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International Political Economy Russia's Realist Approach and Dilemma of Germany's Strategic Choices in the Ukraine Conflict

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Abstract

This paper aims to address the gap in previous studies by examining the role of Russia's realist approach in the Ukraine conflict and foreign relations, and how this impacts Germany's strategic choices. The paper adopts a qualitative research design, utilizing a literature review and case study analysis of the relationship between the two countries in the Ukraine conflict to explore the complexities of the Germany-Russia relationship. Specifically, the paper examines the dilemma of strategic choice of Germany in the Ukraine conflict where Germany's liberal and constructivist approaches could bring economic benefits to Germany, but the security concerns of EU and Germany in the face of Russian aggression face the challenges threatened by a realist approach of Russia. The findings of this paper suggest that the balance of power approach is relevant for the strategic choice of Germany, but in the long term, Germany needs to ensure its economic development to sustain its leadership position in EU as well as dealing with the challenges of Russia's realist approach.

Keywords: Germany's Strategy, Ukraine Conflict, Realism, Foreign Relations of Russia

Introduction

Since 2014, the Ukraine conflict has been difficult for the world to resolve. Russia's Crimea invasion launched the conflict. Eastern Ukraine separatist militants strengthened soon after. Even after many diplomatic attempts, the violence continues, creating great hardship for the locals. Since then, He uses authoritarianism, centralisation, authority, and realist approach to foreign relations as well as to maintain stability and power, according to Tsygankov (2017). Germany has had difficult diplomatic decisions due to his actions in Ukraine.

Buchanan (2019) claims that Germany has been mediating the dispute to help Russia and Ukraine reach a peaceful resolution. Russia's aggressive politics have made it tougher for Germany to remain silent. According to Seipel (2022), Germany has punished Russia economically. Germany has also used both economic and diplomatic solutions to end the conflict peacefully. The Russian foreign policy emphasizes Russia's national interests and global power (Colton, 2014). According to Freedman (2018), this approach to international relations

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emphasises military might, diplomacy, and economic influence. Putin is recognised for his strong positions on Syria, Ukraine, and NATO expansion. He also wants to harness Russia's military and economic power for his country (Herszenhorn, 2018).

They claim Putin's realism promotes a zero-sum foreign strategy and increases world conflict (Sakwa, 2016). Russia's 2014 seizure of Crimea violated international law and threatened regional security (Dunlop, 2016). Mueller (2019) states that some have exploited Russia's 2016 presidential election meddling as proof of its robust foreign policy. The West and other global powers threaten Russian security and authority (Tsygankov, 2016 and Kozlova, 2016). Putin claims that Western criticism of Russia's human rights record is unfair because the West has also fought conflicts and violated human rights (Kuzio, 2017).

Germany's constructivist and liberal approach to Russia has helped it grow power and pay for the Ukraine conflict. This policy has strengthened Russia rather than ending the conflict. The analysis also reveals how Ukraine's position has altered and how Putin's leadership affects Germany's diplomacy. Germany has struggled with Putin's realism and leadership style.

This paper examines how these issues have affected Germany's relationship with Russia and its Ukraine strategy. This thesis concludes that Putin's realism is crucial to understanding Ukraine and Germany's political decisions. This study will demonstrate how complicated the Ukraine conflict is and how Putin's leadership style and realistic beliefs affect Germany's foreign policy to achieve these goals.

In addition to introduction, the paper has four sections. The second section discusses study methodology. Section 3 concerns with the literature review. Section 4 focuses on empirical analysis of Vladimir Putin's leadership style and Russia's realism. This section discusses how this has affected Germany's diplomatic choices. Section 5 concludes.

Study Methodology

This study examines Putin's leadership style using qualitative research. Past leadership and political psychology research and current research on Putin's leadership and realist position in the Ukraine conflict shaped the research technique. This study reviewed the literature and analysed speeches, interviews, and news stories.

Putin's public statements, interviews, and news reports will reveal his leadership style when analysing original sources. The data will come from reliable sources like government websites and major news networks. Content analysis will identify Putin's management style's repeating themes and patterns.

The literature review and primary source analysis will be thematically evaluated to discover Putin's leadership style themes and patterns. Iterative data analysis will ensure reliable outcomes. Multiple data reads will do this.

To achieve the study's goals, qualitative research will be used. First- and second-hand information will be used in the study. Interviews with international relations professionals and policymakers will provide primary data. These discussions were semi-structured. Participants can choose in-person or online interviews based on their preferences and availability. After audio recording, discussions will be typed for analysis.

A comprehensive literature review will yield secondary data. This includes academic articles, books, reports, and policies. JSTOR, Google Scholar, and ProQuest will aid your evaluation.

The thematic documentary review will be utilised to analyse conversation and book data. The data will be analysed to determine recurring themes and patterns and their implications for the study goals. Iterative processing and several data reads will ensure accurate and dependable results. This paper examines how Putin's realist leadership and Ukraine conflict tactics affected Germany. Using primary and secondary data and an ordered analytical approach will help reach this goal.

This study uses a power index (Statistita, 2023) analysis. This study compares country power using hard and soft power. Hard power factors are usually military strength, economic resources, and other easily quantified power. However, what is soft power? Soft power is when a country uses diplomacy, education, media, and cultural exports to influence others. Hard or soft power in foreign relations depends on the country. Hard power can assist the nation achieve its aims and maintain its status. Some academics believe "soft power" can boost a nation's reputation and global influence (Nye, 2004). A strong military and economy can deter competitors and foes (Mearsheimer, 2001).

Literature Review

Constructivism, realism, and liberalism are key international relations concepts (Guzzini, 2013). Use these principles to study how Putin deals with other nations. Ralph Waltz wrote in 1979 that realism emphasizes power and safety in global relations. It also views the international system as chaotic and the state as a self-interested agent. Liberalism emphasizes cooperation and institutions in foreign affairs. Liberalism views governments as knowledgeable agents that can collaborate to achieve our aims, according to Keohane and Nye (2000). Finally, constructivism emphasizes how ideas and social norms influence state behavior. It examines how common identities, perspectives, and behaviors impart meaning and influence government policy (Wendt, 1999). Realists believe that a state needs both soft and hard power to achieve its aims and maintain its position in the international order. A country with great military and economic power has "hard power." Realists think a nation's military and economy are needed to protect its interests and deter attackers (Mearsheimer, 2001). Realists think that only force can maintain global power and prevent other nations from attacking. State residents feel that force or the fear of force may achieve their goals. Cultural and ideological means including diplomacy, education, the media, and cultural exports can influence other nations through soft power (Nye, 2004). Hard and soft power differ. Realists know soft power is vital, but they value hard force more. The soft power helps gain international recognition. It does not replace military or economic power. Realism says a country's "soft power" resources must be backed with "hard power". The realist approach holds that hard power is the best method to protect individuals and achieve national goals. However, soft power is crucial but not necessary for these purposes.

Putin's foreign relations and the Ukraine conflict have emphasized his realist leadership style and decision-making. Examine his leadership approach. Putin's realist stance emphasizes national interests to attain them, according to Bachmann (2017). This approach often causes conflicts with other nations.

According to Bremmer (2018) and Pifer (2015), many experts have studied Putin's realistic foreign policy. They say Putin views the world as "zero sum games" and values using force to achieve his goals. Putin's actions in Ukraine, including as taking over Crimea and aiding insurgents in eastern Ukraine, are commonly used to demonstrate this realistic view (D'Anieri, 2017). However, other scholars believe Putin's foreign policy is founded on nationalism and nostalgia for the Soviet Union (Tsygankov, 2018).

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No previous studies on the Ukraine conflict or foreign ties have examined how Putin's leadership style and realistic outlook operate together. This makes it difficult to grasp how Putin's leadership and foreign policy may have worsened the Ukraine situation and strained Russia's relations (Frye, 2014).

Arutunyan (2019) considers Putin's leadership style as a highly centralized, authoritarian governance model". He has emphasized the importance of restoring Russia's status as a great power on the world stage. As noted by political scientist Kathryn Stoner, Putin's leadership is Putin's leadership style is characterized by a pragmatic approach to problem-solving. He is known for his ability to adapt to changing circumstances and make quick decisions. Hill (2013) argues that Putin's leadership is "very pragmatic and flexible". Putin is also a skilled communicator and has a strong presence that commands attention. He is able to rally support from the Russian people and project a powerful image both domestically and internationally. As Sakwa (2019) noted, Putin's leadership style is "characterized by a highly personalized style, with Putin as the paramount leader". Putin is an authoritarian, realistic, and nationalistic leader who seeks power. Putin's leadership throughout the Ukraine conflict followed the cult of personality theory, which states that leaders must appear powerful to stay in charge. Putin's public statements and actions during the conflict were aimed to convey strength and confidence. This approach was meant to make Putin appear stronger and trustworthy to protect Russia's interests. Mumford and Spangler (2012) define a "cult of personality" as when an appealing leader or authority figure convinces people to follow them even if they disagree (Bader, 2007). He tends to employ state resources to maintain power and their loyalty (Weber, 1946). Patrimonialism rejects formal laws. They use personal connections and unofficial agreements. This is crucial to patrimonialism. The Van de Walle and Ballart (1997) study found this can lead to cheating, inefficiency, and not taking responsibility.

For years, however, it is questionable how Germany's liberal and constructivist ideals affect its foreign policy with Russia. Germany's concentration on multilateralism, international institutions, and norms-based diplomacy indicates its liberal mindset, which values cooperation and dialogue with Russia. According to Harnisch and Wollnik (2016), the importance of shared ideals and rules for governments to function securely and successfully are emphasized in this case. How Germany's policy choices affected the Ukraine conflict and Putin's realistic assessment of the fight deserve further study.

Empirical Analysis

Russia's Realist Approach in the Ukraine Conflict

As a realist in international affairs, Vladimir Putin is willing to employ force to safeguard Russia's strategic interests. Both attributes stem from Putin's behavior. According to Mearsheimer (2001), realism in international relations emphasizes power and self-interest in explaining country behavior. However, he is willing to collaborate with other nations on diplomatic issues if it benefits Russia. Russia has actively participated in peace discussions and accords to terminate the conflict. However, Putin has taken care to ensure that any deals Russia forms are in its strategic interests and do not jeopardize Ukraine (Kofman, 2018). Balance of power is one approach to view Vladimir Putin's foreign policy and diplomacy. This idea emphasizes the importance of maintaining state power balances to avoid conflict and maintain the international order.

Putin has criticized the West's aspirations to take control the world's systems. He also got Russia embroiled in the Syria and Ukraine conflicts to demonstrate Russia's ideals and power (BBC, 2021). However, Putin has shown a willingness to collaborate with Western nations on shared issues like gun control and terrorism (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). Vladimir Putin has worked with other nations to counterbalance the West. Russia's closeness to China and efforts to strengthen partnerships with non-Western nations through the BRICS group demonstrate this (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). Putin's diplomacy and international affairs are not based on the balance of power.

Under his authoritarian leadership, he controls the media, judiciary, and political opposition in Russia and has centralized authority in the Kremlin. Russia is "Not Free" according to Freedom House's 2021 report since the government controls the media and people and there are no political freedoms. Freedom House released their research. Amnesty International (2020) also produced a report on Russia that focused on how the government silences criticism and violates human rights, notably by targeting journalists and activists. Russia's conflict actions have shown Putin's authoritarianism and security and control obsession. Russia's assistance for eastern Ukraine separatists and invasion of Crimea have been denounced worldwide. Scholars describe Putin's leadership "authoritarian" (Ledeneva, 2020; Shevchuk, 2015), indicating that he values security and control. Vladimir Putin's popularity and ability to incite Russian pride have worsened the conflict. President Vladimir Putin has worked hard to make Russia an international force and appealed to Russian patriotism and enthusiasm. This has made it tougher for Western nations to intervene in the Ukraine conflict and helped Russia gain popularity. Putin's Crimea invasion was supported by most Russians.

Russia has been led by Vladimir Putin for almost 22 years. He served as Prime Minister from 2008 to 2012 after two terms as President of Russia from 2000 to 2008. He became president again in 2012 and has remained so. He received a second six-year term till 2024 in 2018. Even without his titles, Putin has had significant political authority in Russia. Because he held various government offices and shaped the country's politics (BBC News, 2018). Vladimir Putin can rewrite the law to stay in power. In 2020, he proposed changing the law to let him run for president again. He might run for office again in 2024 and stay in power until 2036. Despite fraud allegations and poor attendance, a July 2020 national vote approved the amendments. The New York Times (2020) reports that opposition members have called the constitutional reforms a ploy to strengthen Putin and destroy Russia's democracy.

His education in the Soviet Union and KGB service shaped Vladimir Putin's leadership style. Schreiber (2018) claims the Soviet Union was autocratic and regulated. The KGB was crucial to controlling the regime and suppressing opposition. Putin was educated to be disciplined, analytical, and goal-oriented as a KGB officer after retiring, according to Herszenhorn (2018).

Meanwhile, Germany is dedicated to protecting and spreading them worldwide as an EU and NATO member. In contrast, Vladimir Putin's regime has been condemned for controlling the Russian media, limiting political liberties, and suppressing rebellion. Germany and its allies sanctioned Russia for its activities in Ukraine. Germany and its partners also denounce Putin's autocratic and human rights abuses (EU External Action, 2021). Putin's ties with China have grown stronger in recent years, making it tougher for him to get along with free countries. China and Russia have collaborated more on politics and business thanks to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Belt and Road Initiative. Their cooperation has also balanced US global dominance (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). Putin has called China Russia's "strategic

partner" and stressed the importance of their relationship. Russia's invasion of Crimea, engagement in the Ukraine conflict, and accusations that it meddles in other nations' democratic processes have strained relations with the West (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). Putin's leadership style and realistic approach to the Ukraine conflict are influenced by the Soviet Union and KGB. Putin's focus on the pursuit of Russia's strategic interests which has been evident in his actions in Ukraine as seen in Russia's annexation of Crimea and support for separatist rebels in eastern Ukraine in 2014 (Herszenhorn & Kramer, 2015).

According to the power index ranking, by 2023, the United States has the most potent military globally. The next three most dominant countries are Russia, China, and India, which are usually ranked as some of the strongest nations worldwide. Russia is positioned at number 3, while Germany is placed at number 4 (Figure 1).

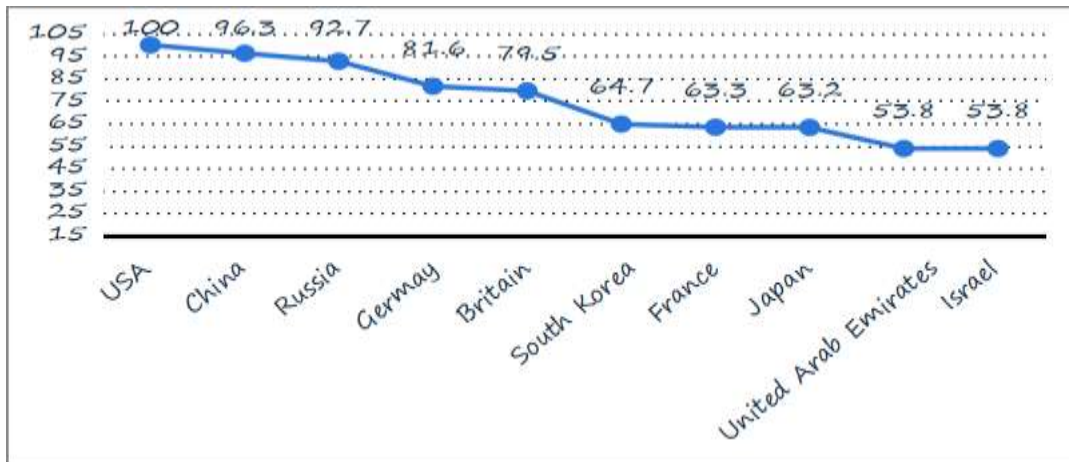


Figure.1 The top 10 Most Powerful Countries in the World, 2022

Source: Statistita, 2023.

The power index can be utilized, with a differentiation typically made between hard power and soft power in the realm of international relations. Hard power refers to the use of economic or military might to exert influence, while soft power relies on intangible values such as the appealing nature of a country's values and norms. The topic at hand concerns countries possessing significant political, economic, or military power that enables them to impact international decision-making, either independently or collectively. Russia's high power ranking is primarily due to its military might, whereas its economic strength is comparatively weaker than other countries in NATO. Russia is ranked at the second position in terms of military power. Meanwhile Germany is ranked relatively weak at the 12th position, even weaker than Poland and Spain. This is largely due to the restrictions placed on Germany's military buildup after World conflict II (Figure 2).

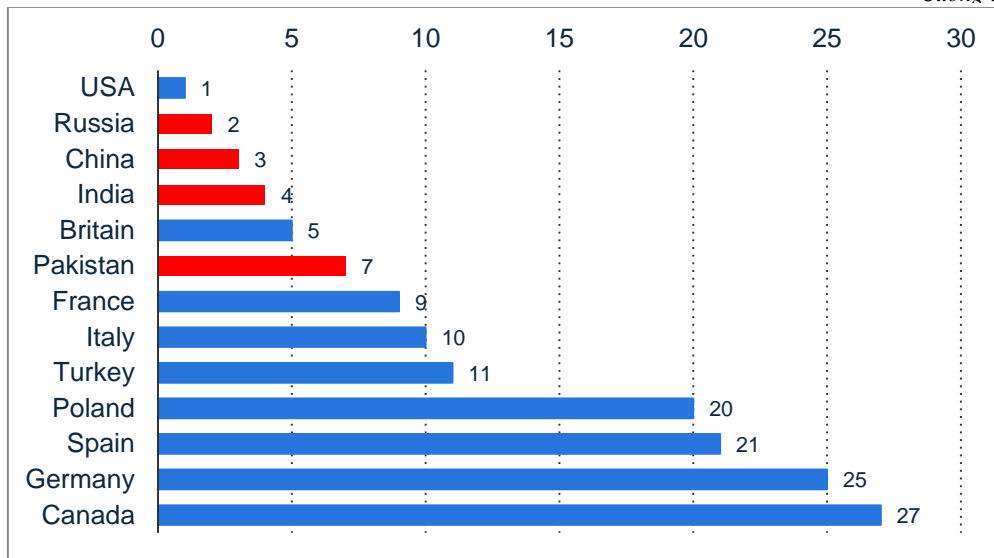


Figure 2. Military Power Ranking, 2023

Source: Statistita, 2023

Despite Russia's high military power ranking, its GDP is smaller than South Korea's, and it ranks 11th in the world in terms of GDP. In comparison, Germany has a stronger economy with a GDP ranked at 4th position globally and is considered a leading economy in the European Union (Statistita, 2022). Russia was ranked 13th on the list. There are some possible reasons for this ranking include criticisms of its governance and involvement in conflicts like the Ukraine conflict, exports and economic development, human right problems which determines a Russia's soft power (Figure 3).

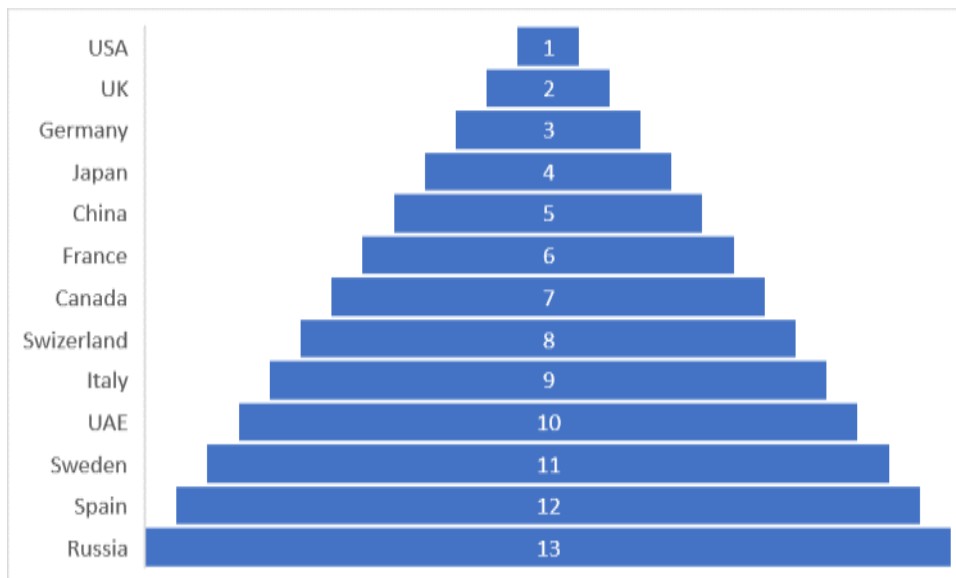


Figure 3. The Top Soft Power Ranking in the World, 2023

One of the key factors driving Russia's actions in Ukraine was concern about the potential for a pro-Western government to come to power in Ukraine and threaten Russia's security interests. This concern was heightened by the Maidan protests in Ukraine in 2013-2014, which led to the ouster of the pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich and the installation of a pro-Western government in Kiev. Russia viewed this as a threat to its own security, particularly given Ukraine's strategic location as a buffer between Russia and NATO (BBC, 2021). The other motivations behind Putin's actions in Ukraine is the fear of NATO expansion in the east. NATO, a military alliance led by the United States, has expanded to conflict Russia's borders since the end of the Cold conflict, which has caused concern for Russia. Putin has expressed his concerns about NATO's expansion, stating that it poses a threat to Russia's national security.

In a speech in 2007, Putin said, "It is already clear that NATO expansion does not have any relation with the modernization of the Alliance itself or with ensuring security in Europe. On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust." (Putin, 2007). Moreover, during the conflict in Ukraine, Putin accused the West of provoking unrest in Ukraine and using NATO to encircle Russia. In a speech in 2014, Putin stated that "The policy of pushing NATO to our borders is nothing but a provocation that undermines the security and stability of the region." (Putin, 2014) Putin sees NATO's expansion to Russia's borders as a threat to Russian security and stability.

However, it's worth noting that there are other factors at play in the Ukraine conflict, including historical tensions between Ukraine and Russia, economic interests, and domestic politics in both countries. Russia also had economic and geopolitical interests in Ukraine. Ukraine is a key transit route for Russian gas exports to Europe, and Russia has long viewed Ukraine as part of its sphere of influence (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). Color revolutions have the potential to pose a direct threat not only to Russia's power, but also to the authoritarian leadership of Putin. The hatred and anger are the root causes of conflict and suffering, and that cultivating compassion, wisdom, and mindfulness can help to reduce these negative emotions and promote peace (The Buddhist Centre, 2021). From a political and psychological perspective, the behavior and decisions of individual leaders can have a significant impact on whether a country or region experiences conflict or peace. The leadership of Russia motivated by fear or aggression may be more likely to pursue policies that lead to conflict, while leaders who prioritize diplomacy, dialogue, and compromise may be more likely to avoid conflict and promote peace. However, without strong economic power, a country may struggle to sustain a prolonged conflict. Russia may face economic sustainability issues when it comes to financing the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, particularly since Ukraine is being supported by both the EU and NATO member countries.

Finally, Putin's realistic approach to international affairs during the Ukraine conflict has three important components. He is willing to employ military action to strengthen Russia, which is considered part of a state's power to protect its interests. Putin's realistic worldview may make him more ready to wield brutal power, his most critical choice in the Ukraine conflict. Realists think the international system is chaotic, hence no one can enforce international laws. States can also rely on their own authority to protect their interests. Further, he exploits foreign difficulties to justify his dictatorship and play on nationalism.

Dilemmas of Germany's Strategic Choices in the Ukraine Conflict

Germany is facing some strategic dilemmas in the Ukraine conflict as it seeks to balance its relationship with Russia and its support for Ukraine. According to Menon and Riecke (2016), Germany has traditionally pursued a policy of engagement with Russia and has close economic ties with the country. However, Germany has also been vocal in its support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as evidenced by its participation in the Normandy Format negotiations aimed at resolving the conflict in eastern Ukraine (Barton and Gustafsson, 2021).

At the same time, Germany is a key NATO member and ally of the United States, which has been providing military and economic support to Ukraine. This creates a delicate balancing act for Germany as it seeks to maintain its relationships with both Russia and the United States while also promoting a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Ukraine.

Russia is Germany's largest trading partner in Central and Eastern Europe, with over 6,000 German companies doing business in Russia. Germany is heavily dependent on Russian gas, with over a third of its gas imports coming from Russia in 2020 (Molchanova, 2021).

Germany faces a difficult strategic dilemma in its relationship with Russia, as the imposition of sanctions against Russia could negatively impact the German economy. In fact, the potential cutoff of Russian gas to Germany would have significant economic impacts, including a reduction in GDP of 1.5% in 2022, 2.7% in 2023, and 0.4% in 2024 due to the negative direct and indirect effects on the economy. These losses would be permanent and would not be offset by deferred economic activity in subsequent years. According to a study by Hertweck, Sigrist, and Wolters (2021), the cumulative GDP loss between 2022 and 2024 would be 4.8% of 2021 GDP. The losses in 2022 would be mainly due to uncertainty effects, while downstream amplification effects would mainly emerge in 2023. By 2024, losses would still occur, but would be mainly driven by downstream amplification effects. However, the study suggests that if energy transformation activities help to mitigate some of the gas shortages, the losses would be smaller, with GDP being 1.2% lower than baseline in 2022, 1.9% lower in 2023, and 0.4% lower in 2024, with no catch-up effects of deferred economic activity in subsequent years.

Germany must also consider the potential economic costs of imposing sanctions on Russia. According to Gersdorf and Wyplosz (2015), the imposition of sanctions against Russia could have negative implications for the German economy, which has close economic ties with Russia, particularly in the energy sector. Before the Ukraine conflict, Germany pursued a policy of engagement and cooperation with Russia, which can be considered a liberal approach in international relations. Germany and Russia had developed close economic ties, with Germany being Russia's largest trading partner in the European Union (European Commission, 2013). In addition, Germany had advocated for greater cooperation between the European Union and Russia on issues such as energy security and trade (Figure 4).

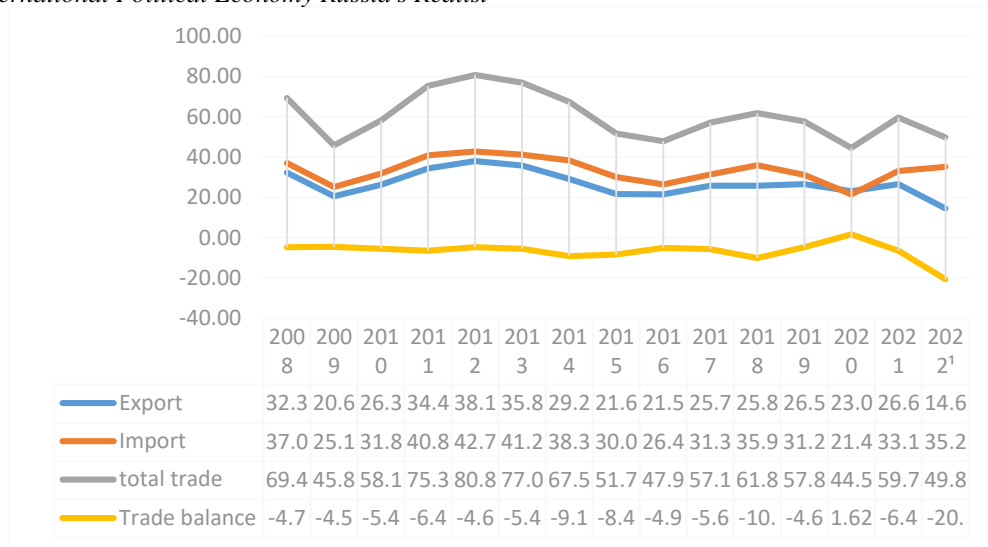


Figure 4. Trade Relations Between Russia and Germany Over Time

Source: Statista, 2023.

Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel also pursued a personal relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin, meeting with him frequently and engaging in informal dialogue. Merkel had expressed a willingness to work with Russia on issues of common interest, such as the Iran nuclear deal and the Syrian conflict. However, Germany's liberal approach to conflicts with Russia came under scrutiny following Russia's annexation of Crimea and involvement in the conflict in eastern Ukraine, waging the conflict, it is argued that Germany's policy of engagement had failed to address Russia's aggressive actions, and that Germany had been too willing to prioritize economic interests over security concerns (Makarychev & Yatsyk, 2016). Germany's liberal and constructive approach has been met with resistance from Russia, which has pursued a more realist approach in its actions in Ukraine. Russia's annexation of Crimea and support for separatist rebels in eastern Ukraine can be seen as actions that prioritize Russia's strategic interests over the principles of cooperation and the rule of law (Tsygankov, 2016).

Germany's efforts to mediate the conflict have been hampered by the broader geopolitical context, including tensions between Russia and the West and divisions within the European Union (Grevi, 2021). Despite Germany's efforts to maintain a constructive relationship with Russia, it has been unable to effectively persuade Russia to change its course of action in Ukraine. Furthermore, the limitations of the liberal approach have been evident in the failure of the Minsk agreements, which aimed to bring a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The agreements were based on the principles of cooperation and the rule of law, but their implementation has been hampered by continued violence in eastern Ukraine and lack of progress in political reforms (European Council, 2022). As of 2021, Germany is one of the largest importers of natural gas in Europe, and it does import a significant amount of gas from Russia (Figure 5).

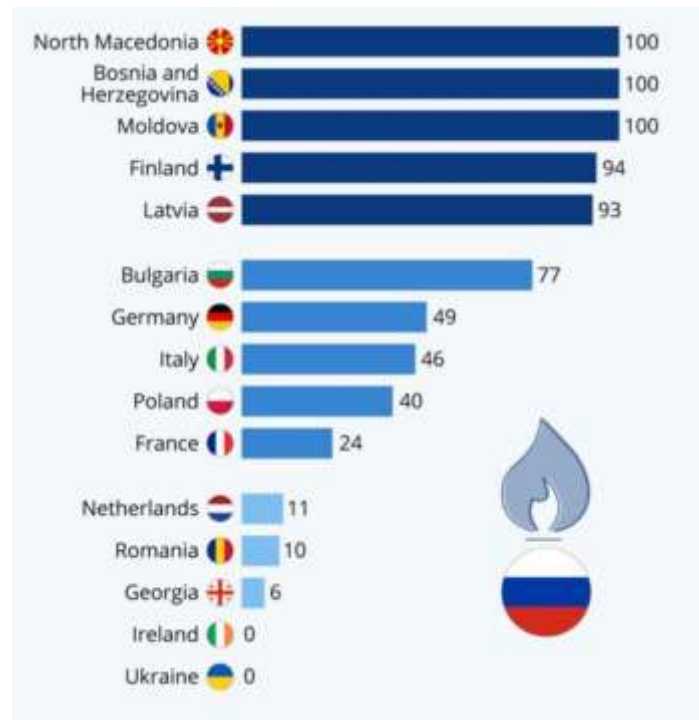


Figure 5. Energy Dependence of EU on Russia, 2020

Source: Statista, 2021

At 1% to 3% growth, a March 2022 market research predicted a sluggish recovery in the German economy. However, the Ukraine conflict has made it tougher for Germany to do business and invest in Russia and Ukraine, worsening this mindset. Germany spent €25 billion in Russia and sent €27 billion in goods last year. German enterprises have left Russia due to Western sanctions, causing a recession, financial loss, and lower exports. The Ukraine conflict will hurt Germany's economy more. Germany buys Russian gas since it has no LNG hubs. Heavy energy imports from Russia are a serious economic danger. The spot market price of gasoline has increased tenfold from last year to this year due to a European or Russian energy embargo. Many businesses can no longer profit. This increases gas and energy production costs, which affects industries.

Supply line issues between Germany and Russia and Germany and Ukraine are also hampering ships traveling to and from German ports. Russian and Ukrainian seamen have been lost by German maritime corporations. Russian supplier restrictions make air shipping between Europe and northern Asia harder. The cargo train link between China and Germany, which was increasing rapidly through Russia, is also affected. Due to these events, freight space is decreasing, transportation costs are rising, and output is slowing or stopping.

Russia trades extensively with Germany. Many goods are sent and received between the nations. Figure 6 illustrates that in 2020, Germany was Russia's third most important export and import destination. Thus, Ukraine's predicament affects Russia politically and economically more broadly. Western countries' prohibitions have hurt Russia and Germany's economies.

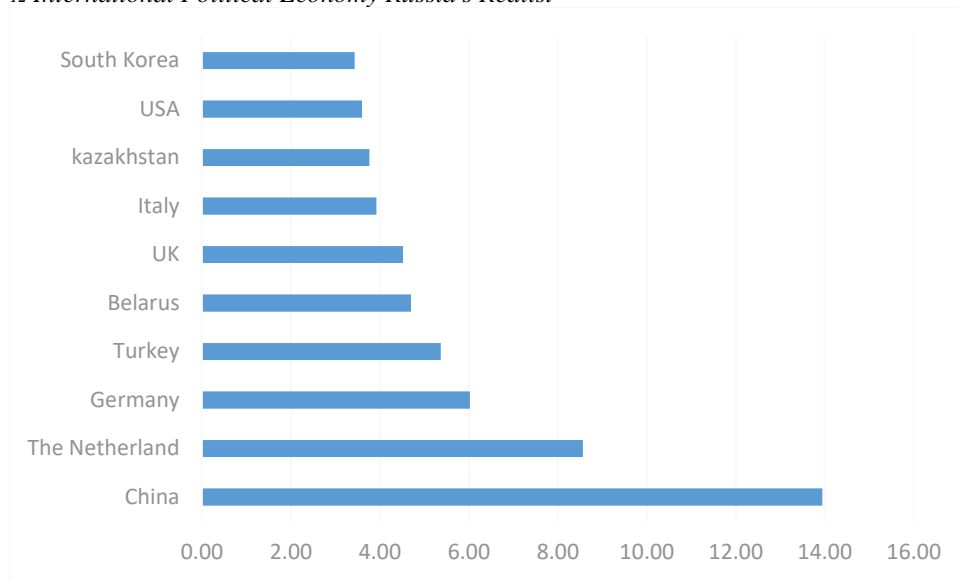


Figure 6. Key Export Partners of Russia, 2021

Source: Statista, 2022.

Germany is one of the main import partners of Russia for a variety of products, including machinery and equipment, vehicles, chemicals, food and agricultural products, and metals and metal products. According to data from the International Trade Centre, in 2020, machinery and equipment accounted for around 30% of Russia's total imports from Germany, while vehicles accounted for around 13%, chemicals for around 9%, food and agricultural products for around 6%, and metals and metal products for around 5% (Statista, 2022).

Concerns include human rights violations, media restrictions, and Crimea annexation. Germany and other EU members have criticized Putin's leadership and realistic outlook. Germany strongly opposes what is happening in Ukraine and how Russian resistance fighters are treated. Germany has criticized Putin's leadership and realism. It stands firm on these concerns.

Germany and others have imposed economic sanctions on Russia for its activities in Ukraine and Crimea. This is one of Germany's most significant political responses to Putin's realism and leadership. Germany reacted similarly to other nations. These fines have hurt the Russian economy and forced Vladimir Putin's government to adapt (Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Energie, 2014).

Germany's cautious and sympathetic approach to Ukraine negotiations with Putin was criticized. Germany has also been accused of not pressuring Russia to defend Ukraine's sovereignty and international law. A constructivist theory of international relations holds that ideas, laws, and identities drive state behavior. A constructivist perspective on Germany's relationship with Russia before the Ukraine conflict emphasizes how democratic values and norms impact their relationship. Russia's aggression in Ukraine is not being contained by a democratic and friendly approach.

Alternative Strategic Choices of Germany in the Ukraine Conflict

Russia's realistic approach to the Ukraine conflict challenges Germany's leadership of the EU and seeks to construct a new world order with China. Putin's realist approach pushes Germany to choose between economic and security objectives, which is costly. The situation is dangerous for Germany. Because of this, Germany could consider several Ukraine conflict strategies.

Germany's first option between business connections with Russia and backing for Ukraine would be this. Being proactive about engaging with Russia and avoiding sanctions that could affect the Russian economy is one approach to do this. Germany's relations with the US and other Western allies would suffer from this stance. These allies want stricter Russia policies (Menon & Riecke, 2016). Giving Germany's economic relations with Russia more priority may indirectly encourage Russia's conflict actions. It may not be the smartest business option for the country during the Ukraine issue. If Germany keeps doing business with Russia, it may be funding the Ukraine conflict (Barton & Gustafsson, 2021). Since Germany imports energy from Russia, this might be a geopolitical weakness. Russia could utilize energy exports to influence Germany's military policy (Menon & Riecke, 2016). This might weaken Germany's defenses. Putting more emphasis on business connections with Russia might undermine Germany's reputation as a peacemaker and its relationships with other Western allies who are more hostile to Russia.

Germany might simply remain neutral and work for a peaceful resolution. Germany would pick this second. Germany's relations with Russia and the US may not be affected by this strategy. It may also be perceived as ignoring Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity (Barton & Gustafsson, 2021). Germany avoids the Ukraine conflict because it doesn't want to. This could affect the country's European and global leadership. Bachmann and Sidorkin (2016) suggest that Germany's neutrality may reduce its influence on European issues. Other EU countries with a stronger attitude to the conflict which Russia may share this view with. The disagreement mediator, Germany, may lose credibility. Germany's diplomatic influence and relations with neighboring countries may suffer. Germany may be adopting realist foreign policy, which prioritizes national interests over international law and institutions (Gvosdev, 2015). This could happen if Germany doesn't act strongly to stop Russia from harming Ukraine. Global governance institutions may not view Germany as a strong human rights, democratic, and liberal internationalist backer. This may weaken Germany's soft power. While a neutral stance may avoid immediate conflict and risks, it could have long-term costs for Germany's leadership role in Europe and its strategic position in global politics.

The third option of Germany is to pursue a more assertive stance to the conflict, by imposing tougher economic sanctions and increasing military support for Ukraine. However, stopping Russia's gas supply would hurt Germany's economy. Russia supplies Germany with a lot of gas. A gas shortage could devastate the economy. Total GDP losses in 2021 will be 4.8%, spread across 2022–2024. Uncertainty effects would largely contribute to the losses in 2022, as downstream amplification effects would take time to develop and become more pronounced in 2023. However, since 2024, German economy will recover. But, the recovery of German economy also depends on how Germany can diversify the supply sources of gas (Figure 7).

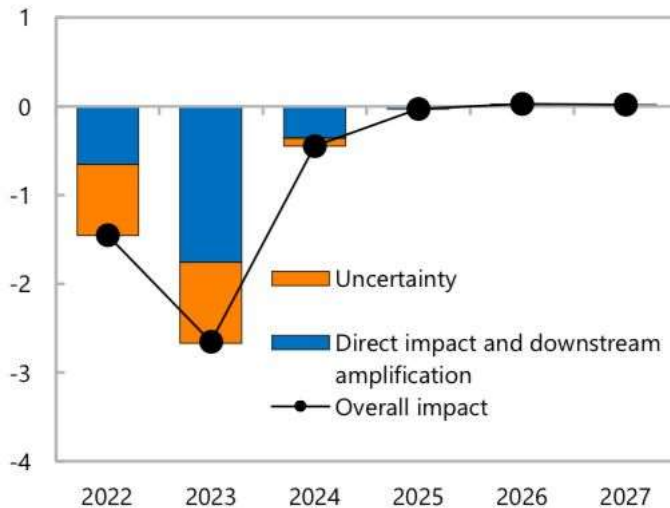


Figure 7. Shut-off of Russian Gas Impacts on German Economy

Source: IMF, 2018

This approach would align Germany more closely with the United States and other Western allies, who have been advocating for a more aggressive response to Russian aggression in Ukraine (Barton & Gustafsson, 2021). From a balance of power perspective, Germany may be motivated to seek a diplomatic solution to the conflict in Ukraine that is acceptable to both Ukraine and Russia, in order to prevent either country from gaining too much influence in the region (Waltz, 1979). Germany may also be motivated to maintain its own influence in the region, and to prevent any other major powers from becoming too dominant (Kupchan, 2012). In its relationship with Russia, Germany may seek to engage with Russia in a pragmatic and realistic way, based on a clear understanding of Russia's interests and motivations as well as wait for the regime change in Russia. Germany seeks to maintain the balance of power and safeguard its interests, so it may work together and compete (Mearsheimer, 2001). Berlin may benefit from using the balance of power theory in numerous ways to deal with Putin's leadership style and realistic worldview. It aims to safeguard its interests and principles, maintain the balance of power, and promote a rule-based international order with Russia. This proposal requires intense pressure to stop Russia from engaging violently in Ukraine. Russia's occupation of Crimea and support for eastern Ukraine separatists have led to US and European economic sanctions (Aslund, 2016). In addition to economic sanctions, others have argued for sending military soldiers to discourage Russian aggression. Due to the situation, the US and NATO have strengthened their military presence in Eastern Europe, according to Lemire and Riechmann (2015). They also ran military training with the Ukrainian army. However, some worry that applying too much pressure could worsen the situation and lead to greater violence. Some experts believe diplomatic efforts should trump military ones. To stop Russia from being aggressive, Nordland (2015) suggests combining economic, political, and military pressure. In any case, settling the Ukraine conflict will require a well-thought-out plan that balances the need to prevent further deterioration with the likelihood of it. Germany and its partners must regard Russia liberally and constructively to avoid supporting its conflict and aggression in Ukraine. Both are happening in Ukraine. This might involve implementing economic sanctions or sending troops to Ukraine to block the Ukrainian government from taking more action against Russia.

Concluding Remarks

Germany's strategy has been influenced by Vladimir Putin's leadership and realism. Germany has kept the balance of power in the region to defend its security and interests and prevent Russia from growing too strong. This is because Germany wants world power balance. Germany has been realistic and practical with Russia. It has also promoted a rule-based international order and protected its interests and ideals.

Germany has kept Russia's expansionism in Ukraine in check and supported peace and stability by maintaining the balance of power, backing Ukraine's battle against Russian aggression, and working constructively with Russia. Russia has remained aggressive in the conflict. Germany must remain realistic and fair to help end the conflict and foster peace and security in the region. This approach is based on balance of power and a rule-based international order. Germany can pressure Russia with sanctions or trade restrictions. This might contain Russia's economic and political influence in the region and raise conflict costs. Germany could send troops and other aid to Ukraine to protect against Russia.

Germany may collaborate with the US, NATO, the EU, China, and India to develop a diplomatic plan to address Russia's actions in Ukraine. These nations might use their economic and political influence to compel Russia to terminate the conflict peacefully. Germany shouldn't expect Russia to change its Ukraine policy unless Vladimir Putin has no choice but to cease the conflict or government changes. However, any strategic option of Germany must pay very high prices such as economic recession, energy shortages, thus Germany must find alternative ways to strengthen economic power for its sustainable leadership position in the EU and globe.

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