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# RETHINKING EUROPEAN SECURITY: THE STRATEGIC NEXUS AFTER RUSSIAN-UKRAINE WAR

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**Abstract:** *This research is focused on the ongoing Russian aggression towards Ukraine, which has already resulted in a changed security architecture of Europe and, hence, increased security concerns not only in the region but also facilitated geopolitical shifts globally. Through the prism of exploratory-descriptive qualitative methodology, research strived to analyze the increased geopolitical concerns and challenges for Europe that led to significant changes in the security paradigms of the countries within the EU and increased accountability, as well as reluctance in terms of current security arrangements. Volatile military and political security and economic, social, and transnational challenges emerged as vibrant signs that European and global security will not be the same in the upcoming years.*

**Keywords:** *Europe; Russian Aggression; Security; Ukraine; War*

## INTRODUCTION

The ongoing Russian aggression towards Ukraine, which started in 2022, has significantly contributed to the fragile security architecture of Europe and, hence, increased security concerns not only in the region but also prompted geopolitical shifts globally. As main security actors, the overwritten geopolitical realities and subsequent challenges urged the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) to rethink their domestic and international policies within the transpired security context. Despite the uncertainty of medium and long-term effects, efforts from Member States to preserve more responsibility for their security were evoked soon after the war hit. European states have relatively increased military expenditure and spending on defense, significantly changing their security paradigms. The concerns over European security gained a greater dimension concerning Russia's containment and other political, economic, and social insecurities posed by the war.

February 2022 marked a flashpoint in the conflict life cycle that manifested in 2014 with Russia's annexation of Crimea, followed by years of conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The West has tried to assist Ukraine by imposing sanctions on the aggressor. However, the roots of the conflict trace back to 2008 when Russia intervened in Georgia, occupying 20% of Georgian territory and recognizing the self-declared independence of two longstanding breakaway Georgian regions, Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region.

Despite alerts to all indirect and interested parties, including Ukraine, regarding Russia's vulnerable imperial instincts and the costly consequences after 2008, NATO and the EU expressed extremely naive and insufficient efforts to deter Russia from further aggression. Europe has consistently sought to avoid Russian unpredictable offensives, especially when some European states struggle to reach a consensus on transforming the EU into a geopolitical union. These states prioritize their homeland security while leaving room for possible future relationships with Moscow.

Except for balancing urgent needs, other social impacts and political risks are vital for Ukraine's effort to strategically prioritize reconstruction and European contribution to deter the existing challenges and aroused transnational threats. As such a massive war has not emerged in Europe since the 20th century, its global implications should not be underestimated. Instead, the West is now facing a Russia that is no longer bound by the consensus on European security established by the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, the 1990 Charter of Paris, and subsequent agreements (Ischinger 2015). A handful of measures have been taken across Europe that stand out from a constitutional perspective, both in state constitutions and the overarching "security and defense constitution" of Europe, that is, the legal, institutional, and political arrangements governing security and defense across the European States (Moser 2022).

## METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted through the spectrum of exploratory-descriptive qualitative methods. Through analysis of primary and secondary data, including content and discourse analysis, interpretation of theories and empirical data, the study strives to analyze the impacts of the Russian-Ukraine war on European and global security, identifying concerns and challenges following the military intervention, implications through the prism of the military, political, economic, and social analysis, and facilitate the shifts in direct and key interested sides efforts to orient their policies from the narrow military dimension to more complex scenarios.

## THEORETICAL FOUNDATION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the second half of the 20th century, it has been widely argued that the significant shift in the post-World War II military-political balance remarkably changed the political destiny of the European continent. Despite the Eurocentric epistemologies continuing to maintain the narratives of the "privileged West" and relevant geopolitical conceptions, the emerging bipolar world order notably lessened Europe's gambit.

The EU remained a free rider in self-defense, which is not, *per se*, a noble posture (Bailes 2008). However, the internal project of the EU has been drastically fueled in the 21st century, reviving the organization and, hence, its Member States in the heart of the global fervent politics. The role of united Europe in global security and its outward- and forward-looking EU foreign and security policy within the perspectives of the global strategy has been seen as increasingly significant, especially after the Russian invasion of Georgia and, later, Ukraine. European Parliament resolution of 12 March 2019 on building EU capacity on conflict prevention and mediation (2018/2159(INI)) enables the organization to enhance its conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms.

It envisages the EU's aspirations for *sui generis* strategic autonomy. At the same time, the war in Ukraine has led to significant changes in the security paradigms of the countries within the EU and increased accountability, as well as reluctance in terms of security arrangements.

The scrutinized acute global challenges characterize the world's politics nowadays. Besides military-political insecurities and a fragile global security system, climate change, famine, energy problems, and world financial crises have emerged as acute global threats. Different geopolitical and geo-economic goals, incompatible security interests, and different perceptions of international security contributed to the start of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Considering the emerging consequences and global impact on the rest of the world, there are different angles concerning the results of the Russian-Ukrainian war. One of them has been officially claimed to be NATO's eastward expansion over the past decades. The vision of the Russian political leadership in the context of the formation of the modern Russian state has a pivotal importance, where Slavic Ukraine and Belarus, as well as other former post-Soviet states, occupy an important place.

Russia's strategic visions' political system and policy arrangements significantly differ from the Western ones. Western security architecture is primarily based on mutual respect, sharing values, and respect for socio-political and economic life norms. It adheres to such fundamental principles as human rights, democratic form of government, freedom of speech and expression of opinion, and others. These distinguish the Western values from the Russian party-based political system.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union (USSR) and the expansion of NATO to the East, the Russian political elite believed that the West took advantage of Russia's weaknesses, did not fulfill the promise given to the Soviet Union not to facilitate the former Warsaw Pact and the USSR Member States to join NATO. Andrei Kozyrev, who was acknowledged as the most pro-European foreign minister, noted that Russia should be and remain a "normal global state". According to Sergei Karaganov, a well-known Russian political scientist and scholar, Russia must ensure global obligations. It must remain the center of global gravity as "Russia had not just a set of interests, but a special mission - a 'heavy cross' to bear - in the territories of the former Soviet Union" (Rumer 2016). According to his assessment, Russia bears a number of obligations and responsibilities in the former post-Soviet space. It has a special mission to ensure the preservation of Russian influence in these territories and, accordingly, to promote Russia's stay in global politics (Rumer 2016). In 2007, at the Munich International Security Conference, Vladimir Putin, the President of the Russian Federation, stated that the further expansion of NATO to the East would undermine the long-term relations between Russia and the West and the strengthening of mutual trust; highlighting the fact that the West does not recognize and does not want to see Russia as a global power.

From the Russian elite's perspective, the West did not fulfill the promise given to Russia to facilitate NATO expansion for the sake of neglecting Russian interests. British diplomat and former chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, Sir Rodric Braithwaite, notes that at the time, Western political circles made Gorbachev promise not to expand NATO further. According to Johns Hopkins University professor Mary Sarotte, during the collapse of the USSR, there was an active discussion that the unified Germany would not be a member of any military alliance and that there would be no foreign military elements on its territory. On the issue of not expanding NATO further, there was a conversation between the US President's National Security Adviser and former CIA director Robert Gates and the head of the KGB of the USSR, Vladimir Kryuchkov, where the American side assured the head of the KGB that there would be no further enlargement of NATO (Dibb 2022).

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John Kennan, a well-known American expert on Russia, also focuses on NATO's eastward enlargement plans and claims that the extension of NATO influences will be a serious mistake of the American foreign policy, which will lead to the coming to power of anti-Western, nationalist forces in Russia, and further militarization of the country. According to him, such a policy would put an end to the West's attempt to transform Russia into a Western-style modern democracy (Kennan 1997).

The main argument for the post-Soviet communist countries joining NATO and the European Union is to protect themselves from the further aggression of economically and militarily strengthened Russia. Joining the Euro-Atlantic community would significantly increase the quality of their economic and political life. Western political elites argue that NATO expansion is partly beneficial for Russia itself, as it can bring more stability and development to Russia's borders. According to the Kremlin, the primary objective of NATO's expansion to the East was to strengthen Western influence and prevent the resurgence of a new powerful Russian state, thereby eliminating the roots of the Russian Empire.

Following the collapse of the USSR, awareness of the West and its values was relatively low in Russian society.

Conversely, the influence and recognition of the Soviet ideology were higher. Vulnerability and repression are additional cornerstones hindering the spectrum's pro-Western alignment. The most famous opponent of the values-based security system in Eurasia is the American scientist Samuel Huntington, who proposed the logic of the emerging confrontation between civilizations. The former adviser of the US president on national security issues, Zbigniew Brzezinski, claimed that implementing purposeful US foreign policy would prevent Russia from re-emerging as an empire. He wrote, "America is now Eurasia's arbiter, with no major Eurasian issue soluble without America's participation or contrary to America's interests" (Brzezinski 1998). These articulations further highlight the classical realist thought, where:

> Invariably, [states] attempt to maximize their power, and as power is a main source of legitimacy, values, cultures, and institutions pervasively influence how states define their interests. States define threats in terms of the intentions of other states, and those intentions and how they are perceived are powerfully shaped by cultural considerations (Huntington 2011, 207).

While materializing interests and preserving spheres of influence that are paramount for the competing states to occupy the legitimate positions of the "world's paramount powers", growing geopolitical ambitions accompanied by value differences provide an explosive combination for conflict situations. At the Yalta Conference, the allies agreed on "the ultimate realist compromise, leaving much of Eastern Europe under Soviet domination. Roosevelt and Churchill were wisely yielding principles to pragmatism by providing Soviet Russia with a buffer zone on its western flank" (Kupchan 2022).

Such strategic restraint has worked effectively for a specific period, but not during the post-Cold War era with the changed geostrategic realities.

Later on, the issue of SFR Yugoslavia has been a concern for Russia. The Russian political spectrum believes that the breakup of Yugoslavia served the purpose of reducing Russian influence in Europe and encouraging destabilizing actions in Russia. The disintegration of SFR Yugoslavia in the 1990s and the Yugoslav wars prompted the interest of the West in the Balkans, analyzing the

perspectives of it becoming another flashpoint due to the high antagonism in the region. While much of the region seeks deeper integration with the EU and NATO, experts say Moscow is trying to leverage simmering tensions to block those efforts (McBride 2022). Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger also spoke about Russia's policy through the lens of realpolitik. He said Russia's security must spread its influence in the close neighborhood. However, CIA Director William Burns has a slightly different opinion. It explains that Russia and its president want to gain even more influence and power (Dibb 2022).

The altered geopolitical realities have challenged Russian military capabilities and the Kremlin's aspirations for achieving victory at any cost, rendering Russia a "wounded beast". However, its ultimate behavior may lead to irreversible consequences. The war has limited the circle of individuals whom the Russian president can listen to. Furthermore, divergent claims of Russian military success, failure, and counteroffensive perspectives have positioned Putin in a dead-end situation. Therefore, it is not surprising that Putin is attempting to maximize his power and efforts to turn Russia into a totalitarian state. Suppose the goal of Russia's expansionary policy is considered to be increased homeland security on the one hand and the revival of a more powerful imperial Russia on the other. In that case, the Kremlin will strive to keep its allies tightly within its orbit. This aims to unsettle the positions of the US, EU, and NATO, transforming the Russian-Ukrainian war into a matter of life and death. Russian officials believe the West could not provide international assistance to Ukraine for the long term, as was found during the war. Scientific assumptions are also becoming more visible in Western informational sources, claiming that:

> Ukraine's current counteroffensive will not throw Russia out - not that anyone expected it to. Nor is it likely to cut the occupation in half before the winter, which might have been one of the more optimistic aims. It has, however, shown how the Russian army can be beaten. Not in 2023, but in 2024 or 2025. Thus, the refrain among Western allies of supporting Kyiv 'for as long as it takes' (Barrons 2023).

Therefore, achieving victory over Ukraine is existential for Russia, as it determines its future well-being, existence, and positioning in world politics. Further considering the historical roots of Russian imperialism, the creation of the first Russian Slavic Orthodox State in the form of Kievan Rus began in the 8th-9th centuries. Thus, Russia's attempt to establish itself as a legitimate global power is unlikely to be fulfilled without Ukraine remaining within the Russian political orbit.

## IMPLICATIONS OF RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

Russian aggression has exposed different perceptions regarding the sustainability of the European security system. On the one hand, it has demonstrated the strengths and more remarkable manifestations of unity within the West in the face of global challenges. The war has brought economic, energy, food, logistical, transit, and other transnational security challenges in Europe and globally. European and US military and financial aid to Ukraine are also increasing in response to the Russian invasion. Until November 2022:

> The US provided $47.8 billion in military and financial aid to Ukraine. As of February 2023, US military aid for military purposes alone since the 2014 annexation of

> Crimea totals $32 billion. On the other hand, the EU provided financial assistance to Ukraine in the amount of 35 billion euros for the year 2022 (Grieger 2023).

Europe and the US expressed their readiness to provide additional financial assistance for 18 billion euros for 2023 (Ráczová 2023, 3). Before the war, the financial institutions of the EU Member States invested up to 17 billion euros in Ukraine. At the end of 2022, at least 349 billion USD were needed to rebuild war-torn Ukraine (Ráczová 2023, 3-4).

Considering the imposed embargo on Russian natural resources, the price of natural gas has increased significantly, which in turn has substantially increased the daily living costs in Europe. The increased costs and severe consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic made financial and economic elites reluctant to make new investments in various areas. Since the start of the war in Ukraine, companies' risk of losing investments has increased from 8% to 15% (Bank 2022). Furthermore, the economic situation in Europe is imperiled by the fact that competing countries are the leading producers and exporters of global grain production. In parallel with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Russia blocked the export of 20 million tons of wheat from Ukraine (EEAS Press Team 2022) and bargained over releasing the imposed sanctions. Increased prices on primary commodities have pushed inflation further and affected the whole region with disruptive trade policies, increased risks of investment sustainability, and business confidence. Russia and Ukraine account for 25% of global grain exports, of which 18% are Russian exports and 7% are Ukrainian exports (Guénette, Kenworthy, and Wheeler 2022, 11).

Russia is an important world exporter of aluminum (10%), crude oil (11%), nickel (22%), agricultural fertilizers (14%), natural gas (25%), palladium 23%, etc. (Guénette, Kenworthy, and Wheeler 2022, 11). Considering the consequences of the war, in order to solve the food crisis, the European Union was forced to mobilize additional financial resources to boost the production of agricultural products within the European Union and to solve the food problem in African countries. For this purpose, the European Union mobilized 1.858 billion euros in 2022 (Guénette, Kenworthy, and Wheeler 2022, 30). The war has raised the issue of disruptions to grain procurement and subsequent exports, increasing threats to agricultural insecurity globally and in Africa (European Investment Bank 2022).

The war in Ukraine has significant consequences in terms of a historic surge in refugee flows. Since the beginning of the war, about 8 million Ukrainians have left Ukraine, with most fleeing to European countries, predominantly Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, and Georgia. The repercussions have led to higher inflation and fluctuations in monetary systems and significantly damaged the regional and global trade and tourism sectors. International transit and logistics routes are yet another critical issue to consider. Russia has been destroying the agricultural infrastructure of Ukraine, "thereby disrupting the entire supply chain. The Black Sea and Azov Sea had been blocked by Russia, and the Ukrainian grain shipments were hijacked in the early months of the attack" (GEP 2022). Indeed, this also raises sea transportation costs for Europe and other countries. It is worth mentioning that the ongoing war has also created significant problems for air transportation.

Approximately 20% of global air cargo shipments were impacted by the ban on flights over the territories of Ukraine and Russia. Air freight prices have experienced a notable increase between Europe and the Far East. Blockage of air, sea, and land cargo in Russian and European territories has increased international logistics costs globally (Guénette, Kenworthy, and Wheeler 2022).

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The global energy landscape has drastically changed since the war broke out. According to the estimation of the economist Brian Michael Jenkins, the energy shock led to the decline of the gross domestic product in the EU and the USA. According to his assessment, Europe's energy security needs to import natural resources directly through pipelines, which increases both the quality of stability and reduces the costs of its transportation. In energy cooperation with Russia, a significant part of Europe was oriented to reduce the import of natural resources from the Middle East. Some European politicians chose a pragmatic attitude towards Russia. Before the war, a significant part of Europe was significantly dependent on Russian natural gas, especially Germany and Central and Eastern European countries. In parallel with the war, the import of Russian liquefied gas in Europe decreased.

If before the start of the war, Russian gas exports to Europe accounted for about 40%, by the end of 2022, it had already decreased to 9% (Archick 2023). Given the increased prices for natural gas and oil, and therefore for consumer products, in November 2022, the EU aimed to agree on a common policy regarding the purchase of natural gas and purchase price criteria to be in constant coordination to reduce the volatility of natural gas and oil prices. Most European countries required the population to limit their electricity consumption and imposed certain restrictions on energy-importing companies. The EU also took responsibility for state subsidies in the energy sector (The European Council 2022).

The war significantly changed the military security architecture and international political landscape. In March 2022, the United States and the European Union approved a threat assessment document. It centralizes the collective efforts of NATO and EU Member States towards threats they face nowadays. For Ukraine, the war put the country's sovereignty at stake. For Russia, it becomes the battlefield of its imperial instincts, and for Europe and the "broader West", it is an opportunity to restrain and weaken Russia. With no surprise, the EU and the USA are primarily interested in their national security concerns and priorities. Considering the scenario of a Russian victory, it is evident that the existing European security architecture would remain vulnerable. Despite the increased financial and military support and the tight sanctions imposed on Russia, it still does not seem likely to end the war with the outcome that the Western countries desire. Accordingly, if the West's global political, economic, and military influence decreases, it will support the desire to transform powerful developing countries into ambitious regional states and pursue a foreign policy independent of the West.

Preserving international security in the scenario of the complete victory of Ukraine might also pose problems for the West, as the probability that revanchist sentiments strengthened in Russia, the coming to power of a new, much less predictable nationalist group (just like the arrival of fascists in the political leadership of Germany after the First World War) and new war preparations are high (Paikim 2023). Russia's allies, especially the Chinese factor, further imperiled security and contributed to fragility. Because a large part of Europe's security significantly depends on NATO, the new defense and security policy of the EU and Europe, in general, will be bound by its compatibility with NATO goals and aspirations.

The EU only has experience participating in low-intensity conflicts and humanitarian operations, and it has only recently, in 2019, enforced conflict prevention and mediation mechanisms that enable the organization to enhance its conflict prevention and resolution capabilities. To what extent the EU can create a joint command and control system to supervise and manage defense

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systems and operations within Europe remains unclear. On the contrary, NATO, created in response to the containment of the Soviet threat, has developed an effective and comprehensive deterrence policy during the first decades of its existence.

This involved enhancing the organization's capabilities to operate the territorial defense system effectively, addressing logistical issues, modernizing EU Member States' armies, and ensuring their compatibility in joint operations. Suppose the EU decides to create a strong and effective defense and security system. In that case, it will first have to determine what are the strategic priorities of cooperation with NATO, distinguish to what extent the EU will be able to create a self-sufficient unified defense and security system, as well as how much they will have resources to ensure the security of the EU Member States including the nuclear umbrella (Simon 2023).

## CONCLUSION

From the very first day up to the present, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine has been highly dynamic, both militarily and politically. Geopolitical proximity, emerging threats, and extremely fragile security architecture have made the EU an interested party and, therefore, significantly contributed to its efforts to aid Ukraine and condemn Russia's war of aggression. While some effects may not be fully apparent at present, there are already vibrant signs that European and global security will not be the same in the upcoming years.

The war has contributed not only to volatile military and political security but also to economic, social, and transnational challenges such as energy and food insecurity, inflation, a substantial rise in prices, refugee and migration concerns, reduced business sustainability, and other transnational threats, including climate change.

The war against Ukraine has already caused thousands of deaths, devastated infrastructure, and led to fatal consequences for the direct parties involved in the conflict, reassessing national and international security parameters. Ukraine has become the battleground for vast incompatible interests and aspirations, erupting at the crossroads of Europe and Russia. This has turned the conflict into a scenario of West vs. Russia, where:

> Tens of thousands of Ukrainians have been killed, maimed, or kidnapped; millions have been internally displaced. The economic cost of the war, in terms of lost output, productive potential, and destroyed assets, may already run into the hundreds of billions of dollars - perhaps as much as a trillion - and continues to rise with every attack on a new target in Ukraine (Bond and Ash 2023).

Russia maintains its strategic priority to undermine Ukraine's and, in fact, other Eastern Partnership countries' westward drift and ensure the security of its borders by preventive efforts to eliminate NATO and EU influences near Russian borders. The war has already emerged as existential for conflicting sides, with principal red lines and acute uncertainty, presumably, by all means, involving critical weapons.

Many European countries have primarily acknowledged Ukraine's resilience, tenacity, and courage. However, as long as the war is prolonged, time is not on Ukraine's side. More Eurocentric sentiments and realpolitik rationalities characterize the latest impressions; therefore, some countries prioritize their challenges and insecurities more than regional threats.

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