



KRAKOWSKA AKADEMIA IM. ANDRZEJA FRYCZA MODRZEWSKIEGO  
ANDRZEJ FRYCZ MODRZEWSKI KRAKOW UNIVERSITY

# BEZPIECZEŃSTWO

## TEORIA I PRAKTYKA

# SECURITY

## THEORY AND PRACTICE

THE CAUSES, COURSE AND POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES  
OF THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR FROM THE PERSPECTIVE  
OF POLAND, FRANCE, AND NEW ZEALAND

edited by  
Marcin Lasoń, Alex Issa, Terry Johanson

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# The causes, course and possible consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian war from the perspective of Poland, France, and New Zealand: Introduction

This issue of *Security: Theory and Practice* represents unique international cooperation among the academics of Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski Krakow University, ESSEC Business School, and Massey University. Three editors Marcin Lasoń (editor in chief), Alex Issa (editor in France), and Lieutenant Colonel (retired) Terence Johanson (editor in New Zealand) gathered carefully selected authors to share their expertise and personal views on the Russian-Ukrainian war. The publication's concept created space for sharing their knowledge and opinions on the war from different perspectives:

1. an average state bordering with Ukraine and fully engaged in helping during the war;

2. a regional power with special ambitions and relations with Russia, North Africa, and the Middle East;
3. a small country playing the role of 'a good international citizen' and engaged in supporting Ukraine from the beginning.

The authors of the articles examined various theoretical approaches, ideologies, and nations' interests, foreign and security policies, economic and energy cooperation, leaders' perceptions, strategic-level security documents, etc., and shared their views on the most significant challenges of the war. National approaches of individual authors are crucial as they provide an opportunity to compare different perspectives of scientists from various backgrounds, therefore each editor was given a free hand to choose the project participants.

The overall framework of the publication focuses on the following issues:

1. the causes of the war (starting in 2014 and its next phase in 2022);
2. the course of the war (including various military aspects and states' attitudes);
3. the consequences of the war (particularly political, military, and economic, and the possible scenarios of the new international order, etc.).

Although all 14 authors focused on military, economic, social, and cultural issues, it is worth emphasising that the French perspective examined a matter crucial for this country: the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war on Lebanon and Egypt. To showcase this, we decided to include both articles in the section devoted to French authors. Moreover, the structure of the issue reflects the idea of comparing the perspectives of the countries closest and furthest from the Russia-Ukraine frontline. Interestingly, the authors decided to show not only the governments' perspective but also the views from the public as presented by the press or ordinary people who decided to fight as volunteers on the Ukrainian side. Yet, as all the above points have demonstrated, this war is important for everyone for various reasons, from idealistic to very realistic ones.

We hope the readers of this issue will embark on a fascinating intellectual adventure resulting in reflections of paramount importance for a better understanding of the Russia-Ukraine war.

The publication is the outcome of the international research project no. DW/WDPR/2023/03/00005 founded by the Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski Krakow University.



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Articles

Poland





## Tomasz Pawłuszko

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# The conflict between Russia and Ukraine: The causes of the war, security studies and the formation of an epistemic community in Poland

## Introduction

The aim of this article is to link three research problems. The first issue is the escalation of the war between Russia and Ukraine. The second issue is the reception of this war in the Polish community of experts in the field of security studies. The third issue is the process of developing a certain community of experts dealing with the problems of this war. To link these three issues, the concept of *epistemic community* was used.<sup>1</sup>

What are epistemic communities? An epistemic community is a network of professionals with recognized knowledge and competence in a given field of state policy. This concept – as Peter Haas states – is based on the pre-war ideas of the Polish scientist Ludwik Fleck, who in the 1930s published works on the ‘thought collective.’<sup>2</sup> This term denotes a group of scholars who have developed a common ‘thinking style.’ As Haas notes, experts may be characterized by (1) similar intellectual

<sup>1</sup> See: E. Adler, P. Haas, *Conclusion: Epistemic Communities, World Order, and the Creation of a Reflective Research Program*, “International Organization” 1992, vol. 46, no. 1: *Knowledge, Power, and International Policy Coordination*, pp. 367–390.

<sup>2</sup> The work was originally published as: L. Fleck, *Entstehung und Entwicklung einer wissenschaftlichen Tatsache. Einführung in die Lehre vom Denkstil und Denkkollektiv*, Benno Schwabe und Co. Verlagsbuchhandlung, Basel 1935; I used the Polish post-war edition: L. Fleck, *Powstanie i rozwój faktu naukowego. Wprowadzenie do nauki o stylu myślowym i kolektywie myślowym*, Wydawnictwo Lubelskie, Lublin 1986.

background. They also (2) adhere to similar principles and (3) share common beliefs about the causes and effects of certain phenomena. Experts are at the head of the knowledge hierarchy of modern democratic states.<sup>3</sup> They have professional criteria for evaluating social practices.<sup>4</sup>

What do security policy experts do? Thanks to their knowledge and social position, experts are considered capable of explaining cause and effect relationships, connections, and interests of various political actors. As a result, they play the role of advisors and interpreters of reality, which allows them to create media discourse and influence the formulation of state policy. Experts are whistle-blowers who contribute to the securitization process.<sup>5</sup> The escalation of the war between Russia and Ukraine has led to the activation of specialists in the field of security. This topic has become significant especially in the countries of the so-called Eastern flank of NATO, including Poland.<sup>6</sup>

In the further part of the article, I will assess the course of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and present the results of research conducted in 2022 among Polish security experts, which have led me to hypothesize that Polish experts developed a coherent way of explaining the problems of security policy. This makes it possible to justify the statement about the existence of an epistemic community.

## War of Russia and Ukraine in 2022

The problem of war is one of the main issues of political studies because for centuries it affected all elements of states, which are: territory, population, and legitimized power.<sup>7</sup> International relations scholars have developed dozens of theories about the causes of wars. It was in the shadow of the Cold War that almost all the key concepts such as power, balance of power, alliance, international anarchy, deterrence, peace, security, international system, interdependence, or international regimes were developed.<sup>8</sup> Also the idea of levels of analysis, introduced by Kenneth

<sup>3</sup> M. Noordegraaf, *The making of professional public leaders*, [in:] *Leadership in the Public Sector. Promises and Pitfalls*, eds. Ch. Teelken, E. Ferlie, M. Dent, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, London – New York 2012, pp. 214–220.

<sup>4</sup> *The Ashgate Research Companion to New Public Management*, eds. T. Christiansen, P. Laegreid, Ashgate, Farnham 2013.

<sup>5</sup> O. Wæver, *Securitization and Desecuritization*, Working Papers, Centre for Peace and Conflict Research, 1993, no. 5.

<sup>6</sup> The term “NATO’s Eastern flank” appeared in the public debate around the NATO summit in Warsaw in 2016; see: J. Gotkowska, *NATO’s Eastern Flank – a new paradigm*, Centre for Eastern Studies, Warsaw 2016.

<sup>7</sup> I refer here to the classic definition of the state formulated by Georg Jellinek in his *Allgemeine Staatslehre*, Verlag von O. Häring, Berlin 1905.

<sup>8</sup> See: T. Diez, I. Bode and A. Fernandes da Costa, *Key Concepts in International Relations*, Sage, London – Thousand Oaks – New Delhi – Singapore 2011.

Waltz in the 1950s, continues to be influential in international studies.<sup>9</sup> Its structure is presented in the Table 1.

Table 1. Causes of wars and the rationale of the Russian-Ukrainian war

Analysis level	Examples of explanations of the Russian-Ukrainian war in the Polish debate
Level 1: Leaders, elites and other people	Vladimir Putin's ambitions; the Russian elite's fear of NATO; belief in the weakness of Ukrainian politicians; the need for historical success and other private views of Russian politicians; conviction about the weakness of the Western elites; Russia's desire to intimidate democratic politicians
Level 2: The state and its policies	The growing assertiveness of the Russian security strategy; the militarization of Russian security policy; the strategy of Russia's domination in the area of the former USSR; assertive and pro-European policy of Ukraine (cooperation with the EU and NATO); demanding the return of Crimea and Donbass; an arms race in the region; loss of Russian influence in the area of the former Soviet Union
Level 3: The international system and its rules	The rivalry of states for hegemony in Eurasia; the growing number of fields of rivalry between China and the US creates space for local conflicts; Russia is on the side of an alliance with China, which means a conflict with the West; Russia wants to test the reaction of the West and increase its prestige and importance in the international system; division of the international system into blocs: democratic and authoritarian

Source: Author's own study.

The process of explaining war in international relations is based mainly on categories developed in political science. Since the times of Clausewitz, war has been interpreted as an instrument of political power in Western thinking, which means that the elites explain war in the context of politics. Therefore, there is no single cause of the Russo-Ukrainian war. Practically all the issues mentioned above are present in the Polish debate.

1) The first phase of the war was the offensive of Russian troops along almost the entire border of Ukraine with Russia and Belarus. The pretext for the attack was the fact that on 21 February Russia recognized the independence of the 'republics' of Donetsk and Luhansk, which then on 23 February asked for help in repelling Ukrainian 'aggression'.<sup>10</sup> The wide-ranging nature of this invasion – shown on TV maps around the world – was designed to scare the people of Ukraine and shock the Western world. An offensive of about 10,000 soldiers from garrisons in the Russian Far East was directed at the city of Kiev alone. Similar forces were sent to Kharkov. Most of the forces in this direction, however, were made up of units of the 1<sup>st</sup> Guards

<sup>9</sup> K.N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War. A Theoretical Analysis*, Columbia University Press, New York 1959.

<sup>10</sup> *Address by the President of the Russian Federation*, 21 February 2022, The Kremlin, Moscow, <http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828> [accessed: 30 March 2023].

Tank Army. After several days of rapid progress, however, the Russian troops ran out of fuel, ammunition, and food. The Russians reached the outskirts of Kharkov and Kiev but were driven back. Russian logistics turned out to be inefficient and poorly commanded.<sup>11</sup> The immobilized Russian equipment was abandoned by the soldiers, which the Ukrainian information services quickly took advantage of. In a few weeks, the image of the Russian army as one of the world's main armed forces was destroyed. The first phase of the invasion ended in defeat for the Russians when they were forced to withdraw from northern Ukraine in early April without having captured Kiev, Chernihiv, or Kharkov. The Ukrainians have not given up any large city to Russia, except for Kherson, captured in March as a result of treason (the Ukrainians regained Kherson in the fall of 2022).<sup>12</sup> The symbolic end of this phase of the war was the sinking of the Russian cruiser Moscow in the Black Sea on 14 April 2022.<sup>13</sup>

During the first phase of the war, there was a quick reaction from the Polish news media, which broadcast programmes about the war around the clock. For the purpose of describing and evaluating the reported events, numerous military and political experts were invited to the studio. In total, we are talking about several dozen people, mainly former military personnel and political scientists. The first stage of the formation of the epistemic community took place, in which rules for describing and explaining events began to be created.

2) The second phase of the war took place from April to July 2022, with particular emphasis on the fighting in the south and east of Ukraine. Russian troops successfully advanced on Mariupol, whose heroic defence was completed in mid-May. Russia's success was the fact that after the fighting in Mariupol ended, they managed to create a 'land corridor' leading from Crimea to the Donbas. The Ukrainians were also forced to retreat in the Donbas, surrendering Severodonetsk and Lisichansk at the turn of June and July.<sup>14</sup> It was the greatest military success of the Russian army in 2022, although the Ukrainian forces could not be encircled or destroyed. In most cases, the Ukrainian army avoided clashes in major cities to avoid civilian casualties. The Ukrainian army moved to another line of defence near the city of Bakhmut. In this phase, the West began to respond more clearly to calls for help and to supply

<sup>11</sup> J. Van Tol *et al.*, *Deterrence and Defense in the Baltic Region. New Realities*, Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, Washington 2022.

<sup>12</sup> According to estimates, Moscow controlled 25% of Ukrainian territory in March, compared to about 15% in November 2022. P. Breteau, *Nine months of war in Ukraine in one map: How much territory did Russia invade and then cede?*, Le Monde, 25 November 2022, [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/les-decodeurs/article/2022/11/25/nine-months-of-war-in-ukraine-in-one-map-how-much-territory-did-russia-invade-and-then-cede\\_6005655\\_8.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/les-decodeurs/article/2022/11/25/nine-months-of-war-in-ukraine-in-one-map-how-much-territory-did-russia-invade-and-then-cede_6005655_8.html) [accessed: 25 March 2023].

<sup>13</sup> *Sunken Russian warship Moskva: What do we know?*, BBC News, 18 April 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61103927> [accessed: 29 March 2023].

<sup>14</sup> *Fall of Severodonetsk is Russia's biggest victory since Mariupol*, Al-Jazeera, 25 June 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/6/25/fall-of-severodonetsk-is-russias-biggest-victory-since-mariupol> [accessed: 28 March 2023].

Ukraine with significant amounts of ammunition and military equipment. Meanwhile, in the Polish public debate, most stations established permanent lists of war commentators. The general framework and ways of interpreting the war were also established. The first scientific and review papers and reports from Ukraine also began to appear.<sup>15</sup>

3) The third phase of the war took place from August to November 2022. 9 August was a symbolic date here, when Ukrainian troops began to attack enemy positions using HIMARS systems, destroying the Russian logistic base. A month later, around 6 September, the Ukrainian counteroffensive near Kharkov began. Within two weeks, the Ukrainians recaptured the city of Izium and a territory of over 8,000 square kilometres. In response to the internationally commented flight of Russian troops, Vladimir Putin announced a partial mobilization in Russia on 21 September, leading to the exodus of around 1 million young men from the country. On 30 September, Putin announced the annexation of the Donetsk, Zaporizhia, Luhansk and Kherson regions to Russia.<sup>16</sup> The development of the Ukrainian offensive also sparked a discussion about the possible use of nuclear weapons by the Russians, which, however, did not materialize. In October, Ukrainian forces recaptured the area around Kherson and forced Russian troops to retreat to the eastern bank of the Dnieper on 11 November.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, in the Polish expert debate at that time, there was already an extensive discourse on armaments, purchases of military equipment, civil protection, changes in NATO, and the reconstruction of Ukraine. The first more serious analytical reports also appeared.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Probably the first Polish book on the Russian-Ukrainian war was a collective publication of the Nowa Konfederacja portal: *Geopolityczne trzęsienie ziemi. Jak rosyjska agresja na Ukrainę zmieniła świat*, Wydawnictwo Nowej Konfederacji, Warszawa 2022.

<sup>16</sup> 'By deciding to annex four Ukrainian oblasts within their administrative boundaries (their total area is approx. 110,000 km<sup>2</sup>; they account for 18.2% of Ukrainian territory), Russia is also attempting to incorporate territories that its armed forces do not even at present control. According to Ukrainian estimates, until recently about 88% of Kherson oblast, 67% of Zaporizhzhia oblast, 57% of Donetsk oblast and 99% of Luhansk oblast were under occupation. Ukraine has also lost 4% of the Mykolaiv oblast, an area that Moscow has counted as part of the occupied Kherson oblast.' M. Menkiszak, M. Domańska, P. Żochowski, *Russia announces the annexation of four regions of Ukraine*, 03 October 2022, Centre for Eastern Studies, Warsaw 2022, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2022-10-03/russia-announces-annexation-four-regions-ukraine> [accessed: 28 March 2023].

<sup>17</sup> J. Landay, *Ukrainians celebrate soldiers retaking Kherson, Russia's latest defeat*, Reuters, 11 November, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/us-urges-ukraine-be-open-talks-with-russia-washington-post-2022-11-06/> [accessed: 30 March 2023].

<sup>18</sup> Major Polish think tanks analyze the situation in Ukraine on an ongoing basis. These include the Polish Institute of International Affairs (Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, PISM) and the Center for Eastern Studies (Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich, OSW). A lot of valuable materials and broadcasts are also published on numerous specialist social media channels, to which a separate publication should be devoted. In the autumn, a publication by strategic studies analysts from the University of Warsaw was also published, see: *Bezpieczeństwo Polski*

4) The fourth phase of the war, which can be called the winter period, consisted mainly in Russian missile attacks on Ukrainian critical infrastructure. Ukraine's acquisition of Western anti-aircraft systems led to a reduction in losses from Russian missiles and drones. The main area of land fighting at the turn of 2023 was the area around the city of Bakhmut. The Russians began storming the city with the help of newly mobilized recruits and mercenaries recruited for a private military company, the so-called Wagner Group. This led to gigantic Russian losses on the front, counting hundreds of casualties every day. In the spring of 2023, an offensive was expected on both sides of the conflict. The Russians hoped to break the Ukrainian defences and open a new front near Kharkov. The Ukrainians hoped to acquire long-range missiles and tear apart the 'Russian land corridor' from Crimea to the Donbas.

In 2023, the disappearance of a broader public debate on the course of the war could be observed in Poland. The topic has become a specialist issue, discussed by experts in the professional media. The number of specialist commentaries in the mainstream media decreased. At the turn of 2023, comprehensive scientific publications already appeared.<sup>19</sup>

## The year of the war

Preparing the balance sheet, I took into account Barry Buzan's division into 'sectors of security.' There are five such sectors: military, political, economic, social, and environmental.<sup>20</sup> Starting from the military sector, it should be mentioned that the total number of casualties on the part of the Russian army is estimated at 200,000 at least. killed and wounded soldiers, although some Western estimates say a higher number.<sup>21</sup> Russia also lost several thousand pieces of combat equipment, including

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*w świetle wojny na Wschodzie*, ed. R. Kuźniar, Scholar, Warszawa 2022. The author of this text was a reviewer of this valuable publication.

<sup>19</sup> See: *Politics and Security of Central and Eastern Europe. Contemporary Challenges*, ed. R. Zięba, Springer International, Cham 2023. The publication discusses the main problems of the CEE region in the face of war, such as peripherality, illiberalism, militarization, energy security and many others.

<sup>20</sup> B. Buzan, O. Wæver, J. de Wilde, *Security. A New Framework for Analysis*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder – London 1998.

<sup>21</sup> 'Senior U.S. officials said this week that they believe the number for Russia is closer to 200,000. That toll, in just 11 months, is eight times higher than American casualties in two decades of war in Afghanistan.' *Soaring Death Toll Gives Grim Insight Into Russian Tactics*, New York Times, 2 February 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/02/us/politics/ukraine-russia-casualties.html> [accessed: 20 March 2023]. 'In all, Conflict Intelligence Team assumes as many as 65,000 Russians have died or gone missing in the wider war on Ukraine. Historically, modern armies suffer three or four wounded-in-action for every one soldier who's killed in action. Thus CIT's 270,000 overall figure for combined wounded and dead.' D. Axe, *It's Possible 270,000 Russians Have Been Killed Or Wounded In Ukraine*, Forbes, 7 February 2023,



numerous pieces of high-tech equipment (new models of rockets, tanks, and anti-aircraft systems).

Apart from capturing part of the southern lands of Ukraine, the Russians did not achieve lasting military successes, and the Ukrainians managed to regain about 40% of the previously lost lands. At the same time, Ukraine acquired additional military equipment from the West worth \$35 billion.<sup>22</sup> The Russians still have superior numbers and ammunition, but they have lost much of their best troops and operational initiative. The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in the report *The Military Balance 2023* suggests that Russia was to lose about 1,500 tanks, or about 40% of those remaining in the line, which is a huge loss, considering the scale of the war and its relatively short duration (in comparison to, for example, the Soviet-Afghan or the Iraqi-Iranian war). According to the IISS, Ukraine has lost under 700 tanks and the number of tanks it has in its possession has increased – from 858 to 953, as it has captured about 500 vehicles on the battlefield and received several hundred post-Soviet tanks from Poland, the Czech Republic, and other countries.<sup>23</sup> In the spring of 2023, Ukrainian forces also acquired several dozen Western tanks.

### Political sector

Both Russia and Ukraine retained their political leadership. The diplomatic and image-building effectiveness of the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, was surprising, while Vladimir Putin was basically excluded from the circle of important European leaders. Putin withdrew from the G-20 summit.<sup>24</sup> Russia has lost its political prestige, negotiating potential, and has become a country isolated by the West, which has brought Russia closer to Asian authoritarian states such as the People's Republic of China, North Korea, and Iran. Russia had to passively accept the unfavourable changes in NATO (the armament of NATO's eastern flank countries, the increased presence of American troops, the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO, the arming of Ukraine, and the NATO's new strategic concept).<sup>25</sup> The unity of European

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<https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidaxe/2023/02/07/its-possible-270000-russians-have-been-killed-or-wounded-in-ukraine/?sh=342b1af12eec> [accessed: 21 March 2023].

<sup>22</sup> A.M. Dyner, W. Lorenz, A. Legucka, *The Impact of the War in Ukraine on the Political Stability of Russia*, 02 February 2023, Polish Institute of International Affairs, <https://www.pism.pl/publications/the-impact-of-the-war-in-ukraine-on-the-political-stability-of-russia> [accessed: 20 March 2023].

<sup>23</sup> *The Military Balance 2023*, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 15 February 2023, <https://www.iiss.org/publications/the-military-balance> [accessed: 17 February 2023].

<sup>24</sup> A. Teresia, *Russia's Putin will not attend G20 summit in Bali in person*, Reuters, 10 November 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/russias-putin-will-not-attend-g20-summit-bali-indonesian-official-2022-11-10/> [accessed: 25 March 2023].

<sup>25</sup> See more: *NATO Strategic Concept*, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/> [accessed: 22 March 2023]; S. Monaghan, E. Arnold, *Indispensable: NATO's Framework Nations Concept beyond Madrid*, Center for International and Security Studies, Washington 2022.

countries, which announced as many as ten packages of economic sanctions within 12 months, turned out to be a surprising success.<sup>26</sup> However, the Kremlin is still able to dominate and even annex Belarus and thus threaten NATO and the countries of Eastern Europe. Perhaps this is what press leaks from the Kremlin to Western media are for, alleging that Russia plans to occupy Belarus by 2030.<sup>27</sup>

### Economic sector

Russia has suffered enormous economic losses, lost key trading partners, and lost access to the Western energy market. The Russian military industry has already suffered heavy losses. According to the European Commission, Russia may have lost more than 5% of GDP in 2022 alone.<sup>28</sup> 2023 will not be any better in this respect, as Moscow has lost the trust of Western investors for a long time, many of whom have permanently withdrawn from the Russian market, and those who have remained are under considerable pressure from the Western public opinion. The stability of the Russian currency is also uncertain, especially if Western politicians manage to confiscate Russian assets in Europe for the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine. The 'Asian turn' in Russian politics and economy will not bring Russia compensation for the lost market and Western partners for a long time.

Ukraine has suffered great material losses. As of December 2022, direct documented damage to Ukraine's infrastructure as a result of Russia's invasion was estimated at \$138 billion. Ukraine's GDP has shrunk by a third. A total of 149.3 thousand residential buildings were destroyed in 2022.<sup>29</sup> In Ukraine, huge areas of crops

<sup>26</sup> *EU agrees 10<sup>th</sup> package of sanctions against Russia*, 25 February 2023, European Commission, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_23\\_1185](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_1185) [accessed: 20 March 2023].

<sup>27</sup> T. Kuzio, *Putin's plan for a new Russian Empire includes both Ukraine and Belarus*, The Atlantic Council, 29 March 2023, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainalert/putins-plan-for-a-new-russian-empire-includes-both-ukraine-and-belarus/> [accessed: 30 March 2023]; A. Myroniuk, *Leaked document reveals alleged Kremlin plan to take over Belarus by 2030*, The Kyiv Independent, 21 February 2023, <https://kyivindependent.com/leaked-document-reveals-alleged-kremlin-plan-to-take-over-belarus-by-2030/> [accessed: 30 March 2023].

<sup>28</sup> 'According to the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2022 was a bad year for the Russian economy. It is estimated that in 2022, Russia's gross domestic product (GDP) dropped by at least 2.2% in the best-case scenario and by up to 3.9% in the worst-case scenario. Russia's economy may continue to shrink in 2023. Its GDP is forecast to decline by 5.6% in the worst-case scenario (OECD) or by 3.3% according to the World Bank.' *Impact of sanctions on the Russian economy*, European Council, Council of the European Union, 17 March 2023 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/impact-sanctions-russian-economy/> [accessed: 30 March 2023].

<sup>29</sup> O. Harmash, *Ukraine's economy stabilizes after shock of war*, Reuters, 27 February 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/ukraines-economy-stabilizes-after-shock-war-2023-02-27/> [accessed: 20 March 2023].

have been destroyed, a large number of people have been resettled, and the occupied territories are exploited for the extraction of rare raw materials.<sup>30</sup>

### Ecological sector

The changes on the European energy market should be mentioned first. The outbreak of war caused an increase in the prices of energy carriers. In the first two weeks of the war, oil prices increased by half, and gas and coal prices tripled. European countries decided to change their approach to energy and the energy crisis was brought under control. One year after the invasion, coal, oil, and gas prices are 15 to 35% lower than before the war. The EU has significantly reduced the import of energy resources from Russia. According to the EU *REPowerEU plan*, hydrocarbons are being replaced by renewable energy sources.<sup>31</sup> This situation is a big problem for Russia, where as much as 40% of the budget revenues were profits from the sale of energy resources.<sup>32</sup> Russia is losing its status as an energy superpower and is becoming increasingly dependent on China. In addition, the EU supported the functioning of the Ukrainian state and in June 2022 officially announced a membership perspective for Ukraine.<sup>33</sup>

### Social sector

It is the most vulnerable element of the war. Due to electricity and water shortages in the cold winter months, nearly 18 million people in Ukraine were in urgent need of humanitarian assistance (according to UNHCR). About 14 million people had to leave their homes.<sup>34</sup> Most people migrated within the Ukrainian state, but a large part of the population left the country. In December 2022, the European Commission announced that 4.8 million refugees from Ukraine had arrived in the EU (the

<sup>30</sup> 'Yet SecDev's analysis indicates that at least \$12.4 trillion worth of Ukraine's energy deposits, metals and minerals are now under Russian control. That figure accounts for nearly half the dollar value of the 2,209 deposits reviewed by the company. In addition to 63 percent of the country's coal deposits, Moscow has seized 11 percent of its oil deposits, 20 percent of its natural gas deposits, 42 percent of its metals and 33 percent of its deposits of rare earth and other critical minerals including lithium.' A. Faiola, D. Bennett, *In the Ukraine war, a battle for the nation's mineral and energy wealth*, 10 August 2022, The Washington Post, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/08/10/ukraine-russia-energy-mineral-wealth/> [accessed: 20 March 2023].

<sup>31</sup> *REPowerEU: affordable, secure and sustainable energy for Europe*, European Commission, [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/repowereu-affordable-secure-and-sustainable-energy-europe\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/repowereu-affordable-secure-and-sustainable-energy-europe_en) [accessed: 16 March 2023].

<sup>32</sup> A.M. Dynner, W. Lorenz, A. Legucka, *op. cit.*

<sup>33</sup> *EU Enlargement Policy: Ukraine*, European Council, Council of the European Union, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/enlargement/ukraine/> [accessed: 27 March 2023].

<sup>34</sup> *Ukraine emergency*, UNHCR, <https://www.unhcr.org/ukraine-emergency.html> [accessed: 27 March 2023].

largest number of refugees came to Poland, Germany, and the Czech Republic).<sup>35</sup> In March 2022, the EU launched a directive which simplified the mechanisms for obtaining a residence permit, access to the labour market, accommodation and medical assistance, and access for Ukrainian children to education in EU countries. The EU guaranteed €523 million in humanitarian aid to refugees.<sup>36</sup> On the anniversary of the Russian invasion, the United Nations reported more than 20,000 confirmed civilian casualties of the war, although it seems that human losses in the fighting areas will certainly exceed 100,000 victims.<sup>37</sup>

## Qualitative research

It should be noted that in the study of international affairs, the acquisition of evoked data is still rare. The relation between the researcher and their subject of study is so remote (inaccessibility of decision-makers, secrecy of information) that in training, political science scholars mainly learn methods of working with text or other existing data (descriptions of events, documents, speeches, strategies, and legislation).<sup>38</sup> Who or what may be covered by such research? After all, we are within the realm of the social sciences, so the phenomena we study concern people. It is people who create institutions, practices, and ideas. Adopting this assumption leads us to the conclusion that we deal with public policy. One feature of public policy is that it has its stakeholders.

The main stakeholders are, of course, the state authorities and politicians from various parties who create and comment on international events. In this circle, legal acts, government documents, strategies, and declarations are created. Reaching this circle of stakeholders is difficult and would require participatory observation. Another circle of stakeholders creating the debate on foreign policy and the state's position in the world are experts, analysts, scientists, journalists, and people professionally involved in international politics. Expert opinions, analyses, scientific publications, reports, professional journals, media relations, and public comments are created in this circle. The last circle of stakeholders are institutions which do not directly comment

<sup>35</sup> *EU Migration and Asylum Policy, Refugee inflow from Ukraine*, European Council, Council of the European Union, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-migration-policy/refugee-inflow-from-ukraine/> [accessed: 29 March 2023].

<sup>36</sup> *Refugees from Ukraine in the EU*, European Council, Council of the European Union, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/ukraine-refugees-eu/> [accessed: 29 March 2023].

<sup>37</sup> *Number of civilian casualties in Ukraine during Russia's invasion verified by OHCHR from February 24, 2022 to March 26, 2023*, Statista, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1293492/ukraine-war-casualties/> [accessed: 28 March 2023].

<sup>38</sup> Classic methodological textbooks in the field of political science show this difficulty only to a small extent, cf. D. Toshkov, *Research Design in Political Science*, Palgrave Macmillan, London – New York 2016; *Theory and Methods in Political Science*, eds. V. Lowndes, D. Marsh, G. Stoker, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, Palgrave Macmillan – Red Globe Press, London 2018.

on politics but are interested in information on this subject. These are domestic and foreign business and media available to citizens.

The circle of expert elites who have both knowledge and practical experience is the most accessible for researchers. It was decided that a selected group of experts would be the main point of reference for evaluating Polish security policy during the war in Ukraine. It was also decided that the main method of work would be interviews and expert surveys. It was assumed that experts are a kind of epistemic community as Peter Haas understands it.<sup>39</sup> When communicating with experts, it was decided to structure interviews, but in such a way as to allow for freedom in the selection of argumentation and length of statements. The respondents were selected specialists who are military professionals, diplomats, analysts, journalists, and scientists. The respondents in the study were 30 specialists (out of 42 people selected for the study). The selection of experts for the study was based on several requirements, which were: at least 5 years of experience in analysing security policy and having expert publications in this area. The experts gave a total of 236 statements related to security policy in the Eastern flank of NATO.

The designed research process required several additional skills compared to working with existing data. The researcher managed the process of data acquisition, recording, analysis, theoretical interpretation, and conclusions. The collected data needed to reflect the respondents' message as accurately as possible (in the case of working with notes from interviews, it required authorization). The next stage was the secondary analysis and forming generalizations based on the obtained data.<sup>40</sup>

## The research process

The process of preparing for the implementation of the project covered the second quarter of 2022. The intended result of the project was a short analytical report, available to the wider public opinion.<sup>41</sup> The designed qualitative research consisted of several elements: (1) theoretical analysis, (2) data collection methods, and (3) data interpretation methods.<sup>42</sup> Theoretical analysis included studies on terminology

<sup>39</sup> P. Haas, *Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination*, "International Organization" 1992, vol. 46, no. 1, pp. 1–35.

<sup>40</sup> *Research Methods in Defense Studies. A Multidisciplinary Overview*, ed. D. Deschaux-Dutard, Routledge – Taylor & Francis, New York – Oxon 2021, see especially chapters 3, 4 and 6.

<sup>41</sup> The material was published as: T. Pawłuszko, *The Security of Poland after the NATO summit in Madrid*, Instytut Sobieskiego, Warsaw 2022, [https://sobieski.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/NATO\\_E\\_BOOK\\_EN.pdf](https://sobieski.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/NATO_E_BOOK_EN.pdf) [accessed: 21 March 2023]. The research was financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as part of the Public Diplomacy 2022 competition.

<sup>42</sup> When designing the research, I benefited greatly from these publications: U. Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition, SAGE Publications Ltd, London – Thousand Oaks – New Delhi – Singapore 2018; J.W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and*

in the field of international relations, selection of theoretical position (analytical eclecticism), development of theoretical proposals for state policy, and development of a conceptual grid and questions for interviews.

Data collection methods included developing interview scenarios, preparing a list of experts for interviews or surveys, developing interview questionnaires, developing an inquiry and a brief description of the project for contact with respondents, determining the availability of experts, creating a work calendar, and conducting expert interviews/surveys (proportion was approximately 50/50).

Methods of data interpretation included preparation of notes from meetings with experts and carrying out the authorization process for each respondent undergoing a live interview, theoretical and thematic coding, analysis of the content, and selection of citations of exemplary statements for individual subchapters of the report for publication.

To sum up, the general schedule of the research first covered theoretical studies (state of knowledge, state of research, reports, publications, analyses), which were conducted in the period of April – July 2022. Their effect was the creation of a scientific foundation for empirical research, which was carried out in August and September 2022. The next empirical research included: the preparatory stage (development of research documentation, contact with respondents), the implementation stage (interviews, surveys, notes, authorization, processing, coding and anonymization of statements, categorization); the final stage of the work included the writing process, evaluation, and presentation of the results.

Table 2. Schedule of own research in 2022

Research stages (months of 2022)	IV–V			VI			VII			VIII			IX			X		
Preliminary research (literature, reports)																		
Studies on the history of the region																		
Studies in terminology																		
Analysis of political positions in Poland																		
Selection of a theoretical position																		
Developing theoretical proposals																		
Developing a grid of terms and questions for interviews																		

*Mixed Methods Approaches*, 7<sup>th</sup> edition, SAGE Publications Ltd, London – Thousand Oaks – New Delhi – Singapore 2017.

Research stages (months of 2022)	IV–V			VI			VII			VIII			IX			X		
Developing the theoretical part																		
Developing interview/ survey scenarios																		
Preparation of the list of experts and contact																		
Field work / interviews																		
Transcription																		
Authorization																		
Coding and analysis of interviews' content																		
Relating the results to the existing knowledge																		
Preparation of the text of the research report																		
Corrections after scientific review																		
Consultations with the expert community																		
Preparation of the final version of the report																		
Printing and presentation of test results																		
Promotion process on the Internet																		

Source: Author's own study.

## Key findings

As part of the research, a report was created containing several dozen statements by experts on Poland's security policy during the Russian-Ukrainian war.<sup>43</sup> Work on the report provided a better understanding of the role of experts as public policy stakeholders. Observation of expert statements also allowed the assessment of the concept of epistemic community. Conclusions from these studies, corresponding to the objectives of this article, are presented below.

Firstly, Polish experts know that they are treated as authorities and know their environment. Secondly, half a year after the outbreak of the war, it turned out that Polish experts have quite a similar assessment of most security policy problems. Thirdly, experts used similar terminology, regardless of their professional

<sup>43</sup> T. Pawluszko, *op. cit.*

affiliation. Virtually all experts consciously and freely used terms such as: *alliance, hegemony, integration, security, strategy, crisis, expansion, sanctions, foreign policy, national interests, and power*. These concepts were present in almost every recorded utterance. Fourthly, the experts had similar opinions on the war scenarios and potential threats to regional security. They also pointed to similar mistakes made by politicians and the Russian army (weak command, inefficient logistics, ineffective combat air forces, killing innocent civilians, constant lies about the invasion) and praised Ukraine's effective strategy. In addition, the experts unanimously emphasized the constancy of the Russian threat and the need to increase NATO's armaments. The vast majority of the experts favoured Ukraine and believed that Ukraine's defence was conducive to the security of the CEE region. This opinion was shared by the majority of Polish society.<sup>44</sup>

It can therefore be concluded that Polish experts commenting on the problems of security policy have created an informal epistemic community, developed thanks to the mass demand for reliable information about the war in Polish media. Therefore, their behaviour, concepts, and style of expression meet several of the aforementioned conditions for the existence of such a community. Interestingly, this process was created independently of the policy of the Polish state (!) which was reluctant to use external expertise.<sup>45</sup>

The vast majority of the experts referred to traditional approaches to international relations. According to the experts, the survival of the state is a necessary condition for the existence of national security. Without ensuring success in this sphere, it is not possible to take care of other public values.<sup>46</sup> However, in a long-term perspective, socio-economic resources turn out to be crucial, allowing the generation of wealth, absorption of new technologies and positioning the so-called country's *soft power*.<sup>47</sup> The war makes it clear that it is necessary to supplement the study of international relations with issues of internal politics (elites, ideas, strategies, institutions). Qualitative research shows that many experts prefer to express themselves in writing rather than orally. The recorded written statements were richer in detail, while oral statements were clearer in explaining the processes. All the experts showed advanced knowledge, especially in the field of international politics and

<sup>44</sup> E. Baszczak *et al.*, *How Polish society has been helping the refugees from Ukraine*, Polish Economic Institute, Warsaw, July 2022; *Poland to spend €8.4bn supporting Ukraine refugees in 2022, highest in OECD*, 12 October, 2022, Notes from Poland, <https://notesfrompoland.com/2022/10/14/poland-to-spend-e8-4bn-supporting-ukraine-refugees-in-2022-highest-in-oecd/> [accessed: 21 March 2023].

<sup>45</sup> *Deбаты Strategiczne BBN. Główne kierunki rozwoju Sił Zbrojnych RP*, National Security Bureau, 21 March 2023, <https://www.bbn.gov.pl/pl/wydarzenia/9624,Deбаты-Strategiczne-BBN-Glowne-kierunki-rozwoju-Sil-Zbrojnych-RP.html> [accessed: 23 March 2023].

<sup>46</sup> B. Brodie, *Strategy as a Science*, "World Politics" 1949, vol. 1, no. 4, pp. 467–488.

<sup>47</sup> J.S. Nye, *The Future of Power*, Public Affairs, New York 2011.



military affairs. The experts focused on observable facts, which increased the potential for objectification of their statements.

## Conclusions

The use of interviews and surveys as tools for qualitative analysis in the area of international relations was a valuable source of new knowledge. The research field of international relations has expanded significantly after the Cold War. This means expanding the conceptual base we operate on to explain increasingly complex phenomena. The Russian-Ukrainian war has become a very important event for the public opinion in Poland and the entire region, which has become an area of strategic importance for the international order. Locally, this may lead to a long-term increase in public interest in international security studies.

It should be noted that the concepts developed in the theory of international relations turned out to be a good starting point for both theoretical research and social research among experts. On the other hand, it is necessary to expand this sphere of knowledge with further issues. The study of epistemic communities in the field of security studies is a relatively new issue in Polish literature. The analysis of social practices and behaviour of experts is an important element in the self-knowledge of the scientific community.

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*The conflict between Russia and Ukraine: The causes of the war, security studies and the formation of an epistemic community in Poland*

**Abstract**

Russia's aggression against Ukraine has led to an increased interest in knowledge about warfare. The public debate about this war has become a test for the expertise skills of numerous scholars and government analysts. Within a few months, a new epistemic community emerged, which began to create a security discourse around the problems of the Russian-Ukrainian war. The article tries to explain the key terms used in this discourse and to indicate what classical texts in the field of international relations say about the causes and course of the Russian-Ukrainian war. In order to compare theory with practice, the author analysed several hundred expert publications on the war and conducted a total of several dozen interviews and surveys in 2022 in the Polish expert community. This text is therefore based on both a theoretical analysis and an insight into the reasoning of the epistemic community of experts educated in the field of security studies.

Keywords: war, securitization, epistemic community, security, power, Russia



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# Poland's support for Ukraine's aspirations to NATO membership

## Introduction

It has been in Poland's strategic interest since the 1990s to join Western integration and allied structures, including NATO. Almost since the very beginning of the debate on this issue, Ukraine has been positive about it. This happened despite the fact that the authorities in Kiev feared that in reaction to Poland's accession to NATO, Russia could try to rebalance this by rebuilding its influence in the post-Soviet zone, including putting pressure on Ukraine.<sup>1</sup> Poland reciprocated this support, becoming one of the strongest advocates of Ukraine's NATO membership. This was due to the converging interests of the two countries, as a sovereign Ukraine rooted in Western allied structures would significantly increase Poland's security.

The article analyses and evaluates Poland's attitude towards Ukraine's aspirations to NATO membership. It answers the question whether the authorities of sovereign Poland unequivocally supported the idea of Ukraine's NATO membership and whether they undertook measurable actions for its implementation. Since the 1990s, the Polish authorities have been in favour of NATO's 'open door' policy, including Ukraine's full membership in the organization. Ukraine's accession to NATO constitutes Poland's strategic interest, as a significant part of its eastern

<sup>1</sup> P. Żurawski vel Grajewski, *Polish-Ukrainian Relations 1991–2002*, p. 11, Fundacja Batorego, [https://www.batory.org.pl/ftp/program/forum/eu\\_ukraine/polish\\_ukrainian\\_relations.pdf](https://www.batory.org.pl/ftp/program/forum/eu_ukraine/polish_ukrainian_relations.pdf) [accessed: 18 January 2023].

border would be secured. Despite diplomatic efforts, the Polish authorities failed to convince NATO allies to accept Ukraine. The main reason was the fear of Russia's reaction, and the secondary reason was Ukraine's inadequate preparation for membership. After Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2022, Poland has become strongly involved in helping Ukraine and maintains the support for its membership in NATO. The article uses the method of content analysis of text sources.

## Poland's political support for Ukraine's aspirations for NATO membership

In 1991, Poland and Ukraine joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC), and in 1994 – the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme, which gave the countries extensive opportunities for political and military cooperation. In 1997, the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership was signed, which established the NATO-Ukraine Commission (NUC). The Charter includes a provision on NATO's support for the creation of the Polish-Ukrainian peacekeeping battalion and on the promotion of defence cooperation between Ukraine and its neighbours.<sup>2</sup> After Poland's accession to NATO in March 1999, it sought to maintain the 'open door' policy in the Alliance and supported the Baltic states and Ukraine in their efforts to become members of the organization. This was due to the fact that Poland did not want to be a NATO frontline state, bordering on an area where there was no stabilized political and military situation. This was especially problematic in the context of the possibility of a resurgence of expansionist and imperialist tendencies in Russia.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, Poland tried to carry out its own adaptation to NATO efficiently enough to increase the possibility of the Alliance's members agreeing to further enlargements.<sup>4</sup>

Poland's attempt to shape a safe international environment in its surroundings and to build trust with non-NATO partners coincided with supporting democratic processes in its eastern neighbours, including Ukraine.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, Poland counteracted Russia, which tried to hinder the political transition of these countries and their tightening of relations with the West. Polish presidents Aleksander Kwaśniewski and Lech Wałęsa were involved in the Orange Revolution in Ukraine

<sup>2</sup> *Charter on a Distinctive Partnership between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Ukraine*, 9 July 1997, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_25457.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_25457.htm) [accessed: 10 January 2023].

<sup>3</sup> Z. Kuśmirek, *Rozszerzenie NATO – implikacje dla Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*, [in:] *NATO a Europa Wschodnia. Rozszerzenie NATO na Wschód – ostatnie wyzwanie europejskie XX wieku*, eds. K.A. Wojtaszczyk, J.M. Niepsuj, Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, Warszawa 1998, pp. 97–98.

<sup>4</sup> A. Krzeczunowicz, *Krok po kroku. Polska droga do NATO 1989–1999*, Znak, Kraków 1999, pp. 235–236.

<sup>5</sup> J. Kaczmarek, *NATO – Europa – Polska 2000*, ATLA2, Wrocław 2000, p. 224.

at the turn of 2005, which was a manifestation of pro-democracy and pro-Western aspirations of part of Ukrainian society, including its rapid integration into the European Union and NATO.<sup>6</sup> After Lech Kaczyński took over the presidency in 2005 and the Law and Justice party formed a coalition government, supporting Ukraine's aspirations for NATO membership became one of the main priorities of Poland's foreign and security policy.<sup>7</sup> The tightening military cooperation between Poland and Ukraine was opposed by Russia, which considered it anti-Russian.<sup>8</sup> Poland provided strong impulses for NATO and the EU to look more seriously at Ukraine as a potential candidate for membership in these organizations.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, Poland took steps to make Ukraine energy independent from Russia, including by pushing for the construction of the Odessa-Brody-Płock oil pipeline.<sup>10</sup>

During the NATO summit in Bucharest in April 2008, together with the United States, Poland pushed the concept of including Ukraine and Georgia in Membership Action Plans (MAPs), which was supposed to open the way to their quick inclusion in NATO.<sup>11</sup> This was opposed by Western European allies who did not want to worsen relations with Russia.<sup>12</sup> As part of the compromise, NATO only declared that these countries would be admitted to the Alliance in the future.<sup>13</sup> The promise and the announcement of a review of Ukraine's and Georgia's progress on the road to membership were the result of efforts by American and Polish diplomacy.<sup>14</sup> The Russian-Georgian war of August 2008 was intended to block Georgia's pro-Western aspirations and to warn Ukraine to review its policy towards NATO. During the war, President Kaczyński built a regional front of resistance against Russia, but this was not supported by the West.

<sup>6</sup> S. Kudelia, G. Kasianov, *Ukraine's Political Development after Independence*, [in:] *From "the Ukraine" to Ukraine: A Contemporary History, 1991–2021*, eds. M. Minakov, G. Kasianov, M. Rojansky, ibidem-Verlag, Stuttgart 2021, p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> R. Kupiecki, *Główne aspekty polityki bezpieczeństwa Polski*, „Rocznik Polskiej Polityki Zagranicznej” 2006, pp. 69–70.

<sup>8</sup> H. Gardner, *American Global Strategy and the "War on Terrorism"*, Routledge, New York 2016, p. 136.

<sup>9</sup> S.N. MacFarlane, *Russia, NATO enlargement and the strengthening of democracy in the European space*, [in:] *NATO–Russia Relations in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. A. Braun, Routledge, London 2008, p. 47.

<sup>10</sup> L.A.M. Bandeira, *The Second Cold War: Geopolitics and the Strategic Dimensions of the USA*, Springer, New York 2017, p. 51.

<sup>11</sup> T. Haesebrouck, S. Taghon, H. Van Coppenolle, *The War in Ukraine: March–April 2022*, „GIES Occasional Paper” 2022, vol. 1, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> R. Zięba, *Polityka zagraniczna Polski w strefie euroatlantyckiej*, Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2013, p. 59.

<sup>13</sup> *Bucharest Summit Declaration. Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest on 3 April 2008*, NATO, 03 April 2008, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_8443.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm) [accessed: 10 January 2023].

<sup>14</sup> M. Madej, M. Terlikowski, *Polityka bezpieczeństwa Polski – wymiar polityczno-wojskowy*, „Rocznik Polskiej Polityki Zagranicznej” 2009, p. 49.

After the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the outbreak of war in the Donbas at the NATO summit in Newport in September 2014, the allies condemned the illegal aggression and called on Russia to withdraw its troops. The Polish delegation was in favour of far-reaching aid to Ukraine, including providing it with weapons. Since most Allies opposed this, the possible supply of weapons to Ukraine was left to the discretion of individual countries. NATO just decided to undertake 'additional efforts to support the reform and transformation of the security and defence sectors and promote greater interoperability between Ukraine's and NATO forces.'<sup>15</sup> In 2015, NATO countries – the USA, the UK, Canada, Poland, Denmark, Lithuania – and non-NATO member Sweden established the Multinational Joint Commission (MJC), under which have been providing reforms and training for the Ukrainian army and police. In 2016, the Ukraine Defence Reform Advisory Board was established to define the main directions of the defence sector reform in Ukraine, in which Poland has been participating from the very beginning. At the NATO Summit in Warsaw in July 2016, the Comprehensive Assistance Package (CAP) was adopted, under which NATO supports the transformation of Ukraine's security and defence sector, including through consulting and a range of capacity-building programmes and initiatives.<sup>16</sup> The CAP was established to support Ukraine in achieving the strategic goal of NATO membership, which was included in Ukraine's numerous internal documents, including the special legislation (2017), the amendment to the Constitution (2019), and the Security Strategy (2020).<sup>17</sup> In July 2020 in Lublin, Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine created the Lublin Triangle initiative which aims to strengthen cooperation between these historical members of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth and support Ukraine's accession efforts to the EU and NATO.<sup>18</sup> As part of the initiative, Poland once again supported the NATO Membership Action Plan for Ukraine,<sup>19</sup> which was in line with the

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<sup>15</sup> *Wales Summit Declaration. Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales*, NATO, 05 September 2014, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_112964.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm) [accessed: 10 January 2023].

<sup>16</sup> *Warsaw Summit Communiqué. Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Warsaw 8–9 July 2016*, NATO, 09 July 2016, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133169.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm) [accessed: 10 January 2023].

<sup>17</sup> M. Minakov, M. Rojansky, *Democracy in Ukraine*, [in:] *From "the Ukraine" to Ukraine...*, *op. cit.*, p. 327.

<sup>18</sup> C. Obregón, *Conflict and Resolution: Includes Comments on the Russia-Ukraine War*, University Editions, Montevideo 2022, p. 103.

<sup>19</sup> *Joint Declaration of Foreign Ministers of the Republic of Poland, the Republic of Lithuania and Ukraine on establishing Lublin Triangle*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Lublin, 28 July 2020, <https://mfa.gov.ua/en/news/joint-declaration-foreign-ministers-republic-poland-republic-lithuania-and-ukraine-establishing-lublin-triangle> [accessed: 12 January 2023].



provisions of the 2020 National Security Strategy of Poland.<sup>20</sup> Although Ukraine was not included in the MAP, Poland's support contributed to further deepening of the partnership with Ukraine in 2020, when it received a status of an Enhanced Opportunities Partner. There were even proposals for the United States to invite Ukraine and Georgia to contribute to the Forward Presence battle group in Poland. This was to be facilitated by Poland's unwavering support for the inclusion of these countries in NATO. Such a decision would constitute a precedent of a non-NATO member country participating in the Forward Presence Mission.<sup>21</sup>

The Russian aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 was strongly condemned by NATO. Poland has provided Ukraine with huge support, accepting millions of refugees, becoming the main hub for the shipment of Western weapons, and the second largest donor of armaments to the Ukrainian army, after the USA. In the first months of the war, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy did not raise the issue of NATO membership, focusing on soliciting supplies of military equipment by NATO countries. This changed at the end of September, when he signed a formal bid for Ukraine's accelerated NATO membership. He justified the motion with the blood shed by the Ukrainians in defence not only of their country, but also of the Alliance's security. This application was supported in a joint statement by the presidents of several NATO countries from the CEE region, including Poland.<sup>22</sup> The Western allies were much more sceptical about this, despite reaffirming in the June 2022 NATO Strategic Concept the Alliance's 'open door' policy and the 2008 Bucharest Declaration.<sup>23</sup>

The war in Ukraine is unresolved and if negotiations between the parties to the conflict begin, many solutions are possible and will depend on the situation on the front. One of them is Ukraine's quick accession to NATO, which Poland favours the most. Another is a transitional period in which Ukraine could receive bilateral security guarantees from the US and other NATO countries, including Poland. Moreover, Ukraine would abandon its NATO membership aspirations in exchange for alternative security guarantees, such as a regional alliance with US involvement.

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<sup>20</sup> *Strategia Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2020*, Warszawa 2020, BBN, p. 25, [https://www.bbn.gov.pl/ftp/dokumenty/Strategia\\_Bezpieczenstwa\\_Narodowego\\_RP\\_2020.pdf](https://www.bbn.gov.pl/ftp/dokumenty/Strategia_Bezpieczenstwa_Narodowego_RP_2020.pdf) [accessed: 12 January 2023].

<sup>21</sup> R. Zabakhidze, *United States partnerships with Georgia and Ukraine: Prospects for advancing military cooperation*, Middle East Institute, Washington D.C. 2021, pp. 14–15.

<sup>22</sup> The statement was signed by the presidents of the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania and Slovakia: *Joint statement of Presidents of Central and Eastern Europe*, President of the Republic of Poland, 2 October 2022, <https://www.president.pl/news/joint-statement-of-presidents-of-central-and-eastern-europe,59400> [accessed: 12 January 2023].

<sup>23</sup> *NATO 2022 Strategic Concept*, Madrid, 29 June 2022, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/> [accessed: 10.01.2023].

In addition, Ukraine could get a real path of integration with the European Union, which focuses on economic rather than military issues, so accepting this would be more possible for Russia and Western European powers.<sup>24</sup> Poland also strongly supports Ukraine's aspirations to EU membership.<sup>25</sup> However, regardless of the solution adopted, it is necessary to provide Ukraine with real security guarantees. Without this, it will be impossible to ensure the security of the region and start the process of rebuilding Ukraine.

## Polish-Ukrainian military cooperation to bring Ukraine closer to NATO

As part of tightening cooperation with Ukraine, Poland undertook a number of activities in the military area, which brought its eastern partner closer to NATO membership. First of all, these activities concerned the formation of joint military units and operational cooperation within peacekeeping and stabilization missions.<sup>26</sup> In addition, Ukraine has participated in a number of military exercises with NATO armed forces, including the Polish army, like Steadfast Jazz, Sea Breeze, Rapid Trident, Maple Arch, and Three Swords.

In the years 1995–1998, the Polish-Ukrainian Peace Force Battalion (POLUKRBAT) was formed, with headquarters in Przemyśl. The battalion could be used in missions conducted under the auspices of the United Nations or UN-approved missions under the auspices of other international organizations, including NATO and the EU, in the field of preventing international and internal conflicts, providing humanitarian assistance to the civilian population in the conflict areas, supporting the countries affected by conflicts, and counteracting the escalation of threats in Europe and in the world.<sup>27</sup> The battalion consisted of 744 soldiers, including 378 from the Polish 4<sup>th</sup> mechanized battalion of the 14<sup>th</sup> Armoured Brigade from Przemyśl, and 366 from the Ukrainian 310<sup>th</sup> mechanized regiment from Yavoriv. The battalion was to be able to take up an action within 30 days after a request for its use by an international organization. The creation of the battalion

<sup>24</sup> R. Youngs, *Ukraine's EU Membership and the Geostrategy of Democratic Self-Preservation*, Carnegie Europe, 01 April 2022, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2022/04/01/ukraine-s-eu-membership-and-geostrategy-of-democratic-self-preservation-pub-86771> [accessed: 18 January 2023].

<sup>25</sup> M. Tampubolon, *Russia's Invasion of Ukraine and its Impact on Global Geopolitics*, "European Scientific Journal" 2022, vol. 18, no. 20, p. 55–56, <https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2022.v18n20p48>.

<sup>26</sup> A. Szeptycki, *Nowa odłona polskiego mesjanizmu na Wschodzie?*, [in:] *Polityka zagraniczna Polski po wstąpieniu do NATO i do Unii Europejskiej. Problemy tożsamości i adaptacji*, ed. S. Bieleń, Difin, Warszawa 2010, p. 296.

<sup>27</sup> A. Drzewicki, *Stosunki z Ukrainą w sferze bezpieczeństwa: polski punkt widzenia*, „Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe” 2011, vol. 17, no. 1, p. 160.

was supported by NATO countries – the USA, the United Kingdom, Canada, and France.<sup>28</sup> After more than a decade of service, the Battalion was disbanded in 2010, as ambitions arose to create a larger joint military unit.

As for operational cooperation in foreign military missions, Ukraine deployed its armed forces in Kosovo alongside Polish troops. From July 2000, POLUKRBAT was deployed as part of NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) Multi-National Task Force (East), with 545 Polish and 267 Ukrainian soldiers.<sup>29</sup> POLUKRBAT performed tasks in the southern part of Kosovo, on the border with Macedonia. In Iraq, Ukrainian troops were deployed in the central-south zone in 2003 as part of the Multinational Division Central-South (MND C-S) under Polish command. A contingent of 1,800 soldiers sent by Ukraine allowed the formation of a brigade that took responsibility for the security of the Wasit province.<sup>30</sup> After losing 18 soldiers and due to social expectations, in the spring of 2005, the Ukrainians began withdrawing the contingent from Iraq. On a much smaller scale, the Ukrainians supported the Poles in maintaining security in the Ghazni province in Afghanistan, where they had sent several soldiers to each shift. In general, Ukraine's involvement in the NATO mission in Afghanistan was small, ranging from a few to 28 soldiers.<sup>31</sup> However, the Ukrainians turned out to be very helpful in the air transport of Polish soldiers to Afghanistan. The experience gained by the Ukrainian army during the military missions carried out together with the Poles is invaluable in the context of learning procedures and increasing interoperability with NATO troops.

In the years 2009–2016, the Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian Brigade (LITPOLUKRBRIG) was formed, with headquarters in Lublin. LITPOLUKRBRIG consists of manoeuvre battalions – the Lithuanian Army Land Forces Grand Duchess Birutė Uhlan Battalion (Lithuania), 3<sup>rd</sup> Mechanized Battalion of the 19<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Brigade (Poland), 1<sup>st</sup> Air Assault Battalion of the 80<sup>th</sup> Airborne Brigade (Ukraine), and a number of battle support and logistic units.<sup>32</sup> The battalion's 4,000 soldiers are stationed with their home units on a day-to-day basis. The brigade is not formally a NATO unit, but it applies all the NATO procedures and aims to be interoperable

<sup>28</sup> P. Żurawski vel Grajewski, *op. cit.*, p. 13–14.

<sup>29</sup> *Polish-Ukrainian Peace Force Battalion*, Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Poland, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070927222951/http://www.wp.mil.pl/strona.php?lang=2&cidstrona=129> [accessed: 18 January 2023].

<sup>30</sup> A. Tyszkiewicz, *Doświadczenia i wnioski z przygotowania i udziału pierwszej zmiany dywizji międzynarodowej w misji stabilizacyjnej w Iraku*, „Przegląd Wojsk Lądowych” 2004, no. 8 [supplement], p. 7.

<sup>31</sup> *International Security Assistance Force. Troop Contributing Nations*, NATO, 15 January 2014, [https://www.nato.int/isaf/placemats\\_archive/2014-01-15-ISAF-Placemat.pdf](https://www.nato.int/isaf/placemats_archive/2014-01-15-ISAF-Placemat.pdf) [accessed: 12 January 2023].

<sup>32</sup> *LITPOLUKRBRIG. History*, LITPOLUKRBRIG, <https://litpolukrbrig.wp.mil.pl/en/pages/history-2019-08-21-3/> [accessed: 18 January 2023].

with Alliance operations.<sup>33</sup> The brigade plays an important role in implementing NATO standards in Ukraine's Armed Forces, and its main activities include 'training Ukrainian officers and military units in these standards, planning and conducting operational tasks, and maintaining operational readiness.'<sup>34</sup> The Brigade has the potential to support Ukrainians' efforts to join NATO.<sup>35</sup> In the future, it could even be used as a contributor to the NATO Response Force. Joint Polish-Ukrainian units have brought Ukraine significantly closer to NATO.<sup>36</sup>

After the outbreak of the war in the Donbas, Poland became involved in the next stage of training Ukrainian soldiers. Poland is one of the few countries that have agreed to join the Joint Multinational Training Group – Ukraine (JMTG-U), established in 2015 by the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Ukraine. The goals of JMTG-U include training, equipping, developing training centre capacity, and doctrinal assistance to the Ukrainian Armed Forces. International forces advise, train, and support the Ukrainian army in developing operational capabilities in accordance with NATO standards. Initially, the training was held at the battalion level, and since 2019, also at the brigade level. Three sites, in Khmelnytskyi, Kamianets-Podilskyi, and Yavoriv, have been set for the training of Ukrainian soldiers. Since 2019, Polish and Lithuanian officers and non-commissioned officers have been participating in training within LITPOLUKRBRIG. Poles trained the Ukrainians at the Combat Training Centre – Yavoriv, acting as advisers in the headquarters of Ukrainian brigades and battalions, including providing advice on the use of NATO procedures in the decision-making process.<sup>37</sup> Polish generals have been advisors to the Ukrainian commanders at the highest levels, for example Lt. Gen. Bogusław Samol.

After the outbreak of a full-scale war in Ukraine, one of the training objectives has been to teach the Ukrainians how to use military equipment provided by NATO countries, including the USA and Poland. For this purpose, in July 2022, the Americans established the Security Assistance Group – Ukraine (SAG-U) in Wiesbaden,

<sup>33</sup> O. Gain, *Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian Brigade: We Are United for Peace*, Defence Blog, 13 February 2017, <https://defence-blog.com/litpolukrbrig-we-are-united-for-peace/> [accessed: 18 January 2023].

<sup>34</sup> *Meeting of Foreign Ministers of Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, 28 July 2020, <https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/meeting-of-foreign-ministers-of-poland-lithuania-and-ukraine> [accessed: 12 January 2023].

<sup>35</sup> M. Fryc, *The Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian Brigade's development potential in the context of regional security*, "Scientific Journal of the Military University of Land Forces" 2020, vol. 52, no. 1, pp. 6–7, <https://doi.org/10.5604/01.3001.0014.0247>.

<sup>36</sup> M. Żyła, *Polish-Ukrainian Military Units in the Years 1991–2018*, "Security and Defence Quarterly" 2018, vol. 22, no. 5, p. 150, <https://doi.org/10.5604/01.3001.0012.6501>.

<sup>37</sup> O. Slobodianiuk, *Wielonarodowa Grupa Szkoleniowa na Ukrainie*, Polska Zbrojna, 17 September 2019, <https://polska-zbrojna.pl/home/articleshow/29249?t=Wielonarodowa-Grupa-Szkoleniowa-na-Ukrainie> [accessed: 18 June 2023].

Germany, and nominated Maj. Gen. Jarosław Gromadziński as its deputy commander. By January 2023, about 500 Ukrainian soldiers were being trained each month. Poland also plays a leading role in the European Union Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine (EUMAM), established in October 2022. The mission assumes the coordination of the training of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, including the Territorial Defence Forces, provided by the European Union countries. As part of the EUMAM, the multinational Combined Arms Training Command (CAT-C) was established in Poland under the command of Maj. Gen. Piotr Trytek. As part of the mission, at least 15 thousand of Ukrainian soldiers are to be trained in EU countries, mainly in Poland. The potential future accession of Ukraine to NATO will depend on the ability of the Ukrainian army to defend the state against Russian aggression, in which Poland strongly supports its neighbour.

## Conclusions

Due to the strategic importance of a sovereign Ukraine and its integration with Western allied structures, Poland consistently strongly supports its aspirations to join NATO. Poland was involved in the democratic processes in Ukraine, which went hand in hand with the adoption of a pro-Western direction in its foreign and security policy. Poland also tried to counteract Russia's actions limiting Ukraine's independence in the international arena and torpedoing its pro-Western aspirations. Poland opted for Ukraine's inclusion in the MAP, but was unable, even together with the United States, to build a coalition that would push this idea through. Poland also undertook military activities to bring Ukraine closer to NATO, mainly through the creation of joint military units and operational cooperation in military missions. In recent years, Ukraine's foreign and security policy has been unequivocally pro-Western, which is conducive to Poland's support for Ukraine's aspirations for NATO membership. The Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2022 did not change Poland's attitude.

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### Poland's support for Ukraine's aspirations to NATO membership

#### Abstract

The aim of the article is to analyse and evaluate Poland's attitude towards Ukraine's aspirations to NATO membership. The main research problem is the question whether the authorities of sovereign Poland unambiguously supported the idea of Ukraine's membership in NATO and whether they took measurable actions to implement it. The Polish authorities, regardless of political provenance, have invariably been in favour of NATO's 'open door' policy since the end of the Cold War. They have supported the idea of including the post-Soviet republics, including Ukraine, in the Alliance. Ukraine's entry into

NATO is in Poland's strategic interest, as it would almost cease to play the role of the Alliance's flank state, which would significantly increase its security. The Polish authorities failed to convince NATO allies, mainly Western European countries, to include Ukraine in NATO, which was due to Russia's strong opposition. However, new circumstances appeared with the Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2022. During the research, the method of content analysis of text sources was used.

Keywords: Ukraine, NATO membership, Poland, NATO 'open door' policy, war in Ukraine





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# Maritime episodes of the Russian 'special operation' against Ukraine<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

The waters of the Black and Azov Seas play an important, but not a primary role in the overall military operations carried out as part of Russia's 'special operation.' It is possible to define this role in detail only in the context of the overall goals and directions of operational activities. It is also reasonable to use the conclusions that can be drawn from both the course of the naval episodes of the 2008 Georgian-Russian war and the change in the strategic security environment that occurred in the Black Sea region with the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and Russia's gaining access to the north-western coast of the Sea of Azov.

The specificity of the legal regime of sea basins and the principle of ensuring freedom of navigation in the open sea and safety of navigation, which dominates in the policy of coastal states, determined the research approach. In the process of preparing this study, the realistic paradigm was adopted for basic research, which allows us to describe and interpret the policy pursued by coastal states as the main

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<sup>1</sup> The text is a shortened version of a study prepared for the Defense Security Cooperation University, Washington, DC.

maritime players. The article is a case study – an analysis of naval episodes used during the ‘special operation’ against Ukraine. The main methods used in the research process are: theoretical methods in the form of a case study, analysis of documents and scientific literature, system analysis, and an empirical method in the form of data analysis.

The purpose of the study is to show the essential elements of the naval operations conducted as part of the ‘special operation’ against Ukraine, and to identify its essential features and transformations in the use of combat potential. The working hypothesis is the assertion that operations on maritime bodies of water served a supporting role to the land operation in the Russian concept, and their purpose was to dominate the Black Sea by preventing the conduct of commercial shipping and protective activities by the naval forces of Ukraine. The tactics used took the form of the so-called naval power policy of classical warfare. This thesis was verified through the application of research methods in the form of a case study, comparative analysis, and analyses of literature and documents. The main research limitation is the period of naval actions analysis, which was one year from the beginning of Russian aggression.

## Evolution of the role of the Azov and Black Seas in 2014–2022

The Sea of Azov, despite unfavourable shipping conditions,<sup>2</sup> has been an important freight route for Ukraine, especially for transporting metallurgical products and coal. Russian policy also viewed the basin as part of a sea-river transportation system, and after the annexation of Crimea, the strategic goal became to obtain a direct connection providing water and food supplies from the Krasnodar Region and, in prospect, Rostov-on-Don. The Black Sea basin, on the other hand, is an area that allows strategic control of the situation in Southeast Europe, limiting American and European expansion in Central Asia, maintaining control over Central Asian raw material resources, controlling the strategic situation in the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean, and engaging in economic and political processes in the Middle East. Traditionally, dominion over this body of water is considered an indicator of Russia’s political position, which means that breaking this monopoly in the northern part of this body of water is treated as a significant threat to state sovereignty.

The strategic role of the two seas during the ‘special operation’ is a consequence of the implementation – new in the context of the 2014 assumptions – of the plan

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<sup>2</sup> It is a body of water with an average depth of 7 meters and it freezes over during the winter. During cold winters, ice covers most of the basin. During the autumn-winter period, storm-force winds threaten vessels engaged in navigation, which are mostly sea-river barges and vessels with a draft of up to 4 meters.

for their use. After the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, the Russian minimum goal was to control the western coast of the Sea of Azov from Mariupol to the Crimean Peninsula, and the maximum – to take control of the economic centres of Eastern Ukraine.<sup>3</sup> The failure of this project led to a back-up option in the form of building a bridge across the Kerch Strait and investing in energy infrastructure in Crimea. However, this did not mean abandoning plans to gain full control of the Sea of Azov, this time because of the potential to control a significant portion of Ukraine's trade in goods, especially since it included a key volume of goods for the country's economy (metallurgical products and agricultural crops). On the other hand, with regard to the Black Sea basin, the primary goal was to obtain shipping capacity to the Mediterranean, which was achieved through the creation of political and economic relations with Turkey and, on occasion, the approval of Chinese activity in the expansion of transport routes in the region. On the other hand, attempts to gain the ability to control shipping in these waters and the sanctioning of the new arrangement of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) resulting from the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula should be considered secondary goals until 2022. With regard to the former goal, a special role has been assigned to shipping routes leading to the ports of Odessa and Azov's Mariupol, while with regard to the latter – to the basins at the bottom of which oil deposits have been identified (including the southwestern part of Ukraine's sea basins).<sup>4</sup>

With the commencement of the 'special operation' against Ukraine, these goals became the priority for Russian naval operations. This is because it had been recognized that Ukraine's export dependence could be used to undermine the country's defence potential, and that preventing shipping was the simplest means of achieving this goal. In the course of military operations, on the other hand, it became apparent that through the shipping routes along the western coasts of the Black Sea it was possible to deliver aid to the Ukrainian state. These conditions made it necessary to effectively block the operation of Ukrainian ports in the north-western part of the Black Sea, but without the use of a classic naval blockade<sup>5</sup> or the so-called 'exclusion zones' (*security zones* with the right to control commercial vessels and those on state service and the *forbidden zone*). Nor was it decided to carry out an air strike or tactical naval landing on Odessa as was done in the port of Poti. This was due to both an assessment of the

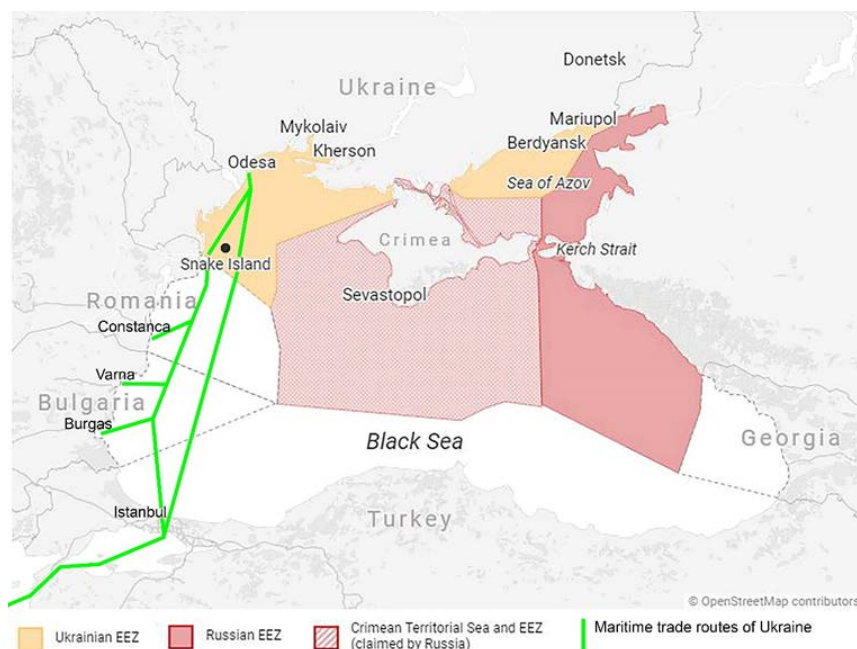
<sup>3</sup> P. Mickiewicz, *Obszar Czarnomorski i Morze Śródziemne w polityce Rosji*, „Rocznik Bezpieczeństwa Międzynarodowego” 2016, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 67–81, <https://doi.org/10.34862/rbm.2016.1.5>.

<sup>4</sup> Idem, *Świadectwo początku upadku imperium? Doktryna Morska z 31.07.2022 r. jako strategia operacyjna Federacji Rosyjskiej po ukraińskim upokorzeniu*, „Colloquium” 2022, vol. 14, no. 3 (47), pp. 73–94, <https://doi.org/10.34813/23coll2022>.

<sup>5</sup> It can be used when the attacked state uses it for defensive purposes, or it is applicable in an operation to stabilize international order. See M. Ilnicki, A. Makowski, S. Pejas, „*Wojna minowa na morzu*”, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 1998, pp. 115–117, 157–163.

Ukrainian defence potential deployed in the region and the size of the Odessa agglomeration itself, which effectively nullified the possibility of carrying out a tactical landing. Such an operation would have to be part of a military operation aimed at the southern areas of Ukraine. A naval blockade, on the other hand, would involve open sea areas also used by NATO states. Both of these factors caused the Black Sea warfare to take on the formula of military episodes and an effective naval mining operation.

Figure 1. Exclusive Economic Zones in the Black Sea, maritime trade routes of Ukraine and strategic location of Snake Island – status as of 2022



Source: the Authors' own elaboration on the basis of A. Colibășanu, A. Crowther, J. Hickman, G. Scutaru, *The Strategic Importance of Snake Island*, The Center for European Policy Analysis, 27 September 2022, <https://cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/the-strategic-importance-of-snake-island/> [accessed: 07 February 2023].

## Black Sea warfare from February 2022 to February 2023

Russia's 'special operation' against Ukraine began around 5:00 a.m. local time on 24 February 2022, with a massive Russian air and missile strike. The attacks were carried out from the territory of Belarus, along the entire eastern Russian-Ukrainian border and from the Crimean Peninsula.<sup>6</sup> In the Russian-Ukrainian war, the Rus-

<sup>6</sup> The first wave of Russian strikes used Su-24M and Su-34 strike aircraft, escorted by fighters – including MiG-29/35, Su-27, Su-35. Strategic bombers – Tu-95, Tu-22M3, Tu-160 – which carried cruise missiles (mainly Ch-31P and Ch-101) were also dispatched.

sian Black Sea Fleet was to play a key role because of its, at least theoretical, combat potential. A few months before the start of hostilities, this component had been reinforced with tactical compounds, troops, and subunits, drawn from the 49<sup>th</sup> Combined Arms Army and 58<sup>th</sup> Combined Arms Army, as well as air and anti-aircraft units of the Air and Space Forces mainly from the 14<sup>th</sup> Air Force and Air Defence Army.<sup>7</sup> The above-mentioned operational compounds were under the command of the Southern Military District.

Table 1. Comparison of general strength of the two adversary navies as of the beginning of 2022

Equipment by type	Ukrainian Navy	Russian Black Sea Fleet
Main naval assets		
Tactical submarines	0	6
Principal surface combatants	1	6
Patrol & coastal combatants	12	36
Mine warfare & mine countermeasures	1	10
Amphibious	2	10
Logistics & support	8	15
Naval aviation/aviation		
Fixed-wing aircraft	4	c. 300–350*
Helicopters	16	c. 80*
Air defence (missile systems only)		
SAM Systems	c. 70–72**	c. 160–200*
Coastal defence (missile systems only)		
AShM Systems	c. 1–4	c. 70–90

\* Together with the hardware of the Air and Space Forces. \*\* SAM systems from the Ukrainian Air Force deployed in the area of ports and naval bases (Note: In 2022, the Ukrainian Navy did not and still does not have, as of February 2023, organic SAM systems, as a result of the adopted organizational structure).

Source: the Authors' own elaboration.

As can be seen from the above compilation, Ukraine was able to counter such great potential with a very modest force of its navy.<sup>8</sup> This has had a significant impact on the shape and nature of the ongoing struggle. Analysing the actions of the Russian naval forces from the perspective of one year since the outbreak of the war, it can be deduced that the following tasks were most likely to be set:

- establishing an effective naval blockade of the Ukrainian coast and ports, using all available anti-access potential (naval forces, aviation, coastal defence troops);

<sup>7</sup> M. Cielma, *Wojna w Europie – agresja na Ukrainę*, „Nowa Technika Wojskowa” 2022, No. 3, pp. 6–12; M. Glajzer, *Lotnicze i morskie aspekty agresji na Ukrainę. Część I*, „Nowa Technika Wojskowa” 2022, no. 3, pp. 13–19.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

- providing support for the operations carried out by the air-land component by conducting coastal shelling and performing tactical naval landings (Snake Island was considered a target of strategic importance);
- conducting activities within the framework of a strategic operation to destroy Ukraine's critical and military infrastructure using saturation missile strikes.

The Black Sea Fleet entered combat operations in the Black Sea area with the launch of 'special operation'. In view of the weakness of Ukraine and an almost complete lack of counteraction on their part, control of the shipping lanes around the Crimean Peninsula was quickly and efficiently taken.<sup>9</sup> The aim of these actions was to block key sea routes for Ukraine, primarily to Odessa.<sup>10</sup> In practice, this prevented the export of Ukrainian agricultural crops and metallurgical products.<sup>11</sup> These actions should be regarded as the establishment – in violation of the Law of the Sea – of a maritime blockade. The operation involved both ships and supporting naval aviation, and coastal defence assets. Naval mines were also used, although it should be stressed that such operations were conducted by both sides in this conflict. Through their use, the Russians attempted to blockade the Black Sea ports.<sup>12</sup> The Ukrainian Navy lay mines in the approaches to ports and beaches to protect the coast from sea landing. The Black Sea mine operation should be considered a success from an operational point of view, as in the first weeks of the war, about 100 ships were stranded in ports along with about 1,500 sailors.<sup>13</sup> On the

<sup>9</sup> B.J. Armstrong, *The Russo-Ukrainian War at Sea: Retrospect and Prospect*, Texas National Security Review – War on the Rocks, 21 April 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/04/the-russo-ukrainian-war-at-sea-retrospect-and-prospect/> [accessed: 06 February 2023].

<sup>10</sup> K. Ellison, *Battle on The Black Sea: Maritime Implications of The Russo-Ukrainian War*, Currents: A Student Blog, School of Maritime and Environmental Affairs, University of Washington, 06 June 2022, <https://smea.uw.edu/currents/battle-on-the-black-sea-maritime-implications-of-the-russo-ukrainian-war/> [accessed: 06 February 2023].

<sup>11</sup> Ukraine and Russia export nearly 30% of the world's wheat supply. Although the reported figures vary to some extent, it can be assumed through their analysis that Ukraine produces about 20% of the world's supply of high-quality wheat and 7% of all wheat. The World Food Programme buys half of its wheat supply from Ukraine. It has been estimated that a major disruption of supply chains could lead to a humanitarian disaster. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the countries most likely to be affected by the decline in Russian and Ukrainian grain exports are in Africa. 100% of Somalia's and Benin's wheat imports come from Ukrainian and Russian sources. Egypt, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Senegal, and Tanzania import more than 60% of their wheat from the same sources. *On the trail of Ukrainian grain*, Lloyd's List Intelligence, <https://www.lloydslistintelligence.com/knowledge-hub/data-storytelling/on-the-trail-of-ukrainian-grain> [accessed: 07 February 2023].

<sup>12</sup> M. Glajzer, *Lotnicze i morskie aspekty agresji na Ukrainę. Część II*, „Nowa Technika Wojskowa” 2022, no. 4, pp. 14–19; B.J. Armstrong, *op. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> In addition, dozens of ships were also located in the roadsteads of Ukrainian ports. K. Ellison, *op. cit.*

other hand, pointing out the illegality of the introduced naval blockade, it should be emphasized that it had not been formally announced, the ships enforcing the naval ban initially did not broadcast appropriate warnings, and their warning shots repeatedly hit civilian vessels of various shipowners.<sup>14</sup>

Indicating the limited possibilities of carrying out tactical landings in the Black Sea and the abandonment of their disembarkation in the Sea of Azov, it is important to emphasize the role of the sham landing operations that were undertaken during 'special operation' until mid-April.

### Strategic dimension of maritime activities between 24 February 2022 and 04 July 2022

As already mentioned, the naval activities of the 'special operation' were in support of the land operation. Nevertheless, three naval episodes played an important role in the overall Russian operation as well as Ukraine's defence operations, namely:

- the battle for control of Snake Island,
- missile shelling of naval targets, carried out by the Ukrainian forces,
- naval minelaying actions.

Figure 2. Approximate distance of Snake Island from selected significant Black Sea locations shown in nautical miles and kilometers



Source: the Authors' own elaboration on the basis of A. Colibășanu, A. Crowther, J. Hickman, G. Scutaru, *op. cit.*

<sup>14</sup> These began to be broadcast only in late February – a few days after the start of hostilities. *Ibidem*; J. Foggo, B. Mainardi, *Boiling the Frog – Russia's Black Sea Aggression Part II, the War*, The Center for European Policy Analysis, 06 May 2022, <https://cepa.org/article/boiling-the-frog-russias-black-sea-aggression-part-ii-the-war/> [accessed: 07 February 2023].

## Russian landing on Snake Island

As part of the Black Sea Fleet-led offensive, on 24 February, the Black Sea Fleet's flagship, the Project 1164 missile cruiser *Moskva*, the Project 22160 patrol ship *Vasily Bykov* and the Project 18280 intelligence-gathering ship *Yuri Ivanov*, headed toward Ukraine's Snake Island.<sup>15</sup> In the early afternoon, Russian ships began shelling the Ukrainian outpost. The Ukrainians responded to the Russian demand for surrender with a firm refusal, 'instructing' – to put it mildly – the Russian ships 'to move away.' Eventually, after several hours of shelling, the Ukrainians capitulated in the evening, and a small subdivision of the Russian Naval Infantry landed on the island and took them prisoner. On the captured island, the Russians deployed their forces. From a military point of view, the deployment of surveillance equipment, airborne reconnaissance systems, anti-aircraft and anti-ship systems makes it possible to conduct operations covering the entire north-western Black Sea region, including the coasts of Bulgaria, Romania and the Danube estuary, connecting Europe with the Black Sea – a total area of about 600 km<sup>2</sup>. This is of particular importance, given that the Romanian port of Sulina served as an alternative shipping route for Ukrainian goods after Russia blockaded Odessa and other Ukrainian ports. Another issue to consider is that of the Dardanelles, controlled by Turkey under the 1936 Montreux Convention.<sup>16</sup> Equally important is the economic importance of the island. As already mentioned, it is located on an important navigation corridor connecting all Ukrainian, Romanian and Bulgarian ports from the Black Sea to the mouth of the Danube. According

<sup>15</sup> Snake Island has an area of just under 17 hectares and a shape resembling the letter X. A. Colibășanu, A. Crowther, J. Hickman, G. Scutaru, *op. cit.*; M. Glajzer, *Lotnicze i morskie aspekty... Część II, op. cit.*, p. 18; H. Mongilio, S. LaGrone, *UPDATED: Russian Navy Launches Amphibious Assault on Ukraine; Naval Infantry 30 Miles West of Mariupol*, USNI News, U.S. Naval Institute, 25 February 2022, <https://news.usni.org/2022/02/25/russian-navy-launches-amphibious-assault-on-ukraine> [accessed: 07 February 2023].

<sup>16</sup> On 28 February, the Turkish government decided to close the Black Sea straits to warships. Announcing the decision, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu publicly invoked Article 19 of the Convention, which states that in the event of a war in which Turkey is not one of the parties, ships of belligerent states may not pass through the straits except to return to bases, but ships of other states retain the right to use the straits. At the same time, M. Çavuşoğlu asked all other states not to try to send their ships into the Black Sea at that time. This was only a request or recommendation, but not a formal prohibition, as this would require invoking Article 21 of the Convention, giving Turkey the right to close the straits completely, but only in the event that Turkey deems itself in immediate danger of war breaking out on its territory. However, it should be stressed that this fact would be very difficult to justify. It is imperative to point out that for Ukraine, the closing of the straits has no real significance for the course of the war. In the face of Russian dominance on the sea and a well-functioning land supply route, bringing supplies by sea would be reasonably impossible without the risk of a military confrontation with the Russian Federation. R. Pedrozo, *Closing the Turkish Straits in Times of War*, "International Law Studies" 2022, vol. 99, pp. 517–520, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/ils/vol99/iss1/19/> [accessed: 04 July 2023].



to experts, control of these routes is critical to Europe's security and prosperity in the event of a wider conflict with Russia. The island's economic importance is also influenced by its large deposits of natural gas, which were discovered in 2009 in both the Ukrainian and Romanian EEZs. Hence, from the point of view of the Russian Federation's interests, the possible annexation of the island would allow it to significantly expand its EEZ and gain control not only over shipping lanes but also over its rich natural gas deposits. This explains why Russian strategists, when planning the invasion of Ukraine, considered this small patch of land so important.<sup>17</sup>

Table 2. Russian military equipment and personnel deployed on Snake Island in 2022 during the occupation

Type	No.	Comments
9K330 Tor M2	1	SP SAM system
9K37 Buk M2	1	SP SAM system
9K22 Tunguska	1 (?)	SP SAM – missile and artillery system; based on the testimony of Ukrainian soldiers who spoke of a Russian anti-aircraft vehicle firing at them from a transport barge, located right next to the island, but not on the island itself
96K6 Pantsir S-1	4	SP SAM – missile and artillery system
9K51 BM-21 Grad	2	122 mm SP MRL
9K51M Tornado-G	2	122 mm SP MRL
AFV	1	Unidentified type (BMP-1 or BMP-2)
Military trucks	3	6x6 trucks
Diesel generators	2	Unidentified type
ISTAR	6	Designated by Ukrainian MoD as 'medium-size military objects.' These facilities were in general no larger than standard cargo containers and they were carefully disguised with camouflage nets. Probably elements of the Russian ISTAR systems (electro-optical and infrared intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition, and reconnaissance systems).
Soldiers	c. 60–90	Including at least naval infantry platoon

Source: the Authors' own elaboration.

The above summary supports the thesis that the Russian side clearly wanted to build the Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) capabilities. However, these plans were thwarted by the Ukrainian side.<sup>18</sup> From the moment the Russian occupation of the island began, the Supreme Command of the Ukrainian Armed Forces was planning to recapture Snake Island, but initially did not have the necessary resources to carry out this endeavour. The Black Sea Fleet was *de facto* the master at sea. An additional important asset of Russian forces was the ability to operate under the cover of

<sup>17</sup> A. Colibășanu, A. Crowther, J. Hickman, G. Scutaru, *op. cit.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem.*

its own aviation and 'anti-aircraft umbrella' from Crimea. It was complemented by the flagship of the Black Sea Fleet, the aforementioned Project 1164 *Moskva* missile cruiser, which had a powerful anti-aircraft, missile, and artillery armament.

### The importance of missile fire on naval targets – the case of the cruiser *Moskva*

The guarantee of Russian control of Snake Island was the constant presence in its area of the cruiser *Moskva*, which simultaneously carried out the task of controlling the basin and identifying and tracking of aircraft (the so-called PIRAZ function – Positive Identification Radar Advisory Zone). Thus, the cruiser's destruction became an important operational objective for Ukrainian forces. It was achieved – according to the Ukrainian sources, which should be strongly emphasized – probably as a result of a combined attack by the Bayraktar TB2-type drones and a strike missile strike from Ukrainian territory.<sup>19</sup> The Russians attempted to salvage and tow their badly damaged ship to Sevastopol, but without success. It eventually sank on 14 April. The operational success of Ukrainian forces resulted in a change in Russian naval activity. Russian ships began manoeuvring at a considerable distance from the Ukrainian coast due to possible Ukrainian ASM threat. As a consequence, naval activity was mainly limited to skirmishes between small patrol vessels, mutual attacks between combat drones and kamikaze drones,<sup>20</sup> and aerial attacks by aircraft and helicopters. More than a dozen smaller vessels of both sides were sunk or damaged in these battles. However, the Black Sea Fleet was still able to control the sea lanes leading to Ukrainian ports.

<sup>19</sup> According to the Ukrainian side, the attack was carried out in such a way that several Bayraktar TB2-type drones absorbed or dispersed (in an unspecified way) the Russian cruiser's air defense systems, after which it received two hits with R-360 Neptune-type anti-ship missiles of Ukrainian production launched from land. It should be noted that Roman Romaniuk presents the story of the sinking of the *Moskva* as officially reported by the Ukrainian Defence Ministry. The Russian side claimed that there was an unfortunate accident on the ship, but the actual events contradict this position because after 14 April 2022, Russian ships moved away dozens of nautical miles from the Ukrainian coast, indicating fear of further similar attacks and thus confirming the credibility of the version presented by the Ukrainian side. R. Romaniuk, *Battle for Zmiinyi (Snake) Island. Reconstructing the heroic tale of Ukraine losing and reclaiming the critical island*, *Ukrainska Pravda*, 07 November 2022, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/articles/2022/11/7/7375232/> [accessed: 07 February 2023]; J. Foggo, B. Mainardi, *op. cit.*; Ch. Pleasance, *Ukraine claims it DID take out Putin's sitting duck naval flagship: Kyiv says it hit Moskva cruiser with missile after bungling Russian admirals let it sail around Black Sea within range amid claims of 'hundreds' of casualties onboard*, "Daily Mail", 14 April 2022, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10718499/Ukraine-war-Kyiv-claims-successful-hit-Russian-warship.html> [accessed: 09 February 2023]; T. Ozberk, *Analysis: Chain Of Negligence Caused The Loss Of The Moskva Cruiser*, *Naval News*, 17 April 2022, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2022/04/analysis-chain-of-negligence-caused-the-loss-of-the-moskva-cruiser/> [accessed: 09 February 2023].

<sup>20</sup> The use of ZALA Lancet-3 kamikaze drones by the Russians has been noticed.

## Ukrainian attempts to recapture Snake Island and attacks on Russian port infrastructure

The sinking of the cruiser *Moskva* was not only a significant reduction in the combat capability of the Black Sea Fleet, but also changed the operational situation around the south-western coast of Ukraine. It became possible to regain control of Snake Island, which was decided on practically as soon as information about the loss of combat capability of the Russian cruiser was confirmed. The earlier fiasco of the landing that the Ukrainian side attempted (according to R. Romaniuk) on the night of 8–9 May<sup>21</sup> resulted in the operation being carried out not in the formula of a landing but of a conducted airstrike against both the military infrastructure deployed in the island's area and the Black Sea Fleet ships trying to provide a defensive umbrella over the island. Air forces, including the Bayraktar TB2 drones, were mainly used to carry out those attacks. In May alone, Ukrainian forces carried out more than a dozen air strikes involving Su-27 and Su-24 aircraft.<sup>22</sup> The most effective actions of the Ukrainian Air Force in this operation were considered to be the following:

- the 2 May 2022 attack which resulted in Ukrainian drones succeeding in sinking 2 Russian Project 03160 Raptor light patrol ships and damaging several targets on Snake Island;<sup>23</sup>
- damage to the Elbrus-type logistics support ship *Vsevolod Bobrov* (12 May 2022);
- sinking of the Project 22870 pusher *Vasily Bekh* by using Harpoon anti-ship missile systems (17 June 2022).<sup>24</sup>

Ukrainian attacks intensified – for example, on 27 June alone, the island became the target of as many as 10 air strikes. On 30 June, Ukrainian artillery launched an intense artillery barrage on Snake Island. The massive artillery fire, concentrated

<sup>21</sup> At that time, 4 Mi-24 and 4 Mi-8 helicopters attempted to attack the island and disembark on it. Ukrainian Hiruza-M armored gunboats were also in the vicinity of the island. A Mi-14 naval aviation helicopter, ready to pick up any survivors, followed them. Despite the surprise, Russian soldiers managed to organize a defence and repel the attack. R. Romaniuk, *op. cit.*

<sup>22</sup> Ukrainian Su-27 multirole aircraft and Su-24 bombers most often made strikes in pairs.

<sup>23</sup> The effectiveness of the attack was confirmed by the available audio-visual materials. However, it should be noted that in the course of the fighting in the area of the island, at least several Ukrainian drones were shot down, including 3 combat TB2s.

<sup>24</sup> H.I. Sutton, *May 2, Two Raptor Assault Boats Near Snake Island*, Naval News, 04 May 2022, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2022/05/russian-navys-5-significant-losses-in-the-ukraine-war-so-far/#prettyPhoto> [accessed: 08 February 2023]; X. Vavasseur, *Watch Ukrainian TB2 Striking Two Russian Raptor Assault Boats*, Naval News, 02 May 2022, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2022/05/watch-ukrainian-tb2-striking-two-russian-raptor-assault-boats/> [accessed: 08 February 2023].

on such a small area (just around 17 hectares), caused enormous damage.<sup>25</sup> As a result of these and the low effectiveness of Russian attacks on Ukraine's shore-based missile systems,<sup>26</sup> the Black Sea Fleet command decided to evacuate the garrison from Snake Island. Ukrainian soldiers then arrived on the island. On 4 July, the liberation of the island from Russian occupation was officially announced.

In addition to the shelling of Snake Island, after obtaining arms supplies from the countries supporting them, Ukrainian forces undertook actions that can be described as *guerre de razzia* – naval non-linear (asymmetrical) warfare. Its primary objective was to force the enemy to disperse its forces.<sup>27</sup> Examples of such actions include Ukrainian kamikaze drone attacks on Russian naval bases. In the 29 October 2022 attack, 7 small USVs (unmanned surface vehicles) attacked the Russian naval base in Sevastopol, efficiently overcoming various defences of that base along the way. As a result of the attack, a Project 11356R frigate and a Project 266M minesweeper were severely damaged.<sup>28</sup> This forced the Russians to deploy some forces to protect their bases, but it did not change the overall strategic situation in the Black Sea.

## Applications

Russian naval activities in the 'special operation' consisted of two forms of activity. The first was the so-called naval policy of force in two dimensions, i.e., coercive

<sup>25</sup> On 1 July, the island was bombed by 2 Russian Su-30 multirole aircraft. The attack, carried out with phosphorus (incendiary) bombs, was aimed at destroying the equipment left on Snake Island and not evacuated in time.

<sup>26</sup> The Russians responded with airstrikes on Ukrainian rocket launcher and artillery positions in the Odessa area, carried out mainly by Su-35 and Su-30 aircraft, but this did not stop the Ukrainian attacks.

<sup>27</sup> The term is of French origin. In simple terms, it means *raid warfare*, a style of warfare in which the main objective of the operation is not to capture or destroy the enemy's trade, as in *guerre de course*, or to defeat their fleet, as in *guerre d'escadre*, but to invade their coast and colonies. The strategic objective is very similar to that in *guerre de course*. It is to capture or destroy the enemy's resources and force them to divide their forces to defend their possessions. The difference, however, is that *guerre de razzia* does not include economic gain among its main motives. In this case, all that matters is the end result. This was the tactic of warfare used, for example, by the US Navy against the Royal Navy during the American War of Independence 1775–1783 and the US-British War of 1812. J.C. Bradford, *John Paul Jones and Guerre de Razzia*, "The Northern Mariner" 2003, vol. 13, no. 4, pp. 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.25071/2561-5467.562>; L.A. Norton, *Asymmetric Warfare, Early American Style. Audacious captains employed a disruptive maritime strategy to rattle the British public during the Revolution and the War of 1812*, "Naval History Magazine" 2017, vol. 31, no 1, <https://www.usni.org/magazines/naval-history-magazine/2017/february/asymmetric-warfare-early-american-style> [accessed: 24 February 2023].

<sup>28</sup> H.I. Sutton, *Why Ukraine's Remarkable Attack on Sevastopol Will Go Down In History*, Naval News, 17 November 2022, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2022/11/why-ukraines-remarkable-attack-on-sevastopol-will-go-down-in-history/> [accessed: 24 February 2023].

diplomacy (naval coercion) and persuasion. These activities pertained to the shipping system and Ukraine itself as a state active at sea. The second activity, also directed at Ukraine, were classical military actions which should be directly regarded as strictly warlike in nature. Both the shelling of facilities on Ukrainian territory and the seizure of Snake Island should be considered an act of aggression, i.e., a violation of Article 2 of the UN Charter. Russia's naval actions achieved two goals: restrictions in navigation by merchant ships and practical stoppage of naval forces of Ukraine in its own ports. The analysis of naval actions confirmed that, in co-ordinated attacks, land-based anti-ship cruise missiles can defeat advanced warship defences. It highlighted the importance of training crews and designing tough, hit-resistant vessels equipped with appropriate defensive systems and armaments. What is more, the naval operations discussed showed that long-range artillery and missiles designed to fire on land targets can also be useful in a naval scenario, and naval mines, which have been in use for more than 100 years, can still pose a serious threat. Geography still matters in planning naval operations, as there are regions of strategic importance, the control of which brings benefits and allows to control shipping lanes (the Snake Island case). It should also be emphasised that control of the sea, or the denial of the use of the sea, now requires the ability to completely claim the space above, on and below the sea, which calls for additional forces and resources, as well as appropriate long-term planning for the development of naval forces. In addition, the war has confirmed the importance of unmanned naval platforms – both surface (USV) and underwater (UUV) – and their ever-increasing role, which should be kept in mind. The case is similar for unmanned aerial systems (UAVs) of various types. Their roles in the conflict in question are equally important.<sup>29</sup>

It is crucial to keep in mind that any fleet can hide its actual status. 'On paper,' the Black Sea Fleet represented great power, but in reality, proved essentially incapable of conducting operations on a strategic scale. This was influenced not only by erroneous concepts of the use of naval forces, but also by corruption scandals, which proved extremely damaging in the field of shipbuilding, maintenance, and repair. The sheer pace and the intensity of high-profile naval operations which cause significant wear and tear on ships, the exhaustion of their crews, not to mention rapidly melting stocks of spare parts and armaments, also affected the Russians' actions. The issue of crew (training, morale, trust etc.), or the so-called 'soft factor,' underestimated in Russia, is particularly important because this factor is often avoided with various theoretical statements. It is important to systematically improve the time of putting crews on standby, thus enhancing communication and emergency

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<sup>29</sup> Moreover, inferring from an analysis of the increasing use of unmanned platforms, it can be assumed that unmanned ground systems (UGVs) will also play an important role in future conflicts.

response systems. However, proper coordination with other types of armed forces is the most important. This is an important lesson for the naval forces of other countries as well.

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## Maritime episodes of the Russian 'special operation' against Ukraine

### Abstract

Maritime operations during Russia's 'special operation' against Ukraine were complementary to land operations. However, they played an important role in the process of isolating the country and limiting its export capabilities. Pointing to selected naval episodes and showing their political, operational, and tactical context, we indicated several features demonstrating the new dimension of naval force operations and the possibility of using missile armament and air weapons to effectively counter surface ship combat teams. The purpose of the study is to show the essential elements of the naval operations conducted as part of the 'special operation' against Ukraine, to identify its essential features and transformations in the use of combat potential.

Keywords: naval forces, naval operations, naval force capability, Ukraine conflict







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# **The trade effects of the war in Ukraine from the European Union's and – in particular – Poland's perspective<sup>1</sup>**

## **Introduction**

The Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine, which began on 24 February 2022, constitutes the escalation of the war continuing from 2014. Due to the Russian war in Ukraine and the subsequent economic sanctions against Russia, a process of transforming the architecture of the world economy has begun. The Russian-Ukrainian conflict will reshape international trade and redefine global value chains, leading to decentralised value chains and changes in trade efficiency. As a result of the Russian war in Ukraine, the impact on countries' economies will be heterogeneous and asymmetric, and will differ greatly, depending on the economies' energy resources intensity and the intensity of mutual economic and, especially, trade relations.

The war in Ukraine is the third asymmetric shock that the European Union has experienced in the last two decades, after the 2008 financial and economic crisis, the following Eurozone crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic. An asymmetric shock is a sudden change in economic conditions that affects some EU countries more than others. The war in Ukraine is indeed having a much greater impact on neighbouring countries due to the influx of refugees and heavy dependence on Russian energy resources.

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Although Russia's and Ukraine's shares in the global trade and production are relatively small, they are important suppliers of basic products, specifically food and energy. In 2019, both countries supplied approx. 25% of wheat, 15% of barley and 45% of sunflower products. Russia's share alone accounted for 9.4% of the global trade in fuels, including its 20%-share in natural gas export. Russia and Ukraine are also key suppliers of raw materials for industrial value chains. Russia is one of the world's main suppliers of palladium and rhodium, key raw materials for the production of car catalysts, satisfying 26% demand for the global import of palladium in 2019.<sup>2</sup> The production of semi-conductors is, to a large extent, dependent on neon provided by Ukraine.

Therefore, the trade consequences of the war for the European Union, Ukraine's important trading partner, deserve special attention. The war also disrupts trade relations between the EU and Russia. The EU's direct trade sanctions are limited to specific sectors, such as oil, coal, arms, dual-use goods, as well as the aviation and space industry. However, financial sanctions, particularly the SWIFT ban imposed on seven Russian banks, increase the costs of commercial transactions considerably. When discussing the trade effects of the war, attention must be paid not only to trade relations between the EU and Ukraine, but also between the EU and Russia, which is a prominent trading partner of the European Union. The trade effects of the Russian invasion of Ukraine are experienced across Europe, they are and will be different for individual Member States.

This paper aims to present the trade effects of the war in Ukraine from the European Union's, Member States' and, in particular, Poland's perspective. This refers not only to the trade creation and diversion effect, but also to changes in the structure of the EU's trade regarding the main groups of goods. These effects will vary depending on direct trade links, dependence on Russian energy and susceptibility to rising energy prices. In order to show a broader perspective of trade relations between the EU and Ukraine, the legal basis of mutual relations was presented first. It was about a deep and comprehensive agreement with Ukraine and a partnership and cooperation agreement with Russia. Given an extensive range of parties involved and issues covered by the research, this paper focuses only on the main aspects of the problem.

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<sup>2</sup> *The Crisis in Ukraine. Implications of the war for global trade and development*, WTO, [https://www.wto.org/english/res\\_e/booksp\\_e/impactukraine422\\_e.pdf](https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/impactukraine422_e.pdf) [accessed: 22 February 2023]

## Legal bases for the EU-Ukraine and the EU-Russia trade relations

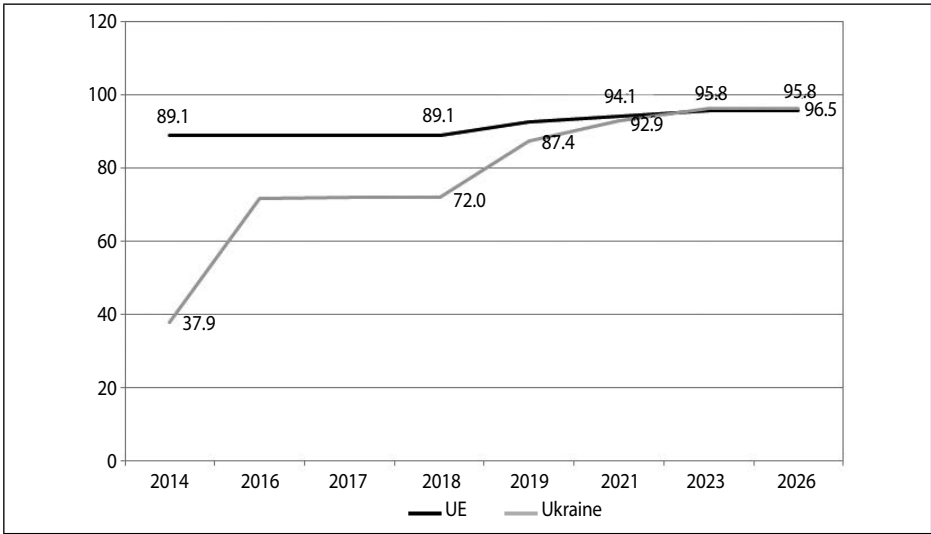
In the 1990s, the European Union entered into Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) with countries belonging to the Commonwealth of Independent States. The Community made such agreements with Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Tajikistan. These agreements were signed with states belonging in that time to the WTO, hence they provided for the normalisation of conditions for trade, in accordance with the most favoured nation (MFN) clause, as well as a general co-operation framework for other areas of the economy.

An association agreement between Ukraine and the EU, whose main part was Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), entered into force on 1 January 2016. That agreement led to the outbreak of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. DCFTA is based on two fundamental elements. First and foremost, it provides for trade liberalisation by eliminating customs duties, import quotas and other (legal, technical, and procedural) barriers to trade. The agreement also stipulates that Ukraine will liberalise regulations on investments and services, including financial, telecommunications, sea transport, and postal services. Second, Ukraine commits itself to adopting EU regulations and technical and infrastructural standards under the agreement. It further provides for the adaptation of Ukrainian regulations to the Union legislation. The EU's priorities for negotiations concerning a free trade area with Ukraine included mainly the following areas: (1) closer integration of Ukraine with the European market, aimed at enhancing its political and economic stability; and (2) safeguarding the interests of Union companies and investors by opening and liberalising the Ukrainian market and adapting it to the European model. It is necessary to improve conditions for investment, as Ukraine has been assessed as a country with the worst business climate in Eastern Europe. In the 2012 Doing Business Ranking, which examines the conditions for conducting business, Ukraine was ranked 152<sup>nd</sup> out of the 183 countries in the world, the lowest in Eastern Europe,<sup>3</sup> and with the highest corruption rate. In Transparency International's corruption perception ranking for 2011, Ukraine was ranked 152<sup>nd</sup> out of the 182 countries in the world; this being the lowest position in Eastern Europe.<sup>4</sup> DCFTA is seen as one of key instruments for the European integration of Ukraine. Nonetheless, that integration is not understood as the prospects for membership, but as the adjustment of Ukraine to fit the European model, which is expected to ensure stability in the immediate neighbourhood of the EU.

<sup>3</sup> *The 2012 Doing Business ranking*, <https://archive.doingbusiness.org/en/reports/global-reports/doing-business-2012> [accessed: 25 February 2023].

<sup>4</sup> *Transparency International's corruption perception ranking for 2011*, <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2011> [accessed: 25 February 2023].

Chart 1. Timeline for reduction of tariff rates specified in the EU-Ukraine Free Trade Agreement (% of duty-free tariff lines)



Source: Author’s own elaboration based on WTO, *The Association Agreement between the European Union and Ukraine (goods and services)*, Report by the Secretariat, WT/REG353/1, 13 April 2017.

Before the agreement entered into force, 25.1% of the EU’s tariff lines were covered by a zero MFN tariff rate, accounting for 75.7% of its imports from Ukraine between 2011 and 2013. It was as early as in April 2014 that the EU introduced unilateral trade preferences for Ukraine (autonomous trade measures, ATM), lowering customs duties in accordance with DCFTA for industrial goods. Hence, in 2014, zero rates of customs duties were applied additionally to 64% of tariff lines for imports from Ukraine. At the end of the transitional period, in 2023, 95.8% of EU tariff headings are duty free for imports from Ukraine, which represents 97.9% of its import in terms of value. There will still be 400 tariff lines which have to be subject to customs duties.

In Ukraine, on the other hand, before the agreement entered into force, 37.9% of tariff headings were covered by a zero MFN tariff rate, accounting for 53.7% of the country’s imports from the UE between 2013 and 2015. With the agreement entering into force in 2016, further 33.9% of tariff lines were covered by zero rates of customs duties in relation to imports from the EU. Further reductions in customs duties, covering another 24.7% of tariff lines, are planned over a ten-year transitional period, i.e., until 2026. Consequently, as of 2026, 96.5% of tariff lines will be covered by zero customs duties, representing 97.7% of import value. Ultimately, non-zero duty rates will apply to 367 tariff lines. Tariff quotas have been introduced for 36 groups of goods. These quotas apply to goods that are considered in the EU to be particularly sensitive and which have to face competition from

Ukrainian goods (e.g., wheat and poultry meat). The EU-Ukraine agreement bans both parties from imposing export duties. However, the Ukrainian government has agreed to the gradual abolition of existing export duties until 2026 in relation to certain goods, including livestock and hide raw materials, seeds of some types of oil-yielding crops and types of metal.<sup>5</sup>

Since the very beginning of the Eastern Partnership's existence, the initiative has been perceived in Ukraine in two ways. On the one hand, the project was seen as a new instrument for bilateral co-operation, allowing Ukraine to obtain specific benefits: a free trade agreement and visa liberalisation (the liberalisation of visas eventually took place in June 2017 after Ukraine had satisfied the liberalisation criteria). On the other hand, many Ukrainian politicians criticised the Eastern Partnership (EP) as a project offering no prospects of EU membership and categorising their country into the same group with such states as Belarus or Azerbaijan, whose ambitions to co-operate with the EU are far more modest. EU membership is regarded by the Ukrainian authorities and citizens as one of the key objectives for Ukraine's foreign policy. However, as there has been no new ambitious Union programme for Ukraine, a sceptical attitude towards the EU has been instilled into the country. This process began already in 2015, when the EU agreed to delay the temporary implementation of DCFTA following Russia's reservations. A setback to the EU-Ukraine relations was seen later, in 2016, when the EU delayed the fulfilling its obligations owing to a referendum on DCFTA held in the Netherlands. The EU's image in Ukraine is becoming more and more negative also due to crises affecting the Union: migration, Brexit, etc. Furthermore, disappointment has been expressed about the limited effects of DCFTA on the EU-Ukraine trade (and mainly on Ukraine's exports). ATM and DCFTA enabled the EU to become the main trading partner for Ukraine (the EU's share in exports rose from 26% in 2013 to 37% in 2016, whereas in imports, it grew from 35% to 44%); however, as regards current prices, the total trade in goods declined (from USD 43.8 billion in 2013 to USD 30.4 billion in 2016; Eurostat data).

Since 1997, political and economic relations between the EU and Russia have been based on a bilateral partnership and cooperation agreement (PCA). PCA provisions on trade are designed to promote trade and investments, as well as to foster economic relations for the benefit of both parties. Negotiations of a new EU-Russia agreement started in 2008, but were stopped in 2010, as there was no progress in the chapter concerning trade and investments. In March 2014, the European Council suspended the negotiations following Russia's military intervention in Ukraine. Since 2012, when Russia became a WTO member, the EU-Russia relations have also been subject to multilateral WTO rules.

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<sup>5</sup> *The Association Agreement between the European Union and Ukraine (goods and services)*, Report by the Secretariat, WTO, WT/REG353/1, 13 April 2017.

## The EU's trade sanctions against Russia

Sanctions imposed on Russia are the most severe and expensive penalties that have been levied on a big economy at least since the Cold War. Their range, global coordination, and the speed of action in this respect seem to be unprecedented.<sup>6</sup>

Since March 2014, sanctions against Russia have been gradually introduced by the EU in response to:<sup>7</sup>

- the annexation of Crimea in 2014;
- military aggression in Ukraine in 2022;
- the annexation of Ukrainian regions: Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson in 2022.

The EU applied sanctions to:

- Belarus – in response to its involvement in the assault on Ukraine;
- Iran – in connection with Russia's use of Iranian drones against Ukraine.

The European Commission employed measures mainly designed to restrict trade, namely import and export bans. In July and September 2014, the EU imposed economic sanctions on trade with Russia in relation to specific sectors of the economy. Since then, economic sanctions have been extended successively by another six months. On 25 February 2023, the EU adopted the tenth package of additional restrictive measures against Russia. Union sanctions do not apply to food and agricultural products; hence they do not limit the export of these goods and transactions related to them. Consequently, EU sanctions have no bearing on food security and concern only bilateral trade between the EU and Russia – but international trade remains unaffected. Economic sanctions are aimed at the financial, trade, energy, transport, technological, and defence sectors. The sanctions that have importance for trade include:<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> S. Cecchetti, K.L. Schoenholtz, R. Berner, *Russian sanctions: Some questions and answers*, CEPR, VoxEU, 21 March 2022, <https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/russian-sanctions-some-questions-and-answers> [accessed: 28 February 2023].

<sup>7</sup> *EU response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine*, European Council, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-response-ukraine-invasion/> [accessed: 28 February 2023].

<sup>8</sup> The sanctions list was prepared based on the Council of the EU data: *EU adopts new set of measures to respond to Russia's military aggression against Ukraine*, Press release, 28 February 2022, Official Journal of the European Union, L 081, 9 March 2022 (sectoral measures of Russia); *EU adopts fifth round of sanctions against Russia over its military aggression against Ukraine*, Press release, 8 April 2022; *Russia's aggression against Ukraine: EU adopts sixth package of sanctions*, Press release, 3 June 2022; *Russia's aggression against Ukraine: EU adopts "maintenance and alignment" package*, Press release, 21 July 2022; *EU adopts its latest package of sanctions against Russia over the illegal annexation of Ukraine's Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions*, Press release, 6 October 2022; *Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine: EU adopts 9<sup>th</sup> package of economic and individual sanctions*, Press release, 16 December 2022; *One year of Russia's full-scale invasion and war of aggression against Ukraine, EU adopts its 10<sup>th</sup> package of economic and individual sanctions*, Press release, 25 February 2023; Official Journal of the European Union, L 059I, 25 February 2023 (including a list of sanctions); EU restrictive

**Financial sector:**

- limited access of certain Russian banks and companies to the Union's primary and secondary capital markets;
- a ban on transactions with the Central Bank of Russia, the Central Bank of Belarus, and the Russian Regional Development Bank;
- certain Russian and Belarusian banks excluded from the SWIFT system;
- a ban on the supply of euro-denominated bank notes to Russia and Belarus;
- a ban on public funding or investments in Russia;
- a ban on investments and contributions to projects co-financed by the Russian Direct Investment Fund.

**Energy:**

- a ban on the import of coal and other solid fossil fuels from Russia (effective as of 10 August 2022);
- a ban on the import of oil (from December 2022) and refined petroleum products (from February 2023) from Russia, with limited exceptions;
- a price cap on the sea transport of oil – USD 60 per barrel;
- a ban on the export from Russia of goods and technologies for the oil refining sector;
- a ban on new investments in the Russian energy and mining sector.

**Transport:**

- the EU airspace closed to all aeroplanes from and registered in Russia;
- a ban on sea transport of Russian oil to third countries (if purchased at a price higher than the price cap);
- EU ports closed to Russian ships;
- Russian and Belarusian road carriers banned from entering the EU;
- a ban on the export of goods and technologies for the aviation, maritime and space sector to Russia.

**Defence:**

- a ban on the export of dual-use products and technologies to Russia;
- a ban on the export of drone engines to Russia;
- a ban on trade in arms, including firearms for civilian use;
- a ban on trade in ammunition, military vehicles and paramilitary equipment.

**Raw materials and other goods:**

- a ban on the import of iron, steel, timber, cement and plastics from Russia;
- a ban on the import of gold, including jewellery from Russia;
- a ban on the import of seafood and liquor (e.g., caviar, vodka), cigarettes and cosmetics from Russia.

Particularly relevant EU sanctions having an impact on trade with Russia were introduced on 8 April 2022. The EU put a ban on the import of coal from Russia. From that date on, a four-month 'period for termination' of existing contracts would continue. These are for execution of existing contracts and spot market transactions.<sup>9</sup>

At the beginning of June 2022, the EU adopted the sixth package of sanctions against Russia. It included a complete ban on the import of Russian oil transported by sea (from 5 December 2022) and petroleum products (from 5 February 2023), which account for 90% of current oil imports from Russia to the EU. The ban on import by sea covers transitional periods of six months for oil and eight months for petroleum products. That sanctions package also includes a ban on insurance and financing of transport (including forwarding) of Russian oil to third countries. For that ban a six-month 'termination' period has been set.<sup>10</sup>

## The EU-Ukraine and the EU-Russia trade relations in the context of military conflict: trade disruptions

The EU is Ukraine's largest trading partner and its share in both EU's import and export in 2021 was nearly 40% (Table 1). On the other hand, Ukraine (in 2021) is the fifteenth biggest trading partner of the EU and a priority partner as part of the Eastern Partnership and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The country's share in the EU's overall trade is 1.2% (1.1% for EU imports and 1.3% for exports). The EU-Ukraine overall trade reached the level of nearly EUR 52.4 billion (exports plus imports) in 2021, which means almost a twofold increase since 2016, when DCFTA entered into effect.

The goods which are mainly exported from Ukraine to the EU include base metals, including iron and steel (20.8% of total exports), mineral products (nearly 18%), vegetable products (nearly 15%) – particularly sunflower seed oil and cereals. The goods which are mainly exported from the EU to Ukraine encompass machinery and appliances (24% of total exports), products of the chemical or allied industries (16%), including pharmaceutical products, and transport equipment (11%) (Table 1).

<sup>9</sup> *Question and answers on the fifth package of restrictive measures against Russia*, European Commission, <https://portal.ieu-monitoring.com/editorial/eu-adopts-5th-round-of-sanctions-against-russia> [accessed: 27 February 2023].

<sup>10</sup> *UK and EU hit Russian oil cargoes with insurance ban*, Financial Times, 31 May 2022, <https://www.ft.com/content/10372dd3-be3c-42b9-982b-241a38efcc88> [accessed: 28 February 2023].



Table 1. EU-Ukraine trade (in EUR billion and %)

	Imports					Exports				
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Value	16.2	17.4	19.1	16.3	24.1	19.8	21.5	24.1	23.1	28.3
Share in extra-EU (%)	0.9	0.9	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.2	1.3
Main goods (% of the total, 2021) (HS section)	Base metals and articles of base metal (23,8)(XV); mineral products (17,8)(V); vegetable products (14,7)(II)					Machinery and appliances (24,0)(XVI); products of the chemical or allied industries (16,1)(VI); transport equipment (11,4)(XVII)				
Ukraine's major trading partners (% of the total, 2021)	Imports					Exports				
	EU27 (40.2); China (15.2); Russia (8.4); Belarus (6.7)					EU27 (39.1); (China (12.1); Turkey (6.1); Russia (5.1)				

Source: Author's own elaboration based on European Commission Trade Statistics, [https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/analysis-and-assessment/statistics\\_en](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/analysis-and-assessment/statistics_en) [accessed: 28 February 2023].

Table 2. EU-Russia trade (in EUR billion and %)

	Imports					Exports				
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Value	138.3	160.9	144.9	94.7	162.5	82.8	82.3	87.8	79.0	69.3
Share in extra-EU (%)	7.8	8.4	7.5	5.5	7.7	4.2	4.0	4.1	4.1	4.1
Main goods (% of the total) (HS section)	Mineral products (64,7)(V); not classified (12,2)(XXI); base metals and articles of base metal (9,3)(XV)					Machinery and appliances (30,3)(XVI); products of the chemical or allied industries (19,0)(VI); transport equipment (13,6)(XVII)				
Russia's major trading partners (% of the total, 2021)	Imports					Exports				
	EU27 (31.9); China (24.8); USA (6.0); Belarus (5.3)					EU27 (38.2); China (13.9); Turkey (5.4); Belarus (4.6)				

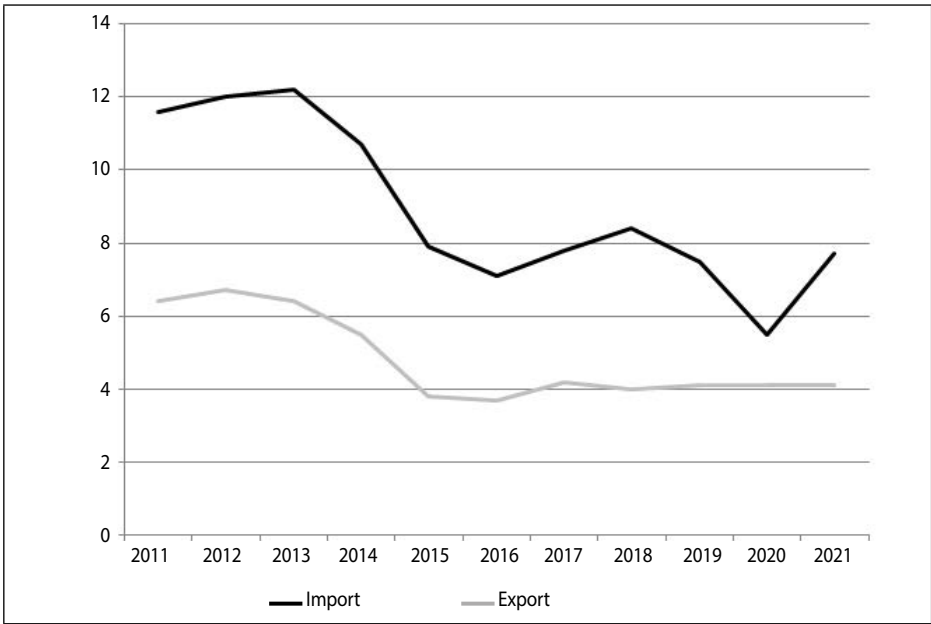
Source: Author's own elaboration based on European Commission Trade Statistics, [https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/analysis-and-assessment/statistics\\_en](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/analysis-and-assessment/statistics_en) [accessed: 28 February 2023].

Out of all states located directly to the east of the EU, Russia was undoubtedly its most important trading partner at the time the country launched the war with Ukraine. In 2021, Russia was the fifth biggest trading partner of the EU (ranking third for imports and fifth for exports), having a 5.9% share in the EU's overall trade in goods. In 2021, the EU was the main trading partner of Russia, having a 35.9% share in the overall trade in goods of that country (Table 2). Despite the fact that in 2021 Russia's share in the Union's trade in goods with foreign countries was merely 5.9% (exports plus imports), it is one of the biggest suppliers of coal, gas, and particularly oil to the EU: in 2020, the EU imported from Russia 45% of mineral fuels in terms of value, with three-fourth of that volume being oil. In 2021, the EU's imports from Russia amounted to EUR 165 billion and included mainly mineral products (nearly 65%), timber (EUR 3.16 billion, 2.0%), iron and steel (EUR 7.4 billion,

4.7%), and fertilisers (EUR 1.78 billion, 1.1%) (Table 2). The EU’s exports to Russia in 2021 totalled slightly more than EUR 69.0 billion. The following goods had the biggest share: machinery and appliances (30.3%); products of the chemical or allied industries (19.0%), including pharmaceuticals (EUR 8.1 billion, 8.1%); transport equipment (13.6%), including motor vehicles (EUR 8.95 billion, 9%), electrical machinery and equipment (EUR 7.57 billion, 7.6%), and plastics (EUR 4.38 billion, 4.3%).

In general terms, trade relations with Russia play a minor role to the EU. Although the EU is the main trading partner of Russia, with almost half of the total exports of that country, Table 2 shows that the EU does not consider trade with Russia to be very important, except for the energy sector. Furthermore, trade has been continuing to decline since the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the introduction of the first package of economic sanctions by the EU in 2014. The year 2021 was an exception, when a share in imports from Russia grew to 7.7% (Chart 2).

Chart 2. EU trade with Russia (% of total EU trade)



Source: Author’s own calculations based on Eurostat data.

Nevertheless, these general figures do not demonstrate considerable differences among countries. One may observe that particularly in the case of export, Russia was the biggest export market for Latvia (30.4%) and Lithuania (25.6%). Similarly, even though the volume of export to Russia is small for the majority of Western and Northern European countries, its role in most economies of Central and Eastern

Europe is essential, which applies also to Poland (11.1%). As regards import, trade relations with Russia are particularly strong in Eastern Europe, the Baltic States, and Poland (Table 3).

Table 3. EU trade of goods to Russia, 2021 (in EUR million and %)

Country	Imports of goods, in EUR million	% of Russia in extra-EU imports	Exports of goods, in EUR million	% of Russia in extra-EU exports	Trade balance in EUR million
Germany	28,856	6.6	26,774	4.2	-2,083
Netherlands	26,684	7.1	7,967	3.7	-18,717
Poland	16,725	17.1	8,004	11.1	-8,721
Italy	13,984	7.0	7,696	3.1	-6,288
France	9,229	4.6	6,392	2.8	-2,907
Finland	8,550	38.8	3,751	12.4	-4,798
Belgium	7,801	7.7	4,445	2.9	-3,356
Spain	5,977	3.7	2,213	1.8	-3,764
Lithuania	4,582	37.3	3,749	25.6	-833
Greece	4,297	13.7	207	1.1	-4091
Slovakia	4,213	22.0	1,345	7.9	-2,858
Hungary	4,131	12.0	1,711	6.5	-2,420
Austria	3,692	8.4	2,049	3.9	-1,643
Romania	3,160	11.7	1,001	5.0	-2,159
Bulgaria	2,980	19.3	433	3.8	-2,547
Czechia	2,987	6.3	3,594	9.6	+615
Estonia	2,110	37.8	772	12.8	-1,338
Latvia	1,983	35.8	1,931	30.4	-52
Sweden	1,978	3.8	2,222	3.0	+244
Denmark	1,852	5.5	1,021	2.0	-830
Portugal	1,068	4.9	178	1.0	-890
Ireland	580	0.9	540	0.5	-40
Croatia	489	6.5	204	3.4	-285
Slovenia	415	1.9	852	5.4	+436
Cyprus	86	2.8	61	2.6	-25
Luxembourg	16	0.7	155	5.7	+139
Malta	9	0.4	8	0.6	-1

Source: Author's own calculations based on Eurostat data.

Four Member States had a positive trade balance with Russia. The biggest surplus was recorded by Czechia (EUR 615 million), followed by Slovenia (EUR 436 million), Sweden (EUR 244 million) and Luxembourg (EUR 139 million). A trade deficit with Russia was reported by 23 Member States. The biggest deficit was recorded by the Netherlands (EUR 18,717 million), followed by Poland (EUR 8,721 million) and Italy (EUR 6,288 million) (Table 3).

According to available data, bilateral trade between Russia and the European Union rose by 30.1% from January to July 2022. Exports from Russia to the EU grew by 69.9%, whereas exports from the EU to Russia fell by 33% due to sanctions and growing energy prices. According to Eurostat, in spite of sanctions, bilateral trade between Russia and EU Member States indeed increased in the period from January to July 2022. The value of trade in that period reached the level of EUR 171.4 billion, while exports from the European Union to Russia declined by 33% over 7 months in 2022, falling to a level of merely EUR 34.1 billion, the EU's imports from Russia grew by 69.9% to EUR 137.3 billion.<sup>11</sup> Direct disruptions to EU-Russia trade are limited, but also highly concentrated on the Baltic States and some Member States from Central and Eastern Europe.

Attention must be given to Russia's importance in the import of certain goods to the EU. Supply chain disturbances are in this case even more relevant than the total trade volume. For instance, Russian timber accounts for almost a half of the total timber import to Finland and considerably contributes to the national forestry sector, which comprises 20% of the total production of the industry and 15% of industry employment. Similarly, farmers across Europe depend, to a large extent, on fodder plants imported from Ukraine, while being heavily dependent on Russia and Belarus as regards fertilisers.<sup>12</sup> More importantly, Russia is one of the world's leading exporters of raw materials and is ranked high on the Union's list of suppliers of critical raw materials. Critical raw materials (CRMs) – such as lithium, cobalt, and rare earth elements (REEs) – are essential commodities for the EU economy. The EU has so far classified 30 raw materials as 'critical,' depending on their supply risk and economic importance. China currently produces 86% of the world's rare earth supply. The EU is largely dependent on palladium from Russia, which is a precious metal used for reducing car emissions. Indeed, Russia extracts 40% of global palladium resources.<sup>13</sup>

Shortages in this respect have already led to price rises and may quickly translate into supply chain issues, especially for the German and Italian automotive industry. Russia also has a big share in the total EU's import of nickel and aluminium.

<sup>11</sup> *Russia-European Union Bilateral Trade Increased 30.1% In 7M 2022*, Russia Briefing News, 3 October 2022, <https://www.russia-briefing.com/> [accessed: 27 February 2023].

<sup>12</sup> N. Redeker, *Same shock, different effects: EU member states' exposure to the economic consequences of Putin's war*, Hertie School, Jacques Delors Centre, 7 March 2022, <https://www.delorscentre.eu/en/publications/economic-consequences-ukraine> [accessed: 10 March 2023].

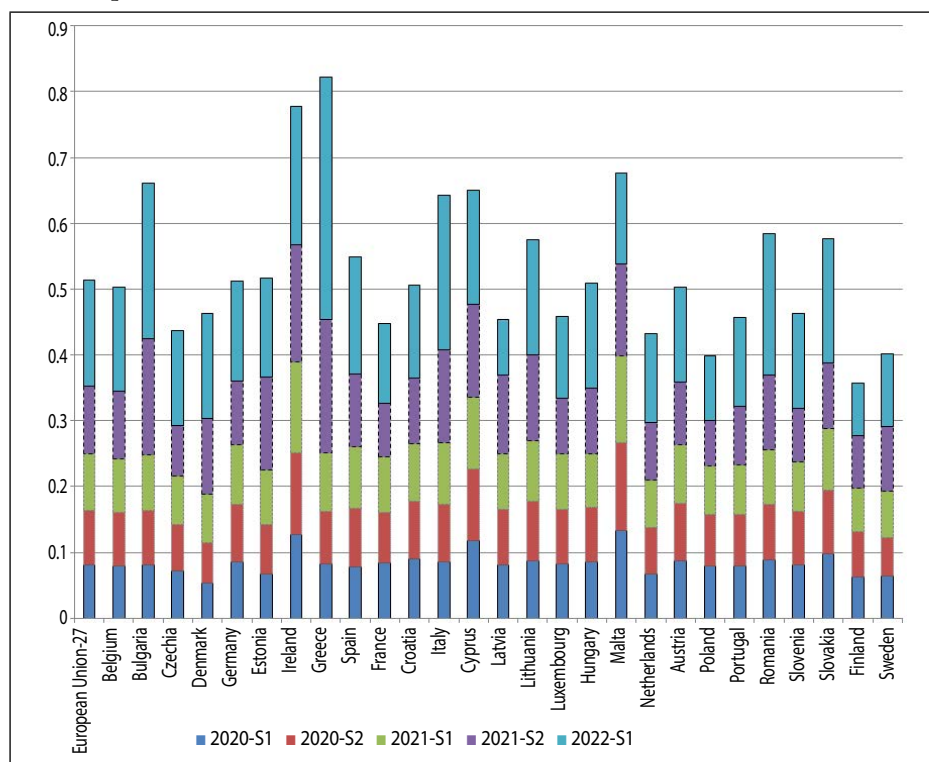
<sup>13</sup> K. van Wieringen, M. Fernández Álvarez, *Securing the EU's supply of critical raw materials*, European Parliamentary Research Service, 8 July 2022, <https://epthinktank.eu/2022/07/08/securing-the-eus-supply-of-critical-raw-materials/> [accessed: 10 March 2023]; *Securing technology-critical metals for Britain: Ensuring the United Kingdom supply of strategic elements & critical materials for a clean future*, University of Birmingham, Birmingham Centre for Strategic Elements, EPSRC Critical Materials & Critical Elements and Materials (CrEAM) Network, Birmingham 2021, p. 22, <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/documents/college-eps/energy/policy/policy-commission-securing-technology-critical-metals-for-britain.pdf> [accessed: 10 March 2023].

Currently, Europe imports 47% of its primary aluminium; however, China controls 60% of the global production capacity, with Russia being ranked behind. The demand for that metal, used in electric cars and feeder cables, is growing.<sup>14</sup> Disturbances to trade flows in these areas may hence have a serious impact on the EU's steel, manufacturing, and construction industries.

## Exposure to energy imports and energy prices

Rising energy prices are the second main impact channel of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on EU trade. In fact, there are two channels that affect Member States: firstly, through direct dependence on the Russian import of energy; and secondly, through soaring gas, oil, and coal prices on global energy markets that follow from the present conflict. Energy prices are shown in Chart 3.

Chart 3. Electricity prices for non-household consumers – bi-annual data (in EUR per kilowatt hour)



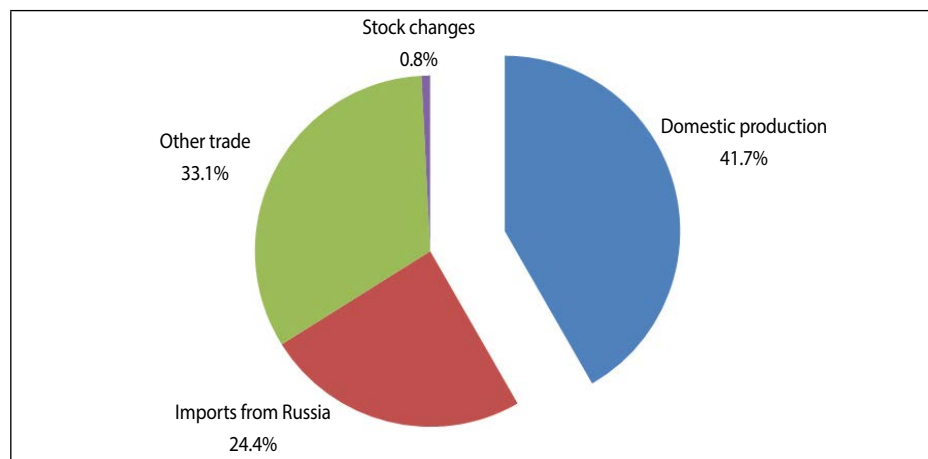
Source: Author's own calculations based on Eurostat data.

<sup>14</sup> F. Simon, *EU to introduce targets for raw materials self-sufficiency*, Euractiv, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy-environment/news/eu-to-introduce-targets-for-raw-materials-self-sufficiency/>, 9 December 2022 [accessed: 12 March 2023].

According to the latest available data, energy prices in the EU in H1 2022 were two times higher than in H1 2020. The biggest rise in electricity prices was seen in the corresponding period in Greece, Bulgaria, Italy, and Romania, whereas the lowest in Poland, Lithuania, and Finland (Chart 3).

The EU, on the other hand, depends on Russia for 24.4% of all its energy needs, more than 40% of that demand was accommodated by its own production (Chart 4).

Chart 4. Gross available energy in the EU and its sources, 2020 (in %)

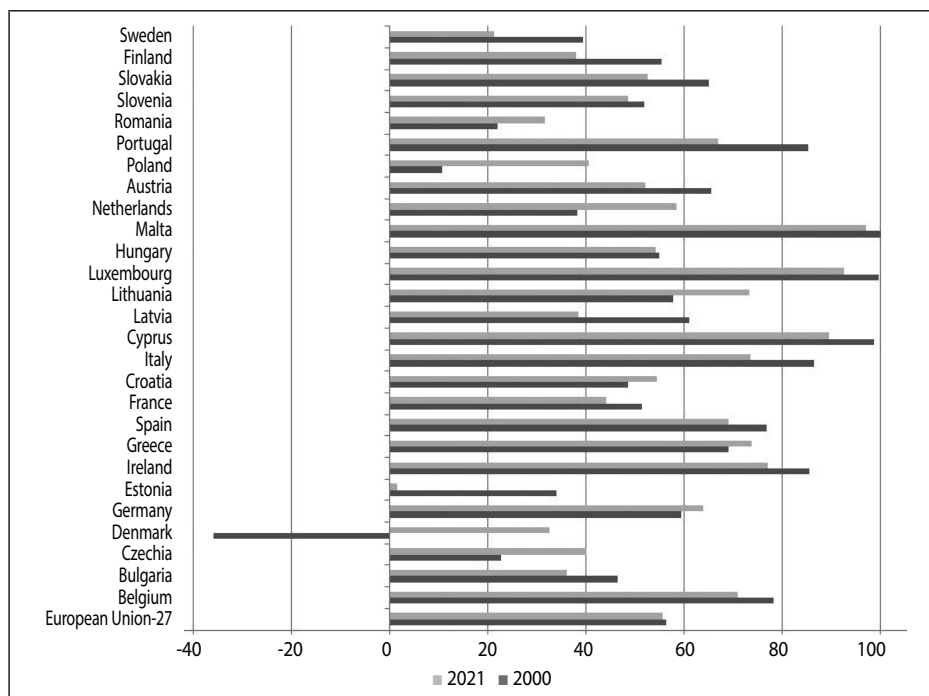


Source: Author's own elaboration based on Eurostat data.

However, to assess the 'energy self-sufficiency' of EU Member States concerned, an energy dependency rate can be used. An energy dependency rate is the percentage of net import of gross available energy (in terajoules). That rate shows the degree to which an economy is dependent on import to satisfy its energy needs. It is measured by a share of net import (import minus export) in gross national energy consumption (namely, the sum of energy generated and net import).

In 2021, an energy dependency rate in the EU stood at 56%, which means that more than half of the EU's energy needs was satisfied by net import. In all Member States, an energy dependency rate ranges between above 90% in Malta, Cyprus and Luxembourg and 10% in Estonia. It must be emphasised that the rate in question has risen dramatically for Poland: from 10% in 2000 to more than 40% in 2021 (Chart 5).

Chart 5. Energy dependency rate in the EU countries (in %)



Source: Author's own calculation based on Eurostat data.

The EU is dependent, to a large extent, on the import of energy resources from Russia. In 2020, the European Union imported the largest share of coal from Russia, nearly 47%.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, in 2020, Russia's share in oil imports was around 23%, whereas the share in the total EU's import of natural gas amounted to 40%. What is relevant is the fact that while trade has been falling in other sectors since the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of the war in Donbass in 2014, the gas and coal imports have been growing.<sup>16</sup>

Russia remains the largest oil supplier for the EU. Russia's share decreased considerably in Q3 2022, totalling 14.4%, which points to a 10.4% decline compared to 2021. On the other hand, there was an increase in the share of the United States (+3.0%), Norway (+1.1%), Saudi Arabia (+4.0), and Iraq (0.9%) (Table 4). After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the European Union replied by imposing several sanctions packages, which had an impact, both directly and indirectly, on trade in oil

<sup>15</sup> *Leading countries based on hard coal production 2021*, Statista, 2023, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/264775/top-10-countries-based-on-hard-coal-production/> [accessed: 12 March 2023].

<sup>16</sup> N. Redeker, *op. cit.*

and natural gas. Therefore, the diversion effect for trade in oil can be seen in the first three quarters of 2022 (Table 4).

Table 4. Extra-EU imports of oil by main trading partners (% share of trade in value)

Partner	2021	Partner	Q1 2022
Russia	24.8	Russia	25.9
Norway	9.4	United States	10.4
United States	8.9	Norway	9.5
Libya	8.2	Kazakhstan	8.5
Kazakhstan	8.0	Libya	7.2
Nigeria	7.2	Nigeria	6.4
Others	33.4	Others	32.2
Partner	Q2 2022	Partner	Q3 2022
Russia	16.8	Russia	14.4
United States	11.5	United States	11.9
Norway	10.1	Norway	10.4
Nigeria	7.3	Saudi Arabia	9.1
Iraq	7.2	Iraq	7.6
Kazakhstan	7.0	Kazakhstan	6.8
Others	40.1	Others	39.8

Source: Eurostat database (Comext) and Eurostat estimates.

Table 5. Extra-EU imports of natural gas from main trading partners (% share of trade in value)

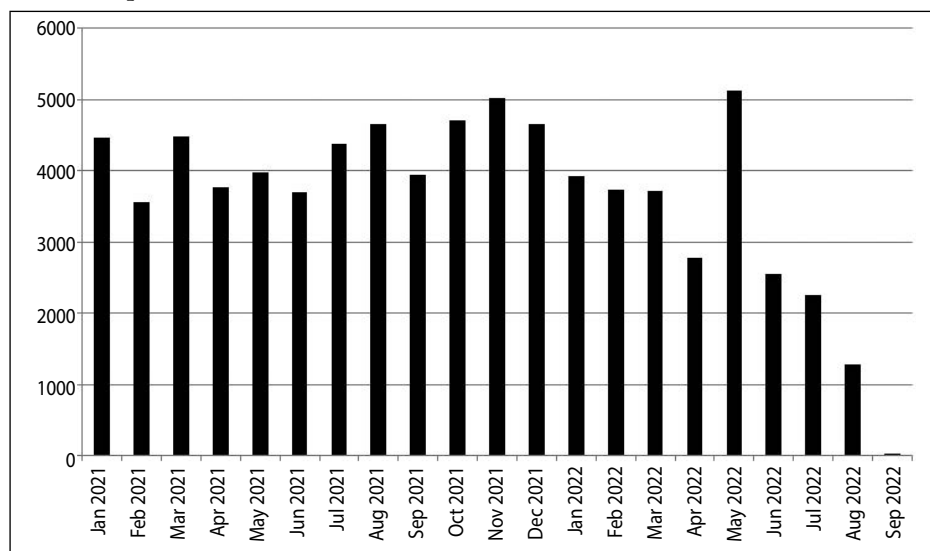
Partner	2021	Partner	Q1 2022
Russia	39.3	Russia	30.9
Norway	24.2	Norway	25.2
Algeria	8.2	United States	15.9
United States	7.1	United Kingdom	8.2
United Kingdom	6.2	Algeria	5.5
Others	15.0	Others	14.3
Partner	Q2 2022	Partner	Q3 2022
Russia	22.9	Russia	15.0
Norway	23.3	Norway	30.8
United States	17.6	United States	15.2
United Kingdom	14.7	United Kingdom	12.3
Algeria	6.1	Qatar	7.2
Others	15.4	Others	19.5

Source: Eurostat database (Comext) and Eurostat estimates.



Similarly, Russia is the EU's biggest supplier of natural gas. Nevertheless, Russia's share decreased considerably in Q3 2022, totalling 15%, which points to a 24.3% decline, compared to 2021. On the other hand, there was an increase in the share of the United States (+9.0%), Norway (+6.6%), and the United Kingdom (+6.1%). As a consequence of the sanctions introduced by the EU, the import of natural gas dropped. The diversion effect for trade in natural gas can be also seen in the first three quarters of 2022 (Table 5).

Chart 6. Import volume of coal from Russia into the European Union from January 2021 to September 2022 (in 1,000 metric tonnes)

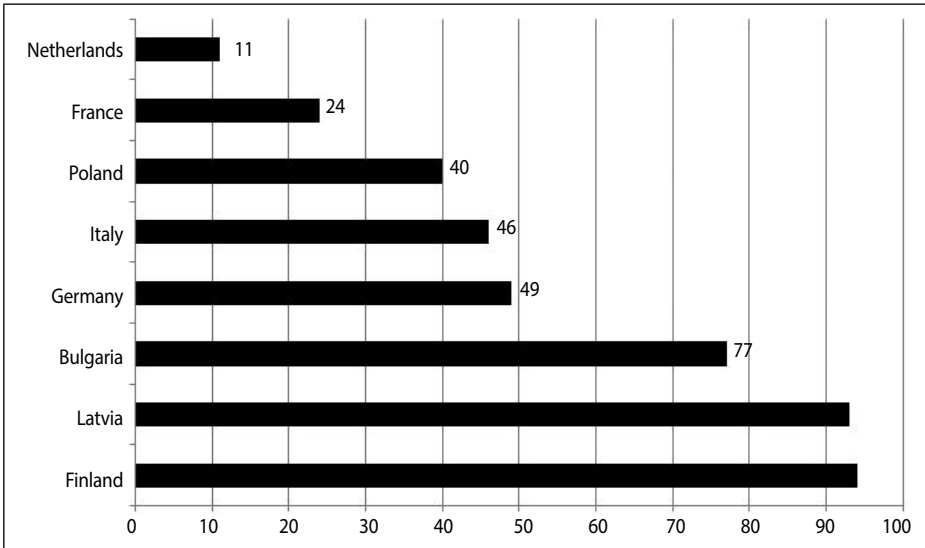


Source: *Import volume of coal from Russia in the European Union (EU)*, Statista, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1345760/eu-monthly-coal-imports-from-russia/> [accessed: 12 March 2023].

In September 2022, the European Union imported from Russia only 16.4 thousand tonnes of coal, compared to almost 1.3 million tonnes imported in the preceding month (the consequence of the introduced sanctions). In the period discussed, the import of coal reached the highest level of more than 5.1 million tonnes in May 2022 (Chart 6).

In fact, dependence on energy resources imported from Russia varies from one Member State to another. In order to evaluate Member States' susceptibility to energy sanctions, the share of energy resources imported from Russia in the total import of such resources has been shown. The highest share of import from Russia in the total gas import is observed for Finland and Latvia (above 90%), it is also relatively high (40%) for Poland (Chart 7). The greater dependence on imports from Russia is, the stronger the effects of trade disruptions caused by the war in Ukraine will be experienced.

Chart 7. Gas supply from Russia in selected EU countries, 2020 (% share in the total gas import)



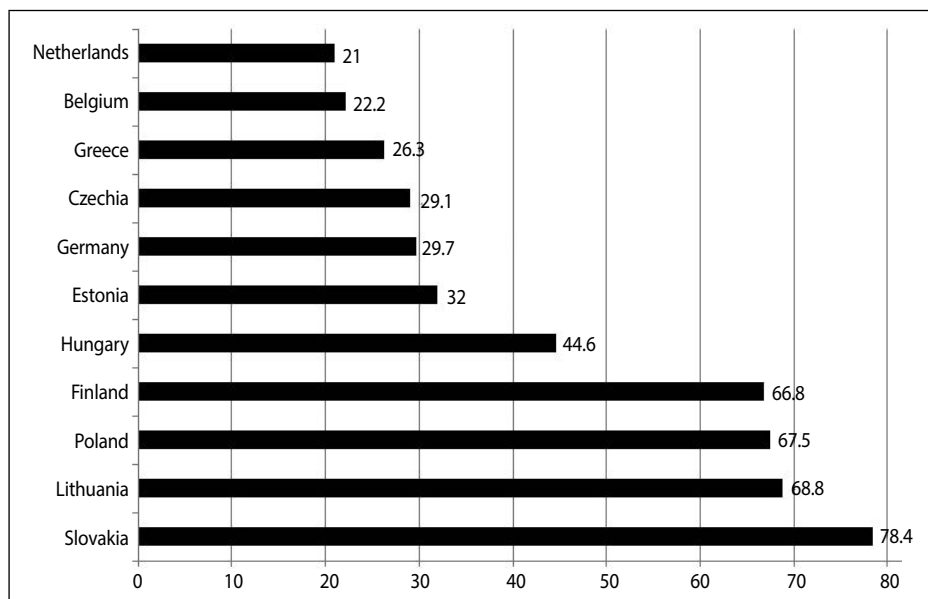
Source: Statista, *Which European Countries Depend on Russian Gas?*, Statista, <https://www.statista.com/chart/26768/dependence-on-russian-gas-by-european-country/> [accessed: 12 March 2023].

The highest share of import from Russia in the total oil and petroleum product import (above 60%) is observed for: Slovakia, Lithuania, Poland, and Finland (Chart 8). These countries will suffer from the effects of trade disruptions resulting from the war to the largest degree.

In 2020, the rate of dependency on hard coal import in more than half of the EU countries exceeded 90%.<sup>17</sup> The difference between the net import of hard coal and its consumption results from the fact that hard coal is supplied from existing resources that respective countries have. For Poland and Czechia, the difference also covers these two countries' own hard coal production. Seven EU countries reported import dependence exceeding 100%. Greece, Luxembourg, Croatia, Romania, Cyprus, Belgium, and Sweden; these countries import more coal than they use, usually to build up reserves. One EU country reported an import dependency rate being lower than 0% – namely Portugal, which exports the remaining reserves, as it is withdrawing from coal. As regards Poland, that rate was relatively low, standing at 12%, owing to its own coal resources.

<sup>17</sup> *Import dependency for hard coal by country, 2020*, Eurostat, [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Import\\_dependency\\_for\\_hard\\_coal\\_by\\_country,\\_2020.png](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Import_dependency_for_hard_coal_by_country,_2020.png) [accessed: 12 March 2023].

Chart 8. The share of Russian products in the total oil and petroleum product imports into the European Union in 2020, by country having the biggest share (in %)



Source: Statista, *Share of Russian products in total oil and petroleum product imports in the European Union (EU) and the United Kingdom (UK) in 2020*, Statista, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1298031/dependence-on-russian-oil-in-the-eu-and-uk/> [accessed: 12 March 2023].

## Changes in Poland-Russia and Poland-Ukraine trade: selected aspects

In 2021, Russia was the eighth biggest recipient of goods exported from Poland and the third largest importer. Trade declined significantly shortly after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February and with the introduction of further sanctions on the aggressor state. Throughout 2022, exports from Poland decreased by more than 46%, to slightly above \$5 billion, with imports falling by nearly 17%, to around \$17 billion.<sup>18</sup> According to the data published by the Central Statistical Office of Poland (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, GUS), Russia was ranked eighteenth as regards export destinations and fourth for imports. The share of import from Russia in Poland's total import also declined from 5.7% between January and November 2021, to 4.5% in the corresponding period of 2022.

In Q2 2022 (the most recent available data), the value of Poland's exports to Ukraine rose to EUR 2.4 billion, reaching a historic high. Compared to the corresponding

<sup>18</sup> *Foreign trade turnover of goods in total and by countries in January–November 2022*, Statistics Poland, <https://stat.gov.pl/en/topics/prices-trade/trade/foreign-trade-turnover-of-goods-in-total-and-by-countries-in-january-november-2022,1,127.html> [accessed: 12 March 2023].

period of 2021, the value of exports grew by EUR 870 million (i.e., by 56%). That is the greatest rise among all EU countries. In Q2 2022, Poland was the biggest, out of all EU countries, exporter of goods to the Ukrainian market. Poland had a 36% share in the Union's exports to war-ravaged Ukraine (compared to 24% recorded in Q2 2021). In the discussed period, Ukraine secured the ninth position on the list of Poland's importers. Ukraine's share in the Polish export also hit a record high, going up to 2.8% in Q2 2022 (in contrast to Q2 2021, when it was 1.9%). It must be highlighted that the foreign trade figures do not include the export of arms.<sup>19</sup>

In Q2 2022, the most important group of exports to Ukraine was fuels, which accounted for 21% of export to this country (compared to merely 2% in the corresponding period of the previous year). This stemmed mainly from the fact that the value of diesel fuel and petrol exports increased 15 times. The second largest group of exports to Ukraine was road vehicles. It comprised 18% of the total exports. In this case, the significant increase in exports followed from the Ukrainian parliament's decision to suspend customs tariff duties and VAT for imported cars, which was in effect from the beginning of July 2022. A rise in export was also reported, among other things, for the group of agri-food products.

In Q2 2022, the value of imports from Ukraine also grew by nearly EUR 600 million, in contrast to the corresponding period of 2021 (57%). As was the case with export, out of all EU countries, Poland was also the most important trading partner of Ukraine in the discussed period when it came to import. As regards Ukrainian exports to the EU, 28% went to Poland. In the period in question, the most important group of imports from Ukraine was cast iron and steel, mainly rolled steel products (23% of the value of import from that country), followed by iron ore (10%). However, the war considerably reduced the export potential of the Ukrainian steel industry. The largest metallurgical plants have either suffered heavy damage or been left on Russian-occupied territories. As for imports from Ukraine, a vital role was also played by agricultural products, including mainly sunflower seed oil (12%), soya bean oil (4%), and corn (8%). In contrast to the previous year, a huge increase was reported for fuels – the import of electricity rose.<sup>20</sup>

## Conclusions

As demonstrated by the research, the war in Ukraine and the sanctions introduced by the EU changed the European Union's trade seen both as a whole and in the context of individual Member States. Given the fact that there is no up-to-date data,

<sup>19</sup> W. Mroczek, *Wojenny wzrost polskiego eksportu do Ukrainy*, Obserwator finansowy.pl, 13 September 2022, <https://www.obserwatorfinansowy.pl/bez-kategorii/rotator/wojenny-wzrost-polskiego-eksportu-do-ukrainy/> [accessed: 12 March 2023].

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*.

these changes can be now identified only to a limited extent. This applies to trade in non-energy goods with Russia, dependence on Russian import of energy and energy resources, as well as susceptibility to energy price rises on global markets. As regards trade in energy resources (gas, oil and petroleum products, coal), 2022 saw the trade diversion effect, which means a decline in the import of these resources from Russia and an increase in the share in imports of other trading partners. When considering the trade consequences of the invasion of Ukraine, respective Member States experience them to a different extent. They are correlated with 'dependence on energy' from Russia (the greater such dependence is, the more severe the consequences are), with susceptibility to electricity price changes, and even with geographical proximity to Ukraine. The consequences are mainly faced by the Baltic States and certain countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

In Poland, an immediate neighbour of Ukraine, these trends have also emerged. Following Russia's invasion, Poland-Russia trade declined, which initially was also the case with Ukraine. However, throughout the consecutive months of 2022, the trade between Poland and Ukraine boosted significantly, reaching the highest level among all the European Union's Member States. Poland became Ukraine's most important trading partner (in 2021, this role was occupied by China), it also has the biggest share in trade with Ukraine among all EU Member States. It must be emphasised yet again that a comprehensive analysis of the trade consequences of the war in Ukraine will be possible only when complete data for 2022, and at least for Q1 2023, has been obtained.

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*The trade effects of the war in Ukraine from the European Union's and – in particular – Poland's perspective*

**Abstract**

The war in Ukraine is the third asymmetric shock that the European Union has experienced in the last two decades, after the 2008 financial and economic crisis, the following Eurozone crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Although Russia's and Ukraine's shares in the global trade and production are relatively small, they are important suppliers of basic products, specifically food and energy. Therefore, the trade consequences of the war for the European Union, Ukraine's important trading partner, deserve special attention. The war also disrupts trade relations between the EU and Russia. The EU's direct trade sanctions are limited to specific sectors, such as oil, coal, arms, dual-use goods, as well as the aviation and space industry. However, financial sanctions, particularly the SWIFT ban imposed on seven Russian banks, increase the costs of commercial transactions considerably. This paper aims to present the trade effects of the war in Ukraine from the European Union's, Member States' and, in particular, Poland's perspective. This refers not only to the trade creation and diversion effect, but also to changes in the structure of the EU's trade regarding the main groups of goods. These effects will vary depending on direct trade links, dependence on Russian energy and susceptibility to rising energy prices. Given an extensive range of parties involved and issues covered by the research, this paper focuses only on the main aspects of the problem.

**Keywords:** war in Ukraine, the European Union, embargo, trade, Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement







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# Untangling the Russian-Ukrainian Knot: Representations of the neo-imperialistic Russian political discourse and its analysis in the Polish press materials in the period of 2013–2014 and 2022

## Introduction

‘War is a mere continuation of policy by other means,’ Carl von Clausewitz stated famously in his military treatise *On War* (1832).<sup>1</sup> The military theorist aptly captured the dynamics governing warfare as a continuation of political agenda yet performed by other mechanisms. In other words, a war is only a way of realizing a political goal; however, it should not be perceived as an objective.<sup>2</sup> The abovementioned quotation holds true in case of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian military conflict. Russian authorities have been preparing a favourable ground for the ongoing war. Realizing this goal included ‘going back to the roots’ by glorifying the pre-revolution era, the Great Patriotic War (WWII) and the Soviet Union, but more importantly by reaching for

<sup>1</sup> “Der Krieg ist eine bloße Fortsetzung der Politik mit anderen Mitteln”. English translation: C. von Clausewitz, *On War*, transl. by J.J. Graham, originally published in 1874, Chapter 1, Section 24, <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/1946/pg1946-images.html> [accessed: 12.02.2023].

<sup>2</sup> C. von Clausewitz, *Wojna i polityka. Na podstawie traktatu O wojnie*, Bellona, Warszawa 2022, pp. 55–57.

the notion of 'Ancient Rus,' comprising of three nations – Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians. Slowly but surely, the idea of Russian-Ukrainian unity, forming a 'single whole' started to loom large. Already in 2007, a Russian journalist, M. Smolin, wrote that 'Ukrainians have torn a piece from the pan-Russian body.' Significantly, a year before the war, Putin himself authored an essay 'On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians' in which he used the disparaging term – Little Russia – when referring to Ukraine. Clearly, the phrase conveys a neo-imperialist view that the Ukrainian territory and people ('Little Russians') are merely a part of one, indivisible Russia.<sup>3</sup> It is no secret that the post-Soviet period witnessed Russia's 'fraternal suzerain relationship with Ukraine'.<sup>4</sup> The bilateral relationships of the two countries have been asymmetric for decades.

There is no denying that this situation, despite strategic and economic factors, was also triggered by mutually exclusive views on state sovereignty and international relations. When Russia persists in adopting its traditional Great Power approach, deeply entrenched in the concept of *derzhavnost*, then Ukraine strives for reaching Western democratic ideals. Would it be plausible to conclude that Russia's bellicose drives are merely motivated politically and/or economically? Or are there socio-cultural paradigms that have led to the Russian-Ukrainian war of 2022? This paper makes no claims to give any systematic analysis of the present conflict in Ukraine.<sup>5</sup> Its aim is to present Russian cultural heritage, which has significantly influenced the so-called 'Russian mindset,' leading to suzerain, if not imperialistic attitude.

## The role of culture in international relations and political science

Religion, identity, and culture were in the limelight of neither international relations (IR) nor political science until the 1990s. The end of the Cold War marks the advent of culture as a variable in peace and conflict studies. The introduction of constructivism opened a new phase in the IR research by employing quite dissimilar yet intrinsically bounded realms of culture, religion, and warfare. In a nutshell, constructivist

<sup>3</sup> W. Putin, *On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians*, 12.07.2021, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181> [accessed: 03.10.2023].

<sup>4</sup> E.W. Merry, *The Origins of Russia's War in Ukraine: The Clash of Russian and European "Civilizational Choices" for Ukraine*, [in:] E.A Wood et al., *Roots of Russia's War in Ukraine*, Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Columbia University Press, Washington D.C., NY 2016, p. 31.

<sup>5</sup> For the origins of the conflict in Ukraine and its anticipated effects, see: E.A Wood et al., *op. cit.*, J. von Bladel, *Captivated by war: The Russian People in the face of the Ukraine War, Mobilization, and Tactical Defeat*, Brussels 2023 (Egmont Paper 118); O. Fridman, *Russian "Hybrid Warfare". Resurgence and Politicisation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2018; J. Watling, O.V. Danylyuk, N. Reynolds, *Preliminary Lessons from Russia's Unconventional Operations During the Russo-Ukrainian War, February 2022 – February 2023*, Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, London, 29 March 2023.

theory ‘emphasizes the meanings that are assigned to material objects, rather than the mere existence of the objects themselves.’<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the assumption that the reality is constructed socially results in deeper investigation of norm development, identity, and ideational powers.

One of the first seminal works devoted to interrelation between war and culture was that of Samuel Huntington entitled *Clash of Civilizations* (1993, 1996). In his book, he divides the world’s major civilizations, which are set apart from each other ‘by history, language, culture, tradition and, most important, religion.’<sup>7</sup> The American political scientist advocated a hypothesis that the post-Cold War World’s conflicts would primarily have cultural (civilizational) rather than economic groundings:

The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.<sup>8</sup>

Importantly, he recognizes also so-called *cleft countries*, which comprise of substantial groups of people representing (or identifying themselves with) separate civilizations. Among others, Huntington includes Ukraine as cleft betwixt-and-between the Eastern Rite Catholic tradition on the West and the Orthodox on the East.

The idea of cultural genetic heritage reverberates across primordialism, which argues that nations or ethnic groups share an innate identity independent of historical processes.<sup>9</sup> Although explicit primordialist assumptions have been discarded after the Second World War, it is worth acknowledging that ‘primordialism, as an approach that stresses the workings of sub-national loyalties and solidarities operative in the collective consciousness of communities, is still capable of furnishing an epistemological and conceptual tool informing and opening up a unique space for inquiry and into social and political action.’<sup>10</sup>

Obviously, one should bear in mind that the abovementioned approaches are only attempts to interpret reality, yet they do not constitute reality *per se*. Nevertheless, a certain cultural trait is undeniably transmitted intergenerationally. The clash

<sup>6</sup> J. Cristol, *Constructivism*, 29.12.2019, Oxford Bibliographies, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199743292/obo-9780199743292-0039.xml?rskey=CbTL8O&result=1&q=cristol+2019#firstMatch>, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OBO/9780199743292-0039> [accessed: 20.03.2023].

<sup>7</sup> S.P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations?*, “Foreign Affairs” 1993, vol. 72, no. 3, p. 25.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 22.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Constructivist Theories of Ethnic Politics*, ed. K. Chandra, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012; M. Bayar, *Reconsidering Primordialism: an Alternative Approach to the Study of Ethnicity*, “Ethnic and Racial Studies” 2009, vol. 32, no. 9, pp. 1–20.

<sup>10</sup> K.F. Osman, *Sectarianism in Iraq: The Making of State and Nation since 1920*, Routledge, London–New York 2015, p. 36.

between the two standpoints seems to have more theoretical, rather than practical grounds. More often than not, core ideas constructivists appeal to stem from the primordial realm. The very existence of cleavages supports the abovesaid. If we agree that a cleavage 'is a historically determined social and cultural line which divides citizens within a society into groups with differing political interests, resulting in political conflict among these groups,'<sup>11</sup> then 'social or cultural cleavages become political ones when they are politicized.'<sup>12</sup> In other words, cleavages stem from deeply entrenched values, perceptions, beliefs, and values which are an indispensable part of national identity.

## Representations of neo-imperialistic tendencies of Russia's policy in the Polish press materials

The previous sections were aimed at presenting the connection between cultural heritage then this section depicts how it has been harnessed in public discourse.

### Methodology and terminology

The scientific objective of this paper is to detect and present traces of neo-imperialistic tendencies in Russia's political discourse in the Polish press materials. In order to achieve this goal, a thorough analysis of articles devoted to Russia in the period of 2013-2014 and 2021 was conducted. "Polityka", a news weekly, was chosen as source material. The criterion for the choice was the circulation. According to the Polish Research on Readership for 2022, the "Polityka" magazine reached the top selling numbers among weekly opinion periodicals, with circulation of 88 496 copies.<sup>13</sup>

The process of gathering raw data included qualitative and quantitative research of subsequent issues of the magazine in search for relevant content a thorough analysis of which revealed some underlying patterns. This, in turn, enabled grouping applicable quotations into thematical categories, which included:

1. the myth of Peter the Great,
2. the myth of a powerful tzar,
3. the Soviet resentment.
4. the notion of *derzavnost'*.

<sup>11</sup> S. Bartolini, P. Mair, *Identity, competition, and electoral availability. The stabilization of European electorates 1885–1985*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1990, p. 76.

<sup>12</sup> H. Kriesi *et al.*, *New Social Movements in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis*, UCL Press Limited, London 1995, p. 98.

<sup>13</sup> „Polityka” najchętniej kupowanym tygodnikiem opinii. „Newsweek” z wyższą sprzedażą niż „Do Rzeczy” i „Sieci” łącznie, Wirtualnemedi.pl, 12.09.2022, <https://www.wirtualnemedi.pl/artykul/sprzedaz-tygodnikow-opiniow-2022-rok-polityka-gosc-niedzielnny-newsweek-tomasz-lis-zwolniony> [accessed: 20.03.2023].

Delineating such a thematic scope is very telling. Already at this preliminary stage, it became evident that the Russian political discourse builds on nationalism deeply rooted in historic heritage. Since categories 1, 2 and 4 are tightly connected, they have merged together under the label of Authoritarian Rule and Imperialism.

### Data analysis

As it was already mentioned, the material has been organized around four major categories. Since a meticulous analysis of gathered material would go far beyond the scope of the present article, the focal points of the Russian political discourse have been fused together. Moreover, the thematical categories serve only as a departure point and have been made up for the sake of clarity. The interpretation will show that they are tightly intertwined with each other.

### *Authoritarian rule and imperialism*

Russian imperial drives have never ceased to exist. Conversely, after years of propaganda, they have re-emerged in an unprecedented form.

The history of Russian imperialism is long, as the pursuit of the world's great power status is historically rooted. One of the core concepts of 'Russia's Great Power' was *derzavnost*. The term has no direct equivalent in English, yet it can be compared to the French *étatisme*. The idea behind this term is that the Russian state enjoys a special sort of primacy and greatness. A belief was so powerful that it was raised to a status of a secular religion. Indeed, its traces can be spotted in other cultural notions of the Holy Rus, Moscow the Third Rome, and the Russian World.

The concept of *derzavnost* legitimizes 'the subordination of the rights and welfare of the citizen at home and the practice of pure power politics in relations abroad.'<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the post-Soviet political apparatus was organized around the Old-Russian traditions:

The word *oligarch* entered the Russian vocabulary in the second half of the 1990s. In 1995, seven of the most influential Russian businessmen – Boris Berezovsky, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Mikhail Fridman, Vladimir Gusinski, Vladimir Potanin, Aleksandr Smolensky and Vladimir Vinogradov – formed a political alliance with Yeltsin. In the media, they were called *siemibankrischina*, similar to *siemiboyarshchina*, the council of seven boyars that ruled in the Kremlin during the Great Troubles. [...] Vladimir Putin has fully subordinated his business to the Kremlin. In practice, this means financing social and industrial state projects.<sup>15</sup>

It is a well-grounded opinion that the oligarchs should pay off their debt to their motherland which has brought them wealth. The abovesaid is corroborated

<sup>14</sup> E.W. Merry, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>15</sup> K. Kwiatkowska, *Zmierzch oligarchów*, „Polityka”, 3–9.04.2013, no. 14 (2902), p. 45.

by another note, concerning the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi. It stated that 'the Olympic village was built partly from the funds of the richest Russians.'<sup>16</sup>

Notably, the state continues to play the role of suzerain towards its citizens. It is the state which is the only (real) administrator of private possessions. In other words, an individual may have private property, yet it is the authority, which really possesses and disposes of it. As a consequence, this leads to the conclusion that a Russian citizen has no real *agency* understood as 'the capacity of individuals to have the power and resources to fulfil their potential.'<sup>17</sup> Andrei Zubov's words perfectly illustrate this phenomenon: '[I]n Russia, we have no possibility to influence our government or our parliament. But I signed [anti-war petition – SH] so that I could express my opinion and distance myself from Russia's ruling elite which is breaking international law.'<sup>18</sup> However, a subservient citizen needs a strong and powerful leader (tzar, emperor) on which they can lean. Such an attitude opens a ritualized dialogue between the authority and society based on fear, violence, and unduly reverence.

If it is possible to pinpoint any prevailing motif of the Russian political narration, then it is a myth of an omnipotent emperor. Putin has successfully positioned himself as a new czar. He has adopted Peter the Great as a role model. The Russian President in no uncertain terms compared himself to his famous predecessor by stating that 'Peter the Great waged the Great Northern War for 21 years. It would seem that he was at war with Sweden, he took something from them. He did not take anything from them, he returned [what was Russia's – SH].' Putin went on saying: '[A]pparently, it is also our lot to return [what is Russia's – SH] and strengthen [the country – SH]. And if we proceed from the fact that these basic values form the basis of our existence, we will certainly succeed in solving the tasks that we face.'<sup>19</sup> He drew this parallel on 10 June 2022, after visiting an exhibition dedicated to the great czar.

What makes czar Peter so Great? Piotr Skwieciński advocates that the Russians have a fetish of territory. Peter the Great embodies power. He represents the empire, as during his reign, Russia became vast.<sup>20</sup> Symbolically, Peter the Great ordered establishing Russia's new capital in the land he conquered from Sweden. The project was not cheap – it cost the lives of tens of thousands of serfs who 'opened the window to Europe' in the swamps of the Baltic Sea coast.

<sup>16</sup> J. Winiecki, *Władimirograd*, „Polityka”, 5–11.02.2014, no. 6 (2944), p. 17.

<sup>17</sup> Ch. Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, Sage, London 2005, p. 448.

<sup>18</sup> *Ukraine-Russia crisis: What's Putin's next move?*, BBC News, 23.02.2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60497653> [accessed: 28.03.2023].

<sup>19</sup> *Putin compares himself to Peter the Great in quest to take back Russian lands*, The Guardian, 10.06.2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/10/putin-compares-himself-to-peter-the-great-in-quest-to-take-back-russian-lands> [accessed: 28.03.2023].

<sup>20</sup> P. Skwieciński. *Koniec Ruskiego Miru? O ideowych źródłach rosyjskiej agresji*, Teologia Polityczna, Warszawa 2022, p. 22.

It would be erroneous to claim that Putin's admiration for Peter the Great is the latest fad. Putin endeavours to turn Sochi, a place with a subtropical climate, into a Winter Olympic centre in 2014, bear a strong resemblance to Peter the Great's efforts to build St. Petersburg. We read the following:

[W]ith the selection of Sochi as the venue for the Winter Olympics, this historic comparison made itself felt. In a place seemingly unsuitable for such an undertaking, the ruler of Russia decided to manifest the power of his country and mark its geopolitical importance. The Sochi 2014 project symbolically reflects another great project from the distant Russian past – St. Petersburg 1703, and Vladimir Putin is trying to disguise himself as Peter the Great.<sup>21</sup>

Notably, Russia took control of the Black Sea shore only 25 years after the death of the tsar. The final touch of this campaign was the Circassia Genocide. It was also hard to overlook another striking similarity. While St. Petersburg was built by peasants, the Olympic village – with the hands of immigrant workers from Central Asia. Sochi became the third capital of the country. Importantly, the city enjoyed Stalin's and Beria's sympathy and many political decisions were made there.

Russia started to act like a real empire. Apart from having nuclear weapons and economic opportunities, it started to construct its soft power. Russia was already fighting this battle for prestige at the front of great sports and political events, i.e., in the areas of life that Putin reveres. The Winter Games in Sochi were the best proof of this.

Russian imperialistic drives did not escape the attention of Polish journalists. In May 2021, Putin tested the limits of European patience. The Russians smuggled almost 100,000 soldiers across the border with Ukraine. Officially, these were only routine exercises. Yet Kiev perceived this as a threat of another invasion and began to look for support in the West. Ukraine received it, especially from Washington. Zelensky himself proposed a meeting with Putin. The Russian president replied that he could receive him in the Kremlin, but only if he first met with the leaders of the separatist 'republics' of Donetsk and Luhansk. This situation was commented on in the following way:

Putin's Russia, like a big cat among buffaloes, is trying to pick out weaker individuals, hoping that the stronger ones – too strong for it – will not react. It was so with Ukraine and – on a different level – with the Czech Republic. While Moscow is threatening Kiev and Prague, Berlin has no intention of giving up Nord Stream II, and the Prime Minister of Saxony Michael Kretschmer is talking in the Kremlin about the purchase of a Russian vaccine. Germany calls for these cases not to be combined. That is enough for Putin.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> J. Winiecki, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>22</sup> Ł. Wójcik, *Putin wśród bawołów*, „Polityka”, 27.04–04.05.2021, no. 18 (3310), p. 10.

Indeed, Russia managed to create an image of a special position of simultaneous fear and reverence on the international arena. Again, such an attitude fulfils the Russian definition of respect: 'they are to be afraid! In Russia, the prevailing thinking is that respect is the same as fear. They beat the weak – that's what Vladimir Putin thinks, and has said it publicly many times. That's what the Russians think. You are either strong or you are gone. The law of the jungle.'<sup>23</sup>

The complexity of the communication problem with Russia on an international level, apart from its obvious political-economic reasons, has its roots in culture. While the Western world appreciates dialogue and consensus, in the Russian cultural realm intransigence is of the essence.

The extremely hierarchized system is not meant for democratic ideas. Russian people have been ruled with an iron hand over centuries. Even if they nowadays use terms such as equality, peace, values, it does not necessarily mean that they understand these concepts in the same way as the rest of the so-called Western world does. The cultural clash between the political West and the East has deeply permeated the Russian mindset. This profound difference is a powerful tool used by nationalistic propaganda. A comprehensive analysis of press materials corroborates this conclusion. In 2014, one could read the following note:

Vladimir Yakunin warns against the West. In his only book *Problems of Contemporary World Futurology*, he writes that Russia must go its own way. Opening up to the West, selling out for money, Yakunin claims, is destroying the Russian spirit and the values on which Russian civilization is based. The author himself is a member of the National Glory of Russia, an organization promoting the purity of the Russian soul and defending it from the corrupt West.<sup>24</sup>

Interestingly, both Putin and Yakunin allude to 'the Russian spirit and values,' yet they do not specify what this precisely means. Therefore, it can be concluded that it has to be a reference to the unique Russian world. By the same token, any messages that contradict the official narration of the Kremlin are deemed as being of Western origin. For instance, Navalny's political activity was portrayed as a betrayal of his own homeland, which he should be punished for: 'it is a pity that Navalny was not effectively poisoned because he is a spy from America.'<sup>25</sup> Similarly, the fact that Ukraine has (partially) chosen its own path and turned its back on Russia is perceived in terms of conspiracy: 'It is difficult for the Russians to understand that the Ukrainians have become an independent nation. For several hundred years, in the form of various myths, the state instilled in them that Russia and Ukraine are

<sup>23</sup> J. Prus-Wojciechowska, *Dmuchane imperium*, „Polityka”, 26.03–01.04.2014, no. 13 (2951), p. 13.

<sup>24</sup> O. Szewczyk, *Rosjanie znów w grze*, „Polityka”, 19–25.03.2014, no. 12 (2950), p. 36.

<sup>25</sup> P. Reszka, *Iwan Wyrpajew: Ojciec nazywa mnie zdrajcą*, „Polityka”, 10–16.02.2021, no. 7 (3299), p. 21.



one. Today, it is easier for them to believe that Ukrainian nationalism is an instrument in a Western conspiracy.<sup>26</sup> The continuous juxtaposition of the two cultural realms is clear propaganda. By strengthening the feeling of alienation, the public opinion develops moral panic that Western civilization threatens the values, interests, and well-being of the society. This state, in turn, leads to the arousal of siege mentality which is a shared feeling of victimization. Importantly, the consequences of this manipulation technique include biased thinking and survivalism and they strengthen social cohesion, but above all, make the society easy to control.

Another manifestation of the *ancient régime* is the authoritarian position of a president. In his work *Development of Morality*, Feliks Koneczny writes that Turanian civilization 'leads all public life out of the camp authority and it is fundamentally unethical'.<sup>27</sup> It concentrates around the leader, who is a 'demigod', the master of life and death. Putin has put a lot of effort into building his image as a ruler. Among various press materials, the most interesting include positioning himself higher than other prominent individuals, which manifests itself in being late: 'Vladimir Putin was almost an hour late for his audience with Pope Francis last week. The Russian president is notoriously late. [...] Yulia Tymoshenko spent three hours in the Kremlin in 2009.'<sup>28</sup> Another important area of self-creation is stressing Putin's masculinity. 'The country's most desirable bachelor' – this is how the incumbent president is presented on the cover, quite seriously, by the most popular Russian women's weekly, with a circulation of nearly half a million. 'Each of us would love to marry Putin,' declares the popular actress and singer Kristina Orbakaite.<sup>29</sup> And a year later we read: 'There are plenty of photos of fishing Putin, presenting his torso. [...] The biggest hit in Russia was the song "Takowo kak Putina" – if you have to choose a husband, choose someone like Putin.'<sup>30</sup> Moreover, Putin is presented as a role model for children: '[A] lot of biographical books for "Putin's children" are being written. For example, about Vova and Dima, that is about Putin and Medvedev, as they were childhood friends. Heroes of children's imagination. Such books were written about both Mussolini and Stalin.'<sup>31</sup>

Yet, the tzar is aging – '[T]he tzar has aged noticeably. Governments changed, parliaments changed, and he continued to enjoy the support of the people. Meanwhile, approval ratings for Vladimir Vladimirovich, as Putin is commonly referred to here, have been going down for two years.'<sup>32</sup> According to the Levada Centre, it is the

<sup>26</sup> O. Szewczyk, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>27</sup> F. Koneczny, *Rozwój moralności*, Wydawnictwo Antyk – Marcin Dybowski, Komorów 1997, s. 25.

<sup>28</sup> *Czekaj, czekaj*, „Polityka”, 4–10.12.2013, no. 49 (2936), p. 11.

<sup>29</sup> *Najbardziej pożądany kawaler kraju*, „Polityka”, 10–16.07.2013, no. 28 (2915), p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> J. Winiecki, *Dziwna wojna*, „Polityka”, 12–18.03.2014, no. 11 (2949), p. 17.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 18.

<sup>32</sup> P. Reszka, *Instrukcja wymiany cara*, „Polityka”, 3–9.03.2021, no. 10 (3302), p. 47.

lowest in the youngest group, 18–24 years old. In 2018, 80% of them believed that the president was doing well. In 2021, only 51%, and 46% are of the opposite opinion.

Putin is aware of the fact that without Ukraine Russia will not become an Asian empire, Russia can be a global power only by controlling Ukraine. On top of that, the Russian president has no accountable successor, which makes the Russian political scene unstable and unpredictable. Presumably, Putin wanted to begin an irreversible chain of events, which would be continued after his resignation. In this way, he would be remembered as the president who re-opened the window to the Black Sea.

## Conclusions

The Russian-Ukrainian war, apart from its obvious geo-political reasons, is culturally motivated. For nearly two decades, the Russian president has been using socio-political tools to recreate national romanticism which nurtured the neo-imperialistic attitude.

The mechanism was quite simple, as Putin used the most widespread and deeply engraved cultural motifs to strengthen the feeling of Russia being the Messiah of all nations on the one hand, and the perception of being alienated on the other. According to the conducted research, Putin presents himself as a new emperor who wants to regain and empower the state. Time will show whether he is going to accomplish his goal. One conclusion seems to be undeniable. Unlike his famous predecessor, Peter the Great, who has opened a window to Europe, Putin is hammering it up with rotten planks from the time of Ivan the Terrible, as Andrei Kolesnikov stated.

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*Untangling the Russian-Ukrainian Knot: Representations of the neo-imperialistic Russian political discourse and its analysis in the Polish press materials in the period of 2013–2014 and 2022*

**Abstract**

Military conflicts have symbolic foundations. Be it religion, identity, values, or language, they all may serve as 'weapons of war' that either help to rationalize the military action or mobilize the nation. The Russian-Ukrainian war is no exception. The ongoing conflict exceeds the premises of a geo-political game or a socioeconomic ambition and proves itself to be deeply entrenched in a cultural conflict between the two countries. Therefore, the thrust of the paper is to explore the cultural-historical context of the Russia-Ukraine war. Russian imperialistic desires have been whetted by neo-romantic historical narration for the past two decades. The article comprises of two parts – historical and empirical. When the former depicts the history of direct imperial Russian rule over Ukraine, then the latter is a critical overview of Polish press materials commenting on the change in the Russian political discourse concerning Ukraine in the years 2013–2014 and 2022. Such an analysis sheds different light on the current Russian-Ukrainian war, but it also indicates that the conflict we are witnessing now has been carefully prepared on both military and socio-political levels.

**Keywords:** Russian imperialism, discourse analysis, Ukraine, cultural divisions, conflict, Polish press materials

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France





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# France towards the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in the Donbas between 2014 and 2022

## Introduction

Since the beginning of the escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in the Donbas, France (together with Germany) has remained strongly involved in the negotiation and mediation process for its settlement. This resulted from both the role of the mediator in the so-called Normandy Format (N4) and frequent contacts with the leaders of Russia and Ukraine, as well as President E. Macron's personal willingness to use the European leadership in negotiations for internal use (leader image). This is because it was assumed in the Élysée Palace that, through dialogue and by 'drawing' Russia into the role of a responsible co-architect of European security, European stability would be enhanced, which is in the interest of both the EU and Russia.

## The role and importance of France in the creation of the Normandy Format (N4)

The annexation of Crimea by Russia (2014) and the war in the Donbas have resulted in a temporary freeze in French-Russian political relations.<sup>1</sup> In the summer of 2014

<sup>1</sup> The President of France, F. Hollande, annulled the contract and France cancelled the delivery of two Mistral-type ships to Russia.

(6 June), during the celebrations of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day and the allied forces landings in Normandy, at the invitation of the President of France, François Hollande, a four-party meeting between the Presidents of Ukraine, Russia, France, and the German Chancellor took place. The meeting resulted in the creation of the so-called Normandy Format (N4).<sup>2</sup> In this way, France, together with Germany, became involved in the process of international negotiations aimed at settling the crisis in the Donbas and working out a political solution for the issue of Crimea's nationality.

The Normandy Format meeting of the Presidents of Ukraine, Russia, France, and the German Chancellor, who signed the so-called Minsk II agreement (the Minsk Protocol on a bilateral ceasefire) on 11–12 February 2015, was to be crucial for the resolution of the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine. The Minsk agreements were intended to put Putin on the diplomatic path and provide a framework for political dialogue. At the same time, a commitment was imposed on Ukraine, among other things, to the adoption of a new constitution and the implementation of a law granting special status to 'some regions of the Donetsk and Lugansk oblasts'.<sup>3</sup>

Contrary to the expectations of mediators from Paris and Berlin, a year after the conclusion of the Minsk agreements, none of the postulates were fully implemented and, at most, the fighting stopped on a larger scale and the number of fatalities was significantly reduced. Meanwhile, the military situation in the conflict zone escalated in July 2016. Both parties intensified their exchange of fire, including the use of heavy artillery, along the entire demarcation line. In consequence, since the end of that year, negotiations and talks in the Normandy Format reached an impasse. France and Germany were seeking accord from Russia and Ukraine to implement a package of commitments based on the Minsk proposals, including those concerning the elections in the Donbas, which were to determine its future status. The lack of both parties' readiness to make any commitments in the above areas resulted in the freezing of all undertaken initiatives.

## French diplomacy towards the resolution of the conflict in the Donbas in the years 2017–2018

Shortly after taking office as President of the French Republic, Emmanuel Macron, who adopted a pragmatic stance towards the Kremlin, hosted his Russian

<sup>2</sup> *Jak doszło do porozumień mińskich*, speech by former President of France, François Hollande at the symposium "Revolution, War and Their Consequences" at the College of Europe, Napoléon, 16 March 2018, <http://czasopisma.isppan.waw.pl/index.php/sm/article/view/164/121> [accessed: 22 November 2022].

<sup>3</sup> *Package of measures for the Implementation of the Minsk agreements*, Minsk, 12 February 2015, UN Peacemaker, [https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/UA\\_150212\\_MinskAgreement\\_en.pdf](https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/UA_150212_MinskAgreement_en.pdf) [accessed: 02 March 2022].



counterpart, Vladimir Putin, in Versailles (29.05.2017). Following this visit, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jean-Yves Le Drian, visited Moscow (20.06.2017), where he met with the heads of the ministries of foreign affairs and defence. In parallel to the revival of cooperation between Paris and Moscow, the new administration of the ambitious President Macron was building a dialogue with Ukraine, which was demonstrated by President Petro Poroshenko's visit to Paris (26.06.2017). France's position towards Kiev assumed France's opposition to the annexation of Crimea and recognition of Ukraine's full sovereignty and territorial integrity. At the same time, it assumed support for Ukraine within the N4. France also engaged with Germany and the United States in establishing a UN mission in the Donbas, the aim of which was to provide political support for the implementation of the Minsk agreements and assistance to humanitarian organisations in the conflict zone. Rapid disillusionment with the lack of effects of the 'opening policy' towards Russia in terms of stabilising the situation in Ukraine led to a reduction in the number of bilateral contacts and a slowdown in the dynamics of the French-Russian cooperation. Despite this, France made efforts to work out progress in improving the security (the ceasefire) and humanitarian situation (an exchange of prisoners of war in accordance with the guidelines set out by the ICRC). On 23 December 2017, President E. Macron and Chancellor A. Merkel issued a joint statement on the situation in the Donbas.<sup>4</sup> In it, they pointed out that the increase in the number of violations of the ceasefire in eastern Ukraine is unacceptable and called on both parties of the fight to fulfil their commitments as soon as possible, improve the situation of the civilian population, and fully implement the Minsk agreements.

France was also very disappointed to learn of Russia's withdrawal from the Joint Centre for Control and Coordination (JCCC) formed by representatives of the Ukrainian and Russian armed forces, which plays a key role in respecting ceasefire agreements under the auspices of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission.<sup>5</sup>

In order to streamline the work of the N4, French and German diplomats proposed to undertake talks in two parallel N3 sub-formats, i.e., France – Germany – Russia and France – Germany – Ukraine at the level of diplomatic advisors, whose first meetings took place in January and February 2018. This formula was to ensure a freer exchange of views and not to incite mutual Russian-Ukrainian accusations. On 22–23 March 2018, French Minister of Foreign Affairs, J.-Y. Le Drian,

<sup>4</sup> K. Rapoza, *Angela Merkel Tries Pressuring Vladimir Putin On Ukraine War*, Forbes.com, 24 December 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2017/12/24/angela-merkel-tries-pressuring-vladimir-putin-on-ukraine-war/?sh=6d43a0052486> [accessed: 26 December 2022].

<sup>5</sup> *Retrait des représentants russes du «centre conjoint de contrôle et de coordination»*, 19 December 2017, <https://ru.ambafrance.org/Ukraine-Retrait-des-representants-russes-du-centre-conjoint-de-contrôle-et-de> [accessed: 15 January 2023].

was on a visit to Kiev. It was the first bilateral visit of the head of French diplomacy to Ukraine in 13 years and was aimed at emphasising France's commitment to resolving the conflict in the Donbas.<sup>6</sup>

French diplomacy found itself in a difficult position. On the one hand, it provided support to Ukraine, e.g., during the meeting between Presidents Macron and Poroshenko and Chancellor Merkel in Aachen on 10 May 2018, a package of solutions prepared by French diplomacy to improve the humanitarian and economic situation of the civilian population in the Donbas was discussed. On the other hand, France pursued its own agenda in relations with Russia, both the one resulting from the international situation (Iran/JCPOA, Syria, Libya, Central African Republic) and the economic one (tightening cooperation in strategic sectors of the economy, increasing trade and investment). This aspiration was reflected in President Macron's visit to Russia, combined with participation in the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (24–25 May 2018). The French President's visit was negatively received in Ukraine, especially since, despite the invitation, he did not visit Kiev on his return trip. What is more, the next meeting of the N4 heads of diplomacy in Berlin on 11 June 2018 did not result in progress in resolving the conflict in the Donbas, maintaining mediation channels or preventing further escalation. At that time, there was an intensification of cooperation between Paris and Berlin, which consisted in exerting pressure on both Moscow and Kiev to induce both parties to make concessions and end the conflict in the Donbas. As a result, on 11 November 2018, President Macron, together with Chancellor Merkel, issued a joint statement pointing out the illegal and contrary to the spirit of the Minsk agreements nature of the elections in some regions of the Donetsk and Lugansk oblasts that took place on that very day.<sup>7</sup> President Macron and Chancellor Merkel stated that these so-called elections undermine the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, contrary to OSCE standards. However, Russia's goal was to achieve the autonomy of the Donbas and to permanently prevent Ukraine from moving closer to the Euro-Atlantic structures (NATO/EU). This led to a deep impasse in the implementation of the Minsk agreements, exacerbated by President Putin's efforts to position himself as a mediator and to 'place' the Ukrainians in direct confrontation with the separatists as parties to the frozen conflict.

With V. Zelensky's victory in the presidential election in May 2019, France and Germany encouraged the new president of Ukraine to make a number of unilateral gestures towards the occupied territories and their inhabitants, which was intended

<sup>6</sup> *Déplacement de M. Jean-Yves Le Drian (22–23 mars 2018)*, <https://ru.ambafrance.org/Ukraine-Deplacement-de-M-Jean-Yves-Le-Drian-22-23-mars-2018> [accessed: 06 November 2022].

<sup>7</sup> *US join EU in condemning 'sham' Donbas elections*, Euractiv, 13 November 2018, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/us-join-eu-in-condemning-sham-donbas-elections> [accessed: 12 December 2022].

by Paris and Berlin to force similar concessions from Russia.<sup>8</sup> At the turn of June 2019, French and German ministers of foreign affairs, J.-Y. Le Drian and H. Maas, travelled together to Kiev.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, President Macron invited Russia to co-create a 'new architecture of security and trust' with the EU, which he expressed on 19 August 2019 at the Brégançon Fort, his summer residence, where he hosted the Russian leader. In President Macron's opinion, Russia played an important role in resolving many international crises (Iran, Syria, Ukraine), which raised the need to define a common action agenda to resolve them, including in the scope of arms control.<sup>10</sup> President Macron believed that isolating Russia would turn Moscow towards Beijing and strengthen Russia's alliance with China, which was not in Europe's interest. Meanwhile, Russia's goal was to maximize power (classical realism) and security (neorealism) by controlling other participants in international relations and maintaining the *status quo* (neoclassical realism). The French diplomatic proposal, however, did not take into account the fact that, in practice, by giving rise to the conflict in the Donbas and Crimea, V. Putin degraded and disintegrated the architecture of European security in order to subjugate Ukraine and stop the West.<sup>11</sup>

## The 2019 N4 Summit in Paris

The breakthrough meeting of the N4 was to be the meeting of the Normandy Format leaders on 9 December 2019 in Paris. Certainly, already bringing the meeting to be held at the highest political level was undoubtedly a success of French diplomacy as well as President Macron's personal success. The N4 summit, which became the occasion for the first Putin-Zelenskyy meeting, was expected to give an impetus to the ongoing negotiations. In practice, however, this time too, it failed to bring breakthroughs and the final declaration largely duplicated the provisions of earlier decisions that had failed to be implemented.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the summit – after three years (since 2016)

<sup>8</sup> cf. H. Stark, *La politique de défense de l'Allemagne: un tournant historique?*, "Politique étrangère" 2022, vol. 87, no. 3, p. 100.

<sup>9</sup> *Ukraine – Déplacement de Jean-Yves Le Drian à Kiev (30–31 mai 2019)*, France Diplomatie, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/ukraine/evenements/article/ukraine-deplacement-de-jean-yves-le-drian-a-kiev-30-31-05-19> [accessed: 15 January 2023].

<sup>10</sup> *Déclaration de M. Emmanuel Macron, Président de la République, sur les relations franco-russes et la situation internationale, à Brégançon le 19 août 2019*, Vie-publique.fr, 19 August 2019, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/269690-emmanuel-macron-19082019-france-russie> [accessed: 25 February 2023].

<sup>11</sup> cf. T. Gomart, *Russia is waging a colonial war in Ukraine under nuclear protection*, IFRI, 23 May 2022, <https://www.ifri.org/en/espace-media/lifri-medias/thomas-gomart-russia-waging-colonial-war-ukraine-under-nuclear-protection> [accessed: 04 March 2023].

<sup>12</sup> The summit reaffirmed the urgent need for a full and complete ceasefire (by the end of 2019), the development and implementation of a disengagement and disarmament plan, and the improvement of the functioning of the OSCE permanent special mission, as well as the holding of elections and reaching an agreement on the special status of some regions of the Donetsk

of no meetings at this level – should be assessed positively. The French leader assessed that ‘the construction of a new architecture of [European – TM] trust and security is ensured by regulating the conflict in eastern Ukraine and within the framework of the Minsk agreements,’<sup>13</sup> while Chancellor Merkel argued for ‘overcoming the period of standstill.’<sup>14</sup> The formulation in the final declaration of a ‘shared aspiration’ (N4) to shape a ‘sustainable and comprehensive architecture of trust and security in Europe, based on the OSCE principles’ was a ‘compliment’ to President Macron’s promoted concept of a new architecture of European security.<sup>15</sup>

In the following months, French and German diplomacy focused on the implementation of the summit decisions at the level of diplomatic advisors and talks within the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) for the settlement of the situation in south-eastern Ukraine (TCG – OSCE mission, Ukraine and Russia). However, Paris’s efforts, aimed at fully implementing all decisions taken at the December N4 summit, were met with reluctance on the Russian side to disengaging areas and disengaging forces and equipment (*disengagement*). Despite this, French diplomacy remained in favour of maintaining contact with Russia, which was confirmed on 15 February 2020 – during his speech at the Munich Security Conference – by President E. Macron, who stated that a strategic dialogue should be built with Russia, the aim of which should be, among other things, to jointly reflect on issues of security architecture and which should lead to its understanding of its role and responsibilities in this regard.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, the linking of the Donbas issue to President Macron’s desire to build a new architecture of trust and security with Russia’s participation, caused disappointment on the Ukrainian side and a misunderstanding of the French efforts to resume dialogue with Russia, which did not agree to give Ukraine control over its eastern border.

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and Lugansk oblasts (in accordance with the provisions of the Minsk agreements of 2015 and the “Steinmeier formula” of 2019, which provides for granting them a special status); see *Paris “Normandie” summit – Common agreed conclusions*, Élysée, 9 December 2019, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2019/12/09/paris-normandie-summit.en> [accessed: 13 January 2023].

<sup>13</sup> *Déclaration du Président de la République – Conférence de presse à l’issue du Sommet au format Normandie*, Élysée, 9 December 2019, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2019/12/09/sommet-de-paris-en-format-normandie> [accessed: 16 January 2023].

<sup>14</sup> “Standstill now overcome”, The Federal Government, 10 December 2019, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/service/archive/normandie-gipfel-in-paris-1705166> [accessed: 15 February 2023].

<sup>15</sup> cf. S. Liechtenstein, ‘If we want to defend Europe’s interests, we have to engage with Russia’ [interview with Ambassador Pierre Vimont], Security and Human Rights Monitor, 14 April 2021, <https://www.shrmonitor.org/if-we-want-to-defend-europes-interests-we-have-to-engage-with-russia-dialogue-with-russia> [accessed: 13 March 2023].

<sup>16</sup> *Discours à la Conférence de Munich sur la sécurité 2020*, Élysée, 15 February 2020, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2020/02/15/conference-sur-la-securite-de-munich-faire-revivre-leurope-comme-une-puissance-politique-strategique> [accessed: 15 January 2023].

The following months were characterised by a slowdown in the pace of the work of the Normandy Format, influenced, among other things, by a difference of opinion between Kiev and Moscow as to the organisation of local elections in the Donbas and its status, and the transfer of control over the Ukrainian-Russian border. The Russian obstruction of the negotiation process resulted from demands for direct talks between the authorities in Kyiv and the separatists, as well as accusations from the Ukrainian side regarding the failure to comply with the arrangements contained in the Minsk agreements regarding the special status of some regions (of the Donetsk and Lugansk oblasts).<sup>17</sup> The movements of the Russian armed forces generated escalation and the main achievement of the Paris Summit regarding the ceasefire was repeatedly violated.<sup>18</sup>

On 16 April 2021, President V. Zelenskyy visited Paris. During the visit, President Macron called on Russia to 'de-escalate tensions,' reaffirming the determination to fully implement the Minsk agreements and a lasting political settlement of the conflict.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the dual-track nature of the French diplomacy's actions is noteworthy: on the one hand, the Élysée Palace strongly supported Ukraine for a peaceful settlement of the conflict in the Donbas; on the other, it kept open channels of dialogue with the Kremlin (Quadriga meeting, i.e., a joint meeting of the ministers of foreign affairs and national defence of the two countries on 12 November 2021 in Paris), rejecting Ukraine's aspirations for EU accession.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Russia remained an important partner for France on major issues on the global agenda (Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, Libya, Yemen, and Central African Republic).

<sup>17</sup> While Kyiv assumed that the status of the Donetsk and Lugansk oblasts would be regulated by a special law as part of the decentralisation reform and that free elections would be held after the withdrawal of troops and taking control of these regions, Russia and the separatists demanded appropriate provisions in the constitution on autonomy.

<sup>18</sup> *Statement by Mr. Jean-Yves Le Drian, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs (9 April 2021)*, France Diplomacy, <https://www.diplomatic.gouv.fr/en/country-files/ukraine/news/article/ukraine-statement-by-mr-jean-yves-le-drian-minister-for-europe-and-foreign> [accessed: 25 February 2023].

<sup>19</sup> G. Segers, *French President Emmanuel Macron says international community must draw "clear red lines" with Russia*, CBS News, 17 April 2021, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/french-president-emmanuel-macron-says-international-community-must-draw-clear-red-lines-with-russia> [accessed: 15 February 2023].

<sup>20</sup> *Entretien de M. Clément Beaune, secrétaire d'Etat aux affaires européennes, avec Radio J le 15 avril 2021, sur l'Union européenne face à l'épidémie de Covid-19, les relations avec la Turquie et la construction européenne*, Vie-publique.fr, 15 avril 2021, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/279512-entretien-clement-beaune-15042021-union-europeenne> [accessed: 15 February 2023]; cf. T. Chopin, Ch. Lequesne, *The European Union in a continent at war*, "Politique étrangère" 2022, vol. 87, no. 3, p. 78; M. Le Drian et Mme Parly reçoivent leurs homologues russes, La France dans l'UE, 12 November 2021, <https://ue.delegfrance.org/m-le-drian-et-mme-parly-recoivent> [accessed: 15 February 2023].

## Failure of the N4's efforts to implement the Minsk agreements

With the deployment of Russian troops along the Russian-Ukrainian border at the turn of 2022, France took firm action, and the position of French diplomacy was clearly presented by the Minister of Foreign Affairs before the National Assembly of the French Republic on 15 December 2021. In his speech, Le Drian indicated that France took seriously Russia's threats of a possible violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity and warned that this would entail 'massive strategic consequences'.<sup>21</sup> The French minister also indicated that the N4 talks should be resumed with the aim of a ceasefire and the implementation of humanitarian measures. To this end, a meeting of diplomatic advisors to the N4 leaders was held in Paris at the end of January 2022 (26.01.2022), while the French President's special envoy, Pierre Vimont, went to Moscow.<sup>22</sup> All the efforts made by French diplomacy did not bring the expected results in view of the 'game of appearances' that was already being played by Vladimir Putin at that time.

On 7–8 February 2022, the President of France (who was then also acting as President of the Council of the EU) visited Moscow and then Kiev. The visit was primarily aimed at obtaining a gesture of de-escalation from the two conflicting parties.<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, these efforts did not result in a return to the talks within the Normandy Format. This increased the disappointment of the French president, who did not get what he was seeking, i.e., the withdrawal of the tens of thousands of Russian troops (135,000) gathered on the border with Ukraine.<sup>24</sup> In response, President Macron condemned the Russian military invasion of Ukraine (24 February 2022) and warned Russia about the uncompromising response of France and announced support to the authorities in Kiev in the form of supplies of military

<sup>21</sup> *Ukraine: la Russie subira des «conséquences stratégiques massives» en cas d'attaque, avertit Paris*, Le Figaro, 15 December 2021, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/ukraine-la-russie-subira-des-consequences-strategiques-massives-en-cas-d-attaque-avertit-paris-20211215> [accessed: 15 March 2023].

<sup>22</sup> *Déclaration des conseillers des chefs d'État et de gouvernement du format Normandie*, Élysée, 26 January 2022, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2022/01/26/declaration-des-conseillers-des-chefs-detat-et-de-gouvernement-du-format-normandie>; *Ukraine: Emmanuel Macron va proposer un «chemin de désescalade» à Vladimir Poutine*, TF1 Info 24 January 2022, <https://www.tf1info.fr/international/crise-ukraine-russie-emmanuel-macron-va-proposer-un-chemin-de-desescalade-a-vladimir-poutine-2208096.html> [accessed: 16 February 2023].

<sup>23</sup> *Emmanuel Macron prône «la désescalade» à Moscou et à Kiev*, Le Monde, 08 February 2022, [https://www.lemonde.fr/international/video/2022/02/08/video-a-moscou-et-kiev-emmanuel-macron-prone-la-desescalade\\_6112841\\_3210.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/international/video/2022/02/08/video-a-moscou-et-kiev-emmanuel-macron-prone-la-desescalade_6112841_3210.html) [accessed: 23 February 2023].

<sup>24</sup> Moreover, Macron's visit to Moscow was part of the electoral calendar of the upcoming presidential elections in France and was certainly aimed at weakening the far-right political party (National Rally) and his main opponent, M. Le Pen, who enjoyed the support of the Kremlin.

defensive equipment and readiness to deploy additional units on NATO's eastern flank (the Baltic states).<sup>25</sup>

## Conclusions

- Since 2015, France (together with Germany) has been involved in the process of mediation and settlement of the conflict in the Donbas within the Normandy Format (N4) and the implementation of the Minsk agreements. French diplomacy has repeatedly stressed the integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, while pointing out the need to develop guarantees for its security that would be compatible with the postulates made by Russia. In the opinion of Paris, the progressive decomposition and erosion of the international deal, as well as the persistent tensions and the *status quo* in relations with the Kremlin authorities, necessitated the need for dialogue with Russia – from the perspective of Paris, an important interlocutor in many areas of the international agenda (Syria, Libya, Ukraine, Sahel). At the same time, France also tried to use the Normandy Format and direct Macron-Putin communication channels to strengthen its own position on the international arena.
- President Macron, striving to tighten direct political dialogue with Moscow, presented on the European arena an initiative to build a 'new architecture of security in Europe' with Russia's participation. This is because he believed that confrontation with Russia would condemn the EU to political and military dependence on the United States. Therefore, the French leader made efforts to convince his most sceptical partners (Poland, the Baltic States, Sweden, Romania) to this idea. However, the desire to normalise relations with Russia, in the absence of tools to put pressure on the Kremlin authorities, meant that Paris also exerted pressure on Kiev to obtain concessions in the ongoing negotiations of the N4. This leads to the conclusion that the French 'Eastern Policy' towards Russia was unable to find the effective way between Ukrainian building aspirations and Russian interests in the Europe.
- French diplomacy declared its readiness to work out a solution that would offer guarantees to all parties in the conflict, both Ukraine (security guarantees) and Russia (hold up NATO eastern enlargement). However, the restrained tone of Paris and Berlin towards Moscow and the search for a compromise did not bring any lasting commitment from V. Putin and did not have a restraining effect on the Kremlin's aggressive rhetoric. In neither capital it was expected that the Russian leader would reject the offer of a peaceful settlement of the conflict. This

<sup>25</sup> *Macron responds 'without weakness' to Russia's 'act of war'*, RFI, 24 February 2022, <https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20220224-macron-responds-without-weakness-to-russia-s-act-of-war> [accessed: 13 February 2023].

happened because, from the very beginning, the most important thing for Putin has been the implementation of Russia's geostrategic goals, i.e., freezing the *status quo* in the post-Soviet space by 'absorbing' Ukraine and keeping it within Russia's sphere of influence.

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*France towards the annexation of Crimea and the conflict  
in the Donbas between 2014 and 2022*

*Abstract*

The aim of this paper is to analyse France's actions in relation to the war in Ukraine between 2014 and 2022, based on three pillars: 1) providing support for Ukraine (cease-fire and cessation of military activities); 2) coordinating actions at the international level (TCG, UN, OSCE); 3) maintaining open channels of dialogue with Russia (Macron-Putin) as a pathway to diplomatic solutions. The paper is an attempt at assessing whether and to what extent the joint 'agenda of trust and security' proposed to Moscow by the President of France has influenced the policy of 'de-escalation' of the conflict and the reduction of Russia's neo-imperial ambitions. What were the effects of the dialogue within the so-called Normandy Format and to what extent did it influence the implementation of the Minsk agreements? The author presents the conclusion that from the very beginning, the goal for Russia has not been so much to settle the conflict in the Donbas and restore Ukraine's territorial integrity, but to permanently block Kiev's aspirations for EU accession and to keep Ukraine within Russia's sphere of influence. The references of the paper include official documents, statements from the main decision-making centres (the Élysée Palace, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of France), recognised foreign policy journals ("Politique étrangère"), as well as analyses and studies (French Institute of International Relations, IFRI).

Keywords: France, Normandy format, conflict, Donbas, diplomacy



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# France's unfailing support under economic influence

## Introduction

Historically, France has been considered the first modern democracy and has made European sovereignty its watchword. A staunch defender of its principles, France has intervened in the world, through all channels, to defend its principles. For the West, Ukraine is the vanguard of democracy and freedom, and it is therefore imperative to defend Ukraine against Russia.

Until the war, the international fight against terrorism was far from the French and European borders. Now, Russian territorial claims are at the doors of the European Union and NATO. Moreover, the threats are no longer the same, the traditional guerrilla warfare of recent conflicts has given way to a high-intensity war between two actors.

Despite the initial desire for appeasement through dialogue, France tried to set itself up as a mediator in the early days of the conflict. At that time, the goal was to maintain contact with Vladimir Putin in order to try to create conditions for future negotiations. However, the determination and inflexibility of the Kremlin did not allow the Élysée to dissuade him from this act.

This was a complicated position for France, which had bilateral relations with Ukraine and Russia. In 2014, Russia's invasion of Crimea complicated the relationship with France. Nevertheless, despite a violation of international law, Moscow remained a major economic partner for Paris. In fact, Russia has more than 500

French companies on its territory in key areas, including agribusiness, finance, distribution, energy, automotive, construction, transport, aerospace, and pharmaceuticals,<sup>1</sup> and is a major energy partner for France.

Moreover, diplomatic relations between France and Ukraine were born in 1992 together with Ukraine's independence but have become more dynamic since 2014. Bilateral relations between the two states are based on economic projects, making France the 10<sup>th</sup> world supplier to Ukraine and the 4<sup>th</sup> European supplier. French investments make France the 6<sup>th</sup> investor in the country. 160 French companies are established in Ukraine and employ approximately 30,000 people, making France the leading international employer in Ukraine.<sup>2</sup> In terms of cultural diplomacy, France continues to develop its cooperation with Ukraine through student exchanges, French alliances, artistic festivals, twinning, etc.

Economic interests are thus holding back relations between France and Russia but also between France and Ukraine. This is why taking sides with one over the other was not the preferred scenario at first. We note that the dissuasion undertaken by Emmanuel Macron during the calls to the Russian president was futile, as France has now sided with the European Union and NATO, thus advocating multilateralism.

## The strategy of multilateralism adopted by France

France is a country with a permanent seat on the UN Security Council thanks to a robust, credible, effective, and independent nuclear deterrent. Its role in international bodies is therefore crucial, making it possible to prevent a major war, to guarantee France's freedom of action and to preserve its vital interests which have a European and transatlantic dimension. France's nuclear deterrence thus contributes to security in Europe.

In 2022, during the French presidency of the Council of the European Union, France reiterated its desire for European defence and strategic autonomy. During the 6 months of its presidency, France put in place several actions in favour of Ukraine:

- reception of over 7.6 million Ukrainians,
- deployment of EUR 2 billion in military aid to support the Ukrainian army,
- EUR 2 billion to support the Ukrainian economy,
- granting EU candidate status to Ukraine,
- adoption of 6 sets of sanctions against Russia and Belarus.

<sup>1</sup> *Relations bilatérales Russie*, France Diplomatie, Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/russie/relations-bilaterales/> [accessed: 30 March 2023].

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

France is convinced that its partnerships and alliances are one of its main assets on the international scene, but also one of the targets intended to be weakened by its strategic competitors.<sup>3</sup>

The events in Ukraine were also an opportunity to reiterate its participation in NATO and its various partnerships. This multilateralism allows France to face the 'strategy of calling into question European security, of which the war against Ukraine on 24 February 2022 is the most open and brutal manifestation.'<sup>4</sup>

Nearly three years after President Emmanuel Macron said, '[w]hat we are experiencing is the brain death of NATO,' it would seem that the Elysée Palace has changed its view of the organisation in question. NATO now represents 'the foundation and essential framework for Europe's collective security.'<sup>5</sup> Now modelled on the NATO vision, France is inflexible in its negotiations with Putin and supports Kiev with the ambition that it will return to its pre-2014 borders.

## Humanitarian action implemented by France

In its National Strategic Review, France takes a clear position and states that 'the invasion of Ukraine by Russia on 24 February 2022 represents a strategic shift.' The consequences of this invasion encourage France to consolidate its alliances and modernise its defence tools.

According to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, since 24 February 2022, France has shown full solidarity with the Ukrainians. Its position is firm towards the Russian authorities. Initially, France showed its unwavering support for Ukrainian people by setting up initiatives at the level of the State, citizens, and communities in favour of Ukrainian displaced persons by taking them in during the first months following the war.

At the International Conference 'Solidarity with Ukrainian People' on 13 December 2022, France pledged immediate support to help the Ukrainians through the winter. France and other participants present at the conference guaranteed the infrastructure resilience in 5 key sectors, including access to energy, access to water, agri-food, health care, and transport. In addition, France has committed to providing and transporting the necessary equipment and carrying out the associated maintenance work (repairs, spare parts). France has put in place a flexible and responsive coordination mechanism to adjust the aid provided in real time

<sup>3</sup> *Revue nationale stratégique 2022*, Secrétariat Général de la Défense et de la Sécurité Nationale, pp. 25–97, Vie-publique.fr, [https://medias.vie-publique.fr/data\\_storage\\_s3/rapport/pdf/287163.pdf](https://medias.vie-publique.fr/data_storage_s3/rapport/pdf/287163.pdf) [accessed: 30 March 2023].

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 14.

to the needs expressed by Ukraine. The international contribution collected at this conference amounts to more than EUR 1 billion.<sup>6</sup>

France is indeed a key humanitarian country, its humanitarian aid totalled, as of 23 February 2023, EUR 320 million according to the Kiel Institute for the World Economy.

## French military support

French solidarity is demonstrated in many other ways, notably through a substantial military aid package of EUR 660 million.<sup>7</sup> Still considered the 7<sup>th</sup> largest military power in the world and the largest military power in Europe, France's role in the conflict was predictable.

However, the military aid provided in relation to its GDP<sup>8</sup> but also in relation to its military arsenal may call into question the unconditional support promised by France. Faced with the Russian army, which in 2022 had 850,000 soldiers and 250,000 reservists with a defence budget of USD 154 billion, the imbalance with Ukraine is total. One year later, the Ukrainian army is still holding out but is tired following repeated Russian offensives. The Russians, on the other hand, have a number of soldiers and are equipped with a powerful hybrid system with a substantial number of tanks, artillery, and small drones. Their industry provides a certain number of elements and replacements, which is not the case in Ukraine. This is why President Zelenskyy and his strategists are looking at all possible options and are closely examining the inventory of the allies: F-16, Mirage 2000, Rafale, CÆSAR, Leopard. In reality, France provides very little military equipment, Paris has already delivered 18 CÆSARs since the beginning of the conflict and still wants to deliver 12 others. France and its Allies wanted to provide a single type of uniform equipment to facilitate maintenance and training. The uniformity of the equipment is taken into account in the negotiations to facilitate the training of the Ukrainian troops, confirmed General Paloméros.

The scope of the military aid provided does not live up to the expectations and the reality on the ground because of this fear of becoming a cobelligerent in the

<sup>6</sup> *Conférence internationale « Solidaires du peuple ukrainien »*, France Diplomatie, Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/ukraine/guerre-en-ukraine-l-action-diplomatique-de-la-france/faire-face-a-l-urgence-humanitaire-et-economique-en-ukraine/article/conference-internationale-solidaires-du-peuple-ukrainien> [accessed: 19 March 2023].

<sup>7</sup> *Ukraine Support Tracker – A Database of Military, Financial and Humanitarian Aid to Ukraine*, Kiel Institute for the World Economy, 2023, <https://www.ifw-kiel.de/topics/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker/?cookieLevel=not-set> [accessed: 30 March 2023].

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

conflict. If France sends fighter planes or long-range missiles, it becomes a cobelligerent by providing Ukraine with the means to strike in Russia, so France would be officially considered as an enemy of Russia and no longer just a supporter of Ukraine.

France, with its 200,000 soldiers and 35,000 reservists, can therefore only intervene by secondary means to help Ukraine, by providing aid that would only be considered as secondary support by the Russians. Considered as the first army in Europe, France's role is decisive, but cannot impinge on its own defence either, as its means are limited. Although since 2017, France has been reinvesting in its army in the face of the 'disruption of global balances.'<sup>9</sup>

### A beneficial conflict for the French Defence Technology Industrial Base

Russia's invasion of Ukraine prompted France to consolidate its alliances and accelerate the modernisation of its defence apparatus while taking into consideration emerging threats without substituting for terrorism. France is aware that warfare has changed and is defined as hybrid and that it is now necessary to move to a war economy. The French Minister of the Armed Forces, Sébastien Lecornu, defines a war economy as 'producing more, faster, and at reasonable costs.'<sup>10</sup>

This strategy addresses several issues:

- continued support for Ukraine,
- supporting the French army model,
- strengthening France's export capacity,
- staying independent.

The first economic element stems from the support that France provides to Ukraine. Our defence tool is defined at a minimum in relation to our needs; it must now be supplied. France provides equipment which is now used, such as ammunition, guns, or drones, and which has a certain impact on our defence industry.

Minister Lecornu confirmed on 24 March 2023 that the first results arrived from our defence industry. Indeed, the Thales company will double its production of Ground Master radars. Nexter will double its production of CÆSAR howitzers. Delivery times have been reduced from 40 to 18 months. Concerning the production of Mistral missiles, MBDA will double the number to 40 units per month and will reduce the time to produce an Aster missile from 40 to 18 months.

<sup>9</sup> *Revue nationale stratégique* 2022, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Armement: livrer rapidement est devenu central, prévient Sébastien Lecornu*, Les Echos, 24 March 2023, <https://www.lesechos.fr/industrie-services/air-defense/armement-livrer-rapidement-est-devenu-central-previent-sebastien-lecornu-1918701> [accessed: 30 March 2023].

According to the former Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General Paloméros,<sup>11</sup> in terms of ammunition, the Ukrainians are spending twice as many artillery shells as the allies are able to produce. The Ukrainians are almost out of ammunition, it is necessary for their allies to feed this chain. In the eyes of the French Defence Technology Industrial Base, this demand was a real opportunity, since it was more a problem of production tools than a problem of research and technology: France produced what already existed.

This situation is a perfect opportunity for France to revive its defence industry. Beyond the positive effects from the economic point of view, the war in Ukraine also has positive effects on France's influence in terms of defence. The military aid provided by France has enabled it to promote its defence industry: the CÆSAR, the Crotales (surface-to-air missile) and the BONUS shell. The aid highlights French know-how in its ability to supply high-level equipment. There is also intangible aid which brings a lot, but which remains difficult to measure: intelligence.

## The opportunity for reconstruction in Ukraine

Every war brings destruction, and successive bombings by Russia have caused the destruction of infrastructure and residential buildings. The French Treasury estimates that 'in the Kiev region, 25,000 buildings have been damaged.'<sup>12</sup>

If France has considerable know-how in the field of Defence Technology Industrial Base, it also has know-how in the field of construction and public works and intends to take advantage of the destruction of Ukraine to highlight French know-how and position French companies that are leaders in their field to become involved in the reconstruction of Ukraine.

This project is a perfect follow-up to the Lugano conference on the reconstruction of Ukraine that took place in early July 2022. Ukrainian officials and their allies discussed the general principles of reconstruction, with a new USD 100 billion fund proposed by the European Investment Bank. The UK and Switzerland have also announced new bilateral aid, but with conditions such as the fight against corruption and the implementation of economic and social reforms. Western donors insist that the investments should not be free and that the necessary reforms to Ukraine's institutions are essential. The Lugano conference was also an opportunity

<sup>11</sup> General Jean Paul Paloméros is a French Air Force general who was Chief of Staff of the French Air Force from 2009 to 2012 and Commander of NATO's Allied Command Transformation from 2012 to 2015. He has since been regularly called upon by the French media, notably to talk about the war in Ukraine.

<sup>12</sup> *Lancement d'un FASEP pour aider la reconstruction de l'Ukraine en favorisant l'économie circulaire*, Direction générale du Trésor, 28 September 2022, <https://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/Articles/2022/09/28/lancement-d-un-fasep-pour-aider-la-reconstruction-de-l-ukraine-en-favorisant-l-economie-circulaire> [accessed: 30 March 2023].



for Europeans to clarify the reforms needed for Ukraine's accession to the European Union. Reconstruction in Ukraine must be structural and decentralised, with European institutions joining forces with similar institutions on the Ukrainian side to support reconstruction.

Ukraine thus seems to be the right place for France to set up its Fonds d'études et d'aide au secteur privé (FASEP), which is a grant to 'finance feasibility studies or the demonstration of innovative green technologies.'<sup>13</sup> This process takes place upstream of an infrastructure project.

From the French point of view, demonstrating French companies' efficiency in Ukraine would be a support mechanism for their internationalization. Based on a circular economy, France promises to reduce the costs and duration of reconstruction while valorising local waste materials. The aim is to then extrapolate this know-how to all buildings in the Kiev region and the rest of the country.

For example, the French company Néo-Eco aims for a world without waste and thus offers a recovery solution for all used materials while promoting a circular economy. Its main mission is to improve the profitability and credibility of its customers while reconciling the economy and the environment.<sup>14</sup>

The company is offering the following project to Hostomel: transform the materials from the deconstruction of weakened buildings into future raw materials for reconstruction. This project is therefore perfectly in line with the Kiev regional administration which considers it necessary to destroy 20% of structurally unstable buildings unusable because of the war. All this deconstruction before reconstruction may result in generating millions of tons of waste that will have to be disposed of.

This project is a 'French reference in the Ukrainian construction sector, demonstrating the ability of French companies to create innovative solutions and circular economy loops aimed at accelerating reconstruction efforts for the population by making use of immediately available resources.'<sup>15</sup>

## The consequences of the war

For now, the support of European and NATO countries has saved the idea of a sovereign, free and democratic Ukraine. The outcome of this war now depends on Ukraine's willingness to restore its full sovereignty over its territory and its original borders as authorised by the UN Charter.

<sup>13</sup> *Le FASEP*, Direction générale du Trésor, <https://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/services-aux-entreprises/le-fasep> [accessed: 30 March 2023].

<sup>14</sup> *Une équipe en place pour la reconstruction de l'Ukraine !*, Neo-Eco, 13 October 2022, <https://www.neo-eco.fr/post/une-equipe-en-place-pour-la-reconstruction-de-l-ukraine> [accessed: 24 March 2023].

<sup>15</sup> *Le FASEP*, *op. cit.*

According to General Paloméros,<sup>16</sup> Russia's presence as a permanent member of the UN Security Council paralyzes a potential settlement of the dispute, as Russia blocks all decisions contrary to its own interests. The only security guarantee left is NATO. This hypothesis will inevitably be on the negotiating table, since Ukraine will not resign the Budapest Memorandum whose meaning is no longer valid.

Russia is a great power, and it is possible that the conflict will end either by force of arms or by political will to partition Ukraine. If Ukraine gets away with a partition with the Donbas and Crimea, it will be fine, but it is possible that the situation might go further in Russia's favour. The other option would be for one side to win, but most likely it would be the Russians and that is not desirable. To ensure Ukrainian victory, even more equipment would have to be provided for as long as it takes, according to some US military leaders.

Former director of the IRSEM, Frédéric Charillon, believes that this conflict will be long. The fact that this conflict pits a nuclear power against a small power makes it impossible for Russia to lose even if it is weakened on the ground. The war could end up being a war of attrition waged by Russia at the expense of Ukraine, with the bombing of infrastructure vital for the country. A war of attrition might result in losing Western support and this would be the ideal scenario for the Kremlin. This is how the Deputy Chairman of the State Duma, Pyotr Tolstoy, states that: 'European solidarity brings deaths. Because of your help, the war has already lasted for a year.' It is true that if the West had not provided military supply, the war would be over today for lack of fighters and materials. The fact that the war is still continuing is fortunate for Ukraine, since the alternative would have been the loss of its sovereignty. Frédéric Charillon's analysis, which says that '[i]n the end, the multiplication of battles, of fronts, will end up costing Russia much more than it will demobilise the Western countries',<sup>17</sup> is perfectly in line with the fact that the union of European countries will not let Russia win this war 'completely.'

In the face of a war of attrition, there is another scenario envisaged by Charillon: that of escalation, according to which America supplies arms under the cover of NATO, which could incite the Kremlin to use nuclear weapons.

<sup>16</sup> J.-P. Paloméros, *Impact de la guerre en Ukraine sur la Transformation de l'Alliance*, « Revue défense nationale » 2023, no. 857: « 24 février 2022, un an après... (1/2) », pp. 56–60.

<sup>17</sup> C. Lopes, *Guerre en Ukraine : « La Russie est en train de perdre sur le terrain mais n'acceptera pas de perdre », l'analyse de Frédéric Charillon*, France 3 – Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, 13 January 2023, <https://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/auvergne-rhone-alpes/puy-de-dome/clermont-ferrand/guerre-en-ukraine-la-russie-est-en-train-de-perdre-sur-le-terrain-mais-n-acceptera-pas-de-perdre-2693018.html> [accessed: 22 March 2023].

## Conclusions

This high-intensity war led by Russia mobilises France, which positions itself behind American multilateralism. Geographically distant from Ukraine, France is minimally involved alongside Ukraine in order to avoid entering a conflict that does not concern it directly. Its commitment to NATO and the EU allows it to intervene indirectly in the conflict. The outcome of this war will have certain consequences for a new world order: a cold war with an iron curtain separating autocracies (Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Iran) from democracies. Guaranteeing the security of this new world order will be the key to any negotiations, but everything depends also on the future Ukrainian offensive in the spring. Ukraine has taken advantage of the last few months to recreate a dozen brigades and to recover a sufficient amount of equipment to launch a major counter-offensive to recover its lost territories. Depending on the outcome of this offensive, France's position may have to evolve because if Ukraine fails, it will be forced to negotiate ending the war with the Russians. France's position could then evolve from a firm stance against Russia to an open position to place itself at the centre of future negotiations between the two countries.

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### *France's unflinching support under economic influence*

#### *Abstract*

France has always prioritized firmness, dialogue, and solidarity in its relationship with Ukraine. In response to the conflict, France has taken on the role of a mediator, engaging in dialogue with the Russian leader in an attempt to discourage further aggression. Despite criticism from the international community, France has also provided military aid, including ammunition and cannons, as a demonstration of its expertise in armaments. Although the aid is minimal compared to its arsenal, France fears weakening and seeks to showcase its power. In addition, France has deployed personnel, including instructors for training purposes.

Demonstrating its commitment to solidarity, France has provided support in energy, food supply, water access, health care, and transport infrastructure to Ukraine, and reiterated its support at the international conference in December 2022. By contributing in these areas, France intends to play a valuable role in the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine, solidifying its position as a reliable partner in the process. Overall, France's commitment to Ukraine is clear, and its effective efforts are an indication of its intention to assist Ukraine in its time of need.

Keywords: solidarity, dialogue, minimal aid, weakening, reconstruction



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# Macron in praise of folly? How Macron's France seeks to gain from power vacuum during the war in Ukraine

## Introduction

France's diplomatic position has been raising eyebrows since the outbreak of the Ukrainian-Russian war. Supporting Zelensky both publicly and passionately while prudently 'leaving an open door' to diplomatic talks with Putin has now become the peculiar and heavily criticized official position of the Elysée. France likes to recall some symbolic traditions of rallying opponents since its 19<sup>th</sup>-century revolutions, but realistically, such public diplomacy seems insufficient in terms of protecting national interests through dialogue with both parties of the war, especially compared to the policy pursued by those who chose a third solution like China, Israel, or Turkey. Nostalgic researchers and political analysts found themselves digging into de Gaulle's powerful diplomatic argument: 'diplomacy of balance,'<sup>1</sup> the so-called exit from a bipolar world through balancing the interests of each bloc. However, beyond certain Gaullist references that the French President's communication has cleverly played on, the concept has fallen short of coherence with ongoing global dynamics, and in fact, has failed to result in the strong legitimacy that Paris likely sought. Whether Macron succeeded in convincing his people that he was the new de Gaulle remains doubtful.

<sup>1</sup> M. Barbero, *There's a Method to Macron's Madness. The French president wants to leave room for talks and carve out a bigger role for France*, "Foreign Policy", 15 June 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/06/15/macron-putin-france-russia-ukraine-war> [accessed: 30 July 2023].

To his detriment, this policy of 'at the same time' that he has showcased in his national and international agenda is a public diplomacy disaster. That said, when it comes to such failures of political communication, we should ask ourselves: what is there to gain? How did the conflict in Ukraine radically alter French diplomacy, and how was Paris forced to change its course with the war?

The answer to that question requires us to look at how the invasion generated opportunities for gaining power by transforming interstate relations. Above all, the global geopolitical and economic conditions have remained largely consistent since the outbreak of the war: 1) high inflation causing daily prices increase, accentuating polarization of the minds in Western countries, and destabilizing weaker states in Africa and the Middle East; 2) delineation of former political tensions between world or regional superpowers, relatively throttled back by mutualisation of financial risks on a world scale, revealing an anarchical structure of the international system in which narratives on 'free world' conflict and states' actions tend to diminish the hegemonic discourse of America. Thus, Macron's France definitely attempts to assert its own narrative on power. This essay is based on Henry Kissinger's claim that power, as decided by a narrow portion of leaders in each state, dominates the global structure<sup>2</sup> of neo-Gramscianism, neorealism, and especially the theory of offensive realism. The ante-war 'organic crisis'<sup>3</sup> of the US' hegemony exacerbated by the war has accelerated power vacuum dynamics. Therefore, weakened or isolated spaces fearing their power deletion and states capable of actualizing power reshape their mutual power relations, with or without integrating the hegemon in their calculations. This situation may refer to what Gilpin used to describe as 'rational calculation in the face of the evolution of the system is only within the reach of the Large, while the behaviour of small units will be structurally determined'.<sup>4</sup>

Macron's bet on this new chessboard is no different: maximizing power by ensuring gains from power vacuums at a moment of global uncertainty. The Russian invasion has profoundly changed power relations in which Paris was actively involved for its own benefit, mostly at three levels. The global impact on markets and the wakening of alliances has affected how states perceive the reliability of their connections. For this reason, we assume that Macron's diplomacy during the war equals to maximizing powers after evaluating the reliability of connections with other states. Three distinct domains of thought are then to be highlighted in the French rationale. This division into three 'levels' will assist us in proving that the war weakened the position

<sup>2</sup> H. Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace 1812–22*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Boston 1957, 376 p.

<sup>3</sup> T. Chodor, *A Nébuleuse for a New World Order? The G20 From a Neo-Gramscian Perspective*, [in:] *The G20 and International Relations Theory: Perspectives on Global Summity*, ed. S. Slaughter, Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, UK 2019, pp. 135–153.

<sup>4</sup> J.-F. Rioux, E. Keenes, G. Légaré, *Le néo-réalisme ou la reformulation du paradigme hégémonique en relations internationales*, « Études internationales » 1988, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 57–80.

of certain powers in politically cohesive spaces, and that France has attempted to step into power vacuums that emerged in these spaces. These three levels are: the EU, the French-privileged diplomatic spheres including France's former colonies, and the hegemon of the block France choose to join: the US. In each case, we will try to reconstruct the rationale the French government favours in these three areas and see the potential gains it aims at.

## France and Germany in the EU: the end of a lifelong coalition?

The first level and probably the most significant one to Macron pertains to the European Union (EU). The war produced significant economic and energy-related ramifications for Germany, a long-time French rival. Shaken internally due to its historical ties with Moscow and not even sparing the European 'Mutti,' but also Macron's France had the incredible timing of the French Presidency of the Council of the EU to assert a certain French advantage in Europe, and over Germany. The EU seems no longer governed by a duumvirate; the French presidency has unprecedentedly reinforced the French leadership in Brussels, despite various visions of the war between Western and Eastern Europe. Better yet, Macron has finally been able to seize the opportunity and advocate for his dearest project of a 'European Defence.'<sup>5</sup> The invasion of Ukraine generated not only a power vacuum, but also a window of opportunity for France to gain recognition as a leader on the European stage.

While Berlin has been profoundly shaken by the political and economic effects of the war, the German crisis opened the door for Paris to take on a leadership role in the EU economy, a long-time object of competition between the two countries.<sup>6</sup> However, seeking a certain advantage over Germany seems to be a delicate game for Macron. Taking over leadership is less a matter of vanquishing your adversary than making them depend on you. From an economic-political perspective, Macron has therefore employed multiple strategies. First, the French aid to export electricity to EU members such as the ARENH plan at the beginning of the war, as well as exporting water during summer droughts (with the water level in the Rhine so low that it had threatened German maritime transport), quickly strengthened France's dominant position. Second, a rebound of the German economy would be a disaster due to direct effects on the French economy in the current European economic structure. It means that, as we will see on a more political level, when the Elysée Palace

<sup>5</sup> B. Szewczyk, *Macron's European Vision Crashed and Burned in Ukraine. A grand intellectual edifice has collapsed under the weight of its own contradictions*, "Foreign Policy", 08 April 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/04/08/macron-putin-france-russia-ukraine-europe-sovereignty-strategy> [accessed: 20 March 2023].

<sup>6</sup> P.-E. Thomann, *Le couple franco-allemand et la dimension géopolitique de la crise de l'euro*, « Hérodote » 2013, no. 151, pp. 39–59.

defines its leadership in the world as European, it assumes duties of representation of the German states in its stead. The most convincing example was the Davos Forum during which France voiced its economic interests as well as the Germans' by disparaging the US Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and green subventions. Generally, the expression of this influence-seeking by France tends to benefit France and Germany themselves and finds its roots in a certain questioning of the dependence on the US, a position even presented in the 'road map for competing with American green subsidies' set out by the EU executive body in February 2023.<sup>7</sup>

Obviously, these apparent mutual gains face realistic limits. As of 13 March 2023, Paris considers the protectionist policies on motor industries in Germany 'dangerous,'<sup>8</sup> but less than two weeks later, 'Germany and France steal the show – again'<sup>9</sup> as EU leaders hope to focus on the economy and foreign affairs at the Euro Summit, on 24 March 2023. The French intentions seem obvious for other EU members that reproach a division between wealthy member states and those less able or inclined to spend on industry support. "Politico" estimates that 'it will probably be 25 to 2 at the EU summit in Brussels'.<sup>10</sup> The Franco-German rapprochement is a welcome change because a strong Franco-German axis has always been central to the proper functioning of the EU, but some believe that the threat of the IRA is being exaggerated, particularly by France in order to push its agenda.

Involved in the concept of 'European strategic autonomy,' Macron initiated a broad common security plan of a similar design. In December 2022, Macron called again for reducing France's dependence on the US for its security while still insisting that it was not proposing an alternative to NATO. Such declarations are not new: they echo an ambition asserted already in 2017. However, they manifest a vision mostly upheld by France only. The previously mentioned project of autonomy includes dialogues with Russia, China, and Turkey, with the idea of not leaving diplomatic monopoly to the last two.<sup>11</sup> Once again, this attempt on European defence under a French paradigm demonstrates power seeking after the war created a new sense of need, rather than

<sup>7</sup> K. Mackrael, *EU Sets Out Options to Compete With U.S. Green Subsidies*, The Wall Street Journal, 01 February 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/eu-sets-out-options-to-compete-with-u-s-green-subsidies-11675253742> [accessed: 30 July 2023].

<sup>8</sup> J. Posaner, G. Leali, H. von der Burchard, *France attacks 'dangerous' German effort to change EU car engine rules*, "Politico", 13 March 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/france-attack-dangerous-germany-effort-change-eu-car-combustion-engine/> [accessed: 20 March 2023].

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>10</sup> S. Lynch, B. Moens, S. Stolton, *France and Germany go it alone as EU summit prepares to tackle fightback against US*, "Politico", 08 February 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/france-and-germany-go-it-alone-as-eu-leaders-meet/> [accessed: 20 March 2023].

<sup>11</sup> N. Bisserbe, S. Meichtry, *France's Macron Calls on Europe to Reduce Reliance on U.S. for Security*, "The Wall Street Journal", 21 December 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/macron-renews-call-for-russia-to-receive-security-guarantees-to-end-war-in-ukraine-11671627645> [accessed: 20 March 2023].



a common agreement. The attempts to negotiate with Putin, rejected by the Russian leader, triggered criticisms of Kiev and the Baltic States against President Macron for his call for security guarantees for Russia.<sup>12</sup>

## France in the world: a power in triumph or disintegration?

Strategic areas for French-privileged diplomatic spheres remain on the second level. International consequences of the war have transformed the French project. On the one hand, it has been quite disappointing that few have correlated the end of the Barkhane operation in Sahel with the ongoing conflict in Caucasasia. Africa was yesterday's display of the French military force; today, it is Europe. And witnessing Wagner's barbarity is only one striking consequence of the French withdrawal from the region. On the other hand, it is certainly impossible not to notice the renewed French diplomatic efforts with the Gulf States, clearly shifting in a direction different from the one prior to the war and in favour of a closer rapprochement with country leaders who are not properly aligned with the belligerents in the Ukraine war. For instance, whereas the Elysée was an active proponent of a new JCPOA, whose chances are highly diminished by Khamenei's policy inside and outside Iran's borders, it is now all about dealing with a surge in energy prices and engaging in talks with the Arab monarchies. Macron showed off his 'personal relationships' with emirs many times,<sup>13</sup> including the Saudi heir Prince, Mohammed bin Salman, ostracized since Khashoggi's murder.<sup>14</sup>

Africa, especially the Maghreb and the Western areas, has constituted the sphere of the most profound changes regarding the French presence in the world. Since the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the French project, widely involved in military operations against terrorism in the Sahel, has significantly reduced. Two dynamics need to be outlined. First, the invasion of Ukraine and Russia's retrieving states partners have steered the Kremlin to rapprochement with African counterparts, all this to the detriment of France, relying on historical bounds until now. In fact, the bottom-line is crystal clear: Russian mercenaries from the Wagner group are pushing France out of the Central African Republic (CAR). The group's propaganda has a clear target: Paris. A report by the French group All Eyes on Wagner and

<sup>12</sup> M. Crowley, M. Shear, *U.S. Sees Little Prospect for Ukraine Talks with Putin After Biden Offer*, "The New York Times", 2 December 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/02/us/politics/biden-putin-ukraine-talks.html> [accessed: 21 March 2023].

<sup>13</sup> B. Surk, M. Macpherson, *France, United Arab Emirates sign deal on energy cooperation*, AP News, 18 July 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-biden-france-7532af3426ce-8067375a54253829c75d> [accessed: 22 March 2023].

<sup>14</sup> R. Noack, K. Fahim, *Saudi crown prince engages in long handshake with Macron on rehabilitation tour*, "The Washington Post", 28 July 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/07/28/mbs-macron-france-khashoggi/> [accessed: 22 March 2023].

the British group Dossier Centre pointed out that Wagner forces Central African miners to transfer or sell exclusively to its shell company Diamville, in violation of conventions prohibiting diamond trading in conflict zones. Yevgeny Prigozhin accuses E. Macron of being the owner of Diamville via a henchman, and NATO of being responsible for the 'racket' by units called S DFA. These actions are only meant to advance Russia's geopolitical objectives in Africa by capitalizing on 'divisions between African governments and their traditional allies in Europe.'<sup>15</sup> Consequently, the resentment toward the French government and the threat of Wagner grow: the expulsion of the French ambassador to Burkina Faso last January equals to a high potential of implantation of Russian mercenaries.<sup>16</sup>

Second, this Russian-African rapprochement has naturally alerted the US in a context of intensifying great power rivalry; the American position echoes the Cold War, a comparison that the Biden administration wants to avoid in order to present Africa as a valued partner and not a pawn in the power struggle. In Chad, for instance, the US are escalating the rivalry between Russia and Chad through sharing sensitive intelligence about the President of Chad, who was targeted for assassination by Russian mercenaries. The United States are asserting its position in the region in order to consolidate the shaky position of France, which has ceded ground to Russia. Nevertheless, in the fight for the power vacuum left by France in the region, E. Macron's tour of Africa did not turn out to be successful. If the objective was to shed the cloak of paternalism and absolute security, 'France cannot simply win in Africa.'<sup>17</sup> One should recall that three of the four visited countries abstained from the recent UN voting condemning Russia. In sum, E. Macron produced mixed results in Africa, where Russia seemingly gains traction.<sup>18</sup>

That said, Macron's foreign policy in the Middle East may turn out more positive. In addition to relative closeness in bilateral relations with the Gulf monarchies, reinforced by the energy crisis, it is important to notice recent evolutions. Whereas the France-Iran relations, as said earlier, deteriorated due to the implication of Iranian military support to Russia in Ukraine, the Iranian case has recently given opportunities for the French government to wield a proclaimed 'independency of thoughts'

<sup>15</sup> J. Ling, *Russian Mercenaries Are Pushing France Out of Central Africa*, "Foreign Affairs", 18 March 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/03/18/russian-mercenaries-are-pushing-france-out-of-central-africa/> [accessed: 22 March 2023].

<sup>16</sup> A. Aboa, T. Ndiaga, *France eyes Ivory Coast after Burkina Faso boots out French troops*, Reuters, 21 February 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/france-eyes-ivory-coast-after-burkina-faso-boots-out-french-troops-2023-02-20/> [accessed: 22 March 2023].

<sup>17</sup> P. Taylor, *Macron's Africa reset struggles to persuade*, "Politico", 13 March 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/france-emmanuel-macron-africa-reset-strategy-francafrique/> [accessed: 30 July 2023].

<sup>18</sup> C.P. Clarke, *How Russia's Wagner Group Is Fueling Terrorism in Africa*, "Foreign Affairs", 25 January 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/01/25/russia-wagner-group-africa-terrorism-mali-sudan-central-african-republic-prigozhin/> [accessed: 23 March 2023].

detached from Russia, China, or the US – as ‘a power should have.’<sup>19</sup> For instance, during his official visit to Beijing, President Macron had a chance to meet Saudi and Iranian delegates after the resumption of diplomatic relations between both states. This non-alignment position toward the US position has sometimes been seen as an affront to the White House. France has tended to join progressively this non-alignment since February 2022. The Ukrainian war allowed this paradigm as a possibility by drastically shifting the power relations in the Middle East in favour of the local countries and deteriorating the US influence. Their desire for independence generates a need to substitute the US, and therefore presents France with economic opportunities which could be obtained by presenting a similar rhetoric of independence.<sup>20</sup>

### Neither Ukraine, nor Russia: looking towards America

Finally, the Ukrainian war has enabled Paris to revive its relations with Washington, which sometimes has allowed France to attempt to stand on the same power level. Ironically, France has not gained substantially from its ‘sometimes ambiguous’ diplomatic position in its relations with the two belligerents. Mostly, it has become the main partner for the US obliged to collaborate with France in certain areas. Some have even concluded that the AUKUS scandal is now behind. Macron stands as *the* European counterpart.<sup>21</sup> For example, headlines on the day following his re-election did not concentrate on his victory over Le Pen, but rather on his newly reinstated role as a leader of Europe.<sup>22</sup> His recent state visit to the White House, only four months after his coming to the UN, is no coincidence. This legitimacy the Biden Administration entrusted in him recalls a traditional strategy of the US foreign policy of ‘special election’ in US’ interest-bounded countries – countries the US has selected to delegate actions fostering their interest in these countries’ neighbourhood.<sup>23</sup> Just like the original one, this new Marshall Plan sometimes lacks realism.

<sup>19</sup> S. Mabrouk, *Bruno Le Maire: «Le président a parfaitement raison de réclamer la souveraineté européenne»*, Europe 1 [interview], 11 April 2023, <https://www.europe1.fr/emissions/l'interview-politique-de-8h20/bruno-le-maire-le-president-a-parfaitement-raison-de-reclamer-la-souverainete-europeenne-4177208> [accessed: 12 April 2023].

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>21</sup> Z. Montague, *White House to Host Biden's First State Visit*, “The New York Times”, 26 September 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/26/us/politics/biden-macron-state-visit.html> [accessed: 23 March 2023].

<sup>22</sup> D. Herszenhorn, J. Barigazzi, *EU celebrates, and frets, over Macron's victory*, “Politico”, 25 April 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-celebrates-and-frets-over-macrons-victory/> [accessed: 23 March 2023].

<sup>23</sup> M. Jourdain, C. Belin, *Biden and Macron's Historic Opportunity: How France and the United States Can Solidify Their Alliance*, “Foreign Affairs”, 28 November 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/bidens-and-macrons-historic-opportunity> [accessed: 23 March 2023].

Macron is still working for his own interests, not those of the US – or is it the price the White House is willing to pay? Indeed, Macron is not satisfied with simple foreign recognition and perhaps never will be. With strong support now behind him, Macron is adopting an unwavering approach in order not only to reach the top, but also to knock out the current superpowers. If the media find it alarming or slightly arrogant, Macron tends to show he could do better than Biden, especially in the Middle East. Whispering secret information during the G7 summit, inviting Mohammed bin Salman to Paris while US leading newspapers declared the Prince's backstabbing on oil, calling Putin on a regular basis... Macron envisions himself more than just a counterpart: he wills to run a superpower that can do what a post-Trump US diplomatically cannot.

Macron's state visit in the US in December 2022 demonstrated his approach. There, Macron's actions or their perception indirectly make his aims, or even the opportunities, possible in the current context. Above all, press coverage particularly emphasized the unwavering France-US 'friendship,' with a strong attention to high standards during the visit that cause many to wonder why France would receive such a treatment contrary to other states' leaders. In addition to these ceremonies usually implemented for leaders of equal powers, Macron's speeches expressed certain seeking for power, made possible thanks to geopolitical concerns and the US' 'organic crisis,' such as the 'convergence of interests in Africa,' the 'required moderation' of Twitter, and even Thomas Pesquet's proposal for a NASA-matching operation, with space remaining a symbol of US' supremacy over the world since the Cold War. Moreover, Macron even spoke in a 'threatening tone' sometimes, be it on potential 'freeze' of US assets in the case of application of the IRA and critique of excessively mobilizing protectionist measures, and publicly differed on geopolitical topics such as Ukraine, the end of the war, being proponent of direct discussions with V. Putin, and the crisis touching China and Taiwan.<sup>24</sup> A strategy we know now to be an active preparation for the non-alignment position the Elysée displays. Macron left the White House unanimously depicted as the 'European leader,' the first counterpart in Europe.<sup>25</sup>

Four months later, his applauded boldness leaves a bitter taste for the Biden Administration. Journalists penned critical pieces on the President's visit to China on 4 April 2023, pointing out that the Europeans believe they can change Xi Jinping's mind on Russia: 'Europe somehow believes it can talk China out of deepening ties with Russia. And that impression — shared above all by France's President Emmanuel Macron — is of course what Beijing most desires, as it will look

<sup>24</sup> B. McCandless Farmer, *Macron on war crimes, Taiwan, and Putin's ambitions*, CBS News, 04 December 2022, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/emmanuel-macron-war-crimes-taiwan-putin-60-minutes-2022-12-04/> [accessed: 23 March 2023].

<sup>25</sup> G. Debinski, *Can Macron Woo Biden?*, GZERO Media, 02 December 2022, <https://www.gzero-media.com/can-macron-woo-biden> [accessed: 23 March 2023].

to exploit even the tiniest of transatlantic rifts.<sup>26</sup> A couple of weeks before, the American media were closely watching Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's tour of Europe, with Foreign Policy noting that he began it with a meeting with President Macron.<sup>27</sup> The non-alignment the Elysée proclaimed will definitely alter the French trustworthiness in the US' eyes. Some analysts have announced the 'era of Europe First',<sup>28</sup> others have criticized Joe Biden's America First policy, such as Edward Alden, who fears a 'widening gap with Europe',<sup>29</sup> After months of 'strategic intimacy' with world leaders, this position has reinforced the impression of miscalculation<sup>30</sup>. This rapprochement could bear fruit for Macron, as in this way, he might ensure commercial advantages with China, on which France is commercially dependent, after months of being the favoured European counterpart for the US, while America feels the urgency to decouple its economy from China in the perspective of a potential war in the Pacific and hegemonic replacement.

### A final word: is striking a balance between two extremes really a virtue?

Elaborating this article required introducing numerous corrections as policy changes were carried out almost weekly by President Macron and his government. However, subdividing the research into three areas was the Planck constant. Despite all the historical contingents, the invasion of Ukraine has deeply modified power positions on the international scene and therefore states adjusted their aims and their own power-seeking calculations. Trying to fill diplomatic power vacuums<sup>31</sup> left on the world

<sup>26</sup> S. Lau, P. Kine, *Xi's 3 EU magi — Huawei scoop — Biden's democracy summit*, "Politico", 07 April 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/newsletter/china-watcher/xis-3-eu-magi-huawei-scoop-bidens-democracy-summit/> [accessed: 08 April 2023].

<sup>27</sup> J. Cheng, *China Is Starting to Act Like a Global Power*, "The Wall Street Journal", 22 March 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-has-a-new-vision-for-itself-global-power-da8dc559> [accessed: 08 April 2023].

<sup>28</sup> B. Moens, H. von der Burchard, *Europe First: Brussels gets ready to dump its free trade ideals*, "Politico", 05 December 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/ursula-von-der-leyen-joe-biden-trade-europe-first-brussels-gets-ready-to-dump-its-free-trade-ideals/> [accessed: 08 April 2023].

<sup>29</sup> E. Alden, *Biden's 'America First' Policies Threaten Rift With Europe*, "Foreign Policy", 05 December 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/12/05/biden-ira-chips-act-america-first-europe-eu-cars-ev-economic-policy> [accessed: 30 July 2023].

<sup>30</sup> B. Moens, H. von der Burchard, *op. cit.*; J.A. Tarquinio, *Macron's Gone From 'Strategic Autonomy' to 'Strategic Intimacy'*, "Foreign Affairs", 05 December 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/12/05/macron-biden-france-state-visit-europe-economy-energy-natural-gas/> [accessed: 08 April 2023].

<sup>31</sup> This vision of French diplomacy is not new. Highly implemented during Jacques Chirac's presidencies (S. Taylor, *Power vacuum at the heart of Europe?*, "Politico", 19 April 2000, <https://www.politico.eu/article/power-vacuum-at-the-heart-of-europe> [accessed: 08 April 2023]), by whom E. Macron claims to be inspired, seeking and filling power vacuums is a regular

chessboard by its European neighbour Germany and, up to some point, by the US, Macron's France looks irrational at first sight. It is not. Reaching out to countries in which the US hegemonic power seems to decline might pay off on the condition that the US discerns tensions between them (among others Saudi Arabia, Russia, and China). Yet, nothing ensures that such a plan will be efficient or sustainable.

New opportunities for French diplomacy during the conflict might shortly face internal limits. Analysis tends to underestimate the internal pressures as a parameter of sustainability of decisions, even on a global scale. For the French voters who do not necessarily share his visions, Macron does not properly assess the widespread economic fatigue – notably for low and middle-classes. Still, money remains the sinews of war, be it military or diplomatic. France, like the states instead of which it wills to fill power, is suffering from inflation and energy prices, and the future of the EU will not be bright for all its members if its economic powers cannot stay afloat. In the short term, France hardly seems economically prepared for assuming the role of a superpower. Moreover, Le Pen herself starts to find foreign partners out of reach for Macron, such as in Africa, Eastern Europe, and Asia. In sum, Macron's diplomatic ambitions are facing inner pressure. The French may support their new 'Napoleon,' while this trait provokes criticism toward his Neronian ego and his 'political impuissance.' It is quite easy to explain the paradoxes and the apparent boldness when sources close to him reveal his 'dreams' of the Nobel Peace Prize as the French Obama. The recent retirement pensions crisis reveals much of the rationale behind the philosophy of the 'at the same time:' obtaining as much room for maneuver as possible by establishing no clear directions, which undermines a fragile understanding, exacerbates a crisis of trust and degradation of political legitimacy, or the risks of potential ousting of the partners, and increases contradictions in the future.

As far as our original questions are concerned, we must conclude that the French bet on unpredictability is a double-edged sword: it benefits from an impression of surprise that could be considered power while ensuring publicity, but it always produces mixed outcomes. Explaining this policy choice through neorealism helps to see some gains, but always to the detriment of trust in the main partners, more reluctant to cooperate if not obliged. The consistent criticism from the US and Eastern Europe of the French ambiguity shows proof of potential damage to relations that are still necessary for France. Moreover, the emergence of 'autonomy' in the French public discourse seem to assert rightfully how we will need to define power as 'strategic autonomy' in a globalized world. Yet, without *kairos* – a talent to seize opportunities at the right time, such an approach appears to fragilize the

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strategy in French diplomacy. A recent declaration of the current French Foreign Minister on Lebanon has even made the concept of power vacuum a public communication tool (N. Housari, *French foreign minister warns Lebanon cannot risk 'power vacuum'*, Arab News, 14 October 2022, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2181221/%7B%7B> [accessed: 08 April 2023]).

positions of partners more than adversaries at a time when partners should be encouraged to cooperate.

Macron's calculations are surely rational, but are they reasonable? Kissinger has proven that the field of international relations is essentially intertwined with the psychologies of world leaders. The choice of ambiguity does not emerge from a public demand but results from the decision of a few persons. During interviews with ambassadors, some confided to me their own surprise at a lack of listening at the Elysée Palace. Speculations aside, the Gaullist 'diplomacy of balance' helped France obtain tools of global power such as the nuclear weapons during the Cold War. However, today, the 'at the same time' policy seems to constitute a subterfuge easy to play by ear, without the need to announce a real long-term plan or to have to formulate a cohesive perspective that the opposition would constantly tackle.

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*Macron in praise of folly? How Macron's France seeks to gain from power vacuum during the war in Ukraine*  
**Abstract**

The Russian invasion has profoundly changed major power relations in which Paris was actively involved to the benefit of the latter, mostly at three levels. The first level, probably the most significant in Macron's mind, is the European one. Not only did the economic and energy-related repercussions of the conflict put down the eternal German rival, shaken internally due to its historical ties with Moscow and not even sparing the European 'Mutti', but Macron's France also had the incredible timing of the French Presidency of the Council of the EU to assert a certain French advantage in Europe, and over Germany. The EU seems no longer governed by a duumvirate; the French presidency has unprecedentedly reinforced the French leadership in Brussels, despite various visions of the war between Western and Eastern Europe. Better yet, Macron has finally been able to seize the opportunity and advocate for his dearest project of a 'European Defence'.

Strategic areas for French-privileged diplomatic spheres remain at the second level. International consequences of the war have transformed the French project. On the one hand, it has been quite disappointing that few have correlated the end of the Barkhane operation in Sahel with the ongoing conflict in Caucasia. On the other hand, it is certainly impossible not to notice the renewed French diplomatic efforts with the Gulf States, clearly shifting in a direction different from the one prior to the war and in favour of a closer rapprochement with country leaders who are not properly aligned with the belligerents in the Ukraine war. Finally, the Ukrainian war has enabled Paris to revive its relations with Washington, not to mention an attempt to stand at the same power level.

Keywords: Macron, French diplomacy, power vacuum, neorealism, Ukraine war





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# The impact of the Ukrainian war on Lebanon: a glimpse of light at the end of the tunnel

## Introduction

Once described as the Switzerland of the Middle East, Lebanon has been struggling because of major political, economic and social problems since 2019 due to wide-spread corruption and sectarianism in the country. For example, over the last 4 years, the Lebanese pound has lost around 98% of its value leading to unprecedented poverty and inflation in the country.<sup>1</sup> In addition to all of those difficulties, the Russo-Ukrainian War (2022) rubbed salt into the wound by further aggravating the economic situation in the country. Despite all the catastrophic consequences of the invasion, Lebanon has also benefited from the war since it has finally been able to delimit its maritime borders with Israel. This paper will explain the political position of the Lebanese government during the war, the economic difficulties the invasion caused to the social and economic situation in Lebanon, and also the opportunities enabling the country to solve some of its most complicated diplomatic issues.

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<sup>1</sup> B. Mroue, *Protests in Lebanon as Pound Hits New Low against Dollar*, AP News, 21 March 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/lebanon-pound-dollar-economy-crisis-ecce2e-773fa8c7f94090ebd67bf7d55a> [accessed: 25 March 2023].

## Lebanon's political stance regarding the Russo-Ukrainian war

Lebanon is a sectarian country and adopts a consociational democracy.<sup>2</sup> In other words, all major sects participate in the decision-making process in the government regardless of the election results. Therefore, Lebanon does not have a clear foreign policy vector. Hezbollah and its allies have a strong relationship with the Islamic Republic of Iran and with Syrian Arab Republic and a tense relationship with the Arab Gulf and Western countries since Hezbollah accuses them of supporting Israel. On the other hand, other political parties in the government constantly criticize Iran and accuse it of being a destabilizing factor in the country, and those political parties advocate for a solid relationship with the West instead.

When the Russo-Ukrainian war broke out on 24 February 2022, the international community was surprised that Lebanon was the first Arab country to condemn the invasion and to appeal to Russia to immediately withdraw its troops from Ukraine. In addition, Lebanon has officially backed all UN resolutions denouncing the Russian attack on Ukraine.<sup>3</sup> The Lebanese Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdallah Bou Habib clarified the position of his ministry by stating that Lebanon was against any invasion targeting other countries, especially that Lebanon itself was invaded and occupied by both Syria and Israel in the last couple of decades.<sup>4</sup> However, Lebanon did not take any further steps (like imposing sanctions) against Russia due to the opposition of Hezbollah and the Free Patriotic Movement. Even Bou Habib mentioned that the position of Lebanon was only a gesture which was not aimed at aggravating the situation with the Russian Federation adding that: 'We are keen on common interests and bilateral relations with Moscow.'<sup>5</sup>

Despite the initial diplomatic rift between the two countries, both Lebanon and the Russian Federation maintain a good relationship with each other. For example, on 30 March 2023, the Lebanese ambassador to Moscow Shawki Bou Nassar indicated that Russia was willing to send 25 thousand tonnes of wheat and 10 thousand tonnes of fuel to Lebanon free of charge. Bou Nassar added that Russia was inclined to support Lebanon in overcoming its deep economic crisis.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> J. Maloney, *An Appraisal of Consociationalism in Lebanon*, McGill Journal of Political Studies, 06 December 2020, <https://mjps.ssmu.ca/2020/12/06/an-appraisal-of-consociationalism-in-lebanon/> [accessed: 20 February 2023].

<sup>3</sup> *Russia Says It Is Surprised by Lebanon's Condemnation of Invasion*, Reuters, 25 February 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-says-it-is-surprised-by-lebanons-condemnation-invasion-2022-02-25/> [accessed: 03 January 2023].

<sup>4</sup> *Lebanon's Position on Ukraine Should Not Affect Ties with Moscow – Envoy*, "Reuters", 27 February 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/lebanons-position-ukraine-should-not-affect-ties-with-moscow-envoy-2022-02-27/> [accessed: 03 January 2023].

<sup>5</sup> *Bou Habib Says Aoun, Miaqti Supported Statement Condemning Russia*, Naharnet, 01 March 2022, <https://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/288214> [accessed: 04 January 2023].

<sup>6</sup> *Russian Wheat and Fuel to Beirut*, IMLebanon, 30 March 2023, <https://www.imlebanon.org/2023/03/30/wheat-russia-lebanon44433/> [accessed: 30 March 2023].

As for the Lebanese public, the Russian invasion of Ukraine divided the society between those who defended Russia (usually Hezbollah supporters and their allies) accusing 'the imperialists' (the US) of meddling in the affairs of other sovereign countries and triggering wars against them (as it happened in Iraq and Afghanistan), while others (Hezbollah opponents) blamed Russia of invading Ukraine in order to overthrow its democratically elected government.

For example, after two weeks of the Lebanese condemnation of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the leader of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, strongly criticized the Lebanese government for taking a pro-Ukrainian stance and even accused the government of obeying the commands of the US Embassy in Beirut without any reservation. For example, Nasrallah claimed that the Foreign Ministry's statement 'not only took the US stance but was written at the American Embassy'<sup>7</sup> (March, 2022). Furthermore, Nasrallah further criticized the biased position of the international community by saying: 'What about all the war that the US has waged in Afghanistan and Iraq? What about the Israeli crimes in Palestine?'<sup>8</sup>

## The economic impacts of the Russo-Ukrainian war on Lebanon

Lebanon has been very badly impacted by the Russo-Ukrainian war for several reasons:

- 1) Lebanon is suffering from major economic problems partially caused by the presence of a huge number of Syrian refugees on its territory. Since 2011, more than 2 million Syrian refugees have fled the war and settled in Lebanon, causing massive social and economic unrest in the country. Despite the support of the UN agencies, Lebanon has been unable to cope with the pressure of Syrian refugees on the Lebanese economy, especially that Lebanon has the most refugees in the world per 1000 inhabitants.<sup>9</sup> The Russo-Ukrainian war and the focus of Western countries on the humanitarian situation in Ukraine could further deteriorate the economic situation of Syrian refugees and of the host country (Lebanon), especially if the budget allocated to Syrian refugees decreases in the future.
- 2) Starting from October 2019, Lebanon's economy has collapsed totally. In 2021, the World Bank referred to the Lebanese economic collapse as one of the worst

<sup>7</sup> *Hezbollah Chief Blasts Lebanon's Response to Russia-Ukraine Conflict*, L'Orient-Le Jour, 08 March 2023, <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1293013/hezbollah-chief-blasts-lebanons-response-to-russia-ukraine-conflict.html> [accessed: 21 March 2023].

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>9</sup> N. McCarthy, *Lebanon Has by Far the Most Refugees per 1,000 Population*, Statista, 19 June 2019, <https://www.statista.com/chart/8800/lebanon-has-by-far-the-most-refugees-per-capita/> [accessed: 20 February 2023].

financial crises since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup> The national currency (the Lebanese pound) has lost more than 95% of its value thus significantly decreasing the purchasing power of the locals. The Russo-Ukrainian War and inflation of wheat and fuel products prices further deteriorated the situation in Lebanon. Since the end of the civil war in 1990, the Lebanese government has adopted an economic system relying exclusively on the banking and services sectors. The agriculture and industry sectors were totally abandoned. Therefore, Lebanon relied heavily on imports (particularly wheat and energy products) to meet the needs of its citizens. In order to make these commodities affordable to the Lebanese citizens, the Lebanese Central Bank subsidized wheat and fuel. However, the rising costs of food and energy due to the Russo-Ukrainian War increased the pressure on the already exhausted Lebanese economy. The factor which aggravated the situation was the fact that Lebanon imported 85% of its wheat from Ukraine and the remaining 15% from Russia.

In an interview with the American Task Force on Lebanon, the Lebanese Minister of Economy, Amin Salam, confessed that Lebanon was passing through a catastrophic economic situation which could further affect the lives of vulnerable citizens. Salam openly asked for financial help from the international community to prevent hunger in the country. 'We want prices to go down or remain stable. If they go up, it'll be a disaster.'<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, the government has completely removed all subsidies for fuel products. Thus, the prices of petrol and diesel oil increased by 6,600% (as of March 2023), depriving a lot of households of heating and nearly causing the collapse of the transportation sector. (Lebanon's transportation sector relies heavily on individual cars/taxis, especially that the government has not development a public transportation system.)

3) Following the Russo-Ukrainian War, the attention of the international community was diverted from the Middle East towards Eastern Europe. Therefore, Lebanon, which was drowning in its political, economic and social problems, felt isolated. For example, following the 2019 economic crisis and the 2020 Beirut explosion, all of the big countries rushed to Lebanon to offer their support and to mediate between the different political parties in order to reach a political consensus. Additionally, following the 2020 Beirut explosion, French President Emmanuel Macron visited Lebanon twice in one month to offer support and encourage reforms

<sup>10</sup> *Lebanon Sinking into One of the Most Severe Global Crises Episodes, amidst Deliberate Inaction*, World Bank, 01 June 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/05/01/lebanon-sinking-into-one-of-the-most-severe-global-crises-episodes> [accessed: 03 January 2023].

<sup>11</sup> J. AbiNader, *Lebanon in the Middle of the Russia and Ukraine Conflict*, American Task Force on Lebanon, 04 March 2022, <https://www.atfl.org/lebanon-in-the-middle-of-the-russia-and-ukraine-conflict/> [accessed: 04 January 2023].

in order to receive financial aid from the international community, mainly the International Monetary Fund.<sup>12</sup> Macron continued to support Lebanon in 2021, when he personally mediated in forming the current Lebanese government. However, the Russo-Ukrainian war has shifted the priorities of the West. For example, in 2022 and 2023, Lebanon's economic and political situation extremely worsened but the attitude of the international community has been passive.

## Turning the Russo-Ukrainian crisis into an opportunity

Despite all the negative consequences of the Russo-Ukrainian War on Lebanon, this same crisis offered Lebanon an unprecedented opportunity to solve some of its diplomatic problems, thus becoming an oil producing/exporting country.

When Russian President Vladimir Putin launched his military operation in Ukraine, most western countries, and particularly the European Union, decided to impose sanctions on Russia. Therefore, most of the EU countries, especially Germany, took a very risky decision to decrease their purchase of Russian oil and gas and look for other providers. For example, many Eastern European countries resorted to Azerbaijani gas via the TANAP pipeline,<sup>13</sup> whereas some Western European countries resorted to Algeria, Qatar or even the United States of America to buy their much-needed hydrocarbons. In their search for new providers, European countries also referred to the East Mediterranean countries, in particular Israel and Lebanon, to diversify their energy resources. However, the problem in the East Mediterranean was complex due to the lack of stability in the region and the increasing tensions between the two countries.

Lebanon and Israel were involved in a dispute regarding their maritime borders for about 12 years (when Israel discovered huge gas reserves in its northern Karish field bordering Lebanon).<sup>14</sup> Despite the mediation of different US administrations, the sides were unable to find a solution to delimit their maritime borders. Therefore, none of the two countries was able to extract the vast amounts of gas deposited under the sea. However, the Russo-Ukrainian war changed the whole scenario. While the European Union was searching for new gas sources, the Biden administration intervened in the Lebanese-Israeli maritime border crisis immediately and offered its support to

<sup>12</sup> T. Qiblawi, *With Macron's Visit to Beirut, Lebanon's Future Is Looking a Lot like the Past*, CNN, 01 September 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/09/01/middleeast/lebanon-macron-beirut-visit-intl/index.html> [accessed: 03 January 2023].

<sup>13</sup> M. Muradov, *Europe Turns to Azerbaijan for Gas: How Big Could This Be?*, Royal United Services Institute, 05 October 2022, <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/europe-turns-azerbaijan-gas-how-big-could-be> [accessed: 20 February 2023].

<sup>14</sup> N. Ebrahim, *5 Ways the Israel-Lebanon Maritime Deal Matters*, CNN, 12 October 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/10/12/middleeast/lebanon-israel-maritime-deal-matters-mime-intl/index.html> [accessed: 03 January 2023].

find a final solution allowing both Israel and Lebanon to export their gas resources to EU countries. Initially, the American diplomacy was unable to find a breakthrough, especially that both parties were unwilling to make any compromises. Some were even worried about an escalation between the two sides, mainly when Hezbollah sent three drones towards one of Israeli gas rigs in the disputed areas.<sup>15</sup> The leader of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, clearly stated that his move was an open message to Israel that Lebanon could and was ready to strike Israeli oil rigs if Israel extracted gas from the disputed oil fields without taking the legal rights of Lebanon into consideration. In its statement following the drone incident, Hezbollah published a press release stating: 'The mission was accomplished, and the message was received.'<sup>16</sup>

However, the American diplomacy of President Biden was ready to intervene and mediate between both sides through the former United States Assistant Secretary of State for Energy Resources, Amos Hochstein. After several visits to the region, Hochstein exerted pressure on both countries to find a final compromise. Eventually, his efforts turned out to be fruitful. After months of tense negotiations, both Lebanon and Israel gave their initial consent to signing a maritime border deal. Despite strong opposition from the opposition parties in both countries (Netanyahu and the right-wing political parties in Israel and the Lebanese Revolution deputies), the American side was able to press the two governments to sign a final maritime border delimitation agreement on 27 October 2022.<sup>17</sup> The agreement stated that the Karish field would totally remain under Israel's control, whereas the Qana field (which is expected to contain a huge gas reserve) remained under Lebanese control. After this settlement, Israel started to immediately extract gas from the Karish field and to send it to the European market, while Lebanon formally asked the well-known French company Total to begin geological work and extract gas from the Qana field.

Several Lebanese and Israeli politicians think that the maritime border agreement between Israel and Lebanon would not have been possible if there had been no war between Russia and Ukraine, which triggered a worldwide gas crisis. Such an argument was voiced by a former Lebanese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gebran Bassil, who clearly stated: 'The Ukrainian War sped up the border deal with Israel.'<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> M. Murphy, *Israel Shoots down Hezbollah Drones Heading for Gas Rig*, BBC News, 02 July 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-62022452> [accessed: 20 February 2023].

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>17</sup> H. Haşıl, *Lebanon-Israel Maritime Border Agreement: From the Line of Tension to the Regional Stability*, ORSAM, October 2022 (Policy Brief no. 226), [https://www.orsam.org.tr/d\\_hbanaliz/lebanon-israel-maritime-border-agreement-from-the-line-of-tension-to-the-regional-stability.pdf](https://www.orsam.org.tr/d_hbanaliz/lebanon-israel-maritime-border-agreement-from-the-line-of-tension-to-the-regional-stability.pdf) [accessed: 03 January 2023].

<sup>18</sup> M. Gebeily, *Lebanon MP Sanctioned by US Says He Played behind-the-Scenes Role in Border Talk*, Reuters, 13 October 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/lebanon-mp-sanctioned-by-us-says-he-played-behind-the-scenes-role-border-talks-2022-10-13> [accessed: 10 February 2023].



Furthermore, Bassil, who is personally sanctioned by the US government, claimed that he directly participated in the negotiation process and was in constant contact with the officials of the US government. This news caused a huge controversy in both Lebanon and the region since people were really wondering how a big state like the US could cooperate with a politician whom it personally sanctioned a couple of years ago.

The deal was a major victory for Lebanon, since the US-led mediation (and partially pressure on Israel) solved the maritime border issue in just a couple of months, whereas the conflicting parties had been unable to find a unilateral solution for more than 10 years. Moreover, this breakthrough will allow Lebanon to extract its natural resources without any delays thus saving its crumbling economy from its catastrophic situation. For this reason, the Lebanese government did not waste any time. It directly hired the French oil company Total to do the necessary geological studies and to extract gas (if any) from the wells as soon as possible. For its part, Total Energies CEO Patrick Pouyanné announced that drilling in Lebanon's offshore Block 9 (the block on the Israeli border) would start as soon as in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2023.<sup>19</sup>

## Conclusion

The Russo-Ukrainian War caused a big geopolitical and economic catastrophe in the whole world, opening ways to new political alliances but also to very difficult financial situation all around the world (including developed countries). Its negative effects will be felt in the world for many years to come. However, the case of Lebanon is an exception. Despite all the catastrophic economic effects of the war on its already fragile economy, Lebanon was able to achieve a great victory which could ensure its prosperity for decades to come. The Arabic proverb 'the misfortunes of some people are benefits for others' perfectly applies to the Lebanese case. With the hope that peace and prosperity will reign over the world soon.

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*The impact of the Ukrainian war on Lebanon:  
a glimpse of light at the end of the tunnel*

**Abstract**

The Russian Invasion of Ukraine (2022) had a catastrophic impact on Lebanon which was already suffering from grave economic problems. Since day one, Lebanon has supported Ukraine and asked for the withdrawal of the Russian forces. The war has left negative impacts on Lebanon, raising particular concerns about famine due to a sharp rise in the food and oil prices. However, this war has also presented Lebanon with a pleasant surprise. For the first time in two decades, Lebanon and Israel have agreed to secure a maritime border deal through US-led mediation, which will allow both countries to extract gas from their marine deposits. The deadlocked negotiations were suddenly resumed because of this war and the acute energy crisis in Europe. Lebanese and Israeli

gas is expected to replace Russian gas on the European market. This paper will explain the Lebanese foreign policy and its stance regarding the Russian-Ukrainian war as well as to the political and economic impacts of the war on Lebanon.

Keywords: Lebanon, Ukraine-Russia war, Israel, Gas, inflation, maritime deal



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# Ukrainian crisis: Egypt's strategic choices

## The Arab crises of 2011: US' withdrawal and Russia's return to the regional scene

In order to understand the US' retreat in the region and the return of Russia, it is important to analyse American power within the MENA region. For several centuries, the United States has seen itself as the sole holder of power. Since the US war in Afghanistan, and especially the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Arab world has felt threatened by US imperialism and omnipotence. The Iraq war was based on the idea that it was necessary to redraw the borders of the Middle East, with a view to 'nation building', i.e., rebuilding Iraq to make it an ally. The geopolitical result of this war was the rise in Iran's power, which today leads to fierce rivalry with Saudi Arabia. The United States, which developed the term 'asymmetrical warfare' after the first Gulf War, are now engaged in assuring their populations of the power of the state while, at the same time, the Arab world has felt threatened by the American omnipotence. The decision of the American President Trump, in December 2017 (which led to demonstrations and protests in the Arab world) to unilaterally recognise Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel, once again gives the image of a destabilising actor in the Middle East who risks tipping the region into a new intifada.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A.H. Cordesman, *America's Failed Strategy in the Middle East: Losing Iraq and the Gulf*, Center for Strategic & International Studies, 02 January 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/america-failed-strategy-middle-east-losing-iraq-and-gulf> [accessed: 21 March 2023].

Today, studying the Syrian case may provide understanding of the return of Russia in the region. Indeed, gradual elimination of terrorist groups in the country places Russia as the actor who wants to stabilize Syria, and who has avoided a flare-up of the conflict in the region. Through this, Moscow wants to extend its power in the region to counterbalance America which has been considerably losing influence year after year.<sup>2</sup>

From the very first hours of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the whole world witnessed various states condemning Russia's actions against its neighbour and taking other, rather neutral positions. The countries of the Middle East chose to be relatively neutral. While the United States immediately expressed its support for Ukraine and hoped that its allies in the region would follow suit, the reality turned out to be quite different. This is another reminder of the loss of influence by the United States and the return of Russia, which started after the Arab crises. For Egypt, there are several explanations.

First of all, in 2013, the Obama administration criticised the overthrowing of the first elected Egyptian president (Mohamed Morsi) and froze American aid for several months as a sign of protest. As for Donald Trump, who initially emphasised the effectiveness of his Egyptian counterpart, he nevertheless reduced US aid to Egypt.

Secondly, this crisis of American influence has helped a rapprochement with Russia, which President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi strengthened as soon as he came to power in 2014, with the ambition of establishing solid relations with the Russian president. This was illustrated by the signing of partnership agreements in the security, military, commercial and economic areas. For example, in the military area, until 2020, Russia was the largest supplier of arms to Egypt: 41% of military imports were of Russian origin.<sup>3</sup>

At the geopolitical and regional level, Egypt wants to renew relations with Damascus. A recent meeting of Foreign Ministers of Egypt and Syria proves this. Russia, an ally and unwavering supporter of the Syrian government, could facilitate the dialogue. Although this has no direct link with Cairo's choices concerning its positions on the Ukrainian crisis, the country is in the heart of a region where Moscow accentuates its influence and weight day by day.

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<sup>2</sup> Russia has positioned itself as the country that fights the Islamic State, protector of the Christian minority etc., while the United States had not intervened in a very visible way for the Syrian crisis.

<sup>3</sup> P.D. Wezeman, A. Kuimova, S.T. Wezeman, *Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2021*, "SIPRI Fact Sheet", March 2022, [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/fs\\_2203\\_at\\_2021.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/fs_2203_at_2021.pdf) [accessed: 21 March 2023].

## Russia in Egypt

Egypt, like many countries in the region, is trying to build relationships with new partners and no longer wishes to rely solely on the United States. Thus, those states are increasingly seeking relations with Russia and China because they can benefit from such a strategy to expand their ties abroad. Therefore, they will not receive criticism from those countries on certain issues such as human rights. As a result, these factors have led to a diversification in relations with countries outside Europe and the US.

Moscow is trying to increase the number of trade agreements in Africa as well as in the Middle East, and to strengthen regionalism. The Kremlin seeks to reinforce cooperation on a geographical basis. The neighbouring countries would be more inclined to cooperate, not only because the trade agreements are a way of maintaining economic power, but they are also a way of creating alliances and maintaining rules and institutions that allow the economy to develop.<sup>4</sup> Egypt, which is in the process of reindustrialisation and technology transfer, aims to create competitive sectors, and subsequently export its products mainly to Africa, and to create a 'made in Egypt' know-how. Its geostrategic situation presents an undeniable advantage. Russia sees Egypt as a gateway to the African continent. With this in mind, in March 2017, Moscow started a dialogue on the creation of a Russian industrial zone in Egypt. This agreement, which was signed in May 2018, will strengthen cooperation on economy, industry, and investment between the two countries. The zone, which covers an area of 5.25 million square metres, is expected to attract \$7 billion in investments. Russia has introduced significant investments in the land of the pharaohs. Another perfect example is the Dabaa nuclear power plant: a civil nuclear power plant (on the Mediterranean coast), with a total capacity of 4.8 GWe, thanks to four 3<sup>rd</sup> generation VVER-1200 pressurised water reactors of 1.2 GWe each, which will produce nearly 10% of all electrical energy produced in Egypt. This project is financed in 85% by a Russian state loan and in 15% by Egyptian funds.

Egypt has been developing its research and development capacities in the sector since the 1990s: the country has a 2 MWt Russian research reactor dating back to 1961 but currently undergoing a long-term shutdown, and a 22 MWt Argentinean research reactor, partially supported by Russia, was launched up in 1997.<sup>5</sup> The Egyptian Atomic Energy Authority (EAEA) includes three large, specialised research centres.

<sup>4</sup> A.R. Muller, *The Rise of Regionalism: Core Company Strategies under the Second Wave of Integration*, Erasmus Research Institute of Management, Rotterdam 2004, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/18520266.pdf> [accessed: 21 March 2023].

<sup>5</sup> *First equipment shipped to Egypt's El-Dabaa NPP*, "Nuclear Engineering International Magazine", 15 March 2023, <https://www.neimagazine.com/news/newsfirst-equipment-shipped-to-egypts-el-dabaa-npp-10677113> [accessed: 21 March 2023].

This project responds to Egypt's two major priorities: meeting its growing domestic demand for electricity and satisfying its need for fresh water. Therefore, the Russian strategy aims to support domestic needs in Egypt. This gives Moscow a strategic position.

## Egypt's balancing act and the impact of the conflict

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict has had considerable repercussions affecting the Egyptian economy. In terms of wheat, the country consumes 20 million tonnes per year, 60% of which is imported, making Egypt one of the world's major wheat importers.<sup>6</sup> The war has disrupted supply chains and global wheat production. Before the conflict, more than 80% of Egypt's imports came from these two countries, 61% from Russia and 23% from Ukraine. In addition, Egypt is heavily dependent on wheat for the production of bread, an essential product in the Egyptian diet, with the annual wheat consumption per capita between 150 and 180 kg, compared to an estimated world average of 98 kg per capita per year.<sup>7</sup>

The choice of balance in the face of this conflict is a logical decision for Egypt. In terms of tourism, Russians constitute between 40 and 50% of tourists coming to Egypt each year. In order to preserve one of its four sources of income, the country's ambition was to implement the Russian card payment system MIR in 2022 to allow Russian tourists to pay in roubles in Egypt, this project didn't come to fruition yet though. This is due to the fact that Russia is facing international sanctions on its financial system, and Visa and Mastercard bank cards issued in Russia no longer work outside the country. However, the Egyptian tourism sector is experiencing the consequences of international sanctions imposed on Russia due to an increase in travel costs, which is caused by Russian aircraft being banned from flying over certain countries, resulting in flight diversions.

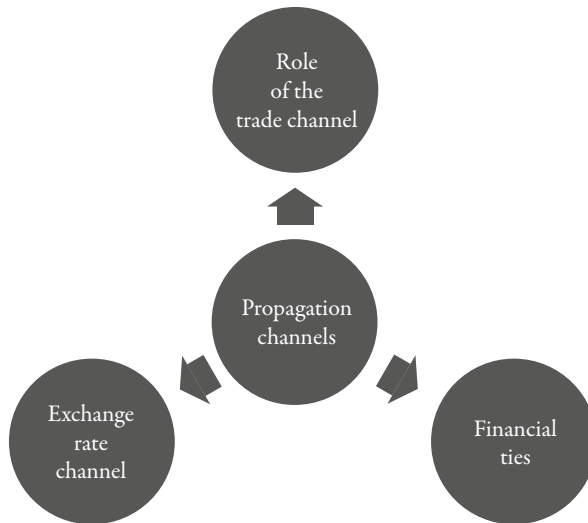
Finally, at the financial level, Egypt has also suffered the fallout of the crisis in Ukraine. We are therefore witnessing a phenomenon of financial contagion. This phenomenon occurs when the economy of one country is negatively affected by changes in asset prices in the financial markets of another country. We can easily identify a transmission mechanism of financial turmoil from one country to another. Due to a set of common links between the emerging markets of these two countries, the financial and political turmoil currently taking place in Ukraine and Russia is negatively impacting on the Egyptian economy.

<sup>6</sup> *Annual wheat consumption in Egypt from 2017/2018 to 2021/2022*, Statista, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1309979/wheat-consumption-in-egypt/> [accessed: 21 March 2023].

<sup>7</sup> V. Lequillerier, *Crise du blé : 4 cartes pour comprendre les principaux enjeux (Policy Brief)*, BSI-Economics, 06 April 2022, <http://www.bsi-economics.org/1396-hausse-prix-ble-pays-vul> [accessed: 21 March 2023].



Figure 1. An illustration of financial contagion



Source: Author's own elaboration.

Thus, the country is experiencing:

- a historic inflation rate, estimated at 40.26%;
- a devaluation of its national currency, up to 50%;
- fuel price increases of up to 20%.<sup>8</sup>

The three above-mentioned markets are linked to each other because of their commercial interactions, especially regarding wheat, of which Russia and Ukraine are the main exporters to Egypt. Any sudden change in the financial situation of one of the partners leads, from an economic and financial point of view, to the impoverishment of the other party.<sup>9</sup>

## Conclusion

As it has been shown, the influence of Russia at the regional level and the upheavals in the Middle East, notably with the reinforcement of the role of China, an ally of Russia, and the new agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran, will only reduce the influence of the United States. Egypt, which has always played a role of a regional mediator, will preserve its interests through neutrality. Going further, it would be interesting to study the regionalism rising among the countries of the region, with

<sup>8</sup> *Egypt core inflation rate*, Trading Economics, <https://tradingeconomics.com/egypt/core-inflation-rate> [accessed: 30 March 2023].

<sup>9</sup> T. Lagoarde-Segot, B.M. Lucey, *Financial Contagion in Emerging Markets: Evidence from the Middle East and North Africa*, October 2005, [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=829604](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=829604) [accessed: 30 March 2023].

the signing of trade partnerships in recent years that only strengthen trade between these emerging economies which are investing in the prospect of South-South trade. It would also be relevant to observe the influence of the Gulf countries – major investors in Egypt – if they can influence its foreign policy and economic choices.

Finally, it would be intriguing to study the ‘redistribution of cards’ of foreign powers in the Middle East, which can also be explained by the 21<sup>st</sup>-century world in the process of multipolarization, notably with the ‘emerging countries’ or emerging middle powers trying to increase their regional power in order to reinforce their status on the international scene. As a result, the Western world is losing the monopoly of power it has had for the past five centuries, which means that the United States is also losing its monopoly of power. Today, it is no longer possible to impose one’s will alone; instead, an open path to multilateral solutions seems to be a reasonable option.

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## *Ukrainian crisis: Egypt's strategic choices*

### *Abstract*

The foreign policy of the great powers due to the Arab revolutions and the recent upheavals in the Middle East seems to display an ‘American retreat’ and a ‘Russian comeback.’ In this context, the countries of the MENA region want to build their relations with new partners and not only with the United States. Egypt, which historically was an ally of the Soviet Union (today Russian Federation), and then of the United States, has kept a neutrality on the Ukrainian conflict for several reasons. My research work aims to provide a political and economic analysis in view of the strategic choices that Cairo has made. For several years, the land of the Pharaohs has been trying to balance its relations with Western countries and also those at the regional level and has become an essential mediator, such as in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In terms of its food security, the country is dependent on Russian wheat (50%) as well as Ukrainian wheat (30%). The tourism sector, which is one of the country's four main sources of income, is also a major issue for the government: Ukrainian and Russian tourists flock to the country in large numbers every year. On the commercial level, Russia is seeking to further develop its economic relations with Egypt. This is illustrated by the USD 20 billion project to build the first nuclear power plant in Egypt, in Dabaa, by the Russian state-owned company Rosatom.

**Keywords:** Egypt, Ukrainian crisis, economy, tourism, balancing



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New Zealand





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# The New Zealand Defence Force and Ukraine: military contributions to foreign and defence policy

## Introduction

Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. In April, the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) deployed a C-130H Hercules aircraft and provided logistics personnel to assist with the transportation of military aid to support Ukraine's self-defence. This was followed by a deployment of Artillery Training Team experts in May, intelligence personnel in June, and infantry trainers in August. In May 2023, this training deployment was extended until 30 June 2024, and two additional NZDF staff were set to be deployed to conduct space training programmes for members of the Ukraine Armed Forces in Poland.<sup>1</sup>

Why would a small country at the bottom of the world contribute to the defence of Ukraine? Underpinning these military contributions is a longstanding ideological commitment to a rules-based international order. But there are other interests at play here too. This paper unpacks the various foreign and defence policy values and interests at play that helped to generate the NZDF's engagement on the other side of the globe, noting the importance of domestic drivers as well as the relevance of small state status and a liberal like-mindedness to this endeavour.

<sup>1</sup> *Chris Hipkins announces new Ukraine support package*, Radio New Zealand, 03 May 2023 <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/489208/chris-hipkins-announces-new-ukraine-support-package/> [accessed: 31 May 2023].

## Foreign and defence policy rationales for deployment

Since the outbreak of the conflict, New Zealand Army infantry personnel based in the UK have been the mainstay of the NZDF's response. These personnel have been delivering a five-week training course to Ukrainian personnel, which provides a basic introduction to soldiering, tactical exercises, range practices, and live field firing. In addition to covering offensive and defensive operations and legal matters, this introductory course also focuses on ensuring recruits understand fundamental skills in field craft, weapon handling, and marksmanship. Understanding different weapons systems, trench and urban warfare, and combat first aid are also components of this intensive short course.<sup>2</sup> In addition to this training role, the NZDF has also supported other operational needs via New Zealand-based open-source intelligence capability as well as the deploying of 14 NZDF intelligence analysts, 4 logistics specialists, 3 liaison officers, and 8 command and administration support personnel. Some surplus military equipment has also been donated, including body armour plates, helmets, and camouflage vests. Notably, too, financial support from the New Zealand government has been delivered in the form of a \$7.5 million donation for procuring weapons and ammunition, a \$4.1 million pledge to support commercial satellite access for Ukrainian Defence Intelligence, and \$10.6 million to the NATO Trust Fund and TAIT Communications for non-lethal military equipment.<sup>3</sup>

The provision of this sort of NZDF support to Ukraine is in keeping with New Zealand's foreign policy trajectory. There are three closely interrelated themes here which have significant historical presence: support for a rules-based international order, which is expected to be a liberal world order, and, as part of this, support for collective defence in the face of perceived unjust aggression.

### Support for a rules-based international order

Support for international rules and multilateral diplomacy are key principles for small states in general: smaller states like New Zealand support collective institutions and arrangements both to amplify their voices and to tie down larger powers to ensure the security and prosperity of all states in the international community.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *NZ Army soldiers return from first Ukraine training mission in UK*, NZDF Media Centre, 12 December 2022, <https://www.nzdf.mil.nz/media-centre/news/nz-army-soldiers-return-from-first-ukraine-training-mission-in-uk/> [accessed: 14 February 2023].

<sup>3</sup> *What we Do – Support to Ukraine*, New Zealand Ministry of Defence, December 2022, <https://www.defence.govt.nz/what-we-do/diplomacy-and-deployments/deployment-map/support-to-ukraine/> [accessed: 12 March 2023].

<sup>4</sup> B. Thorhallsson, S. Steinsson, *Small State Foreign Policy*, [in:] *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Politics*, 24 May 2017, <https://oxfordre.com/politics/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-484> [accessed: 12 March 2023].



International law and international institutions are key in providing options for regulating relationships and establishing the rules of the game. Support for the UN and other international institutions has thus enjoyed strong bipartisan support across the political spectrum within New Zealand and New Zealand governments have a history of supporting other international politico-legal institutions such as the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice.<sup>5</sup>

A key component of contemporary international law is enshrined in the UN Charter. This is the privileging of state sovereignty and the right of states to self-defence, including collective self-defence, in the face of aggression (as per Article 51, in particular). It is notable, then, that the then Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, labelled Russia's first actions in February 2022 as a 'military offensive and an illegal invasion.'<sup>6</sup> Ardern's first press release emphasised that the invasion was 'entirely avoidable', putting at risk 'an unthinkable number of innocent lives' in a 'disregard for diplomacy' and clear breaching of international law: 'As a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, Russia has displayed a flagrant disregard for international law and abdicated their responsibility to uphold global peace and security. They now must face the consequences of those decisions.'<sup>7</sup>

Since these first days, the importance of a perceived breach of international law has continued to underpin the New Zealand's government's response to the situation. By May 2022, Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta again emphasised the opinion that 'Russia's actions are a flagrant attempt to undermine international law and the international system on which New Zealand relies. It has misused its veto in the Security Council, ignored the will of the United Nations General Assembly, and ignored the binding decision of the International Court of Justice ordering it to cease its invasion of Ukraine.'<sup>8</sup>

And, in underscoring the decision to extend and deepen New Zealand's engagement in supporting Ukraine at the end of 2022, the then Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern again emphasised that 'support from distant countries is deeply appreciated

<sup>5</sup> B.K. Greener, *New Zealand in the World*, [in:] *Government and Politics in Aotearoa New Zealand*, eds. J. Hayward, L. Greaves, C. Timperley, 7<sup>th</sup> edn., Oxford University Press, [Melbourne] 2021.

<sup>6</sup> J. Ardern, *Prime Minister's Statement on the Russian Invasion of Ukraine*, Beehive.govt.nz – The official website of the New Zealand Government, 25 February 2022, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/prime-ministers-statement-russian-invasion-ukraine> [accessed: 01 March 2022].

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>8</sup> N. Mahuta cited in M. Hall, *New Zealand entering Ukraine conflict at 'whim of government' – former Labour General Secretary*, Radio New Zealand, 26 May 2022, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/world/491788/nz-entering-ukraine-conflict-at-whim-of-govt-former-labour-general-secretary> [accessed: 13 June 2022].

by Ukraine. Principles matter and Aotearoa New Zealand is committed to uphold the rules of international law and the United Nations Charter.<sup>9</sup>

The New Zealand government response to the Ukraine crisis rests on its understanding that there are specific international legal requirements that have been abrogated by Russia. Under contemporary international law, a country is only justified in using force for the purposes of self-defence. Russian authorities assert that Russia is responding to the rising threat of Ukrainian fascism, neo-Nazism, and threats to Russian-speaking populations within Ukrainian borders, but this version of events has not been accepted by the New Zealand government. Early statements clearly labelled Russia's actions as an 'unprovoked attack,' and this sentiment has predominated since.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, as the conflict has unfolded, these *jus ad bellum* (ethics and law around the right to pursue war) concerns have been joined by *jus in bello* (ethics and law around the conduct of war) concerns. Both government and opposition commentators have asserted that Russia has engaged in actions that breach various Laws of Armed Conflict (LOAC). These are laid out in codes such as the Geneva Convention and in the definitions of war crimes as punishable in the International Criminal Court (ICC). By early April 2022, the New Zealand government agreed that there was evidence of war crimes being systematically perpetrated against Ukrainian civilians by Russian soldiers, and the Leader of the Opposition, National's Christopher Luxon, went further to explicitly call Vladimir Putin a 'war criminal.'<sup>11</sup>

Yet this idea of a 'rules-based international order' is also not ideology-free. Those rules may start with basic tenets, such as acceptance of state sovereignty and the right to self-defence as ordering principles, but deeper value-based judgements colour how those ordering principles are viewed. For example, that state sovereignty may not be believed to be so absolute in the case of a state failing in its responsibility to protect its citizens, or that sovereignty may be seen to be more or less sacrosanct depending on how the ruling regime responds to the rights-based demands of its citizens.

<sup>9</sup> J. Ardern, N. Mahuta, P. Henare, *Assistance to Ukraine extended and enhanced*, Press Release, Beehive.govt.nz – The official website of the New Zealand Government, 14 November 2022, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/assistance-ukraine-extended-and-enhanced> [accessed: 12 December 2022].

<sup>10</sup> J. Ardern, N. Mahuta, *Aotearoa New Zealand condemns Russia's invasion of Ukraine*, Press Release, Beehive.govt.nz – The official website of the New Zealand Government, 24 February 2022, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/aotearoa-new-zealand-condemns-russian-invasion-ukraine> [accessed: 12 December 2022].

<sup>11</sup> *Putin's Ukraine war creating 'significant war crimes'* – Nanaia Mahuta, Radio New Zealand, 05 April 2022, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/464656/putin-s-ukraine-war-creating-significant-war-crimes-nanaia-mahuta>; *National Party leader Christopher Luxon labels Putin a war criminal, again urges ambassador's removal*, Radio New Zealand, 05 April 2022, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/464672/national-party-leader-christopher-luxon-labels-putin-a-war-criminal-again-urges-ambassador-s-removal> [accessed: 12 January 2023].

## The relevance of liberal values

New Zealand has thus been a strong supporter of the idea of a *liberal* rules-based order. Although not necessarily always explicitly stated in foreign policy statements that discuss the idea of a rules based international order, New Zealand governments, leading decision-making in a liberal democratic state populated by people who value individual liberty, have historically valued and promoted liberal concepts such as free trade, representative democracy, human rights, and capitalism.

This also means that successive New Zealand governments have viewed similarly liberal democratic states as being 'like-minded.' Many, although not all, of New Zealand's closest foreign policy and defence relationships are with other liberal democratic states such as the United States, Australia, Canada, and the UK, as well as Japan and the Republic of Korea. This is not the only principle upon which New Zealand forges its partnerships, but it is a key one. This is relevant to the case of Ukraine.

Seen as a fellow democracy, Ukraine's status is enhanced in the eyes of New Zealanders. Russia, on the other hand, is viewed as being in the thrall of a form of dictatorship under Vladimir Putin and associates. Ideologically then, the situation in Ukraine is seen not only as a case of unjustified aggression for one sovereign state against another, but it is also viewed through the lenses of ideology and values, as per normative democratic peace thesis arguments. A less-legitimate Russia has illegally invaded a more-legitimate Ukraine.

The issue of the relevance of this being a *democratic* state under attack has not been aggressively pursued by the New Zealand government in its news releases, with the overwhelming themes being those of betrayal of international law and misuse of the UN system. But the issue of democracy has been noted in New Zealand media and in official news releases in different ways.

In discussing the death of a former NZDF soldier who fought alongside Ukrainian soldiers as an individual volunteer, for example, the Defence Minister, Andrew Little, was reported to have lauded former soldier Kani Te Tai's 'commitment to the democratic values Ukraine is fighting to protect.'<sup>12</sup> Academic commentators emphasised the relevance of the nature of government in each country, with Professor Robert Patman of Otago University asserting that '[t]o date, New Zealand has contributed more than \$40 million in humanitarian and military aid to Ukraine. This is costly for the taxpayer, but the costs for New Zealand and other small and middle powers will be much greater still if the Putin authoritarian regime is allowed to succeed in its brutal attempt to annex a democratic neighbour.'<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> A. Little cited in A. Gifford, *Te Tai fight for Ukraine democracy lauded*, Waatea news.com, 28 March 2023, <https://waateanews.com/2023/03/28/te-tai-fight-for-ukraine-democracy-lauded/> [accessed: 10 April 2023].

<sup>13</sup> R.G. Patman, *Is New Zealand doing enough for Ukraine?*, Newsroom 23 February 2023, <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/ideasroom/is-new-zealand-doing-enough-for-ukraine> [accessed: 10 April 2023].

And in a media interview, the Chair of the Northern region Ukrainians Association of New Zealand's Yuriy Gladun similarly emphasised that '[w]e are part of the free world, if one part fails, the other part is weaker. Don't get fooled: New Zealand is not so far away to be outside of that process.'<sup>14</sup>

In addition to this ideological facet, other liberal values have also been mentioned. For example, a key liberal foreign policy objective is the freeing up of trade to both facilitate best capitalist practices and to increase economic interdependence to decrease the likelihood of conflict breaking out. Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta has emphasised the economic impacts of the conflict, noting that 'Russia's invasion has severely disrupted critical supply chains and exacerbated food insecurity worldwide.'<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, as indicated above, there has been strong bipartisan support for the government to act in support of the Ukraine. It is worth noting, however, that some commentators have suggested that the Ardern government could be accused of engaging in acts of war without a clear procedure in play – actively undermining the importance placed on democratic values. Former Labour Secretary General Mike Smith stated that the country's military involvement had not been debated in Parliament, that the Cabinet's use of discretionary powers was of major concern and that 'we've made those decisions without any procedure as to how they would be authorised.'<sup>16</sup> Similarly, former MP Matt Hobson expressed concern that allowing Ukrainian President Zelensky to address Parliament in December 2022 was an affront to democracy in that there was no intention of having MPs consider the complexities of the war or to discuss New Zealand's growing integration with NATO.<sup>17</sup> Despite these concerns, it appears that support for the defence of Ukraine has thus far been remarkably uncontroversial. Gerry Brownlee, National Party defence spokesperson, for example, confirmed that the 'overwhelming view of the current Parliament is that we should be doing exactly what we're doing.'<sup>18</sup>

### Collective self-defence

As outlined above, the military side of the New Zealand government's response, Operation Tīeke, has predominantly been framed as an effort aimed at being

<sup>14</sup> Y. Gladun cited in *Plea for more support for Ukrainians in New Zealand: 'Most don't have a home to go back to'*, Radio New Zealand, 14 January 2023, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/482430/plea-for-more-support-for-ukrainians-in-new-zealand-most-don-t-have-a-home-to-go-back-to> [accessed: 12 February 2023].

<sup>15</sup> J. Ardern, N. Mahuta, P. Henare, *Assistance to Ukraine extended and enhanced*, *op. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> M. Smith cited in M. Hall, *op. cit.*

<sup>17</sup> *Former Minister Calls Zelensky Address 'An Affront To Democracy'*, Scoop, 14 December 2022, <https://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PO2212/S00127/former-minister-calls-zelensky-address-an-affront-to-democracy.htm> [accessed: 16 December 2022].

<sup>18</sup> G. Brownlee cited in M. Hall, *op. cit.*

a response to a breach of international law(s) and at 'contributing to international efforts to support Ukraine in its self-defence.'<sup>19</sup> As noted above, contemporary international law asserts that a country has a right to use force in self-defence. Moreover, Article 51 of the UN Charter specifically states that this can be a right to 'collective' self-defence too.

Support for collective self-defence has been a key theme in New Zealand's foreign policy. New Zealand had a seat in the League of Nations in 1919 despite not gaining full legal independence until 1947 upon formal adoption of the 1931 Statute of Westminster. New Zealand authorities had been keen supporters of the post-World War I plan to create a collective security system to help ensure international peace and security. This support for collective security continued through after World War II via vocal support for a new organisation to replace the failed League of Nations.

Indeed, in 1945, New Zealand had four main aims for the United Nations: to provide space for small nations and to prevent powerful states from dominating; to maintain international peace and security through collective security; to assist colonies towards statehood; and to help guarantee social and economic progress for all.<sup>20</sup> As a small state, New Zealand recognises that it would not necessarily have the capacity to defend itself from external aggression should it need to act alone. Successive New Zealand governments have therefore supported two main mechanisms in seeking to augment its self-defence: alliance-building and collective security.

With respect to the first of these, Ukraine is not an ally, but it can perhaps best be conceived of as a 'friend of friends.' The US and NATO are key Ukraine supporters, and are, at the same time, important partners for New Zealand. The broad ideological similarities noted above further tap into the long-standing notion that New Zealand seeks to operate with 'like-minded' partners. These factors are not deciding ones but nonetheless augment the other rationales for action outlined above. It is notable, for example, that top NATO officials visited New Zealand in March 2023, and, upon invitation to attend the NATO Leaders Summit in 2023, Prime Minister Chris Hipkins emphasised that '[w]e've remained, as I've always said, independent in our foreign policy and that will continue to be the case. But we will continue to work with like-minded countries. [...] If you look at the situation in Ukraine, for example, we have a lot in common with members of NATO when it comes to our position on that particular conflict.'<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> *What we Do – Support to Ukraine, op. cit.*

<sup>20</sup> D. McKinnon, *Introduction*, [in:] *New Zealand as an International Citizen: Fifty Years of United Nations Membership*, ed. M. Templeton, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Wellington 2005.

<sup>21</sup> Ch. Hipkins cited in K. Scotcher, *Hipkins yet to decide whether he will attend NATO meeting*, Radio New Zealand, 12 April 2023, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/487743/hipkins-yet-to-decide-whether-he-will-attend-nato-meeting> [accessed: 12 April 2023].

Moreover, the decision to support Ukraine is very much aligned with New Zealand's strong support for the concept of collective security. In contemporary international politics, collective security would ideally be brokered through the UN whereby the Security Council would agree to identify, condemn, and respond collectively to an act of aggression. History demonstrates how difficult it is to attain this degree of cohesion; however, with the only instance of collective self-defence thus far being UN mandate to use 'all necessary means' to push Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait in 1991. Other important events since that time – such as the abstaining of China and Russia from votes on the use of force to stop Libya's Colonel Gaddafi from persecuting civilians in 2011 – have not resulted in a stronger norm of enabling the UN to use force to support international peace and security, and, indeed, if anything, the UN has been more rather than less stymied in recent years.

As Russia is a veto-wielding member of the Security Council, the UNSC is stalemated. In 2003, the Clark-led Labour Government refused to support the war against Iraq without a UNSC mandate, asserting that UNSC authorisation was 'an essential precondition for military strike.'<sup>22</sup> But in this case, a UNSC mandate is taken out of the realm of possibility given Russia's P5 status. Indeed, in June 2022, the then Prime Minister Ardern argued that Moscow's 'use of its UN Security Council position to block consideration of the invasion is morally bankrupt,' which 'demonstrates why we must continue to seek reform of the UN.'<sup>23</sup> Without the possibility of being mandated by a UNSC resolution, the New Zealand government must look to other principles upon which to base its decisions. Here, the UN General Assembly provides some degree of succour.

The General Assembly has passed a number of resolutions condemning Russia's 'attempted illegal annexation.'<sup>24</sup> However, despite some commentators arguing that there is capacity for more to be done by the General Assembly under the 'Uniting for Peace' resolution, the predominant view remains that the General Assembly can only help to legitimise action, rather than provide legal decisions to support action.<sup>25</sup> But in this case, the ideal of collective security, bolstered by General Assembly condemnation, does help to underpin New Zealand's chosen response.

In December 2022, the Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky addressed the New Zealand Parliament. In her response to his speech, the then Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern outlined the reasons for New Zealand support. Her response clearly

<sup>22</sup> T. O'Brien, *New Zealand and the International System*, [in:] *New Zealand in World Affairs IV: 1990–2005*, ed. R. Alley, Victoria University Press, Wellington 2007, pp. 54–84.

<sup>23</sup> H. Clark cited in R. Patman, *op. cit.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ukraine: UN General Assembly demands Russia reverse course on 'attempted illegal annexation'*, UN News, 12 October 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/10/1129492> [accessed: 12 December 2022].

<sup>25</sup> S. Talmon, *The Legalizing and Legitimizing Function of UN General Assembly Resolutions*, "AJIL Unbound" 2014, vol. 108, pp. 123–128, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S2398772300002002>.

points to a concern with the need for collective security to thrive despite the lack of institutional mandate: 'Our support for Ukraine was not determined by geography, it was not determined by history or by diplomatic ties or relationships – our judgment was a simple one: we asked ourselves the question "what if it was us"'.<sup>26</sup>

Note that in this speech, Ardern again referred to the breach of the international rules-based order and 'the misuse of multilateral institutions.' Hence, in a time of dysfunctional international institutions, other means for determining just action must be found.

Finally, in addition to these broad-brush values, it is relevant to note that there seems to be a tacit acceptance within New Zealand that, though we may want to avoid frontline combat, the chosen form of engagement in this case – a Building Partner Capacity (BPC) form of engagement – is seen as an acceptable compromise. At least since 2015 (though the practice clearly predates this) and the sending of troops to Iraq to train Iraqi soldiers to help fight ISIL, at the Iraqi government's request, the practice of BPC has not elicited any significant resistance. Hence, contributing to collective self-defence may take many forms, including training and sending material support, and it need not involve the NZDF in much more controversial active combat roles.

Although all these broader legal and ideological arguments for the Ukraine deployment clearly do have strong historical and bipartisan roots, in more recent years we have also heard of a more instrumental rationale for deployment – that of providing an opportunity to deploy to help stem, or at least slow, a growing retention problem within the military.

## Domestic rationales for deployment: benefits for the NZDF

Towards the end of 2022, in outlining reasons for the extension and enhancement of Operation Tīeke, Defence Minister Peeni Henare pursued a slightly different tack from the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. In his comments, he noted the importance of the deployment for domestic purposes. That is, Henare highlighted the value of the training role for both the Ukrainian recruits receiving the training *and* for the NZDF personnel gaining 'valuable experience' in delivering that training. Most revealing, however, was his direct reference to the notion that the deployment would help to 'encourage retention of frontline personnel'.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> J. Ardern cited in *Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky addresses New Zealand Parliament*, Radio New Zealand, 14 December 2022, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/480691/ukrainian-president-volodymyr-zelensky-addresses-new-zealand-parliament> [accessed: 14 December 2022].

<sup>27</sup> J. Ardern, N. Mahuta, P. Henare, *Assistance to Ukraine extended and enhanced*, *op. cit.*

The NZDF has experienced significant retention issues in recent years. Some units, particularly some of those based in the New Zealand Army, have lost up to a third of their capacity. In addition to speculation about the push and pull of perceived decreased benefits and the increasingly tempting draw of higher paid civilian employment in a low unemployment market, one of the suggested causes for such attrition that has gained traction is the tying up of defence personnel in Operation Protect over the years 2020–2022.

Operation Protect constituted part of the New Zealand government's management of the COVID-19 pandemic. To control the spread of the virus, the Government not only restricted the movement of the population within the country but also pursued a very strict border control policy. Apart from a short-lived experiment with a 'travel bubble' with Australia in mid-2021, those travelling to New Zealand over 2020 and into early 2022 were required to isolate within Managed Isolation Quarantine Facilities (MIQ) for at least 10 days. In staffing these MIQs and domestic checkpoints, the Government was especially reliant on drawing on personnel from NZDF – and within the NZDF, this work fell disproportionately to the Army to carry out. This deployment wound up in early 2022 but is believed to have impacted the 'core business' for the NZDF.

NZDF personnel had three main roles in staffing MIQ and checkpoints under Operation Protect: security, day-to-day operations within each facility, and leadership roles across regional centres and the national office in Wellington. The Director General of Health, under the COVID-19 Public Health Response Act 2020, granted these personnel specific enforcement powers, with personnel in MIQs being empowered to give legally enforceable directions (such as requiring a person to stay in their room), and to request a person to provide identifying information, whilst those staffing vehicle checkpoints and providing support to the New Zealand Customs Service were again similarly empowered to enter areas, buildings, vehicles, give directions, and request a person to provide identifying information. Such work was deemed by some as being demanding and unfulfilling as well as not what 'they had trained for' and, therefore, acting as a distraction from core business. Many believed that it produced a significant skill fade of core military skills within the force.

For example, in June 2021, the Chief of Defence Force, Kevin Short reported to the Minister of Defence, Peeni Henare that he was 'conscious that the NZDF's ability to respond to a Christchurch [type] of Kaikōura scale earthquake, or a Pacific event of the size of Tropical Cyclone Winston in Fiji, will remain degraded for the foreseeable future' and that the commitment 'reduces the capability of the NZDF to respond to another national or regional emergency with previously expected scale or speed'.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> K. Short cited in J. Patterson, *Defence Force role in MIQ 'reduces capability' to deal with major disaster*, Radio New Zealand, 13 August 2021, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/449077/defence-force-role-in-miq-reduces-capability-to-deal-with-major-disaster> [accessed: 09 April 2022].



Operation Protect was the main effort of the NZDF over 2020–2022 and impacted everything from training to infrastructure projects. Engagement in Operation Protect significantly impacted the NZDF's ability to maintain other operational outputs and also affected morale as personnel became frustrated by the long hours, rolling deployments away from family, and lack of time spent on 'core business' of their trades. For example, the Annual Review of the New Zealand Defence Force listed work that was not done in 2020/21, largely because of the impact of COVID-19 and the lack of resource—more than 50 projects in total.<sup>29</sup>

In 2021, the attrition rate for all regular force personnel sat at just under 8%. By the end of 2022, attrition across the entire defence force was at 17.4%, with more than 25% attrition occurring in certain trades including combat, armoured combat and combat engineers.<sup>30</sup> Hence an international deployment – a chance to engage in the type of work seen to be more central to the role of those who had joined a military service – is seen as a way to help retain (and potentially to recruit) personnel.

## Conclusion

Reporting about the impact of New Zealand engagement via Operation Tīeke has generally been framed in a positive way. In late 2022, Defence Minister Henare stated:

I have been informed that the Ukrainian recruits have responded well to our training personnel and have said that the NZDF personnel are working hard for them. [...] While the New Zealand military contribution to our bigger partners and Ukraine is small compared to what others are doing, we are contributing in a targeted way and I am confident that our contributions are having a continued impact.<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, a change in the New Zealand leadership, with the resignation of Prime Minister Ardern and the swearing in of Chris Hipkins, has simply seen a reiteration of support to Ukraine. The NZDF's engagement in support of Ukraine is uncontroversial, possibly even popular within a domestic setting, tethered as it is both to ongoing (over)use of the NZDF for the pursuit of foreign policy goals and to long-standing foreign and defence policy principles. Support for an international rules-based order, support for like-minded liberal states, and support for the ideal of collective security are all accepted premises for New Zealand policy. But the deployments also bring

<sup>29</sup> K. Knight, *MIQ: The two-year tour of duty no soldier wanted*, New Zealand Herald, 25 March 2022, <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/miq-and-operation-protect-the-two-year-tour-of-duty-no-soldier-expected/MV4UXDZCS2HQGMXIJ6MDPMBZ4Y/> [accessed: 09 April 2022].

<sup>30</sup> T. Manch, *Army attrition above 15% as units and ranks depleted by quitting soldiers*, Stuff, 11 November 2022, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/130440514/army-attrition-above-15-as-units-and-ranks-depleted-by-quitting-soldiers> [accessed: 10 April 2023].

<sup>31</sup> J. Ardern, N. Mahuta, P. Henare, *Assistance to Ukraine extended and enhanced*, op. cit.

a less obvious, but still important, benefit for the NZDF itself. As attrition rates have soared, this engagement provides a chance for personnel to perform roles that they see as being more in keeping with their expectations about soldiering or military taskings. Hence, the deployment serves both foreign and domestic agendas, at least for now, as New Zealand also holds fast to the notion of having an independent foreign policy and may resist pressure to become more firmly integrated into a US or NATO-led coalition of sorts or to engage in a more direct fashion past the BPC model.

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*The New Zealand Defence Force and Ukraine:  
military contributions to foreign and defence policy*

*Abstract*

New Zealand has demonstrated strong support for Ukraine since the Russian invasion of February 2022. From logistical support to infantry training, the NZDF has been a key player in helping to deliver on the New Zealand government's general statements of support. Though located far from the conflict, New Zealand's traditional values of support for international law, democracy and collective security in the face of external aggression have all been major drivers for these deployments. But certain other drivers, such as recent problems with recruitment and retention in the armed forces, are perhaps lesser known but also important in rounding out an understanding of why and how New Zealand has responded to the situation.

Keywords: NZDF, Ukraine, collective security, international law



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# Kiwis on the Eastern Front: The motivations of New Zealand veterans fighting for Ukraine

## Acknowledgement

This article is dedicated to Kane Te Tai, NZ Veteran, formerly of 2/1 Battalion, The Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment. Killed in action in the Battle of Vuhledar, Donbas Oblast on 20 March 2023 whilst serving as a team leader with the International Legion's Special Service Group. Kane was the primary source for much of the information derived from interviews with NZ veterans serving in the International Legion of Territorial Defence for this article, and in the interests of full disclosure was also my friend.

## Introduction

The conflict in Ukraine, which began with the 2014 annexation of Crimea by Russia, escalated in February 2022 into a full-fledged conventional war, attracting international attention and triggering a surge of volunteers from around the world. Among these volunteers are New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) veterans from New Zealand, who have chosen to join the fight in support of Ukraine. This article explores the underlying motivations of these New Zealand veterans to engage in a conflict far from home; delving into the various personal, social, and political factors that have influenced their decision to serve in Ukraine. Through interviews with personnel currently fighting in Ukraine, and returnees, as well as analysis

of primary data, this research seeks to shed light on the unique experiences and driving forces that have brought these individuals to the front lines, contributing to a broader understanding of the complex motivations at play in international volunteerism in times of conflict.

## Background of the conflict in Ukraine

After the Soviet Union collapsed in the early 1990s, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) quickly expanded eastward, eventually taking in most of the European nations that had been in the former Warsaw Pact sphere. The Baltic republics of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, once parts of the Soviet Union, joined NATO, as did Poland, Romania, and others. That placed NATO military forces hundreds of kilometres closer to Moscow, and for the first time since its inception, directly bordering Russia. In 2008, NATO leaders publicly stated an intent to eventually enrol Ukraine. Russian President Vladimir Putin has described the Soviet disintegration as one of the greatest catastrophes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and one that robbed Russia of its rightful place among the world's great powers. He has spent his two decades in power rebuilding Russia's military and reasserting its geopolitical clout across the globe. The Russian President has called NATO's expansion eastward menacing, and publicly describes the prospect of Ukraine joining the organization a major threat to Russia's sovereignty. As Russia has grown more assertive geopolitically and stronger militarily, President Putin's complaints about the military alliance have grown more strident. He has repeatedly invoked the threat of American ballistic missiles and combat forces being deployed in Ukraine, though US, Ukrainian and NATO officials insist there have been no such deployments.

President Putin has also insisted that Ukraine is fundamentally part of Russia: culturally and historically, ignoring ample evidence to the contrary, including the belief of the majority of Ukrainians. Ukrainian-Russian relations worsened significantly in early 2014, when mass protests in Ukraine forced out the Ukrainian president closely allied with Mr Putin. Moscow also raised, trained, and sustained a separatist rebellion that took control of part of the Donbas Oblast of Ukraine in a war that had killed more than 13,000 people up to the invasion last year. In December 2021, a few months before invading, Russia presented NATO and the United States with a set of written demands that it stated were required to be met to ensure its security but were impossible for the West to practically meet. Foremost among them were a guarantee that Ukraine never join NATO, and that NATO draw down its forces in the Eastern European countries that had already joined. On 24 February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine with the intention of annexing the entire country.

## New Zealand's stance on the conflict

The New Zealand government views the Russian invasion of Ukraine as an unprovoked and illegal attack. It has provided a range of humanitarian and military support to Ukraine including funding directly to NATO, New Zealand Defence Force training teams to train Ukrainian military recruits, and intelligence/logistics/liaison/administrative support. However, no NZDF forces have been acknowledged as having operated in Ukraine itself at the time of this article.

New Zealand discourages its citizens from enlisting in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. However, it is legal for New Zealanders to enlist in the International Legion under New Zealand law. In New Zealand, mercenary activities are prohibited under the Mercenary Activities (Prohibition) Act 2004,<sup>1</sup> however the Act's definition of a mercenary is relatively limited. The criteria include that a person must be motivated by private gain and be paid substantially more than local soldiers, both of which are relatively subjective. New Zealand's terrorism suppression laws<sup>2</sup> are also somewhat relevant to foreign fighters in offshore conflicts, but these only apply if the person engages in terrorism. Apart from these two categories, there is no specific law governing foreign fighting, and therefore nothing that prevents a New Zealand citizen from volunteering to fight in Ukraine. Although New Zealand has not taken legislative action to prevent volunteer fighting more generally, the government does not encourage it. New Zealand has specifically advised against travelling to Ukraine and stated that it may not be able to provide consular assistance to citizens who choose to fight there.

## Involvement of foreign veterans in the conflict

In Ukraine, a 2016 presidential decree<sup>3</sup> made it possible for non-Ukrainian citizens to enlist in Ukraine's armed forces, and in February 2022, in the wake of Russia's invasion, it was announced that the newly established International Legion of Territorial Defence of Ukraine would form part of the nation's armed forces. Ukraine's call for foreign volunteers to fight was primarily driven by a desire to harness their potential to exploit for information operations abroad, principally in the West.

<sup>1</sup> Mercenary Activities (Prohibition) Act 2004, Public Act 2004, no. 69 of 6 July 2004, New Zealand Legislation, <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2004/0069/latest/whole.html> [accessed: 05 April 2023].

<sup>2</sup> Terrorism Suppression Act 2002, Public Act 2002, no. 34 of 17 October 2002, New Zealand Legislation, <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2002/0034/latest/DLM151491.html?src=qs> [accessed: 05 April 2023].

<sup>3</sup> Presidential Decree of Ukraine of 10 June 2016, no. 248/2016, amendment of 1 August 2022 about the approval of the Regulations on passing of military service in the Armed Forces of Ukraine foreigners and stateless persons, <https://cis-legislation.com/document.fwx-?rgn=86889> [accessed: 22 March 2023].

However, the Ukrainian army wants soldiers with qualifications in specific Western equipment it had been supplied, such as the FGM-148 Javelin Anti-Tank missile, and advanced technical infantry skills that Western militaries have greater institutional knowledge of such as sniping.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba claimed that by 6 March 2022, more than 20,000 volunteers from 52 countries had enlisted to fight for Ukraine.<sup>4</sup> Despite these claims of the total number of foreign volunteers, Ukrainian Ministry of Defence officials have consistently refused to give more precise figures for those currently deployed in frontline combat, or numbers relating to nationality. Multiple sources report that the International Legion of Territorial Defence of Ukraine is currently organized into a brigade of three battalions, with an estimated manning state of between 1,500 to 3,000 members at any one time.<sup>5</sup>

The Ukrainian government advises prospective International Legion volunteers to contact the Defence Attaché of the Ukrainian embassy in their respective country.<sup>6</sup> The criteria listed for joining included having prior military or medical experience and submitting documents as proof of military service to the Ministry of Defence official at the Ukrainian embassy.

Examining the topic of foreign fighters is inherently challenging, particularly in the midst of an ongoing war. Due to operational security and potential legal implications, whether in their home countries or following their capture, much of their activity is covert. Conversely, a number of foreign volunteers, including one Kiwi veteran, have been very active across social media.

## New Zealand veterans fighting for Ukraine

According to Oleksandr Kirichuk, Ukraine's honorary consul in Auckland, by the first week of March 2022, over 500 New Zealanders had volunteered to fight in Ukraine against Russia.<sup>7</sup> Most of these volunteers did not proceed past the enquiry

<sup>4</sup> *Ukraine says 20,000 volunteers from 52 countries sign up to fight*, "The Times of Israel", 07 March 2022, [https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog\\_entry/ukraine-says-20000-volunteers-from-52-countries-sign-up-to-fight/](https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/ukraine-says-20000-volunteers-from-52-countries-sign-up-to-fight/) [accessed: 22 March 2023].

<sup>5</sup> A. Clapp, *Fighters with Ukraine's foreign legion are being asked to sign indefinite contracts. Some have refused*, "The Economist, 1843 Magazine", 11 March 2022, <https://www.economist.com/1843/2022/03/11/fighters-with-ukraines-foreign-legion-are-being-asked-to-sign-indefinite-contracts-some-have-refused> [accessed: 29 March 2023].

<sup>6</sup> V. Zelenskyy, *Appeal to foreign citizens to help Ukraine in fighting against Russia's aggression*, President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy Official Website, 27 February 2022, <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/zvernennya-do-gromadyan-inozemnih-derzhav-yaki-pragnut-do-pom-73213> [accessed: 22 March 2023].

<sup>7</sup> R. Sadler, *Over 500 Kiwis volunteer to fight for Ukraine International Legion against Russia despite a 'do not travel' warning*, Newshub, 08 March 2022, <https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/new-zealand/2022/03/over-500-kiwis-volunteer-to-fight-for-ukraine-international-legion-against-russia-despite-a-do-not-travel-warning.html> [accessed: 22 March 2023].



stage, however a small but significant number of NZ veterans have followed through the enlistment process and are now serving, or have served, in the International Legion. As of this article two of them, Dominic Abelen<sup>8</sup> and Kane Te Tai,<sup>9</sup> have been killed in action during combat operations in the Donbass Oblast. Both of these men were serving in the International Legion's Special Service Group (LSSG), which is composed of foreign fighters and was established by the Ukrainian Defence Ministry's intelligence directorate (Головне управління розвідки). The exact number of New Zealand veterans fighting in Ukraine fluctuates on a weekly or even daily basis as NZ veterans are killed, wounded or simply decide they have done enough and return home. However, from interviews with veterans it can be estimated that there are somewhere between 15–25 New Zealanders posted to front line combat units at any particular time. The total of New Zealand veterans who have fought from the beginning of the conflict is estimated anecdotally to be approximately 50 personnel.

## Motivations behind New Zealand veterans' participation

The motivations of New Zealand veterans fighting in Ukraine are complex and multifaceted, reflecting a unique blend of personal, political, and cultural factors. These include actively attempting to live up to the ideals and values of the historical legacy of the ANZAC myth. The majority of NZ veterans, compelled by a strong moral compass, view the conflict as a fight for democracy, human rights, and the protection of innocent lives. At the same time, their willingness to face danger and adversity is fuelled by a sense of duty, a thirst for adventure, a drive to test their military training in a high intensity conflict, and a desire to rekindle past experiences of camaraderie with their new comrades, particularly fellow Kiwis.

### Historical context and the ANZAC spirit

In order to understand the motivations of New Zealand veterans fighting in Ukraine, it is crucial to consider the historical context influencing their actions. The concept of the 'ANZAC spirit' – the enduring values of courage, mate-ship, and sacrifice – is deeply ingrained in the national psyche of New Zealand and its sibling nation, Australia. This sense of camaraderie and shared sacrifice has its roots in the Gallipoli campaign of World War I, where soldiers from the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) fought side by side.

<sup>8</sup> Ch. Graham-McLay, *New Zealand soldier who joined Ukraine foreign legion confirmed killed*, "The Guardian", 25 August 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/25/new-zealand-soldier-who-joined-ukraine-foreign-legion-confirmed-killed> [accessed: 29 March 2023].

<sup>9</sup> Eadem, *Former New Zealand soldier killed fighting Russian forces in Ukraine*, "The Guardian", 23 March 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/23/former-new-zealand-soldier-kane-te-tai-confirmed-killed-ukraine-russia-war> [accessed: 29 March 2023].

New Zealand's history is marked by its involvement in several major conflicts, including the World Wars and the Vietnam War, as well as numerous smaller operational deployments, particularly throughout the 1990's and into the 2000's. This legacy influences NZ veterans' decision to fight in Ukraine, as they draw parallels between past struggles and the current conflict. They see their actions as a continuation of their nation's tradition of standing up against injustice and tyranny.

For many New Zealand veterans, the motivation to fight in Ukraine is reminiscent of the sense of duty and moral obligation that drove their forebears to fight in earlier conflicts, and why they themselves deployed to such theatres as East Timor and Afghanistan whilst serving with the NZDF. The ANZAC spirit serves as a powerful source of inspiration for these veterans, who see their decision to join the fight in Ukraine as an extension of the same values that their ancestors fought for.

### Military experience and opportunity to demonstrate combat skill sets

Many New Zealand veterans fighting in Ukraine, particularly those of the combat trades such as Infantry, are motivated in large part by a deep desire to test their military training and skill sets in a conventional conflict and gain much coveted combat experience. New Zealand Army combat trade training emphasizes land based, conventional operations skill sets throughout a soldier's career, yet most of New Zealand's recent historical operational deployments have not given veterans the opportunity to employ these skill sets to a large degree.<sup>10</sup> Many of the NZ veterans in Ukraine have previously deployed operationally to East Timor, Afghanistan and other conflicts whilst serving in the New Zealand Defence Force, but feel dissatisfied with their experiences, in particular the relative lack of close combat, and seek to test their skills at the highest perceived operational level and finally gain experience in a 'real' war. These veterans often seek to validate their past service and affirm their veteran identity by engaging in the type of combat operations they were trained to fight in, but during their service in the NZDF did not have the opportunity to participate in.

### Personal motivations and the pursuit of justice

Beyond the historical context and the influence of the ANZAC spirit, more personal motivations also play a significant role in driving New Zealand veterans to join the conflict in Ukraine. For many, a sense of justice and the desire to defend the underdog are powerful motivators. This value has been reinforced particularly in veterans of East Timor, Afghanistan, and other countries where they experienced situations of great suffering by the civilian populace at the hands of aggressors. They view the Ukrainian conflict as an opportunity to stand up for a nation that has been the victim of aggression and territorial incursion from a larger, better-armed neighbour. In his appeal for foreign

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with NZ veteran serving in the International Legion of Territorial Defense.

volunteers, President Zelenskyy of Ukraine described the conflict as being ‘the beginning of a war against Europe, against European structures.’<sup>11</sup> In this sense, NZ veterans achieve ideological alignment with Ukraine’s cause.

A number of NZ veterans have had difficulty transitioning from their military careers back into civilian life. Estimates of 20–25% have been made in academic papers, which is relative to statistics from Australia, Canadian, American, and British studies. Unable or even unwilling to adjust to civilian life, some NZ veterans feel alienated from society and, as a result, experience difficulty in maintaining gainful employment, relationships outside of their veteran cohort, and finding satisfaction overall in their post-military service lives. To these veterans, the war in Ukraine has presented an opportunity to reinforce their identity as soldiers and regain the value they feel they have lost since entering civilian society. NZ veterans who reported feeling ‘numb’ and ‘lost’ during their post-service lives describe being emotionally and psychologically ‘recharged’ at the thought of fighting in Ukraine.<sup>12</sup>

The desire to help others in need is also a powerful motivator for many New Zealand veterans. The NZDF has been predominately employed on Operations Other Than War since the 1990’s, with the majority of deployments over that time period being United Nations peacekeeping and humanitarian missions. As such, most NZ veterans are to a degree inculcated to view the inhabitants of countries they deploy to with empathy, as a result of both their training and operational experience. NZ veterans have seen the suffering of Ukrainian people in the media, and their sense of compassion compels a number of them to act. This altruistic drive may also be rooted in New Zealand’s cultural values of empathy and social responsibility.

#### Political motivations:

##### The defence of democracy and the international rules-based system

In addition to personal motivations, the political landscape plays a significant role in shaping the motivations of New Zealand veterans fighting in Ukraine. For many, the conflict in Ukraine represents a struggle for democracy and self-determination of a sovereign nation. In that, there are close parallels to the situation in East Timor during 1999, which led directly to the NZDF’s operational deployment there for its largest mission since the Malayan Emergency in the 1950’s. By joining the fight in the Ukrainian war, these veterans are expressing their commitment as individuals to the principles of freedom, human rights, and the international rules-based system. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has been widely framed as a struggle between democratic values and authoritarian aggression. Many New Zealand veterans view their

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<sup>11</sup> N.K.-T. Haptom, *The Composition and Challenges of Foreign Fighters in Ukraine*, “Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies” 2022, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 79–90, <https://doi.org/10.31374/sjms.151>.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with NZ veteran serving in the International Legion of Territorial Defense.

involvement in the conflict as a defence of democracy and a stand against the expansion of authoritarian Russian influence in Europe. This perspective aligns with New Zealand's long-standing commitment to democratic principles and the rule of law.

Furthermore, the veterans' decision to fight in Ukraine can also be viewed as a personal response to the perceived inaction or insufficient action of the New Zealand government. Although the government has provided funding and peripheral military support – training, logistics, intelligence – no NZDF personnel have been deployed to Ukraine nor is New Zealand willing to take part in direct combat, in line with the rest of the West's stance. By taking matters into their own hands, these veterans are demonstrating their personal ethos about the importance of standing up for democratic values and taking direct action to fight aggression when national leadership is seen by some of them to fall short of their own values.

### The allure of adventure and the warrior ethos

It is important not to overlook the intertwined roles of adventure seeking and the warrior ethos in motivating New Zealand veterans to fight in Ukraine. Many of these veterans have spent their lives training for and participating in military operations, and the prospect of engaging in a new and righteous conflict can be a powerful draw. In particular, NZ veterans of the Afghan campaign widely feel that their efforts and sacrifices were wasted, and that, ultimately, the campaign was not a 'good fight'. Conversely, the war in the Ukraine is widely accepted as being a morally 'right' war, and therefore one worth fighting and sacrificing for.<sup>13</sup>

The NZ Army is an *iwi* (*Tē Reo Māori* for tribe) in its own right, *Ngāti Tumatauenga* – which translates literally as 'The tribe of the War God.'<sup>14</sup> *Ngāti Tumatauenga* blends the customs and warrior traditions of *Māori* (New Zealand's indigenous people) and European military tradition to lay the basis of the New Zealand Army's ethos and values. Also, the 28<sup>th</sup> Māori Battalion, an infantry unit composed primarily of *Māori* soldiers, of the NZ 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, fought with distinction in World War II. The unit's legacy of courage and sacrifice is a source of pride for many NZ veterans, both *Māori* and *Pākehā*, to this day.

For many veterans, the opportunity to test their skills in high intensity, conventional military operations is a significantly motivating factor in travelling to Ukraine to fight. Although exposed to a high tempo of NZDF operational deployments from the late 1990's till the mid 2010's, the majority of NZ veterans did not experience any combat in the form of employing their personal weapons against a threat, with limited overall exposure close combat actions overall. Many combat trade veterans of the NZDF feel that despite multiple operational deployments

<sup>13</sup> Interview with NZ veteran serving in the International Legion of Territorial Defense

<sup>14</sup> P. McKenzie, *How the NZ Army became an iwi*, Newsroom, 25 November 2018, <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/peter-mckenzie-on-army-as-an-iwi-for-monday> [accessed: 05 April 2023].

throughout their careers, they have not had the opportunity to truly earn the title of veteran, having never seen combat on par with other countries' veterans or their ANZAC forefathers, and demonstrate their commitment to the warrior ethos, particularly NZ Army veterans with regard to *Ngāti Tumatuenga*.

### Camaraderie

For some veterans, the opportunity to fight in Ukraine represents an adventure and a chance to forge new friendships that allows them to reengage the level of camaraderie that they lost upon leaving NZDF service.<sup>15</sup> The camaraderie that develops among soldiers is well-documented and can create immensely strong bonds, transcending national and cultural differences. These veterans are drawn to the experience of shared adversity and the opportunity to bond with like-minded individuals.

### Personal connections

Some New Zealand veterans have personal connections to Ukraine or the wider region, such as family members or close friends, as there is a significant Ukrainian diaspora in New Zealand. This creates a strong emotional attachment to the conflict for some veterans and a heightened sense of responsibility to fight in Ukraine.

### Global security and stability

New Zealand veterans recognize that the conflict in Ukraine has implications for global security and stability. They feel that their participation in the conflict helps to prevent the spread of violence and instability in the region, which could have negative consequences for international relations and the global economy. This follows on from their service in the NZDF, particularly operational deployments, which were couched to them in terms of promoting and enabling stability and security across the globe.

### Alliance solidarity

New Zealand has a history of supporting its allies in times of conflict, from its participation in the world wars to its involvement in more recent conflicts such as Afghanistan and Iraq. The veterans fighting in Ukraine see their actions as an extension of this tradition, demonstrating solidarity with Ukraine and its many allies in the face of Russian aggression. Veterans from different countries fighting in Ukraine, such as America, New Zealand, and Australia, often bond initially over shared experiences in coalition operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. They view fighting in Ukraine as an organic extension of that shared desire to protect common values.

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with NZ veteran serving in the International Legion of Territorial Defense.

## Economic incentives

Whilst opponents of foreign fighters in Ukraine, including those denigrating NZ veterans fighting there, often portray them as being motivated to fight for financial reasons, the fact that the International Legion of Territorial Defence of Ukraine pay rate is the same as the wider Ukrainian Armed Forces – adjusted for trade and rank – makes that unlikely. At approximately £7,000 a month (US\$230),<sup>16</sup> this pay rate is significantly lower than Western militaries. NZ volunteers also have to pay their own way to Ukraine and back, as well as purchase much of their own equipment, food, and ancillaries whilst on the ground.<sup>17</sup>

## Impact on society

Considering that New Zealand has a relatively limited veterans support system that caters for only those NZDF personnel who have deployed on gazetted operations,<sup>18</sup> there is no formal, practical support available for NZ veterans returning home from fighting in the Ukraine. There are concerns amongst some within New Zealand that the experience of war, particularly a war such as this, with levels of violence unseen in Europe since the end of the Second World War, may see volunteers bring the emotional, psychological, and physical effects of this violence back to their home country.

## Conclusion

The motivations of New Zealand veterans fighting in Ukraine are complex and multifaceted, reflecting a unique blend of personal, political, and cultural factors. These include the intent of actively living up to the ideals of the historical legacy of the ANZAC myth as well as the warrior ethos and values of *Ngāti Tumatuenga*. The majority of these individuals, compelled by a strong moral compass, view the conflict as a fight for democracy, human rights, and the protection of innocent lives. At the same time, their willingness to face danger and adversity is fuelled by a sense of duty and a shared bond with their fellow soldiers, particularly fellow Kiwis. While the individual motivations may vary, these New Zealand veterans' actions in Ukraine ultimately demonstrate their unwavering commitment to making a difference in a volatile world and standing up for the principles they hold dear.

<sup>16</sup> A. Clapp, *op. cit.*

<sup>17</sup> Interview with NZ veteran serving in the International Legion of Territorial Defense.

<sup>18</sup> *Qualifying Service*, Veterans' Affairs New Zealand, 08 February 2023, <https://www.veteransaffairs.mil.nz/eligibility/qualifying-service/> [accessed: 05 April 2023].

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*Kiwis on the Eastern Front: The motivations  
of New Zealand veterans fighting for Ukraine*

*Abstract*

According to Oleksandr Kirichuk, Ukraine's honorary consul in Auckland, by the first week of March 2022, over 500 New Zealanders had volunteered to fight in Ukraine against Russia. The exact number of New Zealand veterans fighting in Ukraine fluctuates on a weekly or even daily basis as NZ veterans are killed, wounded or simply decide they have done enough and return home. However, from interviews with veterans, it can be estimated that there are somewhere between 15–25 New Zealanders posted to front line combat units at any particular time. The motivations of New Zealand veterans fighting in Ukraine are complex and multifaceted, reflecting a unique blend of personal, political, and cultural factors. This article explores the underlying motivations of these New Zealand veterans to engage in a conflict far from home; delving into the various personal, social, and political factors that have influenced their decision to serve in Ukraine.

Keywords: Ukraine conflict, New Zealand veterans, New Zealand Defence Force, International Legion of Territorial Defence





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# 'They asked for it': Democratic Peace Theory and Vietnamese perceptions of the Russo-Ukrainian War

## Introduction

Perceptions of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 vary significantly, notably at the international level. Governments and most citizens in established democratic countries tend to view Putin and the Russian state as largely responsible for the conflict. However, governments and citizens of countries outside the democratic 'West' often take a different position, as seen in the recent votes taken in the United Nations.<sup>1</sup> In such countries, governments may view Ukraine, the United States, and NATO as partly or even fully responsible for the conflict. Are these views politically driven, or do they reflect an element of culture and national identity?

This paper first discusses Democratic Peace Theory, setting out a theoretical position for understanding the role culture and national identity may play in the formation of perceptions of responsibility for the Russo-Ukrainian war. As an unusual example, the paper then outlines the actions of the Vietnamese government following the outbreak of the war and compares these with the views held by Vietnamese citizens. Finally, the paper explores whether non-democratic countries such as Vietnam can be used to explore key issues in Democratic Peace Theory.

<sup>1</sup> *Ukraine: UN General Assembly demands Russia reverse course on 'attempted illegal annexation'*, United Nations News, 12 October 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/10/1129492> [accessed: 01 May 2023].

## Democratic Peace Theory and the origins of differences in perception of conflicts

Most studies of the interaction of national-level politics and broader international relations cite an often-voiced assertion that democratic states seldom, if ever, go to war with each other. This claim has a surprisingly long history. Building on work by Thomas Paine, Immanuel Kant argued in his 1795 essay *Towards Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*<sup>2</sup> that the establishment of democratic governments would ensure a more peaceful international system. Kant believed that democratic governments are less likely to go to war with each other than other forms of government. He reasoned that such governments can be punished electorally for engaging in unpopular or unsuccessful wars, restraining the temptation to resort to force to resolve international disputes. When two democratically elected governments find themselves in dispute, both will tend to shy away from military conflict, making 'kinetic warfare'<sup>3</sup> even less likely.

In the last 40 years, a sizeable group of political scientists, including Michael Doyle,<sup>4</sup> John Owen,<sup>5</sup> and Bruce Russett<sup>6</sup> have written extensively on these ideas, first described as Democratic Peace Theory (DPT) by Doyle in 1983. Of importance, authors in this group have provided empirical evidence to support the core assertion that democratic governments rarely, if ever, go to war with each other.<sup>7</sup>

While many authors accept the broad assertions of DPT, the approach has also drawn some prominent critics. John Mearsheimer,<sup>8</sup> Christopher Layne,<sup>9</sup> and Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder<sup>10</sup> have all questioned key assumptions underpinning the theory. These, and later, critics point to the very narrow definition of

<sup>2</sup> I. Kant, *Zum ewigen Frieden: Ein philosophischer Entwurf*, bei Friedrich Nicolovius, Königsberg 1795.

<sup>3</sup> T. Noah, *Birth of a Washington Word*, Slate, 20 November 2002, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2002/11/kinetic-warfare.html> [accessed: 01 May 2023].

<sup>4</sup> M.W. Doyle, *Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs*, "Philosophy & Public Affairs" 1983, vol. 12, no. 3, pp. 205–235.

<sup>5</sup> J.M. Owen, *How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace*, "International Security" 1994, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 87–125, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539197>.

<sup>6</sup> B. Russett, J.R. Oneal, M. Cox, *Clash of Civilizations, or Realism and Liberalism Déjà Vu? Some Evidence*, "Journal of Peace Research" 2000, vol. 37, no. 5, pp. 583–608.

<sup>7</sup> M.W. Doyle, *op. cit.*; J.L. Ray, *Wars Between Democracies: Rare, or Nonexistent?*, "International Interactions" 1993, vol. 18, no. 3, pp. 251–276; D. Reiter, A.C. Stam, *Democracies at War*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ 2002; B. Russett, J.R. Oneal, M. Cox, *op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> J.J. Mearsheimer, *The False Promise of International Institutions*, "International Security" 1994, vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 5–49.

<sup>9</sup> Ch. Layne, *Kant or Cant: the Myth of the Democratic Peace*, "International Security" 1994, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 5–49, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539195>.

<sup>10</sup> E.D. Mansfield, J. Snyder, *Democratization and War*, "Foreign Affairs" 1995, vol. 74, no. 3, pp. 79–97, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20047125>.

'democracy' required to support the theory's core claim. They argue that DPT fails to explain examples of proto- or quasi-democratic states going to war together, such as the 1812 war between Great Britain and the United States or the 'football war' between Honduras and El Salvador in 1969.

Further criticism of DPT, central to this paper, focuses on the failure of the theory to address the role that culture, norms, and national identity play in shaping relations between countries. In particular, Alexander Wendt, a prominent constructivist scholar, argues that DPT ignores the importance of these variables in shaping a state's international behaviour. In his article *Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics*,<sup>11</sup> Wendt suggests it might not be political institutions and systems *per se* that determine the likelihood of a country resorting to force internationally. Rather he suggests it might be deeper cultural norms within countries that drive political decisions to use, or not use, violence to resolve international disputes. In other words, democratic political institutions themselves do not lead to pacificism, but rather, pacificism and democratic norms are both 'co-variants' or twin outcomes of deeper cultural beliefs held by individuals within states. In simple terms, Wendt argues that it is a nation's culture rather than its political system, that determine the stance of nations toward conflict and the exercise of power to resolve disputes.

Wendt's view is explored further in the next sections of this paper. Wendt's argument is that cultural norms matter more than political systems when it comes to predicting how nations respond to their *own* international disputes. In the following discussion, we will explore whether key cultural views and experiences matter more than political systems when explaining how citizens and governments react to *other* countries' international disputes, in this case the reactions of the Vietnamese government and its population to the Russo-Ukrainian war. This nuance has practical implications, discussed in the conclusion of the article.

## How does the Vietnamese government view the Russo-Ukrainian war?

Vietnam is one-party socialist republic led by the Vietnamese Communist Party. As such, Vietnam is very far from being the kind of electorally constrained democracy envisaged by Doyle in his seminal work on Democratic Peace Theory.<sup>12</sup> Vietnam scored just 19/100 in a recent *Freedom in the World Report*<sup>13</sup> and was ranked 145<sup>th</sup>

<sup>11</sup> A. Wendt, *Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics*, "International Organisation" 1992, vol. 46, no. 2, pp. 391–425.

<sup>12</sup> M.W. Doyle, *op. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> *Countries and Territories*, Freedom House, 2023, <https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores?sort=asc&order=Total%20Score%20and%20Status> [accessed: 01 May 2023].

of 176 countries listed in the Universität Würzburg's Democracy Matrix.<sup>14</sup> While the Vietnamese government holds elections, 99% of the candidates are pre-selected by the Communist Party.<sup>15</sup> As such, the Vietnamese government is largely unconstrained by public opinion and can choose how to act when faced with international disputes without any fear of electoral consequences.

In this case, while Vietnam is not in dispute with either Russia or Ukraine, the Russo-Ukrainian war poses a very significant geo-political quandary for Hanoi. It therefore provides a good case study of an international conflict that does not directly involve Vietnam, but to which the Vietnamese government and people are forced to pay close attention.

Why does this conflict pose difficulties for a state actor who is not directly involved in the dispute? To explain this, we need to discuss the relationships Vietnam has forged with the key parties to the conflict.

First, Vietnam and Ukraine. While not an obvious pairing, Vietnam and Ukraine have, in fact, enjoyed a fruitful thirty-year relationship since Vietnam recognised Ukrainian independence in 1991. Vietnam had a long association with businesses and the military in Ukraine when Ukraine was part of the USSR, and as a result, Kiev rapidly became an important trade partner and access point to Europe for Vietnam, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. To this day Ukraine is a major supplier of Soviet-designed military equipment to the Vietnam military, with Ukrainian companies contracted to maintain this equipment in Vietnam.<sup>16</sup>

Second, Vietnam and the United States. Surprisingly perhaps, in recent years Vietnam has become the United States' closest strategic partner in South-east Asia.<sup>17</sup> This increasingly important relationship is driven in large part by Washington and Hanoi's mutual and growing concern over China's military build-up in the region. However, the partnership goes deeper than simply growing military ties. Following normalisation of diplomatic relations in the 1990's, economic ties have grown rapidly with a bi-lateral trade agreement signed in July 2000. In 2015, President Obama hosted Nguyễn Phú Trọng, the General Secretary of the Vietnamese Communist

<sup>14</sup> *Ranking of Countries by Quality of Democracy*, Universität Würzburg – Democracy Matrix, <https://www.democracymatrix.com/ranking> [accessed: 01 May 2023].

<sup>15</sup> T. Bui, *Elections in a Communist Party Regime: Vietnam's Electoral Integrity Reforms and Challenges*, The Australian Political Studies Association Annual Conference, University of Sydney, 2014, [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2440088](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2440088) [accessed: 01 May 2023].

<sup>16</sup> *Trade important to Vietnam – Ukraine relations: PM*, "People's Army Newspaper", 07 September 2017, <https://en.qdnd.vn/foreign-affairs/bilateral-relations/trade-important-to-vietnam-ukraine-relations-pm-484506> [accessed: 01 May 2023].

<sup>17</sup> J. Kurlantzick, *Russia's Ties to Southeast Asia and How They Affect the Ukraine War: Part 3, Singapore and Vietnam*, "Council on Foreign Relations", 07 April 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/russias-ties-southeast-asia-and-how-they-affect-ukraine-war-part-3-singapore-and-vietnam> [accessed: 01 May 2023].

Party, at the White House.<sup>18</sup> In addition, over two million ethnic Vietnamese settled in the USA, following the fall of Saigon in 1975, and many maintained relationships with family in Vietnam. With easing diplomatic tensions, these familial bonds have played a key role in strengthening business and cultural connections between the two countries.

Finally, Vietnam and Russia. While Vietnam's new partnership with the USA and the growing friendship with Ukraine have been generally welcomed in Hanoi, they have grown up alongside Hanoi's much older and much more significant relationship with Russia. The Soviet Union was for many decades Vietnam's closest military, economic, and political ally, and without Soviet assistance in its war with the USA, the North Vietnamese would have struggled and potentially failed to take the South. Russia inherited and then maintained these strong ties and friendship with Hanoi, following the dissolution of the USSR. In 2013, Vietnam and Russia signed a regional military cooperation pact<sup>19</sup> and economic ties between the two countries have remained important throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

While occasionally awkward, Vietnam's multi-lateral approach to international relations has been manageable for much of the last twenty years. While tensions between Russia, Ukraine, and the United States have mounted over this period, Vietnam was none-the-less able to balance these three relationships. However, this pragmatic multilateralism, enshrined in Vietnam's 'Four Nos' defence policy<sup>20</sup> has been severely tested since February 2022.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 caught Vietnam (together with many other countries) largely by surprise and created a set of urgent and complex decisions for the Vietnamese government to make. Since the invasion, Hanoi has been forced to resolve a range of severely conflicting economic, military, and defence priorities. Notably, Ukraine and Russia both supply and service Vietnam's military equipment, and the US and Russia have both attempted to persuade Vietnam to engage more closely with their militaries, and less closely with their rivals, albeit for somewhat different reasons.

In response to these challenges, the Vietnamese government has decided to avoid (as far as possible) taking sides in the conflict. To this end, it has not expressed overt support for either party in the Russo-Ukrainian war. In four of the five United Nations General Assembly votes relating to the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Resolution ES-11/1 through ES-11/5), Vietnam has chosen to abstain from voting.

<sup>18</sup> D.C. Kang, *American Grand Strategy and East Asian Security in the Twenty-First Century*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2017.

<sup>19</sup> S. Blank, *Russia's Growing Ties with Vietnam*, The Diplomat, 19 September 2013, <https://thediplomat.com/2013/09/russias-growing-ties-with-vietnam/> [accessed: 01 May 2023].

<sup>20</sup> H.T. Sang, *Vietnam's "Four Nos" of defence policy are being tested*, The Interpreter, 26 April 2022, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/vietnam-s-four-no-s-defence-policy-are-being-tested#:~:text=Vietnam> [accessed: 01 May 2023].

Vietnam voted against just one of the five resolutions (Resolution ES11/3), introduced by the United States to suspend Russia's membership in the UN Human Rights Council.

In summary, the Vietnamese government is clearly autocratic by design and has very significant historical and ongoing ties to Russia, a similarly autocratic state. Yet, none of these cultural, military, or political similarities appear to have influenced Hanoi's decision-making to any significant extent in the last two years. Rather than offer its decades-long supporter and once-essential ally any clear support, the Vietnamese government has pursued a path of neutrality, acting in effect to grant equal status to the needs of its one-time friend (Russia) and its one-time enemy (the United States) together with America's supposed 'lackey' Ukraine. The decision seems driven by a strategic *Realpolitik*, without any obvious consideration for history, cultural ties, or long-standing national friendships. From the perspective of Wendt's view of the primacy of culture and identity in determining a nation's international relations, the evidence here is not convincing. Vietnam's decisions to strive for neutrality seems more rooted in a politico-military calculus, than in any cultural imperatives.

## How do Vietnamese people view the conflict?

In mid-December 2022, the author conducted two in-person focus groups with Vietnamese citizens, one group of business executives and a second of mature business students, both in Ho Chi Minh City. The two sessions lasted an hour each and explored participants attitudes to the Russo-Ukrainian war. Subsequent written correspondence was undertaken to better understand the attitudes of some members.

Such a small-scale effort to understand Vietnamese views can reasonably be criticised. First, the total number of participants was small, numbering just 15 people. Second, participants were arguably unrepresentative of the Vietnamese population as all participants were degree-holding, fluent in English, well-informed, unrestricted internet users, and most had travelled or worked outside of Vietnam. Third, holding focus groups in autocratic states like Vietnam can be problematic. Participants may be inclined to self-censor, particularly given the sensitive nature of the topics discussed.

Given these limitations, the following analysis must be seen as exploratory rather than confirmatory. That said, it can also be noted that focus group research often involves small groups, and while not representative of the overall Vietnamese population, the group was characteristic of young, up-and-coming business and opinion leaders in Ho Chi Minh City. Again, while the possibility of self-censorship remains, participants appeared largely at ease discussing the Russo-Ukrainian war in front of their peers who had been co-students and in some cases friends for some time. When asked, one participant commented that he did not feel overly concerned about speaking his mind on 'these sorts of things' in Vietnam (however,

he noted that he would not 'go out on street protests calling for the overthrow of the government, that would be stupid').

The session began with participants being asked to work individually and privately. The task was to produce an individual rank-ordered list in response to the prompt 'List in order the three countries you believe are the most responsible for the war in Ukraine.' Results were then collected, totals calculated, and the collective, anonymised results presented back to the group for discussion.

All participants identified either Ukraine or the United States as primarily responsible for the war in Ukraine. In total, Ukraine was scored 1<sup>st</sup> nine times and 2<sup>nd</sup> five times (total 19) while the US was scored 1<sup>st</sup> five times and 2<sup>nd</sup> nine times (total 23). No other countries were listed in first or second place.

Problems emerged with the requirement to list a third country. Some respondents asked permission to list only two countries, which was denied. However, in both groups, eventually one participant asked if NATO could be listed as a 'country.' With this option permitted, all participants completed their forms. Eight students listed 'NATO' as their third choice, while three chose 'England/UK,' two chose 'Russia,' one chose 'Germany,' and one participant wrote 'Zelensky!'.

Following the compilation and presentation of these results students were asked to discuss their choices. Comments below are taken from recordings of the sessions and are occasionally summarised for clarity.

The participants who selected Ukraine as their first choice (in other words, the most responsible for the conflict) explained that in their view Ukraine had 'triggered' or behaved in a manner that 'made' the war by 'trying to join the West.' One asserted: 'I think they asked for it [the war].' The self-imposed exile of Viktor Yanukovich to Russia in February 2014, following the Euromaidan unrest, was described by one participant as an 'overthrow' and another commented 'he was their elected president, but some Nazis overthrew him.' Another used the term 'coup' to describe what happened. In the eyes of these participants, a group of Ukrainians overthrew the elected government and then steered Ukraine toward the West, 'triggering' a reasonable Russian response.

The participants who believed the United States was primarily responsible for the conflict generally described the USA as 'using Ukraine' to establish control over an area Russia historically preferred to retain as a buffer state between itself and the NATO alliance. This was considered unacceptable behaviour by many. One commented: 'They [the USA] just want to control everything and everyone.' Another asked: 'What would they [the USA] do if the Russians took Mexico? They would react the same, they are [hypocrites]!' Others pointed to the actions of the USA in invading Iraq as evidence of an international double standard. Within this group, the CIA was also mentioned by some participants as sparking the Euromaidan unrest. 'They [the USA] do that everywhere, that's how they do it [take over countries].'

By comparison, the participants did not appear to see Ukrainian people as having any agency or control over the events leading up to the war. 'Ukrainians [are] just being used by America, they should have stayed with Russia, Russia was good to them!' The USA was seen to be fighting Russia, using Ukrainians who were for some reason powerless to resist. 'Americans are telling the Ukrainians what to do and giving them guns.' 'The Americans are smart, they don't want to die so they use the Ukrainians to fight, but this is all about the US and Russia, not about Ukraine.'

When it came to discuss third-listed 'countries,' opinions varied a little more. Most participants felt NATO or specific key NATO countries, such as the UK and Germany, sought the conflict in order to grow the coalition: 'They [NATO] wanted to pull Ukraine from Russia and this is how they get it. Look at Finland and Sweden. Same thing!' Only two participants suggested Russia had some responsibility for the conflict. One explained: 'They [Russia] were right to be worried [about western influence in Ukraine], but this invasion wasn't the right way to do it. They needed to talk more. If they'd talked more, they wouldn't have to invade [Ukraine].' The one participant who put 'Zelensky!' said: 'Zelensky is... weak... He's an idiot. He was put in by the Americans to do what they want. If he was stronger, he wouldn't let them [the USA] do this [use the Ukrainians to fight the Russians].'

The strength and uniformity of responses from these 15 Vietnamese citizens was unexpected, particularly as they were all well-educated, well-travelled, and well read, with unrestricted access to the internet, including Western news and opinion sites. The opinions of this group were also in stark contrast to the actions taken by their government, a point they were less vocal about.

## Explanations for the responses of these Vietnamese citizens

Two explanations offer themselves for the responses of these 15 participants. First, as discussed above, it might be that these participants were simply all self-censoring, given the sensitivity of the topics under discussion. While the Vietnamese government has taken pains to portray itself as 'neutral' in the conflict, in practice, many political figures and social influencers in Vietnam have expressed ferociously pro-Russian or anti-Western views on Vietnamese social media sites.<sup>21</sup> Extensive anti-American and anti-Ukrainian online commentary has not been taken down by government censors. The possibility exists that it remains up with the tacit consent of the Vietnamese government. It could be that all these participants were simply

<sup>21</sup> Q.T.T. Nguyen, *How Vietnamese "Putinistas" are spreading disinformation about Ukrainians*, The Conversation, 03 May 2022, <https://theconversation.com/how-vietnamese-putinistas-are-spreading-disinformation-about-ukrainians-181131> [accessed: 01 May 2023].



echoing this well understood 'unofficial official' line they have seen on Vietnamese TikTok, Facebook, and other such sites.

A second arguably more plausible explanation is that the views expressed by these 15 participants were genuinely held and reflect a shared Vietnamese view of the world. While many countries have been invaded at some point in their distant past, it is worth remembering Vietnam has fought four invading armies in just eighty years, three of which are easily within living memory of older citizens. Japan (invaded in the 1940s), France ('invaded' in the 1950s), and the USA (invaded in the 1960s) are now seen by the Vietnamese as key players in an ex-colonial 'Western alliance,' using Ukraine to fight their ally, Russia. China (who invaded Vietnam in the 1970s) is not the part of this 'ex-colonial western alliance,' but it is still viewed by many Vietnamese with deep suspicion. Indeed such are Vietnamese concerns over Chinese intentions for the area, the Vietnamese government has sought to ally itself with an earlier enemy (the USA) simply to deter Beijing.

Millions of Vietnamese people died in these Japanese, French, American, and Chinese wars, leaving a lasting sense of bitterness toward these four countries among some of the population. In stark contrast, through all four of these wars, the Soviet Union (Russia) was a generous and reliable primary ally, providing weapons, military training, military advisors, ammunition, logistics, and economic support for Vietnam over a period of decades.<sup>22</sup> Such behaviour arguably enabled the survival of the North Vietnamese state.

The likelihood is that the views expressed by the 15 focus group participants are not artefactual but are rather evidence of a widely shared Vietnamese worldview. Evidence for this can be seen in two opinion polls. According to a Pew Research Centre Global Attitudes Survey of citizens in 37 countries,<sup>23</sup> 79% of Vietnamese expressed a favourable view of Russian President Vladimir Putin in 2017, and 83% expressed a favourable view of Russia itself. These results are quite remarkable, given that the global median support for Putin in this survey was just 26%, while only 34% of the global survey participants had a positive view of Russia. A Gallup International Global Leaders poll the same year appears to confirm this result. In this second survey, using a very different methodology, 89% of Vietnamese participants were found to hold a 'favourable' or 'very favourable' view of President Putin. Again, this figure has to be placed in international context, and compared with just 79% of Russian participants and 14% of US respondents who expressed positive views of the Russian leader.<sup>24</sup> To be clear, more Vietnamese participants in the

<sup>22</sup> K.W. Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2013, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139021210>.

<sup>23</sup> M. Vice, *Publics Worldwide Unfavorable Toward Putin, Russia*, Pew Research Center, 16 August 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2017/08/16/publics-worldwide-unfavorable-toward-putin-russia/> [accessed: 01 May 2023].

<sup>24</sup> *Gallup International's 41<sup>st</sup> Annual Global End of Year Survey*, Gallup International, October–

Gallup poll rated Putin favourably than did participants in Russia itself. These polls results suggest the depth, uniformity, and direction of the views of the focus group participants was not artefactual, but a potentially realistic set of views for a group of well-educated, adult, middle-class Vietnamese students.

Finally, one last piece of evidence points to the strength of feeling of some of these Vietnamese participants. While Vietnamese support for Russia and dislike for Western nations is understandable at one level, at another level, when applied to the current situation in Ukraine, Vietnamese views also seem somewhat contradictory. This needs to be explained.

Vietnam has a lot of experience of being invaded by stronger, larger armies. It knows what it is like to fight a nuclear-armed superpower, almost entirely alone, surviving on weaponry, ammunition, and economic support provided by friendly allies, who are reluctant to get openly involved. It knows the terrible cost of fighting against the odds. It knows the suffering and widespread destruction of infrastructure and economic capacity that is the inevitable consequence of refusing to give in. It has been exactly where Ukraine is today, several times in the last century alone. Yet, for all these similarities, some of these participants seemed unsympathetic to what Ukraine is currently experiencing.

When asked about the similarities between Vietnamese and Ukrainian experiences, many participants struggled to see Ukraine as a fellow survivor, desperately fighting, as Vietnam had, to repel an invasion by a much stronger army. For these participants, the parallels simply were not evident. 'You say this is about Ukraine and the Ukrainians fighting Russia,' said one, '[b]ut we think this is about Russia and the Russians fighting the Western powers, in Ukraine. We don't see this the same as you.' Even when the parallels were accepted, a sense of empathy was not always apparent. One participant reflected: 'When China invaded us in 1979, they did it to teach us a lesson. And we learnt it! Ukraine should have done the same. You must understand what your stronger neighbour wants and be careful what you do as a country.' This participant was the individual who commented that in his view '[t]hey asked for it [the invasion].'

In summary, the Vietnamese participants in this small exploratory study expressed views that corresponded closely with those captured in wider, more rigorous opinion polls conducted in Vietnam five years earlier. If Russia's full-blown invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has reduced Vietnamese admiration for Putin's leadership (or for Russia itself) over the last five years, it was not evident in the views of participants in either of these two focus groups.

## Vietnamese views on the Russo-Ukrainian war and Democratic Peace Theory

Having laid out the position of the Vietnamese government and the views of a very small sample of Vietnamese citizens, it is possible now to consider these responses and whether they might tell us anything about the role of culture and politics in international relations.

To recap, Democratic Peace Theory suggests that *political* structures largely determine national decisions around international disputes. According to the theory, the structure of routine accountability integral to democratic systems (elections) restricts the impulse of governments to use force internationally. The 'handbrake' is a specific political mechanism rather than any particular cultural views or values underpinning the system. The 'handbrake' operates in societies as culturally varied as Japan, Iceland, and Costa Rica. By comparison, Alexander Wendt suggests the 'handbrake' is deeper underlying *cultural norms* common in democracies rather than surface political structures or processes. Wendt sees political artefacts, such as elections, as just other expressions of the same cultural imperatives that serve to constrain the use of state violence to resolve international disputes.

Can the present study of Vietnamese views add anything to this debate? One point that emerges forcibly from this study is that there is a significant lack of connection between the cultural norms and beliefs of Vietnamese people, and the political decision-making of the government. Public opinion polls, the unrestrained flood of pro-Russian messaging on Vietnamese social media, and the views of the participants in the two focus groups all point to a high level of support for Russian war aims and Russian society in general within Vietnam. Indeed, opinion polling suggests that support for Putin and Russia may have been greater in Vietnam in 2017 than in any other major country.<sup>25</sup> Equally, there appears to be some level of active dislike or distrust of Western nations and international agencies seen as being controlled by the West. In a similar vein, the narrative of Russia fighting the West was so powerful in one focus group, it overrode any sympathy for Ukrainian civilians, who are undergoing the very same trauma that the Vietnamese experienced multiple times in the last century. Wendt's view that political attitudes to conflict reflect underlying cultural value does not make sense here.

To the contrary, despite high levels of cultural support for Russia within Vietnam, the Vietnamese government's decision to adopt a neutral stance in the matter in the war suggests politics is more important. The Vietnamese government has presumably decided it cannot afford to antagonise its critical new friend, the United States, and thus it cannot support its once critical old friend, Russia.

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<sup>25</sup> M. Vice, *op. cit.*

This political decision has been taken despite Russia remaining Vietnam's principal arms supplier and a major economic partner. While the decision of the Vietnamese government to remain neutral in this conflict has garnered little media attention in the West, in some regards this erosion in Vietnam's long-standing support for Russia is as momentous as once-neutral Finland joining NATO.

What this lack of connection between the Vietnamese government and the Vietnamese people suggests is that Democratic Peace Theory is correct in at least one obvious respect. The Vietnamese government does not seem to feel at all constrained to make decisions around international relations that solely reflect the views of most of its citizens, its cultural preferences, or its traditional national identity. To bolster the future safety of the nation, it is prepared to pull out some key pillars of its cherished national story. Wendt's criticism that DPT places too much emphasis on political institutions, and not enough on cultural drivers of international relations, does not seem well supported by the decisions of the Vietnamese government in this instance. Political decisions in Vietnam have trumped cultural norms in determining a nation's stance on a significant international conflict.

## Conclusions

This paper has reviewed Democratic Peace Theory, the contention that political considerations prevent conflict, and Wendt's alternative view that culture, not politics, drives decision-making. The theory has been extended somewhat to ask whether it might be used to explain the decisions of nations simply observing and reacting to a significant conflict, rather than engaging in it themselves. The outcome of this theoretical exercise remains uncertain, and more research might be warranted. What is clear is that there is a significant lack of connection between the autocratic Vietnamese government's decision to take a neutral stance in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, and the views of the Vietnamese public, who appear generally supportive of Russia and Russian war aims. Should the Vietnamese government have been subject to the democratic processes, it would be very interesting to observe the outcomes of the next elections.

In conclusion, Wendt's suggestion that culture is a better predictor of the governmental decision-making than political structures or considerations when it comes to conflict does not seem well supported by the Vietnamese case. However, a note of caution is required. Vietnam is neither a democracy nor is it at war. Perhaps that places this case too far outside the usual run of examples discussed to be helpful.

That said, looking at unusual examples can be fruitful. While most democracies have (predictably) opted to support Ukraine, not all democracies have thrown their weight behind Ukraine. Notably, India, Mongolia, and South Africa have chosen to remain resolutely 'neutral' on the matter. In a group with Vietnam, these

democracies abstained in all five UN resolutions relating to the war. Indeed, to the frustration of some in the West, South Africa engaged in ten days of joint Naval exercises with China and Russia in early 2023.<sup>26</sup>

From the standpoint of Democratic Peace Theory, such behaviour might seem a little puzzling for democracies which retain democratic index scores similar to those gained by many countries in Europe.<sup>27</sup> However, all three countries have had long cultural ties to Russia and wish to continue their military and economic partnerships with the nation, even at the risk of distancing themselves from the United States. Perhaps these countries' behaviours lend some credence to Wendt's position.

Inside such 'democratic abstainers,' we have also seen very different responses from populations. In Indonesia, which abstained on two of the five UN resolutions, increasingly vocal elements of the population appear to support Russia.<sup>28</sup> In Mongolia conversely, popular support for Ukraine appears to be building.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, many autocratic countries have consistently voted to support resolutions in the UN introduced by the United States against Russia, such as Egypt and Haiti. Again, this behaviour is very difficult to explain from a purely political perspective. Wendt might argue here that these actions point clearly to the importance of culture and identity when making decisions around international relations.

Finally, the Russo-Ukrainian war has forced many countries to weigh long held cultural beliefs against shifting strategic and political imperatives. The process for some has been awkward. Vietnam, perhaps more than most, has been forced to confront some hard truths about its security needs and its shifting economic and political allegiances. It will be fascinating to watch how an autocratic government shifts a reluctant population away from its long cultural ties to Russia, toward a more western-leaning future.

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<sup>26</sup> *What we learned from the Russia-China-South Africa military drills*, Atlantic Council, 28 February 2023, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/what-we-learned-from-the-russia-china-south-africa-military-drills> [accessed: 01 May 2023].

<sup>27</sup> *The Economist Democracy Index*, Wikipedia, 25 May 2023, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Economist\\_Democracy\\_Index](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Economist_Democracy_Index) [accessed: 25 May 2023].

<sup>28</sup> A.M. Ibnu Aqil, *Pressure mounts for Indonesia to support wartime UN resolution*, Asia News Network, 24 February 2023, <https://asianews.network/pressure-mounts-for-indonesia-to-support-wartime-un-resolution> [accessed: 01 May 2023].

<sup>29</sup> M.J. Smith, *Mongolia's razor's edge relationship with Russia*, IPS, 04 June 2022, <https://www.ips-journal.eu/topics/democracy-and-society/mongolias-razors-edge-relationship-with-russia-5859/> [accessed: 01 May 2023].

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*'They asked for it': Democratic Peace Theory and Vietnamese perceptions of the Russo-Ukrainian War*

**Abstract**

Democratic Peace Theory argues that democratic countries are constrained by political forces in a manner that reduces the likelihood such states will resort to warfare to resolve disputes. This paper extends this argument to consider what happens when countries, democratic or otherwise, are forced to deal with nearby conflicts they are not engaged in themselves. Do political mechanisms still determine what decisions are made, or do cultural forces matter more, as has been suggested by critics of the theory? A case study of Vietnam responding to the Russo-Ukrainian war is used to explore these ideas, and some preliminary conclusions reached.

**Keywords:** Democratic Peace Theory, Vietnam, Ukraine, Russo-Ukrainian War







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# What is the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on New Zealand and what are the future implications?

## Introduction

In 2022, New Zealand, like the rest of the world, was astonished by the actions of Russian President Vladimir Putin launching the so-called 'special military operation' to 'demilitarise' Ukraine.<sup>1</sup> Ukrainian territory was hit by hundreds of Russian missiles and airstrikes supported by the ground forces advancing on multiple fronts and causing the largest humanitarian and refugee crisis in Europe since WWII. This invasion attracted immediate support for Ukraine among predominantly Western communities, and New Zealand also began preparing to assist affected Ukrainian citizens. Russia had broken international law in 2014 when it annexed Crimea and invaded eastern Ukraine and now reneged on the Minsk II agreements made in the aftermath of that conflict. Despite multiple historical factors for Russia's offensive action, the key issue is that a dominant state power explicitly rejected the laws and institutions of the international rules-based order by not respecting Ukrainian sovereignty and its right to exist as an independent nation.<sup>2</sup> Russia's violation of

<sup>1</sup> A. Troianovski, N. MacFarquhar, *Putin Announces Start to 'Military Operation' Against Ukraine*, "The New York Times", 23 February 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/23/world/europe/ukraine-russia-invasion.html> [accessed: 25 March 2023].

<sup>2</sup> T. Snyder, *The War in Ukraine is a Colonial War*, "The New Yorker", 28 April 2022, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/essay/the-war-in-ukraine-is-a-colonial-war> [accessed: 24 March 2023].

international law and institutions raises concerns for small states who rely on the rules-based order to uphold their political and territorial independence as well as mitigate the coercive power of large states.

For the purposes of this article the definition of a small state is based upon the power they exercise rather than the power they necessarily possess. This definition uses relational power as its basis, in that, 'small' is defined through the relationship between the state and its strategic environment. States are considered small if they are the weaker part in an asymmetric relationship within its strategic environment. Small states are therefore unable to alter the 'nature and function' of power relations of this environment on their own.<sup>3</sup> In this way, despite significant differences in empirical measures like population, geographic size, and military assets, both Ukraine and New Zealand share the challenges of small states in negotiating their interests within the competitive international community. Largely, the current international rules-based order promotes equal sovereignty among states and seeks to prevent large states from overtly using their power advantages to detrimentally influence small states. Therefore, when a large state deliberately violates these institutions, small states, as beneficiaries of these rules, actively contribute to international security operations which reinforce the current order.

The imbalance of security in Eastern Europe became a defence interest for New Zealand due to the involvement of their primary international partners. The country has benefitted from having longstanding economic relationships with great powers such as Russia, China, the European Union, the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States. However, in the competitive world of great powers, as a small state, New Zealand needs to choose their actions carefully when the interests of their larger partners cause instability. The outcome of the war in Ukraine will impact the rules-based order of the international system, either by reaffirming the current Western-led democratic model or strengthening the position for authoritarian models to supplant the status quo. Therefore, New Zealand needs to assess the intentions of the great powers to identify opportunities and challenges that best serve the country's national interests.

The aim of this article is to explore the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on New Zealand in a world of competing great powers. An assessment of possible future developments for New Zealand's choices within global challenges is offered to demonstrate the challenge for small states. Due to its reliance on international law and the rules-based order, New Zealand must participate in actions that uphold the international order as well as navigate their relationship with great powers on

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2023]; M. Mäliksoo, *The postcolonial moment in Russia's War against Ukraine*, "Journal of Genocide Research" 2022, p. 1, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2022.2074947>.

<sup>3</sup> M. Maass, *Small States in World Politics: The Story of Small State Survival 1648–2016*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 2017, pp. 24–25.

opposing sides of a conflict. Additionally, building relationships with like-minded small states by means of common features, values, and principles can be an alternative to the undue influence of large states.

This article presents a view through the lens of a Ukrainian immigrant living in New Zealand for the past 15 years and discusses the changing levels of interest in New Zealand's government and population towards Ukraine and the Ukrainian diaspora in New Zealand. It was noticed that prior to 2014, New Zealand's attention toward the Ukrainian people was quite insignificant. The situation changed to some degree in 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea and invaded Eastern Ukraine; however, this receptiveness to the voices of the Ukrainian communities were short-lived. The situation transformed significantly in 2022, as New Zealand provided support to Ukraine, following its international partners/great powers.

## Reaction to the invasion of Ukraine

Ukraine's relationship with Russia has always been problematic. The fall of both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union offered opportunities for Ukraine to assert its independence as a sovereign state. However, in the aftermath of these events, Russia took action to ensure its continued influence within Ukraine. The 2014 Revolution of Dignity, which forced Viktor Yanukovych from presidential office after acting against his citizens' wishes to sign political association and free trade agreements with the European Union instead strengthening ties to Russia, is seen as the catalyst for the current conflict.

The relationship between New Zealand and Russia had been gaining momentum prior to the invasion; however, New Zealand changed its position when Russia broke international law. In 1944, New Zealand and Russia established diplomatic relations and in 1973, the New Zealand embassy was opened in Moscow.<sup>4</sup> The two nations were able to successfully trade with each other during Cold War. With the fall of the Soviet Union, the global ideological confrontation disappeared and a new dynamic to the relationship between Russia and New Zealand was born. Overall, the economic relationship between the two countries was in New Zealand's favour. After years of negotiations, New Zealand, Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan were on their way to forming an FTA, which was supposed to boost New Zealand's economy by generating about 90% of exports free trade by 2030.<sup>5</sup> However, the talks were suspended by New Zealand as Russia annexed Crimea and violated international law.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> J. Headley, *Russia Resurgent: The Implications for New Zealand*, [in:] *Small States and the Changing Global Order: New Zealand Faces the Future*, ed. A.M. Brady, Springer, Cham 2019 (The World of Small States series, vol. 6), p. 214.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 214–217.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 217.

Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine is recognised by many states and international organisations as contravening international law regarding a state's right to sovereignty, treaties established between the two countries after Ukraine's independence, and the Minsk agreements signed after Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea. It is these violations of international institutions which threaten to undermine the international rules-based order that make the conflict in Ukraine an important issue for small states like New Zealand.

New Zealand respects the rule of law not only because of its principles but also as the need for a small state to maintain a sense of order with great powers. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, England introduced *Magna Carta*, a royal charter underpinning people's rights, their protection by the law, and equal justice for everyone. The legacy of this document entrenched a strong symbol of liberty in England as well as in all British colonies including New Zealand.<sup>7</sup> For New Zealand, *Magna Carta* became a cornerstone of the rule of law and represents the country as a trustworthy international partner. As a post-colonial nation of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, Ukraine did not have the same opportunities for a system based on the rule of law. The desire of the Ukrainian people was to become a modern democratic state by implementing the rule of law for the stability and prosperity of the country. However, New Zealand did not understand Ukrainian aspirations and most New Zealanders had a limited knowledge of Eastern Europe.

Prior to the Russian invasion, the ability of the small Ukrainian diaspora in New Zealand to influence political leadership in the country was limited. With only approximately 1500 ethnic Ukrainians identified, their ability to prompt political action, such as recognition of the Holodomor as genocide, was effectively non-existent. Even in the initial stages of the 2022 invasion, the New Zealand government appeared content to 'wait and see.' When members of the Ukrainian diaspora approached their local political representatives, they were informed that no plans to support Ukraine were being considered.<sup>8</sup> This position appeared to change because of the significant interest and reaction of the New Zealand public to the Russian aggression. New organisations were formed, such as Mahi for Ukraine, to petition the government to support Ukraine, as well as generate private funds to provide humanitarian assistance to Ukrainian citizens impacted by the conflict. Whilst the New Zealand government's initial responses were mainly punitive actions against Russia, public influence pushed for a more direct support to the Ukrainian people.

<sup>7</sup> *Magna Carta 1297*, New Zealand Legislation, Imperial Act 29, 28 March 1297, <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/imperial/1297/0029/latest/DLM10929.html> [accessed: 25 March 2023].

<sup>8</sup> Personal experience of the author with her local Member of Parliament.

## New Zealand's response to the invasion

New Zealand's response to the Russian aggression against Ukraine was not only laid in rejecting a potential FTA deal but in changing New Zealand legislation by introducing sanctions against Russia. New Zealand Parliament unanimously passed a bill to sanction the Russian Federation and individuals.<sup>9</sup> The key aspects of the Act were the banning of Russian individuals, government and military vessels under international sanctions, and freezing assets of individuals.<sup>10</sup> In addition to sanctions, the New Zealand government issued a notice prohibiting the export of all goods for the intention of use by the military and security services of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus.<sup>11</sup> Russia's response to New Zealand sanctions was to impose personal sanctions against 32 New Zealand officials, academics, and journalists for the promotion of the 'Russophobic agenda'.<sup>12</sup> Russia also added New Zealand to the list of countries that 'commit unfriendly actions against Russia'.<sup>13</sup>

New Zealand also supported Ukraine with humanitarian and military aid and offered immigration support to Ukrainian citizens. New Zealand has committed nearly NZ\$13 million in humanitarian and economic assistance. In terms of military support, New Zealand provided about NZ\$20 million of military aid either through the UK, NATO Comprehensive Assistance Package Trust Fund or in support of the Ukrainian Defence Intelligence.<sup>14</sup> The New Zealand Defence Force is committed in delivering training to Ukrainian soldiers alongside other nations as well as continuing support in logistics and intelligence.<sup>15</sup>

New Zealand also issued the 2022 Special Ukraine Policy allowing residents and citizens of New Zealand who were born in Ukraine to sponsor their closest families

<sup>9</sup> *Russia Sanctions Act 2022*, New Zealand Legislation, 17 May 2022, <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2022/0006/latest/whole.html> [accessed: 25 March 2023].

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>11</sup> *Export Controls (Export Prohibition to Specified Places) Notice 2022 (No 2)*, "New Zealand Gazette" 2022, notice no. 2022-go899, <https://gazette.govt.nz/notice/id/2022-go899> [accessed: 26 March 2023].

<sup>12</sup> *Foreign Ministry statement concerning personal sanctions against heads of municipal agencies, members of the command of the armed forces and journalists of New Zealand*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 30 July 2022, [https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/news/1824556/?lang=en&ysclid=l67x7j6hqz568094172](https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1824556/?lang=en&ysclid=l67x7j6hqz568094172) [accessed: 26 March 2023].

<sup>13</sup> *Russian government approves list of unfriendly countries and territories*, TASS Russian News Agency, 08 March 2022, <https://tass.com/politics/1418197> [accessed: 26 March 2023].

<sup>14</sup> *Russian invasion of Ukraine*, New Zealand Foreign Affairs and Trade, <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/en/countries-and-regions/europe/ukraine/russian-invasion-of-ukraine/> [accessed: 26 March 2023].

<sup>15</sup> *Support to Ukraine: Timeline*, New Zealand Defence Force, 13 April 2022 – 12 May 2023, <https://www.nzdf.mil.nz/media-centre/story-collections/support-to-ukraine/> [accessed: 06 July 2023].

and bring them to New Zealand under simplified procedures.<sup>16</sup> A year later, a new type of 2022 Special Ukraine Policy was issued on similar terms but with an extension to wider families of Ukrainians.<sup>17</sup> The support that New Zealand provided to Ukraine signalled New Zealand's intent of backing international communities and, at the same time, building its diplomatic relationship with Ukraine.

## Perspectives for the future

The outcome of the Russian invasion of Ukraine will determine the stability of Eastern Europe, and also have an impact on the global environment. As a small state, New Zealand needs to carefully contemplate the consequences of the potential outcomes of the Ukraine conflict and determine what actions to take that will best serve their national interests. The four important areas that New Zealand should consider regarding the Ukraine conflict are:

1. What benefits does New Zealand's current relationship with Ukraine bring?
2. What is the impact on New Zealand if Russia succeeds in Ukraine?
3. How does China perceive the Ukraine conflict, and how might the outcome impact its actions in the Asia-Pacific region?
4. What would be the impact of Ukraine's victory on New Zealand?

The relationship between Ukraine and New Zealand is somewhat recent, but if New Zealand was looking for a deeper affiliation what would be the possible advantages? Ukraine is an agricultural country that has rich mineral resources and advanced Information Technology (IT) industry. According to the World Bank report, Ukraine scores 67.4 out of 100 in enabling the business of agriculture in the country.<sup>18</sup> Another study indicates that despite fragility in some sectors, the economy of Ukraine is still showing remarkable growth, allowing the country to become one of the leading exporters of grain in the world as well as to become Europe's largest IT sector.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, having to defend democratic rights through various revolutions and being in conflict for nearly a decade, Ukraine was still able to increase its Gross

<sup>16</sup> *Important information for Ukrainian nationals*, New Zealand Immigration, 02 March 2022, <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/about-us/media-centre/news-notifications/important-information-for-ukrainian-nationals> [accessed: 26 March 2023].

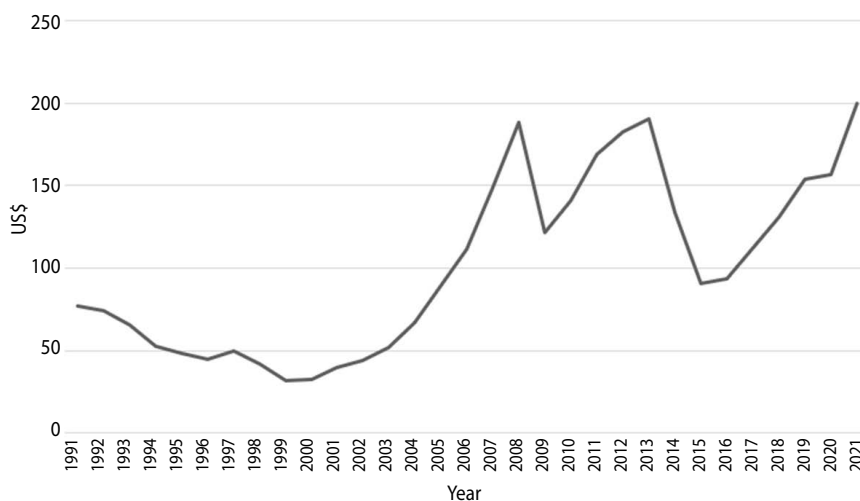
<sup>17</sup> *Temporary visa for family of Ukrainians in New Zealand*, New Zealand Immigration, <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/new-zealand-visas/preparing-a-visa-application/support-family/new-temporary-visa-for-family-of-ukrainians-in-new-zealand> [accessed: 26 March 2023].

<sup>18</sup> *Enabling the Business of Agriculture 2019: Country Profile Ukraine*, The World Bank, Washington 2019, <https://eba.worldbank.org/content/dam/documents/eba/UKR.pdf> [accessed: 29 March 2023].

<sup>19</sup> *Ukraine Growth Study Final Document*, The World Bank, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/543041554211825812/pdf/Ukraine-Growth-Study-Final-Documents-Fast-Lasting-and-Kinder.pdf> [accessed: 29 March 2023].

Domestic Product (GDP) (Figure 1). It was in 2009 that Ukraine faced an economic crisis due to its currency's exchange rate being pegged to the US dollar, resulting in high inflation. The country sought global support through the International Monetary Fund and was granted funding that helped Ukraine recover from the financial crisis.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the Ukrainian GDP crashed in 2015, following the Russian annexation of Crimea and invasion of Eastern Ukraine, but the country was able to increase its GDP year-by-year, reaching the peak in 2021 despite having high spending on military demands necessary for securing its territories. These are all aspects favourable for New Zealand investments. Even though Ukraine's economy may still be unstable in some areas, it has proven its growth despite substantial circumstances and, therefore, New Zealand should be looking for building deeper relationships with Ukraine as there is notable potential in this country.

Figure 1. Ukrainian Gross Domestic Product (GDP), 1991–2021 (US\$ Billion)



Source: *GDP (current US\$) – Ukraine*, The World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?end=2021&locations=UA&start=1991> [accessed: 29 March 2023].

The next outcome to discuss is the possibility of a Russian victory in Ukraine and what would be the implications for New Zealand. Historical factors suggest that Russia will not support democracy in the country as neither the people nor the government are used to following an egalitarian approach. Russia was an absolute monarchy, then it shifted to a Communist regime and at present, the country is upholding its authoritarian status. Besides its history, Russia has been developing a new movement of geopolitics by relying on theories of Russian political analysts

<sup>20</sup> A. Åslund, *Ukraine's financial crisis, 2009*, "Eurasian Geography and Economics" 2009, vol. 50, no. 4, p. 371, <https://doi.org/10.2747/1539-7216.50.4.371>.

such as Alexander Dugin. It was determined that Dugin's vocabulary and ideas were directly influential in political and military discourses. It is not surprising that the description of Dugin as being 'Putin's brain' gained popularity.<sup>21</sup> In his *Fourth Political Theory*, Dugin rejects all ideologies, but at the same time, promotes a new one by combining all other ideologies that have ever existed.<sup>22</sup> He speaks unfavourably about the West and sees America as an adversary to humanity: 'The American Empire should be destroyed. And at one point, it will be.'<sup>23</sup> Therefore, the increasing concern about Russia becoming victorious in their military campaign against Ukraine is that Russia will more likely pursue an authoritarian government to act more aggressively. It will attempt to promote its state policies to other nations. Considering its aggressive ambitions, Russia may attempt to expand their territories to achieve its grand imperial ambition.<sup>24</sup> It is worth remembering that there is a possibility of creating a new regime in Russia, which is not known yet to the world; and more likely, it will be trying to achieve its goals by force. New Zealand needs to contemplate this important matter before it considers rebuilding its ties with Russia. Similar challenges may need to be negotiated with Russia's neighbour China, with whom New Zealand also has strong connections.

The Chinese position towards the Russian invasion is currently neutral; however, what the future intentions of China are and what benefits it may gain from the Ukrainian war remains unknown. On the first anniversary of the invasion, the Chinese government released an official statement suggesting peace talks as the best solution to end the war.<sup>25</sup> Incidentally, Russia and Ukraine tried negotiation talks through the Minsk Agreements and Russia failed to fulfil its promises. It is important to note that China demonstrates similar intentions towards Taiwan. Apart from Taiwan, China's rising power in the Asia-Pacific over the last decade has raised numerous concerns worldwide regarding their aspirations for influence. New Zealand and China recently celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their diplomatic

<sup>21</sup> G.S. Fellows, *The Foundations of Aleksandr Dugin's Geopolitics: Montage Fascism and Eurasianism as Blowback*, Master of Arts Thesis, University of Denver, 2018, pp. 72–87, <https://digital-commons.du.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2516&context=etd> [accessed: 30 May 2023].

<sup>22</sup> A. Dugin, *The Fourth Political Theory*, Arktos Media, London 2012, Kindle, Loc. 3526–3621.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, Kindle, Loc. 3535.

<sup>24</sup> W. Courtney, *Russia's Appetite May Extend Beyond Ukraine*, RAND Corporation, 17 February 2023, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2023/02/russias-appetite-may-extend-beyond-ukraine.html> [accessed: 29 March 2023].

<sup>25</sup> *China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 24 February 2023, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/202302/t20230224\\_11030713.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202302/t20230224_11030713.html) [accessed: 30 March 2023].



relationship<sup>26</sup> and were able to establish a robust and growing trade relationship.<sup>27</sup> New Zealand's relationship with China is necessary for political survival, but a significant point is the divergence of these nations' approaches in important areas, such as human rights and international law.<sup>28</sup> A warning sign may be that China is interested in Russia winning the war, as both countries have similar situations regarding claims of their neighbouring territories. Moreover, China and Russia are two authoritarian states and increasingly respect their ideological approaches. Therefore, New Zealand could look at Russia's actions in Ukraine as an indicator of potential Chinese ambitions within the broader Pacific region.

New Zealand also needs to consider the possibility of Ukraine winning the war, which will lead to the relocation of dominance in the eastern flank of NATO. Even though the security segment of Ukraine is currently at risk as the war is still ongoing, Ukraine gained extensive respect from most of the Western world because of the desire to defend its democracy and to move away from the Russian regime and corruption. It is important to note that most of New Zealand's international partners have provided substantial support to Ukraine with military and humanitarian aid.<sup>29</sup> Another point to consider are Ukraine's endeavours to strengthen its security system by signing the following agreements before the invasion: (a) the Lublin Triangle (2020) between Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine to deepen military, economic, political, and cultural cooperation;<sup>30</sup> and (b) the British–Polish–Ukrainian trilateral pact (2022) aiming to improve cybersecurity and energy security as well as counter disinformation.<sup>31</sup> Poland is Ukraine's partner in both agreements as well as one of the major supporters of Ukraine since the early days of the invasion. Warsaw helped Kyiv with military and humanitarian aid as well as hosted millions

<sup>26</sup> J. Ardern, *50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of New Zealand China Diplomatic Relations*, Beehive.govt.nz – The official website of the New Zealand Government, 09 December 2022, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/50th-anniversary-new-zealand-china-diplomatic-relations> [accessed: 30 March 2023].

<sup>27</sup> *China*, New Zealand Foreign Affairs and Trade, <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/en/countries-and-regions/asia/china/> [accessed: 30 March 2023].

<sup>28</sup> A.M. Brady, *New Zealand-China relations: Common points and differences*, "New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies" 2008, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 19–20.

<sup>29</sup> C. Trebesch *et al.*, *The Ukraine Support Tracker: Which countries help Ukraine and how?*, Kiel Institute for the World Economy, February 2023 ("Kiel Working Papers", no. 2218), [https://www.ifw-kiel.de/fileadmin/Dateiverwaltung/IfW-Publications/-ifw/Kiel\\_Working\\_Paper/2022/KWP\\_2218\\_Which\\_countries\\_help\\_Ukraine\\_and\\_how\\_/KWP\\_2218\\_Trebesch\\_et\\_al\\_Ukraine\\_Support\\_Tracker.pdf](https://www.ifw-kiel.de/fileadmin/Dateiverwaltung/IfW-Publications/-ifw/Kiel_Working_Paper/2022/KWP_2218_Which_countries_help_Ukraine_and_how_/KWP_2218_Trebesch_et_al_Ukraine_Support_Tracker.pdf) [accessed: 29 March 2023].

<sup>30</sup> J. Bornio, *Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine Inaugurate 'Lublin Triangle'*, "Eurasia Daily Monitor" 2020, vol. 17, no. 115, pp. 140–145.

<sup>31</sup> P. Biskup, J. Rogers, H. Shelest, *The trilateral initiative: Rekindling relations between Britain, Poland and Ukraine*, Council on Geostrategy, 01 February 2023, <https://www.geostrategy.org.uk/research/the-trilateral-initiative-rekindling-relations-between-britain-poland-and-ukraine> [accessed: 30 March 2023].

of Ukrainian refugees. It is not only that Poland became a military hub for Ukraine, but it is also a rising power in Europe.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, it may be favourable for New Zealand to deepen its relationship with Ukraine to remain in line with its traditional partners, to pursue international security issues, and to seek economic opportunities through Ukraine as a gateway to Europe.

## Conclusion

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has brought fundamental shifts in regional powers. It impacted small states' security, as well as global political and economic structures. New Zealand was also affected by the disruption of security in Eastern Europe and embraced the coalition of nations providing aid to Ukraine, whose desire was to maintain international law and the rules-based international system. New Zealand's response to the invasion was to support Ukrainian rights to sovereignty and to foster relationships with large states as upholders of international institutions. The complex nature of the imbalance of security in Eastern Europe creates a dilemma for New Zealand, as it needs to cooperate with great powers that it both agrees and disagrees with. As an alternative, New Zealand could consider building relationships with like-minded small nations such as Ukraine. This kind of relationship can be even more effective than one with larger powers. Even though New Zealand and Ukraine are two heterogeneous nations vis-à-vis geopolitics, government structure, economic system, social life, geographical positioning, cultural, and traditional aspects, the two nations have common identities, values, and principles on which an effective relationship could be leveraged. Both nations understand the necessity to comply with international law and rules-based order, for New Zealand this order is one of the ways to ensure political survival, while Ukraine sees these institutions as the route to freedom from historical Russian influence.

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## *What is the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on New Zealand and what are the future implications?*

### *Abstract*

In 2014, Russia annexed Crimea and conducted insurgency operations in Eastern Ukraine resulting in a stalemate for the next eight years and followed by a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. This has triggered an imbalance in international security worldwide as well as impacted small states such as New Zealand. To remain in the same circle of great powers, New Zealand suspended a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Russia and changed its international policies by introducing a sanctions programme against Russia. New Zealand also provided humanitarian and military aid to Ukraine and offered immigration support. The invasion served as a pivotal point for New Zealand's diplomacy, security, and economy. The aim of this article is to identify what choices New Zealand needs to make in order to secure its position within the great powers' domain. By providing a narrative of the possible future scenarios, the study will recommend strategies for New Zealand as a small state to find a right fit within the great powers' dominion. The article suggests the necessity for New Zealand to follow international law and rules-based order as one of the guarantors of the country's security and economic stability.

**Keywords:** Ukraine, New Zealand, Russia, post-colonial, small state

