewed, most articles and news coverage revealed only one perspective and took sides on the conflict. Thus, this paper fills the gap by providing alternative responses. This qualitative case study research design uses an inductive approach, for which data collection involves combing through contending views on the Ukraine crisis. The time frame starts from the current historical background to the present. News articles were analyzed. From the data analysis, codes were organized, from which themes were constructed. A taxonomy of the divergent responses to the research questions was developed. The study in this paper was conducted by categorizing the divergent news articles based on their built-in biases. Metatheory of the data which presented divergent discourses were analyzed through content analysis. Based on the findings, there are conflicting narratives regarding the Ukraine crisis, its causes, current situation, and the aftermath of the armed conflict.

Keywords: *North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Peace, Russia, Special Military Operation, Ukraine*

¹ *Rey Ty* is a faculty member in the Department of Peace Studies, Payap University, Thailand.

1. Introduction

1.1. Statement of the Problem

This paper addresses several problems. Firstly, the current Ukraine crisis has been going on since February 2022, although the impetus started when NATO reneged on its promise at the end of the Cold War not to expand eastward² and the armed hostilities against Ukrainian-born ethnic Russians in the Donbas region, which broke the promises of Minsk Agreement.³ Secondly, there are conflicting explanations regarding the origins of the conflict. Thirdly, the current dominant political, economic, and cultural world system is struggling to maintain the status quo.

1.2. Filling the Gap

Upon reviewing the related literature, most articles reveal only one dominant or hegemonic view and take sides in the conflict. Most news coverage only portrays one side of the conflict. Emerging powers are raising their voices of discontent, as the Global South countries are starting to air out their grievances. Thus, this paper fills the gap by providing multiple concurrent divergent discourses from all sides of the conflict. We are in for a lot of disgruntlement in the world as we know it.

1.3 Research Questions

This paper responded to the following research questions:

1. What are the origins in current history of the armed hostilities in Ukraine?
2. How do key players react to Russia's special military operation?

² George Washington University, "NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard | National Security Archive," 2023, <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2017-12-12/nato-expansion-what-gorbachev-heard-western-leaders-early>.

³ Al Jazeera English, "Ukraine-Russia Crisis: What Is the Minsk Agreement?" February 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/9/what-is-the-minsk-agreement-and-why-is-it-relevant-now>.

1.4. Purpose of the Study

Based on the above-mentioned research questions, the purpose of this study is not only to describe the origin of the special military operation and the ways in which each party to the conflict deal with the armed hostilities. Mainstream news only promotes more war to counter war. As a conflict and peace scholar and researcher, the author goes beyond being descriptive in this article, considering that this author provided research-based and empirically supported prescriptive approaches towards the resolution of the conflict.

1.5. Coverage of the Study

The scope of this article is the study of the Ukraine crisis itself only. It is limited to investigating the communication and discourses of the major powers in the conflict, all of whom are Christians, as well as the voices from the Global South, who hail from diverse faiths. This article deals neither with other matters nor other actors. See Figure 1 below.



Figure 1: Scope, Limitation, and Delimitation of the Study

2. Literature Review

After reviewing the literature, the author conducted the study by categorizing the divergent news articles based on their built-in biases and findings. A seminal work on writing qualitative literature review

indicated that among the different forms of synthesizing literature review is metatheory.⁴ In this article, a qualitative metatheory integrated the data about the Ukraine crisis which presented divergent discourses that were analyzed by way of content analysis. For this article, content analysis of the narratives about the Ukraine crisis involves: 1) data identification and collation; 2) definition of the categories; 3) development of a set of conceptual codes; 4) relational or thematic coding; 5) checking accuracy and generalizability through member checking; and 6) narrative interpretation.⁵

To conduct thematic analysis of the news coverage regarding the Ukraine crisis, the follow steps were undertaken: 1) familiarity with the data from multiple sources; 2) generation of preliminary codes that describe the content of the news items; 3) combing through and searching for trends, patterns, or themes from the data that were coded; 4) collating codes with supporting information; 5) grouping the codes into themes; 6) reviewing and refining the themes as necessary; 7) identification and naming of the final themes; and 8) narrative of the thematic analysis.⁶ Based on the findings of this research work, there are multiple, even conflicting, narratives regarding the Ukraine crisis, its causes, current situation, and the aftermath of the armed conflict. From the above exercise, the divergent thematic narratives about the Ukraine crisis that emerged were categorized to include mainstream news, alternative news, and onsite grassroots journalism. See Figure 2 below.

⁴ Richard J. Torraco, "Writing Integrative Literature Reviews: Guidelines and Examples," *Human Resource Development Review* 4, no. 3 (September 2005): 356–67, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484305278283>.

⁵ Johnny Saldaña and Matt Omasta, *Qualitative Research: Analyzing Life* (Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington, D.C., and Melbourne: Sage, 2018).

⁶ Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber, *The Practice of Qualitative Research*, Third Edition (Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington, D.C., and Melbourne: Sage, 2017).

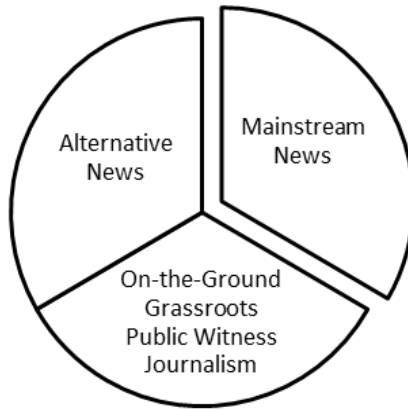


Figure 2: Qualitative Metatheory of One Reality, Three Contending Narratives

3. Methodology

The author utilized a qualitative research method aimed at describing the different views based on the research data and research subjects about what has been happening in the current setting in Ukraine.⁷ The research dealt with a within-case analysis, focusing on one specific issue, while locating key observations from within this issue.⁸ It involves an in-depth case study without the use of statistical analysis to gather data for the findings.⁹ This qualitative case study¹⁰ research design uses an inductive approach, for which data collection involves searching for and combing through divergent and contending reportage and views. Case study research deals with the investigation of

⁷ David Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research*, 5th Ed (London, U.K. and Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2017).

⁸ Gary Goertz and James Mahoney, *A Tale of Two Cultures: Qualitative and Quantitative Research in the Social Sciences* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012).

⁹ Geoffrey Marczyk, David DeMatteo, and David Festinger, *Essentials of Research Design and Methodology* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2005).

¹⁰ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 2nd edition (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, 2007); John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (London: SAGE Publications, 2018).

a real-life present-day situation.¹¹ The time frame starts from the current historical background to the present. The in-depth case study method was utilized with a view to probe intensively and deepen the analysis and understanding of the phenomena¹² related to the present.

To ensure the accuracy of the qualitative research data, multiple sources were used for triangulation. In the data collection stage, information on the phenomenon of armed hostilities and the subjects involved in the conflict were identified. The author is proficient in English, French, and Spanish. To gather data, news articles about the Ukraine crisis were collected in English and French, as evidenced in the References section. However, the author was unable to find news sources from alternative and citizen journalism in the Spanish language due to limitations in the Spanish language news, which largely repeated mainstream news that supported pro-NATO war efforts in Ukraine. The data was gathered through analysis of news articles, features, and editorials, as well as through direct communication with Ukrainians during and after the author's visit to Ukraine, exchanges in social media, and news from sources with different biases. The use of multiple sources for data collection enabled triangulation, which served as a validation strategy for the research.

The researcher in this study acted as a public witness by engaging in informal dialogue with Ukrainians in Ukraine, and employed textual analysis and subjective reflexivity to collect and analyze data regarding the Ukraine crisis and its emerging themes. As quantitative data analysis was not a focus of this paper, the researcher used qualitative data analysis techniques, including memoing, reviewing personal summary notes, and creating visual representations of conflict analysis in figures and tables.¹³ Through this process, codes were organized and themes were constructed from various discourses and narratives.¹⁴ This enabled

¹¹ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2003).

¹² C. R. Kothari, *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques*, Second Revised Edition (New Delhi: New Age International Publishers, 2014).

¹³ Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*.

¹⁴ Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017).

the researcher to detect patterns, identify surprises, classify subjects involved in the armed conflict, compare and contrast divergent groups, and construct a model. The analysis and interpretation were then relayed back to the research participants to obtain validation.¹⁵ In the end, the researcher developed a taxonomy of the divergent responses to the research questions.

The author of this article visited Ukraine for approximately a month before the onset of the Ukraine crisis and witnessed firsthand the effects of recent history on the lives of Ukrainians, as well as the country's economy, politics, and culture. The author traveled to several destinations, including Kiev, Lvov, Odesa, Dnieper, and Chernigov, where he stayed with locals, allowing for meaningful dialogue about current historical events, politics, and the general state of affairs in Ukraine today. See Figure 3 below.



Figure 3: Research Methodology

The author has engaged in member check and peer debriefing in order to ensure the accuracy of the findings,¹⁶ based on the accounts of the Ukrainians with whom he has conversed not only during his visit to different cities in Ukraine but also after leaving Ukraine. Essential to data collection and data analysis, member checking was an ongoing strategy

¹⁵ John Adams et al., *Research Methods for Graduate Business and Social Science Students* (New Delhi, India: SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd, 2007), <https://doi.org/10.4135/9788132108498>.

¹⁶ Leonard A. Jason and David S. Glenwick, eds., *Handbook of Methodologica Approaches to Community-Based Reseaerch: Qualitative, Quantitative, Amd Mixed Methods* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

of verification for descriptive and interpretive validity.¹⁷ The purpose of member check in process through conversations was to ensure rigor in analysis and interpretation of the data collected¹⁸ while the author of this article was still in Ukraine. In addition, terminal member checking was conducted with Ukrainians for the optimization of the validation of the findings for reliability¹⁹ when the author was already back in his academic institution outside of Ukraine. Various forms of communication were employed for this purpose, including electronic mail and social media platforms such as Facebook, Viber, WhatsApp, among others. In both instances, both onsite in Ukraine and offsite outside of Ukraine, in consultation with the Ukrainian respondents, member checking was able to show the accuracy and authenticity of the different views²⁰ of the Ukrainians who engaged in dialogue with the author of this article. In this way, the qualitative data analysis was accurate and truthful to their multiple insights regarding the situation in Ukraine.²¹ The Ukrainians, from whom the contextual data were investigated and gathered, have clarified, reconfirmed, and validated the data collected and analyzed.

4. Findings

4.1. Contending Narratives

This section responds to Research Question 1: What are the contending narratives about the origins of the Ukraine crisis? There are two major types of journalism, as far as the Ukraine crisis is concerned.

¹⁷ Lisa M. Given, *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, Two Volume Set (London: Sage Publications, Inc., 2008).

¹⁸ Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2017).

¹⁹ Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, “Establishing Dependability and Confirmability in Naturalistic Inquiry through an Audit” (Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York, N.Y., 1982), 31, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED216019.pdf><https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED216019.pdf>; Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *The Constructivist Credo* (Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press, Inc, 2013).

²⁰ Given, *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*.

²¹ Timothy C. Guetterman et al., “Contemporary Approaches to Mixed Methods--Grounded Theory Research: A Field-Based Analysis,” *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* 13, no. 2 (2017): 1–17.

There is war journalism and there is peace journalism. Here are the criteria for classifying news as mainstream, alternative, and grassroots journalism. Mainstream news primarily promotes the war efforts in Ukraine and is dominated by large news agencies, television networks, and major newspapers. Alternative journalism covers news that is typically not featured in mainstream media and is not widely circulated in traditional television networks or newspapers. Instead, it is often disseminated through social media and other online platforms, due to the limitations imposed by shadow banning. Grassroots citizen journalism involves individuals who are on the ground and witness events as they unfold, documenting their experiences through text messages and video clips. This type of journalism is particularly relevant in areas affected by Russia’s special military operation. See Figure 4 below.

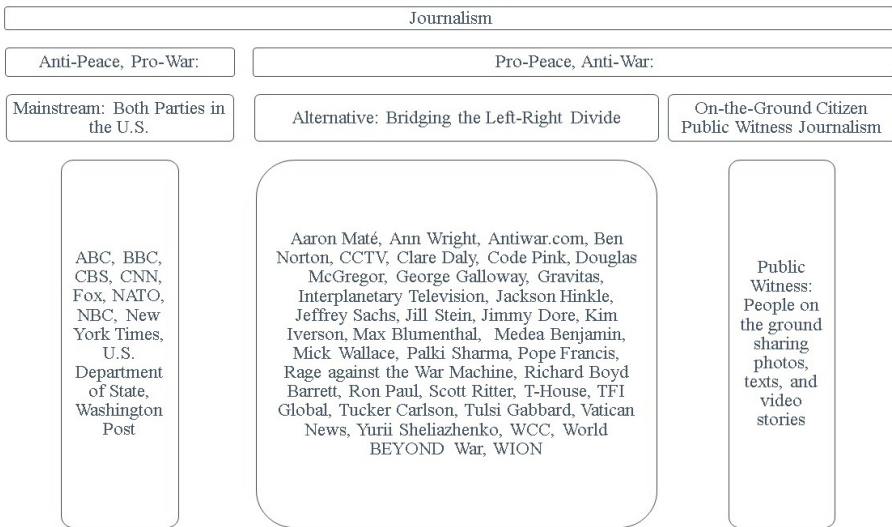


Figure 4: Qualitative Metatheory of Journalism Calling for War and Peace

The mainstream news media outlets in NATO countries, Ukraine, and Russia are actively promoting the war narrative, with each side portraying itself as the protagonist and the other as the antagonist. On the other hand, peace scholars and peace activists are advocating for peace journalism and urging an end to the armed hostilities. Additionally, many independent journalists, politicians, organizations, retired military members, and academics are openly opposing NATO’s

efforts in fueling the conflict in Ukraine, but their social media presence is often shadow-banned.

Individual politicians and retired military personalities who oppose NATO's war efforts in Ukraine include Ann Wright, Clare Daly, Douglas McGregor, George Galloway, Jill Stein, Mick Wallace, Richard Boyd Barrett, Ron Paul, Scott Ritter, and Tulsi Gabbard, many of whom are involved in the anti-war movement.²² They criticize NATO for its double standards in dealing with Ukraine and Russia, not looking themselves in the mirror in all the NATO warmongering²³ and interventions around the world.²⁴ Independent journalists who are anti-war include Aaron Maté, Ben Norton, Jackson Hinkle of The Dive, Jimmy Dore, Kim Iverson,²⁵ Max Blumenthal, and Tucker Carlson. Some prominent organizations that are anti-NATO war efforts in Ukraine include Code Pink and World Beyond War.

The Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches,²⁶ representing Protestants and Orthodox Christians, have both called for a ceasefire and peace talks to immediately end the conflict in Ukraine. The Churches have emphasized the need for diplomacy to resolve the armed conflict. Pope Francis, as the head of the Roman Catholic Church, has made a plea to end the senseless, absurd, and cruel armed conflict in Ukraine. Appealing for a ceasefire,²⁷ Pope Francis called for concrete

²² Countercurrents Collective, "March Against the War Machine: Hundreds Join Anti-War Rally In Washington DC," February 20, 2023, <https://countercurrents.org/2023/02/march-against-the-war-machine-hundreds-join-anti-war-rally-in-washington-dc/>; Helsinki Times, "Anti-War Protests in Washington, Munich and Helsinki," February 22, 2023, <https://www.helsinkitimes.fi/world-int/23014-anti-war-protests-in-washington-munich-and-helsinki.html>.

²³ Clare Daly, "Clare Daly (@ClareDalyMEP)," Twitter, 2023, <https://twitter.com/ClareDalyMEP>.

²⁴ Richard Boyd Barrett, "Irish MP Richard Boyd Barrett Calls out the Double Standards on Ukraine and Palestine," YouTube, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mu2uI0gZD-c&ab_channel=MiddleEastEye.

²⁵ Kim Iverson, "Kim Iversen Show," YouTube, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCoJTOWZxbvq8A18Qat2zgTA>.

²⁶ World Council of Churches, "WCC Convenes Roundtable on Ukraine, Calls for Diplomacy Instead of Threats, Dialogue Instead of Confrontation," March 30, 2022, <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/wcc-convenes-roundtable-on-ukraine-calls-for-diplomacy-instead-of-threats-dialogue-instead-of-confrontation>.

²⁷ Philip Püllella, "Pope Urges Ceasefire in Ukraine Ahead of Invasion

measures to terminate the hostilities, and appeals “for concrete efforts to end the conflict, to reach a ceasefire and to start peace negotiations.”²⁸

However, the mainstream media often criticize and discredit individuals who advocate for peace. Pro-peace advocates are frequently labeled as being anti-Ukrainian, pro-Russian, Kremlin agents, or Russian stooges.²⁹ Peace champions argue that the only people who benefit from wars are politicians and the military-industrial complex.³⁰ In 2021 alone, before Russia’s special military operation, weapons manufacturers amassed US\$768 billion and the Congress of the United States approved \$40 billion for the war efforts with a large portion going to the arms manufacturers.³¹ Clearly, the military-industrial complex, which is composed of armed companies and the ministries or departments of defense has benefitted and profited from the Ukraine crisis. Since Russia’s special military operation, the shares of Thales, BAE Systems, and Lockheed Martin, and Northrop Grumman have skyrocketed.³²

Anniversary,” Reuters, February 22, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/pope-deplores-absurd-cruel-ukraine-war-urges-ceasefire-negotiations-2023-02-22/>.

²⁸ Vatican News, “Pope Francis Appeals for End to ‘Absurd and Cruel’ Ukraine War,” February 22, 2023, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2023-02/pope-francis-prays-for-war-torn-ukraine.html>.

²⁹ Clare Daly, “As the Invasion of Ukraine Escalates into a Wider Horror, Practically Nobody in the #EU Is Doing Anything to Prevent It.,” Facebook, October 7, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1248759872555595>.

³⁰ Sergei Klebnikov, “War Stocks Are Surging as Russia-Ukraine Conflict Rages On: Lockheed Martin, Northrop Up 20%,” Forbes, March 4, 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/sergeiklebnikov/2022/03/04/war-stocks-are-surging-as-russia-ukraine-conflict-rages-on-lockheed-martin-northrop-up-20/?sh=1cff735c43f0>.

³¹ Paula Reisdorf, “Weapons Makers Profit Handsomely off Ukraine War, Three Months After Russian Invasion,” Corp Watch, May 24, 2022, <https://www.corpwatch.org/article/weapons-makers-profit-handsomely-ukraine-war-three-months-after-russian-invasion>.

³² Gravitas, “Gravitas: American Defence Companies Are Profiting from Ukraine War,” YouTube, nd, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iDbzqdfUemQ&ab_channel=WION; Alexa Phillips, “Ukraine War: How Weapons Makers Are Profiting from the Conflict,” Sky News, June 10, 2022, <https://news.sky.com/story/ukraine-war-how-weapons-makers-are-profiting-from-the-conflict-12624574>, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iDbzqdfUemQ&ab_channel=WION; Alexa Phillips, “Ukraine War: How Weapons Makers Are Profiting from the Conflict,” Sky News, June 10, 2022, <https://news.sky.com/story/ukraine-war-how-weapons-makers-are-profiting-from-the-conflict-12624574>.

Ukrainians were divided on whether to align more closely with the West or with Russia.³³ The Maidan revolution of 2014 was a significant factor in the escalation of the conflict in and outside of Ukraine. The protests started in November 2013 and continued until 2014. According to publicly available videos, photos, and leaked conversations, Nuland played a major role in supporting the protests and the subsequent change of government in Ukraine.³⁴ In 2014 and 2015, BBC News reported on the participation of neo-Nazis and other far-right groups in the Maidan protests, with photos, audio files, and videos.³⁵ The protests turned violent when supporters of Nazi Stepan Bandera, neo-Nazis, and other far-right groups resorted to physical violence. Neo-Nazis who were proud of their use of physical violence confirmed during a public talk in a video that “if it wasn’t for us, Maidan would have been a gay parade.”³⁶ The neo-Nazis committed numerous acts of terror and violence, including the burning alive of around 42 people trapped at a trade union building in Odessa by the right-wing *Pravy Sektor* (Right Sector).³⁷ However, since Russia’s special military

³³ Per Anders Rudling, “Between Lenin and Bandera: Decommunization and Multivocality in (Post)Euromaidan Ukraine,” *Nordisk Østforum* 35 (2021): 91, <https://doi.org/10.23865/noros.v35.3115>.

³⁴ Rudling, “Between Lenin and Bandera”; Pearls and Irritations, John Menadue’s Public Policy Journal, “US Hypocrisy and the Role of Victoria Newland in the Maidan Coup,” *Pearls and Irritations* (blog), March 4, 2022, <https://johnmenadue.com/ted-galen-carpenter-americas-ukraine-hypocrisy-and-the-role-of-victoria-newland-a-key-biden-adviser/>.

³⁵ BBC, “BBC Documentary Nazism in Ukraine,” March 28, 2022, <https://web.facebook.com/MiskaBlueEyed/videos/492864189138979>; BBC, “Torchlit March in Kiev by Ukraine’s Right-wing Svoboda Party,” 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tHhGEiwCHZE>; BBC Newsnight, “The Far-Right Group Threatening to Overthrow Ukraine’s Government,” July 23, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sEKQsnRGv7s&ab_channel=BBCNewsnight; Stern, “Ukraine’s Revolution and the Far Right,” BBC News, March 7, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26468720>; BBC Newsnight, “The Far-Right Group Threatening to Overthrow Ukraine’s Government,” YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sEKQsnRGv7s&ab_channel=BBCNewsnight.

³⁶ World News, “Maidan Would’ve Been A ‘Gay Parade’ If Not for Nazi Influence,” March 4, 2022, https://article.wn.com/view/2022/03/04/maidan_would_x27ve_been_a_gay_parade_if_not_for_nazi_influen/; *Ukraine Neo-Nazis Infiltrate EVERY LEVEL Of Military & Government*, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KfaAyiP8Wuc>.

³⁷ BBC News, “How Did Odessa’s Fire Happen?” May 4, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27275383>.

operation, the BBC has not reported on the presence and actions of neo-Nazis in Ukraine, but some individuals have reposted BBC news about Nazism in Ukraine on social media.

Fighting erupted in Donbas between ethnic Russians and the security forces of Ukraine. In 2014 and 2015, the Minsk Agreements II were signed to bring an end to the armed hostilities, but they failed to achieve their goal.³⁸ According to the 2001 census, ethnic Ukrainians constituted 25.1% of the urban and 5.6% of the rural population of Ukraine,³⁹ while ethnic Russians comprised 17.3% of the entire population.⁴⁰ The armed conflict targeted ethnic Russians, further prompting them to leave. The 2019 census revealed that only 8.3% of the population identified as ethnic Russians.

There were three conflicting narratives about what happened during the Maidan protests. According to one view, it was a democratic color revolution. Another perspective suggests that the Azov neo-Nazis were responsible for instigating and carrying out violence during the protests.⁴¹ A third narrative suggests that foreign intervention played a role in the coup that took place in relation to the 2014 Maidan incident, involving covert operations.⁴²

With respect to the Ukraine crisis itself, there are three equally valid discourses. *Realpolitik* or power politics⁴³ explain the actions of

³⁸ Al Jazeera English, "Ukraine-Russia Crisis: What Is the Minsk Agreement?" <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/9/what-is-the-minsk-agreement-and-why-is-it-relevant-now>.

³⁹ Encyclopedia of Ukraine, *Russians in Ukraine*, 2023, <https://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CR%5CU%5CRussiansinUkraine.htm>.

⁴⁰ CIA, "Ukraine: Country Summary," in *The World Factbook* (Central Intelligence Agency, 2023), <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ukraine/summaries>.

⁴¹ Valeurs Actuelles, "Crimes d'Azov En Ukraine: Le Quai d'Orsay Est Au Courant," Facebook, May 13, 2022, <https://web.facebook.com/valeursactuelles.page/videos/1063213467879712>.

⁴² CSPAN, "Senator Rubio Questions Undersecretary Nuland Over Biolabs in Ukraine," March 8, 2022, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?c5005520/senator-rubio-questions-undersecretary-nuland-biolabs-ukraine>.

⁴³ Joshua Goldstein and J. C. Pevehouse, *International Relations* (New

NATO and Russia. *Moralpolitik* or political idealism asserts that, based on the principles of state sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs encoded in the Treaty of Westphalia⁴⁴ embedded in the general principles of public international law, Ukraine has the right to choose its destiny.⁴⁵ Here are the three contending narratives regarding the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. First, NATO claims that the invasion was unprovoked and a singular event. Second, Ukraine argues that it has the right to self-determination, including the right to join military alliances like NATO. Third, Russia has repeatedly expressed its concerns to NATO member countries since the end of the Cold War that the expansion of NATO eastward is unacceptable and poses a threat to its security.⁴⁶

During the Cold War, the Warsaw Pact, which was set up on May 14, 1955, was the mutual defense alliance of the Eastern bloc under the umbrella of the former Soviet Union.⁴⁷ NATO was the military alliance of the Western bloc on both sides of the Atlantic. In December 1989, M. Gorbachev and G.H.W. Bush declared at the Malta Summit that the Cold War has ended.⁴⁸ Thereafter, the Warsaw Pact was disbanded on

York: Pearson-Longman, 2017); James E. Dougherty and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, *Contending Theories of International Relations: A Comprehensive Survey*, 5th ed (New York: Longman, 2001).

⁴⁴ Richard Cavendish, "The Treaty of Westphalia," *History Today* 48, no. 10 (October 1998), <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/months-past/treaty-westphalia>.

⁴⁵ Steve Smith, John Baylis, and Patricia Owens, *The Globalization of World Politics*, 9th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023); Daniel A. Bell and Jean-Marc Coicaud, eds., *Ethics in Action: The Ethical Challenges of International Human Rights Nongovernmental Organizations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Douglas W. Simon, Joseph Romance, and Neal Riemer, *The Challenge of Politics: An Introduction to Political Science* (Washington DC: CQ Press, 2018); Claudia Fuentes-Julio and Raslan Ibrahim, "A Human Rights Approach to Conflict Resolution," *Ethics & International Affairs* 33, no. 3 (2019): 261–73.

⁴⁶ Democracy Now, "Ex-U.S. Ambassador to USSR: Ukraine Crisis Stems Directly from Post-Cold War Push to Expand NATO," February 17, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e5F0JSy-HHY>.

⁴⁷ NATO, "What Was the Warsaw Pact?" 2023, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_138294.htm.

⁴⁸ Center for Slavic, Eurasian and East European Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, "End of the Cold War: A Visual Guide to the Cold War," 2023, <https://coldwar.unc.edu/theme/end-of-the-cold-war/>.

February 25, 1991⁴⁹ with the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).⁵⁰ With the signing of the original Minsk Agreement on December 8, 1991, “the USSR has ceased to exist.”⁵¹ B. Yeltsin set up the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which completed the end of the Cold War.⁵² For this reason, there was no *raison d’être* for NATO hereinafter. On February 9, 1990, then US Secretary of State James Baker told Gorbachev that NATO would move “not one inch eastward,” followed by “a cascade of assurances”; see memoranda and other documents stored in the National Security Archives of George Washington University.⁵³ According to declassified documents at the National Security Archive of George Washington University, “Baker, Bush, Genscher, Kohl, Gates, Mitterrand, Thatcher, Hurd, Major, and Woerner” gave “security assurances against expansion to Soviet leaders.”⁵⁴

Yet, since 1990, NATO has undergone significant expansion, growing from 12 member countries to 30 through eight rounds of expansion.⁵⁵ The largest increase in membership occurred in 2004 when Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania joined the alliance.⁵⁶ Maps comparing NATO expansion since 1990 with Russia’s growing isolation and encirclement in Europe highlight the alliance’s progression toward Russia’s borders.⁵⁷ The perceived threat

⁴⁹ NATO, “What Was the Warsaw Pact?”

⁵⁰ Office of the Historian of the Department of State, “Milestones: 1953–1960,” 2023, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1953-1960/warsaw-treaty>.

⁵¹ Izvestiia, “Minsk Agreement,” Seventeen Moments in Soviet History (blog), September 1, 2015, <https://soviethistory.msu.edu/1991-2/the-end-of-the-soviet-union/the-end-of-the-soviet-union-texts/minsk-agreement/>.

⁵² Atomic Archive, “The End of the Cold War,” 2023, <https://www.atomicarchive.com/history/cold-war/page-22.html>.

⁵³ George Washington University, “NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard,” <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2017-12-12/nato-expansion-what-gorbachev-heard-western-leaders-early>.

⁵⁴ George Washington University.

⁵⁵ NATO, “NATO - Topic: Enlargement and Article 10,” July 6, 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49212.htm.

⁵⁶ AP News, “Timeline of NATO Expansion since 1949,” May 10, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-business-world-war-ii-sweden-finland-240d97572cc783b2c7ff6e7122dd72d2>.

⁵⁷ Ted Kemp, “Two Maps Show NATO’s Growth and Russia’s Isolation

to national security grew more acute as NATO courted Ukraine to join and as ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine were treated poorly. These factors contributed to Russia's heightened concerns and eventual boiling point, as it viewed NATO expansion as a significant national security threat.

In December 2021, Moscow released details of its proposals, requesting that the US and NATO provide assurances that Ukraine would not join the alliance.⁵⁸ However, both the US and NATO rejected the proposal.⁵⁹ After Ukraine violated the Minsk Agreements, Russia recognized the people's republics of Donetsk and Lugansk on February 21, 2022, and established a friendship and mutual security agreement with them. Russia then launched a special military operation against Ukraine.⁶⁰ Thus, NATO's possible expansion to Ukraine, which is on Russia's border, from Russia's point of view, provoked Russia's special military operation, which was to thwart NATO's containment of Russia. Russia claims to be acting in self-defense and for its security interest.⁶¹ The stakes are highest at the Ukraine-Russia border.⁶²

The eastern part of Ukraine and Crimea are both important to Russia for several reasons. Ethnic Russians in Crimea and the Donbas and other parts of eastern Ukraine are Russophone. Russia claims it is protecting ethnic Russians in the eastern Ukraine from Russo-phobic persecution⁶³

since 1990," CNBC, May 19, 2022, <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/05/19/two-maps-show-natos-growth-and-russias-growing-isolation-since-1990.html>.

⁵⁸ Patrick Reeve, "Russia Makes Sweeping Demands for Security Guarantees from US amid Ukraine Tensions," ABC News, December 18, 2021, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/russia-makes-sweeping-demands-security-guarantees-us-amid/story?id=81821816>.

⁵⁹ DW, "U.S., NATO Respond to Russia's Security Demands," January 26, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/us-nato-send-written-response-on-russias-security-demands/a-60567276>.

⁶⁰ DW, "Russia Recognizes Independence of Ukraine Separatist Regions," February 21, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/russia-recognizes-independence-of-ukraine-separatist-regions/a-60861963>.

⁶¹ Benjamin Abelow, *How the West Brought War to Ukraine: Understanding How U.S. and NATO Policies Led to Crisis, War, and the Risk of Nuclear Catastrophe* (Great Barrington, MA: Siland Press, 2022).

⁶² Kathy Kelly, "The Stakes Are Enormously High Along the Russian Border," Common Dreams, June 24, 2016, <https://www.commondreams.org/views/2016/06/24/stakes-are-enormously-high-along-russian-border>.

⁶³ "Ukraine: Conflict at the Crossroads of Europe and Russia," Council on

and the right of self-determination of the people in eastern Ukraine and Crimea.⁶⁴ Thus, Russia claims that it is its “duty to protect these people.”⁶⁵ In addition, for Russia, the Donbas region is a key strategic, political, and economic location,⁶⁶ while Crimea is an important strategic defense area.⁶⁷ Crimea was the crown jewel of the Russian Empire⁶⁸ and has Sevastopol, as a natural harbor, which is the sole deep-wart port on the Black Sea coast of Russia.⁶⁹ Based on the foregoing reasons, the Ukraine case is complex and has several causes.⁷⁰ See Figure 5 below.

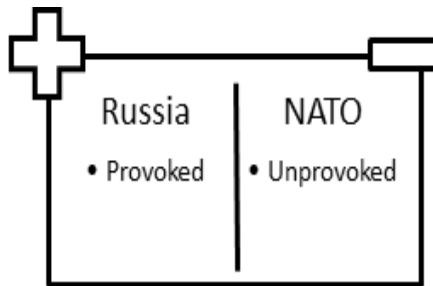


Figure 5: How NATO and Russia View Russia’s Special Military Operation

Foreign Relations, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/ukraine-conflict-crossroads-europe-and-russia>.

⁶⁴ Steven Pifer, “Crimea: Six Years after Illegal Annexation,” Brookings Institution, March 17, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/03/17/crimea-six-years-after-illegal-annexation/>.

⁶⁵ Council on Foreign Relations, “Ukraine: Conflict at the Crossroads of Europe and Russia,” February 14, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/ukraine-conflict-crossroads-europe-and-russia>.

⁶⁶ Holly Ellyatt, “Battle for Donbas: 3 Reasons Why Russia Is Shifting Its War Machine to East Ukraine,” CNBC, April 19, 2022, <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/04/19/why-does-russia-want-the-donbas-region-so-much.html>.

⁶⁷ Institute for the Study of War, “Ukraine Conflict Updates,” August 15, 2022, <http://dev-isw.bivings.com/>.

⁶⁸ Michael Drummond, “Ukraine War: Why Is Crimea so Important to Russia and Can Zelenskyy’s Troops Recapture It,” Sky News, November 23, 2022, <https://news.sky.com/story/ukraine-war-why-is-crimea-so-important-to-russia-and-can-zelenskyys-troops-recapture-it-12753182>.

⁶⁹ Peter Rutland, “Why Crimea Is the Key to the Ukraine War,” Responsible Statecraft, October 18, 2022, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2022/10/18/why-crimea-is-the-key-to-the-ukraine-war/>.

⁷⁰ Executive Intelligence Review, “Interview Lt. Col. Ralph Bosshard (Ret.) An Expert Military View of Why NATO and Russia Are at War,” June 10, 2022, https://larouchepub.com/other/interviews/2022/4923-an_expert_military_view_of_why.html.

The coverage of the Ukraine crisis can be viewed from three different perspectives. Narrative 1 is dominated by mainstream journalism, which is pro-war and prevalent in corporate or state news outlets in NATO countries, Ukraine, and Russia. These outlets often promote an aggressive narrative, urging conflict. Narrative 2 is represented by anti-war alternative journalism, which advocates for an immediate cessation of hostilities. Narrative 2 has supporters across the political spectrum, ranging from the right to the left. Both peace scholars and peace activists maintain that “there are no angels”⁷¹ in the Ukraine crisis, pointing out that the leadership in NATO, Ukraine, and Russia is responsible for the conflict’s failure.⁷²

Narrative 3 is centered around first-hand, eyewitness accounts. Those who are physically present in Ukraine describe their experiences based on what they directly witness, hear, touch, and feel as the events unfold in real-time. This group includes a diverse range of individuals such as Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian refugees who livestream videos on social media to document their treatment as they flee to other countries for safety, as well as independent journalists who remain in the conflict zones to document the situation.

Regarding news coverage, there are three distinct perspectives: mainstream news, alternative news, and grassroots eyewitness reports. Mainstream news in the West typically blames Russia for the conflict, while Russian media tends to blame NATO.⁷³ Alternative news outlets emphasize that the crisis could and should have been avoided, with all parties bearing responsibility,⁷⁴ and they often focus on peace

⁷¹ Yurii Sheliazhenko, “The Ukraine Crisis: U.S.A. and NATO vs. Russia,” ed. R. Ty (Kyiv, Ukraine and Chiang Mai, Thailand: Payap University, 2022).

⁷² Volodymyr Ishchenko, “Ukrainian Political Sociologist: This Is a War of Leadership Failures at Many Levels,” Courthouse News Service, May 13, 2022.

⁷³ Countercurrents, “Geopolitical Update: The Old World Is Over, Says Putin,” June 20, 2022, <https://countercurrents.org/2022/06/geopolitical-update-the-old-world-is-over-says-putin/>.

⁷⁴ Eric Denécé, “The Ukraine Conflict Could Have and Should Have Been Avoided,” in *Proceedings of the Conference: US and European Military and Security Experts Warn: The Insanity of Politicians Threatens Nuclear War* (Schiller Institute, 2022), https://larouchepub.com/other/2022/4922-the_ukraine_conflict_could_hav.html.

journalism.⁷⁵ Eyewitness grassroots reports, on the other hand, highlight the prevalence of fake news and propaganda from all sides,⁷⁶ including Ukrainian refugees, foreign students, mercenaries, and international volunteers who fight with the Ukrainian military.⁷⁷

Some news argue that the Russia-Ukraine war is a proxy war between western powers on the one hand and Russia on the other hand.⁷⁸ This is especially true as Ukraine uses weapons from NATO countries.⁷⁹

One year after Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), a pro-European Union (EU) and pro-NATO elite thinktank funded by several EU member countries, conducted a survey which revealed that Western countries are becoming increasingly politically out of touch with the Global South.⁸⁰ The ECFR poll results show that as the United States and Europe consolidate and become closer politically under the leadership of the United States globally, they are divided from the rest of the world. The Western states surveyed have a combined population of approximately one billion, which accounts for only 13% of the world's population of 8 billion.⁸¹

⁷⁵ Code Pink, "Don't Let Biden Go to War with Russia over Ukraine!" 2022, https://www.codepink.org/ukraine_congress.

⁷⁶ Global Times, "GT Investigates: Western Freelance Journalists Expose NATO Propaganda Fomenting Ukraine Crisis, Suffer Merciless Attacks by 'Civilized' West," June 14, 2022, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202206/1268125.shtml>.

⁷⁷ Armenian Soldier, "The British Mercenary Spent Nine Hours in Ukraine and Left," Facebook, March 17, 2022, <https://web.facebook.com/orthodoxsword/photos/a.623658474505286/2016858641851922/>.

⁷⁸ Géopolitique, "Conflit En Ukraine: « une Guerre Américaine Contre La Russie » Avoue Enfin Un Diplomate Occidental," Facebook, May 14, 2022, <https://web.facebook.com/107789721922490/videos/778101326929595>.

⁷⁹ Kimberly Leonard, "American-Made Javelin and Stinger Missiles Are Heading to Ukraine. At Least 19 Members of Congress Personally Invest in the Defense Contractors behind Them," Business Insider, March 22, 2022, <https://www.businessinsider.com/congress-war-profiteers-stock-lockheed-martin-raytheon-investment-2022-3>.

⁸⁰ Ben Norton, "West Is out of Touch with Rest of World Politically, EU-Funded Study Admits," Geopolitical Economy Report, February 25, 2023, <https://geopoliticeconomy.com/2023/02/25/west-rest-world-eu-study/>.

⁸¹ Timothy Garton Ash, Ivan Krastev, and Mark Leonard, "United West,

The contrasting views between the West and the rest of the world extend to the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the expected outcomes of the armed hostilities.⁸² The majority of respondents in the United States, the United Kingdom, and nine European Union states expressed that Russia was their adversary and that they needed to support Ukraine in the conflict.⁸³ On the other hand, a plurality of people surveyed in China and Russia see an emerging multipolar world replacing the hegemonic power of the West under the United States, while a plurality of Western states surveyed believe that a bipolar world system will emerge under the United States and China.⁸⁴ The divide in views regarding the conflict is evident, with Western countries polled pointing the finger at Russia as the villain, while the Global South countries surveyed view the opposite as true.

4.2. Response to the Military Operation

This section addresses Research Question 2, which analyzes the different responses of the conflict parties to Russia's special military operation. There are essentially three options: war, war, and peace. Let's take a closer look at each option. Firstly, Ukraine, NATO, and pro-Ukrainian forces responded to the war with further military engagement. Secondly, Russia and pro-Russian forces reacted to Ukraine and NATO's armed response with further military action. This resulted in an escalation of the conflict to the point where there was a threat of nuclear war, which could have catastrophic global consequences. However, there is a third option that is often overlooked by the mainstream media – a call for a ceasefire and peace settlement between Ukraine and Russia. Peace

Divided from the Rest: Global Public Opinion One Year into Russia's War on Ukraine," European Council on Foreign Relations, February 24, 2023, <https://ecfr.eu/podcasts/episode/united-west-divided-from-the-rest-global-public-opinion-one-year-into-russias-war-on-ukraine/>.

⁸² Weihua Chen, "West, Rest of the World Divided in Views on Conflict," MSN, February 24, 2023, <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/west-rest-of-the-world-divided-in-views-on-conflict/ar-AA17S3Tq>.

⁸³ MSN, "West, Rest of the World Divided in Views on Conflict," February 24, 2023, <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/west-rest-of-the-world-divided-in-views-on-conflict/ar-AA17S3Tq>.

⁸⁴ Arvind Jayaram, "West United, Rest of World Divided on Ukraine War," The Straits Times, February 26, 2023, <https://www.straitstimes.com/world/europe/west-united-rest-of-world-divided-on-ukraine-war>.

activists are advocating for an immediate end to the war and a peaceful resolution to the conflict.⁸⁵ See Figure 6 below.

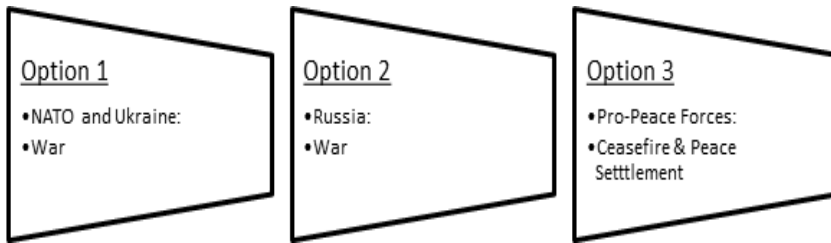


Figure 6: Responses to Russia's Special Military Operation

From the peace studies perspective, there are three courses of action possible in the case of the Ukraine crisis. These include conflict resolution, conflict transformation, and post-conflict peacebuilding.⁸⁶ What is needed are de-escalation and diplomacy,⁸⁷ not more war, as NATO, Ukraine, and Russia are hell-bent on continuing.

Step 1 involves unconditional ceasefire in good faith on all sides in the short term, after which peace making can take place through one of many conflict resolution methods, such as direct negotiations or third-party mediation. Compromises have to be made to end the war⁸⁸ to achieve a serious peace settlement. One possible impasse is that Ukraine would want to restore its territories to the pre-war state of affairs. Russia would want to keep all the territories it has annexed from Ukraine in the post-war period. See Figure 7 below.

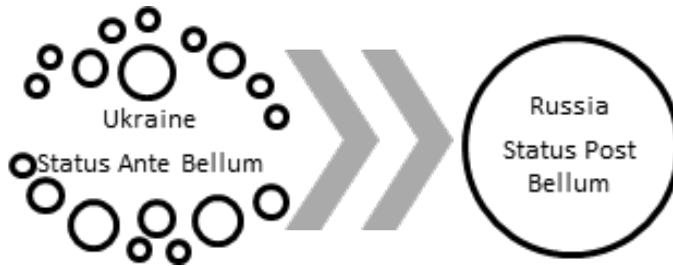
⁸⁵ Ann Wright, "For God's Sake Boys, STOP THIS WAR S**T!!!" Veterans for Peace, January 28, 2022, <https://www.veteransforpeace.org/who-we-are/member-highlights/2022/01/28/gods-sake-boys-stop-war-st>.

⁸⁶ Patrick G. Coy, "Conflict Resolution, Conflict Transformation, and Peacebuilding," ed. Timothy McAlwee et al. (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009), 63–78.

⁸⁷ Kevin Martin, "Ukraine Crisis Demands Diplomacy and De-Escalation, Not More Weaponry," *Countercurrents*, January 29, 2022, <https://countercurrents.org/2022/01/ukraine-crisis-demands-diplomacy-and-de-escalation-not-more-weaponry/>; *The Need for Diplomatic Solutions in Ukraine Crisis*, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GsfvcFth4-U>.

⁸⁸ Volodymyr Ishchenko, "Zelensky May Have to Make 'Painful Compromises' to End the War, Says Ukrainian Scholar Volodymyr Ishchenko," *Democracy Now*, March 23, 2022, https://www.democracynow.org/2022/3/23/volodymyr_ishchenko_how_zelensky_could_end.

Figure 7: Post-War Territorial Disputes and Bone of Contention



between Ukraine and Russia

Step 2 requires mutually agreed upon and acceptable peace-keeping forces to ensure armed hostilities do not break out again. Step 2 relates to conflict transformation in the medium term, which changes the dynamics from waging war to waging peace, from distrust to confidence building, from broken relationships to healing relationships, and from structural problems to structural solutions. Step 3 requires long-term post-conflict peacebuilding efforts, which delve deep into the root causes of the conflict. In addition, they involve relief and rehabilitation of survivors, structural change at all levels, as well as peace, justice, and security for all. See Figure 8 below.

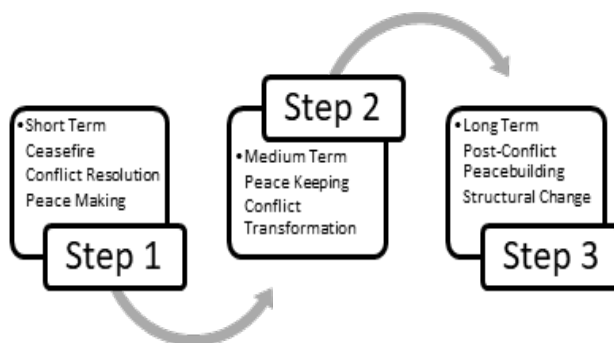


Figure 8: Three Steps to End the Ukraine Crisis from the Perspective of Peace Studies

World beyond War (WBW) provided a comprehensive checklist on what needs to be done to end the armed conflict in Ukraine. They

include the following: 1) an immediate ceasefire; 2) peace talks; 3) a moratorium on weapons sales; 4) the removal of missiles from Poland and Romania; 5) the removal of nuclear weapons from Belgium, Italy, Germany, Netherlands, and Turkey; 6) universal compliance with the Nuclear Nonproliferation treaty; 7) the disbanding of NATO as its purpose was anti-Soviet Union which does not exist anymore; 8) all countries to take part in the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons; 9) prosecution of all violations in recent years through the International Criminal Court; and 10) a shift of resources from war efforts to helping war survivors.⁸⁹

5. Discussion

In the face of the ongoing war, we cannot be heartless. Rather, we must practice and have empathy for non-combatants, refugees, and all persons who have died as a result of this crisis. Additionally, all those who are not in combat, whether civilian or former combatants, who are wounded or sick must be treated humanely and be provided with appropriate medical care.⁹⁰

The war in Ukraine has laid bare sexism, patriarchy, and racism. Foreign students, especially Sub-Saharan Africans and South Asians, who were fleeing for their life, limbs, and safety received racist treatment when they attempted to leave Ukraine in the early days of the Russian special military operation. In Ukraine, white Christian Ukrainian women and children could leave as war refugees without a snag. All adult men were required to stay and not allowed to leave the country, as they could be conscripted to take part in the war efforts. Ukrainian male adults had to stay behind, including men who are in principle opposed to all wars, as conscientious objection to military service is not recognized in Ukraine. In Russia, many male Russians fled, as the government announced the call for a partial conscription.

⁸⁹David Swanson, "Action for Ukraine and the World," World Beyond War, February 16, 2022, https://act.worldbeyondwar.org/ukraine_action/.

⁹⁰Dieter Fleck, *The Handbook of Humanitarian Law in Armed Conflicts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

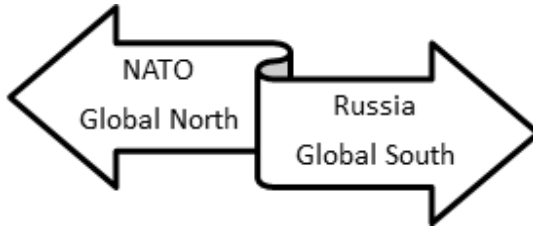
Reminiscent of McCarthyism in the 1950s and 1960s, Russophobia got out of hand in 2022. Today, we see the emergence of Cold War 2.0 during which Russians in general received the cancel culture treatment in NATO countries. Anything Russian sounding was banned: Russian food, music, musicians, professors, restaurants, and students. Anti-Russian sentiments reached an all-time hysteria. Innocent Russians fall victim to this neo-McCarthyite folly and psychosis.

On account of the armed conflict, tensions and contradictions have emerged. On the one hand, NATO and the Global North are united and speak with one voice. On the other hand, NATO is in contradiction with several forces around the world. NATO has tensions with Russia, the Gulf States, China, India, Africa, Latin America, and the Global South in general. In broad sweep, the relationship between NATO and the Global North on the one hand and Russia and the Global South on the other hand, is very complex, with varying degrees of explicit cooperation and contestation as well as concealed concord and discord. Clearly Global South countries do not forget their negative experiences with the colonial past and the neocolonial present. In plain sight, China, India, and other Global South countries want openly to take a neutral stance between Russia and NATO for fear of reprisals from NATO. Think of Bolivia, Chile, Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Peru, Syria, and Venezuela, for example, in current history. But many individuals from Africa and Asia who issue alternative reportage on social media are openly antiwar but their governments either do not take sides or do not call for an end to the armed hostilities, especially as there is a *Myrotvorets* (or “Peacekeeper”) “kill list.”⁹¹ Truth be told, though, India has a long-standing amicable political relationship with Russia; thus, they have historical ties that bind. NATO now treats China as a global threat; hence, China seeks to have closer ties with Russia, what with BRICS+, in order to survive a possible direct multifaceted confrontation between China and NATO. Thus, fearing sanctions and other negative repercussions, many Global South countries are treading on a tightrope

⁹¹ Executive Intelligence Review, “Kiev’s ‘Info Terrorist’ List: ‘Global NATO’ Orders a Hit on Advocates of Peace” 49, no. 34 (September 2, 2022): 6; Executive Intelligence Review, “Ukraine’s Deathlist Database: Myrotvorets.Center” 49, no. 34 (September 2, 2022): 16; Myrotvorets Center, “Миротворец,” February 22, 2023, <https://myrotvorets.center/>.

between taking sides openly and staying neutral. See Figure 9 below.

Figure 9: Complex and Fluid Global Contradictions as a Result of the Ukraine Crisis



6. Summary, Recommendations, and Conclusion

6.1. Summary

The subtitle of this article is Before, During, and the Morning After. The Before section refers to the events after the end of the Cold War and NATO expansion. The During section refers to Russia's special military operation. The Morning After refers to either 1) the end of war or 2) endless war or nuclear holocaust. See Figure 10 below.



Figure 10: Before, During, and the Morning After Russia's Special Military Operation

In response to Research Question 1, there are divergent narratives regarding the Ukraine crisis. NATO claims that Russia's aggression was unprovoked. Russia argues that NATO's eastward expansion to its border provoked its special military operation. In response to Research Question 2, war propaganda and fake news abound in NATO, Ukraine,

and Russia. What we need is an urgent call for open communication, ceasefire, and peace settlement. See Figure 11 below:



Figure 10: Summary of the Findings of This Article on Russia’s Special Military Operation in Ukraine

6.2. Recommendations

There are only two major options in the Ukraine crisis now: 1) endless war and 2) end of war. If all sides to the conflict engage in a tit-for-tat war game, reacting to war with even more war, then the only winners will only be politicians and the military-industrial complex at best. For starter, think of all the lives lost as well as the years and dollars spent on the war in Afghanistan. At worst, the losers will potentially be the whole world as there is a realistic possibility of a nuclear war that spells nuclear mutually assured destruction (nuclear MADness) and the end of the world as we know it. The other option is to choose life; hence, putting an end to the war. For this, we need de-escalation, a stop to sending weapons, sincere dialogue, open lines of communication, ceasefire with no preconditions, diplomacy, a peace treaty, peaceful coexistence, and nuclear disarmament here and now. In addition, a new

security arrangement that ensures the security of all parties concerned—Russia, Ukraine, and the European Union—must be created.

Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University, John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago, and Stephen Walt of Harvard University call for an end to the proxy war or face nuclear Armageddon, for which mainstream media label them as “top U.S. scholars” who are “smart people [who] stake out dumb, immoral positions.”⁹² Yet, they stand firm on their arguments that opening the lines of dialogue and ending war is the only rational way forward to end the bloodshed and save lives. Critical of the involvement of his government and NATO in the Ukraine crisis, Sachs indicated that key concerns that a negotiated end to the hostilities must be addressed, including: 1) sovereignty and security of Ukraine, 2) NATO enlargement, 3) the destiny of Crimea, and 4) Ukraine’s economic recovery.⁹³

The aim of NATO was to counterbalance the Warsaw Pact and deter Warsaw Pact’s geopolitical and military adventures during the Cold War. With the end of the Cold War, what is the *raison d’être* of NATO now? Hence, there is a simultaneous call for ending Russia’s special military operation and ending NATO all at once.

6.3. Conclusion

There are different ways of explaining the Ukrainian dilemma from theories of international politics: *moralpolitik* and *realpolitik* as starting points. From the point of view of *moralpolitik* or political idealism, Ukraine without a doubt has the right to choose its destiny. It can decide to be engaged in full-blown NATOization based on its inherent political right as a sovereign country. However, from the point of view of *realpolitik* or political realism, Ukraine must take its political right to be a member of NATO with a grain of salt. Ukraine is sandwiched between two great

⁹² Eyal Winter, לאנגנו לבנוע, and יהודי ברית, “Top U.S. Scholars vs. Aid to Ukraine: When Smart People Stake Out Dumb, Immoral Positions,” MSN, January 7, 2023 <https://www.msn.com/he-il/news/other/top-u-s-scholars-vs-aid-to-ukraine-when-smart-people-stake-out-dumb-immoral-positions/ar-AA164p5H>.

⁹³ Democracy Now!, “Jeffrey Sachs: Negotiated End to Ukraine War Is the Only Real Way Out,” December 6, 2022, https://www.democracynow.org/2022/12/6/jeffrey_sachs_ukraine_war.

powers with nuclear weapons: NATO and Russia. Ukraine has fallen victim to a proxy war between its neighbors to the East and to the West. Ukraine does not have to choose between a rock and a hard place. If Ukraine takes sides, it will become a semi-colony or neo-colony of NATO or Russia. If Ukraine decides to be neutral, it could benefit from good relations with both sides and avoid the negative aspects in its relationship with either side. For its survival, political realism of neutrality appears to be rationally a better option at this point in time than the moralpolitik of exercising its right to self-determination of joining NATO. Therefore, is neutrality theoretically the best option for Ukraine? Situated between Scylla and Charybdis, Ukraine had better choose neutrality over NATO between these two goods. Russia, Ukraine, and NATO, all of which are capitalists and of majoritarian Christian heritage, must engage in social communication that promotes constructive dialogue to foster mutual understanding and goodwill to end the armed combat and attain peace. All international armed conflicts end with peace talks and agreements, except Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We don't want another nuclear catastrophe, which will wipe out life as we know it. The history of Ukraine is still unfolding.

This article contributes to communication, conflict and peace studies, politics, international relations, and religion in terms of public witness. Aside from the mainstream news, the author presented, among others, the voices from the media in the Global South.

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