

The Effects of Wars: Lessons from Ukraine

Written by Ra Mason, Pierre Bocquillon, Suzanne Doyle, Toby James, Soul Park and Matilde Rosina

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RA MASON, PIERRE BOCQUILLON, SUZANNE DOYLE, TOBY JAMES, SOUL PARK AND MATILDE ROSINA, AUG 14 2024

The devastating war in Ukraine has transformed our understanding of military combat and international politics in the 21st Century. Until now, analyses of the effects of wars – including this one – have tended to be compartmentalised by sub-disciplines. These include International Relations (IR), Security Studies, International Political Economy (IPE), History, Historical Sociology, Public Administration and Psychology, among many others. In contrast, taken together, and addressed from an interdisciplinary perspective, a new set of studies shows how the war has had deep and complex “ripple” and “washback” effects. These are affecting human life; human development; economies; values and attitudes; policy and governance; and power distribution and relations around the world. This complexity, therefore, derives from both the number of actors involved, areas of human society affected and their interconnections. In other words, each of these layers of society have scope to feedback on one another and feedback loops may in turn affect the evolution of conflict and the possibility of its resolution in the future.

Reductive approaches must, therefore, be replaced with a more comprehensive, integrated analysis if specific lessons which are essential to preventing comparable future conflicts are to be learned from the War in Ukraine. Figure 1 (see below) illustrates the framework that we introduce. The integrated study of these ripple effects provides an invaluable understanding of the impact of the war. As such, the remainder of this article looks at these aspects in turn while highlighting their interconnections.

The war in Ukraine continues to rage on with daily deadly effect. Beyond the immediate death and trauma being dealt to life, which has, deservedly, been the focus of much media and public attention, it is also worth considering the impact upon human capital and the wider economy. The long-term consequences of the war on Ukraine’s total productivity are incalculable. For the time being, results show that losses in total productivity are estimated to plummet by about 7% up to 2035 and that the negative effects will fade away only slowly over the following decades. Moreover, these results should actually be taken with a degree of caution, as they might underestimate the true extent of the conflict’s impact.

Negative effects on productivity, also, for example, adversely affect vital tax revenues and the systems they are plugged into. For instance, restrictions caused by the introduction of martial law have heavily interfered with these since Russia’s invasion. In contrast, amendments in legislation that were initially implemented under military rule had some positive effect on the business sector’s operation, since they prevented excessive panic and managed to stabilise the economy to an extent. However, the long-term nature of military operations evident today necessitates the costly reformation of tax systems to prevent ongoing instability as the war rumbles on. Historical precedents suggest that wars often create a need and political opportunity to reform tax systems, to sustain the war effort but also to address demands for tax justice. How this is done, however, is likely to affect the conditions for peace and future economic growth.

In addition, the economic impact of the war has been further magnified by coming at a delicate moment when the world was just recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic. This combined its effects with those of the pandemic, which resulted in severe and far-reaching impacts on agriculture and food production systems and supply chains on a global scale, including in the Global South where it has negatively affected food access and quality, especially for the poor and most vulnerable. In turn, this has shaped attitudes towards the conflict in those countries reliant on imports

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from Ukraine and/or Russia, which are exploited by the belligerents.

The war has also increased uncertainties more generally, negatively affecting the performance of global financial markets and leading to higher commodity prices. Such negative shocks tend to be smaller the longer the war persists and responses to war-induced uncertainties are stronger in Europe and America. Nevertheless, the pattern of regional financial shocks is far from even. For example, the currency valuation of the Polish Zloty, Swedish Krone, and Romanian Leu experienced significant impacts, while the Hungarian Forint and Czech Koruna remained relatively stable. If the picture is taken in general, Europe's finances look in worse shape than before the war started, but a small number of individual European states are doing comparatively well as a result of favourable commodity prices for goods they specialise in.

As such, a comprehensive, integrated approach that incorporates all of these aspects into our wider understanding of the war is required to address the full breadth of its socio-economic fallout. This approach has to include an awareness of competing interests and propose measures to compensate those at a disadvantage. Only then can Europe thereby avoid further fragmentation and galvanise around a shared vision of its values, beliefs and attitudes.

There is, of course, more to the impacts of a major war than the human and economic aspects discussed above. The shifts created in values, beliefs and attitudes are of particular interest in this regard, due to their long-term political and cultural impact. For example, the forging of a unified plural Ukrainian identity as a concept has arisen out of the mutual struggle for survival. This combines international diaspora mobilisation, the elevation of diverse narratives of experience from across Ukraine, and a connected digital environment that links and reinforces concepts of social capital. Ukraine's agency is key here as it creates a prism or conduit through which identity is developed in the context of the battlefield – i.e., not as hapless victims of great power rivalry, but as brave fighters defending the motherland.

What is Ukraine and Ukrainian, therefore, become heavily loaded security concepts with a strong normative background which help to maintain relatively high troop morale and a sense of past, present and future in relation to Russia's invasion. In turn, they may shape the prospect for a settlement and the nation's future beyond the war. Ukrainian identity and the war also feed into larger European narratives of *us* and *them* in relation to Russia. This is evidenced by the way threat perceptions and attitudes toward various aspects of collective defence, including readiness to defend other European nations and the perceived centrality of NATO to European security, has increased fairly consistently across European countries. Even more than in the past, European citizens trust NATO over the EU, although support for EU security and defence cooperation has also increased. At the same time, there are significant differences across countries (e.g., Finland, Sweden, Poland), with some for which threat perception is heightened and the increase in support for collective defence more consistent and larger than in others (e.g., Hungary, Italy).

Beyond affecting immediate life and death, the economy, and values and attitudes across Europe, the war in Ukraine has reshaped governance frameworks and policies, both directly and indirectly. In terms of governance, the war has negatively impacted international cooperation in a wide range of domains. This has taken place at the political level, where the conflict has fuelled divisions and deadlock, in the UN for instance, but also at the expert level of epistemic communities, from the European Space Agency (ESA), to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and to the Arctic Council (AC). Effects on international cooperation and governance are varied, however, with certain frameworks (e.g., ESA) more resilient than others (e.g., AC). Regional governance has been particularly impacted by this conflict of continental reach. For instance, it has created an expanded geopolitical dimension to the EU neighbourhood policy, requiring Brussels to change tack to fill a hard security vacuum in its approach to the neighbourhood, calling for new instruments to deter Moscow and support the EU's Eastern allies. Concomitantly, we have witnessed erosion of the unity of the post-Soviet space, which is increasingly fragmented along geopolitical lines.

The consequences of the war on policy are complex, multifaceted and ambiguous. In some cases the crisis has indeed been a window of opportunity for policy change, in response to functional problem solving and/or pressure from strategic actors. One such example is the cybersecurity domain, which suffered insufficient attention and resource

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allocation, as well as institutional fragmentation and coordination problems. Only now, in the wake of this protracted conflict, have these become identified as critical issues to be urgently addressed.

In the field of migration, too, for example, the EU adopted generous policies towards Ukrainian refugees, triggering the Temporary Protection Directive for the very first time. This can be read as an attempt to increase the EU's soft power, by showing clear support for Ukraine, condemning Russia, and presenting the European Union as a responsible, united and leading actor in the international sphere. Correspondingly, for instance, migrant integration policy in the Czech Republic has been skewed in the short-term towards better acceptance of migrants, due to the political leadership and the need to promptly respond to the rapid arrival of Ukrainian refugees. Yet, as with the complexity and contestation identified in other fields above, these changes may not be permanent, as there is already an emerging tendency towards a reversal of this trend.

The crisis has also helped the EU to become more diversified, more import dependent and less gas intensive following the invasion of Ukraine. As an example, the EU has secured six new gas deals since the start of the war, and EU member states have signed 55 such deals. However, it was primarily market factors (e.g., high prices) and political actions taken in Moscow that forced citizens and companies to reduce their gas consumption and look for gas security elsewhere to sustain consumption for the EU rather than EU policies. Contrastingly, in some areas, despite expectations of change, there has been considerable continuity. For instance, when it comes to EU arms collaboration, procurement, and offsets, the impact of the war, far from a stepped change, has been limited and even negative, potentially increasing both fragmentation and non-EU dependencies.

The dominant media narrative usually focuses on the opposition between a Russia aligned block on the one hand and Ukraine and its western allies, chiefly the EU and the US. Yet, a wider geographical lens suggests a more complex and nuanced picture. China's influence over the conflict, for instance, has grown exponentially in Russia's favour and Beijing does not project itself as a neutral player. However, China also maintains its distance from Russia while simultaneously presenting itself against the US/West-Russian rivalry as an equidistant player belonging to the wider international community. It also uses this divide to assume the position of most suitable actor to manage a peaceful global order.

Meanwhile, India's steadfast reluctance to take sides and its imports of Russian oil reignited the debate from which two camps emerged. From the Western side, these suggest "patience" with India as there is a bigger prize in the Indo-Pacific, on the one hand, but also advocate "punishment" by downsizing investments in and expectations from New Delhi. The war is certainly likely to increase the intensity of Russian engagement with Asia and to recalibrate relations with certain Asian partners. This includes the Gulf states. On the other hand, Asia as a theatre of competition for energy suppliers – and the Gulf states as the dominant oil and gas suppliers for the region – has roots in pre-2022 trends that are unlikely to be transplanted by even the most tumultuous of transformations in Ukraine.

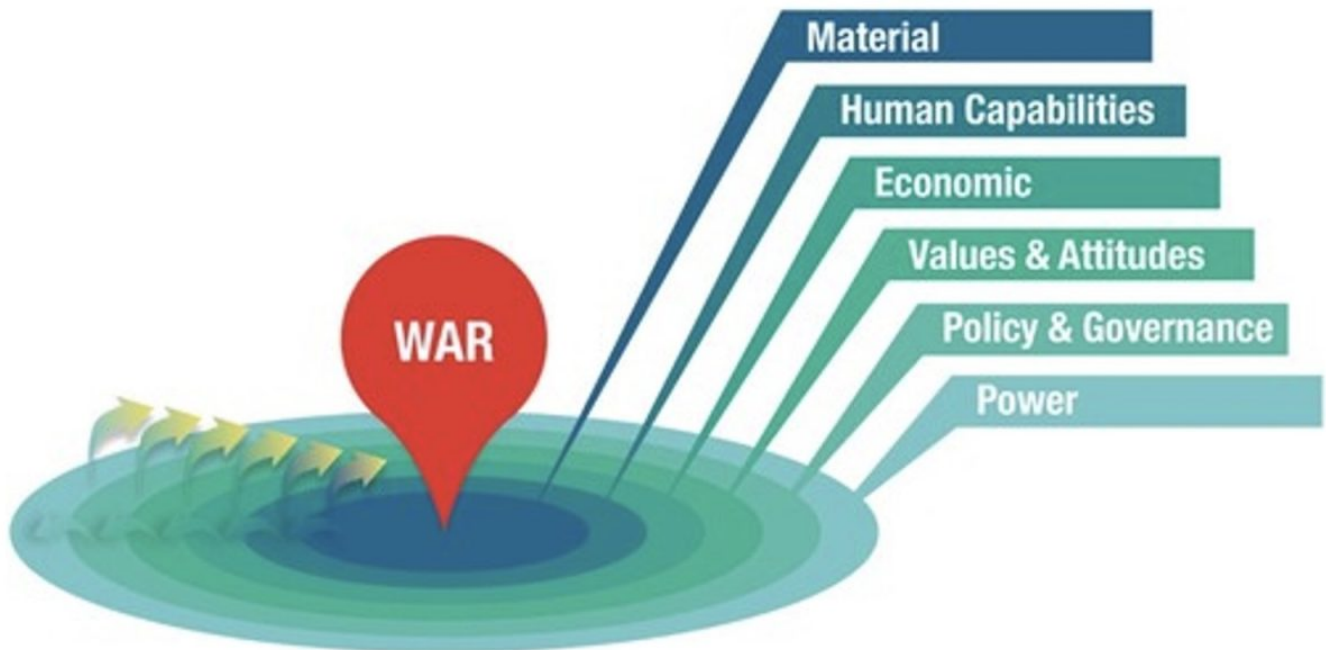
Nevertheless, where Crimean annexation was played down by key Asian states, Ukraine was clearly linked to Asia, with specific reference to a possible invasion of Taiwan. It has also been projected as a threat to the entire liberal international order under which powerful regional states, such as Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, have prospered. This means that their, and the rest of the region's, positionality and alliance structures are being brought into question.

In sum, the tsunami-like effects of the war in Ukraine continue to ripple out across state, market and societal spheres, affecting a multiplicity of layers: human life; human development; economies; values and attitudes; policy and governance; and power distribution and relations around the world. The effects of this war, therefore, operate across a variety of dimensions which, as this review exercise suggests, are closely interconnected. They also operate at different levels, from the individual and national to the regional and international, once again with complex connections between these different layers. The effects of the war thus need to be considered holistically, which this survey represents a step towards. However, although mapping these effects is a useful first step, there is a need for more attention to, and a better understanding of, how these different areas and levels of analysis interact. This should not be a purely academic exercise. The effects of this international crisis will be felt by all and will need to be addressed comprehensively for any route to peace and reconstruction to have a chance of success.

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Figure 1: The ripple and washback effects of war. Source: authors.



This article draws from the *Policy Studies* Special Issue 'The effects of wars: lessons from the war in Ukraine', guest edited by the authors.

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