

THE RUSSIA- UKRAINE WAR: A TEST FOR THE WESTERN ALLIANCE

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Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has evolved beyond a mere conflict between two nations, transforming into a process that reshapes global power balances and exerts profound effects on the transatlantic alliance. Initially, the United States and Europe adopted a synchronized policy in supporting Ukraine, demonstrating unity through sanctions and military aid. However, as the war dragged on and leadership changes occurred -particularly in the U.S.-diverging interests surfaced, weakening the apparent unity and exposing new fractures within the Western alliance.

In this context, long-standing fault lines in transatlantic relations have surfaced. A clear tension has emerged between Europe's defense policies, energy security concerns, and economic stability on one side, and the U.S.'s global power projection on the other. While Russia's attack on Ukraine has reinforced the concept of collective defense in Europe, it has also reignited debates over the continent's military dependence on the U.S. and NATO's evolving role. Germany and France, for instance, have advocated for strengthening the EU's defense capabilities, whereas Eastern European nations have remained inclined to sustain their security policies within the NATO framework under U.S. leadership. Additionally, energy policies have raised concerns about whether the West is not only striving for independence from Russia but also drifting into a new dependency on the U.S.

During this period, Türkiye has emerged as a pivotal actor, leveraging a balancing strategy to carve out a new space in global diplomacy. Its implementation of the Montreux Convention, hosting of negotiations in Istanbul, and mediation role in the Black Sea Grain Initiative all underscore Türkiye's proactive diplomacy throughout the war. At the same time, Türkiye has maintained high-level relations with both Ukraine and Russia, including arms trade agreements and continued economic cooperation with Moscow. This raises the question of whether Türkiye's multidimensional foreign policy reflects strategic mastery or a high-risk maneuver.

This article aims to analyze the geopolitical transformation caused by the Russia-Ukraine War and the fractures within U.S.-Europe relations. Furthermore, it will assess how Türkiye has gained diplomatic flexibility in this process and how its ability to influence regional balances positions it

among global actors. Finally, one of the study's core questions will be whether the current international order can be sustained or if a new world order is in the making.

Is the Russia-Ukraine War Splitting the West from Within?

The Russia-Ukraine War has escalated beyond a regional conflict, evolving into a process that disrupts the global balance of power as historical and geopolitical tensions reach a breaking point. Ukraine's independence process, NATO's eastward expansion, and Russia's security concerns have been among the primary driving forces of the war (Buyar & Şener, 2022).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine declared independence and gradually developed closer ties with the West (Çalışkan, 2022). However, Moscow perceived Kyiv's integration with the West

as a direct threat to its geopolitical interests. The 2004 Orange Revolution and the 2014 Euromaidan protests accelerated Ukraine's pro-Western trajectory, prompting Russia to intervene directly (Kesici, 2022). The 2014 annexation of Crimea and Moscow's support for separatist groups in Donbas were the clearest manifestations of Russia's strategy to maintain its influence over Ukraine (Buyar & Şener, 2022).

During this period, Ukraine's deepening cooperation with NATO, particularly the 2021 Strategic Partnership Agreement with the U.S., heightened Russia's security concerns (Kesici, 2022). In response, Moscow launched a large-scale military operation in 2022, aiming to prevent Ukraine from joining NATO and reassert its regional dominance. Consequently, the war has evolved beyond a conflict over Ukraine's sovereignty, transforming into Russia's broader attempt to redefine its geopolitical sphere (Buyar & Şener, 2022).

The Russia-Ukraine War has not only had military and geopolitical consequences but has also heavily impacted the global economy and political balances. The prolonged conflict led to downward revisions of global growth forecasts, sharp increases in energy prices, and significant disruptions in supply chains. The OECD reduced its 2022 global growth forecast from 4.5% to 3% and its 2023 forecast to 2.8%, illustrating the destructive effects of the war on the global economy. In particular, the rise in energy and raw material prices has increased economic vulnerabilities, especially in regions like Central Asia, and triggered a risk of food crises (Oktav, 2022).

As Russia and Ukraine play a crucial role in global grain production, disruptions in

grain supply during the war have caused global food prices to rise (Buyar & Şener, 2022). Similarly, Russia's position as a major oil and natural gas exporter led to sanctions imposed on Moscow, which quickly increased Brent oil prices and energy costs. The uncertainty in energy supplies reshaped Europe's energy security policies, not only pushing the West to become independent of Russia but also increasing its dependency on the U.S. and other energy suppliers (Seyaz, 2024).

The economic consequences of the war have directly targeted the Russian economy. The comprehensive sanctions imposed by the U.S., EU, and other Western countries have severely affected Russia's energy, finance, and trade sectors, creating unprecedented economic pressure aimed at isolating Moscow from global markets. Many international companies halted their operations in Russia or completely withdrew from the market, Russian banks were removed from the SWIFT system, and the assets of the Russian Central Bank were frozen (OECD, 2022). However, the impact on Ukraine's economy has been even more devastating. In 2022, Ukraine's GDP shrank by nearly one-third, its trade deficit increased from \$5.4 billion to \$8.2 billion, and inflation rose above 30% (Buyar & Şener, 2022).

The political consequences of the war have also resonated globally. Russia's attack on Ukraine met with strong international reactions, and Moscow was excluded from international organizations, leading to diplomatic isolation. This process has resulted in profound changes, particularly in Europe's security policies, with Finland and Sweden applying for NATO membership, marking the beginning of a new era in Europe's security architecture.

These diverging strategic priorities have brought to light fault lines that have long existed within the transatlantic alliance, making it more difficult to develop a common security understanding. The more aggressive policy stance adopted by Eastern European countries against Russia, contrasted with Western Europe's more cautious approach due to economic and energy concerns, raises the question of how sustainable the rhetoric of unity within NATO and the European Union is in practice. Ultimately, the war has become a process that reshapes not only Ukraine's future but also the internal dynamics of the West and its global position.

Is the U.S. – Europe Alliance Fracturing?

One of the key factors shaping the course of the war has been the stance taken by the Western alliance. At the beginning of the war, the US and Europe presented strong support for Ukraine, following a common policy through sanctions and military aid. However, the prolonged conflict, rising economic costs, and changing internal political dynamics have led to more noticeable cracks in transatlantic relations (Buyar & Şener, 2022). Eastern European countries, viewing Russia as a direct threat, adopted a firmer stance and coordinated with the US to increase support for Ukraine. In contrast, Western European countries—especially Germany and France—adopted a more cautious strategy due to concerns over energy security and economic stability (Kesici, 2022). This has deepened the divide in Europe's defense policies and weakened its capacity to act collectively.

For the US, the war in Ukraine has evolved from being a matter of European security to becoming a significant element of the global power struggle. Washington sees its

military and economic support for Ukraine as a critical strategic move not only against Russia but also in the broader global power competition with China (Çelikaslan, 2022). For Europe, however, this support has become a complex balancing act, not reducible to purely security policies. The more cautious approach of Western Europe has highlighted the growing signs of strain on US-led transatlantic leadership, bringing internal tensions to the surface.

As the war nears its third year, the balance within the Western alliance has started to shift. Increasing political infighting in the US and diminishing public support for Ukraine have led to significant changes in Washington's war policies. Initially, the US was the largest provider of military and financial aid to Ukraine, but due to internal political disagreements in Congress, approving new aid packages has become more challenging. This shift has become more evident with the potential re-election of Trump, who radicalized the situation by cutting off aid to Ukraine, affecting the course of the war. The public tensions between Trump and Zelensky, alongside the expectation that the US would continue supporting Ukraine, have shown that Washington is now turning to direct negotiations with Moscow instead. The Trump administration shaped diplomatic relations with Russia, appointing ambassadors, which led to serious divisions within the Western alliance. The US cutting aid to Ukraine and pursuing new diplomatic processes with Moscow has had a direct impact on Europe's security policies.

Europe, on the other hand, has begun to follow a different path. Germany, France, and other EU countries have clearly stated that they will continue to support Ukraine and provide aid (Çelikaslan, 2022). European countries, while assessing the

risks of leaving Ukraine completely alone in a scenario where the US withdraws, have started taking steps to enhance their defense capabilities. This shift indicates that Europe, which initially followed the US leadership at the war's start, is now seeking to develop a more independent strategy.

The Russia-Ukraine War has led to a fundamental transformation in European energy policies. Before the war, the European Union depended on Russia for 40% of its natural gas needs, forcing Europe to develop new strategies to secure energy and reduce its reliance on Moscow (Buyar & Şener, 2022). In this context, investments in alternative energy sources and policies aimed at reducing energy demand have taken center stage. The US has become a key player in helping Europe achieve energy independence from Russia, securing a significant position through LNG exports to fill the continent's energy gap (Seyaz, 2024). However, the changes in Washington's policy toward Ukraine might prompt European countries to pursue a more independent line on energy as well (Kesici, 2022).

This war has tested the resilience of the Western alliance and the divisions within it. The alliance, initially shaped by US leadership, is now shifting in a different direction due to Trump's decision to completely cut aid to Ukraine. While European countries continue to pledge support for Ukraine despite signs of US withdrawal, this situation is leading to a new balance within the transatlantic alliance.

Is Türkiye the Silent Winner of the War

The Russia-Ukraine War has allowed Türkiye to emerge as a prominent geopolitical and strategic actor,

strengthening its role in global diplomacy. By balancing its relationships with both the West and Russia, Türkiye has adopted a strategy that could be described as that of the silent winner of the war. However, this strategy is based on a complex balancing policy that carries potential risks, and its outcomes will become clearer over time.

One of Türkiye's key strategic moves in the war has been the implementation of the Montreux Convention. By closing the Bosphorus to the warships of the warring parties, Türkiye has enhanced its credibility based on international law since the war's onset. This decision was made not only at the request of Ukraine but also after experts assessed the situation as a war. Türkiye's move to ensure regional security has been praised both in the West and internationally (Oktav, 2022).

The negotiations in Istanbul and the Grain Corridor Agreement have further solidified Türkiye's diplomatic success. Türkiye has led negotiations to reduce tensions between Russia and Ukraine, while also seeking solutions to global food security issues. The Black Sea Grain Initiative, especially Türkiye's role as a mediator, has allowed Ukrainian grain exports to resume, making Türkiye a significant player in international diplomacy (Çelikaşlan, 2022). Türkiye's balancing policy has also enabled it to act as a mediator between the West and Russia. While supporting Ukraine's territorial integrity, Türkiye has refrained from joining Western sanctions against Russia and has maintained its trade relations with Russia. This dual strategy has placed Türkiye in a unique position. Throughout the war, Türkiye has succeeded in maintaining diplomatic relations with both sides, ensuring the continuation of this balance.

Türkiye's supply of arms to Ukraine while maintaining trade relations with Russia can be seen as a complex strategic maneuver. By providing armed drones and defense equipment, Türkiye has strengthened Ukraine's resistance, while simultaneously preserving important energy and trade relations with Russia (Çalışkan, 2022). With this dual strategy, Türkiye has built strong ties with both sides, gaining significant military and economic advantages. However, this strategy also carries some risks. Türkiye's decision not to establish an absolute alliance with either side means that no absolute trust relationship has been formed with either. Russia's reaction to Türkiye's arms supply to Ukraine and the West's pressure on Türkiye to impose stricter sanctions on Russia are two-fold challenges that Türkiye faces (Çalışkan, 2022).

Despite all the risks, Türkiye's strategy presents significant opportunities in terms of geopolitical intelligence and potential economic gains. By capitalizing on the opportunities created by the war, Türkiye has become a more effective diplomatic player on the international stage.

Conclusion: The Fragile Unity of the West and New Geopolitical Developments

The Russia-Ukraine War has evolved into more than just a conflict between two countries. It has shaken global power balances, reshaped international alliances, and triggered new geopolitical fractures. While the Western alliance initially appeared united in its strong support for Ukraine, as the war dragged on, the rising economic costs, shifting political balances, and debates over leadership deepened the differences between the U.S. and Europe. Washington sees the military and financial aid to Ukraine not only as a move against

Russia but also as a strategic maneuver in the broader global power struggle with China, while for Europe, the war has become a far more complex balancing act. Security concerns, the quest for economic stability, and energy dependence have made it increasingly difficult for the continent to develop a unified strategy, making the growing differences within NATO and the European Union more apparent.

Rising domestic political tensions in the U.S., especially with Trump's statements on cutting support to Ukraine, have highlighted the fragility of transatlantic relations, while Europe struggles to form a common defense strategy due to diverging security priorities. Eastern European countries view Russia as an existential threat and tend to align more closely with the U.S., while Western European nations, like Germany and France, are more cautious due to concerns over energy security and economic stability. This process will determine whether Europe enters an era where it can act more independently of the U.S. in terms of security policy. However, considering current economic and military capacities, it seems unrealistic for Europe to establish a security framework independent of NATO in the short term.

The war's impact on economic and energy policies will also play a key role in shaping global power dynamics in the long term. The European Union, seeking to reduce its energy dependency on Russia, has turned to the U.S. and other alternative suppliers, but this shift has made the continent more reliant not only on Russian energy but also on energy resources from the U.S. This new dependency in terms of energy security increases Washington's influence on global energy policies and may alter the power

balance in transatlantic relations in the long run. Similarly, global uncertainties, rising inflation, and the risk of economic recession have become factors directly influencing both security policies and domestic political stability in the Western world.

From Türkiye's perspective, one of the most notable outcomes of the war has been its more active role in global diplomacy thanks to its strategic balancing policy. By maintaining relations with both the West and Russia, Türkiye has managed to navigate this delicate balance, though this process has also created a risky foreign policy equation. The implementation of the Montreux Convention, the Istanbul negotiations, and the mediation role in the Grain Corridor Agreement have strengthened Türkiye's diplomatic influence, but also positioned it in a situation closely monitored by both the West and Moscow. Türkiye's pragmatic foreign policy, supplying UAVs to Ukraine while maintaining energy and trade relations with Russia, reflects this strategy. However, in the long term, the critical issue will be how global powers accept Türkiye's independent maneuvering and whether Ankara can maintain this balance.

One of the most important consequences of the war at the global level is the ignition of new debates about the sustainability of the current international order. Western sanctions and political isolation efforts aimed at Russia have tried to isolate Moscow within the international system, but the Kremlin has countered by strengthening its economic and strategic ties with China. Although China has avoided direct involvement in the war, it has allowed Russia to maintain connections with global markets through its growing economic ties. Additionally, China's efforts

to mediate in the Ukraine crisis show that it is preparing to play a more active diplomatic role in international crises. In this context, the war signals a new era in the post-war world order, where the leadership of the West is being questioned, and a multipolar system is taking shape.

From the perspective of European security architecture, the NATO membership process of Finland and Sweden reveals the West's inclination to expand militarily against Russia, further deepening Moscow's security concerns over NATO's eastern expansion. However, it remains uncertain how successful the West will be in completely isolating Russia. The military and economic pressures created by the war have also had an impact on Russia's internal political dynamics, leading to discussions about the direction the Kremlin will take after the war.

In light of all these developments, the Russia-Ukraine War has reshaped not only Ukraine's future but also the internal dynamics of the Western alliance, Europe's strategic autonomy, the global leadership role of the U.S., and Russia's position in the international system. As the power struggle between global actors enters a new phase, the long-term consequences of the war signal a lasting change in international relations.

In the aftermath of this war, the world will face a new reality that challenges the boundaries of the old order. As transatlantic relations, global power balances, and regional geopolitical dynamics are reshaped, the resilience of the Western alliance and the sustainability of the international order will be among the most discussed issues in the coming years. The deepening divides between the U.S. and Europe, China and Russia's efforts

to form alternative blocs, and regional actors' adaptation to changing dynamics demonstrate that the war has become a decisive turning point not only for Ukraine but for the global order as a whole. Ultimately, the Russia-Ukraine War will go down in history as one of the most critical geopolitical fractures redefining the 21st-century international order.

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