Russia – Ukraine Conflict: Clash of Interest not a Clash of Civilization
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ABSTRACT
This qualitative study discusses and denies Huntington’s argument proposed by him in 1993, according to future states having different civilizations will be in conflict with one another. The pragmatic accuracy of this claim can be evaluated by exploring the current issue between Russia and Ukraine that happened in 1914, belonging to the same civilization. This study explores whether the main factors contributing to this crisis were cultural or religious differences or a clash of interests between both countries at the international level. The core argument of this research is that there is hardly any evidence of Huntington’s claim that the conflict between the two states is because of a “Clash of Civilizations”, but Ukraine’s foreign policy towards international relations threatens Russia’s hegemony and political and economic interest. This research will also discuss the importance of stately heritage between Russia and Ukraine to make the argument clear. This research is made more comprehensible within the “Interest Group Theory” theoretical framework.

Keywords: Ukraine- Russia War, Clash of Civilization, Interest Group Theory, Huntington’s Argument, New World Order, Geo-political Interests, Cold war

1 Introduction
The transformation of the current world order is becoming more important because of new emerging geopolitical inconsistencies between major international powers which have a great influence on their new and existing national and international interest. Previous studies show that the main superpowers exert their influence by expanding their power and pressure on small and underdeveloped countries. As a result, this clash of interests of these major powers created a large number of crises in the world. At the end of world war military power was replaced by economic supremacy. In the contemporary situation, it can be said that geopolitical analysis of international conflicts has been changed by technology and information revolution which includes information weapons, war of information, hybrid war, and semantic war. Talking about the Eurasian Region, the civilization clash cannot be ignored. Such as the geopolitical situation of Ukraine is a main part of the inter-civilization conflict and the major factor in changing the world order for Eurasians in general. The armed forces were deployed in Ukraine mainly because of the clash of geopolitical interests of the three world’s central civilizations; the USA, the EU, and Russia in Eastern Europe.

According to Huntington clash of civilizations commonly occurred between the people or countries of different civilizations and religions. So, he argues that conflicts between the states of different civilizations are mainly because of their beliefs in different gods, p. 251. This favors Huntington’s argument that the clash of civilizations is the main reason for conflicts between the states of different civilizations which are overloaded, ethnically and culturally to intensify the inter-civilization conflict. The sense of his argument is clear because if cultural identity is the reason for conflict and identity is unchallengeable, then the identity of a person becomes more important than his position in conflict or clash (Barkanov, 2015).

The clear argument or proposition which can be derived from Huntington’s thesis is that in the post-cold war era, the most dominant international conflicts will happen at the fault lines of different dominant civilizations. But in my opinion, the major factors of global conflicts after the post-cold war are geographical and economic
interests rather than ideological and religious, as its clear and authentic example is the recent Ukraine and Russia conflict (Barkanov, 2015).

**Objectives of the study**

This study denies Huntington’s theory of the “clash of civilizations” by making the argument that the recent conflict between Russia and Ukraine is not the clash of civilizations but the result of the clash of interests.

**The argument of the Study**

This research discovers that the concept of a Clash of Civilizations has been replaced by a Clash of Interests.

**The gap in the Study**

This research explores that all conflicts in the world are no more because of a Clash of civilizations but because of a clash of interests, by discussing the Ukraine conflict.

**Research question**

1.- Is the Russia – Ukraine war a clash of civilizations or a clash of interests as Russia shares deep political, economic, and cultural ties with Ukraine?
2.- What are Russia’s Interests in Ukraine?
3.- Is Ukraine important for Russia for its international identity or hegemony in the world?

2 **Theoretical Framework**

This study is theoretically based on the “Interest Group theory”. The topic of the research can be understood through the lens of “Interest Group theory”. As Birkland (2016, p.158) explained that interest group mean a group or gathering of people and organizations who joined together to get their political and economic interests from the government or society. The voice of interest groups cannot be underestimated because their voice becomes stronger or loud when they joined in the shape of a group or organization. So, it is observed that interest groups are more important in the policy-making and decision-making process. These may constitute in the name of a political group, public interest group, economic group, and religious group with the only purpose to demand and get their interests (Mbah, 2021; Birkland, 2016). In spite of all these crises between Russia and Ukraine, the Euro-Atlantic Union, Ukraine resulted in an orange revolution between both countries in 2014. The interest of the Eu has also hardened the situation in the region because Russia considers it as a Domain of its National and international interests (Samokhvalov, 2007).

3 **Literature Review**

The main argument of Huntington’s thesis (1993, 1996) states that states having different civilizations have more conflicts and disputes rather than those belonging to the same civilizations. Huntington argues that the clash of civilizations aroused after the cold war because of several factors, collaboration and interaction among the people belonging to different civilizations, the arrival of western leaders and elite class in non-western states, and regional economic interests, which intensify civilization identity and revival of religious identity which replaced the national and local identity. But economic and demographic interests have changed the balance of power between the major civilizations because the abilities and status of Asian and Islamic states is the great challenge to the supremacy and domination of western powers, and this is obviously the clash of interest not of civilizations (Mc Faul, Sestanovich & Mearsheimer, 2014).

Huntington argued that the Cold War resulted in a new era where international politics was shaped by civilizational clashes, based on religion and that this would be the main factor in future global conflicts. According to Huntington religion is the central aspect that shapes the state's civilization and interests and is the greatest difference between the people of different civilizations. The issue of Ukraine is the best example of this argument, as Ukraine is considered a “Torn state” that has been fragmented between two civilizations; Christian Orthodox connected with Moscow and Uniate has sympathized with Western states (Huntington, 1996, pp.266-274, 165-166 & Barkanov, 2015).

The conflict in Ukraine is the recent outcome of contrary geopolitical interests related to the specific balance and distribution of power. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the concept of Unipolarity emerged.
Unipolarity concentrate all power in one state. In this context, Russia’s main concern is to prevent the entry of Ukraine into NATO which is definitely a great challenge to its hegemony.

In the recent global war of geopolitical interests, the western states are trying to pursue their interests by establishing new liberal and democratic values in Eastern Europe, using new emerging democratic countries such as Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova, which has weakened the influence of Russia in the Eurasian area. In this way, the USA has put great pressure on Moscow, while in response Russia wants to maintain its domination and influence on the post-Soviet states and to stop pro-western political and economic interests, especially Ukraine as it is one of the important post-Soviet states (echo, 2014).

Russia claims that Ukraine is part of the Russian Orthodox civilization, which by chance has become a separate state or region as a result of the geopolitical disaster that happened in the 20th century, as the breakdown of the USSR (Kondratenko, 2016). After its independence, Ukraine always wanted to maintain its sovereignty by aligning close relations with European organizations such as NATO and the EU (European Union). Though, Kyiv always tried to stabilize its foreign relations and its internal crisis. In Ukraine, the Ukrainian-speaking community is in the favor of relations with Europe and the west while Russian-speaking people in the East want closer relations with Russia.

In 2014, Ukraine became a battlefield when Russia occupied Crimea and deployed an army there to assist separatists in the region of Donbas in the Southeast of the country. It was the first time in the history of the world after world war two that a European country seized another European state.

Now, the state has become the front line of the new and transformed rivalry of great powers and will definitely dominate the global relations of superpowers in the future. Ukraine has been the keystone of the Soviet Union and the historical evidence of the USA throughout the Cold War. Ukraine was the second most populated and strong state of the Soviet Union's fifteen republics and was the hometown of agricultural products, with great industrial and military power, such as the Black Sea Fleet and Nuclear power. Ukraine was very important to the Soviet Union and its decision to split its relation in 1991 proved as a rebellion against sick superpowers (Cohen & Ewing, 2022).

In the previous decades Russia in coordination with Ukraine has been the major supplier of wheat, both countries provide almost a quarter of the world’s export (Cohen & Ewing, 2022). In fact, the war between Russia and Ukraine is the outcome of new geopolitical disputes between Russia and western states. Though Ukraine, Soviet Union’s previous republic, shares close political, cultural, and economic ties with Russia (Cohen & Ewing, 2022).

Russia called its interference in Ukraine a “Taproot of Trouble” (Pabriks & Kudors, 2015). This situation has raised the question that the contribution of Russia in Ukraine’s conflict has battered the trust of the EU and whether Russia is still a trustworthy partner of the EU or EU should reduce its economic relation and financial dependency on Russia (Mbah & Wasum, 2022).

4 Inherited Legacy: Russia - Ukraine

In the middle of the 16th century Muscovite state came into being and afterward in the 17th century Eastern part of Ukraine also entered into its territory. In the 18th century, Russia was acknowledged as Empire by Peter the Great (Rossiiaia Imperiia). Out of 140 million of its population, 44% were ethnic Russian and 18% Ukrainian, 11% were Muslims and the remaining were poles and Jews. Though the main language was Russian and Orthodox was the religion of the state, these were not essential factors for the unity of the Soviet empire. Although the elites of the state were polyethylene and multiconnection, these non-Orthodox and non-Russian Language acknowledgments were endured till the end of the 19th century (Kappeler, 2014).

After being the republics of the Soviet Union for seventy years, Ukraine and Russia became independent states about 23 years ago. The separation of Ukrainian socialists under the leadership of Leonid Kravchuk and Russian socialists under Boris Yeltsin from the Soviet Union against its president Gorbachev was the pivotal factor in the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Mosco together with Kyiv fought against the president of the Soviet Union. But the Russian politicians and people were surprised to see that Ukraine is now an independent state and not a republic of the Soviet Union. Still, the Russians did not agree to accept Ukraine as an independent and equal state. While the Ukrainian government was trying to establish its hegemony and sovereignty and wanted relations with Russia equally (Burkovs & Haran, 2010; Smoli, 2014).

Nikita Khruschev decided that Crimea should be part of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic, which was the part of Russian Soviet Republic until 1954, although most of its population was ethnic Russian. In 1992 the Soviet
Republic of Crimea was retitled as the Republic of Crimea which was the only independent territory in the area of Ukraine. The political elites of the republic formally favour the pro-Russian policy, as the recent conflict of 2013.

The importance of the Russian Black Sea Fleet is closely linked with the issue of Crimea. In the year of 1991, the Navy of the Soviet Black Sea was divided between Ukraine and Russia, and Russia had to acknowledge the sovereignty of Ukraine over the Sevastopol naval base. Though in 1997 Naval base was returned to Russia by Ukraine on a renewable lease for 20 years. But in 2010 after the developing crisis between Russia and Ukraine, the tenure of the Naval base lease was extended till 2042. For the Russian people Sevastopol naval base is very important and is known as the “Hero City” of 2nd World War. Still, the Russians are not ready to accept Sevastopol as part of Ukraine.

About eight million ethnic Russians are living in Ukraine which is 17% of its total population and Russian is the 1st language of almost 50% of Ukrainian people. Similarly, approximately three million Ukrainian people live in Russia and after the Tatars, the 2nd largest Ethnic Community in Russia. Though the Russian government always tried to use Russian-speaking Ukrainian and Ethnic Russian for its political purposes. Whereas the Ukrainian government hardly talks about the Ukrainian people living in Russia.

Discussion

The dispute between Russia and Ukraine is observed by some scholars and politicians as new geopolitical competition between Russia and European powers including the EU and US. According to many Russian elites and politicians, the divorce of Russia from Ukraine was a great blunder in the history of the Soviet Union because it is a great threat to Russia’s status as Super Power and its hegemony. Because of the Soviet collapse, Russia has lost its control over Ukraine and lets it go into the western circle, this is seen by many politicians as a great setback to Russia’s international status and respect. As Russian president Putin has warned US envoys that their coalition with Ukraine would be a “Hostile Act” towards Russia.

It is also observed that the main factor behind the invasion of Crimea was the fear of Putin of losing power and control in the home country. Especially after the eruption of anti-government protests in the year of 2011 and the change in US and EU policy towards this region, particularly Ukraine, because the US is determined to restore the sovereignty and regional honour of Ukraine. The US does not acknowledge the claim of Russia to Crimea and wanted to reconcile Russia and Ukraine by solving the Donbas issue through Minsk Agreement, which was signed by Germany and France in 2014-2015 (Masters, 2022).

For centuries Ukraine and Russia shares family relations and strong cultural bonds. Ukraine’s capital Kyiv is also known as the “Mother of Russian Cities” with great cultural resemblance with St. Petersburg and Moscow. In the eighth and ninth centuries in Kyiv, Christianity was transferred from Byzantium to the Slavic Peoples. For Kievian Rus, the prior Slavic state Christianity served as a presenter from which modern states like Ukraine, Russia, and Belarussian draw their ancestry (Masters, 2022).

From the above discussion, it can be drawn that conflict in Ukraine is the outcome of the renewal of geopolitical rivalry and shifting of the balance of power between major superpowers, particularly the emerging concept of Unipolarity which has become the key interest of major powers, after the end of the cold war and collapse of Soviet Union (Barkanov, 2015).

This research also finds out that before the cold war (1816-1945) states belonging to similar civilizations were more at the stake of war than those having different civilizations, which challenges Huntington’s thesis. Concisely speaking, this study reveals that the Post-cold war period (1989-1992), opposed Huntington’s argument that a clash of civilizations would be more dominant in the future, and states belonging to the same civilizations would not concern with the chance of interest war. Briefly speaking, our findings challenge Huntington’s and reject policies and arguments which were evolved from his thesis (Henderson & Tucker, 2001).

Finally, it can be suggested that as a need of time, European Union should rethink carefully its foreign policies, particularly in the region of the Easter neighbourhood keeping in mind the response of Russia to its relations with Ukraine.

5 Findings

During the research, it is found that the relations of Ukraine with the EU and NATO on one hand, and Russia and its economic and political partners, on the other hand, are the bone of contention between Russia and Ukraine. Russian politicians and leaders condemn Ukraine’s cooperation with NATO or its planning to join NATO.

This is an indisputable reality that Russia and Ukraine have a close cultural and religious relationship. they were very close to each other by having common East Slavic culture and common Orthodoxy religion and sharing.
common history for centuries. For centuries most of the Ukrainians had been part of Russia, and Russia was the most dominant region in the Soviet Union. Still, Russian people considered Ukraine to the part of Russia and the Russian nation. But Ukraine wants to establish its sovereignty from the hegemony of Russia. While Russia wanted to keep Ukraine under its control and influence. Russia is struggling to practice its hegemonic strategies through its dominant language and church, as Orthodox is the main religion in Russia and Ukraine. Again in 2013, Russia tried to keep Ukraine under its territory and to stop the amalgamation of Ukraine into the EU (Kappeler, 2014).

Huntington’s content of the clash of civilizations is more obviously opposed to the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which has deteriorated the world economy and it may increase the level of inflammation, which will definitely disturb the world order. As Ukraine has been the main player in the security order of the world. It is finding out during the research that the war of interest between Russia and western countries through Ukraine will shift the balance of power and the world’s security order from the USA’s unipolar period to the new rivalry between superpowers. This situation has created a clash of interests in spite of the clash of civilizations between Ukraine, the EU, the US, and Russia (Mbah & Wasum, 2022). So, it can be concluded that Russia – Ukraine conflict is not a clash of civilizations but a clash of interests.

6 Russia’s trade Interest in Ukraine

Both Ukraine and Russia are the largest trade partners, but even in recent years, this partnership has been weakening. Before Russia’s attack on Crimea, Russia wanted to make Ukraine its single market. As Eurasian Union, including Kyrgyzstan, Belarus, and Armenia.

7 Energy interest of Russia in Ukraine

Until the invasion of Crimea Russia was the great supplier of gas to Ukraine but it stopped the gas supply in 2016. Though Russia still depends on the gas pipeline of Ukraine to supply gas to its Eastern and Central Europe customers, and it pays billions of dollars as transit fees to Kyiv. In 2020, Russia was near to completing its gas pipeline,” Nor Stream 2” through Baltic Sea gas that will reduce important revenue of Ukraine. But still, Russia is planning to supply gas to its customers through Ukraine for more several years (Masters,2022).

It is found that energy interests, especially large amounts of Russian gas, are supplied to Ukraine or through Ukraine by Russia to central Europe. Russia used an increase in gas prices as an instrument for its political purposes because, since 2005, there have been continuous conflicts on the price of gas.

8 Russian Strategic Interest in Ukraine

In the era of Putin, the aim of the Russian government was to revive its earlier power and status. Putin always aimed to re-establish the status of Russia as Super Power in Northern Eurasia by invading Crimea, because Russia had maintained its complete control over the Black Sea. In the Middle East, North Africa, and Mediterranean. Russia can project a deeper power project by deploying great and trained military power. In the meantime, Russia is establishing its military and energy power with turkey in the South, another power of the Black Sea. In Donbas the strategic interests of Russia are brittle. By promoting political uncertainty in Ukraine there may be some interest unless the factors move in its favour (Masters, 2022).

In the early period of his government, Medvedev was known as his actual counsellor of Putin. Putin. He always favoured the military invention of Russia in Georgia and introduced a new term, “Sphere of Privileged Interests”, to establish its hegemony in the earlier Soviet Union. Even USA president Obama did not accept the interpretation of “Realism” by Medvedev and said in a meeting in 2009 that there are many common interests of Russia and the USA in the neighbouring countries of Russia. In the interest of their countries Russian president Dmitry Medvedev and USA president Barack Obama cooperate with each other on the Iran issue and Russia expand and provide the supply route for US soldiers in Afghanistan can travel through Russia. America also Helped Russia in getting the membership in WTO (World Trade Organization) and also aimed to cooperate with each other in every matter from counter-terrorism to Nuclear energy (Mc Faul, Sestanovich&Mearsheimer,2014).

9 Conclusion

This research finds, by opposing the main contents of Huntington’s thesis “Clash of civilizations that “the difference in civilizations is not related to the happening of interstate war or conflicts. It can be concluded from this research that states belonging to the same civilization are involved in the war, as Ukraine conflict, this relationship actually opposes the argument that Huntington made in his thesis. Though this study does not agree with what
Huntington said about the clash of civilizations, still we cannot disagree that civilizations and cultural values play a pivotal role in international politics. But it can also be concluded that they are not as important in the world's politics as Huntington assumed. Certainly, this research finds out that Huntington’s clash of civilization thesis does not offer new and favorable directions to study international interest conflicts and wars.

However, we cannot depend only on Huntington’s arguments that the clash of civilizations will be in practice over a long time period. Because Huntington's claim is that most long and vicious conflicts have been endangered for centuries, only because of a clash of different civilizations, while after the cold war, most of the conflicts between the international superpowers and interstate are not because of a clash of civilizations but because of the clash of geopolitical and economic interests.

In the post-cold war period, most interstate wars are closely linked with antecivilization differences. This research also found that the absence of ideological factors during the cold war debases the membership between interstate war and cultural civilizations. While on other hand one can easily reject that inter-civilizations, war is the result of intra- civilization association as overall affairs of state. Which has become the main reason for adverse relationships between interstate conflicts and civilization membership in the post-cold war era.

Generally speaking, it is observed during the research that there is a clear irregularity in the relationship between two states and different civilizations (Kappeler,2011). Russia considered itself the sole claimer of the Soviet Union and the Russian Empire, with abundant resources and a prosperous emerging economy. While Ukraine is a second rank state with inadequate resources and many financial problems. Even though the elites of Russia have recognized Ukraine’s sovereignty, yet, the Ukrainian people are not ready to accept Ukraine as an equivalent state and nation of the same level. Briefly speaking Russia considered Ukraine as part of its own territory.

It is explored during the research that the main reason between Russia and Ukraine is that Russia is Status quo power and wants to secure its economic and geopolitical interests and maintain its prestige and honour against European invasions and violations. It is also observed that the country has become the fault line in the new war of interest between great rival superpowers. We can conclude that this clash of interests may dominate international politics in the centuries ahead. So, it can be concluded that Russia – Ukraine conflict is not a clash of civilizations but a clash of interests. It is clear from the above discussion that international politics has entered in a new phase of conflict which may be called a war of interest, which many intellectuals called the End of History. This will be the return of competition between nation states from the disputes between globalism or among others.

Still, there is a dire need to research what would be the pattern of international politics in the future. it is found that the Ukraine issue is a multi-dimensional issue. Definitely, this pattern will take time to be implemented in the world, meanwhile, many emerging and old powers will shape the international political and economic system according to their interests. The history of the world has made it clear that the possibility of war is always there as the result of these competitions between rivalries. As a matter of interest, Kremlin never back off from the war even US imposed sanctions on the Russian economy because he thought that Russian interests are at stake. There was also the question of Russia’s prestige in the world. Finally, it can be concluded that loss of control of Russia in Ukraine would definitely mean, defeat in the geopolitical scenario, Putin and Kremlin wanted to tell the world that Russia still can defend its sovereignty and status even at the cost of Ukraine’s statehood. Regardless of all these vulnerabilities and liabilities, Russia wants to maintain its control to get its interest in Eurasia and will not withdraw from it because its core interests and advantages are under threat.

References


