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The Perils of Alliances

How International Coalitions Increase Conflict Propensity

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Departmental Honors Thesis

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*“It was the rise of Athens and the fear that this inspired in
Sparta that made war inevitable.”*

- Thucydides, in the fifth century B.C

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Abstract

What is the relationship between alliances and interstate conflict proclivity? By analyzing states' alliances and conflicts from 1816 to 2007, I find that (1) states with alliances are more conflict-prone than states without an alliance, (2) states with more alliances are more conflict-prone than states with fewer alliances, (3) states with an alliance initiate conflict more often than states without an alliance, and (4) states with more alliances initiate conflict more often than states with fewer alliances. In all dimensions of analysis in this article, the presence of more allies is always a portent of increased interstate conflict. I theorize that the origins of this behavioral phenomenon are a function of states' security dilemma and ally empowerment. I evaluate these causal mechanisms in a real-world setting by process tracing their presence leading up to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014. I conclude that the West's post-Cold War hegemony was essentially unchecked by any real competing coalitions and empowered to expand its purview eastward. The Western Alliance was utterly indifferent to Russia's geopolitical concerns. Ukraine's proselytization into a Western bastion on Russia's borders would not be tolerated, which was made abundantly evident by Russian foreign policy statements since 1989. The West's insouciance would go unmitigated. Therefore, Russia was necessarily behooved to invade Ukraine to alleviate its exacerbated security dilemma.

Introduction

On February 20th, 2014, Russia invaded the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea. The Kremlin received rather tepid repercussions after its initial incursions but would be made an international pariah after it escalated its ambitions to a full-scale invasion on February 24th, 2022. The war has plunged Europe into its first major conflict since the Second World War while displacing millions from their homes and costing thousands of lives. Since the inception of the conflict, many have purported explanations for it; some obstreperously blame it on the tyrannical and nationalist tendencies of Russian President Vladimir Putin; some try to focus causation *only* on NATO expansion. However, explanations thus far have failed to sufficiently account for how interstate alliance mechanisms compel seemingly erratic and unjustified state behavior. This paper aims to separate the wheat from the chaff by fundamentally analyzing (1) how alliances *generally* affect state behavior, and (2) the causal mechanisms of ally empowerment and the security dilemma that can be used to understand why alliances produce internecine results. The Western alliance's post-Cold War hegemony gave it the predominant position in engineering Europe's new security protocol, wherein the voice of opposition would fall on deaf ears. The price would be paid.

We are then met with the question; how do alliances promote conflict? As I will provide ample quantitative and qualitative evidence to support, interstate alliances alter state behavior in two fundamental ways. States that accrue allies are generally more prone than states without allies to engage in conflict and be the aggressor. I argue that this is a function of ally empowerment. Given their assurance of support, states with allies feel more compelled to absorb the costs of war because the probability of victory is improved. Secondly, states without allies suffer an exacerbated security dilemma because of the security inequality generated by alliances.

If a state without allies feels it has reached a critical point of precarity, it will become bellicose by retaliating against the alliance's encroachments on its security. These encroachments need not be material, only perceived.

The history of post-Cold War Russian-Western relations is the history of these alliance mechanisms in effect. The West's proliferation of allies since the fall of the Soviet Union has only enabled it to push Russia to the precipice. As the Alliance crept eastward and increasingly impinged on Russian affairs, Moscow's security dilemma intensified. Russia countered the West's encroachment by resorting to military force because it was the only reliable method to maintain security. In accordance with the paradoxical nature of the security dilemma, Russia's tempestuousness triggered the West's security dilemma and promoted its eastward inklings.

A Review of the Literature on Alliances

Alliances serve as a tool of foreign policy for national actors to promote their interests while simultaneously pursuing a common goal. Formal alliances between states typically serve a dual purpose: the combining of resources against a common adversary, and an effort to amalgamate national powers with a friendly state as a reflection of amicable relations. State alignment, in a word, is the identification of enemies and friends. Alliances are the formalization of state alignment, that is, the ties a state has with another that induce cooperation like similar ethnic makeups, ideology, or political systems. The formalization and necessary expectations of alliances typically enjoin some degree of combined military and the legalization of conditions in which a member is required to contribute to the alliance's commonwealth.¹

The security dilemma is a means of conceptualizing alliance mechanics on the global stage and depicting the underlying rationalization that compels states to construct cooperative edifices like military alliances. States have two options: to join or abstain from alliances. The reasons for alliance formation, in this model, are twofold. Firstly, they can increase their security if other states abstain from alliances. Secondly, other states will ally themselves to prevent isolation in the fear that other states will not abstain. But this process of rationalization inevitably leads to the formation of a counter-alliance by excluded states, since Alliance A's intentions cannot be confirmed to be only defensive. The conclusion of this process is a system of two large rival coalitions that have achieved little to no security benefit and have only incurred the

¹ Snyder, Glenn H (1997) *Alliance Politics*. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1997. Print, 1-8.

monetary costs and political restraints of an alliance.² This framework delivers the irony of alliance consequence.

Scholarly literature has debated the effect of alliances on interstate conflict for decades. There lie two primary schools of thought in alliance politics: those who unilaterally support their efficacy as tools of deconfliction and deterrence, and those who are skeptical of their ability to maintain peace. Generally, most scholars favor alliances as effective tools of foreign policy to stabilize political tensions and promote deconfliction. Below is an exploration of the prevailing polemics from both sides.

Alliances as a Tool for Peace. Alliances do not only emit influence between potential aggressors and targets, but they also create politics between allies. For example, allies can exert foreign policy change on one of their member states to reduce the probability of them encouraging the creation or extension of a dispute. Some research proposes that alliances produce institutions and norms on the global stage that promote peace. Further, alliances allow the diffusion of information to flow more rapidly, which promotes interstate connectivity and stability. Such factors decrease the overall likelihood of conflict.³ Another argument proposes that the type of alliance propagated is significantly correlated to its effects on the international stage. Research provides that defense alliances indeed do deter aggression, whereas offensive alliances have a violently invigorating effect. This research provides an easily discernible quantitative relation between the increase in alliances and the decrease in militarized conflict.⁴

² Snyder, Glenn H. (1984) *The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics*. World Politics 36 (4): 461–495

³ Pressman, J. (2017). *Warring friends: Alliance restraint in international politics*. Cornell University Press.

⁴ Leeds, Brett Ashley. "Do alliances deter aggression? The influence of military alliances on the initiation of militarized interstate disputes." *American Journal of Political Science* 47.3 (2003): 427-439.

Some argue that alliances have a restraining effect because “[w]hen a target values an alliance highly, an ally’s recommendation for settlement can encourage the target to concede to demands without further escalation.” Further, they argue that allies can deter challenges and restrain peers, which in turn, mitigates conflict potential and ensures peaceful outcomes.⁵

A study conducted an analysis of alliances from 1816 to 2000 which tested three hypotheses that are pivotal to understanding the statistical generalities alliances have caused over a large breadth of time. The *deterrence effect*, that is, “a potential challenger is less likely to initiate a militarized interstate dispute if the potential target has a relevant defensive alliance” was empirically supported. The *initiation effect*, that is, “a potential challenger is more likely to initiate a militarized dispute if the potential challenger has a defensive alliance” was not empirically supported. The *escalation effect*, that is, “a target of a militarized interstate dispute is more likely to resist if the target has a relevant defensive alliance” was not empirically supported.⁶

Alliances as a Cause of Conflict. Member states of an alliance operate under the impression that, upon collision with an adversary, their allies will aid them. The effect of this expectation, the so-called “entrapment argument,” promotes a moral hazard for member states in that they act less cautiously and more recklessly due to the assurance of support from their respective alliance.⁷ Another argument suggests that states have a given amount of resources and allocate a certain quantity to foreign policy with two objectives: to change and maintain the status quo. This argument posits that states will use resources to change that to which they are

⁵ Fang, S., Johnson, J. C., & Leeds, B. A. (2014). To concede or to resist? The restraining effect of military alliances. *International Organization*, 68(4), 775-809.

⁶ Johnson, Jesse C., and Brett Ashley Leeds. "Defense pacts: A prescription for Peace?." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 7.1 (2011): 45-65.

⁷ Ibid.

not keen and maintain that to which they are. Alliances are communal depositories for member states' collective defense initiatives. Insofar as an alliance reduces the per-state resource contribution to security (states in an alliance contribute fewer resources to defense than those not in an alliance), such newly freed resources may lead to states adopting an aggressive foreign policy stance, or "change" initiatives, on the international stage to promote their will.⁸

The formation of defense alliances, namely the militarization they beget as a natural property of their premise, instigates other national actors to increase their own militarization as a result of isolation insecurity. This rationalization process implements a system in which actors recursively militarize, based on insecurity and the expectation of inevitable hostility, which increases the likelihood of interstate disputes that eventually metamorphosize into war. This argument does not require actors to resort to military force, the final political appeal; the gradual rise of disputes in general as a result of national insecurity and exclusion serves as sufficient testimony to prove this argument's assertion.⁹

Some research claims that alliances affect the behavior of potential aggressors and targets, and that the incidence of war itself cannot thoroughly be distilled into a single causative variable due to the complexity inherent in reality. Outright war can only be attributed to multivariable equations, and the role of alliances in this calculus is unclear. For instance, an alliance encourages a potential target to resist aggression, increasing the probability of war; however, a defense alliance mitigates the initial risk of a challenger's aggressiveness, lowering the probability of war. Therefore, under certain abrasive conditions, alliances can instigate war.¹⁰

⁸ Palmer, Glenn, and T. Clifton Morgan. (2006) *A Theory of Foreign Policy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

⁹ Senese, P. D., & Vasquez, J. A. (2008). *The Steps to War: An Empirical Study*. Princeton University Press.

¹⁰ Smith, Alastair. (1995) Alliance Formation and War. *International Studies Quarterly* 39 (4): 405–425

Alliances, for different reasons and circumstances, can deter or implicitly encourage conflict because of the different ways alliances influence state behavior.

A study that analyzed alliances from 1495-1980 found that “interstate alliances are, with the exception of the nineteenth century after 1815, usually followed by war rather than by peace,” and that “alliances that embody settlements of territorial disputes are most peaceful.”¹¹ Another argument asserts that alliances in the prenuclear era are associated with both the initiation of militarized interstate disputes and the onset of war.¹²

With respect to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the lack of distinction between NATO and EU integration has posed Europe with a new variant of the security dilemma. The integration of states into the EU, and other forms of expansionist EU policy, have accumulated to become a security concern for Russia. The conflation of purported NATO military expansion and the EU’s economic-legal influence eastward has done little to improve relations between the West and Russia.¹³ This argument does not necessarily favor or disapprove of alliances at large; it is merely an observation of the political complexities and possible conflicts international institutions can emanate under certain conditions that can produce conflict.

Existing research thus far severely lacks a general and comprehensive analysis of the relationship between alliances and interstate conflict. For instance, research has focused on the relationship between certain alliance types (like defense alliances) and conflict propensity, whereas this article fixates on a far wider breadth of alliances and their relationship with conflict.

¹¹ Gibler, D. M., & Vasquez, J. A. (1998). Uncovering the dangerous alliances, 1495–1980. *International Studies Quarterly*, 42(4), 785-807.

¹² Kenwick, M. R., Vasquez, J. A., & Powers, M. A. (2015). Do alliances really deter?. *The Journal of Politics*, 77(4), 943-954.

¹³ Duke, S., & Gebhard, C. (2017). The EU and NATO’s Dilemmas with Russia and the prospects for deconfliction. *European security*, 26(3), 379-397.

Secondly, alliance literature has failed to sufficiently articulate the specific alliance conditions that deter or promote conflict, and how alliances initiate causal dynamics that compel state insecurity and ally empowerment. This is to say, empirically verifiable causative factors within the context of alliance politics have been left, to a large extent, to the imagination of curious observers.

Theory and Model

Alliances

I begin my theoretical analysis by first describing the process by which states form alliances. From this point, I analyze the two emanating effects alliances have on states that maintain them and states that do not.

This paper considers an alliance to be a “formal commitment by two or more states to some future security-related action. The action involved could entail almost anything – detailed military planning, consultation during a crisis, or a promise by one state to abstain from an upcoming war.”¹⁴ This broader definition is in accord with Singer and Small’s definition, which includes agreements of interstate consultation and cooperation during periods of crisis.¹⁵

There are different types of alliances that distinguish its ability to ensure peaceful or pernicious outcomes. For instance, there are defense pacts, non-aggression pacts, and promises of conflict abstinence. However, this study seeks to broadly instantiate the most general and predictable effects of states with alliances on conflict variability, and therefore, I account for all types of alliances in my theoretical model and research design.

Alliances between states, despite their designated function, represent something more fundamental than the legal clauses and arrangements that bound them; they represent mutual state alignment. This is to say that allied states carry some degree of commonality that may be expressed through similar ethnic makeups, ideology, security goals, and so forth. The degree to

¹⁴ Gibler, D. M. (n.d.) “Alliance Systems.” In *Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace, and Conflict*, edited by L. Kurtz. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

¹⁵ Singer, J. D., and M. Small (1968) “Alliance Aggregation and the Onset of War, 1815–1945.” In *International Politics: Insights and Evidence*, edited by J. D. Singer, pp. 247–286. New York: Free Press

which states are aligned speaks to, “[the] expectations about whether they will be supported or opposed by other states in future interactions.”¹⁶ These patterns of alignment are only strengthened by the codification of formal alliances which provide legal legitimacy to allied states’ heightened degree of alignment.¹⁷

I argue that this heightened degree of alignment which is formalized as an interstate alliance has two emanating effects that result in increased conflict: ally empowerment and an exacerbation of excluded states’ security dilemma. Alliances are operationally identified as states with allies.

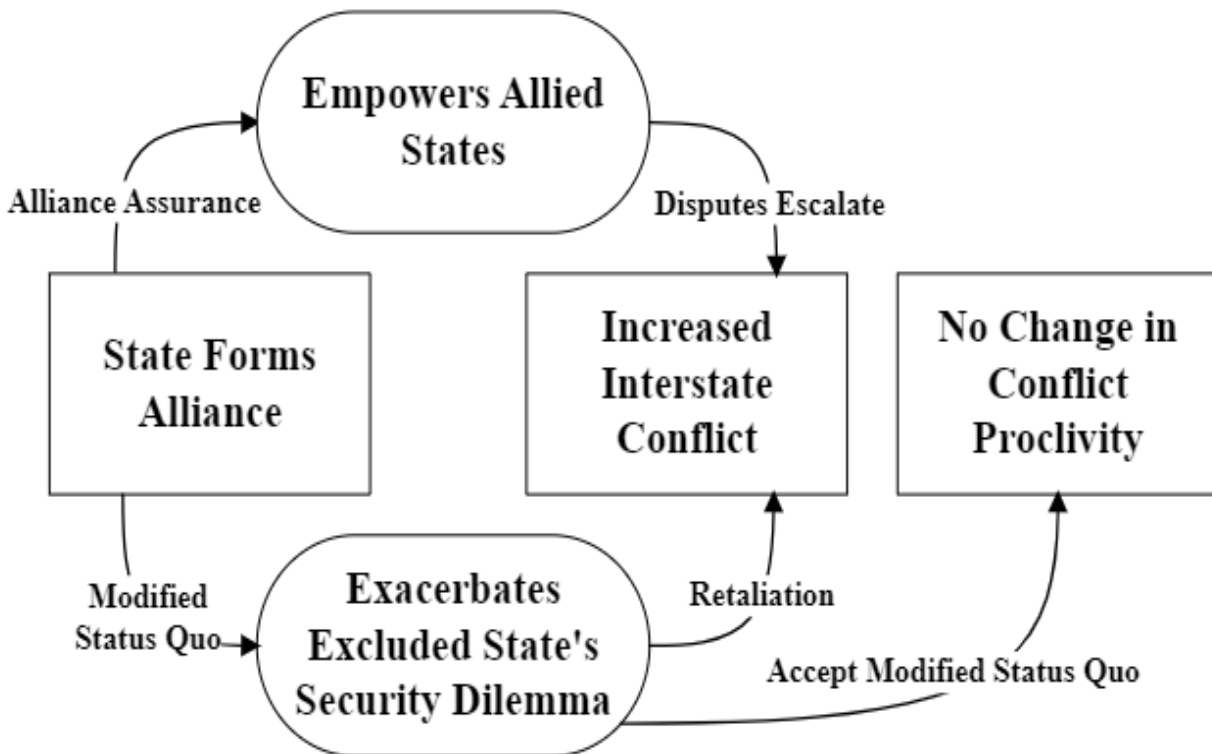
Excluded States’ Security Dilemma

The first way alliances may lead to deleterious disputes is by modifying the status quo in a manner that exacerbates excluded states’ security dilemma, therefore, increasing the likelihood of conflict. My model adopts the following axioms: (1) states exist in an anarchic model with no supranational authority to regulate behavior; (2) each state’s knowledge of the other states’ intentions and capabilities is unknown; (3) each actor seeks to increase its security to ensure its survival. Security can take many forms: technology, manpower, regime stability, logistical capability, geographic advantages, and so forth. As a result of this system’s nature, states are constantly imposed upon by the security dilemma which asserts that “many of the means by which a state tries to increase its security decrease[s] the security of others” because “one state’s gain in security often inadvertently threatens others.”¹⁸ Moreover, when states form alliances, they aggregate security resources and convert them into a collective good for all states involved

¹⁶ Snyder, G. H. (1997). *Alliance Politics*. Cornell University Press, 6.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 8

¹⁸ Jervis, R. (1978). Cooperation under the Security Dilemma. *World politics*, 30(2), 169-170.



to relish. However, I argue that states that are excluded from the benefits of collective security offered by alliances suffer an exacerbated security dilemma that leads both parties into a perennial spiral of increased securitization that increases the probability of conflict outbreak.

Let us observe the model at work in a system with four hypothetical states to explore this intuitive outcome more thoroughly. Suppose the following hypothetical conditions in conjunction with the systemic axioms aforementioned: (1) each state harbors identical security potential which is of arbitrary origin; (2) each state maintains equivalent original insecurity. In this systemic outlook, security is a fixed quantity equally divided among four states. The initial precarity of the scenario is in complete equilibrium because there exists no inequality of capability between the states. However, let us suppose that States 1 through 3 form an alliance. From this point, the system departs from equilibrium, and the security dilemmas of excluded states are exacerbated. State 4, the only excluded party, stands in solemn opposition to a coalition

thrice its size. The balance of power has dramatically shifted, and State 4's existence has been implicitly threatened. To combat this newfound insecurity, State 4 increases its security potential, which, according to the structural condition imposed by the security dilemma, cannot be deciphered as merely an act of preemptive militarization by the prevailing alliance. A global increase in security capability ensues, which is of no relative consequence, and only contributes toward interstate tensions.

In sum, the inequality of state capability propelled by alliances leads to internecine effects. It is of paramount importance that this phenomenon is not confounded with excluded states initiating conflict because of their exacerbated precarity. Though my model does not bar excluded states from initiating conflict, it is more accurate to characterize them as simply retaliatory actors in which retaliation operates on a spectrum of severity: from merely increasing security to initiating militarized conflict. The model also accounts for the opposite: because states with allies cannot be certain of the intentions of an increasingly militarized foreign actor, they may seek a preemptive military incursion optimal. I operationalize excluded states' security dilemma by measuring how often states with allies engage in conflict as opposed to states without allies. Admittedly, operationalizing exacerbated security dilemmas in this fashion is prone to error by excessive extrapolation. However, I believe that observing the differential in conflict-proclivity between states with and without allies will provide a strong indication of the effect alliances have on state behavior. If states with allies are less conflict-prone than otherwise, then my model is wrong; however, if states with allies are more conflict-prone than otherwise, then my proposition regarding the security inequality imposed by alliances and the result of excluded state insecurity offers some measure of clarity to the scholarly conversation.

Given the theoretical assertions mentioned thus far, I argue that states with alliances are more conflict-prone than states without alliances which allows me to derive the two following hypotheses for analysis:

Hypothesis 1: States with alliances are more conflict-prone than states without an alliance.

Hypothesis 2: States with more alliances are more conflict-prone than states with fewer alliances.

Ally Empowerment

States with alliances can lead to conflict by empowering their allies toward conflict by offering them an assurance of support in the event conflict were to occur against a non-ally. States with allies are less likely to seek conflict de-escalation or enter diplomatic negotiations with other states if they believe their alliance will contribute military assistance. Snyder calls this “the risk of entrapment,” which is the process by which an ally, due to heightened confidence from the alliance’s support, becomes tempestuous, intransigent, and aggressive in disputes with its opponents.¹⁹

To facilitate understanding, I look toward the useful analogy of insurance contracts. Auto insurance policies stipulate how much a policyholder will receive if they were to be in an accident. In the same manner, alliance agreements include the specific amount of aid an ally will provide in the event of a conflict. For instance, in the 1893 Franco-Russian alliance, both states clearly enumerated the exact quantity of aid in the event Germany aggressed against them: “The available forces to be employed against Germany shall be, on the part of France, 1,300,000 men,

¹⁹ Snyder, G. H. (1997). *Alliance Politics*. Cornell University Press, 44.

on the part of Russia, 700,000 or 800,000 men.”²⁰ Moreover, the price of the insurance premium generally travels in tandem with the level of risk being undertaken by the insured party. In this same fashion, the quantity of aid enumerated in an alliance agreement is functionally synonymous with the size of the insurance premium; greater insurance promotes greater risk tolerance. I argue that the assuring effects of alliances produce moral hazard because the guarantee of indemnity warps the insured party’s behavior due to the insurance policy insulating them from the risk of their potentially perilous actions.²¹

To effectively capture the deterring effects of alliances, states are behooved to construct alliance agreements that are “strong enough to deter an adversary but also with obligations sufficiently conditional or limited to restrain allies from provoking a conflict.”²² I operationalize ally empowerment by measuring how often states with allies commence conflict as opposed to states without allies. Conflict initiation is a reliable indicator of empowerment because it signifies the aggressor’s perceived low costs and relatively high benefits of war as a result of the alliance’s assurance of support. Given this explanation, I derive the two following hypotheses for analysis:

Hypothesis 3: States with an alliance initiate conflict more often than states without an alliance.

Hypothesis 4: States with more alliances initiate conflict more often than states with fewer alliances.

²⁰ 2008 Lillian Goldman Law Library, 127 Wall Street, New Haven, CT 06511.: https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/frumil.asp

²¹ Pauly, Mark V. (1968). "The Economics of Moral Hazard: Comment." *The American Economic Review* 58 (3): 531-37.

²² Benson, B. V., Bentley, P. R., & Ray, J. L. (2013). Ally provocateur: Why allies do not always behave. *Journal of Peace Research*, 50 (1), 48

Research Design

This piece will employ two methods of analysis that are highly complementary by merging the virtues of quantitative and qualitative research. I will begin by delving into the statistical truths that can be extracted from large swaths of data regarding states, alliances, and conflict from 1816 to 2007. The numeric conclusions drawn from this large breadth of statistically analyzed data allow knowledge of general propensities that have held true over an extended period while carrying the merit of being replicable and falsifiable. Quantitative analysis also avails us with unbiased data that is purely scientific, which is inherent to any qualitative analysis conducted by researchers. For these reasons, I have delegated half the responsibility of my argument to the conclusions drawn from the data. However, quantitative analysis is limited in a few respects. Firstly, it does not demonstrate the motives and psychology of involved actors, which is a central component in understanding the effect of alliances on state behavior and how ally empowerment is bred. Secondly, it fails to account for what material factors exacerbate isolated states' security dilemmas. It is not enough to propose that state insecurity arises only from alliance exclusion; the *why* component, and the real-world implications of an encroaching alliance, like territorial concessions, diluted international identity, and economic infringements of marginalization, provide a more holistic understanding.

To combat the quantitative shortcomings involved with perusing the causes of conflict, I include a qualitative case study on the West's role in provoking Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In accordance with my model, I analyze the primary propellants toward the Russian-Ukrainian war as a result of the dynamics between the European Union, the United States, NATO, Ukraine, and Russia. Quantitative analysis allows the critical application of my model's assertions to explain the West's incessantly hubristic foreign policy toward exacerbating Russia's security dilemma,

which culminated into its climax in 2014. The objective of this study is to process trace ally empowerment and the security dilemma as dualistic factors that pushed an isolated and insecure state into the fray of war. The qualitative contribution of this study gives insight into how the broad generalities of statistical observations are portrayed in real-world events. In a word, quantitative analysis avails us with the structural inclinations of reality, whereas qualitative analysis avails us with the necessary descriptions between the numeric facts.

Quantitative Analysis

To assess the veracity of my propositions, I employed two data sets: the Correlates of War (COW) and Alliances Treaty Obligations and Provisions (ATOP) datasets. The ATOP dataset²³ includes all the states that are members of any ATOP alliance during the years they have any active alliance commitments, whereas the COW dataset²⁴ provides militarized interstate disputes (MID) from 1816-2014 at the participant level. Despite the COW dataset providing data until 2014, the ATOP dataset only provides data until 2007, therefore, my study must terminate at this point. In conjunction, these datasets allow me to observe the relationship between state conflict proclivity and alliances from 1816-2007. I merged these two datasets so that each state's country code would match with the relevant years in which a state was in an alliance and participated in a militarized interstate dispute (MID). The product is a large data set of 17121 observations that articulate the number of allies and conflicts each state had from 1816 until 2007. Each hypothesis will draw upon this data set.

The independent variable, states with allies, are coded 1-59 based on the number of allies a state had during a given year, and 0 if otherwise. I account for all alliance types. The dependent variable, conflict, is coded as 0-26 based on the number of militarized interstate disputes a state experienced during a given year. I operationalize conflict by measuring the quantity of MIDs in any given year during the range of my analysis from 1816-2007. I adopt Jones, Bremer, and Singer's definition of a MID: "The term "militarized interstate dispute" refers to united historical

²³ The specific data set is referred to as "atop5_1sy". The state-year dataset (atop5_1sy) includes information about each state's alliance commitments each year. Data can be accessed at: <http://www.atopdata.org/data.html>.

²⁴ Palmer, G., McManus, R. W., D'Orazio, V., Kenwick, M. R., Karstens, M., Bloch, C., Dietrich, N., Kahn, K., Ritter, K., & Soules, M. J. (2022). The MID5 Dataset, 2011–2014: Procedures, coding rules, and description. *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 39(4), 470–482. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894221995743>; The specific data set is referred to as "MIDB 5.0". Data can be accessed at: <https://correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/mids/>.

cases in which the threat, display or use of military force short of war by one member state is explicitly directed towards the government, official representatives, official forces, property, or territory of another state.”²⁵ To reflect the internecine condition of states more accurately, I implemented a start-year to end-year function for each conflict so that intermediate years would be accounted for as one conflict per year to express the ongoing nature of interstate tensions. Moreover, to better capture the severity of militarized disputes of significance, I only analyzed conflicts that demonstrated a conflict level of three or more on a scale from one to five. My minimally relevant conflict level is a “display of force.” which is defined by the Correlates of War data set as the following: “Displays of force involve military demonstrations but no combat interaction.” My maximally relevant conflict level is “war” which the Correlates of War data set defines as the following: “When militarized interstate disputes evolve, or escalate, to the point where military combat is sufficiently sustained that it will result in a minimum of 1,000 total battle deaths (Small and Singer, 1982), they become interstate wars.”²⁶

Hypothesis 1: States with alliances are more conflict-prone than states without an alliance.

Data. I applied two filters to my sample of 17121 observations. The first filter coded for states with no allies; the second filtered for states with one ally or more. The product was two groups of non-allied (Group A) and allied states (Group B) from 1816 to 2007. I applied a mean function toward each group’s MIDs per year. To delineate experimental certainty, I applied a *T*-test and accounted for the *P* value to attain statistical significance.

²⁵ Jones, D. M., Bremer, S. A., & Singer, J. D. (1996). Militarized Interstate Disputes, 1816-1992: Rationale, Coding Rules, and Empirical Patterns. *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 15(2), 168.

²⁶ Ibid.

Results. I conclude that there is a positive relationship between states being in an alliance and an increased propensity for conflict. The results of the statistical analysis appear in Table 1 which reports Group A and B's average MIDs per year, which is 0.2452 and 0.4391, respectively. The divergence between Group A and Group B in conflict tendencies is substantively and statistically significant. Group B maintains 44% more average conflicts per year than its Group A counterpart which is in accord with the prediction of my model. Moreover, Table 1 provides extremely high experimental certainty with a P value ($P=2.20E-16$), implying that therein lies a statistically significant relationship between states with alliances and increased state conflict.

Table 1: Hypothesis 1: Experimental Results

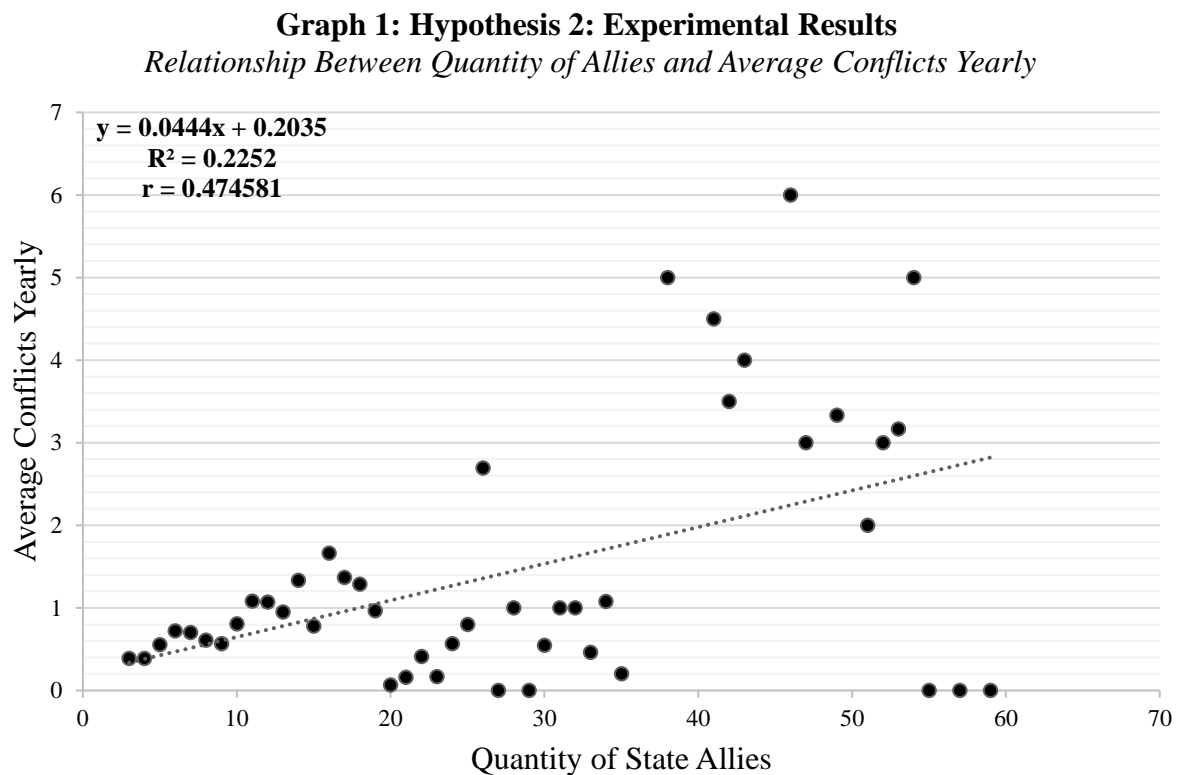
Relationship between alliances and state conflict (NOT Considered: #sidea=1)

	Group A (States without alliances)	Group B (States with alliances)
Average MIDs per year	0.2452	0.4391
<i>Experimental Certainty</i>		
t-test	-13.907	
Degrees of freedom	13297	
p-value <	2.20E-16	

Hypothesis 2: States with more alliances are more conflict-prone than states with fewer alliances.

Data. I applied a filter function to my sample to delineate the number of allies that states maintained during any given year and sorted them into groups according to ally count. Given the ally distribution, there are 47 groups in which states are segregated based on their ally count. For instance, if a state has 19 allies in a certain year, it will be cataloged with other states into the

group with 19 allies. Given the data distribution of states with allies, some groups had no states with the necessary quantity of allies to comprise the said group, and therefore, those groups will not be considered in this experiment. I then calculated the mean conflicts per year in each group ranging from 1-59. To garner experimental certainty, I applied a linear regression test to demonstrate the relationship between my variables.



Results. As my model predicts, the size of an alliance should have a positive linear effect on the number of conflicts experienced by the alliance per year due to a mixture of the ally empowerment syndrome and exacerbated security dilemmas. Graph 1 supports my model as it provides an easily discernible positive linear trend that describes the relationship between the increased quantity of allies and increased conflicts per year. Even more telling, for every ally added to an alliance, therein lies a 0.04 increase in average conflicts per annum. In other words, as allies in an alliance increase, so does the rate of conflict. The linear regression analysis of

0.474581, which is robust by most statistical standards that deal with metrics in social science, proves the statistically robust relationship between variables.²⁷

Hypothesis 3: States with an alliance initiate conflict more often than states without an alliance.

Data. I followed the same procedure as H_1 with the exception that I filtered for states in the main sample that initiated conflicts and for those that did not. The product was two distinct sets of data: states that initiated MIDs, and states that defended against MIDs. To delineate experimental certainty, I applied a *T*-test and accounted for the *P* value to attain statistical significance.

Results. I begin by analyzing states that initiated MIDs. As Table 2.1 reflects, Group B initiates 0.2766 MIDs per year, whereas Group A initiates only 0.1425 MIDs per year which is 48% less than their allied counterparts. The story regarding states that defended against aggression is also interesting. As Table 2.2 presents, Group B defended against 0.1625 MIDs per year, whereas Group A defended against only 0.1026 MIDs per year which is 37% less than the allied group. The differential can probably be attributed to the absolute advantage Group B has with general conflict proclivity over Group A (see Table 1). Moreover, as Table 2.2 provides, the *P* value for both perspectives of analysis ($P=2.20E-16$) strongly favors the veracity of my proposition.

In accordance with my model, states with allies should be more prone to conflict initiation than states without allies. As the results indicate, states without allies are almost half as likely to initiate conflict than states with allies. This serves as a strong indication that the

²⁷ Akoglu, H. (2018). User's guide to correlation coefficients. *Turkish Journal of Emergency Medicine*, 18(3), 91-93.

presence of allies empowers states to go beyond defense against foes, and rather, to adopt a position of proactivity toward the inauguration of violence because of their assurance of support.

Table 2.1: Hypothesis 3: Experimental Results

Relationship between alliances and state conflict (sidea=1)

	Group A (States without alliances)	Group B (States with alliances)
Average MIDs per year	0.1425	0.2766

Experimental Certainty

t-test	-12.493
Degrees of freedom	13234
p-value <	2.20E-16

Table 2.2: Hypothesis 3: Experimental Results

Relationship between alliances and state conflict (sidea=0)

	Group A (States without alliances)	Group B (States with alliances)
Average MIDs per year	0.1026	0.1625

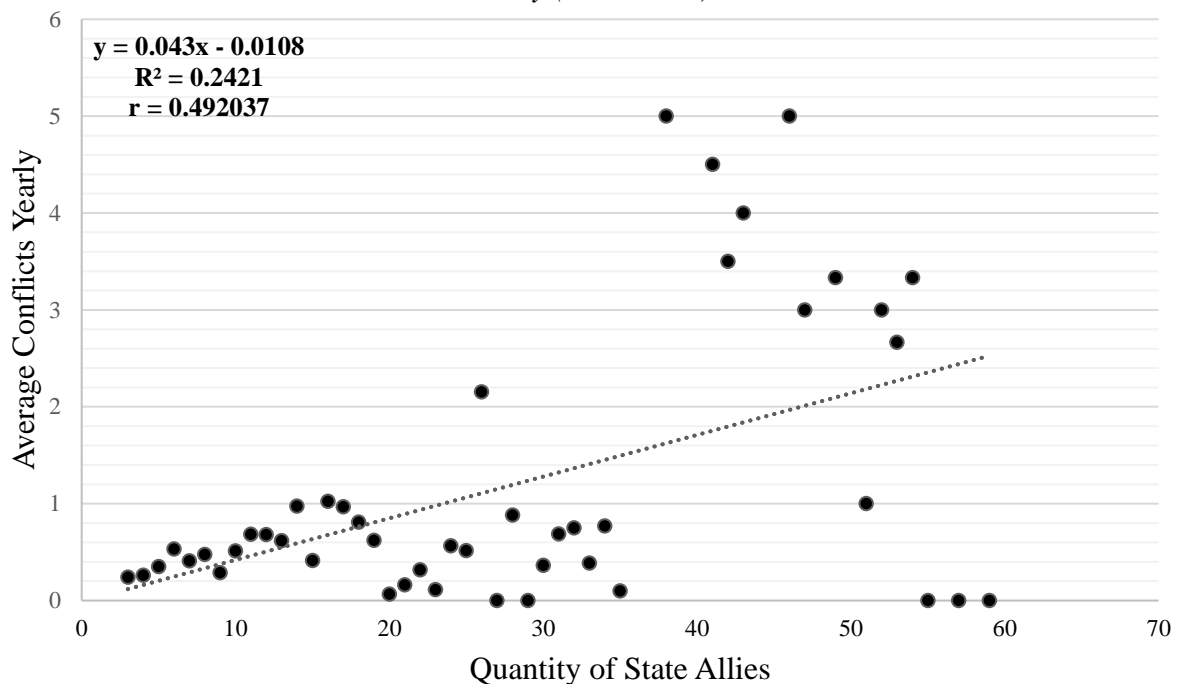
Experimental Certainty

t-test	-9.1784
Degrees of freedom	13500
p-value <	2.20E-16

Hypothesis 4: States with more alliances initiate conflict more often than states with fewer alliances.

Data. I followed the same procedure as H₂ with the exception that I filtered for states with allies that initiated conflict and for those that defended against aggression. The product was two groups where Group A initiated conflict and Group B defended. Further, each group was composed of 47 entries of a certain alliance size ranging from 1-59. Further, I applied a linear regression test to demonstrate the relationship between my variables.

Graph 2.1: Hypothesis 4: Group A: Experimental Results
Relationship Between Quantity of Allies and Average Initiated Conflicts Yearly (Side A = 1)



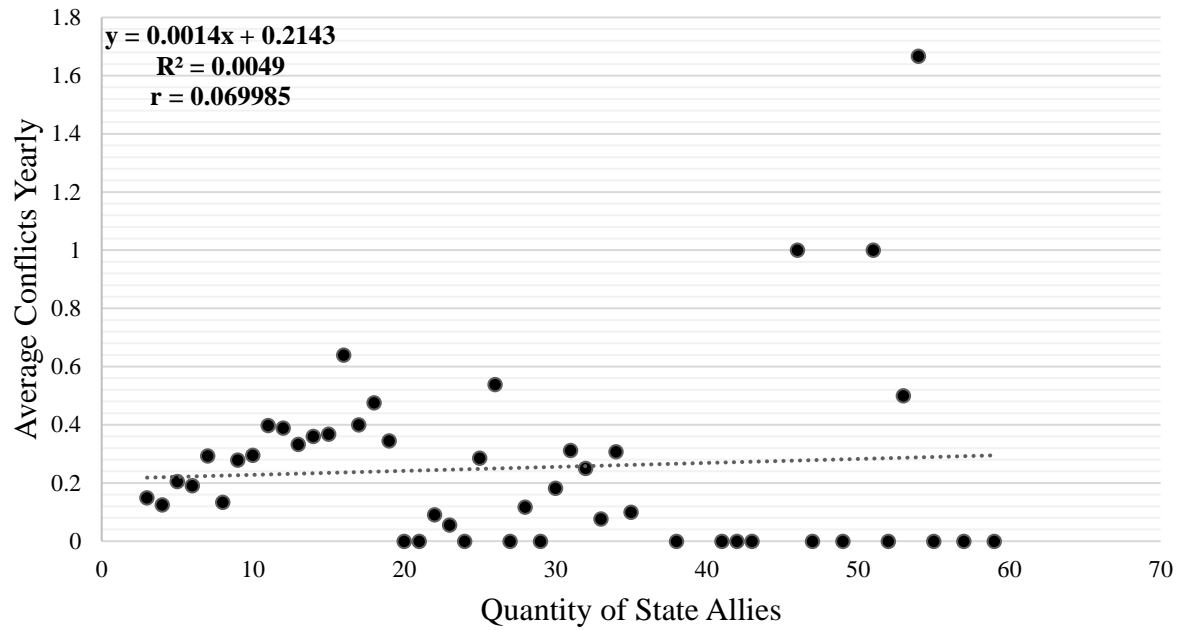
Results. As the results intimate, as states increase the number of allies they have, so too will their propensity for conflict initiation which supports the theoretical assertion of my model. States with larger alliance rosters empower them to initiate conflict more often than states with fewer allies because of their increased assurance of support. As Graph 2.1 provides, there is a

positive relationship between the increased quantity of allies and the increased average of initiated conflicts per year. This evidence is striking for two reasons. Firstly, it proves that as states increase their ally reserves, a general rule dictates increased conflict proclivity. Secondly, and more importantly, this evidence serves as a powerful insight into the psychology beneath ally behavior. The data delineates that as states accrue allies, not only are they more conflict-prone, but they are more willing to adopt the costs of conflict because of their network of support. In H₂, I made a binary analysis of whether states with more allies are generally more conflict-prone, which proved the affirmative and is supported by the data. However, the data accumulated toward verifying H₄ communicates that allies operate in an almost synonymous fashion to people with an insurance policy. For each additional ally states accrue, the willingness of states to initiate conflict grows by 0.043 conflicts per year. The linear regression analysis provides a robust correlation coefficient of 0.49 which demonstrates a powerful relationship between the increased quantity of allies and average initiated MIDs per year.

On the issue of states with allies defending against aggression, the experimental results reveal that the intuitional expectation of increased alliance size deterring more aggression than smaller alliances is weakly portrayed by the data. As Graph 2.2 presents, there is an almost non-existent correlation coefficient of 0.07 between the number of a state's allies and the average number of defended conflicts per year. This is to say that adding allies to an alliance's roster does not significantly alter the projected number of defended disputes faced by states with allies. On the contrary, as states accumulate allies, there is some weak evidence (see Graph 2.2) to support

that more allies lead states toward defending more conflicts than otherwise which subtracts from the defensive premise that so many alliances are supposedly founded upon.

Graph 2.2: Hypothesis 4: Group B: Experimental Results
Relationship Between Quantity of Allies and Average Defended Conflicts Yearly (Side A = 0)



Qualitative Analysis: The West, Russia, and the Ukraine Question

Introduction

On February 24, 2022, the Russian government initiated a full-scale invasion of the Ukrainian mainland. Conventional wisdom attributes the invasion to overly simplistic notions of Russian President Vladimir Putin's megalomaniacal tendencies and nationalistic expansionism to redeem the old empire.²⁸ As the prevailing party of the Cold War, the West's institutions, ideology, and security networks have been the dominant force in Europe. The post-Cold War status quo and mixed perceptions of the new world order have left the Russian state in a position of unprecedented precarity. The elements of this precarity can be understood by observing North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) burgeoning membership and the increasingly pervasive liberalism propounded by the West's vast alliance. In this vein, I argue that upon dissecting the historical elements of this perennial conflict, the fundamental propellants can be distilled into two issues: ally empowerment and the security dilemma.

Though this paper has quantitatively only dealt with security alliances integrated into the Alliance Treaty and Obligations Provisions data set, it is important to consider the more fundamental entity that underpins NATO. As aforementioned in the section *Theory and Model*, alliances are only formal expressions of mutual state alignment. The reader will remember that alignment implies a certain degree of interstate commonality that may be expressed through similar ethnic makeups, ideology, governments, security goals, and so forth. Alignment is not limited in its expression to security agreements as it can also be demonstrated through trade

²⁸ McFaul, M., Sestanovich, S., & Mearsheimer, J. J. (2014). Faulty Powers: Who Started the Ukraine Crisis? *Foreign Affairs*, 93(6), 167–178. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24483933>

agreements, partnerships in supranational organizations, and so forth. Therefore, to only observe the Western coalition as NATO is inaccurate as it fails to account for the broader alliance beyond NATO to provide the full extent of Russia's security dilemma and the scope of the West's political and economic influence. To understand Russia's invasion of Ukraine more thoroughly, I have considered other institutions and actors beyond NATO such as the European Union (EU), the United States, and Ukraine because its internal politics were such significant factors that altered the fabric of international relations.

After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the West has been at best indifferent and at worst inimical to Russia's foreign policy objectives. Firstly, the central pulse of the issue has been NATO's expansion eastward as a strategy to absorb Ukraine into the West's sphere and pull it away from Russia. The conservative Duma and President Putin have held a longtime absolute dealbreaker with the West which has been to maintain Ukraine, a former Soviet satellite state, as a buffer territory between the West and Russia's western border. Ukraine's status as either a Western bastion or neutral territory is the defining feature of Russia's security dilemma. For many reasons elaborated below, the significance of Ukraine's allegiance is of ultimate value to Russia's military security, economic health, and domestic politics. Any attempt to deviate Ukraine into Western arms triggers Russian state insecurity where war is preferable to precarious peace.

Secondly, the formidable condition of the post-Cold War United States and its European allies has led to its evident indifference to Russia's geopolitical concerns. Russian officials have formally voiced their concerns and conditions of NATO enlargement and eastern Europe's economic and political integration with the West on numerous occasions to no avail. This is not a communicative failure. The West, with its cornucopia of military resources and substantial roster

of allies, has no incentive to negotiate in good faith with Russia because of its vast assurance of support in the event of a conflict. This has had the deleterious effect of pushing Russia into a corner where diplomatic efforts generate nothing, and military incursions are the only reliable method to attain security.

This case study will demonstrate how the security dilemma and ally empowerment are potent explanatory devices for analyzing the motions that created the largest military conflict of the twenty-first century. I will briefly review the history between Russia and Ukraine and the fall of the Soviet Union because these junctures are so intertwined with contemporary politics. Then, I will describe the multidimensional reasons why Ukraine is pivotal to Russia's security. Lastly, the study will terminate with an analysis of the West's ally empowerment syndrome by using various examples of how the Alliance has acted with brazen disregard for Russia's foreign policy objectives.

A Brief History of Russian-Ukrainian Relations

The history between Russia and Ukraine is inextricably attached to the politics that have characterized their relations leading up to Russia's invasion of the former Soviet state. Russia's perception of Ukraine as an alienated Russian body becomes evident by the precedent enforced by their long cultural and political affiliation. The contextual aid of history makes looking back a useful device for explaining the future and providing a glimpse into how a once civilized coalition denigrated from productive amicability to battlefields bathed in blood.

Tsarist Ukraine. Russia's Ukrainian affinity began during Tsarist Russia in the late-18th century. Under Empress Catherine II, many territories including most of modern-day Ukraine were annexed by Russia as part of the Second Partition of Poland in 1793. This "New Russia"

was of critical importance to the Russian regime because it would act as a safeguard against potential European incursions. Predominant Ukrainian traditions, religion, education, military organization, and intellectual discourse were reformed and Russified at the direction of the eastern empress. To a large extent, Ukraine's assimilation into the grander Russian empire was alacritous and utilitarian.²⁹ This period would extend for 124 years of cultural intermingling as Ukrainian nobility would become increasingly influenced by their imperial overlords and where two nations would coalesce into one.

Soviet Ukraine. The Russian empire died upon the Bolshevik's February Revolution in 1917, and with it, Ukraine's status as a provincial limb of the former regime. Emperor Nicholas II abdicated the throne bringing the three-century Romanov dynasty to its dismal end. Immediately following the removal of the tsarist regime, Ukraine set up a provisional government and pronounced itself a republic within the Russian federal structure. However, internal Bolshevik political discord led to a split in the party leaving the Leninists, the radical communist sect of the party, as head of state: such was the origin of the Soviet Union. Initially, the prevailing Leninist regime proclaimed the Ukrainian People's Republic an independent state – if it remained within the bounds of Russia's federal framework. Within this context of political disunity and disarray, Finland and Ukraine found it opportune to leave the Federation and declared complete independence in January 1918.

Ukraine's moment of independence would be brief and demonstrative of a woeful lack of competence in establishing a functioning state. In the words of Wilhelm Groener, a German military commander in Kyiv, "The [Ukrainian] administrative structure is in total disorder,

²⁹ Plokhyy, Serhii. (2015). *The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine*. Basic Books, 2015, 135-137.

completely incompetent and in no way ready for quick results.”³⁰ The abrasive Bolshevik coalition would not concede Ukraine’s territory and assaulted it. The Ukrainian Rada could not fend off the Bolshevik advancement. Bolshevik promises of harmony, land, and revolutionary enlightenment inspired many desertions from the Ukrainian Central Rada’s cause. The independence of Ukraine was the intellectual elites’ aspiration, not the concern of laymen. Moreover, attempts by the Rada to conjure foreign military support provided little long-term benefit. Ultimately, the Red Army’s initiative could not be curtailed, and in March 1921, a peace treaty between the Russian Federation and Ukraine was signed in Latvia. The terms articulated a new Polish-Soviet border wherein Ukraine would operate autonomously within a Russian polity. Only one year later in December 1922, the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic would enter into a formal agreement with the Russian Federation, Belarus, and Transcaucasia to form the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

Ukrainian Ukraine. The Cold War ended with the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. The world was born anew. Tension within the West versus the East dynamic was mitigated. However, there were several perceptive discrepancies in the new world order. The West was under the impression that the Soviet hegemonic mentality had withered along with its statehood. Russia was not inclined to fill this mold. The new Russian regime thought it would maintain its role as a great global power and keep its traditional prerogatives and ability to veto international security arrangements. To most Russians, this meant that Ukraine would continue its provincial status as part of Russia because there existed no distinction between the two peoples.

³⁰ Strachan, H. (2013). *The First World War*. Penguin Books.

In 1990, as a precursor to their eventual independence, the Rada issued the Declaration of State Sovereignty of Ukraine which stated the “intention of becoming a permanently neutral state that does not participate in military blocs.”³¹ In 1991 Ukraine finally declared independence, and the Russian state felt infringed upon but was in no position to enforce its will; the Soviet apparatus had wavered, and the new Russian regime was still state-building. The political dissolution of the Soviet state gave an opportune moment for Ukraine to detach from its sovereign which is reminiscent of the events of 1918. Russia would not forget, and as psychologist Daniel Kahneman notes, “losses loom larger than gains.”³²

Below I will argue that the West’s role in the aftermath of the Soviet Union’s fall toward embracing Ukraine into its purview was a function of ally empowerment. These conditions exacerbated Russia’s security dilemma which provided the impetus for its invasion of Ukraine in 2023. But first, I must delve into why Ukraine is of such lucrative strategic value to Russia and how its Westernization would intensify its security dilemma.

The Russian Security Dilemma: The Geopolitical Significance of a Western Ukraine

Russia’s security dilemma has been exacerbated by the overwhelming success of the post-Cold War liberal world order. The magnetism of the Western model has made Ukraine betray its initial notions of neutrality and run towards the liberal coalition. Evidently, Russia has repeatedly opposed this stance because of the substantive geopolitical concerns attached to the prospect of a Westernized Ukraine. The primary issues of Russia’s perceived security risk are geographical, economic, and political in nature. The geographic contention is concerned with the

³¹ Declaration of State Sovereignty of Ukraine, July 16, 1990, Section IX, Clause 4. Accessible at: http://static.rada.gov.ua/site/postanova_eng/Declaration_of_State_Sovereignty_of_Ukraine_rev1.htm#:~:text=The%20people%20of%20Ukraine%20are,councils%20of%20the%20Ukrainian%20SSR

³² Kahneman, D., & Tversky, A. (2013). *Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision Under Risk*. In Handbook of the Fundamentals of Financial Decision Making: Part I, 279.

strategic military risk associated with a potentially hostile state occupying a wide and easily assailable expanse of Russia's western front. The economic complication lies in Russia's status as a main supplier of energy to Europe which is contested by the fact that Ukraine has discovered considerable reserves of crude oil which primes them as potent competition. A secondary aspect of Russia's economic security dilemma is intertwined with competing interests in Ukraine's southern body of water, the Black Sea. Lastly, the political issue comes from fears of democratization moving through the forest of eastern Europe and parts of Asia like wildfire. These are the fundamental security issues that underpin the significance of Ukraine's status of allegiance. However, the details are important to describe in order to instantiate both the severity and extent of Russia's heightened security dilemma.

The Geographic Factor of Security. During the Cold War, there were two rival military alliances in Europe: NATO and the Warsaw Pact (see Figure 1).³³ From Moscow's perspective,

Figure 1: NATO and the Warsaw Pact



³³ NATO and the Warsaw Pact, Image, *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Accessed at: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Warsaw-Pact#/media/1/636142/218137>.

the states that consisted of the Warsaw Pact provided a massive buffer territory between themselves and potential European crusades. Upon the fall of the Soviet Union, this buffer zone was the state's greatest geopolitical casualty, and it has been a central Russian foreign policy objective to reinstate it.

An unfortunate fact Russia has faced for centuries is the indefensibility of its flat geography. From the Netherlands in the west to the Ural Mountains in the east, this entire land area of Europe is the North European Plains (see Figure 2).³⁴ The plains begin narrowly in northern Germany but with a mouth that widens as it approaches the Ural Mountains. Given this natural flaw, a pivotal element of the Russian grand strategy is maintaining advantageous geography through intermediate land masses between itself and potential aggressors. This objective is rooted in a long history of territorial insecurity. The Mongolian Invasion of the 13th century allowed the Mongols' skilled horseback riders to devastate Russia as no mountains or

Figure 2: The North European Plains



³⁴ Accessed at: <https://ecsforum1.wordpress.com/2013/01/29/mission-1-europes-physical-geography/>.

other obstructions were in the way. In the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-1905, Russia's flat geography was a foundational role in their defeat in this conflict. Japanese forces could easily outmaneuver and outflank Russian defensive positions.

The most significant and recent example of this deeply rooted geographic insecurity occurred in the calamitous and humiliating early stages of the Nazi's invasion of Russia during Operation Barbarossa. On June 22, 1941, the Third Reich launched the largest military offensive ever in human history. The Germans allotted approximately three million troops, nineteen panzer divisions, and twenty-five hundred aircraft – a monumental force.³⁵ This massive assault took Soviet leadership completely by surprise, as the Panzer blitzkrieg roiled the flat Russian plains. Being that the eastern Soviet Union was ideal for tank movement, the Nazi Panzer divisions overwhelmed Soviet garrison districts on the border and were able to collect about five hundred thousand Soviet prisoners within days. One story, which is most likely apocryphal, recalls Nazi General Reinhardt, head of the 41st Panzer division, who said he could see the top of the Kremlin before meeting a fierce Soviet counterattack during the winter of 1941. The sheer land size was the greatest geographic fact favoring the Soviet defense. Though the Nazis moved quickly, the considerable Ukrainian land area diluted the strength of their initiative which ultimately supplied Soviet leadership with the necessary time to organize and gather reserve troops toward organizing a coherent counterassault, and for the severely frigid Russian winter to bog down the Nazi advancement.

These historic junctures provided the basis for Russia's perennial desire to be encapsulated by buffer regions. In their book, Grygiel and Aaron offer that the possession or

³⁵ Royde-Smith, J. Graham (2022, October 26). Operation Barbarossa. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Operation-Barbarossa>

neutralization of surrounding territories has been a necessary precondition to Russia's great power status.³⁶ Since the Warsaw's Pact termination in 1991, almost all of the former Soviet Union's allies have become NATO countries. Regardless of the period, and prevailing ideology, any regime based in Moscow holds the strategic imperative of maintaining as much westward control of the North European Plain as possible.

Evidently, the westernization of Ukraine irritates Russia's security dilemma because of its immediate proximity to Russia. If Ukraine were to operate as a NATO bulwark, it would share approximately 2,300 kilometers of a difficult-to-defend flat countryside. Of course, given the vast context of history, Russia will not tolerate this. One may raise issue with this assertion on the basis of stating that Russia has not responded with military force to the NATO membership of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. This is true for an important reason: those countries are not equivalently scaled in geopolitical priority as Ukraine because these states can easily be disconnected from the greater alliance by occupying the Suwalki Gap between Belarus and Kaliningrad, and therefore, revoking the West's geographic advantage in the Baltic.

Irrespective of one's thoughts on the potential of the West mounting an eastward assault, from the Russian perspective, it cannot be overlooked. The potential speed of hostile mobilization is too sudden and devastating. The United States has a long history of attacking countries based on installing and defending liberal notions of democracy and capitalism. The Bush administration attacked Iraq "to free the Iraqi people,"³⁷ Lyndon Johnson invaded South Vietnam in the name of capitalism, and Harry Truman committed many U.S. troops and

³⁶ Grygiel, J. J., & Mitchell, A. W. (2017). The Unquiet Frontier. In *The Unquiet Frontier*. Princeton University Press.

³⁷ White House (2003), *President Bush's Radio Address: Operation Iraqi Freedom*. Accessed at: <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030322.html>.

hardware toward preventing communism's spread into South Korea. Nothing is guaranteed, and Russia cannot afford to allot its sovereignty to the goodwill of local Western bastions. In the name of "liberty," almost any campaign can be justified, and Putin will not wait for a Western moral discovery to befall him.

Since the Warsaw's Pact termination in 1991, almost all the former Soviet allies have become NATO countries, and as the blue tide rises closer and closer to Russia's eastern front, the more willing they are to respond aggressively. Perhaps if Russia's western geography were elevated and irregular, their foreign policy would be more amicable to shared borders with states allied with the West. As Tim Marshall, a political commentator from *The Atlantic*, provides, "Putin says he is a religious man, a great supporter of the Russian Orthodox Church. If so, he may well go to bed each night, say his prayers, and ask God: "Why didn't you put mountains in eastern Ukraine?"³⁸

The Economic Factor of Security. Though Russia's GDP is only slightly larger than Spain's, through the lens of oil and gas production, Russia is a global superpower. In 2021, Russia was the second-largest oil producer and largest natural gas-exporting country in the world.³⁹ Russia's absolute advantage in energy production has rendered it a petrol state. Russia's federal budget in 2021 consisted of 45% oil and natural gas exports.⁴⁰ The lifeblood of the Russian state is owed to its natural resource abundance which it has utilized toward reestablishing itself as a great power.

³⁸ Tim Marshall (2015), *Russia and the Curse of Geography*, The Atlantic. Accessed at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/10/russia-geography-ukraine-syria/413248/>.

³⁹ U.S. Energy Information Administration. Accessed at: <https://www.eia.gov/tools/faqs/faq.php?id=709&t=6>; and: <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=51618#:~:text=Of%20the%2010.1%20million%20barrels,or%204.7%20million%20b%2Fd>.

⁴⁰ U.S. Energy Information Administration. Accessed at: <https://www.iea.org/articles/energy-fact-sheet-why-does-russian-oil-and-gas-matter>.

Russia's profound geological treasure does have its complications from Moscow's perspective. Russia's natural gas exports almost exclusively are sold to the European market which accounted for almost 75% of Russia's total exports in 2021.⁴¹ However, this lucrative venture is plagued with sensitive geopolitical issues that trace back decades. During the Soviet era, pipelines were built running through Ukraine and into Europe.⁴² Since the Soviet Union's fall, Ukraine, in tandem with its warming relations with the West, has incrementally increased tariffs on Russian oil passing through its country while costing Russia billions of dollars per year. Moreover, Ukraine would abuse its intermediary status by "diverting gas from the pipelines supplying western Europe [to itself]."⁴³ Russia's gas transportation excessively relied on pipelines to transmit gas into Europe.⁴⁴ Without Ukraine's cooperation, approximately 84% of Russia's exported gas could not reach its European buyers, and the Russian government could simply not afford to refuse Ukraine's conditions. The only leverage Russia had on tariff control was through its own sway over Ukraine's economy and the presence of a lenient pro-Russian polity in Ukraine, both of which have been curtailed by the increasing westernization of Ukraine.

A more menacing fact that is of both geographical and economic significance for the Kremlin is Ukraine's exclusive Black Sea maritime access and various sources of recently discovered natural gas reserves that are concentrated around the Crimean Peninsula. These abundant reserves make Ukraine the possessor of 1.1 trillion cubic meters of natural gas reserves,

⁴¹U.S. Energy Information Administration. Accessed at: <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=51618#:~:text=Of%20the%2010.1%20million%20barrels,or%204.7%20million%20b%2Fd>.

⁴² *Amelin and Prokip (2020), The Forgotten Potential of Ukraine's Energy Reserves*, Harvard International Review. Accessed at: <https://hir.harvard.edu/ukraine-energy-reserves/>.

⁴³ D'Anieri, Paul. *Ukraine and Russia: From Civilized Divorce to Uncivil War*. Cambridge University Press, 2019: 156

⁴⁴Siddi, Marco. "The Role of Power in EU–Russia Energy Relations: The Interplay Between Markets and Geopolitics." *The European Union, Russia and the Post-Soviet Space*. Routledge, 2022: 1567

and the owner of the 14th largest reserves in the world.⁴⁵ The geopolitical issues arising from this are threefold. Firstly, the Black Sea, a marginal ocean south of Ukraine, is of immense strategic value to Moscow because controlling it allows them to ensure that “no new east-west energy corridor can bypass Russia” and compete with its energy hold on Europe.⁴⁶ Secondly, Ukraine’s access to the Black Sea would be a staging point for NATO’s naval units against Russia in the event of war. From Russia’s perspective, a Western Ukraine is synonymous with a “NATO lake” just southwest of their mainland.

Thirdly, before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the Ukrainian government had already begun importing western oil companies like Shell and Exxon to harvest their reserves and sell to the European market.⁴⁷ Within the span of only a few months, Ukraine would go from a marginal European economy to the continent’s second petrol state while posing a lethal threat to Russia’s status as Europe’s main supplier. Ukraine is geographically and ideologically closer to the West, making it a more attractive trading partner than autocratic Russia. This competition would substantively subtract from Russia’s governmental budget and operate as a platform for Ukraine’s quickened assimilation into the West. Partially for these reasons and more to be mentioned below, Russia felt compelled to defend its economic status by invading Ukraine because of its multifaceted economic and geopolitical values.

The Political Factor of Security. Vladimir Putin has a longstanding contempt for democracy. As his presidency progressed, he reversed many of the constraints on his power:

⁴⁵ Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), *Ukraine*. Accessed at: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ukraine/#energy>.

⁴⁶ Hodges, Ben (2021), Center for European Policy Analysis, “The Black Sea...Or a Black Hole,” 3. Accessed at: <https://cepa.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/CEPA-SP-Black-Sea-Strategy-v2-1.19.21.pdf>.

⁴⁷ Reuters (2012). Accessed at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-ukraine-oil/exxon-and-shell-win-ukraine-oil-bid-ft-idUKBRE87E00F20120815>

eradicating the national independent media, reconfiguring the party system to ensure his own political dominance, unfair elections, and so forth. As Putin's autocratic eminence expanded, relations with the West receded. Meanwhile, the West contributed a striking addition to these tensions with two democratic breakthroughs on the borders of Russia: The Rose Revolution of Georgia in 2003 and the Orange Revolution of Ukraine in 2004. These were cataclysmic moments in which autocracy and democracy clashed on the ideological battleground. The West rejoiced and celebrated the spread of its values abroad, whereas Putin saw these events as yet another example of Western hubris and unnecessary meddling in Russian affairs. It was this epoch of Western-Russian relations that saw a consequential departure from cordial tolerance to ongoing confrontation.

Given the context of competing viewpoints between the West and Russia regarding democratization, the Ukrainian crisis in 2014 is the logical culmination of these preexisting conditions. Russian President Yanukovich was ousted in 2014 which sent the Russian-Ukrainian affair to the zenith of interstate insecurity. So long as Yanukovich was president, Russia would remain in a dominant position to manipulate Ukraine's internal politics from afar. However, Russia would be alienated from this political luxury upon the electoral victory of pro-Western President Yushchenko who sought to incorporate Ukraine economically and politically with the West. The consequence of the Orange Revolution was a dramatic shift in the Ukrainian political landscape and Russia's perception of Ukraine's future standing.

Putin's immediate reaction upon Yanukovich's rebellious removal was to take Crimea and to sabotage Ukrainian civil stability until they withdrew their Western propensities. It was a swift campaign that was certainly aided by the fact that a majority of Crimeans are ethnically

Russian and wanted to join their homeland.⁴⁸ To Putin, this was “an unconstitutional coup, an armed seizure of power” by Yushchenko and his rebellious goons and the apotheosis of Western “double-standards” in which they were free to pursue their own interests, but Russia was not.⁴⁹

One can rightfully interpret Russia’s invasion of Crimea as a reaction to built-up geopolitical tension that reached its culmination with Yanukovych’s illegal replacement with a Western agent. Democratization in Russia’s most proximate neighbors would not be tolerated.

The reasons for Russia’s deep derision of pro-Western democratic regimes are fundamental. Russia does not come from a liberal intellectual history; these notions are culturally foreign to its people. Russia’s natural political gravity inherited from centuries of practice causes their domestic systems to orbit autocratic organizations of government that see the world through a realist lens: from the Romanov dynasty that began in 1613 to the modern Russian state in 2023, centralized power hierarchies have always been the Russian people’s innate political proclivity. Post-Cold War Russia did not liberalize and fell back into the Soviet apparatus and focused on building a strong state.

Moreover, in accordance with the liberal model, the West sought to promote democracy and authority of supranational institutions. “Colored revolutions” of the sort that removed Yanukovych had also extirpated other pro-Russian governments in Serbia and Georgia and supplanted them with governments that were friendly with the West. In 2013, Carl Gershman notoriously wrote, “Ukraine’s choice to join Europe will accelerate the demise of the ideology of Russian imperialism that Putin represents.” He added, “Russians, too, face a choice, and Putin

⁴⁸ Morello, Constable, and Faiola (2014), Crimeans vote to break away from Ukraine, join Russia. Accessed at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2014/03/16/cccec2132-acd4-11e3-a06a-e3230a43d6cb_story.html.

⁴⁹ Address by the President of the Russian Federation, Moscow, March 18, 2014, Kremlin website.

may find himself on the losing end not just in the near abroad but within Russia itself.”⁵⁰ Putin feared that Gershman’s words would foreshadow his own political demise as the Arab Spring, the Rose Revolution, and the ousting of Yanukovich would become a template for his own removal in Russia. Putin has correctly assessed the most plausible consequences of a democratic Ukraine on his doorstep and has decided to not await the most catastrophic eventuality. Therefore, the threat of democratization lies in the fact that it poses an existential threat to Putin’s regime stability.

The Mechanism of Ally Empowerment Toward Conflict

The Russian fright of a Westernized Ukraine has befallen it. I have discussed Ukraine’s prominence in dictating the extent to which Russia’s security dilemma is exacerbated by the West’s proselytization of it. Below, I will present several prominent historical junctures where foreign policy intents between the West and Russia were evidently expressed wherein the Kremlin was ignored. Armed with the power of history, one is able to recognize the same recurring elements that have characterized Russian-Western relations for three decades; the West’s influence creeps eastward, Russia responds with condemnation and the West discounts it. In this section, I argue that the West’s assurance of support from its broad coalition of allies has empowered it to negate Russia’s security dilemma as a formidable figure in the geopolitical calculus in eastern Europe. This negation has had the deleterious impact of forcing a fearful Russian regime into attacking Ukraine to defend its security concerns that have been disregarded on numerous attempts from 1989 to 2014. To corroborate this well-documented assertion, I will

⁵⁰ Mukherjee, Subrata (2022), *Farewell, Peace*, The Statesman. Accessed at: <https://www.thestatesman.com/opinion/farewell-peace-1503068954.html>.

delineate a timeline of Western actions and Russia's responses from the fall of the Soviet Union to Putin's initial invasion in 2014.

Russian-Western contradictions began at the beginning of the Soviet Union's end in 1989. On July 6th, 1989, Mikhail Gorbachev, the contemporary president of the Soviet Union, spoke to the Council of Europe in a speech dubbed, "Europe as a Common Home. This speech would serve as Russia's initial steps into the new world order, a world order where the Soviet system sank and would be reborn as the New Russia. He said, "Any interference in internal affairs, any attempts to limit the sovereignty of states – whether of friends and allies or anybody else – are inadmissible."⁵¹ This exposition was a reformulation of the Brezhnev Doctrine of 1968 which held that, "forces that are hostile to socialism [that] try to turn the development of some socialist country towards capitalism" would be met with force.⁵² Gorbachev envisioned the future power distribution to be multipolar in which Russia would remain a central actor in dictating security arrangements and the privilege to maintain its ideological norms alongside the West. On the other hand, the West had a diametrically opposed image of the future. In a 1989 address, President Bush would say, "The path of freedom leads to a larger home, a home where West meets East, a democratic home, the commonwealth of free nations."⁵³ Bush, and the West at large, did not envision a pluralist world. As the imminent prevailing coalition of the ongoing Cold War, the West was entrenched on its perch of ideological superiority with many allies; it

⁵¹ James A. Markham, "Gorbachev Spurns the Use of Force in Eastern Europe," *New York Times*, July 7, 1989. The full text of Gorbachev's speech is at https://chnm.gmu.edu/1989/archive/files/gorbachev-speech7-6-89_e3ccb87237.pdf.

⁵² The relevant excerpt from Brezhnev's speech is translated at the "Modern History Sourcebook: The Brezhnev Doctrine, 1968," <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1968brezhnev.asp>. The original was in *Pravda*, September 25, 1968.

⁵³ "A Europe Whole and Free Remarks to the Citizens in Mainz," President George Bush, Rheingoldhalle, Mainz, Federal Republic of Germany, May 31, 1989.

would ensure that a single doctrine of values would command the post-Cold War era and keep Russia far from its discussion.

In 1990, the pivotal problem of NATO expansion arose during the reunification of west and east Germany. Soviet leadership strongly opposed NATO membership being granted to a reunified Germany. A NATO security structure in eastern Germany was a potent vehicle of insecurity for the Eastern Federation. When Gorbachev eventually prostrated himself to the issue, it was only because he could not prevent it. In a recent interview from 2014, Gorbachev recalled conversations with Western leadership:

“Another issue we brought up was discussed: making sure that NATO’s military structures would not advance and that additional armed forces from the alliance would not be deployed on the territory of the then-GDR after German reunification. Baker’s statement, [that “NATO will not move one inch further east”] was made in that context ... The decision for the U.S. and its allies to expand NATO into the east was decisively made in 1993. ... It was definitely a violation of the spirit of the statements and assurances made to us in 1990.”⁵⁴

There is evidence that suggests that NATO made broad and informal agreements with Soviet lieutenants to ensure their safety, but there was never a legally formulated doctrine that would set clarion parameters of interstate conduct. For instance, NATO Secretary General Manfred Woerner said in 1990, “The very fact that we are ready not to deploy NATO troops beyond the territory of the Federal Republic gives the Soviet Union firm security guarantees.”⁵⁵

Communications between the West and Soviet leaders regarding NATO enlargement were excessively vague and informal, leaving the path open to expeditious expansion. Despite the lack of a formalized doctrine to affirm the limitations of NATO’s eastern prospective, many people in

⁵⁴ “Mikhail Gorbachev: I Am against All Walls,” *Russia beyond the Headlines*, October 16, 2014.

⁵⁵ “The Atlantic Alliance and European Security in the 1990s,” Address by Secretary General, Manfred Woerner to the Bremer Tabaks Collegium, May 17, 1990.

Russia observed these various exchanges of Soviet-Western correspondence as embodying a spirit of agreement that would continue into the post-Cold War order. As one contemporary Soviet commentator provided, “We are abandoning the idea of a “forward defense” of the USSR in Central Europe. But this will not lead to a loss of strategic depth in defending our state *if NATO remains within its current borders*, and if the East European states become truly independent, prosperous and sufficiently strong to keep from becoming a “corridor” for adventurists.”⁵⁶ The Russian people conditioned their security on NATO remaining within its Cold War borders. The Western coalition recognized this fact but it had little effect on taming the ambitions of the moment.

In 1994, the West would make its first inroads as a central actor in Ukraine’s security. President Clinton met with Ukrainian president Leonid Kravchuk and invited his nation into NATO’s Partnership for Peace. Clinton made it abundantly clear that this superficial interstate alignment was only the beginning of a long and totalistic assimilation process as he stated:

“While the Partnership is not NATO membership, neither is it a permanent holding room. It changes the entire NATO dialogue so that now the question is no longer whether NATO will take on new members but when and how. It leaves the door open to the best possible outcome for our region, democracy, markets, and security all across a broader Europe...”⁵⁷

Two days after Clinton’s statement, Russian President Boris Yeltsin expounded his differing vision of the Partnership for Peace:

“This concept is a very important step toward building a security system from Vancouver to Vladivostok that excludes the emergence of new demarcation lines or areas of unequal security. We believe that this idea may prove just one of the scenarios for building a new Europe. Just one of those will well impart very specific cooperation in this dimension of cooperation, including the military area. Of course, we will keep track of other collective

⁵⁶ S. Rogov, “Na Zapadnom Frontye Bez Peremen,” *Izvestia*, September 21, 1990, p. 4, emphasis added.

⁵⁷ The President’s News Conference with Visegrad Leaders in Prague, January 12, 1994, www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/the-presidentsnews-conference-with-visegrad-leaders-prague.

security structures in Europe, including such time-tested institutions like the United Nations and the CSCE.”⁵⁸

Yeltsin’s statement articulated Russia’s understanding of Europe’s future which is reminiscent of Gorbachev’s “Europe as a Common Home” speech in 1989. The Russian conception had not evolved; Europe would cooperate with Russia in describing a collective security structure where Russia held veto powers. The divergence of these primordial positions was acknowledged by former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski and Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev. Brzezinski asserted: “If not openly imperial, the current objectives of Russian policy are at the very least proto-imperial.”⁵⁹ The Russian minister issued an ardent rebuttal,

“The only policy with any chance of success is one that recognizes the equal rights and mutual benefit of partnership for both Russia and the West, as well as the status and significance of Russia as a world power. Russian foreign policy inevitably has to be of an independent and assertive nature. If Russian democrats fail to achieve it, they will be swept away by a wave of aggressive nationalism, which is now exploiting the need for national and state self-assertion ... Russia is predestined to be a great power.”⁶⁰

Brzezinski and Kozyrev’s exchange testifies to the competing visions of how security would be organized and how Russia imagined its leverage on such arrangements. It further provides that from the genesis of Western-Ukrainian affairs, Russia has responded with utter acrimony to any notion encompassing a Western Ukraine. It is an acute matter of survival to the Russians and only a testament to the West’s territorial avarice.

In 1997, NATO and Russia formed the NATO-Russia Founding Act which was meant to assure Russia that the Alliance’s expansion would not bear on Russia’s interests. Shortly thereafter, Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic were invited to join NATO during the

⁵⁸ The President’s News Conference with President Boris Yeltsin of Russia in Moscow, January 14, 1994, www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=50021.

⁵⁹ Zbigniew Brzezinski, “The Premature Partnership,” *Foreign Affairs* 73 (March/April 1994): 76.

⁶⁰ Andrei Kozyrev, “The Lagging Partnership,” *Foreign Affairs* 73 (May/June 1994): 60.

Madrid summit. The blue wave was briskly moving eastward, and the Ukrainian question would soon be asked, but “[t]aking in Ukraine without also inducting Russia is the quickest way to alienate Russia, because Russians across the political spectrum consider Ukraine to be part of Russia.”⁶¹

In 1999, NATO bombed Serbia shortly after inducting Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic as official NATO members. This event was of decisive import to Russia for three reasons. Firstly, Russia wanted to deal with the Serbian crisis through diplomacy, not force. When NATO decided to bomb Serbia, the message was clarion to Russia; their privilege to veto issues of European security was only rhetorical fiction. As Fyodor Lukyanov, a popular Russian foreign policy commentator, wrote:

“From the Russian point of view, a critical turning point came when NATO intervened in the Kosovo war in 1999. Many Russians – even strong advocates of liberal reform – were appalled by NATO’s bombing raids against Serbia, a European country with close ties to Moscow ... [I]t is not only NATO’s expansion that has alarmed Russia, but its transformation ... [I]t is now a fighting group, which it was not during the cold war.”⁶²

Secondly, upon the crisis’ termination, the West sought to establish a democratic state in Serbia. To Russian circles, this sounded like the West was willing to use lethal force to instantiate its own imperatives despite all else. As some Russian political leaders provided in a joint article:

“The events in Yugoslavia constitute the first attempt since World War II to redraw European borders by force. Russia’s firm initial stance gave the world community hope that the aggression would be decisively rebuffed. The damage that the ultimatum imposed on Yugoslavia has done to Russia’s international reputation is incalculable ... This shameful agreement is identical to the Munich compact that paved the way for the Second World War. *Appeasement of the aggressor will undoubtedly spur it to launch*

⁶¹ Robert J. Art, “Creating a Disaster: NATO’s Open Door Policy,” *Political Science Quarterly* 113, 3 (1998): 383–384. Art (pp. 399ff) recommended a new “concert of Europe” as an alternative to NATO expansion.

⁶² Fyodor Lukyanov, “Putin’s Foreign Policy: The Quest to Restore Russia’s Rightful Place,” *Foreign Affairs* 95, 3 (May/June 2016): 32–33.

other wars of conquest. There is no doubt that the next target of NATO aggression will be Russia."⁶³

NATO's actions in the Kosovo war were bemoaned by Russia at every turn. The Alliance's rash bellicose instilled in Russia heightened concern. In the span of only five years from 1994 to 1999, the West had done nearly everything within the scope of its ability to exacerbate Russia's security dilemma: they incorporated three large European states into NATO with well-established prospects for further expansion, and they bombed Serbia which delineated exactly what NATO expansion means.

From 2003 to 2004 was an era marked by the EU's expansion and political upheaval in Ukraine. Since 1990, the EU's economic expansion has crept eastward with its NATO counterpart. The content of Russian insecurity regarding the EU was economic in nature. The EU absorbed ten new members in 2004 which "underscored the EU policy of constructing a Europe without any meaningful role for Russia."⁶⁴ This is yet another situation in which a substantial section of Europe, despite its promises to Russia, is drawn into the vortex of Western influence. Russia lamented these developments because it would reinforce notions of the West's "normative hegemony" which had the periphery effect of imposing democratization in the region.⁶⁵

The events of this period leading up to the Orange Revolution are tumultuous as they are telling. The United States and the European Union thought Ukrainian candidate Viktor Yanukovich was a Russian shill and strongly preferred his pro-Western opposition, Victor Yushchenko in the upcoming election. Numerous Western organizations and NGOs took

⁶³ G. A. Zyuganov, N. I. Ryzhkov, and N. M. Kharitonov, "Usherb Neismernim Zayavlenie ob Ocherednom Predatl'stvye Interesov Mezhdunarodnoi Bezopasnosti," *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, June 10, 1999, p. 1, emphasis added.

⁶⁴ Andrei P. Tsygankov, "Putin and Foreign Policy," in Dale R. Herspring, ed., *Putin's Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), p. 202.

⁶⁵ Hiski Haukkala, "Russian Reactions to the European Neighborhood Policy," *Problems of Post-Communism* 55, 5 (September/October 2008): 40–48.

considerable action to ensure that Yanukovych would not become the 2004 electoral victor.⁶⁶

From Russia's perspective, whatever sense of cooperation between itself and the West that existed hitherto was eliminated by the West's belligerent meddling in Ukrainian internal affairs.

When the EU contested the veracity of the second round of the vote, the Russian Foreign Ministry wrathfully responded:

“The ministry cannot welcome the recent statement by the EU Office chairman qualifying the second round of the polls in Ukraine as counter to world standards and to the will of the Ukrainian people. Though the statement expresses hopes that the authorities and the sides concerned will not resort to violence, the plea itself indicates that Brussels, on the one hand, ignores the fundamental democratic principle – respect for the people's will [–] and on the [other] hand, is overtly pushing the opposition toward infringement [of the] law and use of force ... Since the outset, that is already during the first round, the only position favoured by the EU was that of either Victor Yushchenko will win, or the elections will be found anti-democratic, falsified and counter to world standards. He has lost and the EU reaction is quite predictable. But what has it to do with democracy and impartiality?”⁶⁷

The West's involvement in Ukraine was seen as a truculent and hypocritical double standard of what constitutes legitimate international intervention. Putin and his cadre saw this whole ordeal as a flagrant act of neo-warfare. He would ignominiously comment on these perceived transgressions during the Munich Security Conference in 2007, “One state and, of course, first and foremost the United States, has overstepped its national borders in every way. This is visible in the economic, political, cultural and educational policies it imposes on other nations. Well, who likes this? Who is happy about this?”⁶⁸ The Orange Revolution removed whatever veneer of cordiality that had preexisted it; Ukraine's status was now viewed as a zero-sum game between all parties.

⁶⁶ Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine's Orange Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 2005), pp. 184–186

⁶⁷ ‘The European Union's actual appeals to revise the results of the presidential elections in Ukraine are somewhat embarrassing,’ *RIA Novosti*, November 23, 2004.

⁶⁸ Vladimir Putin, “Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy,” February 10, 2007, Kremlin website, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>.

The Bucharest Summit in 2008 to many scholars was the beginning of the end. During the summit, NATO extended a Membership Action Plan (MAP) to Ukraine and Georgia, which adumbrated the process of these countries' eventual assimilation into the Alliance and were right on Russian borders. Russia's "Foreign Policy Concept" made it manifestly clear in January 2008: "Russia maintains its negative attitude towards the expansion of NATO, notably to the plans of admitting Ukraine and Georgia to the membership in the alliance, as well as to bringing the NATO military infrastructure closer to the Russian borders on the whole, which violates the principle of equal security [and] leads to new dividing lines in Europe."⁶⁹ Additionally, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov said, "Russia will do everything it can to prevent the admission of Ukraine and Georgia into NATO."⁷⁰ He added, "We will do all we can to prevent Ukraine's and Georgia's accession into NATO and to avoid an inevitable serious exacerbation of our relations with both the alliance and our neighbors."⁷¹ Putin's advisor Sergei Markov, said, "Ukraine's accession to NATO would be perceived by many Russians as the occupation of a part of their homeland."⁷² The day following the Bucharest meeting, Putin said: "The emergence of a powerful military bloc at our borders will be seen as a direct threat to Russian security."⁷³ The MAP would eventually be recanted. Whether or not this was a consequence of Russian wrath is impossible to pinpoint. What is certainly not contested is Russia's stentorian backlash at even the intimation of NATO in Ukraine or Georgia. The West's eastern progression was increasingly seen as intolerable from Russia's position.

⁶⁹ "Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation," January 12, 2008, <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/4116>.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Mark Kramer, "Russian Policy toward the Commonwealth of Independent States: Recent Trends and Future Prospects," *Problems of Post-Communism* 55, 6 (2008): 9.

⁷¹ "Russia FM: Moscow Will Do All It Can to Prevent NATO Membership for Ukraine, Georgia," Associated Press, April 8, 2008.

⁷² Malek, "The Western Vector," p. 536.

⁷³ Quoted in Adrian Blomfield and James Kirkup, "Stay Away, Vladimir Putin Tells NATO," *The Telegraph*, April 5, 2008.

Events between 2010 and 2013 exacerbated interstate relations to the point of complete anomie in 2014. The mark of this period was the sweeping prevalence of democratization that drove a jolt of fear into Putin's regime.

The Arab Spring that started in 2010, by 2012, had toppled many authoritarian regimes such as Yemen, Egypt, and Libya. The democratic momentum continued with numerous protests in Syria and several other states. Unfortunately, calamitous political disarray continued in Libya. Russia and the West unanimously agreed to take measures to protect citizens from the Libyan military. However, disagreement began when NATO bombing campaigns transitioned from being strictly protectionary of the civilian populace to aggressively backing the rebellious cohorts attempting to supplant Muammar Gaddafi's tyrannical regime. The autocrat would be quickly executed in 2011 which contradicted Russia's stance on the issue. Moscow had an economic stake in Gaddafi's government and "felt deceived by what to them seemed like a "bait and switch" by Western leadership.⁷⁴ Putin petulantly responded, "What concerns me most is not the armed intervention itself – armed conflicts are nothing new and will likely continue for a long time, unfortunately. My main concern is the light-mindedness with which decisions to use force are taken in international affairs these days."⁷⁵ He added, "[Americans] killed [Gaddafi] without court or investigation... Sometimes it seems to me that America does not need allies, it needs vassals. People are tired of the dictates of one country."⁷⁶ The Arab Spring inspired ardent protests outside the Kremlin which heightened Putin's precarity. His insecurity was certainly

⁷⁴ D'Anieri, P. (2023). *Ukraine and Russia*. Cambridge University Press, 188.

⁷⁵ Mikhail Zygar, "The Russian Reset That Never Was," *ForeignPolicy.com*, December 9, 2016.

⁷⁶ Andrew Osborn, "Vladimir Putin Lashes Out at America for Killing Gaddafi and Backing Protests," *The Telegraph*, December 15, 2011.

aggravated when Senator McCain tweeted, “Dear Vlad, the Arab Spring is coming to a neighborhood near you.”⁷⁷

On November 21, 2013, Ukrainian President Yanukovich announced he would suspend discussions over the EU’s Association Agreement (AA). As a result, thousands of protesters flooded the streets. Yanukovich’s government responded repressively and used excessive force. This escalated the vehement violence amongst the insurrectionists, and in February 2014, Ukrainian President Yanukovich was ousted which sent the Russian-Ukrainian affair to its zenith of interstate insecurity.

The AA agreement regarded Ukraine’s decision to economically integrate with the West. Russia saw the AA as an existential threat. Evidently, the agreement exacerbated their security dilemma because, though the agreement was economic in nature, it would preclude Russians from their economic leverage over Ukraine and provide a platform for further Westernization. Yanukovich was pro-Russian, and he understood the monumental consequences of the AA which led him to dissolve consideration of it. His removal traumatized the Russians. So long as pro-Russian Yanukovich was president, the Kremlin would remain in a dominant position to manipulate Ukraine’s internal politics from afar and regulate its own security dilemma. The West’s meddling in Ukraine’s internal affairs and attempt to remove it from Russian orbit through its incessant and obstinate imposition of liberal principles was the proverbial last straw for the Russians. Given the context of competing viewpoints since 1989 between the West and Russia regarding democratization, Russia’s invasion of eastern Ukraine is the logical culmination

⁷⁷ “McCain Warns Putin of ‘Arab Spring,’” Moscow News, December 6, 2011.

of these preexisting conditions. The consequence of Yanukovych's removal was a dramatic shift in the Ukrainian political landscape and Russia's perception of Ukraine's future standing.

Putin's immediate reaction upon Yanukovych's rebellious removal was to take Crimea and to sabotage Ukrainian civil stability until they withdrew their Western propensities. It was a swift campaign that was certainly aided by the fact that a majority of Crimeans are ethnically Russian and wanted to join their homeland.⁷⁸ To Putin, this was "an unconstitutional coup, an armed seizure of power" by radical extremists. and his rebellious goons and the apotheosis of Western "double-standards" in which they were free to pursue their own interests, but Russia was not.⁷⁹ Russian Prime Minister Medvedev said:

If you consider Kalashnikov-toting people in black masks who are roaming Kiev to be the government, then it will be hard for us to work with that government. Some of our foreign, western partners think otherwise, considering them to be legitimate authorities. I do not know which constitution, which laws they were reading, but it seems to me it is an aberration ... Something that is essentially the result of a mutiny is called legitimate.⁸⁰

Russia felt empowered by, what they felt to be, a blatant disregard by Ukraine for law and order, and a failure on the West's part to acknowledge Russia's regional hegemony. Russia's invasion of Crimea rightfully is interpreted as a reaction to built-up geopolitical tension that reached its culmination with Yanukovych's illegal replacement with a Western agent. Democratization in Russia's most proximate neighbor would not be tolerated.

The West reacted with alacrity to the protests in Ukraine and Yanukovych's removal. US Senator McCain told protesters, "We are here to support your just cause, the sovereign right of

⁷⁸ Morello, Constable, and Faiola (2014), Crimeans vote to break away from Ukraine, join Russia. Accessed at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2014/03/16/cccec2132-acd4-11e3-a06a-e3230a43d6cb_story.html.

⁷⁹ Address by the President of the Russian Federation, Moscow, March 18, 2014, Kremlin website.

⁸⁰ Ian Traynor, "Russia Denounces Ukraine 'Terrorists' and West over Yanukovich Ousting," The Guardian, February 24, 2014.

Ukraine to determine its own destiny freely and independently. And the destiny you seek lies in Europe.”⁸¹ Moreover, British foreign secretary, William Hague said, “It is inspiring to see these people standing up for their vision of the future of Ukraine: a free, sovereign, democratic country with much closer ties to the European Union and a positive relationship of mutual respect with Russia. This is a vision I share.”⁸² These commentaries project the prevailing mood in the West. Beyond supportive commentary by governments abroad, it is important to note that the West subsidized democracy in Ukraine for decades through the National Endowments for Democracy (NED) and other avenues. Victoria Nuland, the US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, estimated that from 1991 to 2013, the United States had invested more than five billion dollars in “democracy promotion” activities in Ukraine.⁸³ The NED had shown opprobrium toward Yanukovich’s electoral victory in 2010 and escalated its efforts in opposing the pro-Russian regime. However, the West’s typical “promote democracy” model was indifferent to calculating the geopolitical issues of democratizing Ukraine in the face of Russia’s evident recalcitrance to the prospect. It should not be shocking that Russia’s forays into Ukraine came in the manner they did.

⁸¹ “John McCain Tells Ukraine Protesters: ‘We Are Here to Support Your Just Cause,’” *The Guardian*, December 15, 2013.

⁸² “Ukraine Protests Backed by William Hague,” *The Guardian*, December 16, 2013.

⁸³ Peng, C. (2017). Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West’s Fault: A Historical and Philosophical Perspective. *International Critical Thought*, 7(2), 267-278.

Conclusion

The relationship between alliances and interstate conflict has been a subject of much debate among scholars of international relations. While some argue that alliances can serve as a deterrent to aggression, others suggest that they may increase the likelihood of conflict. In this paper, I have examined the impact of alliances on states' propensity to engage in conflict, using data from 1816 to 2007. Through this analysis, I have found that states with alliances are indeed more conflict-prone than those without, and that this effect is even more pronounced for states with multiple allies. I attempt to explain this phenomenon by invoking the security dilemma and ally empowerment as causal mechanisms toward conflict. States with allies may exacerbate excluded states' security dilemma by creating perceived threats. Additionally, allies embolden states to act more aggressively than they would without allies because of an assurance of support in the event of war.

I empirically observed these mechanisms at work in the history leading to Russia's initial incursion into Ukraine in 2014. I argued that in the aftermath of the Cold War, the West emerged as a dominant power in the international system, with little to no competition from rival coalitions. This unchecked hegemony empowered Western powers to expand their influence eastward, without regard for the geopolitical concerns of Russia and other neighboring states. Ukraine, in particular, became a flashpoint, as the West sought to draw it into its orbit, while Russia sought to maintain its sphere of influence in the region. Russia saw this eastward wave of liberalization as an existential threat to its survival which aggravated its security dilemma. Upon Yanukovich's removal in 2014, Russia's security dilemma had reached its zenith and required Russia to invade Ukraine to defend its security interests which had otherwise been disregarded on the world stage. John J. Mearsheimer raised a similar argument in a controversial article, *Why*

the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault.⁸⁴ He argues that NATO expansion, the EU's economic integration, and democratization threatened Russia. His arguments are formidable but incomplete. Beyond elaborating upon Mearsheimer's argument in comprehensive detail, this article has added two elements to his argument that are absent by perusing the striking role of geography and energy politics toward culminating conflict.

This article does not wish to be interpreted as a prosecution of the West's actions as a sort of issue of moral turpitude, but rather, an illustration of nations, coalitions, and leaders acting as rational actors. The West's post-Cold War hegemony gave it ideal circumstances and conditions to expand its prerogative wherever it calculated the greatest strategic return. The Alliance acted rationally by seeking to incorporate more states economically and politically into its sphere of influence. In turn, the Kremlin could not be sure of its security status and position on the international hierarchy. Russia's recalcitrance to a formerly hostile coalition's geopolitical gains in its vicinity was also a rational reaction. Therefore, rational processes may lead to internecine outcomes wherein attributing "blame" to a certain actor is an inappropriate and intellectually feeble objective.

To aid the scholarly conversation, future research may explore the extent to which states can mitigate the risks associated with alliances, such as the security dilemma and issues of ally empowerment through diplomacy and other means, and investigate how the dynamics of alliances change in the context of a multipolar world, wherein there are multiple competing great powers and a more complex web of alliances.

⁸⁴ Mearsheimer, J. J. (2014). Why the Ukraine crisis is the West's fault: the liberal delusions that provoked Putin. *Foreign Aff.*, 93, 77.

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