

4-19-2022

The Theoretical Challenges in Ukraine

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Kim, A. (2022). The Theoretical Challenges in Ukraine.

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TO: Dr. Martha Lizabeth Phelps, UNLV, Department of Political Science
FROM: Andrew Kim
DATE: February 27, 2022
SUBJECT: Theoretical Challenges Regarding Ukraine.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Russia and Ukraine, strikes and death. The unfolding situation in Ukraine seems like a scene out of the Cold War, the complexity within it not only lies in how fast these events are occurring but also the unpredictability of Russia's leader; to address this current conflict requires the acknowledgment of a brief background within these events and also the possible responses which we could expect to see. Accordingly, I suggest that we think about the historical influences of the current Russia and Ukraine dispute on the United States National Security Policy, and acknowledge that the realist viewpoint would recommend a consensus formed between Russia and NATO, whereas the liberal viewpoint might approach the situation with both the absence and presence of a military solution.

BRIEF BACKGROUND:

Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered troops into separatist pro-Moscow regions of Eastern Ukraine on Monday, February 22, 2022, in what Russia has called a peacekeeping mission. This happened shortly after Vladimir Putin had signed decrees which recognized the independence of Moscow-backed regions, but in order to understand why this is indeed a big deal, one must look at the history of Ukraine's separatist regions. After Ukraine's Moscow friendly former president Viktor Yanukovich was driven out of office by prevalent protests in 2014, the Russian response was to annex Ukraine's Crimean peninsula, and this led to persistent tensions until a second Minsk agreement had been signed with the support of Russia, Ukraine, France, and Germany, and although this agreement stopped many of the large scale battles, it gave Russian rebels political control of Ukraine's separatist regions causing tensions to persist for the following eight years (Ellyatt 2022). The intensity of the fighting and notably the indiscriminate airstrikes hitting civilians and civilian infrastructure, continues to trigger large-scale displacement, while simultaneously exacerbating the humanitarian needs of those who are internally displaced or remain in heavily affected areas, and the delivery of lifesaving aid remains challenging, with a lack of safe humanitarian access. While the EU has unanimously voted to let most Ukrainians live, work, and study across the bloc for up to three years, the bulk of the challenge of acting as host countries for those fleeing Ukraine has fallen to neighboring countries, with Poland, Romania, Moldova, and Hungary hosting the vast majority of those who have left Ukraine, and with estimates from the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR, over 3 million people have fled Ukraine with a majority of them going to Poland, Romania, Moldova, Hungary and Slovakia (Alfonseca & Magee 2022).

- During January and February 2022, Russia "prepared" to invade.
- On February 24th, the Russians invaded Ukraine.

Timeline of fled refugee:

February 2022

- On February 24th, 84,641 Ukrainians have fled.
- By February 25th, 192,182 Ukrainians have fled.
- By February 26th, 341,301 Ukrainians have fled.
- By February 27th, 509,665 Ukrainians have fled.
- By February 28th, 672,139 Ukrainians have fled.

March 2022

- By March 1st, 840,296 Ukrainians have fled.
- By March 2nd, 1,013,787 Ukrainians have fled.
- By March 3rd, 1,180,113 Ukrainians have fled.
- By March 4th, 1,352,112 Ukrainians have fled.
- By March 5th, 1,549,632 Ukrainians have fled.
- By March 6th, 1,755,972 Ukrainians have fled.
- By March 7th, 1,962,444 Ukrainians have fled.
- By March 8th, 2,146,533 Ukrainians have fled.
- By March 9th, 2,316,501 Ukrainians have fled.
- By March 10th, 2,450,443 Ukrainians have fled.
- By March 11th, 2,569,699 Ukrainians have fled.

- By March 12th, 2,685,521 Ukrainians have fled.
- By March 13th, 2,842,697 Ukrainians have fled.
- By March 14th, 2,956,814 Ukrainians have fled.
- By March 15th, 3,068,073 Ukrainians have fled.
- By March 16th, 3,172,746 Ukrainians have fled.
- By March 17th, 3,266,960 Ukrainians have fled.
- By March 18th, 3,349,615 Ukrainians have fled.
- By March 19th, 3,426,372 Ukrainians have fled.
- By March 20th, 3,493,765 Ukrainians have fled.
- By March 21st, 3,558,442 Ukrainians have fled.
- By March 22nd, 3,626,547 Ukrainians have fled.
- By March 23rd, 3,674,952 Ukrainians have fled.
- By March 24th, 3,725,806 Ukrainians have fled.
- By March 25th, 3,772,599 Ukrainians have fled.
- By March 26th, 3,821,049 Ukrainians have fled.
- By March 27th, 3,866,224 Ukrainians have fled.
- By March 28th, 3,901,713 Ukrainians have fled.

(Source: Operational Data Portal)

US CHALLENGES:

The United States' view on the situation in Ukraine is ambivalent because although it desires to keep its title as a city on a hill, the chilling warning from Vladimir Putin claiming any Interventions will face the full force of the Kremlin's nuclear arsenal seems difficult to ignore (Smith, 2022). The United States has had a somewhat odd tendency to put national security as a secondary matter, but the influence of public opinion can indeed quickly determine the likelihood of specific policy possibilities. The military has always seemed to be a top priority of public opinion in regards to U.S. national security, as one can recall how former President Barack Obama's choice in 2011 to pull out all U.S. forces from Iraq received much support from the American public and served as a strong example of the "rally around the flag" effect, but although taking consideration towards public opinion seems appealing, its effectiveness has been labeled to be temporary. Political mobilization could also serve as a challenge for U.S. national security policymakers since they must often find a way to ensure that the action taken in response to threats is also aligned with the national interests and values, but also at the same time they must couch the causes of war in black in white terms for the public to understand the justification of war (Meese et al., 2018).

REALIST PERSPECTIVE:

One of the choruses of voices that could exist during the unfolding conflict in Ukraine would be the realists. The realist perspective acknowledges states as self-interested actors pursuing their own strategic objects with skepticism brought towards moral judgment within the players and only describes the game (Dunne & Schmidt, 2020). A quick bullet point overview on the realist viewpoint towards the current Ukraine conflict could include:

1. Russia's feeling of insecurity.
2. A reflection of historical betrayal.
3. NATO started it, so NATO fixes it.

One of the emphases brought upon by realists is also the focus primarily on "securing the physical survival of the state", but in Russia's perspective, this might be exactly why they have the intentions they currently do (Dunne & Schmidt, 2020). Realists could possibly claim that the West and the NATO alliance only have themselves to blame as they could have made Russia feel a sense of insecurity. The policy of expansion NATO had adopted following the collapse of the Soviet Union (which had also admitted more than a dozen former Soviet States) could have resulted in Russia feeling isolated, and along with this, former U.S. secretary of states James Baker had also assured the then-president of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev in 1990 that NATO would not expand eastward, but we can clearly see that NATO troops have already made their way to the Baltic States and Ukraine.

The realists could view the cause of the crisis to rely solely on NATO which is why it would then suggest that it is up to NATO to resolve it. Realists would suggest policies from NATO to assure

Moscow that Ukraine will not be allowed to join NATO and will remain suspended between Russia and the West.

LIBERAL PERSPECTIVE:

Liberalism might indeed be an expansion from realism, but it also carries many contrasting theories. Unlike realists, liberals do accept morality and ethics, and focus more on how we can deter war and create a world order dedicated to, as Immanuel Kant would say, “perpetual peace”. Liberals generally want to reach a consensus and earn cooperation (Dunne, 2020). The presented bullet point overview below presents that the liberal viewpoint on the current situation could follow as:

1. Stresses of military action.
2. Public opinion needs emphasis.
3. Usage of military action is possible.

The liberal viewpoint I find to be the most complex because it would seem that due to its strong focus on democracy and morals, a military solution would not be plausible for them. Liberalism also puts emphasis on public opinion and would possibly suggest that policies formulated towards the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine should “reflect the will and values of the people” and since the majority of liberals would typically prefer diplomatic approaches to international conflict, they wouldn’t view the military as a viable solution correct? I believe that there does exist a slight chance where the liberal viewpoint specifically in the U.S. may actually suggest a military incorporated solution because of its goal of being that city on a hill. The United States’ interest in American Liberalism could perhaps initiate the usage of what Dr. Michael Boyle calls “Illiberal liberalism” since the existence of an authoritarian leader could be undermining democracy (Boyle & Lang, 2021).

CONCLUSION:

A confident policy memo regarding the unfolding situation in Ukraine may not be the easiest to achieve due to the conflict continuing to persist during the time of this writing. The disregard of U.S. warnings by Russia and its decision to invade Ukraine seems to make certain the enormous consequences that could occur on the international scale with strains already formed between U.S. and Russian relations. Outlined above is the explanation of how the U.S. can be described as a heterogeneous group because of its citizens varying in opinions towards a magnitude of topics (Meese et al., 2018). This notice of the U.S. means that the viewpoints towards the current conflict can be split between multiple sides such as the realist and liberal train of thought; both viewpoints suggest their own versions of a solution from giving Russia what they want because they deserve it and the usage of military forces to effectively move towards a status of perpetual peace. Regardless of which perspective is favored or to actually be implemented, successfully comprehending them is what serves as an integral part of understanding the theoretical challenges within Ukraine.

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