



The Russia-Ukraine Conflict: the Us' Strategic Goals in Reshaping the Power Structure in Europe

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ABSTRACT

The Russia-Ukraine conflict beginning February 24, 2022 strongly impacted the power structure in Europe as the geopolitical crisis reshaped relations between the US, EU and Russia. This paper explores how the US reshaped Europe's power balance by analyzing three strategic goals. First, establishing Russia as a permanent security threat to European countries' structure by rejecting Russia's NATO membership and promoting NATO's eastward expansion despite promising no expansion post-Cold War. This helped the US strengthen dominance over the EU which needed NATO protection from Russia. Second, prompting the EU to reduce dependence on Russia's gas and become the EU's largest energy provider after Russia weaponized energy. This allowed the US to replace Russia's role in Europe's energy security. Third, containing President Putin's ambitions to restore Russia's superpower status through sanctions weakening its economy and military aid to Ukraine. Research methodology included qualitative analysis of secondary sources like government data and scholarly articles. Key findings were that the US succeeded in its goals, using the conflict to weaken Russia and increase influence over the EU. However, consequences included undermining international rules restraining major powers and destabilizing Europe's long-term security architecture established post-WWII. Overall, the paper demonstrates how major powers utilize conflicts to reshape regional power dynamics aligned with their interests, despite ensuing instability.

INTRODUCTION

In the third decade of the 21st century, the Russia-Ukraine conflict has strongly influenced the power structure in the European region. Thus, the balance of power in this region is being reestablished due to the impact of the Ukraine geopolitical crisis. In this situation, scholar William B. White observed the turbulent power structure shift events in Europe and commented: "Any European country that proposes direct military support for Ukraine, the result could lead to an even wider confrontation between NATO and Russia" (White, 2022). Therefore, the risk of a military conflict enveloping the entire European continent is in a state of alarm, which has seriously impacted the security structure of the European region established since the end of World War II. In this context, the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict is directly related to US intervention in NATO's strategy of expanding its influence eastward. Ukraine's ability to withstand Russia's powerful attack depends largely on military aid from the US, NATO and Western allies, especially the UK and EU. However, the relationship between the US and EU in this framework is very complex with many disagreements, exemplified by the two leading Atlantic powers - France and Germany. These issues have created instability and lack of consensus in NATO's joint decision-making process. In this event, the US plays a core role in promoting NATO's strategy of expanding its influence eastward. Therefore, the US has taken a strategic approach to take advantage of the opportunity to strengthen its dominance over the EU while weakening Russia's national power and traditional position with European countries.

METHODOLOGY

This paper aims to explore, evaluate and analyze the US' goals in reshaping the power structure in Europe through the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Thereby, the paper will draw conclusions about the extent of the US' success in achieving these goals as well as the long-term consequences of changing the power structure in the European region. Thereby, the paper mainly uses qualitative analysis through secondary data collected in August 2023. Specifically, the paper will collect data from the European Council (EC), International Energy Agency (IEA), US Energy Information Administration (EIA), documents, books, newspapers related to the topic to analyze the US' process and approach in shaping the power structure in Europe. Additionally, statistical methods, logical methods and historical methods will also be used in this research.

RESEARCH RESULT

Russia becomes a permanent security threat to European countries' structure

This strategic goal stems from after World War II when the US successfully dominated continental Europe through the \$13.3 billion Marshall Plan aid package (equivalent to \$173 billion at current exchange rate as of August 9, 2023). From there, through the 1947 Truman Doctrine, the US took the lead in establishing NATO on April 4, 1949 with three dual goals: "Keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down" (Maunder, 2016). The top priority goal was to contain and restrain the spread of Russia's communism

to Western Europe, Central Europe and other regions around the world. Therefore, the Soviet Union became the core target that NATO confronted to protect the democratic values and freedom of capitalism (Wade, 2022). However, the collapse of the Soviet Union on December 26, 1991 left NATO's core objective in an uncertain state. This created room for European countries to break free from US dominance, exemplified by France and Germany. Therefore, European countries sought to limit US influence and pursued independent policies to establish a separate community with high self-determination belonging to the "European civilization". Thus, to be able to have enough resources to restrain the "hegemonic" power of the US in Europe, these countries took a breakthrough step to link the members of the "old continent" into a formidable alliance. On December 7, 1992, the Maastricht Treaty was signed and took effect on November 1, 1993. The EU was officially established and the Euro currency was introduced. One of Euro's important tasks was to limit the influence of the US dollar. The EU's independent actions made US leaders realize the situation was increasingly difficult to control as US dominance in Europe became increasingly blurred. Sometimes US political actions led to serious political and bilateral trade conflicts. In 1996, the US passed the Helms-Burton Act (against Cuba) and the D'Amato-Kennedy Act (against Iran and Libya). This threatened the trade interests of major European multinational corporations and provoked strong protests among Europe's top businesses. Both the US and EU went through many challenges to find a common solution for both sides in this event. Therefore, analyzing the damages and contradictions in the above events, scholar Alexey Portansky assessed: "The Helms-Burton and D'Amato-Kennedy Acts marked the beginning of disagreements in the allied relations between the EU and US" (Portansky, 2019). Especially when Iraq's President Saddam Hussein declared: "No acceptance of oil transactions in USD, only acceptance of oil transactions in Euros" (Heard, 2003), this seriously threatened the petrodollar system and dominance of the USD globally. This made the US anxious and tried hard to prevent potential threats to the power of the USD.

On November 22, 2005, the new government of Chancellor Angela Merkel took power in Germany. The EU's independent activities not dependent on the US increased. US dominance and influence over the EU became increasingly blurred, especially with the two leading powers Germany and France. Notably, in April 2018, when German Chancellor Angela Merkel met with US President Donald Trump to discuss Germany cooperating with Russia to build the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, to prevent bilateral cooperation between Germany and Russia in energy, he suggested: "The US could remove steel and aluminum tariffs if Berlin refuses to build Nord Stream 2" (Ellyatt, 2020). However, Germany did not accept this deal with the US because energy cooperation with Russia had become a "security belt" for Germany's economy. On June 1, 2018, the US increased import tariffs by 25% on EU metal products including steel and 10% on aluminum. This provoked a strong reaction from the EU, especially when US President Donald Trump legally justified this by using the Trade Expansion Act passed in the US in 1962. This allows restrictions

on imports of goods if they pose a “threat to national security” (Breuninger, 2018). This led to the EU’s retaliation by increasing tariffs by 10% on US-made cars. German Chancellor Angela Merkel emphasized: “We will not let ourselves be ripped off again and again. Instead, we will also act” (Niennaber, 2018). Analyzing this event, scholar Alexey Portansky said: “It is this legal justification that has been perceived by Europeans with hostile attitudes, which collapses the entire system of existing rules. This system is based on the fact that within the framework of the World Trade Organization (WTO), each country has individual obligations based on the general rules of the organization that have been developed in a long and complex process” (Porstansky, 2019). Thus, US dominance in Europe became increasingly blurred as the leading EU powers grew increasingly strong, independent and successfully built prestige and trust with other EU members amid US political actions that often threatened the EU’s collective interests, especially under President Donald Trump’s “America First” ideology.

In the 21st century, Russia was no longer an “existential threat” to European countries, as domestic issues like aging population and Russia’s dependence on exporting natural resources erased its “superpower” status of the 20th century (Dabrowski, 2019). Therefore, Russia needed the European market to revive its economy and ensure social welfare quality for its citizens, while the EU needed Russia’s abundant and diverse natural resources to create leverage for the stable development of the economy and ensure long-term energy supply safety for the EU. Therefore, Ukraine became an important “buffer zone” to maintain balance and cooperation in the pragmatic relationship between Russia and the EU. This established a peaceful, stable dialogue relationship between Russia and the EU under the adept, flexible leadership of German Chancellor Angela Merkel amid the context of the US trying to maintain its dominant position in Europe and limit cooperation between Russia and the EU. Therefore, to maintain dominance over the EU, Russia became the target to help the US create a permanent security threat to Europe. This explains why the US rejected Russia’s membership application to NATO four times, in 1954, 1983, 1991 and 2002. Therefore, facing political fluctuations in the 1994 Russia-Chechnya War, US President Bill Clinton decided to expand NATO’s influence eastward despite US Secretary of State James Baker’s “spirit promise” to the Soviet Union during initial negotiations on the final settlement treaty related to Germany in the late 1980s: “NATO would not move an inch eastward” (Shehadi, 2022). The issue of expanding NATO eastward was completely in line with the EU’s common interests, so the strategy gained consensus from the EU. NATO expanded continuously to the three Baltic states formerly part of the Soviet Union - Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia - and countries in the Carpathian region that were formerly part of the Warsaw Pact. This led to Russia’s strong reaction by military intervention in the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict on August 7-12 when US President George W. Bush was determined to promote the NATO eastward expansion strategy. He stated to all alliance members: “The terrorist threat is real, extremely dangerous and defeating this enemy (Russia) is NATO’s top priority” (Erlanger & Myers,

2008). However, this went against the interests of the EU's leading powers, exemplified by Germany and France, which opposed the demand to admit Ukraine into NATO because they believed "this was an unnecessary insult to Russia" (Erlanger & Myers, 2008). Therefore, Germany and France wanted to maintain the status quo in this region to minimize the risk of conflict encompassing all of Europe.

However, nationalism was on the rise in Ukrainian society. The US' anti-Russia policies and strategies applied in Ukraine sparked a "color revolution" wave in the Euromaidan event which led to the establishment of a pro-Western government. This placed Russia's vital security on the western flank in a state of serious threat. Thus, if Russia used military force to intervene in Ukraine, it meant the "buffer zone" between Russia and the EU collapsed and directly threatened the EU and NATO's eastern flank security. This forced the EU to support Ukraine to maintain solidarity and unity within the EU as well as eastern Europe's security. Of note, an important cause leading to the EU's actions stemmed from the "fear of Russia" syndrome in Europe's war history, especially for Eastern European countries. Scholars Stephen M. Walt and Robert A. Belfer pointed out: "A nation's historical war memories strongly impact the psychology of that nation's leaders. Even the most rational leaders are influenced by the power of collective memory" (Walt & Belfer, 2017). Therefore, EU members, especially Eastern Europe, were always wary and reacted strongly to Russia's political activities in Europe. Thus, the current triangular US-EU-Russia relationship was still influenced by historical, economic and political factors between the past and future. Thereby, the Russia-Ukraine conflict split the dialogue and cooperation relationship between the EU and Russia. This helped the US strengthen its traditional dominance and influence in Europe when the EU needed NATO to protect eastern Europe's security in the face of Russia's threat. Therefore, to maintain dominance over the EU, Russia became the target to help the US create permanent security threats to Europeans. This explains why the US rejected Russia's NATO membership application four times in 1954, 1983, 1991 and 2002. Facing political fluctuations in the 1994 Russia-Chechnya War, US President Bill Clinton decided to expand NATO's influence eastward despite US Secretary of State James Baker's "spirit promise" to the Soviet Union during initial negotiations on the final settlement treaty related to Germany in the late 1980s: "NATO would not move an inch eastward" (Shehadi, 2022). The issue of expanding NATO eastward was completely in line with the EU's common interests, so the strategy gained consensus from the EU. NATO expanded continuously to the three Baltic states formerly part of the Soviet Union - Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia - and countries in the Carpathian region that were formerly part of the Warsaw Pact. This led to Russia's strong reaction by military intervention in the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict on August 7-12 when US President George W. Bush was determined to promote the NATO eastward expansion strategy. He stated to all alliance members: "The terrorist threat is real, extremely dangerous and defeating this enemy (Russia) is NATO's top priority" (Erlanger & Myers, 2008).

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The EU's process of reducing dependence on Russia's energy sources allows the US to replace Russia's role in Europe's energy security structure

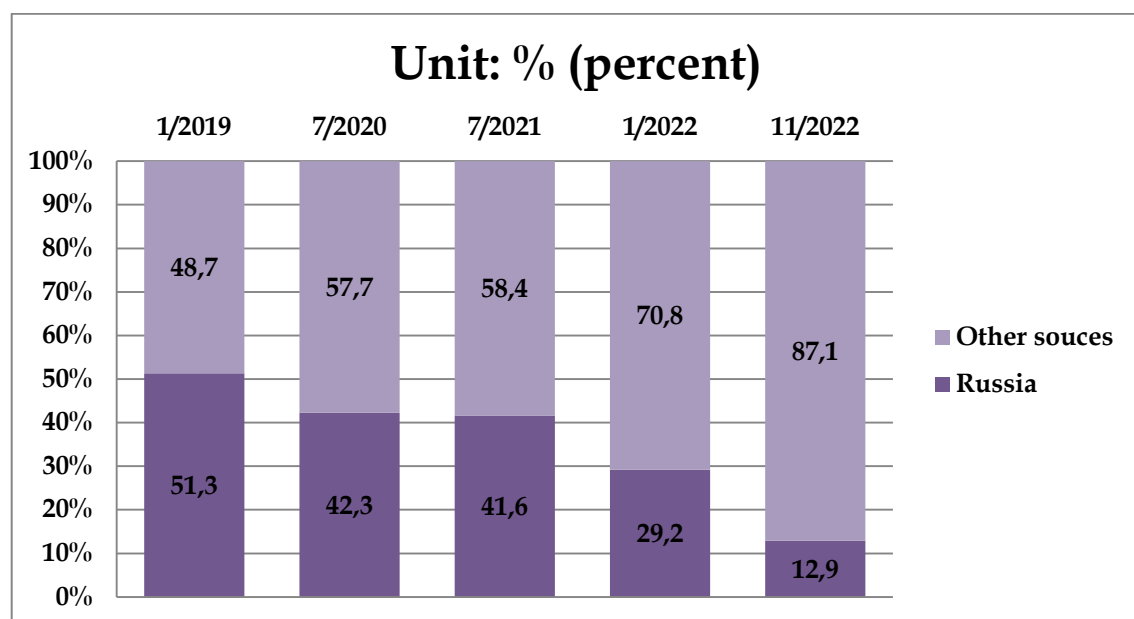
The energy map between the EU and Russia began during the Cold War, especially in the 1970s when the globalization boom and the oil crisis impacted by the Arab-Israeli war created huge energy demands for Western Europe's economy. Thus, the Soviet Union supplied 27% of Western Europe's total 59% oil consumption in 1972 (David, 2017). Therefore, since the Urengoy-Pomary-Uzhgorod gas pipeline was completed in 1983 despite US opposition, this event marked the long-term influence and position of Russia (Soviet Union) with Europe. In 2009, the Russia-Ukraine gas crisis showed the EU was seriously dependent on Russia's cheap energy sources, which strongly impacted the operation of the overall economy of key members in the "old continent". On January 7, 2009, Russia stopped supplying gas through Ukraine, accounting for 80% of Europe's gas consumption. This severely impacted EU members like Slovakia, Serbia, Bulgaria who had to declare a "state of emergency", while several other members were under huge pressure due to the disruption of energy supplies from Russia. Thus, energy officially became a "diplomatic tool" used by Russia to pressure the EU's foreign policy. Since the Euromaidan event took place, cooperation between Russia and the EU was still maintained largely

because the EU depended on Russia's energy sources. This led to the EU's indecisiveness and lack of consensus with the US on admitting Ukraine into NATO and sanctioning Gazprom's energy sources. In 2021, before the Russia-Ukraine conflict broke out, the EU imported about 155 billion cubic meters of gas from Russia, with about 65% from Germany and 40% of Europe's total gas consumption. Additionally, Russia supplied around 108.1 million tons of crude oil to Europe, while also being the top supplier of related oil products with 91 million tons. Besides, the EU also imported nearly 1/2 of its total coal imports from Russia with 51.4 million tons. Russia also provided energy for 18 of Europe's nuclear reactors (Kardash, 2023). Therefore, dependence on Russia's energy sources led to the EU's indecisiveness on issues related to Ukraine. This impacted the US' strategy to strengthen its dominance in Europe specifically and NATO's eastward expansion strategy in general. Especially when the Nord Stream 2 project was completed with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz agreeing to put it into operation, this prompted the US to intensify its anti-Russia policies and strategies in Ukraine to pressure Germany into demonstrating its "captain" position of the "EU ship" when eastern Europe's security was seriously threatened by Russia. This pressured the EU to counterbalance with the US against Russia in NATO's strategy of expanding eastward. Thus, the US pledged support for Ukraine's NATO membership while backing Ukraine in restoring its eastern separatist Donbas region territory.

On February 24, 2022, the Russia-Ukraine conflict officially began which required the EU to show support for Ukraine and oppose Russia's invasion and warmongering. Facing the emerging crisis, EU High Representative Josep Borrell strongly opposed Russia's actions: "Such decisions are illegal and unacceptable. They violate international law, Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, Russia's own international commitments and further escalate the crisis" (European Council, 2022). Thus, the EU officially announced its first sanctions package against Russia on February 23, 2022 regarding Russia recognizing the sovereignty of the breakaway Donbas region's government and moving troops into the area. Thereby, the EU's 27 members unanimously signed the March 2022 Versailles Declaration on gradually removing the EU's dependence on Russia's fossil fuels including gas, oil and coal. To retaliate against the EU's sanctions, Russia's leaders officially "weaponized" energy against the EU. Thereby, Russia stopped supplying gas to Poland (50% of consumption) and Bulgaria (90% of consumption) in April 2022. Through Decree No. 172 on "Special procedures for foreign natural gas buyers to fulfill obligations to Russian natural gas suppliers", Russia demanded major EU powers like Germany and Italy pay in Rubles (Karymsak, 2022). Analyzing Russia's "retaliatory" move, International Energy Agency (IEA) Director Fatih Birol commented: "Make no mistake, Russia's use of its natural gas resources as an economic and political weapon shows that Europe needs to act quickly to be ready to face significant disruptions to Russia's gas supply next winter" (International Energy Agency, 2022). Additionally, in presenting the IEA's plan to reduce dependence on Russia's energy, EU Energy Commissioner Kadri Simson emphasized: "Reducing dependence on Russian oil and gas is a

strategic imperative for the EU at this moment” (International Energy Agency, 2022). Thus, the IEA provided the EU with a 10-point plan to reduce dependence on Russia’s energy by more than 1/3 (50 billion cubic meters of gas). Therefore, facing Russia weaponizing energy, on May 30-31, 2022, the EU officially decided to ban nearly 90% of Russia’s total oil imports (excluding crude oil) by late 2022. This caused Russia to lose over 160 million euros daily due to the EU’s energy sanctions and the G7’s price cap (Yanatma, 2023). Thereby, the EU made significant progress in reducing dependence on Russia’s energy since the Russia-Ukraine conflict began, especially regarding gas (see diagram 1).

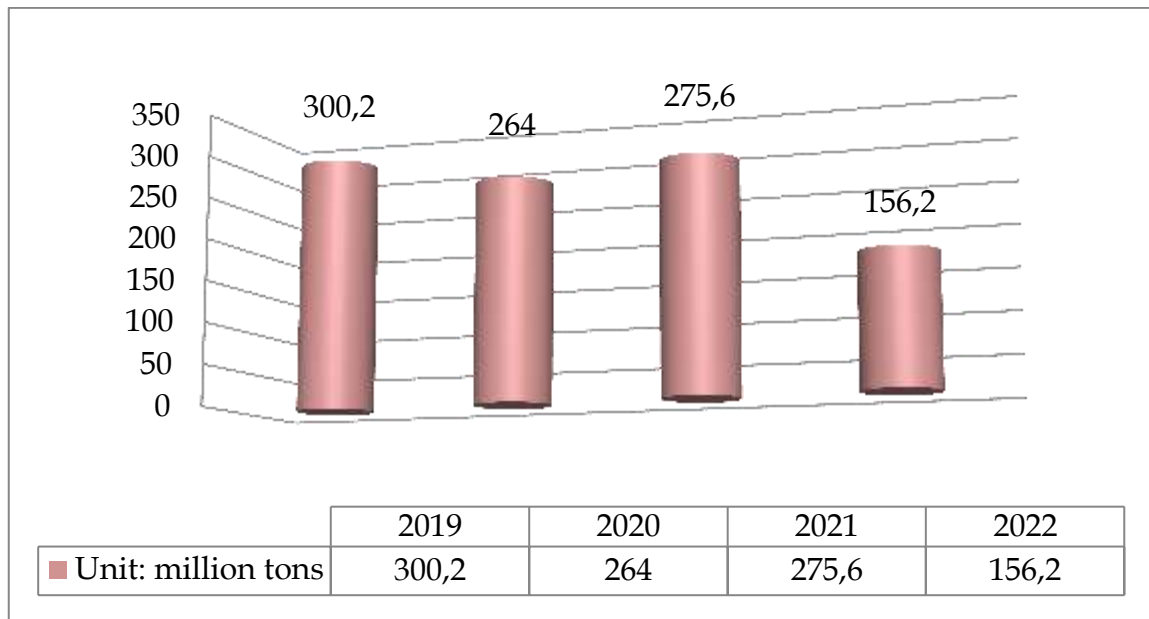
Diagram 1. The EU diversifies gas sources and reduces Russia’s import share from January 2019 to November 2022



Source: Author compiled data from the European Council (EC)

Table 1’s data shows the EU made significant steps in the strategy to reduce dependence on Russia’s gas, from importing 51.3% to 58.4% in 2019-2021, down to just 29.2% in January 2022. Especially since the Russia-Ukraine conflict began, Russia’s share of the EU’s gas imports sharply dropped to just 12.9% in November 2022. Additionally, Germany declared complete independence from Russia’s gas after achieving the target of storing over 95% of gas in preparation for the 2022 winter without needing to import gas from Russia (Khoi, 2022). This demonstrated the EU’s determination to diversify gas import sources and weaken Russia’s “energy weapon” as well as an important source of revenue to sustain the Ukraine conflict. Besides, notably, the EU’s total energy imports from Russia in 2022 significantly decreased compared to 2019 (see diagram 2).

Diagram 2. The EU's total energy import volume from Russia in 2019 – 2022



Source: Author compiled data from the European Council (EC)

Table 2's data shows the EU reduced its total energy imports from Russia by nearly 50%, from 300.2 million tons in 2019 down to 156.2 million tons in 2022. This indicates the EU made breakthrough progress in diversifying energy sources and reducing dependence on Russia's energy since the Russia-Ukraine conflict began. However, eliminating Russia's energy required the EU to shift to cooperating with other countries. In 2022, the EU increased liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports by 60%, including 12% from Russia compared to 2021 (European Commission, 2022). The US became the EU's biggest source of increased LNG imports. According to the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) report: "The US shipped nearly 3/4 of total LNG exports to Europe in the first 4 months of 2022 and became the world's largest LNG exporter in the first half of 2022. US gas shipments accounted for over 70% of Europe's imports so far in 2022 through September. Thus, Europe became the top destination for US LNG exports in 2022, accounting for 64% of total US exports" (Energy Information Administration, 2022). However, although the US provided sufficient energy to operate the EU's economy and society, the cost of imports from the US increased 10 times compared to Russia's energy imports. Thus, the EU's energy costs seriously impacted Europeans' social welfare. According to the European Statistical Office (Eurostat) report, inflation hit a record 10.6% in the Eurozone in October 2022 and had fallen to 5.3% in July 2023 (Eurostat, 2023). However, inflation in Europe was still fluctuating strongly due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict's impact, which sharply increased energy and food prices and pressured Europeans' livelihoods. Thereby, the US succeeded in replacing Russia as the EU's top energy supplier. This helped the US strengthen its traditional dominance and influence in Europe through

energy power and military power amid the context of the EU facing pressure from Russia's warmongering on eastern Europe.

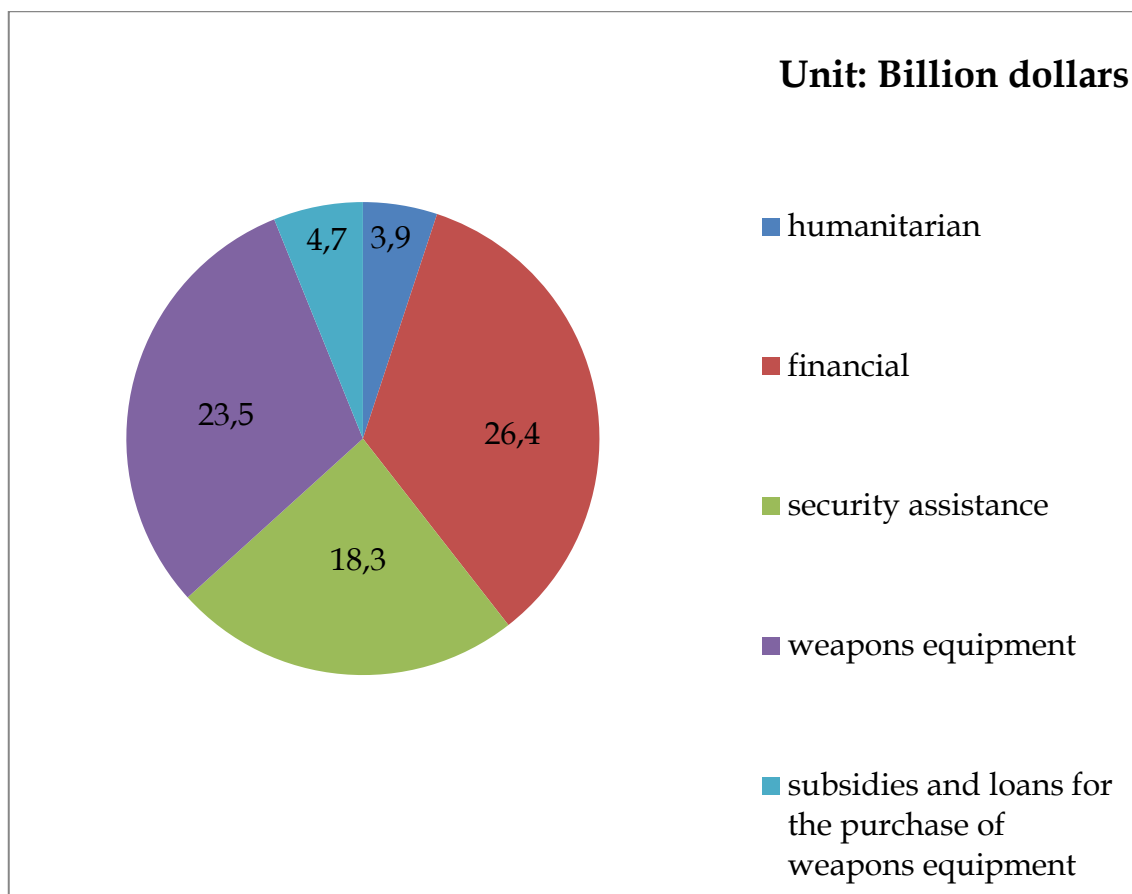
Containing President Vladimir Putin's ambitions to return Russia to superpower status

Entering the 21st century, Vladimir Putin's Russian government took power and succeeded in rebuilding the economy after a decade of crisis in the late 20th century. Thus, Russia returned as a leading Eurasian power. This worried the US about Russia's rise when this country converged too much potential to return to superpower status in the 21st century. Putin's firm, determined nationalist leadership was a serious challenge to NATO as NATO's eastward expansion strategy severely weakened Russians' "status" on the European map. This was clearly reflected in scholar Paul Dibb's essay "Why Putin decided to attack Ukraine?" which assessed Russian President Vladimir Putin's worldview: "Putin has four basic strategic priorities in his very long and complex speeches" (Dibb, 2022). Thereby, scholar Paul Dibb said Putin's first perspective was: "That was the humiliation over the collapse of the Soviet Union. In Putin's view, the US took advantage of how weak Russia was at that time" (Dibb, 2022). Therefore, this could explain the anger and strong reaction of nationalists like President Vladimir Putin to the US trying to promote NATO's eastward expansion strategy which made Russians in Ukraine have to "renounce their ancestral origins and ancestors for generations and even have to believe that Russia is their enemy. It would be no exaggeration to say that the process towards forced assimilation, towards forming a purely ethnic Ukrainian state, aggressive towards Russia, can be compared in its implications to the use of weapons of mass destruction against us" (Kremlin, 2021). Therefore, Ukraine's actions made President Vladimir Putin believe the US was trying to establish an extremely "anti-Russia" Ukrainian political system. Finally, scholar Paul Dibb mentioned Putin's fourth perspective: "That Putin wants to rebuild Russia as a superpower, for the West to accept Russia's dominance within its sphere of influence over former Soviet territories" (Dibb, 2022). Thereby, Russia reacted strongly to the US wanting to admit Ukraine into the alliance. Ukraine's geostrategic position and the Crimean Peninsula's existence played a core role in Europe's security policies and strategies and Russia's ambition to return to superpower status. Scholar Tim Marshall analyzed and evaluated: "Because Russia lacks an ice-free warm water port in winter, this made Sevastopol port a core interest that could seriously impact Russia's security policy" (Marshall, 2020, p.43). Thus, if Russia wanted to return as a superpower in the 21st century, the warm water Sevastopol port was the "keystone" to help Russia progress equivalently with the US and China.

Thus, in its global dominance strategy, the US always wanted to keep Russia not too strong and unable to potentially challenge US global leadership and Europe's security (Brzezinski, 2019, p.325). Therefore, Russia's resurgence as a Eurasian power in the 21st century and pressure from nationalist leader President Vladimir Putin worried the US and NATO about Russia's potential revenge sentiments in the future once Russia's national power was fully restored. Therefore, scholar Paul Stronski analyzed NATO's current role and

stated: “The Ukraine conflict brought NATO back to its origins, specifically containing Russia and dealing with new challenges stemming from an increasingly unpredictable and vengeful power” (Stronski, 2022). Therefore, to contain Russia’s potential to restore its superpower status, the US intensified long-term aid sanctions for Ukraine in the conflict with Russia. White House spokesperson Karine J. Pierre’s speech showed the US’ strong support for Ukraine: “The war is at an inflection point and we have to do everything we can to help the Ukrainians resist Russia’s aggression” (Baldor & Matthew, 2023). Thus, as NATO’s commander, the US played a core role in the NATO eastward expansion strategy and became the top country in training and providing military aid to Ukraine (see diagram 3).

Diagram 3. US aid to Ukraine from January 24, 2022 to May 31, 2023



Source: Author compiled data from the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR)

According to Table 3’s statistics, the CFR analyzed data from the Pentagon and US State Department to state that since the conflict began until May 31, 2023, the US and NATO promoted the largest military and economic aid of resources since World War II ended for the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Thereby, the US provided \$76.8 billion, including \$46.6 billion (61%) in military aid, \$26.4 billion (34%) in economic aid and \$3.9 billion (5%) in humanitarian aid to Ukraine. Additionally, the US coordinated with the G7 to enhance over

300 strong sanctions to weaken Russia's economy and military (Baldor & Matthew, 2023). On February 26, 2022, the US and NATO officially removed Russia from the global interbank SWIFT telecommunications system. This was seen as "financial nuclear weaponry" against Russia's economy (Rebucci, 2022). Therefore, Russia's new Foreign Policy Security Doctrine stated: "The US and its satellites viewed the actions Russia took to protect its vital interests regarding Ukraine as a pretext to escalate their longstanding anti-Russia policies and sparked a new type of hybrid war. This hybrid war sought to weaken Russia in every possible way, including weakening its military, economic and technological potential. It also aimed to limit Russia's political sovereignty in foreign and domestic affairs and erode the integrity of Russia's territory" (Kremlin, 2023). Thus, the US succeeded in implementing sanctions, embargoes and blockades on Russia's economy. This weakened Russia's military power, economy and reduced its status and influence in Europe.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The above analysis showed the US succeeded in establishing Russia as a permanent security threat to Europeans' security structure. This helped the US strengthen its traditional dominance and influence in Europe while weakening Russia's traditional position in the region. Additionally, since the Russia-Ukraine conflict erupted, the US reshaped Europe's power structure by prompting the EU to gradually eliminate Russia's energy from Europe's energy map. This helped the EU diversify its energy supply sources and eliminate pressure from Russia's "energy weapon" over the EU in issues related to Ukraine. However, the EU abandoning decades of cooperation with Russia meant the EU had to find energy suppliers from other countries globally, exemplified by the US, UK, Norway and Qatar. Thus, the US became the EU's top energy supplier. This helped the US strengthen its dominance and influence over Europe through energy power and military power amid the context of the EU facing pressure from Russia's warmongering in eastern Europe. Additionally, Russia's rise in the 21st century and determined nationalist leader Vladimir Putin worried the US and NATO about Russia's potential revenge sentiments once Russia's national power was fully restored. Therefore, to contain Russia's potential to regain superpower status, the US intensified economic sanctions and promoted military aid for Ukraine to weaken Russia's economic and military power. In summary, the Russia-Ukraine conflict helped the US reshape Europe's power structure and weaken Russia's traditional position in the region. However, the shift in power balance left long-term consequences for Europe's security structure. Scholar Susan Thornton commented on the Russia-Ukraine conflict's impact on Europe's security situation: "The specter of territorial conquest became a reality in a way not seen for decades, and the erosion of the international rules-based order became shockingly apparent" (Thornton, 2022). Therefore, this event put Europe's security on high alert. This showed international rules became ineffective in restraining major powers' actions because power competition would use "hard power" to achieve individual interests.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

While this paper provided an overview of the US' strategic goals in reshaping Europe's power structure through the Russia-Ukraine conflict, further research could delve deeper into specific aspects.

Geopolitical modeling - Apply geopolitical models like Spykman's Rimland theory to analyze how the US aims to contain Russia and command the Eurasian heartland from the western edge. Examine how the US uses rimland states like Ukraine to counter Russia's power.

EU energy security - Conduct an in-depth study on the EU's alternatives to replace Russian energy post-conflict. Assess the costs, feasibility and geopolitical implications of major options like increased LNG imports, renewables expansion, and pipeline diversification.

NATO-Russia relations - Trace NATO's historical expansion and evolution of strategic doctrines towards Russia. Analyze how those policies contributed to current tensions and assess future prospects for NATO-Russia rapprochement.

Sanctions effectiveness - Evaluate the effectiveness of Western sanctions on Russia's economy and military capabilities. Examine how sanctions have impacted Russia's capacity to prolong the conflict and achieve its strategic goals. Assess prospects for sanctions relief.

Domestic politics - Compare how nationalist narratives and historical memory have shaped strategic cultures in Russia vs. Western states. Examine how those factors have influenced foreign policy decisions contributing to the Ukraine conflict.

Peace scenarios - Explore potential negotiated settlement options to end hostilities. Game out scenarios for security guarantees, territory/border changes, NATO membership, sanctions relief etc. and how both sides could claim victory.

By diving deeper into these areas, advanced research could provide greater insight into the geopolitical dynamics at play and supplement the current analysis on achieving strategic objectives in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. More empirical data and modeling would further strengthen the study's conclusions.

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