NATO STRATEGY IN THE RUSSIA - UKRAINE CONFLICT : ANALYSIS BASED ON DEFENSIVE REALISM THEORY 2014 - 2022

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No material other than that used was contained. I have read and understood the university's rules and procedures regarding plagiarism.

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ABSTRACT

This research discusses why NATO was involved in the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2014 - 2022. This study uses the theoretical framework of defensive realism by Kennezt Waltz. This research analyses the dynamics of NATO's complex involvement in the conflict that has captured the world's attention, namely the Russia-Ukraine conflict starting from the highlight in 2014, namely the annexation of Crimea as a starting point and increasing tensions in Eastern Ukraine until February 2022 when Russia launched a large-scale invasion of Ukraine. It outlines NATO's position on the conflict, such as NATO's commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and steps taken at an early stage, as well as diplomatic and sanctions efforts in coordination with relevant parties.

Keywords: NATO, Russia, Ukraine, Defensive Realism, Invasion, Sovereignty.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The massive attack that Russia launched against Ukraine at the beginning of 2022 commanded the world's attention. However, far from that year, the conflict had already begun to flare up in 2014 (Walker 2024, 3). Towards the end of February 2014, an unidentified military figure, later confirmed to be Russian personnel, besieged the airport in Crimea, a peninsula in Ukraine with a majority Russian population (Arvi 2022, 21). Following that, pro-Russian forces seized the autonomous assembly of Crimea (Clinch 2022, 2). At that time, Ukrainians who voted for more independence overthrew pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovych. The pro-EU demonstrations occurred due to the rejection of Viktor's policy of preferring trade relations with Russia. The defection of Viktor has led to a conflict within the Ukrainian government, resulting in a division into two factions, pro-European Union and pro-Russian (Elad 2024, 5). The pro-Russia movement originates from the community and politicians of Crimea (Arvi 2022, 23).

Ukraine is equipped with a gas pipeline that spans its country, functioning as a transit route for Russian gas to be transported into European nations. In contrast, Ukraine's significance towards Russia depends not on energy (Keliauskaitė 2022, 12). As a developing nation, Ukraine also acquires strategic notes composed in Russian (Myre 2024, 4). Ukraine's Western power was held in treasury as a matter of Russia's security interests. Given the geostrategic and geopolitical tendencies that are significant factors in the Ukraine-Russia

relationship, Russia cannot curtail its influence in Ukraine and prevent Ukraine from aligning with Western powers (Deslandes 2024, 7).

Russia has made various efforts to reinforce its influence in Ukraine, ranging from friendly efforts to economic assistance to reunifying Ukraine through Crimea. However, this has led to multiple conflicts in Ukraine and internationally. This political policy was further exacerbated by the involvement of the United States and European Union countries in the conflict (Tampubolon 2022, 48). One of the bridges of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, the Euromai revolution, also deepened polarisation within Ukraine and led to demonstrations and seizure of government buildings by separatists in two regions, namely Donetsk and Luhansk. Therefore, the Ukrainian government launched an anti-terrorist operation (Ray 2024, 14). Until the very complex action between Russia and Ukraine gave birth to the Minks I 2014 and Minks II 2015, agreements conferenced and signed by delegates of several parties involved in the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, which took place in Minks, Belarus also attended by the host Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko (Allan 2020, 23). Although agreements have been signed as an essential effort to end conflicts, ceasefires are often violated. Conflicts continue with varying intensities, such as sporadic fighting, shootings, and ceasefire violations (Belkin 2014, 12).

Tensions between Russia and Ukraine peaked with the presence of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) alliance, which was founded on April 4, 1949 (Mosquera 2019, 34). They were officially formed in Brussels, Belgium, to overcome the threat of communism in Europe. The essence of the NATO charter is

the agreement of the signatory countries to build a collective defence (Mosquera 2019, 28). Jens Stoltenberg, Secretary General of NATO, plays a critical role in shaping the Alliance's response to global security challenges, including the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine. As the top diplomat and strategist of NATO, Stoltenberg has actively pursued measures to strengthen collective defense and ensure stability in Eastern Europe. Therefore, any attack directed at one NATO member state will be considered an attack on other countries (Ridgwell 2024, 26).

NATO responded to the conflict with efforts such as halting practical cooperation with Russia and supporting Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. By holding joint military exercises with Ukraine, NATO strengthens and enhances its defence capabilities (Ridgwell 2024, 26). Ukraine serves as a buffer zone between NATO and the Russian Federation, making it a strategically important country in terms of geopolitical influence and territorial disputes. Using this context, Russia considers Ukraine one of the geopolitical axes in the Eurasian region that conflicts (Sarıkaya 2017, 19). Ukraine is a buffer zone between NATO and the Russian Federation, which makes the country's position geopolitically viable to exert ideological influence (Störk 2015, 17). Ukraine is in the sphere of influence of the United States and its strategic alliances with the European Union and NATO. Despite the dissolution of the Soviet Union, NATO remains a solid alliance to this day, comprising 30 member states, including Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, and Romania, a former Soviet state (Shalest and Viktoria 2024, 8).

Ukraine is also the second largest country in Europe after Russia, while Russia still views Ukraine as an essential region with intersecting geographical

proximity (Siebold et al. 2023, 13). The most crucial action of NATO is maintaining deterrence, such as the *Enhanced Forward Presence* action. NATO's "Enhanced Forward Presence" was introduced as a strategic initiative to bolster defense and deterrence measures in Eastern Europe, particularly in the Baltic states and Poland. This program underscores the Alliance's commitment to collective security, aiming to demonstrate allied solidarity and readiness to respond to aggression. The decision to establish EFP was formalized during the NATO summit in Warsaw in 2016, with deployment beginning in 2017 (Miliušas, Vytenis, and Denisenko 2023, 72). This action reflects NATO's unified response to escalating tensions caused by Russia's annexation of Crimea and increasing geopolitical threats in the region (Saleh, Saragih, and Karuniawan 2024, 72). NATO highlights the importance of a diplomatic solution to resolve the conflict and urges Russia to respect international law and state sovereignty (Hester and Knudsen-Latta 2023, 6).

This thesis aims to comprehensively analyse the involvement of NATO in the Russia-Ukraine war in 2014 and 2022, considering many factors and features that have been thoroughly investigated. This thesis studies how NATO engages in intricate and ever-changing affairs in Ukraine, emphasising the difficulties and diplomatic difficulties overlooked by NATO member states. By carefully researching and observing facts, this thesis not only imparts information about intricate conflicts but also enhances comprehension of current international politics and security in a larger sense. This research will provide a valuable point of reference for the academic community and other individuals seeking to understand and address the Russia-Ukraine conflict in the future.

1.2 Research Question

Based on the background and description above, the formulation of the issue in this study is as follows: **How did NATO's strategy in the Russia - Ukraine conflict from 2014 to 2022 reflect the perspective of defensive realism theory?**

1.3 Research Objective

1. To analyze NATO's strategy in the 2014–2022 Russia–Ukraine conflict from the perspective of the theory of defensive realism, with a focus on the concept of balance of power and security dilemma.

2. To understand the implications of NATO's involvement on regional security, including Russia-NATO relations. Evaluate and emphasise the need for deterrence and defence in response to territorial threats.

1.4 Research Scope

This study focuses on issues surrounding NATO's involvement in the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2014 – 2022. The writer started the analysis in 2014 as the starting point for the study of NATO's involvement in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. In February and March 2014, Russia annexed the Crimea region, which

was part of Ukraine. This annexation came after a controversial referendum that was not recognised by the international community, a critical event that led to the annexation and subsequent conflict. This action sparked international condemnation and was considered a violation of Ukraine's security and territorial integrity. This event marked a turning point in Russian-Ukrainian relations and triggered a response from NATO and Western countries (Mearsheimer, 2014). 2014 marked the beginning of a series of policies and actions carried out by NATO in response to the developing situation, making this year very relevant as an initial guide for the study. At a NATO summit in September 2014 in Wales, NATO adopted measures to strengthen its security in Eastern Europe and support Ukraine more significantly. This includes the creation of a NATO Rapid Response Force and increased military exercises in the region. The Wales Summit reflected NATO's commitment to responding to Russian aggression and strengthening cooperation, making 2014 a momentous year in the context of this study ("Wales Summit Declaration", 2014).

In examining NATO's involvement in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, this thesis chose 2022 as the end of the author analysis for the research time frame. 2022 marks several significant developments in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict that provide essential context for analysis. Events such as full military escalation, changes in diplomatic strategy, and an intensifying international response to Russian actions occurred during this period. The choice of 2022 as the endpoint allows for a broader assessment of the impact of NATO policies and actions over eight years. It evaluates the effectiveness of measures such as deterrence and

defence implemented by NATO and how the alliance adapts to changing situations. Given these time constraints, research could assess the long-term impact of NATO involvement. In 2022, there was a significant increase in international involvement in this conflict regarding economic sanctions, military assistance, and diplomacy, indicating growing awareness of this crisis and the need for a unified response. NATO and its member countries have taken firmer and clearer steps in responding to the situation in Ukraine. NATO's involvement in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict can be interpreted as a reaction to the growing *security dilemma* in Eastern Europe, maintaining stability and *balance of power*.

1.5 Research Framework

This research uses the theory of defensive realism, which was introduced by Kenneth Waltz in his 1979 book *"Theory of International Politics"* to analyse how NATO's strategy responded to the Russia - Ukraine conflict (2014–2022) by focusing on *the balance of power* as well as the security *dilemma,* which encourages international behaviour in an anarchic international system (Waltz 1979).

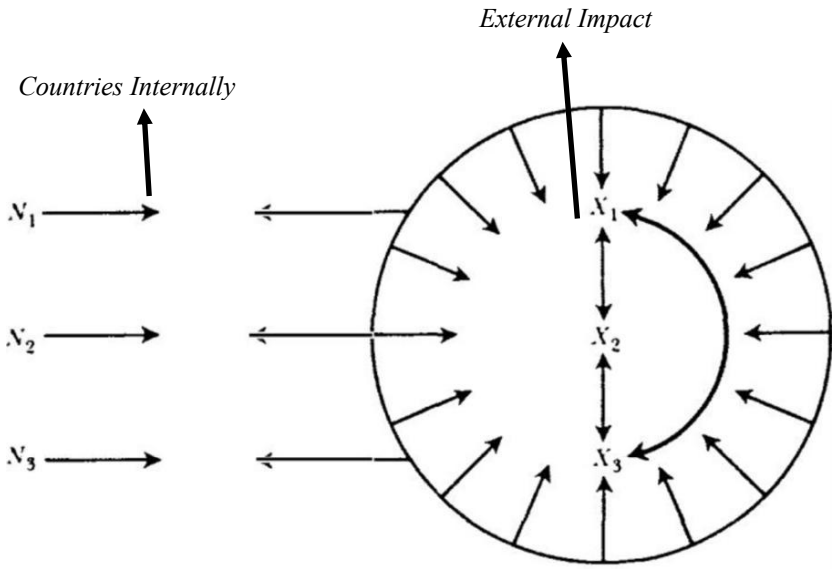
According to Waltz*,* the concept of the *international system of anarchy* and the structure of the global political system means that no supreme authority regulate relations between countries on the international stage. Waltz's concept of anarchy gives rise to self-help systems (Waltz 1979, 118*)*. That is, every country acts based on the interests of trying to survive and protect its sovereignty. In the self-help system, countries compete to gain greater power economically, militarily, and

politically. This is because countries are always alert to threats whose power is predicted to be greater and damage their security systems. System characteristics *self-help*. In other words, they are alliances and coalitions formed with common interests for security purposes (Waltz 1979, 103).

As Waltz's theory of Defensive Realism explains, no higher power can guarantee security or control significant actions like Russia and the NATO alliance. This creates conditions under which countries or alliances act based on the need to maintain their existence and security. In the case of the thesis, no authority can prevent Russia from invading Ukraine or regulate NATO's defensive actions (Morley 2014). Not even the United Nations or other international organisations have enough power to force Russia to stop its aggression against Ukraine or prohibit NATO from taking defensive measures. This creates an atmosphere where NATO and Russia act as independent actors who regulate each other with specific goals, as NATO aims to maintain the security stability of Eastern Europe due to Russia, which aims to keep its existence by carrying out aggression that destroys stability in Eastern Europe (Chae, 2024). The characteristics of the self-help system are formed in the NATO alliance with an analysis of how NATO responds to Russian threats, such as strengthening its members in the Eastern European region to provide military support to Ukraine, since no mechanism can guarantee their complete security. NATO acted on its initiative to maintain stability in Eastern Europe and prevent Russian expansion (Beaumont, David and Wihelmsem, 2024).

The *theory of Defensive Realism* is adopted to describe how countries' internal and external policies intersect. Waltz said that countries will make decisions based on their interests and security concerns, which will trigger competition between countries. To survive, the country must consider power and authority. Power can be regarded as direct and indirect (*internal* and *external).* Internally, power includes increasing state resources and capabilities, and a country can strengthen its economic strength, develop better military technology, and foster political stability and social cohesion. Meanwhile, external power involves foreign countries in building alliances and carrying out diplomacy between two countries on an initiative basis. To increase national security, the country can strengthen its domestic military capabilities (Waltz 1979, 100).

The image I: Realism Defensive Theory Operation



Source Image: (Waltz 1979, 100)

This thesis operationalises *Defensive Realism* theory as N_1 *Russia*, N_2 *Ukraine*, N_3 *NATO*: countries internally produce external impacts. X_1 *Russia*, X_2 *Ukraine*, X_3 *NATO*: International policy results from the influence of domestic policy (Waltz 1979).

Russia's internal policy (N_1) is influenced by the need to maintain the political stability of the former Soviet Union so that there is no domination by western countries. This policy ultimately influences Russia's external policy (X_1), namely by taking steps to annex Crimea, part of Ukraine, which is the same as the former Soviet Union, which intends to get closer to it. NATO and the European Union (Omay and Azizah, 2022).

After the 2014 annexation of Crimea, Ukraine's policy (N_2) focused on strengthening its security and military sectors to protect itself from Russian threats. Ukraine is also carrying out political and economic reforms aimed at Ukraine's aspirations to escape Russian influence. Of course, Ukraine's internal policy drives its external policy (X_2) by seeking support from Western countries, mainly NATO and the European Union. Ukraine establishes diplomatic relations with NATO member countries to obtain economic assistance in the face of Russian aggression (Syntsar, 2020).

The internal policy (N_3) carried out by NATO to maintain stability in conflict areas by strengthening alliances and collective defence by holding a NATO Summit at every increase in Russian escalation, which aims to be a forum for NATO member countries to strengthen the commitment to collective defence in accordance with article 5 NATO and formulating strategies against external threats. NATO's internal policy has resulted in expanding military cooperation with partner member countries around Russia's borders to strengthen regional defense capabilities that can limit Russian expansion. NATO also increases coordination with the European Union regarding cyber security and hybrid threats (X_3) (“Deterrence and defence”, 2024).

The concept of balance of power is cornerstone international theory, as it seeks to maintain stability by preventing any single state from dominating. Waltz states that a balance of power is established when consciously or unconsciously acting to ensure that no one country becomes too powerful. Balance of power is

achieved in various ways, such as forming alliances, strengthening military power or carrying out strategic interventions. Waltz states that balance of power is often applied to understand international power dynamics and global political stability. It is important to prevent significant conflict by continuing to intensify the balance of power between the major powers (Waltz 1979, 118).

In an anarchic system, the *balance of power* is an antidote to domination, meaning countries or alliances maintain the balance of power so that no single country is too strong to dominate (Waltz 1979, 118). Russia, which is trying to expand its influence in Ukraine in various ways, is considered by NATO to be a threat to the stability of the *balance of power* in the Eastern European region (Stemplowka, 2022). Thus, it is necessary to analyse how NATO acts or responds by taking steps to balance of power, such as strengthening its military presence in member countries that border Russia and Ukraine. The actions taken by NATO are an effort to prevent Russian domination in Eastern Europe, which disrupts the balance of power in the region ("Deterrence and Defence", 2024).

A security dilemma is defined as a description where countries arm themselves because of uncertainty about the intentions of other countries, with the aim of security. However, this action complicates the situation because this security facility makes other parties and countries feel it is a threat. Whatever and however it is, weapons and whatever the number of countries in the system, the country must face its security dilemma, which is not caused by the country's desires but rather the existing situation (Waltz 1979, 187).

In the anarchy system, the security dilemma of NATO's relations with Russia becomes the focal point of an increasingly tense conflict. NATO's steps aimed at strengthening the security of its members and partners are considered by Russia as aggressive actions that threaten Russia's interests or existence. In response, Russia increased the intensity of its military power, so NATO should also respond to any actions taken by Russia which ultimately triggered an escalation of tensions (Morley, 2014).

From Kenneth Waltz's perspective, the application of defensive realism theory to international organisations such as NATO stems from Waltz's understanding of the international system, which is essentially anarchic. Waltz argued that in the international system without a central authority, states operate in a *"self-help"* environment where survival is the primary goal (Waltz 1979, 118). This leads to a competitive structure in which countries must maintain a balance of power to avoid domination by other countries. As Waltz puts it, defensive realism emphasises that countries, including alliances such as NATO, prioritise actions that maintain stability and deter expansionist threats.

In the case analysis of NATO's involvement in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, defensive realism can be used to explain NATO's policies and actions as a reaction to perceived threats, such as NATO's military support for Ukraine and defence reinforcement in Eastern Europe, which can be seen as an attempt to balance power over Russia's actions, thus maintaining the balance of power in the region

(Ivasechko and Daniv, 2023). This response aligns with the Waltz principle that countries seek to maintain a stable status quo to avoid potential escalation or domination by a single power, in this case, Russia. Waltz's concept of the level of analysis in international relations categorises the dynamics of international relations into three levels: individuals, countries, and international systems. He emphasised that the international system level is the most significant in shaping the behaviour of states, arguing that anarchic structures force states to act in such a way as to guarantee their security and position of relative power (Waltz 1979, 61-62). This framework supports the understanding that NATO's response to Russia is influenced mainly by structural pressures in the international system rather than the policies of specific individuals or countries.

The *balance of power* and *security dilemma*, which will be described in the operationalisation of defensive realism within the circle of the international anarchy system, are relevant for analysing NATO's actions in its involvement in the Russia - Ukraine conflict 2014-2022.

1.6 Literature Review

This study describes several previous studies on NATO's involvement in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, using similar journals and research as a reference. First, research was conducted by Liana Fix and Steven Keil. The paper examines the implications of Russia's invasion and its relationship with NATO. It underscores a long-term mode in Russian foreign policy led by Vladimir Putin: militarism and

securitisation (Fix and Keil 2022). This is evident in Russia's increasingly militaristic and aggressive approach, allowing it to lead in global conflicts. However, the conflict in Ukraine shows the extent to which the military, security services, and defence ministry have taken over Russia's foreign policymaking (Fix and Keil, 2022). The author provides a balanced insight into the complications of relations between Russia and NATO after the invasion, considering historical, strategic, and political factors that affect both sides. They also underlined the dilemma NATO faces in navigating the challenges of maintaining a defensive posture and preventing further escalation (Fix and Keil, 2022).

Belkin, Mix, and Woehrel conducted the second study in the journal Current Politics and Economics of Russia, Eastern, and Central Europe; Hauppauge Vol. 29, Iss. 2, (2014): 281-304. The study examined NATO's response to the crisis in Ukraine and security concerns in Eastern and Central Europe (Belkin, Mix, and Woehrel, 2014). The authors analyse the impact of Russia's actions in Ukraine on NATO's relations with Russia and their implications for European security. The authors also discuss steps NATO is taking to reassure allies and partners in the region and deter further Russian aggression. The article underlined NATO's response and the briefing of military assets to Ukraine's peninsular region as part of the European Reassurance Initiative. The authors also discuss political, economic, and energy policies towards the crisis of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Totir and Scipanov conducted a third study in the journal International Scientific Conference "Strategies XXI"; Bucharest, Vol. 18, Iss. 1, (2022).

DOI:10.53477/2971-8813-22-43. This research examines the historical context of NATO-Russia relations, the causes of the crisis, and its implications for international security (Totir and Scipanov, 2022). The researchers also provide recommendations for crisis management and future conflict resolution. The research underscores the importance of understanding the root causes of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, such as Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and warming relations between NATO and Russia. The study also discusses the role of diplomacy, sanctions, and military action in managing conflicts and the need for communication and cooperation between the parties involved. The authors also highlight the importance of learning from past experiences and applying those learnings to current conflicts. The researchers also suggest that NATO-Russia builds trust, improves communication, and finds bright spots to cut tensions and prevent future conflicts.

The fourth research was conducted by Zofia Stemplowska in an article entitled NATO Enlargement Is Not to Blame for Russia's War in Ukraine (2022), written on the Europp Blog, reviewing Russia's claim that NATO expansion into Eastern Europe was the main cause. The author actually highlights that NATO's response to the Russian threat is more defensive in nature. Examines how NATO implements a collective security policy that is often misinterpreted as aggression by Russia (Stemplowska 2022). Highlights the influence of the security dilemma in escalating the conflict between NATO and Russia. This article is relevant to support the argument that NATO's steps to strengthen defense in Eastern Europe, including military assistance to Ukraine, are a response to real threats, not provocative

actions. The analysis in this article can be used to strengthen the narrative that the security dilemma is an important factor in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, according to the theory of defensive realism.

The fifth research was carried out by Paul D'Anieri in an article with the title. “Magical Realism: Assumptions, Evidence, and Recipes in the Ukrainian Conflict” (2022), which explores the Russian-Ukrainian conflict from the perspective of power relations between NATO, Russia, and Ukraine (D'Anieri 2022). The author shows how NATO's strategy to expand its influence in Eastern Europe triggered an aggressive Russian reaction, creating tension between the goal of protecting NATO and Russia's threat perception. The author underlines the strategic importance of NATO in maintaining the regional balance of power in response to Russia's geopolitical threat.

The literature reviewed in this study highlights critical aspects of NATO’s involvement in the Russia-Ukraine conflict while revealing gaps that this thesis aims to address. Fix and Keil (2022) analyze NATO’s post-2014 strategy, emphasizing the challenges of *balance of power* defensive postures with preventing escalation, particularly in the face of Russian militarism. Similarly, Belkin, Mix, and Woehrel (2014) focus on NATO’s reassurances and deterrence measures following the annexation of Crimea, underlining the geopolitical implications for Eastern Europe. However, their analysis largely overlooks the interplay between NATO’s actions and the security dilemma that underpins the conflict. Totir and Scipanov (2022) bring a historical perspective to NATO-Russia relations and

propose lessons for conflict management, yet their work does not sufficiently explore the theoretical underpinnings of NATO's strategic evolution. Furthermore, Stemplowska (2022) addresses NATO's expansion and its defensive nature, offering insights into how collective security measures are misinterpreted by Russia as aggression. However, the study underutilizes key concepts like balance of power to explain these dynamics comprehensively. Lastly, D'Anieri (2022) explores power relations among NATO, Russia, and Ukraine, suggesting that NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe triggered aggressive Russian responses. This analysis underscores the strategic importance of NATO but stops short of framing these developments within defensive realism, leaving gaps in understanding the security dilemma at play. By integrating these insights with the theoretical framework of defensive realism, this thesis refines and extends the discourse, focusing on how the balance of power and security dilemmas shaped NATO's involvement in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. It contributes a nuanced perspective that connects NATO's strategic responses to the broader international system's anarchic structure and the mutual perceptions of threat that fuel this protracted conflict.

1.7 Provisional Arguments

Based on the theoretical framework of Defensive Realism, this study argues that NATO's involvement in the 2014-2022 Russia-Ukraine conflict can be explained through key concepts of *balance of power* and *security dilemma* by operationalising these concepts within the circle of the anarchic international system. The author tries to show how NATO's strategy in Eastern Europe aims to

maintain regional stability and prevent Russian domination without triggering an escalation of the conflict. The author's efforts will include analysing how preventive efforts are operationalised as a presence and military presence with NATO members in the Eastern European member region, especially countries directly bordering Russia and Ukraine, in the hope that the author can understand whether the strategic actions carried out by NATO have succeeded in creating a solid barrier to potential Russian aggression, this is in line with the principle of deterrence in defensive realism, where the alliance acts to maintain the security status quo in the region. The author also seeks to analyse how the *balance of power* strategy is operationalised as a NATO collective defence initiative because the *balance of power* is an essential element in how NATO responds to threats from Russia, seen as NATO's initiative to maintain regional stability and secure members and partners who are directly adjacent to conflict areas by forming an effective *balance of power* in Eastern Europe.

The author argues that the *security dilemma,* which is the source of Russia's escalation, is increasingly tense; by proving this, the author seeks to analyse the *security dilemma* of operationalisation through a reciprocal military buildup between NATO and Russia. The concept of a *security dilemma* can be seen in the interaction between NATO and Russia, where an increase made by one party is perceived as a threat to the other side. NATO's response to strengthening its defences in border areas often provokes a Russian backlash to carry out further aggression. This cycle of actions – reactions creates an undesirable military

escalation and illustrates the *security dilemma* in the context of NATO-Russia relations.

Thus, through the concept of defensive realism perspective, the author argues that NATO's involvement in the Russia-Ukraine conflict is an effort to maintain stability and prevent unilateral changes in the European security order while at the same time facing the risk of increasing tensions due to the perception of threats from both sides.

1.8 Research Method

1.8.1 Types of Research

This research uses a qualitative approach method with case studies and data collection through analysis of documents, reports, and related academic literature—data analysis using the theoretical framework of defensive realism. A qualitative approach method to study NATO's involvement in the Russia-Ukraine conflict from 2014 to 2022 using the theory of defensive realism, the research will focus on a deep understanding of the dynamics, perceptions, and motivations behind NATO and Russian actions.

1.8.2 Subjects and Objects of The Research

This study uses NATO involvement as the main subject because the research focuses on the Alliance's engagement and response to conflict, as the subject to be researched. Then, the object of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and NATO's involvement in the Russia-Ukraine conflict include all actions, policies,

and strategies acted upon by NATO from the beginning of the conflict in 2014 to 2022.

1.8.3 Data Collecting Method

In this study, the author's data collection method to be used is a literature study, which is a research method involving the collection, analysis, and synthesis of data from relevant sources such as scientific journals, books, policy documentation, research reports, and related articles aimed at answering research questions, strengthening theoretical foundations and helping in defining research directions.

1.8.4 Research Process

The author's research was carried out by analysing all data related to NATO's policy strategy in the Russia-Ukraine conflict for 2014–2022. Identify and develop a research topic using the theory of defensive realism by Kannezt Waltz (1979). A literature review involves searching, assessing, and integrating findings from related literature to build a theoretical foundation and research context. The research methodology will be determined using a qualitative research type, NATO involvement as a subject, and the Russia-Ukraine conflict as an object. Design data collection methods and establish data analysis procedures. Carry out the prepared procedures for collecting data relevant to the research questions. Analysing the data was done by processing the data, which was sorted based on the theory of defensive realism. Interpretation of results by interpreting research results in the context of research questions and defensive realism theory and identifying its effectiveness.

Write a report or paper that summarises the research process, methodology, results, and conclusions by discussing the theoretical and practical essence.

1.9 Thesis Outline

This research is prepared systematically as follows:

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter covers the background, Research Question, Research Objective, Research Scope, Literature Review, and Research Framework. The theoretical foundation uses the theory of defensive realism to analyse the research topic. Research methods consist of research types, subject and object, method of collecting data, and research process.

Chapter 2: Dynamics Relations Russia - NATO

Chapter II consists of three sub-chapters:

Subchapter 2.1 Strategy Balance of Power NATO During Cold War, 2.2 Strategy Balance of Power NATO Poat-Cold War 2.3 The Annexation of Crimea and Russia's military capabilities. The Beginning of NATO's Response to the Conflict (2014) consists of two subchapters: 2.1.1 Chronology of Russia's Annexation of Crimea and Russian Military Capabilities. 2.1.2 The beginning of NATO's response strategy to conflict (2014).

Subchapter 2.2 Analyzing the Consolidation Period: Escalating the Conflict in Eastern Ukraine and Increasing NATO Readiness (2015 – 2018). Consists of two

subchapter 2.2.1 Escalation of the Conflict in Eastern Ukraine: Military Provocations, Nuclear Threats, Russian Hybrid Warfare. 2.2.2 Increasing NATO Readiness Against Russian Threats (2015 – 2018).

Subchapter 2.3 Full-Scale Invasion: NATO Strategy Reform and the Failure of the NATO-RUSSIA COUNCIL (2019 – 2022).Consists of two subchapter 2.3.1 Full-Scale Russian Invasion 2.3.2 NATO Strategy Reform and the Failure of the NATO-RUSSIA COUNCIL (2019 – 2022).

Chapter 3: NATO's Involvement in the Russia-Ukraine Conflict Based on Defensive Realism Theory

Chapter III consists of one sub-chapter:

Subchapter 3.1 Analysis of the Internal and External Policies of Russia, Ukraine, and NATO Triggers the Formation of a Circle of *Balance of Power* and *Dilemmas Security* in the International System. Consists of six sub-chapters 3.1.1 N_1 (Russia) Internal Policy and External Impacts X_1: Actions Driven by *Security Dilemmas*. 3.1.2 N_2 (Ukraine): Internal Policy and External Impact X_2. 3.1.3 N_3 (NATO): Internal Policy and External Impact X_3. 3.1.4 Action-Reaction Interaction of Russia X_1 and Ukraine X_2 in the International System**.** 3.1.5 Interaction between Ukraine X_2 and NATO X_3 : NATO Strategy *Balance of Power.* 3.1.6 Russia X_1 and NATO X_3 Aggression: The Main Factor of the Dilemma Security

Chapter IV: CONCLUSION

This chapter contains conclusions and suggestions.

Bibliography

This chapter lists all the sources used with Chicago writing techniques.

CHAPTER 2

DYNAMICS OF RUSSIA - NATO RELATIONS

There are three critical phases in Chapter 2, which focuses on analysing the chronology of the Russia-Ukraine conflict (2014 – 2022), constituting Russia - NATO relations. Changes in the cycle of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2014 - 2022 reflect how NATO's strategy responds to the conflict in the conflict, international policy and how it develops in the global system. The following is a series of reviews, the beginning of the conflict that has attracted the attention of the international world, including the NATO organization as a collective defense alliance, the conflict rooted in Ukraine is a real threat to security and undermines the balance of power in Europe which is analyzed in 2.1 Strategy *Balance of Power* NATO During Cold War, 2.2 Strategy *Balance of Power* NATO Post Cold War, 2.3 The annexation of Crimea and Russia's military capabilities: The beginning of NATO's response to the conflict (2014), then tensions escalated into a security dilemma caused by NATO's strategy and made Russia feel that it was a threat described in 2.4 Analyzing the Consolidation Period: Escalation of the Conflict in Eastern Ukraine and Increasing NATO Readiness (2015 – 2018)**,** mapping NATO's strategy, which was considered an attempt to isolate and encircle Russia and cause Russia to launch a full-scale invasion of Ukraine with The purpose of launching military operations into Ukraine so that NATO does not continue to expand includes countries such as Ukraine, of course it makes NATO feel more and more threatened by the overall geopolitical stability of Europe which will be analyzed in 2.5 Full-Scale Russian Invasion: NATO Strategy Reform and Failure *NATO-*

RUSSIA COUNCIL (2019-2022) analyzes the increase in tensions that occur based on chronological order:

2.1 Strategy *Balance of Power* NATO During Cold War

NATO played an important involvement in maintaining the *balance of power* during the Cold War. NATO's strategy focused on maintaining *collective power* to confront threats from the Soviet Union and the *Warsaw Pact*, creating a stable political-military environment in Western Europe. At the start of the Cold War, NATO served to counterbalance the power of the Soviet Union through a solid military alliance among Western countries, including the United States, Canada, and Western European countries. This strategy follows the classic balance of power principle, namely building a coalition to counter the potential dominance of a single power. This is reinforced by the United States' commitment to defend its allies with nuclear weapons, if necessary (Kaplan 1999, 54). One of the main pillars of NATO's approach is a nuclear deterrence strategy known as *"flexible response"*. NATO ensured that Western nuclear forces, especially the United States, would be used to prevent a major attack from the Soviet Union. The use of nuclear power as an instrument of balance of power prevented open conflict in Europe by creating high risks for both sides (Kaufmann 1990, 27). In this case, NATO imposed collective defense and a permanent military presence in Europe to ensure readiness to face threats (Snyder 1984, 126). During the Cold War, NATO continued to modernize its members' military forces through the integration of new technologies, such as missile defense systems, as well as intelligence collaboration to unite the Warsaw Pact movement. In addition, NATO supported its allies in various proxy

wars, such as in the Middle East and Asia, to counter Soviet influence without causing direct conflict (Gaddis 2005, 174). This step shows NATO's efforts to maintain the balance of power in various regions of the world with a comprehensive political and military strategy. Apart from military strength, NATO also utilized the economic strength of its member countries to fight the Soviet Union. With the support of the Marshall Plan, Western European countries rebuilt their economies, allowing them to support significant military budgets. This strengthened NATO's overall position and reduced the risk of dependence on the United States (Hogan 1987, 135).

2.2 Strategy *Balance of Power* NATO Post Cold War

Following the end of the Cold War in 1991, NATO faced significant changes in the global geopolitical landscape. With the loss of the Soviet Union as the main enemy, NATO promised to remain relevant in maintaining the balance of power in a multipolar era. NATO increased its role and gathering to face new threats such as armed conflicts, regional conflicts, and the influence of other great powers, such as Russia. After the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, NATO began to accept new members from former Soviet satellite countries in Eastern Europe, such as Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary, in 1999. This move was designed to expand the influence of the NATO zone and create a balance of power with Russia in the region. NATO's expansion strengthened the position of Eastern European countries in the face of potential Russian threats while demonstrating NATO's transformation from a defensive lie to a regional stabilization tool (Smith 2006, 45-46). Post-Cold

War, NATO played an important role in conflicts outside its traditional territories. For example, interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s confirmed NATO as a force capable of maintaining stability in Southeastern Europe. Through this operation, NATO demonstrated its ability to maintain the balance of power in regional conflicts by countering Russian influence in the Balkans (Daalder and O'Hanlon 2000, 102). Since the early 2000s, the rise of Russia under Vladimir Putin restored the classic balance of power dynamics between NATO and Russia. NATO responded by strengthening its military presence in the Baltic countries and Eastern Europe through initiatives such as *Enhanced Forward Presence* (EFP) following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. This move aimed to counterbalance Russia's military power in the region and strengthen the security of its members (Charap and Shapiro 2014, 87).

2.3 The Annexation of Crimea and Russia's Military Capabilities: The Beginning of NATO's Response Strategy to the Conflict (2014)

In this sub-chapter, to analyse the chronology of the beginning of Crimea's annexation, which will be the prologue of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. NATO's initial step was discussed at the *NATO-RUSSIA COUNCIL* (NRC) forum but failed, and then another strategy was set at the 2014 Walas Summit.

2.3.1 Chronology of Russia's annexation of Crimea and Russian Military Capabilities

The Maidan Revolution in Ukraine ended in February 2014. President Yanukovych left Kyiv, fled to Russia, and appointed an acting president and prime minister to take over power in Ukraine (Pifer, 2020). After that, in Crimea, pro-Russian protesters and armed soldiers without clear identification covered the airports in Simferopol and Sevastopol. Gunmen managed to occupy the Crimean Parliament Building (Pifer, 2020). They raised the flag of the Russian parliament, and pro-Russian members collapsed the government and installed Sergey Aksyonov, a leader of the Russian Unity Party, as Prime Minister of Crimea. On 6 March, the Crimean parliament voted to secede from Ukraine and join the Russian Federation, with a public referendum on 16 March 2014, with a result of 97% in favour of joining the Russian Federation. With this result, the Kyiv government refused, and the United States and the European Union froze assets and banned Russian officials and members of the Crimean Parliament from travelling to (Kryzhanivsky et al., 2024).

During Crimea’s annexation, Russia demonstrated rapid military capabilities, focusing on modernisation and hybrid strategic capabilities that combine conventional military forces and non-conventional operations such as information warfare and intelligence operations. Militarily, Russia has deployed considerable land, air and sea power in Crimea, which was previously the base of Russia's Black Sea Fleet (Rinaldi, 2024). Russia's power then was supported by

modernization of military equipment, including tanks, armoured vehicles, and advanced air defence systems (Rinaldi, 2024). In addition, the use of electronic and cyber warfare to cut off Ukrainian communications and the manipulation of media and information became an integral part of their strategy ("Russia to Modernize", 2023). This move allows Russia to secure Crimea quickly and with minimal risk. These forces prove that Russia, although still considered to be in the stage of military modernisation, is sufficient to deal with regional conflicts effectively, especially in operations that require speed and precision ("Russia will Modernize", 2023).

2.3.2 The beginning of NATO's response strategy to conflict (2014)

After the annexation of Crimea in April 2014, the forum *NATO-RUSSIA COUNCIL* held a meeting to discuss the crisis in Crimea. NATO, of course, strongly condemns the annexation masterminded by Russia. On the other hand, Russia even defends its actions on the grounds of protecting ethnic Russians in Crimea. The meeting did not yield a significant solution, and NATO severed all cooperation with Russia, especially in the military field (Iulian 2015). The annexation carried out by Russia is an aggressive action that directly threatens the stability of the *balance of power* in Eastern Europe, especially for NATO member countries because they are directly bordering Russia, such as Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia (Gardner 2014). Crimea is a regional strategy to strengthen Russia's military presence in the Black Sea, and this annexation increases Russia's ability to threaten countries around the border area (Epstein, 2024).

NATO's failure to negotiate in the forum *NATO-RUSSIA COUNCIL,* NATO declared a summit forum in Walas with the primary objective of this summit being to formulate a solid response to the security challenges in the Eastern European region especially in Ukraine posed by Russia's aggression, which is considered a violation of international law and the UN Charter. 28 NATO member countries and several international partners attended the NATO Wales Summit held in September 2014 ("Wales Summit Declaration", 2014).

The primary outcomes of the 2014 Walas Summit meeting and conference included NATO strengthening its support for Ukraine through various forms of political assistance and creating a military strategy to maintain the stability of Eastern Europe. NATO members agreed that NATO would provide non-lethal aid, such as medical equipment, communications equipment, and technology to detect explosives (Wales Summit Declaration" 2014). In addition, NATO also supports Ukraine's defence reforms by offering military training and defence capacity building. This support is intended to help Ukraine strengthen its defence capabilities and show NATO solidarity with the country that is the victim of aggression (Wales Summit Declaration", 2014).

2.4 Analysis of the Consolidation Period: Escalation of the Conflict in Eastern Ukraine and Increased NATO Readiness (2015 – 2018)

This sub-chapter analyses the conciliation period to understand how NATO reformulated its military-political and diplomatic strategy during the escalation of Russia in Eastern Ukraine, which took place in 2015 – 2018. Russia's escalation

reflects a significant geopolitical shift in the Eastern European region and prompts NATO to step up military reinforcements and reorganise its regional security strategy.

2.4.1 Escalation of the Conflict in Eastern Ukraine: Military Provocations, Nuclear Threats, Russian Hybrid Warfare

In 2015, Russia was increasingly seen as an existential threat to NATO. It began when President Vladimir Putin signed Russia's *National Security Strategy*, which formally stated that NATO's expansion and increase in military power in Eastern Europe directly threatened Russia's national security. Russia considers NATO an actor hostile to Russia and seeks to pressure Russia politically, economically, militarily, and through information (Miliušas, Vytenis, and Denisenkom, 2023). So Russia acted to increase cyber activities and hybrid warfare, which included propaganda efforts and cyberattacks against Western countries as well as support for pro-Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine. This threat is not only rhetorical but also involves military provocations such as military exercises on the borders of NATO countries and nuclear missile tests (McDermott, 2016).

A series of diplomacy agreements agreed upon by Ukraine and Russia, such as the Minsk I ceasefire agreement (2014), failed to give rise to the Minsk II agreement (2015), which failed again. This has led to deteriorating humanitarian conditions in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions, especially with the arrival of winter. Millions of people have been forced to live without adequate access to clean water, food, and medical care; the situation has been exacerbated by the damage to

infrastructure caused by the fighting ("Eastern Ukraine : A Dangerous Winter", 2015).

To carry out the defence strategy, NATO enacted a policy called *Strategy Deterrence Nuclear*; that is, NATO began to strengthen its nuclear deterrence strategy in response to the nuclear threat from Russia. Since 2014, Russia has used the nuclear threat as a tool to pressure NATO and European countries. On the other hand, NATO is increasing its nuclear readiness and military exercises to ensure that the alliance can provide an integrated response to nuclear threats from Russia (Ruhl, Gans, and Horowitz, 2021).

Russia routinely conducts large-scale military exercises near the borders of countries – NATO member states in Eastern Europe, such as Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, are the most significant of these exercises *Zapad 2017* (Sorongan 2021). The exercises involve simulating a substantial conflict with NATO, which raises concerns that Russia may be preparing for or testing invasion scenarios into Baltic countries or Eastern Europe. Exercise *Zapad 2017*, in particular, is seen as a severe threat by NATO, as it creates uncertainty and increases the risk of military escalation in the region. NATO considers these exercises as evidence that Russia is strengthening its military capabilities for potential aggression (Nurhariani, 2018).

2.4.2 Increasing NATO Readiness Against Russian Threats (2015 – 2018)

On March 18, 2016, the *North Atlantic Council* (NAC) issued a statement, "serious breaching international law and a *major challenge to Euro-Atlantic Security"*. In the official statement, NATO stated that the annexation action carried

out by Russia is a violation of international law, especially the *United Nations Charter*, and strongly opposes the annexation of Crimea carried out by Russia will never be recognised by NATO and emphasised that this includes *"illegal and illegitimate"* thus asking Russia to return control of Crimea to Ukraine. NATO fully supports the *"Crimea is the territory of Ukraine"* ("Statement by North Atlantic Council (NAC)", 2016).

NATO also increased the intensification of cooperation and support for Ukraine; NATO issued a policy called *Comprehensive Assistance Package (CAP), Enhanced Forward Presence*, *Cyber Defense Development,* and NATO are working with the European Union to work more effectively to meet the shared security challenges adopted at the Warsaw Summit in July 2016 (Niehus, 2023).

The Comprehensive Assistance Package (CAP) is designed to support Ukraine in increasing its defence capacity and pushing for military reforms to deal with threats from Russia. The program includes material assistance, military training, and support for Ukraine's security sector reform. The *comprehensive Assistance Package (CAP)* is crucial to strengthen Ukraine's ability to deal with complex security threats (Niehus, 2023).

Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) is NATO's response to power security in Eastern Europe by deploying multinational forces in the Baltic states and Poland. The move aims to provide deterrence against potential Russian aggression, strengthen the collective defence, and ensure NATO military readiness in regions vulnerable to threats from Russia. The importance of the *Enhanced Forward Presence* in the context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict is to ensure that NATO can

respond quickly to potential threats in the region. The *Enhanced Forward Presence* also powers cooperation between NATO member states and demonstrates collective readiness to face challenges from Russia (Noll et al., 2020).

Cyber Defense Development, which NATO intended to protect against cyber attacks launched by Russia, which have targeted critical infrastructure in Ukraine and NATO member states in Eastern Europe. This move also aims to increase NATO's readiness to deal with global cyber threats, especially those from Russia. NATO and the European Union are also strengthening cooperation in dealing with cyber threats (Efthymiopoulos 2023). Russia's cyber attacks on Ukraine, including those targeting power grids and media, are of significant concern within the framework of NATO and EU cybersecurity cooperation (Matishak, 2024).

NATO and EU cooperation, NATO and the European Union are working together in the face of a hybrid threat that has increased due to Russia's annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. Since 2014, the two have sought to strengthen cooperation in the defence field, especially in dealing with hybrid threats, including propaganda and cyberattacks. This cooperation includes capacity building, strategic communication, and crisis management to respond more effectively to shared threats (Gaiser, 2019).

In 2018, NATO launched a major overhaul of its command structure, the most significant structural change since the end of the Cold War. These reforms aim to improve NATO's ability to deal with Russia's rapidly evolving security

threats and increase the ability of alliance forces to move troops quickly across Europe ("NATO Command Structure: Factsheet" 2018).

NATO again held an important meeting, namely the Brussels Summit held on July 11-12, 2018, which adopted an increase in defence budgets by member states, the Intensity of NATO-EU Cooperation, NATO *Readiness Initiative*, *Cyber Threat Handling*, *Hybrid* and NATO Membership and Support to Partners (Lozarou 2018). The 2018 NATO summit in Brussels was held amid rising tensions between NATO and Russia, especially after an incident in the Sea of Azov in late 2018, in which Russia seized Ukrainian ships. NATO acknowledged the escalating tensions with Russia after the Sea of Azov incident and committed to strengthening support for Ukraine during the 2018 Brussels summit (Mills 2024). The Brussels summit emphasised the importance of maintaining NATO solidarity in the face of threats from Russia and ensuring that Ukraine continues to receive support from the alliance. NATO continues to support Ukraine's territorial integrity and increase military cooperation in the face of threats from Russia after the incident in the Sea of Azov (Mills 2024). At the Brussels summit, NATO reaffirmed its commitment to supporting Ukraine by expanding military and non-military assistance. NATO expanded military aid and training for Ukraine after the 2018 Brussels summit, including logistical assistance and non-lethal ways to strengthen Ukraine's military capabilities ("Brussels Summit Declaration", 2018).

In addition to military support, NATO emphasised the importance of diplomacy in relations with Ukraine. Thus, NATO encourages diplomacy efforts with Ukraine through cooperation in political and security reforms to strengthen

transatlantic ties and military interoperability. NATO is committed to improving strategic communication capabilities for defensive Russian disinformation as well as fully supporting Ukraine's sovereignty in the face of aggressive Russian propaganda (Berker, 2024).

2.5 Full-Scale Invasion: NATO Strategy Reform and the Failure of the NATO-RUSSIA COUNCIL (2019 – 2022)

This sub-chapter indicates that Russia has launched a full-scale invasion. Confrontational actions in the Black Sea region, In April 2019, Russia's Black Sea Fleet and Air Force, along with the fourth air defence of the Southern Military District, conducted a series of high-intensity warfare exercises near Ukraine's borders. These exercises were designed to counter threats from NATO and the United States, a matter of urgent concern. The scale of Russian troop deployment in 2020 has increased significantly, and the exercise scenario has become more ambitious and complex. This was demonstrated by a hypothetical attempt to encircle the Ukrainian joint forces Operation in Donbas (Bielieskov, 2021).

2.5.1 Full-Scale Russian Invasion

Russia launched a large-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, which shocked the world and triggered a broad international response to the act of aggression (Saleh, Saragih, and Karuniawan, 2024). During its massive invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russia carried out a series of military and non-military actions designed to take control of territory, disrupt the Ukrainian government, and influence the international community (Fix and Keil, 2022). On the first day of the

invasion on February 24, 2022, Russia launched massive air and missile strikes against various military targets and critical infrastructure across Ukraine (Saleh, Saragih, and Karuniawan, 2024). In addition to military strikes, Russia has also launched a massive propaganda and disinformation campaign to justify the invasion and influence public opinion, both at home and abroad (Atok, 2022).

Attacks on civilian infrastructure, including health facilities and schools, create a humanitarian crisis that has destroyed millions of civilian lives. Russian forces are seeking to target Ukraine's political and military leaders, including an attempt to overthrow President Volodymyr Zelenskyym (Fix and Keil, 2022).

2.5.2 NATO Strategy Reform and the Failure of the NATO-RUSSIA COUNCIL (2019 – 2022)

NATO responded to tensions in 2019 by holding a meeting at the 2019 London Summit with NATO adaptation strengthening the military presence in the Black Sea section, Naval Patrols and the intensity of regional cooperation with partners Georgia and Ukraine (Khan and Muthukumar 2019). The 2019 London NATO Summit was held to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the alliance, where global security challenges, including threats from Russia, were one of the main focuses of the meeting ("NATO Leaders Gathering in London", 2019). At the summit, NATO reaffirmed its commitment to collective defence amid new and rapidly evolving threats, especially related to the increased military presence in the Eastern European region. At the London summit, NATO pledged to continue

military support and strengthen Ukraine's cybersecurity to help the country maintain its territorial integrity in the face of Russian threats. Due to Russia's increased military activity in the region, Black Sea security was one of the main focuses at the 2019 NATO summit. NATO is committed to improving its regional naval presence (Melvin and Seskuria, 2022).

Tensions between NATO and Russia were getting out of control, so NATO decided to hold the 2021 Brussels Summit with the adaptation of NATO's strategy to deal with the rapidly developing conflict; the meeting took place during a tense geopolitical situation due to the increase in Russian activity in Eastern Europe and the Black Sea (Clapp 2022). In response to Russia's aggressive actions, NATO is committed to improving its defence readiness, especially in Eastern Europe. The focus is on strengthening military cooperation between NATO member states, especially on the eastern side of the alliance, to counter threats from Russia ("NATO's Collective Security Myth", 2022).

NATO strengthened its strategy and security partnership at the 2022 Madrid Summit to respond to Russia's invasion and support Ukraine by increasing military and humanitarian assistance (Mills, 2024). The 2022 Madrid Summit is an essential point for NATO to adopt a new strategy in strengthening collective defence and partnerships with countries in Eastern Europe, especially Ukraine, in the face of threats from Russia. This strategy includes increased military cooperation and the development of more resilient defence capabilities in the Euro-Atlantic region (Kecskeméthy and Sipos, 2022).

Responding to Russia's invasion in February 2022 prompted NATO to increase its strategic role in the Eastern European region by strengthening military deployments and providing a collective response to Russian military threats. This includes the addition of troops in NATO member states bordering Russia and Ukraine (Fix and Keil, 2022). NATO Supports Ukraine by Increasing Military and Humanitarian Assistance. At this summit, NATO reiterated its commitment to providing military assistance to Ukraine, including the provision of weapons and military training, as well as humanitarian support to help civilians affected by Russia's invasion. NATO also focuses on rebuilding Ukraine's war-torn infrastructure (Atok, 2022).

After Russia began its military intervention in Ukraine in 2022, the *NATO-Russia Council* lost its credibility completely. NATO is shifting from a policy of dialogue to a policy of collective deterrence and defence, especially in Eastern Europe, focusing on protecting NATO member states bordering Russia. At this time, the *NRC* is considered to have failed to maintain a constructive relationship between the two parties (Iulian, 2022).

As can be identified in Chapter 2, NATO's involvement in the Russia-Ukraine conflict has evolved from an initial defensive response to a more proactive and coordinated response with members and non-member partners, particularly Ukraine. However, to avoid escalating the conflict into a war between NATO and Russia, NATO is careful not to get directly involved in the battle. NATO's

involvement is also an essential indicator of the collective defence strategy and response to European security threats.

CHAPTER 3

NATO's INVOLVEMENT IN THE RUSSIA - UKRAINE CONFLICT BASED ON REALISM DEFENSIVE THEORY

Chapter 3 introduces the theory of realism defensive put forward by Kenneth Waltz in *Theory of International Politics (1979*). Waltz's theory emphasises that the behaviour of states in the international system is governed by the system's structure, which is anarchic. This chapter will explain how Waltz's theory is relevant in understanding the involvement of NATO, Russia, and Ukraine in the conflict. The focus will be on four main concepts from Waltz: the anarchy system, the balance of power security dilemma, and the *system operational theory* (Iulian, 2022).

Defensive realism is an essential approach in international relations theory, which focuses on how countries, including alliances such as NATO, seek to maintain their security within an anarchic international system. This theory assumes that the state acts rationally and is more likely to avoid conflicts that could threaten its existence. Thus, countries tend to maintain the status quo rather than hegemony, which could trigger more significant international tensions (Waltz 1979, 185). Waltz explained that hegemony is a great power that aims to dominate the world system by dominating other regions or countries, either militarily or by promoting political power to achieve international influence (Waltz 1979, 201)

In the context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict (2014 – 2022), defensive realism provides a relevant analytical framework for understanding NATO's involvement in the conflict. As a collective defence alliance, NATO views Russia's threat to Ukraine as a potential threat to European security (Naichuk and Markitantov 2022). Based on this theory, NATO's involvement can be seen as an attempt to prevent Russia's expansion of power that could upset the balance of power in Eastern Europe and create broader instability (Imedashvili and Siroky 2023).

The theory of defensive realism also emphasises the importance of a balance of power. In an anarchic international system, states seek to prevent domination by a single power (Waltz 1979, 119). NATO, in this case, acted to maintain the *balance of power* in Eastern Europe by strengthening its members who are directly adjacent to Russia and providing support to Ukraine. These measures align with a defensive logic that seeks to prevent a more significant conflict by ensuring that no country has enough power to dominate the region (Ivasechko and Daniv, 2023).

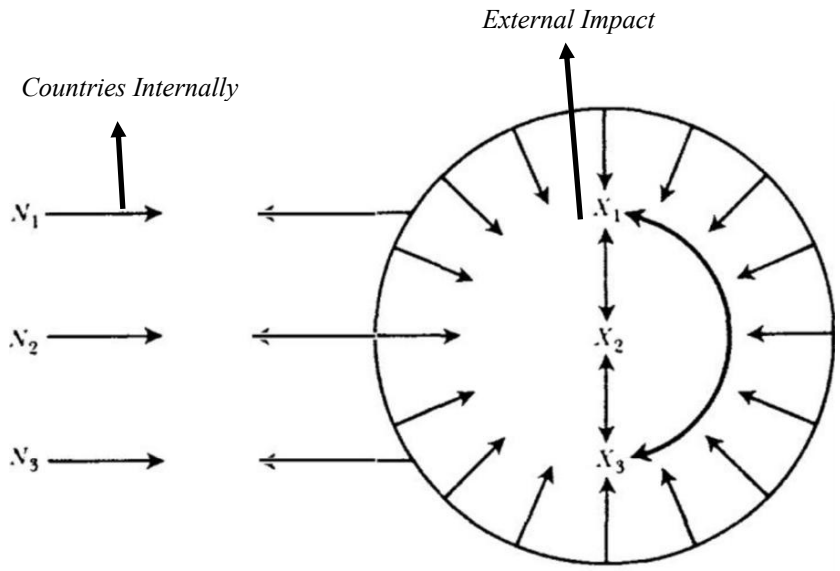
In addition, the *security dilemma* is also an essential concept in defensive realism that can explain the dynamics of NATO's relationship with Russia. This dilemma arises when one country or alliance takes defensive actions as a threat by another, which then responds by strengthening its military power, thus creating a vicious circle that increases the risk of conflict. In the case of NATO and Russia, the deployment of NATO forces in Eastern Europe, although intended for defensive

purposes, is seen by Russia as a direct threat, escalating tensions and complicating diplomatic efforts to defuse the conflict (Waltz 1979, 186-187).

The realism defensive approach provides an in-depth understanding of how and why NATO is involved in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. NATO is acting to protect its members and maintain a balance of power in the region, which is critical to preventing a broader escalation of European conflict (D'Anieri 2019). Defensive realism argues that countries prefer to take steps to prevent threats and will react defensively when they feel threatened. This means that, instead of waging war for expansion, countries will strengthen their defences or form alliances to prevent domination by other countries from maintaining peace and stability in an anarchic international system (Waltz 1979, 114).

3.1 Analysis of the Internal and External Policies of Russia, Ukraine, and NATO Triggers the Formation of a Circle of *Balance of Power* and *Dilemmas Security* in the International System.

The Image 2: Realism Defensive Theory Operation



Source Image: (Waltz 1979, 100)

This thesis operationalises *Realism Defensive* theory as *N_1 Russia, N_2 Ukraine, N_3 NATO*: countries internally produce external impacts. *X_1 Russia, X_2 Ukraine, X_3 NATO*: International policy results from the influence of domestic policy (Waltz 1979, 100).

Kenneth Waltz's (1979) *Defensive Realism theory* describes how the internal policies of countries (*N_1, N_2, N_3*) directly affect their external impact (*X_1, X_2, X_3*) in the international system. Each country acts as a unit in a system of anarchy on the global stage, where internal policies produce external actions that impact other countries. In the case of Russia (*N_1*), Ukraine (*N_2*), and NATO (*N_3*), the

internal policies of each actor create a strategic *balance of power* and *great power,* which will lead to security dilemmas as well as far-reaching impacts on the international stage, which then triggers a reciprocal response between countries (Waltz 1979, 100).

Waltz described the international system as anarchic, meaning there was no central authority regulating the behaviour of states. Each country acts on its interests in this anarchic system and is always suspicious of other countries. Countries seek to defend themselves and ensure security in an uncertain and potentially hostile environment (Waltz 1979, 115). Anarchy System in the Russia-Ukraine Conflict: Russia, NATO, and Ukraine operate in an anarchist system. No central authority can prevent Russian aggression against Ukraine, and NATO must act to defend the interests of its members as well as maintain regional stability (Lobell, n.d.).

3.1.1 N_1 (Russia) Internal Policy and External Impacts X_1: Actions Driven by Security Dilemmas.

Russia's internal policy *(N_1)* reflects domestic interests driven by the need to maintain its influence in the former Soviet Union, as well as rejecting NATO expansion ("NATO Expansion to the East" 2023). Then Russia enacted its external policy *(X_1)* with the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and a full-scale invasion in 2022. Are projections of this external policy reflect Russia's geopolitical goals to maintain its influence and deter Eastern European countries from approaching the West? The impact of Russia's external policies has involved a global response, including economic sanctions from the West and an increased NATO military

presence on Europe's eastern borders (Deslandes 2024). The Russians felt that within this system of anarchy, they were forced to act unilaterally to maintain their influence in the territory of the former Soviet Union (Waltz 1979, 126).

In early April 2014, conflict emerged in Donbas with the push for annexation carried out by Russia, as well as the autonomy of Crimea and Sevastopol with the help of Russian military intervention. Pro-Russian separatists and Russian armed groups succeeded in seizing power in most of the Donbas region, namely Luhansk and Donetsk. They proclaimed the *Luhansk People's Republic* (LNR) and the *Donetsk People's Republic* (DNR) (Kazadobina, 2024). The Donbas conflict is rapidly becoming a major international conflict and the most significant conflict between Russia and the West since the end of the Cold War, significantly influencing political changes and Ukraine's future. As a result of the war in Donbas, it is estimated, based on official statistics for each country, that there are 3 million refugees, 1.7 million internal refugees registered in Ukraine, and more than 1 million refugees from Donbas in neighbouring countries, including Russia (Katchanovski, 2016).

Russia sees this as a provocative act and a response to what it sees as a threat to its geopolitical interests. This has triggered an increased Russian military presence on its western borders, exacerbating tensions and strengthening the security dilemma cycle. The deployment of the missile system *S-400* in Kaliningrad by Russia is an example of a response to NATO actions (Loh, 2023).

3.1.2 N_2 (Ukraine): Internal Policy and External Impact X_2

Ukraine's internal policy (N_2) since 2014 has centred on efforts to get closer to the European Union and NATO and strengthen its national sovereignty from Russian influence. These measures include political and economic reforms and strengthening the defence sector (Adrusiv 2023). The external impact of Ukraine's (X_2) policy is that after Crimea was illegally annexed, Ukraine began to improve relations with the West, especially with NATO. However, it has not yet become a full member. Ukraine earned the *"Enhanced Opportunity Partner"* status with NATO in 2020, an essential step in strengthening security cooperation (Ivasechko and Daniv, 2023).

Although Russia continues to support separatists in the Donbas, Ukraine is trying to defend its sovereignty by increasing international alliances. Ukraine's foreign policy is increasingly focused on integrating with the West and strengthening support from countries such as the United States, which is crucial in providing military and economic assistance (Katchanovski, 2016). Ukraine has also secured support from the European Union and the rest of the international community to maintain its territorial integrity and accelerate post-war reconstruction efforts. In addition, the war has changed Ukraine's diplomatic identity internationally, with a stronger focus on sovereignty and democracy (Hester and Latta, 2023). Tensions are rising with Russia, which feels threatened by Ukraine's attempts to join the Western bloc. It has also sparked more significant support from NATO through military aid and security training. This reaction from

Russia to Ukraine's internal policy has led to a continued escalation of the conflict (Mearsheimer, 2014).

3.1.3 N_3 (NATO): Internal Policy and External Impact X_3

NATO's internal policy (N_3) focuses on maintaining its members' collective defence and stability in the Euro-Atlantic region. After the annexation of Crimea by Russia, NATO strengthened its defence posture by expanding its military presence in Eastern European countries (Williams and Lunn, 2023). The external impact of this policy (X_3) is an escalation of tensions with Russia, which sees NATO expansion as a direct threat to its national interests. In addition, NATO is also expanding aid to Ukraine, which externally created a more aggressive reaction from Russia in the form of a more intense attack on Ukraine in 2022 (Imedashvili and Siroky, 2023).

As an alliance, NATO is collaborating to reduce the risk of uncertainty from Russia's aggressive actions. NATO must act under the assumption that if they do not defend Ukraine, regional stability could collapse, and Russia will extend its influence further to Eastern European countries (Mills 2024). Russia's conflict with Ukraine, which has been going on since 2014, has made NATO countries aware of the real threat from Russia. The countries bordering Russia are aware, in particular, that in the event of a possible armed conflict between NATO and Russia, they will be the first regions to fall victim to a potential Russian attack. Faced with such risks, these countries are working to increase military security for all NATO members (Brauss, 2024).

3.1.4 Action-Reaction Interaction of Russia X_1 and Ukraine X_2 in the International System

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine began when Russia illegally took control of the Crimean Peninsula after Euromaidan protests in Ukraine that toppled pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovych (Ray, 2024). The international community does not recognise this annexation and has triggered international sanctions against Russia. Russia claims that the referendum held in Crimea shows excellent support for joining Russia, although the result is widely disputed by many countries and international organisations (D'Anieri, 2019).

After Crimea, the conflict spread to the Donbas region, where pro-Russian separatists, with military support from Russia, waged fighting against Ukrainian government forces. Despite several diplomatic efforts, including the signing of the Minsk I and II Agreements, the violence continued, with thousands killed and millions more displaced. Russia denies direct involvement, but evidence suggests it is providing military and logistical assistance to pro-Russian separatist groups (Katchanovski, 2016).

Tensions continue towards the 2022 invasion, tensions continue to rise, with Russia maintaining its military presence on Ukraine's borders. At the end of 2021, Russia mobilised tens of thousands of troops on Ukraine's borders, sparking international fears of a full-scale invasion. Despite diplomatic efforts by various countries, Russia's invasion finally began in February 2022, marking a significant escalation in the eight-year-old conflict (Clinch, 2022). Overall, interactions

between Russia and Ukraine during this period have been dominated by military confrontations, international sanctions, and significant changes in geopolitical relations, with Ukraine increasingly oriented towards the West in response to Russian aggression (Mearsheimer, 2014).

3.1.5 Interaction between Ukraine X_2 and NATO X_3 : NATO Strategy *Balance of Power*

One of the main principles in Waltz's theory is a *balance of power*. Countries are trying to defend the *balance of power* to avoid domination by more powerful countries. When a powerful country, such as Russia, shows signs of excessive expansion or increased power, other countries try to balance that power through alliances or increased military capabilities (Waltz 1979, 103). The increased threat from Russia makes Ukraine (X_2) increasingly dependent on NATO for military and political support. NATO responded by expanding military assistance and implementing strategies to reduce Russian influence. Ukraine's policy to join NATO and the European Union escalated regional tensions and triggered a harsher response from Russia (Mearsheimer, 2014).

After the annexation of Crimea in 2014, NATO adopted a policy to strengthen collective defence in the Eastern European region. Military strategy: NATO creates a strategy Readiness Action Plan, which includes two primary elements: the steps *assurance and adaptation measures*. *Assurance measures* involve a rotating air, land, and sea presence in NATO's eastern regions, such as

Poland and the Baltic states, to guarantee security to members on the front lines (Wales Summit Declaration", 2014).

Adaptation strategy measures include the NATO capacity-building *NATO Response Force* (NRF). NATO formed the *Very High Readiness Joint Task Force*, designed to move within 48 hours to face the Russian threat. The *Very High Readiness Joint Task Force* comprises 5,000 soldiers and operates as a rapid response force for emergencies in the Eastern European region ("NATO Response Force,", n.d.).

The *Readiness Action Plan* also strengthened military infrastructure in Eastern European countries by establishing *NATO Force Integration Units* (NFIUs), a logistics and coordination centre for NATO troops (Šešelgytė 2024). The *Readiness Action Plan* is designed to ensure that NATO can move quickly and efficiently in the face of any threat to member states in the eastern part of the alliance. The success of the *Readiness Action Plan* lies in NATO's ability to adapt its ground forces, coordinate multinational manoeuvres, and guarantee that troops are ready to be deployed in a short time (Šešelgytė, 2024).

NATO did not implement the *Readiness Action Plan* directly in Ukraine due to the risk of a more significant escalation of the conflict with Russia, as well as the need to protect NATO alliance members in Eastern Europe that directly border conflict areas. Russia has warned that NATO's military presence in Ukraine would be seen as a provocation and could lead to a confrontation between NATO and

Russia, which could escalate into a large-scale conflict. NATO wants to avoid a confrontation with Russia, which could lead to a nuclear escalation or a significant war in Eastern Europe (Younis, n.d.).

These steps include *Enhanced Forward Presence* in the Baltic and Poland and increased military cooperation with Ukraine to ensure Russia cannot expand its influence further. This is a classic example of NATO's efforts to balance Russian regional power. NATO gradually strengthened its position by deploying troops, forming battle groups, and improving interoperability between its members (Noll, Bojang, and Rietjens 2021). The move also includes increasing member-state defence budgets to deal with Russian threats. Focusing on Strengthening Regional Engagement, NATO member states agreed to increase regional engagement with countries in Eastern Europe, including Ukraine, to strengthen cybersecurity, military, and economic cooperation to anticipate threats from Russia. This strategy includes increased military training and logistical support for Ukraine and countries on Russia's borders (Rublovskis, 2023).

3.I.6 Russia X_1 and NATO X_3 Aggression: The Main Factor of the *Dilemma Security*

A *security dilemma* is a fundamental concept in international relations. It occurs when defensive actions by one country or alliance intended to enhance its security are perceived as a threat by another. When one country increases its military power or strengthens its alliance, the other may feel threatened and respond similarly. This creates an action-reaction cycle that not only increases tensions but

also has the potential to trigger a more significant conflict, even if the initial intention of each side is defensive (Waltz 1979, 186).

The buildup of Russian military troops with increasingly high intensity in 2021 in Belarus is a strategic point because it is very close to the Ukrainian border, with a total of 100,000 - 190,000 military personnel consisting of tanks, artillery weapons, air support, and sea support (Elliot 2024). Increased Military Activity on Ukraine's Borders: at the end of 2021, Russia began deploying more than a hundred thousand troops on its border with Ukraine, creating a significant threat to NATO's regional stability and security. This mobilisation reinforces concerns that Russia plans to expand its influence in the Eastern European region and directly threaten NATO member states in the area (Younis, n.d.).

Russia also stepped up its nuclear rhetoric in 2021. Russia is using its nuclear arsenal as a tool to pressure NATO countries, threatening European stability by maintaining the ability to launch nuclear strikes as part of its defence strategy. This places Russia as a direct threat to the security of NATO member states (Younis n.d.). NATO and its involvement in the *security dilemma*: NATO sees the increase in Russian military power as a direct threat, increasing the deployment of their troops and military capabilities in the border areas (Podilskyi et al. 2022). Instead, Russia considers this action an aggressive step, strengthening the security dilemma between the two sides and finally culminating in the invasion in 2022. The full-scale invasion event being the result of this research in any way, NATO will always be considered an existential threat to Russia.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

4.1 Conclusion

Analysis of the NATO-Russia-Ukraine conflict underlines NATO's important role in security in Europe through the principles of defensive realism. NATO's involvement in this conflict reflects its commitment to maintaining the regional balance of power and protecting its member states from potential Russian aggression. Despite its aggressive intentions, NATO's actions—including the deployment of troops in Eastern Europe, increased military readiness, and support for Ukraine—have increased tensions, highlighting the complexity of collective security efforts in a multipolar world.

This thesis shows that the strategy implemented by NATO, which has a concept of defensive realism, strengthens NATO's position as a counterbalance to Russian influence in the Eastern European region. However, this engagement has fueled a security dilemma, where each defensive move appears threatening to the other party, thus exacerbating the cycle of escalation. Ultimately, this ongoing conflict shows how NATO and Russia's strategic decisions affect regional stability and the broader international security framework. It can be concluded from the analysis of NATO's strategic involvement in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which started in 2014 and resulted in a full-scale escalation by Russia against Ukraine in 2022.

4.2 Recommendations

Based on research findings, the following are recommendations for future research :

1. Strengthening Diplomatic Relations

NATO and its member countries should also focus on diplomatic efforts with Russia to reduce tensions by building mechanisms with clear and sustainable objectives to facilitate mutual suspicion and create a path for conflict de-escalation.

2. Review Military Strategy

Review military strategy. NATO must take these steps to ensure a more stable and secure Eastern Europe.

3. Increasing European Strategic Autonomy

Increasing European strategic autonomy, it is the responsibility of NATO member countries in the European Region to lead efforts to achieve greater strategic autonomy. This will create more balanced defence conditions and help avoid antagonism in the European Region.

4. Implement a Trust Building Steps System

Russia and NATO can engage in measures to build mutual trust and transparency in military activities to reduce the risk of accidental confrontation.

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