

The Change of European International Relationship under the Background of the Russia-Ukraine War

Siqi Wang^{1,a,*}

*¹School of History, Classics & Archaeology, The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, EH10 5HF,
The United Kingdom*

a. S2101464@ed.ac.uk

**corresponding author*

Abstract: The Russia-Ukraine war, as one of the most important geopolitical events since the twenty-first century, has increasingly become a major preoccupation of Politics and International Relations researchers. The researchers realise that the nature of the prospect of current and future European politics is still in controversy. This research aims to provide an understanding of the change of dynamics of current European states' foreign policy and the international relationship under the background of the Russia-Ukraine war. The Russia-Ukraine war was one of the most crucial geopolitical events since the twenty-first century. Russia and Ukraine have a considerable influence on global politics and the economy, triggering a series of global turbulence after they went to war. Europe is the region that is most severely affected. A range of scholars and researchers proposed their own understanding of the issue and provided various perspectives. This research examines and analyses the current European international politics by looking at the different actions and motivations of foreign policy combined with theories of different schools. It shows that what Europeans had decided or done was not usually independent and restricted and affected by external pressures or internal economic considerations. These factors render the embarrassment of current European international relationships.

Keywords: European international relationship, Russia-Ukraine war, European politics

1. Introduction

The war between Ukraine and Russia, which broke out in February 2022 is probably one of the most important and sensational geopolitical events since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, especially to the Westerns and Europeans. It was the first time since World War II that a war occurred between two central European states. Unlike other wars that took place in the “periphery” (such as Africa or Asia) from the Western perspective, the war between Russia and Ukraine is an event that is extremely close “core” of the Western War. The anxiety of European states of security has never been this severe for decades.

On 2022 February 24, Russia declared its “Special Military Operation” and started a war against Ukraine. Unlike the Crimea crisis in 2014, this time was a total war which Russia claimed, aiming to achieve “demilitarisation and denazification” of Ukraine. Quickly after the inauguration of the war, the US and its European allies announced a series of economic sanctions and a large amount of condemnation against Russia. Even though there was no direct intervention in the war nor any solid

military actions taken by the US and its allies, the whole Western World was intrinsically involved in the war. The war itself is still in a stalemate. The Russians failed in their strategy, which was to end the war quickly after the declaration. By the time this research was written, according to the latest report, Russia had controlled the eastern part of Ukraine with its western frontier in Kherson [1]. However, though Russians began to be more advantageous on the battlefield and hold the offensive tense, the prospect of the war is still foggy and unpredictable. Even though the war itself is far from being decisive, international politics have already been profoundly changed in the past one and a half years. The geopolitical changes, the economic shifts, and the ideological changes were all raised by the war, intertwined with each other and conducted to the globe. This research will find that these impacts are by no means unidirectional. They are reciprocal and interconnected with each other, which means that everything that is conducted to the globe as the result of the war can, in turn, affect the war and subject connected to the war. This research will examine how the international politics of Europe has been changed or affected by the Ukrainian War by looking at several European states such as France, Germany, and Poland. Then, the research will discuss the current theories which explain the changes in international politics and further analyse how the Ukrainian War impacted the European international relationship. This essay uses the research approach based on literature analysis.

2. European States Which Get Involved and Their Policies

Almost all European states were affected by the war between Ukraine and Russia. However, depending on their geopolitical environment, their role in international politics, and their economic structure, states reacted differently. France, Germany, and Poland are the three states which reacted most actively to the Ukrainian war, and each state took different foreign policy depending on their condition.

It should first be clear that lots of European states have provided weaponry support to Ukraine since the war began. All three states that will be discussed have provided weapons and military aid to Ukraine until now. During the first year of the war, Poland sent the largest number of weapons to Ukraine, which equals 2.55 billion dollars [2]. Germany provided slightly less than Poland, valued at 2.47 billion dollars [2]. While France provided a relatively limited amount of military aid, which is valued at 0.69 billion dollars [2]. Both Germany and Poland also provided some heavy weapons to Ukraine. Germany had provided 14 Leopard 2 tanks, one of the most advanced tanks in the world, and large amounts of artillery and air defence [3]. Poland, which had provided an equal amount of Leopard 2 but far much more tanks than Germany in total [3]. France has also sent some tanks and artillery as well as cruiser missiles but much less compared to Poland and Germany. Here it can be concluded that France is much less active in supporting Ukraine compared to Poland and Germany.

France, though in general supporting Ukraine and imposing some sanctions on Russia, has a relatively neutral attitude towards both parties of the war. Macron, the president of France, keep calling for negotiation and peace in his public statement. Macron showed he wanted to be a moderator of the war instead of firmly supporting one party to “crush” the other [4]. He was also the first major Western leader who tried to appeal to China’s influence to end the war publicly because he believed that China was the only power that is capable of doing so [5]. In addition, there seems to be some disagreement between France and the current NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) policy, which is largely the US’s policy, to support Ukraine fully since Macron attended to leave NATO [6]. It can be concluded, with reference to the relatively mild amount of military aid France provided, France has a rather ambivalent position on the war.

Germany, unlike France, faced a more complicated condition. On the one hand, as a member of the Western Camp and a member of the EU (European Union) and NATO, Germany imposed sanctions and firmly supported Ukraine against Russia. On the other hand, Germany’s sanctions,

which are basically economic ones, mean that Germany has to give up its dependence on Russian energy resources [7]. Germany, whose economy is largely dependent on the manufacturing industry, extremely relied on cheap energy imported from Russia. Data shows that Germany's manufacturing PMI (Purchasing Managers' Index) has dropped sharply in the last one and a half years from around 60 in early 2022 to merely 40.6 in June 2023 [8]. However, this doesn't stop Germany from supporting Ukraine against Russia. Scholz actively claims in the public statement to rearm the German army and describes Ukrainian War as a "Turning Point, which is marked by the recent increase in the defence budget of Germany [9]. In short, Germany has a firm position against Russia.

Poland is probably the one that reacts most actively to the Ukrainian War. Such anxiety is largely triggered by the security danger that Poland faces. Unlike France or even Germany, the border of Poland is just next to Ukraine and Belarus. In addition, Russia (or more broadly, the Soviet Union) is a historical feud with Poland; therefore it is understandable that Poland stands firmly against Russia. Poland provided the largest amount of military aid to Ukraine in the EU. The meeting between Zelenskyy and the Polish President in April shows that "Poland has emerged as Ukraine's most steadfast European supporter in the fightback against Putin's invasion" [10].

3. Theories on the Ukrainian War

There are various theories and analyses which try to explain the nature and prospect of the Ukrainian War. Some of these theory's analysis of the nature of the war and the prediction of the war can make the motivations and reasons for these European states' actions and their future policy more comprehensible.

The first scholar John Mearsheimer, who is known as an offensive realist scholar, argued that it is the US's and its Western European allies' responsibility to push Putin have to declare war upon Ukraine [11]. He said that the US has a long process of supporting Ukraine by keep implying that Ukraine could join NATO [11]. Unlike mainstream Western scholarship or opinions, Mearsheimer believed that what Putin was appealing before the war, which aim to stop the West and NATO from expanding its frontier of influence to Ukraine, is righteous. It is the West's failure to ignore the righteous appeal which exerts security pressure and anxiety to Russia and finally leads to the war [11]. Mearsheimer also predicts that Russia is going to win the war, and Ukraine will probably lose more than 50% of its economy and large sectors of its territory [11].

However, the opinion which attributes the responsibility of war to Russia is still the majority of Western scholarship. Different scholars and researchers attempt to explain Russia's responsibility from various perspectives. One of the classic patterns of explanation is from the perspective of regime type. For example, Hal Brand in his analysis of the autocratic regime of Russia, is the key factor that drives Russia to provoke war. Because autocratic regimes are aggressive in nature, thus the Ukrainian War broke out [12]. Some arguments based on the dichotomy of autocracy and democracy, claiming that it is Putin's personalism turn Russia into an aggressive, autocratic state and lead to the war [13]. Some researchers furtherly appealed that Russia's invasion is a great challenge to the liberal world's order and must be defeated. For instance, Michael Beckley and Hal Brands argue that to defend the threats from autocratic states like Russia and China, the democratic bloc should strengthen themselves in order to deal with the challenge to democracy [14]. Here it can be seen a highly ideologicalized pattern of analysis, which to some extent reflects the motivation and reason for European states' foreign policy.

Some non-western researchers also expressed their views on the Ukrainian War. Zhang Xin defines the nature of the Ukrainian war as the conflict between two "empires," which is the US and Russia [15]. The US, as the larger empire, enclosed and threatened the living space of Russia, while Russia as the successor of the old Russian empire and the Soviet Union, tried to deter the expansion

of the US and rebuild its legitimacy among old member states of the Soviet Union [15]. Ukraine, as the vanguard of the US's expansion, inevitably became the battlefield of the conflict between the two empires, according to Zhang [15].

Other Chinese researchers argue that the nature of the Ukrainian War is that it is a war indirectly provoked by the US to maintain its supremacy and global hegemony. Wang in his article "*The Russo-Ukrainian Conflict's Effect on Global politico-economic Change and the Response of China*", pointed out that the reason why the US had to provoke the war was that it needed a war to solidify the legitimacy of NATO as a military organisation with its core members from Europe and get military exports as well as getting votes for the election [16]. Li also argue that war is desperately needed for America's military-industrial complex and its financial capital [16].

It could be concluded that Chinese researchers emphasised the role of the US throughout the war. Unlike Mearsheimer, who also argues that the main responsibility is on the West, which puts its main focus on Russia's own security anxiety, most Chinese researchers emphasise the role of the US as the initiator of the war out of its own interest.

Among all these theories, it can be easily observed that none of these theories places European states as the major actors throughout the process. Whether one thought the war's main responsibility should fall on the US or Russia, European states all seem to be in a marginal position in the analysis of the cause of the war. This is exactly the dilemma European states and their foreign policy face. Europe, at this stage, does not have the ability to initiate any decisive agenda or to do anything decisive to affect the international political situation. Throughout Mearsheimer's analysis, the dominant power which forced Russia to strike back is the US, while European states are mere "assistants" throughout this process. This analysis which attributes the major responsibility to Russia and appealing the free democratic world to unite together to strike back against autocratic Russia's invasion, also reveals an implication that the leader of such a group of "free democratic world" is undoubtedly the US. In the two patterns of Chinese scholar's analysis, both of them attribute the main responsibility to the US, and there is almost no mention of Europe. The major reason why Europe is almost absent in the analysis is that the relative military power of European states and their willingness to act independently from the US are relatively low. This make Europe became almost subordinate of the US's policy.

4. Analysis of the Policies of European States

The marginal position of Europe throughout the Ukrainian War geopolitical game determines that sometimes European states' foreign policy will be contradictory and is not in their interest. Take Germany as an example. It has been discussed that Russia's cheap energy is extremely crucial to Germany's economy, but because Germany do not has the ability to make its own independent foreign policy, it has to follow the economic sanction proposed by the US and suffered from the revenge of Russia to cut the energy supply. In addition, the ideologicalisation of international politics led by the US also indirectly induced states like Germany to view Russia as an enemy that has to be defeated. These factors render Germany to make foreign policy which would severely damage its own economy.

The situation for France is different. France has more independence and power in the military; thus, it has a higher willingness to act independently than Germany. As discussed above, France keeps appealing for negotiating for peace of war and feeling unsatisfied with NATO's policy. The major reason for this is that either the war per se or intervening in the war has no benefit to France or the EU in general. As the only country in the EU that owns nuclear weapons and the country has the strongest army in the EU, France's appeal for independence seems to be understandable. However, so far, France still does not have done any decisive action to get rid of the US's influence and control of its foreign policy. The tension between France's desire to make its own policy that is

more suitable for its own interest and the influence of the US and NATO is the reason why France is ambivalent towards its policy.

Poland's situation is much simpler. As mentioned above, Poland is so close to the battlefield of the war, so out of the consideration of security, it has to join the border agenda of NATO and the US for its own safety. Unlike Germany, Poland does not have high economic interdependence with Russia. Poland also does not have an awareness of leadership or willingness to make its independent foreign policy as France does. This is the reason why Poland has hesitation in supporting Ukraine against Russia.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the foreign policy of European states is highly affected by the US in general, and each state has their own situation dependent on its relative power and interest. European states' policy against Russia and the policy to support Ukraine is affected mainly by the US, even though such policy is not entirely accorded with their own interest. The international relationship of Europe became more united. However, the two prominent leaders of the EU, France and Germany, have their own considerations and interests. Such interest and consideration conflict with the current agenda of the West's "free world". At this point, the shared ideology served as the cement for the international relationship, but such a relationship has its potential peril. This research aims to clarify the nature of post-Ukrainian War European politics and attempts to explore the factors that shape the current condition. This research is inevitably limited because the Ukrainian War is still far from ending, and the current politics might be changed.

References

- [1] Brown, D. *Ukraine Invasion: Russia's Attack in Maps*. BBC News, February 24, 2022, sec. Europe. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60506682>.
- [2] Buchholz, K. *Infographic: Where Military Aid to Ukraine Comes From*. Statista Infographics, November 10, 2022. <https://www.statista.com/chart/27278/military-aid-to-ukraine-by-country/>.
- [3] Bolton, Thomas. *Who Is Sending Heavy Weapons to Ukraine, and Is It Enough?* euronews, March 5, 2023. <https://www.euronews.com/2023/03/05/which-countries-are-sending-heavy-weapons-to-ukraine-and-is-it-enough>.
- [4] Chatterjee, P. *Ukraine War: Russia Must Be Defeated but Not Crushed, Macron Says*. BBC News, February 19, 2023, sec. UK. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-64693691>.
- [5] Nikkei, A. *In China, Macron Appeals to Xi to Help End Ukraine Conflict*. April 6, 2023. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/In-China-Macron-appeals-to-Xi-to-help-end-Ukraine-conflict>.
- [6] Dong, Y.F. *Russia-Ukraine Conflict Spurs More Sentiment in France to Leave NATO* - Global Times. [www.globaltimes.cn](https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202203/1254222.shtml), March 7, 2023. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202203/1254222.shtml>.
- [7] Bernhard, B., Muttreja, I. *How Russia's Invasion Changed German Foreign Policy*. Chatham House – International Affairs Think Tank, November 18, 2022. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2022/11/how-russias-invasion-changed-german-foreign-policy>.
- [8] Tradingeconomics.com. *TRADING ECONOMICS*, December 2019. <https://tradingeconomics.com/germany/manufacturing-pmi>.
- [9] Press, The Associated. *Germany Unveils Increased Defense Budget*. Defense News, July 5, 2023. <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2023/07/05/germany-unveils-increased-defense-budget/>.
- [10] Dickinson, P. *Poland and Ukraine: The Emerging Alliance That Could Reshape Europe*. Atlantic Council, April 13, 2023. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/poland-and-ukraine-the-emerging-alliance-that-could-reshape-europe/>.
- [11] Mearsheimer, J.J. (2022) *The Causes and Consequences of the Ukraine War*. *Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development*, 21: 12–27.
- [12] Hal, B. *How to Make Biden's Free World Strategy Work*. Foreign Affairs, 24 May 2022, www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2022-05-24/how-make-bidens-free-world-strategy-work.
- [13] Gomza, I. *The War in Ukraine: Putin's Inevitable Invasion*. *Journal of Democracy*, 33(3), 23–30.

- [14] Beckley, M., Hal, B. *The Return of Pax Americana?* *Www.foreignaffairs.com*, 21 Mar. 2022, www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2022-03-14/return-pax-americana.
- [15] Zhang, X. (2022) *Russio-Ukrianian War as the Result of Imperial Conflict*. *Beijing Cultural Review*, 03, 40-48.
- [16] Feng, J., Feng, S.L., Li, Y.Q., Xu, M.Q., Yu, Y.Q., Zhan, W. (2022) *Russo-Ukrainian Conflict, Global Political and Economic Tansformation and Its Influence on China*. *Russian Studies*, 3.