

‘Warm Water’ Politics in The Russia-Ukraine Conflict

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Abstract: Russia’s strategy to control the Black Sea is one of the things that has caused the escalation of its conflict with Ukraine. Russia’s strategy is called ‘warm water’ politics through the placement of military bases in the port of Sevastopol, Crimea. This research discusses the ‘warm water’ politics that Russia has adopted as a strategy in its conflict with Ukraine. This research is qualitative research with a descriptive-analytical data analysis method. The data is presented descriptively and then analyzed using Liddell Hart’s analysis of Strategy and Till’s Maritime Function. Data were obtained through a literature review of official documents, websites, and scientific articles. The data analysis technique uses the Miles and Huberman model, which consists of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results show that Russia’s Black Sea control strategy maintains the country’s existence, matching NATO’s strength in the Black Sea region. Sevastopol is an important port for accessing warm water areas. The maritime functions of Crimea for Russia are sea control, power projection, good order at sea, and maritime consensus. Russia is using “warm water” politics by utilizing the energy sector, especially natural gas supplies, as a tool to control Ukraine in the ongoing conflict. Due to these strategies, Russia has a significant chance to influence Ukrainian policy. Therefore, Russia’s employment of “warm water” tactics has proven to be an effective tactic in conflict with Ukraine.

Keywords: ‘Warm Water’ Politics; Strategy and Conflict; Maritime Function; Oil and Natural Gas; Sea Control; Power Projection; Miles and Huberman model.

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1. Introduction

Russia is one of the countries with national interests that it wants to achieve in its interactions with other countries. One of Russia’s interests is to own Crimea, which has brought it into conflict with Ukraine. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine started with the leadership of Nikita Krushchev in the Soviet Union (the name of Russia’s territory during the Cold War). Krushchev, through his interests in favour of the United States, Europe and NATO, handed over Crimea to Ukraine. This was without a referendum or the consent of the Crimean population, the largest of which was ethnic Russians. After the Soviet Union collapsed and Russia re-emerged as a de facto and de jure recognized state, Russia built its country into a large country with a strong military force. Given the history of the Crimean breakaway, Russia did not remain silent about it. In early 2014, Crimea became the main focus of the Russia-Ukraine crisis since the Cold War [1]. The trigger was the Ukrainian parliament

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removing the Ukrainian president, Viktor Yanukovich, from office. Russia saw this as a pro-Western coup as Yanukovich favoured Russia and refused to sign a trade cooperation agreement with the European Union.

The escalation of the conflict saw Russia successfully reclaim Crimea as part of the Russian state. Ukraine regards this as an annexation of its territory, and Russia is violating its national interests. On the other hand, the people of Crimea also want to join Russia and become part of its territory. Thus, Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, sent military aid to Crimea to protect the Crimean population from Ukrainian intervention. Ukraine also considers Russia's military intervention into its territory as a form of invasion. However, the Russian government considers that it was not an invasion but intended to provide assistance and protect ethnic Russians in Ukraine and the threat posed by pro-Ukrainian forces.

The escalation of the invasion intensifies the threat of high inflation, increasing the risks of stagflation. The resulting jump in costs for essential commodities will make it harder for policymakers in some countries to strike the delicate balance between containing inflation and supporting the economic recovery from the pandemic [2]. This statement shows that the conflict between Russia and Ukraine impacts the economic side regionally and globally. The impact can be seen as inflation, and many of the essential commodities increased their price due to the hyperinflation of oil that occurred during the war.

Currently, the conflict between the two countries continues. The conflict even reached the violence/war stage in early 2022. Russia attacked Ukraine after announcing the recognition of independence to militia groups in Donbas, Eastern Ukraine [3]. Russia does not accept any military activity in Eastern Europe and Ukraine. This is due to Russia's interest in the Black Sea-based port of Crimea. In 1997, both Russia and Ukraine signed a friendship treaty. The aim was for Russia to regain access rights to the Black Sea even though it had to pay rent to Ukraine for using the port of Sevastopol.

Geopolitically, Crimea is contested by Russia and Ukraine because of its strategic location. Crimea is a peninsula located in the south of Ukraine, which is also a border area for Russia. Crimea is located between the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, with an area of 27,000 square kilometres [4]. This area causes Russia to declare war on Ukraine. This marine area, Crimea, became the most powerful location for Russia to get into the warm water harbour. This is how Russia uses its strategy to achieve the national interest by using the 'warm water' policy in the conflict.

Of particular interest in the Russia-Ukraine conflict is Russia's interest in one Crimea-based location, the Black Sea. Russia uses The Black Sea as a regional strategy to achieve its interests. Russia's interest became more obvious in 2010 when the government issued a policy to expand the military base area to Sevastopol. The author is then interested in further analyzing Russia's interests in Crimea, especially in the Black Sea region, which caused the conflict with Ukraine. So, this research is interesting because it discusses Russia's geopolitical foreign policy further in the conflict with Ukraine. For this reason, the research question to be answered in this study is: How does Russia carry out 'warm water' politics in the Russia-Ukraine conflict?

2. Research Method

This type of research is qualitative-descriptive, with data collection conducted through library research. Data sources were obtained by studying books, documents, and scientific articles. The data analysis technique uses the Miles and Huberman model, where data analysis is carried out interactively and continuously [5]. The first stage of data analysis in this research is data reduction. Data reduction includes separating which data supports and is related to research and which is not related. The data reduction stage also helps researchers to focus more on data related to the research issues raised. The second stage is data presentation. Data on the Russia and Ukraine conflict and Russia's interests in the Black Sea were obtained and presented as graphs or descriptive depictions. The third step is conclusion drawing, where after the data has been successfully analyzed using policy theory, a conclusion is drawn that answers the research question.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Result

Crimea (Republic of Crimea) is a peninsula north of the Black Sea. Crimea is geographically located in eastern Europe. In the north, Crimea borders the Azof Sea and Ukraine. To the east, Crimea borders the Black Sea and Russia. To the west, Crimea borders the Black Sea, Bulgaria and Romania. The population of Crimea is 2.4 million people, with the largest population being ethnic Russians [6]. Karkinit Bay is a bay that separates the Crimean mainland from Ukraine. The Kerch Strait is the strait that separates the Crimean mainland from Russia.

Crimea's strategic location has been of great importance and interest for centuries. Located on the northern shore of the Black Sea, the peninsula has been a melting pot of cultures, a battleground for various powers, and a key player in geopolitical developments. One of the main reasons why Crimea is so important is its access to the Black Sea. This sea has been an important

trade route for centuries, connecting the Middle East, Europe and Asia. Its strategic position between Eastern Europe and Western Asia makes it a centre of trade, cultural exchange and political influence. In addition, Crimea's location has made it an attractive target for military powers throughout history. Its proximity to key waterways, such as the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, has given naval forces control of these key points. The ability to control these straits has been a power source throughout history, allowing dominant states to exert influence over trade and wartime activities. In addition, Crimea's natural resources are also of strategic importance. The peninsula is renowned for its large mineral reserves, including coal, oil and natural gas. These resources have played an important role in the economic and military plans of countries seeking energy security and a strong industrial base (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Map of Crimea [7]

Crimea became Ukrainian territory after the Soviet Union's Nikita Khrushchev handed it over to Ukraine in 1954. However, Crimea re-joined Russia through a referendum on March 17 2014 [8]. In the same year, Ukraine opted to join NATO, so it entered a defence and security alliance with NATO countries [9]. This shows that the conflict in Crimea is inseparable from the interests of countries that support Ukraine. Based on the data above, Crimea is a strategically located disputed territory inseparable from Russia and Ukraine's influence. The interesting thing in this study is that Crimea was only a 'gift' given by Khrushchev to Ukraine during the Cold War. This shows a tug-of-war between the two countries over Crimea, a strategic region.

The crisis in Ukraine began in November 2013 when pro-Moscow President Viktor Yanukovich's government abandoned a deal with the European Union in favour of stronger ties with Russia. The majority of Crimea's 2.3 million population identify themselves as ethnic Russians and speak Russian - a legacy of Russia's 200-year involvement in the region. Sevastopol in Crimea is also the historic base of Russia's Black Sea Fleet. Within days of February 2014, the Crimean parliament voted to join Russia and called for a referendum. Russia later admitted that its military helped the Crimea insurgents. On March 16, 97% of referendum voters backed the proposal to join Russia. The figure is later disputed, with leaked documents showing only 50-60% support for the move [7].

As presented in picture 2 below, the conflict occurred in 2018, then the ceasefire in March of the same year. There were four ceasefires in 2018, compared with 2019, there was only one ceasefire. The escalation increased terrifically between 2020 and 2022, and there was only one ceasefire during those years. Although the conflict decreased in 2020, it does not mean there has been no conflict. There were more conflicts from 2020 until 2022, which increased rapidly in January 2022 (Figure 2).

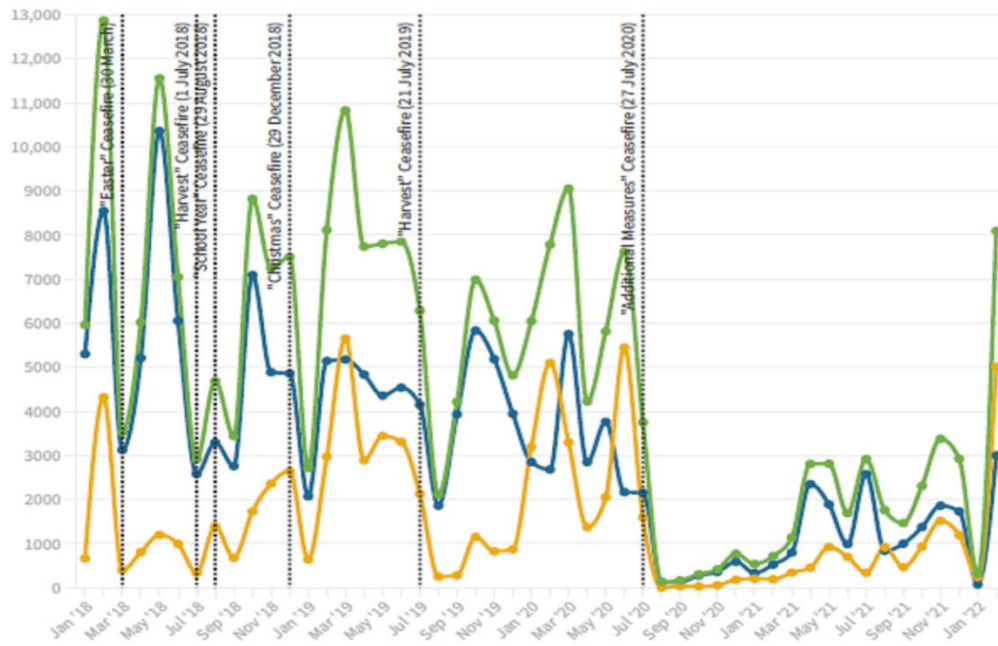


Figure 2: The Escalation Conflict of Russia-Ukraine from the Year 2018-2022 [10]

In February 2022, Russia launched an invasion of Ukraine, intensifying a conflict that had started eight years earlier when Moscow annexed Crimea. While Russia expects its attack will help it reclaim its authority over important neighbours and assert its role in the world, Ukraine is fighting for its basic survival as a state. The possibility that Russia could succeed in forcibly redrawing borders worries Ukraine’s Western supporters about their security. Thus, they attempt to balance the possibility of the war worsening and their military assistance for Ukraine. The reporting of Crisis Group tracks the war’s progress, evaluates its human cost, and assesses the implications of the fighting for regional and international security. Crisis Group advocates for measures that will enable Ukraine to endure, lower the risk of escalation, lessen the toll that combat takes on human life, and contribute to a stable and secure Europe.

The attack by Russia on Ukraine on February 24, 2022, was a momentous shift in the security architecture of Europe. Ukraine may have been able to resolve the situation with greater Western assistance in the immediate wake of the invasion. Still, quarters of its population are already refugees or internally displaced, and the majority of its cities and infrastructure were severely damaged. Russia’s war on Ukraine is a part of the narrative of Russian aggression against Ukraine, which has been steadily increasing since the early 2000s [11].

It stems from more than just the ideological or geopolitical rivalry between Russia and the West or European Union over their opposing or mutually incompatible integration strategies in the shared environment. The agency of Ukraine, with all of its internal political and social characteristics, ideology, the role of energy, business ties, and the influence of regional and global dimensions, is part of this more dynamic process. This chapter provides a triadic overview of the interconnected relationships among the EU, Ukraine, and Russia in ideology, geopolitics, energy, and integration projects. It does so by concentrating on the underlying causes of the Russia-Ukraine war of 2022 and its potential consequences for EU politics [11].

3.2. Discussion

Ukraine’s interest in defending Crimea is to blockade Russia’s military defences. By controlling Crimea, Russia automatically has no access to Western Europe, Asia and even Africa. The reason is that Russia’s territory and its sea areas are covered by snow throughout the year. This is supported by the fact that one of Russia’s rivers, the Siberian River, is an important means of transport to and from the Arctic Sea, even though it is covered by ice for long periods every year [12].

Meanwhile, Russia has strategic interests in making Crimea part of its territory. Firstly, to maintain the country’s existence by placing a naval military base in Crimea’s Sevastopol harbour. Second, to match NATO’s strength in the Black Sea region. Third, Sevastopol is an important port because it is not covered by snow in winter. This is supported by data explaining that the region’s climate is close to the subtropical climate of the southern coast of Crimea [13]. The southern coast of Crimea means Sevastopol. The region can be divided into two microclimatic subzones: the foothills with a mild marine and moderately continental climate and the south-western coast with its subtropical Mediterranean climate [13]. In other words, the Sevastopol region is a harbour that gives Russia access to warm water waters.

One of Russia's main motivations for annexing Crimea was to safeguard national security and maintain its presence as a dominant global power. By establishing a naval military base in the Crimean port of Sevastopol, Moscow gained an important foothold in the Black Sea, allowing the country to project its naval power beyond its immediate borders. The base is an important asset in protecting Russian naval interests in the region, especially in times of conflict or crisis. This is part of the explanation of Russia's first strategy: to use its 'warm water' politics.

The second strategic goal Russia seeks to achieve by incorporating Crimea into its territory is to counterbalance and balance NATO's power in the Black Sea region. After Montenegro became a NATO member in 2017, Russia's fear of encirclement deepened as the alliance expanded closer to its borders. By establishing a strong military presence in Crimea, Russia aims to counterbalance NATO's influence and safeguard its regional geopolitical interests.

The third strategy is capitalizing on Sevastopol's geographical advantage. Another important factor contributing to Russia's interest in Crimea is the important harbour city of Sevastopol, which is known as an ice-free port in winter. Unlike other major Russian ports that face severe winter weather conditions, Sevastopol remains accessible all year round. This strategic advantage allows Russia to maintain uninterrupted maritime access, facilitating trade, military operations and logistics, even during the difficult winter months.

Russia's interest in Crimea, by controlling the military base in Sevastopol, is a form of Russia's strategy in using military means to achieve its goals. Liddell Hart defines strategy as distributing and applying military means to fulfil the ends of policy. Strategy is distributing and applying military means to fulfil policy ends [14]. Control of Crimea is Russia's strategy to achieve its three objectives outlined in the previous two paragraphs. To realize its objectives, Russia expands the military base area in the port of Sevastopol. In other words, control of Crimea is Russia's 'warm water' policy in its war with Ukraine.

Warm water politics manifests a country's military strategy to utilize warmer waters for trade and military access. As described in the previous data, Russia's waters are covered by snow throughout the year. Access to warmer waters is at the port of Sevastopol. So, this area is important and strategic for Russia. By controlling the waters of Crimea, Russia certainly won the conflict over Ukraine.

Not only that, Crimea, as a maritime territory, has a strategic function for Russia. According to till [15], the maritime territory has functions that are used as reasons for warm water politics, namely: 1. sea control, 2. power projection, 3. good order at sea, and 4. maritime consensus. The four functions will be elaborated on in the next paragraphs.

3.3. Sea Control

First, sea control is the power to control the sea to realize interests [16]. The port of Sevastopol is important because it allows Russia to control access to sea and coastal areas [17]. By controlling the port of Sevastopol, Russia rejects Ukraine's presence in the same area, and Russia also ensures that Ukraine cannot limit its military. Sea Control Crimea is a strategy adopted by Russia to secure and control the Black Sea. The Black Sea has a very important geographical position for Russia because it is the main route of trade and transport connecting Europe with Asia. Therefore, controlling the Black Sea is vital to Russia's interests.

One of the main functions of Sea Control Crimea is to ensure Russia's maritime security in the Black Sea. By controlling Crimea, Russia can strengthen its military power in the region and improve its ability to monitor the movement of foreign vessels travelling through the Black Sea. This will provide a strategic advantage for Russia in dealing with potential threats from Black Sea littoral states that are considered its geostrategic rivals.

In addition, the Sea Control of Crimea also provides direct access to the Caucasus region. This region is important because of the ethnic minority groups living on Russian territory. By controlling the Black Sea, Russia can ensure the security of transport routes and energy supplies vital to the country's economy. Controlling the Black Sea also benefits Russia in the context of regional and global geopolitics. By having military bases in Crimea, Russia can help stabilize the region, which has been unstable. In addition, this control will also increase Russia's influence in the region and send a strong message to Western countries that tend to be suspicious of Russia's expansionist ambitions. Overall, Sea Control Crimea is important for Russia's interests in the Black Sea. It provides strategic benefits regarding maritime security, access to the Caucasus region, geopolitical influence and regional stability. Although controversial, this strategy remains a priority for the Russian government in safeguarding its interests in the Black Sea region.

3.4. Power Projection

The second is power projection, in which Russia uses the Sevastopol port as a platform to highlight its power. In 2014, President Vladimir Putin spoke to both Russian parliaments, stating that Crimea would continue to be an "inseparable part of Russia" and that "there was no single armed confrontation in Crimea and no casualties" [18]. This indicates that Sevastopol is critical to Russia's security as it provides access to geopolitical and military interests at the domestic and international levels. The

access is an outlet for Russia's trade routes and military bases because Sevastopol, located on the Black Sea, is one of the warmest areas of the sea and will not freeze in winter.

Crimea's Power Projection in the Black Sea gives Russia a significant military advantage. Russia can strengthen its military presence and capabilities in the Black Sea by having a military base in Crimea. The base is a place to store and escort Russian military ships and aircraft and conduct military operations if necessary.

The important function of the Crimean Power Projection in the Black Sea for Russia's interests is to maintain security and stability and protect the economic benefits and natural resources owned by Russia in the Black Sea region. Through the Crimean Power Projection, Russia can monitor and control important waterways in the Black Sea, which is a strategic international trade route. In addition, the Crimean Power Projection also allows Russia to protect and defend natural resources in the Black Sea, such as natural gas and oil, which are important economic benefits for Russia.

3.5. Good Order

The third is good order, which means that by controlling Sevastopol, Russia can create peace and security for its country and neighbouring countries. Sevastopol is important for Russia's security because, through this port, Russia can protect its territory from threats that could destabilize the state, such as the threat of socio-cultural radicalism to the economic and military fields. Slobodchikoff writes that Russia creates a regional order compatible with the global order, but historically, the West has isolated Russia and destroyed its regional order [19]. This has caused Russia to become dissatisfied and seek to rise again and challenge Western hegemony.

One of the functions of the Good Order in the Black Sea is to maintain regional security and stability for Russia's interests. By maintaining good order, Russia can prevent security threats such as terrorism, drug smuggling and other illegal activities. This is important to keep the Black Sea economy running smoothly and avoid conflicts that could negatively affect Russia's interests.

In addition, the Good Order in the Black Sea also plays a role in facilitating international trade. The Black Sea has strategic shipping lanes, crossing the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits, which connect Europe with Asia. By maintaining good order, Russia can ensure these shipping lanes remain safe for passing merchant ships and foster the growth of international trade. This also has a positive impact on the Russian economy.

In addition to trade, the Good Order in the Black Sea is also important in supporting the exploration and exploitation of natural resources. The Black Sea is rich in natural resources such as oil, natural gas and fish. By maintaining good order, Russia can protect its claims and rights to these resources and ensure the development and exploitation of these resources can proceed smoothly and by international law.

Beyond economics, Good Order in the Black Sea also has important political and military implications for Russia's interests. Through close surveillance of Black Sea waters, Russia can control foreign military activities that could jeopardize its national interests. By maintaining security in the Black Sea, Russia can also maintain its regional power and influence.

3.6. Maritime Consensus

The fourth is maritime consensus, where Sevastopol is important for Russia's security because it effectively allows Russia to conduct regional trade co-operation and military support and avoid non-traditional threats such as drug smuggling, terrorism and money laundering. The port of Sevastopol makes maritime co-operation easy to implement and realize. Sevastopol allows Russia to enforce maritime consensus with Moldova, a country between Ukraine and Romania. It has no access to the coast or the sea for sharing forces, conducting joint military operations, exchanging weapons, tanks, cannons and other military equipment, and directing border security operations in Transnistria (between Moldova and Ukraine in Eastern Europe) [19].

According to Sanders, Sevastopol is valuable to Russia because it can enhance military security operations with other countries towards a multinational maritime task force. This includes the Black Sea Naval Force (BLACKSEAFOR), a multinational security organization established by Turkey in maritime threats and from the Black Sea with visits to the ports of Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Russia and Turkey.

Another example is Operation Black Sea Harmony, a maritime operation led by Turkey that aims to prevent risks and deter threats in the sea area. The Black Sea Economy Co-operation (BSEC) Organisation was established in 1992 to foster co-operation across the coastal region [19]. This Russian-initiated military operation aims to protect its regional strategic and geopolitical objectives. Through naval exercises, surveillance and diplomatic efforts, Operation Black Sea Harmony has been instrumental in maintaining the security and stability of Crimea and strengthening Russian influence in the Black Sea region.

One of the main objectives of Operation Black Sea Harmony was to establish a strong naval presence in the Black Sea. By deploying naval forces in Crimea, Russia aims to protect its commercial and military interests, maintain control over strategic

naval bases and secure its maritime borders. The naval exercises during this operation helped improve readiness, enhance combat capability, and demonstrate Russia's naval capabilities to regional and international stakeholders.

Operation Black Sea Harmony aims to protect Russia's access to natural gas reserves in the Black Sea, including those on the Crimean Peninsula. By securing these resources, Russia ensures its energy independence and strengthens its position as a European energy supplier. Operation Black Sea Harmony contributed to strengthening border security in Crimea. Through surveillance and monitoring activities, the operation helps prevent illegal border crossings, intercept illicit trade and combat transnational organized crime. These efforts are crucial in countering potential threats to stability and upholding the rule of law in the region.

In other words, the economic co-operation Russia has established over its control of the Black Sea is an economic benefit. Beyond the military advantages, warm water harbour offers significant economic benefits to Russia. Access to global trade routes allows Russia to improve its economic links with other countries and extend its export capabilities. These seaports facilitate the transport of goods, energy resources, and commodities, contributing to Russia's economic growth and stability.

4. Conclusion

'Warm water' politics is Russia's strategy to win the conflict with Ukraine. Not only winning the conflict but also controlling Crimea implies that Russia controls the Black Sea in terms of defence and security. Russia's Black Sea control strategy is: First, Russia wants to maintain the existence of its country. Second, to match NATO's strength in the Black Sea region. Russia does this by using military facilities in Sevastopol. The purpose of the military base in the port is to blockade Ukraine as the frontline, and NATO's strength is also automatically reduced. Third, Sevastopol is an important port for accessing warm waters.

The maritime functions of Crimea for Russia are sea control, power projection, good order at sea, and maritime consensus. Firstly, control over the Black Sea manifests Russia's power and control over Ukraine. Second, Sevastopol is critical to Russia's security as it provides access to trade and military to achieve domestic and international geopolitical and military interests. Third is good order, which means that by controlling Sevastopol, Russia can create peace and security for its country and neighbouring countries. The fourth is maritime consensus, where Russia can conduct regional trade cooperation and military support and avoid non-traditional threats.

Russia is using "warm water" politics in its conflict with Ukraine by using a strategy of disadvantage and capitalizing on the energy crisis. Russia has used control over gas supplies and economic pressure on Ukraine to achieve its political goals. These tactics have given Russia strong negotiating power and provided an opportunity to influence Ukrainian policy. Thus, "warm water" politics is an effective strategy Russia uses in its conflict with Ukraine.

In its conflict with Ukraine, Russia uses "warm water" politics by relying on its economic dominance and natural resources, which include the production and export of natural gas. This strategy is used to achieve political and economic goals in the region. Russia can utilize Ukraine's dependence on its natural gas supplies as a tool of political pressure and also to influence Ukraine's domestic policies in line with Russian interests. Through the dominance of energy supplies, Russia has managed to gain economic benefits and strengthen its influence in the region.

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