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Examining Contending Explanatory Models of Nuclear Proliferation: Theoretical and Policy Implications

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Abstract

This study examines major theoretical models that seek to explain states' pursuit of nuclear weapons programmes and decisions to abandon them. A comparative historical analysis of multiple case studies suggests that the traditional 'security' model cannot be supplanted by Scott Sagan's challenger alternatives – the 'domestic political' and 'norms' models. While political dynamics and normative pressures play a significant role in nuclear policymaking, the analysis indicates that these factors are themselves influenced by underlying security considerations. The findings further caution the United States against relying exclusively on normative constraints or the presence of democratic political structures to dissuade allies facing growing nuclear threats from pursuing nuclear breakout capabilities.

Keywords: nuclear proliferation models, theory, US policy, Iran, Korea

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Introduction

Why do states seek nuclear weapons or alternately decide to freeze, downscale and even dismantle their nuclear programmes? Providing an answer to this question is a prerequisite to designing efficacious policies for preventing the spread of nuclear weapons. However, choosing a theoretical model through which to examine the question has become significantly more challenging following the publication of Scott D. Sagan's seminal article 'Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons?' (Sagan 1996). Sagan contests the explanatory power of the 'security model' and offers the 'domestic political' and 'norms' models as better alternatives for explaining the decisions of states to go nuclear or refrain from doing so.

According to the security model, nuclear weapons are developed either as a means to deter nuclear and overwhelming conventional military threats, or as an offensive tool designed to 'compel changes in the status quo' (Sagan 1996: 57). The domestic political model focuses on scientists and military officials within the bureaucracy as well as on politicians, who, each out of their own interest, form coalitions in order to prevent or promote nuclear armament. The norms model studies the evolution of normative perceptions as a result of the interaction between different actors, both state and non-state, in the international system. Changing perceptions beget normative pressures that can label the pursuit and acquisition of nuclear weapons as prestigious or rather as warranting opprobrium (Sagan 1996).

Contrary to Sagan, this study suggests that neither the domestic political model nor the norms model can replace or serve as alternatives to the security model in explaining nuclear decision-making. Although bureaucratic and political struggles, as well as normative pressures, play a significant role in explaining the pursuit of, or decision to forgo, nuclear weapons programmes in case studies such as India, South Africa, Ukraine and Argentina, the security model cannot be discounted. In each of these cases examined by Sagan, security-related concerns influenced the shaping of outcomes in domestic political dynamics and normative choices.

The initial section of this study revisits Sagan's critique of the security model by examining his argument, alternative models, and main case studies. The following sections analyse two additional cases – Iran and North Korea. These cases were selected because, in both, security considerations exerted a significant influence on the outcomes of political-bureaucratic struggles and normative pressures in nuclear policymaking. They also represent different outcomes. The Iran-Iraq War prompted the ayatollahs to resume Iran's nuclear programme, despite Islamic norms upheld by supreme leader Ayatollah Khomeini, who regarded nuclear weapons as incompatible with the Islamic concept of a just war. Conversely, in the mid-1990s, North Korean leader Kim Jong-il decided – against the advice of the most influential bureaucratic body in domestic politics, the military – to freeze and dismantle the country's nuclear programme in exchange for a deal with the United States that included security guarantees, economic assistance and the normalisa-

tion of bilateral relations.[1] In both cases, the historical narrative and sequence of events suggest a causal link between rising security concerns and the decision to respond, despite political and normative obstacles, by advancing either towards the pursuit of nuclear weapons or their abandonment.

Kenneth Waltz's proposition that states are actors 'who, at minimum, seek their own preservation and, at maximum, drive for universal domination' (Waltz 1986: 117) offers a useful lens through which to understand how states conceptualise security in relation to their perceived position along this scale. Iran in the mid-1980s and North Korea in the early 1990s were both situated closer to the self-preservation end of Waltz's scale. Their approaches to addressing this situation, however, differed and were shaped by their specific circumstances. For Iran, enhancing its security became closely tied to the acquisition of a nuclear deterrent, having been confronted by a US–Soviet-led international coalition during its eight-year war with Iraq. This coalition not only provided military support to Iraq, but also overlooked its use of chemical weapons in violation of non-proliferation norms and regimes (Chubin 1989; Herzog 1989; Karsh 1989).

For North Korea, security was about preventing economic implosion and thereby ensuring the survival of the Kim regime. After the collapse of the Communist bloc and the Soviet Union, North Korea experienced a dire economic crisis that was exacerbated by droughts, floods and famine in the early 1990s. Isolated under US and international sanctions, and having lost its major economic partners – which had replaced ideology-driven policies with profit-seeking practices – North Korea's economy and the regime were in desperate need of a lifeline. The 1994 Agreed Framework between the United States and North Korea provided that lifeline. North Korea pledged to freeze and gradually roll back its nascent nuclear programme in exchange for reciprocal sanctions relief and the normalisation of US-DPRK bilateral relations (Farago & Merrill 2021).

The concluding section examines the nuclear policies of two US partners – South Korea and Saudi Arabia. It suggests that, in their nuclear policymaking, security concerns present a significant challenge to US-guarded international non-proliferation norms. Furthermore, the South Korean case illustrates how public opinion in a democracy may support the pursuit of an indigenous nuclear deterrent. Whereas the US administration is expending great effort to alleviate South Korean security concerns, not enough is being done on the Saudi front.

Sagan's alternative models revisited

Sagan (1996) ponders why India did not move towards the acquisition of a nuclear deterrent immediately after China's nuclear test in the mid-1960s. He finds the

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1 The US-North Korean deal, also known as the Agreed Framework, collapsed after less than a decade. The Agreed Framework is discussed in more detail in the relevant section.

answer in the bureaucratic and political battles that were waged over nuclear armament from the mid-1960s up to the 'peaceful' nuclear test of May 1974 – a test that symbolised the victory of nuclear proponents. These domestic battles undoubtedly help explain why India was slow to develop a nuclear deterrent. However, according to Sumit Ganguly, escalating security concerns in the 1960s and early 1970s played a pivotal role in settling the political debate between the opponents and proponents of nuclear proliferation. In fact, in the late 1950s, security concerns led Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, who publicly opposed the development of nuclear weapons, to give India's chief nuclear scientist, Homi J. Bhaba, free reign to pursue research into all aspects of nuclear power should circumstances require India to arm itself with a nuclear deterrent. After China conducted a nuclear test in 1964, Nehru's successor, Lal Bahadur Shastri, turned to the superpowers and asked them to provide India with nuclear guarantees against the threat from a nuclear China. Simultaneously, Shastri instructed Bhaba 'to work toward reducing the time needed to develop nuclear explosives' (Ganguly 1999: 155).

Following the 1965 Indo-Pakistani War, during which Beijing provided assistance to Pakistan and threatened to open a second front along its border with India, an increasing number of voices in the political arena called upon Shastri to exercise India's nuclear potential. Furthermore, Shastri himself warned that 'if the Chinese perfected their nuclear delivery systems India would be forced to reconsider its nuclear policies' (Ganguly 1999: 156). According to Indian analysts, the continuing failure of Shastri's replacement, Indira Gandhi, to obtain satisfactory guarantees from the superpowers against the threat posed by China, coupled with US pressure on India during the 1971 Indian-Pakistani War, eventually convinced Gandhi of the need to move forward with India's research into the military aspects of nuclear power. This conviction not only contributed to India's decision not to join the Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), but also led to the nuclear test of May 1974 (Ganguly 1999).

Examining South Africa's nuclear quest, Sagan contends that it was led by the desire of the power and mining industries 'to enhance their standing in international scientific circles. . . . As a result, the first South African nuclear device was actually too large to be deliverable by an aircraft' (Sagan 1996: 70). He further stresses that South Africa initiated its nuclear quest in 1971, long before there was any communist threat of expansion facing South Africa in the form of Cuban forces in Angola in 1975. However, as Sagan himself acknowledges, following the emergence of a communist threat, the military took control of the nuclear programme and redesigned it, highlighting the explanatory significance of the security model in this case study. Sagan also argues that President de Klerk's decision to dismantle and eliminate all evidence of South Africa's nuclear programme stemmed from his determination to prevent sensitive nuclear technology from

falling into the hands of either the African National Congress or white extremists. For Sagan, de Klerk's decision was driven by a domestic political imperative (Sagan 1996). However, the decision – and its rapid execution in 1991, as the apartheid regime was collapsing – can also be understood as a response to a security imperative to prevent nuclear proliferation to untrustworthy elements in the wake of the regime's disintegration.

Unlike de Klerk, the ousted military junta in Argentina left the country's nuclear programme intact in the hands of the democratically-elected Raul Alfonsin government in 1983. Sagan identifies the transition to liberal democracy in Argentina as the dominant factor that led the country to abandon its pursuit of nuclear weapons, despite its defeat in the 1982 Falklands War, which should have 'strongly encouraged Argentina's nuclear ambitions' (Sagan 1996: 71). Nevertheless, it can be argued that Britain's decisive victory in the war contributed significantly to the subsequent regime change in Argentina (Schumacher 1984). This, in turn, eased the tensions between Buenos Aires and the international community, including the United Kingdom, and ultimately led Argentina to forgo its nuclear weapons programme. In other words, changes in variables pertaining to the domestic political model brought about changes in variables relating to the security model and facilitated the Argentinian decision to abandon the country's nuclear weapons ambitions. Significantly, not all successful transitions to a liberal democracy would necessarily bring about nuclear disarmament. In the face of looming security threats, democracies may move towards the acquisition of a nuclear deterrent, as in the cases of India and Israel.

Sagan (1996) rightly notes that in 1994 changing international norms contributed to the decision of the government in Kiev to join the NPT and to remove all nuclear weapons from Ukrainian territory by June 1996. Had the international norms of the 1950s and 1960s prevailed in the 1990s, and in the absence of the NPT, it is possible that Ukraine would have perceived the acquisition of a nuclear deterrent as a symbol of high international status, as France did in the 1950s and 1960s, rather than as a membership card for the 'exclusive' club of rogue states, such as Iraq, North Korea, Libya and Iran. However, security assurances played a crucial role in the creation of a framework for Ukrainian denuclearisation and the government in Kiev insisted that such assurances would be presented to it in an international document (Budjeryn 2014). Unlike the France of Charles de Gaulle in the 1950s and 1960s, Ukraine in the 1990s had no delusions of grandeur. It was merely interested in assuring its national security and sovereignty, rather than in obtaining global influence. After Russia, the United States, Britain, France and China provided satisfactory assurances in the form of the Budapest Memorandum, Ukraine needed no nuclear deterrent. In this regard, the Kremlin's willingness to reverse its course and recognise Ukraine as an entity separate from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was vital to the success of the

disarmament negotiations with the government in Kiev (Garnett 1995). At that point in the history of the two nations, Ukrainians, including many of non-Russian ethnic origin, did not 'conceive Russia as an enemy to be deterred with nuclear weapons' (Garnett 1995: 8). Hence, no contradiction between variables pertaining to the norms model and variables relating to the security model hindered Ukraine's nuclear disarmament. Conversely, India, Pakistan, Israel, Iran and North Korea are all examples of countries in which security considerations have led governments to decide against operating in accordance with the norms model.

The Ayatollahs' decision to go nuclear
Tension and war in the Gulf

In 1966, during the reign of the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the renowned Iran-watcher Rouhollah Ramazani wrote: 'The image of a great past usually lay at the heart of Iranian irredentism. From the beginning of Iran's independent existence in modern times its policymakers strove to restore the ancient boundaries of the country. Irredentism was responsible for many wars with small and big powers' (Ramazani 1966: 306-307). A few years later, Ramazani added that historical and economic imperatives dictate that Iran must assume a paramount role in the Gulf, 'no matter who rules in Iran' (Ramazani 1972: 88). This observation was proven to be accurate in subsequent years. After the toppling of the Shah in 1979, the new leadership of Islamic clerics remained committed to fulfilling Iranian regional aspirations, despite being perceived as a threat and treated as a pariah by both the United States – Iran's ally prior to the Islamic Revolution – and the Soviet Union.

Following the Islamic Revolution of February 1979, the accession to power of the ayatollahs and their supreme leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, was marked by even more ambitious visions of regional dominance than those of the Shah. As Efraim Karsh notes, the new regime was obsessed with extending 'its hegemonic claims from the geopolitical to the spiritual (or ideological) domain . . . envisioning Iran's supremacy as taking place within an entirely new, and hitherto unprecedented system – that of an Islamic order' (Karsh 1989: 26). In order to achieve this goal, it was not enough merely to force the Ba'ath regime in Iraq and the Sheikhs of the Gulf to recognise Iran as the predominant power in the region and to accept its territorial claims. If Iran were to export its revolution successfully to other Gulf states, then secular and oppressive Sunni regimes had to be toppled. For that purpose, the *Pax Irana* and the status quo established in the region pursuant to the Algiers Agreement of March 1975 between Iran and Iraq had to be challenged (Karsh 1989).

Tehran's proclamations and actions after the revolution clearly evinced a re-solve to bring down the Ba'ath regime in Iraq. For example, on 19 October 1979, Ayatollah Montazeri, a leading Shiite theologian and later Khomeini's deputy, said that the Iraqi people, of which three-quarters are Shiites, opposed Saddam Hus-

sein, the Iraqi president. He added that if Khomeini were to instruct the Iraqis to overthrow their leadership, 'the entire Iraqi nation would rise' (Foreign Broadcast Information Service 1979a: R8). For Iran's foreign minister, Sadeq Qotbzadeh, such a scenario was inevitable. In April 1980, in an interview with the Turkish daily newspaper *Milliyet*, he said: 'There is no other way out than the complete collapse of the Ba'ath party. These people have nothing in common with Islam. Problems cannot be resolved unless the Ba'ath administration is overthrown. . . . They are more dangerous than Zionists. That is why mediation and bilateral talks are out of the question' (Foreign Broadcast Information Service 1980: I25). Moreover, on 17 April 1980, Khomeini called upon the Iraqi people and army to 'turn their back on the Ba'ath regime and overthrow it . . . because this regime . . . is attacking the Koran and Islam' (Abdulghani 1984: 189). These proclamations were followed by a renewal of Iranian assistance to separatist Kurds and anti-government Shiite groups in Iraq as well as by an increasing number of skirmishes along the Iran-Iraq border (Abdulghani 1984; Rubin 1983).

However, Iraq, which had benefited a great deal in terms of economic and military development from the détente in the region following the 1975 Algiers Agreement, was interested neither in severing its relations with Iran nor in going to war. Immediately following the Islamic Revolution and during the spring and summer of 1979, Saddam Hussein attempted to engage with the Iranians. On 14 February 1979, Saddam

> stressed that Iraq has no aims in Iran . . . [and] supports whatever expresses the national interests of the Iranian people . . . Iraq is anxious to deal on a sound basis with the choice of the Iranian people. . . . This must be done on the basis of non-intervention in domestic affairs and respect for each other's sovereignty. (Foreign Broadcast Information Service 1979b: E1)

Iraq also welcomed the break in Iran-Israel relations, as well as the Iranian withdrawal from the UK-led and US-supported Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO), and offered to assist Iran in joining the Non-Aligned Movement. Furthermore, Saddam officially invited the Iranian premier to visit Baghdad in order to discuss ways to improve bilateral relations. By spurning Iraq's gestures of goodwill and marking the deposal of Saddam and his regime as the primary target of the Islamic Revolution, the ayatollahs left Saddam with little choice but to pre-empt while Iran was still suffering from the after-effects of the revolution (Karsh 1989; Rubin 1983).

On 22 September 1980, the Iraqi Air Force struck Iran's major military airfields in a futile attempt to eliminate its air force on the ground. The next day, five Iraqi divisions invaded Iran. The Iran-Iraq War had begun. From the outset of the war, Iraq and Iran's strategic objectives were very different in *Clausewitzian* terms. Saddam planned to conduct a limited war and concentrated the Iraqi military's

main effort on Khuzistan in order to separate the Shatt al-Arab waterway from the rest of Iran. On 28 September 1980, Saddam announced that Iraq had achieved its territorial goals. Subsequently, he attempted to initiate negotiations in an effort to end the hostilities and reach a settlement (Herzog 1989).

The ayatollahs' regime, on the other hand, was fighting a total war. Thus, capturing Baghdad was, according to Iranian spokesmen, merely a stepping stone on the path to liberating Jerusalem. The success of tens of thousands of Iranian *Basij* militia volunteers and Revolutionary Guards in pushing Iraqi forces back to the border by mid-1982 gave credence to the Iranian notion, and later slogan, that 'the faith of the Islamic troops is stronger than Iraq's superior firepower' (Chubin 1989: 15). This notion contributed to Khomeini's decision towards the end of 1982 to invade Iraq. Iran's goal was to capture the predominantly Shiite city of Basra, in the hope that this would create an impetus that would lead to the downfall of Baghdad and the Ba'ath regime. Prominent voices in Iran who opposed the invasion of Iraq were ignored. Among the opponents of the invasion were most of the military leadership, President Sayyed Ali Khamenei and Prime Minister Mir Hussein Musavi. They doubted Iran's military ability to carry out Khomeini's goals successfully and pointed out the political obstacles and high cost in terms of human lives and materials that Iran might incur on the way to Basra and Baghdad (Karsh 1989).

The realities of war and Islamic norms collide

The opposition to Khomeini's decision to invade Iraq was not the only challenge to the judgement of the supreme leader from within the Iranian regime. The future of Iran's nuclear programme – initiated by the Shah in 1974 – was also at the centre of a heated debate between Khomeini and other prominent ayatollahs and politicians. Khomeini, who was as passionate to uphold Islamic norms as he was to topple the Ba'ath regime and spread the revolution, perceived nuclear weapons as an anathema to Islam – a product of Western imperialism that contradicts Islamic ideology and the concept of just war. In this context, Khomeini labelled the acts of dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing and maiming tens of thousands of innocent civilians, as evil. Immediately after coming to power, and despite rising tensions in the Gulf, Khomeini began clamping down on Iran's nuclear programme. He froze contracts with the German and French companies Kraftwerk and Framatome for the construction of nuclear reactors near Bushehr and Ahwaz and cancelled Iran's agreement with the European Gaseous Diffusion Uranium Enrichment Consortium (EURODIF) for the supply of nuclear fuel for the aforementioned reactors. Khomeini also forced drastic cuts in manpower and research activities upon the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran (AEOI), a circumstance that led many nuclear scientists to leave Iran and seek their fortune elsewhere (Melman & Javedanfar 2007).

Khomeini's actions, however, did not represent a consensus within the Iranian leadership. Among those who spoke out in favour of continuing the deposed Shah's nuclear programme was Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti, the secretary-general of the Islamic Republic Party and head of Iran's judicial system. Beheshti claimed that as Iran's geo-strategic aspirations in the region had not fundamentally changed, it was still in need of the nuclear programme. Three months after the revolution, Beheshti told his aides that Iran needed nuclear weapons despite the heavy burden that a weapons programme would place on Iran's economy (Melman & Javedanfar 2007). Fereidun Fesharaki, a former energy advisor to the Shah, recalls that in May 1979, one of Khomeini's advisors told him: 'It is your duty to build this [nuclear] bomb. Our civilization is in danger and we have to do it' (Bhatia 1988: 82). These voices in support of a nuclear weapons programme became stronger and much more influential as the war with Iraq stretched on and took its toll on the Iranian military and people.

From the onset of the war, an international coalition composed of global powers and regional actors assisted the Iraqi war effort politically, economically and militarily. For example, the Soviet Union and France were important sources of arms and equipment for the Iraqi military. Complementarily, in 1984 the United States initiated Operation Staunch in an effort to block arms sales to Iran. The United States and the Soviet Union also took an active role in the Tanker War between the two belligerents when, in 1987, they granted Kuwait's request to protect its tankers from Iranian naval attacks. France, Britain, Italy and the Netherlands joined the superpowers in this naval policing activity that enabled Kuwait to continue subsidising the Iraqi war effort and to serve as a transshipment point for arms destined for Iraq. Other major sources of support for Iraq within the Arab world included Saudi Arabia, which led a policy of pushing down oil prices in order to reduce Iran's oil revenues, and Egypt, from which Iraq purchased military equipment. Thus, while Iran was exhausting its military inventory, Iraq enjoyed a regular supply of arms and equipment (Chubin 1989; Herzog 1989; Karsh 1989).

In 1987 and 1988, the United States became directly involved in the fighting as US naval forces attacked Iranian boats and oil platforms. In this regard, Ayatollah Rafsanjani, the speaker of the Iranian parliament, attributed the success of the Iraqi effort to recapture the port city of Fao (April 1988) to increased US naval activity against the Iranian fleet. The fact that Iraq, in defiance of non-proliferation norms and regimes, introduced chemical weapons to the battleground as early as 1984 did not stop the assistance and support that it received from the superpowers and other countries. The chemical warfare, however, did play havoc with the morale of the Iranian forces. After the results of the February 1988 Iraqi chemical attack on Halabja were published, the number of Iranian volunteers (*Basij*), which had stood at around 300,000, dropped by a third. Simultaneously, the fear that Iraq might arm the missiles that it had begun launching in 1984 against Iranian

urban centres with chemical warheads increased the level of panic among the population (Chubin 1989; Herzog 1989; Karsh 1989).

Iran resumes its nuclear quest

In 1984, despite Khomeini's ideological abhorrence of nuclear weapons, Iran resumed its nuclear quest. The Iranians contacted Kraftwerk Union and asked the German company to complete the Bushehr nuclear project which Khomeini had frozen. However, the two semi-complete reactors at Bushehr were the target of Iraqi bombardments throughout the war[2] and the Germans refused to carry out any work as long as the war continued. In 1985, Iran launched a PhD programme in nuclear science and technology at the Amir Kabir Technological University and called upon nuclear scientists who had left the country after the revolution to return (Feldman 1997). In February 1986, A. Q. Khan, the father of Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme, made a clandestine visit to Iran and met with Ayatollah Rafsanjani. The following year, Khan visited Iran again. These visits resulted in an agreement to train Iranian scientists in Pakistan to operate centrifuge cascades for enriching uranium. Khan also sold centrifuge design blueprints and 400 centrifuges to the Iranians (Melman & Javedanfar 2007).

The rationale behind the ayatollahs' decision to resume Iran's nuclear quest was derived from the realities of war, as evident from Ayatollah Rafsanjani's own words. Significantly, this decision was the result of security imperatives taking precedence over normative considerations. On 6 October 1988, referring to Iraq's use of WMD on the battlefield and to the international community's mild response to this abrogation of WMD regimes and norms, Rafsanjani told the Revolutionary Guard that 'the war had shown chemical and biological weapons to be "very decisive," and that "all the moral teachings of the world are not very effective when war reaches a serious position"' (Chubin 1989: 22). In the same year, Rafsanjani 'told a group of his followers: "We must fully equip ourselves with defensive and offensive chemical, biological, and radioactive weapons. From now on, you must use every opportunity to accomplish this task"' (Feldman 1987: 137).

In mid-1988, after Iraqi forces recaptured Fao, Mohsen Reba – a senior Revolutionary Guard commander – wrote to Khomeini that 'Iran could only win the war [with Iraq] if it had more men, funds for arms, and access to new arms, including laser and atomic weapons' (Chubin 2008: 56). Shahram Chubin (2008) claims that Reba's letter persuaded Khomeini to accept UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution 598 of July 1987 and end the war. Whether it was Reba's letter or a series of Iranian defeats in Majnoun (May 1988), Shalamche and Mehran (June 1988), and Dehloran (July 1988), coupled with the low morale of the fighting forces and the

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2 The reactors were attacked in March 1984, February 1985, November 1987 and July 1988.

Iranian public, in July 1988, Khomeini accepted UNSC resolution 598 (Herzog 1989). The war ended, but Iran's reinvigorated quest for nuclear technology had only begun.

In the decades following the Iran-Iraq War, US–EU-led international pressure on Iran and intermittent negotiations succeeded in slowing down the development of the nuclear programme, but failed to persuade the ayatollahs' regime to invariably abide by the NPT, the safeguards agreement and other Iranian non-proliferation commitments. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) signed in July 2015 between Iran and the permanent members of the UNSC plus Germany (P5+1) was the latest attempt to contain Iran's nuclear quest. Under the JCPOA, also referred to as 'the nuclear deal', Iran agreed to scale down its nuclear programme substantially for a period of between ten and fifteen years and submit it to a rigorous international inspection regime in exchange for sanctions relief. According to US intelligence assessments, before the nuclear deal went into effect in January 2016, Iran had had the capability to enrich enough weapons-grade uranium for a single nuclear weapon over the course of a few months. However, under the constraints of the deal a year was theoretically required to accomplish such a feat, thereby providing the United States and the international community more time to detect and prevent an Iranian attempt to cross the nuclear threshold (Robinson 2023).

In May 2018, President Donald Trump, who has been a leading opponent to the Obama administration-brokered JCPOA, announced that the United States was pulling out of the nuclear deal. President Trump argued that the deal failed to address Iran's belligerence and war-by-proxy strategy in the Middle East as well as the threat posed by its missile programme, while only delaying a confrontation over the nuclear programme. In addition, the Trump administration accused Iran of concealing past weaponisation activities after Israeli Premier Benjamin Netanyahu exposed (April 2018) thousands of Iranian documents obtained by the Mossad and related to project Amad – a nuclear weapons programme that Iran has refused to acknowledge. In contrast to US intelligence, the Israelis are convinced that Iran did not halt its research into weaponisation in 2003 (Federman 2018; BBC News 2018).

The withdrawal of the United States from the JCPOA in 2018 resulted in reinvigorated Iranian nuclear-related activity. Consequently, US military and intelligence officials estimate that Iran can enrich enough weapons-grade uranium for a single nuclear weapon in between one and two weeks. They also assess that Iran needs between several months and a year to complete acquiring necessary weaponisation capabilities that would enable it to go nuclear (Kerr 2023). As of mid-2025, the tension between Iran on the one side and the United States on the other has reached new heights. A new nuclear deal or a strike on Iran's nuclear installations are the two options that the second Trump administration presents

to the ayatollahs in an effort to end their pursuit of nuclear weapons capabilities. While the United States and Iran began negotiations on a new deal in April 2025, with Oman acting as mediator, President Trump reaffirmed that the military option remained on the table (Barnes et al. 2025).

The decision to dismantle North Korea's nuclear programme

North Korea's decision to dismantle its nuclear programme in 1994 serves as another quintessential example of the powerful influence of security consideration on the outcome of political debates and the effectiveness of normative constraints in nuclear policymaking. In the face of strong opposition from within the North Korean military – perhaps North Korea's most important and influential bureaucratic organ – Kim Jong-il decided to strike a deal with the United States on an initial freeze and the eventual disarmament of North Korea's nuclear programme in exchange for security guarantees and political as well as economic inducements. Kim's decision did not correspond with North Korea's overarching normative guideline – its ideology of self-reliance (*Juche*) – and was made despite the fact that the nuclear programme was perhaps among the last remaining totems that served as a source of national pride for North Koreans.

The birth of the juche ideology and its predominance in North Korean policy
The *Juche* ideology emerged after the end of the Korean War (1950–1953) and advocated self-reliance in all areas, including economics and security. Apparently, North Korean leader Kim Il-sung was disappointed in what he perceived to be limited Soviet and Chinese support during the war and realised that the strategic and political objectives of his allies were far from overlapping North Korea's. For example, Joseph Stalin, the Soviet leader who gave the green light to Kim's invasion of South Korea, instructed his ambassador to the UN, Jacob Malik, not to veto a US-sponsored UNSC resolution to invoke a US-led UN military action against the invading North Korean forces. Bruce Cumings, relying on US intelligence sources, claims that 'there is no evidence of an upturn in Soviet military shipments to North Korea after June 25 [the day the war broke out]; if anything, a decrease was registered' (Cumings 1997: 266). According to Rosemary Foot (1985), Soviet military assistance with the war effort in Korea reached sufficient levels only towards the end of 1951, after the battles had reached a stalemate. China, under Mao Zedong, was concerned more about the survival of North Korea as a political entity and less with its territorial integrity. Therefore, Mao's defensive line on the Korean Peninsula stretched from Pyongyang in the West to Wonsan in the East. The renowned China-watcher and US diplomat Allan S. Whiting (1960) claims that Mao could have accepted a new demarcation line on the Peninsula north of the 38th parallel, but the US rollback strategy of reunifying the peninsula and the march towards the Yalu River pushed China to enter the war (Zhang 1995).

In July 1953, after three years fraught with US nuclear sabre-rattling incidents, the war ended with an armistice and with the two Koreas in possession of nearly the same territory as they had held before the war broke out. However, tension and mistrust continued to characterise US-DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) relations throughout the Cold War. Against this backdrop and the US decision to deploy tactical nuclear weapons in South Korea, North Korea initiated its nuclear quest (Farago & Merrill 2021).

From the late 1960s onward, US-Chinese rapprochement only reinforced North Korean conviction in the importance of the *Juche* ideology of self-reliance. The warming of US-China relations resulted from the Nixon administration's determination to prevent China from falling victim to Leonid Brezhnev's aggressive doctrine, as manifested in the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. Aware of the growing tension between the two communist countries along their mutual border, the US administration feared an imminent Soviet military action against China to include a pre-emptive strike against Chinese nuclear installations (Burr 2001, document 9). On 18 August 1969, Boris Davydov, a KGB officer stationed in Washington, contacted State Department Vietnam expert William Stearman and asked him 'What the US would do [sic] if the Soviet Union attacked and destroyed China's nuclear installations . . . [And] what would the US do if Peking called for US assistance in the event Chinese nuclear installations were attacked by us?' (Burr 2001: document 10). In early September, the Nixon administration responded by extending deterrence to China through a public statement issued by Under Secretary of State Elliot Richardson, clarifying that the United States would not remain indifferent to a Soviet attack on China (Kissinger 1994).

In the following years, the historic visits to Beijing of National Security Adviser Kissinger and President Nixon in July 1971 and February 1972, respectively, marked the beginning of an era characterised by political normalisation, cooperation and increasing economic interdependence between the United States and China. This trend soon manifested itself in a growing US-China trade volume that by 1990 stood at $20 billion (US Census Bureau 2024), making the United States China's most important trading partner. Simultaneously, as its dependency on trade with the United States was increasing, China's credibility as a North Korean ally was weakening. In the mid-1980s, North Korean leader Kim Jong-il wrote in his book *On the Juche Idea of Our Party*: 'Of course, one may receive aid in national defence from fraternal countries and friends. But it is impossible to depend on others for the defence of one's own country' (Kim 1985: 53). This notion became even more evident after the collapse of the Communist Bloc and the Soviet Union as Russia and China discarded Cold War ideology and embraced economic growth as the driving force of their foreign policies. In September 1990, Russia and the Republic of Korea (ROK, South Korea) established diplomatic relations and agreed, within the framework of a November 1992 treaty, to tighten bilateral relations and pro-

mote mutual trade. At the same time, Russia distanced itself from North Korea, and in 1996, President Yeltsin opted not to renew the 1961 Soviet–North Korean Treaty of Friendship, but to replace it with a less binding amity pact (Ahn 2012). China and the Republic of Korea established diplomatic relations in 1992 and bilateral trade between the two countries increased exponentially throughout the decade at an average rate of twenty percent per annum (Roy 2004).

Security imperatives override Juche ideology and military opposition

In accordance with the *Juche* ideology, the waning credibility of North Korea's traditional allies should have encouraged the Kim regime to continue its nuclear quest with vigour. Instead, in December 1988, North Korea entered into dialogue with the United States and was willing to trade its nuclear programme for security guarantees, sanctions relief and normalisation. A few years into the dialogue, North Korea took a major step towards building trust with the US-led international community by signing a safeguards agreement with the IAEA on 30 January 1992. However, IAEA inspections of North Korean reprocessing facilities during the summer of 1992 revealed that North Korea had produced more plutonium than it had declared. Furthermore, the IAEA was denied access to two underground facilities that were suspected of containing waste from undeclared reprocessing. While North Korea was failing to meet its safeguards obligations, experts estimated that it possessed enough weapons-grade plutonium for one or two nuclear weapons (Fitzpatrick 2011; Park 1997).

Thus, the George H.W. Bush and Clinton administrations were highly suspicious of North Korea's intentions and conditioned a nuclear deal on its upfront and full compliance with IAEA demands (Sigal 1998). This US policy was supported by a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) estimate that highlighted the destabilising impact of North Korea's severe economic crisis on the regime and attributed the signing of the safeguards agreement to its 'desperate need for Western economic assistance' (Wampler 2005: document 2), rather than its acceptance of nonproliferation norms. The CIA estimate further noted that by refusing to fully implement the safeguards agreement, the heir apparent Kim Jong-il signaled to ultra-conservatives and members of the old guard that 'he can be entrusted with the country's future, particularly in view of his close identification with failing economic policies and fruitless overtures to the West, as well as signs of growing public dissatisfaction and rumors of military opposition' (Wampler 2005: document 2).

In spite of apparent resistance from North Korea's military to concessions to the United States, Kim Jong-il continued to pursue a nuclear deal with the US administration. If anything, the opposition of DPRK generals to a nuclear deal was used by North Korea's chief negotiator Kang Sok-ju as a bargaining chip in the negotiating process. North Korea envisioned a long-term step-by-step trust

building deal that would allow it to dismantle gradually, while receiving security guarantees and two proliferation-resistant light water reactors [LWRs] to ease its energy shortage. On 27 September 1994, Kang suggested that 'North Korea would agree to cooperate with the IAEA after a "considerable amount" of the nonessential parts of the new [LWR] reactors were in place and when essential components were shipped' (Wit, Poneman & Gallucci 2004: 301). Kang presented his proposed compromise again on 6 October 1994: 'It is impossible to accept the American position that the new reactor project could take place only after safeguards were imposed. The military already believed the project was a trick to reveal military sites . . . [However, North Korea] would be willing to "take all steps necessary to implement IAEA safeguards" after 70 to 80 percent of the new reactor components had been delivered' (Wit, Poneman & Gallucci 2004: 307–308).

The decision of the Clinton administration to accept Kang's proposed compromise resulted in the finalisation of the Agreed Framework on 21 October 1994. It stipulated that North Korea would freeze its nuclear programme and 'when a significant portion of the LWR project is completed, but before delivery of key nuclear components, the DPRK will come into full compliance with its safeguards agreement with the IAEA' (Wit, Poneman & Gallucci 2004: 317, 421–423). The dismantling of North Korea's graphite-moderated reactors and the related facilities was to commence after the completion of the first LWR unit and was to be completed by the time the second LWR unit was ready (Wit, Poneman & Gallucci 2004).

Unfortunately, the Agreed Framework, which was supposed to alleviate North Korea's security concerns and help it revive its economy, did not work out as planned. Mutual suspicion resulted in a failure to honour key Agreed Framework commitments. Consequently, the Agreed Framework had become obsolete by the late 1990s, and the Kim regime clandestinely resumed its pursuit of nuclear weapons, focusing on uranium enrichment. Shortly afterward, around the turn of the millennium, North Korea received from Pakistan a uranium enrichment starter kit. Although the Clinton administration was well aware of the uranium project, it chose not to act. However, after the Bush administration assumed office in January 2001, it decided to break the Agreed Framework. In October 2002, US Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly was sent to Pyongyang to confront the North Koreans about their uranium project. As a result of Kelly's visit and the subsequent suspension of oil shipments to North Korea, the Kim regime expelled IAEA inspectors and withdrew from the NPT. The Agreed Framework collapsed (Farago 2016; Kartman, Carlin & Wit 2012).

In the past two decades, while efforts to rebuild trust between the two countries and reach sustainable nuclear deals failed to bear fruit, North Korea has enhanced its nuclear capabilities. Between 2006 and 2017, North Korea conducted six nuclear tests, and it is estimated to possess approximately 45 nuclear weapons to

include thermonuclear warheads. Complementarily, North Korea has improved the mobility and survivability of its delivery systems by acquiring solid-propellant and Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM) capabilities. The ability to incorporate high-precision guidance and in-flight manoeuvrability systems to its arsenal of short-range missiles allows North Korea to develop tactical nuclear weapons that threaten US allies and assets in the vicinity of the Korean Peninsula. North Korea has also improved the range and capabilities of its Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) so they could cover the continental United States. For example, the Hwasong-17 ICBM that North Korea began testing in 2022 can reach potentially anywhere in the United States and is designed to carry multiple re-entry vehicles (warheads), according to US intelligence estimates (Nikitin 2023; Smith & Yim 2023).

Conclusion

Thus far, US-led international normative pressure and more than two decades of intermittent negotiations have evidently failed to persuade North Korea and Iran to set aside their security concerns and abandon their nuclear ambitions. Sooner rather than later, the United States' restrictive normative policy of depriving even allies of their NPT-sanctioned right to acquire an independent nuclear fuel cycle may face challenges from South Korea and Saudi Arabia – both of whom are apprehensive about the growing nuclear and missile capabilities of their regional adversaries. For example, in April 2023, on the eve of a summit meeting between Presidents Joseph Biden and Yoon Suk Yeol, a Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) poll showed that more than fifty-six percent of South Koreans were in favour of acquiring a nuclear deterrent (Hwang 2023). This finding is starkly at odds with the argument that the rule of democracy is necessarily conducive to a decision not to go nuclear, or alternatively, to abandon an existing nuclear programme. Public opinion may turn out to be a tailwind for proponents of an indigenous nuclear deterrent and a headwind for an administration in search of other solutions to its security dilemma.

Significantly, it appears that the US administration is cognisant of the limited ability of democratic domestic political structures as well as international norms and rules to prevent allies from seeking a nuclear deterrent to balance out their adversaries. Therefore, the United States attempts to assuage its allies' fears by resorting to military and diplomatic tools chosen from within the realm of the security model. On the Korean Peninsula, having failed to stop North Korea from crossing the nuclear threshold and obtaining an impressive and rapidly growing nuclear arsenal and missile capabilities, the United States focuses on bolstering extended nuclear deterrence to South Korea. In this regard, during their April 2023 summit, Presidents Biden and Yoon signed a joint declaration that included the establishment of a Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG) between the two allies – a

mechanism intended to allow South Korea to influence US nuclear policymaking and contingency planning on North Korea. The United States further pledged to 'enhance the regular visibility of strategic assets to the Korean Peninsula' (White House 2023) – assets such as the Ohio-class USS Kentucky nuclear-armed submarine that entered the port city of Busan in mid-July 2023, marking the first visit of a US nuclear-armed submarine to South Korea after more than four decades (Nam 2023).

It is too early to judge whether the upgraded US-ROK strategic cooperation would affect the divided public opinion in South Korea on the issue of US extended nuclear deterrence credibility. A poll conducted by the South Korean *Asan* Institute in November 2022 showed that fifty-three percent of South Koreans thought the United States would use its nuclear power to respond to a nuclear attack by North Korea on South Korea, if the response did not threaten the security and territory of the United States. However, fifty-four percent of South Koreans were of the opinion that the United States would be deterred from using nuclear force in response to a nuclear attack on South Korea, if exposed to North Korean nuclear retaliation against US territory (Kim, Kang & Ham 2023).

The question facing the South Korean public at present resembles the question French President Charles de Gaulle asked President Kennedy during his visit to Paris in late May 1961, at the height of the Cold War and the Berlin Crisis: Would the United States 'be ready to trade New York for Paris?' (Sampson & Lafantasie 1993: document 30). The Kennedy administration surmised that if de Gaulle doubted US resolve, so did the Soviets, and was determined to convince the French leader of US extended nuclear deterrence's credibility. The problem was how to accomplish that (Sampson & Lafantasie 1993: document 30). The further North Korea improves the range and capabilities of its ICBMs, the harder it will become to convince the South Korean public and leadership that the United States is committed to trading New York for Seoul or Busan.

Not only the public, but also a growing number of South Korean politicians and academics are considering the nuclear option. Their concerns stem not only from the quantum leap in North Korea's nuclear capabilities and doubts about the credibility of US extended deterrence, but also from the emergence of a multi-polar international system, characterised by an assertive Russia and China. They argue that South Korea should not overlook the inadequacy of the US response to recent Russian and Chinese aggression. For example, Go Myong-hyun of the Asan Institute criticised the US response to Russian nuclear threats against Ukraine, noting that NATO forces were prepared to respond only with conventional means. Hong Joon-pyo, an influential conservative politician and the mayor of Daegu, has expressed concern that, in the event of simultaneous Russian and North Korean attack, the United States might not prioritise South Korea's security and could fail to respond effectively to a North Korean nuclear

strike. In this context, Cheong Seong-chang of the Sejong Institute pointed out that South Korea has failed to persuade the United States to guarantee an immediate and automatic overwhelming response to a North Korean nuclear attack (Kang 2024). For Lee Geun of Seoul National University, the aforementioned circumstances require South Korea to pursue a nuclear weapons option (Lee 2022).

The ongoing debate in South Korea echoes concerns from the 1970s. At that time, President Park Chung-hee decided to launch a clandestine nuclear programme in response to what he perceived as weakening US security guarantees. Under the Nixon administration's retrenchment policy, a US army division was withdrawn from South Korea, and US-China relations entered a period of rapprochement (Bernal 2023). For Park, Taiwan's political status and security had been compromised in the service of Washington's strategic priorities, which necessitated improved ties with Beijing. In his view, it did not seem improbable that South Korea could meet a similar fate (Pollack 2004). In the mid-1970s, the United States resorted to threats of abandonment to bring South Korea back into compliance with non-proliferation norms and regimes (Sukin 2023). By the mid-2020s, against the backdrop of rapidly deteriorating US-China relations, South Korea has become an integral component of Washington's Indo-Pacific strategy, aimed at checking China's growing power.

In contrast to North Korea, Iran has not crossed the nuclear threshold yet, but can go nuclear in a matter of months if it chooses to. Even if the United States and Iran agreed to re-implement the JCPOA, or to reach a new deal, the Iranians would be able to produce nuclear weapons within less than a year because of their technological advancements after the collapse of the JCPOA in 2018 (Kerr 2023). Saudi anxiety over Iran's nuclear programme is amplified by the kingdom's concerns about and vulnerability to Iranian aggression in the Gulf. In September 2019, tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran climaxed after Iranian cruise missiles and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) hit the kingdom's oil installations and temporarily disabled nearly half of its production capacity. The failure of the Trump administration to provide Saudi Arabia with military assistance during the attack was perceived by the Saudis not only as an act of abandonment, but also as a sign of the United States' weakening credibility as a regional balancer. Aware of its military and strategic conundrum and in an effort to ease tensions in the Gulf, Saudi Arabia initiated a dialogue with Iran in April 2021. Two years into the dialogue, through Chinese mediation, the two countries restored diplomatic ties that had been severed in 2016 (Shine, Guzansky & Shavit 2023).

However, the recent improvement in Saudi Arabia-Iran relations has changed neither the Saudis' perception of the Iranian threat nor their plans to catch up with the Iranians by acquiring an independent nuclear fuel cycle. Thus, Saudi Arabia – a signatory of the NPT with a vision of building sixteen nuclear reactors by 2040 – rejects US pressure to sign a '123 agreement' with the United States which would entail commitments to refraining from indigenous uranium enrichment and the

processing of plutonium as a condition for nuclear cooperation between the two countries. Saudi Arabia is also unwilling to sign the IAEA Additional Protocol that facilitates tighter supervision over declared nuclear installations as well as access to undeclared sites suspected of nuclear activity. As an alternative to possible nuclear cooperation with the United States, South Korea, and France, Saudi Arabia is examining Chinese and Russian proposals (Guzanski 2023).

Similar to other case studies examined in this article, it appears that security considerations significantly influence Saudi nuclear policymaking. Thus, a continued US effort to impose normative constraints on Saudi Arabia in excess of its NPT and safeguards agreement commitments could eventually benefit China and Russia. Instead, in order to prevent a nuclear arms race from erupting in the Gulf, the US administration should focus on tackling Saudi security concerns. Critical to US success is containing Iran's independent nuclear fuel cycle and research into weaponisation, preferably through a revised nuclear deal rather than a military operation.

Before leaving office, the Biden administration attempted to promote the establishment of an extraterritorial, US-run and IAEA-supervised nuclear fuel cycle in Saudi Arabia, in an effort to break the deadlock in the US-Saudi nuclear dialogue (Nissenbaum & Lieber 2023). The Saudis, for their part, have continued to postpone the deadline for their nuclear tenders, to the chagrin of China and Russia (Aguinaldo 2024). Importantly, the success of the US-Saudi nuclear dialogue in resolving disagreements is contingent upon the outcome of the April 2025-initiated negotiations in Oman and Rome between the second Trump administration and Iran. Persuading the Iranians to scale back their nuclear programme and rely on imported nuclear fuel is a key challenge for the US administration in the negotiations, one that it is actively seeking to overcome (Knickmeyer 2025). If the Iranians yield to US pressure, this could assist the administration in its efforts to convince the Saudis to accept a nuclear programme based on a restricted nuclear fuel cycle.

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Interwoven Resilience: Non-State Actors and Formal Institutions in Ukraine's Urban War Effort

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Abstract
This article explores the perceptions of an interplay between formal and informal institutions in sustaining Ukraine's defence and governance during the full-scale Russian invasion. Focusing on three cities—Vinnytsia, Mykolayiv and Sumy—it examines how civil society organisations, business actors, municipal authorities and national-level decision-makers contribute to security-related functions such as direct city defence, wartime governance, material support to the army, financing of military needs, community leadership, coordination of efforts and communication. Using the repertory grid methodology, the article interviews and records the perceptions of civil society leaders and experts on institutional roles and effectiveness under wartime conditions. Findings reveal the centrality of non-state actors, particularly Territorial Defence Commanders and Local Civic Activists, in frontline cities, often compensating for underachieving formal institutions. Municipal authorities exhibit varied performance, excelling in Vinnytsia but struggling in Mykolayiv and Sumy. The article highlights the adaptability of civil society, the limited governing effectiveness of city formal institutions, the exclusion of national-level decision-makers from local affairs, and the critical need for collaboration between all these actors to enhance resilience and address wartime challenges.

Introduction

This article explores the role and functions of the state (formal) and civic/business (non-state or informal) institutions in the war effort in Ukraine's regions, particularly in the context of the defence of the major cities (oblasni tsentry) from Russia's full-scale invasion. The article investigates public perceptions and interpretations of how these institutions engage in security-related activities at the city level.

When reflecting on Ukrainian society's adaptation to the conditions of war, Mykola Bielieskov highlights that it has assumed functions traditionally reserved for the state:

> The grassroots motivation to defend their land is so impressive among ordinary Ukrainians. . . . In the last 150 years it has been solely the state's task to prepare and support armies on the battlefield. However, since the first day of this war Ukrainians have willingly shifted much of this burden onto their shoulders. (Bielieskov 2022)

Similarly, Yulia Kurnyshova highlights how local authorities and volunteers replaced the national-level institutions in delivering relief. She notes:

> In the first months of Russia's invasion, local governments and volunteers . . . were in the limelight of practical resilience. They provided vital humanitarian aid, especially in remote and frontline areas, and helped communities to remain resilient . . . when access to aid and public services was typically cut off. (Kurnyshova 2023: 95)

These observations challenge conventional state-centric models of governance and security provision, revealing a unique interplay between formal and informal institutions in wartime Ukraine. The article investigates civil society perceptions of this unique interplay in three cities—Vinnytsia, Mykolayiv, and Sumy—to evaluate how formal institutions and non-state actors have adapted to the perils of the Russian invasion.

To conduct the analysis, the article employs the repertory grid methodology, a semi-structured interview tool from personal construct psychology that was

designed to understand how an individual makes sense of reality (Bourne & Jankowicz 2018: 128–129). This qualitative methodology allows to capture the perceptions of civil society activists, experts and journalists from Vinnytsia, Mykolayiv and Sumy on the performance of their city institutions under crisis conditions. By bridging psychological methodology with political science analysis, the article aims to offer a deeper insight into how civil society leaders comprehend wartime security and how it can be institutionally ensured in their cities.

The article puts forward four hypotheses:

- First, civil society and informal institutions are perceived to bear the primary burden of the war effort and the defence of Vinnytsia, Mykolayiv and Sumy.
- Second, local non-military institutions, both formal and informal, seem to exceed their traditional governance roles to actively support the war effort of their cities.
- Third, central state institutions are perceived to be inadequately engaged in the security provision at the level of cities, with limited visibility and impact.
- Fourth, the poor performance of formal institutions, both national-level and local, encourages the non-state actors to embrace the security-related functions which otherwise they would never have embraced.

This article is part of a broader project with a focus on popular legitimacy for formal and informal institutions in contemporary Ukraine. The project evaluates the adaptation of institutions to post-1991 realities and society's capacity to mobilise in response to external military aggression. By focusing on the major regional cities, the project charts political values and institutional expectations, providing comparative insights into how governance and security are perceived across the country.

This article is structured into three thematic blocks. The first examines the wartime changes in the functioning of formal and informal institutions in Ukraine, introducing the contexts of Vinnytsia, Mykolayiv and Sumy. The second block explains the repertory grid methodology, emphasising its advantages in eliciting the perceptions of civil society leaders. The third block presents the results of the content analysis, summarising key roles and functions that institutions perform in the three cities, as outlined by the interviewees.

The findings of this article have broader implications for understanding governance in crisis contexts. On the example of Ukraine, they reveal the strengths and limitations of formal and informal institutions, highlighting the importance of local actors in sustaining wartime resilience. The article demonstrates that civic and business actors have the capacity to overstep their usual competencies and assume functions typically performed by central or local state institutions—particularly in instances where those formal institutions are underperforming or fail

to respond to urgent needs. In such cases, informal institutions become not just complementary, but substitutive. Conversely, where state institutions remain responsive and functional, informal actors tend to reinforce them, creating synergy in the delivery of security, and thereby strengthening collective resilience. This is a rather illustrative practice for contemporary Ukraine, but may hold true for war-torn environments in other parts of the world.

The article also provides insights into the conditions that enable effective local governance during Russia's ongoing full-scale invasion. Such governance often hinges on the level of social capital and institutional reputation that authorities possess within their communities. These, in turn, are shaped by public perceptions of institutional effectiveness in both governance and security.

Ukraine's war effort

A fair share of the recent literature on the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine argues that the events of February 2022 catalysed the transformation of Ukrainian society. Kurnyshova (2023: 86) has observed that the dichotomic distinction *state-society* lost much of its relevance: 'The functionality of the government, the consolidation of political elites and the professional communication and information management boosted the legitimacy of the state as a security provider and simultaneously inspired resilience within society.' One of the outcomes of the post-2014 decentralisation reform was that the state created a favourable environment for grassroots activism to gain momentum (Kushnir 2024: 123). The operational principle of subsidiarity allowed decisions to be made at the lowest effective level, empowering local governments, volunteers and civil society (Kurnyshova 2023: 96; Sydorchuk & Chabanna 2017: 139).

Apart from the impetus from decentralisation, the new type of *state-society* synergy has been facilitated by the rise of wartime leadership figures. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy became a symbol of national resistance, with nearly 90% of Ukrainians supporting him by the end of 2022 and 59% supporting him in September 2024 (Kyiv International Institute of Sociology 2024). Valeriy Zaluzhny, the former Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, grew to be another public hero in the first months of the invasion (Kurnyshova 2023: 92; Pankieiev 2024: 16). On the regional level, military commanders responsible for successful defensive and counter-offensive operations garnered the trust of local residents (Pankieiev 2024: 9–10). This allowed selected figures—both state officials and grassroots leaders—to acquire unexpectedly broad legitimacy and to influence the war effort by the mere gravity of their authority.

The business sector, including Ukraine's oligarchs, also played a distinct role in defending the state and its regions. As Andrew Lohsen (2022) notes, Ukraine's wealthiest individuals often aligned with the formal institutions, making substantial donations for the needs of the army and humanitarian support of people in

crisis. This alignment reflects both self-interest—recognising the threat a Russian takeover poses to their properties—and an opportunity to enhance their public standing (see also Fedinec 2024: 343; Burakovsky & Yukhymenko 2023: 181–182; Matuszak 2022). Acknowledging the importance of business actors in wartime planning and governance, this article will also scrutinise their engagement in the defence of Vinnytsia, Mykolayiv and Sumy.

Olga Boichak and Brian McKernan (2024: 49) highlight the limitations of measuring the strength of Ukrainian civil society through formal indicators such as number of registered organisations, their membership and fiscal revenue. Without questioning the importance of the registered NGOs, they suggest adding to the equation the horizontal networks, which have become the driving force behind *state-society* transformations. To properly explore the potential of Ukraine's civil society, Boichak and McKernan deem it necessary to look at 'informal forms of communal assistance and contentious political activities' (Boichak & McKernan 2024: 51; see also Channel Justice 2022: 36; Sereda 2018: 100). Kateryna Zarembo and Eric Martin provide an elegant definition of Ukraine's civil society, which allows to embrace the versatility of its participation in the war effort. For them, civil society is 'a voluntary and civic-minded activity, beyond the household and family, and not including the State or the market. Actions, whether individual or collective, formal or informal, private or non-profit, motivated by civic values, constitute civil society' (Zarembo & Martin 2024: 210; see also Gonçalves dos Reis 2024: 2).

Civil society institutions enjoy an outstanding reputation in Ukraine (Kornievskyi, Tyshchenko, & Yablonskyi 2019: 41). According to the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS), the public trust in charitable organisations helped them raise nearly UAH 33.96 billion (almost USD 1 billion) in donations during the first year of the full-scale invasion (Kyiv International Institute of Sociology 2023: 7). The National Democratic Institute survey from January 2023 found that 41% of Ukrainians had experience volunteering (including making donations) not least due to the 'soft power' of the NGOs (Fedinec 2024: 344). On top of that, 37.7% of members of public associations and charitable organisations interviewed by the KIIS believed that civil society strongly influenced the developments in Ukraine after February 2022; 40.3–41.4% of the interviewed members believed that their own influence was strong or moderately strong (Kyiv International Institute of Sociology 2023: 7).

Before the Russian invasion, 36% of civil society organisations in Ukraine predominantly focused on matters of culture, sport and tourism, while 29.1% dealt with education. In early 2023, the above areas were prioritised by only 8.8% and 5.3% of organisations, respectively. In contrast, assistance to the Armed Forces and support for victims of Russian aggression emerged as primary objectives for 43% of organisations, reflecting a substantial increase of 21.3% and 25.7%, respectively (Kyiv International Institute of Sociology 2023: 8).

Having interviewed Ukrainian civic activists engaged in the war effort, Boichak & McKernan (2024: 65) conclude that they pursue political goals in three plains. Their short-term goals are 'alleviating some of the immediate needs of soldiers, veterans and civilians to ushering in radical changes at the societal level'. Their long-term goals are 'alleviating immediate needs or helping an existing social institution function better', which signifies their openness to the cooperation, support and reform of the governing structures. Their ultimate goals reside in ushering in 'radical social transformations, such as ending corruption and drastically reforming the state'.

According to Chatham House survey (Lutsevych 2024: 3) – and much in line with what Boichak & McKernan discovered – members of Ukrainian civil society organisations define the following societal challenges as crucial (listed in order of importance): reintegrating veterans by providing prosthetics, creating employment opportunities and offering mental health support; fostering national unity around a strategy for victory; ensuring that children and young people affected by the war have access to quality education; addressing the acute demographic crisis; establishing a functioning war-specific economy; and integrating internally displaced persons into local communities (see also Gonçalves dos Reis 2024: 5). Additionally, civil society activists exert pressure on formal institutions to safeguard press freedom, media independence and journalistic ethics. By doing so, these activists enhance the role of the media as a watchdog and a bulwark against disinformation campaigns (Gonçalves dos Reis 2024: 5). It is, thus, no surprise that nearly 97% of respondents interviewed by the KIIS opined that civic activism contributed to the consolidation of communities, fostered belief in victory and strengthened resistance (Kyiv International Institute of Sociology 2023: 7).

This article examines the role of formal and informal institutions in the war effort in three Ukrainian cities—Vinnytsia, Mykolayiv and Sumy. While much of the up-to-date research has been focused on Kyiv-based institutions, exploring the resilience of territorial communities in other parts of the country is important for understanding the impact of the decentralisation reform, especially in the context of Ukraine's limited experience with self-governance. Apart from that, such an exploration will help unveil the uniqueness of the regional self-organisation and institutional interplay in the context of the Russian invasion.

The selection of Vinnytsia, Mykolayiv and Sumy as case studies allowed to devise a compelling analytical framework. Vinnytsia is located in west-central Ukraine, in a comparatively safe rear, with a population of 369,739 as of January 2022 (Ministry of Finance of Ukraine 2024). It has hosted 2,508 registered non-governmental organisations at the time of writing this article (YC Market 2024a). Since 2014, the dominant focus of these organisations has been on promoting democratic values and community development, enhancing local governance and civic participation, fostering leadership and volunteerism among young peo-

ple, preserving local heritage and cherishing urban art. Mykolayiv is a southern frontline city with a pre-invasion population of 470,011 (Ministry of Finance of Ukraine 2024). It has faced significant destruction yet maintains an active civil society network of 2,699 organisations (YC Market 2024b), which have a history of engagement in humanitarian aid and support to vulnerable populations, promoting transparency and combating corruption, and advocating for the protection of the Southern Bug River and local ecosystems. Sumy is a northern frontline city located near the Russian border. It counted 256,474 residents before the invasion (Ministry of Finance of Ukraine 2024). With 2,032 non-governmental organisations in late 2024 (YC Market 2024c), Sumy can compete in civic activism—at least in officially registered activism—with more populous Vinnytsia and Mykolayiv. The civil society organisations in Sumy have a record of providing support to internally displaced persons and facilitating community integration, enhancing media literacy and critical thinking skills among residents, and promoting urban art.

Repertory grid methodology

This article employs the repertory grid interview technique to gather primary empirical data. Originating in the 1960s within the field of personal construct psychology, the repertory grid technique offers a structured framework for exploring nuanced meanings of discussed concepts and topics. Whilst being in essence a qualitative methodology, it allows for the quantitative operationalisation of individual responses, which can then be subjected to statistical analysis. As noted by Devi Jankowicz (2004: 14–15), a leading expert in the field, the repertory grid technique represents a combination of structured interviewing and a multidimensional rating scale approach (see also Osterberg-Kaufmann 2022: 3).

The repertory grid—literally a grid containing information collected during an interview (see example below)—comprises four sections (Jankowicz 2004). First is the *topic*, a straightforward section that identifies the research field, guiding further elaboration and exploration of how interviewees perceive the discussed concepts. In this article, the topic is the security-related functions and performance of institutions in three cities. The second is a *set of elements*, a section that presents a list of objects or items whose characteristics are analysed during the interview. In this article, the elements include ten institutions involved in the security provision in Vinnytsia, Mykolayiv and Sumy (details provided below). The third section is *constructs,* which includes interviewee-elucidated statements (perceptions) relating to the elements. Constructs in this article represent the security-related functions and performance of the ten institutions in three cities. Each construct is bipolar, requiring an interviewee to provide an opposing statement alongside the original one. Finally, the fourth section is *quantitative ratings*, which includes numerical values assigned by an interviewee to each element based on the individual understanding of its relationship with the construct. In

this article, ratings are assigned on a 1–5 scale, reflecting the degree to which each institution demonstrates a specific security-related function or activity.

The repertory grid interview technique allows for a systematic exploration of how civil society leaders and experts perceive institutional functions and performance. In the process of interviewing and filling out the grids, to elucidate every new construct (function/performance of an institution) and add it to section three, the interviewees were presented with three elements (institutions) and asked to identify two that shared a similarity and one that stood out. The guiding question was: 'In the context of your observations, what makes two of these institutions more similar and/or effective than the third at the city level?' The response (perception) of the interviewees was noted down as a statement and used as the basis for the 'positive' construct pole with the opposing pole phrased as an antonym. For instance, if the original 'positive' statement sounded like 'The institution(s) are(is) affiliated with the city and know(s) the local context well' and was placed in the right construct pole of the section three, the antonym would be 'The institution is detached from the city and not directly affiliated with it, does not know the local context' and placed in the left pole (see example table below). Once the construct poles were established, the interviewees had to look into the fourth section and rate the relationship between the elements (institutions) and the construct (functions/performance) on a 1–5 scale. Throughout the interview, the interviewer recorded responses, continuously expanding the repertory grid with new constructs and ratings.

It is important to mention that, for this article, the interviewer prepared the elements (institutions) in advance and aggregated them in triadic combinations, which remained consistent across all interviews (e.g. 'President of Ukraine—City Mayor—Local big business owners' to elucidate the first construct, 'Parliament of Ukraine—City Council—Local volunteers/civic activists' to elucidate the second construct, and others). As for constructs, ten of them were elucidated during the interview and one was supplied at the very beginning: 'In general, the institution does not manifest itself in any way at the city level' against 'In general, the institution functions very efficiently at the city level'. The supplied construct was necessary to assess the quality of performance of the same institution in three different cities.

The elements (institutions) discussed during the interview included the President of Ukraine (**PU**), the Parliament of Ukraine or *Supreme Council* (**SC**), the City Mayor (**CM**), the City Council (**CC**), the Commander-in-Chief of Ukraine's Armed Forces (**AC**), Commanders of territorial defence units (**TDC**), Local volunteers/civic activists (**LCA**), Local big business owners (**LBB**), Local media influencers (**LMI**) and Leaders of local religious organisations (**LRL**).

This set of elements was created based on four considerations. First is *public trust*—institutions were chosen based on their perceived trustworthiness in

public opinion surveys (Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation 2023). Second is *representativity and accountability*—almost all institutions in the set are either elected or directly accountable to the public. Third is *contribution to the war effort*—all institutions are actively engaged in the defence of the country and, specifically, the cities of Vinnytsia, Mykolayiv and Sumy. Fourth is *attention in the literature*—all institutions have been defined as the ones making an impact in recent academic publications.

For clarity, an example of an empty repertory grid is provided below (Table 1):

Table 1: Example of repertory grid

Section one (topic)												
RepGrid #N												
Topic: Institutional Functions and Performance												
	Section two (set of elements)											
Section three (opposing construct pole)	President of Ukraine	Supreme Council	City Mayor	City Council	UAF Commander-in-Chief	TDU commanders	Local activists/volunteers	Local big business owners	Local media influencers	Local religious leaders	Ideal institution	**Section three (original construct pole)**
The institution is detached from the city and not directly affiliated with it, does not know the local context	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	The institution is affiliated with the city and knows the local context well
Elucidated construct -2	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Elucidated construct 2
Elucidated construct -3	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Elucidated construct 3
…	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	…
Elucidated construct -10	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Elucidated construct 10
In general, the institution does not manifest itself at all at the city level	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	In general, the institution functions very effectively at the city level
	Section four (quantitative ratings), N=1-5,											

Source: Author

The repertory grid technique offers several advantages over other interviewing techniques. First, it allows for the quantitative insights into the qualitative data. Second, it establishes a transparent and consistent connection between constructs (functions/performance) and elements (institutions). Third, it gives interviewees the freedom to independently define institutional functions and performance, ensuring that they perceive the constructs as personally relevant rather than imposed by the interviewer. Finally, the grid format allows for equal attention to each element, enabling reliable comparisons within and between grids (Bourne & Jankowicz 2018: 135–136).

The article draws from answers from 35 interviewees, distributed as follows: 15 in the Vinnytsia sample, 10 in the Mykolayiv sample and 10 in the Sumy sample. The sample sizes were intentionally designed to favour Vinnytsia, the only city in the rear, compared to Mykolayiv and Sumy, which are both frontline cities. The interviewees included civil society leaders (independent volunteers, *ad hoc* activists and/or registered NGO members—29 in total), experts in municipal governance (one per city) and local media analysts (one per city). Some of the interviewees had a history of involvement in national and regional war efforts, such as supplying equipment or crowdfunding for the army and territorial defence units.

Interviewees were recruited through discriminative snowball sampling, with eligibility criteria requiring them to be established civil society leaders, experts or media analysts who had been permanently residing in Vinnytsia, Mykolayiv or Sumy. They needed to have specific knowledge of the functioning of formal and informal institutions at the city level and relevant governance experience (formal, informal or both). All interviews were conducted individually and via online video conferencing software. All interviews were recorded between March and August 2024.

The article acknowledges a potential bias inherent in interviewing civil society leaders who are, in part, expected to assess the performance of non-state informal institutions—including their own. This bias may manifest in a tendency to overestimate their own significance in providing security and compensating for gaps in governance. However, given the interview-based methodology, such subjectivity is considered acceptable within the qualitative research framework. Moreover, civil society leaders represent only one of ten institutions discussed in the article, and the inclusion of their perspectives offers valuable insight into broader dynamics of governance and security provision. That being said, the author recognises the importance of mitigating this bias in future and plans new research that will incorporate data from representatives of local formal institutions and ordinary city residents.

It is important to emphasise that repertory grids belong to the qualitative research toolkit. At their core, they are semi-structured interviews designed to yield in-depth insights into how individuals perceive and make sense of the

world around them. Two out of the four sections of each grid are shaped entirely by the subjective perceptions of the interviewee, ensuring that the data reflects individual experiences. At the same time, the responses can be systematically structured, categorised and compared across grids. This unique combination allows us to bridge qualitative and quantitative approaches, enabling a degree of basic statistical analysis.

While the article acknowledges the limitations of repertory grids from a strictly quantitative perspective—such as the relatively small sample size—it emphasises the method's qualitative strength: depth of interpretation rather than breadth of coverage. The study is based on 35 interviews, which generated a total of 350 constructs (perceptions of functions/performance of institutions) across three cities. Even when approached quantitatively, this volume of data offers the potential to identify statistically meaningful patterns and regularities.

Content analysis

The content analysis looks into the perceptions expressed through the elucidated constructs to pool and aggregate the latter into categories according to the meanings they convey ('bootstrapping' technique). With respect to repertory grids, constructs serve as both *content units* (i.e. units revealing the meaning of the basic idea) and *context units* (i.e. units demonstrating how the basic idea was phrased). 'In other words, each and every construct is regarded as expressing a single unit of meaning' (Jankowicz 2004: 149).

The content analysis in this article embraced all 35 repertory grids and 350 constructs (150 from the Vinnytsia sample group, 100 from Mykolayiv and 100 from Sumy), aiming to identify security-related constructs. This meant that only the constructs containing keywords such as 'defence', 'security', 'protection', 'war', 'army', 'military' and 'martial' were flagged for analysis. Once these constructs were identified, their thematic categories were developed for each of the three sample groups. Most of the elucidated categories appeared to be the same for Vinnytsia, Mykolayiv and Sumy. On the last stage of content analysis, the percentage of flagged security-related constructs in relation to the total number of constructs within each sample group was calculated and presented in graphs (see below).

The majority of constructs were easily allocated to categories. However, there were two clusters of constructs that appeared to be tricky. The first cluster is the constructs that encompass multiple and/or overlapping security-related activities. To allocate these constructs to a category, the initial association provided by the interviewee was used as a point of reference. For instance, if a construct began with 'cooperation' or 'interaction' and was later elaborated with specific details (e.g. 'Interaction with other institutions to ensure the financial and economic needs of the city'), it was categorised under 'Wartime inter-institutional cooperation' (not 'Financial support to the city war effort'). Constructs discussing

any kind of 'humanitarian and technical' support to the army were categorised under 'Humanitarian and spiritual support to the city defence structures', while constructs focusing on 'technical and humanitarian' support to the army were allocated to the 'Material and technical support to the city defence structures' category. The second cluster is the constructs that did not explicitly include the security-related keywords but clearly reflected wartime challenges (e.g. support for internally displaced persons or assistance for people in crises). These were also included in relevant categories. That being said, constructs from both clusters were comparatively few.

After categorising all security-related constructs, the article examined which elements (institutions) received high ratings in which constructs (functions/performance). The percentage of constructs associated with each high-scoring element within a category was then calculated.

To determine an element's relevance to a construct, only institutions with a rating of 4 or higher were considered. For bipolar constructs, only the 'positive' pole—indicating strong performance of a function—was included in the analysis and added to tables (see below). The opposing pole was excluded, as high ratings in it indicated poor institutional performance in security-related activities.

The relationship between an element and the supplied construct enabled the assessment of the institution's overall wartime effectiveness within a specific city. To calculate this, the ratings from all supplied constructs, across all repertory grids within a given city sample, were summed for each institution and then divided by the number of interviewees in that sample. Based on the resulting average, institutional effectiveness was classified as follows: scores between 2 and 3 indicated 'low' effectiveness, scores between 3 and 4 indicated 'moderate' effectiveness, and scores between 4 and 5 indicated 'high' effectiveness.

The results of the content analysis are presented in a series of tables (see below). These tables include *categories of security-related constructs*—thematic groupings of constructs identified during the analysis; *list of security-related constructs*—specific constructs within each category as elucidated by the interviewees; *construct codes and numbers*—unique identifiers for constructs to ensure clarity and traceability to original repertory grids; *weight of a category*—the proportion of all constructs in one category relative to the total number of security-related constructs; *institutional performance within a category*—the weight of each institution in performing functions within a given category.

Vinnytsia

Fifteen (15) interviewees from Vinnytsia elucidated 150 constructs in total, among which 44 were security-related (29.33%). See Table 1.1 and Graph 1.1.

Table 1.1: Security-related functions and performance of institutions in Vinnitsa

Category	Construct definition	Construct №	Constructs quantity (weight among 44 defence constructs, %)	Institution times mentioned in the category (weight among others in the category, %)
Direct participation in the city defence **(DPCD)**	Regional assistance to the Armed Forces (purchase of drones and cars, fundraising and collection of donations); Involvement with the security structures of the city; Reform and support of the city defence structures; Participation in the city's defence structures, support of Vinnytsia's fighting spirit; Affiliation to territorial defence structures; Participation in the city and state defence structures; Participation in the structures of defence and protection of the city; Participation in the security and defence of the city, assistance to relevant structures; Involvement in the activities of defence and security structures of the city; Participation in volunteer (informal) support of city defence structures; Defence activities at the city level, assistance to Vinnytsia units at the front.	VA1.2 VA1.3 VA3.3 VA3.6 VA4.3 VA8.3 VA9.5 VA10.8 VA12.3 VA12.8 VA13.3	11 (25%)	LCA: 10 (16.94%) AC: 8 (13.55%) TDC: 8 (13.55%) LBB 7: (11.86%) PU: 6 (10.16%) CC: 6 (10.16%) CM: 4 (6.77%) LMI: 4 (6.77%) SC: 3 (5.08%) LRL: 3 (5.08%)
Material and technical support to the city defence structures **(MTSA)**	Provision of technical support and humanitarian aid to city security structures; Assistance in technical and humanitarian equipment of city security structures;Participation in the logistical support of defence structures in Vinnytsia; Participation in the support, equipment and management	VP1.8 VA1.8 VA4.8 VA5.8 VA6.5	8 (18.18%)	TDC: 7 (20.58%) LCA: 7 (20.58%) CM: 5 (14.70%) CC: 4 (11.76%) PU: 3 (8.82%)

| Category	Description	Codes		Distribution
	of defence structures at the city level; Participation in material and technical provision of city defence structures; Involvement in material, technical and humanitarian assistance to the city's defence structures; Involvement in the material and technical support of the city's defence structures; Participation in the material and technical support of the city's defence structures.	VA9.8 VA11.8 VA13.8		AC: 3 (8.82%) LBB 2 (5.88%) LMI: 2 (5.88%) SC: 1 (2.94%)
Wartime planning and governing in the city (**WPGC**)	Influence on the city's security structures; Influence on the security of the city through the formal army institutions (recruitment of soldiers, defence planning); Involvement in the planning and implementation of the city's defence; Influence on the enhancement of the city security and defence; Influence on the formation of the city governance model (legislation and defence); Formal subordination to the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and execution of orders and combat tasks; Strong subordination to the General Staff of the Armed Forces; Use of institutional authority and competencies to strengthen the city's defences.	VJ1.3 VA1.6 VA2.3 VA5.3 VA7.6 VA9.3 VA11.3 VA11.5	8 (18.18%)	AC: 6 (18.75%) TDC: 6 (18.75%) CC: 5 (15.62%) PU: 4 (12.5%) CM: 3 (9.37%) LCA: 3 (9.37%) SC: 2 (6.25%) LBB: 2 (6.25%) LRL: 1 (3.12%)
Wartime community leadership and support (**WCLS**)	Active solving humanitarian problems and helping members of society in crisis situations; Active patriotic position, focus on satisfying the wartime interests of the city community and front-line fighters; High compassion and sensitive response to humanitarian and spiritual needs of citizens (emotional support); Uniting society around the problems of city	VJ1.8 VA3.4 VA3.7 VA5.5 VA7.5 VA10.3	7 (15.9%)	LCA: 7 (17.94%) LBB: 7 (17.94%) PU: 5 (12.82%) CC: 5 (12.82%) AC: 4 (10.25%) LRL: 4 (10.25%)

	defence; Active solving of humanitarian issues of the city (assistance to displaced people); High trust of residents in the institution that guarantees their security and protection; Active institutional engagement in satisfying the basic material needs of society, including security.	VA10.5		CM: 3 (7.69%) TDC: 3 (7.69%) LMI: 1 (2.56%)
Wartime inter-institutional cooperation (**WIIC**)	Openness to dialogue with other institutions to provide security during the full-scale invasion; Active cooperation and subordination in the context of fulfilling defence obligations (mobilisation, demobilisation); Direct cooperation with other institutions to enhance the defence of the city; High inter-institutional synergy in providing humanitarian and material aid to city defence structures; Direct cooperation with other institutions to enhance defence and solve humanitarian issues.	VP1.7 VA4.6 VA6.3 VA6.8 VA8.8	5 (11.36%)	PU: 5 (15.15%) LBB: 5 (15.15%) LMI: 4 (12.12%) CC: 4 (12.12%) LCA: 4 (12.12%) SC: 3 (9.09%) TDC: 3 (9.09%) CM: 2 (6.06%) AC: 2 (6.06%) LRL: 1 (3.03%)
Financial support to the city war effort (**FSCW**)	Payment of taxes to the regional budget for the safety and well-being of the city; Financing of needs reported by city security structures, financing of innovative solutions; Participation in financing and logistical support of city defence structures.	VA1.5 VA1.9 VA3.9	3 (6.81%)	LCA: 3 (17.64%) LBB: 3 (17.64%) CM: 2 (11.76%) CC: 2 (11.76%) TDC: 2 (11.76%) PU: 1 (5.88%) SC: 1 (5.88%) AC: 1 (5.88%) LMI: 1 (5.88%) LRL: 1 (5.88%)

| Humanitarian and spiritual support to the city defence structures (**HSSA**) | Active resolution of the humanitarian issues in the city and humanitarian support of local defence structures. | VA3,5 | 1 (2.27%) | PU: 1 (20%) LCA: 1 (20%) LBB: 1 (20%) LMI: 1 (20%) LRL: 1 (20%) |
| Wartime communication (**WCom**) | Active participation in communication activities and formation of public opinion in Vinnytsia during the war. | VA3,10 | 1 (2.27%) | PU: 1 (50%) LMI: 1 (50%) |

Source: Author

Graph 1.1: Percentage of security-related constructs among all constructs elucidated in Vinnytsia

Security (44)
29.3%

Total (150)
70.7%
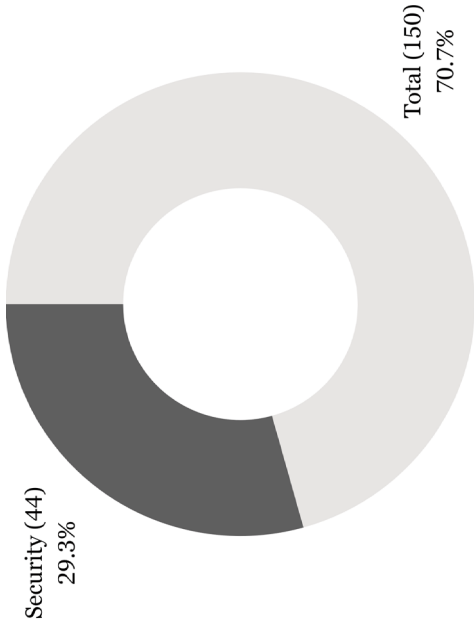
Source: Author

It is also worth highlighting some additional data extracted from the Vinnytsia repertory grids, particularly from the supplied construct ratings. Table 1.2, as well as Graphs 1.2 and 1.3 provide details on the quantity and quality of functions performed by an institution.

Table 1.2: The number and effectiveness of defence functions performed by an institution in Vinnitsa.

| Institution	Number of constructs (mentions across 30 constructs, %)	Performance on a 1-5 scale (effectiveness)
President of Ukraine	26 (59.09%)	2.73 (low)
Parliament of Ukraine	10 (22.72%)	2.4 (low)
City Mayor	19 (43.18%)	4.2 (high)
City Council	25 (56.81%)	4.2 (high)
Commander-in-Chief of UAF	24 (54.54%)	2.8 (low)
Commanders of territorial defence units	23 (52.27%)	2.8 (low)
Local volunteers/civic activists	27 (61.36%)	4.13 (high)
Local big business owners	15 (34.09%)	4.06 (high)
Local media influencers	7 (15.9%)	3.13 (moderate)
Leaders of local religious organisations	12 (27.27%)	2.8 (low)

Source: Author

Graph 1.2: Quantity of security-related functions performed by institutions in Vinnytsia (max 44)
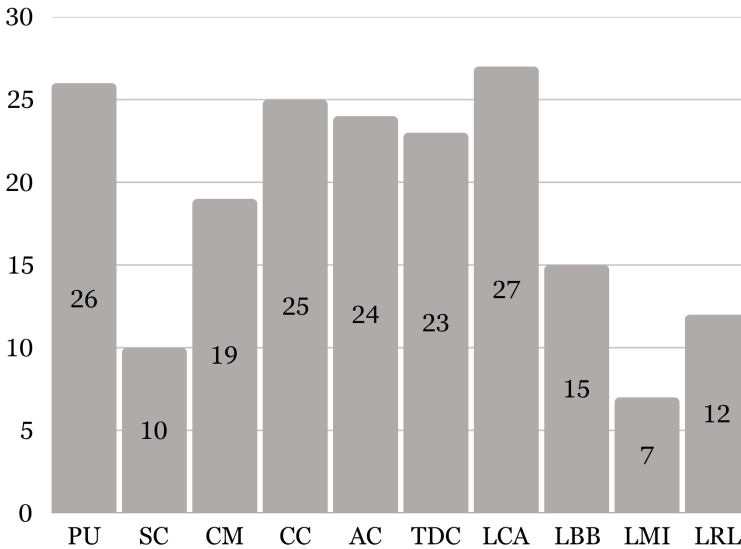
Source: Author

Graph 1.3: Quality of institutional performance in Vinnytsia (max 5)
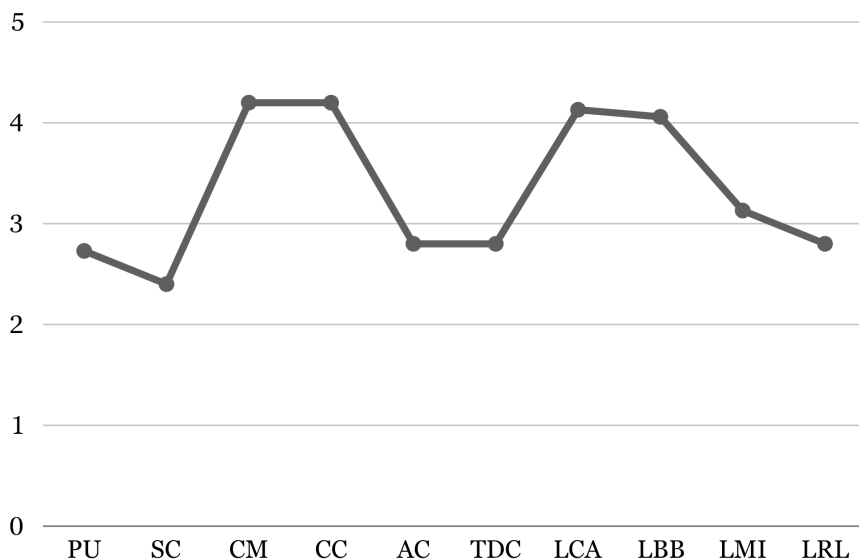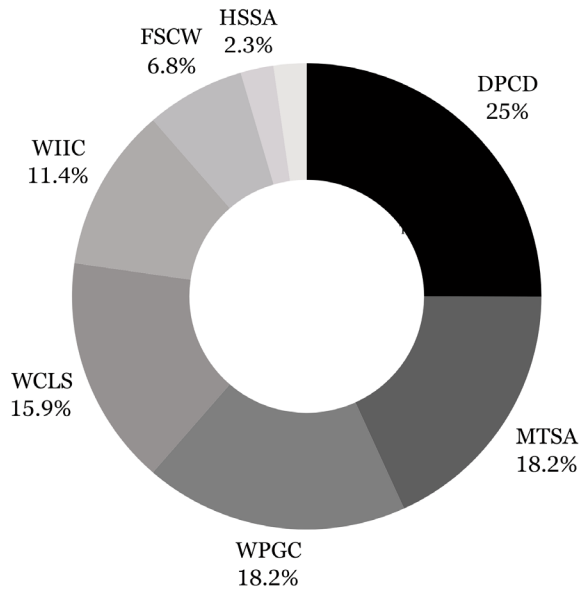

Source: Author

Tables 1.1 and 1.2 demonstrate that—in the perceptions of interviewees—local civic activists, City Mayor and City Council emerge as pivotal actors in Vinnytsia, each playing a critical role in the defence and support functions. Their effectiveness exceeds 4 points and is the highest among all institutions. In contrast, while formal state institutions such as the President, Army Commander-in-Chief and territorial defence commanders exhibit substantial involvement in defence-related constructs, their effectiveness score under 3 suggests a perception of limited efficiency compared to the abovementioned local actors. The Parliament is notably underperforming with respect to both quantity and quality of functions in Vinnytsia. Local big business owners seem to be effective and easy to access, but not as versatile and responsive as civic activists and municipal authorities. Local media influencers and religious leaders are neither effective nor particularly visible in the city's war effort.

An interesting observation is that the President is perceived to be more actively engaged in local communication and community leadership than the media influencers (not least due to the regular online video addresses of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to the public). City Mayor and City Council have exceeded their traditional roles as purely municipal institutions; beyond their responsibilities in administering the city, they have strived to provide material, technical and financial support to the army. Local civil activists excel in direct contributions

to city defence and the execution of *ad hoc* tasks for the army and community. Surprisingly, local big business owners have emerged as leaders in community support and inter-institutional cooperation, highlighting their responsiveness and role in fostering resilience.

For more details on which institutions are the most active in which categories of functions in Vinnytsia see Graphs 1.4 and 1.5.

Graph 1.4: Categories of security-related functions in Vinnytsia, as elucidated from 44 constructs

HSSA 2.3%
FSCW 6.8%
DPCD 25%
WIIC 11.4%
MTSA 18.2%
WCLS 15.9%
WPGC 18.2%

Source: Author

Mykolayiv

Ten (10) interviewees from Mykolayiv elucidated 100 constructs in total, among which 42 were security-related (42%). See Table 2.1 and Graph 2.1.

As with the case of Vinnytsia, it is worth extracting additional data from the supplied construct ratings and creating a separate Table 2.2, as well as Graphs 2.2 and 2.3, to illustrate quality and quantity of institutional functions.

In Mykolayiv, as in Vinnytsia, local civic activists stand out with the highest engagement in defence-related functions. Their role is pivotal in mobilising resources and addressing immediate wartime needs. City Mayor and territorial defence commanders are equally prominent, each performing half of the defence functions. That being said, the perceived effectiveness of City Mayor indicates fairly strong leadership while the territorial defence commanders demonstrate limitations in execution. The President and Army's Commander-in-Chief, two

Graph 1.5: Institutional engagement in performing security-related functions within each of the categories in Vinnytsia
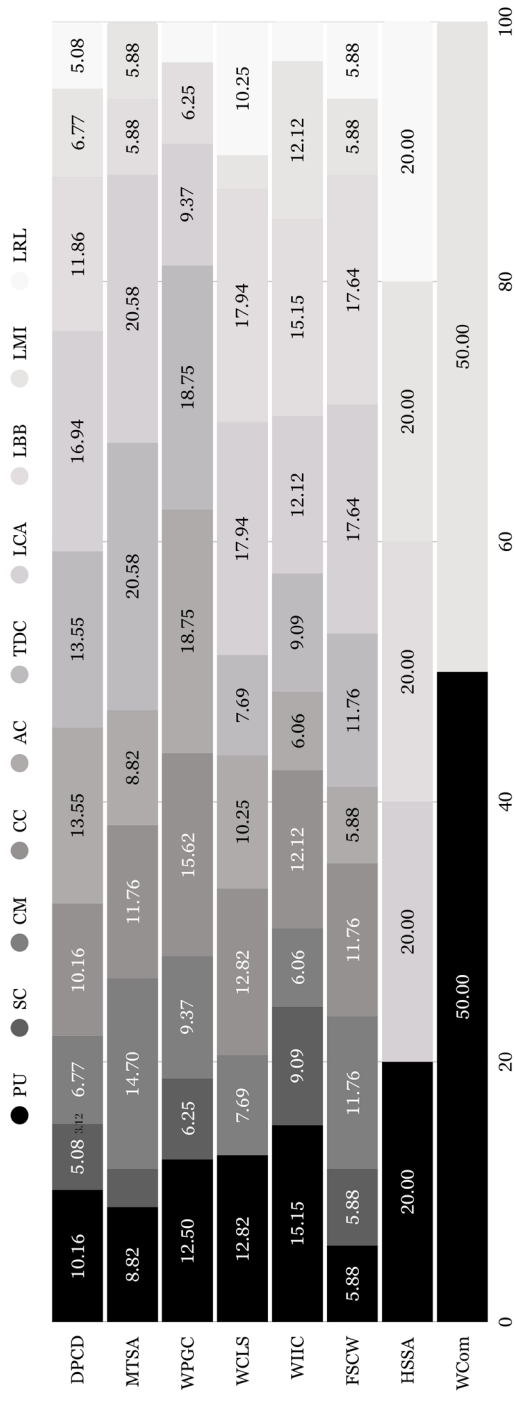
Source: Author

Table 2.1: Security-related functions and performance of institutions in Mykolayiv

Category	Construct definition	Construct №	Constructs quantity (weight among 42 defence constructs, %)	Institution times mentioned in the category (weight among others in the category, %)
Wartime planning and governing in the city (**WPGC**)	Ability to make key decisions to protect the city, the institution has broad powers and does not liaise with others; Implementation and support of decisions made to protect the city, high effectiveness of decision implementation; High awareness of the front-line situation and dynamics, access to military secrets and resources; High desire to end the war, even through negotiations with the enemy; Active involvement in coordinating army conscription processes in the city; Pivotal role in making decisions about the city's defence; Active care of the city welfare and management in wartime; Resolving issues related to protection and defence of the front-line city, active interaction and communication to boost defence; High efficiency of the institution in adopting important decisions for the security and development of the city; Ability to make decisions under martial law, the increased influence during martial law; The institution is important and influential only in wartime.	MP1.6 MP1.9 MA2.3 MA3.1 MA3.6 MA4.6 MA4.9 MA8.3 MA8.6 MA6.1 MA6.6	11 (26.19%)	AC: 9 (18%) PU: 7 (14%) CM: 6 (12%) LCA: 6 (12%) LMI: 6 (12%) TDC: 5 (10%) LBB: 5 (10%) LRL: 3 (6%) CC: 2 (4%) SC: 1 (2%)
Wartime inter-institutional cooperation (**WIIC**)	High symbioticity and interaction of the institution with others in the context of protecting the city; Inter-institutional activity in ensuring the material and technical	MP1.3 MA1.8 MA2.2	7 (16.66%)	LCA: 7 (21.87%) LMI: 5 (15.62%) CM: 4 (12.5%)

Category	Description			
	needs of the city's defence structures; Inter-institutional cooperation in the context of the state of war to ensure the defence of the city; Interaction with other institutions to ensure the financial and economic needs of the city and the army; Cooperation in the context of assistance and support for the city's defence structures; Inter-institutional work on defence, participation in joint projects on material/technical support for the army; High inter-institutional synergy that allows rapid response to urgent war needs.	MA2.9 MA3.8 MA4.8 MA8.2		AC: 4 (12,5%) TDC: 4 (12,5%) LBB: 4 (12,5%) CC: 2 (6,25%) LRL: 2 (6,25%)
Financial support to the city war effort (FSCW)	High activity in financing and logistical support for the city's defence; Management of funds to support the city's defence capability (impact on defence budgets); Participation in fundraising activities for the needs of the city's defence; Participation in the formation and filling of the budgets of the city's defence structures; Active participation and high efficiency in raising money for the needs of the army and the city community.	MP1.4 MA1.2 MA1.4 MA1.9 MA2.4	5 (11,90%)	CM: 3 (15,78%) LBB: 3 (15,78%) PU: 2 (10,52%) CC: 2 (10,52%) TDC: 2 (10,52%) LCA: 2 (10,52%) LMI: 2 (10,52%) SC: 1 (5,26%) AC: 1 (5,26%) LRL: 1 (5,26%)
Material and technical support to the city defence structures (MTSA)	Material and technical support to local defence structures; Active and sincere participation in assistance to the army (material and technical, informational, or PR); Involvement in assisting and supporting the city's defence forces, high responsiveness to army requests; Quick and effective response to requests from the city's defence structures, active material and technical support of the army.	MA2.5 MA3.4 MA7.5 MA8.8	4 (9,52%)	LCA: 4 (23,52%) TDC: 3 (17,64%) LBB: 2 (11,76%) LMI: 2 (11,76%) LRL: 2 (11,76%) PU: 1 (5,88%) SC: 1 (5,88%)

				CM: 1 (5.88%)
				AC: 1 (5.88%)
Humanitarian and spiritual support to the city defence structures (**HSSA**)	Providing humanitarian assistance to defence structures, spiritual and mental support for soldiers; Support and assistance in the reintegration of army veterans at the city level; Involvement in supporting the army and providing humanitarian assistance to people in difficult situations; Provision of spiritual and psychological support to soldiers and refugees.	MP1.5 MA1.1 MA5.8 MA1.5	4 (9.52%)	LCA: 3 (25%) LRL: 3 (25%) AC: 2 (16.66%) LBB: 2 (16.66%) CM: 1 (8.33%) LMI: 1 (8.33%)
Direct participation in the city defence (**DPCD**)	Direct involvement in defence activities, legal obligation to do so; Active cooperation with the military bloc, direct involvement in the defence of the city; Direct participation in the army vertical, contribution to the army reform; Participation of the institution in strengthening the city's defence, support for the army.	MA6.8 MJ1.3 MA1.3 MA4.5	4 (9.52%)	AC: 3 (18.75%) TDC: 3 (18.75%) PU: 2 (12.5%) CM: 2 (12.5%) CC: 2 (12.5%) LCA: 2 (12.5%) SC:1 (6.25%) LBB: 1 (6.25%)
Wartime communication (**WCom**)	Active dissemination of critically important information in the community, counteraction to hybrid warfare; Participation in, as well as communication about measures to support the community and the military of Mykolaiv; Formation of trends and norms of social ideology in wartime (Muscovites are inhumane, the Ukrainian language is supreme); High media presence, active communication of critical information, media coverage of wartime events and decisions.	MP1.10 MA1.7 MA3.10 MA8.10	4 (9.52%)	PU: 3 (20%) LCA: 3 (20%) CM: 2 (13.33%) AC: 2 (13.33%) LMI: 2 (13.33%) SC:1 (6.66%) TDC: 1 (6.66%) LBB: 1 (6.66%)

| Wartime community leadership and support (**WCLS**) | Active assistance to the city community in war conditions, the institution is the first to respond to the challenges of war; The institution follows the vocation to protect the community, goes beyond its direct powers in the context of 'military democracy'; Eagerness to help people in difficult life situations, treatment and rehabilitation, targeted action. | MPr.2 MA6.3 MA7,8 | 3 (7.14%) | TDC: 3 (18.75%) LCA: 3 (18.75%) CM: 2 (12.5%) AC: 2 (12.5%) LBB: 2 (12.5%) LMI: 2 (12.5%) CC:1 (6.25%) LRL: 1 (6.25%) |

Source: Author

Graph 2.1: Percentage of security-related constructs among all constructs elucidated in Mykolayiv


Total (100)
58%

Security (42)
42%

Source: Author

Table 2.2: The number and effectiveness of defence functions performed by an institution in Mykolayiv

| Institution	Number of constructs (mentions across 30 constructs, %)	Performance on a 1–5 scale (effectiveness)
President of Ukraine	15 (35.71%)	2.7 (low)
Parliament of Ukraine	5 (11.9%)	2.2 (low)
City Mayor	21 (50%)	3.6 (moderate)
City Council	9 (21.42%)	2.8 (low)
Commander-in-Chief of UAF	21 (50%)	2.7 (low)
Commanders of territorial defence units	21 (50%)	2.6 (low)
Local volunteers/civic activists	30 (71.42%)	3.7 (moderate)
Local big business owners	20 (47.61%)	3.4 (moderate)
Local media influencers	20 (47.61%)	3.2 (moderate)
Leaders of local religious organisations	12 (28.57%)	2.1 (low)

Source: Author

Graph 2.2: Quantity of security-related functions performed by institutions in Mykolayiv (max 42)
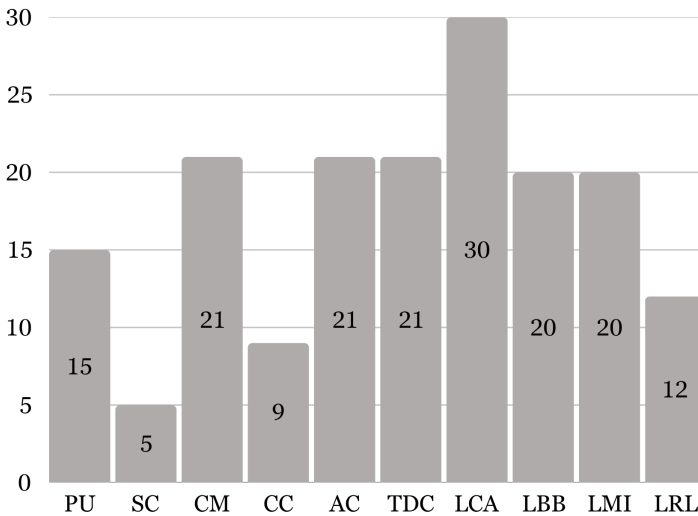
Source: Author

national-level institutions, are involved in strategic decision-making, yet their effectiveness at the local level remains modest compared to grassroots actors. Local big business owners and media influencers both perform many functions and are fairly effective. City Council, National Parliament and local religious leaders are neither operationally impactful nor engaged in many activities in wartime Mykolayiv.

Graph 2.3: Quality of institutional performance in Mykolayiv (max 5)
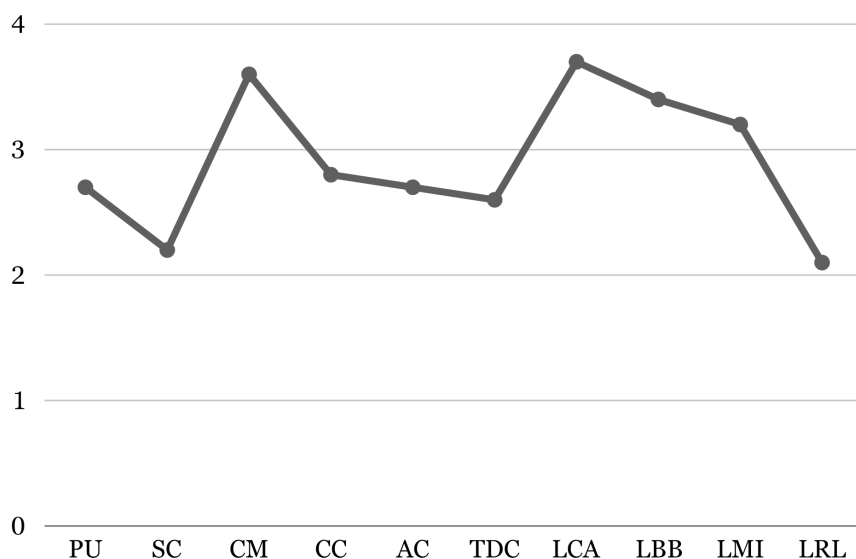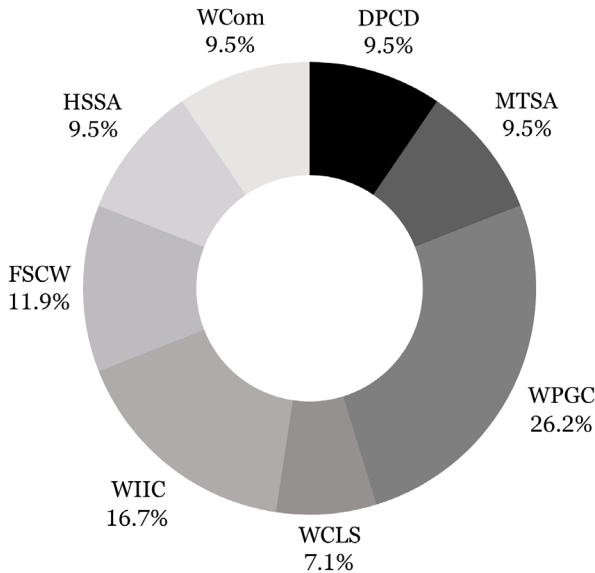

Source: Author

It can be observed in Table 2.1 that the institutions most open to inter-institutional cooperation are local civic activists and media influencers. In terms of financing the city's war effort, City Mayor and local big business owners take the lead. While the involvement of business actors is expected, the Mayor's prominent role is less conventional, as it is typically the City Council that has primary influence over the distribution of the municipal budget. Actually, the Mayor seems to be an authoritative institution in the city as it is engaged in performing functions across all categories. Material, technical and humanitarian support to the army is predominantly driven by grassroots actors. Direct participation in defence and wartime governance, however, is led by the Army's Commander-in-Chief (moderately effective). Similar to the observations from Vinnytsia's Table 1.1, the President demonstrates a notable strength in wartime communication.

For more details on which institutions are the most active in which categories of functions in Mykolayiv see Graphs 2.4 and 2.5.

Sumy

In Sumy, the categories of institutional performance exhibit a few differences compared to Vinnytsia and Mykolayiv. For instance, the phrasing of constructs in Sumy sample made it hard to combine them into a distinct category for humanitarian support to the army. Second, when mentioned, the inter-institutional synergy was not explicitly tied to the post-invasion context. Third, the category

Graph 2.4: Categories of security-related functions in Mykolayiv, as elucidated from 42 constructs
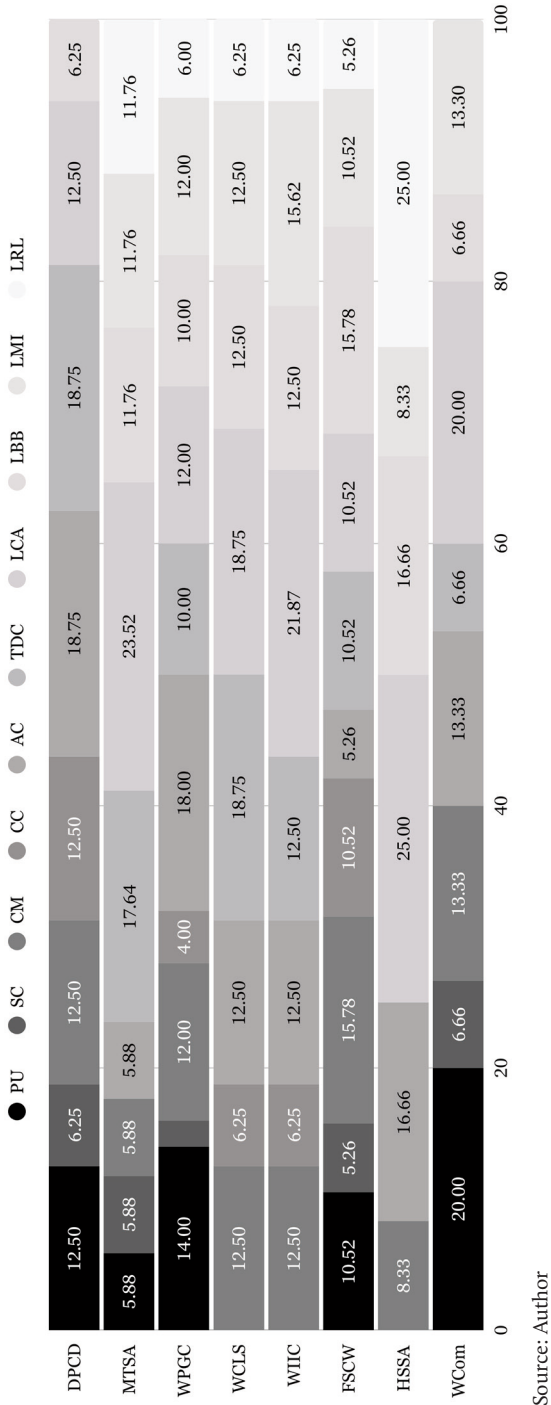

Source: Author

of community leadership had to integrate humanitarian contributions to the war effort. Fourth, the communicational prowess of institutions was frequently noted by the interviewees but rarely in the wartime context, contrasting with how constructs were phrased in Mykolayiv, another frontline city. Finally, a particularly unique category in Sumy is 'Cooperation with the enemy' reflecting the geopolitical impacts of city's proximity to Russia and its unique patterns of pre-invasion coexistence.

Ten (10) interviewees from Sumy elucidated 100 constructs in total, among which 30 were security-related (30%). See Table 3.1 and Graph 3.1 for more detail.

After the processing of supplied construct ratings in Sumy repertory grids, the quantity and quality of defence functions performed by institutions have been presented in Table 3.2, as well as Graphs 3.2 and 3.3.

Sumy's institutional performance showcases a heavy reliance on grassroots and local actors, with territorial defence commanders and civic activists playing leading roles. Their high scores in a supplied construct highlight the strength of localised and adaptive response in this northern frontline city. Conversely, the lower scores for national-level institutions like the President and the National Parliament high-light gaps in centralised governance or poor awareness of local contexts. The eluci-dated contributions of local media influencers and big business owners emphasise their importance in indirect support of the war effort through equipping the army

Graph 2.5: Institutional engagement in performing security-related functions within each of the categories in Mykolayiv
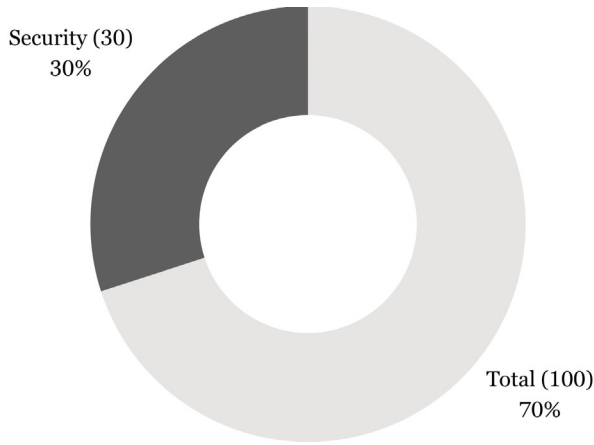

Source: Author

Table 3.1: Security-related functions and performance of institutions in Sumy

Category	Construct definition	Construct №	Constructs quantity (weight among 30 defence constructs, %)	Institution times mentioned in the category (weight among others in the category, %)
Direct participation in the city defence (**DPCD**)	Active performance of the city's defence functions; Construction of fortifications around the city, implementation of a new centralised defence model; Involvement in supporting and staffing the city's defence forces; High initiative and creativity in matters of city defence; Active performance of the city's defence function; Direct involvement in the defence of the city and building the resilience of the frontline community; Designing local defence, managing the defence budget; Involvement in the defence and protection of the city, participation in defence structures; Involvement in the defence of the city and the formation of city military policy; Performing the function of direct protection of the regional capital; Involvement in the defence of the city of Sumy, providing support to defence structures; Active position in confronting the enemy and responding to community requests.	SA7.3 SA6.6 SA5.3 SA5.8 SA4.3 SA3.6 SA2.3 SA1.3 SA8.3 SP1.3 SJ1.3 SP1.5	12 (40%)	TDC: 12 (21.81%) LCA: 10 (18.18%) AC: 8 (14.54%) PU: 6 (10.9%) LBB: 5 (9.09%) LMI: 5 (9.09%) CM: 3 (5.45%) SC: 2 (3.63%) CC: 2 (3.63%) LRL: 2 (3.63%)
Wartime planning and governing in the city (**WPGC**)	Active formal management of the city under martial law; Understanding the city's defence needs, understanding threats and methods of counteraction, active communication with the army and military; High flexibility, ability for selective activity in the context of the defence of frontline cities; Work to strengthening the city's defence structures; Performance of key functions in the defence of the city and the state, formation of defence strategies; Availability of formal and informal mechanisms for solving problems of the community of a front-line city.	SA7.6 SA4.8 SA1.6 SP1.8 SJ1.6 SJ1.5	6 (20%)	TDC: 6 (22.22%) AC: 5 (18.51%) LCA: 5 (18.51%) PU: 4 (14.81%) CC: 3 (11.11%) LBB: 3 (11.11%) CM: 1 (3.70%)

Category	Description	Codes	Count	Breakdown
Material and technical support to the city defence structures (**MTSA**)	Active cooperation and individual activity in material and financial support for the city's defence forces; Assistance in the logistical support of defence structures at the expense of city budget funds; Support to local defence structures, provision of logistical assistance to the army; Provision of logistical support to city defence structures.	SA8.8 SA7.5 SA6.8 SJ1.8	4 (13.33%)	TDC: 4 (19.04%) CC: 3 (14.28%) AC: 3 (14.28%) LCA: 3 (14.28%) CM: 2 (9.52%) LBB: 2 (9.52%) PU: 1 (4.76%) SC: 1 (4.76%) LMI: 1 (4.76%) LRL: 1 (4.76%)
Financial support to the city war effort (**FSCW**)	Allocation of funds and financing of city defence projects (including protecting the sky over Sumy); Provision of additional financing for the city's defence structures, crowdfunding; Ability to manage the city budget for the needs of the city's defence, access to city resources.	SA8.5 SA7.4 SA6.3	3 (10%)	CC: 2 (22.22%) TDC: 2 (22.22%) LBB: 2 (22.22%) CM: 1 (11.11%) LCA: 1 (11.11%) LRL: 1 (11.11%)
Wartime community leadership and support (**WCLS**)	Active involvement in campaigns aimed at encouraging the community to protect the city; Active involvement in meeting the humanitarian needs of the city's community.	SA3.3 SA1.8	2 (6.66%)	LMI: 2 (33.33%) PU: 1 (16.66%) LCA: 1 (16.66%) LBB: 1 (16.66%) LRL: 1 (16.66%)
Wartime communication (**WCom**)	Attempts to improve communication processes and accelerate information exchange to enhance city defence; Objective informing the population in the conditions of war, interest to influence public opinion.	SP1.10 SP1.4	2 (6.66%)	LMI: 2 (100%)
Cooperation with the enemy (**CoEn**)	History of cooperation with the enemy after the invasion, seeking opportunities for private communication in the conditions of the war.	SP1.1	1 (3.33%)	LBB: 1 (100%)

Source: Author

Graph 3.1: Percentage of security-related constructs among all constructs elucidated in Sumy

and framing public opinion. Both the City Mayor and City Council demonstrate moderate performance with a narrow focus on city governance, which makes informal local institutions shine with respect to security provision.

Table 3.2. The number and effectiveness of defence functions performed by an institution in Sumy

| Institution	Number of constructs (mentions across 30 constructs, %)	Performance on a 1–5 scale (effectiveness)
President of Ukraine	12 (40%)	2.3 (low)
Parliament of Ukraine	3 (10%)	2.3 (low)
City Mayor	7 (23.33%)	3 (moderate)
City Council	10 (33.33%)	2.9 (low)
Commander-in-Chief of UAF	16 (53.33%)	2.9 (low)
Commanders of territorial defence units	24 (80%)	3.9 (moderate)
Local volunteers/civic activists	20 (66.66%)	4.2 (high)
Local big business owners	14 (46.66%)	3.4 (moderate)
Local media influencers	10 (33.33%)	4.1 (high)
Leaders of local religious organisations	5 (16.66%)	2.5 (low)

Regarding the critical observations from Tables 3.1 and 3.2, territorial defence commanders stand out as particularly active and effective in Sumy, surpassing their performance in other cities. While it may take on fewer functions overall, it executes them better. Unusually, defence commanders play an influential role

Graph 3.2: Quantity of security-related functions performed by institutions in Sumy (max 30)
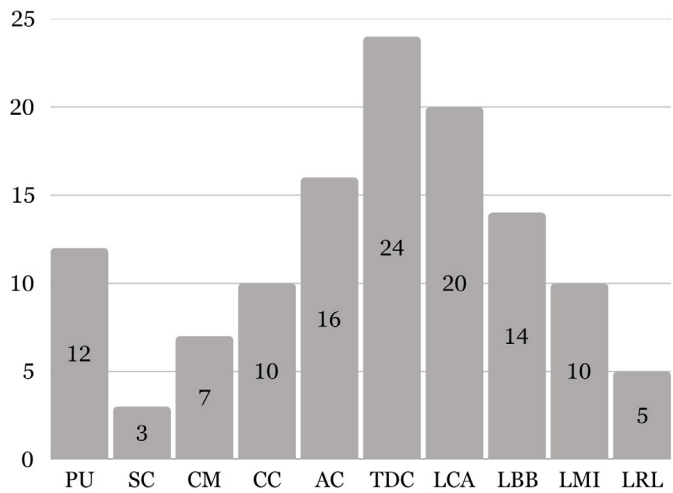
Graph 3.3: Quality of institutional performance in Sumy (max 5)
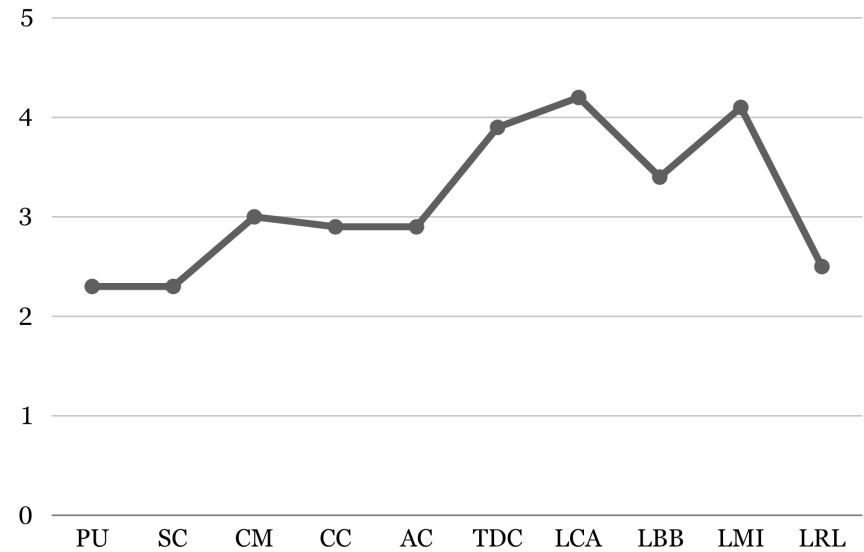
in Sumy governance, a function not typically associated with their mandate. Ukraine's Army Commander-in-Chief, on the other hand, appears to be the least versatile in performing security-related functions compared to other cities. Together, territorial defence commanders, the Army's Commander-in-Chief,

and local civic activists form the backbone of Sumy's 'hard power' defence. Local big business owners and media influencers effectively fulfil their traditional niche functions, though these were not identified as critically important by the interviewees. The President of Ukraine is no longer defined as a good wartime communicator and community-builder.

For more details on which institutions are the most active in which categories of functions in Sumy see Graphs 3.4 and 3.5.

Graph 3.4: Categories of security-related functions in Sumy, as elucidated from 30 constructs
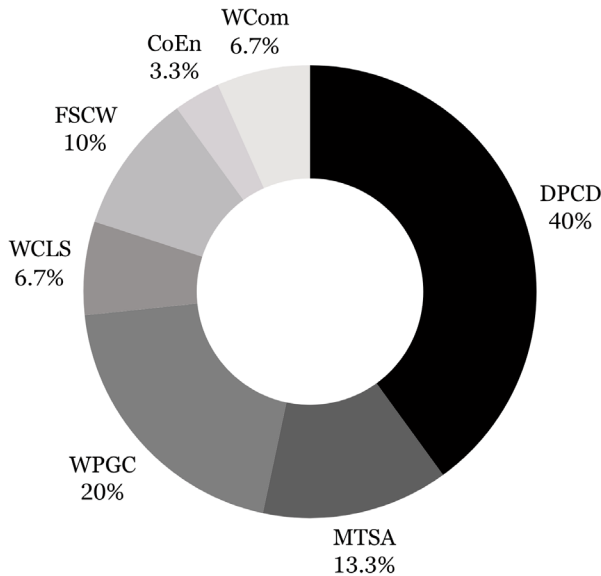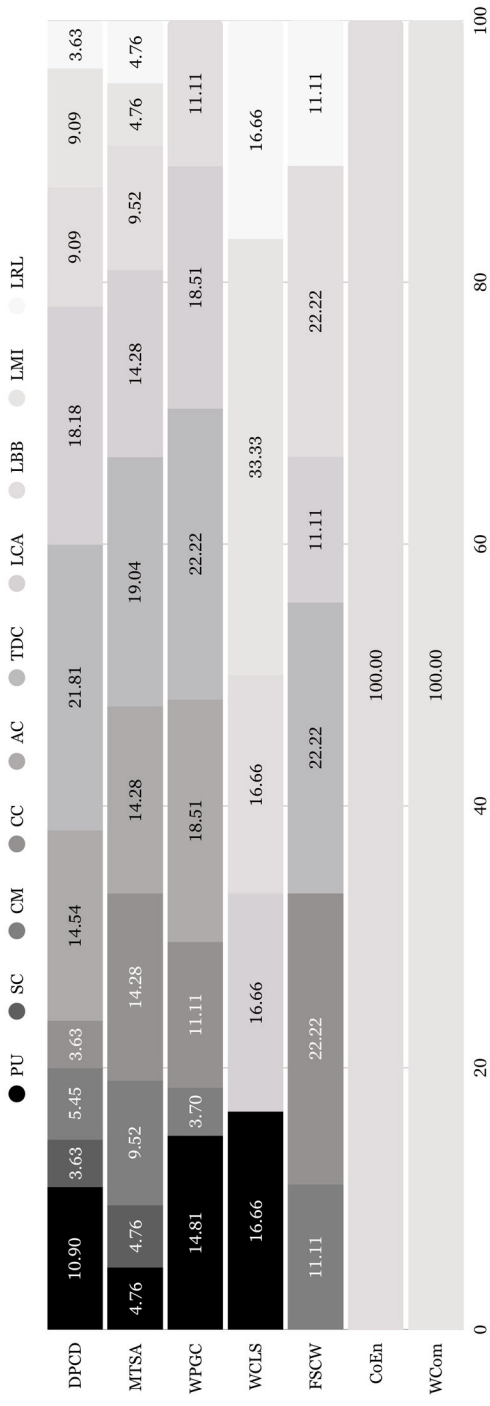

Source: Author

Major findings

Having analysed all security-related constructs elucidated by 35 interviewees from Vinnytsia, Mykolayiv and Sumy, the article identified nine key categories of functions that institutions are expected to perform to address wartime challenges in the third year of the Russian invasion. These functions are: *Direct participation in city defence* or **DPCD** (emerged as a core function in all cities, encompassing tasks such as fortifying the terrain, establishing coordination between units, and staffing defence structures); *Wartime planning and governance* or **WPGC** (reallocating municipal resources to support defence projects/infrastructure, designing response mechanisms to mitigate evolving threats, and devising plans for community protection and resilience-building); *Material and technical support to defence structures* or **MTSA** (supplying the army with vehicles, drones, tools, protective

Graph 3.5: Institutional engagement in performing security-related functions within each of the categories in Sumy

Source: Author

gear, communication devices and other similar goods); *Financial support for city war efforts* or **FSCW** (redirecting municipal funds to support defence needs, crowd-funding, public fundraising, procurement of military equipment, investing in innovative technologies and/or infrastructure); *Wartime communication* or **WCom** (updating the community timely and accurately about wartime developments, counteracting Russian misinformation and propaganda, campaigning to foster public resilience and support for defence efforts); *Wartime community leadership and support* or **WCLS** (encouraging civic participation in defence-related activities, leading initiatives to unite the community); *Wartime inter-institutional cooperation* or **WIIC** (building horizontal networks to better address material, technical, humanitarian, financial and other needs of the territorial communities and military units); *Humanitarian and spiritual support to defence structures* or **HSSA** (offering spiritual guidance and emotional counselling to soldiers, reintegration of veterans into society, helping people in crisis situations—including internally displaced people); *Cooperation with the enemy* or **CoEn** (trying to restore pre-war practices of doing business with Russia—category that concerns big business owners in Sumy only). These nine categories identified by the article to a significant degree are in line with the typical activities of Ukraine's civil society as they were described by other scholars (see the section 'Ukraine's war effort' above).

According to the perceptions of the interviewees, in all three cities, local civic activists and volunteers emerge as a pivotal actor, demonstrating significant adaptability and commitment to security-related functions. In Vinnytsia, the institution leads in direct city defence, as well as in community and army support activities (material, financial, humanitarian). In Mykolayiv, it dominates in inter-institutional cooperation, community leadership, and material and humanitarian support to the army. Sumy further highlights civic activists' importance, where they perform 66.66% of security-related functions with an effectiveness score of 4.2/5, excelling in direct defence, grassroots governance and community leadership. While one should not question the pivotal role of the institution, it is worth keeping in mind that the majority of interviewees are civic activists themselves, which may lead to a latent bias in their (self-)assessment.

Similarly, territorial defence commanders are believed to be momentous in direct defence and operational tasks across all three cities, with their prominence increasing in frontline contexts. In Vinnytsia, commanders contribute to 52.27% of functions, focusing on wartime governance and army logistics with moderate effectiveness. Mykolayiv sees comparable engagement at 50% with similarly moderate performance in inter-institutional cooperation and material and financial support to the army. In Sumy, however, territorial defence commanders' performance reaches its peak, handling 80% of defence functions—direct defence, wartime governance, army logistics and financial support—with a relatively high effectiveness score of 3.9/5. The outstanding performance of the institution in

Sumy may be related to the fact that the local self-government bodies lack effectiveness. At the time of the recording of the sample interviews, the mayor of Sumy was under investigation by the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office and could not perform its functions. Therefore, territorial defence commanders (backed by local civic activists, big businesses and media influencers) might have had to step in and cover the emerging institutional gap.

Municipal self-government bodies, such as City Mayor and City Council, demonstrate varying levels of performance depending on the city. In Vinnytsia, the interviewees believe that both institutions seem to work as a team and go beyond their formal responsibilities, making substantial contributions to the material and financial support of the army. In Mykolayiv, City Mayor handles 50% of functions with an effectiveness score of 3.6/5, manifesting a fairly strong leadership, while City Council remains in the Mayor's shadow with 21.42% engagement. The picture in Sumy is the opposite of Mykolayiv because City Council performs 33.33% of functions while City Mayor handles 23.33%. Both institutions scored $\leqslant 3$ in effectiveness in Sumy and are predominantly focused on governance and resource allocation. In frontline cities, unlike in Vinnytsia, low indicators of municipal self-government bodies may be partially explained by the strong authority of the military administrations that are tasked with the organisation of defence and logistics for the military under martial law. On top of that, the Mayor of Sumy could not perform its duties fully.

National-level institutions, including the President of Ukraine and the Army's Commander-in-Chief, seem to contribute significantly to defence efforts but often face challenges in effectiveness on a local level. In Vinnytsia, the President excels in wartime communication, bolstering morale and unity. Mykolayiv sees the President's performing 35.71% of functions with moderate effectiveness (2.7/5), emphasising strategic governance. In Sumy, the President's involvement increases to 40%, but its effectiveness declines to 2.3/5. Army Commander's performance is consistent across all three cities, handling over 50% of functions, yet its effectiveness remains moderate, with scores ranging from 2.7 to 2.9/5. Speaking of the Parliament of Ukraine, it is one of the least effective and engaged institutions, with scores of effectiveness approaching 2/5 in all three cities.

Economic and logistical support roles are prominently held by big business owners, which—according to interviewees—demonstrate versatility across contexts. In Vinnytsia, they play a noticeable role in community support and inter-institutional cooperation. In Mykolayiv, they handle 47.61% of functions, focusing on financing and material support to the war effort. Sumy further underscores the importance of local big business owners, where they perform 46.66% of functions with a moderate score of effectiveness (3.4/5).

Local media influencers have often been recorded to play a niche role, particularly in informing about wartime realities and boosting public unity. In Vinnytsia,

they are the most visible in communication and inter-institutional cooperation, though performing poorly overall. Mykolayiv highlights their critical contribution to shaping public opinion and providing essential information, performing 47.61% of functions with moderate effectiveness. In Sumy, media influencers achieve an effectiveness score of 4.1/5, reflecting their unique ability to engage and support a frontline population. The discrepancy in performance of the institution may hint that in Vinnytsia it is being used as a tool for political struggle while in Mylolayiv, and especially in Sumy, it became a tool of survival for the community.

Contributions of local religious leaders are consistent in their focus on spiritual and moral support across all three cities, though their overall involvement and effectiveness are perceived as incomparably lower than those of other institutions. In Vinnytsia, the interviewees believe that the religious leaders complement the humanitarian activities of other city actors, while in Mykolayiv and Sumy they add a layer of resilience for communities under immediate threat. Across all cities, the role of religious leaders highlights the importance of addressing the psychological and emotional dimensions of resilience, offering an important, albeit secondary, layer of support in Ukraine's wartime governance. Some of the interviewees argue that the religious leaders' role in the war effort does more harm than good because—instead of uniting all people against the common enemy—the unceasing hostilities between denominations deepen rifts within and between territorial communities.

Conclusion

Revisiting the hypotheses presented at the beginning of the article, the research confirms that all of them are either true or partially true. First, the hypothesis that civil society and informal institutions—particularly local civic activists and territorial defence commanders—bear the primary burden of the war effort in their cities is true. The interviewees believe that the defence commanders undertake a significant share of functions in direct defence and wartime governance, with their role being particularly pronounced in Sumy. Local civic activists complement these efforts by leading community mobilisation, providing material and technical support and facilitating inter-institutional cooperation. Local big business owners are perceived to play a critical role in financing urban security and supporting the community, while other informal actors, such as media influencers and religious leaders, contribute within more niche and less visible capacities.

Second, the hypothesis that non-military institutions exceed their traditional governance roles to actively support the war effort is partially true. In Vinnytsia, according to the interviewees, municipal institutions like City Mayor and City Council assume responsibilities for material and financial support of the army, roles traditionally outside their legal mandates. However, in Mykolayiv and Sumy,

the performance of non-military formal institutions is believed to be more limited. This limitation is partly due to the strong presence of military administrations and, in Sumy, the paralysis of the mayor's activities resulting from an investigation.

Third, the hypothesis that central state institutions are inadequately engaged in security provision at the city level is partially true. The President of Ukraine and the Commander-in-Chief of Ukraine's Armed Forces are believed to contribute to strategic oversight and wartime communication, with the President excelling in morale-building in Vinnytsia. However, their direct effectiveness in addressing local needs, particularly in frontline cities like Sumy and Mykolayiv, is perceived as moderate to low. The Parliament of Ukraine consistently ranks as one of the least engaged and effective institutions, underscoring gaps in central-local coordination. One may refer to Kurnyshova's observation here (2023: 93) that, instead of framing nationwide wartime resilience, the Parliament lost trust and agency in the eyes of Ukrainians and became the 'legislative department of the President'.

Fourth, the hypothesis that the poor performance of formal institutions encourages non-state actors to embrace security-related functions is true. In contexts where formal institutions fall short—most notably in Sumy—local informal entities such as territorial defence commanders, civic activists and big business owners are believed by the interviewees to step in to fill critical governance and security roles. This phenomenon is the most articulate in frontline cities, where non-state actors not only adapt to but excel in functions traditionally managed by formal institutions. While such interplay highlights the adaptability and resilience of civil society, it also underscores systemic weaknesses in formal governance structures during wartime.

It would be unreasonable to claim that Ukraine's wartime civil activism is an absolutely unique phenomenon; it shares similarities with the experiences of other regions in turbulence across the world. In Afghanistan, for example, local NGOs and informal networks have been engaged for decades in delivering humanitarian aid, supporting displaced populations and promoting local development (Lakha 2024; Porter Peschka 2011: 7, 15). In West Africa, civil society organisations have also been noticed in assisting combatants, post-conflict peacebuilding, and reconciliation efforts (Boadu 2025; Acemoglu & Robinson 2023: 407–408; De Waal 2009: 101–102). Across these cases, a common thread is the ability of grassroots actors to operate where formal state institutions are either weak, absent or distrusted.

While these similarities are significant, Ukraine's civil activism is still distinct. Unlike many other regions in the world, Ukraine experienced several waves of peaceful and organised mass mobilisation—most notably the Orange 2004 and the Euromaidan 2013–14 Revolutions—which contributed to a strong tradition of civic engagement and public accountability (Diuk 2014: 84). These revolutions not only energised Ukrainians, but institutionalised mechanisms of political guardianship, giving citizens a more assertive role in governance (Zarembo & Martin 2024: 210).

On top of that, Ukrainians' aspiration for EU integration further distinguishes their bottom-up proactivity—the access to broader European networks and awareness of norms have enhanced grassroots organisational capacity and legitimacy. In contrast, civil society in Afghanistan has often been fragmented, politically constrained, and heavily dependent on international aid (Nemat & Werner 2016: 8–9). Finally, Ukraine has faced an invasion of a well-equipped, well-trained and sizeable professional army of an enemy state in an immediate geographic proximity, which has not always been the case in other parts of the world.

In a word, while grassroots resilience is a shared feature with other regions, Ukraine's civic activism stands out for its continuity, domestic legitimacy and integration with international civil society frameworks. That being said, the role and place of Ukraine's civil society in global context, as well as the degree of applicability of Ukraine's grassroots experiences to other war-torn environments, requires a separate and more tailored research.

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Unravelling Indonesia's Failure to Implement the ASEAN Petroleum Security Agreement (APSA)

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Abstract

In 1975, Indonesia initiated oil and gas cooperation, leading to the establishment of the ASEAN Council on Petroleum (ASCOPE) in 1976. Then, the ASEAN Petroleum Security Agreement (APSA) was created to improve petroleum security and minimise the impact of emergencies experienced by ASEAN Member States (AMS). The First APSA was signed in 1986 but did not succeed, so ASCOPE was tasked with conducting a review. This led to the signing of the Second APSA on 1 March 2009, which was then ratified by all AMS in 2013. As the initiator of the ASCOPE establishment and considering the status of Indonesia as the highest oil producer among AMS, even with its status as net oil importer, this research examines why Indonesia failed to implement the Second APSA even after it had been ratified for ten years. The research will gather primary data from official APSA documents and related agreements, as well as interviews. The secondary data are from official reports, presentations and studies about energy trends and development. The authors argue that non-compliance is the factor affecting the stagnation of the Second APSA in Indonesia. Therefore, before the expiration of the Second APSA in March 2023, AMS agreed to extend it on an interim basis for the next two years.

Introduction

In our increasingly interconnected world, fuelled by technological advancements and globalisation, energy has emerged as a critical cornerstone of economic growth and global prosperity. Indeed, energy issues have evolved into a complex and far-reaching global geopolitical concern, significantly shaping the relationships between nations. Fossil fuels, including oil and natural gas, stand as strategic resources that exert considerable influence on the economic stability, political power and diplomatic engagements of numerous countries. The intricate relationship between energy and geopolitics has a long history, often leading to detrimental effects on the global economy, instigating conflicts between nations and even playing a decisive role in the outcomes of wars (Figueiredo et al. 2022). Recognising the multifaceted nature of energy challenges, there is a growing impetus for cooperation at both global and regional levels, exemplified by collaborative efforts among countries within Southeast Asia.

Under the framework of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), energy stands as a paramount priority for regional cooperation in Southeast Asia. The groundwork for prioritising energy issues within the region was laid early, commencing with the inaugural ASEAN Economic Ministers on Energy Cooperation (AEMEC) meeting held in Bali, Indonesia, in September 1980. This foundational step culminated in a significant milestone when the Agreement on ASEAN Energy Cooperation (AAEC 1986) was signed by the ASEAN Member States (AMS) on 24 June 1986, which was subsequently ratified on 29 September of the same year. The ratification of the AAEC formally inaugurated the era of structured energy cooperation across Southeast Asia. This proactive and early endeavour accentuated the strategic importance that the AMS had long placed on collaborative energy initiatives for the region's collective advancement.

The escalating volatility of global oil markets in the mid-1980s underscored the urgency for AMS to collectively address energy security concerns. As a response to these challenges, ASEAN formulated the First ASEAN Petroleum Security Agreement (APSA) in 1986. This landmark agreement, an embodiment of the broader AAEC 1986, was designed to establish a cooperative framework for mitigating the impact of oil supply disruptions. AAEC 1986 Article VI on Cooperation in Security of Energy Supply mandates AMS to endeavour to cooperate in drawing up and concluding emergency agreements for different energy forms as may be desirable from time to time and to take appropriate measures to cope with these emergency situations (Secretariat 1986).

The shortcomings in the implementation of the First APSA prompted AMS to undertake a comprehensive review. This led to the development of the Second APSA ratified in 2013 which was valid for ten years up to 2023. Designed to bolster regional petroleum security, the agreement aimed to mitigate supply shortages and coordinate emergency responses on a voluntary, commercial basis. In this context, an oil emergency refers to a critical disruption in the petroleum supply chain resulting from events such as natural disasters (e.g. earthquakes or tsunamis), industrial accidents like facility explosions, or the outbreak of war. The Second APSA encompasses a range of short-, medium- and long-term strategies, which include diversifying alternative fuels and supply sources, exploring new petroleum resources, enhancing the efficiency of energy markets and energy utilisation. Nevertheless, the Second APSA also faced challenges in effective implementation, necessitating a two-year extension up to 2025 while a more comprehensive oil and gas cooperation agreement was formulated.

Given Indonesia's historical leadership in regional oil and gas cooperation initiative in 1975, which was the forerunner for the establishment of the ASEAN Council on Petroleum (ASCOPE) in 1976, which was then assigned to review the First APSA (Nicolas 2009), the research will focus on a case study of APSA implementation in Indonesia. Furthermore, based on the ASEAN Center for Energy (ACE) database, Indonesia dominated oil production from 2013 to 2022 with a total of 7,533MBOPD or approximately 43% of the total oil production in the Southeast Asian region (ASEAN Center for Energy 2023). This dominant position as the region's largest oil producer underlined its potential to serve as a linchpin in ASEAN's energy security.

Indonesia also ratified the APSA which has been extended twice – from 1986 to 2013 and from 2013 to 2023. However, despite ratifying the Second APSA, Indonesia encountered significant obstacles in transforming the agreement's provisions into concrete actions. This study seeks to uncover the underlying reasons for this implementation gap, considering the country's substantial role in the ASEAN energy landscape. Hence, this study raises the question of why Indonesia failed to implement the Second ASEAN Petroleum Security Agreement (APSA) even when it had been ratified for ten years.

This study delves into the factors that hindered Indonesia's implementation of the Second APSA despite its ratification a decade ago. By focusing on the 2013–2023 period, the research aims to provide novel insights into the challenges encountered during the agreement's lifespan. Academically, this research aims to significantly contribute to international relations, specifically the under-explored area of regional energy cooperation. It seeks to bridge a gap in the literature by thoroughly analysing factors influencing the effectiveness of regional energy cooperation regimes. Empirically, the findings will inform policymakers in Southeast Asia, enabling the development of more sustainable, inclusive and environmen-

tally responsive energy cooperation strategies. It will also offer targeted insights for navigating increasingly complex energy challenges.

For Indonesia, this study will clarify its strategic role in regional energy cooperation, particularly within the APSA framework. As the leading oil producer in Southeast Asia during the study period, despite being an importer, Indonesia's role is critical to the Second APSA's success. This research will identify factors affecting Indonesia's compliance and its broader impact on the agreement's implementation.

The Dynamics of the ASEAN energy issue

The existence of ASEAN as the only formal organisation in the field of economic cooperation in Asia is considered one of the unique characteristics of the Southeast Asian region. Energy is viewed as an ideal area of cooperation in the region, so the AMS boost cooperation in sharing various resources and interconnection to increase resilience. When discussing the broader scope of energy cooperation, previous studies discussing energy issues within the ASEAN framework focus on four categories: energy transition, development of New Renewable Energy (NRE), the status of fossil energy and implementation of energy cooperation within the ASEAN framework.

First, energy transition is one of the initiatives in addressing the issue of climate change initiated by developed countries through the Paris Agreement. This global trend encouraged AMS leaders to carry out an energy transition by updating energy and climate policies through investment in new and clean energy infrastructure, as well as encouraging energy mainstreaming and democracy to strengthen energy security by increasing the use of renewable energy and reducing the dominance of fossil fuels (Heffron et al. 2024; Sony et al. 2024). In addition, it is necessary to accelerate decarbonisation efforts through major investments in green initiatives and to emphasise the urgency for widespread adoption of clean technologies. This includes using both fossil and non-fossil technologies for decarbonisation rather than waiting for certain technologies to mature, while still using a holistic approach based on the principles of sustainability, security, affordability, reliability, readiness and the country-specific impact reflected in technology ranking (Hu & Weng 2024; Lau et al. 2022). These steps are critical because the future energy landscape of ASEAN will rely on today's actions, policies and investments to change the fossil fuel-based energy system towards a cleaner energy system, while still considering potentially higher energy costs, affordability issues and energy security risks during the energy transition period (Phoumin, Kimura & Arima 2021).

Second, new renewable energy development in the Southeast Asia region is one of the strategies for transitioning the energy system towards cleaner energy. The Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam are blessed with

most types of renewable energy sources, even though almost all the renewable energy sources in the region are underutilised (Chien, Chau & Sadiq 2023; Vidinopoulos, Whale & Fuentes Hutfilter 2020). Thus, to maximise the potential and capacity of renewable energy available in the region, AMS leaders have implemented several policies, including encouraging individuals and industries to maximise use of renewable energy as a comprehensive substitute for fossil fuels in Southeast Asian countries (Erdiwansyah et al. 2019). Another measure to be taken for fossil fuel efficiency is through the promotion and adoption of more environmentally friendly alternative energy, especially renewable energy sources that exhibit a low or negligible carbon footprint. These findings offer significant contributions to policymakers in achieving sustainable energy, environmental stewardship, and the formulation and execution of comprehensive strategies that aim to mitigate carbon dioxide emissions arising from the consumption of AMS fossil fuels (Syed Ali et al. 2023). This condition provides confidence that the decarbonisation of the AMS energy system is very possible, but current policies and actions still need to be maximised to achieve any level of decarbonisation by 2050 (Vidinopoulos, Whale & Fuentes Hutfilter 2020).

Third, the status of fossil energy still dominates the energy system in the Southeast Asian region because AMS still rely on fossil fuels to meet its energy needs, especially when viewed from its total primary energy (Malahayati 2020). According to the 2015 Total Primary Energy Consumption (TPEC), renewable energy resources range from low to moderate, are unevenly distributed geographically and contribute to only 20% of TPEC. Meanwhile, fossil energies depending heavily on coal and oil contributed to 80% of TPEC (Lau et al. 2022). Despite the increasing installation capacity, renewable energies' contribution to TPEC has been decreasing in the last two decades (2002–2020). This suggests that the current rate of the addition of renewable energy capacity is inadequate to allow ASEAN to reach net zero by 2050. Therefore, fossil energies will continue to be an important part of ASEAN's energy mix (Lau et al. 2022).

Fossil energy is also considered strategic resources affecting economics, power, as well as the diplomatic relations of countries. Fossil fuels – especially oil and natural gas – are linked to geopolitics in the energy sector as it is concerned with the dwindling and geographically concentrated oil and gas deposits in nations with fragile political systems. Geopolitics and energy issues have long been intertwined, to the point where they could cause negative impacts on the global economy and even determine the outcome of wars (Figueiredo et al. 2022: 4). For example, a case study of oil price effect on economic growth from the three largest AMS oil exporters – namely, Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia and Vietnam – showed that oil prices do not significantly affect economic growth in Malaysia and Vietnam. Meanwhile, negative oil price shocks caused a significant impact on Brunei's economic growth. This suggests that oil price

still plays a significant role as the main driver of economic progress for Brunei (Kriskkumar & Naseem 2019).

Lastly, the implementation of energy cooperation has been relatively disappointing so far, even within the ASEAN framework and despite the high level of ambition. Although cooperation is certainly easier and chances of success more substantial within ASEAN where the most important obstacles no longer prevail, the sheer scale of diversity and scope of diverging national interests have significantly impeded most efforts at coordination. In particular, the absence of a recognised common goal persists, making pledges such as joint strategic reserves and region-wide gas pipelines unfulfilled promises (Nicolas 2009: 34). For example, the TAGP project is still considered only the promotion of small, bilateral energy deals benefitting individual countries with the 'rhetoric of regionalism', but not its substance. This cooperation is considered a narrow way to acquire natural gas supply from neighbours, but not to promote a more holistic or productive form of regionalism (Sovacool 2009).

Existing research on the energy sector within the ASEAN framework still focus on AMS efforts in carrying out energy transitions, the development of renewable energy and its challenges, the status of fossil energy in the ASEAN energy mix and the implementation of energy cooperation within the ASEAN framework. While these studies provided valuable insight, there is still a notable research gap particularly in the oil and gas sector. Given the continued dominance of oil in the region's energy mix, cooperation in this sector is equally important to broader energy cooperation efforts. A comprehensive analysis of the Second APSA's implementation in Indonesia can shed light on its successes, challenges and potential improvements, ultimately contributing to a more effective implementation of future APSA.

Analytical framework

Common sense and rationality to cooperate bestowed upon mankind is considered a positive matter. The anarchic international system in this context could be subdued through institutions and regimes to facilitate international cooperation that can influence the system and overcome transactional costs. The international regime has a series of rules, norms, values and procedures that should be obeyed by actors so that the other actors' behaviours can be predicted. This is in line with Robert Koehane's view in *After Hegemony* which states that the international regime has four different components for making decisions: principles, norms, rules and procedures (Keohane 1984).

Compliance with the international regime is defined as an actor's behaviours that conforms to treaty provisions, the spirit and principles of the agreement, and international norms (Mitchell 1996: 5). Meanwhile, non-compliance means violating a given treaty rule (Mitchell 1996: 11) or a premeditated and deliberate

violation of a treaty obligation (Chayes & Chayes 1996: 9). Mitchell and Chayes both argue that non-compliance is caused by three factors.

First, non-compliance as preference happens when an actor may prefer non-compliance simply because the benefits of compliance simply do not outweigh its costs (Mitchell 1996: 11). The argument is complemented by Chayes from an international regime perspective stating that non-compliance occurs due to am-biguity and indeterminacy of treaty language (Chayes & Chayes 1996: 10). Second, both Mitchell and Chayes have similar arguments that non-compliance is also sourced from incapacity or called non-compliance due to incapacity (Mitchell 1996: 12) or limitations on the capacity of parties (Chayes & Chayes 1996: 13).This incapacity could be attributed to a lack of material resources, technical knowledge, an efficient bureaucratic system or financial support.

Third, aside from the two abovementioned factors, both scholars complement perspectives that non-compliance is also influenced by the inadvertence and temporal dimension of the social, economic and political changes contemplated by regulatory treaties. Non-compliance due to inadvertence is when an actor may take actions sincerely intended and expected to achieve compliance but fail to meet the treaty standards (Mitchell 1996: 13). Meanwhile, the temporal dimen-sion happens when an actor needs considerable time to make significant changes mandated by regulatory treaties; hence treaties provide transitional arrangements and make allowances for special circumstances (Chayes & Chayes 1996: 15).

To analyse the sources of non-compliance identified by scholars, this research adopts the conceptual framework proposed by Ronald B. Mitchell. Mitchell's ap-proach offers a more comprehensive perspective by focusing on the behaviours of actors within the international regime, rather than solely on the characteristics of the regime itself, as presented by Chayes. The focus on actor-level perspectives is particularly relevant for a case study in Indonesia, where the actions and motiva-tions of domestic actors will significantly influence compliance. This allows for a more nuanced understanding of why a state might choose or fail to comply, even with a seemingly clear agreement.

While the APSA document could be analysed from a regime-centric perspec-tive, focusing on factors such as ambiguity and uncertainty in its language, this research prioritises the actor-level perspective. Mitchell's three components of non-compliance, which will be discussed in detail, provide a valuable framework for understanding the factors that contribute to non-compliance in the Indone-sian context. It will also allow for a deeper exploration of domestic factors, such as political will, bureaucratic processes, economic considerations and even the influence of domestic priorities and policies that might drive non-compliance.

Aside from all the aforementioned explanation, it is important to note that the concept from Chayes' model is not entirely disregarded. Chayes' concept, like ambiguity in the Second APSA's language, can certainly interact with Indonesia's

preferences and capacities in Mitchell's focus. However, Mitchell's framework provides a more direct lens through which to analyse the reasons behind Indonesia's actions or inactions. Hence, the three sources of noncompliance by Mitchell will be explained further as follows.

Non-compliance as preference means that the actor prefers not to comply as a choice, and then the actor's rationality plays the biggest part. The absence of law enforcement for the violation committed by an actor is the driver of non-compliance. Thus, international agreements with no normative force are unable to enforce the law or influence actors to comply. Non-compliance can also occur when the benefits of compliance simply do not outweigh its cost. Eventually, the actor chooses not to comply. Even in some cases, actors may consciously sign treaties only to garner the political benefits of membership and never intend to comply. Others may feel strong domestic and international pressures to sign an agreement, without considering the compliance risks and costs that should be taken. Thus, this condition influenced actors to believe that compliance did not serve the national interests. Moreover, actors may also view most but not all rules in a treaty as in their interests, leading them to sign with the intention of complying with most but not all of the rules (Mitchell 1996: 11–12, 2009: 184).

Non-compliance due to incapacity is usually encountered by developing countries due to a lack of necessary resources, including financial, administrative, technology and knowledge-based. For example, agreements that incur additional costs due to having to adopt certain technologies or the costs required to comply are not as large as the actor's ability to pay. Lack of administrative capacity will also affect compliance in implementing ratified agreements. In addition, cultural, social and historical aspects of existing local values can also hinder the adaptation of international rules (Mitchell 1996: 11–13, 2009: 184–185).

Non-compliance due to inadvertence is the failure of an actor to fulfil a compliance commitment in certain situations due to negligence. The actor may take actions sincerely intended and expected to achieve compliance but fail to meet the treaty standards. This problem is not restricted to developing countries as even developed countries may fail to achieve the intended results. Many policy strategies have inherently uncertain effects, particularly those that give targeted actors flexibility. A policy that performs well in one country may perform less well when duplicated in others. Innovative policies reflecting sound theoretical predictions may, in the messy world of implementation, face obstacles that reduce or eliminate any significant influence on an actor's behaviours (Mitchell 1996: 11–13, 2009: 185).

Unfavourable external factors may also hinder the achievement of targets and agreement periods in the international regime, such as unexpected economic booms, energy crises, global geopolitical turmoil, energy development trends and other external factors.

Research method

This article uses a qualitative research method with a deductive approach to the single case study. According to Neuman, qualitative research is a means of analysing and understanding events, group behaviours, facts or subjects to create a concept that will help in understanding social phenomena (Neuman 2014). The deductive approach of a single case study is carried out by collecting specific data comprehensively and connecting the dependent variable with various independent variables and hypotheses discussed in previous literature (Rosella & Spray 2012: 33). Thus, this study will use the independent variable of non-compliance consisting of three sources – namely, non-compliance as a preference, non-compliance due to incapacity and non-compliance due to inadvertence.

The data collection methods employed in this study include desk research and interviews aimed at gathering primary data on Indonesia's position, policy direction and perspective regarding the Second APSA implementation. This primary data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with several relevant government officials from the Directorate General of Oil and Gas (DGOG) and the Directorate General of New, Renewable Energy and Energy Conservation (DGNREEC) at the Indonesian Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources. As the DGOG serves as the focal point for APSA implementation in Indonesia, their perspectives, spanning strategic direction to operational execution, are indispensable for a thorough analysis. At the same time, the DGNREEC is critical for understanding the potential shift in Indonesia's energy priorities towards renewable energy development and energy transition. Another resource person is from the National Energy Council (NEC), who advises the president on energy policy. The data collection was conducted for two months, from July to August 2024.

In addition, primary data on APSA principles and Indonesia's commitment at the global level are from official documents of the ASEAN Energy Cooperation Agreement, APSA documents, and related laws and regulations. Meanwhile, secondary data on energy sector development trends, energy system conditions and global energy sector trends are from government or related agency official report documents, online data searches, official presentation materials and other related studies or research. The primary and secondary data collected during the period 2013–2023 were processed using the triangulation method with narrative content analysis.

Non-compliance as preference: The absence of law enforcement and compliance did not serve the national interests

Asia's regional cooperation landscape is characterised by a complex network of formal Regional Organisations (ROs) and informal Regional Fora (RF). Unlike the other world regions, Asian regionalism has primarily emerged in a single, post–Cold War wave, leading to a proliferation of intergovernmental bodies as a high

number of regional cooperation agreements were created. This rapid growth has created a multifaceted and intricate institutional environment, with states often holding multiple memberships simultaneously. Such overlapping commitments contribute significantly to the complexity of Asian regional governance (Panke & Rüland 2022).

Despite a delayed start, Asian states have rapidly embraced regional cooperation by becoming active participants in multiple regional agreements. Southeast Asian states, even as a sub-region, do not deviate from the broader trend of Asian countries in terms of the involvement in regional cooperation. This is exemplified by Southeast Asian regions such as Thailand, which, by 2015, was a member of no fewer than 17 such arrangements. Vietnam followed closely with 15 memberships, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar each participated in 12 memberships, while Indonesia joined in 10 memberships. This surge in membership underscores the growing significance of regionalism in the Asian context. The surge in such arrangements across Asia, including Southeast Asian regions is primarily driven by a collective aspiration to address shared regional and transnational challenges more effectively at a regional level. These challenges, exacerbated by globalisation, necessitate collaborative solutions that transcend national boundaries, thereby propelling states towards regional cooperation as a strategic imperative (Panke & Rüland 2022).

While regional cooperation in Southeast Asia has been motivated by a shared desire to address common challenges, the voluntary nature of many agreements can hinder the effective implementation of cooperative mechanisms. For example, the Second ASEAN Petroleum Security Agreement (APSA) lacks a binding enforcement mechanism as it is implemented based on a voluntary basis. The APSA was established to enhance petroleum security and mitigate the impact of emergencies through short-, medium- and long-term measures. However, the APSA's voluntary nature limits its ability to compel member states to comply with its provisions. This can be problematic, especially in cases where a member state faces a critical shortage of petroleum supplies and fails to take necessary actions to address the situation. The APSA defines an AMS in distress as one that has notified the ASCOPE Secretariat of a critical shortage caused by an emergency that threatens energy security. A critical shortage is characterised by a shortfall of at least ten percent (10%) of the normal domestic requirement for a continuous period of at least 30 days (Secretariat 2013: 4).

ASCOPE is a forum for oil and gas state-owned companies in Southeast Asia that was appointed as the chair of the APSA Task Force and Pertamina is Indonesia's representative participating in this forum. To support the operationalisation of APSA, the APSA Task Force has prepared the Coordinated Emergency Response Measures (CERM) as an implementation guidance. Based on CERM, all AMS are required to strive to provide oil to any AMS in distress with a total amount of ten

percent (10%) of the normal domestic requirement of the AMS experiencing an emergency. In addition, the assisting AMS may not gain unfair advantage, and the assistance provided under CERM must be voluntary (Secretariat 2013).

The voluntary framework of the APSA is considered the most appropriate mechanism for its implementation due to several factors. Firstly, not all ASEAN member states (AMS) possess the same capabilities in the oil sector, making it challenging to impose mandatory obligations. Secondly, Indonesia, despite being a major oil producer, cannot guarantee a consistent supply of oil to other AMS experiencing emergencies (Utomo 2024). This is partly because oil reserves in Indonesia are owned and managed by private entities, limiting government control over their distribution (Sularsih 2024). Finally, Indonesia prefers a voluntary framework because there are no specific national regulations governing oil aid to other countries, and the instability of national buffer reserves (Mahendra 2024). These factors collectively support the decision to maintain a voluntary approach for the APSA.

Despite its voluntary nature, the APSA framework does not guarantee that Indonesia will aid other ASEAN member states in distress. The agreement lacks binding obligations means that no country can be compelled to collaborate during emergencies. This limitation highlights the challenges of implementing effective regional cooperation mechanisms, even in the face of shared threats like energy security. The 'APSA prescribes that cooperation by each country will be conducted "on a commercial and voluntary basis," which lacks the compulsory power to force each country to collaborate in the event of an emergency' (Kobayashi & Anbumozhi 2015: 60). Thus, this loose provision limits the incentive for AMS to participate proactively in APSA activities. As long as ASEAN is still a non-binding organisation, based on consensus and there is no legal enforcement process, then AMS, including Indonesia in this context, will still have the freedom to carry out resolution strategies in the Southeast Asian region without worrying about criticism from other AMS (Thompson & Chong 2020).

Compliance with the provisions of the Second APSA is also unable to help Indonesia fulfil its national interests in ensuring domestic energy security. The concept of energy security has undergone a significant transformation over time. Initially, energy was primarily viewed as a strategic military commodity. However, the oil crises of 1973 and 1979 fundamentally shifted this perception. OPEC's oil embargo demonstrated the critical role of energy that is not just essential for military purposes, but also critical for global economic stability. This realisation led countries to recognise energy as a powerful political and economic tool, capable of influencing international relations (Ramadhani 2018).

Energy security issues began to be a major concern for AMS, particularly in tackling crises. Based on the five-year planning period for 2005–2010, the study found that AMS made little progress toward establishing energy security as the

progress regressed in some categories such as affordability, acceptance and availability so that the situation of ASEAN energy security became less stable than the period before (Tongsopit et al. 2016). The modern energy challenges faced by ASEAN demand a broader and more holistic notion of energy security that encompasses the importance of not only the sufficiency of fuel supply, but also local community development, macroeconomic and geopolitical stability, equity and affordability, and environmental sustainability. The crisis could occur not for purported lack of investment, but connected to a crisis of thinking and technology. Thus, the logic and values underpinning the concept of ASEAN energy security must be changed (Sovacool 2009).

Defining energy security is crucial for developing appropriate energy policies. Therefore, two main paradigms could be used to guide the policy formulation – namely, treating energy as a market commodity or viewing it as a strategic commodity. The market commodity approach emphasises competition, price liberalisation and the role of the private sector. On the other hand, the strategic commodity approach prioritises energy independence, national security and government control over energy resources. Understanding these paradigms is essential for developing effective energy policies that balance economic goals with strategic considerations (Keliat 2017).

In terms of Indonesia, energy security should be viewed not only as a market commodity but also as a strategic commodity. A market-commodity based approach to energy can promote efficiency and reduce government intervention, but it is essential to also consider broader energy security issues, particularly in the context of geopolitical factors (Ramadhani 2018). Practically, energy security in Indonesia is measured by using five scales: very resilient, resilient, less resilient, vulnerable and very vulnerable. The NEC has been measuring Indonesia's energy security since 2014 as 'less resilient', which went on to be 'resilient' in 2022 even though some indicators were still in 'less resilient' to 'vulnerable' condition (Sujatmiko 2024). However, Indonesia's energy security is considered to be very vulnerable when compared to other countries, including neighbouring countries in Southeast Asia. This is because Indonesia does not yet have a national reserve to be used at any time in the event of a crisis and critical conditions such as disasters or war (Umah 2020).

Energy security and innovation are intertwined, particularly in the context of sustainable development. While energy security ensures a reliable and affordable energy supply, energy innovation drives the transition to cleaner, more efficient energy sources, reducing the environmental impact and promoting economic growth (Ma, Feng & Chang 2025). Indonesia's rapid economic growth has earned it a place among the world's leading economies by the participation of Indonesia as a G20 member. However, despite its recognised achievements in innovation and industry, its advancements in materials science and technology often remain

understated. To address this, the Indonesian government has established a National Research Priorities framework, focusing on ten key areas including new and renewable energy. This strategic approach aims to strengthen Indonesia's research capabilities and drive innovation across various sectors, contributing to both energy security and sustainable development (Madsuha et al. 2021).

The World Energy Council has conducted a comprehensive assessment of energy system performance across 126 countries, including Indonesia. This evaluation, known as the energy trilemma index, considers three key dimensions: energy security, energy equity and environmental sustainability. The 2023 World Energy Trilemma Index revealed Indonesia's ranking to be 58th, significantly behind its regional counterparts Singapore (31), Malaysia (35), Brunei (45) and Vietnam (56) (World Energy Council 2024: 76–78). Consequently, domestic pressure has intensified to bolster energy security through the release of energy buffer reserves and the establishment of petroleum reserve facilities (stockpiling). According to the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, the National Energy Council has recommended a national operational reserve for oil fuels (BBM) equivalent to 30 days of imports. However, the Downstream Oil and Gas Regulatory Agency (BPH Migas), citing International Energy Agency (IEA) data, suggested an ideal reserve of 90 days (Umah 2020). Indonesia's primary BBM producer, PT Pertamina (Persero), currently maintains an operational reserve of only 21 days of imports. This shortfall has been a subject of concern, with the Commission VII of the Indonesian House of Representatives urging Pertamina to increase its operational reserve beyond 21 days to align with international best practices (Perdana 2022).

To fulfil national interests in ensuring energy security, Indonesia has implemented Presidential Regulation Number 41 of 2016 concerning Procedures for Determining and Handling Energy Crises and/or Energy Emergencies. The regulation establishes the role and authority of government entities, including the president, ministers, National Energy Council (NEC), Regulatory Agency and governor, in developing strategies to mitigate such crises. One key strategy involves the release of Energy Buffer Reserves (*Cadangan Penyangga Energi*, CPE), a measure recommended by the NEC (Rahayu, Supriyadi & Yusgiantoro 2018). As defined by Law Number 30 of 2007 on Energy, CPE represents the quantity of energy sources and nationally stored energy required to meet national energy needs within a specified timeframe. It is one of three national energy reserves, alongside operational and strategic reserves (Kusdiana 2024; Utomo 2024).

In accordance with Government Regulation Number 79 of 2024 on National Energy Policy (KEN), the government is obligated to provide CPE as a reserve beyond operational reserves to address energy crises and national energy emergencies. The provision of CPE is dependent upon economic conditions and the state's financial capabilities (Sujatmiko 2024). However, within the context of the APSA, Indonesia currently lacks a mechanism for releasing CPE to AMS members

experiencing emergency conditions, as CPE regulations are primarily focused on domestic energy crises. To rectify this, the government is urged to promptly formulate legal regulations governing the arrangement and management of CPE, including necessary budget allocations. A draft Presidential Regulation on CPE is currently undergoing harmonisation to be submitted to the president (Sujatmiko 2024). Furthermore, it remains uncertain whether Indonesia will modify domestic regulations to align with APSA provisions (Utomo 2024).

The national interest in ensuring energy security can also be observed from the provision of stockpiling facilities to ensure the availability of fuel according to the required import days. From a business entity perspective, constructing stockpiling facilities aligns with the commercial aspect of the APSA framework. However, this endeavour requires careful consideration of appropriate mechanisms and business processes, as it demands substantial financing with uncertain economic benefits (Kusdiana 2024). For the government, while stockpiling facilities are crucial, their implementation is challenging due to their association with domestic energy security policies and budget allocations. Although Indonesia is actively developing oil and gas infrastructures, such as gas pipelines, oil refineries and LNG terminals, these efforts primarily focus on meeting domestic needs (Kusdiana 2024; Sularsih 2024).

Despite the significance of stockpiling facilities for energy security, domestic budgets are often prioritised for other programmes, including subsidies and compensation to ensure public access to energy (Kusdiana 2024). Consequently, Indonesia faces the challenge of maintaining domestic political will and securing funding for the development of oil stockpiling facilities. Acquiring new funding for oil reserves is particularly difficult because increasing financial support for stockpiling development means reducing domestic petroleum product subsidies. The financial burden imposed by the subsidy policy is a pressing issue that requires attention but is often politically sensitive to discuss. Therefore, finding alternative sources of funding for stockpiling facility development is not a simple task (Kobayashi & Anbumozhi 2015).

The absence of legal enforcement for non-compliance with the Second APSA, coupled with its voluntary and non-legally binding framework, indicates that Indonesia may not be optimally implementing the agreement. Furthermore, compliance with the Second APSA may not effectively contribute to Indonesia's national interest in ensuring domestic energy security through the release of CPE and the provision of stockpiling. Consequently, under these circumstances, Indonesia might prefer to avoid compliance with the APSA.

Non-compliance due to incapacity: Lack of necessary resources

The APSA defines a critical shortage as a situation where an AMS in distress is experiencing a shortfall of at least ten percent (10%) of its normal domestic re-

quirement for a continuous period of at least 30 days. Despite the APSA's expiration in 2023, no AMS reported such a critical shortage to the APSA Secretariat. However, to effectively and ideally implement the provisions of the Second APSA, oil production within the region should ideally exceed the domestic requirements and consumption of AMS. This surplus production could then be utilised to provide aid to other AMS facing emergency conditions, such as critical shortages or natural disasters (Kusdiana 2024).

Indonesia's economic growth in the late 20th century was significantly fuelled by the oil industry. Two major oil booms, triggered by geopolitical events in the Middle East, contributed substantially to the nation's economic prosperity. These booms led to increased foreign exchange earnings, attraction of foreign investment and very high oil production in the 1970s, which eventually propelled Indonesia's development. However, the country's reliance on oil has diminished over time. Despite the initial economic gains, a decline in exploration and investment in the oil sector, coupled with aging oil fields, has led to a continuous decrease in production since the 1990s. Consequently, to meet the rising domestic demand fuelled by continued economic growth, Indonesia had to import significant quantities of oil and fuel. This has resulted in Indonesia transitioning from a net oil exporter to a net importer in 2004, followed by Indonesia's withdrawal from OPEC membership in 2008.

Despite the declining oil production and the shift from net oil exporter to a net importer, the oil production in Southeast Asian regions was still dominated by Indonesia and Malaysia, both of which contributed 76% of total ASEAN production in 2022 (ASEAN Center for Energy 2023: 7). Between 2013 and 2022, Indonesia maintained its position as the leading petroleum producer in the ASEAN region, accounting for approximately 43% of the total oil production (ASEAN Center for Energy 2023: 7). However, from 2016 to 2022 AMS oil production experienced a decline of nearly 30%, or an average of 5.7% per year, including Indonesia's oil production as illustrated in Figure 1.

Even though Indonesia's oil production dominates among the AMS, based on the data processed from the Handbook of Energy & Economic Statistics of Indonesia 2023, Indonesia's oil production between 2013 and 2023 experienced a downward trend. In 2023, the production was recorded at 221 million barrels, which was lower than the production in 2013 of 301 million barrels. Meanwhile, the total final energy consumption of oil fuels in 2023 was recorded at 263 million barrels, exceeding the production. Indonesia's oil production and consumption trend throughout these last ten years showed an imbalance trend. Likewise, imports and exports followed a similar trend, showing that the number of imports were higher than the exports. For example, crude oil imports in 2023 amounted to 132.4 million barrels or 26% higher than the previous year as described in Table 1 (Kementerian Energi dan Sumber Daya Mineral 2024).

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Figure 1: Oil and Gas Production Trend of AMS 2013–2022
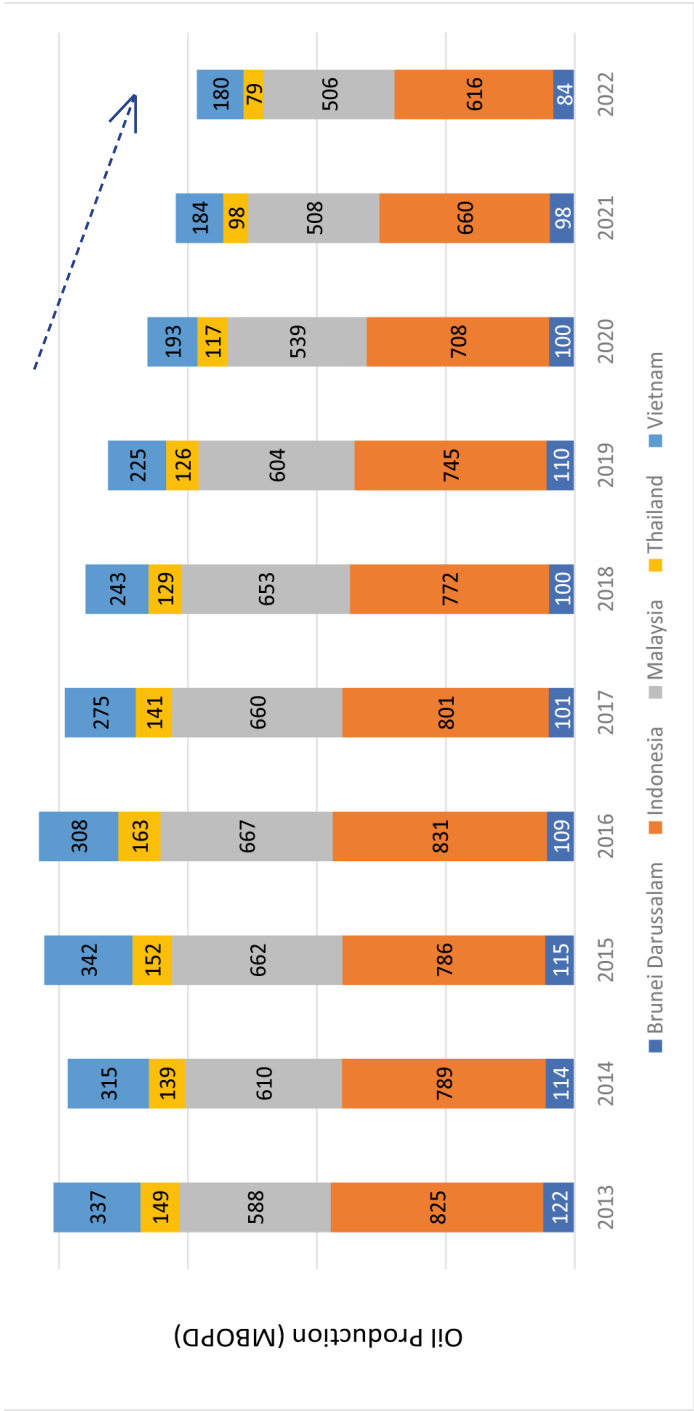
Source: Based on data from ASEAN Oil and Gas Update 2023

Table 1: Oil Production, Export, Import and Final Energy Consumption of Oil Fuels between 2013 and 2023

Year	Production	Export	Import	Consumption
2013	300,830	104,791	118,334	378,049
2014	287,902	93,080	121,993	363,713
2015	286,814	115,063	136,666	323,331
2016	303,336	125,541	148,361	329,094
2017	292,374	102,723	141,616	331,454
2018	281,780	74,472	126,082	320,730
2019	272,025	25,971	89,315	261,971
2020	259,247	31,448	79,685	222,339
2021	240,367	43,769	104,403	235,941
2022	223,532	15,494	104,722	262,987
2023	221,089	21,396	132,386	263,690

Source: Based on data from Handbook of Energy & Economic Statistics of Indonesia 2023, Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources

The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine has had a detrimental impact on the global economy, including a significant crisis in the energy sector. Several AMS experienced disruptions to the global oil supply chain, leading to fuel shortages in countries like Myanmar and Laos. These oil and gas challenges were primarily addressed bilaterally with non-AMS producers and international traders (Nicolas 2009: 26). For example, when Myanmar faced a fuel shortage due to the military coup in 2021, Indonesia was unable to provide assistance. Drivers in the city of Yangon, with a population of 8 million, endured long queues to obtain scarce fuel (Iswara 2023). Similarly, Laos experienced a fuel supply crisis in 2022, but instead of seeking help from Indonesia, it opted to purchase gasoline from Russia, which was 70% cheaper than oil supplies from other countries (Luc 2022).

In 2022, Indonesia's oil production reached 616 BPD and 5,531 MMSCFD, respectively equivalent to 87.3% and 95.3% of the set targets. The significant decline in oil production compared to 2021 (by almost 7%) indicates upstream challenges such as unplanned shutdowns, operational delays and unexpected production declines (ASEAN Center for Energy 2023: 8). In response, Indonesia implemented oil and gas fiscal reforms since 2021, including an agreement on a 10% shareable First Tranche Petroleum (FTP), setting the Domestic Market Obligation (DMO) price at 100% of the Indonesian Crude Oil Price (ICP), and introducing new release requirements (ASEAN Center for Energy 2023: 8). However, these reforms have been insufficient in restoring the stability of oil production in Indonesia, as the overall trend has been downward for the past ten years.

The limited petroleum resources owned by Indonesia to meet the provisions of the Second APSA are also evident in the trade balance deficit, which reached 13 million tons in 2022. This figure represents a 96% increase compared to the average of the previous 5 years (6.6 million tons). This deficit aligns with the

ASEAN crude oil trade balance deficit, which rose from 103 million tons in 2021 to 125 million tons in 2022, a 21% (ASEAN Center for Energy 2023: 12). As demand surges due to economic recovery while domestic production continues to decline, none of the AMS are oil exporters. In fact, in 2022, Indonesia experienced an 11% increase in import dependence. With limited oil production in ASEAN, 93% of crude oil imports come from outside the region, including Indonesia, most of whose oil imports originate from non-AMS.

The lack of sufficient oil resources in Indonesia may hinder its optimal implementation of the Second APSA. This is evident in the decline in Indonesia's crude oil production by almost 7% in 2022, the substantial increase of 96% in the crude oil trade deficit compared to the average of the previous five years and the growing dependence on oil imports by 11%, primarily from non-AMS sources.

Non-Compliance due to inadvertence: Certain situations of inadvertence

Indonesia's non-compliance with the provisions of the Second APSA can be attributed to inadvertence of certain situations, such as the new priority towards energy transition and also the geopolitical situations. Climate change has emerged as a powerful catalyst for energy transitions. The increasing severity and frequency of extreme weather events, rising sea levels and other climate-related impacts create a compelling urgency to move away from fossil fuel-based energy systems towards cleaner, more sustainable alternatives. ASEAN was relatively late in addressing climate change compared to other international organisations. Initially absent from ASEAN's agenda, climate change was formally introduced into the discussions through the Jakarta Declaration in 1997. Since then, ASEAN has consistently issued declarations and statements related to climate change, demonstrating its commitment to addressing this global challenge (Pramudianto 2016).

The affordability of coal has made it a compelling energy source for Southeast Asia's developing economies, including Indonesia, which is experiencing rapid growth and energy shortages. This situation has driven a significant expansion of coal-fired power plants (CFPPs) in the region, particularly Indonesia. The ambitious plans to substantially increase coal power capacity by adding 117 CFPPs will lock the country into a heavily carbon-intensive energy mix for decades to come, exacerbating its status as a major global greenhouse gas emitter (Rüland 2023: 1277). This development poses a significant challenge for Indonesia's efforts to transition towards a more sustainable energy future, as it may hinder the country's ability to reduce its carbon footprint and meet its climate change commitments.

Therefore, to solidify its commitment to global climate action, Indonesia submitted the Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 29% by 2030 during the Conference of the Parties/ COP-21 in 2015 and subsequently ratified the Paris Agreement in 2016. This inter-

national agreement aims to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5 degrees Celsius. This marked a pivotal step for Indonesia, which is grappling with rapid development while still contributing significantly to a global effort to combat climate change through greenhouse gas emissions reduction. As a middle power, Indonesia also played a significant role at the 2018 COP-24 climate summit by advocating for the needs of developing countries. Indonesia sought to create a supportive environment to address climate change challenges. Despite challenges in securing commitments for technology transfer and capacity building, Indonesia successfully articulated its key negotiation points and made progress in obtaining financial support from developed countries (Pratama & Karim 2023).

Then, through its enhanced Nationally Determined Contribution (e-NDC), Indonesia intensified efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 32% by 2030. The energy sector is at the forefront of these mitigation strategies, with a target of reducing emissions by 358 million tons of CO_2 equivalent. Recognising the rapid pace of climate action, Indonesia is also currently formulating an even more ambitious second NDC to guide the energy transition efforts beyond 2030. This framework underscores Indonesia's determination to transition towards a low-carbon economy and position the energy sector as a foundation of this transformation. Some of the key initiatives include the transition to renewable energy sources, energy efficiency improvements, clean energy generation, the adoption of low-carbon fuels and post-mining reclamation (Dewi 2024).

The sustainable development of developing countries, including Indonesia, is positively affected by renewable energy usage. Indonesia has a large, widespread and diverse NRE potential in total of 3,687 GW in 2023, consisting of solar energy potential as the highest for 3,294 GW, followed by wind and hydro for 155 GW and 95 GW respectively. Despite the enormous solar energy potential, the adoption level remains low as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Indonesia's Renewable Energy Potential in 2023

Energy	Potential (GW)	Utilization (MW)
Solar	3,294	315
Hydro	95	6,696
Bioenergy	57	3,104
Wind	155	154
Geothermal	23	2,370
Ocean	63	0
Coal Gas.	–	30
Total	**3,687**	**12,669**

Source: Based on Directorate General of New, Renewable Energy and Energy Conservation, Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources 2023

The adoption of renewable energy technologies, such as solar panels, align with the circular supply chain concept that acknowledges the challenges of future resource scarcity. A circular supply chain minimises waste, thereby supporting the seventh sustainable development goal in ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all. By reducing waste production and promoting self-sustaining production systems, a circular supply chain supports sustainable development (Bekti et al. 2021). Solar energy plays a pivotal role in the ongoing energy transition. With its rapid construction timelines, decreasing development costs and widespread geographical potential, solar power presents a compelling solution for diversifying energy sources and reducing reliance on fossil fuels. Therefore, Indonesia persists in implementing solar PV projects as outlined in the Electricity Business Plan, promoting solar PV rooftop installations and extending solar energy access to remote areas (Dewi 2024).

Indonesia has also formulated a comprehensive energy transition roadmap to achieve Net Zero Emissions (NZE) by 2060 or earlier. This collaborative effort, involving both the government and stakeholders, aligns with global climate mitigation strategies. The roadmap adopts a dual approach: supply-side and demand-side (Dewi 2024). The supply side includes the massive development of new renewable energy; reducing the use of fossil fuels in power plants (dedieselisation programme, phasing out fossil fuel power plants); utilisation of low-emission technology (Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS)/ Carbon Capture, Utilization and Storage (CCUS)); development of smart grids; energy storage; and hydrogen production technology. Meanwhile, the demand side includes the use of electric vehicles; the development of induction stoves; the development of household gas networks; utilisation of biofuels; and the implementation of energy management and of minimum energy performance standards for equipment (Dewi 2024).

Indonesia's archipelagic geography presents a unique opportunity to harness widespread renewable energy (RE) resources through a modern, integrated super grid and smart grid. This advanced infrastructure seeks to optimise the distribution of renewable energy by enhancing electricity system connectivity, bridging the gap between renewable energy generation sites and high-demand centres, and mitigating the challenges posed by the intermittent nature of variable renewable energy sources (Dewi 2024).

This robust infrastructure is essential for establishing a resilient and efficient energy system. While connectivity has been a catalyst for Southeast Asia's economic growth, infrastructure modernisation often overlooks environmental sustainability. The neglect of environmental sustainability in energy infrastructure projects is closely associated with the practice of kick-starting development through persistently high rates of economic growth measured in GDP. Building infrastructure and guaranteeing energy supplies are considered essential

to accomplish this goal, so other development aims, such as environmental sustainability, are given less importance. Hence, to truly achieve sustainability, infrastructure projects must adhere to international best practices, ensuring they meet present needs without compromising future generations' ability to do the same (Rüland 2023: 1270, 1278).

As Indonesia's representative in ASCOPE, Pertamina is at the forefront of the nation's energy transition, pursuing green and sustainable energy. The company's strategic focus is articulated through eight key pillars: green refinery, bioenergy, geothermal energy, hydrogen, gasification, electric vehicle battery and energy storage system (ESS), new renewable energy and circular carbon economy. Aligned with the government's decarbonisation goals, Pertamina also supports the government's efforts in reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by abating the emissions from its operations through utilising gas flares and Project Blue Sky, which aims to urge people to use low-carbon fuels (ASEAN Center for Energy 2023: 32).

The Acting Director General of Oil and Gas, Dadan Kusdiana, emphasised that Indonesia's prioritisation of energy transition towards renewable energy will not undermine its commitment to developing fossil energy resources. The government is actively formulating policies and incentives for both upstream and downstream sectors to accelerate oil potential production and reduce reliance on imported oil. Despite the shift towards renewable energy, the energy demand will initially continue to rely on fossil fuels, while simultaneously accelerating the transition towards cleaner alternatives, particularly to meet the growing demand for electric vehicles. Ultimately, the successful transition to renewable energy will strengthen fossil energy security as the decreasing consumption will maintain the existing supply. Moreover, energy diversification through renewable energy development is a long-term measure under the APSA, ensuring that both fossil and renewable energy sources complement each other (Kusdiana 2024).

As also highlighted by the director general of New, Renewable Energy and Energy Conservation, Eniya Lestiani Dewi, energy security should transcend the energy transition. Immediate replacement of fossil fuels with renewable energy sources is challenging due to the substantial time required to develop the necessary infrastructures. Despite the gradual decline in fossil fuel investments, the transition to renewable energy must occur concurrently with the development of these resources. Therefore, existing fossil energy plants should be integrated with renewables such as solar, hydro, geothermal energy or even gas. Unless this transition is accelerated, Indonesia may struggle to achieve the target of 23% renewable energy mix and the target of green RUPTL (Electricity Supply Business Plan). Transition does not mean eliminating fossil fuels entirely, but gradually transforming towards low carbon, clean carbon, then eventually free carbon (Dewi 2024).

Indeed, oil and gas still dominate the energy supply mix, but the demand is expected to decline nominally in line with the high ambitions of the AMS in renewable energy and energy efficiency towards 2050. Based on the baseline scenario, oil and gas demand based on the ASEAN Plan of Action for Energy Cooperation (APAEC) target scenario will decline by 63% and 48% respectively by 2050. The main causes of the decline are electrification in the transportation sector and declining energy consumption due to increased implementation of energy efficiency (ASEAN Center for Energy 2023: 37). In the end, the condition will potentially remain as the factor slowing down the implementation of the Second APSA as Indonesia's focus will be split between carrying out the transition process from fossil to renewable energy, accelerating the development of renewable energy, while at the same time ensuring the sustainability of fossil energy development across the expanse of time.

Other situations causing Indonesia to be suboptimal in implementing the Second APSA are the geopolitical situation, which, since the COVID-19 pandemic, has been accompanied by economic activity recovery that triggered oil price increase and the expansion of gas price distribution among regions, as well as geopolitical tensions. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, many countries have adopted restrictive measures to prevent the spread of the virus, which has led to the stagnation of many industries and a decrease in the demand and consumption of fossil fuels. Global fossil fuel demand fell by 6% in 2020, with the United States (US) and the European Union (EU) reporting the largest falls of 9% and 11%, respectively (Tang & Aruga 2021). This was in line with the decreasing AMS oil consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic. The reduction in the consumption of fossil fuels is likely to have adverse impacts on fossil fuel prices, exemplified by the record low price of US West Texas Intermediate crude oil. It was suggested that the pandemic had a significant impact on the stability of the financial markets (Tang & Aruga 2021).

Ever since the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine War in 2022, its consequent chain of events has adversely impacted the global economy through several channels, such as the commodity market, stock market and trade. Notably, the energy market has been hit the hardest. Given the strategic importance of crude oil and the formation mechanism of prices in a seller's market, it is apparent that oil prices are highly susceptible to extreme events, particularly geopolitical conflicts in major oil-producing nations. Energy security is challenged. The short-term and long-term impacts of extreme events on the energy market have become apparent. The Russia-Ukraine War may increase oil prices by over 50%, reflecting the significant instability of oil prices. Therefore, countries and organisations should collaborate to establish an efficient emergency management mechanism within the oil market to stabilise supply and decrease sharp fluctuations in oil prices (Zhang et al. 2024: 10–11).

Crude oil prices generally rose quite rapidly across different benchmarks, averaging more than USD 90 per barrel in the first half of 2022 compared to USD 69 per barrel in 2021. This large increase hit import-dependent AMS hard as the regional demand remained strong due to sustained industrial growth and urbanisation (ASEAN Center for Energy 2023: 19). In addition to the relatively low global oil stockpile due to rapid storage withdrawal for fuelling the recovering economy, the full-blown conflict in Eastern Europe forced some European countries to find new sources of oil imports, sparking a global oil supply crunch and hence skyrocketing oil prices. Natural gas prices also increased in 2022, driven mainly by global political tensions that disrupted the supply. The economic impact of the natural gas price surge on AMS was cushioned by several factors, including low exposure to the LNG spot market, heavily regulated domestic natural gas market and available substitutes for natural gas in the power sector (ASEAN Center for Energy 2023: 19).

This geopolitical situation has had a significant impact on Indonesia, affecting its domestic energy security and the national economy. In response to geopolitical crises, fiscal policy is often prioritised to secure the domestic energy sector, limiting the ability to assist AMS countries facing emergency conditions. This financial instrument is required to alleviate the risk of high production costs caused by fluctuating raw material prices, manage oil price shocks and ensure safe and effective operations. Extreme events can easily exacerbate the volatility of oil prices, leading to overreactions. To mitigate such risks, Indonesia should strive to diversify their oil and gas import sources. As demonstrated by the European countries' over-reliance on Russian energy imports during the Russia-Ukraine War, a single-source dependency can lead to an energy supply crisis. To address this, energy-importing countries must engage in multi-level cooperation with various nations and gradually establish an energy cooperation network while diversifying their oil and gas import patterns (Zhang et al. 2024).

Indonesia's energy sector faces significant challenges due to the uncertainty of global oil and gas supplies and fluctuating prices. To mitigate these risks and avoid broader economic impacts, Indonesia has implemented a range of short-term and long-term strategies in both upstream and downstream sectors. These strategies include providing incentives for investment, ensuring a stable oil supply, and implementing policy changes and tariff adjustments, such as tax deductions and subsidies for commodities, which significantly affect communities (Mahendra 2024). The surge in crude oil prices in January 2022, for example, led to a 340% year-on-year increase in Indonesia's energy subsidies, highlighting the substantial financial burden imposed by volatile oil prices (ASEAN Center for Energy 2023: 25).

Given the current context, Indonesia may not be optimally implementing the Second APSA due to the shifting priorities towards renewable energy and

the impact of geopolitical crises on domestic policy focus. These factors have contributed to Indonesia's non-compliance with the provisions of the Second APSA.

Conclusions

Indonesia's pivotal role in the Southeast Asian region's petroleum security is undeniable. As the largest petroleum producer among AMS for the past decade, Indonesia has a unique opportunity to spearhead regional resilience. The Second APSA was designed to enhance both individual and collective petroleum security among AMS, but its implementation in Indonesia remains at the level of agreement and documents. Given its historical leadership in regional petroleum cooperation, dating back to 1975, Indonesia is ideally positioned to transform the APSA from a theoretical framework into concrete actions, thereby serving as the linchpin for ASEAN's response to critical shortage.

In accordance with the analysis using three sources of non-compliance, it could be concluded that Indonesia's non-compliance towards the implementation of the Second APSA are caused by preference, resource incapacity and inadvertence. Non-compliance as preference occurs due to the absence of law enforcement because the framework is voluntary and therefore non-legally binding. In addition, compliance with the Second APSA is unable to fulfil the national interest in ensuring domestic energy resilience through the release of energy buffer reserves and the provision of stockpiling. Non-compliance due to incapacity was caused by the lack of necessary resources. This can be observed from the declining trend of Indonesian crude oil production, the increasing crude oil trade deficit and the trend of increasing dependence on oil imports, most of which are imports from non-AMS. Non-compliance as inadvertence occurs due to the influence of certain situations – namely, the new priority towards energy transition and because of the geopolitical crisis. Fossil fuels are no longer the prima donna because they will always be associated with issues related to climate change and GHG emissions. Meanwhile, the geopolitical crisis has made Indonesia focus more on developing domestic fiscal policies.

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Acknowledgments

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'Global Transformation': Chinese Scholars Debate the International System in the Aftermath of the War in Ukraine (2022–2024)

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Abstract

This article explores discussions among Chinese International Relations scholars on the implications of the war in Ukraine for the international system. While official Chinese foreign policy rhetoric is often vaguely centred around obscure slogans, scholarly debates can be used as a 'proxy measure' to gain insights on the prevailing views in Chinese policy communities. This article identifies three main trends in Chinese scholarly discussions: 'campification' of great power politics, increasing de-globalisation and the ascent of the 'Global South'. The article analyses Chinese perceptions of the implications of these trends for the United States, Europe, Russia and the developing world.

Keywords: China, war in Ukraine, grand strategy, international relations

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Introduction

As the war in Ukraine drags on, the international system is going through a period of significant transformation though great uncertainty about its future shape remains. Yet, paradoxically, the war in Ukraine is simultaneously provid-

ing massive volumes of unique information on the strategic capabilities of great powers and coalitions. Wars, after all, can be seen as the ultimate 'stress tests' for national power, and while they primarily display the capabilities of those directly involved, they provide indirect insights into the international system due to the deep interdependencies and interlinkages of the modern, globalised world (Lissner 2021). While the future shape of the international system remains unclear, all states are parsing and analysing the mountains of information produced by the war to better adjust their strategies according to new realities. The future direction of the international system has also become an increasingly prominent subject of research among students and observers of international relations, as scholars have scrambled to analyse how the war will impact the already crumbling post–Cold War international order (see e.g. Brunk & Hakimi 2022; Dück & Stahl 2025; Tellis 2024).

This work is well underway in China too, as the Chinese leadership observes the changes brought on by the war, and adapts its grand strategy of 'rejuvenation' based on perceived changes in the 'international structure' (国际格局, *guoji geju*). This article aims to shed light on this process by analysing discussions and debates of Chinese International Relations scholars on the effects of the war for the international system. There has been extensive scholarly analysis on how China views the war in Ukraine and on how the conflict could be affecting China's foreign policy (Chestnut Greitens 2022; Leonard & Bachulska 2023; Lin & Hart 2024; Medeiros 2022). Many scholars have also explored possible 'lessons' China is drawing from the conflict, both at the level of international politics (e.g. how unified and resilient is the West with its sanctions) and at the level of military strategy (e.g. how does the war impact the People's Liberation Army's planning on Taiwan contingency) (Feigenbaum & Szubin 2023; Fravel 2023; Wuthnow 2022).

This article hopes to contribute to this line of research by analysing Chinese IR scholars' perceptions of the major trends created and accelerated by the war, and the impacts of these trends on the evolution of the 'international structure' – that is, on the positions, strengths and weaknesses of major powers. Although such debates do not directly represent official views, Chinese IR scholars and China's policymakers exist in a complicated and mutually constitutive relationship, in which scholars can have a certain influence on the thinking of the leadership, while the leaders' policy choices construct boundaries for Chinese IR scholars as to what to think and write (Feng & He 2020a). In contrast to the ambiguous official foreign policy concepts or the propagandistic tone of China's state-affiliated press, Chinese scholarly debates, furthermore, provide calm and objective analyses of current events, offering an interesting window into how the current state of international relations is seen in China, and how it *might* be perceived within the foreign policy leadership as well.

The article aims to identify the main trends that the scholars believe are gaining traction in the wake of the war (increasing 'campification' of great power politics, accelerating de-globalisation of the global economic system and the rise of the 'Global South'), and analyses how these trends are estimated to impact the major powers: The United States, Europe, Russia and the developing world. In the concluding section, the article discusses how the scholars see China's place within the emerging international structure affected by these trends, and what (if any) policy advice they suggest for the Chinese leadership for adjusting its strategic approach. Overall, the debates reflect lingering doubts about the inevitable rise of China at the expense of the West's decline (see Doshi 2021), while preparing China for a volatile and dangerous world of great power competition.

Before moving into the actual analysis, the article briefly discusses the role of strategic information in international relations and in China in particular, and provides considerations on methodology and research data.

The Russo-Ukrainian war of revelation

The role of information is an interesting yet somewhat unexplored variable in the study of International Relations. As Rebecca Lissner has suggested in *Wars of Revelation*, to be able to effectively balance and adjust their strategies, states need reliable information on the landscape of international relations, especially on the relative strengths and weaknesses of great powers and their supporting coalitions. This includes information on the capabilities of one's main opponents, as well as those of one's allies and partners (Lissner 2021).

For Lissner (2021), information is nothing less than the 'currency' of international relations, as having a clear understanding of the structure of the international system is crucial for successful grand strategy.[1] However, making accurate estimates of the prevailing international landscape is extremely hard. National power is complex to measure, and great power relations involve considerable amounts of concealment and deception, making estimates prone to psychological miscalculations (Heuer 1999; Jervis 2017). Assessing even the level of one's own military capabilities is challenging as well, especially after long lasting 'fogs of peace' (see Howard & Wilson 1974), when military technologies and operational concepts have made significant developmental leaps without being used in actual combat. Other attributes of power, such as the political, societal or economic resilience of a state, are similarly hard to measure before put to an actual stress-test. Unlike in other domains of human activity, such as business, where the 'capabilities' of companies are continuously tested in the market, the true national power of states is rarely put to a serious stress test (Lissner 2021).

1 Jennifer Sims has argued in a similar manner that under conditions of anarchy, the side that has better analysis of the prevailing conditions is able to maintain 'decision advantage' over its opponents, leading to more efficient statecraft. See (Sims 2022).

For assessments of state power, war provides the ultimate test, producing bursts of information on their strategic capabilities. In addition to providing an objective assessment of the quantity and type of military power a state is able to generate on the battlefield, war also exposes the level of economic and societal resilience of the states involved in the conflict, and ultimately, serves as the final test for alliances and coalitions (Lissner 2021). Taken together, wars – especially major ones – compel all states to update their grand and military strategies based on the information flowing from the battlefield; this may result in minor adjustments in some cases and complete overhauls of strategic orientations in others. The ongoing war in Ukraine is providing large volumes of information on the capabilities of not only the primary contenders, Russia and Ukraine, but also of the strengths and weaknesses of broader coalitions and partnerships. In the largest scale, it even provides indirect insights into the interdependencies and interlinkages (e.g. the extent of value and production chains) of the broader, globalised economic system. The war is therefore prompting all states and coalitions to at least adjust their strategic outlooks based on their interpretations on the future evolution of the international system.

China is also in the process of estimating the emerging shape of the international system and making necessary adjustments in its grand and military strategies. In Chinese discourse – both official and academic – the structure of the international system is often denoted by concepts such as 'global security structure' (全球安全格局, *quanqiu anquan geju*), 'international structure' or 'global geopolitical structure' (全球地缘政治格局, *quanqiu diyuan zhengzhi geju*), all of which somewhat interchangeably point to the distribution of power within the system, but also include the strategic relations between major powers.[2] Instead of a static snapshot of the structure, the concept emphasises temporal change within a longer time frame, and according to Zhou Fangyin of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, aims to 'grasp the evolutionary trend rather than simply discuss the nature of the current structure' (Zhou 2020).

The international structure is seen as evolving through major historical trends, which provide both opportunities and challenges, and in which China must adapt its foreign and domestic policies. In the Chinese foreign policy decision-making system, officially sanctioned assessments of the prevailing trends serve a crucially important function (Heath, Grossman & Clark 2021). The Chinese Communist Party even bases its legitimacy on such claims that, due to rigorous and scientific Marxist-Leninist analysis, the party leadership is able to identify and anticipate, in the words of Xi Jinping, the evolution of the underlying 'historical laws' (历史规则, *lishi guize*) and 'world tides' (世界潮流, *shijie chaoliu*) (Xi 20213), and to adapt its grand strategy to reach its desired end-state of 'national rejuvenation' (Heath 2014).

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2   Sometimes the word 'situation' (形势, *xingshi*) is used in place of 'structure'.

The actual process of trend analysis and policy planning is almost completely shrouded in secrecy as it takes place in opaque black boxes of high-level party committees. However, a rough public official assessment of the international structure and its main trends is available in authoritative speeches and publications, in which state leaders discuss China's foreign policy and its main principles. Throughout most of the reform era, official estimates of the future direction of the international structure tended to be generally optimistic. 'Peace and development' and 'multipolarisation' were identified as the main 'irreversible' trends, while an outbreak of a major war between great powers was considered very unlikely. The main challenge for these trends to reach their full potential has consistently been identified in 'hegemony and power politics' – a euphemism for the United States and its arguably 'unilateral' policies to maintain its leading position (Doshi 2021).

Positive evaluation prevailed through most of Xi Jinping's first two terms in power (2012–2022) as well. China, in the leadership's view, continued to remain in a period of 'strategic opportunity', and estimated that the 'relative international forces were becoming more balanced' as the US-led West was perceived to decline in contrast to China's rise. These developments were codified in the official terminology as 'changes unseen in hundred years' – a concept gaining considerable visibility since 2017, essentially meaning that the US decline was accelerating to the point that China could begin challenging its dominance more directly instead of 'hiding its strength' (Doshi 2021; Gill 2022).

However, following the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Chinese estimates of the evolution of the international structure have become more uncertain. In the 20th Party Congress of the Communist Party organised in October 2022, Xi warned that while the trend of peace and development prevailed, the global community was facing numerous previously unseen challenges. 'Strategic opportunity' now 'coexisted with great risks', and unpredictable 'black swan' and 'grey rhino' events made it hard to predict future developments with any clarity (Xi 2022). Xi's remarks could be taken as signs of a more pessimistic official assessment on the future evolution of the international structure. The debates analysed in this article provide additional evidence that this might indeed be the case.

Regarding the method and data

Since official Chinese estimates on the shape of the international structure remain vague this article aims to go around them by analysing discussions in Chinese IR communities. Such scholarly debates have long been used as an important window for gaining insights on the prevailing sentiments in Chinese policy communities. Huiyun Feng and Kai He suggest that expert debates serve as a '"proxy measure" for the views of the Chinese policy community and government' (Feng & He 2020a), and although direct causal links between scholarly debates and official

policy cannot be proved, the debates can still at the least 'make sense of the policy boundaries and future directions of China's foreign policy' (Feng & He 2020b).

With this in mind, the article conducts a literary review of Chinese discussions on the shape of the international structure during the first two years of the still ongoing war in Ukraine. It explores major themes and converging narratives on the main trends that the Chinese scholars perceive as developing, and on how these trends are estimated to impact relations between major powers. As its source material the article uses primarily academic articles in Chinese peer reviewed journals, and to a lesser extent shorter commentary and opinion pieces and interviews published in magazines and blogs between 2022 and 2024. Much of the material has been gathered through the Chinese CNKI portal by using keywords such as 'Russia-Ukraine conflict', 'Ukraine' and 'international structure'. In addition to CNKI, many articles have been reached through websites such as *Aisixiang.com*, which re-publish journal articles and opinion pieces. Besides Chinese databases, numerous international websites translate and re-publish Chinese academic texts for the general audience. A very useful resource for conducting this review has been *The Interpret* (produced by the Center for Strategic and International Studies), which publishes Chinese academic texts with both translations and original Chinese versions. In choosing the research material for closer analysis, the article has attempted to focus on most impactful journals (e.g. *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi*, *Eluosi Yanjiu*) and on scholars from well-known and prestigious universities and research institutions (e.g. CICIR or CASS). In total, 32 articles were chosen for closer analysis in this study. Importantly, all of the material was collected before the 2024 US presidential election, and the analysed views thus represent initial Chinese estimates of the war and its implications. In many cases, they also reflect Chinese analysts' reactions to President Joe Biden's foreign policy.

The limitations of the approach are obvious. Most prominently, the Chinese discursive space is vast, and an article-length study can only grasp a small part of its totality. Although this article suggests that certain generalisations on Chinese scholars' views can be made, the issues discussed in the subchapters could easily deserve studies of their own. Also, the selection of subjects for closer analysis (great powers) is somewhat arbitrary, as one could have also focused on, for example, the role and perceived future evolution of international institutions, such as the United Nations or BRICS.

Finally, there are concerns related to China's increasingly tense political climate, which limits space for open academic debate. The term 'debate' could indeed an overstatement, since most scholars analysed in this article seem to agree on basic interpretations, and the research material rapidly 'saturates' with similar definitions of the perceived trends, or of the strengths and weaknesses of the major powers. In addition to the similarity of the arguments, Chinese discussions tend to reproduce official framings (and as a consequence, those prevalent in Russia),

for example, in unanimously blaming NATO and its expansion as the sole cause of the war in Ukraine. While such similarity and saturation provide delight for its analyst, it raises questions as to whether the scholars are representing their genuine thoughts and beliefs, or if the concurrence is merely an aspect of the current intellectual climate of Xi Jinping's China. On the other hand, if the latter is the case, the debates could indeed be seen as strong 'proxy measures' of the official views.

Epochal change: Campification, de-globalisation and the Global South

The war in Ukraine is generally viewed as an important turning point by scholars and observers of international relations (Dück & Stahl 2025; Ikenberry 2024). Chinese scholars, in a similar manner, see the war – or rather the 'Russia-Ukraine conflict' since terms such as war or invasion are rarely used – as the most important geopolitical event in recent history. It is seen as marking an epochal change from the 'post–Cold War' era to an 'age of great power competition' (大国竞逐时代, *daguo jingzhu shidai*) or an 'era of great contention' (大争之世, *da zheng zhi shi*), with an overall effect of increased unpredictability, and an increase and escalation of conflicts from the Southern Caucasus to the Korean Peninsula (Renmin University Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies 2024; Wang 2023b).

Although unpredictability increases, Chinese scholars generally agree on three main trends intensified by the war: 'campification' (阵营化, *zhenyinghua*), de-globalisation and the rise of the Global South. In the Chinese analysis, these largely intermingled and overlapping trends are not perceived as being caused by the war, but they were fermenting long before its outbreak under the rubric of the 'greatest changes unseen in hundred years'. The war in the Chinese scholar's view is thus a powerful catalyst, or in the words of known Russia researcher Feng Shaolei, an 'oscillator', which accelerates the 'greatest changes' and the trends associated with them (Feng 2024a).

The first main trend, campification, means the emergence, consolidation and enlargement of strategic 'camps', which includes both military alliances and looser coalitions centred around ideological, economic or technological issues. Campification was already intensifying before the war, and the Chinese scholars see it as the original cause for the conflict itself. In the eyes of Chinese observers, the United States and the broader West were never interested in integrating Russia into a stable post–Cold War European security order, but instead, pushed for the expansion of NATO towards Russia's former treaty allies (Fu 2023; Huan & Ji 2022). In addition, the West waged ideological warfare against Russia by promoting 'colour revolutions' in its 'sphere of influence'. According to Liang Qiang of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Russia has thus been practicing its own defensive 'containment' against Western incursions into its 'buffer zone' ever since the end of the Cold War, and as NATO had again brought forth Ukraine's

membership in the alliance in 2021, Russia saw no option but to launch its 'special military operation' (Liang 2024).

Whereas the 'new Cold War' or 'Cold War 2.0' is becoming a dominant frame for interpreting the ongoing great power competition in European or American IR communities (see e.g. Buzan 2024; Schindler et al. 2024), Chinese scholarly analysis does not perceive a 'new Cold War' on the horizon, even amid potential intensification of campification following the war. The most formidable and recognisable camp, in Chinese view, is the US led 'West', often called 'Amero-West' (美西方, *Meixifang*) to emphasise the dominating role of the US. The campification of the West has gained significant momentum from the war in Ukraine, as NATO has awakened from its 'brain dead' state, and as the European Union is militarising and aligning with the US in an ideological contestation against autocracies. A more worrying development for China is that the Amero-Western camp is expanding its reach towards the Asia-Pacific, as security cooperation with Pacific states is proceeding quickly under the pretext and momentum generated by the war (Wang 2023b).

The Amero-West has an acute conflict with Russia, but while Russia increases security cooperation with China and countries like North Korea and Iran, Chinese analysts do not perceive the emergence of an authoritarian camp to balance the West. Thus, although a 'new Cold War' according to some Chinese scholars may be brewing within Europe, the West and Russia do not represent the equally matched camps of the original Cold War. If anything, the new iron curtain is merely isolating the considerably weaker Russia from the rest of Europe (Fu 2023).

A new Cold War is not seen as a correct metaphor for the global situation either, since China is presented in the analyses as an independent actor, not belonging to any camp, nor allied with Russia or even strongly supporting Russia in its war against Ukraine. China is not placed in an 'authoritarian' block, and the Chinese experts are highly critical of the tendency in Western analyses (see e.g. Kendall-Taylor & Fontaine 2024) to lump China and Russia together into an 'authoritarian' axis (Yan 2023). In addition, Chinese scholars perceive much of the developing world (or 'the Global South') as positioned outside of major blocks as well, although some authors do see the recent expansion of SCO and BRICS through the lens of campification (Wang 2023c).

The trend of campification is closely connected to the trend of 'de-globalisation'. Even if Chinese analysts do not see the international structure as being divided into Cold War–style military-ideological camps, they do anticipate that the war will intensify the emergence of two (or more) economic and technological groups, as countries 'decouple' and 'de-risk' from economic interlinkages, and as sanctions and counter-sanctions 'weaponise' ever larger parts of the global economy (Renmin University Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies 2024). Many analysts use the concept of 'hemispherisation' (半球化, *banqiuhua*) to describe the

phenomenon in which value chains and flows of energy are concentrating into their own hemispheres. In energy, Russian exports are turning towards the east, while Europe pivots to the United States, mutually giving birth to new 'hemispherised' Atlantic and Asian energy economies (Liu, Huang & Hu 2023). Similar hemispherisation is evolving in various technologies, too. In the words of Wang Peng of Renmin University, an 'iron curtain of technology' is falling across the globe, with two technological trees intertwining value and supply chains around them and competing in the 'intermediate zones' (Wang 2023c).

However, a complete divergence between even the economic hemispheres is typically not predicted (Feng 2022) and most scholars argue that the trend of globalisation is continuing in the vast world outside the West-Russia proxy conflict due to the rise in power of the developing world. This is connected to the third trend caused by the war, the emergence of the Global South (often also called the 'new non-aligned movement') as a major power, as most developing states strive to maintain their independence, remain outside of the West–Russia-divide and focus on the development of their domestic economies (Fu 2023). Although the Global South is not described as one of the campifying blocks, Chinese scholars tend to see it as consolidating around its own ideological principles of neutrality and the prioritisation of economic development.

To summarise the three main trends, parts of the world are campifying and deglobalising at an increasing pace, while a rising Global South remains neutral and carries forward the trend of 'peace and development'. Great powers are adapting into this new reality with varying strengths and weaknesses and differing strategies, and the article will next examine Chinese scholars' perceptions of the main contenders and their future outlooks.

The United States: The winner of the war in Ukraine

When describing the United States and its strategy in the post-Ukraine world, Chinese scholars consistently begin from assumptions of the US's 'hegemonic' objectives. Echoing the official tone of the Chinese government, they perceive the United States as a self-interested actor, whose core objective is to maintain its hegemonic order through all means at its disposal, and to contain its main adversaries at both ends of the Eurasian continent. In this regard, the prolongation of the war in Ukraine is benefiting the US in numerous ways, and the Chinese analysis overall perceives the United States as emerging more powerful than ever from the war. First of all, a prolonged conflict in Ukraine wears down Russia's strategic capabilities in a slow but effective manner, as the Russian economy suffers and as Russian military capabilities are destroyed in large numbers. In addition, the war greatly benefits the US arms industry, as the Pentagon and US allies all over the world scramble to replenish their arsenals, often with US-made capabilities (Wang et al. 2022).

Furthermore, Chinese scholars do not perceive the United States as merely aiding Ukraine, but as a party to the conflict that is successfully waging 'proxy' or 'hybrid warfare' against Russia through a combination of military, economic, information and cyber means (Xu & Gao 2023). Chinese scholars have been surprised with how rapidly the US has been able to 'NATO-ise' Ukrainian armed forces with its military aid, and how effectively the NATO-ised Ukrainian force has fought against the Russians (Zhao 2023). In addition to direct military aid, the scholars mention intelligence sharing and cyber operations as tools of the US's hybrid warfare (Xu & Gao 2023), and many analysts have noted its ability to leverage private companies (e.g. Microsoft and Google) in organising Ukrainian cyber defences (An & Hao 2022; Hu 2023). The United States' hybrid warfare also includes 'economic warfare' waged through massive sanctions (especially in energy, see Shi & Zhou 2022), 'diplomatic warfare' and attempts to isolate Russia from the international arena, and finally, intensive information or 'cognitive' operations. In the terminology of one commentator, the US-led West is waging 'algorithmic cognitive warfare' (算法认知战, *suanfarenzhizhan*), which combines information offensives and content manipulations on social media with coordinated statements in the more open fora of global diplomacy (Zhong & Fang 2022). Overall, the war has provided a great display of the United States' capability to utilise various levers of its national power for waging hybrid warfare against Russia.

Beyond the frontlines of the proxy war, Chinese scholars emphasise the control the United States has exerted over its allies, especially in Europe, but increasingly in the Asia-Pacific as well. First of all, the war has driven European states into an economically precarious position, increasing their dependency on the United States, especially for energy supply. More importantly, the transatlantic security relationship has gained increased traction, as the war has awakened NATO from its 'brain dead' state. In the Chinese analysis, NATO is not an autonomous entity that designs its strategy through democratic deliberation, but a tool for the United States for projecting power and for maintaining its hegemony over Europe. Thus, NATO's recent consolidation around its core mission of collective defence in addition to its 'northern expansion' (北扩, *beikuo*, the inclusion of Finland and Sweden) are perceived as representing the pinnacle of campification, greatly reinforcing US power and influence in Europe (Wang 2023b).[3]

More worryingly, Chinese scholars have taken note on how the United States is utilising the momentum created by the war and the cooperation between China and Russia, to expand and consolidate its alliances in the Asia-Pacific. Perhaps the most direct linkage is NATO's expansion towards the Asia-Pacific region, or in Chinese terms, its 'Asia-Pacificisation' (亚太化, *Yataihua*). In its 2022 summit in Madrid, NATO designated China as a 'systemic challenge', and has since in-

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3   On official views on 'northern expansion' see e.g. Renmin Wang 2023.

creased its cooperation with the so-called Asia-Pacific 4 (AP4) states: Australia, Japan, New-Zealand and South-Korea (Sun 2022). Chinese observers have since paid close attention to the increase of military exercises (especially in cyber and space) between NATO, Japan and South-Korea. Although they do not see NATO as being able to establish a strong presence in Asia in the near future, its Asia-Pacificisation represents a long-term trend as the alliance is an excellent tool for the United States to connect the European and Pacific theatres into a shared strategic space, in which material, technologies and sensitive information can flow both ways (Chen 2023; Puranen 2024; Sun 2022).

All this combined, the war in Ukraine has driven Russia into a strategic quagmire while greatly increasing US control over its allies, as well as its ability to project influence in other parts of the world. Chinese analysts thus generally describe the United States as the 'only winner of the war', and as likely to remain in a strong position, as long as the war drags on (Wang et al. 2022). However, Chinese analysts still see the United States as having its weaknesses, and many uncertainties abound, including its political stability and its ability to maintain domestic support for its war efforts in the long term.

Europe: Militarised, ideologised, yet weakened

Of all the regions beyond the immediate warzone, Chinese scholars estimate Europe as facing the most significant changes. Having long been accustomed to trends of peace, growing interdependence and globalisation, Europe is now quickly adjusting itself for militarised great power competition (Wang et al. 2022). With this, the 'European power structure' is in transformation, and Chinese analysts generally recognise three main trends driving it forward: deepening transatlanticism, ideologisation and militarism (Zhang 2024).

The first trend, transatlanticism, refers to the quick and strong turn of the European economic and security policies towards the United States. Before Russia's invasion, and especially during the first term of Donald Trump (2017–2021), many Chinese observers saw Europe as distancing itself from the United States. This was epitomised by French President Emmanuel Macron's suggestions that NATO was 'brain dead' and that Europe should develop 'strategic autonomy' in relation to other powers. The war in Ukraine has all but stopped that trend, and Europe is again turning towards the United States in its security and economic woes (Ibid.; Sun 2022; Zhang 2022). For Fu Yu, a professor of International Security at the Nankai University, the change is not due to the old 'Europeanist' powers, France and Germany, having abandoned their project of strategic autonomy, but a result of changes in intra-European distribution of power. Following Russia's invasion, both Germany and France have weakened economically and politically, and the power vacuum created by their decline is being filled by the rise in influence of Eastern European and Nordic countries, especially Poland (Fu 2023). For

Zhang Jian of CICIR, this block is driving for a more hawkish and offensive policy against Russia, and since it cannot rely on either Germany or France to defend their interests, it opposes ideas on European strategic autonomy and pushes for deeper security cooperation with the United States (Zhang 2024).

By ideologisation, the second intra-European trend, Chinese scholars refer to the unification of Europe in a self-perceived new Cold War against an authoritarian axis led by China and Russia. While the trend is not new, the war has greatly intensified its significance, since Russia's invasion (and China's neutrality) has helped Europe to lump Russia and China together into an imagined camp of authoritarian states. As a result, Europe is severing its economic and political ties with Russia and increasingly 'de-risking' from China as well. Furthermore, ideologisation is pushing European states to expand their presence in the Asia-Pacific region, both at bilateral and EU-wide levels, and through NATO (Yan 2023). Finally, the war has sparked a new momentum for the EU's expansion, as the Union is considering Moldova and Ukraine as its new members (Wang 2023b).

Finally, the third major trend changing Europe in the Chinese scholar's view, is the trend of militarisation. In a striking contrast to its past, when Europe wanted to present itself through 'cultural power' and 'institutional supremacy', the continent is now increasing its military budgets at an unseen rate, with Germany's 'Zeitenwende' investments as a prominent example (Ibid.; Zhang 2022). For some analysts, such budgetary increases are not seen as contributing to European strategic autonomy, however, as Europeans are mainly investing in US built capabilities (such as the German purchase of F-35 fighters). Instead of strengthening Europe's own defence industrial base, they are contributing to the US military industry, thus at least temporarily bolstering US dominance through military-technological interdependencies (Zhang 2022).

Overall, Chinese scholars see Europe as being amidst the biggest changes since the end of the Cold War, yet although its ideological unification and rise in military power could be read as signs of strength, Chinese analysts overwhelmingly estimate the power and influence of Europe as weakening in the emerging post-Ukraine international structure. 'De-Russification' and disengagement from Russian energy is considerably undermining European economic power, and some observers estimate that the continent is facing a new wave of 'de-industrialisation'. Militarisation is a slow process as well, and thus its overall weakness leaves Europe highly dependent on the United States at least in the short term, casting visions of an autonomous and self-reliant European great power in a dubious light, and forcing Europe to play the role of a junior-partner in the 'Amero-Western' camp (Zhang 2022).

Russia: Resilient decline

In describing Russia's strategic objectives before and after the war in Ukraine, Chinese scholars describe Russia as a defensive actor, aiming to prevent NATO's

incursions into a 'buffer zone' of neutral countries surrounding it. Beyond its immediate periphery, Russia is seen as striving to regain its great power status (of which controlling Ukraine is seen as a crucial part) and to build a multipolar world order to balance the power and influence of the United States (Liang 2024). The war has, however, displayed Russia's innate weaknesses, and the general estimation of the Chinese scholars is that while Russia has been able to continue the war, withstand Western sanctions and evade attempts at complete diplomatic stigmatisation, its overall power and influence have been greatly hurt as a consequence. While the Chinese interpretation of the roots of the conflict thus closely echoes Russian rhetoric, Chinese analysts are more in line with international estimates, which see the war as negatively impacting Russia's great power status (e.g. Šćepanović 2024).

First of all, Russia's military has proven to be much weaker than expected: technologically backward, operationally clumsy and incapable of conducting modern joint operations. In the Chinese categorisation of forms of warfare, the Russian military represents a barely 'informatised', mostly 'mechanised' force, which resorts to tactics reminiscent of previous world wars (Zhao 2023) and is increasingly vulnerable to Ukrainian long-range strikes (Ye 2023). Its logistical capabilities (including strategic air delivery) are weak, and its military production has been insufficient for a modern war (Huan & Ji 2022). Russia is not faring well in the domains of cognitive and cyber warfare either in the view of Chinese scholars. In the information domain, Russia quickly lost the initiative to gain 'public opinion dominance' (舆论控制权, *yulun kongzhiquan*) to the Amero-West, while its famed cyber capabilities have been offset by Ukrainian cyber defences supported by Western private companies (Zhong & Fang 2022).

Beyond the frontlines, Chinese scholars harbour doubts about the resilience of the Russian political and social order. Many scholars saw the Wagner mutiny of 2023 as denoting serious social tensions bubbling under the seeming façade of stability (Pang & Gao 2023). Among the most pessimist evaluations, Feng Yujun of Peking University saw Russia in a state of economic decline and political apathy, hinting in a not-so-subtle-manner that large-scale military failures have tended to bring forth revolutionary changes in Russian history (Feng 2024b). In an article published by *The Economist* Feng was more straightforward, stating that Russia was certain to lose the war in the long term (Feng 2024c).

Nevertheless, most Chinese analysis maintains that Russia remains a great power as it has been able to adapt into the realities of war, both at the operational level of the battlefield as well at the grand strategic levels of economy and diplomacy. Although scholars estimate the Russian economy as paying a heavy price for the war, it has nevertheless survived the West's massive sanctions, and been able to find substitute markets for its energy exports (Han 2023). Some accounts even see the war as hastening the systemic restructuring of the Russian economy

(Xu 2024). And although tensions abound, Russia is seen as socially stable enough to endure a long conflict (Wang 2023b). Finally, attempts to isolate Russia diplomatically have not succeeded as Russia maintains minimal relations even with the West, and well-working relations with the developing world. Taken together, the Chinese analysis sees Russia as weakened and facing considerable challenges, but resilient enough to continue the war for many years to come.

The Global South: An emerging global power

The third major trend recognised by the Chinese scholars is the rise of the developing world, often called 'the Global South' in the debates – a trend acknowledged by non-Chinese analysts as well (Alden 2023). As with other trends, the war in Ukraine is seen as not causing, but catalysing the already prevalent rise of the Global South, as most of the developing world is heavily influenced by the war and its ramifications (e.g. by disruptions in food and energy supply), but at the same time attempting to distance from its campifying and de-globalising effects (Wang 2023a). As a combined effect, the identity of the Global South as a collective of non-aligned states unified by a unique set of principles has greatly strengthened, and Chinese scholars see it as an emerging global power, centred on its main objective of economic and social development, neutrality and non-interference (Fu 2023; Xu & Shen 2023).

Chinese scholars anticipate the Global South evolving into a prominent balancing force between the established powers, positioning it as a zone of intensified competition among them. They especially emphasise the attempts of the Amero-West to lure the Global South into its contestation between democracies and autocracies, while China is never presented as competing for influence within the group (Cai 2023; Xu & Shen 2023). Chinese scholars, however, unanimously define China as a core member of the Global South through organisations such as the BRICS, and through Chinese initiatives such as the BRI and the global security initiative (全球安全倡议, *quanqiu anquan changyi*) (Xu & Shen 2023).

However, many authors note, that the cohesion of the group is fragile with numerous diverging and even contradicting interests providing avenues for exploitation by the Amero-West (Xu & Shen 2023). The role of India is, in a similar manner, somewhat an elephant in the room, since its role as a part of the group is emphasised, but the growing tensions between China and India are brushed aside. Overall, the rise of the Global South is seen as an irreversible trend, but its ascendancy as a collective and game-changing player in the emerging international structure is not wholly certain.

Conclusions: China amid epochal changes

The War in Ukraine has provided a 'revelatory' test of the capabilities, strengths and weaknesses of great powers and their alliances (Lissner 2021). To sum up the

Chinese scholarly interpretation of this test, the war is seen as a crucial historical turning point that hastens the trends of 'camp confrontation', de-globalisation and the rise of the Global South, and that escalates ongoing conflicts all around the world. The war is seen as challenging the trend of 'peace and development', as well as the expectation of a swift decline of the West that paves the way for China's rejuvenation. Instead, China is facing a challenging, unstable and rapidly evolving international structure, in which its 'period of strategic opportunity' is turning into an era of intensified great power competition.

Overall, the debates represent a highly hierarchical and 'realistic' worldview, in which international politics is essentially seen as a contest between great powers that leaves smaller states (including Ukraine) as mere pawns without real agency in shaping their destinies. When comparing the major powers, Chinese observers perceive the United States as 'winning', as it wears down Russian capabilities with its 'hybrid warfare' and gains tighter control over its allies especially in a weakening Europe, but in the Asia-Pacific as well. Like Europe, Russia's global influence is seen as waning, but Chinese scholars hold mixed views on its future prospects. Finally, the 'Global South' is finding its own identity amid the intensifying campification, possibly emerging as a balancing power of its own.

Amid these evolving dynamics, China's role is perceived as that of an independent and neutral mediator, with the Global South as its immediate peer group. China is not perceived as belonging to an 'authoritarian axis' with countries like Russia and Iran, and even though many authors provide a rationale for China's support of Russia in its war, the relationship is described as being similar to China's relations with other developing countries, or as driven by *realpolitik* interest-calculus that provides economic benefits and prevents the deterioration of security in China's 'strategic rear' (战略后方, *zhanlüe houfang*) (Zhao 2022).

In providing policy advice for the Chinese government, most authors remain vague, merely voicing their support for official foreign policy slogans such as 'the three initiatives', and the 'Community of Shared Future for Mankind'. However, most would agree that China must do its utmost to prevent, or at least hinder, further campification by continuing its delicate balancing act between the Amero-West and Russia, while strengthening its influence and leadership within the Global South (Yan 2023; Zhao 2022). Practical challenges of such balancing are well understood, however, as Chinese scholars are well aware, it is hurting especially China's relations with the European Union. In practice, China should thus, for example, maintain an impression of distance between itself and Russia (e.g. by emphasising that a 'strategic partnership' is not an alliance, and that China does not support Russia's war) while continuing to cooperate with it in the domains of economy, security and global diplomacy like before. Even those critical of Russia's war, such as Yan Xuetong, generally agree that China must remain on its side, while not directly supporting its war effort or taking actual sides in the conflict

(Yan 2022). Zhao Huasheng from Tsinghua provides perhaps the most realistic analysis: In the event China's ties with the United States collapse, or the Taiwan conflict escalates, it is absolutely crucial that Russia remains at least non-aligned, simply for reasons of energy supply, as Zhao foresees China potentially facing strong Western sanctions or even attempts at embargo (Zhao 2022).

Finally, although campification and competition are intensifying, the Global South is seen as a zone in which peace and globalisation continue to march forward. China must therefore strengthen its influence in this region by supporting its non-alignment and distancing from the 'new Cold War' narrative of global competition between democracies and autocracies promoted by the Amero-West.

In many parts, the essence of the Chinese analysis of the future shape of the international system mirrors non-Chinese analysts' views, in which the great power competition between increasingly consolidated geopolitical groupings is becoming the dominant global trend (Ikenberry 2024). Although this undercurrent is likely continuing during the second term of President Donald Trump, many other parts of the Chinese analysis may require an update following Trump's erratic foreign policy initiatives and outright U-turns. Instead of 'waging hybrid war' against Russia through arms sales, economic sanctions and diplomatic pressure, the United States is now seeking a rapid peace settlement of the conflict, and even flirts with a cooperative relationship with Russia. In Europe, the US seems to be voluntarily giving up the leverage it has gained over European states, which could ease Chinese worries of an increasingly campified 'Amero-Western' alliance that is expanding towards the Asia-Pacific. And although the US's China strategy will likely continue along previous lines, Trump's willingness to defend Taiwan could be disputed and even a 'grand bargain' with China cannot be ruled out.

Intuitively, many of the changes brought by Trump could end up being beneficial for China's strategic objectives, and could especially weaken the effects of campification. The analysis provided in this article is therefore already in need of a 'part two', focusing on Chinese scholarly debates in the post-Biden era.

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