GHENT INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AND EUROPEAN STUDIES

GIES OCCASIONAL PAPER

The War in Ukraine

March-April 2022

Edited by Tim Haesebrouck, Servaas Taghon & Hermine Van Coppenolle

GHENT UNIVERSITY

GIES

GIES OCCASIONAL PAPER

THE WAR IN UKRAINE | March - April 2022

TABLE OF CONTENTS

GIES OCCASIONAL PAPER

THE WAR IN UKRAINE | March-April 2022

INTRODUCTION

Tim Haesebrouck, Servaas Taghon & Hermine Van Coppenolle

Ghent Institute for International and European Studies – Ghent University

On February 24th 2022, the world was shocked by a blatant act of aggression: in clear violation of international law, Russia launched a horrible war against Ukraine. At the time of writing, April 6 2022, the United Nations Office of The High Commissioner For Human Rights (OCHA) has already recorded 3,455 civilian casualties as a direct consequence of the war.[1] Unfortunately, given the difficulty of gaining adequate information from those places where fighting is most intense, the actual number of casualties is considerably higher. The use of explosive weapons caused most of the civilian casualties. However, Russian troops have also intentionally murdered innocent civilians, as the shocking images of executed civilians in the streets of Bucha painfully demonstrated.[2] Out of a population of over 40 million, more than 10 million Ukrainian citizens have fled their homes. Four million of these refugees have crossed the border to neighbouring countries. The other 6.5 million are displaced inside Ukraine. Tragically, many other Ukrainian citizens are unable to leave the areas in which heavy fighting continuous. Russia's blatant act of aggression not only caused a horrible humanitarian tragedy, it also seems to constitute one of the most consequential geopolitical conflicts of our times (at the very least in Europe). For the first time since the darkest hours of the Cold War, the threat of nuclear weapons deployment looms over the European continent.[3]

Taken aback by the violent intervention launched by the Russian authorities in Ukraine, the researchers of the **Ghent Institute for International and European Studies** aim to shine a light on the crisis with a new initiative: the GIES occasional paper. Starting from Monday March 21st 2022, contributions that present the analyses of our researchers on the Ukraine War were published on a daily basis. This first GIES occasional paper collects these contributions in an edited volume.

In the first contribution, **Tim Haesebrouck and Servaas Taghon** describe the key events that happened before Russia's war on Ukraine, starting in the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union and ending with

[1] Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Ukraine: civilian casualty update 3 April 2022", *United Nations Human Rights*, April 3,2022.
[2] Simon Gardner, "Ukraine accuses Russia of civilian 'massacre'; Moscow denies it", *Reuters*, April 3, 2022.
[3] Ellen Knickmeyer, "West, Russia mull nuclear steps in a 'more dangerous' world", *AP News*, April 2, 2022.

the start of Russia's aggression. In the second contribution, **Goedele De Keersmaeker** goes further back in history and draws a cautious comparison between Russia after the Cold War and Germany after World War I. From this historical comparison, she draws two important lessons: "First, take your old enemies/new friends seriously, do not humiliate them and respect their security concerns, even if their perception differs fundamentally from your own. Second, take your old enemies seriously once they decide they are no longer interested in your friendship and will restore their old status by their own means." **John Irgengioro**, in turn, looks at Russia's past, present and future, arguing that the war in Ukraine is unravelling "deeply existentialist questions about the trajectory of the Russian Federation as a successor state of the USSR". His contribution convincingly argues that Putin has abandoned any soft power efforts in in Ukraine in favour of utilizing hard power. This contrast sharply with the way in which the EU exercises power, as shown in the contribution of **Klaas Wauters and Hendrik Vos.** This contribution draws attention to the power and attractiveness of the European project, to which Ukraine is seeking rapprochement and which "scares the hell out of Putin". **Louise Amoris** also sees Ukraine drawing closer to the West, arguing that "Ukraine has indeed enshrined its future always more strongly towards the West, and the launch of the Russian invasion in Ukraine on 24 February 2022 could well be a determining stepping stone in this journey." More generally, her contribution indicates that Ukraine has increasingly tried to position itself at the centre of Europe in the context of Russian aggression, while also asserting its own civic identity, one that is neither East, nor West.

The next three contributions focus on the (possible) consequences of Russia's war in Ukraine and the West's reaction to it. **Mattias Vermeiren** looks at the West's sanctions, which seek to completely isolate Russia from the western-dominated international financial and monetary system. His contribution discusses the possible objectives behind the western sanctions, as well as the possible consequences of Russia's isolation from the financial system. **Ferdi De Ville**, in turn, argues that the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the unprecedented sanctions with which the West has responded will be a watershed in the trajectory of the global economy. The economic isolation of Russia will long outlive the duration of the war and the sanctions and will constitute a blow from which globalisation will never fully recover. **Moniek de Jong and Thijs Van de Graaf** argue that the war in Ukraine will also be a watershed moment for Europe's energy politics. Their contribution focusses on the impact of the war against Ukraine on Europe's energy politics, drawing attention to the long-term benefits of a green transition.

The four remaining contributions look at the position and reaction of three countries towards the war in Ukraine. **Huanyu Zhao and Jing Yu** map the official Chinese position towards the Ukraine conflict. Their contribution offers a structured and concise overview of the official Chinese discourse on the conflict. **Sven Biscop, Bart Dessein and Jasper Roctus** further elaborate on China's reaction to the war in Ukraine. More specifically, they argue that, by not fully supporting Russia in its war against Ukraine, China has avoided tipping the world into a new bipolar rivalry. In consequence, there is still a chance to keep the world together, to maintain one set of rules that all states subscribe to, because to pursue its interests, China needs the stability that these rules create. **Dries Lesage, Emin Daskin and Hasan Yar** focus on the position of Turkey, which as a neighbouring country to Ukraine and Russia has become indirectly involved in the Ukrainian war in multiple ways. Last (but anything but least), **Karolina Kluczewska** sketches how the first weeks of the war in Ukraine affected Tajikistan, a country tied to Russia in many ways: historically, politically and, most importantly, economically.

GIES OCCASIONAL PAPER

THE WAR IN UKRAINE | March-April 2022

RUSSIA'S INVASION IN UKRAINE: WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE?

Tim Haesebrouck & Servaas Taghon

Ghent Institute for International and European Studies – Ghent University

On February 24th 2022, Russia launched a full-scale military invasion into Ukraine, causing a horrific humanitarian tragedy for the Ukrainian people and what might become the most consequential geopolitical conflict since the end of the Cold War. In this contribution, we describe the key events that happened before Russia's war on Ukraine, starting in the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union and ending with the start of Russia's aggression. We do not aim to look for the historical causes of the war, nor can we hope to provide a full history of the Russia-Ukraine relationship in this short piece. Our goal is limited to providing some historical background to the conflict.

From Ukrainian independence till Orange Revolution (1991-2004)

The Ukrainian parliament declared Ukraine independent from the Soviet Union on August 24th 1991, five days after Russian President Boris Yeltsin had climbed upon a tank in the streets of Moscow to defy an attempted coup by communist hardliners.[4] On December 1st, a referendum was organised that resulted in a landslide vote in favour of Ukrainian independence. The most important task for the newly elected Ukrainian president Leonid Kravchuk was to negotiate a "civilized divorce" from Russia. Russian leaders, Yeltsin included, were not in favour of a complete separation of Ukraine from Russia.[5] However, the dissolution of the Soviet Union was the easiest way for Yeltsin and his allies to get rid of his political rival, Michail Gorbachev, who was the president of the Soviet Union and, hereby, technically hierarchically superior to Yeltsin. Kravchuk met with his Russian and Belarussian counterparts to negotiate a new relationship between the three states on December 8th 1991. This resulted in the Belovezh Accords, which formally dissolved the Soviet Union and established the Commonwealth of Independent States. These accords were not unambiguously welcomed by the Russian leadership, who only agreed to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and hereby to

[4] Paul D'Anieri, Robert Kravchuk, and Taras Kuzio. *Politics and society in Ukraine* (London: Routledge, 2018).
[5] Taras Kuzio and Paul D'Anieri. *The sources of Russia's great power politics: Ukraine and the challenge to the European order* (Bristol: E-International Relations, 2018)

a fully independent Ukraine, to complete Yeltsin's takeover of political power in Moscow.

Several issues needed to be resolved following Ukraine's independence, among which the question of control over its nuclear arsenal, arguably the most pressing for the United States and other western states.[6] Ukraine had the third largest arsenal of nuclear weapons on its territory and insisted on binding security guarantees before it wanted to surrender its nuclear weapons. The issue was resolved in January 1994 when Ukraine, Russia and the US signed the Trilateral Agreement on Nuclear weapons. Ukraine agreed to transfer the nuclear warheads stocked on its territory to Russia in return for financial compensations and security assurances. In the December 1994 Budapest memorandum, the US, the UK and Russia welcomed Ukraine's accession into the Non-Proliferation Treaty as a non-nuclear state and "reaffirmed their commitment to refrain from the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine."[7]

Another pressing issue was the division of the Soviet Union's Black Sea Fleet, which was linked to the status of the port city Sevastopol and the Crimean peninsula, where the fleet was located.[8] Crimea had been part of Russia since the times of Catherine the Great, but was transferred to Ukrainian jurisdiction in 1954. In the years following Ukrainian independence, Russia continued to contest the legitimacy of Ukraine's control over the peninsula, with the Russian parliament challenging the legality of the 1954 decision to transfer control of Crimea to Ukraine. The dispute over the Black Sea Fleet would be resolved in 1997, when Russia and Ukraine reached a deal on how to split the fleet among the two countries. More importantly, Russia was given a 20 year lease of the port facilities, as well as the right to keep up to 25,000 Russian troops at the military base in Sevastopol. The deal opened the door for the 1997 Russia-Ukraine Friendship Treaty, in which Russia and Ukraine agreed to respect each other's sovereignty and reaffirmed "the inviolability of the borders existing between them."[9]

In July 1994, Kravchuk was succeeded by Leonid Kuchma, who had won the presidential elections on a platform of economic reconnection with Russia. Under his presidency, Ukraine would adopt a multi-vector foreign policy, in which cooperation with Russia and integration with the West were carefully balanced.[10] Relations with the US, NATO and the EU were strengthened during Kuchma's first term in office, with Ukraine becoming the "most eager participant" of NATO's Partnership for Peace and adopting an official strategy on EU integration.[11] However, because of Kuchma's increasingly authoritarian inclinations, the relationship with the West frayed during his second term in office. The murder of journalist Gongadze, in which Kuchma's office was implicated, and other illegal actions through which Kuchma attempted to concentrate political power, made clear that he was not willing to implement the democratic reforms necessary for further integration with the West. As the relationship with the US and the EU deteriorated, Kuchma increasingly turned to Moscow for support.

---

[6] Paul D'Anieri, Robert Kravchuk, and Taras Kuzio. *Politics and society in Ukraine.*
[7] "Memorandum on security assurances in connection with Ukraine's accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons", accessed on March 28, 2022.
[8] Wolczuk, Roman, *Ukraine's foreign and security policy 1991-2000* (London: Routledge, 2002).
[9] Taras Kuzio and Paul D'Anieri. *The sources of Russia's great power politics.*
[10] Paul D'Anieri. *Ukraine and Russia: From Civilized Divorce to Uncivil War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).
[11] Ibid, 89.

From Orange to Maidan Revolution (2004-2014)

The highly unpopular Kuchma was constitutionally not allowed to pursue a third term in office. Prime minister Viktor Yanukovych became the candidate of Kuchma's Party of Regions in the November 2004 presidential elections. Yanukovych was strongly backed by Russia and its president, Vladimir Putin. In contrast, the US and the EU were openly hoping for a victory of his main competitor: Viktor Yushchenko.[12] In spite of suffering from dioxin poisoning in the run up to the elections, exit polls indicated that Yushchenko had won with 52% of the votes. The official results, however, gave the electoral victory to Yanukovych.[13] Domestic and international election monitors immediately challenged Yanukovych's victory and, in response to the blatant electoral fraud, millions of Ukrainian citizens flooded the streets of Kyiv in what would become known as the 'Orange Revolution'. Within two weeks, the electoral results were declared invalid by the Ukrainian parliament and the Ukrainian Supreme Court. New elections were organized on December 26th, which were convincingly won by Yushchenko. Another leading figure of the Orange Revolution was appointed as prime minister: Yuliya Tymoshenko.

The Orange Coalition did not last long. Old personnel and political differences between the two leading figures of the Orange Revolution quickly re-emerged and Yushchenko fired Tymoshenko in September 2005.[14] Benefitting from the competition between the members of the Orange Coalition, the Party of Regions became the largest party in the Ukrainian parliament after the 2006 elections. Yanukovych managed to form a parliamentary majority and became Ukraine's prime minister. This cohabitation of the two main antagonists of the Orange Revolution resulted in several political crises and the eventual dissolution of the Ukrainian parliament in 2007. Yushchenko's 'Our Ukraine'-party and Tymoshenko' s 'Bloc of Yuliya Tymoshenko' managed to secure a small majority in parliament in the subsequent elections. In December 2007, Tymoshenko reprised her role as Prime Minister.[15] However, this did not mean the end of the rivalry between the different members of the coalition, which continued to suffer from political infighting.

The change towards a more explicit pro-Western leadership after the Orange Revolution did not result in dramatic progress towards EU-membership. Partially because the EU was disinclined towards integrating a country of the size of Ukraine at a time it was suffering from enlargement fatigue, but also because the necessary domestic reforms were not carried out by the Ukrainian government, the EU did not make a clear membership commitment to Ukraine. In 2007, the EU and Ukraine did start negotiating on an Association Agreement, which would include a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) between the EU and Ukraine. Yushchenko also did not manage to get a clear prospect of membership in NATO. In the run-up to the 2008 Bucharest Summit, the US supported the idea of offering a membership action plan (MAP) to Ukraine and Georgia, which would put the countries on a clear path towards NATO membership. However, mainly because of the strong opposition of France and Germany, the Summit would not result in the offering of a MAP to either one of these states. The Bucharest Summit Declaration did include the following statement: "NATO welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's

[12] Ibid, 127.
[13] Adrian Karatnycky, "Ukraine's orange revolution," *Foreign Affairs* 84, no 2 (2005): 35.
[14] Kataryna Wolczuk, "Conflict and reform in Eastern Europe: Domestic politics and European integration in Ukraine," *The International Spectator* (2006): 7-24.
[15] Paul D'Anieri. *Ukraine and Russia: From Civilized Divorce to Uncivil War*

Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO."[16]

The relationship between Russia and Ukraine had become more hostile since the Orange Revolution.[17] The most dramatic events were the 2006 and 2009 'gas wars', in which Russia diverted gas shipments away from Ukraine over allegations that Kyiv was not paying for its gas supplies. More generally, Russia had started adopting a more assertive policy in its neighbourhood since the beginning of the 2000s and, in the Summer of 2008, it launched an actual war against Georgia over two breakaway regions Abkhazia and South-Ossetia. Russia vehemently opposed any possible accession of Ukraine to NATO. Foreign Affairs minister Lavrov explicitly argued that "Russia 'will do everything possible' to prevent the accession of Ukraine (and Georgia) to NATO."[18] At the NATO-Russia Council, which took place the day after the Bucharest declaration was issued, Putin reportedly told US President Bush: "You realize, George, that Ukraine is not even a state! What is Ukraine? A part of its territory belongs to Eastern Europe, while another part, a significant one, was given over by us!"[19]

With Yushchenko having become highly unpopular during his term in office, the 2010 presidential elections turned into a standoff between Tymoshenko and Yanukovych. Benefitting from Ukraine's economic decline after the global financial crisis, Yanukovych won the elections and became the fourth president of Ukraine. The presidential elections were generally considered to be free and fair.[20] However, after his inauguration, Yanukovych started concentrating political and economic power through illegal means, such as bribing members of parliament and manipulating Ukraine's legal system. In October 2011, he even managed to get his rival Tymoshenko sentenced to seven years in prison on charges of abuse of power.

Yanukovych's foreign policy reconnected with the multi-vector policy of Kuchma.[21] In April 2010, Yanukovych and Russian President Medvedev signed a deal in which Ukraine would get a 30% discount on Russian gas and Russia's lease on the Sevastopol naval base (due to end in 2017) would be extended for 25 years. Negotiations with the EU also moved ahead, with the signing of the Association Agreement (which included a free trade area between the EU and Ukraine) being scheduled for EU Summit in Vilnius in November 2013. However, Russia was working on a regional integration project of its own: the Eurasian Economic Union. This project, which would involve a custom's union between its members, was not compatible with a free trade agreement with the EU. Using both carrots and sticks, Russia increasingly put pressure on Ukraine not to sign the Association Agreement.

The annexation of Crimea and war in East Ukraine (2014-2019)

In line with Russia's preferences, the Ukrainian government announced that it would not sign the Association Agreement on November 21st 2013. Following the announcement, protesters started gathering on Kyiv's Maidan Square, starting the 'Revolution of Dignity'.

[16] NATO, "Bucharest Summit Declaration" last modified May 8 2014, accessed March 28, 2022.
[17] Sabine Fischer "Ukraine as a regional actor," in Ukraine: Quo Vadis, ed. Sabine Fischer, Rosaria Puglisi, Kataryna Wolczuk and Pawel Wolowski (Paris: EUISS, 2008), 119-146.
[18] Cited in Martin Malek, "The "Western Vector" of the Foreign and Security Policy of Ukraine: Continuities and Ruptures under President Viktor Yushchenko (2005–2009)," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 22, no 4 (2009): 538.
[19] Cited in ibid: 538.
[20] Paul D'Anieri. *Ukraine and Russia: From Civilized Divorce to Uncivil War*, 171.
[21] Ibid, 176.

The Ukrainian population did not back down in the face of increasingly violent repression by the Ukrainian authorities. As protest continued, Yanukovych started losing the support of the members of his party, the parliament and the Ukrainian security forces. Seeing his power base erode, he fled to Crimea, where Russian forces took him in. On February 22nd 2014, the Ukrainian parliament unanimously voted in favour of removing Yanukovych from office and new presidential elections were scheduled.

Yanukovych's flight was the trigger for a series of dramatic events. Only a few days after the dismissal of Yanukovych, 'little green men' (i.e. Russian soldiers) popped up and seized different strategic locations in Crimea. After a gathering of the Supreme Council on February 27th, Sergey Aksyonov was declared Prime Minister of Crimea and a referendum about the status of Crimea was issued. In the following days, the Crimean peninsula became increasingly isolated from Ukraine, not just physically but also because Ukrainian radio and television were cut off. In the March 16th referendum, 97% of the voters supported the "reunification with Russia", at least according to official Russian sources. However, these results were widely contested.[22] Almost simultaneously with Russia's annexation of Crimea, fighting broke out in East Ukraine's Donbas area, a region where a large number of Russian speaking Ukrainians live. With support from Russia, two self-declared 'republics' called for separation from Ukraine: the Donetsk People's Republic and the Lugansk People's Republic.[23] In contrast to its reaction to the annexation of Crimea, Kyiv responded to these separatist uprisings by setting up an Anti-Terrorist Operation and managed to push the rebels in the defensive.

The EU and the U.S. responded to the events in Ukraine by imposing economic sanctions to deter further Russian aggression. Initially, Western sanctions were targeted at the Crimean economy, forcing Russia to artificially keep it alive with financial transfers. After Russia initiated weaponized rebellion in the Donbas area, and shot down the civilian plane MH-17 a few months later, the sanction package was substantially extended. In combination with lower oil prices, western sanctions significantly weakened Russia's economic position.[24] Under President Petro Poroshenko, who had won the May 25th presidential elections, relations between the West and Ukraine were strengthened. Ukraine finalised the Association Agreement with the EU and the DCFTA entered into full force on 1 September 2017.[25] NATO, in turn, has bend itself to specific Ukrainian needs since the Russian aggression in 2014. Despite not intervening directly or offering membership to Ukraine, it has played an advisory role in reforming the Ukrainian army and enhancing its ability to deal with Russian challenges.[26]

---

[22] Thomas Grant, "Annexation of Crimea," *American journal of international law* 109, no. 1 (2015): 68-95.

[23] John O'Loughlin, Gerard Toal and Vladimir Kolosov, "The rise and fall of "Novorossiya": examining support for a separatist geopolitical imaginary in southeast Ukraine," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 33, no. 2 (2017): 124-144.

[24] Anders Åslund and Maria Snegovaya, "The impact of western sanctions on Russia and how they can be made even more effective," *Atlantic Council*, Report (2021). See also Nigel Gould-Davies, "Economic effects and political impacts: Assessing Western sanctions on Russia," *Bank of Finland*, Policy Brief No.8 (2018).

[25] "Ukraine: Council adopts EU-Ukraine association agreement," European Council, July 17, 2017, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/07/11/ukraine-association-agreement/

[26] Elyssa Shea and Marta Jaroszewicz, "Opening in times of crisis? Examining NATO and the EU's support to security sector reform in post-Maidan Ukraine," East European Politics 37, no.1 (2021): 159-181.

There were several diplomatic attempts to stop the fighting in Eastern Ukraine, among which the Minsk-Agreements stand out as particularly important.[27] The Minsk-Agreements were negotiated by representatives of the separatist republics and the 'Trilateral Contact Group' (Ukraine, Russia and the OSCE), with mediation of France and Germany. The Minsk-1 Agreement, signed in September 2014, aimed at a ceasefire and included Russian-requested clauses about the special status of the Donbas with local elections and "an inclusive nationwide dialogue."[28] These provisions granted greater autonomy to the two separatist republics. Nevertheless, the fighting continued and the Minsk-diplomats gathered again at the start of 2015. Minsk-II brought the unbridgeable differences between Kyiv and Moscow very clearly to the surface. Essentially, Ukraine's principal purpose was to stabilise the conflict in the Donbas and as such regain its full sovereignty. Russia, for its part, was particularly interested in channelling substantial political autonomy to the separatist republics to undermine Ukraine's sovereignty and as such thwarting Kyiv's western ambitions.[29]

The election of Zelensky and an increasingly aggressive Russia (2019-2022)

The Poroshenko Administration failed to adequately answer the public's demand for higher living standards and handling the longstanding corruption in the political sphere.[30] In a context of increasing public dissatisfaction with the established political parties and elites, an outsider managed to capture the 2019 presidential elections: comedian and actor Volodymyr Zelensky. With a non-traditional political programme, focusing on 'the people' and contrasting his party against the ruling elite, Zelensky created an anti-corruption image that led to a resounding electoral victory.[31] On foreign policy, Zelensky appeared to be taking a softer stance towards Russia and revived diplomatic channels by agreeing to the Steinmeier-formula, named after the former German Foreign Minister who simplified the extensive provisions of the Minsk-Agreements.[32] However, the Zelensky Administration would also not accept the surrender of the Crimean peninsula, just as it could not ignore the wilfully Russian intervention in the Donbas area.[33] Meeting with the French, Russian and German representatives in 2019, the Ukrainian president reiterated the stances about Ukrainian sovereignty that had been drawn by his predecessor Poroshenko.[34]

In 2021, Russia build up the pressure on Ukraine and its Western partners to make concessions. In April, up to 100,000 Russian soldiers were placed at the Ukrainian

[27] See also 'the Geneva Agreement' and the Poroshenko Plan prior to the Minsk Agreements.
[28] Duncan Allan, "The Minsk Conundrum: Western Policy and Russia's War in Eastern Ukraine," Chatham House, Research Paper (2020): 7-10.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Cristina Gherasimov, "Rupture in Kyiv: Ukrainians Vote for Change to Consolidate Their Democracy," Berlin: *Forschungsinstitut der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik*. Also see Aram Terzyan, "From Revolution to Transformation and European Integration: Ukraine after the Maidan Revolution," *Centre for Studies in European Integration*, Working Papers Series 1, no. 15 (2020): 45-57.
[31] Viktoriia Demydova, "2019 Presidential Election in Ukraine: How Zelensky was Elected?," *Karadeniz Araştırmaları*, (67), 2020, 581-603.
[32] Kristian Åtland, "Destined for deadlock? Russia, Ukraine, and the unfulfilled Minsk agreements," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 36, no. 2 (2020): 122-139.
[33] Taras Kuzio, "Peace Will Not Come to Europe's War Why Ukraine's New President Zelensky will be Unable to Improve Relations with Russia," *Federal Academy for Security Policy,* Security Policy Working Paper No. 14 (2019).
[34] James Sherr, "Nothing New Under the Sun? Continuity and Change in Russian Policy Towards Ukraine," *International Centre for Defence and Security*, Report (2020).

border.[35] After retreating these troops, Putin launched another attempt in November, again deploying large numbers of troops and military equipment at the border.[36] In December, the Kremlin was demanding assurances that NATO would not expand further to post-Soviet states.[37] However, the West would not bow down to Putin's demands, although they kept diplomatic channels open throughout the start of 2022. February 2022 saw the further escalation of the conflict, as the militarization peaked and the Russian demands were repeated with more urge. Despite final diplomatic attempts, Moscow declared the independence of the Republics of Donetsk and Lugansk, under the guise of 'denazyfing' Ukraine and 'the protection of Russian citizens'. On February 24th, Putin announced the launch of a special military operation in Ukraine. Russian troops and vehicles entered Ukraine in a blatant act of aggression and in clear violation of international law, starting a conflict that, after one month, would already cause over 2,500 civilian casualties, among which over 225 children.[38]

[35] *Reuters*, "Russian military build-up near Ukraine numbers more than 100 000 troops, EU says," April 19, 2021, and Gustav Gressel, "Waves of ambition: Russia's military build-up in Crimea and the Black Sea," *European Council on Foreign Relations*, Policy Brief, September 21 2021.
[36] *BBC*, "Russia-Ukraine border: Nato warning over military build-up," November 15, 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-59288181
[37] *EURACTIV with Reuters*, "Russia demands US, NATO containment in draft security accords," December 17, 2021.
[38] *News Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights*, "Ukraine: civilian casualty update 24 March 2022", March 30, 2022.

RUSSIA AFTER THE COLD WAR AND GERMANY AFTER WORLD WAR I, A CAUTIOUS COMPARISON

Goedele De Keersmaeker

Ghent Institute for International and European Studies – Ghent University

In the Winter 1990/1991 issue of *Foreign Affairs,* Charles Krauthammer published a famous article that was the start of a whole school of academic and non-academic analyses describing the world after the Cold War in terms of American unipolarity, primacy, hegemony or even empire.[39] Though the article was entitled *'The Unipolar Moment'* Krauthammer and his followers were convinced that American dominance in international politics was there to stay for many decades. More particularly he considered the '*emergence of a reduced but resurgent, xenophobic and resentful "Weimar" Russia',* as an extremely formulated speculation. Such threats to American security could develop, he acknowledged, but they could not be predicted in 1990, just as it was impossible to predict Nazism in 1920.[40]

Thirty years later we are there. Of course, we should always be careful with historical comparisons. As one commentator wrote: *"Joe Biden is not Neville Chamberlain. Nor is Putin Hitler or Napoleon or Stalin."*[41] History never repeats itself completely and highlighting differences is at least as important as stressing similarities. But a comparison with another era of crisis and war can help us in clarifying the processes that led to the situation we now face. We will see that not taking an old enemy (Germany after World War I, Russia after the Cold War) serious, either as a partner in a post-war settlement or later as a re-emerged threat, can undermine security.

Germany in the 1920s

The end of the First World War left Central and Eastern Europe in turmoil, with the breakup of Austrian-Hungary, and civil war and wars of secession in the former tsarist empire, that became the Soviet Union. New smaller but vulnerable states emerged: Finland and the Baltic states, Poland, Czechoslovakia. Others, like Romania and Serbia/Yugoslavia, expanded their territory. Germany was territorially weakened but still one of the largest states in Europe. It lost the war, though part of the German public never

[39] Goedele De Keersmaeker, *Polarity, Balance of Power and International Relations Theory: Post-Cold War and the 19th Century Compared* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).
[40] Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs* 70, no. 1 (1990/1991): 31-32.
[41] Simon Jenkins, "Beware, Boris Johnson: In War, Drawing Historical Parallels Is a Dangerous Game," *The Guardian*, March 3, 2022.

believed it, misled as it was by nationalistic propaganda. After all in November 1918 Germany still occupied Belgium and great swathes of territory in Eastern Europe. This led to the so-called 'Stab in the Back' legend, which blamed internal socialist, liberal and Jewish circles for what was considered an unnecessary armistice.[42]

After the war the allies imposed heavy reparatory payments on Germany, with disastrous effects on its economy, thus enhancing the resentment against the Western powers. Limits where put on the German armed forces and the Rhineland was demilitarised. To add insult to injury the Versailles-treaty put the blame for the war on Germany. Many Germans felt humiliated. At the same time, the Versailles Treaty was innovative in several ways. With the League of Nations it established the first formally institutionalised system of collective security. It founded the Permanent Court of International Justice, and organised a system for protecting the numerous national minorities that ended up on the wrong side of the borders of the newly established states. It even put forward the perspective of general disarmament.[43] But Germany was excluded from membership, whereas as a great power it should have had a permanent seat in the Council of the League.

Many liberal observers, both in Germany and elsewhere, warned against the resentment the treaty caused in Germany.[44] Keynes' economic critiques are well known. Even after the reorganisation of the German debt – against the background of threats of a right-wing coup – resentment against Versailles remained vivid in Germany. The 1925 Locarno treaty constituted the highpoint of détente between Weimar-Germany and the West. Germany recognised its western borders and the country became member of the League of Nations and its Executive Council. Yet Germany refused in principle to recognise its eastern borders with Poland and Czechoslovakia (where substantial German minorities lived). Moreover resentment continued: against the occupation of the Rhineland, the still heavy burden of debt payment, and the severe limits on the German armed forces. By the time the debt was again rescheduled, the occupation of the Rhineland ended and the League organised a general disarmament conference, Germany was faced with the consequences of the Wall Street crash. Hitler rose to power, and quickly ended the whole Versailles construction.[45]

Russia in the 1990s

Russia too came highly frustrated out of the Cold War. Years later this even led to the development of a Russian version of the 'Stab in the Back' myth, when some Duma-members wanted to prosecute Gorbachev for treason for his role in the fall of the Soviet Union.[46] Of course, the Soviet Union/Russia did not lose

---

[42] Ian Kershaw, *To Hell and Back: Europe 1914-1949* (Allan Lane, 2015); J. Adam Tooze, *The Deluge: The Great War and the Remaking of Global Order, 1916-1931* (London: Penguin Books, 2015): 312-320.

[43] Stewart Patrick, *The Best Laid Plans: The Origins of American Multilateralism and the Dawn of the Cold War* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009):12-24; Howard Elcock, *Could the Versailles System Have Worked?* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018): 38

[44] For example, Max Weber criticized the victors for not taking into account the interests but above all the honour of the Germans. Max Weber, "Politik Als Beruf," in *Gesammelte Politische Schriften* (Tübingen: Johannes Winckelmann 1988 (originally published in 1919)): 548.

[45] Elcock.: 114-124; Tooze.: 462-477

[46] "Russian MPs Say Mikhail Gorbachev Should Be Persecuted for Treason," *The Guardian*, April 10, 2014; W. C. Wohlforth and Vladislav Zubok, "An Abiding Antagonism: Realism, Idealism and the Mirage of Western-Russian Partnership after the Cold War," *International Politics* 45 (2017): 411; For an assessment of Gorbachev's role see Zubok in Vladislav Zubok et al., "A Cold War Engame or an Opportunity Missed? Analysing the Soviet Collapse Thirty Years Later," *Cold War History* 21, no. 4 (2021).

a war; it is even debatable whether it lost the arms race. The so-called 'victory' of the West in the Cold War was above all an economic, political and ideational one.[47] But the results in the 1990s were similar to the situation in the 1920s. Again Central and Eastern Europe was in turmoil. After losing its buffer zone in Central Europe, the Soviet Union itself collapsed. Russia was more or less reduced to its borders under Peter the Great. New states emerged, some peacefully, some through violent wars and secessions (the collapse of Yugoslavia, the Armenian-Azerbaijani war on Nagorno-Karabakh, Georgia, Moldova). Russia withdrew its troops from Central Europe in a hurry, without proper housing for its soldiers, which contributed to the frustrations of the armed forces. Later, the disarmament treaties negotiated in the second half of the 1980s by the Reagan-Bush administrations and Gorbachev/Yeltsin (INF; START I & II, CFE) were often perceived as 'unequal treaties', accepted under pressure in a situation of weakness. This was particularly true for START II, with its deep cuts in the ICBM forces, the heart of Russian nuclear deterrence.

The economic transition was painful everywhere but especially in Russia due to the collapse of the integrated Soviet economic space combined with a Thatcherite-Reaganite market fundamentalism by Yeltsin's young reformers and their Western advisors. They did not realise that reforming a highly centralised state-led and continent-wide economy was something of another order than privatising British Telecom. They also hoped for larger economic support by Western governments, that did not really materialise. The result was a barbaric, kleptocratic capitalism and enormous hardship for ordinary Russians. No wonder that by 1993 the communists and nationalists where on the rise. After some years of recovery the 1998 fall of the rouble constituted a new shock.[48]

But just as Germany seventy years earlier, Russia was still a great power. It still had the largest territory on the Eurasian landmass, a large population and a massive army. Most importantly, it remained a nuclear superpower and in 1994, under American pressure, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan even transferred the nuclear weapons on their soil to Russia. The international community never formally denied great power status to Russia, as happened to Germany. Russia smoothly took over the Soviet permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council, the successor of the League of Nations, that developed a dynamic it never had during the Cold War and thus gave Russia an important role in world politics.

However, status in international politics is not only defined by one's formal position in international organisations, but also by daily practice and its perception by major players. In this respect the West and Russian conservatives implicitly agreed that Russia lost the Cold War and that its great power status had substantially declined.[49] In the West there was an unnecessary and inappropriate triumphalism, that humiliated Russia. Just after the collapse of the Soviet Union, president Bush declared in his State of the Union speech: *"By the grace of God, America won the cold war".*[50] The analysis was widely shared by pundits and academic analysts. Far into the 2000s a large part of the International Relations literature, whether realist, liberal or constructivist, occupied itself with analysing the consequences of what was considered a unique American preponderance after the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, for

[47] Ibid., 546.
[48] Ibid., 566.
[49] Ibid., 560.
[50] George Bush, "Address before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union, January 28, 1992,".

many Russian scholars and decisions makers, all these analyses were seen as a form of American self-glorification, and a programme for unilaterally imposing America's will on a weakened Russia. [51] All this was not meant to be particularly unfriendly towards Russia, but it expressed the overall idea that the United States were the polar star that had to guide the world into the 21st century, and that the rest, especially Russia, had to follow. As a result Russia became extremely sensitive about its status as a great power. Ever since the late Yeltsin years, and even more under Putin, enhancing it became an almost obsessive foreign policy goal. [52]

Reorganizing European security

The way European security was reorganized also played a major role in this. The task was not easy in the confused years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union. Innovative ideas did circulate at the time. The French proposed a large European Confederation, including Russia. The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe was popular both within the Western peace movement and Eastern European dissident circles because it was the only pan-European forum for security, combined with a commitment to human rights and economic cooperation. It was indeed strengthened with institutions to promote democracy and monitoring elections, a High Commissioner for National Minorities (reminiscent of the League of Nations' Minority System), further development of military confidence building measures, and related to it, a revised treaty on conventional arms reductions. But despite this, a conservative reflex prevailed in the West that can be summarized as follows: 'let's stick to NATO and EU that served us so well during the Cold War'. Basically this meant a reorganisation of security and economic life on Western terms, though it was fully supported by the Eastern European states, who considered joining those organisations a way to 'return to the West or to Europe'. [53]. At the same time they considered NATO membership as a way of balancing towards an eventual future threat by Russia. This created a classical security dilemma: what is seen by one party as a purely defensive policy is seen by the other as a form of aggression. Most probably this was not at all NATO's intention. A great deal can be explained by the iron law that makes organisations look for new purpose once they achieved their main goal. NATO's focus shifted to new tasks: the promotion of democracy, convinced as we were in the West that peace and democracy are closely interwoven. Above all, for much of the last thirty years NATO or its individual member states were involved in military operations outside of its territory (the defining interventions in former Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya), often but not always, as a subcontractor for the United Nations.

Yet, Russia felt humiliated, cheated and encircled by the continued existence and enlargement of NATO. It claimed that during the informal negotiations on German unification Gorbachev received a promise that NATO would not expand into Eastern Europe, a claim that was denied by the West. This at first sight purely academic debate between

[51] De Keersmaeker; Tatyana A. Shakleyina and Aelksei D. Boguaturov, "The Russian Realist School of International Relations," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 37 (2004): 37-51.
[52] There is a large literature on status in Russian foreign policy. See for example: Thomas Ambrosio, "The Russo-American Dispute over the Invasion of Iraq: International Status and the Role of Positional Goods," *Europe-Asia Studies* 57, no. 8 (2005): 1189-210; D.W. Larson and A. Shevchenko, "Status Seekers: Chinese and Russian Responses to Us Primacy," *International Security* 34, no. 4 (2010): 63-95; "Special Issue on Status in Russian Foreign Policy," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 47 (2014).
[53] Frank Schimmelpfennig, *The EU, NATO and the Integration of Europe: Rules and Rhetorik* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Ptess, 2003); Wohlforth and Zubok.

historians became a symptom of the growing tension between the two sides.[54]

Two things are clear however. First, the idea that Russia could become a member of NATO, which would have changed the very nature of the organisation, was rejected. Already in December 1991, Yeltsin suggested this to NATO secretary general Manfred Wörner. Much later Putin asked Clinton. In both cases the answer was 'impossible, Russia is too big'.[55] Thus, Russia was deliberately left at the periphery of the new European security architecture, just as Germany was excluded from the League. Second, once NATO enlargement was officially put on the agenda, Russia saw this as a threat. At the 1994 Budapest summit Yeltsin explicitly and bitterly made the point. "*It is a dangerous delusion to suppose that the destinies of continents and the world community in general can somehow be managed from one single capital,"* he said.[56] Clinton responded that no nation was excluded from NATO membership in advance, and that no external power could have a veto on it. [57] This 'open door policy' has been the official NATO line until today. Yet in 1994 the French president François Mitterrand for example thought it would be difficult for the Russians not to see NATO enlargement as an encirclement.[58] But just as nobody took German complaints about Versailles seriously, nobody seemed to bother about the Russian view. That even goes for the NATO-Russian Founding Act of 1997, signed on the eve of the first round of NATO-enlargements. Though approved by Russia, the text actually expresses Western views on security and hardly takes into account Russian security concerns, for example Russia's emphasis on traditional hard power, that remained at the heart of Russian security thinking. In particular, it rejects the idea of zones of influence, a concept that is crucial for understanding Russian policy towards Ukraine.[59] Moreover, the US avoided any strong, binding promise that NATO would not deploy Western troops or military installations in the new member states. But the Russians thought they did get such a promise. So rather than easing the tension, the Act became a new bone of contention between NATO and Russia. Lastly the 1999 NATO bombing campaign against Serbia during the Kosovo War without approval by the UN Security Council, upset many Russians because it deprived Russia of one of the few power tools it still had: its veto right in the UN Security Council.

If we go back to our comparison with Weimar Germany, we see one major difference. The Versailles system had definitely a deliberate anti-German undertone (demilitarisation, unilateral disarmament, exclusion of the League of Nations). This was not the case with Western policy towards Russia in the 1990s. But

---

[54] Mary Elise Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe*, new - Kindle ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); "A Broken Promise? What the West Really Told Moscow about NATO Expansion," *Foreign Affairs* 5, no. September/October (2014): 90-97; Kristina Spohr, "Exposing the Myth of Western Betrayal of Russia over NATO's Eastern Enlargement," (March, 2nd 2022).; Zubok et al.

[55] 551; Jonathan Steele, "Understanding Putin's Narrative About Ukraine is the Master Key to this Crisis," *The Guardian*, February 23, 2022.

[56] Daniel Williams, "Yetlsin, Clinton Clash over NATO's Role," *The Washington Post*, December 6,1994; Putin almost literally repeated this argument in his infamous speech at the 2007 Munich Security Conference. Wladimir Putin, "Speech at the 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy 02/10/2007," *Münchner Konferenz für Sicherheitspolitik* (2007).

[57] Williams.

[58] Sylvie Kauffmann, "Derrière la crise en Ukraine se profile un autre foyer de tension: Un possible redéploiement d'armes nucléaires en Biélorussie," *Le Monde*, no.february 6, 2022.

[59] Wohlforth and Zubok; Falk Ostermann, *Die Nato: Institution, Politiken und Probleme kollektiver Verteidigung und Sicherheit von 1949 bis Heute* (München: UVK Verlag, 2020), 106-09; A. Zagorski, "The Limits of Global Consensus on Security: The Case of Russia," in *Global Security in a Multipolar World.* , ed. L. Peral, Chaillot Papers (Paris: EU Institute for Security Studies, 2009).

just as the West did not take German complaints serious in the 1920s, it did not take serious Russia's economic problems, it did not care about Russia's perception of its security interests and it organized a European security architecture around NATO without Russia. For the West, Russia became to a large extent 'an international irrelevance', as Kristina Spohr summarized it.[60] But what happened in the 1990s is now used by Russia in its dispute with the West on the current security crisis in Europe. So much so that a 2015 Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) panel was not able to develop a common analysis on what happened, but just summarized the different views.[61] In any case, just as the Western policies in the 1920s provided the breeding ground for the rise to power of Hitler, the 1990s and the early years 2000 did the same for the Putin regime today.

Germany in the 1930s, Russia after 2000

What happened in Germany and Europe after 1930 is general knowledge and there is no need to repeat it here. Moreover, because of the brutality of the Nazi-regime, its extreme revanchism, its deeply racist nature, and because of the horrors of the holocaust and the Second World War that followed, a comparison with Hitler is too often used as an easy way to end all forms of discussion or debate. As we already said, historical comparisons only go that far, but this should not prevent us from making a comparison between the Western policies towards Nazi-Germany and Putin's Russia, more in particularly when it comes to foreign policy.

To start with a major difference, Hitler's rise to power was sudden. It constituted a clear break with the Weimar-republic, and he quickly left the League of Nations, started to rearm, tried to destabilise Austria and promoted his revanchist ideas. By contrast, after 2000 it took Russia more than ten years to develop from a proto-democracy into an outright conservative authoritarian regime. This path was not straightforward, as the Medvedev-episode illustrates. It can explain why some of the warnings about Russia's foreign policy goals were neglected. 'Russia needed time', the argument went. Moreover, Putin's foreign policy was not outright anti-Western from the beginning. He did try to establish a working relation with Bush junior, defended the START II Treaty during the Duma-ratification debate and supported the US in its war on terror after 9/11. But in 2002 the US withdrew from the ABM Treaty, a clear sign that it did not care at all about Russian security concerns. A new round of NATO enlargements, now including the former Baltic Soviet republics followed, despite Russian protests. The definitive turning point came in 2008 when the vague promise of a NATO-membership for Georgia and Ukraine was answered by a short Russian-Georgian war. Yet even then the West did not seem to take the whole issue serious, as it officially continued its 'open door policy'. Only after the Maidan-crisis in Ukraine, the annexation of the Crimea and the deliberate destabilisation of the Donbass region by a Russian organized 'frozen conflict', NATO took the Russian threat serious and Europe imposed sanctions.

Why so late? Why did we not see the writing on the wall? Maybe we did not read the relevant texts. In the 1930s warnings by Germany-experts in the foreign offices were not taken seriously. Translations of *"Mein Kampf"* were hardly circulated outside Germany and its content dismissed as hollow rhetoric.[62] Similarly, Russian specialists in academic circles and think tanks have been warning for

[60] Zubok et al., 573.
[61] OSCE, Back to Diplomacy: Final Report and Recommendations of the Panel of Eminent Persons on European Security as a Common Project, (Vienna: OSCE, 2015).
[62] Goedele De Keersmaeker and Dries Lesage, *Conflict en Samenwerking: Internationale Politiek van 1815 tot Heden* (Gent: Academia Press, forthcoming)

years that Putin's Russia was on a revanchist track.[63] But 19th and 20th century ultra-conservative and nationalist Russian thinkers, whose writings were broadly circulating in post-communist Russia and clearly inspired Putin, are totally unknown in the West, except for a small circle of Russian speaking specialists. Influential public opinion leaders in Russia never recognised the border with Ukraine, just as Germany never accepted its eastern border. Even Putin's repeated remarks that he did not consider Ukraine a real state or his long article of July 2021, in which he outlined his vision on Russian and Ukrainian history, were considered too grotesque and too out of touch to be taken seriously.[64]

Looking back to the 1930s we find several other reasons for the 'appeasement policy'. Memories of the Great War were still fresh, so people were deeply afraid of a new one. Moreover the Western powers were convinced they were not ready for a military confrontation and the economic crisis made it difficult to sell higher defence spending to the public. The French and the British were also occupied in colonial struggles. The United States, never a real member of the Versailles system anyway, focused on its own "New Deal" and was more isolationist than ever. There was the rising threat of the Soviet Union under Stalin. British business circles and pro-German lobbies promoted good relations with Germany because of their economic interests and a naïve belief in the merits of dialogue. The extreme right was on the rise almost everywhere in Europe. It admired Germany and had sometimes a certain influence on foreign policy, as for example in France.[65]

We see similar arguments and mechanism playing out to day. Apart from the fact that a direct military confrontation with Russia will always include some risk of nuclear war (a defining difference with the situation in the 1930s), nobody in the West really wanted to go back to the Cold War, to a new iron curtain and a new East-West divide. Paris and Berlin wanted to keep communication lines with Russia open, partially because of gas dependency and business interests, but also inspired by the strong memories of the French and German 'Ostpolitik' of the 1960s and 1970s that had done so much to soften the Cold War. The 2008 financial crisis constituted a major challenge for Europe and the United States. It made American demands for an increase in European defence expenditures futile. In the meantime, the Americans themselves made their 'pivot to Asia' and focused on their relation with China. Thus, they declared Europe a secondary theatre in their global strategy, without however given up their dominance in NATO.

There was the new internal and external threat of jihadi terrorism and war that worried the West much more than what was seen as the rather theoretical possibility of Russian expansion. Indeed, it looks like NATO did not even bother to develop real plans to support or defend Ukraine, while it continued to claim that it could become a member. In the meantime right-wing populists in the West, from Donald Trump to Marine Le Pen and Victor Orbán expressed their admiration for the Russian leader. Sometimes these people were in government and thus could influence the policies of the EU and NATO. Putin also tried to destabilise Western societies, using the new

[63] To give only two examples: Edward Lucas, *The New Cold War: The Future of Russia and the Threat to the West* (New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Dimitri Trenin, "Russia Leaves the West," *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 4 (2006): 87-96.
[64] Michel Eltchaninoff, *Inside the Mind of Vladimir Putin* (London: Hurst & Company, 2018); Cécile Ducourtieux et al., "Guerre en Ukraine: Face à Poutine, un déni européen," *Le Monde*, March 3, 2022; Vladimir Putin, "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians", July 12, 2021; Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America*. (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2018).
[65] De Keersmaeker and Lesage.

internet technologies that made both Hitler and the Soviets look like propaganda amateurs.

By 2020, as a result of the combined negligence, or at least tolerance of the West, and Russia's moody way to cope with (at least partially) unnecessary frustrations and perceived threats, the whole post-Cold War European security architecture and even the heritage of the 1970s détente years were in ruins. There were no longer any European nuclear or conventional arms control agreements, and even the functioning of the OSCE, a platform Putin's predecessors loved, had been blocked by him and other authoritarian leaders.[66] After the occupation of Crimea, as a clear example of a self-fulfilling prophecy, NATO started to look more intensely on how to defend its eastern member states, and created multinational battalions at its eastern borders. Though they were small, they constituted even more proof of NATO's aggressiveness in Moscow's eyes.

With Putin's war in the Ukraine, we are not even back in the Cold War, as since 1945 there has been no attack by any European great power on a smaller neighbour in order to take its territory, as we saw in 2014 and again now. The use of step-by-step tactics by Putin (first invading Georgia, then annexing Crimea and creating the Donbass puppet states, now the war in Ukraine) is strikingly similar to the ones Hitler used. However, the West took sanctions against Russia. Officially it always stood by the principle that the independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine was sacrosanct, and that it was free to choose its own alliances. This at least from the moral point of view spared it a new 1938 Munich affront. But at the same time the West, despite fourteen years of projected NATO-membership for Ukraine, was not able and – for good reasons – not willing to defend it, thus leaving Ukraine to the mercy of Putin. Here too the resemblance with Czechoslovakia, a country that had an alliance treaty with France and the Soviet Union, is striking, though there is also a difference: the West sends weapons to Ukraine, and thus supports it indirectly.

Conclusions

We have shown that there are remarkable similarities but also differences between the way the West did not take German complaints seriously in the 1920s and Russia in the 1990s. We also have seen that for a long time, sometimes for similar reasons, sometimes for different, it took some time before western countries took appropriate measures against renewed aggressive policies of the former enemies. When looking at these two cases, two lessons can be drawn: First, take your old enemies/new friends seriously, do not humiliate them and respect their security concerns, even if their perception differs fundamentally from your own. Second, take your old enemies seriously once they decide they are no longer interested in your friendship and will restore their old status by their own means. Realise in time that at a certain point, your diplomatic influence on them is limited, that they not always share your views on how international relations should be organized and so that other measures than diplomacy might be more appropriate.

Many commentators who blame the West for the Russian invasion of Ukraine, have used similar arguments as we did. Even the offensive realist John Mearsheimer, who in his theoretical works makes the deterministic claim that great powers wars are unavoidable and that aggression constitutes the best defence, has repeated this critical chorus.[67] But detecting certain patterns in behaviour and policy is not the same as making a moral judgment.

[66] Andrew Lohsen, "Can the OSCE Help Resolve the Russia-Ukraine Crisis?,".
[67] John. J Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions that Provoked Putin," *Foreign Affairs*, no. 5 (2014).: 77-89; Isaac Chotiner, "Why John Mearsheimer Blames the U.S. for the Crisis in Ukraine," *The New Yorker*, March 1, 2022.

Moreover, from an ethical point of view, there is a fundamental difference between invading an independent country on one hand, and not taking the threat of such invasion seriously on the other. Hitler invaded Poland in 1939, not the British and French who sanctioned the Sudeten annexation a year earlier in the hope to preserve peace. Putin invaded Ukraine, not the West. It should probably have reacted more firmly after the annexation of Crimea, but that does not make it guilty of the invasion. Nobody forced Putin's hand. It was his decision and the thirty years old, though sometimes understandable, frustrations about how the West treated Russia in the 1990s do not justify this. This being said, it might be good to remember what Hans Morgenthau wrote more than seventy years ago. Despite all the economic and military might a nation may have, he argued, it will only lead to temporary successes if its diplomacy and statecraft is not up to the task.[68] Perhaps in the 1990s the West, despite all its power, was indeed not up to the enormous task of organizing a new inclusive order in Europe together with Russia. Ukraine now pays the price.

[68] Hans J. Morgenthau and Kenneth W. Thompson, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, Revised/ brief edition ed. (Boston, Ma: McGraw Hill, 1993), 155-56.

GIES OCCASIONAL PAPER

THE WAR IN UKRAINE | March – April 2022

BETWEEN IMPERIALISM AND SOFT POWER RECKONING WITH RUSSIA'S PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE NATIONAL IDEA

John Irgengioro

Ghent Institute for International and European Studies – Ghent University

The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine tends to be seen as concerning not only for Ukraine's existence, but also Russia's future.[69][70][71] Although it seemed that Putin singlehandedly ordered this invasion[72], his fateful decision is bringing to a crescendo Russia's long time reckoning with its own *national idea* over the past three decades since the collapse of the Soviet Union. This war is unravelling deeply existentialist questions about the trajectory of the Russian Federation as a successor state of the USSR: how to reckon itself with its past legacy of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, how to conceptualise its *national idea* of the present, and what to make of Russia's paths for its future.

Reckonings with Russia's past:

A dissection of Putin's two speeches immediately before the war finds a concoction of pure ideological arguments derived from Russian imperialist thinking which contends the simple existence of Ukraine.[73] While the specific support of such revisionist perceptions of the past among the Russian public as justifying a full scale invasion of Ukraine is contentious amongst Russia's increasingly totalitarian environment[74], this war will trigger a fundamental soul-searching in Russian society concerning the broader question of Russia's imperial legacy one way or another. Emerging from the unique historical trajectory of a

[69] Joschka Fischer, "Russia's Stolen Future" *Project Syndicate*, February 24, 2022.
[70] Harold Cooper, Ryan Meyerson. "Worse Than a Crime; It's a Blunder." *The American Prospect*, February 25, 2022.
[71] Kadri Liik. "War of Obsession: Why Putin Is Risking Russia's Future – European Council on Foreign Relations." *ECFR* (blog), February 25, 2022.
[72] James Risen. "U.S. Intelligence Says Putin Made a Last-Minute Decision to Invade Ukraine." *The Intercept*, 2022.
[73] Marlene Laruelle. "Decoding Putin's Speeches: The Three Ideological Lines of Russia's Military Intervention in Ukraine". *Russia Matters.* Feb 25, 2022.
[74] Alexei Minialo. "Хотят Ли Русские Войны." *Хроники - Chronicles*, 2022.

'subaltern' Russian empire[75] *vis-a-vis* the West followed by the internationalist and rhetorically anti-imperialist project of the Soviet Union which nonetheless exhibited imperialistic practices[76], while ironically compounded by both the USSR's relatively peaceful collapse and Russia's subsequently painful decade of capitalist transition and perceived humiliation, Russian society as a whole has not only to yet come to sufficient terms with its imperialist legacy, but also saw its imperialistic sentiments amplified by Putin's regime in pursuit of its political trajectory. As a post-imperial nation[77], the broader resonance of Russian imperialist sentiments thus reaches beyond the core Russian monarchic circles, especially concerning the status of Ukraine. Here, the phenomenon of imperial syndrome[78] in Russia, especially concerning such a closely perceived nation whose status is seen as fundamentally linked to Russia's own identity construction, thus resulted in the current scenario of a Russian society particularly sympathetic with such an imperialistic view towards Ukraine. However, as the devastations of this war, defiant Ukrainian resistance, and international geopolitical consequences steadily dawn on Russian society, the Putin regime's identity construction of Russia based on the political legitimacy derived from the memory of Russia's anti-fascist credentials of World War II will be increasingly shaken to its core by the counternarrative of Russia as a perennially imperialistic power of its own towards its 'brotherly nations' like Ukraine.

Reckonings of Russia's present:

The progress of this war will also provide a painful reckoning with Russia's current manifestation and what it stands for in the present. Putin's regime, in the pursuit of Russia's perceived interests in Ukraine, has over the last eight years since the Maidan revolution chosen to pursue a policy based on coercion and then, with its initiation of full scale war, on pure compellence, abandoning any soft power efforts of winning the hearts and minds of the Ukrainian people in favour of utilizing hard power to prevent Ukraine from moving closer towards Europe and the West at all costs. Such a logic is hardly surprising considering the current state of Russia's soft power capacities, especially for the Eastern European countries on its Western flank between itself and the EU. Today's Russia, Ishchenko argues, offers little in terms of attraction to the world even compared to the Soviet Union, whose universal ideology and economic achievements, however flawed they may be, once drew mass movements of admiration. Instead, for countries like Ukraine, the question of "what can Russia offer" now provides little except for the violent absorption of the country into Russia and the denial of Ukrainians as a distinct people.[79] Meanwhile, Putin's war will likely render even the niche soft power attractions of Russia's cultural heritage and political positioning as a joker on the international scene[80]much less effective due to the negative impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on its international reputation. Regardless of the military outcomes, this war thus reveals to Russian society that the

[75] Viatcheslav Morozov. *Russia's postcolonial identity: a subaltern empire in a Eurocentric world*. Springer, 2015.
[76] Francine Hirsch. *Empire of nations*. Cornell University Press, 2014.
[77] Marlene Laruelle. "Marlene Laruelle: Russian Society Is Very Different from Its Regime" *Review of Democracy*, February 21, 2022.
[78] Emil Pain. "The Imperial Syndrome and Its Influence on Russian Nationalism." In *The New Russian Nationalism*, 30, 2022.
[79] Volodymyr Ishchenko. "A Russian Invasion of Ukraine Could Destabilize Russia's Political Order." *Truthout*, 2022.
[80] Marlène Laruelle. "Russia's Niche Soft Power: Sources, Targets, and Channels of Influence." *French Institute of International Relations*, 2021, 30.

ultimate transformation of the *Russian idea* under Putin is towards the logic of autocratic imperialism, formulated with little consideration for the logic of voluntary attraction at home and abroad.

The crossroads of Russia's future

Finally, the reckonings with Russia's past and the realization of Russia's current trajectory under the Putin regime clearly presents the crossroads Russia is now facing in terms of its future as a nation. Provided that a more global catastrophe does not immediately follow, this war will provide the final acceleration towards a most repressive form of Russian imperialism as well as the demonstration of its limitations. Putin's regime seems to increasingly abandon its soft power efforts in favour of solely hard power compellence, but as Russia's hard power limitations are increasingly apparent due to the country's economic fragility[81] and military weakness[82], it seems increasingly likely that Russia simply lacks the hard power capacities to carry through its brute force approach to impose its will on Ukraine, let alone for its other objectives. The question to the agency of Russian leaders and Russian society is thus whether they will ultimately prove to support Putin's imperialist legacy, or whether this war will prove the catalyst to shift their country, in light of such realistic constraints, towards another *national idea* away from hard power imperialism towards the greater utilization of soft power as the basis of its global standing. As Kenya's Ambassador to the United Nations argue[83], it is normal for countries to want closer relations with their perceived brethren, but such yearnings should not be pursued by force. An alternative path for Russia can thus take inspiration from Germany, where only after the abandonment of its imperialistic hard power ambitions faded after World War II did its soft power successfully manifest, allowing Germany to arguably achieve a greater leadership role in Europe by attraction than what its preceding imperialist rulers cannot achieve by compellence. The chances of such a radical reconceptualization of Russia's *national idea* is uncertain, but such an evolution seems plausible, even likely in the long term due to the unsustainability of the current Russian model. A shift towards the German model would thus similarly push Russia to abandon imperialism towards soft power, although the precise manifestations such a new Russian regime would be difficult to predict due to the different geopolitical landscape in the centre of Eurasia.

[81] Paul De Grauwe. "Russia Is Too Small to Win" *Project Syndicate*, March 17, 2022.
[82] Amy Mackinnon, Robbie Gramer, Jack Detsch. "Where Does Putin's War Go From Here?" *Foreign Policy*, 2022.
[83] Bill Chappell. "Kenyan U.N. Ambassador Compares Ukraine's Plight to Colonial Legacy in Africa." *NPR*, February 22, 2022, sec. Europe.

GIES OCCASIONAL PAPER

THE WAR IN UKRAINE | March – April 2022

PUTIN IS AFRAID OF EUROPE

Klaas Wauters & Hendrik Vos

Ghent Institute for International and European Studies – Ghent University

It is still said here and there, even in academic circles: we must understand the Russian president. The poor guy worked for the KGB when the Soviet empire collapsed. His Slavic soul was wounded, so he had troublesome journalists killed or gave opponents tea with polonium to drink. What would you do instead? Poor Mr. Putin is already happy if he can give a sympathetic fascist some money or get compliments from Hungarian leader Viktor Orban and his clique. Interventions from extreme right-wing parties in the European Parliament, denouncing sanctions against Russia and praising the much maligned leader for his virile policy and generous election victories, have recently brought a glimmer of joy to the man's difficult existence.

The nostalgia remained however, and so Putin decided on historical grounds that he could invade Ukraine, destroy it and terrorise its people. Let's hope that he did not give the Italians, Turks or Spaniards the idea of teaching a history lesson as well. Next they too will want to return to their Roman or Ottoman Empire, or restore the Spanish sphere of influence of olden days. It would be quite something on our continent. It is hard to believe all the nonsense that is being sold under the cloak of geopolitics.

Thirty years ago, the Soviet Union broke up into a bunch of republics, each going its own way. Some stayed closer to Moscow than others. In many places, the Chinese influence has grown in the meantime. This does not seem to bother Putin. It is only when the republics start looking westwards that he becomes nervous. The interest of some republics in Europe is understandable. Here we moan about the Union, complain about slow decision-making and whine about every decision. Those who look at it from a distance usually see it differently: this is a haven of peace, stability and prosperity that exists nowhere else on this scale. The European model is attractive and that scares the hell out of Putin. If Ukraine really adjusts its compass to the Union, adopts its way of governing and living together and benefits from it, this may inspire other countries in the region to do the same. Perhaps enthusiasm will grow among the Russian people too. To keep things under control then, the President will have to order a lot of novichok. So therefore Ukraine had to be smashed up. It looks as if this will be a kamikaze action, not least for Putin himself, but in the meantime shocking misery will be caused.

Europe is rightly concerned, because there is not much room for a diplomatic solution any more. That station has actually been passed. The next conversation with Putin should take place in front of a tribunal, not at that much too long table in the Kremlin. At the same time, an apocalyptic confrontation between nuclear powers must also preferably be avoided. Unanimously, sanctions are being imposed and weapons are being delivered to Ukraine in a semi-concealed manner. Almost as unanimous is the view that we should

invest more in our defence. Diplomacy is for spineless wimps. In some Member States, the debate on compulsory military service has been flaring up. Almost twenty years after Robert Kagan wrote that Europeans come from Venus and Americans from Mars, it is time for Europe to set sail for Mars as well. At least, that is how it sounds to some.

Would the situation really be different if we had invested more in military defence? The countries of the Union spent, albeit in scattered order, four times more than the Russians. How much did it have to be then to keep Putin out of Ukraine? Five times more? Ten times? The four largest NATO countries put over 900 billion dollars into their military in 2020. Russia spent 62 billion. So is the problem really a lack of resources? Of course, the Union is not very efficient because of its fragmentation. There are, so to speak, 27 separate land forces, naval forces, air forces and military bands. They each buy their own equipment, which is often incompatible with each other. It is a waste of resources, entirely due to the fact that Member States prefer to control and decide on their defence themselves. Despite this, it is decided everywhere to spend more on the army.

Yet the European project is powerful and attractive, precisely because it does not adopt the language and tools of rogue states, because it does not engage in military bidding, because it does not install rigid hierarchical lines of command. Europe talks, consults, mediates, tolerates opposition, allows media freedom and, although it has its armies, it also keeps a budget for fighting inequality and investing in policies that benefit people every day. It happens far from consistently, but it happens more than elsewhere in the world. And blood is not shed here. That is why Ukraine is seeking a rapprochement with the Union. And that is why Putin is getting nervous. This time diplomacy has failed, and the armies are on standby. But there is no reason to throw away our model, imitate dictators and move to Mars altogether.

GIES OCCASIONAL PAPER

THE WAR IN UKRAINE | March – April 2022

UKRAINE'S IN-BETWEENNESS: FROM HYBRIDITY TO CENTRALITY

Louise Amoris

Ghent Institute for International and European Studies – Ghent University

"We feel like a part of Europe, but may look like a part of Russia. With our thoughts, we are in the West. With our sins, we are in the East".[84]

The Ukrainian diplomat Olexander Sherba has described Ukraine as a state that has often been rather unknown and undervalued from an outsider's eye. As many 'post-Soviet' states, it has been perceived through the prism of corruption and uncomplete statehood, a marginal actor on the borderlands of Europe, but also of its former Russian imperial 'master' (if we use the postcolonial vocabulary). Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Ukraine has found itself in a difficult structural position, in-between two cores, in a state that could be described as one of liminality. Liminality refers to a state of ambiguity, of falling in-between existing categories, of being partly-Self partly-Other, "neither here nor there".[85] This indeterminacy comes from the fact that the liminal actor is in a phase of transition, one that is from a Soviet, unfree, undemocratic past towards a free, democratic, European future from a Ukrainian perspective. Since its independence in 1991, Ukraine has indeed enshrined its future always more strongly towards the West, and the launch of the Russian invasion in Ukraine on 24 February 2022 could well be a determining stepping stone in this journey.

Ukraine as the EU's and Russia's 'little Self'

Before addressing Ukraine's own subjectivity and how it has built its identity in relation to its two big neighbours – the EU and Russia – it is worth observing how Ukraine has been framed by them. After the EU's wide enlargement in 2004, Ukraine has become a direct neighbour (among others) of the community. This led to the formulation of the European Neighbourhood Policy, followed by the Eastern Partnership in 2009, which are policies that come as a substitution to enlargement, to reduce the risks of full exclusion. The side effect of these policies is that they also come to blur the boundaries between the EU's Self

[84] Olexander Sherba, *Ukraine vs. Darkness. Undiplomatic Thoughts* (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2021), 15.
[85] Victor Turner, *The ritual process structure and anti-structure* (London: Penguin Books, 1969), 359.

and the Others.[86] The neighbours of the Eastern Partnership are framed as the EU's 'potential we',[87] not yet 'good enough' according to the established standards to become full Europeans, but on their way to do so.[88] Through this kind of policies, the EU creates places of liminality, places of transition in which the liminars are supposed to adopt the dominant categories as defined by the core (e.g. democracy, rule of law, governance etc.) to reduce the risks of subversion and secure the EU's own Self, while still refusing to accept them fully within the in-circle.[89] The relationship appears as one between a teacher and a student, the EU expecting Ukraine to learn and progress towards its model.[90] This representation of Ukraine as the EU's 'little self'[91] is in a way reflected in the latter's refusal to fast-track the Ukrainian application to join the bloc: its aspirations to join the community are acknowledged, the EU wants Ukraine in and considers it as part of the European family, but it is not yet 'ready' to fully join.

From the Russian perspective now, we can also note an ambiguous form of Othering, blurring the lines between the inside and the outside. The very Russian notion of its 'near abroad' underlines this ambiguity, implying that Russia considers the former Soviet Republics as not completely foreign, i.e. as partly-Self. Moreover, referring to 'the Ukraine' has a historical connotation, representing the Ukrainian territory as Russia's borderland, coming from the translation of the Russian word "Okraina". Oskanian argues that Russia articulates its Self as superior in relation to its constructed subalterns which are denied any true agency, with diverging practices depending on whether it looks towards its East or West.[92] Towards its eastern flank, Russia adopts an Orientalist behaviour, bearer of a civilising mission. Towards its Western neighbours, however, the approach is different, promoting a common Slavic authenticity with Russia at its core, as the big brother and protector. This fraternal link uniting Ukraine to Russia has been particularly visible in the Russian discursive escalation, used as an element of justification for the so-called 'special operation'. In the Russian discourse, it is only natural for Ukraine and Russia to be together, they are one people, with Russia playing the role of a protector, as any big brother would do. Ukraine is considered to have no nationhood on its own, again underlining this 'little self' projection coming from Russia. We can note a form of differentiation being made in the Russian official discourse

[86] Laure Delcour, "Armenia's and Georgia's contrasted positioning vis-à-vis the EU: between vocal centrality and strategic marginality." *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 27, no 4 (2019): 439-450.
[87] Alena Vieira, "The European Union's 'Potential We' between Acceptance and Contestation: Assessing the Positioning of Six Eastern Partnership Countries." *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 59, no 2 (2021): 297-315.
[88] Shota Kakabadze, "The East in the West: South Caucasus Between Russia and the European Union." *Polity* 52, no 2 (2020): 273-287.
[89] Bahar Rumelili, "Liminal identities and processes of domestication and subversion in International Relations." *Review of International Studies* 38, no 2 (2012): 495-508; Maria-Ruxandra Stoicescu, "Communitas and forms without foundations: Romania's case of interlocking liminalities." *Review of International Studies* 38, no 2 (2012): 509-524.
[90] Ondřej Horký-Hlucháň and Petr Kratochvíl, ""Nothing is imposed in this policy!" The construction and constriction of the European neighbourhood." *Alternatives* 39, no 4 (2014): 252-270; Petr Kratochvil,. "Discursive constructions of the EU's identity in the neighbourhood: an equal among equals or the power centre." *European Political Economy Review* 9, Autumn (2009): 5-23.
[91] Maria Ruxandra Stoicescu, *Liminality in International Relations: A Comparative Analysis of Discursive Articulations in the Geopolitical Visions of Romania, Turkey, and Ukraine* (Institute of International and Development Studies, 2008).
[92] Kevork Oskanian, *Russian Exceptionalism between East and West: The Ambiguous Empire* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

between the genuine Ukrainian people, who naturally belong with their brother Russia, and the threatening Other embodied by Ukrainian authorities, who only are the West's puppets. Here, Ukraine's in-betweenness is framed as a threat, with the argument that its specific position is being used by the West to contain Russia.[93] Ukraine's choice for a pro-Western liberal democratic path comes as a destabilising factor of the identity discourse the Kremlin is trying to build for the Slavic/Eurasian space around the concept of the 'Russian world'.[94]

Ukraine's liminality: from hybridity to marginality

Where does Ukraine situate itself, in-between these two cores with each their own perception of the country, but which share the similarity of framing it within a hierarchical relationship, as some kind of a 'lesser' or 'little' self? Identity is never something that is fixed, but rather always in flux,[95] and we can note changes in how Ukraine has articulated its own Self in relation to the two cores since the fall of the Soviet Union.

Since its independence, Ukraine has looked towards the West, although civil society and political elites were divided and unstable on how to relate with their neighbours. Depending on the time or the political side, the 'Other' was changing and the perceptions of Russia were balancing between the brother and the enemy,[96] while always trying to maintain limited strategic relations to try and hedge the risks for Ukraine's territorial sovereignty.[97] It is interesting to note that, before the point of rupture in the relations between Ukraine and Russia in 2014, the former could have seen itself play the role of a bridge between Europe and Russia, "to 'return to Europe' *together* with Russia".[98] This underlined Ukraine's ambiguous positioning that it had strived to turn into an opportunity under Kuchma's presidency (1994-2005), to act as a bridge, to be a dynamic force of connection and rapprochement. The Euromaidan revolution in 2013-2014, followed by the annexation of Crimea by Russia and unrest in the Donbas mark a shift in Ukrainian political discourse, with a rearticulation of its identity now firmly embedded in its European choice, putting an end to the balancing strategy and the perspective of being a bridge with Russia. "[T]here is no longer a debate on Ukraine's geopolitical choice".[99] Ukraine has strongly framed its identity as one that belongs in Europe in terms of its history, identity and values, therefore aspiring to be accepted within the process of European integration.[100] While no longer being a bridge between Europe and Russia, it has started promoting its role as a bridge between Europe and 'the rest', being a model for other countries 'in transition' towards democracy.[101] The accession to the EU is often presented as a natural way forward and the EU as Ukraine's ally and

[93] Vladimir Putin, "Address by the President of the Russian Federation," 2022, accessed February 22, 2022, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828
[94] Dmitri Trenin, *Understanding Putin and the Ukraine Crisis*. Presentation at Carnegy Endowment for International Peace, Online, February 2022.
[95] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Social Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985).
[96] Taras Kuzio, "Identity and nation-building in Ukraine: Defining the 'other'," *Ethnicities* 1, no 3 (2001): 343-365.
[97] Karina Shyrokykh, "The evolution of the foreign policy of Ukraine: External actors and domestic factors," *Europe-Asia Studies* 70, no 5 (2018): 832-850.
[98] Taras Kuzio, "Identity and nation-building in Ukraine", 360.
[99] Vera Axyonova and Diana Zubko, "The European Union through the Eyes of Ukrainian Think Tankers: Studying EU Perceptions Post-Euromaidan," *Kyiv-Mohyla Law and Politics Journal* 0, no 3 (2017): 197.
[100] Karina Shyrokykh, "The evolution of the foreign policy of Ukraine".
[101] Vjosa Musliu and Olga Burlyuk, "Imagining Ukraine: From history and myths to Maidan protests." *East European Politics and Societies* 33, no 3 (2019): 631-655.

counter-pole to Russia.[102] We could argue that the main objective for Ukraine has first been to stay away from Russian influence, more than being a European Ukraine as such.[103] Russia is indeed Ukraine's most significant 'Other', familiar but hostile,[104] and it could be contended that Ukraine takes the essence of its identity in opposition to Russia.[105]

In the literature, a distinction is made between hybrid and marginal liminality.[106] The former emerges from "the interstices of crosscutting discourses of identity, which create mismatching categorisations". The latter is "the product of universalising discourses, where liminality designates the constant state of becoming of an actor in search for a place within an established structural arrangement".[107] Before the 2010s, we could argue that Ukraine was in a state of hybrid liminality, "a synthesis of East and West" and "ambivalent category resting in both",[108] embracing its in-between position and at times trying to turn it into strength as a bridge between East and West. The escalating tensions in Ukraine-Russia relations leading to the 2014 shift gave rise to a transformation of Ukraine's liminality into one of marginality. It has strived to be accepted within the European club by engaging in reforms, trying to comply with its standards, without ever being completely successful and thus remaining of the 'edges'.[109] Marginality does not necessarily mean weakness however, and we have seen Ukraine using its 'marginal' position to influence the EU's identity and foreign policy. Indeed, Ukrainian authorities have endeavoured to frame Ukraine as central for the EU's security, linking it to its future membership against a common Russian threat.[110] It has increasingly projected a representation of itself as a buffer with a protective role for European security against the Russian threat, thus projecting conflictual representations to also engage the EU in its confrontation with Russia. This discursive strategy has reached its peak in the context of the current war in Ukraine, with Ukrainian authorities emphasising how the Russian aggression on Ukraine constitutes a great threat for the whole of Europe, its security architecture, its values. They are framing the conflict as one between democracy against barbarism and authoritarianism, with Ukraine included within the family of the former, in the front row as 'Europe's army', therefore asking for the right to be considered as equal.[111] This strategy did receive some resonance, as the perspective for Ukraine's membership has never

[102] Vera Axyonova and Diana Zubko, "The European Union through the Eyes of Ukrainian Think Tankers".
[103] Vjosa Musliu and Olga Burlyuk, "Imagining Ukraine".
[104] Kornely Kakachia, Bidzina Lebanidze and Volodymyr Dubovyk, "Defying marginality: explaining Ukraine's and Georgia's drive towards Europe," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 27, no 4 (2019): 451-462.
[105] Vjosa Musliu and Olga Burlyuk, "Imagining Ukraine".
[106] Dylan M.H. Loh and Jaakko Heiskanen, "Liminal sovereignty practices: Rethinking the inside/outside dichotomy," *Cooperation and Conflict* 55, no 3 (2020): 284-304; Bahar Rumelili, "Liminal identities and processes of domestication and subversion".
[107] Maria-Ruxandra Stoicescu, "Communitas and forms without foundations,' 512.
[108] Ivan L. Rudnytsky, 1987, cited in Vjosa Musliu and Olga Burlyuk, "Imagining Ukraine", 5.
[109] Kornely Kakachia, Bidzina Lebanidze and Volodymyr Dubovyk, "Defying marginality".
[110] Christopher S. Browning and George Christou, "The constitutive power of outsiders: The European neighbourhood policy and the eastern dimension," *Political Geography* 29, no 2 (2010): 109-118.
[111] RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service, "Zelenskiy Calls For Ukraine's Immediate EU Membership But Bloc Cool On Idea," *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty,* last modified February 28, 2022, accessed March 22, 2022, https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-eu-membership-zelenskiy/31728332.html; Volodymyr Zelenskyy, "Interview: David Muir Reporting. ABC News Exclusive." Accessed March 14 2022, https://abcnews.go.com/US/video/zelenskyy-interview-david-muir-reporting-abc-news-exclusive-83309456

been erased from the EU's agenda, and has been put again on the table in light of the ongoing war, with higher support than ever before.

Recognition is essential in the affirmation of one's identity.[112] It would seem that, although the EU recognises Ukraine's Europeanness and still does not close the door for future membership, Ukraine is still not perceived as 'ready' to be part of the in-group. EU discourses emphasise the need to support and reconstruct Ukraine's still 'unperfect' democracy,[113] implying that it is still incomplete. Even if the candidate status finally gets granted to Ukraine, this will not necessarily mean that it will leave its liminal status, as it could still take years before it reaches full membership. Even then, differentiation from the 'real' core could persist, as we can see in the case of the Central Eastern European states which, despite having joined the EU, still remain liminal in relation to the Western core. A normative hierarchy persists between different Europes and Europeans.[114]

Ukraine's 'own face'

The pitfall in seeing Ukraine as liminal in comparison to the EU is to miss signs of a new nation emerging from below, with 'its own face', emancipated to a certain degree from its two large neighbours, despite still being in-between.[115] These signs were already visible in the Maidan events and would appear reinforced today in the face of the invasion. While Ukraine has often been perceived as a divided country (between a more pro-European West and a more pro-Russian East), many scholars have argued that the Russian aggression has in fact strengthened Ukrainian identity and united the country.[116] In terms of (geo)political preferences, regional divides are fading, the question of language is not so much a determining factor.[117] In Ukraine, we witness the affirmation of a strong civic identity rather than a nationalist project.[118] Before Russian aggression already in 2014, there were no strong, virulent anti-Russian sentiments in the population according to a 2021 study by the Razumkov Centre.[119] Now, however, Ukrainians are united and consolidating their identity around the dichotomy of the democratic Self against the Russian imperial and authoritarian Other. The Russian invasion of February 2022 most probably marks a point of no return in Ukrainian-Russian

[112] Danijela Čanji and Aliaksei Kazharski, "When the "subaltern empire" speaks. On recognition, Eurasian integration, and the Russo-Georgian war," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* (2022): 1-28.
[113] Council of Europe, "Informal meeting of the Heads of State or Government. Versailles Declaration.", Accessed on March 14 2022, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/54773/20220311-versailles-declaration-en.pdf; Ursula Von der Leyen, "Speech by President von der Leyen at the Munich Security Conference 2022," Accessed on February 22, 2022. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_22_1221
[114] Maria Mälksoo, "The normative threat of subtle subversion: the return of 'Eastern Europe'as an ontological insecurity trope," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 32, no 3 (2019): 365-383.
[115] Alexandr Osipian, "Украина все же обрела собственное лицо" [Ukraine Managed to Acquire a Face of Its Own]. *Ab Imperio,* 3 (2014).
[116] Paul D'Anieri, *Rethinking Sovereignty*. Symposium conducted at TCUP Conference: Beyond Borderland: 30 Years of Ukrainian Sovereignty, Harvard University, Online, February 2022; Taras Kuzio, "Euromaidan revolution, Crimea and Russia–Ukraine war: why it is time for a review of Ukrainian–Russian studies," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 59, no 3-4 (2018): 529-553.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Vjosa Musliu and Olga Burlyuk, "Imagining Ukraine"; Olga Onuch, *Contested Identities and State-Making in the Post-Soviet Space*, Symposium conducted at the Association for the Study of Nationalities, Online, January 2022.
[119] Faustine Vincent, "Kyiv satisfait de l'« unité » de ses partenaires face à Moscou," *Le Monde*, January 13, 2022.

relations. According to Makarychev,[120] it will now be difficult for Russia to reconcile the two images representing Ukraine in relation to its own Self: the threatening Other and the brother. It is also uncertain what will happen regarding Ukraine's sense of belonging to the European community. Faced with the lack of receptiveness from Western actors to its repeated calls for integration and assistance, there is a growing sense of disappointment noticeable in Ukrainian official discourses. This first concerns NATO's inaction,[121] but also now the EU's incapacity to "do more" when they refused to fast-track Ukraine's membership application.[122] Despite the numerous signs of support and solidarity, Ukraine stands mostly alone in its fight. This could lead to a stronger affirmation of the "Ukraine as Ukraine" narrative identified by Musliu and Burlyuk, according to which Ukraine is neither East nor West and does not need to be integrated into any regional framework "*to become*".[123] The responsibility for its present and future would lie in its own hands, as would demonstrate the strong resistance we are witnessing today against Russian aggression.

[120] Andrey Makarychev *The Russian Geopolitical Crescendo: Lessons for the International Relations Theory*. Seminar at the Institute of European Studies and International Relations of the Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences, Comenius University, Online, March 2022.(
[121] "War in Ukraine, Day 10: Ukraine disappointed and outraged by NATO's "inaction". *Euromaidan Press,* March 5, 2022.
[122] Volodymyr Zelenskyy, We have already reached a strategic turning point and are moving towards our goal, our victory, last modified March 11, 2022, accessed March 14, 2022.
[123] Vjosa Musliu and Olga Burlyuk, "Imagining Ukraine", 15.

GIES OCCASIONAL PAPER

THE WAR IN UKRAINE | March – April 2022

FREEZING RUSSIA'S CENTRAL BANK RESERVES: MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING?

Mattias Vermeiren

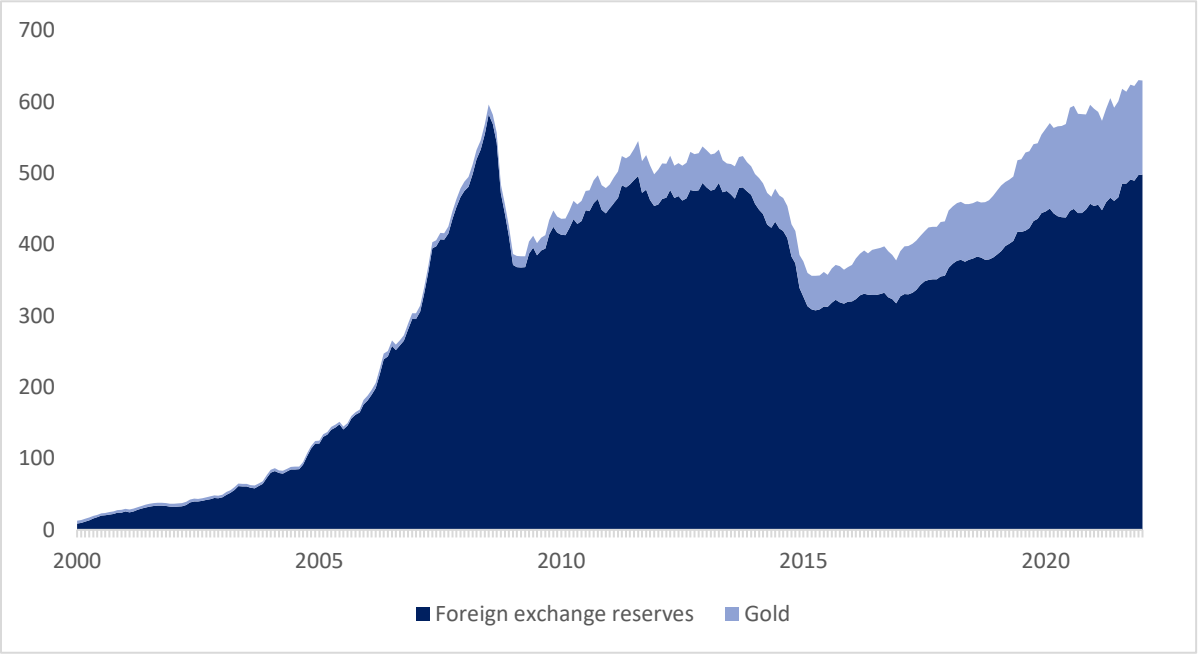
Ghent Institute for International and European Studies – Ghent University

Western countries have responded to the invasion of Ukraine with a plethora of sanctions that seek to completely isolate Russia from the western-dominated international financial and monetary system.[124] On February 26th, major Russian banks were cut off from the Brussels-based SWIFT international payments system, which provides messaging services that are needed to send money across borders. On the same day, jurisdictions issuing key internationally used currencies (especially the US and the EU but also the UK, Canada, Japan, Australia, and Switzerland) aimed to incapacitate the Central Bank of the Russian Federation's (CBRF) use of its international reserves by effectively freezing more than half of the CBRF's assets.

Especially the latter sanction is widely seen as an unprecedented move that would debilitate Russia's attempt to cushion the blow of other financial sanctions like the exclusion of major Russian banks from SWIFT, which western powers already considered as a retaliation for Russia's annexation of the Crimea back in 2014. As president Putin and his fellow travellers could expect a SWIFT-exclusion in response to the current invasion, they hoped to rely on the CBRF's reserves to mitigate the direct impact of these sanctions. After all, the accumulation of foreign exchange reserves over the last two decades by Russia and other emerging powers has been a central component of their growing "financial statecraft", which is aimed at strengthening their policy autonomy in the face of western-dominated international financial institutions and reducing their vulnerability against capital flight.[125] Russia alone accrued more than US$630 billion in international reserves by January 2022, about 79 percent of which consisted of foreign exchange assets and 21 percent of gold (Figure 1). After its annexation of the Crimea in 2014, Russia stepped up its efforts to build a "war chest" of reserves, which peaked by the time of its 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

[124] For a complete overview and timeline of the imposed financial and economic sanctions, see Chad P. Bown, "Russia's war on Ukraine: A sanctions timeline," *Peterson Institute for International Economics*, last modified March 29, 2022.
[125] Cynthia Roberts, Leslie Armijo and Saori Katada, *The BRICS and Collective Financial Statecraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Figure 1. International reserves at the Central Bank of the Russian Federation[126]

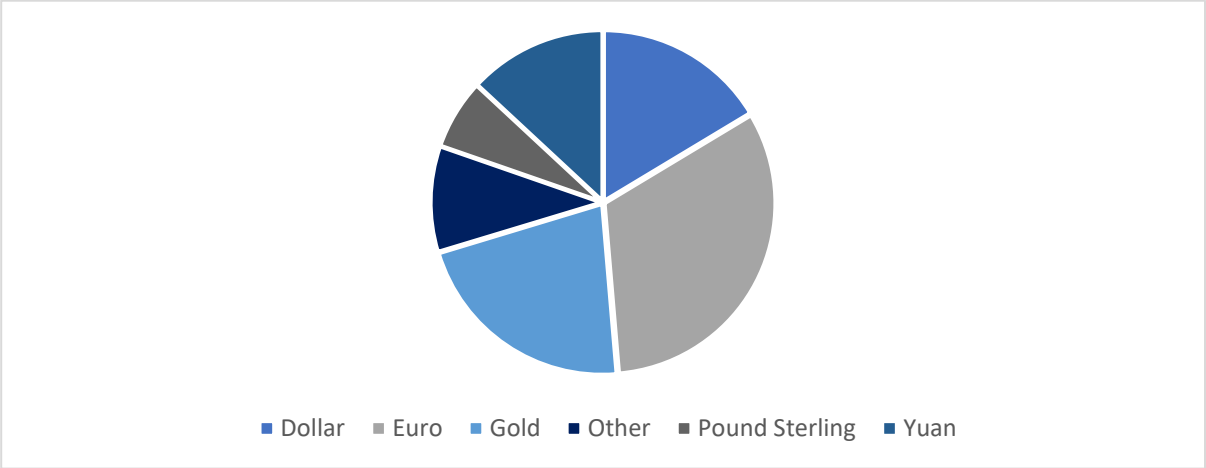


Currency collapse?

Foreign exchange reserves usually allow central banks to have immediate access to foreign currencies; they are a kind of deposit that can be deployed during a crisis to bailout domestic banks or defend the exchange rate against capital flight without having to resort to the IMF's emergency loans and implement its harsh conditionality programs. In February 2022, almost 60 percent of the CBRF's reserves were invested in western currency-denominated financial assets (Figure 2), enabling western powers to freeze these assets and undermine the capacity of the Putin regime to minimize the destabilizing effects of other financial sanctions on the Russian economy. One of the key *economic* objectives of the central bank sanctions is therefore to bring about a collapse of the exchange rate of the rouble, as one top official in the Biden administration openly acknowledged: "No country is sanctions-proof and Putin's war chest of $630 billion in reserves only matters if he can use it to defend his currency value of the Russian rouble against major currencies, specifically by selling those reserves in exchange for buying the rouble."[127] In the days following the announcement of the sanctions, the rouble plunged by almost 40 percent against the US dollar and the euro.

[126] Central Bank of the Russian Federation
[127] Anonymously quoted in Amanda Macias and Thomas Franck "Biden administration expands sanctions against Russia, cutting off U.S. transactions with central bank," *CNBC.com*, February 28, 2022.

Figure 2. Composition of Russia's central bank reserves in February 2022[128]



The underlying *political* objectives of the sanctions remain unclear, however. The most direct purpose is to limit the ability of Russia to finance the war against Ukraine by cutting of its access to foreign exchange markets and weakening the economic foundations of its geopolitical ambitions.[129] Western powers might additionally hope that the sanctions will eventually stoke social unrest and embolden ordinary Russians to openly contest "Putin's war": a collapsing currency would severely erode their purchasing power by making imports vastly more expensive and fuelling inflationary pressures in the Russian economy more generally. If so, it would reveal how western sanctions no longer only target Putin's inner circle of *siloviki* and oligarchs but are explicitly designed to impoverish ordinary Russian citizens who bear no responsibility for the war. As Nicholas Mulder – author of the recently published book *The Economic Weapon,* an economic history of sanctions[130] – has forcefully argued, sanctions inflicting financial damage on entire populations are morally fraught: "any liberalism worth its name should support and defend individual dissent and resistance against oppressive and dictatorial governments, not punish those unfortunate enough to find themselves living under such regimes."[131] Any hope to provoke popular revolt against the Putin regime would also be painstakingly naïve, as the sanctions could even boost societal support for the war by turning ordinary Russian citizens against western powers and making their economic fortunes increasingly reliant on protective actions of the government.[132] If regime change is the ultimate political goal, western powers could also prove dangerously reluctant to remove the sanctions as a condition for Putin to stop the invasion and withdraw his troops from Ukraine.

In the meanwhile, the Russian government took swift actions to prevent the further fall of

[128] Source: Central Bank of the Russian Federation
[129] Carla Norrlöf "The New Economic Containment: Russian Sanctions Signal Commitment to International Order," *Foreign Affairs*, March 18, 2022.
[130] Nicholas Mulder,*The Economic Weapon: The Rise of Sanctions as a Tool of Modern War* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2022).
[131] Interview of Nicholas Mulder by Anny Lowry, "Can Sanctions Stop Russia?" *The Atlantic,* March 10, 2022.
[132] Lee Jones, "Sanctions won't save Ukraine," *UnHerd*, February 28, 2022. See also Lee Jones' book on sanctions: Lee Jones *Societies Under Siege Exploring How International Economic Sanctions (Do Not) Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

the rouble and bolster its exchange rate, facilitated by a major loophole in the sanctions regime: the exclusion of energy imports. Being the main channels for European payments for Russian oil and gas, Sberbank and Gazprombank were barred from the SWIFT sanctions.[133] Although the US and the UK eventually banned imports of Russian oil and gas, EU member states have been reluctant to go as far for fear of further escalating energy prices and triggering an economic recession. Combined with a sanctions-induced collapse of imports, continued exports of oil and gas at elevated prices can be expected to boost Russia's current account surplus and sustain its access to new inflows of foreign exchange. At the same time, the Putin regime responded to the sanctions by introducing exchange controls that ban Russians from transferring foreign currency abroad and force Russian exporters to sell 80 percent of their foreign currency revenue for roubles.[134] Together with the sustained energy exports and related influx of foreign currencies, these exchange controls managed to completely recover the exchange rate of the rouble against the US dollar by the first week of April. Putin's decision on March 23rd to demand "unfriendly countries" to pay for Russian gas in roubles was hence largely symbolic, as it will merely force European importers rather than Russian exporters to sell euros for roubles.

The rouble's recovery certainly does not imply that the Russian economy will remain unscathed from the central banks sanctions: to defend the rouble, the CBRF also had to raise its main interest rate from 9.5 percent to 20 percent in ways that will (together with other economic sanctions) contribute to a severe recession and put severe hardship on Russian citizens (as well as on migrant workers in Russia and people relying on their remittances). Because of financial and trade sanctions, Russia is also practically unable to use the foreign currencies it continues to have access to via its energy exports to import goods from western markets. But the absence of a currency collapse does suggest that a central mechanism of the central bank sanctions failed to bite.

Global financial fragmentation?

What about the long-term effects of the sanctions? Freezing the CBRF's foreign exchange reserves seems to have eroded the "moneyness" of these reserves, the perceived safety of which has always been based on their alleged liquidity and ease at which they can be converted into hard currencies at par.[135] By "weaponizing" foreign exchange reserves, western powers could give non-western central banks an incentive to diversify their reserves away from assets denominated in western currencies: it could, as some observes like Barry Eichengreen have argued, accelerate the stealth erosion of the US dollar as the dominant reserve currency.[136] After all, Russia responded to the 2014 sanctions by further de-dollarizing its reserves, shifting to gold and especially euros instead.[137] The central banks sanctions could now even alter the political calculations of China – which currently holds more than US$ 3.3 trillion in international reserves – and push it to ditch the US dollar as its main reserve asset.

---

[133] Philip Blenkinsop, "EU bars 7 Russian banks from SWIFT, but spares those in energy," *Reuters*, March 3, 2022.
[134] Katie Martin, Tommy Stubbington, Philip Stafford and Hudson Locket, "Russia doubles interest rates after sanctions send rouble plunging," *Financial Times*, February 28, 2022.
[135] Jon Sindreu, "If Russian Currency Reserves Aren't Really Money, the World Is in for a Shock," *Wall Street Journal*, March 3, 2022.
[136] Barry Eichengreen, "Ukraine war accelerates the stealth erosion of dollar dominance," *Financial Times*, March 28, 2022.
[137] Daniel McDowell "Financial sanctions and political risk in the international currency system", *Review of International Political Economy* 28, no. 3 (2021): 635-661.

This raises the question about alternatives. The perceived moneyness of foreign exchange reserves is the key reason why gold cannot be seen as a plausible substitute: it is difficult if not impossible to swiftly sell huge volumes of gold for US dollars or other international currencies without incurring massive losses on these sales; even though the CBRF diversified its international reserves toward gold, its gold reserves – amounting to more than US$130 billion in February 2022 – will most likely remain largely idle over the next few months. The unique deepness and liquidity of US markets for debt securities – especially the market for US Treasuries – is the principal foundation of the dollar's dominance as the world's reserve currency: central banks can easily liquidate these debt securities and/or use these assets as collateral in repo funding markets to borrow US dollars at minimum transaction costs. Other currencies are not backed by comparable markets for debt securities and lack a similar level of liquidity. The international role of the euro has been constrained by the fragmentation of the Eurozone's (sovereign) bond markets and its restrictive macroeconomic policy regime, which curtails the supply of safe and liquid debt securities to the rest of the world by privileging the interests of the export-oriented growth models of the northern member states.[138] The cross-border trade of yuan-denominated assets, in turn, has been impeded by persistent capital controls, which play a crucial role in China's investment-led growth model by enabling the Chinese government to channel cheap credit to its state-owned enterprises.[139]

While remaining the world's dominant reserve currency, it is perfectly conceivable that the western sanction regime will somewhat reduce the share of the US dollar in global foreign exchange reserves by inducing possible contender states to look for alternatives. The sanctions will also further encourage emerging powers to settle their bilateral trade in their own currencies instead of the greenback. Both Russia and China have already set up their own financial messages systems to reduce their reliance on SWIFT and US financial institutions to settle their trade. Even so, it is essential to remember that the dominance of the US dollar goes way beyond its role as the global reserve and trade settlement currency: the most important source of the global hegemony of the US dollar – and the structural power it confers upon the United States – is that it is by far the most favoured investment and borrowing currency for *private* actors in global finance. A recent McKinsey report estimated that the total value of financial assets and liabilities in 2020 amounted to more than US$1,000 trillion (12-times global GDP).[140] Only the onshore and offshore US dollar markets are sufficiently large to absorb the global need for private financial and non-financial firms to raise funding and accumulate liquid financial wealth. The willingness of the US Treasury and Federal Reserve to backstop even offshore US dollar-denominated money created outside the US financial system in response to the global financial crisis of 2008 consolidated the position of US dollar as the world's dominant store of value.[141]

Wealthy elites in non-western countries might infer from the current sanctions that "they can easily fall victim to geopolitics" – as Branko Milanovic has argued – pushing them to "find

---

[138] Mattias Vermeiren "Meeting the world's demand for safe assets? Macroeconomic policy and the international status of the euro after the crisis", *European Journal of International Relations* 25, no. 1 (2019): 30-60.

[139] Miguel Otero-Iglesias and Mattias Vermeiren "China's state-permeated market economy and its constraints to the internationalization of the renminbi", *International Politics* 52 (2015): 684.

[140] McKinsey Global Institute *The rise and rise of the global balance sheet: How productively are we using our wealth?* November 15, 2021.

[141] Steffen Murau, Joe Rini and Armin Haas "The evolution of the Offshore US-Dollar System: Past, present and four possible futures," *Journal of Institutional Economics* 16, no 6 (2020): 767-783.

new havens for their investments … probably in Asia."[142] Nevertheless, stashing their financial wealth into US dollars in non-western financial centres can still expose them to US secondary sanctions that punish these centres from doing business with targeted elites. The only other option is to invest in real estate instead of financial assets, pushing up housing prices in non-western jurisdictions. But should the United States and other western powers really care about this "risk"? Rather than fragmenting the global financial system around competing geopolitical blocs, the flight of their money could ease some pressure on skyrocketing real estate prices in several of the West's overly expensive global cities and ought to be welcomed for precisely this reason.

[142] Branko Milanovic "The End of the End of History: What have we Learned So Far?", *Global Policy*, March 7, 2022.

GIES OCCASIONAL PAPER

THE WAR IN UKRAINE | March – April 2022

THE END OF GLOBALISATION AS WE KNOW IT

Ferdi De Ville

Ghent Institute for International and European Studies – Ghent University

While it is impossible to predict the outcome of the war in Ukraine in the short term, we can more confidently assess its medium-term consequences. The Russian invasion of Ukraine and the unprecedented sanctions with which the west has responded will be a watershed in the trajectory of the global economy. The consequences of the economic isolation of Russia will long outlive the duration of the war and the sanctions. Globalisation will never fully recover from this blow.

After Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, western countries have responded with exceptionally harsh economic sanctions.[143] The European Union, as Russia's main trading partner accounting for 38% of its exports, played a key role. Its position as Russia's main export destination provides it with leverage, but this is partly neutralized by its own dependence on imports of Russian gas and oil. As a result, the EU has often been accused of handling Russia with kid gloves. In response to Russia's occupation of Crimea and the downing of the MH17 plane in 2014, the EU reacted mainly with diplomatic sanctions and restrictive measures limited to individuals and specific companies.

The speed and scale of the EU's response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine therefore came as a surprise to many. Germany, often among the most hesitant EU member states when it comes to using sanctions in general and against Russia in particular, decided to shelve the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. The EU closed its airspace for all Russian carriers. More significantly, on March 2nd seven Russian and three Belarusian banks were banned from the Brussels-based SWIFT financial messaging system and hence excluded from international financial markets, a move considered a last resort "financial nuclear weapon".[144] just a week earlier. At least as consequential was the ban on transactions and freezing of the assets of the Russian and Belarussian Central Banks.

The EU has extended asset freezes to more Russian individuals, including President Putin and Minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov, and has broadened export controls in the energy, transport and technology sector. The Union, together with other countries, stopped

[143] I would like to thank Niels Gheyle and Jan Orbie for helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

[144] Giorgio Leali, "France not opposed in principle to cutting Russia from SWIFT: Bruno Le Maire," *Politico*. February 25, 2022. https://www.politico.eu/article/frances-le-maire-not-against-cutting-russia-out-of-swift/

treating Russia as a most favoured nation within the World Trade Organisation, enabling it to further impose restrictions on imports from Russia.

The goal of these (currently four) packages of sanctions is to run dry the financial and material flows supporting Russia's war in Ukraine. The French Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire even undiplomatically stated that the objective is to "cause the collapse of the Russian economy", a quote from which he later backtracked[145]. While stopping the imports of Russian hydrocarbons seems impossible in the immediate future, the EU has now made it an explicit short-term goal. Russia is responding with its own countersanctions, such as restrictions on raw material exports and threats to nationalize western companies.

From liberal peace to weaponised interdependence

The events of the past weeks shake some age-old convictions about the relationship between economic and foreign policy. It has long been believed that increased economic integration would lead to the spread of democracy to every corner of the world and make war in the globalised era unthinkable. This "liberal peace theory"[146], popularized by Thomas Friedman's dictum that two countries that both have a McDonald's would not go to war with each other[147], has been considered one of the few true "laws" of politics. The law has now been falsified. Globalisation, or the presence of McDonald's, did not stop Russia from invading Ukraine, but the war has now forced McDonald's to stop operating in Russia.

The idea that economic interdependence guarantees international political stability and friendship had already lost some of its lustre before the war in Ukraine. The concept of "weaponized interdependence" coined by Henry Farrell and Abraham Newman in 2019[148], which argues that asymmetric interdependence can be leveraged by states to pursue strategic interests, has rapidly gained currency. The weaponization of SWIFT to try to choke the Russian financial system is a crystal-clear illustration of their argument.

Not only academics but also policymakers have in recent years started to abandon the idea that trade and foreign policy can be neatly separated or that their goals are always mutually reinforcing. In the EU, this view that was still dominant no more than a decade ago is now widely considered to be "naïve". The shortage of personal protective equipment in the first weeks after the covid outbreak that left EU Member States scrambling for masks and gloves, and the humiliating Chinese "facemask diplomacy" towards Italy and others, drove home the insight that import dependence can be a matter of public health and national security, not just a desirable feature of an optimal global division of labour. More generally, global value chains and just-in-time business models that were long considered the high-water mark of economic efficiency now became seen as causes of supply chain disruption and economic stagflation.

---

[145] Davide Basso, "Le Maire backtracks after talking of 'economic and financial war' against Russia." *Euractiv.* March 2, 2022. https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/le-maire-backtracks-after-talking-of-economic-and-financial-war-against-russia/

[146] E.g. Michael W. Doyle "Three Pillars of the Liberal Peace." *American Political Science Review* 93 no. 3 (2005): 463.

[147] Thomas L. Friedman, "The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization," (New York: Picador, 1999).

[148] Henry Farrell and Abraham L. Newman, "Weaponized interdependence: How global economic networks shape state coercion," *International Security* 44, no. 1 (2019): 42-79. See also Andrej Krickovic, "When interdependence produces conflict: EU–Russia energy relations as a security dilemma." *Contemporary Security Policy* 36, no. 1 (2015): 3-26.

The European Union responded to the covid pandemic and its economic fallout by rethinking its trade policy. In its 2021 trade policy review it put forward "open strategic autonomy" as its new guiding principle. This implies that the EU's trade policies should help ensure that the EU is able to make its own choices and shape the world in line with its strategic interests and values, rather than undermining this ability. But the practical elaboration of this new principle was far from revolutionary. Open strategic autonomy was not interpreted as an imperative to reduce interdependence but rather as a stimulus to diversify dependencies, complemented with the build-up of production capacities and reserves in a limited set of strategic goods[149].

This time is different

While in the recent past, globalization has managed to survive blows dealt by not only a pandemic but also a global financial crisis[150], politicisation, populism, and inequality and climate change challenges, this time might be different. Now, an entire economy, the ninth largest in the world (when counting the EU as a whole), is being cut off from the global economy, or at least from its western hemisphere. Russia, which had prepared for additional sanctions but not of the scope and severity that they turned out to be, is now struggling to rearrange its economy and financial system to become largely independent from the west (except for energy, for now), with some help of countries like China and India.

Since the war in Ukraine and the sanctions against Russia, governments and firms no longer have the luxury to ignore geopolitics in their decision-making. Governments will become increasingly less tolerant of overdependence on imports of strategic supplies. This will not be limited to fossil fuels or Russia. The dynamics that unfolded in the past weeks will amplify concerns among policymakers about relying on (potential) strategic rivals for the imports of medicines, critical raw materials[151], microchips, and the like. Inward and outward investment will be scrutinised even more critically for security risks. Governments will try to escape networks in which they find themselves in a vulnerable position. Already, China and Russia have been exploring alternatives to SWIFT and are considering joining forces in this respect.

Private firms as well will have to factor in the higher plausibility of disruptive conflict and sanctions in their investment and supply chain decisions. Many western multinationals have pulled out of Russia in recent weeks to escape the collateral damage of sanctions or to protect their corporate image. The costs of dismantling operations in Russia from one day to the next run high. The loss for BP of selling its 20% stake in the Russian oil company Rosneft alone is an estimated $25 billion[152].

Even if the war would be peacefully resolved soon and sanctions on Russia would be withdrawn, it is unlikely that foreign companies would be as willing to risk investing in the

[149] Cfr. Jacobs, Thomas, Ferdi De Ville, Niels Gheyle and Jan Orbie. "The hegemonic politics of 'strategic autonomy' and 'resilience': COVID-19 and the dislocation of EU trade policy." *Journal of Common Market Studies* (2022, forthcoming).
[150] Ferdi De Ville and Jan Orbie, "The European commission's neoliberal trade discourse since the crisis: Legitimizing continuity through subtle discursive change," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 16, no. 1 (2014): 149-167.
[151] Cfr. Tobias Gehrke, "Putin's critical raw materials are a threat to EU economic security," *Egmont Institute*, March 15, 2022, https://www.egmontinstitute.be/putins-critical-raw-materials-are-a-threat-to-eu-economic-security/.
[152] Ron Bousso and Dmitry Zhdannikov, "BP quits Russia in up to $25 billion hit after Ukraine invasion," *Reuters*, February 28, 2022, https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/britains-bp-says-exit-stake-russian-oil-giant-rosneft-2022-02-27/.

country as they have been in the past. This logic exceeds Russia. Investors and companies can be expected to factor in a much more significant probability of conflict, followed by disruptive sanctions, such as after a Chinese incursion into Taiwan[153].

Security-driven deglobalisation

It is not fanciful to imagine that the war in Ukraine and the sanctions of the west against Russia will increasingly split the world economy in (at least) two parts. Global value chains, which have always been more regional in nature than their term suggests, might be rewired within a western and an eastern hemisphere. The war in Ukraine could in this way succeed in bringing about some degree of deglobalisation, a goal long pursued by social justice activists.

Security-driven deglobalisation might bring some positive side effects. It could lead to a reinforcement of efforts to decarbonise the economy to reduce dependency on autocratic fossil fuel exporting countries, like the European Commission has proposed with its REPowerEU plan, announced less than two weeks after the start of the war. It may result in more transparency about financial transactions and do away with "golden passport" programs with which cash-strapped countries tried to lure oligarchs. It might shorten supply chains, decrease transportation costs and associated negative externalities and curtail regulatory competition as firms' opportunities to outsource and relocate are curtailed.

But deglobalisation that is driven by a mutual suspicion about the threat that interdependence could be weaponised should not be unequivocally welcomed. When the economy and trade become predominantly perceived through a geopolitical lens, this could lead to a prioritization of security and defence not only over efficiency but over sustainability and social justice as well. Moreover, we should not succumb to the logical fallacy that because interdependence did not prevent war, autonomy will guarantee peace. Decoupling between major powers would make the economic weapon of sanctions obsolete, leaving standing by or responding with military means as the remaining options.

Finally, countries in the global south will watch the west's change in trade course with bitter irony. They have since long warned that free trade threatens their security, not in military terms but to ensure sufficient food for their populations. The response that they received is that food security is better guaranteed through cheap imports than via domestic production support or stockholding. Now, the war in Ukraine and the sanctions against Russia risk causing food shortages in some of the poorest countries in the world, many of which depend heavily on Ukraine or Russia for wheat imports. The world has an obligation to prevent famines as another tragic consequence of this war. And when the link between trade and security is redefined, the global south's interests and views cannot be forgotten.

[153] Hudson Lockett and Edward White, "Investors in Taiwan seek to hedge against risk of conflict with China," *Financial Times*, March 15, 2022, https://www.ft.com/content/f5c45861-599d-412f-85e7-13f86963f5bb/.

GIES OCCASIONAL PAPER

THE WAR IN UKRAINE | March – April 2022

EUROPE'S ENERGY TRANSITION WILL DISARM PUTIN

Moniek de Jong and Thijs Van De Graaf

Ghent Institute for International and European Studies – Ghent University

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a watershed moment for Europe's energy policy. Prior to the invasion, Russia was Europe's biggest energy supplier. The EU buys from Russia some 45% of its imported gas, around a third of its oil and nearly half of its coal. Europe's energy reliance on Russia dates back at least five decades, to the early 1970s, when the first East-West gas pipelines were laid from the Soviet Union to Western Europe. In German political elites, there was a strong belief that this *Ostpolitik*, fostering economic interdependence across the Iron Curtain, was a contributing factor to the peaceful end of the Cold War. That perspective is now completely in tatters.

Berlin finally placed the contentious Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline on ice. Even though the EU has (so far) refrained from imposing any sanctions or ban on Russian oil or gas, it has announced that it wants to become independent from Russian fossil fuels well before 2030. It wants to move especially fast for gas, aiming for a two-thirds reduction in Russian gas exports before the end of the year. In the coming months and years, we will witness a great energy decoupling between Russia and Europe. This process could very well mean the end of Russia as an energy superpower and give a shot in the arm to the energy transition across Europe. The task for Europe is to look beyond fuel diversification (say, replacing Russian gas with US LNG), but to accelerate the drive to energy efficiency, electrification and renewables.

More than one crisis

The 1973 oil crisis triggered a major energy shift. An oil embargo and high oil prices saw the ideas on abundant oil supplies change overnight. At that time, a decision was made to become less reliant on Middle Eastern oil sources. In response, we diversified our sources of oil (e.g. Russia and Norway) and diversified our energy mix by increasing nuclear and coal capacity. The 1973 crisis also saw the first calls for energy conservation (e.g. the introduction of car-free Sundays), energy efficiency, and increased research into renewables. These measures had a massive impact on our energy use and subsequently the emissions associated with this burning of fossil fuels.

Recent crises, related to Russia, have not had the same impact. In the winters of 2006 and 2009, Russia temporarily halted gas flows to Europe due to disputes with transit country Ukraine. The 2014 Crimea annexation, the downing of flight MH-17 and continued Russian support for Ukrainian separatists were further causes for concern. Although the EU sought to diversify gas suppliers by promoting the construction of LNG terminals and gas pipelines (for example, the Southern Gas

Corridor), these diversifications efforts had little impact on the share of Russian gas in Europe. Instead, the share of Russian gas increased from 30% in 2014 to 40% in 2021.

The 2015 Paris Agreement aims to limit global warming to 1.5 degree Celsius. In order to reach that goal, we need to stop burning fossil fuels (oil, gas and coal), as they are responsible for 80% of all the CO2 emissions. This entails that the majority of fossil fuels should be kept in the ground. The urgency of the climate crisis has since become more readily apparent, as extreme weather events become more frequent in Europe and impact Europeans. The 2021 heat waves in the south of Europe have costs lives, and last year's floods in Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands resulted in the loss of life and billions of damages.

The COVID-19 pandemic provided green growth opportunities with the economic downturn and decrease on fossil fuel consumption, but instead economic recovery continued with the use of fossil fuels. The COVID recovery led to high gas and power prices in the months preceding the invasion of Ukraine. This pushed even more European households into energy poverty (in 2021 31 million European lived in energy poverty).

A challenging break-up

Since the start of the war, the International Energy Agency (IEA) has introduced a 10-point plan to reduce European dependency on Russian gas. Additionally, the IEA suggested that an extension of the operation of coal power plants or reopening recently closed coal power plant could also contribute.[154] The high gas prices and tight energy market have made coal an interesting alternative and substituting gas with coal would be a quickly band-aid for our gas dependency on Russia. Just months earlier, a new commitment was made to phase out coal power. This resurgence of coal is bad news for our climate ambitions and our energy independence. Coal is the most polluting fossil fuels and increased use of coal could lead to more emissions. Additionally, most of our coal imports comes from Russia, so our energy dependency would not change.

There have also been calls to delay the phase-out of nuclear power plants in Germany and Belgium. Germany, which plans to close all of its nuclear power plants by the end of the year, has indicated that regulatory issues prevent it from extending the operational stage of these power plants. In Belgium, a decision was made to delay the phase-out of two of its seven reactors, although many issues remain.

As announced in the REPowerEU plan,[155] the European Union is counting on LNG and non-Russian piped gas to reduce Russian gas imports into the EU with two-thirds by the end of the year, but this might not be the best solution. Berlin has announced the construction of two LNG terminals, has engaged in negotiations with the emir of Qatar to secure LNG imports and signed contracts for blue hydrogen (hydrogen produced from gas). There are many problem with this European plan.[156] Filling up gas storage will provide security against Russian gas deliveries, but the current high gas prices do not make a commercially sound case to do so. Excess LNG capacity is located in Spain and infrastructure to transport gas from Spain to gas markets such as Germany is limited. LNG provides less dependency on a single supplier than pipelines, but brings with it its own set of problems.

---

[154] "A 10-Point Plan to Reduce the European Union's Reliance on Russian Natural Gas," *IEA*, March 2022.
[155] "REPowerEU: Joint European action for more affordable, secure and sustainable energy," *European Commission*, March 8, 2022.
[156] Ben McWilliams, Giovanni Sgaravatti, Simone Tagliapietra & Georg Zachmann, "Can Europe survive painlessly without Russian gas?" *Breugel*, January 27, 2022.

Europe would have to compete with other LNG consumers for gas supplies. This would imply that these higher gas prices are here to stay and the risk of gas price fluctuations are taken for granted.

For years, the horrible living and working conditions for foreigners in Qatar has been highlighted in the run-up to the World Cup,[157] and not to forget that Qatar is an authoritarian regime. Europe would also become more vulnerable to the geopolitics of the Strait of Hormuz and the bottleneck that is the Suez Canal, as Qatari LNG would have to pass through both. A similar geopolitical concern can be raised for piped gas from Azerbaijan, which has to transit Turkey. Shifting our energy dependency to these countries would not be an improvement.

Besides human rights and geopolitical considerations, there are also concerns on how this would impact Europe's Green Deal ambitions. The European Green Deal seeks to make Europe the first climate neutral continent by 2050. The building of new LNG terminals and expanding of capacity of pipelines counters this goal and brings risks of carbon lock-in. Carbon lock-in "occurs when fossil fuel-intensive systems perpetuate, delay or prevent the transition to low-carbon alternatives".[158] Additionally, the production of gas is associated with the releasing of methane, a potent greenhouse gas that contributes 84 times more to global warming than CO2 in the first twenty years after emission. This means that the continued usage of gas has massive impacts on our climate goals. Our shift from piped gas to LNG will contribute to more emissions, as LNG needs to be cooled to minus 160 degree Celsius. Furthermore, US LNG is produced using fracking, a method that pumps a mixture of water, sand and chemicals into rock formations to release gas. This production method has been criticized for its environmental impact and this has also contributed to the lack of fracking in Europe. Despite the risks of earthquakes, the pressure to increase the production from the Groningen gas has been growing.

A smart and just transition

A green transition can help Europe end its fossil fuel dependency and rid it of all the negative externalities that come with fossil fuels. The high energy prices make renewables, such as solar and wind, attractive and more competitive. Renewable energy has low operating costs, as they do not require the input of costly gas, oil or coal. A renewed focus on a green transition is also evident in many European countries, as a surge of investments in clean energy have been announced. Germany, Italy and the Netherlands have proposed the building of new wind turbine farms. Germany committed 200 billion euros to combat climate change. Germany has also extended deadline for subsidies for new solar panels and France has cut subsidies for gas heaters in an effort to boost heat pumps.

Generating power from domestic sources will also minimize our vulnerability to global energy geopolitics. Europe would become less dependent on other countries and this would increase Europe's strategic autonomy. Although supply and availability concerns can be raised about the need for rare metals for the production of clean energy technology. Compared to conventional energy sources, clean energy require, for example, more copper and zinc and batteries for electric vehicles or storing electricity need cobalt and lithium.[159] These sources are mostly found outside of the EU and the green transition will create new trade relations. However, the green transition still leads to a system with a decreased role for geopolitics. A supply

[157] "Qatar World Cup of Shame," *Amnesty International,* 2022.
[158] Beth Elliott, Ichiro Sato & Clea Schumer, "*What Is Carbon Lock-in and How Can We Avoid It?*" *World Resources Institute*, May 25, 2021.
[159] "The Role of Critical Minerals in Clean Energy Transitions," *IEA*, May 2021.

disruption will not result in immediate shortages. In the future, green hydrogen (hydrogen produced from renewables) will not create similar dependencies as fossil gas does today since green hydrogen is not an energy source; it is an energy carrier, which many countries will be able to produce (including importers).

While these long-term benefits of a green transition are attractive, they do not help us in the short-term with our dependency. Instead, we should be looking at energy consumption and aim to reduce our energy demand by reassessing our behaviour and through energy efficiency. The IEA introduced a 10-point plan to reduce our oil consumption.[160] These measures include the promotion of public transport and lowering the speeding limit (as the Netherlands did a few years ago), but also a reintroduction of car-free Sundays. Gas consumption can be reduced by lowering the thermostat and lowering our usage of hot water (e.g. short showers and more efficient use of washing machines). These measures can have an immediate effect on our energy consumption from Russia, but also provide some much needed financial relieve to households.

Admittedly, this green transition will not solve the war in Ukraine, neither will finding new gas suppliers. The decisions and actions taken today will however ensure that Russia's energy weapon is effectively disarmed while avoiding a future in which Europe remains locked in to a dependence on authoritarian, oppressive regimes.

[160] "A 10-Point Plan to Cut Oil Use," *IEA*, March 2022.

GIES OCCASIONAL PAPER

THE WAR IN UKRAINE | March – April 2022

UNDERSTANDING CHINA'S DIPLOMATIC STANCES VIS-À-VIS THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE CRISIS

Huanyu Zhao and Jing Yu

Ghent Institute for International and European Studies – Ghent University

As the ongoing Russia-Ukraine crisis is in flux, China's diplomatic stances and reactions vis-à-vis the Crisis are puzzling for many observers. Russia's military actions in Ukraine have sent Beijing into a diplomatic scramble. Beijing's stances and reactions vis-à-vis the crisis were mainly criticized on three fronts. First, China's refusal to condemn or even address Russia's military actions as 'invasion' undermines its long-standing diplomatic principles of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity. China abstained from voting on a draft U.N. Security Council resolution that would have deplored Moscow's invasion of Ukraine[161]. Washington blamed such a stance and reaction as irresponsible due to not actively preventing Russia from violating the universal principles of the United Nations (UN). Second, Washington suspected China had already known Russia's striking plan beforehand and was asked to provide military equipment and additional economic assistance[162]. In other words, Russia's action is thought to be bolstered by China[163]. Third, China is accused of helping Russia to spread disinformation[164]. Washington deems China and Russia are allies of misinformation agents that ruin information sources and mislead people.

In this occasional paper, we try to offer a more nuanced picture of Beijing's stances and reactions and contribute to a better understanding of why and how China acts as such. Methodologically, we draw our empirical information from official documents and news media.

Mapping China's diplomatic stances

To map China's diplomatic stances, we draw from official information from high-level

[161] "Security Council Fails to Adopt Draft Resolution on Ending Ukraine Crisis, as Russian Federation Wields Veto," *United Nations*, last modified February 25, 2022 (accessed 25 March).
[162] See e.g. Edward Wrong and Julian E. Barnes, "Russia Asked China for Military and Economic Aid for Ukraine War, U.S. Officials Say," *New York Times*, March 13, 2022 (accessed 23 March).
[163] See e.g. Nike Ching, "US: China Risks Credibility by Backing Russia," *Voice of America*, February 25, 2022 (accessed 23 March).
[164] See e.g. David Bandurski, "China and Russia are joining forces to spread disinformation," *Brookings*, March 11, 2022 (accessed 23 March).

officials[165] and spokesmen[166] and summarised China's main stances from February 2022 to date. From direct and clear answers to indirect and ambiguous ones, table 1 shows China's stances in addressing different questions on the Ukraine crisis.

Table 1: China's diplomatic stances addressing different questions on the Ukraine crisis*

	Direct and clear	***Indirect and ambiguous***
On the sovereignty of Ukraine	China firmly deems Ukraine as an independent sovereign state. China always obeys the rules of the UN Charter.	/
On the issues of "Donetsk People's Republic" and "Luhansk People's Republic" …	/	1) China always obeys the rules and principles of the United Nations Charter. 2) It has nothing to do with Taiwan. The United States cannot use this excuse to interfere with Chinese domestic affairs.
Did China know Russia's plan beforehand?	No. Russia as an independent power did not need China's consent.	/
Why has China not taken effective actions to stop Russia?	/	1) Russia has its own strategic autonomy. 2) China is neither the cause nor the direct stakeholder in the Ukraine crisis. 3) The United States promised to bring peace to Europe but failed. Instead of forcing China to provide a possible solution, it makes better sense to ask how the U.S., Russia and Ukraine would plan to solve the problem.
Russia's excuse for sending troops to Ukraine (genocide of Russian people)	/	1) The world has witnessed U.S. troops kill many innocent people in the past years. 2) It has nothing to do with Xinjiang. People who live in Xinjiang are treated equally as elsewhere in China.
Will China support Russia by military methods?	No. Russia did not ask China for military equipment support.	/
Call on the Russian troop to leave Ukraine?	/	All the relevant parties involved should calm down and come back to the negotiation table.
Condemning Russia	/	1) The West has a 'double standard' on the issue. What did the West do when the

[165] *Ministry of Foreign affairs of P. R. China*.
[166] Ministry of Foreign affairs of P. R. China.

		United States bombarded the former Yugoslavia, Iraq, and Afghanistan? They did not condemn the United States. 2) The Ukraine crisis has a complex historical background and complex geopolitical factors. 3) Every country's security concern should be taken into consideration (including both Ukraine and Russia). 4) NATO shall not overlook Moscow's security concerns. It should not expand further to seek absolute security at the cost of threatening other countries' security. Security should be common security that is comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable.
On sanctions	China disagrees with illegal unilateral sanctions. And the sanctions on Russia should not damage China's interests.	/
Disinformation and misleading (together with Russia)	/	1) It is the United States who spreads rumours and disinformation. The U.S. always blames China for supporting Russia or ruining human rights without evidence. 2) The U.S. should provide convincing explanations of bio-laboratories which are led by the American Ministry of Defence as soon as possible and uncover all the secrets to the whole world under the framework of the United Nations.
Civilians	China expressed deep sympathy for innocent Ukraine civilians. China has put forward a six-point initiative on the humanitarian situation in Ukraine, and China has provided humanitarian assistance and will provide further assistance to Ukraine and other affected countries.	/

* Note: All the information is drawn from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of P. R. China and compiled by the authors.

As illustrated in the table, we find China deploys both the 'direct and clear' and 'indirect and ambiguous' approaches in addressing different questions and presenting its stances on the Ukraine crisis. We observe Beijing prefers to express its stance firmly and clearly on certain questions, while in other cases it tends to address questions indirectly and often highlights the negative role of the United States and the Western media before and during the Crisis. We will further explain this in the next section.

In addition, we find Chinese spokesmen often refer to the articles and speeches by George Kennan, Henry Kissinger, and some other scholars from the 'Western world'. One common view they shared is that the over-expansion of NATO is unwise, and it may damage the pride of Russia as a previous great power, provoking an overreaction from Putin. Beijing agrees with this view and deems the Ukraine crisis is not an independent event between Russia and Ukraine. Instead, it is also a

miserable strategic mistake linked to the United States and NATO.

Repeatedly, we find Beijing clarifies China as not being a direct stakeholder in this crisis. As claimed by the Chinese spokesman, it is unjustified to blame China for not actively joining sanctions or undertaking other possible actions. The historical background and geopolitical factors of the Ukraine crisis are exceedingly complex, China is not in a proper position to judge or take part in the joint punishment. China does not support unilateral sanctions on Russia. Punishment such as sanctions won't make the Russian government surrender but ruin the daily lives and human rights of ordinary people (Russian people and people living in other countries, including Europeans). As a major power, China has its strategic autonomy and will not be forced to endorse stances or actions imposed by others.

Understanding China's diplomatic stances

To understand the mapped stances above, we need to situate China's stances in a challenging and complex environment - not Russia vs. Ukraine, but Russia vs. Ukraine plus the West and beyond. China's diplomatic stances and reactions vis-à-vis the crisis are driven and delimited by the following intertwined internal and external conditions. Beijing needs to identify and choose the best possible approach to present its stances.

First, China's diplomatic stances are driven by its interests and preferences and confined by its longstanding foreign policy principles. When the former (interests and preferences) and the latter (foreign policy principles) are in line with each other, we observe a more direct and clear expression of stance. For instance, when asked if China regards Ukraine as an independent country, with no hesitation Beijing deems Ukraine as an independent country, and its sovereignty and territorial integrity should be respected and protected according to the United Nations Charter. Because stating a clear stance to supporting Ukraine's status as independent sovereignty is not in conflict with China's core interests.

In parallel, when the core national interests and the foreign policy principles have tensions, we observe a more indirect and ambiguous stance. For example, China's stance is more indirect and ambiguous when answering if China recognizes the independence of the self-proclaimed 'Donetsk People's Republic' and the 'Luhansk People's Republic'. It is difficult for Beijing to give a direct and clear yes or no. The risky implication of 'yes' is putting Taiwan in a position where it can be treated as an 'independent Republic'. Stating 'no' is risking deterioration of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership.

Second, China's stances and reactions are delimited by the features of the international structure. The current crisis may provoke a security-driven deglobalisation to some extent, yet the international structure is not featured as bipolar with the according polarisation and intra-bloc discipline of the Cold War, but evolving multipolar. China is highly embedded and entrenched within the depolarised and highly institutionalized system. Beijing deems a stable global economic order is essential for its further growth and prefers to stay out of the conflict. Therefore, when asked if China supports international sanctions on Russia, China bluntly refused. Imposing sanctions on Russia conflicts with Chinese economic interests and its strategic partnerships with Russia. Beijing is against unilateral sanctions without the approval of the UN and insists on multilateralism.

Third, China's diplomatic stances and reactions are influenced by the interplay among major powers and global politics. The continuous deterioration of the China-US (EU) relationship, combing with Russia's pull, is driving Beijing close to Moscow. Despite official claims that the friendship between China and Russia has 'no limits', the two States are strategic partners but not allies that aim at confrontation or deterrence. Both sides maintain a high level of strategic autonomy. At the same time, the US and EU have a great stake in China's economic and foreign policy. China's leaders are keenly aware that any support to Russia over Ukraine would aggravate relations with the EU and the United

States. Chinese strategists view Russia, the United States, and Europe as the most important determinants of the global balance of power.[167] Beijing attempts to minimize collateral damage to Chinese interests from economic turmoil and potential secondary sanctions from the US and EU. It is unlikely that Beijing would sacrifice China's interests and undertake a challenging role by being deeply involved with Russia in Ukraine regardless of any possible outcome.

All the intertwined internal and external conditions are pushing and pulling China's diplomatic stances, tactical positioning, and strategic choices vis-à-vis the Crisis. Beijing has some flexibility to manoeuvre yet is also in a challenging spot to make its interests and principles be met both rhetorically and substantively.

Conclusion

In this paper, we mapped a picture of Beijing's stances and reactions and identified several sets of internal and external conditions to understand why and how China acts as such. As the ongoing Russia-Ukraine crisis is in flux, China's policy evolution and strategic choices will further unfold in Ukraine.

In a connected, contested and complex world, it is unwise to assume *a priori* that China is fully backing Russia against the United States or Europe and beyond. China maintains a high level of strategic autonomy, neither Moscow nor Washington can frame alternatives and choices for Beijing. China views Russia, the United States, and Europe as the most important determinants of the global balance of power and tries to balance its core national interests during the process of multiple interplays.

Strategic partners like the EU may share different stances with China in the Ukraine crisis, yet it is important to continue to coordinate and cooperate in shared fields for both sides. As the EU wrote in its Indo-Pacific strategy that it should adapt and build its cooperation according to specific policy areas where partners can find common ground based on shared principles, values or mutual interest.[168] Instead of confrontation, such cooperation is ever more essential and meaningful. Especially during crisis.

[167] See Jude Blanchette and Bonny Lin, "China's Ukraine Crisis: What Xi Gains—and Loses—From Backing Putin", *Foreign Affairs*, February 21, 2022.
[168] "Strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific," *Council of the European Union*, April 16, 2021.

PUTIN IS CREATING THE MULTIPOLAR WORLD HE (THOUGHT HE) WANTED

Sven Biscop[169], **Bart Dessein**[170] **& Jasper Roctus**[171]

Ghent University[172]

Up until the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Russia's and China's worsening relations with the European Union and the United States meant that the world order was at risk of falling apart into two rival blocs, as during the Cold War: Europeans and Americans against Russians and Chinese.[173] Since 24 February 2022, that is not so clear anymore. The more Russia escalates the violence in Ukraine, but also the strategic anxiety (by putting its nuclear forces on alert), the more difficult it becomes for other powers to stay completely aloof, let alone to simply align with Russia. The more EU and US sanctions reverberate throughout the global economy, the more it becomes impossible for other powers to avoid going at least partially along. China in particular has in fact already made a defining choice.

The Kingdom in the Middle

China's instinct when other powers go to war is to avoid taking any explicit stance.[174] When Russia is involved, China will not always openly support it, but it will hardly ever openly

[169] Prof. Dr. Sven Biscop lectures at Ghent University and heads the Europe in the World programme at the Egmont Institute. He is the author of Grand Strategy in 10 Words – A Guide to Great Power Politics in the 21st Century.
[170] Prof. Dr. Bart Dessein lectures on modern and contemporary China at Ghent University, where he is head of the research group ''East Asian Culture in Perspective: Identity, Historical Consciousness, Modernity". He also is a Senior Associate Fellow at Egmont.
[171] Jasper Roctus is a PhD researcher in the "East Asian Culture in Perspective: Identity, Historical Consciousness, Modernity" research group at Ghent University (funded by the Research Foundation – Flanders), working on modern narratives surrounding Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925). He also is a former research intern at Egmont.
[172] This piece was published earlier in March 2022 as a security policy brief for the Egmont Institute.
[173] See: Frank Gaenssmantel, "China's Rise and the Geopolitical Identity of the European Union," In: Bart Dessein (ed.), *Interpreting China as a Regional and Global Power. Nationalism and Historical Consciousness in World Politics*, (Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 271-292.
[174] Sulmaan Wasif Khan, *Haunted by Chaos. China's Grand Strategy from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping*, Cambridge MA and London, (Harvard University Press, 2018), p.218, characterises Chinese foreign policy as, at heart, "defensive."

go against it (and vice versa).[175] Judging from a quotation from the *China National Defence Newspaper* in the *People's Daily* on 11 February 2022, China at first, indeed, distinctly leant towards Russia, blaming the US and NATO for the tensions, and ridiculing the American warning that large-scale invasion was imminent.[176] Many even suspected collusion, assuming that Vladimir Putin must have informed Xi Jinping of his plans while in Beijing for the Winter Olympics.

Putin likely did warn Xi of impending action, but, judging from reports in Chinese official media, China appears to have been taken by surprise by the scale of the actual invasion. Initial media reports spoke of "trouble in Eastern Ukraine" and largely ignored the assault on Kyiv.[177] This is also evidenced by how China bumbled the evacuation of its citizens from Ukraine, leading to derision on Chinese social media. Initially Chinese citizens were urged to proudly display the Chinese flag when they went out, so as to prevent Russian fire. After a few days, however, Beijing implicitly admitted that this might provoke violence, due to increasing anti-Chinese sentiment in Ukraine, and by the third day of the invasion, it advised citizens to remain indoors and hide their identities instead,[178] before finally recommending evacuation via Moldova.[179]

As the war unfolded, China's public stance began to evolve. On 25 February already, China (along with India and the United Arab Emirates) abstained from the vote in the UN Security Council on the draft resolution condemning Russia; only Russia itself voted against. The Chinese ambassador explained the abstention by the need for caution, adding that "Ukraine should be a bridge between the East and the West, not an outpost for major powers".[180] The *Liberation Daily*, the newspaper of the Committee of the Chinese Communist Party of Shanghai, reported that on the same day, in a telephone conversation between Xi and Putin, the former again expressed understanding for Russia's

---

[175] Dmitri Trenin, "How Russia Can Maintain Equilibrium in the Post- Pandemic Bipolar World," Commentary, *Carnegie Moscow Center*, May 1, 2020.

[176] *China National Defence Newspaper* (*Zhongguo guofang bao*) cited in the *People's Daily* (*Renmin ribao*) of February 11, 2022: "U.S. 'adds oil to the fire' of tensions in Ukraine" (美给乌克兰紧张局势 '火上浇油'). Also see *Renmin ribao*, February 21, 2022: "Biden says Russia 'has decided to invade Ukraine', Germany, Ukraine do not agree" (拜登称俄罗斯 '已决定入侵乌克兰' 德国、乌克兰不附和).

[177] See: *Jiefang ribao*, February 26, 2022, small frontpage column: "Xi Jinping talks with Putin on the phone, focusing on exchanging views on the current situation in Ukraine. Supports Russia and Ukraine to solve their problems through negotiation" (习近平同普京通电话，重点就当前乌克兰局势交换意见---支持俄方同乌方通过谈判解决问题). The article commences with the statement that "recently, the situation in eastern Ukraine has changed dramatically…" (近期，乌克兰**东部**地区局势急剧变化…; emphasis ours).

[178] Radio France Internationale, February 26, 2022: "Chinese embassy in Ukraine changed their dispatch: from brightly showing the national flag to hiding one's identity" (中国驻乌使馆改通知：从亮出国旗改为身份保密).

[179] As of 5 March, despite the Chinese embassy's (belated) efforts, there were still multiple accounts – both anonymous and identified – of Chinese exchange students stuck in bomb shelters, and even, casualties. See for instance *Voice of America*, March 5, 2022: "China's Ukraine Evacuation delayed, Chinese nationals injured, about 200 students trapped in bomb shelters" (中国乌克兰撤侨行动迟缓，中国公民受伤，约二百学生困陷防空洞).

[180] UN SECURITY COUNCIL, "SECURITY COUNCIL FAILS TO ADOPT DRAFT RESOLUTION ON ENDING UKRAINE CRISIS, AS RUSSIAN FEDERATION WIELDS VETO," UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK, 25 FEBRUARY 2022, HTTPS://WWW.UN.ORG/PRESS/EN/2022/SC14808.DOC.HTM/.

"reasonable security concerns", and stated that "China supports the Russian side to solve their problems with the Ukrainian side through negotiations", while also referring to respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries.[181] On 1 March, foreign minister Wang Yi spoke with his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba, stating that "China deplores the outbreak of a conflict between Ukraine and Russia, calls on Ukraine and Russia to find a solution to the problem through negotiations, supports all constructive international efforts conducive to a political solution, and is extremely concerned about the harm suffered by civilians".[182]

As to the sanctions, the Chinese foreign ministry stated that "China is not in favour of using sanctions to solve problems".[183] Beijing is unlikely to follow the EU and the US in freezing Russian reserves or to halt trade with the country. But it cannot totally avoid the impact of the sanctions either. The Bank of China's Singapore branch, for example, is but one of several banks that has stopped financing trade in Russian commodities, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank has frozen all its activities in Russia and Belarus.

A Multipolar World

This does not mean that China is now "on the side" of the EU and the US. But, set against the backdrop of Western fears that China might abuse the moment to revert to force of arms itself to change the status quo concerning Taiwan, Beijing's actual position is very restrained. Those fears did not take into account, in any case, that the last time China went to war was against Vietnam in 1979. Going to war now would completely overturn the world's perception of China, therefore, and the potential impact on all of its international relations would be immense. While by no means impossible, it would certainly be an enormous gamble.[184]

Silent pragmatism puts China on the side of its own interests. What that does mean, is that we are in a truly multipolar world. Each of the current four global players pursues its own interests; these interests overlap more often with those of some than of others, but they do not overlap completely. In the end, therefore,

---

[181] *Liberation Daily* (*Jiefang ribao)*, February 26, 2022, small frontpage column: "Xi Jinping talks with Putin on the phone, focusing on exchanging views on the current situation in Ukraine. Supports Russia and Ukraine to solve their problems through negotiation" (习近平同普京通电话，重点就当前乌克兰局势交换意见---支持俄方同乌方通过谈判解决问题). Note that, according to David Shambaugh, "*China Goes Global. The Partial Power,"* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013), p.53, the "five principles of peaceful coexistence" (mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual nonaggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful co-existence) are "the only thing that has remained constant over time" in China's foreign policy.

[182] *Foreign Ministry of China*, March 1, 2022: "Wang Yi Holds Telephone Talks with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Kuleba" (王毅应约同乌克兰外长库列巴通电话). Original citation: "王毅表示，乌克兰局势急剧变化，中方对乌俄爆发冲突感到痛惜，对平民受到伤害极为关注".

[183] *Foreign ministry press conference*, February 28, 2022: "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin Hosts Regular Press Conference on Feb. 28, 2022" (2022年2月28日外交部发言人 汪文斌主持例行记者会). Original citation: "汪文斌：中方不赞成用制裁手段解决问题".

[184] China's foreign policy in the Xi Jinping era may therefore be more pro-active (some would say assertive) than it was in the Deng Xiaoping era. Now the latter's motto for the country's international stance (again) seems to prevail: "observe calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; hide the capabilities and bide the time; never claim leadership; make some contributions" (*lengjing guancha*; *wen zhu zhenjiao*; *chenzhe yingfu*; *taoguang yanghui*; *shan yu shou zhuo*; *jue bu dangtou*; *you suo zuowei* – 冷静观察;稳住阵脚;沉着*应付;*韬光养晦;善于守拙;决不当头;有所作为).

each of the four cooperates, or not, with each of the other four, as its interests dictate. China and Russia regard each other as close partners against perceived American hegemony. At the same time, China's often very assertive yet mainly politico-economic strategy requires a degree of stability. Now especially the CCP needs to project stability, as it is preparing for the expected re-election of Xi Jinping as General-Secretary later this year. Russia, in contrast, is pursuing an aggressive politico-military strategy that allows it to make the most of its resources in conditions of instability.

Beijing welcomes Russian military interventions that preserve stability, like recently in Kazakhstan. But a war (and, after some initial reluctance, as of early March Chinese media seem willing to call it just that)[185] that destroys a country seen as a major hub for the Belt and Road Initiative, and that provokes a global economic shockwave, is hardly in China's interest. This reality explains the following opinion in the *Liberation Daily* of 2 March: "Ukraine's renewed application to become member of the EU at this time is not unexpected. The EU is an economic integration organization, not a military one, and Ukraine will legitimately receive more economic support after joining the EU, without stepping on Russia's 'red line'".[186]

Putin regularly clamoured for multipolarity, but what he really meant was an end to perceived American unipolarity. What he did not want, but has now provoked, is an international arena ruled by actual multipolarity, in which he has to compete for the support of other states. Only to find out that he can coerce only a very few into aligning, and that he has little to attract the others, while his brutal aggression has shaken the equipoise even of those inclined to favour his version of events.

In a multipolar world, the EU strategy of dealing with other powers as partner, competitor, and rival all at once, is the right one. Great powers traditionally compartmentalise their relations: they cooperate where they can, but push back when they must. Even towards Russia, after the initial 2014 invasion of Ukraine, the EU kept signalling that it was willing to cooperate in areas where interests coincided. Russia declined. By launching a war of aggression, it has now finally made compartmentalisation impossible, and forced the EU to reduce all relations to a minimum.

---

[185] Initially, the word "war" was avoided. See for instance *Renmin ribao*, February 25, 2022, small column on page 3: "Foreign Ministry spokesman answers reporters' questions on the situation in Ukraine" (外交部发言人就乌克兰局势等回答记者提问). Here the word "war" (战争) was only used pejoratively to refer to America's alleged attempts to start one: "The U.S. is non-stop increasing tensions and fomenting war [in Ukraine]" (美方在不断推高紧张、煽动战争). This had changed by March, see for instance: *Jiefang ribao*, March 2, 2022, major column on page 7: "Russian media: a new round of negotiations held today at the Belarusian-Polish border——Ukraine formally applies to join the EU, more rapid situational evolutions, Russian troops to continue to carry out special military operations" (俄媒：今在白波边境举行新一轮谈判乌正式申请加入欧盟，局势 再添变数 俄军将继续执行特别军事行动). The article's first sentence admits to an ongoing war: "The war in Ukraine enters its sixth day" (乌克兰战事进入第六天。).

[186] *Jiefang ribao*, March 2, 2022, major column on page 7: "Russian media: a new round of negotiations held today at the Belarusian-Polish border——Ukraine formally applies to join the EU, more rapid situational evolutions, Russian troops to continue to carry out special military operations" (俄媒：今在白波边境举行新一轮谈判乌正式申请加入欧盟，局势 再添变数 俄军将继续执行特别军事行动). Said comments are attributed to Li Xin, director of the Eurasian Institute of the Shanghai University of Political Science and Law. Original citation: "乌克兰此时再提入盟并不出乎意外。欧盟是经济一体化组织，而非军事组织，乌克兰入盟后将合法获得更多经济支持，但又不至于踩到俄罗斯的"红线".

Chinese support for (eventual) EU membership of Ukraine, while resolutely backing Russian opposition to NATO membership,[187] shows that China is still looking to compartmentalize its relations with the West. This is no surprise. After all, by also applying compartmentalisation to China, in spite of all the recent frictions, the EU, and even to a large degree the US, have enabled it to assume the position that it has today. Had they not done so, and treated China exclusively as a rival, Beijing may have seen no other option than to fully align with Russia. Instead, China currently has too much at stake to opt for such a choice. Now is not the time, therefore, to overplay the "democrats vs autocrats" narrative: The West needs some of the world's other autocrats to help dam in their Russian colleague.

Conclusion: One World

Will China eventually play a more active role in solving this crisis? That it could provide Russia an economic lifeline may actually be in the interest of the EU and US. Western sanctions are intended to hurt, to signal to Russia and to the world at large that violating the core rules of the international order comes at a price. But they are not meant to make Russia collapse, which might provoke escalatory behaviour – remember Japan's reaction to the US oil embargo that crippled its economy in 1941: the attack on Pearl Harbor. Continued trade with China could prevent such an apocalyptic outcome.

At the same time, Beijing could make use of that relationship to signal its discomfort to Moscow behind the scenes and prove itself to be a "responsible stake holder". A public mediation initiative would carry the prospect of great diplomatic prestige, but comes without any guarantee for success, and thus runs counter to China's risk-avert instincts on the international stage. A private message from Xi to Putin that expresses his hopes that this war ends soon, however, might be just as effective.

The fact is that by its stance to this date, China has already made a defining choice. Had China fully supported Russia in its war of aggression it may well have tipped the world into a new bipolar rivalry. Instead, there is still a chance to keep the world together, to maintain one set of rules that all states subscribe to, because to pursue its interests, China needs the stability that these rules create. Russia has put itself outside that order for now, but the aim must be to bring it too back into the fold eventually. Only a world order that includes all great powers of the day can be truly stable. China's self-interest may just overlap enough with our self-interest to make it happen.

[187] Ibid. Comments by former diplomat Wang Zhen are cited to give expression to this standpoint: "The unrestricted eastward expansion of NATO is the crux of the problem, and Ukraine's quest for NATO membership is the nucleus of this crux. The international community should seize the opportunity to promote peace talks. If [the West] would continue to provide additional weapons and equipment to one side of the conflict and continue to build momentum to pull one side into [NATO], it is tantamount to adding fuel to a fire." (北约无限制东扩是问题的症结所在，乌克兰寻求加入北约是症结之核。国际社会应抓住时机劝和促谈。如果继续向冲突一方增援武器装备，继续造势拉一方入盟，无异于火上浇油。).

GIES OCCASIONAL PAPER

THE WAR IN UKRAINE | March – April 2022

THE WAR IN UKRAINE AND TURKEY'S HEDGING STRATEGY BETWEEN THE WEST AND RUSSIA

Dries Lesage, Emin Daskin and Hasan Yar

Ghent Institute for International and European Studies – Ghent University

As a neighbouring country to Ukraine and Russia, Turkey has become indirectly involved in the 2022 Ukrainian war in multiple ways. This paper analyses various facets of the complexity that explains Turkey's current position.

Antecedents

Turkey's relation with Russia

For most of their history, the Russian and Ottoman empires have been rivals, having fought 13 wars between 1568 and 1918.[188] Russia not only conquered Ottoman territories, but consistently put pressure to gain control over the highly strategic Turkish Straits (Bosphorus, Sea of Marmara and Dardanelles) as the only permanently ice-free maritime route to the rest of the world. In 1946, when Soviet leader Joseph Stalin intimidated Turkey over the Straits, the US Truman administration – then the only nuclear power – successfully deterred Moscow's planned aggression with a strong commitment to fight for Turkey.[189] In 1947, Turkey received military and economic support following the Truman doctrine. In 1952 Turkey became a member of NATO, which accelerated the deep military cooperation between the US and Turkey.

With the end of the Cold War and the bipolar discipline, Turkey opened up its diplomatic horizons, notably to the Middle East, Russia and the new ex-Soviet republics. In the post-Soviet space, Turkey hoped to resuscitate historical, linguistic and cultural ties with a multitude of Turkic-speaking and Muslim countries and minorities, which also have a diaspora in Turkey itself. Turkey's warming of relations with Russia resulted in the building of the Blue Stream gas pipeline connecting Russia and Turkey under the Black Sea, entering into operation in 2002 and turning Turkey into one of Russia's main customers. In 2010, Ankara also approved the construction by Russian companies of its first nuclear

[188] Kurat, Akdes Nimet. "Xviii. Yüzyıl Sonundan Kurtuluş Savaşana Kadar Turk-Rus Ilişkileri," Ankara*: Türk Tarih Kurumu*, 2010.
[189] Eduard Mark, "The War Scare of 1946 and Its Consequences," *Diplomatic History* 21, no. 3 (1997): 383-415.

power plant in Akkuyu, which is nearing completion.[190]

However, the Arab uprisings from 2011 onwards turned Turkey and Russia into adversaries. Alongside Western and Gulf states, Turkey supported rebels against the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad, which was staunchly backed by Russia. In November 2015, the downing of a Russian Su-24 jet by the Turkish military was retaliated with harsh Russian economic sanctions.

Turkey's hedging strategy between the West and Russia

In June 2016 president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan expressed 'regret' for the downing of the Russian jet, after which a normalisation of relations with Russia followed. This happened in the background of a deepening crisis of confidence between Turkey and the West. From 2007 onwards, some EU member states raised fundamental objections to Turkish accession to the EU. In 2013, the Turkish police crackdown on the Gezi protests sparked harsh criticism in Western politics and press. Turkey, in its turn, heavily objected the arming by the US of the Syrian Kurdish militia YPG in the fight against Daesh. The YPG[191] is closely affiliated with the PKK[192], which has been fighting the Turkish state since 1984, and is considered as a terrorist organisation by Turkey, the US, and the EU.[193]

The 15 July 2016 violent attempted coup further damaged the relations between Turkey and the West because the Gülen organisation – which is held primarily responsible by the entire Turkish political spectrum, several international media, as well as the current head of the British intelligence MI6[194] – has been receiving ample sympathy from Western governments before and, when it became the subject of massive purges, after the coup attempt. In contrast to Western leaders, the Russian president Vladimir Putin was quick to express solidarity. Putin and Erdoğan held a summit on 9 August 2016 in Saint Petersburg. A widely held belief among Turkish nationalist circles – but unconfirmed – is that Russia offered intelligence support during the coup attempt.[195]

Anti-American, 'Eurasianist' elements on both sides, such as the left-wing Turkish-nationalist, Eurasianist Patriotic Party[196] and its affiliates in the army, contributed to the Turkish-Russian rapprochement. In November 2016, the Russian ultra-nationalist ideologue Aleksandr Dugin visited the ruling Justice and Development Party[197] (AKP).[198] The December 2016 assassination of Russian ambassador Andrei Karlov – by the Turkish authorities

[190] Şaban Kardas, "Turkey-Russia Energy Relations: The Limits of Forging Cooperation through Economic Interdependence," *International Journal* 67, no. 1 (2012): 81-100.
[191] People's Defence Units.
[192] Kurdish Workers Party.
[193] Seçkin Köstem, "Russian-Turkish Cooperation in Syria: Geopolitical Alignment with Limits," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 34, no. 6 (2021): 795–817.
[194] See, e.g., Sedat Ergin, "No Question Who Planned and Executed the Attempted Coup in Turkey," Berlin: *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 2017.;
Michael Martens, "Auffällig Zufällig," *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, September 29, 2017.; CNN Türk. "İngiliz Büyükelçiden Çok Çarpıcı Fetö Yorumu.", 2017.
[195] "Russia Warned Turkish Government About Imminent Coup – Reports," *Moscow Times*, July 21, 2016.
[196] Vatan Partisi.
[197] Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi.
[198] Suat Kınıklıoğlun, "Eurasianism in Turkey," *SWP Research Paper 2022/Rp 07, Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik*, 2022; Amberin Zaman, "'Putin's Rasputin' Pushes Russian Alliance in Parliament Visit to Akp," *Al Monitor*, November 8, 2016, https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2016/11/russia-putin-advisor-dugin-turkey-parliament-nato.html;

ascribed to the Gülenists – did not harm the improving ties between Moscow and Ankara. For Russia, this pro-Turkish policy was conceived as a tactic to weaken NATO.

Given the regaining of control over Syria by Assad and Russia from September 2015 on, Turkey redefined its goals in Syria to more realist proportions. Toppling Assad was no longer an objective. Turkey now focused on curbing the YPG/PKK, securing some refuge for anti-Assad rebels, and a horizon to repatriate part of the 3.5 million refugees. Subsequently, from December 2016 onwards, Turkey took part in the Astana-Sochi peace process with Russia and Iran, side-lining the West, and allowing the presence of Turkish troops around the rebel-held region of Idlib.[199]

In 2017, due to the deteriorating relationship with the West as well as the US refusal to deliver Patriot air defence missiles with technology transfer to Turkey, Ankara decided to buy a batch of S-400 surface-to-air missiles from Russia, upsetting its NATO partners. Russia and Turkey also cooperated to build the TurkStream pipeline, for delivery of natural gas to Turkey and EU countries. TurkStream is operational since 2020. This constructive relationship does not preclude that Turkey and Russia remained rivals in the recent phase of the Libyan war (2019-2020), where Turkish drones and Syrian mercenaries in defence of the UN-recognised Tripoli government repelled the assault by general Haftar, who was supported by Russia and a few other countries.[200]

The abovementioned developments marked Turkey's hedging strategy between the West and Russia. Hedging refers to a strategy of a smaller power (Turkey) navigating between two great powers or blocs (the West and Russia). This is an alternative to bandwagoning with one to balance the other. In this case, Turkey fears the two major powers/blocs, but also benefits from cooperation with each of them. Furthermore, it plays off one against another. This seesaw strategy amounts to a form of power, as Turkey signals to both sides that, if one behaves too unfriendly, it can tilt more definitively to the other. In recent years, Turkey has been oscillating back and forth, remaining committed to NATO and cherishing its paramount trade relationship with the EU, but also collaborating with Russia on the economic, energy, military and diplomatic fronts (e.g. concerning Syria and Nagorno-Karabakh).[201]

Turkey's relation with Ukraine

The strong links between Turkey and Ukraine go back to the late 15th century, when the Turkic-speaking and Islamic Crimean Khanate became on Ottoman protectorate, to last until the Russian take-over in 1783. The Tatars are the main ethnic group of Ukraine with Turkic background. Because of the war between Russia and the Ottoman Empire in 1877-1878 and the First World War and its aftermath, tens of thousands of Tatars from Crimea and Ukraine migrated to Turkey.

When Ukraine became independent in 1991, Turkey was quick to develop strong relations. Ukraine became a founding member of the Turkey-led organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). A sensitive issue in the relationship used to be the return of citizens of Tatar origin from Turkey to the Crimean peninsula. Ankara supported this reintegration, whereas the process was

[199]Seçkin, Köstem, "Russian-Turkish Cooperation in Syria: Geopolitical Alignment with Limits," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 34, no. 6 (2021): 795–817.
[200]Wolfram Lacher, "The Great Carve-Up: Libya's Internationalised Conflicts after Tripoli," *SWP Comment 2020/C 25, Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik*, 2020.
[201] On hedging: Nicholas Ross Smith, "When Hedging Goes Wrong: Lessons from Ukraine's Failed Hedge of the Eu and Russia," *Global Policy* 11, no. 5 (2020): 588-97.

obstructed by the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, dominated by Russian-speakers.[202]

In the latest bilateral High-Level Strategic Council meeting, chaired by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and President Erdoğan in Kyiv on 3 February 2022, it was stated that the trade volume between Ukraine and Turkey in 2021 had increased to more than USD 7.5 billion. Both countries signed a free trade agreement with a view to an increase to USD 10 billion within 5 years.[203] Food imports from Ukraine are notably important for Turkey.

In 2014, Turkey condemned Russia's annexation of Crimea and its support to pro-Russian rebels in Donbas. Turkey interprets transforming the Black Sea into a 'Russian Lake' as a threat to its national security. Since 2014, Turkey and Ukraine have stepped up cooperation between their defence industries. Starting in 2019, Turkey sold at least 20 Bayraktar TB2 combat drones to Ukraine. Both countries are also cooperating on drone production.[204] Turkey's cooperation with Ukraine is not necessarily to be interpreted as NATO member Turkey implementing 'Western' policy. In line with its own search for strategic autonomy, it is plausible that Ankara intends to foster a more independent, even non-aligned position of Ukraine as well.[205]

Turkey's reaction to Russia's 2022 aggression against Ukraine

Political stance

On 27 January, the Turkish National Security Council (MGK) called upon Russia and Ukraine to reduce tensions.[206] On 22 February 2022, the Turkish president called Russia's decision to recognise the independence of "the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk Republics" unacceptable.[207] On 24 February, he condemned the Russian invasion: "This step, which we see as a violation of the international law, is a heavy blow dealt to regional peace, calm and stability. […] Türkiye supports the struggle Ukraine wages to protect its territorial integrity."[208] On 2 March in the United Nations General Assembly, Turkey voted in favour of the resolution denouncing Russia's aggression.

However, the Turkish government stresses its willingness to maintain 'good relations' with both Moscow and Kyiv. Turkey does not join US and EU sanctions against Russia; it states only to follow United Nations sanctions. To mitigate Russia's ire, Ankara distances itself from the Ukrainian glorification of the Turkish drones, referring to them as a merely commercial transaction between a Turkish company and Kyiv. Still, the Baykar company is led by Erdogan's son-in-law, and the drones

[202]Turgut Kerem Tuncel and Aydıngün Aysegül, "Turkish-Ukrainian Relations Throughout History: Continuities and Strategic Requirements," in *25 Years of Turkey-Ukraine Diplomatic Relations: Regional Developments and Prospects for Enhanced Cooperation*, edited by AVIM (Center for Eurasian Studies), 13-34. Ankara, 2018.
[203] Government of Ukraine, 2022.
[204]Christopher Isaijw, "Free Trade and Drones: Turkey and Ukraine Strengthen Strategic Ties," *Atlantic Council*, February 11, 2022.; Derek Gatopoulos and Suzan Fraser, "Cheap but Lethal Turkish Drones Bolster Ukraine's Defences," *AP News*, 17 March 2022.
[205]Selim Koru, "What Russia's New Reality Means for Turkey," *War on the Rocks*, February 25, 2022.
[206] Milli Güvenlik Kurulu, "27 Ocak 2022 Tarihli Toplantı," news release, 2022, https://www.mgk.gov.tr/index.php/27-ocak-2022-tarihli-toplanti.
[207] *Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye*, "President Erdoğan: Russia's Decision to Recognise the So-Called Donetsk and Luhansk Republics Is Unacceptable," February 22, 2022, https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/english/haberler/detay/president-erdogan-russias-decision-to-recognise-the-so-called-donetsk-and-luhansk-republics-is-unacceptable.
[208] *Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye*, "The Military Operation Russia Has Launched against Ukraine Is Unacceptable," news release, February 24, 2022, https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/english/haberler/detay/the-military-operation-russia-has-launched-against-ukraine-is-unacceptable.

have already been used in recent years against pro-Russian rebels in the Donbas.[209]

At the humanitarian level, Turkey received more than 58,000 Ukrainian refugees.[210] In addition, from the first days of the war, the Turkish Red Crescent and the government disaster relief agency AFAD[211] sent aid convoys with tents, medical equipment, food, etc. National fundraising campaigns have been started and donated to Ukraine. On 24 March, the French president Emmanuel Macron announced that France, Turkey and Greece will undertake a mission to evacuate civilians from the besieged town of Mariupol in consultation with Russia.[212]

Hedging throughout the war?

The war poses serious risks to Turkey's security and economy. Regardless of Turkey's reaction, the rising international energy and food prices and the loss of business opportunities in Ukraine and Russia, add to the already ongoing deep currency and inflation crisis in Turkey. In addition, support to Ukraine could be met with Russian retaliation in one way or another. Turkey is vulnerable to Russian economic sanctions, as it depends for 33.59% of its natural gas imports on Russian gas (even though this dependency has spectacularly decreased in recent years)[213], while Russians are important for Turkish tourism. Turkey also takes into account the fragile military status quo in the North Syrian Idlib region, where its troops – following the Astana-Sochi agreements with Russia and Iran – form a buffer between a concentration of rebels and 3 million civilians on the one hand, and Assad's army on the other. On 27 February 2020, 33 Turkish soldiers died in an air attack by Syria and/or Russia.[214] Without Ankara directly blaming Moscow, this incident seriously damaged the Turkish-Russian relationship. Neither Turkey nor the EU look forward to renewed Russian/Syrian pressure on Idlib and a new wave of Syrian refugees.

Finally, Ankara might have doubts about NATO's collective defence pledge under Article V, in the case of a major international escalation of the war and a Russian attack on Turkey. In assessing the situation, the Turkish political elite and public also have history in mind. The Ottoman Empire's alliance with Germany in the First World War led to traumatic defeat and destruction. In 1931, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk introduced the adage 'peace at home, peace in the world', underpinning a Turkish foreign policy of restraint. During the Second World War Turkey avoided devastation by remaining neutral. Turkey's loyalty to the US and NATO during the Cold War, in its turn, came with the loss of political independence and tutelage by a largely US-backed, coup-prone military. Across the entire Turkish political spectrum there is little enthusiasm for taking sides in conflicts between great powers. It is fair to assume that Turkey will continue its hedging strategy far into this war.

Application of the 1936 Montreux Convention

From the beginning of the Russian invasion, Ukraine asked Turkey to close the Turkish Straits for Russian warships. On 28 February Turkey called the hostilities 'a war' and decided to implement article 19 of the 1936 Montreux Convention, providing for the prohibition of "vessels of war belonging to belligerent Powers [to] pass through the Straits". Only

---

[209] Ayla Jean Yackley, "Ukraine Army Hails Turkish Drones but Ankara Plays Down Weapons Sales," *Financial Times*, March 12, 2022.
[210] Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu in interview with *TVNET*, March 21 2022.
[211] Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency.
[212] Maïa De la Baume, "Macron says France will spearhead operation to evacuate Mariupol," *Politico*, March 25, 2022.
[213] *Energy Market Regulatory Authority*, "Turkish Natural Gas Market Report 2020, " Ankara, 2021.
[214] Metin Gurcan, "Deciphering Turkey's Darkest Night in Syria," *Al Monitor*, February 28, 2020.

vessels “which have become separated from their bases” may return. The latter provision may apply to returning Russian warships in the Mediterranean or beyond. The Turkish government indicated that these ships should be registered in a Black Sea port and not be involved in the war. At the same time, Ankara warned both Black Sea and non-Black Sea countries not to pass warships through the Straits[215], even though Montreux still allows a limited presence of non-belligerent navy. Since the bulk of the Russian navy that can play a role in the aggression against Ukraine is already in the Black Sea, the Turkish decision can only have a limited impact on the war. Furthermore, the decision can hardly be seen as a proactive move against Russia, since according to a wide political consensus in Turkey, the correct implementation of the Montreux Convention is regarded as a cornerstone of regional security.

Turkey’s mediation efforts

In response to the mounting tensions and in line with its strong interest in peace in the Black Sea region, in January 2022 Erdoğan invited Zelensky and Putin for a summit. After the start of the invasion, on 10 March, Turkish foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu hosted a meeting of the Ukrainian foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba and his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov in Antalya. Afterwards, Erdoğan held phone calls with Putin and Zelensky. Until this day, these talks did not produce a breakthrough. However, the high-level nature of the talks confirms the existence of a solid diplomatic relationship between Turkey and both belligerents, and that Russia does not fully identify Turkey with the rest of NATO. For Turkey, which has a tradition of mediation, it is a next step to mediate between non-Muslim countries.

The 2022 Ukraine war comes at a time when Turkey has been improving its fraught relations with the EU, France, Greece, Armenia, UAE, Egypt, and Israel. These efforts are partly motivated to boost the Turkish lira, trade and investment, and lift the country out of its economic troubles. Since the invasion, Turkey hosted the heads of state or government of Greece, Israel, Germany, Poland, and the Netherlands. Turkey’s mediation is welcomed by its Western allies. Even though there is some concern that the Turkish financial system could become a conduit for Russian circumvention of US and EU sanctions, so far Western capitals have appreciated Turkey’s military and diplomatic support to Ukraine, while understanding its specific situation.

The Turkish societal dimension

As of day one, the Russian invasion of Ukraine was visible in the major news outlets and in the streets of Istanbul in the form of small size protests. However, these two were not much related. On television, an inflation of ‘strategists’ and ‘Russia-Ukraine experts’ held multi-hour discussions on the war. Many have established a link between NATO enlargement and the war. The Turkish public opinion continues to be highly sceptical of NATO. These sentiments are widely shared across Islamists, nationalists and leftists.[216] The Turkish public opinion and all political parties support variants of a cautious, middle-of-the-road, even neutralist Turkish foreign policy concerning this war.

Street protests against Russia’s war have not made it to the Turkish mainstream media. The heterogeneity of the participants and the flags varied according to the location of protest, being more homogenous (Ukrainians) during the protest in Beyoğlu area (lacking the support of liberal and socialist circles), and being a more heterogenous mix of Ukrainians, Turks, Tatars, Azeris, Georgians, Kazaks, Uzbeks and Circassians during protests at

[215] Ece Toksabay, "Turkey Warns Countries Not to Pass Warships through Straits," *Reuters*, February 28, 2022.
[216] Pinar Tremblay, "Turkish Public Support for NATO Declines," *Al Monitor*, March 8, 2022.

the Beyazit Square in the conservative Fatih area.[217] Public support for the protests were motivated by ethical empathy towards the Ukrainian people, mutual fear of being the next victim of future Russian aggression, and religious and nationalist motivated support for the Ukrainian Tatars. Some protests were co-organised by the Ukrainian Cultural Association and the Crimean Turks Culture and Assistance Association.[218] The main messages given were a call for a no-fly zone by NATO, a Turkish boycott on Russian products and demands for active support by Turkey to Ukraine.

The slogans and speeches during the protests showed that the deep-rooted perception of the 'Moskof', a pejorative word referring to the Russians as barbaric and brutal enemies, was still alive.[219] This perception was created by historical brutality by (Soviet) Russian governments towards Turks and Muslim minorities that were massacred or forced to leave their homelands. It was resuscitated during the Cold War as part of the anti-communism agenda, for example through the book *Moskof* (1973) by the conservative nationalist poet and writer Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, who remained influential among members of the ruling AKP. Furthermore, the idea that Russia aggressively pursues control over the Turkish Straits remains part of the standard Turkish high school curriculum.

Conclusions

In the face of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, Turkey takes a cautious position in line with its hedging strategy between the West and Russia, with the aim to maintain positive relations with both sides. Turkey has armed Ukraine and condemned Russia's aggression. But it does not join Western sanctions against Russia. Due to traumatic historical experiences, Turkey does not want to be caught up in a conflict between major powers/blocs and prefers to retain its strategic autonomy. Recent crises of confidence between Turkey and the West reinforce this stance. Due to its geographical location and bad economic situation, Turkey has a direct interest in a rapid end to the war. This explains its active mediation role, where theoretically a more passive stance was possible. In addition, this high-profile mediation might also enhance Turkey's international standing and help stem the decline of popularity of the incumbent leadership domestically.

[217] One of the authors own observations.
[218] Yusuf Tuncbilek, "Ukraynalılar Ve Kırım Tatarları Ile Ukrayna'nın Işgal Edilmesi Üzerine Söyleşi," *AjansKafkas*, February 27, 2022.
[219] The Turkish Language Institution (*Turk Dil Kurumu*) provides two meanings for the word ' Moskof' 1) Russian, and 2) unmerciful and brutal.

GIES OCCASIONAL PAPER

THE WAR IN UKRAINE | March – April 2022

HOW THE WAR IN UKRAINE AFFECTS COUNTRIES THAT DEPEND ON RUSSIA

Karolina Kluczewska

Ghent Institute for International and European Studies – Ghent University

I was doing field research in Tajikistan when Russia attacked Ukraine. In a country where people usually are not concerned about world affairs, the war suddenly became a frequent topic of discussion, and a major preoccupation of many people whose livelihoods depend on Russia. This post-Soviet Central Asian country is tied to Russia in many ways: historically, politically and, most importantly, economically. Based on my observations, I sketch in this paper how the first weeks of the war in Ukraine affected Tajikistan.

In Tajikistan, as in most parts of the world, the news about the war in Ukraine was received with surprise and disbelief. In a country that witnessed violence, displacement and deaths during the civil war that started immediately after Tajikistan's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, some people felt sympathetic towards Ukrainian refugees and talked about the victims of war with compassion. Others, who follow Russian media, which are still very popular in the country, sided with the Russian government's version of events. Yet, initially the war in Ukraine was not a big concern for the majority of people. Ukraine is located far from Tajikistan, and, moreover, people are accustomed to hearing news about warfare in their close neighbourhood. Tajikistan shares its entire southern border with Afghanistan which has experienced several decades of violent conflicts and military interventions.

Very soon, however, it became clear to many people that the war in Ukraine, although having nothing to do with their country, would have a direct impact on their lives.

Remittances

There are nine million people in Tajikistan, more than one million of whom live and work in Russia. This is about a third of this country's working age population. Most migrants are young men from rural areas, who are not able to find jobs on the Tajik labour market and even if they do, local wages are too low to make a living.

With such a big part of the population working abroad, Tajikistan is one of the most remittance-dependent economies in the world. According to the World Bank's data, in 2021 the official amount of money sent home by Tajik migrants amounted to 2.3 billion USD, a sum which is comparable to nearly 30% of the

country's GDP.[220] These numbers, however, are very far from reality and the actual amount of money which comes in from Russia annually is much higher. Very often migrants send money home through the so-called *havala*, an informal money transfer system relying on brokers, which is cheaper than official bank transfers. It is impossible to calculate how much money is sent from Russia to Tajikistan in this way, but some estimate that it might be comparable to official transfers. The scale of remittances being sent both formally and informally shows that migrants' income is crucial for their families in Tajikistan.

On the last weekend of February, as part of a new package of sanctions against Russia, the EU and US agreed to disconnect a number of Russian banks from SWIFT, the main international financial transaction and payment system. On Monday morning, February 28, when banks opened in Tajikistan, long queues formed in front of counters all across the country. Tajik banks are connected to the global financial system through Russian banks, of which they are subsidiaries. This means that changes in the Russian financial sector automatically apply to Tajikistan, too. As all previous financial crises have shown, including the last two years of COVID 19-related recession, any shocks affecting the Russian labour market have an aftershock in Tajikistan, with Tajik migrants either earning less or losing their jobs abroad. Now, news about a sudden halt in construction sites in Russian cities, as a result of Western sanctions, was already widespread. Construction is a sector where many Tajik migrants work in Russia, which means that many of them have already lost their jobs.

As a result, on that Monday morning the panic was clearly noticeable in Tajik banks. Some people worried whether they would still be able to receive money from their relatives in Russia when SWIFT was disconnected. Others wondered if it made sense to withdraw remittances which their relatives had already sent to them, or should they wait until the exchange rate between Russia's rouble and Tajik somoni rose again. Those days, the exchange rate was constantly changing, and many feared that the money their relatives worked so hard for had lost its value. People were asking bank employees, and each other, what to do – and everyone was giving a different answer.

[220] World Bank, *Migration and Development Brief 35: Recovery. COVID-19 Crisis through a Migration Lens*, November, 2021, pp. 18, 39.

Picture 1: Relatives accompanying young men to the airport before their trip to Russia

Collapse of the rouble

Following the collapse of Russia's rouble worldwide, on March 1 the National Bank of Tajikistan suddenly lowered the official exchange rate of the rouble against the Tajik somoni, by 17,4%.[221] A few days later, on March 7, the exchange rate was abruptly lowered by another 11,2%.[222] Several smaller corrections followed. These developments reflected the gravity of the situation. They came as a surprise, given that in Tajikistan the currency is usually artificially controlled by the state. Since the economic crisis in the early 1990s, which resulted from the collapse of Soviet Union, similar currency controls became common measures in post-Soviet countries: they allowed the governments to avoid market shocks.

In Tajikistan, exchange rates are more than just numbers. The quality of life in Dushanbe, Tajikistan's capital city, is slowly but steadily increasing. Restaurants and coffee shops are mushrooming, and tall, brand new Dubai-inspired buildings are changing the post-Soviet urban landscape. But everyday realities of most people living outside the capital are very different and have little to do with the capital's glamour. This is where Tajikistan's dependence on Russia becomes visible. In towns and villages, many families are waiting for monthly remittances from their relatives in Russia to pay back their accumulated debt in nearby shops, where for the last few weeks they have been buying foodstuffs on credit to feed their children.

[221] Asia Plus, "В Таджикистане рубль за сутки обесценился на 17,4%" [In Tajikistan, the Rouble Depreciated by 17.4% Per Day], March 1, 2022.
[222] Asia Plus, "Обвал курса рубля в Таджикистане продолжается" [The Collapse of the Rouble in Tajikistan Continues], March 7, 2022.

As the rouble kept falling, within just 10 days the money sent from Russia by migrants depreciated by 35%.[223] Before the war in Ukraine started, for every 1000 Russian roubles sent home by labour migrants local banks would give their families 141 Tajik somoni. Now, the banks would give only 92-115 Tajik somoni for the same amount of roubles. For instance, if before people could buy 25 kg of flour in Tajik bazaars for an equivalent of 1000 roubles sent by migrants, now they would receive only 16-20 kg for the same amount.[224]

Rising prices

A few days later, on March 9, the National Bank of Tajikistan increased the official exchange rates of both the dollar and euro against the local currency by 15%.[225] This move additionally impacted on the Tajik economy that is highly dependent on imports from abroad, with transactions occurring mostly in US dollars. Consequently, with the rouble collapsing and the dollar becoming more expensive, prices of most goods and services started to rise all over the country. To give an example of three of the products most often purchased by Tajik households, the prices of which are commonly discussed, the price of a 50 kg bag of flour increased by 16% from 280 to 325 Tajik somoni; the price of a bottle of sunflower oil rose by 22% from 22 to 27 Tajik somoni; and 1 kg of sugar went up by 20%

Picture 2: Bazaar in Dushanbe

The day after the war in Ukraine started, on February 25, the chairwoman of the Federation Council of Russia's Federal Assembly

[223] Idem.
[224] Calculations based on prices provided in: Asia Plus, "Как в Таджикистане выросли цены за три недели военного конфликта России с Украиной" [How Prices Rose in Tajikistan During the Three Weeks of the Military Conflict between Russia and Ukraine], March 19, 2022.
[225] Asia Plus, "Курсы доллара и евро в Таджикистане взлетели на 15%" [Dollar and Euro Rates Soared in Tajikistan by 15%], March 9, 2022.
[226] Asia Plus, "Как в Таджикистане выросли цены за три недели военного конфликта России с Украиной" [How Prices Rose in Tajikistan During the Three Weeks of the Military Conflict between Russia and Ukraine], March 19, 2022.
[227] Asia Plus, "Средняя зарплата в Таджикистане: где и сколько получают?" [Average Salary in Tajikistan: Where and How Much Do People Get?], March 2, 2022.

Valentina Matviyenko came to Dushanbe for a long-planned high-level visit. During her trip, she informed the president of Tajikistan:

> Before leaving [for Tajikistan], I talked with Vladimir Vladimirovich [Putin], he asked me to pass on his friendly greetings and best wishes, he warmly remembered your last meeting in December last year in Saint Petersburg, and he instructed me to inform you about the situation concerning Ukraine.[228]

Official press releases did not report how the president reacted to her words. The Tajik government not only did not take any stance on the war, but it also refrained from acknowledging that this conflict was happening. Unlike the few independent newspapers operating in the country, none of official government news outlets reported the outbreak of war in Ukraine.

The first related news appeared in one of main state newspapers, *Jumhuriyat*, only on March 1 and informed the readers in a dry way about the number of Tajik citizens on Ukrainian territory. The article did not even refer to the war directly, instead describing it as 'the current situation in Ukraine' (*ҳодисаҳои кунинӣ дар Украина*) and an 'imposition of martial law' (*ҷорӣ гардидани ҳолати ҳарбӣ*).[229] The way the war in Ukraine is framed is a sensitive issue. Framing it as Russia's invasion and calling it a war would mean that the Tajik government sided with the West. In turn, calling it a special operation (*спецоперация*) would mean that the government supported Russia's position.

When a day later, on March 2, the United Nations General Assembly voted on a resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Tajikistan abstained from voting. This ambiguous position, or rather lack of a position, reflects the limited choices that Tajikistan has vis-à-vis Russia, with silence being the safest option.

Conclusion

The case of Tajikistan offers insights about how the war in Ukraine affects small countries which largely depend on Russia, both on micro and macro levels. This dependence is not so much a result of free political choices, because in world politics these are rarely unconditioned and reflect the actual will of governments and the population. Rather, this dependence results from geographical location, absence of reliable alternatives, and interconnected economic and political systems, going back to Soviet times. Other variations of Tajikistan's dependence on Russia can be found in Central Asia, the South Caucasus and Eastern Europe.

While the variety and complexity of reactions on the part of people in Tajikistan to the war in Ukraine is a topic for a separate paper, at the end of this paper I would like to quote one of my interlocutors. This person, a lower level government official, reflected on the war in Ukraine in the following way:

> Because of the decision of one person, the West is punishing all Russians, and with them also us. In this war, the West is using different means from Russia, economic rather than military. But I do not see much difference between these two sides, both are cruel because they make millions of people suffer.

The war in Ukraine can look different, depending on where we are based and how it affects us personally.

---

[228] TASS, "Матвиенко проинформировала президента Таджикистана о ситуации вокруг Украины" [Matviyenko Informed the President of Tajikistan About the Situation in Ukraine], February 25, 2022.
[229] Jumhuriyat, "Дар Украина 4 ҳазор шаҳрванди Тоҷикистон қарор дорад" [There Are 4,000 Tajik Citizens in Ukraine], 41-42 (24,401), March 1, 2022, p. 1