



Mixed reactions to the Russian war against Ukraine in the Indo-Pacific

Views of governments and civil society

Edited by

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Foreword

On February 24th, 2022, the world woke up to a new reality: Russia initiated a large-scale military aggression against neighboring Ukraine.

While the war is happening on the European continent, considering it a purely European affair is flawed, since the conflict has global ramifications. The very fact that a permanent member of the UN Security Council, which is also a nuclear power, initiated a war of aggression ranks at the top of the list of events with an eroding effect on the rule-based world order and international law. Consequent disruption of food supply chains and the rising inflation threatens further destabilization, disproportionately affecting the countries of the Global South.

Hence, to fully understand the war's impacts and how it is perceived, we must turn our attention beyond the physical borders of Europe. The Indo-Pacific region presents a particularly interesting puzzle. The views and reactions of the Indo-Pacific governments - ranging from democratic to semi-democratic to authoritarian regimes - vary significantly. The region encompasses countries that are largely supportive of Ukraine, those that provide Russia with diplomatic or other means to fight the war, and many others which fall somewhere in between on this spectrum.

This paper provides a close look at how Russia's aggression was reflected in the statements, policies, and actions of ten countries of the Indo-Pacific, namely China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, North Korea, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Special attention is also given to how the war was seen by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Moreover, the reactions of the civil society, academia, and media in the studies countries are also addressed. Last but not least, observations are offered on how the war has affected the strategic landscape and security situation in the Indo-Pacific region, and how the European Union, as well as individual member states, should respond to that.

Bratislava, March 2023

Matej Šimalčík & Alfred Gerstl

Executive summary

1

Responses of Indo-Pacific governments to Russia's unjustified, unprovoked, and unlawful invasion of Ukraine on February 24th, 2022, range from unequivocal condemnation and the imposition of sanctions against Russia (Japan, Singapore, Taiwan) to a cautious middle position of countries leaning either towards Russia or Ukraine (ASEAN, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, South Korea, Vietnam) and diplomatic support for Moscow (Myanmar, North Korea).

2

The Chinese government is performing a perilous balancing act. While the principle of national sovereignty is of utmost importance for Beijing, China has regularly emphasized Moscow's "legitimate security concerns" and called the US the "culprit of current tensions". While the Chinese public views Russian President Vladimir Putin somewhat favorably and leans slightly towards Russia overall, the majority of people take a neutral stance on the matter.

3

Since the launch of Russia's war, Japan has had a clear and consistent position, strongly criticizing Russia, upholding sanctions against Moscow, and supporting Ukraine. The fragility of the international order makes Japanese politicians reconsider the necessity to strengthen national defense efforts.

4

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has shone a spotlight on Taiwan's precarious status-quo vis-à-vis an increasingly assertive China. The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government emphasizes Ukraine as "a fellow country 'on the front lines in guarding against authoritarian expansionism'" and uses international attention to advance Taiwan's difficult international relations.

5

India maintains its proactive neutrality: not condemning Russia but calling for an end of the hostilities and a return to diplomacy and dialogue. India criticizes Europe's Eurocentrism and the West for turning a blind eye on many problems in (not only) Asia.

6

South Korea's initial reaction to Russia's invasion of Ukraine was lukewarm, similar to Seoul's reaction to the annexation of Crimea in 2014. South Koreans, however, feel solidarity with Ukrainians and would support additional sanctions. The government's approach changed only after the US applied economic pressure on Korean exports.

- 7** North Korea continues with its pragmatic foreign policy known since the times of the Cold War to receive certain benefits and advantages. North Korean media repeat the official Russian position often adding quotes from Western conspiracy media and websites.
- 8** Even though respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity are key principles of ASEAN, the Southeast Asia organization refuses to criticize Russia for severely violating these principles. This response, though, is consistent with ASEAN's diplomacy.
- 9** Singapore is the only Southeast Asian nation that unequivocally condemns Putin's war and imposed sanctions on Russia. Singapore's hard stance reflects the importance of international law and a rules-based order for the vulnerable city-state.
- 10** Cambodia and the Philippines criticized Moscow. Myanmar's United Nations' representative voted in favor of the Russia-critical UN resolutions. The ruling junta, though, supports Russia diplomatically.
- 11** Historically close Russia-Vietnam relations, notably in defense matters, make it difficult for Hanoi to criticize Moscow. In line with its hedging strategy, it is aware that it needs Western support, too, which provides a counterweight for becoming too close to Russia.
- 12** The Indonesian government still maintains its longstanding *Bebas-Aktif* foreign policy doctrine. Russia still enjoyed a strong support from the Indonesian public even months after the war started, something Russia publicly lauded not long before the G20 summit in November 2022.
- 13** The Malaysian government opted to exercise its longstanding neutral and non-aligned foreign policy in the ongoing Russian war in Ukraine, which will see little to no change under Malaysia's new Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. Although President Putin is still mostly viewed positively by the Malaysian public, it is largely apathetic toward the developments of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

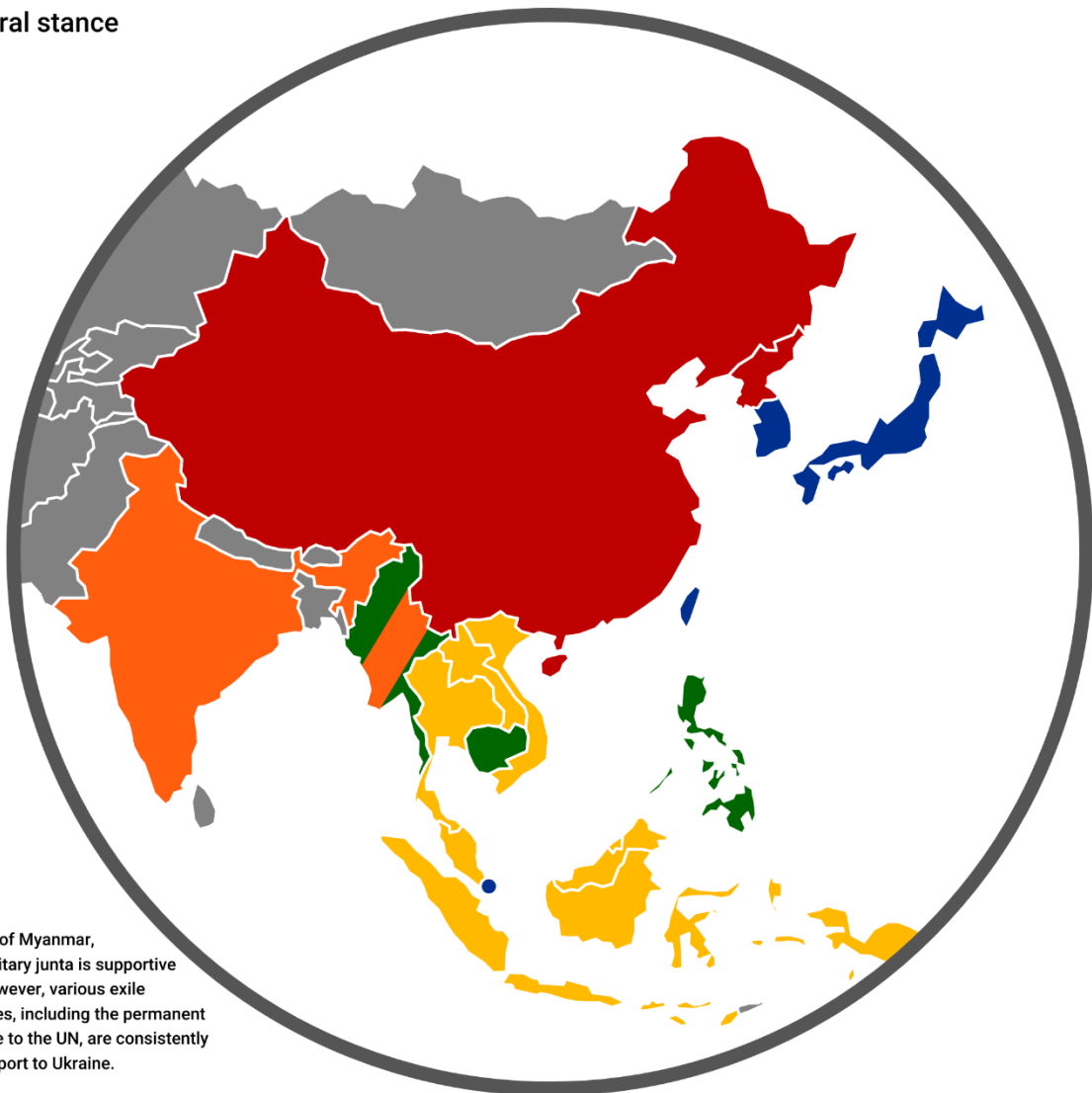
- 14** The stability of the multilateral security and economic order in the Indo-Pacific is at risk. It is undermined by the Sino-US rivalry but also by bilateral and minilateral security initiatives and competing regional trade agreements.
- 15** While the strategic competition between China and the US in the Indo-Pacific region reduces the strategic leeway of other players, the hedging strategies of many Indo-Pacific countries offer the EU and other regional and non-regional actors structural incentives to play a stronger role in the region.
- 16** The EU faces the dilemma that its values-based foreign policy, aiming to promote democracy and human rights, can reduce Brussel's *realpolitik* influence in East Asia and the Indo-Pacific where most of the regimes are semi-democratic or authoritarian.
- 17** Despite its considerable economic power, the influence of the EU on the strategic and security landscape in the Indo-Pacific will remain severely limited. Unless the EU will be able to project more hard power, it will remain a niche player in the region.

Ukraine versus Russia

Positions of East Asian states on Russian aggression against Ukraine



- Diplomatic & material support of Ukraine
- Diplomatic support of Ukraine
- Neutral stance
- Diplomatic support of Russia
- Diplomatic & material support of Russia



Note: In case of Myanmar, the ruling military junta is supportive of Russia. However, various exile representatives, including the permanent representative to the UN, are consistently providing support to Ukraine.

Data: CEIAS

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China: Balancing conflicting interests in the Russian war against Ukraine

Nick Nieschalke & Valentin Hoffmann

- 1** The Chinese government is performing a perilous balancing act: While the principle of national sovereignty is of utmost importance for Beijing, China has regularly emphasized Moscow's "legitimate security concerns" and called the US the "culprit of current tensions".
- 2** While the Chinese public views President Vladimir Putin somewhat favorably and leans slightly towards Russia overall, the majority of people take a neutral stance on the matter.
- 3** The European Union should continue to uphold its commitment to its partners, as well as the liberal international order, whilst seeking to preserve its engagement with China.

The government's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine

The Chinese government is performing a perilous balancing act. The principle of national sovereignty is of utmost importance for Beijing, which does not wish to see its claims on Taiwan or Xinjiang rebutted. On the other hand, China has regularly emphasized Moscow's "legitimate security concerns" and called the US the "culprit of current tensions", accusing it of "pouring oil on the flame."

A lot of questions have been raised on China's potential prior knowledge of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. According to the *New York Times*, citing Western intelligence reports, Chinese officials had asked President Vladimir Putin to hold off his plans up until the end of the Beijing Winter Olympics, something vigorously denied by China. "Had China known about the imminent crisis", said the Chinese ambassador to the US, Qin Gang, on March 15th, 2022, "we would have tried our best to prevent it".¹ While the question remains unresolved, on February 4th, 2022, exactly 20 days before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, both countries released a joint declaration qualifying "the friendship between the two States" as having "no limits", the timing of which certainly raises questions.² Notably, it is highly likely that members of the Politburo, as well as other high ranking government officials, were divided on President Xi Jinping's support for Putin. Indeed, Chinese leadership disappeared from the public eye for a week preceding Russia's invasion in February 2022, hinting at prolonged internal debates.³

The first official Chinese response to the war in Ukraine was published on February 26th, 2022, by State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi.⁴ It consists of five points, and can be summed up as follows:

- “the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries should be respected and protected”, with the “purposes and principles of the UN Charter abided by”;
- “legitimate security concerns of all countries should be respected”;
- the current situation “is not what [China] wants to see”, “restraint” is “the top priority” and “the life and property safety of civilians should be effectively guaranteed”;
- China “supports and encourages all diplomatic efforts conducive to a peaceful settlement of the Ukraine crisis” (note the use of the word ‘crisis’) as well as “direct dialogue between Russia and Ukraine”. The Ukraine “issue” (again, no mention of a war here) has developed in what is dubbed “a complex historical context”;
- China “believes that the UN Security Council should play a constructive role” in mediating the war, but “disapprove[s] of [the invocation of] UN Charter Chapter VII that authorizes the use of force and sanctions in UNSC resolutions.”

China is walking a fine line here. As Nouwens puts it, Beijing “is finding it difficult to adhere to one policy line that bridges its long-held principles of non-interference and territorial integrity and also shows support for Russia.”⁵

Chinese support is reflected in official statements in two ways. First, through direct endorsement of their bilateral relations: on March 7, 2022, Foreign Minister Yi qualified the friendship between both countries as “rock solid”.⁶ On June 15th, 2022, Xi emphasized the willingness of China “to work with Russia to continue supporting each other on their respective core interests [...] as well as on their major concerns.”⁷ And on September 9th, 2022, the Russian transcript of the meeting in Moscow between the chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress, Li Zhanshu, and members of the Duma reads “China understands and supports Russia on issues that represent its vital interests, in particular on the situation in Ukraine.”⁸

Second, through characterizing both NATO and the US as instigators of the war: at the beginning of April 2022, unnamed Chinese officials labeled the US “the initiator of the crisis and contracting party.”⁹ On May 6th, 2022, Le Yucheng assessed that the US “want[s] to profit from the war, and control Europe” and that NATO’s “continued eastward expansion has upset security in Europe and created a big mess.”¹⁰ Karásková et al. also noted that in certain Central European countries (Czechia, Poland, and Hungary), the “Chinese messaging” portrays NATO as ‘Voldemort’, the Harry Potter villain, drawing a parallel between its activities and making both an “entity disrupting international relations.”¹¹

Contradictions in Russian and Chinese transcripts and speeches lead Tiezzi to believe that Beijing’s position has “subtly shifted”¹² between June and September. Russia’s impasse in Ukraine is becoming a burden which China seeks to protect itself from. To do so, Beijing attempts “to erect a firewall between its relationship with Russia and Putin’s war in Ukraine”, doing so with “very limited success”, adds Tiezzi. Chestnut Greitens, on the other hand, believes that China “appears to think that it has found a sustainable pathway.”¹³

Besides, China's actions do not always match its words. In what Chestnut Greitens calls "higher-profile fora", as well as "multilateral settings and institutions," Beijing remains careful. An example of which would be China's abstention, rather than veto, on the UNSC draft resolution that asked for Russia to withdraw its troops on February 26th, 2022.¹⁴ Similarly, on September 30th, 2022, China abstained from voting on a UNSC draft resolution condemning the Russian annexation of Ukrainian lands.¹⁵ On March 24th, 2022 however, China backed a Moscow-led resolution generally calling for attention on the humanitarian situation in Ukraine. Making no mention of Russia's responsibility in the situation, it was subsequently rejected by the UNSC.¹⁶

On February 24th, 2023, China published a statement (China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis) listing the conditions and principles Beijing considers as prerequisites for a long-lasting peace in Ukraine.¹⁷ It is noteworthy that China continues to refer to the situation as a "crisis" rather than a war.

Structured in 12 points, this proposal takes up ideas previously expressed, such as a ceasefire, the importance of humanitarian safety, and the necessity of peace talks. China openly rejects the unilateral sanctions regime and calls for an end to "Cold War mentality," in line with its contestation of the US-led order and its vision of a shift towards a multilateral one. Special attention is furthermore brought upon nuclear safety, grain exports and the stability of "industrial and supply chains," highlighting China's strategic and economic considerations, which will be further investigated in the next chapter. It shall be noted however that Beijing refrained from explicitly calling for the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukrainian territory.

The proposal was positively perceived by Moscow - "We share Beijing's views", said the Russian Foreign Ministry - and is carefully considered by Zelensky, who seeks a meeting with Xi Jinping. However, it is being outright rejected by the US administration, with Joe Biden condemning the proposal stating that it would not be "beneficial to anyone other than Russia."¹⁸

Political and economic determinants of the governmental view

Based on its response, China's main motivation in its position on the war in Ukraine appears to be clear. Beijing contests the US-led, rules-based liberal international order, which it seeks to replace by a "politically multipolar, functionally multilateral and ideologically pluralistic" system¹⁹, with China at its core and where the principles of "indivisible security", sovereignty and territorial integrity are integrally respected. Russia, being the other main revisionist power, as well as a nuclear one and a permanent member of the UNSC, is an ally of choice for Beijing. This is the core and backbone of China's strategy, which builds the principal foundation for its response. This position has remained consistent since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014: Beijing again did not approve of it at the time, but never openly criticized Moscow.

The second determinant at play here is Taiwan. The one-China principle postulates Taiwan as an internal affair, hence Beijing's emphasis on sovereignty and territorial integrity. It is designed to fend off any criticism and repel any action that could be undertaken in support of Taiwan's independence. The Taiwan determinant explains why China has only been

moderate in its support to Russia as the invasion goes, in fact, against a core Chinese principle in international relations.

However, while many comparisons between Ukraine and Taiwan have been drawn, China has been insistent on pointing out the differences. For example, Chinese ambassador to the US Qin Gang stated that comparing the situations in Ukraine and Taiwan was “a mistake”, as they were indeed “totally different things.”²⁰ He continued by asserting that “Ukraine is a sovereign state, while Taiwan is an inseparable part of China’s territory” and pointed out that “It does not make sense for people to emphasize the principle of sovereignty on Ukraine while hurting China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity on Taiwan.” Any variation in that response could justify and open the door for separatism in Taiwan, or even in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region.

Political and economic Relations between China and Russia

China and Russia clearly have geopolitical divergences. The best example of that is the struggle for influence in Central Asia, where multiple Chinese (Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Global Security Initiative, the Belt and Road Initiative [BRI]) and Russian-led (Commonwealth of Independent States, Collective Security Treaty Organization [CSTO], Eurasian Economic Union) multilateral organizations and initiatives find themselves at odd sometimes. In this regard, the case of the Shanghai Cooperation will be particularly interesting to look at. Co-founded and co-led by both China and Russia, its purpose is being debated. Moscow would like to see it being attached to the CSTO in order to form a regional security organization that would counterbalance NATO, something opposed by Central Asian states, which seek ties with the West and do not wish to remain entrapped in the Russia sphere of influence. Beijing, on the other hand, wants it to serve the economic interests laid out by the BRI, while assuming greater influence in security matters and keeping Russia out of the domestic affairs of Central Asian states. The compromise reached so far was based on China’s concept of the Central Asian division of labor, with Beijing responsible for bolstering economic relations while Moscow was entrusted with security matters.²¹ Considering Russia’s military setbacks during the invasion of Ukraine, it remains to be seen whether this accord holds.

On a global stage, however, both countries remain tied by the strategic objective described earlier: a common front against the US-led liberal order. On top of that, Russia has some leverage. Kuo notably mentions energy security (arguably the most important point), military and nuclear technology expertise, and its veto at the UNSC.²² However, while China was Russia’s biggest trading partner in 2021, Russia only accounted for 2% of Chinese trade that year. In contrast, the US and EU accounted for 26%, making the sustainability of these commercial relations much more important for China.²³ As such, Russia has become the junior partner in its relationship with China; it needs China more than China needs it.

As for Ukraine, China’s investments in the country have grown steadily over the years, but remain limited. In 2020, Ukraine exported goods worth about \$7.25 billion to China. While that remains modest, Ciurtin notes that Kyiv holds a central place in supply chains in “fundamental sectors”, such as agricultural products, iron ores and military equipment.²⁴ Additionally, 70% of China’s corn and 60% of its sunflower oil comes from Ukraine, and Chinese companies own strategic infrastructures in the country. Abandoning Ukraine

might prove complicated and costlier for China, which partly explains its desire to see an end to hostilities as soon as possible.

Impacts of the war on China

China does not feel the impact of the war as strongly as Western European countries, which relied on Russia for energy, or countries such as Egypt, the D.R. Congo, Sudan, and Yemen, that imported more than 50% of their wheat – constituting the basis of food supply there – from Ukraine and Russia.²⁵

Following the February 4th, 2022 “no limits” communique, Beijing effectively benefited from an increase in trade with Moscow, receiving cheap carbohydrates and boosting wheat imports.²⁶ China remains careful, however, not to become hyper-dependent on Russia, according to Huang and Lardy.²⁷

Inflation too remains limited; in July 2022, the annual consumer price increase only went up by 2.7%, as opposed to 8.3% in the US in August 2022. More than the war in Ukraine, the pressing issue in China remains to be the consequences of the only-recently lifted zero-Covid policy; and rather than inflation, deflation might be the more tangible issue.²⁸

Diplomatic pressure on China

China is under great pressure from both the US and the EU, which have made it clear that any military support or circumvention of sanctions would have consequences. This has been reflected in official speeches. On April 1st, 2022, Vice-President of the European Commission Josep Borrell stated that “In practice, Beijing’s attitude has been one of pro-Russian neutrality.” While he acknowledged that “China does not condone Russia’s behavior”, he assessed that Beijing “does support Russia’s justifications of the war”.²⁹ On April 5th, 2022, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg commented that “China has been unwilling to condemn Russia’s aggression”, adding that it has “joined Moscow in questioning the right of nations to choose their own path”.³⁰ Furthermore, on September 19th, 2022, US President Joe Biden warned Beijing of the “huge mistake” it would commit by abetting Moscow.³¹

On top of that, both the US and the EU are significantly more important and strategically valuable to Beijing in terms of commercial relations than Russia is, which partly explains the caution in China’s response to the war; the country is simply too intertwined in the global economy to risk sanctions.³²

And indeed, most Chinese companies have so far complied with the sanctions. When VISA and MasterCard pulled out of Russia, UnionPay did not step in. At least two state-owned Chinese banks have refused to issue letters of credits to Russia, and tech companies, such as Huawei, Xiaomi or Lenovo, have scaled back on their presence, exports and investments.³³ From an economic perspective, China’s response is purely motivated by “self-interest”.³⁴ Beijing does not wish to alienate the US nor the EU, and that takes precedence over an overt support to Moscow.

Responses of the public, academia and media in China

Major media outlets

While China's state media unsurprisingly reflects the official, somewhat neutral position of the Chinese government, private media outlets and popular opinion leaders tend to be much more vocal, "especially [about] the blame, and condemnation towards the US" and their subsequent support and empathy towards Russia. Despite some apparent differences, both public and private media outlets rely on a "geopolitical-game framing [...], which provides a monodirectional and simple narrative for the Chinese public to understand the war in the context of US-China strategic competition". This focus on long term geopolitical aspects of the war over other aspects, such as the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, is emblematic for the war's perception in China overall.³⁵

Additionally, it shall be mentioned that despite the putative neutral stance major media outlets adopted, prominent actors such as Xinhua News or CCTV have repeatedly published Russian footage and, at least, partly adopted Russian narratives.³⁶

Social media

Social media users in China seem to be heavily divided on the topic of the Russo-Ukrainian war. Online polls suggest that around 30% of Chinese users voiced support for Russia, 20% expressed support for Ukraine, while around 40% adopted a neutral stance.³⁷

The main reasons for such polarizing results lay in two fundamentally different perceptions of the legitimacy of Russia's war: while one side recognizes it as an invasion of a sovereign state, supporters of Russia view it as an act of defense towards Western expansion and draw parallels to US engagement in the Middle East.

These views rest upon a critical attitude towards US hegemony, a natural empathy for Russia's security concerns over the US, as well as favorable perceptions of Putin's "tough guy" image. Notably, though, the biggest group of Chinese refrain from overtly choosing a side and are primarily concerned with the wellbeing of China itself.³⁸

Academia

The aforementioned different framing and China's national interests form a vastly different foundation for academic discourse in China. Chinese academics overwhelmingly point towards NATO enlargement as a catalyst for Russia's invasion. Through their eyes, the war is yet another proxy war being fought on foreign soil on behalf of two great powers, namely the US and China itself. This view is supported by the idea that the invasion marks a further step towards a declining US hegemony and an accompanied shift in the international order towards a more pluralistic one.³⁹ However, one should be careful to not view Chinese academics as a monolithic block. In fact, just after Russia's invasion, five prominent Chinese scholars issued a joint statement condemning Russia: "No matter how many reasons or excuses Russia may have, invading a sovereign state [...] is a violation of the UN Charter's norms of international relations. (...) We strongly support the actions of the Ukrainian people in defense of their country."⁴⁰ While the statement fell under censorship in China, it stands exemplarily for a diverse academic discourse in China.

Support for Ukraine and Ukrainian Refugees?

China's support for Ukraine or Ukrainians primarily consists of humanitarian aid. On March 8th, 2022, the country proposed a six-point initiative emphasizing its willingness to "ensure the protection of civilians, and prevent secondary human disasters in Ukraine"⁴¹. China is reported to having delivered three batches of humanitarian supplies containing "infant formula, quilts, and moisture-proof mats."⁴² Despite pledging to "avoid politicizing humanitarian issues"⁴³, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian has not hesitated to do so by directly contrasting Chinese humanitarian aid with US arms deliveries: "Will the latest US assistance of weapons bring stability and security to Ukraine or cause more civilian casualties? Which do the civilians in Ukraine need more, food and sleeping bags or machine guns and mortar rounds? It won't be difficult for anyone in his right mind with a shred of common sense to make the right call."

Impacts on the Indo-Pacific security architecture and the relations with the EU

In line with its overall responses to the war, China has been cautious in addressing the roles of the EU and its member countries in the conflict. In a virtual joint conference between Xi Jinping, French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Xi again stressed the importance of "the sovereignty and territorial integrity", as well as "the legitimate security concerns of all countries." Xi declared that "China commends the mediation efforts by France and Germany on Ukraine" and that "China supports France and Germany in promoting a balanced, effective and sustainable European security framework for the interests and lasting security of Europe, and by upholding its strategic autonomy."⁴⁴ While seemingly inconspicuous, highlighting Europe's "strategic autonomy" hints towards China's vision of a multipolar, pluralistic order with Europe loosening its ties to the US.

Similarly, China has refrained from openly communicating implications for the security architecture of the Indo-Pacific. Notably, though, Xi submitted a written speech at the CEO summit of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in November 2022 declaring that the "Asia-Pacific is no one's backyard and should not become an arena for big power contest."⁴⁵

What lies ahead?

China's views on the war in Ukraine primarily depend on three aspects:

- Strategic considerations: Russia is a valuable partner for China in forming a counterweight to the US-led international order.
- Economic considerations: the economic consequences of the war for China have been comparatively light so far. While the country rejects the sanctions in place, it has made sure to not fall victim to economic sanctions itself.

- The Taiwan question: As Russia has violated the principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty of states – principles that China continuously emphasizes – China’s support for Russia is somewhat attenuated.

While China and Russia have strengthened their relations since the beginning of the war, China neither has an interest in excessively increasing its support for Russia, nor to fully give up on its strategic partner. While not being neutral on the matter, China will expectedly attempt to continue its balancing act aiming to not undermine any of the above mentioned core principles. The February 24th proposal reflects those considerations.

Japan: A strong advocate for Ukraine in the Indo-Pacific

Olga Khomenko

- 1** Since the launch of Russia's war, Japan has had a clear and consistent position, strongly criticizing Russia, upholding sanctions against Moscow, and supporting Ukraine.
- 2** The fragility of the international order makes Japanese politicians reconsider the necessity to strengthen national defense efforts.
- 3** Russia's war facilitated the further deepening of Japan's relations with the EU, whereby both stress the importance of maintaining a rules-based international order.

The Government's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine

Immediately after the start of the war, Japan strongly condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine and adopted the Western sanctions regime.⁴⁶ Japan has shown its support for Ukraine since 2014, when then-Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited the country for the first time in June that year. Support of Ukraine became even stronger after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24th, 2022. Being a close US ally, Japan's relations with Russia are overshadowed by the Kuril Islands dispute and the lack of a formal peace treaty. Drawing a clear parallel between Ukraine and Taiwan, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida emphasized the need for cooperation with allies and like-minded countries, and to "never tolerate a unilateral attempt to change the status quo by the use of force in the Indo-Pacific, especially in East Asia."⁴⁷

Since the beginning of the war, Kishida has frequently met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy online, showing support and empathy to Ukraine and its people. For instance, in April 2022 Kishida had six events regarding Ukraine in his schedule, including three official press conferences on Ukrainian topics.⁴⁸ Also, on April 8th, 2022, the Japanese government announced the expulsion of eight Russians, including diplomats, and accused Moscow of killing innocent civilians" in Ukraine. Also, in support of Ukraine, on April 7th, 2022, in his official press-conference Kishida announced the arrival of 20 Ukrainians on the Japanese governmental aircraft and a decision to welcome more refugees in Japan.⁴⁹ It was a historical decision of the Japanese government, which for decades has refused to take in refugees. Until now, Japan has accepted more than 2000 people from Ukraine.

Consequently, Japan became an advocate for Ukraine's cause in the Indo-Pacific. In early May 2022, Kishida visited Indonesia, Vietnam, and Thailand, while Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi visited Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Mongolia.⁵⁰ The aim of their visits was to promote a common Asian position in support of the critical G7 stance on the Russian aggression against Ukraine ahead of the G20 summit in Bali in November 2022. During the summit, Japan, as a member of G7, reassured that "We reaffirm our steadfast support for Ukraine and the Ukrainian people in the face of ongoing Russian aggression, as well as our continued readiness to hold Russia accountable for its brazen attacks on Ukrainian communities, even as the G20 meets to deal with the wider impacts of the war. We all express our condolences to the families of the victims in Poland and Ukraine."⁵¹

During late August 2022, Kishida gave an official online speech at a public event of the Crimea platform in Kyiv, supporting Crimea as Ukrainian territory. Also, Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal and First Lady Olena Zelenska visited Japan in late September 2022 and held meetings with Kishida.

Political and economic determinants of the governmental view

The key political determinants for Japan's strong support of Ukraine are the breach of international law, the threat to the global order posed by Russia's aggression, and, in Japan's view, the many similarities between Russia and China, in relations to Beijing's assertiveness towards Taiwan.⁵² Some degree of diplomatic pressure from the US may have also influenced Japanese decisions. Despite strong economic connections between Japan and Russia, the war in Ukraine saw Japan impose sanctions and restrict transactions with Russia's central bank, freezing assets of persons related to the governmental officials of Russia and Russian oligarchs, as well as assets of eleven Russian banks and their subsidiaries in Japan. It has also introduced measures to prohibit new investment in Russia and implemented a price cap on Russian oil. Moreover, Tokyo revoked Russia's status as a most-favored trading nation and banned imports of wood, vodka, and gold, as well as the export of luxury goods to Russia.⁵³

In December 2022, Japan stated that "The killing of a large number of innocent civilians by the Russian forces in Ukraine is a grave breach of international humanitarian law and war crimes. It is absolutely unacceptable, and Japan vehemently condemns it. The truth about these atrocities must be uncovered and Russia must be held strictly accountable for war crimes."⁵⁴ Ukraine was added to the Japanese government's humanitarian aid platform.⁵⁵ Also, since the beginning of the war, Japan provided massive assistance to Ukraine, including \$200 million in humanitarian aid and \$600 million in financial support. It supported the export of grain from Ukraine worth \$17 million and supplied Ukraine with generators and solar lanterns valued at \$2.57 million. Also, for the first time in history, Japan decided to support a foreign country in a war with non-direct military aid, such as providing Ukraine with drones, bulletproof vests, helmets, winter battle uniform, tents, cameras, binoculars, medical supplies, civilian vehicles, and hygiene products.⁵⁶

In January 2023, Japan became the chair of the G7 for the year. The minister of foreign affairs, Yoshimasa Hayashi, stated during a meeting with UN secretary-general Antonio

Guterres in early January 2023 that they will work together toward strengthening the function of the United Nations and especially its Security Council.⁵⁷

Japan hosts the G7 summit in May 2023 in Hiroshima, and it seems that Japan will support Ukraine and the country will be a priority during the event. Japan made its point in supporting official statements of G7. A mutual statement noted that "We have imposed and will continue to impose further economic costs on Russia, including on individuals and entities – inside and outside of Russia – providing political or economic support for Russia's illegal attempts to change the status of Ukrainian territory."⁵⁸ Also, in his address on the upcoming Hiroshima summit, Kishida stated that, as the chair of the G7, he will not tolerate the breach of international law by force and "will facilitate candid discussions among the G7 leaders to articulate ideas and plans for the future."⁵⁹

The war in Ukraine also influenced Japan's opposition toward war in general. Beforehand, former prime minister Abe's government was criticized for expanding defense spending, but the war in Ukraine and especially the killing of many civilians has shown the fragility of international order, compelling Japanese politicians to reconsider Japanese views on their country's defense.⁶⁰ Even the opposition is now slowly starting to consider the necessity of strengthening Japan's defense, a plan which they had previously opposed.

Academia, media, and civil society

During the first days of the war, Japanese media was confused. It was fascinating to see how 'experts' who had only been to Ukraine a few times and had never been specialists on Ukraine started to give comments on Ukraine and the war on TV. These kinds of comments misled the Japanese audience during the first three to five days of the war. After this initial period, the TV stations started to look for specialists from academia associated with Slavic, Ukrainian, EU, NATO, or British studies, such as professors Atsuko Higashino⁶¹ or Michito Tsuruoka, as well as prominent researchers in Japan on security and military aspects, like Yu Koizumi. They are gathering information from different sources, including Ukraine. Most of them were able to grow their Twitter followers by 10-20 times since the war in Ukraine began.

Still, there is a small "pro-Russian lobby" among Japanese politicians and public intellectuals, including MP Muneo Suzuki and former diplomat and now writer Sato Masaru, who transmit pro-Russian rhetoric and even blamed Japan for not following its own national interests and for joining Western states in their support of Ukraine. In a discussion on the possibility of a visit of Japanese Prime Minister Kishida to Kyiv, MP Suzuki was quoted: "It is said that he is aiming to visit (Ukraine) in February (2023), but I wonder if he is visiting Ukraine in consideration of the geopolitical situation of Japan and national interests. I would like Japan to carefully consider whether Russia or Ukraine is more important. Isn't it necessary to resolve the Northern Territories issue? Are you thinking about a stable supply of energy? Above all, isn't world peace the ultimate goal of politics?"⁶²

There is practically no media in Japan that does not cover the war in Ukraine. Every two weeks, during NHK prime time on Tuesday night, the political show "Close Up Gendaï" covers Ukraine for 45 minutes. Programs like "Good Morning, Japan" and "Sunday Watch" on NHK cover Ukraine almost every morning. Also, TV Asahi, BS Fuji Prime News and TBS

weekend programs, such as “Mr. Sunday”, provide detailed coverage of the war in Ukraine. Recently, because Japanese audience has become a little exhausted with the amount of the harsh war images, media like NHK have taken a new approach and shown the war in Ukraine in their special programs through unique angles of the national premier football league⁶³ or children’s art.⁶⁴

Also, in 2022, the NHK World news channel webpage started its service in Ukrainian language.⁶⁵ Beside placing news on international politics and war in Ukraine, the webpage also introduces Japanese language and features stories about successful Ukrainians living in Japan.

Due to the work of the Japanese media over the last 365 days of the war, more people have become familiar with Ukrainian history, politics, and names of Ukrainian cities. In April 2022, “Kiev” became “Kyiv” because of media coverage of post-colonialism and its toponymic in Ukraine.⁶⁶ Still, there is a disbalance between public TV and commercial channels. Aiming to raise their TV ratings, sometimes private TV stations tend to focus more on the dramatic side of the war, instead of drawing sound conclusions.

Because of such massive media coverage in Ukraine, the Japanese government, politicians, NGOs, and local people took very seriously the problem of accepting refugees from Ukraine. The government eased the bar for issuing visas to Ukrainians who have family and friends in Japan⁶⁷. Foundations like the Nippon Foundation provide refugees substantial financial support of 1 million yen per year.⁶⁸ Some local authorities provide free houses, and companies accept Ukrainians as their local staff. Also, many Japanese volunteers and NGOs have delivered humanitarian aid to Ukraine’s neighbor Poland. A few Japanese people joined the Ukrainian army to fight against Russia, despite the Japanese government’s call to refrain from such action.⁶⁹

Impacts on the Indo-Pacific security architecture and the relations with the EU

On October 7th, 2022, the Ukrainian parliament adopted resolution No. 8108 on recognizing the northern territories of Japan as occupied by the Russian Federation and declared support for Tokyo’s position. The deputy head of the Committee on Humanitarian and Information Policy, Evhenia Kukharuk, said that the “Japanese people consider its occupied territory. We do support Japanese people.”⁷⁰ This move happened after Japan called the four northern islands “illegally occupied” by Russia in April 2022.⁷¹ The decision of the Ukrainian parliament was a political reaction to both the situation in the Indo-Pacific region and a result of the current war with Russia. Before the war, Ukrainian politicians were careful in expressing their official opinion about the status of the northern territories.

The war in Ukraine not only brought Russia and China closer together, but also deepened relations between the EU and Japan. Both sides realized the necessity to cooperate on different fields, not only the economy and energy sector but also cyber security. During the Okinawa summit in May 2022, the president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, emphasized that Japan and the EU are “Not just partners, not just allies – true friends. The EU and Japan are showing the power of democracies working together.”⁷² She also announced a digital partnership between Japan and the EU and emphasized the will

to use the bilateral strategic partnership to diversify and strengthen both sides' supply chains. Also, von der Leyen thanked Kishida for the "solidarity Japan showed by diverting some of its LNG supplies to Europe."⁷³

The Okinawa summit showed that the war in Ukraine has made the EU and Japan closer and made both sides think about how to avoid dependence on energy supply, resources, and goods from Russia and China. As well, to look not only for alternative supply chains, but also alternative partners on the international arena. And as von der Leyen stated: "Our cooperation is excellent – not least on trade, technology and climate action. But there is so much more we can do together."⁷⁴ For sure, more cooperation will occur in the future.

What lies ahead?

Ukrainians became the first big refugee group to be accepted to Japan in 25 years. Still, Japan does not have an established system of social, economic, and cultural integration of refugees. Some Japanese citizens criticize the government for its different approaches to refugees from Ukraine and Syria. In reality, the 2,000 Ukrainian refugees accepted, so far, face many struggles.⁷⁵

First of all, a refugee visa does not allow one to work right away, though it can be changed to a one-year visa. Also, the Japanese language is difficult to learn in a few weeks. For people who have never lived in Asia, the lifestyle is different, and while some of the people who fled to Japan are thankful for a temporary home, they are still having a hard time adjusting.⁷⁶

Despite the fact that Japanese media sometimes like to present images of happy Ukrainian refugees working on cashier desks of discount shops, like Don Quixote or other success stories, the reality is not that ideal. However, in the last twelve months, the visibility of Ukraine and Ukrainians in Japan has increased significantly. The Japanese government and the civil society are helping Ukrainians a lot, and both have demonstrated a strong will to support them in the future.

Taiwan: A fellow country on the front lines

Martin Mandl

- 1** **Russia's invasion of Ukraine has shone a spotlight on Taiwan's precarious status-quo vis-à-vis an increasingly assertive China.**
- 2** **The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government emphasizes Ukraine as "a fellow country 'on the front lines in guarding against authoritarian expansionism'" and uses international attention to advance Taiwan's difficult international relations.**
- 3** **In light of Russia's invasion, the Taiwanese public is increasingly concerned with the relationship to its own assertive neighbor, China.**
- 4** **The EU and its members can offer visibility to Taiwan's cause by fostering exchange and cooperation along the shared values of human rights and democracy.**

The government's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine

The Taiwanese government was among those Indo-Pacific governments that reacted with a clear condemnation of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.⁷⁷ Four days after the invasion, President Tsai Ing-Wen highlighted the Ukrainian "fight against the invasion by a powerful country" and pledged to defend the island's democracy in the face of an increasingly assertive China.⁷⁸ The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP; Minjindang) government's position on the invasion has remained consistent throughout 2022, emphasizing Ukraine as "a fellow country 'on the front lines in guarding against authoritarian expansionism."⁷⁹ The main opposition party, the Kuomintang (KMT; Chinese Nationalist Party), however, has shifted down its criticism of President Tsai's response in light of the November 2022 elections.

Along the lines of "Taiwan can help", the government in an unprecedented way has offered substantive aid, gestures of solidarity, and eased visa access to Ukrainians. "Taiwan can help, and Taiwan is helping!" was a slogan developed to highlight Taiwan's contribution and technical assistance in the global fight against COVID-19. The slogan was used in regard to cooperation on health research and the development of vaccinations, and around donations of medical supplies.⁸⁰ The slogan was a response to the World Health Organization's refusal to reconsider Taiwan's observer status at the World Health

Assembly, and to increase the island's global visibility. Several governments have since advocated for Taiwan's return to the WHA, including the US, the EU, and the G7.

Taiwan also responded to Russia's invasion of Ukraine with an unprecedented wave of financial support. Within weeks of the invasion, several million dollars in government aid and private donations were collected for refugee support in Lithuania, Poland, and Slovakia.⁸¹ The Taiwanese Relieve Disaster Foundation alone raised an additional \$33 million from private donors. In December 2022, the government renewed its supportive stance with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with Kyiv Major Vitali Klitschko for \$1 million "to fund emergency electricity generation in the Ukrainian capital", as well as the donation of blankets, scarves, gloves, and warm clothes. At the time of writing, an additional \$56 million for rebuilding efforts are awaiting legislative approval.⁸²

The early days following the invasion saw public and official gestures of solidarity with Ukraine. In a press conference, Foreign Minister Wu Jaushieh posed in front of a symbolized Ukrainian flag with a field of sunflowers for the yellow lower part.⁸³ The sunflower in itself is a political symbol in Taiwan since the 2014 student protests opposing China-friendly policies by the then ruling KMT.

Lastly, the Taiwanese government announced easier visa access for Ukrainians. Certain limitations, however, apply, as Taiwan does not yet have a comprehensive asylum law. The number of Ukrainians eligible for the facilitated Taiwanese visas and their actual willingness to move to the other side of the world are, therefore, debatable.⁸⁴

Political and economic determinants of the governmental view

The Taiwanese government was able to use the international platform offered by Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine to draw further attention to the island's volatile situation vis-à-vis an increasingly assertive Beijing. The US and other democracies have since reassured Taiwan of their assistance and stepped up informal and formal contacts within the limitations of the diplomatic protocol of Beijing's "One China principle". These contacts, for the time being, culminated in the visit of then-US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi in August 2022. As the highest-ranking US official to visit the island in 25 years, it was met with fierce reactions from Beijing, including unprecedented military maneuvers showcasing the PRC's threat to a de facto independent, democratic Taiwan.

The condemnation of Russia's invasion and the analogies with Taiwan's own situation in face of Beijing's violent rhetoric might have been less outspoken if it was not for an incumbent DPP-led government. The party traditionally takes a stronger stance against China and openly opposes a reunification as demanded by Beijing. The party itself was founded in opposition to the then ruling KMT, the party that had lost the Chinese Civil War but held on to its claim on sovereignty over all of China.

Given the economic and security dependence on the US, a KMT-led government would still have had to follow Washington's lead in condemning Putin's invasion. Given its non-confrontative stance towards Beijing, it could, however, have attempted a rather timid condemnation along the lines of South Korea's initial response.⁸⁵ The KMT, in fact, used the government's initial responses to condemn the DPP government as "angering China".⁸⁶

In light of the November 2022 local elections, the KMT, however, quietens references to Taiwan's and the party's own Cross-Strait relations. The KMT itself is aware of the growing public concern with Beijing's intentions and the diminishing support for rapprochement.⁸⁷ It rather emphasized unresolved domestic issues by calling for "ditching the DPP".

Faced with the global issues surrounding the war in Ukraine and the COVID-19 pandemic, the DPP, on the other hand, tried to bring its national security stance into the local elections. It called for "proudly standing up for Taiwan" and "resist China and preserve Taiwan". This stance paid in terms of mandates in the local councils, where the DPP candidates gained seats from the KMT. It could not make up, however, for the perceived government shortcomings in tackling some domestic issues, such as inflation and affordable housing. With these, the KMT gained mayoral and magistrate positions from the DPP.⁸⁸

A similar thing happened during Tsai's first term in office, when KMT candidate Han Kuo-yu claimed victory in Kaohsiung's mayoral elections. Kaohsiung was a traditional DPP stronghold. Many observers then foretold Tsai's defeat in the 2020 presidential elections. On the national level, the security and Cross-Strait issues prevailed, however, and the DPP secured a second term. Whether we will observe a similar pattern in the 2024 presidential and Legislative Yuan elections will also depend on China's assertiveness towards Taiwan and how the KMT will position itself, especially since Tsai cannot campaign for re-election.

A candidate with a very particular family history of Cross-Strait relations is getting ready to challenge the DPP: Chiang Wan-an, the mayor-elect of Taipei, is the great-grandson of the KMT's former generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek.⁸⁹ It was Chiang Kai-shek who led the KMT to Taiwan at the defeat in the Chinese Civil War. His repeated claims on sovereignty over all of China during Taiwan's martial law period resulted in the island's unresolved status today.

Economically, the war in Ukraine has accelerated the entanglement of Taiwan's economic dependence on China.⁹⁰ Taiwan is the world's largest producer of semiconductors, many of which are produced by Taiwanese firms in mainland China. With Washington's chip embargo, the need for the relocation of Taiwanese production sites has further increased.⁹¹ Taiwan is keen to remain world-leader in production and could use the chips as strategic assets to position itself closer to the EU, the US, and its Indo-Pacific allies.

Again, it will be interesting to see how the KMT positions itself in the upcoming presidential elections. In part, it has been arguing for close and calm relations with China, specifically in terms of the economic dependency. When this dependency is forcefully lessened by the geopolitical necessities following the invasion of Ukraine, the KMT might lose the support of big economic actors traditionally in favor of friendly relations with China.

In terms of Taiwan's trade relations, Russia traditionally is a source of natural resources, including crude oil, and fertilizers, while Taiwanese exports to Russia consist mostly of electronics and electronic parts.⁹² Russia in 2022 was Taiwan's 25th largest trading partner, but the \$5.7 billion trade accounts only for a fraction of Taiwan's overall trade. It compares to \$120 billion with the US and \$23 billion with Germany.⁹³ Taiwan's government swiftly joined the US and the EU in issuing economic sanctions against Russia (and later including Belarus, as well) and an expanded the list of sanctioned items throughout 2022 and into 2023⁹⁴. Russia reacted by putting Taiwan on its "list of unfriendly countries and territories".⁹⁵ As a result of the sanctions, Taiwan's exports to Russia decreased by 35%

compared to 2021 while its imports decreased by only 3%.⁹⁶ As with most of Taiwan's foreign trade, "receiving orders in Taiwan and shipping goods from China" might further add to the trade deficit.⁹⁷

Taiwan's trade with Ukraine was severely affected by Russia's invasion. Trade with Ukraine almost halved in 2022, with Taiwan's exports reduced by 59% and imports by 34%. Trade with Ukraine has not been strong in recent years, lagging since the early 2010s.⁹⁸ Prior to the invasion, Ukraine had sought to balance its trade with Russia by appeasing China and, thus, minimized contacts with Taipei. As a result of Russia's invasion (and China's support of Putin) this might change in Taiwan's favor.⁹⁹

Academia, media, and civil society

Amidst Beijing's aggressive rhetoric and a pessimistic Taiwanese public opinion,¹⁰⁰ Russia's invasion of Ukraine was met along the lines of "Today Ukraine, Tomorrow Taiwan" by the media and civil society.¹⁰¹ As mentioned earlier, it also triggered an unprecedented wave of (financial) support and solidarity with Ukraine. The lights at Kaohsiung's Ai River and Taipei's iconic 101 skyscraper were lit in blue and yellow. Civil society groups arranged demonstrations in support of the Ukrainian resistance.¹⁰² Approximately ten Taiwanese nationals are even reported to have joined the International Legion of Territorial Defense of Ukraine¹⁰³, of which 25-year old Tseng Sheng-guang was the first East-Asian casualty of Russia's war.¹⁰⁴

While many of the comparisons drawn between Taiwan and Ukraine have their shortcomings, the invasion also highlighted some of Taiwan's own issues. The US' "strategic ambiguity" towards Taiwan came under scrutiny with Russia's invasion, resulting in a decreasing trust in US military support in case of a Chinese invasion. This also increased the understanding for the need to include public engagement to build self-defense capacities in an asymmetric warfare.¹⁰⁵ Likewise, it sped up the reorganization of the general draft system and continued military exercises. Taiwan, meanwhile, extended the compulsory military service from four to twelve months amid lessons from Ukraine and recent threats by Beijing.¹⁰⁶ The US (and other democratic governments) responded with a show of goodwill, including the sales of further weaponry, presidential assurances of security commitments, and the mentioned high-ranking visits.

Impacts on the Indo-Pacific security architecture and the relations with the EU

EU-member states, including "dovish"¹⁰⁷ Germany and France, have increased their semi-official contacts with Taiwan as highlighted by several reciprocal visits throughout 2022. Contacts included ministerial and parliamentary delegations in a wide topical area, from lawmaking, culture, and education to economic cooperation.¹⁰⁸ These visits come in light of Europe's newfound interest in the Indo-Pacific and in response to China's increasingly assertive behavior, now also extending to Central and Eastern Europe.¹⁰⁹ But the EU is also Taiwan's largest foreign investor and needs Taiwanese knowhow in the strategic semiconductor sector, as EU representatives highlighted already before Putin's invasion of Ukraine.¹¹⁰ As such, the war in Ukraine may not be the reason for engagement, but has

stressed its urgency amidst the volatile situation in the Taiwan Strait and the existing reliance on China.

On these occasions, President Tsai and her government officials repeat the connotation that, like Ukraine, Taiwan stands on the front line facing “the expansion of authoritarianism” and that with shared “values of democracy and freedom”, Taiwan can contribute to “world peace and prosperity” along the lines of “Taiwan can help”.¹¹¹

While German fighter jets passed Taiwan on route from Australia for their first ever participation in a maneuver in the Indo-Pacific in August/September 2022,¹¹² Taiwan’s key security partner in the Indo-Pacific remains the US. In face of Beijing’s increasingly assertive claims on the island, Taiwan needs US security assurances and military presence in the region. On the grounds of a rules-based order, human rights, and democracy, the EU and its member states can however offer another thing, just as vital to the survival of Taiwan’s vibrant democracy: visibility.

As China is closely watching the West’s response to Russia’s war in Ukraine, it will also calculate the cost of its own potential invasion of Taiwan. The geographic and security landscape is quite different in Taiwan’s case, increasing the military cost of an invasion. But Beijing will also consider the additional cost to its economy and further development. A cost that the EU and its individual members can increase by watching closely what is going on in the Taiwan Strait, and by building mutual relations in face of a bullying neighbor. Chinese President Xi Jinping, more than anything, will consider the cost of his government’s actions to China’s development, given that the legitimacy of his Communist Party rests solemnly on its performance.

What lies ahead?

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, together with an increasingly assertive Chinese rhetoric towards Taiwan, has moved the island nation further away from the mainland. This will likely increase the tensions in the Taiwan Strait and the Indo-Pacific. The current regime in Beijing will not back down on its declared goal of reunifying with Taiwan as part of Xi’s great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. As such, we will witness harsh reactions and increased military pressure on the island as Beijing responds to Taiwan’s domestic politics and international relations.

The Taiwan Strait is the Achilles Heel of the growing Sino-US rivalry and, much like Ukraine, a fault line between the continental powers of Russia and China, on one side, and the NATO/US Pacific alliances, on the other side. Incidents there, whether provoked or unintentional, could easily spiral out of control resulting in a military clash no side wanted, particularly not the 24 million Taiwanese who would suffer the most from such a clash.

Within Taiwan, the DPP will likely continue to use the international attention it can draw from Taiwan-Ukraine analogies to further its image as the defender of a Taiwanese identity and de facto independence for the 2024 presidential elections. How the KMT will position itself, and whether the security stance is enough to secure another DPP presidency, is yet to be seen. It would be the first time for the young Taiwanese democracy that one of the two parties could secure a third consecutive term in office.

South Korea: A timid support for Ukraine

Aneta Roth

- 1** South Korea's initial reaction to Russia's invasion of Ukraine was lukewarm, similar to Seoul's reaction to the annexation of Crimea in 2014. South Koreans, however, feel solidarity towards Ukrainians and would support additional sanctions.
- 2** The government's approach changed only after the US applied economic pressure on Korean exports, but major South Korean companies later stopped operations in Russia anyway.
- 3** The South Korean government is reluctant to provide lethal weapons to Ukraine, an approach that is most likely to remain unchanged as Seoul does not wish to risk Moscow's support for the North Korean regime amidst the heightened tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

The government's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine

South Korea's initial reaction to Russia's invasion of Ukraine was lukewarm. Although then-President of the Republic of Korea, Moon Jae-in, was concerned about the developments in Eastern Ukraine,¹¹³ he did not seem to be particularly keen on implementing any measures that could harm South Korea's economy more than was necessary. In the aftermath of Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to deploy Russian troops to Donetsk and Luhansk, Moon said that "Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity must be respected,"¹¹⁴ but only a few days later, his communications secretary stated that South Korea "can't disregard" the volume of trade with Russia.¹¹⁵

"As a responsible member of the international community,"¹¹⁶ South Korea announced on February 24th, 2022, that it would join the international sanctions imposed on Russia. "The use of armed forces causing human casualties cannot be justified under any circumstances,"¹¹⁷ the President said. However, Seoul refused to impose any additional measures of its own, despite the fact that many other countries (such as the UK or Switzerland) did.¹¹⁸ Only when Moon's administration found out that South Korea was not included in the list of the "partner countries" of the updated US Foreign Direct Product Rule (FDPR), which meant that South Korean firms using US technology would have to seek approval from the US before exporting their products to Russia,¹¹⁹ was Seoul forced to rethink its stance. The FDPR could harm exports of Korean chip makers, such as Samsung and SK Hynix,¹²⁰ and, thus, South Korea almost inflicted upon itself what it was trying to avoid.

After prompt negotiations with the US, the South Korean government suddenly announced on February 28th, 2022, that it would “block the export of strategic items to Russia”, exclude Russian banks from SWIFT, release oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve to help stabilize the global energy market, and consider diverting LNG to Europe.¹²¹ South Korean exporters, such as Samsung and LG, were granted the FDPR exception shortly afterwards,¹²² but they decided to suspend shipments to Russia anyway.¹²³ Korean Air and Hyundai Merchant Marine suspended transports to Russia and Hyundai Motor Manufacturing stopped its Russian car production.¹²⁴ The Russian factory produced 4% of Hyundai's global output before the war, assembling about 200,000 cars per year.¹²⁵ Like for many other carmakers, Hyundai's main motivation to halt operations was the “ongoing global logistics issues with components delivery”.¹²⁶ However, South Korea did not stop doing business with Russia completely; in August 2022, South Korean state-run Korea Hydro and Nuclear Power signed a deal with a Russian state-owned company to build Egypt's first nuclear power plant together.¹²⁷

The government also sent initial humanitarian assistance to Ukraine worth \$10 million¹²⁸, which expanded tenfold in value later throughout the year.¹²⁹ Seoul since then provided bulletproof vests, helmets and medical supplies to Ukraine,¹³⁰ but remains reluctant to provide any lethal weapons despite Kyiv's explicit requests. When Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy made his video address to the South Korean National Assembly in April 2022, where he requested South Korea to provide lethal weapons, less than half of the members showed up, including members of the opposition Democratic Party, as they held a majority in the National Assembly at the time. This was in stark contrast with other countries. For example, in neighboring Japan, President Zelenskyy received a standing ovation in the state Diet. When Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov requested support with anti-aircraft defense systems, South Korean Defense Minister Seo-wook refused.¹³¹ And when five Russian men applied for asylum at the Incheon airport in November 2022, their requests were rejected by the South Korean government stating that “avoiding military draft in one's home country is not [a] valid reason for granting refugee status.”¹³²

Political and economic determinants of the governmental view

Even before the war in Ukraine, South Korea has always tried to be a good ally to the United States without undermining its relations with the Kremlin. After the Russian annexation of Crimea, Seoul refrained from imposing its own sanctions on Moscow, although it did comply with the sanctions imposed by the United States and other countries, and did not recognize Crimea as part of Russia.¹³³ There are two major reasons why Seoul did so: mutual trade and North Korea.

In 2021, Russia ranked as South Korea's 11th largest export and 8th largest import partner.¹³⁴ South Korea imports Russian naphtha, crude oil, coal, LNG and other raw materials,¹³⁵ and Hyundai Motors, LG and Samsung made investments into facilities in Russia.¹³⁶ With high energy prices and decreased imports after the war began, South Korea experienced a trade deficit and high consumer prices for months. This aspect was also highlighted by the leader of the Democratic Party, Lee Jae-myung, during the presidential election campaign in the beginning of 2022. Lee, who labeled himself an “economy president”, said during the campaign that the government should “prepare

countermeasures for businesses that rely on imports and exports that can be affected by the war and related sanctions.”¹³⁷

However, it is important to mention that the war in Ukraine has also brought some economic benefits to South Korea's businesses. Despite Seoul's strong reluctance to provide lethal weapons to Ukraine, it has managed to secure substantial arms supplies to Poland. In a framework agreement signed by Polish and South Korean officials in July 2022, Warsaw agreed to purchase 980 K2 Black Panther battle tanks, 648 K9 howitzers, and 48 FA-50 light attack fighter jets. The value of the whole deal is estimated to amount to \$14.5 billion, which makes it one of Poland's "most important and largest" defense purchases in recent years. For Korea Aerospace Industries (KAI), South Korea's sole aircraft maker, the deal represents the biggest export of the FA-50 fighter jets ever. As a result, South Korea's arms sales doubled in 2022 compared to the previous year.¹³⁸

Meanwhile, North Korea seems to be a more significant factor in the Russo-Korean relations, as it is seen as a “direct and serious threat” in the Indo-Pacific by its southern neighbor.¹³⁹ Whether it is because of the shared history or Russia's vote in the UN Security Council, Seoul believes Moscow exerts a special kind of influence over Pyongyang. Now, this concern seems to be ever more justified. North Korea, in hope of receiving economic aid, military equipment, and support for its nuclear program from Russia, is one of the few countries supporting Moscow's occupation of Eastern Ukraine. According to a US report, North Korea even supplied Russia with weapons to be used in Ukraine, even though Pyongyang denied the accusations.¹⁴⁰ South Korea simply does not want to risk Moscow's closer alliance and military support to Kim Jong-un's regime. When President Putin accused South Korea of supplying weapons to Ukraine in October 2022,¹⁴¹ the South Korean President went to great lengths to explain that South Korea has never done so.¹⁴² Putin then said that such actions would be equal to Moscow sending arms to North Korea.¹⁴³

Academia, media and civil society

The response of the civil society in Korea seemed to be more resolute than that of the government, and it seems like South Koreans would welcome a stronger response to Russia. This view is, however, not shared by the media that are rather neutral, mostly echoing the government's stance, or at least not openly criticizing it.

After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, around 300 people protested in front of the Russian embassy in Seoul and the Seoul municipality even highlighted the main sights in the colors of the Ukrainian flag.¹⁴⁴ By the beginning of March 2022, South Koreans managed to raise \$3 million in aid to Ukrainian citizens.¹⁴⁵ Although some world-famous Korean idols have been criticized for not using their platform to condemn Russia or stand up for other important matters,¹⁴⁶ some Korean celebrities publicly voiced their support for Ukraine,¹⁴⁷ and a prominent professor from Korea Advanced Institute of Science & Technology (KAIST), a top South Korean university, said “[w]e're all Ukrainians now.”¹⁴⁸

When asked whether they feel like the war in Ukraine is “not their problem”, up to 80% of South Koreans disagree. In fact, according to a survey conducted by Ipsos, 77% of Koreans feel like their country is facing a significant risk linked to the war. Although the survey does

not mention what exactly the risk would be, the respondents said they would support additional sanctions against Russia.¹⁴⁹

Korean media, however, do not share this view. According to *The Korea Herald*, one of the leading South Korean media outlets, “economic and financial sanctions against the world’s 11th-largest economy and one of the biggest commodity producers, if expanded or extended, could lead to more pitfalls for Korean businesses.”¹⁵⁰

Impacts on the Indo-Pacific security architecture and the relations with the EU

Although South Korea unveiled its first ever Indo-Pacific strategy in November 2022, unlike Japan's recent National Defence Strategy, it does not mention the impacts of the war in Ukraine on the Indo-Pacific region. Neither does it mention the potential for cooperation with European countries. However, the war has already brought South Korea and European countries closer together.

South Korea was among the three Indo-Pacific regional powers invited to participate at the NATO's Madrid Summit in June 2022, where President Yoon cautioned about the “threat to universal values”, referring to Vladimir Putin's Russia.¹⁵¹ In light of improving NATO-South Korean cooperation, we can expect that just like Poland, more European countries will be open to procuring military technology and equipment from South Korea. NATO's Central and Eastern European members are the prime suspects, given their ongoing attempt to rid themselves of old Soviet-era technology and modernize their militaries without prolonging their dependencies on Russia, a cause of increased importance for the EU in light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

What lies ahead?

South Korea's stance on the war in Ukraine is largely influenced by two factors: trade with Russia and relations with North Korea. Since both factors are stable variables in South Korea's foreign policy, its stance on the war in Ukraine will most likely remain unchanged in the near future.

While Seoul is economically not dependent on Moscow, Russia represents an important source of raw materials for South Korea's economy. As Pyongyang is accelerating its missile tests, it is highly unlikely that Seoul would change its stance about the provision of weapons to Ukraine, or impose additional sanctions on Russia, especially when President Putin made his threats clear. And as regards to energy imports from Russia, experts suggest that South Korea should rather look around for more sustainable options that would also help with its environmental pledges.¹⁵² As Industry Minister Lee Chang-yang recently said, South Korea plans to “increase gas and oil reserves”¹⁵³ and “will boost energy self-sufficiency by expanding both nuclear power and renewable energy generations.”¹⁵⁴

North Korea: Reigniting old alliance?

Lucia Husenicová

- 1** North Korea continues with its pragmatic foreign policy known since the times of the Cold War to receive certain benefits and advantages.
- 2** North Korean media repeat the official Russian position often adding quotes from western conspiracy media and websites.
- 3** The international consensus on nuclear disarmament of North Korea is severely weakened by this conflict.

The government's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine

The North Korean government did not react to the Russian invasion of Ukraine for three days. On February 27th, 2022, South Korean media quoted commentary¹⁵⁵ published in North Korea that differed quite considerably to the rest of the world. North Korean media, citing governmental positions, directly blamed the expansion of NATO as a reason for Russia's action and repeated the phrase that Russia's security was threatened by it. The following day, a spokesperson for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterated this position by blaming the hegemonic policy of the US and the West.¹⁵⁶

In the DPRK's official position, those responsible for the situation in Ukraine are first and foremost the US for undermining the security environment in Europe, through NATO expansion to the east, and the failure to provide Russia with security guarantees. In addition, the spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs mentioned the US wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and involvement in Syria as contradicting Washington's calls for respect of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. In addition, the DPRK's ambassador to the UN repeated this position in his speech held at the UN General Assembly on March 2, 2022, and in a subsequent vote, North Korea was one of only five countries that voted against the resolution condemning the Russian invasion and calling for a withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukraine territory.¹⁵⁷

The DPRK's stance on the war has not changed since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Within the UN structure, North Korea voted against the suspension of Russia from the Human Right Council.¹⁵⁸ In addition, in July 2022, the DPRK recognized Donetsk and Luhansk as independent republics.¹⁵⁹ The support for Russian politics by North Korean

representatives did not change, and it led to an increase in mutual contacts and negotiations. In September 2022, news appeared that the DPRK and Russia agreed to resume cross-border rail traffic for the first time since 2020.¹⁶⁰ In the late autumn, US intelligence asserted that North Korea is supplying the Russian paramilitary Wagner group with weapon systems.¹⁶¹

Political and economic determinants of the governmental view

To understand North Korean behavior and its position vis-à-vis the Russian invasion of Ukraine we need to take into consideration the position North Korea finds itself in international relations. North Korea is one of the most isolated states when it comes to international contacts and participation in international organizations and events. The isolation has deepened in recent years, firstly after an unsuccessful summit meeting between General Secretary Kim Jong Un and US President Donald Trump in 2019 and, more profoundly, when North Korea completely closed its borders at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw most foreign diplomats leave Pyongyang over the course of 2020 and 2021. Currently, Russia still has an ambassador residing in the country, which helped within the last year in a restart of the mutual relationship. Moreover, North Korea is facing a strict sanctions regime imposed in the aftermath of missile and nuclear testing from 2009 to 2017. Besides the sanctions forbidding trade of materials usable for military purposes, the latest round of sanctions curbed the import of oil and gas to the country, too. In this situation, North Korea could only rely on the black market, as well as those countries and companies who managed to find a way to avoid restrictions. Russia and its companies were long suspected of these activities,¹⁶² together with China.¹⁶³

In addition, North Korean foreign policy since the Cold War was closely connected to the position of the United States. When looking back at the development of nuclear and missile programs we can see common paths, such as North Korea increasing its testing when the new administration in the US was sworn in, or when there was lower activity within the US administration regarding its policy towards North Korea. Since the inauguration of the Biden administration, no clear US policy towards North Korea has been announced, and North Korea's attempts to increase tensions with last year's missile testing did not change the situation and did not bring the possibility to negotiate some advantages from the US. It is no surprise that North Korea decided to support Russia in this international environment. Clearly, the North Korean government expects to benefit from this position. There are several areas in which it can benefit:

- North Korean relations with Russia have been pragmatic since the Cold War and often based on the personal relations of the leaders. The renewed partnership can give North Korea a stronger position vis-à-vis its relations with the US and South Korea as the international denuclearization effort was based on the joint pressure of all parties involved, including Russia and China. Nevertheless, the further development of the North Korean nuclear program is still not in Russian or Chinese interests as it may lead to a regional arms race.¹⁶⁴
- As the sanctions are imposed now on Russia, there is a chance that Russia will be less willing to implement a sanction regime against North Korea. The first signs came when Russia and China vetoed the UN Security Council resolution proposed

by the US to strengthen the sanctions regime against North Korea in May 2022.¹⁶⁵ Later in the year, the possibility of admitting North Korean workers to Russia and Russian-controlled territories of Ukraine was already mentioned by the Russian ambassador to the DPRK.¹⁶⁶

- Talk about the potential nuclear strike by Russia is also in line with North Korean politics, as it clearly shows the importance of the possession of nuclear weapons and their deterrence function, and gives North Korea leverage for any potential demands to denuclearize.

We can conclude that North Korea sees the benefits that its support of Russia can bring; in the short-term the further violation of sanctions against North Korea when it comes either to weapons trade or allowing North Korean workers to return to Russia or move to Ukraine which are direct sources of income for the regime. At the same time, the mid-to-long-term benefits could be the renewed partnership as a source of support vis-à-vis the pressure of the UN and the US to denuclearize.

Academia, media, and civil society

When looking at the reporting of North Korean media (available through KCNA watch),¹⁶⁷ we see that North Korean media is using the same phrasing and reasoning as Russia, as well as conspiracy-prone websites and media worldwide. On several occasions, the war in Ukraine was termed a proxy war between the US, the West, and Russia. The US and European allies are blamed for prolonging the war by supplying Ukraine with military support, according to the KCNA, Pyongyang Times, and Voice of Korea, and dubbed as extremely dangerous and aggravating for the whole situation. In addition, news about secret labs producing biological and chemical weapons appeared in North Korean media, as did Russian media's claims that Ukraine is attempting to procure a dirty nuclear bomb.

The media coverage in North Korea is not surprising given that the media only reiterates governmental positions and often directly quotes or reprints the statements of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the DPRK.

Impacts on the Indo-Pacific security architecture and the relations with the EU

We are clearly in an era when a change in the international order is looming over us. The more Russia is isolated from the West, which will continue regardless of how long the war lasts and what it ends will be, the more this will lead to the increased orientation of Russia towards Asia. We can already see glimpses of this in the case of Russia's oil and gas agreements with China and India. What we must take into consideration here is the potential division of the world into competing blocs or arrangements that do not need to be regional in a geographical sense but which will more likely be based on the division between democratic and non-democratic states. We have been seeing the trend of non-democratic countries cooperating in the case of Iran-Syria-Libya-North Korea when it comes to missiles or nuclear programs since the end of the Cold War. However, up until now, none of these non-democratic cooperating partners were one of the dominating

players in international relations. This possible arrangement will likely have China in it, which is a rising power in international relations. China might likely dominate it. Russia will likely be weakened, especially vis-à-vis China, and become just a part of the arrangement, not its significant player.

North Korea, as another member of this arrangement, will certainly benefit from it, as it will not face a unified position of all the powers towards its nuclear program, as was the case since the early 2000s. That will give the country a chance to develop its missile and nuclear program further and potentially modernise its conventional armed forces. In addition, this new arrangement is expected not to abide by existing international norms, giving North Korea an opportunity to avoid sanctions regimes and implement economic reforms. Membership in this arrangement could provide the country with a source of legitimacy as a non-democratic country, in the same way Cold War divisions provided.

When looking at the EU's position in the Indo-Pacific region, and specifically on the Korean Peninsula, the South Korean government was interested in the EU's involvement in the denuclearization issue, especially because of the EU's participation and mediating role in a similar agreement with Iran. However, North Korean representatives did not share the same approach regarding the EU. For North Korea, the issue of its nuclear program has been connected to the US since the end of the Cold War. The US was and is the actor North Korea is most interested in talking to. However, if China and Russia will support North Korea's position, there might be a need for a mediator in the whole issue, which the EU could potentially be interested in. And if the EU wants to show its interest and influence in the region, in this specific case it will need to step up its expertise on this issue and broaden its cooperation with the South Korean government and other partners in the region.

What lies ahead?

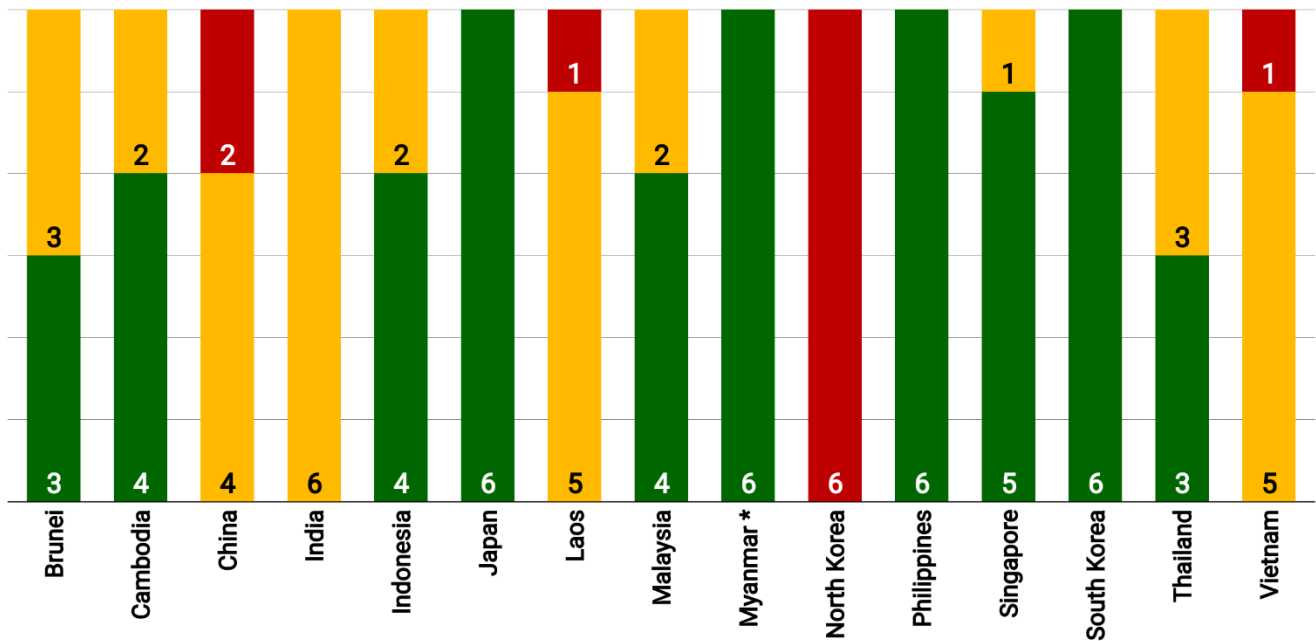
North Korea is one of few countries that has openly supported Russian actions since the start of the war in Ukraine last February. The institutions, official state media, and diplomatic representatives are using the same rhetoric as Russia and its media. In addition, North Korean representatives vote against resolutions and positions within the UN structure that condemn the Russian war in Ukraine. Because the North Korean government apparently thinks that, through this behavior, it will receive some benefits, there is a very low possibility that its position will change in the short or mid-term perspective. We can potentially expect greater support for Russia and more voting against any document criticizing the war or Russian conduct in it.

A year of Russian aggression at the UN General Assembly

East Asian states' votes at the UN GA 11th special emergency session



Yes Abstain No



* Myanmar's permanent representative to the UN does not represent the currently ruling military junta

UN GA Resolution no.	Yes	Abstain	No	Description
A/RES/ES-11/1	10	4	1	Condemnation of aggression (first resolution following Russian attack)
A/RES/ES-11/2	9	5	1	Humanitarian consequences of aggression
A/RES/ES-11/3	4	7	4	Suspension of Russia's membership in UN Human Rights Council
A/RES/ES-11/4	9	5	1	Territorial integrity of Ukraine
A/RES/ES-11/5	5	8	2	Remedy and reparation for aggression against Ukraine
A/RES/ES-11/6	10	4	1	Comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine (one-year anniversary resolution)

Data: United Nations Digital Library

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India: From non-alignment to multi-alignment - reinforcing the “India Way” of diplomacy

Vladimíra Ličková

- 1** India maintains proactive neutrality; not condemning Russia but calling for an end of the hostilities, and a return to diplomacy and dialogue.
- 2** India’s position should be understood by its complex relations with both Russia and the West, its national interests, and geostrategic balancing, all of which are encompassed in the publicly hailed “India way” of diplomacy.
- 3** India criticizes Europe’s Eurocentrism and the West for turning a blind eye to many problems in (but not only) Asia, most vocally Afghanistan, which Delhi perceives as an equally problematic issue and denounces the chaotic exit of Western powers.
- 4** Considering India’s current G20 Presidency, its leadership might indicate ambitions of a greater involvement in mediating the Ukraine conflict.

The government’s response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine

As Russia’s aggression against Ukraine unfolded, Delhi’s immediate and most pressing concern was the need to protect its citizens (mostly students) in the Eastern European country. In a further response, India’s permanent representative to the United Nations, T. S. Tirumurti, reiterated India’s call for an urgent cessation of violence and an end to all hostilities, stressing that there is no other choice but to return to diplomacy and dialogue.¹⁶⁸ Considering the need to evacuate its nationals, abstaining from the late February 2022 UN Security Council vote to call an emergency UN General Assembly meeting may have seemed like India’s best bet to avoid offending either side. However, the logic behind Delhi’s behavior is rooted in a deeper complex of Russia-India relations.

Vocal condemnation of Russia from the democratic world and India’s specific ties with both Russia and the West have turned a spotlight on Delhi’s foreign policy steps. The democratic community is trying to persuade the Indian leadership to join it in its criticism of Moscow. Yet, India’s position of formal neutrality is staying unshakably staunch. Although some would associate this with India’s formerly active membership in the Non-Aligned Movement during the Cold War era, we would beware of this nomenclature, as the South Asian country’s foreign policy has undergone a transformation over the past

decades. In the mid-2000s, “multi-alignment” started to emerge and has intensified since the National Democratic Alliance’s (NDA) first tenure in 2014.¹⁶⁹ In practical terms, India upholds its core interests (ranging from security and development to promotion of its influence and values) and order in international relations by strengthening its engagement in multilateral institutions, and the use of strategic partnerships.

Therefore, Delhi has consciously refrained from public condemnation of Russia and abstained from all votes at the UNSC, the UNGA resolutions (aggression against Ukraine, humanitarian consequences of the war, suspension of Russia’s membership in the Human Rights Council, territorial integrity of Ukraine, reparation for aggression in Ukraine), and the UN Human Rights Council, as well as the International Atomic Energy Agency.¹⁷⁰

Nevertheless, during the visit of the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in India at the end of March 2022, India’s External Affairs Minister (henceforward just “EAM”) S. Jaishankar reaffirmed India’s appeals to cease the violence, turn to dialogue and diplomacy, and respect international rules, the UN Charter, sovereignty and territorial integrity.¹⁷¹ Moreover, at the beginning of September 2022, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi reinforced his stance to President Vladimir Putin, stating that “this is not the era of war ... Democracy, diplomacy and dialogue – these things help the world.”¹⁷² Despite this, there has been no change in India’s neutral position so far, with Delhi continuously highlighting that “India is on the side of peace and will remain firmly there” and supplementing its arguments and reactions that justify its behavior.¹⁷³

Political and economic determinants of the governmental view

Behind Delhi’s unchanged position lie various determinants influenced by both historic and current political-economic ties with Moscow. As mentioned earlier, since the Modi-led government first came to power in 2014, India’s foreign policy has been defined by its multi-vector strategic partnerships, ever-growing emphasis on India’s own and independent diplomacy, and its contempt for Eurocentrism, imperialism, and Western “hypocrisy”. From a historical point of view, India’s long-standing relationship with Russia stems from the era of the Soviet Union, which supported India at the UN on the strategically important issue of Jammu and Kashmir, as well as on its relation to Bangladesh and China. It was also during this era that strong defense ties were developed. Although Russia is still a key supplier of defense technologies to India, the share of procured military equipment decreased from 70% in 2012-17 to below 50% in 2017-21.¹⁷⁴ The differences are being compensated by defense contracts with Western partners (Israel, France, and the US), which further signals the need to have well diversified and balanced partnerships that in the first place serve Indian national interests and autonomy. When it comes to Western criticism of Russia-India defense ties, Delhi’s argument is derived from history and criticism of Western help in arming Pakistan:

“So, we are talking about principles and let’s talk a little about history. We have a long-term relationship with Moscow, and it is important to look at the history of that relationship. It was built in the period when Western democracies used to arm a military dictatorship next to us called Pakistan and deny India defensive weapons.”¹⁷⁵

For India, the Ukraine War is also a matter of principles based on the respect for the territorial integrity of all states. In this sense, India feels betrayed, because when it raised territorial integrity of Jammu and Kashmir in the UNSC, the Council did not respond and allowed Pakistan to occupy part of Kashmir, which lasts until today. The current strength of bilateral relations also emanates from the shared similarities between Putin and Modi's populist political styles.

Russia is India's traditional trading partner with a total trade turnover of \$13.1 billion (although India has a trade deficit of \$6.6 billion), making Russia its 25th largest trade partner in 2021-22.¹⁷⁶ The top imported commodities consisted of oil, fertilizers, coal, and military equipment, while exports were dominated by food products and pharmaceuticals. However, since the start of the war, Russia strengthened its position and became the top-five trading partner of India, with a total trade turnover of \$31 billion (further deepening India's trade deficit to \$27.2 billion) from April to November 2022.¹⁷⁷ Whereas products imported from Russia typically included a mix of fuels, machinery, fertilizers, and consumables, in 2022 (caused by a steep increase in oil purchases) fuels and fertilizers alone accounted for 91% of all imports from Russia.¹⁷⁸ India needs to import 85% of its oil needs, for which the top suppliers were typically Middle East countries (Iraq, Saudi Arabia, UAE), West Africa and the US.¹⁷⁹ This has completely changed in less than a year; in October 2022, Russia became India's largest oil supplier, with its share in total oil imports rising from 2% prior to the war to 25% in January 2023.¹⁸⁰ Moscow emerged also as Delhi's top supplier of fertilizer, which is not included in the Western sanctions. India's oil purchases came under scrutiny from Western countries calling on India to stop buying discounted Russian oil, join the sanctions, and the price cap imposed recently. Indian authorities, however, vehemently defend their purchases and present their unshakable stand:

*"We still buy only a quarter of what Europe buys in one afternoon. There is no moral conflict. We don't buy from X or Y. We buy whatever is available. The government does not buy, it's the oil companies which do the buying, where the oil is the cheapest."*¹⁸¹

*"The oil import in the EU is six times what India has imported. We do not import (gas) while the EU imported €50 billion worth (of gas). I understand that there is a conflict situation (in Ukraine). I also understand that Europe has a point of view. But for Europe to make choices which prioritizes its energy needs and then ask India to do something else ... And bear in mind, today, Europe is buying a lot (of crude oil) from the Middle East. The Middle East was traditionally a supplier for an economy like India. So, it puts pressure on prices in the Middle East as well."*¹⁸²

On the other hand, India's bilateral trade with Ukraine amounts to four times less than with Russia: \$3.4 billion in FY 2021-2022, followed by a steep decrease to only \$386 million from April–November 2022.¹⁸³ In our view, the tendencies of India's bilateral trade with Russia and Ukraine reveal what we have addressed previously in practical terms: the overall position of Delhi regarding the conflict is a direct result of Delhi's realist and pragmatic foreign policy, which prioritizes national interests, chiefly economic and national development as well as underlining the independence in its foreign policy. This can be, furthermore, illustrated by statements of EAM Jaishankar:

"Yes, I put the interests of the Indian public first. It is my duty to ensure that when it comes to securing fuel, fertilizer, or food Indian public does not pay the cost of some other countries' actions or also some other regions' actions. That is the way that foreign policy should be conducted."¹⁸⁴

"...We have a range of interests and a range of partners. Obviously, we are trying to maximize our gains..."¹⁸⁵

"It's better to engage the world on the basis of who we are, rather than try and please the world as a pale imitation of what they are. This idea that others define us, that we need to get approval somewhere – that is an era we have to put behind us."¹⁸⁶

What's more, India argues that it has been in talks to expand trade with Russia prior to the war: "New Delhi and Moscow have been engaged in talks to expand trade relations much before February 24"¹⁸⁷ and that it helps secure prices of oil on the global market low.¹⁸⁸

For India, besides the conflict being an issue of principles and values, it also has practical consequences of higher prices of energy, and food, inflation, and unrest in Asia and Africa. Considering the food crisis, India imposed various protectionist measures and banned wheat exports in May 2022, wheat flour exports in August 2022 (despite previous plans to export 12 million tons compared to 8 million tons in 2021), and rice exports later in September 2022 due to unexceptional droughts.¹⁸⁹ In January 2023, the government also raised additional levies on domestically produced crude and export of refined oil (diesel and aviation turbine fuel – ATF) arguing that tax rates were cut in December 2022 (following a decline in global crude oil prices), but a rise in international oil prices since then has necessitated an increase in a windfall tax.¹⁹⁰ Nevertheless, the government is reviewing the windfall levies on crude oil every fortnight since July 1st, 2022.

Moreover, Delhi experiences substantive external pressure on the political and economic level from its Western partners. However, according to the US deputy secretary of treasury, Wally Adeyemo, there is no evidence of Indian companies circumventing imposed sanctions.¹⁹¹ Despite the introduction of the international trade in Rupee by the Reserve Bank of India in July 2022 and the government's desire to expand trade and narrow a ballooning deficit with Russia, Indian exporters are wary of shipping to Russia and only a few transactions took place by now.¹⁹² Some companies openly expressed their fears of being sanctioned by the West and large Indian lenders are also reluctant to process direct rupee trade transactions with Russia, months after the mechanism was put in place, also for concerns of being sanctioned.¹⁹³

Apart from the aforementioned logic defining Delhi's stance on the Ukraine conflict, interests of big Indian businesses also affect, to some extent, India's behavior. Businesses such as Mukesh Ambani's yarn-to-petrochemicals conglomerate Reliance Industries and Gautam Adani's ports-to-coal enterprise Adani Group are making huge profits from the surge of global commodity prices since the start of the war. Shares of Reliance and Adani Group have risen significantly since February 2022.¹⁹⁴ Despite announcing huge investments into green energy projects, the two hydrocarbon tycoons find it hard to turn away from their mainstay businesses because of the current circumstances on global markets. Although our view is that the government's stance towards Russia's war in Ukraine is shaped mainly by its political, economic, and geo-strategic interests, several

studies further demonstrate the link and personal ties between Prime Minister Modi and these businessmen, with the government often bending its political will in their favor.^{195,196}

On the domestic political level, there is no serious political contestation between the two major parties, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Congress, in regard to the war. Only a few Congress party members voiced unease:

"Russia is a friend ... but for India to go suddenly silent on it will be seen as a disappointment by Ukraine and its friends. It does not reflect well when a country like India who aspires for a UN Security Council seat goes completely silent on internationally recognized principles ... Friends need to be told when they are wrong."¹⁹⁷

In this case we can clearly observe that in Indian political circles Russia is strongly perceived as an ally and a rounded partner.

Responses of the public, academia and media in India

The views and perceptions of the civil society, including leading public intellectuals and media, to a great extent follow the government's line. However, academic circles are more vocal about India's likeliness in mediating the conflict. For instance, a well-established academic and columnist, Raja Mohan, highlights potential Indian diplomatic contribution to peacemaking and ending the conflict.¹⁹⁸

A public survey conducted in India, moreover, shows that 72% Indians support giving refuge to Ukrainians, 79% want India to avoid getting militarily involved, and 62% support India in continuous diplomatic ties with Russia. Furthermore, only few Indians support economic sanctions by India on Russia, the banning of oil and gas imports from Russia (ca. 40% for both), and the provision of weapons to Ukraine (38%).¹⁹⁹ This reflects how overall perceptions of civil society align very close to Delhi's official policy narrative. The views on Russia are mostly neutral and pragmatic due to close relations with Russia and overall authority and support of populist governments represented by charismatic leaders.

Support initiatives for Ukrainian refugees do not translate much in practical terms. The number of Ukrainians is negligible, and more accurate data will be released from UNHCR only in the coming years. Most refugees in India are presently from Myanmar, Sri Lanka, China (Tibet), and Afghanistan.²⁰⁰ Nevertheless, India has delivered several humanitarian relief packages to Kyiv. In March 2022, India donated the first package to Ukraine via Poland, and in the last six months dispatched eleven more consignments (approx. 97.5 tonnes) of humanitarian aid not only to Ukraine, but also to neighboring countries like Romania, Moldova, Slovakia, and Poland.²⁰¹

Impacts on the Indo-Pacific security architecture and the relations with the EU

Regarding the role of the EU and its member states in the conflict, the Indian side maintains its non-intervention principle and avoids comments on the reactions of other countries. For Delhi, it is much more important to balance China and, if addressing other actors, it is for the purpose of advocating its own position. This can be observed in statements by EAM Jaishankar on the sidelines of the GLOBSEC 2022 Bratislava Forum, where he emphasized Western hypocrisy and Eurocentrism:²⁰²

“Europe has to grow out of the mindset that its problems are the world’s problems, but the world’s problems are not Europe’s problems. If I were to take Europe collectively which has been singularly silent on many things which were happening, for example in Asia, you could ask why would anybody in Asia trust Europe on anything at all.”

“We have a difficult relationship with China, and we are perfectly capable of managing it. If I get global understanding and support, obviously it is of help to me, but this idea that I do a transaction – I come in one conflict because it will help me in conflict two, that’s not how the world works. A lot of our problems in China have nothing to do with Ukraine and have nothing to do with Russia. They are predated.”

What’s more, the importance of regional issues where India aims to project its own ambitions, but at the same time where China plays a significant role, is obvious also from openly refusing to choose one of the sides and accept the bipolar world view (the US vs. China). In this light, India tries to hedge and balance China and further Sino-Russian convergence, as well as to define its own place (with its growing assertiveness) in the international arena and alter from others:

“This is a construct you’re trying to impose on India. I don’t think it’s necessary for India to join any axis. I am the fifth of the world’s population and the fifth largest economy. I am entitled to make my own choices which will be a balance of India’s values and interests.”²⁰³

European countries and the US are still trying to pressure India to change its stance on Russia.. However, the EU is aware that it will not reach an agreement with Delhi on this, and the business continues as usual, focusing instead on bilateral trade, free trade agreements, and climate funding. During Modi’s official visit to Denmark, France, and Germany in May 2022, the European countries experienced India’s “sensitivity” in communicating positions towards the Russian aggression. India paid close attention to the wording of the joint communiqués so as not to indicate anything different from its neutral position towards Russia. This can be observed in the joint communiques with Copenhagen,²⁰⁴ Berlin,²⁰⁵ and Paris.²⁰⁶ Delhi, as usual, balanced the topic of Ukraine with the topic of Afghanistan, criticizing mainly the consequences of a chaotic exit of Western powers. According to Delhi, Europe has not responded to violations of the rules-based order in Asia for more than ten years.

What lies ahead?

In conclusion, India maintains its dominant position in South Asia and, at the same time, is aware of its growing influence in the international arena, which simultaneously causes its growing assertiveness. It defines itself as neutral in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine and offers itself to be a mediator between both parties – although, so far, without important results. Delhi's delicate balancing position is based on historical, and political-economic ties with Moscow, which encompass Russian support of India on the Jammu and Kashmir issue, and Russian military equipment and energy exports (mainly oil) to India.

Moreover, possible anti-Russian positions could strengthen Russia's strategic partnership with China, which is not in Delhi's interests. India's strategic autonomy is, furthermore, based on the policy of multi-alignment, which translates into geopolitical pragmatism, prioritizing national interests, and maintaining good relations with all parties. Additionally, authorities in India are counterbalancing the topic of Ukraine by highlighting the instability in Afghanistan, which is considered equally serious and a direct consequence of the chaotic withdrawal of the Western powers. On behalf of India's current Presidency in G20, the country has indicated its ambitions to bridge the two conflicting sides although avoiding direct use of the word "mediator."²⁰⁷

Indonesia: Maintaining the free-and-active doctrine, staying cordial with Russia

Omar Rasya Joenoes

- 1** The Indonesian government still maintains its longstanding “*Bebas-Aktif*” (“free-and-active”) foreign policy doctrine.
- 2** Russia still enjoyed strong support from the Indonesian public even months after the war started, something Moscow publicly lauded not long before the G20 summit in November 2022.
- 3** The EU’s engagements with Indonesia can still be improved by firstly solving its low visibility problem in the archipelago.

The government’s response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine

On the day of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Indonesian President Joko Widodo called for the war to be stopped immediately, without naming either side.²⁰⁸ A day later, the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a statement saying military action against Ukraine is unacceptable, again without mentioning Russia, and imploring all sides involved to cease animosity and exercise diplomacy to solve their conflicts.²⁰⁹ Nonetheless, Indonesia later voted in favor of the UN resolution that condemned Russia’s attack on Ukraine,²¹⁰ on top of the UN resolution to condemn Russia’s annexing four Ukrainian regions in October 2022.²¹¹

But Indonesia neither participated in the (predominantly) Western sanctioning of Russia nor accepted the West’s calls to disallow Russia from attending the G20 summit that it hosted in November 2022. Jakarta tried, regardless, to mitigate the pressure by inviting Ukraine to attend the event, as well.²¹² A possible reason might be that Indonesia was aware how the West might react to its association with Russia. After all, one of Indonesia’s concerns as the last G20 summit was approaching was whether its plan to buy Russian crude oil would incite the US to sanction Indonesia.²¹³ Nonetheless, true to Indonesia’s resolve, both Ukraine and Russia were present in the last G20 summit in some capacity.²¹⁴

Political and economic determinants of the governmental view

Not long after Russia attacked Ukraine in February 2022, the deputy chairwoman of the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry for International Relations, Shinta Kamdani, explained that, compared to Indonesia's trade with its neighbors in the Southeast Asian region, Indonesia's investment and export-import activities involving both Russia and Ukraine remained proportionally miniscule. Both countries are, after all, not treated as traditional trade and investment partners by the Indonesian business community. Therefore, it would be relatively easy for Indonesia to diversify its export-import interests disrupted due to the war from Russia or Ukraine if need be.²¹⁵ In comparison, the US, who has been leading the Western-backed sanctions against Russia, remained one of Indonesia's three largest trading partners in 2022.²¹⁶ Thus, the strongest explanation as to why Indonesia chooses to side with nobody in the ongoing conflict in Ukraine lies outside the dimensions of trade and economy.

In understanding the Indonesian government's decision to neither outright side with the West in reacting to the current conflict nor blatantly side with Russia over its invasion of Ukraine, the Indonesian foreign policy doctrine known as *Bebas-Aktif* ("Free and Active") must first be comprehended accordingly. Introduced in 1948 by then-Indonesian Vice President Mohammad Hatta out of Indonesia's desire to remain independent from aligning with either the Western Bloc or the Eastern Bloc in the early days of the Cold War, the *Bebas-Aktif* doctrine basically emboldens and compels Indonesia to exercise its own judgments in responding to the dynamics of international politics without the influences of foreign powers.²¹⁷

This doctrine is still exercised today by the Indonesian government, including in Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs response to the Kremlin's decision to invade Ukraine.²¹⁸ Ever since Indonesia's initial reactions, President Widodo visited both President Volodymyr Zelensky in Ukraine and President Vladimir Putin in Russia in June 2022 to help both sides find a peaceful solution, "among other things."²¹⁹ These visits also saw Widodo contribute aid to a Ukrainian medical facility while, at the same time, improving economic cooperation with Russia.²²⁰ Widodo's visits have received compliments from the three largest political parties in Indonesia: Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan,²²¹ Golkar,²²² and Gerindra.²²³ Interestingly, after Indonesia adopted the aforementioned UN resolution condemning Russia's annexation of Ukrainian regions, Putin strongly hinted to Widodo, during a phone call in late October 2022, that he was not going to attend the G20 summit, a piece of information that Widodo said was understandable because of complicated global affairs.²²⁴

The G20 summit in Bali under the Indonesian presidency itself produced a G20 Leaders' declaration containing a paragraph that condemns Russia's actions in Ukraine (after what Widodo has described as an intense discussion), a declaration that was praised by both the G20 countries condemning Russia and,²²⁵ surprisingly, even Russia itself.²²⁶ This declaration was unexpected because, during Indonesia's year-long presidency, the G20 ministerials leading up to the summit failed to produce a document of consensus.²²⁷

Academia, media, and civil society

Due to a historically embedded anti-communist stance in Indonesian society since the 1960s, Indonesia was once the Southeast Asian country with the worst perception of Russia.²²⁸ Now, however, there is visible support toward Russia's invasion of Ukraine from many in the Indonesian public discussion,²²⁹ especially online. More concerning is the fact that some Indonesian academics have adopted the Russian narrative against Ukraine, such as it being a denazification process, in their articles and speeches to support what is still being done to the Ukrainian people as of today. A prime example came in February 2022, where, during an online discussion hosted by the National University about the conflict, a presentation by a Russian observer called Ahmad Fahrudji, from the University of Indonesia, resulted in Vasyl Hamianin, the Ukrainian ambassador to Indonesia, call Fahrudji's presentation a Soviet communist propaganda.²³⁰

Prior to Russia's invasion, the Indonesian public was not necessarily antagonistic toward Ukraine; after all, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, a founding member of the United Nations, was among the first entities to support Indonesia's independence from Dutch colonialism. Even Hamianin himself described Indonesia and Ukraine as old friends, whose first interactions dated as far back as the late 19th century. Similarities between Ukraine's independence ideology and Indonesia's core *Pancasila* ideology (the official and foundational state philosophy of Indonesia) did not escape Hamianin's attention.²³¹

Additionally, while the relations between Indonesia and Russia improved after the end of the New Order, a period from 1966 to 1998, when Indonesia was under the authoritarian rule of President Soeharto and Indonesia's relations with Eastern Bloc countries, such as the Soviet Union and China, were either distanced or outright frozen. Cooperation between Jakarta and Moscow in the defense and military dimensions started as far back as the late 1950s,²³² but that does not truly explain why Russia is enjoying so much support from the Indonesian public. Thus, to comprehend this significant change, the clock needs to be rolled back to 2013, when the Kremlin deployed *Russia Beyond* as its premier media in Indonesia (named *RBTH Indonesia*) to produce an image-transforming effort in Indonesian eyes. The most common method to carry out such an effort is to draw comparisons between Russia and Indonesia; for example, by producing content which reinforced both countries' anti-Western stance. This remains popular in Indonesia due to its past as a colony of the Netherlands for 350 years (making it suspicious of Western influences) and the purported injustice of the West's treatment of the Islamic world, from issues such as Palestine or assumptions of Islamophobia.²³³

Another commonly repeated narrative is one linked to explaining "misperceptions about the Russian People", including one that "explained" how communism is now just another part of Russian history, because communism is always a domestically sensitive topic in Indonesia.²³⁴ Perhaps most effectively of all, in a country where the Islamic identity is dyed-in-the-wool and becoming increasingly more conservative,²³⁵ is the content depicting Russia as a friend to the Islamic world. Such messaging usually covers the lives of Russia's Islamic community, historical Islamic influences in Russian culture, and even explaining the Burqa ban or Russian Halal tourism.²³⁶ This makes it easier for many Indonesians to accept Russia as both a post-Communist state and an ally of Islam.²³⁷ Interestingly, since influencing the moderate Indonesian Muslims is seen as a way to gain Widodo's support

toward a certain cause, both Kyiv and Moscow have tried to court Indonesia's Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the world's largest moderate Islamic group, in early March 2022.²³⁸

Moving forward, another less flashy but nonetheless vital role that *RBTH Indonesia* has assumed is as a provider for scholars to study Russia-related content on its active website or social media. This made studying in Russia a more accessible option for the Indonesian people.²³⁹ Even the aforementioned Fahrurodji was a recipient of a Russian scholarship, which may explain why he (and many Indonesian academics like him) could comfortably repeat Russian propaganda in a public discussion. Also, Russian studies programs in Jakarta and Bandung are funded by Moscow, while experts on Russia (or Eastern Europe in general) who can counter the Kremlin's narrative in Indonesia remain scarce, making it even easier for Moscow to frame its narrative in Indonesia.²⁴⁰ Unsurprisingly, Indonesia's refusal to diplomatically isolate Russia did not escape Russian eyes.²⁴¹ The support of the Indonesian public toward Russia even trounces the heartfelt pleas of their fellow Indonesian citizens living in Ukraine, such as Nani Agustin, whose compassionate appeal for support fell on deaf ears in a comment section on Youtube.²⁴²

Impacts on the Indo-Pacific security architecture and the relations with the EU

Indonesia realizes that China is its pivotal trading partner, while the US and its allies can provide a way to curb China's expansionist ambitions, especially in the South China Sea.²⁴³ Due to their history of meddling in Indonesian internal affairs, and their rivalry in what is basically Indonesia's backyard, however, Indonesia does not trust either China and the US completely, so an isolated Russia is not in Indonesia's best interest. Nonetheless, concerns over American sanctions did stop Indonesia's plan to purchase fighter jets from Russia in late 2021,²⁴⁴ so, as far as the defense and security dimensions go, it is conceivable that Indonesia will have to find new partners soon, especially since Russia's invasion of Ukraine exposed Moscow's weapons shortage and many other problems.²⁴⁵

Interestingly, France, a leading EU member state, has recently approached Indonesia from the defense and security dimensions with great successes. In 2021, France signed a *Defense Cooperation Agreement* (DCA) with Indonesia.²⁴⁶ This DCA, by itself, is a massive victory for French diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific because it is, at the time of writing, the only one of its kind that Indonesia has with a European partner. Then, in February 2022, Paris continued its winning streak by securing a \$8.1 billion deal to sell 42 French *Rafale* fighter jets to Jakarta, even more notable since it was accomplished following the AUKUS debacle in 2021 and Indonesia's cancellation of its plan to purchase Russian fighter jets *Su-35*.²⁴⁷ Indonesia itself now considers France to be a core strategic partner within the geopolitical and geostrategic dimensions.²⁴⁸ With such a statement coming from what is essentially Asia's biggest geopolitical prize,²⁴⁹ it is difficult to argue that France's recent strategic successes with Indonesia should not serve as an inspiration for the EU in starting to improve its approaches within the world's largest archipelago or as an example that can be followed by other EU member states, such as Germany, Italy, and Spain, while naturally keeping the common EU position in mind.²⁵⁰

Moving on, helping Jakarta address Indonesia's concerns is an area where the EU could and should come in, because Indonesia views the EU highly favorably at the global level.²⁵¹

However, while Indonesia is favorable towards the EU, as an alternative partner, its perceived weak strategic identity means it suffers from low visibility in Indonesia, which mostly knows the EU from its interactions with its individual member states instead of it as one singular entity. This means many Indonesians know fairly little about the EU and commonly see it as a flimsy international actor. It stands to reason then that the EU should accrue its soft power engagements with Indonesia properly,²⁵² and Brussels can start by settling its ongoing palm oil dispute with Jakarta.²⁵³ Brussels can also help Jakarta in addressing Indonesia's pervasive forest fires.²⁵⁴ With forest fires also becoming tangible problems across Europe, especially in 2022,²⁵⁵ the time is ripe for the EU to prevent wildfires together with Indonesia.²⁵⁶ The EU, in this regard, can follow what it had already done with Australia and build a *Geospatial based Environment for Optimisation Systems Addressing Fire Emergencies* (GEO SAFE) project with Indonesia. Similar to how it is with Australia,²⁵⁷ this project should allow both Jakarta and Brussels to interchange experiences, ideas, and knowledge regarding the prevention of forest fires via remote sensors and satellite data that shall bolster the expansion of innovative tools and methods development. This will enable a unified decision support system to augment resources for adeptly handling any wildfires in the coming times. If the EU can help Indonesia tackle this problem, which has been hounding Indonesia for decades,²⁵⁸ Brussels' reputational stock should decidedly increase in the eyes of Jakarta. Furthermore, with Indonesia now assuming the ASEAN chairmanship in 2023,²⁵⁹ elevating Brussels' engagements with Jakarta could see the EU's reputation as an alternative partner also improve in the eyes of Southeast Asians more generally.

What lies ahead?

Indonesia's *Bebas-Aktif* doctrine is the nucleus of Jakarta's foreign policy,²⁶⁰ so, even as it traverses an Indonesian public supportive of Russia and the dynamics caused by a competition between great powers in the Indo-Pacific, Indonesia will not align exclusively with only one side of the global politics equation. But it will always be open to cooperation, including with an alternative partner such as the EU.

As to how the relations between Indonesia and Russia will proceed next, it is important to point out that, in early October 2022,²⁶¹ Indonesia and Russia conducted further discussions on how to increase their ties. Additionally, Russia was the first country to donate to Indonesia following an earthquake in Cianjur, West Java, in late November 2022.²⁶² It is, thus, safe to conclude that, aside from potential changes in the defense and security dimensions, their partnership will likely remain unaltered for the foreseeable future.

Malaysia: A neutral and non-aligned government, an apathetic public

Omar Rasya Joenoes

- 1** The Malaysian government decided to exercise its longstanding neutral and non-aligned foreign policy in the ongoing Russian war in Ukraine, which will see little to no change under new Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim.
- 2** Although Russian President Vladimir Putin is still mostly viewed positively by the Malaysian public, it is largely apathetic toward the developments of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
- 3** The European Union (EU) should observe the ongoing conflict's spillover effects on Malaysia to bolster its engagements in Malaysia and maybe even in the Indo-Pacific eventually.

The government's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine

In early March 2022, only days after Malaysia voted in favor of a UN resolution condemning Russia over its actions in Ukraine, the then Malaysian Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abdullah announced that Malaysia would not impose sanctions on Russia, unlike neighboring Singapore. Instead, he called for a ceasefire and dialogue as the preferred means to solving this matter.²⁶³

Interestingly, when Russia asked Malaysia to supply it with semiconductors in April 2022 (in no small part due to the fact that Malaysia contributed to at least 7% of global semiconductor sales),²⁶⁴ Datuk Bala Chandran Tharman, Malaysia's envoy in Moscow, answered that Malaysia would consider fulfilling Russia's request, despite the risks of running afoul of Western-backed sanctions on Russia.

Not long after, Saifuddin explained that, while Tharman's statement was taken out of context, Malaysia's ties with Russia remained unchanged. He added that Kuala Lumpur only recognizes sanctions on any country if they come from a resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, since Malaysia respects and abides by its resolutions.²⁶⁵

Political and economic determinants of the governmental view

It is difficult to argue that Malaysia's stance regarding the ongoing conflict in Ukraine is driven by trade and economic dimensions. Malaysia's trade volume with Russia is nanoscopic: only 0.5% of total imports and merely 0.33% of total exports.²⁶⁶ Trade between Malaysia and Ukraine is even smaller.²⁶⁷

Therefore, in understanding the reactions of the Malaysian government and Malaysian academics toward Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine, it is important to acknowledge that neutrality is a guiding concept within the Malaysian foreign policy framework.

Firstly, it guides Malaysia to live up to the political expectations of its public; pro-Malay/Islamic and anti-colonialist interests, such as supporting the Palestinian cause.

Secondly, it drives Malaysia to ascertain regional stability; it prefers the non-interference principle of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to keep big powers and their allies out of the region.

Thirdly, it steers Malaysia to evade any form of alignment with big powers and so-called "imperialists". As such, any foreign alignment for Malaysia always depends on its needs. After Malaysia became newly independent in 1957, for instance, it recognized the immediate importance of having a security guarantee and joined the defense pact with Britain, New Zealand, and Australia, as a loyal member of the Commonwealth.

However, after witnessing how some countries around it fell prey to big powers during the Cold War, Malaysia embraced a non-interference preference and demonstrated its neutrality by deciding to join the Non-Aligned Movement, instead of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) that was largely influenced by the US. It was able to hence focus on bolstering its local economy.²⁶⁸ Malaysia's resolve to remain neutral regarding Russia and Ukraine has also been reiterated by Saifuddin, months after the invasion started.²⁶⁹

Academia, media, and civil society

The Malaysian government's reaction to Russia's aggression in Ukraine has been justified by Malaysian academics such as Chandra Muzaffar, a political scientist, who explained that Malaysia is internationally non-aligned and, thus, has no onus to adhere to the West's official position. He also mentioned that Russia would not have considered attacking Ukraine in the first place had NATO not continued its expansion after Russia abolished the Warsaw Pact, leading Russia, according to his view, to genuinely worry over its border security. Other Malaysian academics who considered Malaysia's stance to be in accordance with its neutral and non-aligned foreign policy included Hoo Chiew-Ping, a senior lecturer of Strategic Studies and International Relations at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, and Ibrahim Suffian, co-founder of Merdeka Centre.²⁷⁰

According to a study published by Ipsos Malaysia on April 27th, 2022, the majority of Malaysians feel that a war between two Western countries in Europe is of no concern to Malaysians and that the third biggest economy of Southeast Asia should avoid bothering

itself with such matters. Rather than helping the Ukrainians, the study discovered that the majority of Malaysians considered it more appropriate for Malaysia's money to be spent on domestic recovery efforts of the local economy following the COVID-19 pandemic. Ipsos also revealed that only around 49% of Malaysians paid attention to the ongoing conflict. In comparison, 89% of Japanese, 76% of Indians, and 66% of South Koreans paid attention to the development of the conflict.²⁷¹

Be that as it may, it is interesting to note that Malaysia is not necessarily without a pro-Russia crowd who, online at least,²⁷² not only blamed NATO expansion for the war,²⁷³ but also adopted Russian propaganda in framing Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a denazification process. This portion of Malaysian society finds commonality with Russian President Vladimir Putin, owing to their dislike toward the Western world and Russia's effective diplomacy in the Islamic world that makes it look like Russia is more tolerant of Muslims in comparison to the West.²⁷⁴ An example of such diplomacy took place even in Malaysia, where an international photo exhibition called 'Traditions of Islam in Russia' was held months after Russia attacked Ukraine.²⁷⁵

Since Russia is also seen as an alternative "superpower" option that is capable of standing up against Western neo-colonialism and influence (conveniently neglecting the Russian imperialistic actions), it appears that a number of Malaysians still sees the world as black-and-white: a struggle between the noble Eastern superpowers, good but often wrongfully accused, and the evil Western imperialists, corrupt yet powerful.²⁷⁶ This anti-Western sentiment itself is something that Putin has attempted to kindle among Asian leaders.²⁷⁷ In June 2022, Pew Research Centre released the result of an international survey: of the 18 countries polled, Malaysians had the highest confidence in Putin's actions on "doing the right thing" regarding world affairs. Some 6 out of 10 Malaysians (or around 59%) favor him, and nearly half of Malaysians (47%) had a favorable response towards Russia.²⁷⁸ Interestingly, prior to the invasion itself, Malaysia's partnership with Ukraine was relatively normal, especially since Malaysia was among the first countries to acknowledge the independence of Ukraine.²⁷⁹ However, after the invasion, the pro-Russia crowd in Malaysia often accused Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky of provoking Russia into attacking it first and mocking him as a "clown", courtesy of his former career as a comedian.²⁸⁰

Impacts on the Indo-Pacific security architecture and the relations with the EU

On July 25th, 2022, prior to assuming Kuala Lumpur's highest office, Anwar Ibrahim stated that Malaysia will still exercise its neutral and non-aligned foreign policy under his leadership. But even he is unable to undermine the importance of having Malaysia engage properly with great powers, such as the EU, the US, and especially China, as partners in the economy and education sectors in current world affairs.²⁸¹ It is important to note, nonetheless, that neither Anwar's statement, nor the fact that Russia is closely allied with China,²⁸² negates Malaysia's general wariness of China. Malaysia would loathe to become financially dependent on and ultimately subservient to China. Longstanding cultural reasons are also at play; Malaysia's historic conflict with a communist insurgency gave birth to antipathy to anything approximating communism in Malaysia.

It certainly does not help China's image that many Malaysians still regard China as a communist state even to the present time, aside from the persisting anti-Chinese sentiments from the Malay grassroots, who fear being replaced by the ethnic Chinese within Malaysia. On top of this history, Beijing's aggressiveness in the South China Sea and mistreatment of the Uyghur Muslims further damaged China's image among Malaysians.²⁸³ The latter is particularly notable because, despite China's effort in image rebuilding,²⁸⁴ the Uyghurs still enjoy strong support from Malaysia.²⁸⁵ Malaysia remains likewise cautious about the US and lending institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF).²⁸⁶

It is such these concerns that the EU should pay close attention to in order to boost its standing in Malaysia, particularly regarding the developments related to the ongoing EU-Malaysia dispute over palm oil and the resumption of talks over a free trade agreement between Brussels and Kuala Lumpur.²⁸⁷ ²⁸⁸ It is now up to the EU to seize the chances present in Malaysia, including the ones caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Malaysia's new prime minister, Anwar, is known to many policymakers in Brussels.

To begin with, Russian invasion of Ukraine has disrupted Malaysia's supply chains, reducing economic growth,²⁸⁹ and in the Malaysian power generation industry, which is under pressure due to the domino effect caused by increasing fuel prices attributable to the Kremlin's aggression.²⁹⁰ The latter is particularly relevant to Malaysia's renewable energy aspirations because,²⁹¹ by focusing on renewable energy, Malaysia wants to transition toward a low-carbon future. Through the Tenaga Nasional Bhd (TNB), the Malaysian government has been retiring selected coal plants ahead of schedule and using new green technology to recharge fossil-fired power plants. In reacting to rising costs in fuel and other electricity generators, TNB has also actively explored other potential energy sources, such as biofuel, solar, and hydro. However, while TNB has a clear renewable strategy, it lacks the technological availability and costs to realize its ambitions.²⁹²

The EU could use this chance to accept that many elements of its European Green Deal (the EU's comprehensive strategy to achieve greenhouse neutrality) can be promptly applied to the Indo-Pacific region,²⁹³ for example, by repeating its October 2022 green energy partnership success with Morocco in Southeast Asia. On October 18th, 2022, the EU and Morocco consolidated their cooperation to fight climate change, conserve biodiversity, and protect the environment by launching the EU-Morocco Green Partnership. Being the first Green Partnership Brussels signed with a partner country, it was meant to expand the European Green Deal's external dimension via groundwork application and serve as a bridge for further cooperation between Europe and other African partners.²⁹⁴ Nonetheless, the adjustments which are important in the Green New Deal, such as agreements related to improving the resilience of supply chains and energy generation,²⁹⁵ are also relevant to Malaysia's aforementioned green economy aspirations. On top of it, green economy just so happens to be the EU-Morocco Green Partnership's main thematic axes, which is wonderful, for the EU and Malaysia already support the green economy together, so improving their partnership to a point where the EU could directly contribute to one of Malaysia's long-term green energy aspirations should bode well for Brussel's stocks in Kuala Lumpur.²⁹⁶ The EU could even use its success with Morocco in promoting this project to Malaysia, since both are Islamic countries with a long history and a success in one can influence a success in another.²⁹⁷

This could be the opportunity for Brussels to realize that, by listening to the governments of the member states of ASEAN, the EU can learn of areas in which it can contribute meaningfully, in a complementary manner to regional initiatives such as China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and eventually provide balance to existing security frameworks (such as the Quad and AUKUS) by ensuring the existence of security goods. This, in turn, will allow the EU to lead the way in including both the US and China in creating a comprehensive security order to maintain comity and understanding in the Indo-Pacific region and ideally pre-empt a situation not unlike what is happening in Europe, courtesy of the Kremlin.

What lies ahead?

Malaysia's neutral foreign policy will ensure that it sides with neither Russia nor Ukraine in their conflict.²⁹⁸ While the Malaysian public may not care much about the ongoing war,²⁹⁹ the EU could nonetheless pay attention to the invasion's spillover effects on Malaysia to explore how Brussels could seize the opportunities presenting themselves to improve its standings in Kuala Lumpur and beyond.

While several ASEAN member states, such as Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam, have exhibited signs of trying to nurture closer relations with Russia even after its invasion, there did not seem to be any sign that Malaysia would follow such a path, due to the fact that the Malaysian trade volume with Russia was fairly low in the first place. Also, according to Daniel Thomas from the Institute of Strategic and International Studies, the amount of military hardware Kuala Lumpur purchased from Moscow (including 18 Sukhoi SU-30MKM that makes up the foundation of Malaysia's air force combat fleet) is ultimately rather insignificant compared to its aforementioned neighbors.³⁰⁰ Add Anwar Ibrahim's previous statement that illustrates his intention of maintaining Malaysian foreign policy of neutrality into this equation, and it is difficult to imagine Malaysia having a change of heart regarding its views on Russia,³⁰¹ or anybody else, any time soon.³⁰²

ASEAN, Singapore, Vietnam and the rest of Southeast Asia: No common views on Russia's war

Alfred Gerstl

- 1** Even though respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity are key principles of ASEAN, the organization refuses to criticize Russia for severely violating these principles. This reaction, though, is consistent with ASEAN's diplomacy (ASEAN Way).
- 2** Singapore is the only Southeast Asian nation that unequivocally condemns Putin's war, while also imposing sanctions on Russia. This hard stance reflects the importance of international law and a rules-based order for the vulnerable city-state.
- 3** Cambodia, the ASEAN Chair in 2022, and the Philippines also regularly criticize Russia's war against Ukraine. Cambodia's stance demonstrates that it is a gross oversimplification to portray the war as a confrontation between authoritarian and democratic systems.
- 4** Historically close relations between Russia and Vietnam, notably in defense, make it difficult for Hanoi to criticize Moscow. In line with its hedging strategy, it is aware that it also needs Western support which acts as a counterweight for becoming too close to Russia.
- 5** Myanmar's ruling junta supports Russia diplomatically. The country's permanent representative to the United Nations, who does not represent the junta, voted in favor of the Russia-critical UN resolutions.

The immediate responses of ASEAN, Singapore, and Vietnam

On March 2nd, 2022, nine of the eleven Southeast Asian nations voted in New York in favor of the United Nations General Assembly resolution demanding the immediate end of the Russian military operations in Ukraine; only Laos and Vietnam abstained. Already, on February 26th, the foreign ministers of the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) had released a statement on Russia's unlawful and unjustified invasion of Ukraine. The foreign ministers stated that they "are deeply concerned over the evolving situation and armed hostilities in Ukraine". In typical ASEAN speech, they called

“on all relevant parties to exercise maximum restraint and make utmost efforts to pursue dialogues through all channels, including diplomatic means to contain the situation, to de-escalate tensions, and to seek peaceful resolution (...).” The foreign ministers stressed that they “believe that there is still room for a peaceful dialogue to prevent the situation from getting out of control.” They added: “For peace, security, and harmonious co-existence to prevail, it is the responsibility of all parties to uphold the principles of mutual respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and equal rights of all nations.”³⁰³

In light of ASEAN’s traditionally cautious diplomatic approach, embedded in its *realpolitik* conduct of international relations, this weak statement that did not even mention Russia by name is not astonishing (see below). More surprising was the strong condemnation of the 2022 ASEAN Chair Cambodia. Prime Minister Hun Sen criticized Russia’s “act of aggression”, speaking of an invasion.³⁰⁴ In late 2022, the criticism became weaker, but Cambodia trains Ukrainian experts on how to remove Russian landmines.³⁰⁵ Also critical of Russia is the Philippines. Even former President Rodrigo Duterte who initially sought closer relations with Moscow condemned Russia.³⁰⁶ The US-friendly administration of President Marcos jr., in office since June 2022, remains critical of Russia.³⁰⁷

Not surprising was the strong immediate reaction of Singapore – a small and vulnerable city-state – a few hours after the war started. A spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that “Singapore strongly condemns any unprovoked invasion of a sovereign country under any pretext. We reiterate that the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine must be respected. (...).”³⁰⁸

Since February 24th, 2022, Singapore has been very consistent in its wording. So, too, has Vietnam. The communist regime and long-term partner of Russia has so far not criticized Moscow for its actions. Hanoi’s statements are strongly in line with the cautious ASEAN wording. A clear pattern is that Vietnam regularly expresses its belief that all disputes shall be resolved by peaceful means in line with international law and the UN Charter, “especially the principle of respect for countries’ independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity”.³⁰⁹ The latter can be read as an indirect and very concealed criticism of Russia. But without taking sides, Vietnam urges both Russia and Ukraine to cease hostilities and engage in dialogue.³¹⁰ The communist regime, though, is also aware that for the implementation of its hedging strategy it needs Western partners. Thus, it cannot fully snub Western criticism of its stance on the war.

Political and economic determinants of the official positions

In December 1978, during the height of the Cold War, Vietnam invaded Cambodia, resulting in the ousting of the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime. However, instead of highlighting this beneficial outcome, the then five ASEAN members (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand) condemned Vietnam for violating the sovereignty and territorial integrity of a smaller country. Since the establishment of ASEAN in 1967, these principles and the renunciation of aggression and of the threat of or use of force are deeply enshrined in all ASEAN documents and policies. In the case of the criticism of Vietnam, a contributing factor was that the communist and authoritarian-ruled country was regarded as an enemy. The end of the Cold War and the withdrawal of the Vietnamese troops from Cambodia in 1989 prepared the ground for Vietnam’s admission to ASEAN in 1995.

In light of ASEAN's 'Vietnam experience', the regional bloc's lack of criticism of the more powerful Russia violating the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its smaller and weaker neighbor (Ukraine) seems illogical and inconsequential. Moreover, Moscow is only an important strategic, defense, and economic partner for Vietnam, but not for the other ASEAN members or ASEAN itself. However, ASEAN and its members need to consider the close relations between Russia and China. Southeast Asian criticism of Moscow could be interpreted by China as suggesting a political leaning towards the US.

The main explanation for the Southeast Asian states' cautious reactions to Russia's war are their foreign policy strategies, notably the hedging strategies which ASEAN and the majority of the Southeast Asian nations apply.³¹¹ The foremost strategic aim of the Southeast Asian (and many Indo-Pacific) nations is to avoid being forced to side either with the US or China. Rather, they seek friendly relations with both superpowers, while also engaging other major players, such as Japan, India, Australia, South Korea, the EU or, in some cases, Russia. According to this strategy, these omnidirectional political, economic, and defense relations provide insurance against dependence on a single great power. Moreover, a key characteristic of ASEAN's diplomacy, the so-called ASEAN Way, is that countries that violate international or regional norms are never publicly named and shamed. Therefore, ASEAN's response to Russian President Vladimir Putin's unprovoked and unjustified war is in line with the organization's policies.

With its clear and ongoing criticism of Russia, Singapore stands out in Southeast Asia: It is the only staunch critic of Russia's war who also imposed targeted sanctions against Moscow. Accordingly, it finds itself on Moscow's enemy list, even though the sanctions are limited to the control of the export of military and technological goods and financial measures targeting Russian banks, entities, and activities, and fund-raising activities which benefit the Russian government.³¹²

Singapore is a small city-state. The ruling People's Action Party (PAP) has even created an ideology of survival, not least to justify its hold on power in the semi-democratic system.³¹³ Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan warned of the "completely unacceptable precedent" set by Russia's breach of international law, describing it as an "existential issue for us".³¹⁴ Accordingly, during his talks with US President Joe Biden at the White House in March 2022, Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong explained: "Our actions [i.e., the condemnation of Russia] are based on principles that are fundamental to our survival and existence as an independent, sovereign nation." Furthermore, he added: "The war in the Ukraine has implications for the Asia-Pacific. There are potential flashpoints and contentious issues in our region too, which, if not managed well, could escalate to open conflict."³¹⁵ Another motive for vocally condemning Russia's war is Singapore's fear of secondary US sanctions.

Traditionally, the war-torn Vietnam is Russia's closest partner in Southeast Asia. The mutual friendship, dating back to the Cold War, limits Hanoi's room of maneuver to criticize Moscow. The communist regime follows a "nuanced approach",³¹⁶ aiming to neither fall out of favor with Russia nor the West. In official statements, the need for self-restraint and dialogue are highlighted, without taking sides.³¹⁷ In personal discussions, Vietnamese diplomats claimed that they need more information to understand the conflict situation. They also pointed out that smaller nations must respect the strategic and security interests of greater powers – "a smaller state living next to a giant neighbor should avoid becoming

a battlefield of great power conflict.”³¹⁸ However, notwithstanding this *realpolitik* stance, Vietnam pursues a robust hedging strategy towards China and takes a clear stance in the South China Sea dispute: Hanoi is a vocal proponent of international law and emphasizes the need to maintain a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific.³¹⁹

There is a small Vietnamese minority in Ukraine. Immediately after Russia’s invasion, Hanoi set up a hotline for countrymen in need.³²⁰ However, the fate of the overseas Vietnamese had no direct impact on Vietnam’s stance towards Russia.

ASEAN’s trade with Russia amounted to almost \$20 billion in 2021, an increase of 34% compared with 2020. Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, and Vietnam are its main regional trade partners. Russia-ASEAN trade peaked in 2014 at \$23 billion, yet Russia is only the ninth largest trade partner of ASEAN. The Southeast Asian nations import mainly mineral fuels, mineral oils, and products of their distillation (a 51.6% share in 2020), iron and steel (14.7%), fertilizers (7.3%), and cereals (6.1%). Russia is even less important as an investor: just \$63.2 million in 2021.³²¹

Vietnam signed a free trade agreement with the Russian-dominated Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) in 2016. Since then, trade and investments have increased. In 2021, Vietnam had a trade deficit of \$1.3 billion with Russia, importing mainly coal briquettes, hot-rolled iron, and pig meat. Singapore records a similar trade volume with Russia of approximately \$2.4 billion. It also has a trade deficit with Moscow (\$600 million). It mainly imports refined and crude petroleum as well as raw nickel.³²² The economic relations with Ukraine are even less developed. Ukrainian trade with Vietnam and Singapore was worth just \$579 million and \$217 million, respectively, in 2020. Ukraine is, however, a significant source of cereals (9.2% of ASEAN’s import share).

While Russia is not a major economic player in Southeast Asia, it is the largest weapons exporter, although that value decreased since 2014, amounting to only \$89 million in 2021. As Ian Storey points out, the war will make it more difficult for Russia to export arms since the Russian army requires them. Other obstacles include export sanctions and the reputational damage Russian weapons suffered in the war.³²³ It can, therefore, be expected that many nations, including Moscow’s key defense partner Vietnam, will reduce their imports from Russia. However, Vietnam, Malaysia, and other countries rely on spare parts for submarine vessels or fighter jets in the near future. Conversely, Myanmar, facing Western sanctions, is likely to deepen its defense collaboration with Russia.

Responses of the public, academia and media in Southeast Asia

Pro-Russian and pro-Putin narratives resonate among many Southeast Asian citizens, notably in Vietnam. However, due to the country’s authoritarian system and the strong censorship it is difficult to get an accurate picture of public opinion. On the one hand, social media is full of praise of strongman Putin. On the other hand, netizens criticize the illegal war and its brutality.³²⁴ Due to the censorship, there are also no widespread reports from Vietnamese citizens living in Ukraine on social media, which would provide a more accurate picture of the war.

About one year after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the opinions of the majority of the Southeast Asian citizens have not changed much: "While a consensus view is that Moscow breached international law with its offensive, any support for Ukraine is tempered by the belief that the war is distant (...)"³²⁵ According to an Ipsos survey, 60% of the respondents in Thailand, 54% in Malaysia, 48% in Indonesia, and 44% in Singapore agreed with the statement "The problems of Ukraine are not our business, and we should not interfere".³²⁶ The respondents showed concern about rising fuel and commodity prices.

According to the most recent "State of Southeast Asia Survey", a poll of "elite" opinion conducted by ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 47.9% of the Southeast Asian respondents are very concerned and 35% somewhat concerned about Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Most concerned were respondents in the Philippines (93.9% very and somewhat concerned), Vietnam (90.4%), Indonesia (89.3%), and Singapore (87.5%); in Malaysia 79.8% showed concern. Strikingly, only 51.6% of the Southeast Asian respondents strongly approve or approve of their government's reaction to the war; 31.3% remain neutral, and 17.1% strongly disapprove or disapprove of their governments' response. Most opposed are the respondents in Thailand (45.2%), Vietnam (23.5%), Myanmar (20%), and the Philippines (19.2%).³²⁷

According to the respondents, the most serious impacts of the war on Southeast Asia are the increased energy and food prices causing economic hardship (58.3% on ASEAN level) and the erosion of trust in a rules-based order and the violation of national sovereignty (25.9% on ASEAN level). In regard to the latter, the highest rate of concern was uttered in Singapore (40.9% of the respondents), Vietnam (32.4%), and Laos (31.8%).

Impacts on the Indo-Pacific security architecture and the relations with the EU

Russia's war did not fundamentally change the general security situation in Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific. Rather, it strengthened existing patterns and put unresolved disputes in the spotlight. For ASEAN, upholding the rules-based, inclusive, and multilateral order in the Indo-Pacific is of utmost importance – and so is the acknowledgement of its regional centrality in the Indo-Pacific.³²⁸ The majority of the multilateral forums and dialogue mechanisms, the base of the rules-based regional order, were all established by ASEAN, notably the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the East Asia Summit (EAS). Verbally, all partners, including China and the US, endorse ASEAN's centrality because so far they benefit from the ASEAN-led mechanisms. ASEAN plays the role of an honest broker, aiming to mediate compromises between the great powers.

If either China or the US becomes the regional hegemon allowing it to dictate the rules of the game, the need of a mediator would be eliminated. Another risk for ASEAN's centrality is the increasing bi- and unilateral collaboration in the realm of security, as it could undermine the significance of the multilateral security architecture with the ARF at its core.

ASEAN's foreign policy – despite the Political-Security Community, the organization has no common foreign and security policy – is also undermined by its members' policies. They are independent in their foreign policy and seek closer defense and security relations with

regional and non-regional partners, foremost the US and Japan, but also India, Australia, South Korea, and European nations.

ASEAN and the EU have closely cooperated since the 1970s; since 2022 they are strategic partners, emphasizing the shared principles of a rules-based order, effective and sustainable multilateralism, and free and fair trade.³²⁹ The rules-based order is especially at risk in the South China Sea – a dispute where ASEAN and many Southeast Asian nations are welcoming a stronger European role. Specifically, they seek stronger EU statements in support of the award of the Arbitral Tribunal of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in 2016.³³⁰ China's refusal to accept the award, according to which Beijing's nine-dash line is invalid, demonstrates how difficult it is to defend international law against the will of a great power. Strong supportive EU statements at ASEAN-led forums, but also at the United Nations and other international organizations, will at least ensure that the award will not be forgotten in the international arena.

Ensuring maritime security is crucial for the region, but also the EU. About one third of European trade passes through the South China Sea. However, unlike the US, the EU lacks the naval capacity to conduct Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) to challenge China's claims in the South China Sea. Only France, possibly with the inclusion of ships or personnel from other EU countries, can do so. However, whether a European FONOP or the participation in a FONOP led by an Indo-Pacific nation other than the US would increase the EU's standing in the region, is questionable. In particular, as the littoral states aim to reduce the military tensions in the South China Sea.

Turning a weakness into a strength, one view uttered by European diplomats is that the EU could forfeit military means in the region, clearly focusing on promoting international law, dialogue, and mediation. Whether adopting a solely non-military approach to resolve the tensions in the South China Sea, which are mainly caused by China's assertiveness, is the most logical conclusion drawn from Russia's war against Ukraine, though, seems in light of the Cold War logic and the arms race in the Indo-Pacific not very promising.

However, lacking hard power, right now, the EU is, indeed, better suited to using diplomatic and technical support to uphold the existing multilateral structures, notably through cooperation with ASEAN. In many East Asian countries, and in particular in Southeast Asia, the EU is viewed positively as a normative power. In 2023, 23% of the Southeast Asian respondents showed trust in the EU to provide leadership to maintain the rules-based order and uphold international law. The US, though, scores higher with 27.1%, while only 5.1% view China in such a role.³³¹ A representative survey conducted in 15 Indo-Pacific countries also reveals a favorable view of the EU, but the perceptions of the US are even more positive. Interestingly, the views on China are overall less critical than in the ISEAS survey.³³²

What lies ahead?

Russia's war against Ukraine has not changed the security landscape in Southeast Asia. However, it sheds further light on the negative impacts of the geostrategic competition between China and the US on ASEAN, and the smaller nations in the region. It has also reinforced the importance of upholding peace, stability, and a multilateral rules-based order in Southeast Asia in general and in the South China Sea in particular. The failure of the international community to pressure Moscow to end the war should also raise questions in Southeast Asia about how the (volatile) regional order can be defended in case of a conflict. ASEAN must ask itself self-critically whether the cautious ASEAN way is still an appropriate means of resolving a crisis and ensuring ASEAN's regional centrality.

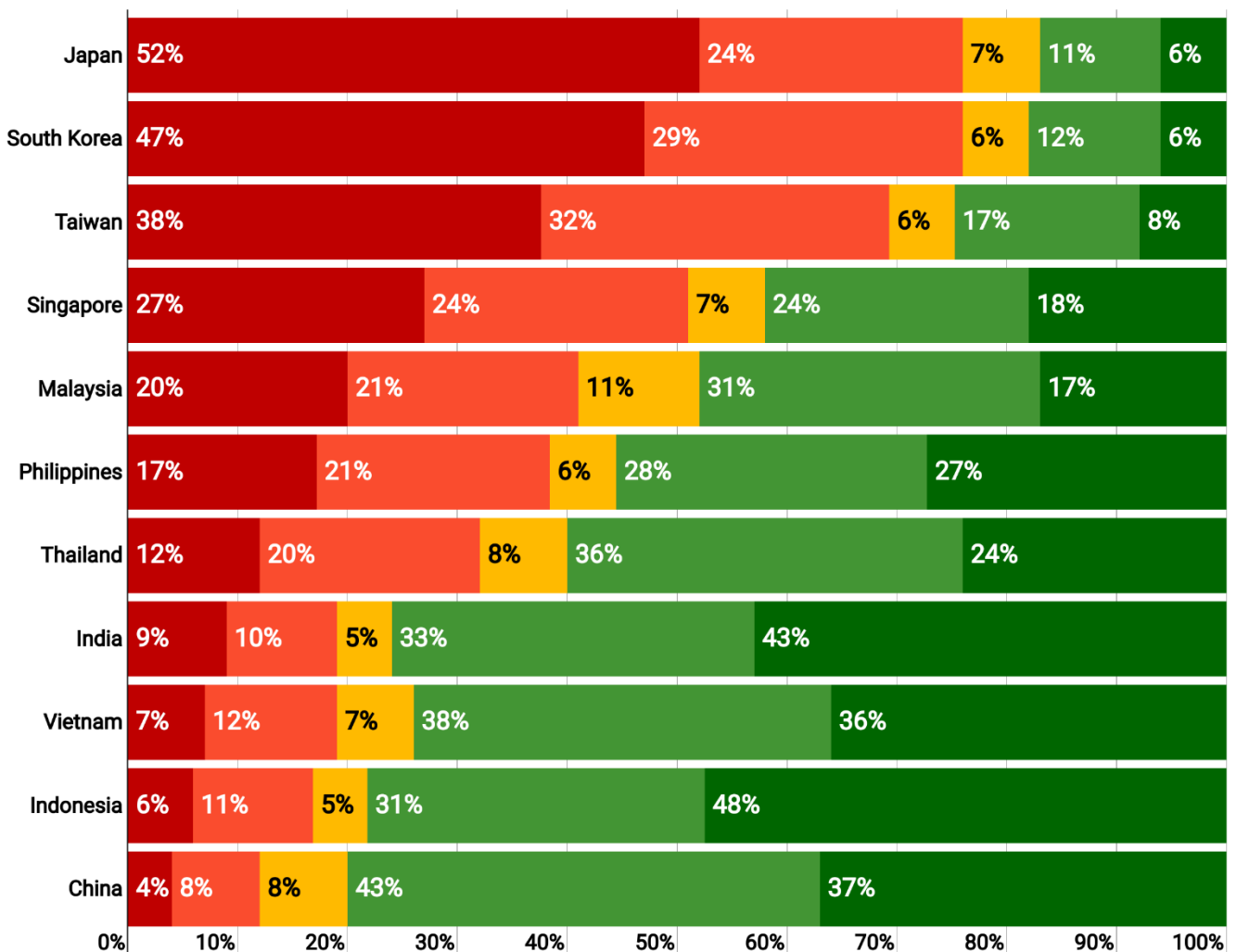
Regarding Russia's war against Ukraine, neither ASEAN nor Vietnam nor Singapore will change their stance and rhetoric in the immediate future. Unlike Singapore, ASEAN and Vietnam perceive that their national interests are better served when not taking sides in this conflict. Neither ASEAN nor any Southeast Asian government will play an active role in mediating peace or a ceasefire. The political, diplomatic, and humanitarian support for Ukraine and its citizens will also remain limited, as the war is, despite its direct economic and indirect strategic impacts, viewed as a European problem.

A battle for hearts and minds

Public opinion on Russia in select East Asian states



Very negative Negative Neutral Positive Very positive



Data: Sinophone Borderlands & CEIAS

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Conclusion: The EU's role in the Indo-Pacific amid the Russian war against Ukraine

Alfred Gerstl

- 1** The stability of the multilateral security and economic order in the Indo-Pacific is at risk. It is undermined by the Sino-US rivalry, but also by bilateral and minilateral security initiatives.
- 2** While the strategic competition between China and the US in the Indo-Pacific region reduces the strategic leeway of other players, the hedging strategies of many Indo-Pacific countries offer the EU and other regional and non-regional actors structural incentives to play a stronger role in the region.
- 3** Despite its considerable economic power, the influence of the EU on the strategic and security landscape in the Indo-Pacific will remain severely limited. Unless the EU will be able to project more hard power, it will remain a niche player.
- 4** The Global Gateway Initiative is the most promising means for the EU to deepen the relations with the Indo-Pacific nations, as the region needs more investments in infrastructure and connectivity.
- 5** The EU faces the dilemma that its values-based foreign policy, aiming to promote democracy and human rights, can reduce Brussel's realpolitik influence in East Asia and the Indo-Pacific where most of the regimes are semi-democratic or authoritarian.

The impacts of Russia's war on the Indo-Pacific security architecture

Russia's war against Ukraine has made the world, including the economically dynamic Indo-Pacific region, an even more unsafe place. The war signals the return to geopolitics and hard power politics, and has set alarm bells ringing in many East Asian and Indo-Pacific countries. The Indo-Pacific is a vast region already rich in tensions and conflicts, ranging from the unresolved Taiwan issue and the territorial disputes in the South and East China Sea to North Korea, in addition to many bilateral conflicts, such as between India and China, and India and Pakistan. The fear that a violent conflict could break out in the highly-militarized region and have incalculable consequences has increased.

After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, politicians and academics were quick in drawing parallels between Russia and China, most notably China's rising assertiveness towards Taiwan and in the South China Sea. After all, a major power with nuclear arms and a permanent seat on the UN Security Council launched an attack against one of its weaker neighbors, violating the fundamental principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity.³³³ These norms underpin the regional order in East Asia and are deeply enshrined in the DNA of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).³³⁴

The Indo-Pacific governments are usually staunch defenders of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interference. Nevertheless, only a handful of countries unequivocally condemned Moscow's aggression and imposed sanctions on Russia, following the lead of the US and the EU: Japan and Singapore stand out, while South Korea reacted more cautiously, and ASEAN and other Southeast Asian nations hid behind empty diplomatic phrases. In South Asia, despite ongoing Western pressure, India has not condemned Russia. Like China, it did not stop its oil and gas imports from Moscow. However, not even China has wholeheartedly supported its partner Russia. The only strong diplomatic support for Russia in East Asia comes from dictatorial regimes in Myanmar (albeit not its UN representative who opposes the junta) and North Korea. These different reactions, however, are not surprising, since they are in line with the previous stance of the respective governments towards Russia.

As the individual chapters of this study revealed, the war in Ukraine and its impacts on international security and economic development, including food insecurity and rising inflation, have raised concerns in the Indo-Pacific and contributed to the individual countries' position on Russian aggression. Yet, all in all, Russia's aggression has not fundamentally altered the security landscape and the underlying regional dynamics, namely the Sino-US rivalry. However, it is likely that the distrust with which many Indo-Pacific nations regard China's rise will further increase,³³⁵ further reinforcing the Cold War 2.0 situation in the Indo-Pacific. Thus, Russian President Vladimir Putin's war functions as a catalyst. This is also because Russia's overall influence in the Indo-Pacific is comparatively low. Russia may be a significant weapons provider for the region, but whether it will remain so after the end of the war is open to speculation. It is an important economic partner for only a few countries, notably India and Vietnam.

The countries in the region did not alter their foreign policy and security strategies since the start of the war. For instance, Japan's efforts to strengthen its defense capabilities started already under late Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in the last decade. Already in 2014, the fear of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan was a key driver for the reinterpretation of Article 9 of the constitution.³³⁶ It allows Japan, in some instances, to exercise the right of collective self-defense and support allied forces, if they were attacked. The recent security agreement between Japan and the Philippines, including joint military exercises and stronger interoperability, confirms a longer trend in the bilateral relations, too.³³⁷ It is, however, extremely significant, not least because of the Philippines' geographic location in the South China Sea and proximity to Taiwan. Moreover, even though new Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. allowed the US, its traditional ally, access to more military bases in his country, the defense collaboration remained close even during the reign of his predecessor, Rodrigo Duterte.³³⁸

Another trend that started before Russia's war against Ukraine was the establishment of minilateral security mechanisms, such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad; consisting of Australia, India, Japan, and the US) and AUKUS (Australia, the United Kingdom, and the US). Both are predominantly concerned with China's increasing assertiveness and rising military capabilities and are, therefore, viewed critically by Beijing. To appease Beijing, nations willing to join the Quad in the form of Quad Plus, notably Vietnam, but potentially also the Philippines, are currently focused on non-security collaboration. The EU follows a similar approach, offering cooperation in less sensitive policy areas, especially climate change, technology, and vaccines. Nevertheless, the increasing bi- and minilateral collaboration threatens to undermine the existing, ASEAN-led structures, in particular in the realm of security (the ASEAN Regional Forum).³³⁹

This trend goes hand in hand with the increased likelihood that defense spending will further increase. There is also the risk that if the nuclear threat from North Korea cannot be reduced, South Korea and Japan will opt for building nuclear weapons.³⁴⁰ Both have the knowhow and capacities to do so rather quickly.

The EU's limited agency in the Indo-Pacific

The majority of the Indo-Pacific countries aim to maintain their strategic autonomy and avoid being forced to sideline either with China or the US. Most of them pursue a so-called hedging strategy.³⁴¹ This strategy offers other actors, foremost Japan, India, Australia, South Korea, but also the EU, opportunities to deepen the bilateral relations and play a stronger role in the region. They are welcomed as additional political, economic, and security partners in order to reduce the dependency on the two superpowers and assemble potential balancing partners. On the other hand, a hedging strategy also motivates some countries (such as India) to maintain relations with Russia, which is sometimes seen as a potential counter-balance to rising Chinese power.

In its Indo-Pacific strategy, published in September 2021, the EU regards itself as a stakeholder in this region. The strategy was adopted comparatively late when compared to Japan, Australia, India and the US.³⁴² It follows the more detailed national strategies of France, Germany, and the Netherlands.³⁴³ The EU strategy correctly states the geo-economic and geopolitical importance of the Indo-Pacific, not least for Europe, but also the wide range of traditional and non-traditional security risks it is home to. It emphasizes the need to uphold the multilateral, inclusive, and rules-based regional order. To achieve this aim, it endorses ASEAN's regional centrality (ASEAN established and leads the majority of the existing multilateral structures and forums) and seeks deeper cooperation with the regional organization, but also other like-minded nations.³⁴⁴

However, even though the regional security and economic architecture is under stress, Brussels fails to address in detail the underlying reason for the challenges multilateralism and cooperation face in the Indo-Pacific: the Sino-US rivalry and how it impacts on the EU's role and influence in the region.³⁴⁵ Strikingly, the Indo-Pacific strategy offers China, in a general way, cooperation and avoids criticism of Beijing. Even though the Indo-Pacific strategy and the China strategy of 2019 are complementary, there is a stark contrast to how China is viewed in both. In the China strategy, the PRC was for the first time portrayed

as a partner, (economic) competitor, and “a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance”.³⁴⁶

The existing means of the EU to promote its strategic interests in the region are severely limited. Due to the consensus principle, decisions made under the frame of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) automatically reflect the lowest common denominator. As already stated above, the EU is not a military power, as no EU army exists. Lacking military power projection capabilities, the EU is, unlike the US, not a security provider in the Indo-Pacific. Compared to Japan, the usually favored “third partner” behind the US and China, the agency and influence of the EU will in the near future also remain limited. Tokyo can offer the Indo-Pacific states a much more credible defense cooperation. However, the EU has taken first steps: The plan on “Enhancing EU Security Cooperation in and with Asia” from May 2018 seeks closer dialogue and consultations with India, Indonesia, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and Vietnam. The main areas are maritime, cyber security, and non-proliferation.

More specific and far-reaching offers, though, can and should be made by individual EU member states. France, after Brexit the only military heavyweight in the EU, has permanently deployed military troops in the Indo-Pacific where it has territories. Moreover, since 2016, Paris “has mobilized support for a European presence with annually rotating forces which have expanded with participation from a growing number of countries. Rather than overt deterrence of China, the effort is more broadly intended to protect a rules-based regional security architecture through cooperation with Indo-Pacific partners.”³⁴⁷ In addition, France is engaged in arms deals. In 2022, it sold 42 Rafale fighter jets to Indonesia, a small consolation prize for the fiasco of the failed submarine deal with Australia in 2021.

In the last two years, Germany has launched some symbolic gestures to demonstrate a stronger security interest in the region. In 2021/22, a German frigate sailed through the South China Sea and made, inter alia, port calls in India, Singapore, and Vietnam. In 2022, Berlin sent 13 fighter jets to the Indo-Pacific, specifically via Singapore to Australia to join maneuvers. Other EU members could be included in such limited but nevertheless highly visible activities, demonstrating to partners in the region that Europe is politically willing to become more engaged in the Indo-Pacific.

Logical partners are Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, which play leading roles in ASEAN. Economically and strategically Vietnam is another crucial actor, which also follows a hedging strategy, actively seeking additional partners to China and the US. Despite the limitations the Sino-US rivalry brings with it, it also opens opportunities for the EU and the EU member states to deepen the relations with Indo-Pacific nations, at least in certain policy areas. A possible EU contribution to mitigate the territorial disputes in the South China Sea has been discussed in the chapter on China; therefore the situation in the Taiwan Strait and the Korean peninsula should be addressed.

Taiwan and North Korea

Chinese President Xi Jinping has never ruled out using military force to achieve the “reunification” of Taiwan.³⁴⁸ Fears of a secret agreement between Russia and China to attack Ukraine and Taiwan, respectively, did not become reality. Taiwan benefits from the increased scrutiny under which China’s policies towards the island came since February 24th, 2022. Taiwan demonstrated strong support for Ukraine as well as Ukraine’s neighbors. It strongly benefits from its unambiguous support for democracy and human rights at home and abroad. Moreover, the strong and ongoing Western support for Ukraine surprised both Russia and China. This reaction needs to be calculated in any Chinese plan to use force against Taiwan.

Even though the EU should not end its “One China policy”, there is considerable leeway to deepen economic, cultural, and civil society relations with the self-ruled island without upsetting the PRC disproportionately. Central Eastern Europe nations, such as the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Poland, and Slovakia, are in this regard a vanguard from which other EU members and the EU can learn.³⁴⁹ Closer EU-Taiwan relations would show China that it would have to pay a high price in the event of an invasion of Taiwan.

The policy tools of the EU to mitigate the tensions on the Korean peninsula are extremely limited. Brussels should uphold its critical dialogue with the North Korean regime, putting emphasis on the human rights situation and non-proliferation. In addition, the EU should support any multilateral initiative to resolve the conflict.

The Global Gateway Initiative as means to promote the EU’s influence

The trend of cooperation with selected or like-minded countries, rather than a whole region, is not only visible in defense matters but also in trade and economics. The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) brings together China-critical nations under the leadership of Japan, Australia, and Vietnam.³⁵⁰ The membership of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Cooperation (RCEP) partly overlaps, as it includes ASEAN, Japan, and Australia, but also China. India’s late refusal to join the RCEP due to domestic concerns strengthened Beijing’s position in the cooperation, as the other nations lost a strong counterweight against China.

In May 2022, the Biden administration launched the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF). Even though it is still very vague, it demonstrates to the Indo-Pacific nations (and not least China) that the US is, after President Donald Trump’s bilateral approach, eager to revive multilateralism. The EU, however, is not a member of any of the major free trade agreements. Even worse, it is currently not even engaged in multilateral negotiations to create a regional agreement, for instance, with ASEAN, focusing on a bilateral approach instead. As the difficulties with the ratification of the trade agreement with Mercosur shows, the reluctance on European and national level to negotiate and ratify such large agreements is very high. Trade agreements between the EU and individual countries (recently concluded with Singapore and Vietnam), however, do not strengthen the regional trade architecture. The failure to conclude regional agreements undermines

the ability of the EU to promote strong social, environmental, and human rights standards. Its role as international norm- and standard-setter is, therefore, impaired.

For the EU, the currently most pragmatic and realistic means to project its influence globally and in the Indo-Pacific is the Global Gateway Initiative. This ambitious initiative is not only restricted to infrastructure and connectivity but includes the sectors digital, climate and energy, transport, health, and education and research. In a combined Team Europe approach, more than €300 billion should be mobilized, with the Indo-Pacific being one of the main geographic areas.³⁵¹ The EU already agreed to cooperate closely with the G7, chief among them the US and Japan. Joining forces will help avoid competition and overlaps and increase the attractiveness of the Western initiatives vis-à-vis China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). These actors regard the BRI with distrust, both in Europe (16+1) and abroad.

According to Jagannath Panda, the Global Gateway Initiative offers the EU "an opportunity to promote its values and sustainability vision in a tangible and lasting way by increasing cooperation on economic and social infrastructure projects. Amidst a global environment of distrust when it comes to China, the EU must build active action via Global Gateway with other democratic actors."³⁵² However, democracies are a rare species in the Indo-Pacific, and the semi-democratic and authoritarian regimes are much more in need of infrastructure development. Reasonable compromises with non-democratic regimes are, therefore, required, without compromising on the EU's key principles.

Obstacles for the EU's values-based foreign policy

A complex bundle of international and domestic factors, including the respective relations with Russia, but also the US and China, is responsible for the Indo-Pacific governments' stance and policies towards Russia and Ukraine. The democratic nature of a political system contributes to a more critical view of Russia, but is not the only factor. Moreover, in a region where the majority of regimes are not democratic, it is not helpful for the West to portray opposition to Russia's war and the competition between the United States and China primarily as a conflict between democratic and authoritarian systems.

The EU has a political obligation to defend the liberal order, democracy, and human rights as well as a moral duty to promote the cause of Ukraine in its foreign policy and relations with other nations. However, the Indo-Pacific nations, and not least ASEAN, are sensitive in regard to real or perceived interference in their domestic affairs and unsolicited instructions. While frank and open discussions between European and Asian diplomats about the war in Ukraine and the respective reactions to Russia's aggression are legitimate and standard practice in diplomacy, more forceful attempts to persuade the Asian governments to criticize Moscow or join the sanction regime are counterproductive. The governments may feel pressured too much to side either with the West or Russia (and China), in particular as the US and Japan already aim to convince many nations to take a stronger stance in the war. Moreover, the threat of the US imposing secondary sanctions on countries undermining the Western sanctions against Russia is already a strong signal.

For the EU and many of its member states, the promotion of human rights and democracy is an important aspect of their foreign policy and reflected in their identity and national

values. Europe, though, must be aware that many non-democratic regimes in the region regard the values-based European foreign policy with skepticism. Most of them are not, in principle, opposed to the European approach, but object to the frequency and the often lecturing tone of European politicians and diplomats. Southeast Asian diplomats often cite the example of the Western criticism on the gross human rights violations in Myanmar in the early 2000s, but also on ASEAN's inability to resolve the situation. Western diplomats even boycotted some meetings with ASEAN-led forums when Burmese representatives were present. From an Asian point of view, this behavior was thought to be hypocritical and undermined the overall cooperation, in particular as ASEAN lacked the power to influence the junta in Myanmar, exactly as it does today.³⁵³ Civil society organizations have, of course, much more favorable views on democratic and human rights values than authoritarian governments. Consequently, the EU should strengthen the track 1.5 and 2 diplomacy with these actors.

What lies ahead?

The Sino-US competition for power and influence will remain the key line of conflict in the international relations of the Indo-Pacific in the upcoming decades. All other powers need to adjust their strategies to mitigate the negative impacts of this rivalry and the insecurity it causes. As many Indo-Pacific nations follow a hedging strategy, they also seek to obtain benefits from the two superpowers. The EU benefits from the political openness of these nations towards cooperation in politics, security, and economics.

On the positive side, the EU is not regarded as a military threat to any Indo-Pacific nation. It projects its power and influence through economic and infrastructure initiatives, and through the promotion of good governance and rule of law. It is, therefore, also well respected as a normative power contributing to upholding the rules-based order and international law. However, the lack of its capability to resort to hard power challenges the EU's ability to contribute to resolving a violent conflict. It also undermines the EU's strategic autonomy in international relations, notably vis-à-vis the US and China, whose dominance builds both on hard and soft power.

A strong and credible EU contribution to the defense of regional order in the event of a major attack is due to its limited hard power difficult to imagine. However, defense and security cooperation of individual members, such as France and Germany, could partly compensate for the lacking security involvement of the EU. All in all, though, the engagement of the EU, but also of individual member states with the Indo-Pacific nations, must be credible, reliable, and comprehensive. To lay a strong base for this cooperation, the strategic and economic significance of the Indo-Pacific for Europe should be explained to the European citizens in even more detail.

In addition to bilateral relations, the EU should aim to further deepen and institutionalize the multilateral Europe-Asia bonds in close dialogue with ASEAN and other key stakeholders, identifying areas of common interest but also contested issues which need to be resolved. In order to avoid duplication, the initiatives and structures should be promoted under the frame of the existing, ASEAN-led mechanisms. It may be overly optimistic, but a joint EU-ASEAN dialogue offensive, modeled after the former Conference on Security and Cooperation (CSCE) could at least bring China and the US to the negotiating

table and ensure a continuous dialogue and exchange to resolve the most pressing security risks in the Indo-Pacific.

The EU's Indo-Pacific strategy of 2021 can only be a first step in the necessary endeavor to define the European interests in the region in a more ambitious, comprehensive and concise manner. Further needed is the development of sound instruments to implement the strategy and related policies in a way that benefits both European and Indo-Pacific citizens.

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Views of governments and civil society**

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