



# UNC Conflict Research and Ukraine-Russia War Overview

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POLI 150

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- UNC Conflict Research
- Overview of Ukraine-Russia War
- Theory application



## Central Question

What conflict research has been published recently at UNC? How can we apply class concepts to the Russia-Ukraine war?



# Key Terms

- Market power politics
- Strategic delay
- Grey zone tactics
- Salami expansion
- Petrodollar system



Group yourselves and answer the following:

- What was their main point?
- Why might states want to expand their territorial reach?
- What can prevent them from doing so?
- What strategies can states pursue to expand their territorial reach and market power?



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- **Market power politics theory argues that competition for market power gives states incentives to expand their territory or prevent other states from expanding.**
- However, since WWII, a norm of international respect for settled borders has (generally) prevailed.
- This may lead to constraints on a state's actions.



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- If a state's goal is to expand its market power by expanding its territorial control, what might constrain its actions? Two factors:
- **Economic interdependence:** sufficient dependence on a globalized economy, which would be disrupted by open conflict, can dissuade states from open conflict.
- **International institutions:** states may anticipate that the dispute resolution mechanisms would lead to an outcome that would be suboptimal from a domestic political standpoint.



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- In these cases, states can use a tactic of **strategic delay**.



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  - These tactics let states slowly pursue their territorial claims over time, while avoiding major armed conflict.
  - Grey zone tactics frequently involve **salami expansion:** small, cumulative steps each of which is too minor to fight over, but at their culmination leads to an outcome that would have triggered conflict if carried out all at once.



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- This is desirable for several reasons:
  - Increased state revenue
  - Domestic political stability (if resource is vital for daily life)
  - International bargaining power
- This theory focuses on "hard commodities," which are natural resources like oil, gas, or rare minerals.



Group yourselves and answer the following:

- What was his main point?
- What is the relationship between the host state and the US?
- What is the relationship between the host state and the terrorists?
- What effect does US military aid have on terrorism?



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- Why? One consequence of the US going off the gold standard in the 1970s.



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- Given the economic benefits of a strong dollar, this means the US has rational incentives to protect such an economic system.
- This can involve the US sending military aid to oil producers ("host states") to ensure their security, as a destabilized or failed state will no longer participate in the global petrodollar system.



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  - **If the terrorism stops, so does the flow of aid.**
- This aid strengthens the government such that its leaders are able to stay in power (particularistic benefits), while the costs of an ongoing terrorism campaign are borne by the general population.



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- In response to any threatened decrease in aid, the host state can argue that it is in America's economic interest to keep the state functional, as this way its participation in the petrodollar system continues.



## Formal Model: The Take-Away

- US military aid for fighting terrorism does not actually decrease the amount of terrorism, but instead prolongs it, while also serving US interests in stability of the petrodollar system.



# Ukraine-Russia War





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- US and allies imposed sanctions on Russia in retaliation.
- This creates a low-level conflict that continued until late February 2022, with tensions rising as Russian troops massed on the border.
- Russia invades on February 24, 2022.



# Basic Map 1: Pre-War Boundaries



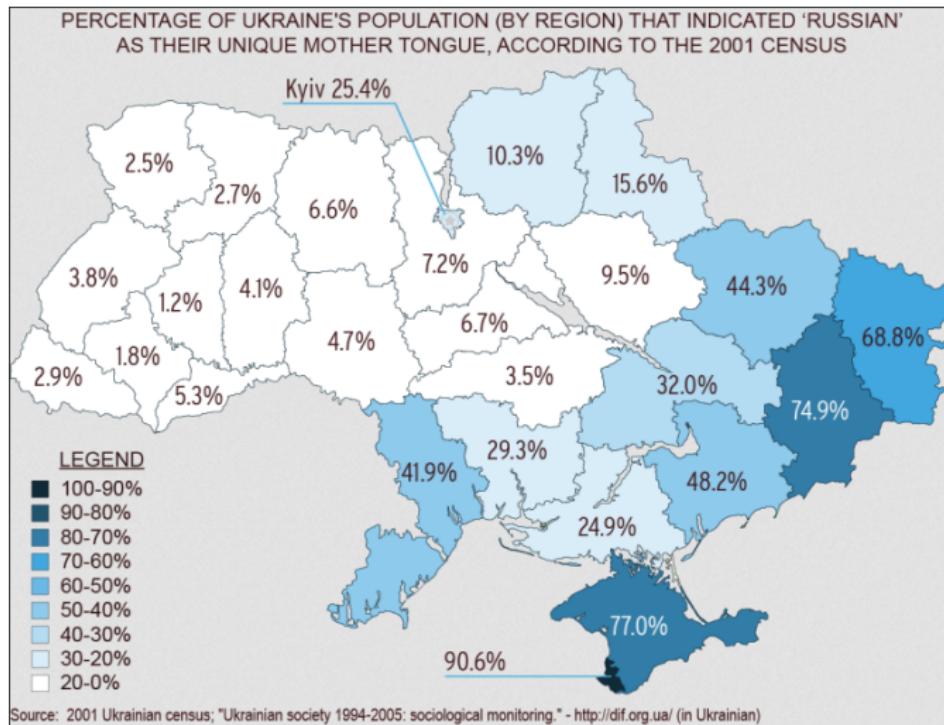


## Basic Map 2: Soviet Bloc



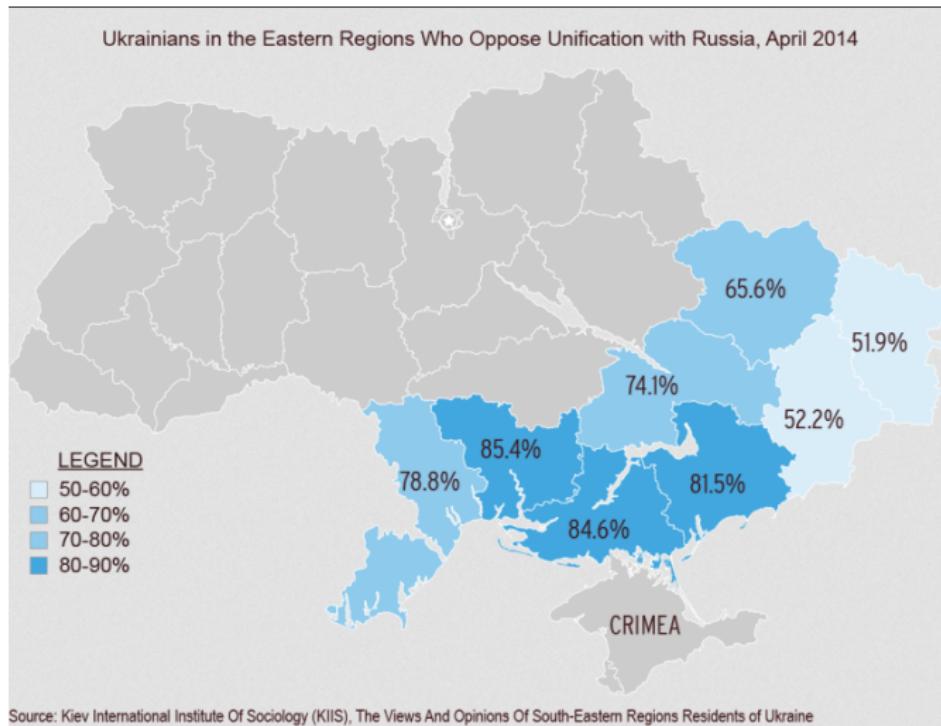


# Basic Map 3: Russian as Unique Language





# Basic Map 4: Russian Unification Poll





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  - This does not mean that this conflict divides by linguistic lines, as plenty of Ukrainians in the western areas also speak Russian.
  - Out of the entirety of Ukraine, however, the most likely place for a pro-Russian rebellion would be in the eastern part of the country.



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  - This effort would be threatened by a Ukraine that shifted its foreign policy stance to more firmly align with Western Europe, which is exactly what was happening after 2014.



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- Finally, Putin appears to see this as a way to stop the spread of NATO's influence.
  - Backfired as NATO invited Sweden and Finland to join, while Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, and Ukraine have all declared interest in joining...



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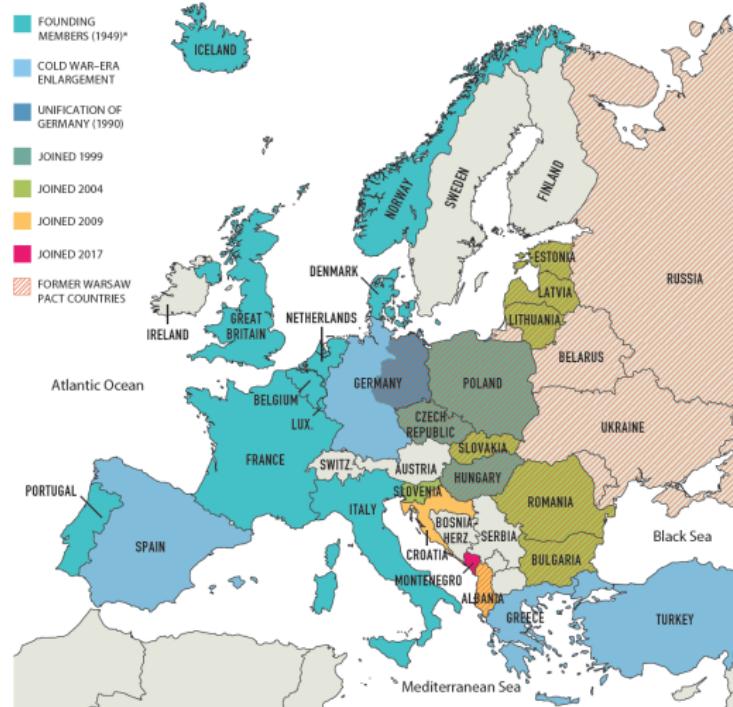
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- However, the last 30 years have seen increasing ties between NATO member states and Ukraine. In particular, their security cooperation has steadily grown.
- More recently (2017 onwards), joining NATO is an explicit goal of Ukraine's foreign policy.
- Recall NATO's post-Cold War expansion...



# NATO Global Membership

*NATO Expansion, 1949–2017*



\* NATO members also include the United States and Canada



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- What does this expansion look like? **Like NATO is encircling Russia.**
- In particular, note how it has absorbed several former Warsaw Pact states.
- In a realist, security-oriented view of the world, Putin's conclusion that this is an attempt to limit Russian power and influence is not an unreasonable one (setting aside the question of whether it is correct).



# Low-Level Conflict in Ukraine

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- Conflict was characterized by many short-lived ceasefires.



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- Most notably, he has demanded NATO cease its eastern expansion and never admit Ukraine as a member.
- If the US had accepted these demands, it would have been a clear infringement on its sovereignty.
- Meanwhile, Ukraine received some supplies from allies (including NATO countries like Turkey) while Biden sent 3,000 US troops to NATO allies.
  - Biden said that the US would *not* be sending troops to Ukraine.



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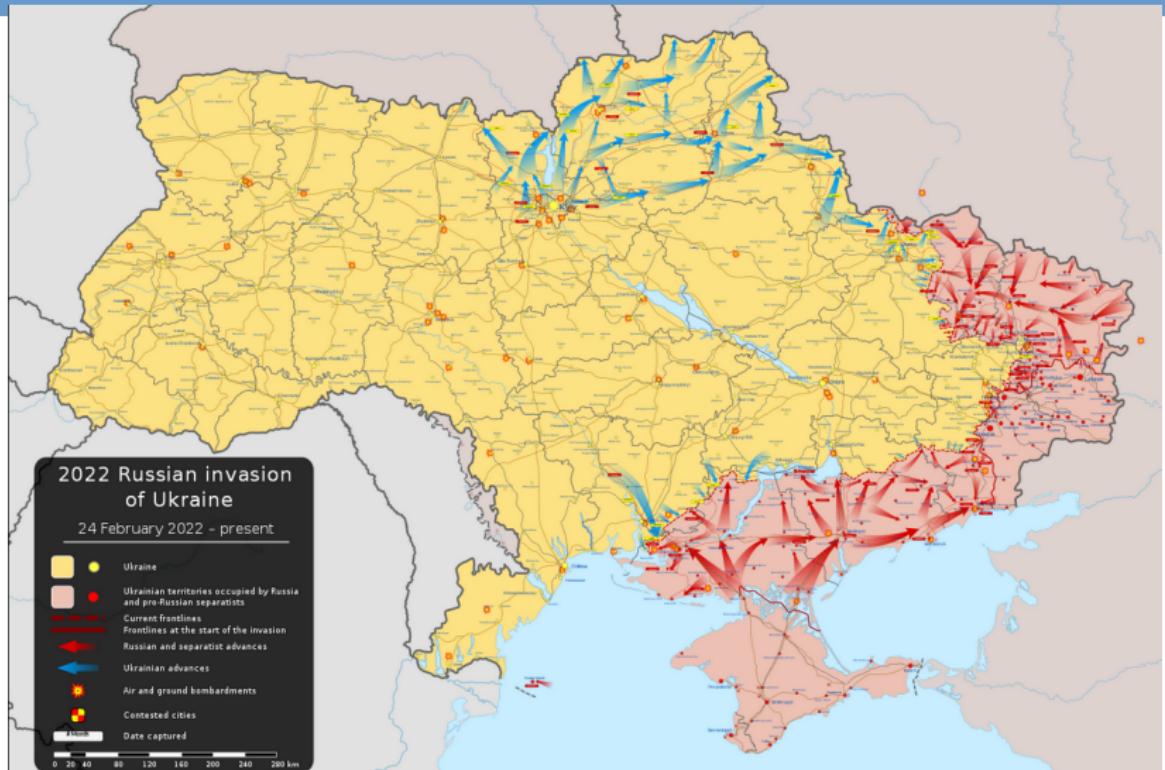


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- Russian military plagued throughout the conflict by mixture of supply issues and low morale, further decreasing their effectiveness.
- Substantial and unforeseen international efforts, led by EU and US, continue to send Ukraine weapons and supplies while also sanctioning Putin's Russia.

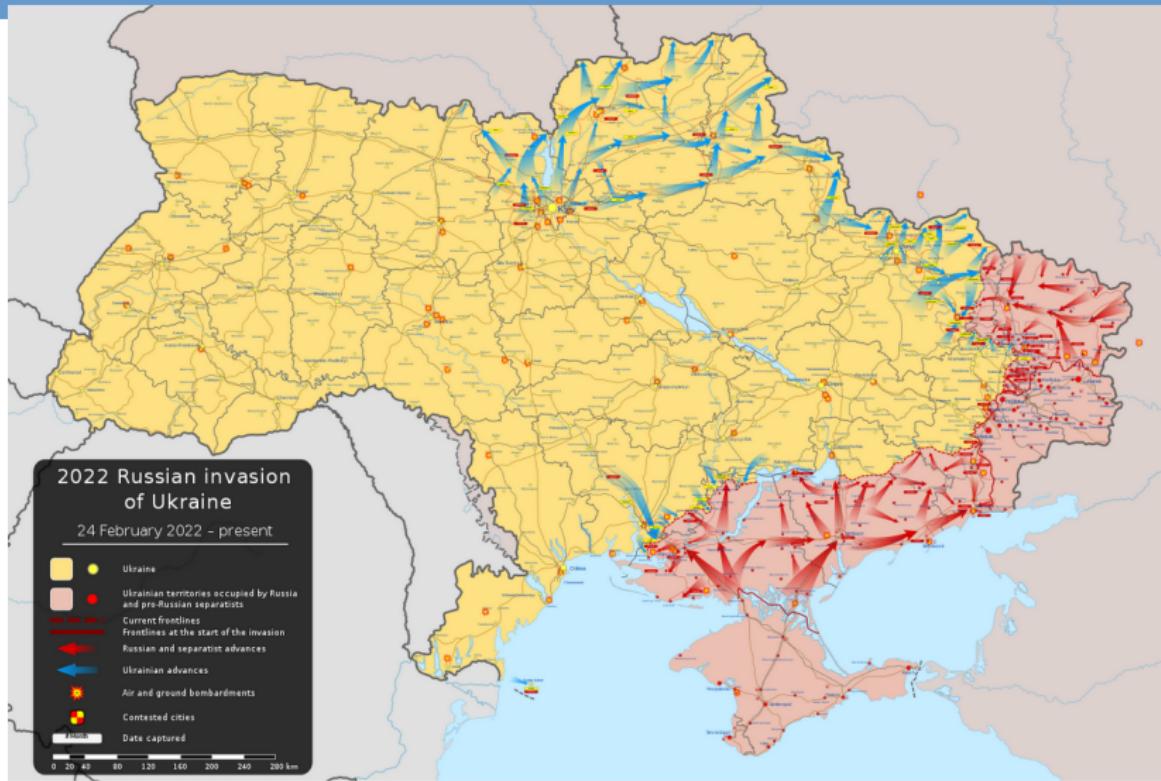


# Conflict Map (29 June 2022)





# Conflict Map (14 September 2022)





# Conflict Map (1 July 2023)





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- Internal disruption in Russia: Wagner group mutiny and continued uncertainty.
- Conflict seems likely to continue.