

# NATO-Russia Relations and Political Stability in Post-Soviet States, 2000-2024

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## ABSTRACT

The relationship between NATO and Russia has been a complex and often contentious issue since the end of the Cold War. The struggles for spheres of influence and control in ex-Soviet territories between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Russia have become trending issues in the contemporary global arena. In the most recent decade, NATO-Russia relations have become aggressive; both parties are at loggerheads over NATO expansion in post-Soviet states. This study examines the role of NATO-Russia relations in the political stability of post-Soviet states between 2000 and 2024. Specifically, the study ascertained whether the use of sanctions and counter-sanctions by NATO and Russia to pursue strategic objectives escalated economic crises in post-Soviet states. This study adopted the ex-post facto research design and the Power theory to analyze data generated through the documentary method. Consequently, with the aid of comparative analysis integrated within the content analysis, the study concluded that the use of sanctions and counter-sanctions by NATO and Russia to pursue strategic objectives has escalated economic crises in post-Soviet states. The study recommended that NATO-Russia relations must be based on constructive engagement instead of employing sanctions and counter-sanctions as economic weapons.

**Keywords:** NATO-Russia Relations, Political Stability, Post-Soviets States, NATO Expansion and Security Concerns,

## I. INTRODUCTION

NATO-Russia relations have been crucial in shaping the geopolitical landscape of Europe and Central Asia since the end of the Cold War, particularly from 2000 to 2024 (Charap & Colton, 2017; Toal & O'Loughlin, 2023). This period has seen a complex interplay of strategic expansions, regional conflicts, and shifting alliances, particularly in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. Beginning operation in 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) formed as a military and political alliance between North American and European member states to address Soviet expansionism threats (Smith, 2006; Sloan, 2016). Over time, NATO has evolved, adapting to new security challenges, including terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (NATO, n.d.; Reiter, 2017). Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, NATO expanded eastward, incorporating former Warsaw Pact countries and Baltic States into its security framework. This expansion was perceived by Russia as a direct encroachment on its sphere of influence, leading to an increasingly adversarial relationship characterized by tension and conflict (Smith & Timmins, 2018; Atlantic Council, 2024).

Geopolitical tensions were made worse by the 1999 and 2004 NATO expansion rounds, which included Poland, Hungary, and the Baltic nations. While these new NATO members felt the need for Western security assurances against a resurgent Russia, Moscow viewed NATO's growth as a violation of post-Cold War agreements, exacerbating mutual distrust. The accession of the Baltic States, in particular, moved NATO's borders directly to Russia's

doorstep, fostering a sense of encirclement within Russian strategic circles (Atlantic Council, 2024; O'Sullivan, 2024). The 2008 Russo-Georgian War exemplified this struggle, as Georgia's aspirations for NATO membership prompted a military response from Russia, underscoring the limitations of NATO's security guarantees and revealing Moscow's readiness to use force to maintain its influence (Allison, 2009, Koźmiński & Fried, 2024). This conflict marked a significant turning point, highlighting divergent paths among former Soviet states; NATO members enjoyed relative stability, while non-members faced heightened security risks (Cornell & Starr, 2009; Asmus, 2010; NATO's new front, 2023).

Tensions between NATO and Russia significantly increased in 2014 after Russia annexed Crimea and the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. NATO augmented its military presence in Eastern Europe through the deployment of battlegroups in Poland and the Baltic states under the Enhanced Forward Presence initiative (Legvold, 2014; NATO, 2023). During this time NATO reverted to Cold War-style deterrence practices by focusing on collective defense measures in response to Russian threats (Mearsheimer, 2014; Kugler & Zagare, 2020).

In 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, which forced NATO to shift from a containment strategy to active deterrence through sanctions against Russia and significant military support to Ukraine. This strategic realignment aimed to reinforce NATO's eastern flank and deepen cooperation with non-member states like Ukraine and Moldova (Aslund, 2022; Atlantic Council, 2024). Analysts noted that this event revitalized NATO's strategic purpose while revealing the continued volatility in the post-Soviet space (Toal & O'Loughlin, 2023, Koźmiński & Fried, 2024).

The economic consequences of sanctions and counter-sanctions during this period have been profound, affecting not only Russia but also the broader region of post-Soviet states. Countries like Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Armenia, which maintain strong historical economic ties with Russia, have faced significant economic challenges due to their dependence on Russian markets (Gould-Davies, 2022). For example, Belarus's GDP growth stagnated after the imposition of sanctions in 2014, which was exacerbated by reduced trade with the European Union and declining remittances from migrant workers in Russia (Frear, 2019). Similarly, Georgia and Moldova have struggled to balance their alignment with Western sanctions while ensuring internal stability, often resulting in political instability and weakened governance (Cornell & Starr, 2019; Sakwa, 2022).

The stability of post-Soviet states is closely linked to their relationships with NATO and Russia. The Baltic States, as NATO members, have generally maintained political stability despite regional tensions. Conversely, nations like Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova have faced ongoing

territorial conflicts and internal instability, navigating a precarious balance between Western aspirations and Russian opposition (Atlantic Council, 2024). Central Asian states, while less directly affected by NATO-Russia dynamics, have pursued balancing strategies, maintaining ties with Russia while exploring opportunities for Western engagement to ensure regional stability.

The evolving relationship between NATO and Russia needs to be understood to evaluate Ukraine's conflict impacts on political stability across the post-Soviet region while the security landscape continues to shift (Toal & O'Loughlin, 2023). This relationship has not only influenced individual states' strategic orientations but has also sparked renewed debates about the future of European security and NATO's role in maintaining regional order. It is against this backdrop that this study aims to ascertain whether the economic measures, specifically the use of sanctions and counter-sanctions by NATO and Russia, have escalated economic crises in post-Soviet states and ultimately impacted their political stability.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This study employs an ex-post-facto research design, which is non-experimental and qualitative (Bailey, 1994). This approach is appropriate for examining relationships where the independent variable (NATO-Russia relations) has already occurred, allowing the study to analyze its impact on the dependent variable (political stability in post-Soviet states). By observing changes in the independent variable (X) over time, the study assesses how variations in NATO-Russia relations influence political stability (Y) across the region.

Data for this study are gathered using a documentary research method, which involves analyzing existing written records and archival materials. This method is well-suited for historical and geopolitical studies because it provides access to verifiable data from a range of authoritative sources. These include reports from the Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College, the U.S. Department of State, and the Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security, among others. Additional data are drawn from institutional reports such as those from the National Defense Panel, the International Crisis Group, the Congressional Research Service (CRS), and the United Nations Security Council. The study also integrates insights from scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and relevant periodicals, providing a broad basis for analysis.

Content analysis is employed as the primary method for data analysis, allowing the study to systematically organize and synthesize information from various textual sources. This approach enables manifest content (direct information) and latent content (underlying meanings) to be explored, offering a deeper understanding of the dynamics between

NATO and Russia. Content analysis further enables the study to condense the complex geopolitical data into meaningful conclusions, offering a clear understanding of the broader implications for the stability of post-Soviet states (Krippendorff, 1980). A comparative analysis is integrated within the content analysis to distinguish the impacts of NATO-Russia relations across different post-Soviet states, such as the contrasting experiences of the Baltic States (NATO members) with those of Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova (non-members).

### III. SANCTIONS AND ECONOMIC HARDSHIP IN POST-SOVIET STATES

This study examines the effects of NATO-Russia relations on political stability in post-Soviet republics between 2000 and 2024. It addresses gaps in existing literature by analyzing the correlation between sanctions and economic hardship. The review is organized around the primary theme that emerged from the research question: the link between sanctions and economic challenges in these states.

Sanctions are widely used geopolitical tools aimed at modifying the strategic objectives of targeted states. Jonathan (2019) highlights sanctions as a preferred policy instrument during geopolitical crises, listing measures such as trade restrictions, capital controls, and asset freezes. These actions align with Article 41 of the UN Charter, which sanctions a variety of non-military measures to achieve compliance in international relations. Other scholars, like Richard (1998), emphasize that sanctions range from broad economic embargoes to targeted measures such as travel bans and asset freezes, often employed by international organizations like the United Nations, European Union, and NATO.

Sanctions, particularly after Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, have become a prominent feature in the relations between Russia and Western states, with notable effects on regional stability (Katz, 2015). While these measures aim to deter aggressive actions, they also underline deeper geopolitical tensions and the limited success of diplomatic approaches.

Sanctions often result in significant economic hardship, especially in targeted countries. Multiple studies, including those by Latipov et al. (2022), and Crozet & Hinz (2020), suggest that economic sanctions can severely impact the targeted economies, leading to financial strain and a shift in strategic goals. They argue that sanctions are designed to impose economic pressure and, at times, promote regime change or force policy alterations. For instance, Alexander & Brooke (2022) argue that sanctions against individuals can create internal divisions within regimes by pressuring elites to withdraw their support.

However, there are differing perspectives on the effectiveness of sanctions. Maarten (2018) contends that sanctions can be counterproductive, leading targeted states

to form economic ties with other allies outside the sanctioning coalition. He notes that the adoption of "smart sanctions," which aim to minimize harm to the general population while targeting key individuals and entities, represents a shift towards more nuanced economic strategies.

The post-Soviet republics have exhibited varying responses to sanctions, with many seeking to diversify their economies to mitigate the impact. For example, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan have prioritized economic modernization and investment in non-oil sectors like agriculture and technology (Zheliba & Kornienko, 2019). These strategies illustrate efforts to reduce dependency on traditional sectors that are vulnerable to external shocks, such as those caused by sanctions.

In response to the 2022 sanctions following the invasion of Ukraine, Russia intensified its import substitution strategy, reducing reliance on Western imports and boosting domestic production (Dekalchuk & Movchan, 2019). Such policies aim to soften the economic blow of sanctions while fostering internal resilience. Nonetheless, the broader economic impact remains significant, as evidenced by Rebecca (2022), who notes that while sanctions have not delivered the anticipated economic "knockout," they have placed Russia under considerable economic strain, particularly in the energy sector.

Anar (2018) argues that increased sanctions on Russia could undermine the economic stability of neighbouring states, especially those reliant on Russian markets or financial systems. This aligns with findings from Zheliba & Kornienko (2019), who suggest that economic diversification remains crucial for these states to mitigate the adverse effects of sanctions.

Furthermore, studies such as Maia & Kimberly (2023) indicate that sanctions targeting specific individuals have expanded significantly since the 2022 conflict, resulting in asset freezes and travel bans. However, the effectiveness of such targeted sanctions remains debated, as some argue that politically connected individuals can find ways to circumvent these measures (Chesterman & Pouligny, 2003). The existing literature highlights that economic sanctions significantly impact political and economic conditions in targeted states, including those in the post-Soviet space. While sanctions can exert pressure and potentially alter strategic behaviour, their effectiveness varies, and they often produce unintended consequences. Post-Soviet republics have shown adaptability through diversification and strategic alliances, but the broader implications of sanctions for regional stability remain complex. This review underscores the need for further analysis of the long-term effects of sanctions on the political stability of post-Soviet states, filling a critical gap in existing research.

#### IV. POWER THEORY IN NATO-RUSSIA RELATIONS AND POLITICAL STABILITY IN POST-SOVIET STATES

To understand the complex dynamics between NATO and Russia and how these relations impact political stability in post-Soviet states, this study adopts the Power Theory. Power theory is a central framework in international relations that examines how power shapes the behaviour of states and other actors in a competitive and often anarchic international system. It draws from the intellectual contributions of early 20th-century scholars such as Hans Morgenthau (1954) and Max Weber (1979), whose works laid the foundation for modern interpretations of power dynamics in global politics.

Power theory emerged in the aftermath of World War II, responding to a period marked by heightened global tensions and an increasingly complex international system. The theory builds on the insights of social theorists who sought to understand how power is both distributed and exercised within societies and across states. Scholars like Hans Morgenthau, Kenneth Waltz, and Robert Keohane became key proponents, each providing different lenses through which power could be understood in global politics. Morgenthau's seminal work, *Politics Among Nations* (1954), introduced the idea that states are inherently driven by a desire for power, leading to inevitable conflicts. Morgenthau argued that power is the central determinant of state behaviour, a perspective that became foundational in the study of international relations.

Kenneth Waltz further developed these ideas in *Theory of International Politics* (1979), emphasizing that the structure of the international system—specifically its anarchic nature—compels states to seek power as a means of ensuring survival. Waltz's approach, often classified under neorealism or structural realism, suggests that states are primarily concerned with maintaining a balance of power to prevent domination by any single actor. Robert Keohane's contributions in *After Hegemony* (1984) shifted focus to the concept of relative power, positing that it is not the absolute power of a state that matters, but how power is distributed relative to other actors. This view is particularly relevant in analyzing NATO-Russia relations, as both entities navigate their relative strengths and weaknesses to maintain influence in Eastern Europe and beyond.

Power theory offers valuable insights into the dynamics between NATO and Russia and their impact on political stability in post-Soviet states. Following the end of the Cold War, NATO expanded into Eastern Europe, incorporating several former Soviet republics and satellite states, such as Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania (Stephen, 2000; Cooley, 2005; Lieber & Alexander, 2018). This expansion signified a shift in the balance of power, with NATO extending its influence closer to Russia's borders, which Russia perceived

as a direct threat to its strategic interests (Cohen, 2000; Legvold, 2014). This perception has driven Russia to respond assertively, using both diplomatic and military means to push back against NATO's presence, as demonstrated by its military interventions in Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014, and 2022).

From a power theory perspective, NATO's expansion is seen as an attempt to consolidate its relative power in Eastern Europe, while Russia's actions reflect a desire to maintain its sphere of influence and counterbalance NATO's moves (Mearsheimer, 2014; Trenin, 2016). This ongoing power struggle has contributed to instability in the post-Soviet space, where countries like Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia find themselves caught between the competing interests of NATO and Russia. These states often face internal divisions, with factions supporting closer ties to the West or maintaining alliances with Russia, resulting in political instability and regional tensions (Cooley, 2012; D'Anieri, 2019).

A key tenet of power theory is that states are rational actors, pursuing power to maximize their security in an uncertain international environment (Waltz, 2001; Jervis, 2017; Mearsheimer, 2003). Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 is an example of power assertion, as it sought to protect its strategic interests and maintain influence over its near abroad (Charap & Colton, 2014; Fattore, 2014). This move was perceived as a challenge to the territorial integrity of Ukraine, an aspiring member of NATO and a critical partner to both the EU and NATO. Russia's actions led to heightened tensions with NATO, prompting the alliance to reinforce its military presence in Eastern Europe.

This pattern of power competition has significant implications for the political stability of post-Soviet states. As NATO and Russia engage in a strategic tug-of-war, these states are often caught in the crossfire, facing pressures to align with either side. Some, like the Baltic states, have fully integrated into NATO's security framework, while others, such as Belarus, maintain strong ties with Russia. This division contributes to a lack of regional cohesion and makes political stability more elusive.

Several scholars have analyzed the power dynamics between NATO and Russia and their effects on regional stability. Mearsheimer's (2014) analysis of *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* suggests that the pursuit of power and survival drives states like Russia to adopt offensive postures when they perceive threats from rivals like NATO. Kaczmarek (2018) highlights the precarious balance that Russia faces in maintaining influence over its post-Soviet neighbours, emphasizing that its military actions, particularly in Ukraine, have led to a strategic stalemate. Additionally, Binnendijk and Krickovic (2018) argue that NATO's challenge lies in adapting its strategic posture to address the evolving security environment in Europe. They suggest that the alliance must develop strategies that balance

deterrence with dialogue to manage relations with Russia. These perspectives underscore the complexity of power theory, which requires understanding not only military capabilities but also diplomatic efforts and regional dynamics.

In conclusion, power theory provides a robust framework for analyzing the interaction between NATO and Russia and its implications for political stability in the post-Soviet region. It emphasizes the centrality of power in shaping state behaviour, highlighting how the pursuit of power by NATO and Russia has led to a competitive and often contentious relationship. This competition has a direct impact on the stability of post-Soviet states, as they navigate the challenges of aligning with either Western or Russian interests. Understanding the role of power in these dynamics enables a more nuanced view of the tensions and opportunities present in the region. As NATO and Russia continue to compete for influence, power theory remains a key tool for scholars and policymakers seeking to interpret the evolving geopolitical landscape of Eastern Europe.

## V. NATO-RUSSIA SANCTIONS AND ECONOMIC CRISES IN POST-SOVIET STATES

Sanctions and counter-sanctions between NATO and Russia are driven by political, economic, security, and normative considerations (Davidova & Thomas, 2017). Politically, NATO's sanctions serve as a means to pressure Russia and deter further aggression, particularly in Ukraine. These measures align with NATO's collective security framework and its commitment to protecting member states and upholding international law (Reuters, 2018). Russia, in response, has implemented counter-sanctions, such as banning agricultural imports from the EU, as a way to retaliate against Western economies and strengthen domestic narratives that frame the West as an adversary (Averre et al., 2015).

In terms of the economy, Russia's GDP has grown more slowly, trade has decreased, and foreign investment has decreased as a result of NATO and the EU targeting important economic sectors (Goldthau & Stepan, 2015). Although they haven't had as much of an impact on Western economies, Russia's counter-sanctions have affected European agricultural exports and caused inflation in some sectors (Lucas, 2008). By restricting diplomatic interactions and decreasing mutual economic dependency, these economic constraints have widened the gulf between Russia and the West. In addition to Russia, post-Soviet nations that depend on economic relations with both Russia and the West have also been impacted by the drop in trade and investment.

Security considerations play a significant part in the current sanctions regime. NATO sanctions are meant to safeguard European security and prevent Russia from further territorial invasions, particularly given its annexation of Crimea and involvement in the conflict in Eastern Ukraine (Davis, 2016). Russia, on the other hand, views NATO's expansion and Western influence in post-Soviet states as a direct threat to its geopolitical interests. Moscow's counter-sanctions and retaliatory actions serve to push back against NATO's influence and reinforce Russia's position in the region (Renard, 2020).

Sanctions also serve a normative function, with NATO and the EU arguing that economic restrictions are necessary to uphold international norms, such as state sovereignty and human rights (Davis, 2016). The EU, for instance, has justified sanctions on Russia as a response to violations of Ukraine's territorial integrity. Russia, however, counters this argument by portraying Western sanctions as unjust interference in its internal affairs and an attempt to undermine its sovereignty (Russian Foreign Ministry, 2020). The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 increased sanctions, as NATO partners imposed severe economic restrictions, including bans on Russian oil imports and sanctions against oligarchs and state enterprises. In reaction, Russia used its energy exports as a weapon, cutting gas supply to Europe, causing energy shortages and increasing prices (International Energy Agency, 2023). This predicament has prompted European governments to investigate alternate energy options and accelerate their transition to renewable energy sources.

The broader impact of these sanctions has been mixed. While Russia has faced economic strain, it has also strengthened ties with China and other non-Western allies to mitigate the effects of Western restrictions (Stephen, 2022; Kaczmarek, 2023). Post-Soviet states such as Ukraine and Moldova have gravitated towards NATO and the EU for security guarantees and economic support (Gressel, 2023). However, these countries also face inflation, supply chain disruptions, and economic instability due to the ongoing conflict and sanctions regime.

The larger geopolitical transition towards a multipolar world also drives Russia's and NATO's activities. Security, economic, political, and normative considerations influence NATO's and Russia's strategic reasons for implementing sanctions and counter-sanctions. These incentives have grown to be a vital instrument for achieving regional foreign policy goals and are intimately related to the larger strategic interests of the states that make up the post-Soviet states. The goals and outcomes of NATO and Russian sanctions and counter-sanctions in post-Soviet nations are displayed in the table below.

**Table 1 Sanctions and Counter Sanctions by NATO and Russia in Post-Soviet States.**

Country	Sanctions/Counter-Sanctions Imposed	Reasons/Motives	Effects	Sources
Ukraine	Russia imposes sanctions on imports, transit, and financial services. NATO and EU sanctions target Russia individuals, entities, financial services, and restrict access to critical technologies.	Stemming from Russia’s annexation Crimea in 2014, ongoing conflict, and the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and political instability.	Economic decline, decrease in GDP, decrease in exports, and increase in poverty rates.	Dyner (2018); EU, (2024)
Belarus	EU sanctions include bans on individuals, entities, arms exports, and economic measures. Russia’s support leads to counter-measures by the EU.	The economic crisis was due to political instability, repression following 2020 elections, and dependence and alignment with Russia’s actions in Ukraine.	Decrease in industrial output, investment, and foreign exchange reserves.	Popova (2019); EU, (2024)
Georgia	Russia sanctions on imports and financial services.	The crisis was due to internal political instability and the 2008 war or conflict over South Ossetia and Abkhazia with Russia.	Decrease in exports and negative impacts on GDP growth.	Vymyatnina (2019)
Moldova	Russia sanctions on Moldovan agricultural products, imports, and remittance flows (financial services).	The crisis was due to political instability, corruption, and dependence on remittance flows from Russia.	Decrease in exports and decrease in remittances.	Dyner (2018); Geukjian (2020)
Armenia	Azerbaijan and Turkey sanctions on imports and transportation.	The crisis was due to political instability and internal conflicts (the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict).	Decrease in export, remittances and tourism revenue.	Geukjian (2020)
Azerbaijan	Armenia sanctions on imports and transportation.	The crisis was due to the dependence on oil exports and internal political instability.	Decrease in oil prices, GDP and foreign exchange reserves	Geukjian (2020)
Kazakhstan	Russia and NATO sanctions on individuals, financial services, and certain technologies.	The crisis was due to the dependence on oil exports, internal political instability, and the COVID-19 pandemic impact on oil prices, and the effects of the 2022 Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.	Decrease in foreign investment and export, and economic instability	EU, (2024)
Kyrgyzstan	Recently affected by sanctions due to its trade connections with Russia and accusations of sanctions circumvention by the West.	Supporting Russia’s economy and sanctions and accusations of aiding sanction evasion.	Strain on diplomatic ties with Western countries, and economic challenges.	EU, (2024)

**Source:** Author’s compilation from different independence sources

The use of sanctions and counter-sanctions by Russia and NATO, together with the effects on post-Soviet states, are compiled in Table 1. It is important to emphasize that the

specific sanctions imposed, the political and economic circumstances of the nation, and its degree of integration

with the global economy all affect the impact and efficacy of sanctions and counter-penalties.

## VI. IMPACT OF SANCTIONS, COUNTER-SANCTIONS AND ECONOMIC DECLINE IN POST-SOVIET STATES

Sanctions and counter-sanctions between Russia and the West have had widespread economic consequences for Russia and post-Soviet states. Western sanctions, particularly the EU's 14<sup>th</sup> package (June 2024), has targeted Russia's financial and energy sectors, restricting liquefied natural gas exports, financial messaging, and industrial equipment (Squire Patton Boggs, 2024). These measures have intensified inflation, currency devaluation, and GDP decline in states like Ukraine and Moldova, reducing trade and increasing poverty (Dănilă & Gavrilova, 2018; Dawson, 2016). Energy-exporting countries, such as Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, faced fiscal instability due to limited market access and volatile energy prices (Dziuban & Pecyzski, 2020).

Russia's financial isolation has pushed it toward alternative markets, but losses persist (Sidiropolou et al., 2017). Rising costs of essential goods have worsened social inequalities, driving shadow economies (Aslund, 2018). Structural reforms, including economic diversification and stronger social policies, are necessary to stabilize affected economies and prevent political instability (Bratu et al., 2021; IMF, 2021). These developments highlight the long-term economic challenges of global trade disruptions and economic isolation.

These problems are significant barriers to economic stability as post-Soviet nations battle with declining foreign direct investment (FDI) and deteriorating infrastructure. According to the European Investment Bank (2022), the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 severely damaged Ukraine's infrastructure, which currently harms transportation networks, industrial sectors, and key utilities. Both Moldova and Georgia suffer from deteriorating infrastructure and political instability which leads to lower foreign direct investment while governance difficulties repel potential international investors. Poor infrastructure lowers living conditions by causing environmental damage and public health problems (Estrada & Busygina, 2019).

Political unpredictability and poor infrastructure continue to deter foreign investment, resulting in insufficient capital inflows required for modernization and industrial advancement (Gast, 2021). The lack of foreign direct investment limits access to sophisticated technology and professional knowledge, which prevents economic diversification (Fujinaka & Uchno, 2019). Moreover, unreliable transportation and energy supplies increase investment risks, discouraging business expansion and

contributing to employment stagnation (Eicke & Matytsin, 2018). The lack of skilled labor, coupled with inadequate infrastructure, has exacerbated economic disparities and slowed industrial development (Gast, 2021).

The decline in FDI has further constrained economic modernization, preventing post-Soviet states from diversifying their economies and increasing employment opportunities (Estrada & Busygina, 2019). Poor infrastructure deters large-scale investments, weakening regional competitiveness in the global economy (Fujinaka & Uchno, 2019). Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive governance reforms, infrastructure modernization, and policy measures that foster a more transparent and investor-friendly business climate.

Post-Soviet nations must make significant expenditures in infrastructure to upgrade utilities, enhance transportation systems, and stabilize energy availability to address these problems. Restoring investor confidence and drawing in foreign direct investment requires transparent policies and anti-corruption initiatives (Fujinaka & Uchno, 2019). Low living standards, diminished global competitiveness, and economic stagnation will continue in the absence of these measures.

The humanitarian crisis in post-Soviet territories has worsened due to conflict, economic instability, and disrupted supply chains. Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine has displaced over 14 million people, severely damaging infrastructure and limiting access to food and medical supplies (UNHCR, 2022; OCHA, 2023). Economic hardships, including high inflation and currency devaluation, have heightened food and healthcare shortages, particularly in Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia (World Bank, 2023; WHO, 2023).

Food security remains critical as Ukraine's grain exports, vital to Eastern Europe and Central Asia, have been heavily disrupted, causing price surges in dependent countries like Armenia and Kyrgyzstan (OECD, 2023). Healthcare systems, weakened by underfunding and corruption, struggle to meet growing demands. Poor sanitation in refugee camps has led to outbreaks of preventable diseases such as cholera and measles (WHO, 2023; UNDP, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic further strained these fragile systems, worsening access to protective equipment and vaccinations (OCHA, 2020). Addressing these crises requires international aid, strengthened healthcare infrastructure, and economic stabilization efforts. The table below shows the percentages of the impacts and/or the effects of the use of sanctions and counter-sanctions by NATO Russia in post-Soviet states with emphasis on infrastructure, foreign investment, currency devaluation, prices of commodities, economic situation, humanitarian crisis, food security and medical suppliers.

**Table 2. The percentages impacts of the use of sanctions and counter-sanctions by NATO and Russia on essential and critical aspects of economy of the post-Soviet states.**

Country	Infrastructure	Foreign Investment	Currency Devaluation	Prices of Commodities	Economic Situation	Humanitarian Crisis	Food Security	Medical Suppliers
Russia	35%	45%	55%	40%	50%	55%	35%	40%
Ukraine	40%	35%	45%	55%	60%	50%	55%	55%
Kazakhstan	25%	30%	35%	30%	35%	25%	35%	20%
Belarus	30%	25%	30%	35%	30%	35%	30%	25%
Uzbekistan	20%	15%	20%	25%	20%	15%	20%	15%
Azerbaijan	15%	20%	25%	20%	25%	20%	25%	30%
Turkmenistan	10%	10%	15%	10%	15%	10%	15%	10%
Georgia	25%	25%	30%	30%	35%	30%	35%	40%
Armenia	20%	20%	25%	25%	30%	25%	30%	35%
Moldova	30%	30%	35%	35%	40%	35%	45%	45%

**Source:** Author’s compilation from policy briefs and reports from international organizations such as World Bank (2023), UNEC Research Fund, (2023) and Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (2024).

The data in Table 2 highlights the significant effects of sanctions and counter-sanctions on post-Soviet economies. Infrastructure impact is most severe in Russia (30%) and Ukraine (35%), aligning with McKinsey & Company (2022), which attributes this to years of underinvestment. Poor infrastructure limits economic competitiveness (Eicke & Matytsin, 2018). Foreign investment declined sharply in Ukraine (35%) and Russia (45%), as investors avoid politically unstable regions (OECD, 2022; Gast, 2021). Currency devaluation hit Russia (55%) and Ukraine (45%) hardest, worsening economic instability (World Bank, 2023).

Food insecurity increased when commodity prices rose most sharply in Russia (40%) and Ukraine (55%), respectively (WFP, 2023). In these countries, unemployment and inflation exacerbate economic suffering, making poverty worse (Clements et al., 2018). Russia (55%) and Ukraine (50%) have the highest rates of humanitarian crises, with

millions of people displaced (UNHCR, 2023). Food insecurity is severe in Ukraine (45%) and Moldova (45%), whereas Turkmenistan (15%) and Uzbekistan (20%) were the least impacted (FAO, 2023). Moldova (45%) and Ukraine (55%) also have severe shortages of medical supplies (WHO, 2023). These difficulties show how urgently the most impacted areas require humanitarian aid and economic recovery initiatives.

Sanctions may also have unintended impacts, which are equally detrimental but difficult to quantify. Economic difficulties may result from these effects for both the sending and receiving nations. The possible impact on the lives of regular people should therefore always be considered when deciding whether to impose punishment. The nature and effects on impacted people and businesses of the ongoing sanctions and counter-sanctions imposed by Russia and NATO are shown in the table below.

**Table: 3 Nature and consequences of sanctions and counter-sanctions by NATO and Russia on affected individuals and companies.**

Dates	Sanctioning Authority	Nature of Sanctions	Individuals and Companies affected	Consequences of Sanctions
March 2014	NATO	Economic and financial sanctions.	Russian state banks, energy, and defense companies.	Decreased Russia imports, decreased foreign investment, weaker Russian ruble, economic recession, reduction in GDP growth, and weaken of Russian economy (Hufbauer et al., 2018).
March 2014	NATO	Travel bans and asset freezes.	Russian politicians.	Restricted travel and froze assets of Russian politicians and individuals, and a decrease in diplomatic relations (U.S. Department of State, 2023).
March	Russia	Travel bans and	Ukrainian	Restricted travel and froze assets of Ukrainian

2014		asset freezes.	politicians.	politicians, political tensions between Ukraine and Russia, and a decrease in diplomatic relations(Kremlin, 2023).
June 2014	Russia	Export restrictions.	Natural gas exports to Ukraine.	Decreased natural gas exports to Ukraine, and potential implications for energy security in Ukraine and Europe(International Energy Agency, 2023).
July 2014	NATO	Arms embargo.	Russian arms exports and imports.	Limited Russian arms imports and exports, decreased foreign revenue, and pressure on the Russian defense industry(Åslund & Guzmán-Concha, 2018).
August 2014	Russia	Economic and financial sanctions.	European union member states and companies.	Decreased European exports to Russia, decreased foreign investment in Russia, decreased in EU GDP growth and economic recession in targeted EU member states(Gurvich, E. & Prilepskiy, I. 2019).
August 2014	Russia	Import restrictions.	Agricultural goods from European Union member states.	Decreased agricultural exports from EU member states to Russia, economic losses for the targeted EU member states, and the potential for increased food insecurity in Russia(European Commission, 2023).
2014	Ukraine	Sanctions against Russian individuals and companies.	Russian politicians and companies linked to Ukraine's conflict.	Restricted access to Ukraine and Ukrainian markets decreased foreign investment, limited access to Ukrainian natural resources, and a decrease in bilateral trade between Ukraine and Russia(UN General Assembly, 2023).
February 2022	NATO	Comprehensive sanctions	Major Russian banks, oligarchs, and state-owned enterprises.	Severe restrictions on banking transactions, frozen assets abroad, economic isolation, and a projected GDP contraction of up to 10% in Russia (World Bank, 2023).
October 2023	NATO	Sectoral sanctions	Russian energy sector	Increase operational challenges for Russian oil exports, impact on global oil prices, and reduced state revenue (U.S. Department of Treasury, 2023).

**Source:** Author's compilation from various independent sources (Hufbauer, Moran, & Vieira, 2018; U.S. Department of State, 2023; Kremlin, 2023; International Energy Agency, 2023; Åslund, & Guzmán-Concha, 2018; Gurvich, E. & Prilepskiy, I, 2019; European Commission, 2023; UN General Assembly, 2023; World Bank, 2023; and U.S. Department of Treasury, 2023).

The data in Table 3 presents an overview of NATO and Russia's sanctions and counter-sanctions, detailing their nature, affected entities, and broader economic and political impacts. NATO's sanctions, targeting Russian banks, defense firms, and political figures, have weakened Russia's economy, reducing foreign investment and devaluing the ruble (Hufbauer et al., 2018; Åslund & Guzmán-Concha, 2018). In response, Russia imposed counter-sanctions, particularly on EU agricultural imports, causing economic losses and exacerbating food insecurity (European Commission, 2023).

Politicians and oligarchs have been impacted by the sanctions, which have strained diplomatic ties by limiting travel and freezing assets (Gurvich & Prilepskiy, 2019). Ukraine also complicated trade dynamics by imposing sanctions on Russian firms. In addition to economic downturns, the actions have exacerbated poverty and

instability by causing humanitarian crises (U.S. Department of Treasury, 2023; UN General Assembly, 2023). Global trade and regional stability are impacted by these restrictions, which also continue to affect economic structures and geopolitical alliances.

## VII. CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

An examination of NATO-Russia relations between 2000 and 2024 shows that the implementation of sanctions and counter-sanctions has resulted in economic crises in post-Soviet states, increased economic instability, diminished growth opportunities, and impeded political stability. The fierce struggle for influence between NATO and Russia has increased tensions, which has harmed the socioeconomic well-being of post-Soviet nations.

To foster political stability and economic resilience, NATO and Russia should shift towards constructive engagement, focusing on dialogue, trust-building, and cooperation on mutual regional interests. Collaborative economic strategies promoting regional trade shared resources, and joint infrastructure projects can strengthen economic resilience and mitigate the negative impacts of sanctions. International organizations and regional bodies should facilitate mechanisms for conflict resolution and cooperation, focusing on economic development and political integration. Supporting democratic institutions and civil society is vital for promoting long-term political stability, including technical assistance, funding, and training.

### More Research Is Required

More research is needed to determine the long-term consequences of sanctions on the post-Soviet economy and the social impacts of geopolitical tensions on local inhabitants. Policymakers must investigate the effectiveness of conflict resolution initiatives and their effects on regional stability. It is also crucial to look into how international institutions mediate disputes between NATO and Russia.

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