UKRAINE CRISIS AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL ORDER

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Abstract. When studying the political processes occurring in the world, we witness that armed conflicts are still taking place in certain regions. Among them, the largest and most urgent is the war between Ukraine and Russia**.** This war began in February 2022, has drastically altered the geopolitical, security and economic landscape of the world. Therefore, it is essential to conduct an in-depth analysis of the impact the war on international politics, security and the economy. From an international politics perspective, the war has shifted the balance of global power, leading to the formation of new alliances and political conflicts. The strengthening of cooperation between organizations such as NATO and the European Union with Ukraine, as well as the imposition of sanctions on Russia, are seen as the main diplomatic consequences of the war. This conflict has created new risks and challenges not only for Ukraine and Russia but for the entire world.

Key words: “Greater Eurasia”, Russia, Ukraine, USA, NATO, European Union, “Heartland”, “Golden Bridge”.

Introduction

When analyzing the global political system, we observe that it consists of extremely rich events, political problems, relevance, and conflicts. These events, in turn, influence the international community and lead to changes in the socio-political life of certain states. One such event is the war between Ukraine and Russia. This war has not only altered relations between the two countries but has also forced a transformation of global politics and the system of international relations.

From a geopolitical perspective, the war between Ukraine and Russia emerged primarily as a result of rivalry and a clash of interests among powerful states, affecting Eastern Europe and beyond. Russia's decision to invade Ukraine prompted major international organizations such as the United States, the European Union, and NATO to reconsider their positions, perspectives, and strategic plans in global politics. Moreover, the impact of the war on international politics has deepened further. New diplomatic approaches by NATO and the European Union, Russia's international isolation, and the United States' strategic actions on a global scale have framed the war as a strategic confrontation. The powerful rivalry between Russia and the United States, NATO's eastward expansion, and the growing interest of other states in the social, economic, and security consequences of this conflict have created a new and powerful dynamic in world politics.

Main Part

Today, political scientists and analysts around the world express various opinions regarding the root causes of the Russia–Ukraine military conflict and its consequences. The true reasons behind official Moscow's decision to start the war remain unclear. From a geopolitical perspective, however, Russia had sufficient grounds and pretexts to initiate this war.

First, the British scholar Halford Mackinder, in his 1904 lecture *The Geographical Pivot of History*, proposed the following concept: "The center of the world is Eurasia, and its core is the Heartland. Whoever controls Eastern Europe controls the World Island; whoever controls the World Island controls the world." Based on this concept, the U.S. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, in his book *The Grand Chessboard*, emphasized that the main task of the United States in the 1990s was to bring Eastern Europe under its sphere of influence. The heart of Eastern Europe is Ukraine. Therefore, a clash of interests between the United States and Russia in Eastern Europe and Ukraine was inevitable.

Russian political elites and geopoliticians have also developed a special "Greater Eurasia" concept aimed at uniting Eurasia. For Moscow to implement this concept, Ukraine must remain within its sphere of influence. This is because Ukraine and Belarus are considered a "golden bridge" connecting Russia with Europe. If these territories fall outside Russia's influence, geopolitically Russia risks turning into merely an Asian state. This, in turn, would undermine the realization of the Kremlin's ambitious "Greater Eurasia" concept.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the West, led by the United States and NATO, continued expanding its sphere of influence eastward. As a result of NATO's fourth, fifth, and sixth enlargements, 11 Eastern European countries became its members. Until 2004, Russia had no submarine presence in the Black Sea. However, after Bulgaria, Slovakia, Romania, and the Baltic states joined NATO, Russia deployed its submarines into the Black Sea region.

The events of the Russo-Georgian War, as well as the Annexation of Crimea and developments in Donetsk and Luhansk, led Ukraine and Georgia to intensify their efforts to join NATO. Russia, however, could not remain indifferent to further NATO expansion into regions it considers vital to its national interests. The potential NATO membership of Ukraine and Georgia has been perceived by Russia as a real threat to its territorial integrity.

At the beginning of 2022, the Kremlin appealed to the United States and the West, requesting guarantees that NATO would not expand further eastward and that Ukraine and Georgia would not be admitted as members. However, such guarantees were not provided by the collective West and the United States. As a result, official Moscow faced a difficult choice between two options:

1. Russia would deploy troops into Ukraine, which would lead to severe economic sanctions imposed by the United States and Western countries.

2. To passively observe Ukraine and Georgia leaving its sphere of influence and joining NATO and the European Union.

For Russia, both options carried serious consequences. The expansion of NATO up to Ukraine's territory could be disastrous for Russia's territorial integrity. The collective West placed Russia in a highly challenging situation. As a result, a new phase in global geopolitics emerged, marked by an intensifying struggle between a unipolar and a multipolar world order. Thus, a step was taken toward the formation of a new international order.

The Russia–Ukraine conflict is closely linked to Russia's concerns about NATO's expansion toward its borders. The neglect of Moscow's security concerns intensified tensions between the two sides and became one of the main causes of the conflict. Perceiving NATO's expansion and the threats to its security, Russia took countermeasures. Despite repeated Russian warnings, the increased pressure from NATO further intensified the confrontation. NATO actively participated in supplying Ukraine with weapons and strengthening military assistance. This aid expanded from simple air defense systems and anti-tank missiles to heavy weaponry, including tanks, artillery, and armored vehicles. NATO's provision of military support to Ukraine significantly increased the risk of direct clashes and accidental conflicts.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov accused NATO of waging war against Russia through its proxy forces and emphasized that NATO's goal was to undermine Russia's military and industrial capacity through the conflict in Ukraine. If tensions between NATO and Russia continue to escalate, the future prospects for regional and global stability remain highly uncertain.

The intensification of hostility between NATO and Russia has serious implications for global and regional security. The acceleration of the arms race and the risk of direct confrontation increase the likelihood of a major conflict and can have severe consequences. Experts argue that the international community must recognize the

urgency of efforts to de-escalate tensions and actively participate in diplomatic negotiations to resolve the Ukraine crisis.

NATO's disregard for Russia's security interests, combined with Russia's responsive measures, has further escalated the Russia–Ukraine conflict. Continued militarization and the potential for direct confrontation pose significant threats to global and regional security. Therefore, all parties must prioritize diplomatic solutions, engage in dialogue to reduce risks, and work toward achieving peace.

It can also be added that the Russia–Ukraine war has altered the international geopolitical balance and established a new strategic order. This shift has led to NATO's expansion, Russia's international isolation, and the formation of new alliances among global powers. As a result of the war, Finland and Sweden joined NATO. While this decision aimed to strengthen security in Northern Europe, it was perceived as a threat by Russia.

The accession of new NATO members brought the alliance's borders closer to Russia, changing the regional strategic balance of power. This intensified Russia's traditional opposition to NATO's eastward expansion and became an additional geopolitical cause of the war. Furthermore, the combined military expenditures of NATO member states have increased, defense budgets have expanded, and military assistance to Ukraine has grown, requiring new measures to ensure regional security. This, in turn, has enhanced NATO's role in the global geopolitical arena.

As a result of the war, Russia has been isolated from the global economic system. Sanctions imposed by Western countries sharply reduced Russia's revenues from energy exports, deepening its economic difficulties. Moreover, Russia's isolation within international organizations has weakened its diplomatic position and limited its influence on the global stage.

Russia's international isolation has also shifted the balance of power among global powers. Some developing countries prefer to maintain a neutral stance toward Russia,

which has increased divisions within the international system. These countries include China and India. Their positions on the war reflect significant geopolitical changes. China, while continuing economic cooperation with Russia, has refrained from directly supporting the war. This stance has intensified geopolitical competition between Western countries and China. Although China is seen as a strategic partner of Russia, it considers the war inconsistent with international law. India, on the other hand, continues to purchase oil from Russia to ensure its energy security, adopting a pragmatic position regarding the conflict. This decision has brought strategic relations between Western countries and India to a new phase.

Conclusion

The war between Russia and Ukraine is a complex geopolitical crisis that has had profound impacts on international politics, security, and the global economy. This conflict has accelerated the transition of the international system from a unipolar world order to a multipolar one. The increased support of NATO and the European Union for Ukraine has sharply intensified relations between Russia and the West. At the same time, the war has brought serious consequences for the global economy. Economic sanctions imposed on Russia have significantly harmed its energy exports, causing major disruptions in global energy markets. Therefore, the international community must take active diplomatic measures to mitigate the ongoing effects of the war. Efforts to resolve the conflict should focus on solutions that consider the interests of all parties, ensuring security and stability. In this regard, the restoration of dialogue between Russia, Ukraine, and the West, along with positive steps toward achieving peace, could serve to reestablish balance in international relations.

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