

Russia-Ukraine conflict: An analysis of geopolitical alignments in Asian countries



Azlizan Mat Enh*, Muhammad Nor Hazmi Bin Awg Lah, Suffian Mansor, Al-Amril Othman

Research Center for History, Politics and International Affairs, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi 43600, Selangor, Malaysia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 17 May 2023

Received in revised form

9 September 2023

Accepted 21 September 2023

Keywords:

Russia

Ukraine

Geopolitics

Foreign policy

UNGA

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the impact of the Russia-Ukraine conflict on the geopolitics of Asian countries, by assessing changes in their inclination towards neutrality, criticism of Russia, or support for Russia. Despite the abundance of literature on the topic, few publications have focused on the conflict's effects on Asia. Thus, this article provides a unique perspective by offering a comprehensive view of the geopolitical positions of Asian countries, compared to existing research. The article examines the factors influencing a country's foreign policy orientation, including economic, military, and geographical factors. The study evaluates the positions of Asian nations in the conflict by analyzing their voting records in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and UN resolutions. These sources highlight the details of the conflict. The research methodology is qualitative and relies on library research, with a focus on online newspaper sources like CNN, BBC, The Guardian, and Al-Jazeera. These newspaper sources were chosen because of their comprehensive coverage of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and their focus on geopolitical reactions by Asian nations, which are not extensively discussed in other media. The article is also backed by credible sources including the World Bank Group, official government reports, and research papers from various authors. The findings of the study indicate that the conflict between Russia and Ukraine has a significant impact on the domestic and foreign policies of Asian countries.

© 2023 The Authors. Published by IASE. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

The Russia-Ukraine conflict is increasingly attracting global attention due to Russia's heightened aggression on its border with Ukraine (Umar et al., 2022). The armed conflict in eastern Ukraine erupted in 2014, coinciding with Ukraine's bid to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Ukraine is interested in joining NATO due to the defense benefits the coalition offers. If one NATO member is attacked, other member countries are obligated to assist. Ukraine, seeking protection from the Russian threat, views NATO and the European Union as the most fitting destinations.

The current situation of the Russia-Ukraine conflict remains uncertain since its start on February 24, 2022. The conflict has affected various areas,

including politics, arms control, terrorism, and the economy. Additionally, it has further strained the relationship between the United States and Russia. In addition, the involvement of external parties such as the European Union, the United States, and the United Nations encountered obstacles in resolving the conflict in Ukraine due to the neo-imperial foreign policy implemented by Russian President Vladimir Putin. The strategic geopolitical importance of Ukraine makes it challenging to argue for the involvement of a third party, particularly when the West tends to use human rights concerns as a tool in the region.

The conflict heating up at that time affected the surrounding countries. The impact on various aspects, including geopolitics in European countries, is often focused on. However, because Russia is one of the world's great powers and has relations with various parties (Enh, 2010a), the conflict certainly also affects Asian countries, especially small countries in Asia today that are actively establishing international cooperation to improve their position. Therefore, this research examines the effect of the

* Corresponding Author.

Email Address: azlizan@ukm.edu.my (A. M. Enh)

<https://doi.org/10.21833/ijaas.2023.10.010>

Corresponding author's ORCID profile:

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2181-6178>

2313-626X/© 2023 The Authors. Published by IASE.

This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license

(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>)

Russia-Ukraine conflict on the geopolitics of Asian countries and their stance on this conflict.

2. Literature review

The Russia-Ukraine conflict and its impact on global geopolitical relations have garnered extensive analysis. For example, [Ratten \(2022\)](#) highlighted the potential risks to international security and prosperity. Among the risks are threats to human safety, increased cyber risks, European sanctions, and impacts on resource supply. In addition, [Kotoulas and Pusztai's \(2022\)](#) research centered on propaganda and the historical context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Similar to the studies conducted by [Kotoulas and Pusztai \(2022\)](#) and [Megoran \(2022\)](#), which detailed the consequences of Russian colonialism on the geopolitics of nations belonging to NATO ([Megoran, 2022](#)).

In addition, [Molchanov \(2015\)](#) examined the history between Russia and Ukraine long before the conflict began and how, the ethnic relations that settled between the two countries in the past, and how the similarities they have pushed Russia to return and conquer Ukraine. The impact on European countries that are close to the Russia-Ukraine border is also discussed, for example, this can be seen in the research by [Klement \(2021\)](#). [Rexhepi \(2017\)](#) focused on the relationship between Ukraine and NATO and the European Union. [Rexhepi \(2017\)](#) described how Ukraine's geopolitical changes increasingly favour NATO.

In addition, research works that focus on geopolitical changes also exist. [Tampubolon \(2022\)](#) analyzed how the Russia-Ukraine conflict affects the tension between NATO, the United States, and Russia. [Tampubolon \(2022\)](#) explained the impact of the war on geopolitics in Northeast Asia. [Tampubolon \(2022\)](#) only focused on the geopolitical changes in 3 countries: China, India, and Japan. Furthermore, [Storey and Choong \(2022\)](#) expressed the views and reactions expressed by countries in Southeast Asia to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. It can be seen that these articles focused more on a particular region only.

As we know, the countries of Central Asia are the countries of the former power of the Soviet Union. This article explains how the impact of the war between Russia and Ukraine on the countries of Central Asia. Every country in Central Asia no longer trusts Russia to help in their disputes, as well as with domestic security, economic support, and protection from other countries. This article explains how the influence of other powers such as China, Iran, India, Turkey, and even NATO are all seen as having interests and influence in this region. The current conflict may allow Russia's influence to collapse and give other powers a chance to dominate the region. In another work, [Cheng \(2022\)](#), in the geopolitical aspect, explained that the United States and NATO are responsible for causing changes. Research about the impact of the Russia-Ukraine conflict on geopolitics is widely discussed, but writing that

focuses on the impact on the geopolitics of Asian countries is still less discussed, and most of them only give a general overview. Therefore this writing will be more in-depth to all regions and countries in Asia.

3. Methodology

In order to gather authentic information and data, qualitative methods were used in this study. The qualitative method used is library research by examining online newspapers such as CNN, BBC, The Guardian, Daily News, Frontline, and Al-Jazeera. The focus on press sources is because the media is one of the parties closest to the conflict and is the first to report on the current situation. Online newspapers are also easier to access, and a lot is written in contrast to the writing published through books which is still less because the conflict has not yet been resolved. Newspapers that include a broader dimension, including the impact experienced by countries in Asia, are also the strength of why the researcher chose this source. Apart from newspapers, official and authoritative websites such as the World Bank Group ([WBG, 2022](#)), the Institute for Security and Development Policies, and official government reports are also consulted to fill the research gap. As a result of this information-gathering effort, a full review was performed.

4. Discussion and results

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine has had an impact on geopolitics, especially in countries in Asia. Countries in Asia have a lot of political and economic relations ([Enh, 2010b](#)), especially with Russia, a major player in geopolitics in Asia. However, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has greatly affected geopolitics in Asia. This can be seen through the reactions issued by Asian countries. In this regard, the foreign policy stance of Asian countries, whether they choose neutrality against Russia or in favor of Russia, will be peeled off. The reaction that Asian countries have highlighted and each has a different reaction to their national interests. This paper discusses the impact of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2021 on the geopolitics of Asian countries.

4.1. South Asia that chose to remain neutral

The most significant effect of the Ukraine crisis on the global level is the increase in petroleum prices. Therefore, the global sanctions on Russia have further clouded the situation to the point of disrupting the flow of commodities. If observed, the political views of the South Asian countries have created a variety of mixed reactions that are critical of Russia but choose to remain neutral. All the countries in the region urged that both sides resolve the dispute through peaceful diplomacy, considering that South Asian countries also feel various adverse effects if this conflict continues for a long time.

The Russia-Ukraine crisis received different responses from countries in South Asia. This is due to the national interests that have shaped them over the years. What is certain is that they take this invasion issue seriously even though their actions vary. However, compared to the realpolitik issue between India and Pakistan, the realpolitik dimension of the 'Russian Invasion of Ukraine' is still less debated by other South Asian countries.

Responses by countries in South Asia ranged from neutrality to participation in discussing Russian aggression. The individual interests of a

country largely influence these changes. On March 2, 2022, The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) held a vote to see support from surrounding countries. However, the response from South Asian countries was tactical (self-preservation) and produced different reactions that failed to implement a new strategy to suppress the crisis. However, as presented in Table 1, the response from South Asian countries was tactical (self-preservation) and produced different reactions that failed to implement a new strategy to suppress the crisis.

Table 1: Collection of UNGA voting results

Country	Policy	UNGA vote
Afghanistan	Neutral (by the Islamic Emirate)	In favor (represented by the Islamic Republic)
Bangladesh	Unofficially neutral	Abstain
Bhutan	Criticized Russia	In favor
Nepal	Criticized Russia	In favor
The Maldives	Neutral; later criticized Russia	In favor
Sri Lanka	Neutral	Abstain

Afghanistan and Sri Lanka have refused to take sides in this conflict and continue to maintain neutrality in their official statements. In this regard, Afghanistan has asked both sides to resolve the crisis through peaceful dialogue. Through diplomacy and dialogue, Sri Lanka has also urged the concerned parties (Russia and Ukraine) to maintain peace, security, and stability. The Taliban's declarations of peace and neutrality are driven by their broader project of gaining legitimacy and international aid (Sullivan, 2023). Likewise, experiencing an economic crisis, Sri Lanka has formed a neutral attitude (Rajagopalan, 2023). Sri Lanka at that time was struggling with a severe forex crisis and debt problem, and realizing the outflow and inflow of every dollar was essential to them prompted them to remain neutral.

As for Bangladesh, they have adopted an unofficial policy of neutrality. In this regard, Bangladesh also urged both sides to return to dialogue and diplomacy. Their stance results from a compromise between their national interests and their discomfort with Russia violating the UN Charter. Russia's position is vital as a development partner of Bangladesh. This relationship with Russia is essential for Bangladesh to end its Least Developed Country (LDC) status and maintain economic growth and resource security. This can be seen when their trade in 2020 alone is worth almost US \$2.4 billion. In the face of Russia, Europe, and the US are also putting pressure on those who seem to have relations with Russia, including Pakistan, which receives pressure on its foreign policy. The West interpreted the first visit by Pakistan to Russia as support for Russia's act of aggression. They (the West) insist that Pakistan has ignored the situation in Ukraine. The West wants to control Pakistan's movements by trying to determine the country's foreign policy (Shah et al., 2022). Thus, political unrest is spreading in Pakistan due to the Ukraine crisis, significantly impacting Pakistan's internal issues. The Russia-Ukraine conflict that was going on

at that time tested Pakistan's competence in determining diplomatic relations with those who had previously chosen to remain neutral. Pakistan does not want to support Ukraine or condemn Russia's military actions. Pakistan, which is not a NATO ally of the United States, did not take part in the vote on the resolution passed by the UN General Assembly to condemn Russia's aggression against its neighbor. Thirty-four countries have participated in the vote, three of which are in South Asia: Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and India. However, Ukraine's security concerns remain unaddressed in the resolution. Turning to Pakistan, according to their Representative at the UN, Munir Akram has explained why his country chose to remain neutral: "Non-partisan countries like Pakistan are in a position to play a helpful role in reinforcing efforts for cessation of hostilities and a diplomatic solution."

Through an online discussion with Volodymyr Zelensky (President of Ukraine), the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan, expressed concern about the continued armed confrontation. Imran Khan also expressed unwavering support to resolve this crisis through diplomatic methods. He persisted in persuading towards a better solution by showing the adverse effects of the conflict on the economy of developing countries with the increase in oil and commodity prices. Imran Khan also explained that Muslim countries are demanding an immediate end to hostilities due to the deterioration of security and the humanitarian crisis caused by the conflict in Ukraine. While sitting at the OIC meeting, Imran Khan proposed that China and the Islamic bloc countries mediate in ending the Russia-Ukraine war (Ahmad, 2022).

Pakistan's current desire is to develop relations with all major powers. Pakistan's desire happened because they learned from the experience during the Cold War in which they favored the US Bloc and were hostile to the USSR. The geopolitical reality in the South Asian region is based on their policy of neutrality. With this policy, without severing ties

with Washington, Pakistan can establish better relations with Moscow when India is tied to the United States, and on the other hand, Russia makes better relations with both India and Pakistan.

The situation in Afghanistan also provides an excellent opportunity for them to close the relationship between Pakistan and China, where the leadership of Afghanistan has created great concern for Russia. Neither Russia nor China will replace the interests of the US and the European Union in Pakistan's geoeconomics. Pakistan is highly dependent on international financial aid as its fragile economic situation prevents it from fighting Western capital. Pakistan's exports to the United States are significant, which is 20% of the total 28% to European countries and 8% to the British market (WBG, 2022). Therefore, Pakistan has a big challenge to establish good relations with Russia and maintain its relations with China while maintaining its position in the United States.

4.2. China chose to remain silent and the impact on its internal politics

The military aggression carried out by Russia on Ukraine is contrary to the principle practiced by China, which is to respect the sovereignty and integrity of a region. In this regard, Beijing should have openly denounced Russia's violation of international law, especially since China is currently defending its claim on Taiwan based on the principles of the law, but China chooses to remain silent and neutral. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has sparked a debate about parallels with China's invasion of Taiwan (CSIS, 2022). These two issues indeed have elements in common, namely democracy with larger authoritarian neighbors and the tendency of superpower leaders to emphasize historical and ethnic ties (Pacheco and Kim, 2022; Enh et al., 2022). However, China sees these two situations differently because it sees Taiwan as part of China and insists that the issue Ukraine is experiencing is not the same as the China-Taiwan issue.

The year 2022 is an unlucky year for the President of China, Xi Jinping. The situation became somewhat unfavorable for China with the 20th Party Congress approaching in the fall, where he made an unusual bid for a third term as General Secretary. The local response to the massive lockdown in Shanghai due to the Covid pandemic and the severe economic downturn has led to growing discontent with Xi Jinping's leadership. Therefore, Russia's invasion of Ukraine comes at a very inopportune time for Xi Jinping, putting him in an increasingly difficult position. Furthermore, Russia's failure in the early stages of the war, causing the outcome to be unpredictable, worries Xi Jinping even more.

Xi needs to maintain a balance not only in foreign relations but also in the domestic political arena. His concern is not entirely for the interests of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the government (Trough, 2022). In this regard, many Chinese leaders

benefited quite well from US-China relations, especially during the Jiang Zemin era, when they had the opportunity to send their students to study in the US, transfer their assets there, and even engage in business activities. Xi's actions have the potential to create discontent and worsen China's rivalry with the US. However, if Xi Jinping were to change his current pro-Russian position, it would seem like he was admitting his mistakes while undermining his influence in his country. If Putin is removed from his position through a coup d'état in Russia, it will be a significant blow to Xi because he has strengthened his relationship with Putin even though contacting the Russian President is currently quite dangerous.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the difficulties faced by Russia in the issue of the invasion of Ukraine have given Xi Jinping various pressures, as well as being one of the factors considered in choosing the policy currently being used. As seen, the stability of the Chinese political arena began to be disturbed. The good news is that, in examining the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the issue of Taiwan's claimed unification has allowed China to reconsider more carefully than a hasty military invasion of Taiwan (Obaid, 2022). In terms of relations with the US, despite China's firm attitude, Xi Jinping attaches importance to continuous dialogue with them. However, the concern of the President of China at this time is the deterioration of the check function of government institutions due to the personalization of foreign policy-making. Formulating "rational" Chinese policies, including policies towards Taiwan, will remain uncertain (CSIS, 2022).

4.3. ASEAN members are in a dilemma

In Southeast Asia, the reaction by Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia can be said to be relatively passive. At the time, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Ismail Sabri, said the situation in Ukraine saddened him. Although he expressed grave concerns, Malaysia did not label Russia guilty and urged all parties involved to reduce the conflict. Unlike Malaysia, Thailand was also very worried about the situation then and supported peaceful dialogue to resolve the conflict. Thailand has a friendly relationship with Russia and wants to maintain its political relationship, so they try not to get caught up in the great power dispute that prompts the Thai Prime Minister to remain neutral. In addition, Cambodia is also on the neutral side, and many observers assess Cambodia as the country that gave the slightest prominent reaction to the conflict in the region. This protects their geopolitical situation, considering that their country is still weak.

If you look at the situation in Vietnam, they refrain from criticizing Putin because the relationship with Russia is significant to Vietnam's military (Storey and Choong, 2022). This started about two decades ago when Vietnam began to rely on Russian-made weapons to further modernize the military aspect due to receiving pressure from China in the South China Sea. Therefore, Vietnam does not

want to damage relations with Moscow and only stated that they are very concerned about the conflict and seek a peaceful solution through dialogue to respect international law. Unlike Vietnam, Laos also has a long-standing relationship with Russia. When the conflict broke out, Laos refrained from giving criticism, and their Foreign Minister also expressed concern when following the development of the current situation. This geopolitical reaction of Vietnam and Laos can be understood to maintain relations with the great power of Russia which can protect their stability in Asia.

4.4. Countries that criticize Russia

South Korea and Japan have been willing to become partners in the U.S.-led alliance to condemn and sanction Russia for its illegal invasion of Ukraine and its war crimes since the beginning of the war. Both countries joined international sanctions, issued statements condemning Putin's aggression, voted against Russia at the UN, and participated in a NATO summit for the first time. This action is in line with the emphasis of both governments, which is support for democracy, human rights, and international rules, as well as concerns about the invasion of the country by a significant power with nuclear weapons.

The concept of "Global Korea" by the South Korean president, Yoon Suk Yeol, reorients Seoul's strategic direction to establish closer ties with the US-ROK Alliance and emphasizes a foreign policy based on support for liberal norms that support the US-led international order. Yoon described this strategic shift as a way to make up for Seoul's past mistakes, which previously chose to remain silent on violations of liberal democratic norms and human rights. Furthermore, the geographical situation of South Korea prompts them to pay close attention to how the US and its allies respond to the aggression of countries that have nuclear powers and, at the same time, how Russia uses its nuclear posture to threaten intervention by third parties (Rinna, 2023). From a strategic point of view, Seoul understands that support for Ukraine and solidarity with the US and its allies in Europe today can give them an advantage in the future regarding the issues of inter-Korean relations and the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula. At the same time, appreciation of Russia's role in denuclearisation talks and inter-Korean relations played a prominent role in Seoul's previous engagement with Moscow. As observers anticipate the launch of South Korea's Indo-Pacific Strategy by Yoon, it is essential to pay attention to how Seoul's role vis-à-vis Russia's war in Ukraine is framed, given the complex strategic interactions on the Peninsula issue.

Following Putin's invasion of Ukraine, the Japanese Prime Minister, Kishida Fumio, also dissolved their policy that had been relatively good with Russia for many years, as well as ending the diplomatic campaign by the former Prime Minister

(Abe Shinzo) over the years aimed at resolving issues in the Region North. Tokyo's tougher stance toward Moscow is not surprising when placed in the context of Japan's foreign policy that increasingly emphasizes democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. From a security point of view, Japan has to compete with China-Russia military relations. Russia's growing military presence in the Northern Territory prompted them to join the US.

Since the beginning of the conflict, Singapore has been the country in Southeast Asia with the most assertive stance on this issue. In this regard, Singapore is the only member of ASEAN that condemns Russia openly and acts by imposing restrictions on finance and exports to Moscow. If we look at the conflicts that have happened before, Singapore is not partial to any country when it comes to peace (Ab Ghani et al., 2020). Singapore has criticised Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in 1978, Iraq's occupation of Kuwait in 1990, and Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. Singapore's stance that it does not recognize the invasion of national sovereignty as enshrined in the UN Charter has influenced this pattern of the geopolitics of Singapore. According to the Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Hsien Loong, if international power is based on military strength, the world will be dangerous for a small country like Singapore.

Indonesia, Brunei, and the Philippines also condemned the attack by Russia despite not labeling Russia as a terrorist. Indonesia, for example, had asked Russia to resolve the dispute peacefully before the invasion and stated that the economic recovery due to the COVID-19 epidemic would be affected if there was a conflict. The President of Indonesia, Joko Widodo, called for an end to the hostilities after the attack had started in Russia (Suswandi et al., 2022). Shortly after that, Brunei began to follow Indonesia's steps in criticizing any action that violates the sovereignty of any country. The Philippines initially only focused on bringing its citizens out of the war zone. Their president also vowed to take care of his geopolitics by pursuing a balanced foreign policy by improving relations with Russia and China at the time and described the ongoing conflict as none of their business. However, a few days after the war continued, the Philippines showed signs of changing its political stance by openly criticizing the invasion. Meanwhile, in South Asia like, Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives took a bold step by criticizing the aggression by Russia in contrast to other countries in the region whose majority are more inclined to remain neutral towards this conflict. Nepal has been the most critical country since the beginning of the invasion, while the Maldives, which was previously on a neutral line, changed its political stance by choosing to criticize Russia during the UNGA vote.

4.5. Countries that favor Russia

From the beginning, North Korea's reaction to the war differed. They showed no immediate reaction to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Only on

February 27, three days after the invasion began, did North Korea begin to break its silence by stating its position. Instead of blaming Russia, North Korea sees NATO's one-sided dominance as a threat to Russia (Pacheco and Kim, 2022). They described the US as arrogantly pursuing hegemony based on military superiority. North Korea further asserted that Russia initially thought rationally and reasonably in its demands but was ignored by NATO.

North Korea's support for Russia is reflected in its voting at the UN. North Korea was one of five other countries - Belarus, Eritrea, Syria, and Russia - that voted against the General Assembly resolution condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Through its foreign minister, North Korea continues to support Russia's position after the UN vote. In his speech during the UN General Assembly, Kim Song, North Korea's ambassador to the UN, said: "The US and the West, in defiance of Russia's reasonable and just demand to provide it with a legal guarantee for security, have systematically undermined the security environment of Europe by becoming more blatant in their attempts to deploy attack weapon systems while pursuing NATO's eastward expansion."

North Korea also voted against a resolution to suspend Russia from its seat on the UN Human Rights Council, and North Korea is one of three countries that recognize the two breakaway republics of Donetsk and Luhansk in Ukraine (Pacheco and Kim, 2022). For its part, Russia has supported North Korea's newly intensified missile launches since early 2022.

Myanmar also shows its support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This is because Myanmar's junta government wants to strengthen its military. Myanmar's reaction through its Junta government differs from other ASEAN member countries when it appears as the only country in the region supporting Russia's actions. This happened because, during the military coup in Myanmar in February 2021, Russia emerged as the first major power to recognize the Myanmar government. Therefore, Myanmar's action favoring Russia is a form of repaying the favor of Russia while forming a new diplomatic relationship. In the meantime, the Myanmar military also described Russia as acting in such a way as to protect its sovereignty while also showing its status as a great power. The Russian leader and the leadership of the Myanmar Junta are interested in strengthening relations geopolitically, especially from the military aspect, although Myanmar is aware that the financial sanctions imposed on Russia will make the procurement process difficult. Although Myanmar's government under the Junta supported Russia, the old leadership of Myanmar's government in exile at the time showed a different reaction by criticizing the invasion by Russia.

4.6. Reactions of Gulf countries

Members of the Gulf countries are not interested in intervention. Since Russia's attack on Ukraine,

Western countries behind Kyiv tend to speak behind the scenes and try to gain sympathy from countries that hover between the Western bloc and Moscow. The leadership of the United States showed support for Ukraine under the pretext of defending international rules that inhumane parties defiled. Most of the Arab countries (West Asia), however, reject the Manichean narrative. Saudi Arabia, for example, and members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) think that Arab countries do not need to get involved in opposition to Putin because they see the war in Ukraine as a complicated European conflict.

As the war in Ukraine enters its ninth month, analysts believe Saudi Arabia will likely continue defying Western pressure to cut ties with Moscow. Many observers believe that Riyadh's actions of ignoring Western pressure and being neutral in geopolitics are a message to the US that they are not Washington's vassals that can be controlled at will. "Most of the developing world in Asia and Africa, including the Middle East, has not viewed the Ukraine war as the kind of definitive, transformational moment in international relations that the West does."

According to Gerald Feierstein, the former US ambassador to Yemen to Al Jazeera, who is also the vice president of the Middle East Institute, Saudi Arabia, in recent years, has been trying not to get entangled in the great power competition planned by the US. In this regard, Saudi Arabia is more focused on maintaining solid relations with all major powers, namely, the US as their leading economic partner, while China and Russia are the main partners in OPEC+. However, Saudi Arabia's cooperation with Russia through OPEC+ has angered Washington because it is trying to help Russia withstand the economic burden due to sanctions by America and Europe. Saudi Arabia's Kingdom Holding Co has invested over \$500 million in energy companies Rosneft, Lukoil, and Gazprom which seems to breathe new life into Russia, which the West is pressuring. "There was no doubt that Riyadh perceived a need to maintain cordial ties with Moscow, both to coordinate oil production as well as maintain a solid dialogue with Russia over its Iran initiatives."

This decision of OPEC+ by Saudi Arabia built a geopolitical relationship with Russia and China until the US began to question the actual Saudi position in favor of the US or Russia. We can see the effect of OPEC+ collapsing in the US market and worsening the US-Saudi relationship, which has started to crack since 2019 due to Yemen's attack on the Saudi Aramco facility. According to David Roberts, a researcher from King's College London, the political relationship between Saudi Arabia and America is already very fragile and is only waiting for time to be destroyed (Al Jazeera, 2022). Saudi Arabia is not actually on the side of any country, and we can see it when Saudi Arabia and Turkey mediate in transferring prisoners in Kyiv and Moscow, who succeeded in freeing some US citizens detained

during the war. Saudi Arabia also gave financial aid to Ukraine, amounting to \$400 million, and was seen by many observers as an effort to show that they are not against the West and remain neutral.

Among the Gulf countries, only Syria has shown open support for Russia's actions on Ukraine, while other Arab figures have argued that it is inappropriate for their governments to cut ties with Moscow because of this conflict. Returning to Syria's support for Russia, Bashar Al-Assad (President of Syria) stated that Putin's action was the right action to correct history and rebalance world geopolitics after the fall of the Soviet Union (Crisis Group, 2022). In addition, Bashar Al-Assad also explained that the stance to reject NATO's influence is Russia's right and claimed that Western countries are responsible for the chaos and bloodshed because they want to control the people, as happened in Syria.

5. Conclusion

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine has influenced the geopolitics of Asian nations. In China, for example, this conflict has impacted not just their foreign policy, but also their domestic political scene. Xi Jinping faced pressure from various parties, particularly amidst the COVID-19 pandemic aggravating their economic state. Countries in South Asia face a choice between aligning with either the West or Russia or pursuing economic self-preservation. This has led to a shift in the geopolitical landscape of the region, which previously did not exhibit a clear alignment with any major power prior to the conflict. ASEAN member countries also experience a significant impact on their geopolitics due to this situation. In this regard, Singapore has altered its rapport with Russia by implementing economic sanctions and limiting imports after the conflict arose. Some ASEAN countries, which previously adhered to neutral geopolitics, have begun to express reproach towards Russia, although they have not completely severed ties. Finally, the outbreak of this conflict has brought about a new level of geopolitical formation among Gulf member countries, including Saudi Arabia, Russia, and China's involvement with OPEC. Unfortunately, this has further deteriorated Saudi Arabia's relationship with the United States. The Russia-Ukraine conflict has altered the political situation in Asian countries, causing them to make statements regarding major power actions. Prior to this conflict, many Asian countries refrained from commenting on such matters. However, they have now spoken out either willingly or under pressure from the West.

Acknowledgment

This study is under the funding of the Fundamental Grant Research Scheme (FRGS) with Research Code FRGS/1/2021/SSI0/UKM/02/1 and MPOB-UKM Endowment Chair Research Scheme with Research Code MPOB-UKM-2022-006. The

researcher would like to thank the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, MPOB, and the relevant RMC for funding this research.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

References

- Ahmad S (2022). How can military conflict between Russia and Ukraine affect Pakistan economy. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4093222>
- Al Jazeera (2022). Analysis: The Russia-Ukraine war and the view from Saudi Arabia. Available online at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/10/24/analysis-russia-ukraine-war-view-from-saudi-arabia>
- Cheng M (2022). The Ukraine crisis: Causes, conundrum and consequences. *Journal of Social and Political Sciences*, 5(2): 96-111. <https://doi.org/10.31014/aior.1991.05.02.350>
- Crisis Group (2022). The impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in the Middle East and North Africa. Available online at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/impact-russias-invasion-ukraine-middle-east-and-north-africa>
- CSIS (2022). Ukraine and Taiwan: Parallels and early lessons learned. Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington D.C., USA.
- Enh AM (2010a). Malaysia's foreign policy towards Bosnia-Herzegovina 1992-1995. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 18(2): 311-320.
- Enh AM (2010b). World War 1: Who was to blame? *Tamkang Journal of International Affairs*, 13(3): 45-88.
- Enh AM, Bustami MK, Mustafa H, Mokhtar MS, and Ashri NSM (2022). The Malaysian palm issue in the European Union press report. *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication*, 38(1): 118-142. <https://doi.org/10.17576/JKMJC-2022-3801-07>
- Ghani RHA, Kib MZM, and Eah AM (2020). Indonesia-Malaysia confrontation (1963-1966) and the peace talks for restoration of relationship. *Tamkang Journal of International Affairs*, 23(3): 103-142.
- Klement J (2021). Geo-economics: The interplay between geopolitics, economics, and investments. CFA Institute Research Foundation, Charlottesville, USA. <https://doi.org/10.56227/22.1.4>
- Kotoulas IE and Pusztai W (2022). Geopolitics of the war in Ukraine. Foreign Affairs Institute, Athens, Greece.
- Megoran N (2022). "Russian troops out! No to NATO expansion!" A pacific geopolitics for a new Europe. *Political Geography*, 98: 102699. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2022.102699>
- Molchanov M (2015). Russia as Ukraine's 'other': Identity and geopolitics. In: Pikulicka WA and Sakwa R (Eds.), *Ukraine and Russia: People, politics, propaganda and perspectives: 1-12*. E-International Relations, Bristol, UK.
- Obaid UR (2022). Will China invade Taiwan: War game strategy and lessons for China from the Russia-Ukraine conflict. *Journal of Peace and Diplomacy*, 3(1): 15-29. <https://doi.org/10.59111/JPD.003.01.015>
- Pacheco PR and Kim YI (2022). Russia's invasion of Ukraine and China-North Korea relations: Stronger weak-great power

- alignment. *Asian Survey*, 62(5-6): 920-944.
<https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2022.1799746>
- Rajagopalan R (2023). Faraway war: Effects of the Ukraine war on South Asian security thinking. *Asia Policy*, 30(2): 47-54.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/asp.2023.0019>
- Ratten V (2023). The Ukraine/Russia conflict: Geopolitical and international business strategies. *Thunderbird International Business Review*, 65(2): 265-271.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/tie.22319>
- Rexhepi EH (2017). Ukraine's geopolitical position: Between East and West. *SEEU Review*, 12(1): 95-111.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/seeur-2017-0007>
- Rinna AV (2023). The Russia-South Korea relationship after Russia's invasion of Ukraine and implications for the US-ROK alliance. *Asia Policy*, 30(1): 95-113.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/asp.2023.0009>
- Shah SNA, Majeed G, Ali RA, and Hussain T (2022). Russia-Ukraine crisis and its impact on South Asia. *Review of Applied Management and Social Sciences*, 5(2): 141-148.
<https://doi.org/10.47067/ramss.v5i2.219>
- Storey I and Choong W (2022). Russia's invasion of Ukraine: Southeast Asian responses and why the conflict matters to the region. ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore, Singapore.
- Sullivan CJ (2023). Kabul and the Kremlin: Russia's evolving foreign policy towards the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. *Asian Affairs*, 54(1): 1-17.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2022.2156705>
- Suswandi I, Sapanti IR, and Sanjaya AT (2022). The image of Indonesia in the G20 presidency on the Russia-Ukraine conflict: A pragmatic approach. In *Symposium of Literature, Culture, and Communication (SYLECTION)*, 1(1): 146-156.
<https://doi.org/10.12928/sylection.v1i1.11533>
- Tampubolon M (2022). Russia's Invasion of Ukraine and its impact on global geopolitics. *ESJ Humanities*, 18(20): 48-70.
<https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2022.v18n20p48>
- Troush SM (2022). China and the evolution of Russia's conflict with Ukraine and the West. *Herald of the Russian Academy of Sciences*, 92(Suppl 15): S1488-S1494.
<https://doi.org/10.1134/S1019331622210213>
- Umar Z, Polat O, Choi SY, and Teplova T (2022). The impact of the Russia-Ukraine conflict on the connectedness of financial markets. *Finance Research Letters*, 48: 102976.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.frl.2022.102976>
- WBG (2022). South Asia sees slower growth as war in Ukraine impedes recovery, worsens existing challenges. World Bank Group. Washington D.C., USA.