

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of Research

The Russia-Ukraine conflict is one of the largest conflicts of the 21st century. This conflict has become a topic of global discussion. The dispute between these two countries has a long and complex history with deep-rooted issues. Tensions escalated in early 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine and supported separatist groups in Eastern Ukraine.¹ This triggered a prolonged armed conflict in the Donbas region. In October 2021, the situation escalated again when Russia began deploying a large number of troops and military equipment near Ukraine's border. This move sparked international concerns about the possibility of a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, heightening tensions in the region and drawing global attention. It is essential to understand the historical context of the relationship between Ukraine and Russia.

The two countries have had a close and complex relationship since the Middle Ages when the territory now known as Ukraine was part of various empires and kingdoms that also included areas of Russia.² This closeness is reflected in many aspects, including language, culture, and political history. Russian President Vladimir Putin has consistently stated that Russia and Ukraine are united by a shared history and culture. Between 2005 and 2014, Ukraine experienced a series of revolutions that marked a rejection of Russian hegemony. The Orange Revolution in 2004 and the Euromaidan

¹ "View of Tinjauan Yuridis Tindakan Aneksasi Rusia Di Krimea, Ukraina Dari Perspektif Hukum Internasional," accessed February 26, 2024, <https://journal.unram.ac.id/index.php/majil/article/view/2534/1150>.

² Samindra Mohan Biswas, "HISTORY OF RUSSIA-UKRAINE RELATIONS & ITS IMPACT ON THE U.S. & INDIA," *KHAZANAH MULTIDISIPLIN* 4, no. 1 (2023).

protests in 2013–2014 are two significant examples of Ukraine's efforts to determine its own political direction and future, including its aspirations to join the European Union and NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization).

The evolving dynamics of the conflict have made it increasingly significant, culminating in military aggression between the two countries. Unfortunately, the impact of this conflict is not limited to Russia and Ukraine but also affects neighboring countries, particularly in Europe and the former Soviet states. Russia's ability to exert significant influence over European countries has not gone unnoticed by Belarus, which views Russia as a "*rising power*."³ In 2014, when the Russia-Ukraine conflict erupted, Belarus played a significant role by adopting a flexible and neutral approach. Belarus even served as a venue for negotiations between Russia and Ukraine. In 2014, relations between Belarus and Russia began to improve due to Belarus' neutrality in the conflict. Belarus also provided a forum for resolving the Russia-Ukraine conflict in Minsk.⁴

In 2022, when the conflict escalated again, Belarus took a different approach by fully supporting Russia. Belarus' economy is heavily dependent on Russia, not only in terms of trade but also in energy supply.⁵ Russia supplies gas and oil at lower prices compared to international markets, which is crucial for Belarus' relatively small and underdeveloped economy. This dependency offers clear economic benefits to Belarus but also makes it vulnerable to political pressure from Russia.

³ Ruth Deyermond, "The State of the Union: Military Success, Economic and Political Failure in the Russia–Belarus Union," *Europe-Asia Studies* 56, no. 8 (December 2004): 1191–1205, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1465342042000308910>.

⁴ Ryhor Astapenia dan Dzmitry Balkunets, "Belarus-Russia-Relations_en.Pdf" (Belarus Digest, August 1, 2016).

⁵ Deyermond, "The State of the Union."

From a neorealist perspective, the world operates within an international framework filled with anarchy, where there is no central authority regulating the behavior of states.⁶ As a result, countries tend to strive as much as possible to maintain their existence and interests amidst competition with other states pursuing their own national interests. For Belarus, this means prioritizing national security and stability by relying on a close relationship with Russia as its main strategic partner. Russia provides crucial military and economic support to Belarus, helping the country address external challenges and maintain domestic stability. Belarus also implements diplomatic strategies to balance Russia's influence and foster relations with Western countries, although carefully avoiding provocations that could trigger sanctions or conflict.

In the context of the Rational Actor Model, Belarus, under President Lukashenko, evaluates policy options based on calculations to maximize its benefits. Decisions such as close cooperation with Russia and multidirectional diplomacy reflect efforts to enhance the country's security, economic power, and geopolitical position. Therefore, Belarus' actions align with the basic assumptions of neorealism, where states act as rational actors in an anarchic international environment to achieve and maintain their national interests.

The conflict mentioned above is actually referred to in Al-Qur'an, Surah Al-Maidah, verse 120, which means, "To Allah belongs the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth and whatever is in them; and He has power over everything." This interpretation emphasizes that only Allah owns the heavens and the earth. He is the creator and controller of them. He is the owner of all creatures within them, and He has absolute

⁶ Kenneth N. Waltz, "REALIST THOUGHT AND NEOREALIST THEORY," *Journal of International Affairs* 44, no. 1, (1990): 21–37.

power over everything. Nothing can weaken His authority. This indicates that everything that happens on earth occurs solely because of Allah's power and according to His will, including conflicts between nations.

This research fills several gaps in the existing literature. First, although the Russia-Ukraine relationship has been extensively studied, the role and national interests of Belarus in this conflict have received limited attention. Second, the application of neorealism to analyze Belarus' foreign policy in the context of this conflict remains scarce. The novelty of this research lies in the use of neorealism theory to explore how Belarus, as a rational actor in an anarchic system, formulates policies to maximize its security amid the tensions between Russia and Ukraine, and how the country navigates geopolitical dynamics to maintain its independence and domestic stability.

1.2. Research Problem

Based on the background above, the research question can be formulated as follows:

How can Belarus national interests in the Russia-Ukraine conflict be analyzed through a neorealist perspective?

1.3. Research Purposes

This study aims to further analyze how Belarus' national interests in the Russia-Ukraine conflict can be examined through a neorealist perspective.

1.4. The Utility of the Research

1.4.1. Academic Benefit

Some benefits of the research findings for academics include:

1. Contributing knowledge and information regarding Belarus' national interests in the Russia-Ukraine conflict through the lens of neorealism.
2. Providing additional insights for scholars of international relations, particularly those interested in diplomatic relations between countries.

1.4.2. Practitioner Benefit

Practically, this research is expected to provide benefits in the following areas:

The findings are anticipated to be useful and provide practical advantages to all parties involved in the issues studied by the researcher, as well as the subject of the research.

1.5. Literature Review

1.5.1. Previous Research

Research on the diplomatic relations between Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine has been extensively studied by previous researchers using various approaches. Some of the key works include: **"South China Sea Conflict: China's Strategy to Strengthen Territorial Sovereignty in the Neorealism Perspective"** by **Hannah Fadhila Anindya Wibowo (2023)**, **"Belarus Between East and West"** by **Roy Allison, Stephen White, and Margot Light (2005)**, **"Belarus - Ukraine: A Strategically Important Environment"** by **Oleg Bogutsky (2014)**, **"Belarus-Russia Relations after the Ukraine Conflict"** by **Ryhor Astapenia and Dzmitry Balkunets (2016)**, and **"Belarus and Russia: From Brotherhood to Alliance"** by **Anatoly Pankovski (2016)**.

The first discussion regarding China's national interests in the South China Sea conflict, analyzed using the neorealist perspective, is relevant to this research, which also

uses neorealism. A study by Hannah Fadhila Anindya Wibowo explores China's strategy to strengthen its territorial sovereignty in the South China Sea. In recent years, this international maritime conflict has drawn global attention, particularly concerning disputes over islands, waters, and natural resources in the region. The conflict involves overlapping claims from six countries: Brunei Darussalam, China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, and the Philippines. The dynamics of the conflict often shift due to various strategies employed by these countries to pursue their respective national interests.⁷ One aspect of these national interests is territorial sovereignty. China, as one of the dominant powers in the Asia-Pacific region, employs various methods to achieve its interests in the South China Sea conflict. From a neorealist perspective, China's national interests can be analyzed. The similarity between this research and others lies in the application of neorealism theory to analyze a case. This research also supports other researchers in gaining further understanding of the neorealism theory used to analyze Belarus' national interests in the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

The second discussion focuses on Belarus' foreign policy towards the East and the West, as exemplified in the work titled "Belarus Between East and West" by Roy Allison, Stephen White, and Margot Light. The authors argue that Belarus' foreign policy reflects an authoritarian political system heavily reliant on Russia, with the president as the primary source of policy. Although there is a sense of 'European-ness' among the population, Belarus' official stance leans towards 'Eurasia' and integration with Russia as well as the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States). Relations with Europe are more

⁷ Hannah Fadhila and Hannah Wibowo, "Konflik Laut Cina Selatan: Strategi Cina Mengukuhkan Kedaulatan Teritorial Dalam Perspektif Neorealisme," June 21, 2023.

of a pragmatic response to the European Union's position rather than a rigid ideological stance. Political changes in the region, such as the color revolutions in Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, tend to strengthen the Belarusian government's resistance to political dialogue. Attacks on the weaknesses of Belarusian political institutions and exclusion from international organizations may push Belarus further towards 'Eurasia.' A 'constructive engagement' approach from the West could yield better results than the existing hostility.⁸ The similarity between this research and others lies in the case study approach taken, while the difference lies in the focus of the research, as this study specifically examines Belarus' national interests in the Russia-Ukraine conflict through a neorealist perspective. This research also supports other researchers in gaining further understanding of Belarus' position as a former Soviet state.

The next discussion comes from a work reviewed by Oleg Bogutsky titled "Belarus - Ukraine: A Strategically Important Environment." In his writing, Oleg states that post-revolution, Ukraine has become an important focus in Belarus' foreign policy. Minsk aims to maintain access to one of the largest markets, while Kiev seeks to ensure security on its northern border and uninterrupted oil supplies.⁹ The explanation above shows that Belarus is engaged in cooperation with Ukraine but perceives a regional threat if it continues to maintain this cooperation. The similarity between this research and others lies in the discussion of the cooperation Belarus has with Ukraine, while the difference lies in the specific case study. This research also supports researchers in

⁸ Roy Allison, Stephen White, and Margot Light, "Belarus between East and West," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 21, no. 4 (December 2005): 487–511, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523270500363411>.

⁹ Oleg Bogutsky, "Belarus – Ukraine: Strategically Important Neighborhood," *Foreign Policy*, 2014.

gaining a better understanding of Belarus' relationship and cooperation with Ukraine post-revolution.

The next discussion comes from a work reviewed by Ryhor Astapenia and Dzmitry Balkunets titled "Belarus-Russia Relations after the Ukraine Conflict." In their writing, Ryhor and Dzmitry reveal that although Belarus' dependence on Russia has decreased, the relationship between the two countries remains strong because Belarus is still heavily financially dependent on Russia, particularly through loans and subsidies.¹⁰ Russia controls Belarus' energy infrastructure and recognizes the results of Belarus' presidential elections, which are crucial for Lukashenko's legitimacy. Belarus holds high strategic value for Russia, such as controlling transit routes to Kaliningrad and energy shipments. Therefore, the Kremlin will not allow this relationship to be completely severed. A process of estrangement may occur with generational changes and increased political and cultural independence in Belarus, but this reflects more the formation of Belarus' national identity than a direct conflict with Russia. The similarity between this research and others lies in the case study discussing Belarus' relationship with Russia, while the difference lies in the theory used for analysis, where this research applies neorealism. This research also supports researchers in gaining a deeper understanding of the Belarus-Russia relationship.

The final discussion by Anatoly Pankovski in his article titled "Belarus and Russia: From Brotherhood to Alliance" suggests that Belarus' economic cooperation with Russia in 2016 was heavily influenced by the ongoing recession. Direct financial assistance from

¹⁰ Ryhor Astapenia dan Dzmitry Balkunets, "Belarus-Russia-Relations_en.Pdf."

Russia and the easing of restrictions on Belarusian commodities helped mitigate its impact.¹¹ Direct contact with regional Russian leaders is expected to contribute to the recovery of exports, although it is not a determining factor. Political cooperation is expected to remain amicable, with Belarus seeking to enhance its role as Russia's advocate in international relations, particularly with Ukraine, Turkey, and the European Union, as well as lobbying for the interests of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) in various countries and international organizations such as India, Vietnam, and the United Nations. Additionally, the revitalization of relations within the Union State is likely to occur, with a focus on developing a joint military doctrine expected to last throughout the year. The similarity between this research and others lies in the case study of Belarus' cooperation with Russia, while the difference lies in the theory used and the specific focus of the case being studied, where this research focuses on Belarus' national interests in the Russia-Ukraine conflict analyzed through Neorealism theory.

1.6. Conceptual Framework

1.6.1. Neorealism Theory

Neorealism is one of the main perspectives in the study of modern International Relations theory. This theory emerged as a critical response to classical realism, which assumed that the struggle for power in international relations is driven by human nature.

¹² According to the neorealist perspective, a country's aggressive behavior in international politics cannot be explained solely by referring to selfish and conflict-prone

¹¹ Anatoly Pankovski, "BELARUS AND RUSSIA: FROM BROTHERHOOD TO ALLIANCE," *Foreign Policy*, 2016.

¹² Rodger A. Payne, "Neorealists as Critical Theorists: The Purpose of Foreign Policy Debate," *Perspectives on Politics* 5, no. 03 (September 2007): 503, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592707071514>.

human nature, as this cannot be empirically proven. Neorealists argue that the main determinant of a country's behavior is its position within the anarchic international structure.

Neorealism offers several key arguments that can be summarized in four main points. First, the international world operates in a state of anarchy. In this context, international politics is seen as an arena of competition and conflict between states, where each state strives to maintain its national interests and survival.¹³ This drives states to maximize their security and power because, in an anarchic system, there is no guarantee of how long a state's interests will be sustained or when threats from other states may arise. Second, neorealism asserts that states always strive to protect themselves. Third, states are the primary actors in international relations, holding political power, and in an anarchic international system, the intentions or behavior of other states are difficult to predict, leading to mistrust between states. Lastly, a state's ability determines the pattern of power distribution at the international level. States with significant military power will have greater influence in global politics. Factors such as ideology, political systems, or the moral character of a state become less relevant; what matters most is the strength or weakness of a state, measured by its military capability.¹⁴

1.6.2. Rational Actor Model Concept

Foreign policy is a strategy designed by decision-makers to engage with other international political entities with the aim of achieving and advancing specific

¹³ Robert H. Jackson and Georg Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches*, Fifth edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹⁴ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Addison-Wesley Series in Political Science (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co, 1979).

interests.¹⁵ The evaluation of a country's foreign policy involves identifying the objectives the country aims to achieve and assessing how the actions taken by the country are considered rational choices.¹⁶ Therefore, analysts agree on highlighting the objectives a country aims to achieve through its actions and explaining how these actions are considered rational choices in line with the country's goals. This set of assumptions forms the basis of the rational choice policy framework. In this research, the researcher will apply the foreign policy formulation theory developed by Graham T. Allison in the form of the Rational Actor Model. This theory views foreign policy as the result of actions by rational actors. The model also emphasizes that the process of formulating foreign policy decisions is an intellectual process.

Graham T. Allison proposed five paradigms of rational policy in his work. These paradigms serve as a framework for understanding and analyzing how states formulate and implement their foreign policies.¹⁷ In the Organizing Concepts paradigm, it is explained that there are four components that determine the rationality of a state's actions. First, the national actor, which refers to a group of rational decision-makers with similar goals who consider each policy alternative. Second, the issue, meaning that the actions chosen by the state emerge as a response to occurring phenomena, considering both threats and strategic opportunities. Third, static selection, meaning that the action chosen by the government to represent the people is the safest and most beneficial step among several possible alternatives. Fourth, action as a rational choice, which refers to

¹⁵ Supono Hariyanto, Agus Salim, dan Endah Palupi, "Kerjasama Industri Pertahanan melalui Pengadaan Jet Rafale untuk memperkuat Pertahanan Indonesia," *Jurnal Teknik Industri*, nd

¹⁶ Graham T. Allison dan Morton H. Halperin, "Politik Birokrasi: Paradigma dan Beberapa Implikasi Kebijakan," *Politik Dunia* 24, no. S1 (1972): 40–79, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2010559>.

¹⁷ Graham T Allison, "CONCEPTUAL MODELS AND THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS: RATIONAL POLICY, ORGANIZATION PROCESS, AND BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS," n.d.

the goals, objectives, relevant choices concerning strategic issues, the consequences of actions, and the maximization of value in selecting alternatives. This includes goals and objectives to fulfill national interests and security, selecting relevant options or actions, considering the consequences of actions, and making choices to maximize value.

1.7 Hypothesis

The research hypothesis states that, within the framework of the neorealism approach and the rational actor model, Belarus's national interest in the Russia-Ukraine conflict focus in anarchic international system, where states prioritize self-preservation by maximizing their security and power, leading to a global structure where military capability determines influence, mistrust prevails, and ideological or moral considerations become secondary to strategic survival. Belarus act as a rational actor striving to defend its national interests in the midst of complex geopolitical dynamics, by considering the advantages and disadvantages.

1.8. Research Methodology

1.8.1. Research Design

This study uses a qualitative research methodology and a literature-based approach. Case study, which is one of the elements in qualitative research, is also used. According to Albert J. Mills and Gabrielle Durepos, case study is a research strategy rather than a research method. Case studies focus on the relationships between the factors that shape the context of a specific entity, such as an organization, event, phenomenon, or individual. This approach analyzes the relationship between contextual factors and the entity being studied, with the explicit aim of generating insights about the interactions between these relationships. The main goal is to develop new theories or contribute to

existing theories by highlighting how contextual factors interact with the entity under study.¹⁸ The data collection technique employed is literature review, with data sources consisting of relevant journals and books. This study gathers data from various journals and books to ensure that the data is relevant and comprehensive.

1.8.2. Research Object

The object of this research is Belarus's national interests in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, analyzed through the neorealist perspective. By incorporating the concept of the Rational Actor Model, where the state makes decisions as a rational actor

1.8.3. Procedures for Collecting Data

In this research, the author uses the data collection technique of literature study and secondary data to obtain the necessary information. The literature study includes collecting data from various sources such as scholarly journals, books, websites, e-books, newspapers, as well as gathering data from various official documents and others. After the data is collected, it will be filtered, selected, and then grouped in the discussion. In addition to collecting data through literature and written documents, the author also attempts to gather data through questionnaires with responses from academics and students in the field of international relations to strengthen the author's confidence and open up possibilities for the content of the discussion to be written in the thesis.

¹⁸ Albert Mills, Gabrielle Durepos, and Elden Wiebe, *Encyclopedia of Case Study Research* (2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks California 91320 United States: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2010), <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412957397>.

1.8.4. Procedures for Analyzing Data

The data analysis technique employed in this research follows the Miles and Huberman model. This model involves three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing verification. In the first stage, the researcher gathers data from various documents such as academic journals, reports, relevant books, websites, e-books, and news articles. After collecting extensive data, the researcher reduces or selects data focusing on aspects significant to the research. The next stage is presenting the reduced data in descriptive paragraphs, followed by data verification and conclusion to address the research questions. The results of the data analysis will be summarized comprehensively in Chapter 4 as the conclusions of this study.

1.9 Structure Of The Writing

The structure of this research consists of four chapters, as follows:

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

As the introduction to this research, this opening chapter contains an explanation of the research background, problem formulation, research objectives, research benefits, hypothesis, research methods, as well as the concepts and theories as the foundation. In the context of this research, the opening chapter briefly explains the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Belarus' relationship with Russia, and the fundamental assumptions of the neorealist perspective that underlie Belarus' national interests to be achieved in the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

CHAPTER II: BELARUS BETWEEN TWO POWERS: RUSSIA AND EUROPEAN UNION

In this chapter, the researcher will present the research findings related to Belarus' position between the two major powers, Russia and Europe. This study will explore the political, economic, and social dynamics that influence Belarus' relations with both powers and their impact on foreign policy and internal stability. Belarus' position between these two great powers presents unique challenges. The Belarusian government must navigate pressure from both sides, maintaining a delicate balance between maintaining good relations with Russia and responding to Europe's demands for political and economic reforms. This study will explore how Belarus addresses this dilemma and the strategies used to maintain stability and national sovereignty amid complex geopolitical dynamics.

CHAPTER III: BELARUS NATIONAL INTERESTS IN THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT FROM A NEOREALIST PERSPECTIVE

In this chapter, the author will present the research findings that cover several factors influencing the direction of Belarus' political policy. First, internal factors such as national interests and the role of the Belarusian president in determining the direction of foreign policy are crucial, making neorealist theory and the rational actor model relevant in explaining this. Second, Belarus' foreign policy is also influenced by external factors, such as threats and sanctions against Belarus. The author will provide a detailed analysis of these findings, explaining how internal and external factors have shaped the foreign policy adopted by Belarus. Since one of the key structures of the state is the president, who plays an important role, this concept supports the research.

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION

This chapter will contain a summary of the findings the author has researched regarding how Belarus achieves its national interests in the Russia-Ukraine conflict through the lens of neorealism and the rational actor model. It will also provide recommendations for future research. The author will summarize the main findings from the analysis of how Belarus pursues its national interests in the Russia-Ukraine conflict from a neorealist perspective and present suggestions that can serve as a foundation for researchers who will continue this study.

