

## EDITORIAL

# **CONTEXTUALISING THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE: A FRACTURED GLOBALISATION PERSPECTIVE**

*Peter Záborský*

The University of Auckland

[p.zamborsky@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:p.zamborsky@auckland.ac.nz)

## Introduction

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has escalated the conflict that has been ongoing since 2014, when Russia occupied Crimea. Over the past decade, and especially since February 2022, the ongoing war has been studied and discussed from many perspectives related to understanding Russia, Ukraine, and their place in global realities of shifting East–West and Global South–North tensions. The perspectives include, for example, the paradox and change of Russian cultural values,<sup>1</sup> narratives of the Russian–Ukrainian conflict,<sup>2</sup> historical memory and information warfare.<sup>3</sup> Perspectives on the various contexts of the war have valuable implications for important debates in areas such as the European Union’s (and other countries’) strategic autonomy,<sup>4</sup> economic policy<sup>5</sup> and energy markets worldwide.<sup>6</sup> Lastly, understanding the conflict is vital for navigating the uncertain era of emerging global turbulence, with the war in Ukraine possibly foreshadowing more dangerous years to come.

This special issue examines the conflict by (1) focusing on the understanding of the concepts of power and failure in Russia from a management perspective, (2) examining the historical context of Ukraine’s self-narrative of the European perspective, and (3) exploring the consequences of neutrality in an analysis of media coverage in two Global South countries (Brazil and South Africa) during the Russia–Ukraine war. This editorial also places the three studies in the special issue within a broader perspective of fractured globalisation.

---

<sup>1</sup> Chimenson, Dina, Rosalie L. Tung, Andrei Panibratov, and Tony Fang. 2022. “The Paradox and Change of Russian Cultural Values.” *International Business Review* 31 (3): 101944.

<sup>2</sup> Koval, Nadiia, Volodymyr Kulyk, Mykola Riabchuk, Kateryna Zarembo, and Marianna Fakhuridnova. 2022. “Morphological Analysis of Narratives of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict in Western Academia and Think-Tank Community.” *Problems of Post-Communism* 69 (2): 166–78.

<sup>3</sup> Pakhomenko, Sergii, Kateryna Tryma, and J’moul A. Francis. 2018. “The Russian–Ukrainian War in Donbas: Historical Memory as an Instrument of Information Warfare.” In *The Use of Force against Ukraine and International Law*, edited by Sergey Sayapin and Evhen Tsybulenko, 297–312. The Hague: T.M.C. Asser Press.

<sup>4</sup> Helwig, Niklas, and Ville Sinkkonen. 2022. “Strategic Autonomy and the EU as a Global Actor: The Evolution, Debate and Theory of a Contested Term.” *European Foreign Affairs Review* 27 (Special).

<sup>5</sup> Blanchard, Olivier, and Jean Pisani-Ferry. 2022. “Fiscal Support and Monetary Vigilance: Economic Policy Implications of the Russia-Ukraine War for the European Union.” Bruegel.

<sup>6</sup> Johannesson, Jokull, and David Clowes. 2022. “Energy Resources and Markets—Perspectives on the Russia–Ukraine War.” *European Review* 30 (1): 4–23.

## Fractured globalisation

One way to frame the conflict in Ukraine is to see it as part of the process of shifts in globalisation and its nature. Fractured globalisation is defined as the shifts in globalisation, de-globalisation, and re-globalisation.<sup>7</sup> De-globalisation, a post Global Financial Crisis of 2008–2009 reversal in the trend of global interdependence, has also intensified the degree of bifurcation between the US-led bloc (“the West”) and other countries, most notably China, its allies and neutral countries cooperating with China (or other non-aligned countries).

The fractured globalisation perspective suggests that globalisation is not only a cohesive process binding us together but also a multi-faceted fracturing process with tensions and various epicentres of conflict between the West and its interests and the interests of other, increasingly powerful players in the world. The fractured globalisation perspective cautions that it is important to consider the cohesiveness, changing composition, size, and growth of the blocs associated with the US and China; the dynamics of interdependence within and between them; and the degree to which countries are aligned or not aligned with the blocs.

The conflict in Ukraine is in many ways a manifestation of this fractured globalisation process. The war started shortly after China and Russia had signed a comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for “a new era.” Russia made it clear that it saw the conflict as part of a broader effort to usher in a new world order not dominated by the US and the West. The conflict strengthened the West’s unity for a while, but more recently has also reinforced divisions, e.g., in the US (Republicans’ increasing reluctance to finance the Ukraine war) and in the European Union (e.g., Hungary not being resolute in supporting Ukraine, and the Hungarian President Viktor Orbán attending China’s Belt and Road Forum in 2023).

---

<sup>7</sup> Zámorský, Peter, Zheng Joseph Yan, Snežina Michailova, and Vincent Zhuang. 2023. “Chinese Multinationals’ Internationalization Strategies: New Realities, New Pathways.” *California Management Review* 66 (1): 96–123.

## Papers in this special issue

Perspectives from management, history and media studies are offered in this special issue to illuminate multiple contexts of the war. Michailova's "Power and (No) Failure: How Management Concepts Can Help Understand Some of the Drivers of the War in Ukraine" starts by delving into the Russian culture and Russian attitudes to power and failure.<sup>8</sup> Because Russia started the war, understanding the mentality of its leader(s) and other decision makers is crucial for contextualising the war. Michailova argues that power dynamics in Russian organisations are associated with one-man authority, hierarchy, and formal status. In contrast, employee empowerment is viewed as a loss of power. In her view, this perception of power, combined with a fear of failure, has contributed to the escalation of the war in Ukraine.

Zhabotynska et al.'s article entitled "Ukraine's Self-Narrative of the European Perspective: Reminiscences of the Future" complements Michailova's essay by offering perspectives from Ukrainian academics, two of them currently based in Ukraine.<sup>9</sup> Contextualising the conflict in Ukraine requires not only understanding Russian culture and why President Putin decided to invade Ukraine, but also understanding Ukrainian history and its self-narrative of belonging to Europe. The article argues that Ukraine may be termed an international "pivot" in the two meanings of this word—as a rotation stem and an important issue. Russia's military assault against Ukraine has made us recognise the fragility of world peace and the necessity to restore and maintain it via revising and strengthening political alliances. The article examines what Zhabotynska et al. consider to be one of the triggers of Russia's aggression since 2014—Ukraine's formulation of the strategic self-narrative focused on its European and Euro-Atlantic perspective.

---

<sup>8</sup> Michailova, Snezhina. 2023. "Power and (no) failure: How management concepts can help understand some of the drivers of the war in Ukraine." *New Zealand Journal of Research on Europe* 17 (1): 8–18.

<sup>9</sup> Zhabotynska, Svitlana, Natalia Chaban, & Anatoliy Chaban (2023). "Ukraine's self-narrative of the European perspective: Reminiscences of the future." *New Zealand Journal of Research on Europe* 17 (1): 19–45.

The authors argue that this narrative, self-featuring Ukraine as a sovereign actor belonging to Europe, has ample historical grounds under various time-perspectives—short, medium and long term. They propose and illustrate the “IN,” “OUTSIDE,” “BACK TO,” “WITH,” and “FOR EUROPE” semantic taxonomy to unpack the strategic narrative directions from Ukraine’s past to its present and future. The analysis highlights Ukraine’s being IN Europe in its long-term history which builds a bridge to the short history and present times, when Ukraine, standing against Russia WITH Europe and FOR it, aspires to be IN Europe again as an equal and reliable partner of European democracies. Ukraine’s desire to be a part of the West (e.g., to be a member of the European Union and ultimately of NATO) and Russia’s increasing drift to the East are manifestations of the fractured globalisation. It is no coincidence that Ukraine, the epicentre of the fracture, spans lands that historically leaned both to the West (e.g., the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth) and East (the Soviet Union).

Bailey and Nanton’s article, titled “The Consequences of Neutrality: An Analysis of Media Coverage in Two Global South Countries During the Russia-Ukraine Conflict,” zooms out from the Russian and Ukrainian contexts to global perspectives.<sup>10</sup> They analyse two media outlets—Brazil’s *Folha de São Paulo* (Folha) and the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)—and their coverage of the events and effects of the attacks on both international politics and global markets. Both Folha and SABC avoided a critical language condemning the Russian attacks. The media’s resulting narratives, which heavily centre on the impact of the war on domestic issues, are an extension of Brazil and South Africa’s diplomatic decision to remain neutral in the war in Ukraine, even amid calls by the West to condemn the actions of the Russian government. Bailey and Nanton discuss Brazil’s and South Africa’s geopolitical relations with non-Western countries during the initial phases of the war in Ukraine to

---

<sup>10</sup> Bailey, Camila, and Talia Nanton. 2023. “The consequences of neutrality: An analysis of media coverage in two Global South countries during the Russia-Ukraine conflict.” *New Zealand Journal of Research on Europe* 17 (1): 46–70.

understand the media’s framing of the issue as a strategic tool for self-preservation and diplomatic gains, recognising various consequences and trade-offs for these nations.

The article shows how the war in Ukraine—as part of the fractured globalisation process—has created divisions and shifting alliances around the world. While Russia’s President Putin did not attend the BRICS summit of emerging economies in 2023, the BRICS admitted Iran, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Argentina (although Argentina did not join after its new President Milei came to power). The BRICS expansion was hailed as a win for China. Moreover, while some Western countries (e.g., Italy) are distancing themselves from China’s Belt and Road Initiative, Putin and many leaders of the Global South countries attended the Belt and Road Forum in 2023, and these countries increasingly cooperate with China. South Africa even held a joint military exercise with Russia and China in 2023. Figure 1 further demonstrates the stark differences in global attitudes to the war in Ukraine, with Global South countries more closely aligned to Russia’s and China’s views on the war.

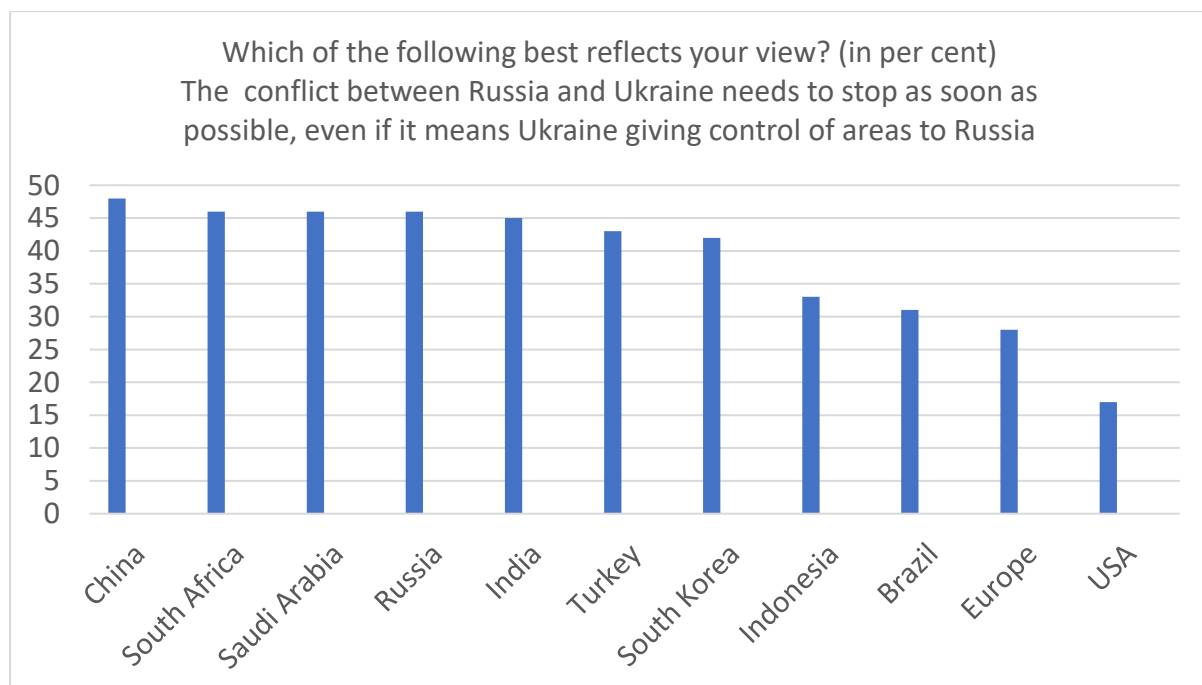


Figure 1. Views about the Ukraine war. Source: adapted from Datapraxis & YouGov (Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Switzerland), Datapraxis/Norstat (Estonia), Gallup International Association (Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, US), September/October 2023.

## Conclusion

The evolving and possibly strengthening geopolitical fracture between countries aligned/non-aligned with the West (the US and other liberal democracies) vs China (and Russia) has also consequences for most countries in the Indo-Pacific region and around the world.<sup>11</sup> With the rise of the importance of the Asia-Pacific region in international business and world affairs,<sup>12</sup> and the increasing economic and innovative power of emerging economies in the East (e.g., China and India) and Global South (e.g., Brazil and South Africa),<sup>13</sup> we are likely to see continued tensions and possible conflicts not only in Europe, the Middle East and Africa, but also in other regions of the world (e.g., in Latin America, Venezuela is possibly going to annex parts of Guayana). Contextualising the war in Ukraine is important but must go beyond Eurocentric or Atlantic perspectives. The geopolitical shifts inflaming the war are global in nature; the grinding tectonic plates of world power will cause upheavals worldwide.

---

<sup>11</sup> Abbondanza, Gabriele. 2022. "Whither the Indo-Pacific? Middle Power Strategies from Australia, South Korea and Indonesia." *International Affairs* 98 (2): 403–21. Smith, Nicholas Ross. 2022. "New Zealand's Grand Strategic Options as the Room for Hedging Continues to Shrink." *Comparative Strategy* 41 (3): 314–27.

<sup>12</sup> Verbeke, Alain, Robin E. Roberts, Deborah Delaney, Peter Záborský, Peter Enderwick, and Swati Nagar. 2019. "Contemporary International Business in the Asia-Pacific Region." Higher Education from Cambridge University Press. Cambridge University Press. 2 April 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Záborský, Peter, Igor Ingrst, and Krishna Raj Bhandari. 2023. "Knowledge Creation Capability under Different Innovation-Investment Motives Abroad: The Knowledge-Based View of International Innovation Management." *Technovation*, 127, 102829.