NATIONAL INTEREST AS A CATALYST FOR THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINE WAR AND THE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN DONETSK

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 Abstract
The ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine which started in February 2022 can be traced back to 2014 when a pro-Russian Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych was removed from office as a result of a revolution organized by pro-Western Ukrainians. Similarly, the Russian invasion of the Crimea peninsula, a territory owned by Ukraine signifies a strong political gesture, which has been the casus belli of the war between the two nations, arising from a complex historical background, the struggle to build a national identity, and political power. The war shows no signs of abating and has continued to drive humanitarian crises across the country, especially in the Donetsk region. The intense hostilities and fight have left more than 17 million people representing 40 per-cent of the country's population in urgent need of humanitarian assistance and protection. In the Donetsk region, the hostilities have resulted in the death of many civilians, including women and children, internal displacement of millions of persons and the destruction of critical infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, electricity and water supply systems. This paper, therefore, by employing the power theory explains how the Russian military actions driven by its national interest led to war in Ukraine, resulting in the humanitarian crisis in the Donetsk region. The paper depended on the time series research design, utilizing the documentary data generation method. Content analysis was used. This paper found that the actions of the Russian military in Ukraine led to the humanitarian crisis in the Donetsk region. The paper recommended that Russia should pursue its interest in Ukraine by diplomatic means and cooperation, not military actions leading to the humanitarian crisis in the country, especially in Donetsk.
Key Words: *War, Humanitarian Crisis, Invasion, Internal Displacement, Destruction*

Introduction
After the collapse of the Soviet Union (USSR) in 1991, the newly Independent Republics of Ukraine and Russia maintained ties, and Ukraine agreed in 1994 to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and dismantle the nuclear weapons in Ukraine left by the USSR (Yahaya, 2023). In reciprocation, Russia, the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States (US) agreed in the Budapest Memorandum to uphold the territorial integrity of Ukraine. Consequently, in 1999, Russia signed the Charter for European Security, reaffirming the inherent right of every participating state to be free to choose or change its security arrangements, including treaties of alliance (Barbaro et al, 2022).

Therefore, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, several former Eastern Bloc nations joined NATO due to regional security threats such as the 1993 Russian constitutional crisis, the War in Abkhazia (1992–1993) and the First Chechen War (1994– 1996) (Yahaya 2023, p.115). Russian leaders claimed Western powers pledged that NATO would not expand eastward, although this claim is disputed, however, the above declaration led to the Euro-first protests and a revolution organized by pro-Western Ukrainians, resulting in the removal of pro-Russian Ukrainian President, Viktor Yanukovych from office in February 2014 (Barbaro et al., 2022).

Consequently, Russian military without provokation took control of strategic positions and infrastructure in the Ukrainian territory of Crimea and seized the Crimean Parliament. Before the invasison Crimea Peninsula, Russian government has organized a controversial referendum whose consequence was for Crimea to join Russia, however, Vladimir Konstantinov, a former speaker of Crimea's regional parliament ruled out the peninsula's return to Russia in February 2014, resulting in the Russian annexation of Crimea Peninsula in March 2014 (Yahaya 2023). Between September 2014 and February 2015, there were the Minsk agreements signed to stop the fighting, but ceasefires repeatedly failed due to Russia insistence that Ukraine should negotiate directly with the two Russia-backed separatist quasi-states: the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic separatist republics (Yahaya, 2023).

Therefore, the Russian invasion of the Crimea Peninsula, a territory owned by Ukraine represents a strong political signal, which has been the casus belli of the ongoing war between the two countries, emanating from a complex historical background, the struggle to build a national identity and political power (Amadeo 2020). This is because the annexation of Crimea led to a new wave of Russian nationalism, with much of the Russian neo-imperial movement aspiring to annex more Ukrainian land, including the unrecognized Novorossiya.

Similarly, in 2021, Putin refused offers from Zelenskyy to hold high-level talks, and the Russian government subsequently endorsed an article by former president Dmitry Medvedev arguing that it was pointless to deal with Ukraine while it remained a "vassal" of the Black Sea (Hernandez, 2022). Consequently, in March and April 2021, Russia began a major military build-up near the Russo-Ukrainian border, followed by a second buildup from October 2021 to February 2022, in both Russia and Belarus (Yayaha, 2023). Although officials of the Russian government frequently denied plans to invade or attack Ukraine; including government spokesman Dmitry Peskov on 28 November 2021, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov on 19 January 2022, Russian ambassador to the US Anatoly Antonov on 20 February 2022, and Russian ambassador to the Czech Republic Alexander Zmeevsky on 23 February 2022 (Nikolskaya & Osborn, 2022).

However, Nikolai Patrushev, the Russian Chief National Security Adviser's belief that the West had been in an undeclared war with Russia for years coupled with Russia's restructured national security strategy, published in May 2021, which stated that Russia may use "forceful methods" to thwart or avert unfriendly actions that threaten the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Russian Federation are enough reasons to show that Russian invasion of Ukraine was immanent (Morin 2022).

On deeper analysis, however, it can be argued that the war between Russia and Ukraine is an example of great power competition driven by national interests. This is because the pursuit of

national interest sometimes clashes with the broader goal of promoting global security and cooperation. Therefore, finding a balance between national interests and international cooperation is problematic in international relations (Keohane, 2008). The ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine is driven by several factors, including historical tensions between Ukraine and Russia, as well as disagreements over Ukraine's relationship with the West. This is because Russia has argued that it is protecting the rights of ethnic Russians in Ukraine and defending itself against what it sees as Western encroachment on its borders (Owens, 2023).

Therefore, this paper analyzes how the pursuit and protection of national interest account for the Russian military actions in Ukraine, leading to the war and the humanitarian crisis in the Donetsk region of Ukraine.

Literature Review
Military Actions and Humanitarian Crisis
Military actions and humanitarian crises often intertwine, creating complex and challenging situations that demand careful analysis and response. This study explores the relationship between military actions and humanitarian crises, drawing upon relevant literature to provide insights into their dynamics. Darcy and Hofmann (2003) argued that conflict and violence, often precipitated by political, ethnic, or religious tensions, can lead to widespread displacement, loss of life, and humanitarian emergencies. Conversely, Slim (2004) avers that humanitarian crises can also provoke military interventions, either to provide aid or as part of broader geopolitical strategies. Hilhorst and Bankoff (2004) asserted that the use of force, whether through conventional warfare or asymmetric tactics, results in casualties, destruction of infrastructure, and disruption of essential services such as healthcare, water, and food supplies. The targeting of civilian populations, deliberate or indiscriminate, further compounds the suffering, leading to widespread human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law (Slim, 2004).

Collaborating Slim's argument, Macrae and Leader (2000) posited that the provision of aid in the context of humanitarian crises arising from conflict requires careful negotiation with armed actors, adherence to humanitarian principles, and innovative strategies to reach affected populations. From the point of view of Ferris (2011), military actions can impede humanitarian access, either through direct attacks on aid workers or restrictions on movement imposed by warring factions. Military actions can have enduring repercussions on humanitarian situations, shaping the trajectory of crises in the long term. This is why Barnett and Prins (2006) stressed that protracted conflicts, fueled by geopolitical interests or deep-rooted grievances, prolong human suffering and hinder efforts at reconstruction and recovery. Fast (2005) observes that the militarization of aid, where humanitarian interventions are perceived as extensions of military objectives, can undermine the neutrality and impartiality of relief efforts, eroding trust and complicating the delivery of assistance.

Gent (2005) argues that the complex interplay between military actions and humanitarian crises requires integrated approaches that recognize the interconnectedness of political, security, and humanitarian dimensions. Bradley and Loughnan (2010) submit that coordination between military forces, humanitarian actors, and diplomatic efforts is essential to minimize harm to civilians, facilitate humanitarian access, and work towards sustainable peace. Lischer (2005) on his part noted that efforts to address the root causes of conflicts, including poverty, inequality, and

governance failures, are fundamental to preventing and mitigating humanitarian crises in the long term.

Scholars such as Lister and Kesa (2022), Murphy (2022), Rodionov and Balmforth (2022), Ratcliffe et al. (2022), Pitta (2022), Kirby and Guyer (2022), Yayaha (2023), Nikolskaya and Osborn (2022), Hernandez (2022), Atnadu and Halilu (2023), Morin (2022) and Rashid Manzoor (2023) among others have argued that the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine, leading to the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, especially in the Donetsk region is caused by factors such as the recognition of the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics (some pro-Russian separatists in the eastern region of Ukraine) by the Russian government, the desire by Russia to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine, disagreements over Ukraine's relationship with the West, protection of the rights of ethnic Russians in Ukraine, prevention of western incursion on Russian territories, the quest by Russia to prevent Ukraine from joining NATO, and removing multinational forces from NATO's Eastern European member states.

Rashid Manzoor (2023) argues that the war is driven by several factors, including historical tensions between Ukraine and Russia, as well as disagreements over Ukraine's relationship with the West. This is because Russia has argued that it is protecting the rights of ethnic Russians in Ukraine and defending itself against what it sees as Western encroachment on its borders. The war between Russia and Ukraine has drawn in many international actors, including the United States, the European Union, and NATO, which have imposed economic sanctions on Russia and provided military and economic aid to Ukraine. This explains why Manzoor (2023) posited that the Russian-Ukraine war has drawn in numerous international actors, each with their own interests and motivations. Largely, the involvement of international actors in the war between Russia and Ukraine reflects the complex geopolitical dynamics at play, with different countries and organizations pushing for their interests and agendas (Manzoor, 2023)

Graceffo (2023) further argues that the Russian-Ukraine war is further complicated by the actions of third parties, both state and non-state actors. For him, the involvement of NATO (representing 31 nations), the European Union (27 countries, including some overlap with NATO), the G7 (whose members are all part of NATO or EU), as well as other U.S. allies, such as Japan and Australia, increases the likelihood of the war escalating into a World War. Therefore, the outcome of the war will determine which of these alliances hold and which actors will participate in the resulting international order. The Western/United States side of the conflict contains many of the world's largest and most developed nations, all of whom have supported the UN condemnation of the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Manzoor, 2023). The Western allies have been providing weapons, money, and logistic and technological support to Ukraine, and in addition, 30 of these nations are participating in economic sanctions against Russia (Graceffo, 2023). According to Graceffo (2023), although Russia has no direct allies in the ongoing war, it has relied on Minsk and Belgrade, and Belarus has been involved militarily. Similarly, China is Russia's somewhat ally, although the two nations do not have a defence agreement, however, since the war began, China has become Russia's largest trading partner and financial patron, and India, an officially nonaligned country, has continued to purchase crude from Russia since the beginning of the war in February 2022, and India's trade with Russia is now the largest it has ever been (Graceffo 2023).

However, from the review of the extant literature, it is apparent that scholars did not analyze how the pursuit of national interest by Russia accounted for the Russian military actions in Ukraine, leading to the humanitarian crisis in Donetsk region of Ukraine. This constitutes our point of departure and contribution to knowledge.

Theoretical Framework
This paper was anchored on the power theory, which is the offshoot of the realist theory of international relations. Power theory incorporates various schools of thought exploring the nature, distribution, and influence of power in international politics in different contexts. Leading proponents of power theory include Classical Realists such as Thomas Hobbes (1651), Niccolò Machiavelli (1532) and Hans Morgenthau (1948). Others are Structural Realists like Kenneth Waltz (1979), John Mearsheimer (2001), and Alexander Wendt (1987). At the heart of power theory is the assumption that international politics is driven by competitive self-interest among sovereign nation-states, with each state trying to actualize its national interest defined in terms of power. The theory assumes that power is the primary motive force in international relations, driving states to pursue security and expansion. Power theory focuses on practical strategies and national interests, overlooking moral considerations (Realpolitik). The theory also argues that the international system is anarchical; therefore, nations seek to maintain a balance of power to prevent any single actor (state or non-state actor) from dominating the system (balance of power). Thomas Hobbes emphasizes the "state of nature" as one of anarchy and competition for power, leading to social contracts and states seeking security (Hobbes, 1651). Niccolò Machiavelli on his part views power as essential for rulers to maintain order and achieve national interests, sometimes through ruthless means (Machiavelli, 1532). Hans Morgenthau argued that states act primarily in self-interest, driven by power considerations in an anarchical international system (Morgenthau, 1948).

Structural realists such as Kenneth Waltz introduced the concept of the "structure of the international system" (anarchy), arguing that the structure of the international system (anarchy) influences the state's behaviour and power dynamics in international relations (Waltz, 1979). Another structural realist John Mearsheimer stressed the offensive realist standpoint, where states prioritize survival and seek to maximize their relative power, leading to conflict (Mearsheimer, 2001). Structural realists also argued that unipolar, bipolar, or multipolar systems influence how states interact and pursue power in the international system (polarity of the system). Alexander Wendt (1987) advocated for "constructivism," arguing that shared international norms and institutions shape state identities and interests, influencing power distribution and cooperation among states in the international system (social construction of power) (Wendt, 1987).

Applicability to the Russian-Ukraine War
 The relationship between the Russian-Ukraine war and the humanitarian crisis in the Donetsk region of Ukraine is explained in this paper in light of power theory. This framework unravels the hidden dynamics that analyze how the structure of the international system (anarchy), power as the primary motive force in international relations, driving states to pursue security and expansion, and the focus on practical strategies and national interests, overlooking moral considerations (realpolitik) are responsible for the activities of Russian military in Ukraine, leading to the humanitarian crisis in the Donetsk region of Ukraine, and how the international actors' interest intensifies the war between Russian and Ukraine, resulting in the destruction of infrastructure in the Donetsk region of Ukraine.

Therefore, power theory offers a valuable lens for analyzing the dynamics of the Russian-Ukraine war and the resulting humanitarian crisis in the Donetsk region of Ukraine. This is because power theory highlights the stark power imbalance between Russians and Ukrainians. Russia possesses significantly more military, economic, and political power, allowing it to influence the war's terms and control resources. This asymmetry manifests in settlement expansion, restrictions on Ukrainian movement, and limited self-determination. Indeed, understanding domination and resistance, power theory illuminates the dynamics of domination and resistance between Russia and Ukraine.

In line with the basic assumptions of the theory, particularly the competitive self-interest among sovereign nation-states to actualize their national interests defined in terms of power, power theory is a valuable framework to explain the actions of the Russian military in Ukraine as it relates to the desire to prevent western incursion on Russian territories, and also prevent Ukraine from joining NATO.

Similarly, by analyzing international influence, power theory helps explain how the roles of external actors like the United States and the international community; their political and economic support for Ukraine, alongside limited pressure for accountability, contributes to the power imbalance and perpetuates the war. Therefore, power theory is a valuable framework for understanding the Russian-Ukraine War, especially the interest of international actors which intensifies the war between Russia and Ukraine, leading to the destruction of infrastructure in the Donetsk region of Ukraine.

Discussion of Findings
The pursuit of national interest, while seemingly a rational act for individual nations, is a significant driver of conflict in the international system that is anarchical. This explains why the pursuit and protection of national interest by the Russian government have resulted in the Russian military actions in Ukraine associated with attacks, bombardments, airstrikes and destructions of critical infrastructures, leading to the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, especially in the Donetsk region. For instance, the Donetsk region that is exposed to continuous Russian military bombardment, colossal destruction in these areas, active fighting and the annihilation of critical infrastructure have made life awful for millions of Ukrainians. Similarly, in the Donetsk region, intense aggressions between the Russian forces and Ukrainian military have led to the killing of civilians, injured thousands of people, displaced millions of people, damaged critical infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, electricity and water supply systems, leading to the humanitarian crisis in the Donetsk region of Ukraine (Humanitarian Situation Report, 2023).

The massive destruction of civilian infrastructure by the Russian military has made life extremely difficult for millions of people and has severely disrupted critical services in Ukraine, especially in the Donetsk region. Again, persistent attacks targeting energy systems, schools and hospitals, homes and businesses have not only stripped children's access to schools but have also rendered hospitals unworkable and interrupted livelihoods. For instance, about 11 million Ukrainians need water, sanitation, and hygiene assistance; 14.6 million require health assistance; 11.1 million need food and livelihood assistance, and the war also disrupted the Ukrainian economy with more than 5 million people lost their jobs (Loft & Brien, 2023). The war has also left invisible scars, exposing millions to enormous trauma. Nearly 10 million people in Ukraine are at risk of acute stress, anxiety, depression, substance use and post-traumatic stress disorder, according to the World Health Organization's report (2024).

Donetsk region has recorded around 50% of all reported conflict events in Ukraine since the beginning of the war on 24 February 2022. The war has caused significant damage to infrastructure and further increased humanitarian concerns for civilians in the affected areas. For instance, millions of people have been forced to flee their homes since Russia's war on Ukraine began, in one of the world's fastest-growing displacement crises in recent history. About 17.3 million of Ukraine's 44 million people are now displaced, either internally within Ukraine or abroad, particularly in Eastern Europe (Loft & Brien, 2023). In the same vein, schools and classrooms have been attacked, destroyed by Russian forces, or converted into military bases throughout the war, severely hampering access to education. For instance, the escalation of the war has affected access to quality education for 4.3 million school-aged children, representing 70 per cent of the estimated child population in the country (Ukrainian Ministry of Education, 2023). According to the Ministry of Education of Ukraine, over 3,000 education facilities across Ukraine have been damaged or destroyed by bombardment since the war started in February 2022. Also, over 16,631 civilians were killed and over 11,660 injured, mostly children and women from the start of the invasion in the Donetsk region (HRMMU, 2023).

Similarly, between February 2022 and May 2024, about 17 million Ukrainians needed humanitarian assistance with multiple problems of water supply, food, support to repair their houses, medicines and medical supplies to make sure their hospitals continued running (UNOCHA, 2024). In March 2023, the World Bank, the Government of Ukraine, the EU and the UN estimated that the cost of reconstruction and recovery in Ukraine stood at US$411 billion. This is 2.6 times the country's estimated gross domestic product (GDP) for 2022. The World Bank and UN Development Program also estimated that 60% of Ukraine's power plants have also been damaged since the start of the war in February 2022. The World Bank estimates Ukraine's GDP has fallen to 29% in 2022 and that the budget deficit grew to around 27% (if grants and aid from outside Ukraine are excluded). Poverty also increased from 5.5% to 24% of the population, pushing 7 million people into poverty (World Bank, 2023).

According to the report of the Ukrainian Ministry of Temporarily Occupied Territories (2024), most of the damaged buildings in the Donetsk region are residential buildings (7158). Also affected were objects of road transport infrastructure (36), trade establishments (31); general educational institutions (27); health care facilities (21); preschool institutions (13); gas supply facilities (8); vocational schools (7); physical education and sports facilities (3); cultural institutions (14); objects of road infrastructure (36); industrial facilities (19); trade institutions (31); objects of other spheres (66). In total, there are 7403 facilities.

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The UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU, 2023) reported that over 7,155 civilians killed, including 440 children and over 11,660 injured, including over 850 children. The report also stated that more than **16,631** people were killed in the Donestk region since the start of the invasion in February 22 to November 14, 2022.

Table 1: Showing Number of Casualties in Cities of Donetsk Region between January and May and 2024

City	Deaths	Injured
Sloviansk	39	56
Kramatorsk	42	140
Bakhmut	6	6
Vuhlegirsk	33	45
Novolugansk	3	20
Mayorsk	NA	19
Toretsk	8	2
Debaltseve	146	231
Horlivka	289	763
Yenakiieve	24	111
Yasynuvata	64	259
Avdeevka	97	509
Zhdanivka	4	5
Khristivka	21	41
Donetsk	693	604
Makiyivka	84	106
Zuhres	19	49
Khartsyzk	22	65
Ilovaisk	58	127
Shakhtarsk	27	58
Snizhne	46	33
Marinka	59	117
Total	**1, 784**	**3, 366**

Source: HRMMU (2024)

Information from Table 1 above shows that between January and May 2024, about **1, 784** people were killed across the cities of Donestk region, and at least **3, 336** others were injured.

Table 2: Showing Number of Facilities Attacked in Donestk City

Facility type	Total attacks	Attacks (%)	Total injured	Total death
Primary Care	123	32.71	3	2
Secondary care	152	40.43%	49	2
Tertiary care	18	4.79%	3	1
Mobile clinic	1	0.27%	0	1
Pharmacy	9	2.39%	0	0
Warehouse	7	1.86%	0	2
Others*	66	17.55%	17	63
TOTAL	**376**	**100%**	**72**	**81**

Source: Compiled by the authors with data from Humanitarian Situation Report (2023)

In addition to the information on the Table 2 above, the Report started that more than 12.5 million households and nearly 400,000 businesses are without electricity due to attacks on energy facilities, affecting water pumping, adding to the previous challenges millions faced to access clean water or run their heating systems at home.

Furthermore, in the first week of the invasion, the UN reported over a million refugees had fled Ukraine; this subsequently rose to over 7.5 million by 15th June, 2022 mostly women, children, the elderly, or people with disabilities (UNHCR, 2023). The report also stated that as of 3 May, another 8 million people were displaced inside Ukraine. By 20 March, 2022 a total of ten million Ukrainians had fled their homes, making it the fastest growing refugee crisis in the contemporary era (UNHCR, 2023). According to the UN High Commission for Refugees report (2023), as of 13 May, 2022 there were 3,315,711 refugees in Poland, 901,696 in Romania, 594,664 in Hungary, 461,742 in Moldova, 415,402 in Slovakia, and 27,308 in Belarus, while Russia reported it had received over 800,104 refugees. As of 23 March, 2022 over 300,000 refugees had arrived in the Czech Republic. Turkey has been another significant destination, registering more than 58,000 Ukrainian refugees as of 22 March, 2022 and more than 58,000 as of 25 April 2022 (Tabarovsky and Finkel, 2022).

Conclusion and Recommendation

In a hegemonistic manner, Russia in the year 2021 started building up a large military presence very close to its border with Ukraine, with similar moves within Belarus, a close ally of Russia in the region. In February 2022, in an obvious move that the whole world was aware of, Russian government persistently denied its intention to invade Ukraine and rather called for Ukraine to be barred from ever joining NATO, a military alliance that Russian government has continued to be afraid of. On the 24th of February, Russia officially sent up to 200,000 soldiers into Ukraine with no direct provocation to warrant such a deployment, arguing that the goal was to demilitarize and de-Nazify Ukraine and to protect Russian citizens that were subjected to eight years of genocide and bullying by the Ukrainian government. However, this assertion did not add up as there was no evidence to suggest that the Russian government's claim was right. This narrative seems to have been formed by Russia and its proxy forces to justify the unwarranted and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine.

This paper concluded that the ongoing invasion of Ukraine by Russia was to stop it from joining NATO, demonstrating the fact that Ukraine needs NATO for its protection because if Ukraine were a NATO member, Russia would not have dared to invade Ukraine. This is because before the invasion, Ukraine reportedly agreed a provisional deal with Russia not to join the Western defensive alliance, an alliance that exists primarily for defensive purposes. Apparently, Russia

does not want its neighbor to join NATO, as it fears that if this happens, it will encroach too closely on its territory.

From the foregoing conclusion, this paper recommended that the United Nations Security Council should be reformed to allow the UN to intervene when unprovoked attacks are mounted against nations by a superior power country.

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