Iran's Geopolitical Patterns in the Ukraine Crisis: A Strategic Analysis[*]

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Abstract

The Russia-Ukraine war has ignited a complex geopolitical landscape with far-reaching implications. Global trade disruptions, economic strain, and heightened geopolitical tensions are only few of the consequences. This crisis serves as a microcosm of broader power struggles, influenced by historical, regional, and resource-based factors. Iran, although geographically distant from the conflict, is deeply intertwined in this complex web due to overlapping geopolitical interests. Ukraine's strategic position as a grain exporter, coupled with the broader context of NATO expansion and Russia's regional dominance, have placed Iran in a pivotal position. A central question emerges: What type of geopolitical pattern does Iran exhibit in response to the Ukraine crisis? Is it interactive, confrontational, dominance-seeking, influence-oriented, or competitive? To answer this, we will examine Iran's behavior across the various dimensions of geopolitics: geoeconomics, geoculture, geostrategy, and politics. By understanding Iran's approach, we can better assess potential opportunities and risks stemming from this crisis. Grounded theory approach was used for qualitative analysis, focusing on patterns and themes. MaxQDA software was used to analyze data and extract key concepts. Findings reveal that Iran-Ukraine geopolitical relations pattern are confrontational in all three dimensions: geostrategy, geoculture, and geoeconomics.

Keywords: Geopolitical Patterns, Geostrategy, Iran, Russia, Ukraine Crisis

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1. Introduction

Geopolitical crises, shaped by border disputes, ethnic and religious differences, and major power interference, endure and impact global systems. Examples like the Russia-Ukraine conflict and crises in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan disrupt trade and raise costs globally. The ongoing conflict, now lasting over a year, showcases the lasting effects of such tensions. Russia's energy role and Ukraine's grain supply make this crisis reverberate in commodity markets. The conflict's escalation poses risks to the world economy, highlighting the significant impact of geopolitical crises on the international financial system. Patterns of geopolitical relations emerge from these crises, each with distinct costs and benefits, reshaping the global landscape with lasting consequences (Chortane & Pandey, 2022; Nerlinger & Utz, 2022; Umar et al., 2022).

The Ukrainian crises have jeopardized Russia's interests and security in the Eastern Europe, prompting the country to actively manage these challenges. The Ukraine crisis began on November 21, 2013, when President Viktor Yanukovych declared abandonment of a trade agreement with the EU, triggering unrest in the capital. Protests escalated into violent clashes with police by November 30. Amidst this, Yanukovych met Putin in Sochi on December 6 for strategic cooperation talks. Following the meeting, Lenin statues were toppled, symbolizing anti-Russian sentiments. Yanukovych's subsequent trip to Russia resulted in a $15 billion investment and a reduced gas export price from Russia. Opposition intensified, leading to clashes, deaths, and the release of former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko from prison (Fathi & Mossanejad, 1399 [2020 A. D.]). The historical ties between Russia and the United States, ranging from wartime allies to Cold War

adversaries and the post-Soviet era, have significantly shaped their shared history. Initially optimistic about Western relations following Kozyrev's foreign policy, Russia's stance shifted to traditional competition and discord under Putin's leadership after September 22, 2012. Fundamental challenges in Russia-U.S. relations include maintaining influence in surrounding regions, geopolitical energy transit routes, U.S. missile defense deployment in Eastern Europe, and issues like Iran and North Korea's nuclear programs. Ukraine emerges as a turning point, symbolizing the pinnacle of geopolitical differences and competition (Dorj & Tabatabai, 1398 [2019 A.D.]). Having once been the Soviet Union's second-largest power, Ukraine faced challenges in foreign policy balancing between the West and Russia since its independence in 1991. Demographic divisions intensify these challenges, with Russian-speaking Orthodox Christians in the east and south leaning pro-Russia, while Catholic Western Ukrainians tilt towards the West. This demographic duality turns every Russia-West confrontation into a complex issue for Ukraine, as it strives to address internal complexities. Despite the fact that Ukraine does not share a border with Iran, its geopolitical significance and the ongoing U.S.-Russia competition over the country influence Iran's national interests indirectly. The behavior of Russia and the U.S. in the Ukraine crisis aligns with aggressive realist elements, a topic that will be explored further (Nonejad & Karimi, 1397 [2018 A.D.]).

Iran and Ukraine share a nuanced geopolitical relationship despite lacking a direct border, heavily influenced by the Ukraine crisis. This dynamic is analyzed through the lens of geopolitical relations, highlighting the involvement of major global players such as the U.S., Russia, NATO, China, and others. The crisis,

rooted in conflicts for control over Ukraine's strategic geography, has far-reaching global implications, drawing in NATO, Russia, Europe, and China. Iran's strategic interest in Ukraine, particularly its role as a source of vital resources like grain and oil, is underscored. The crisis also impacts Iran's nuclear situation and potential sanctions. Geopolitically, the NATO-Ukraine alliance and the Caspian Sea's resources are significant for Iran. Concerns arise over Iran's potential military aid to Russia amid the conflict, pointing to complex security factors. This research aims to delineate Iran's evolving geopolitical stance in the Ukraine crisis, essential for navigating potential advantages and mitigating damages, situated within the broader context of Central Eurasia's geopolitics. The question raised is: What type of pattern (interactive, confrontational, dominance, influence, or competitive) does Iran's geopolitical relations in the Ukraine crisis exhibit across the sub-branches of geopolitics (geoeconomics, geoculture, geostrategic, and political)?

2. Materials and Methods

The qualitative aspect of the research is grounded in the grounded theory method and The Emerging Design proposed by (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This study employs a mixed methods approach to explore Iran's interventionist competitive pattern in geopolitical relations during the Ukraine crisis. Grounded theory informs the qualitative aspect, while Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with Smart PLS software is used for quantitative rigor. The research uses interrogative and inductive logic, analyzing scientific documents and expert opinions until data saturation. Qualitative findings become research hypotheses, validated through SEM with a minimum sample size of 80. SEM confirms the qualitative model,

investigating variable relationships, hidden factors, and complex models. To ensure validity, a questionnaire was reviewed by 5 experts, and reliability was assessed with Cronbach's alpha in SPSS software. After reviewing scientific documents and research on the issue of Ukraine crisis and its relationship with Iran, open coding was done and 86 factors were obtained. From these 86 items, 13 subcategories were obtained by axial coding and categorizing items one step higher. Finally, 4 main categories were determined by selective coding in the last step (Table 1).

The methodology for "Iran's Geopolitical Patterns in the Ukraine Crisis: A Strategic Analysis" employs grounded theory for the inductive analysis of the empirical data, offering a nuanced understanding of Iran's role. MaxQDA aids in systematic coding of diverse sources, extracting key patterns. The study combines qualitative and quantitative approaches, utilizing MaxQDA for data collection and analysis, allowing for thorough examination of Iran's geopolitical dynamics in the Ukraine crisis.

2. 1. Grounded Theory Theorizing Steps

Grounded theory has systematic, emergent, or constructionist approaches, with this research adopting the emergent method. Emphasizing Glaser's critique of Strauss and Corbin, the process focuses on theory generation by linking categories. The steps include compiling research questions, data collection through various methods, and coding in three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Continuous note-taking records the researcher's thoughts and interpretations during data interaction. The final step involves writing and editing the generated theory or model, highlighting grounded theory's aim of hypothesis generation (Glaser, 1992).

2. 2. Structural Equation Method

The quantitative stage utilizes the structural equation modeling with partial least squares method (SEM-PLS) and Smart PLS 3 software to test the qualitative model and research hypotheses. SEM-PLS examines relationships between variables, assesses their importance, explores connections between hidden and observable variables, allows complex model analysis, and is insensitive to data distribution. This method helps understand intricate variable relationships and validates the model based on collected data. The adoption of SEM-PLS ensures a comprehensive examination of variable connections and model validation, enhancing the research's quantitative aspect (Danai Fard & Emami, 1386 [2007 A. D.]; 2012).

2. 3. Stages in Grounded Theory Analysis

As figure 1 shows, grounded theory analysis includes the following steps:

- Data collection: Gather data through interviews, observations, or documents.
- Open coding: Start with an open mind and read through the data to identify and label emerging concepts or themes. You should give each concept or theme a name or label.
- Axial coding: Look for relationships between the concepts or themes identified in the open coding stage. Categorize and organize these relationships into subcategories.
- Selective coding: Synthesize the subcategories into a theory. Identify a main category that links all the subcategories and provides an overarching explanation for the phenomenon under investigation.
- Verification: Test the theory against new data to see if it holds true. Refine the theory as necessary

Figure 1. Stages in Grounded Theory Analysis
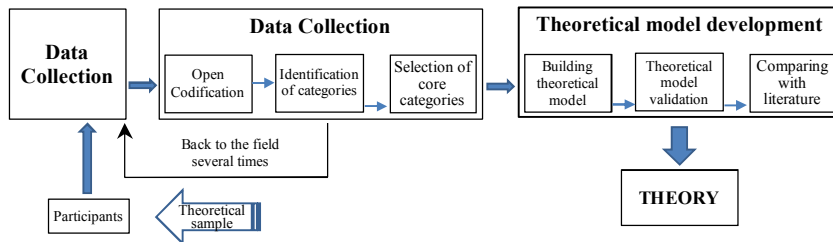
Source: Authors

3. Fundamental Concepts

3. 1. Types of Geopolitical Relationship Patterns

3. 1. 1. Competitive

When the geopolitical weight of two powers is relatively close, and they obstruct each other's access to opportunities, it is termed as a competitive model. In this scenario, the interests of both powers are in conflict.

3. 1. 2. Confrontational

This state arises when two powers, with equal geopolitical weight, have sharply conflicting interests. The benefit of one directly results in the loss of the other. The outcome of this geopolitical pattern can manifest as either a military confrontation or a cold war.

3. 1. 3. Influence

Similar to domination, influence operates in an invisible and indirect form, using various tools to shape the behavior of the actor with less geopolitical weight. Power in this geopolitical model is soft, diplomatic, and psychological.

3. 1. 4. Hegemony

Extreme inequality of geopolitical weight characterizes this pattern, leading one power to overpower another and assign it a subordinate role.

3. 1. 5. Cooperative

Geopolitical weight is not a decisive criterion in this pattern. Communication is primarily based on common interests or shared goals between two powers, potentially fostering greater convergence (Hafeznia, 2013).

3. 2. Geopolitical Crisis

A geopolitical crisis, equivalent to the English term "crisis," -which is rooted in the word Krinein, meaning turning point- signifies a turning point in the life of a geopolitical power, when its survival is threatened. It involves active components such as power combinations, interests, perceptions, and fronts converging around a specific geopolitical issue, posing a direct threat to the survival of the geopolitical system. The crisis may precede, coincide with, or follow a war. Geopolitical crises arise from conflicts among countries, political-spatial groups, and political actors competing for control and possession of one or more values and geographical factors. These crises have diverse origins and types, disrupting the equilibrium state and normal processes of the geographical space and human habitat. Geopolitical crises are prevalent in regions where major powers wield significant influence over events and developments (Hafeznia, 2013; Mossalanejad, 2015).

3. 3. Geopolitical Conflicts

John Collins categorizes geopolitical conflicts between countries into four types in his military geography book: strategic conflicts, economic conflicts, cultural conflicts, and environmental conflicts (Collins, 2002).

4. Results and Discussion

4. 1. Output Theory in the Qualitative Phase

The Ukraine crisis has profoundly affected Iran, with both direct and indirect consequences. Directly, it has reshaped Europe's security landscape, prompting NATO to bolster its presence in Eastern Europe due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This heightened Russia-NATO tension might affect Iran, potentially pressuring it to limit cooperation with the West, including its nuclear activities. Indirectly, the crisis has impacted the global economy, causing rising energy prices and food insecurity, which pose further challenges for Iran.

These economic challenges could have a negative impact on Iran's economy, which is already struggling under the weight of US sanctions. The crisis has also had a significant impact on the global political landscape, leading to a resurgence of nationalism and populism. This could have a negative impact on Iran's efforts to improve its relations with the West, as it could lead to increased hostility towards Iran among Western countries. The Ukraine crisis is still ongoing, and it is difficult to predict its long-term implications for Iran. However, it is clear that the crisis has had a significant impact on Iran, both in the short and long term. The following is a ranking of Categories of the Ukraine crisis for Iran, from most to least significant (Table 1):

- Geostrategical
- Geoeconomic
- Political
- Geocultural

The Geostrategical implications of the crisis are the most significant, as they have the potential to have a direct impact on Iran's security and economic well-being. The geoeconomic implications of the crisis are also significant, as they could have a negative impact on Iran's economy. The political implications of the

crisis are less significant, but they could still have a negative impact on Iran's relations with the West. The geocultural implications of the crisis are the least significant, but they could still have a negative impact on Iran's relations with Russia.

Table 1. Open Coding & Selective Coding; Synthesize the Categories

| Categories	Geostrategic	Geoculture	Geoeconomics	political

Source: Authors

Figure 2 & 3 present the statistical frequency results derived from codes extracted during interviews and from various documents. The visualization provides an insightful overview of the occurrence rates of the identified codes, shedding light on the patterns and prevalence within the collected data. This analysis, through the presentation of statistical frequencies, contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the key themes and elements that emerged from both interviews and document analysis. Such visual representations play a crucial role in elucidating the qualitative data, enabling researchers to discern trends and draw meaningful conclusions from the coded information.

Figure 2. Statistical Frequency of Codes in MAXQDA Software
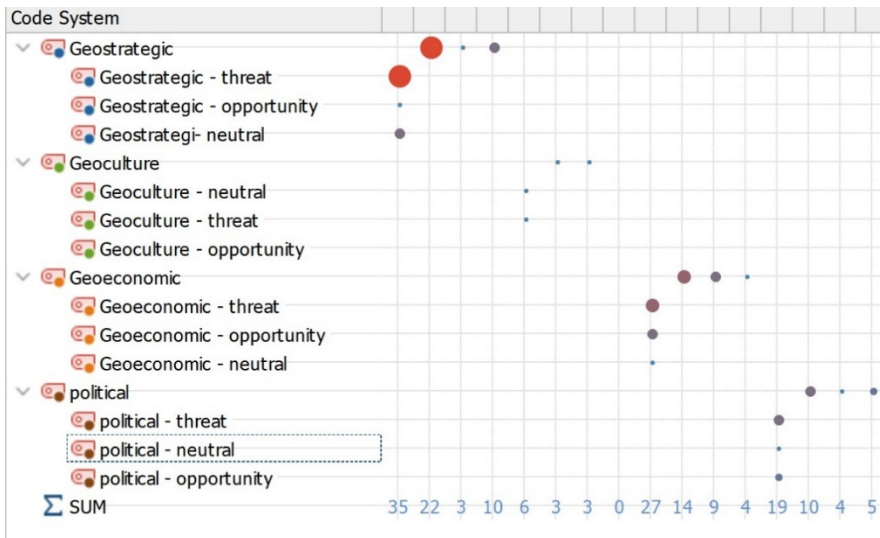
Source: Authors

Figure 3. Communication Diagram and Statistical Frequency of Codes in MAXQDA Software
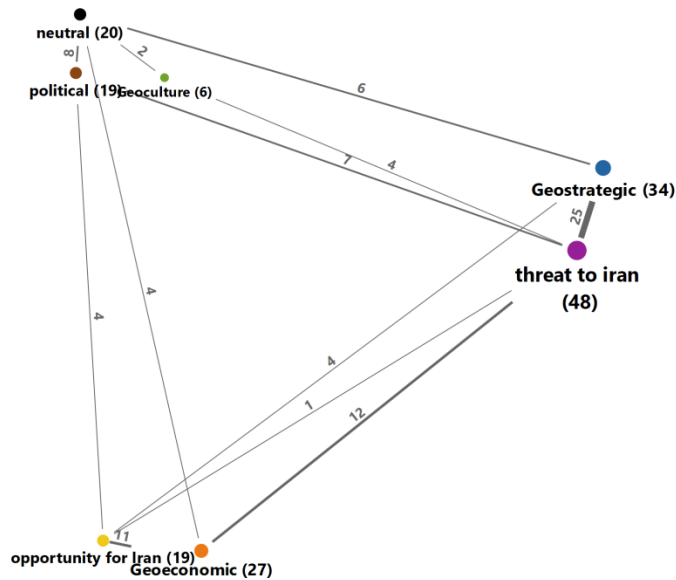
Source: Authors

After collecting codes and transforming them into core and selective encoding, and synthesizing concepts, the following results were obtained: Approximately 31% of the topics surrounding the Ukraine crisis are of economic nature, among which more than 51% of the economic data pose a geo-economic threat to Iran. It was further revealed that out of the total 7% of cultural data, 50% or half are perceived as a threat to Iran. Regarding topics categorized as geostrategic, which account for 40% of the data, it should be noted that the majority of the geostrategic effects of the crisis, namely 62%, constitute a threat to Iran. Among issues dominated by political components, totaling 21% of the data, it was concluded that 52% have the potential to threaten Iran. In the final conclusion, considering the variables, it can be stated that out of the

overall 87 results from the Ukraine crisis for Iran, 56% are threats from the four aforementioned categories, 20% are opportunities, and 24% are states of prediction and neutrality for Iran. In the following section, we will test the general model of the article using the partial least squares method and SMARTPLS software, according to the coefficient of the path or the factor load that indicates the intensity of the relationship (Table 2 & 3).

Table 2. An Overview of the Statistics of the Extracted Codes

Variables	Geoeconomics	Geoculture	Geostrategic	Political	SUM	Percent
Threat	14 (51%)	3 (50%)	22 (62%)	10 (52%)	49	**56%**
Opportunity	9	0	3	5	17	**20%**
Neutral	4	3	10	4	21	**24%**
SUM	27	6	35	19	٨٧	-
Percent	31%	7%	40%	21%	-	-

Source: Authors

Table 3. The Partial Least Squares (PLS) Path Modeling Method

Variables	AVE (average variance extracted)	CR (Composite reliability)	Cronbach alpha
Threat	**.908**	**.980**	**.974**
Opportunity	**.995**	**.998**	**.997**
Neutral	**.978**	**.989**	**.978**
Political	**.993**	**.996**	**.993**
Geostrategic	**.937**	**.968**	**.933**
Geoculture	**.939**	**.969**	**.936**
Geoeconomics	**.997**	**.998**	**.997**

Source: Authors

4. 2. Russian Interests in Ukraine

Following Crimea's annexation by Russia, tensions escalated in eastern Ukraine, particularly in Donetsk, Luhansk, and Kharkiv. The opposition, seizing government buildings in Donetsk and Luhansk, was labeled as terrorists by Ukraine. In response, the Ukrainian government initiated a military operation to quell their activities. However, facing resistance, fueled by Russian support, the operation proved ineffective. A meeting in Geneva on April 24, involving the U.S., Russia, Ukraine, and the EU aimed to resolve the unrest, but the agreed-upon measures were never implemented (Wang, 2015, pp. 9-10). Moscow aims to enhance its role as a military weapons supplier to a key Middle Eastern power, Iran. Tehran seeks Russian military support to sustain its strategic competition with Sunni Arab nations, which predominantly acquire weapons from Western sources (Gomart, 2015). Ukraine holds immense historical, religious, cultural, economic, and strategic importance for Russia. The historical ties are deep, with Kyiv being the birthplace of the first Russian state and the pivotal Battle of Poltava standing as a crucial event. Religiously, it's the heart of the Russian Orthodox Church. Economically, Ukraine's industries and pipelines have been vital for Russian exports. Strategically, it acts as a buffer against NATO's expansion, with Russia's naval fleet in Sevastopol crucial on the Black Sea. Russia closely monitors Ukraine due to its significance, fearing a shift towards the EU could challenge its geopolitical position. Moscow aims for a pro-Russian government in Ukraine, rejecting the idea of it joining NATO, which could undermine Putin's Eurasian Union (Nonejad & Karimi, 1397 [2018 A.D.]). Zbigniew Brzezinski underscores in his book *The Grand Chessboard,* that Moscow's endeavors to regain influence in the former Soviet territory will be futile without the

inclusion of Ukraine (Stokes, 2014). Since its inception, the Islamic Republic of Iran has contested numerous rules set by the United States and its allies in the international order, deeming them inequitable and biased toward major powers. The ongoing Moscow-West tension in Ukraine aligns with Iran's overarching objectives on the global stage, positioning a major power against the current world order. When signing the annexation agreement for Crimea, Putin criticized the unilateral approach in the international system, stating, "The Westerners, led by America, think that they are appointed by God to decide the fate of other peoples." He further asserted that Western powers have consistently attempted to dominate, but Iran stands firm in its independence and vigorously defends it (Putin, 2014).

4.3. Geocultural Components between Iran and Ukraine Crisis

The hypothesis regarding the artificial nature of Ukrainian national identity, propagated by Putin and Russia's political predecessors, centers on the contention that this identity has been shaped through external manipulations. This argument contrasts historical differences between the two nations and underscores Moscow's historical efforts to forcibly assimilate them, a practice that persisted until the Soviet Union's collapse. Despite Putin's expectation of Ukrainian support in an impending war, Mankov highlights the unexpected resistance from Ukrainians. The sustainability of this resistance hinges on Ukrainians' determination to safeguard their nation and the explicit response from the West (Miri Nam Niha & Omidi, 1401 [2021 A.D.]).The historical narrative of the Ukraine Crisis can be viewed as the intersection between myth and 21st-century propaganda. Myths traditionally serve to enhance communal understanding rather than fostering

discourse and communication within the community (Schöpflin, 2000). The historical framing process has transitioned events in Ukraine from a matter of political positioning to one centered around national identity (McGlynn, 2020). The lack of accurate political rationality in comprehending the geopolitical situation on the part of Kyiv authorities, along with the failure to establish a cultural balance between the two eastern and western fronts, has transformed itself into a catalyst for intensifying this conflict. If the identity conflicts of the two nations are not addressed by the statesmen of both countries and vice versa, and their persistence in the continual and conscious development of this duality, creating lasting peace will be far from possible, even with the resolution of the geopolitical propositions in this crisis. In accordance with Putin's pan-Slavic ideology, the present-day Ukraine is fundamentally perceived as an integral part of Russia's cultural identity. The presence of Ukraine aligning itself with NATO along the border is deemed unacceptable in any way. Consequently, the Ukrainian government's pursuit of NATO membership has consistently been viewed as a direct geocultural aggression by Russian leaders (Minic, 2022). Meanwhile, preventing this scenario and fulfilling Moscow's overarching developmental strategy in Eastern Europe is best achieved by leveraging the eastern regions of Ukraine (Green et al., 2022). Moscow's primary justification for the military intervention in Ukraine revolves around supporting the self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, ostensibly to prevent the genocide of Ukrainians (Miri Nam Niha & Omidi, 1401 [2021 A.D.]).

In this context, the results of a survey conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology in July 2022 have revealed intriguing insights. The survey indicates that 11% of the population

leans towards Western values, while over 78% express support for traditional values. However, when Ukrainian traditional values are framed as shared values with Eastern customs, coupled with Russian and Belarusian culture, the identity duality within Ukrainian society becomes apparent. Only 33% of Ukrainians endorse these traditional values (shared with Russians), and the inclination towards Western values rises to over 51% (Beehner & Shelock, 2022).

A significant portion of the Ukrainian population, upon identifying their national identity as having commonalities with Russian identity, even to a limited extent, is willing to forsake their national identity and embrace a European and Western identity. However, excluding the neutral 11-11% portion of the population, those advocating for a shared Ukrainian identity with Eastern cultures are in the minority and often include the population of Rostbar. Consequently, over the past decades, the United States, while fully acknowledging the nationalistic, anti-Russian, and, when necessary, westernizing inclinations of the Ukrainian-origin population, has exploited this demographic as a means to exert dual political, cultural, and security pressures on Russia. This strategy became evident during the 2014 Orange Revolution (Chetveryk, 2019), where the support of this population for Ukraine's accession to NATO was unmistakable (Kendrick, 2022).

4.3.1. Geocultural Relationship Pattern; Ukraine's Strategic Culture and Importance of Identity Map

Taylor and Flint (2007) argue that geopolitical codes are the primary foundation of the foreign policy of the powers (Flint & Taylor, 2007). Ukraine's strategic culture, shaped by its diverse

society and geopolitical position, drives its foreign policy. Focused on security and independence from Russia, Ukraine seeks ties with the US and NATO, while aiming for EU membership. Although challenges exist, Ukraine is progressing towards a more consistent foreign policy. Strategic culture influences elites, shaping policy and geopolitical codes. Ukraine's desire for Western alignment, stemming from independence and fear of Russian dominance, guides its geopolitical orientation, reflecting opposition to Russian hegemony. The convergence of cultural factors and historical memory underpins Ukraine's geopolitical behavior, emphasizing closeness to the West and distance from Russia, a stance consistent since independence **(**Pishgahi Fard & Shiravand, 1397 [2018 A.D.]).

4.3.2. Current Situation

Through the adoption of identity policies rooted in ethnicity, the Russian language, and shared historical narratives, Russia has actively promoted its own Russian utopia among the Ukrainian populace, effectively courting a significant portion of the Ukrainian social fabric. Conversely, aspirations towards European integration and NATO membership have instilled a distinct European-Western utopian vision within the minds of the remaining Ukrainian populace. Notably, the eastern region of Ukraine gravitates towards Russia, while the western region aligns with the European Union. This pole, relying on social forces and identity politics, is attempting to counter Russia's economic-security strategies in Eastern Europe (Sheikh al-Islami & Shiravand, 1395 [2015 A.D.]). In Figure 4, we can observe Russia's Identity Ring in Europe. This visual encapsulates the cultural and Geocultural identity rings of Russia, offering a unique insight into the intricate layers that define

Russia's cultural and geographical presence within the European context. The composition of the image allows viewers to explore and appreciate the nuanced elements that contribute to Russia's multifaceted identity, symbolized through the interconnected rings in the visual representation.

Figure 4. Russia's Identity Ring in Europe

Source: WorldAtlas, 2022

The title "Iran's Identity Ring in Asia" conveys an in-depth examination of Iran's cultural, Geocultural, and historical identity spanning the extensive geographical scope of Asia. The visual

representation of the identity ring encapsulates the intricate fabric of Iran's cultural and historical heritage, transcending national boundaries into the broader context of Asia. The interlinked rings serve as symbolic representations of the multifaceted layers defining Iran's identity, emblematic of a narrative deeply entrenched in historical roots. This portrayal not only accentuates the cultural significance, but also emphasizes the Geocultural and historical dimensions contributing to the formulation of Iran's identity within the diverse and expansive landscape of Asia (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Iran's Identity Ring in Asia

Source: WorldAtlas, 2021

Contrary to the seamless portrayal of Iran's Identity Ring in Asia, Ukraine's identity within its borders faces challenges, marked by pronounced differences in Geocultural orientation between the Eastern and Western regions. The internal dynamics of Ukraine reveal a complexity, where the notion of a unified national identity encounters obstacles. The disparity in geopolitical alignments between the Eastern and Western parts of Ukraine contributes to a distinct divergence in Geocultural and cultural characteristics. This internal divide highlights the intricate interplay between Eastern and Western influences, underscoring the multifaceted nature of Ukraine's Geocultural landscape. The challenges within Ukraine's identity ring reflect not only internal tensions, but also a nuanced interplay of Geocultural forces that shape the nation's identity within its defined borders (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Cultural, Linguistic and Ethnic Divides in Ukraine
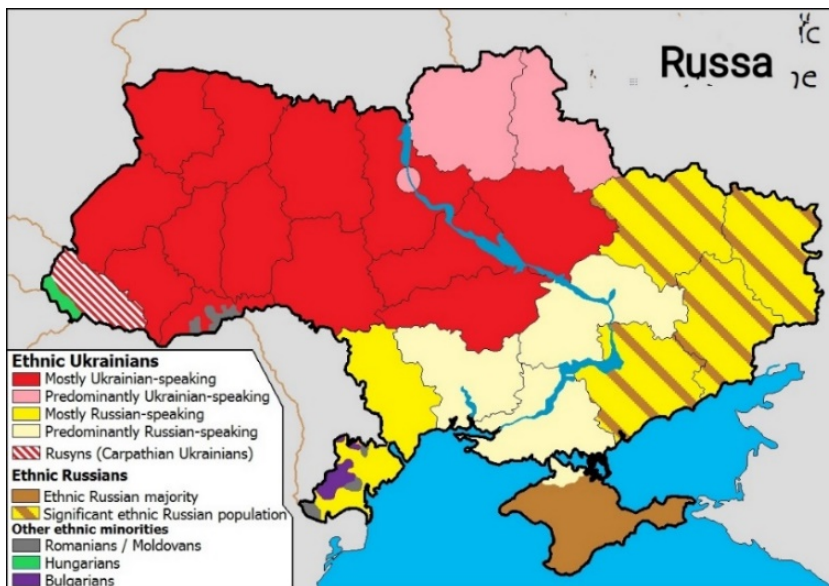
Source: Wikimedia Commons, n.d.

4.3.3. IRAN's Strategic Culture

Cultural interests can be defined as a set of values, beliefs, and norms that characterize a society. These advantages may encompass the following:

- Moral and spiritual values

- Religious and philosophical beliefs

- Social and cultural norms

- Historical and artistic heritage

Iran and the West are rich in culture, influenced by Islam, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Ancient Greece, and Rome. Geopolitical competition shapes modern interactions, leading to tensions. Divergent cultural interests often clash, influenced by historical interactions and differing definitions of culture. These dynamics define the complex relationship between Iran and the West.

In Figure 4, the cultural and linguistic identity ring of Russia in Europe is characterized by extensive reach and minimal cross-border geo-cultural conflicts. However, in Figure 5, depicting Ukraine, it is noteworthy that there is an absence of a cross-border cultural identity ring, unlike Iran and Russia. Linguistic and cultural cleavages are evident, with segments of the population leaning towards Russia and others aligning with the West, resulting in pronounced cross-border geo-cultural conflicts. Finally, Figure 6 is associated with Iran's cultural identity ring, illustrating broad inclusivity and minimal cross-border geo-cultural conflicts among its constituents.

Figure 7 shows the output of the model of geocultural relations between Iran and Ukraine in different cultural dimensions.

Figure 7. Geocultural Relationship Pattern between Iran and Ukraine Crisis
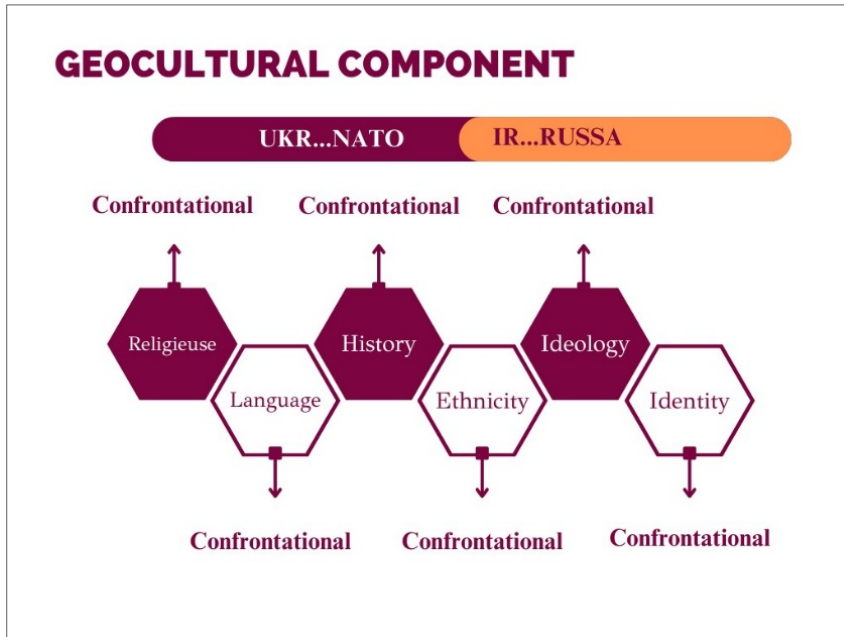
Source: Authors

4.4. Geostrategical Relationship Pattern: Importance of Drones

The geopolitical situation of Ukraine, situated approximately 600 km from Moscow, is distinctive for the West. During the Cold War, the prospect of attaining such proximity to the heart of the Eastern Bloc was an aspiration for the West. Ukraine stands as a pivotal link in the Western strategy for containing Russia.

Emerging technologies, such as cyber, AI, and neuroscience, have revolutionized warfare by enabling long-range attacks, spatial control, intelligence operations, and air support through drones. These advancements have transformed the nature and dynamics of

modern conflicts (Can & Vieira, 2022). The Ukraine war highlighted the importance of drones in modern warfare. Ukraine's successful use of drones against Russia revealed a weakness in Russian unmanned technology, prompting Iran to supply Russia with hundreds of drones in an effort to improve its drone capabilities (Eslami, 2022). Ukraine war exposes wide tech gap: Russia lags in crucial drones (Dijkstra et al., 2022). Despite Russia's request for military aid, (Kai & Wanyuan, 2022) China declined due to its own geopolitical tensions with the United States (Papageorgiou & Vieira, 2021). In July 2022, at the White House, US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan claimed that Iran was selling hundreds of drones to Russia and would train Russian forces to use and deploy these UCAVs in its "special operation" in Ukraine (Sallivan, 2022). Iran's foreign ministry spokesperson acknowledged the sale of drones to Russia, but emphasized the collaboration predated the Ukraine war . UN arms embargo lifted in 2020 paved way for Russia-Iran drone deal (Kanani, 1401 [2022 A.D.]). Iran views the drone deal as a strategic partnership that bolsters its military position and increases demand for its weapons. By defying international condemnation and continuing the drone program, Iran aligns itself with Russia's broader strategy of countering Western influence (Grajewski, 2020). Since the mid-1980s, Iran has adopted a defensive doctrine focused on ballistic missiles for deterrence and defense, shaped by lessons from the 1980–1988 war with Iraq (Murray & Woods, 2014). Iran's military doctrine evolved due to regional insecurity and terrorist groups, leading to the "forward defense" strategy and asymmetric warfare, involving the IRGC forces in multiple countries (Eslami, 2021). In 1984, Iran began concurrent investigations into missile and drone technology. Recent developments include supporting non-Middle Eastern allies like Venezuela, Tajikistan, and Russia with military

drones, highlighting the importance of Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles (UCAVs) in Iran's "forward defense" approach (Akbarzadeh et al., 2023; Ostovar, 2016). The principal capabilities of the Shahed-191 and Shahed-129, as outlined by Nadimi (2022), encompass the precise collection of information regarding the positioning of Ukrainian troops, meticulous management of the logistics associated with the Ukrainian army, and most significantly, the facilitation of Russia's long-range arsenal operations (Nadimi, 2022).

Iran's strategic landscape is shaped by factors in Central Asia, the South Caucasus, the Middle East, as well as the situations in Afghanistan and Iraq. The political conditions of certain Islamic nations, the presence of Israel, and notably, the ongoing confrontation with the United States further impact this environment. In addressing national security concerns while preserving substantial regional influence, Iran has assigned a pivotal role to its Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicle (UCAV) program (Ajili & Rouhi, 2019). Iran's diverse, affordable, and effective drone program, coupled with the absence of alternative suppliers, has driven Russia to purchase Iranian drones (Eslami, 2022). In Tables 4 & 5, we see the performance of the Shahid-136 (Geran-2) in the Ukrainian War during the fall of 2022 and an overview of the most important Iranian Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles (UCAVs).

Table 4. The Performance of Shahid-136 (Geran-2) in the Ukrainian War in the
Fall of 2022

Date	Attack time	Attack type	Number of drones	Alleged Success and Failure Rate
13th Sept.	Day	Multiple drone attack	12 Drones	66% (8) – 33% (4)
27th Sep.	Day	Stand-alone attack by drones	18 Drones	61% (11) – 39% (7)
9th Oct.	Night	Multiple drone attack	7 Drones	100% (7) – 0% (0)
10th Oct.	Night	Mass drone attack	49 Drones	84% (41) – 16% (8)
13th Oct.	Night	Hybrid attack by drones and missiles	20 Drones	90% (18) – 10% (2)
15th Oct.	Night	Multiple drone attack	9 Drones	78% (7) – 22% (2)
17th Oct.	Night	Multiple drone attack	11 Drones	81% (9)- 19% (2)
18th Oct.	Night	Stand-alone attack by drones	5 Drones	100% (5) – 0% (0)
20th Oct	Day	Multiple drone attack	13 Drones	61% (8) – 39% (5)
21st Oct	Night	Multiple drone attack	18 Drones	44% (8)- 56% (10)

Source: Eslami, 2022

Table 5. Most Important Iranian Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles (UCAV)

Name	Range	Endurance	Speed	Armament	Type	Organization
Gaza	3500 km	35 hours	200 km/h	500 kg	Combat/ Surveillance	IRGC
Kaman 22	1750 km	24 hours	150 km/h	300 kg	Combat/ Electronic war	Artesh
Kaman 12	1000 km	10 hours	200 km/h	100 kg	Combat/ Electronic war	MDAFL
Sayeh	100 km	20 hours	NA	NA	Surveillance/ Intelligence	IRGC
Arash 2	2000 km	NA	NA	NA	Suicide/ Electronic war	Artesh
Pelikan	100 km	5 hours	NA	NA	Surveillance/ Intelligence	Artesh
Kian	2750 km	12 hours	480 km/h	30 kg	Combat/ Surveillance	Artesh
Kalaagh	90 km	2 hours	60 km/h	0.5 kg	Surveillance	IRGC
Shahed 129	1711 km	24 hours	200 km/h	400 kg	Combat/ Surveillance	IRGC
Shahed 191	1500 km	24 hours	NA	200 kg	Combat/ Surveillance	IRGC
Shahed 136	2000 km	NA	185 km/h	45 kg	Suicide/ Electronic war	IRGC
Shahed 131	900 km	NA	185 km/h	35 kg	Suicide/ Electronic war	IRGC
Karrar	1000 km	NA	900 km/h	250 kg	Air combat/ Suicide	MDAFL
Fotros	2000 km	30 hours	250 km/h	NA	Combat/ Surveillance	MDAFL
Sadegh	200 km	6 hours	200 km/h	30 kg	Combat/ Surveillance	MDAFL
Mohajer 1–2	150 km	2 hours	200 km/h	30 kg	Combat/ Surveillance	IRGC-Artesh
Mohajer 5–6	2000 km	12 hours	200 km/h	40 kg	Combat/ Surveillance	IRGC-Artesh
Mohajer 3–4	200 km	6 hours	200 km/h	NA	Mapping/ Intelligence	Police
Simorgh	1500 km	24 hours	NA	300 kg	Combat/ Surveillance	Artesh
Saeghe	50 km	1 hours	250 km/h	30 kg	Combat/ Electronic war	IRGC
Meraj 521	5 km	¼ hour	180 km/h	3 kg	Suicide/ Electronic war	IRGC
RQ 170	4400 km	10 hours	NA	300 kg	Combat/ Stealth	IRGC
Hamaseh	200 km	11 hours	190 km/h	200 kg	Combat/ Surveillance	MDAFL
Sarir	NA	12 hours	NA	23 kg	Air combat/ Stealth	IRGC
Ababil	120 km	3 hours	370 km/h	40 kg	Combat/ Electronic war	Artesh
Yosir	200 km	10 hours	120 km/h	NA	Surveillance/ Intelligence	IRGC
Hazem	100 km	1 hour	140 km/h	NA	Combat/ Electronic war	IRGC
Mobin	150 km	1 hour	NA	NA	Suicide/ Electronic war	IRGC
Mohajem	500 km	6 hours	200 km/h	80 kg	Combat/ Surveillance	Artesh
Yaser	500 km	10 hours	120 km/h	NA	Surveillance/ Intelligence	Artesh
Tufan	400 km	2 hours	250 km/h	NA	Suicide/Electronic war	IRGC-Artesh
Farpad	20 km	1 hour	NA	NA	Light UCAV/Combat	Artesh
Sine Sorkh	100 km	2–3 hours	170 km/h	2 kg	Light UCAV/ Stealth	MDAFL
Ra'ad 85	100 km	NA	450 km/h	10 kg	Suicide/ Electronic war	IRGC
Shahin	150 km	NA	200 km/h	NA	Surveillance/ Intelligence	Artesh

Source: Eslami, 2022

Figure 8. Chronology Detailing the Utilization of Drones
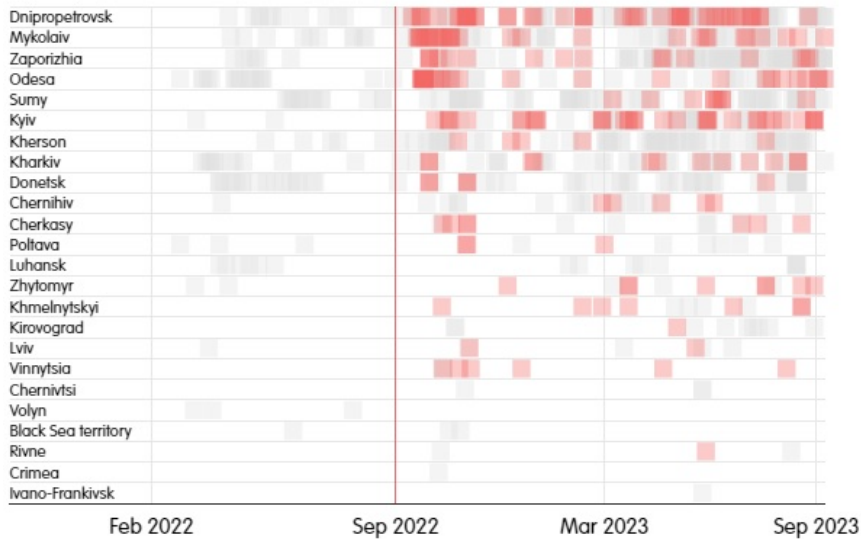
Source: Geranmayeh & Grajewski, 2023

Over the past decade, Iran has exported its unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to countries such as Ethiopia and Venezuela, while supplying drones to proxies in the Middle East like Hezbollah and the Houthis. The Houthis have used these drones against targets in Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. Iran's influence extends with a drone production site in Tajikistan, bolstering its regional power status in drone technology. This facilitates meeting Russia's needs, including providing suicide drones such as the Shahed-136 and Shahed-131, with ranges of 2000 km and tactical targets including air defenses, military bases, and warships (Eslami, 2022).

In June to July 2022, a Russian delegation visited Iran's Kashan Air Base to evaluate combat drones like Shahed-129, Shahed-191,

and Mohajer-6. The Shahed-191 and 129 drones, inspired by the U.S. RQ-170, can carry two 400 kg bombs. The Mohajer-6, a long-range UCAV with a 2000 km range, targets air defenses to aid deeper drone penetration. Russia sees these drones as assets to shift the tide in its conflict with Ukraine, offering precise and long-range attacks while aiding in reconnaissance and mapping Ukrainian troop positions (Nadimi, 2022).

The efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and, notably, the accessibility of Iranian drones have spurred Russia to escalate its procurement from Iran. On September 27, 2022, the same strategic airlifter (Ilyushin I1-76)[1] responsible for transporting Iranian drones to Russia in July 2022 returned to Iran to facilitate the delivery of another drone shipment to Russia. President Zelenskyy reported that Russia had placed an order for 2400 Kamikaze drones from Iran (Zelenskyy, 2022). In contrast, Ukraine's Minister of Defense, during a news program aired on October 15th, asserted that "Russia still possesses 300 Shahed-136 drones ready for launch" (Reznikov, 2022). With the exception of the Shahed and Mohajer series, Russia's alternative acquisition options encompass the purportedly Ababil drones, utilized for offensive operations and artillery surveillance. In offensive maneuvers, Ababil-3 can deploy two Qaim-guided bombs (40 kg) with an effective range of 8 km or Almas-guided rockets. Ababil-3 exhibits a maximum range of 250 km and sustains up to 8 hours of uninterrupted flight (Vahedi & Birghadar, 1401 [2022 A.D.]). Lastly, Arash-2, a kamikaze drone, distinguishes itself by being notably swifter, more precise, and more destructive than Shahed-136, carrying a larger warhead. The significance of this drone lies in the context that Russia has

1. This flight was registered with RA-78816 and left Iran one day after its arrival.

reportedly depleted approximately two-thirds of its ballistic and cruise missiles, purportedly placing orders for missiles from Iran, including Fateh-110, with a range of 300 km and Zolfaghar with a range of 700 km (Warrick et al., 2022). The deployment of suicide drones provides Russia with the means to conserve its depleted ballistic missile reserves, a potential necessity in forthcoming operations. Iran's weapon supply to Russia holds not only tactical implications for the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, but also strategic impacts with the potential to reshape regional and international security dynamics. Military cooperation at this level signifies a significant alignment between Russia and Iran, elevating Iran to a key player in the evolving international order. Noteworthy is Iran's historically outdated air force, attempting to procure SU-35 Combat fighters from Russia multiple times, facing failures each time (Vahedi, 1400 [2022 A.D.]). Current discussions suggest Russia's approval of the sale, positioning Iran among the top 10 global military powers. This shift in geopolitical stature has broader implications for the region and the world, emphasizing the transformative potential of Iran's role in shaping international power dynamics. In the geostrategic realm, Iran's weaponry possesses the capability to alter the geopolitical balance to the disadvantage of Ukraine and NATO. To some extent, this shift has already been realized.

Iran and Russia share a common objective in opposing the unipolarity of the United States (Ward, 2005), encompassing the challenge of what they perceive as U.S. "interference" in the domestic affairs of other nations (Tabatabai & Samuel, 2017). Tehran has consistently asserted that NATO's expansion in Eastern Europe is a root cause of the conflict in Ukraine. Despite numerous conflicting priorities between Iran and Russia, their alignment in

the context of the Ukrainian conflict assumes paramount importance. Iran's involvement in the Ukraine-Russia war has not only influenced other Middle Eastern actors, but has also brought them to the forefront of this conflict. Israel, a traditional ally of Russia in the Middle East and a primary adversary of Iran, exhibited significant support for Ukraine by promptly announcing the provision of military equipment to Kyiv following Iran's announcement of similar assistance (drones) to Russia. Nonetheless, Israel hesitated to furnish air defense systems to Ukraine (Czerny, 2024). Saudi Arabia, in an effort to position itself among the nations supporting Ukraine's war, contributed 400 million dollars (Reuters, 2022) specifically to counter Iran's influence.

4. 4. 1. Ukraine and its Allies such as NATO Accuse Iran of Selling Drones to Russia

Interestingly, both Iran and Saudi Arabia collaborated with Russia in OPEC Plus, collectively reducing global oil production in September 2022. This aligns with Russia's strategy of utilizing energy as a tool for security leverage to exert pressure on the United States and European countries. By the end of 2022 Russia had received at least 1,700 drones from Iran, and the two reportedly plan to open a manufacturing facility in Russia capable of producing some 6,000 Iranian Shahed and Mohajer model drones (Hamilton, 2023). Since mid-September, Ukraine has grappled with Iranian-supplied Shahed-136 kamikaze drones, operated by Russia and known as Geranium-2 (Trofimov & Nissenbaum, 2022). The Shahed-136 kamikaze drones, with a 50 kg explosive payload and a range exceeding 2,000 km, surpass Switchblade's 10 km range, offering cost-effective means for Russian forces to strike deep into Ukraine. These flying bombs lack dynamic navigation systems,

relying on inertial and commercially vulnerable satellite navigation. Despite Ukrainians intercepting over 80% using anti-aircraft measures, the remaining 20%, coupled with cruise missiles, destroyed one-third of Ukraine's electrical grid in a week. This caused power outages for four million Ukrainians and inflicted severe damage on critical infrastructure, straining resources and depleting Kyiv's stock of expensive air defense missiles (Hird et al., 2022).

The Institute for Science and International Security has analyzed open-source information compiling reported or visible Western parts and components used in Iranian unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), or drones, operated by Russian forces in Ukraine. China plays a larger role than previously assessed in enabling Iran to manufacture and supply drones to Russian forces. It appears that Chinese companies are supplying Iran with copies of Western commodities to produce UAV combat drones (Albright et al., 2022). Adding to the complexity, akin to developments in other security domains (Bollfrass & Herzog, 2022; Willett, 2022), the conflict in Ukraine is rapidly revealing forthcoming trends in drone utilization. Future warfare scenarios will involve not only unmanned long-range surveillance systems and automated missile launchers, but also a novel class of diminutive and discreet drone scouts deployed across various operational domains. As witnessed in Bakhmut and Kyiv towards the close of 2022, drones demonstrate their capacity to engage in diverse roles (Kunertova, 2023). In Figure 9, we see the geostrategical relationship pattern between Iran and the Ukraine Crisis. In Table 6, we see the components of Iran-manufactured UAVs, claimed to be produced in the West and assembled in Iran.

Table 6. Components of Iran-manufactured UAVs, Claimed to be Produced in the West and Assembled in Iran

Drone	Part	Details	Manufacturer	Country
Shahed-136	Engine	MD550 (Based on: German L550)	Limbach Flugmotoren GmbH & Co.KG ; Beijing MicroPilot Flight Control Systems ; Xiamen Limbach Aircraft Engine Co.,Ltd.	German / China
	Electronic Signal Receiver*	TMS320F28335*	Texas Instruments*	United States of America*
	Fuel Pump*	In-Line High-Efficiency Fuel Pump*	TI Automotive *	United States of America* / Poland*
Shahed-131	Engine	Serat-01/Serat-02 (Based on: Chinese MDR-208: which is based on: British AR731)	--------------	United Kingdom / China / Iran
Mohajer-6	Engine	912 IS SPORT	BRP-Rotax GmbH & Co KG	Austria

Source: Albright et al., 2022

Figure 9. Geostrategical Relationship Pattern between Iran and Ukraine Crisis
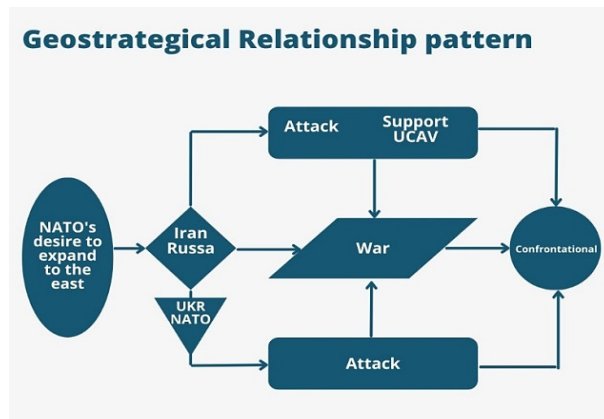
Source: Authors

4.5. Geoeconomic Relationship Pattern; Importance of Sanction

Russia, although economically smaller relative to its size and population, is vital globally as a major commodity exporter. The Ukraine conflict and subsequent Western sanctions raise fears of trade disruptions, especially in oil and gas to Europe. This may spike commodity prices, upping global inflation and slowing growth. Sanctions also deter business with Russia, possibly disrupting supply chains, with impact hinging on the war's course and commodity trade shifts.

4.5.1. A Comparative Analysis of Iran-Ukraine Trade Dynamics

4.5.1.1. Iran-Ukraine Bilateral Trade Imbalance and Trends in Goods Exchange

Iran and Ukraine maintain a bilateral trade relationship characterized by a significant trade imbalance. In 2021, Iran exported $90.5 million worth of goods to Ukraine, primarily consisting of styrene polymers, packaged medicaments, and processed fruits and nuts. This represents an annualized growth rate of 11% over the past 25 years, expanding from $6.67 million in 1996. Ukraine, on the other hand, exported a substantial $590 million worth of goods to Iran, primarily composed of corn, seed oils, and wheat. This trade has experienced a modest growth of 6.73% annually, increasing from $116 million in 1996. Notably, both countries have not exchanged services in recent years.

4.5.1.2. Trade Composition

Iran's exports to Ukraine showcase a diverse range of products, reflecting its diversified industrial base. Styrene polymers, a key component in various manufacturing processes, highlight Iran's

chemical industry. Packaged medicaments indicate the presence of a robust pharmaceutical sector, while processed fruits and nuts point to a thriving agricultural industry.

Ukraine's exports to Iran, on the other hand, primarily focus on agricultural commodities. Corn, a staple food crop, drives the majority of Ukrainian exports to Iran, and seed oils, extracted from various oilseeds, and wheat, another essential food grain, further contribute to this agricultural dominance.

4.5.1.3. Economic Complexity Index (ECI)

Both Iran and Ukraine exhibit varying levels of economic complexity, as measured by the ECI. In 2021, Iran ranked 67th globally with an ECI value of -0.091, indicating a relatively simple economic structure. Ukraine, on the other hand, ranked 44th with an ECI value of 0.49, suggesting a more diversified and sophisticated economy.

4.5.2. Trade Implications

The trade imbalance between Iran and Ukraine highlights the need for further diversification in their bilateral trade relations. While Iran possesses a range of industrial products, Ukraine's exports primarily focus on agricultural commodities. Exploring opportunities for increased trade in complementary sectors, such as machinery and technology for Iran, and processed food and high-value agricultural products for Ukraine, could strengthen the economic partnership between these two nations.

Overall, the bilateral trade dynamics between Iran and Ukraine

reflect a growing economic interdependence. However, unlocking the full potential of this relationship requires addressing the trade imbalance and expanding into mutually beneficial sectors (The Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2023). In Table 7, we see the direct exposure (demand side) of the economic relations between Iran, Russia, and Ukraine.

Table 7. Direct Exposure (Demand Side)

Economic relation between IRAN & RUSSA & UKRAINE	
Exports of goods to Russia (% of total goods exports, ave. 2015 2020 or latest data)	**0.28**
Exports of goods to Ukraine (% of total goods exports, ave. 2015–2020 or latest data)	**0.03**
Imports of goods from Russia (% of total goods imports, ave. 2015–2020 or latest data)	**2.42**
Imports of goods from Ukraine (% of total goods imports, ave. 2015–2020 or latest data)	**0.60**
Total trade with Russia (goods exports+imports as % of GDP, ave. 2015-2020 or latest data)	**0.35**
Total trade with Ukraine (goods exports+imports as % of GDP, ave. 2015-2020 or latest data)	**0.07**

Source: Raga & Pettinotti, 2022

The Russia-Ukraine war is expected to have a significant negative impact on the global economy, with estimates suggesting a reduction in global output of 0.4% to 1% in 2022. This could translate into global costs between $380 billion and $950 billion. Low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) are particularly vulnerable to this economic shock, as they are more reliant on imported goods and services from Russia and Ukraine. The war is already causing disruptions to trade and driving up prices for commodities such as oil, metals, and wheat, which are essential for LMICs' economies. The World Bank reports that global price

indices for food and metals and minerals increased by 11% and 12%, respectively, between December 2021 and February 2022. This paper assesses the economic vulnerabilities of 118 LMICs to the war by quantifying their direct and indirect exposure to the conflict. Direct exposure includes trade and investment ties with Russia and Ukraine, while indirect exposure encompasses reliance on imported commodities, trade openness, and tourism. Resilience, defined as the ability to manage the negative impact of shocks, is also considered. The results show that LMICs with high direct and indirect exposure to the war and low resilience are most at risk from the economic fallout. These countries should prioritize measures to mitigate the impact of the war, such as diversifying their trade partners and improving their economic governance (Raga & Pettinotti, 2022). Figure 10 shows the economic effects of the war between Russia and Ukraine on world trade.

Figure 10. The Economic Effects of the War between Russia and Ukraine on World Trade
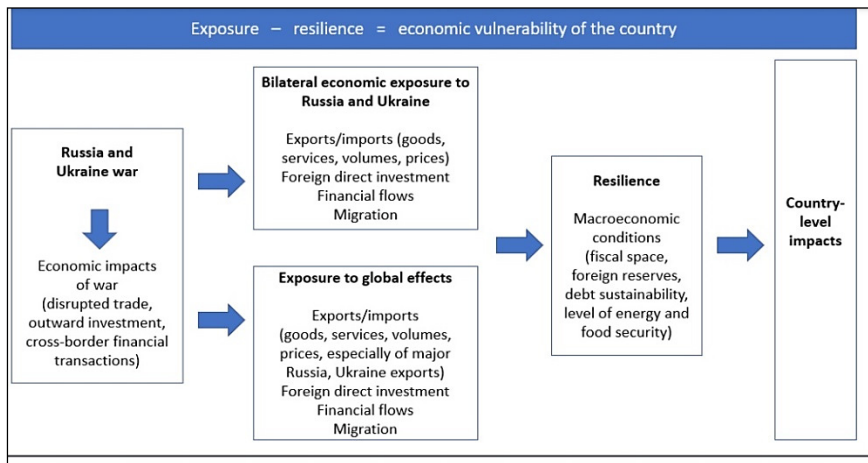
Source: Raga & Pettinotti, 2022

4.5.3. Energy and Mineral Resources; Sanction Against Iran and Russia

The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine has exacerbated already tight global natural gas markets, with potential implications for Europe's energy security and economic stability. Russia is a major supplier of natural gas to Europe, accounting for approximately 40% of its demand. A disruption in gas deliveries from Russia could have significant consequences, including higher energy prices, reduced economic growth, and potential energy shortages. Prior to the conflict, Europe had anticipated that the Nord Stream 2 pipeline would provide additional gas supplies from Russia. However, Germany's decision to halt the pipeline's certification has left Europe with reduced options for diversifying its gas imports. The conflict has also driven up global oil prices, as supply disruptions and increased demand have tightened the market. Higher oil prices could further exacerbate inflation in Europe and other developed economies (Kalish, 2022).

a) Impact on Europe

Europe's trade with Russia comprises 4.8% of EU trade and 2.3% of German trade, yet Russia supplies 40% of EU gas, 25% of oil, and 47% of solid fuels. A halt in gas delivery would profoundly affect Europe's energy security. While LNG imports and domestic production can help, it is uncertain if they can fully replace the Russian gas. Even a partial disruption would spike energy prices, dent economic activities, and dampen sentiment. However, Europe's robust gas infrastructure and households' pandemic savings could provide some cushion. The conflict poses significant challenges, requiring careful planning for energy security and economic stability, given the far-reaching impacts of potential gas shortages and higher prices (Valentina Romei et al., 2022).

b) Impact on US

- Limited trade affected.
- Main concern: higher oil and commodity prices.
- European slowdown could spill over.
- Disruptions in semiconductor and battery materials from Russia/Ukraine.

c) Impact on Asia-Pacific

- Modest trade affected by sanctions' uncertainty.
- Net energy importer vulnerable to price hikes.

d) Global uncertainty

- Volatility in commodity and financial markets.
- Delays in business decisions.

e) Potential consequences

- Increased defense spending in Europe.
- Energy policy debate: diversification and clean energy.
- Supply chain disruptions and financial market stress.
- Questions about globalization and international order (Kalish, 2022).

4.5.4. Sanction against Iran and Russia

Since March 2014, the EU has implemented a series of restrictive measures against Russia due to its:

1. Illegal annexation of Crimea
2. Aggressive war against Ukraine
3. Illegal annexation of Ukraine's Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions

These measures aim to undermine Russia's economic foundations by restricting access to vital technologies and markets, considerably limiting its capacity for waging war. Additionally, the EU has imposed sanctions on:

1. Belarus, as a response to its involvement in the invasion of Ukraine
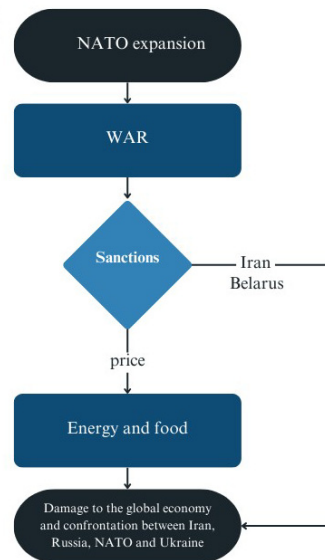2. Iran, concerning the production and supply of drones (European Concil, 2023).

In Figure 11, we can see the final pattern of geoeconomic relationships between Iran and Ukraine during the Ukraine Crisis.

Figure 11. Geoeconomical Relationship Pattern between Iran and Ukraine Crisis

Source: Authors

Figure 12. Categories and Sub-categories, Obtained Documents and Researches of Experts about Iran's Intervention Model in the Geopolitical Crisis of Ukraine
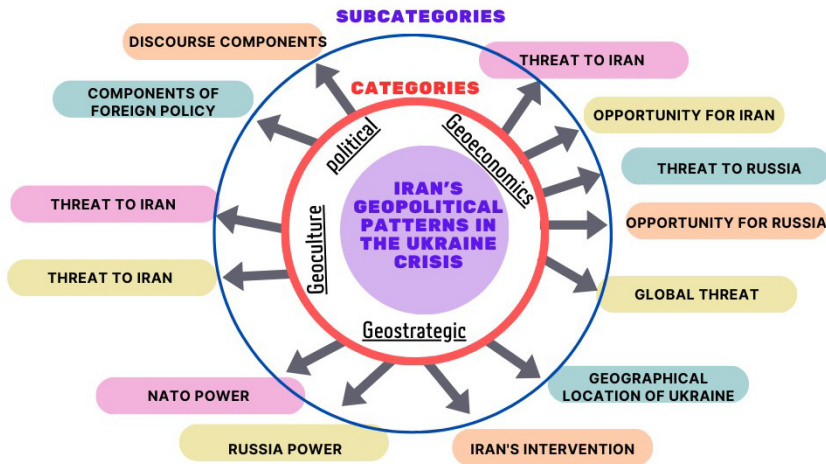
Source: Authors

5. Conclusion

This study employed a grounded theory approach to analyze geopolitical codes within the geostrategic, geoeconomic, geocultural, and political sub-branches of Iran-Ukraine relations during the Ukraine crisis. The aim was to identify the prevailing pattern in these relations: interactive, confrontational, competitive, dominance-seeking, or influence-oriented. A comprehensive analysis of relevant literature yielded 87 codes, which were categorized into four main themes: geostrategy (35 codes), geoeconomics (27 codes), geoculture (6 codes), and politics (19 codes). These codes were further evaluated in terms of their implications for Iran, revealing a predominance of threats (56%), followed by opportunities (20%) and neutral factors (24%). The findings suggest that Iran's geopolitical interactions with Ukraine

during the crisis are characterized by a complex interplay of threats and opportunities, with the overall pattern being heavily influenced by geostrategic factors. This study provides valuable insights into the geopolitical dynamics shaping Iran-Ukraine relations during the Ukraine crisis. By employing a grounded theory approach and analyzing a comprehensive dataset of 87 geopolitical codes, the research reveals a complex interplay of threats and opportunities. The findings suggest that Iran's geopolitical behavior is primarily driven by geostrategic considerations, with a significant portion of the identified codes being perceived as threats. These findings have important implications for understanding Iran's foreign policy, as well as for predicting future developments in the region. Based on the findings from the grounded theory analysis, the Ukraine crisis primarily poses a significant geopolitical threat to Iran. A predominant 56% of identified codes across the geoeconomic, geocultural, geostrategic, and political dimensions were classified as threats. Economic factors constituted the largest portion of the data, with over half presenting geo-economic risks. Cultural and political dimensions also revealed substantial threats. Although 20% of codes were categorized as opportunities and 24% as neutral or predictive, the overall impact of the crisis on Iran is predominantly negative.

These results underscore the complex and challenging geopolitical environment in which Iran operates and highlight the need for careful consideration of the potential consequences of the Ukraine crisis on Iran's national interests. To further elucidate the relationships between these variables, a subsequent analysis utilizing Partial Least Squares (PLS) method and SMARTPLS software was conducted. The results of this analysis, presented in Tables 2 and 3, provide insights into the strength of the relationships between the identified factors.

Furthermore, this study conducted a detailed analysis of the geopolitical issues between Iran and Ukraine within the specific contexts of geoeconomics, politics, geostrategy, and geoculture.

The Ukraine-Russia conflict carries significant global repercussions, prompting Iran to assess its geopolitical relations amidst the crisis. Analyzing these relations can optimize benefits and mitigate potential fallout. Some Key points include:

The Russia-Ukraine war has complex implications for Iran. Economically, trade imbalances and global sanctions exacerbate challenges. Energy dependence in Europe fuels market tensions. Strategically, Iran-Russia cooperation, marked by drone provision, has deepened their convergence against the West. Drones, crucial in modern warfare, become central to the conflict. Russia seeks economic and strategic control over Ukraine as a buffer zone. Geoculturally, both nations utilize cultural ties for political gain, while Ukraine's identity struggles and the war exacerbate divisions. Iran's Islamic identity also influences its foreign policy. These interconnected factors across geostrategy, geoculture, and geoeconomics profoundly shape Iran-Ukraine relations, necessitating a comprehensive understanding for assessing broader impacts.

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