

**TERRITORIAL SOVEREIGNTY, SECURITY DILEMMAS, AND PROTRACTED WAR:
UNDERSTANDING THE RUSSIA–UKRAINE CONFLICT THROUGH
CONTEMPORARY CONFLICT THEORY**

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Abstract

This study examined the Russia–Ukraine conflict through the lenses of territorial sovereignty, security dilemmas, and protracted war within contemporary conflict theory. The study was guided by two main objectives: to analyze how competing sovereignty claims contributed to the escalation of the conflict and to explain how security dilemma dynamics sustained its protracted nature. The paper adopted the Realist Theory and Security Dilemma Theory as its theoretical framework, emphasizing power politics, state survival, and the role of mutual mistrust in conflict escalation. A qualitative research design was employed, utilizing a case study approach based on secondary data sources, including academic literature, policy reports, and institutional publications. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key patterns related to sovereignty disputes, security interactions, and conflict persistence. The findings revealed that the conflict was driven by competing interpretations of sovereignty, intensified by NATO expansion and Russia's strategic concerns. It was also found that security dilemma dynamics created a cycle of action and reaction, reinforcing mutual insecurity. Additionally, external involvement and evolving geopolitical rivalries contributed to the protracted nature of the war. Based on these findings, the study recommended strengthening multilateral diplomacy, developing balanced security guarantees, promoting neutral mediation, and enhancing international legal enforcement mechanisms. The study concluded that the persistence of the conflict reflected deeper structural tensions within the international system, requiring integrated political and security solutions.

Keywords: Territorial sovereignty, Security dilemma, Protracted war, Russia–Ukraine conflict, International relations

Introduction

The Russia–Ukraine conflict has emerged as the most consequential military confrontation in Europe since the end of the Cold War, with profound implications for global security, international law, and the evolving structure of the international system. The crisis, which began with Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 and escalated into a full-scale invasion in February 2022, has since developed into a prolonged and multifaceted war involving conventional military operations, hybrid warfare, and extensive international involvement (Mearsheimer, 2014; Sakwa, 2015; Freedman, 2023). Recent analyses further indicate that the conflict has reshaped global security alignments, increased military expenditures across Europe, and intensified great power rivalry (International Institute for Strategic Studies [IISS], 2024).

At the core of the conflict lies the contested principle of territorial sovereignty, which remains a cornerstone of international law and the United Nations Charter. Ukraine’s assertion of its sovereignty, territorial integrity, and right to determine its foreign policy orientation—particularly its aspirations toward European Union and NATO integration—has directly conflicted with Russia’s strategic objective of maintaining influence within its perceived sphere of interest (Krasner, 1999; Allison, 2014). From Russia’s perspective, Ukraine’s westward alignment represents not only a geopolitical loss but also a potential security threat, thereby transforming a bilateral dispute into a broader systemic confrontation.

The concept of the security dilemma provides a crucial theoretical lens for understanding the escalation and persistence of the conflict. As originally articulated by Herz (1950) and further developed by Jervis (1978), the security dilemma describes a situation in which measures taken by one state to enhance its security are perceived as threatening by others, leading to reciprocal actions that ultimately decrease overall security. In the Russia–Ukraine context, NATO’s expansion and military cooperation with Ukraine have been interpreted by Russia as encirclement, prompting military responses that have, in turn, reinforced Western perceptions of Russian aggression (Mearsheimer, 2014; Freedman, 2023).

Moreover, recent scholarship emphasizes that the conflict has transcended its initial territorial and political dimensions to become a protracted war, sustained by structural factors such as mutual mistrust, external military support, economic sanctions, and evolving geopolitical rivalries (Galeotti, 2024; IISS, 2024). The involvement of external actors including NATO member states providing military and financial assistance to Ukraine has further internationalized the conflict, complicating prospects for resolution and embedding it within broader global power competition. Against this backdrop, this study examines how the interaction between territorial sovereignty and security dilemmas has contributed to the transformation of the Russia–Ukraine conflict into a protracted war. By situating the conflict within contemporary conflict theory, the study seeks to move beyond event-based explanations and instead highlight the structural and systemic dynamics that continue to sustain the war.

Statement of the Problem

The persistence of the Russia–Ukraine war underscores a fundamental contradiction within international relations: the tension between the principle of sovereign equality and the realities of power politics in an anarchic international system. While Ukraine asserts its sovereign right to territorial integrity and independent alliance choices, Russia has framed these developments—particularly NATO expansion—as direct threats to its national security and strategic influence (Mearsheimer, 2014). This divergence reflects a deeper structural conflict between legal norms of sovereignty and geopolitical considerations of power and security. Scholars have offered

competing interpretations of this crisis. Mearsheimer (2014), from a realist perspective, attributes the conflict largely to Western expansionism and the security concerns it generated for Russia. In contrast, Allison (2014) emphasizes the violation of international law and the erosion of sovereignty norms resulting from Russia's actions in Ukraine. While these perspectives provide valuable insights, they often analyze the conflict from either a geopolitical or legal standpoint, without sufficiently integrating the dynamic interaction between sovereignty claims and security dilemmas.

Furthermore, recent studies suggest that the war has evolved into a systemic crisis with global implications, influencing alliance structures, military strategies, and international security governance. However, there remains limited comprehensive analysis explaining why these interacting dynamics have sustained the conflict as a protracted war despite ongoing diplomatic interventions. Therefore, the gap in the literature lies in the absence of an integrated theoretical analysis that links territorial sovereignty and security dilemma dynamics to the persistence of protracted war. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining how these factors interact to sustain the Russia–Ukraine conflict.

Conceptual Review

Territorial Sovereignty

Territorial sovereignty is a foundational concept in international relations and international law, referring to the supreme authority of a state over its territory and its right to exercise political independence without external interference. Krasner (1999) conceptualizes sovereignty as “organized hypocrisy,” arguing that while sovereignty is formally recognized as a core principle of the international system, it is frequently violated or contested in practice due to power politics and strategic interests. From this perspective, sovereignty is not absolute but conditional, often shaped by the relative power of states. In the Russia–Ukraine conflict, this insight is particularly relevant, as Ukraine's formally recognized sovereignty has been challenged by Russia's strategic actions, reflecting the tension between legal norms and geopolitical realities.

Similarly, Barkin and Cronin (1994) emphasize that sovereignty is both a legal and political construct, evolving over time in response to changes in international norms and power structures. They argue that sovereignty is not static but subject to reinterpretation, particularly in contexts where great powers seek to redefine the rules of international engagement. In the case of Russia–Ukraine, Russia's justification for intervention based on historical ties, security concerns, and the protection of Russian-speaking populations illustrates how sovereignty can be reframed to serve strategic interests, thereby complicating its traditional meaning.

Furthermore, Zacher (2001) highlights the strength of the norm of territorial integrity in the post-World War II international system, arguing that states generally respect borders due to shared expectations and institutional frameworks. However, he also acknowledges that violations occur when powerful states perceive critical security or strategic interests at stake. This perspective helps explain why, despite the strong global norm supporting Ukraine's territorial integrity, the conflict persists due to competing strategic imperatives. Critically, these scholarly perspectives reveal that territorial sovereignty is not merely a legal principle but a contested and politically mediated concept. While Krasner underscores its vulnerability to power politics, Barkin and Cronin highlight its evolving nature, and Zacher emphasizes its normative strength. In the Russia–Ukraine conflict, sovereignty operates at both territorial and geopolitical levels, where legal claims intersect

with strategic competition. Thus, understanding the conflict requires recognizing sovereignty as a dynamic concept shaped by both norms and power.

Security Dilemma

The concept of the security dilemma occupies a central place in international relations theory, particularly within realist thought, as a key explanation for conflict escalation among states. Herz (1950), who first articulated the concept, defines the security dilemma as a condition in which the efforts of states to increase their own security through military build-up, alliances, or strategic positioning unintentionally threaten other states, thereby triggering countermeasures that ultimately reduce overall security. In this sense, the dilemma arises not necessarily from aggressive intentions, but from uncertainty and mistrust within an anarchic international system.

Jervis (1978) further develops this concept by emphasizing the role of perception and misperception in shaping state behavior. He argues that even defensive actions can be interpreted as offensive threats, particularly when there is a lack of transparency or trust between states. According to Jervis, the severity of the security dilemma depends on factors such as the distinguishability of offensive and defensive capabilities and the relative advantage of offensive strategies. In the context of the Russia–Ukraine conflict, NATO’s expansion and military cooperation with Ukraine though perceived as defensive by Western actors have been interpreted by Russia as offensive encirclement, thereby intensifying the dilemma.

More recently, Glaser (2010) provides a nuanced interpretation by distinguishing between security-seeking and greedy states, arguing that not all states are inherently aggressive. He suggests that conflicts may be mitigated if states can credibly signal defensive intentions and reduce uncertainty. However, in highly polarized geopolitical environments, such signaling becomes difficult, and mutual suspicion prevails. Critically, these perspectives highlight that the security dilemma is not merely a structural condition but also a process driven by perception, mistrust, and strategic interaction. In the Russia–Ukraine conflict, the security dilemma manifests in a cycle of action and reaction, where each side’s efforts to enhance security are perceived as threats by the other, thereby reinforcing escalation. This underscores the importance of trust-building mechanisms and transparent communication in mitigating conflict dynamics.

Protracted War

The concept of protracted war refers to conflicts that persist over extended periods due to deep-rooted structural, political, and strategic factors that inhibit resolution. Azar (1990), in his theory of protracted social conflict, argues that such wars are typically driven by unresolved grievances, identity-based divisions, and weak state structures. According to him, protracted conflicts are not merely prolonged by military engagements but are sustained by underlying socio-political conditions that continually reproduce violence. Although Azar’s framework was developed primarily for internal conflicts, its emphasis on structural drivers is relevant to understanding the enduring nature of the Russia–Ukraine war, particularly in relation to identity, historical narratives, and geopolitical competition.

Similarly, Fearon (2004) explains the persistence of long wars through rationalist perspectives, emphasizing factors such as information asymmetry, commitment problems, and shifting power balances. He argues that conflicts become protracted when parties are unable to credibly commit to peace agreements or when uncertainty about outcomes encourages continued fighting. In the

Russia–Ukraine context, mutual distrust and the absence of credible guarantees have contributed to the continuation of hostilities despite diplomatic efforts.

Kalyvas (2006) adds another dimension by highlighting the role of violence dynamics and local-level interactions in sustaining conflicts. He argues that wars often endure because violence becomes institutionalized, creating incentives for actors to continue fighting. While his analysis focuses on civil wars, the broader implication is that once conflict systems become entrenched, they develop self-sustaining mechanisms. Critically, these perspectives suggest that protracted war is not simply the result of prolonged military confrontation but a complex interaction of structural conditions, strategic calculations, and institutionalized conflict dynamics. In the Russia–Ukraine case, the interplay of geopolitical rivalry, external support, economic interests, and unresolved security concerns has transformed the conflict into a sustained and evolving war. Thus, understanding protracted war requires moving beyond immediate causes to examine the deeper forces that perpetuate conflict over time.

Literature Review

The Russia–Ukraine conflict has generated extensive scholarly debate across multiple theoretical traditions in international relations, with competing interpretations reflecting broader disagreements about the causes, dynamics, and implications of contemporary warfare. At the center of these debates are three dominant perspectives: realist explanations emphasizing power politics and security concerns, legal-institutionalist approaches focusing on sovereignty and international law, and emerging analyses that situate the conflict within broader geopolitical and systemic transformations.

From a realist perspective, the Russia–Ukraine conflict is primarily understood as a product of great power rivalry and the security dynamics of an anarchic international system. Mearsheimer (2014) famously argues that the crisis is largely the result of Western policies, particularly NATO expansion into Eastern Europe, which Russia perceived as a direct threat to its national security. According to this view, Russia's actions are not driven by expansionist ambitions per se, but by defensive concerns aimed at preventing strategic encirclement. Walt (2018) similarly contends that great powers are highly sensitive to shifts in the balance of power near their borders, and that Ukraine's increasing alignment with Western institutions triggered predictable countermeasures from Russia.

More recent realist scholarship continues to reinforce this argument. Charap and Colton (2022) emphasize that the roots of the conflict lie in unresolved post-Cold War security arrangements, where Russia's concerns about NATO's eastward expansion were not adequately addressed. Freedman (2023) further notes that Russia's strategic calculations reflect a combination of perceived vulnerability and a desire to reassert its influence in the post-Soviet space. From this perspective, the conflict is best understood as a manifestation of enduring structural tensions between major powers rather than an isolated regional dispute. However, realist interpretations have been strongly challenged by scholars who emphasize international law and normative principles, particularly the concept of territorial sovereignty. Allison (2014) argues that Russia's annexation of Crimea and subsequent military actions constitute clear violations of international law, undermining the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity enshrined in the United Nations Charter. Similarly, Grant (2015) contends that the legal justifications offered by Russia such as the protection of Russian-speaking populations lack validity under international law and set a dangerous precedent for the erosion of established norms.

From this legal-institutionalist perspective, the conflict is not merely a security dilemma but a crisis of the international legal order. Krasner (1999) acknowledges that sovereignty has always been subject to political manipulation, yet the scale and visibility of Russia's actions have intensified concerns about the weakening of international norms. Recent analyses by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and United Nations bodies have further reinforced the view that Ukraine's sovereignty remains legally inviolable, highlighting the gap between legal principles and geopolitical realities (United Nations, 2023).

Beyond these competing theoretical frameworks, contemporary literature increasingly focuses on the broader geopolitical consequences of the conflict. The Russia–Ukraine war has significantly altered global power dynamics, leading to shifts in alliances, increased military spending, and widespread economic disruptions. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS, 2024), defense expenditures among NATO member states have risen sharply since 2022, reflecting heightened perceptions of insecurity across Europe. This militarization underscores the extent to which the conflict has extended beyond Ukraine, reshaping regional and global security priorities. In addition, the war has had profound economic implications. Baldwin (2022) highlights the role of economic sanctions as a tool of modern warfare, noting that Western sanctions against Russia have had far-reaching effects on global energy markets, supply chains, and financial systems. Similarly, Tooze (2022) argues that the conflict has exposed vulnerabilities in the global economic order, particularly in relation to energy dependence and economic interdependence. These developments suggest that the Russia–Ukraine conflict is not only a military confrontation but also a multifaceted crisis affecting multiple dimensions of global governance.

Recent scholarship also emphasizes the role of external actors and internationalization in sustaining the conflict. Western support for Ukraine, including military aid, financial assistance, and intelligence sharing, has significantly enhanced Ukraine's capacity to resist Russian advances. At the same time, Russia has sought to strengthen its strategic partnerships with non-Western actors, contributing to the emergence of a more polarized international system (Galeotti, 2024). This dynamic reflects what scholars describe as a “new Cold War” environment, characterized by intensified competition between major powers and competing visions of global order.

Furthermore, the concept of protracted war has gained increasing attention in recent studies of the conflict. Scholars argue that the war's persistence is driven by a combination of structural and strategic factors, including mutual mistrust, unresolved security concerns, and the involvement of external actors. Fearon (2004) identifies commitment problems and information asymmetries as key factors that prolong conflicts, while Kalyvas (2006) highlights the role of entrenched violence and institutionalized conflict dynamics. In the Russia–Ukraine case, these factors are compounded by geopolitical competition and the absence of a mutually acceptable settlement framework. Recent analyses suggest that the conflict has fundamentally reshaped the global security architecture. The enlargement of NATO, the rearmament of European states, and the increasing importance of hybrid warfare and technological innovation all point to a transformation in the nature of international security (IISS, 2024; Freedman, 2023).

Moreover, the conflict has reinforced the centrality of great power competition in international relations, with implications extending beyond Europe to regions such as Asia and the Middle East. Despite the richness of existing literature, there remains a degree of fragmentation in how the conflict is analyzed. Realist scholars tend to focus on power politics and security dilemmas, while legal scholars emphasize sovereignty and normative frameworks. Meanwhile, emerging literature

on geopolitical consequences often examines the conflict's global impact without fully integrating these theoretical perspectives. This fragmentation highlights the need for a more comprehensive analytical approach that combines insights from multiple theoretical traditions. In summary, the literature on the Russia–Ukraine conflict reflects a complex and evolving debate. Realist perspectives emphasize the role of security concerns and great power rivalry, while legal-institutionalist approaches focus on violations of sovereignty and international norms. Contemporary studies highlight the broader geopolitical, economic, and systemic implications of the conflict, underscoring its global significance. Together, these perspectives provide a foundation for understanding the multifaceted nature of the war, while also pointing to the need for integrative frameworks that can capture its complexity and protracted character.

Gap in the Literature

Existing scholarship on the Russia–Ukraine conflict has provided extensive insights into its causes, dynamics, and implications, yet important analytical gaps remain. Realist scholars such as Mearsheimer (2014) have emphasized the role of NATO expansion and great power rivalry in provoking Russia's response, framing the conflict primarily as a security dilemma rooted in power politics. Conversely, Allison (2014) and other legal scholars focus on violations of international law, highlighting Russia's actions as a breach of Ukraine's sovereignty and the broader norms governing state behavior. While both perspectives are valuable, they tend to operate in isolation, offering partial explanations that do not fully capture the interaction between legal and strategic dimensions.

Furthermore, contemporary studies have increasingly examined the geopolitical consequences of the conflict, including shifts in global alliances and the restructuring of international security architecture (Freedman, 2023). However, these analyses often prioritize macro-level outcomes without sufficiently explaining the underlying mechanisms that sustain the conflict over time. In particular, there is limited integrative research that connects territorial sovereignty, security dilemma dynamics, and the persistence of protracted war within a single analytical framework.

Additionally, while protracted conflict theories (Fearon, 2004) explain why wars endure, they are rarely applied systematically to interstate conflicts involving great powers. This creates a gap in understanding how structural and strategic factors interact in such contexts. Therefore, the gap in the literature lies in the absence of a comprehensive, theory-driven analysis that integrates sovereignty, security dilemma, and protracted war frameworks to explain the persistence of the Russia–Ukraine conflict. This study seeks to fill this gap.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Realist Theory and Security Dilemma Theory, both of which provide a robust analytical foundation for understanding the dynamics of the Russia–Ukraine conflict. Realist Theory, particularly structural realism as advanced by Waltz (1979), posits that the international system is anarchic, meaning there is no central authority to regulate state behavior. In such a system, states prioritize survival, security, and the accumulation of power. From this perspective, the actions of both Russia and Ukraine can be understood as rational responses to perceived threats and opportunities within the international system. Mearsheimer (2014) further argues that great powers are inherently sensitive to shifts in their strategic environment, especially near their borders, and will act decisively to prevent potential threats. In the case of Russia–

Ukraine, Russia's opposition to NATO expansion and Ukraine's westward alignment reflects this logic of power balancing and sphere-of-influence politics.

Complementing realism, Security Dilemma Theory explains how interactions between states can unintentionally escalate into conflict. As articulated by Herz (1950) and Jervis (1978), the security dilemma arises when defensive measures taken by one state—such as military buildup or alliance formation—are perceived as offensive threats by others. This leads to reciprocal actions, creating a cycle of escalation and mutual insecurity. In the Russia–Ukraine context, NATO's expansion and military cooperation with Ukraine were interpreted by Russia as encirclement, prompting military responses that reinforced Western fears of aggression.

Critically, the combination of these theories allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the conflict. While realism explains the structural motivations behind state behavior, the security dilemma highlights the interactive processes that lead to escalation and persistence. Together, they provide a framework for analyzing how competing security interests and mutual mistrust have transformed the Russia–Ukraine conflict into a protracted war.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, employing a case study approach to examine the Russia–Ukraine conflict as a complex and context-dependent phenomenon. The case study method is particularly suitable for investigating contemporary conflicts where multiple variables political, military, economic, and historical interact within a real-world setting (Yin, 2018). By focusing on the Russia–Ukraine conflict as a single, in-depth case, the study is able to generate nuanced insights into the underlying dynamics of sovereignty, security dilemmas, and protracted war. The study relies on secondary data sources, including peer-reviewed academic literature, policy reports from international organizations, government publications, and analyses from think tanks. These sources provide diverse perspectives on the conflict, allowing for triangulation and enhancing the reliability of the findings. Particular attention is given to recent publications (2022–2026) to ensure that the analysis reflects current developments.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This involved systematically identifying, coding, and interpreting recurring patterns within the data. Key themes such as territorial sovereignty, security dilemma dynamics, external intervention, and conflict persistence were examined in relation to the theoretical framework. The qualitative approach adopted in this study enables a deeper understanding of the complex interactions shaping the conflict, while also providing flexibility to incorporate multiple sources of evidence. However, the reliance on secondary data may limit the ability to capture real-time developments, which is acknowledged as a methodological limitation.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the Russia–Ukraine conflict is sustained by three deeply interconnected dynamics: competing sovereignty claims, escalating security dilemmas, and protracted conflict structures. These dynamics operate simultaneously at legal, strategic, and systemic levels, reinforcing one another and contributing to the persistence of the war.

Competing Sovereignty Claims: The study found that at the core of the conflict lies a fundamental disagreement over the meaning and limits of territorial sovereignty. Ukraine's assertion of its sovereignty particularly its right to determine its foreign policy orientation and

pursue integration with Western institutions represents a classical interpretation of sovereignty grounded in international law (Krasner, 1999). However, Russia's position reflects a geopolitical interpretation of sovereignty, in which Ukraine is viewed as part of its strategic sphere of influence and security perimeter (Mearsheimer, 2014).

This divergence has created a zero-sum dynamic, where Ukraine's efforts to consolidate its sovereignty are perceived by Russia as a direct threat. Allison (2014) notes that this clash between legal sovereignty and geopolitical interests has transformed the conflict into a broader contest over the norms governing the international system. Consequently, sovereignty in this context is not merely territorial but also ideological and strategic, reinforcing the intractability of the conflict.

Escalating Security Dilemmas: The study further found that the Russia–Ukraine conflict exemplifies a classic **security dilemma**, in which actions taken by one side to enhance security are interpreted as threats by the other. NATO's expansion and increasing military support for Ukraine—though framed as defensive—have been perceived by Russia as evidence of encirclement and strategic containment (Jervis, 1978; Freedman, 2023). In response, Russia has adopted increasingly assertive military strategies, including large-scale mobilization and territorial offensives.

This cycle of action and reaction has intensified mutual mistrust and reduced the prospects for de-escalation. Herz (1950) emphasizes that such dilemmas are often driven by uncertainty about intentions, which leads states to assume worst-case scenarios. In the Russia–Ukraine case, both sides have interpreted each other's defensive measures as offensive threats, thereby reinforcing escalation. The absence of credible security guarantees and effective diplomatic mechanisms has further entrenched this dynamic, making the conflict more resistant to resolution.

Protracted Conflict Dynamics: The study also found that the war has evolved into a **protracted conflict**, sustained by a combination of structural, political, and strategic factors. External involvement, particularly from Western states providing military and financial support to Ukraine, has significantly enhanced Ukraine's capacity to sustain resistance. At the same time, Russia has adapted its military strategy, incorporating hybrid warfare tactics and leveraging its economic and geopolitical networks (Galeotti, 2024).

Additionally, the conflict has developed self-sustaining characteristics, including entrenched military positions, ongoing mobilization, and the institutionalization of war economies. Fearon (2004) argues that such dynamics are often driven by commitment problems and the inability of parties to reach credible agreements. In the Russia–Ukraine context, mutual distrust and incompatible objectives have made negotiated settlements difficult, thereby prolonging the conflict.

Contemporary Dynamics (2024–2026)

Recent developments between 2024 and 2026 indicate that the Russia–Ukraine conflict is increasingly embedded within broader global geopolitical dynamics. The war has evolved beyond a regional dispute to become a central arena of great power competition, involving not only Russia and Ukraine but also NATO, the European Union, and other global actors. According to the

International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS, 2024), the conflict has accelerated military modernization and strategic realignment across Europe, with several states increasing defense spending and revising security doctrines.

Russia has increasingly relied on hybrid warfare strategies, including cyber operations, disinformation campaigns, and economic leverage, to sustain its position (Galeotti, 2024). These strategies reflect an adaptation to prolonged conflict conditions and demonstrate the evolving nature of modern warfare. At the same time, Western support for Ukraine has continued, though not without internal divisions and strategic uncertainties regarding long-term commitments and escalation risks.

The conflict has also had significant global economic and energy implications. The disruption of energy supplies, particularly natural gas, has reshaped global energy markets and forced European states to diversify their energy sources (Tooze, 2022). Additionally, the war has accelerated the development and deployment of advanced military technologies, including drones, artificial intelligence, and precision weaponry, further transforming the character of warfare (Freedman, 2023).

Moreover, the war has reinforced the emergence of a more fragmented international order, characterized by competing blocs and shifting alliances. The polarization between Western and non-Western actors has complicated diplomatic efforts and reduced the likelihood of a unified international response. As a result, the conflict has become deeply embedded in global geopolitical competition, making resolution increasingly complex. In sum, the findings and extended analysis demonstrate that the Russia–Ukraine conflict is sustained by a combination of structural tensions, strategic interactions, and evolving global dynamics. The interplay between sovereignty disputes, security dilemmas, and protracted war mechanisms has created a self-reinforcing cycle that continues to drive the conflict forward.

Conclusion

The Russia–Ukraine conflict illustrates the enduring tension between territorial sovereignty and security imperatives within an anarchic international system. The study demonstrated that competing sovereignty claims, escalating security dilemmas, and structural factors sustaining protracted war have collectively contributed to the persistence of the conflict. While Ukraine’s pursuit of sovereign autonomy aligns with established international norms, Russia’s strategic response reflects deep-seated security concerns shaped by geopolitical rivalry. The interaction of these dynamics has produced a self-reinforcing cycle of mistrust and escalation, further complicated by external involvement and evolving global power competition. Consequently, the conflict cannot be adequately understood as a purely regional dispute but rather as a manifestation of broader systemic tensions in international relations. The study concludes that durable resolution requires addressing both the legal principles of sovereignty and the underlying security concerns of all parties, alongside broader reforms in global security governance to manage great power competition.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen multilateral diplomacy to address mutual security concerns.

2. Develop balanced security guarantees acceptable to both Russia and Ukraine.
3. Promote sustained dialogue through neutral international mediation platforms.
4. Enhance global mechanisms for enforcing international law and sovereignty norms.

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