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Flashpoints in Small State Diplomacy: The Effects of Strategic Alignment, Democratic Norms, and Domestic Support in Ukraine and Taiwan on US Commitments

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Abstract

In the field of international relations, the fate of small and mid-sized nations is often analyzed through the lens of great power politics, but this perspective misses half of the story. In this paper, I ask the question: what factors internal to smaller states affect their ability to court Western support? I compare the cases of Ukraine and Taiwan, as both are geopolitical flashpoints with a much larger aggressor, are widely researched for their implications on the global balance of power, yet lack sufficient research regarding their own actions on the world stage. Looking at the history of both states since democratization (the early 1990s in both cases), three variables—international/democratic norms, strategic alignment, and domestic support—have been relevant to the success of each state in realizing security agreements and military support from the United States. Yet the way these variables affect outcomes reveals interesting nuances in the cases examined. I argue that Ukraine and Taiwan find diplomatic success in achieving security partnerships with the US by emphasizing different norms and employing different messaging around strategic alignment, while domestic support is a prerequisite for diplomatic success in both cases. These findings should inform how scholars understand the factors internal to smaller nations which have a real and lasting impact on geopolitics, in particular by highlighting the underlying conditions which make adherence to democratic and international norms effective for some states and not others, and which influence the calculus for strategic alignment. These findings open up possibilities for further examination of small and mid-sized states to delineate these dynamics with greater clarity.

Introduction

The task of explaining the mechanisms and causes of war, conflict, power, and trade on the world stage is never simple. But to understand these mechanisms and causes is to understand the course of history, and furthermore to have a better base of knowledge from which to craft modern foreign policy. Given the complex array of factors in any international conflict, our understanding could stand to benefit from further research—specifically, research into the historically overlooked arena of small- and mid-sized-state diplomacy.

Why has the agency of small and middle powers been overlooked? Great power politics are undoubtedly important to the field of international relations. Large nations have the ability to effect an impact on the global stage commensurate with their size and power advantages. For decades, prevailing theories on conflict and the fate of smaller nations framed the fate of smaller nations as a consequence of the actions of great powers.¹ In more recent times, this has begun to change, with research indicating more nuance and detailing the ways in which smaller nations can and do impact conflicts to which they are party.² Take, for example, the Nordic states—Norway joined NATO in 1949, while Sweden and Finland opted for a policy of neutrality (at least until Russia’s 2022 invasion). Despite the similarity of these nations, domestic factors like national identity and public desire for non-alignment resulted in distinct foreign policy outcomes for Sweden and Finland compared to Norway.³

¹ Jeffrey Willis, "Breaking the paradigm (s): A review of the three waves of international relations small state literature," (2021), 23; Hans Morganthau, "Politics among nations," New York: Knoph (1948); Kenneth Waltz, "Theory of international politics. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley," Chapter 4, no. 5 (1979): 6.

² Willis, "Breaking the paradigm (s): A review of the three waves of international relations small state literature," 27-28; Christine Ingebritsen, and Iver Neumann, *Small States in International Relations* [Electronic Resource], New Directions in Scandinavian Studies, University of Washington Press, 2006; Christopher Browning, *Constructivism, narrative and foreign policy analysis: A case study of Finland*, Peter Lang, 2008.

³ Carl Bergqvist, "Determined by History: Why Sweden and Finland Will Not Be More than NATO Partners," War on the Rocks, July 13, 2016, <https://warontherocks.com/2016/07/determined-by-history-why-sweden-and-finland-will-not-be-more-than-nato-partners/>.

Explaining these differences only in terms of Soviet and US objectives would miss this important piece of the story.

I aim to further this investigation by asking: which factors internal to smaller states affect their ability to court Western support? I will examine and compare Ukraine and Taiwan, as these nations merit serious investigation. Ukraine and Taiwan represent two of the most prominent examples of flashpoints in modern geopolitics.⁴ Over the course of history, there have been, and will continue to be, many examples of geopolitical flashpoints—states around which great power conflicts surface. Thus determining causal relationships between the actions of Ukraine and Taiwan and the outcomes of those actions—more specifically, what kind of Western support and security assurances are procured—will be useful in understanding how other relatively smaller nations with geopolitical significance can leverage that influence into increased security. These are prototypical examples of smaller states with geopolitical significance, thus a great starting point for studying geopolitics through the lens of the actions of flashpoint nations.

When states such as Ukraine and Taiwan are discussed in international relations, their status and security is often articulated in terms of the motivations, power, and decisions of larger powers.⁵ It is as if the US, EU, Russia, and China were the only players in the game, and Ukraine

⁴ Phelim Kine, "Taiwan's Accelerating Slide toward U.s.-China Military Flashpoint," POLITICO, 2022, <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/politico-china-watcher/2022/07/28/taiwans-accelerating-slide-toward-u-s-china-military-flashpoint-00048320>; Thomas Graham, Rajan Menon, and Jack Snyder, "Russia Matters," Ukraine Between Russia and the West: Buffer or Flashpoint? | Russia Matters, April 24, 2017, <https://www.russiamatters.org/analysis/ukraine-between-russia-and-west-buffer-or-flashpoint>.

⁵ Elias Götz, "Putin, the state, and war: The causes of Russia's near abroad assertion revisited," *International Studies Review* 19, no. 2 (2017): 228-253; Jokull Johannesson and David Clowes, "Energy resources and markets—Perspectives on the Russia–Ukraine War," *European Review* 30, no. 1 (2022): 4-23; Taras Kuzio and Paul D'anieri, "The Causes and Consequences of Russia's Actions towards Ukraine," *E-International Relations* (2018); Isaac Chotiner, "Why John Mearsheimer Blames the U.S. for the Crisis in Ukraine," *The New Yorker*, March 1, 2022, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/why-john-mearsheimer-blames-the-us-for-the-crisis-in-ukraine>; Kimberly Marten, "NATO enlargement: evaluating its consequences in Russia," *International Politics* 57, no. 3 (2020): 401-426; Nancy Tucker and Bonnie Glaser, "Should the United States Abandon Taiwan?," *The Washington Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (2011): 23-37; Michael Swaine, "Trouble in Taiwan," *Foreign Affairs* (2004): 39-49; Phillip Saunders, "Long-term trends in China-Taiwan relations: implications for US Taiwan policy," *Asian Survey* 45, no. 6 (2005): 970-991; John McClaran, "US arms sales to Taiwan: Implications for the future of the Sino-US relationship," *Asian Survey* 40, no. 4 (2000): 622-640.

and Taiwan were simply passive observers of their own destinies. Given Taiwan's legal status under international law and the US One-China policy as not (fully) independent from mainland China,⁶ it is understandable that discussions of Taiwan's foreign policy invariably reference geopolitical consequences in regards to the People's Republic of China (PRC). Still, this paper will attempt to add nuance to this discussion by framing an analysis of Taiwan's actions around the causal consequences of those actions on security assurances from the West. While reference to US-PRC relations is inevitable, this paper will focus on when and how Taiwan has been successful or unsuccessful, rather than what the West/US should or should not do in reaction to Taiwan's actions.

In this paper, I will illustrate factors internal to Ukraine and Taiwan that influence the ability of each government to achieve security agreements with the United States. Based on existing literature, I hypothesize that adherence to democratic norms are a useful tool for both nations; strategic alignment has different implications for Taiwan and Ukraine based on unique circumstances; and domestic support is not consequential for winning US support. Yet my findings are only partially in line with these hypotheses. Based on my research, I argue that Ukraine and Taiwan find diplomatic success in achieving US security partnerships by emphasizing distinct norms and employing distinct messaging around strategic alignment, while domestic support is a prerequisite for diplomatic success in both cases.

⁶ Li Kua-teng "What Is Taiwan's Legal Status According to International Law, Japan, and the US?," The News Lens, December 2, 2019, <https://international.thenewslens.com/feature/taiwan-for-sale-2020/128242>.

Literature Review

Small and Middle Power Politics

Older literature concerning international politics consistently emphasizes the power of larger states.⁷ Small states in international relations have been analyzed under two dominant paradigms—classical realism and neorealism.⁸ Classical realists like influential thinker Hans Morgenthau posit that the inherently conflictual nature of humans drives conflict as nations seek power.⁹ In contrast, neorealists argue that security, rather than power, is a state's primary concern. In neorealism, international conflict is a result of the international system itself; as larger states maneuver for more power within the system, conflict can occur.¹⁰ Under both perspectives, states which are more materially powerful are more impactful in geopolitics.¹¹ These perspectives were influential in early writing on small states in international relations (from the 1940s until the late 1960s), which characterized small state diplomacy as largely a product of the larger geopolitical environment.¹²

Research from the late 1960s through the 1980s developed out of this paradigm. Scholars described the quest for security—meaning self determination, economic security, and physical safety—as the guiding force of small state diplomacy, but now argued that small states can be quite effective in navigating changing tides to ensure their survival.¹³ The work of the scholar

⁷ Willis, "Breaking the paradigm (s): A review of the three waves of international relations small state literature;" Morgenthau, "Politics among nations;" Waltz, "Theory of international politics. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley."

⁸ Willis, "Breaking the paradigm (s): A review of the three waves of international relations small state literature." Morgenthau, "Politics among nations."

¹⁰ Willis, "Breaking the paradigm (s): A review of the three waves of international relations small state literature," 23; Waltz, "Theory of international politics. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley," 6.

¹¹ Willis, "Breaking the paradigm (s): A review of the three waves of international relations small state literature," 23.

¹² Ibid, 24; Annette Baker Fox, *The Power of Small States: Diplomacy in World War II*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959.

¹³ Willis, "Breaking the paradigm (s): A review of the three waves of international relations small state literature," 24-26; David Vital, *The survival of small states: studies in small power/great power conflict*, London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1971; Olav F. Knudsen, "Small states, latent and extant: Towards a general perspective," *Journal of international relations and development* 5, no. 2 (2002): 182-198.

David Vital is notable in this era, theorizing that the smaller the state, the fewer political options it has, and the more challenges it will have to surmount in order to maintain security.¹⁴ In his earlier work, *The Inequality of States*, Vital argues that a passive non-alignment may be the safest strategy for small nations.¹⁵ While Vital's work remains widely cited, other scholars from this era disagreed with his conclusions around strategic alignment.¹⁶ The scholar Robert Rothstein, for example, argued that small states face more threats when remaining neutral, and gain greater security from intentional alignment with larger powers.¹⁷ The work from this era agreed upon the weakness of small states, but reached no consensus regarding strategic alignment.

The prevailing realist and realist assumptions of the previous decades—that the actions of small states were contingent upon the will of larger nations—were challenged by researcher Miriam Elman in 1995. Detailing the ways in which domestic institutions and rules in the early United States impacted the substance and timing of its military strategies, Elman argued that small state foreign policy was significantly influenced by domestic factors.¹⁸ Elman (1995) has since been widely cited, speaking to the need to factor in domestic politics as a motivating factor in small state actions. Accordingly, I will illustrate how domestic politics and public support in both Ukraine and Taiwan affects the success of Ukraine and Taiwan's diplomacy.

Most literature on how states court great powers involves the United States. Scholarship in the post-Cold-War era has strengthened the idea that small states are not powerless in international relations.¹⁹ In a book which has proven widely influential in the field of

¹⁴ Vital, *The survival of small states: studies in small power/great power conflict*.

¹⁵ David Vital, *The inequality of states: a study of the small power in international relations*, Clarendon Press, 1967.

¹⁶ Willis, "Breaking the paradigm (s): A review of the three waves of international relations small state literature," 24.

¹⁷ Robert L. Rothstein, *Alliances and small powers*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1968.

¹⁸ Miriam Fendius Elman, "The foreign policies of small states: Challenging neorealism in its own backyard," *British Journal of Political Science* 25, no. 2 (1995): 171-217.

¹⁹ Willis, "Breaking the paradigm (s): A review of the three waves of international relations small state literature," 27-28; Ingebritsen and Neumann, *Small States in International Relations* [Electronic Resource]; Christopher Browning, *Constructivism, narrative and foreign policy analysis: A case study of Finland*.

international relations—*Small States in International Relations*—scholars Christine Ingebritsen and Iver Neumann argue that small states can have a real impact on the geopolitical environment, and detail different ways in which this happens.²⁰ For example, Ingebritsen and Neumann contend that smaller states can exercise large amounts of influence on larger states when lobbying for specific issues that are of less political significance (or less perceived political significance) to the larger nation.²¹ Imagine that a smaller nation is lobbying the US; if that state's preferred policy is a non-voting issue in US politics, a US politician could presumably be convinced to alter policy if it is of critical importance to the lobbying party. This is a non-realist analysis of small state diplomacy, highlighting the importance of domestic factors in geopolitics.

While this non-realist lens adds important context to the study of smaller nations, it can not be applied in every scenario; in the cases of Ukraine and Taiwan, this theory may not hold. Ingebritsen and Neumann note that the geopolitical implications of countering a world power can transform small-state interests into flashpoints of geopolitical significance.²² Taiwan and Ukraine seem to fit this description. Both nations are of great importance to US foreign policy; it seems unlikely that Ukrainian or Taiwanese lobbyists could effectively argue that a change in US policy would not have politically significant consequences in the United States. Modern scholarship has detailed the ways in which smaller nations can exert influence, but has noted the challenges of doing so when their potential aggressor is so large that the policy becomes an area of high importance for the power that the smaller nation is attempting to influence. This dynamic merits investigation in the cases of Ukraine and Taiwan; both may gain leverage based on their importance to geopolitics, but both are limited in that their actions are significant. Any small

²⁰ Ingebritsen and Neumann, *Small States in International Relations*.

²¹ Ingebritsen and Neumann, *Small States in International Relations*, 71.

²² Ingebritsen and Neumann, *Small States in International Relations*, 71-72.

diplomatic move may be interpreted as strategic alignment, an important factor for the security of each state.

There is consensus among scholars that status can be a basis of power in international politics, but much of this research focuses on great and rising powers.²³ By “status,” scholars refer to the influence wrought by a state when it is perceived as in line with the moral standards of the prevailing world order.²⁴ In research on the specific strategies of small and middle powers in status seeking, the scholars Wohlforth, Carvalho, Leir, and Neumann argue that smaller powers implement a strategy of being perceived as a “good power” to gain status vis-a-vis the moral framework of great powers.²⁵ The authors note that status is an important and intrinsic aspect of recognition on the world stage.²⁶ Small and middle powers may gain status by calling out the hypocrisies of great powers and, conversely, by supporting existing hegemonies and social orders—under the liberal world order, this means adherence to democratic values and international norms.²⁷ I will investigate these phenomena in depth as they pertain to Ukraine and Taiwan’s foreign policy decisions and the framing of those decisions.

To summarize, existing perspectives in the field of international relations have long underplayed the significance of non-great power states in shaping geopolitics. Still, small state research has grown in stature and quantity; since the end of the Cold-War-era, scholars have begun to detail the ways in which small(er) states influence great powers and geopolitics. The field has not reached consensus on whether strategic alignment is beneficial or dangerous for a

²³ Jonathan Renshon, "Fighting for status," In *Fighting for Status*, Princeton University Press, 2017; Steven Ward, *Status and the challenge of rising powers*, Cambridge University Press, 2017.

²⁴ Renshon, “Fighting for status,” Ward, *Status and the challenge of rising powers*.

²⁵ William C. Wohlforth et al., “Moral Authority and Status in International Relations: Good States and the Social Dimension of Status Seeking,” *Review of International Studies* 44, no. 3 (2018): 526–46, par. 24, doi:10.1017/S0260210517000560.

²⁶ Wohlforth et al., “Moral Authority and Status in International Relations: Good States and the Social Dimension of Status Seeking,” par. 6.

²⁷ Wohlforth et al., “Moral Authority and Status in International Relations: Good States and the Social Dimension of Status Seeking,” par. 23.

small state. Domestic support is regarded as an important factor. Status as a state which upholds international values—democracy, in these cases—may grant a state more international leverage. There is a need for more specific research on the ways in which nations which are geopolitical flashpoints—Ukraine and Taiwan being notable examples at this juncture in history—can leverage their specific situations into greater security.

Defining the Term *Smaller*

While this paper aims to study how smaller states can affect their foreign policy agendas, an immediate objection might be that neither of the two states in question—Ukraine and Taiwan—are especially *small*. As I employ the terms *small* and *smaller* to describe a certain type of state, it is important to define these terms in the context of this paper. Smallness is often defined quantitatively in order to ensure more objective criteria.²⁸ Scholars Donna Lee and Nicola J. Smith, widely cited for their work on small states, identify the various criteria used to define “smallness”—geographic, economic, and demographic size, or some combination of those factors.²⁹ Yet these objective terms might disqualify nations like Ukraine, which has a large landmass and population,³⁰ and Taiwan, which boasts a large and influential economy.³¹ Other scholars point out that in addition to quantitative means of measuring “smallness,” it is useful to examine smallness from a qualitative (relative) perspective—analyzing the relative power and influence of a state in its wider environment—as some outwardly small states often exercise more influence than quantitative measures would suggest.³² Smallness can be relationally

²⁸ Donna Lee and Nicola J. Smith, "Small state discourses in the international political economy," *Third World Quarterly* 31, no. 7 (2010): 1091-1094.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1092.

³⁰ “Land Area (Sq. Km) - Ukraine,” Data (World Bank, 2022), <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.LND.TOTL.K2?locations=UA>

³¹ Prableen Bajpai, “An Overview of Taiwan's Economy,” *Nasdaq* (Nasdaq, 2022), <https://www.nasdaq.com/articles/an-overview-of-taiwans-economy>.

³² Neill Nugent, "Cyprus and the European Union: The significance of its smallness, both as an applicant and a member," *European Integration* 28, no. 1 (2006): 51-71; Lee and Smith, "Small state discourses in the international political economy”.

defined—Ukraine is *smaller* than Russia. This lens can be helpful in examining regional and global relationships where one party in a conflict is relatively smaller (economically, militarily, and/or territorially) than the other parties.

I use this qualitative perspective when I describe Ukraine and Taiwan as “smaller” states. The economic, military, and political capabilities of both Ukraine and Taiwan are greater than that of still smaller nations, who may not have the same tools at their disposal, nor the same effectiveness in garnering attention and support.³³ Still, Ukraine and Taiwan are undoubtedly smaller than their aggressive neighbors (Russia and China, respectively).³⁴ For the purposes of this paper, I often use the term *smaller* in reference to Ukraine and Taiwan, as this term indicates the qualitative nature of smallness better than “small,” which could elicit objections on quantitative terms. Given the qualitatively smaller characteristics of Ukraine and Taiwan, I will review the literature on small state diplomacy, as some of the analytical framework provided by this scholarship is applicable.

It should also be noted that this research is not an investigation of merely relatively smaller states. These are states with unique vulnerabilities and unique implications for the liberal world order.³⁵ Accordingly, I use the term *flashpoints* to refer to these nations, in reference to the broader implications of their security situation. The bulk of the literature on small states either fails to make the distinction between average small states and those which are flashpoints, or fails to investigate the consequences of this distinction. Both Ukraine and Taiwan were historically a part of a current world power, and both neighbor that same world power today.

Throughout this paper, I will show that Ukraine and Taiwan are representative of a unique type

³³ Anjali Dayal and Kate Cronin-Furman, “Russia's Invasion Has Created Victims the World Recognizes,” *Foreign Policy*, April 5, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/04/05/russia-invasion-victims-bucha-ukraine/>.

³⁴ Data (World Bank, 2022), <https://data.worldbank.org>.

³⁵ Kine, “Taiwan's Accelerating Slide toward U.s.-China Military Flashpoint;” Graham, Menon, and Snyder, “Russia Matters.”

of state in their status as flashpoints in international relations, and thus face unique challenges and unique opportunities to leverage that status into increased influence.

Case Studies –Ukraine and Taiwan

In this section, I will attempt to enumerate what foreign policy decisions the Ukrainian and Taiwanese governments have made, and explain prominent factors which influence the success of those diplomatic efforts.

Ukraine

Historical Context

Soviet Era

The dynamic of Russian aggression towards Ukraine is not unique to the post-Cold War era. After the collapse of the Russian empire in 1917—an empire which included Ukraine—Poles, Ukrainian nationalists, and the Red Army of the Russian Bolsheviks fought over the territory that is today Ukraine.³⁶ The Bolsheviks prevailed and in 1922, Ukraine was incorporated into the USSR as the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic.³⁷ In the early 1920s, the more liberal New Economic Policy and cultural indigenization (Ukrainization) allowed Ukraine some degree of cultural autonomy in order to bolster support for the communist regime. Yet as collectivization was actualized under Joseph Stalin, rural independent farmers in Ukraine increasingly rebelled, and were met with brutal repression by the Soviet secret police and Red Army.³⁸

³⁶ Mayhill Fowler, “Soviet Ukraine in a Nutshell,” *Origins* (Ohio State University, July 2022), https://origins.osu.edu/read/soviet-ukraine-nutshell?language_content_entity=en.

³⁷ Ali Rogin and Morgan Till, “Ukraine’s History and Its Centuries-Long Road to Independence,” PBS (Public Broadcasting Service, March 8, 2022), <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/ukraines-history-and-its-centuries-long-road-to-independence>; “Holodomor,” College of Liberal Arts (University of Minnesota), accessed October 26, 2022, <https://cla.umn.edu/chgs/holocaust-genocide-education/resource-guides/holodomor>.

³⁸ “Holodomor,” College of Liberal Arts (University of Minnesota).

This repression intensified in 1932, when Stalin manufactured famine (termed “the Holodomor”) in Ukraine by imposing unrealistically high grain quotas.³⁹ From 1932-1933, an estimated 3.9 million Ukrainians died of starvation while Moscow rejected foreign aid and exported Ukrainian grain; historians believe the famine was designed to suppress Ukrainian autonomy and eliminate threats to collectivization.⁴⁰

Still, Ukraine’s history of resistance to Russian aggression continued. During World War II, some Ukrainians again fought for autonomy.⁴¹ As many welcomed the Nazi invasion as a means to challenge Soviet rule, the Nazis killed some 1.5 million Ukrainian Jews.⁴² The Ukrainian Nationalists and Ukrainian Insurgent Army later broke with the Nazis when it was clear the Nazis would not tolerate Ukrainian independence.⁴³

In 1954, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic was gifted Crimea, a formerly Russian territory with an ethnically Russian majority.⁴⁴ While the Soviet government claimed this was done in celebration of the unity of Russia and Ukraine, historians believe it more likely that this action was aimed at both stabilizing Soviet control over new territories in Ukraine and winning Ukrainian allies for the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev as he consolidated power in the aftermath of Stalin’s death.⁴⁵ While the Khrushchev era included more concessions to Ukraine

³⁹ Rogin and Till, “Ukraine’s History and Its Centuries-Long Road to Independence.”

⁴⁰ “Holodomor,” College of Liberal Arts (University of Minnesota).

⁴¹ Fowler, “Soviet Ukraine in a Nutshell.”

⁴² Rogin and Till, “Ukraine’s History and Its Centuries-Long Road to Independence.”

⁴³ Fowler, “Soviet Ukraine in a Nutshell.”

⁴⁴ Krishnadev Calamur, “Crimea: A Gift to Ukraine Becomes a Political Flash Point,” NPR (NPR, February 27, 2014),

<https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2014/02/27/283481587/crimea-a-gift-to-ukraine-becomes-a-political-flash-point>.

⁴⁵ Mark Kramer, “Why Did Russia Give Away Crimea Sixty Years Ago?,” Wilson Center, accessed October 26, 2022, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/why-did-russia-give-away-crimea-sixty-years-ago>; Calamur, “Crimea: A Gift to Ukraine Becomes a Political Flash Point.”

and looser restrictions, the project of Russification—imposing Russian identity—was reinvigorated in the early 1970s under Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev.⁴⁶

On April 26, 1986, a fatal nuclear disaster at the Chernobyl power plant occurred, revealing weaknesses in Soviet infrastructure.⁴⁷ The Soviet authorities covered up the severity of the incident for days, creating lasting distrust among Ukrainians and generating support for Ukrainian independence.⁴⁸

Independence (1991-1994)

Ukraine's history as a former member of the USSR, and as an important part of the Russian empire before that, provides important context to understanding Ukraine's modern-day status as a geopolitical flashpoint.⁴⁹ Russia succeeded the USSR as a world power both in perception and in power structures such as the UN Security Council.⁵⁰ Russian president Vladimir Putin has long maintained that the fall of the Soviet Union was “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century.”⁵¹ Accordingly, the end of the USSR is an appropriate point to lend historical context to the present concerns of Ukraine.

In 1989, as Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev loosened Soviet control over Eastern Europe, democratic movements gained momentum. Following the downfall of communist

⁴⁶ Noel King, Miles Bryan, and Lauren Katz, “The Real and Imagined History of Ukraine,” Vox (Vox, February 25, 2022), <https://www.vox.com/22950915/ukraine-history-timothy-snyder-today-explained>.

⁴⁷ “Chernobyl Accident 1986,” World Nuclear Association, April 2022, <https://world-nuclear.org/information-library/safety-and-security/safety-of-plants/chernobyl-accident.aspx>.

⁴⁸ Will Englund, “Chernobyl a Milestone on the Road to Ukrainian Independence,” The Washington Post (WP Company, April 24, 2011), https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/chernobyl-a-milestone-on-the-road-to-ukrainian-independence/2011/04/22/AFRghNdE_story.html.

⁴⁹ Rogin and Till, “Ukraine's History and Its Centuries-Long Road to Independence.”

⁵⁰ Philip Remler, “Russia at the United Nations: Law, Sovereignty, and Legitimacy,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/01/22/russia-at-united-nations-law-sovereignty-and-legitimacy-pub-80753>.

⁵¹ “Putin: If He Could, He'd Try to Prevent 1991 USSR Collapse,” AP NEWS, Associated Press, 2018, <https://apnews.com/article/d36b368c6ad44bb2b8e883fc8d800514>.

regimes in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and the Baltic States sought independence.⁵² On December 1, 1991, Ukrainians voted for independence via referendum, with 92 percent agreeing to leave the Soviet Union.⁵³ This vote came only a few days after a coup in Moscow spelled the end of power for Gorbachev and the Communist Party.⁵⁴ At that time, Ukraine's population and economy were second only to Russia among the fifteen Soviet Republics.⁵⁵ This is where I will begin my analysis of the actions of the Ukrainian government, for it is at this point that Ukraine became an independent state and a flashpoint in geopolitics. Now we must consider the avenues by which a newly independent Ukraine garnered western support.

Factors Influencing Western Support

In this section, I will trace the political actions of Ukraine since independence as they relate to international politics, and the results of those actions in terms of major international agreements. While these actions are far from the only causal explanation for international agreements, they are factors which merit investigation. To understand how Ukrainian diplomacy is shaping current events—such as the international response to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine—it is necessary to look at what has been effective and ineffective in Ukrainian diplomatic efforts over the course of time. In researching Ukrainian diplomacy since independence, I have identified three factors internal to Ukraine which have influenced the success of Ukraine in securing Western commitments: *democratic and international norms* (adherence to the norms the United States and Western partners profess to value); *strategic*

⁵² “The Collapse of the Soviet Union,” U.S. Department of State (U.S. Department of State), accessed October 25, 2022, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1989-1992/collapse-soviet-union>.

⁵³ Council on Foreign Relations, “A Historical Timeline of Post-Independence Ukraine,” PBS NewsHour, February 22, 2022, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/a-historical-timeline-of-post-independence-ukraine>.

⁵⁴ “The Collapse of the Soviet Union,” U.S. Department of State.

⁵⁵ Council on Foreign Relations, “A Historical Timeline of Post-Independence Ukraine.”

alignment (unambiguous actions signaling the desire for closer alliance with the West); and *domestic support* (public approval within Ukraine for the diplomatic objectives of its leaders).

Democratic and International Norms

Witnessing the breakup of the USSR, US Secretary of State James Baker outlined five principles upon which US policy would be based: “self-determination consistent with democratic principles, recognition of existing borders, support for democracy and rule of law, preservation of human rights and rights of national minorities, and respect for international law and obligations.”⁵⁶ Former Soviet states could expect support from the US if they followed these principles, although the details of that support were not firmly established.⁵⁷ These norms are not always followed uniformly, and in the case of Ukraine, the adherence to some has mattered more than the adherence to others.

Several actions taken by Ukraine in the years immediately following independence worked to assure the West that these norms would be respected. In 1991, Ukraine met with Russia and Belarus to establish the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), an agreement which spelled out economic and security agreements between the newly independent nations but effectively signaled the end of the Soviet union.⁵⁸ Several other former Soviet republics would join before the charter was submitted to the UN in 1994.⁵⁹ As a result of CIS agreements, and of efforts by the United States to ensure the breakup of the USSR did not result in nuclear catastrophe, Ukraine agreed to surrender its nuclear arsenal to Russia in the 1994 Budapest

⁵⁶ “The Collapse of the Soviet Union,” U.S. Department of State.

⁵⁷ David Hoffman, “Baker Vows Aid for Soviets, Lists Five Principles for Dealings,” The Washington Post (WP Company, September 5, 1991),

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1991/09/05/baker-vows-aid-for-soviets-lists-five-principles-for-dealings/0ae47ad8-7580-4b49-a736-933aeea22a14/>; “The Collapse of the Soviet Union,” U.S. Department of State.

⁵⁸ “The Collapse of the Soviet Union,” U.S. Department of State.

⁵⁹ “Charter of the Commonwealth of Independent States (with Declaration and Decisions). ,” Executive Secretariat of the Commonwealth of Independent States, 1994,

<https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%201819/volume-1819-I-31139-English.pdf>.

Memorandum. In exchange, Ukraine received financial compensation for the value of its enriched uranium; reimbursement for the costs of dismantling its nuclear infrastructure; and security assurances from the United States, United Kingdom, and Russia.⁶⁰ Ukraine signed the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in 1994 as a non-nuclear-weapons state.⁶¹

These efforts by Ukraine to establish itself as independent were paired with a security agreement with NATO; in 1994, Ukraine joined the Partnership for Peace (PFP), a US-based initiative connecting NATO to neutral and former Soviet-bloc European countries.⁶² This represented a moderate success for Ukraine in bolstering its security—the US Department of State describes PFP as “a framework for enhanced political and military cooperation for joint multilateral activities, such as humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping, and crisis management and enables Partners to improve their interoperability with NATO,” as well as enabling “PFP members to consult with NATO when faced with a direct threat to its security but does not extend NATO security guarantees.”⁶³

To what extent can we attribute this NATO cooperation and the security assurances of the Budapest memorandum to Ukraine’s denuclearization? Ukraine’s membership in the PFP initiative is at least in part a result of its efforts to meet the US principles outlined by James Baker. The US Department of State notes that “participation in PFP does not guarantee entry into NATO, but it is the best preparation for states interested in becoming NATO members.”⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Steven Pifer, “Why Care about Ukraine and the Budapest Memorandum,” Brookings (Brookings, March 9, 2022), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/12/05/why-care-about-ukraine-and-the-budapest-memorandum/>.

⁶¹ “Fact Sheet on WMD Threat Reduction Efforts with Ukraine, Russia and Other Former Soviet Union Countries,” U.S. Department of Defense, June 9, 2022, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3057517/fact-sheet-on-wmd-threat-reduction-efforts-with-ukraine-russia-and-other-former/>.

⁶² Nato, “Relations with Ukraine,” NATO, September 23, 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_37750.htm.

⁶³ “NATO Partnership for Peace,” U.S. Department of State (U.S. Department of State, 1997), https://1997-2001.state.gov/regions/eur/nato_fs-pfp.html.

⁶⁴ “NATO Partnership for Peace,” U.S. Department of State.

Ukrainian actions catering directly to US security interests via nuclear nonproliferation treaties and disarmament resulted in enhanced security cooperation from the US. These security assurances were far from ironclad, but they secured Ukraine's independence in a time of great change and set the stage for further partnerships with the West.

Ukraine has not consistently adhered to democratic norms. Leonid Kravchuk's 1994 defeat marked the first peaceful defeat of an incumbent in a post-Soviet state, as Leonid Kuchma took over from Ukraine's first president.⁶⁵ Yet under Kuchma in 1996, Ukraine adopted a new constitution with vague language delineating the separation of powers, allowing Kuchma to extend his powers and limit political and economic reform.⁶⁶ The years of the Kuchma Administration were marked by corruption and economic struggles.⁶⁷ Despite the violation of democratic norms, NATO and Ukraine further strengthened their relationship by signing a Charter on a Distinctive Partnership in 1997.⁶⁸

Closer adherence to democratic norms has not guaranteed diplomatic success for Ukraine. In Ukraine's 2004-2005 presidential election, electoral fraud led to protests against Moscow-backed candidate Viktor Yanukovich.⁶⁹ The protests succeeded, leading to the election of reformist candidate Victor Yushchenko; his administration was successful in reversing government encroachment on free speech, but unsuccessful in effectuating alignment with the EU.⁷⁰ This period saw efforts by Ukraine to align itself with the West—Victor Yushchenko

⁶⁵ Council on Foreign Relations, "A Historical Timeline of Post-Independence Ukraine."

⁶⁶ Gwendolyn Sasse, "Constitution Making in Ukraine: Refocusing the Debate," Carnegie Europe, April 12, 2016, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2016/04/12/constitution-making-in-ukraine-refocusing-debate-pub-63304>.

⁶⁷ Council on Foreign Relations, "A Historical Timeline of Post-Independence Ukraine."

⁶⁸ Nato, "Relations with Ukraine," 2022.

⁶⁹ Lili Bivings, "Ukraine's Orange Revolution," The Kyiv Independent, September 4, 2022, <https://kyivindependent.com/explaining-ukraine/ukraines-orange-revolution>.

⁷⁰ Peter Dickinson, "How Ukraine's Orange Revolution Shaped Twenty-First Century Geopolitics," Atlantic Council (Atlantic Council, November 23, 2020), <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/how-ukraines-orange-revolution-shaped-twenty-first-century-geopolitics/>.

expressed his goal for Ukraine as “the final integration to the European Union and NATO. The main question is not in the direction of movement, but in the speed of it.”⁷¹ But Yushchenko failed in a major opportunity to secure a pathway to NATO membership at the 2008 Bucharest Summit.⁷²

International law and international norms around territorial integrity may be more powerful factors aiding Ukrainian diplomatic efforts. Referencing the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, the scholars Anjali Dayal and Kate Cronin-Furman have noted that conflicts which involve a nation invading the sovereign territory of another nation are more likely to garner international support.⁷³ This is a consequence of the way International Law has been set up—the UN charter explicitly condemns invasion of one sovereign state by another, while the UN Security Council has repeatedly affirmed the principles non-intervention and non-interference in states’ internal affairs.⁷⁴ This scholarship suggests that we might expect to see more international solidarity with Ukraine when Ukraine can frame Russia as a threat to international law and norms. While Ukraine was unsuccessful in securing the kind of security guarantees that might have prevented Russia from invading, it has been successful in rallying Western support for its defense in 2022. As of October, the US has provided \$17 billion in security assistance, which includes advanced missile and drone systems.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Rogin and Till, “Ukraine's History and Its Centuries-Long Road to Independence.”

⁷² Melinda Haring, “Why the Bucharest Summit Still Matters Ten Years On,” Atlantic Council (Atlantic Council, August 29, 2019), <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/why-the-bucharest-summit-still-matters-ten-years-on/>.

⁷³ Dayal and Cronin-Furman, “Russia's Invasion Has Created Victims the World Recognizes.”

⁷⁴ United Nations, “Part III: Purposes and Principles of the Charter of the United Nations,” 2011, 344, https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sites/www.un.org.securitycouncil/files/en/sc/repertoire/2010-2011/Part%20III/2010-2011_Part%20III.pdf. 344.

⁷⁵ Jonathan Masters, “Ukraine: Conflict at the Crossroads of Europe and Russia,” Council on Foreign Relations (Council on Foreign Relations, October 11, 2022), <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/ukraine-conflict-crossroads-europe-and-russia>.

One could argue that as Ukraine has endeavored to meet Western norms around security and democracy, it has secured political capital with the West, significant in this time of crisis. This point of view would hold that adherence to Western norms has afforded status to Ukraine as a “good state” in the West’s rules-based system, status which is significant in Ukraine’s efforts to leverage international attention and support.⁷⁶ While the evidence previously discussed suggests that over Ukraine’s history, democratic norms have not had an immediate impact on the success of Ukrainian diplomacy in advancing alliances with the West, it is possible that status, accumulated over time, has contributed to the more substantial Western commitments we see currently.

Strategic Alignment

When Ukraine first approached NATO with a draft version of the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership in 1995, there was little support among NATO leaders (who worried a strong relationship with Ukraine would complicate detente in NATO-Russian relations).⁷⁷ What, then, elicited a change of heart in NATO leaders? One contributing factor is that the language in later drafts of the charter was more ambiguous, thus less potentially provocative vis-a-vis Russia.⁷⁸ But significantly, Ukrainian diplomacy under the Kuchma Administration shifted from a cautious neutrality (pre-1995) to a more open alignment with the West, openly supporting NATO enlargement.⁷⁹ Ukrainian leadership was betting that supporting an independent Ukraine—in the words of Kuchma—“is a strategic investment for securing Western European [and US] interests.”⁸⁰ It is possible that in aligning Ukrainian diplomacy so closely to the West, Ukrainian

⁷⁶ Renshon, "Fighting for status;" Ward, Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers.

⁷⁷ Tor Bukkvoll, “Ukraine and NATO: The Politics of Soft Cooperation,” Security Dialogue 28, no. 3 (1997): 363–74. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26296597>, 366.

⁷⁸ Bukkvoll, “Ukraine and NATO: The Politics of Soft Cooperation,” 366.

⁷⁹ Bukkvoll, “Ukraine and NATO: The Politics of Soft Cooperation,” 367-372.

⁸⁰ Bukkvoll, “Ukraine and NATO: The Politics of Soft Cooperation,” 371.

diplomacy limited NATO's options. If NATO leaders were to abandon Ukraine at a time in which the nation was so openly aligning itself with NATO, they may have risked both looking weak in relation to Russia, and dissuaded other nations from supporting NATO policies.

Conversely, the Moscow-friendly Yanukovich Administration demonstrated that when Ukraine's leadership was less forthcoming about its allegiances, Ukraine failed to secure its objectives with the West. Despite posturing towards more economic aligning with the EU, Yanukovich demanded the EU compensate Ukraine for the loss of Russian investment at a sum EU leaders thought was exorbitant; the EU did not accede to these terms, and Yanukovich walked away from the EU deal in 2013 in favor of stronger alignment with Russia.⁸¹ The Yanukovich years saw no major security assurances from the West.⁸² Instead, they ended in protests—which came to be known as the “Revolution of Dignity”—forcing Yanukovich from power, rejecting his partners in Moscow, and contributing to Russia's 2014 invasion of the Crimean peninsula.⁸³

Domestic Support

Domestic support for foreign policy has been a significant factor influencing the success of Ukrainian diplomacy. In the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit, which saw Albania and Croatia welcomed to the NATO ranks, Ukraine failed to secure a Membership Action Plan (MAP).⁸⁴

Ukraine was granted a vague promise of eventual membership, with no concrete plan or

⁸¹ Elizabeth Piper, “Special Report: Why Ukraine Spurned the EU and Embraced Russia,” Reuters (Thomson Reuters, December 19, 2013), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-russia-deal-special-report/special-report-why-ukraine-spurned-the-eu-and-embraced-russia-idUSBRE9BI0DZ20131219>.

⁸² Nato, “Relations with Ukraine,” 2022; Piper, “Special Report: Why Ukraine Spurned the EU and Embraced Russia,” 2013.

⁸³ Andrey Kurkov, “Ukraine's Revolution: Making Sense of a Year of Chaos,” BBC News (BBC, November 21, 2014), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30131108>.

⁸⁴ Haring, “Why the Bucharest Summit Still Matters Ten Years On,” Atlantic Council, 2019.

prerequisites given to achieve that membership.⁸⁵ The US had backed full membership for Ukraine and Georgia, but Germany and France opposed the move out of concern about provoking Russia.⁸⁶ Why was Ukraine denied? Stephen Pifer, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution who specializes in US-European policy and security, identifies three primary reasons: “(1) the low level of public support in Ukraine for joining NATO; (2) the strained cohabitation between President Yushchenko and the presidential administration, on the one hand, and Prime Minister Tymoshenko and the cabinet, on the other; and (3) the possible Russian reaction.”⁸⁷ It seems that Ukraine’s commitment to NATO was undermined by its shaky public support for Ukrainian diplomacy and the shaky standing of its current government.

Domestic ambivalence continued as Ukrainians elected the Moscow-backed Yanukovych in the 2010 election on the promise of delivering stability and breaking the economic and political stagnation which had characterized the previous administration.⁸⁸ Yanukovych’s abandonment of EU negotiations sparked mass protests from the Ukrainian people, demanding partnership with the EU and rebuking state corruption.⁸⁹ A lack of clarity in the wishes of the Ukrainian people could not have inspired confidence in Western leaders that Ukraine would remain a reliable partner.

Domestic support is likely a significant factor in the kind of Western responses to Russia’s 2014 invasion of the Crimean peninsula. In a study of public opinion within Crimea, scholars John O’Loughlin and Gerard Toal detail the international condemnation and local

⁸⁵ “Bucharest Summit Declaration Issued by NATO Heads of State and Government (2008),” NATO, 2008, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm.

⁸⁶ “NATO Denies Georgia and Ukraine,” BBC News (BBC, April 3, 2008), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7328276.stm>.

⁸⁷ Steven Pifer, “Ukraine and NATO Following Bucharest,” Brookings (Brookings, July 28, 2016), <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/ukraine-and-nato-following-bucharest/>.

⁸⁸ Nataliya Jensen, “Ukraine after One Year of Yanukovych,” Wilson Center, 2011, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/ukraine-after-one-year-yanukovych>.

⁸⁹ Kurkov, “Ukraine’s Revolution: Making Sense of a Year of Chaos,” 2014.

legitimization of the Russian invasion, suggesting that this paradoxical “conundrum” is critical to understanding Russia’s success.⁹⁰ This research can be useful in understanding the outcome of the 2014 invasion—local legitimacy may again have undermined the efficacy of Ukraine’s calls for international support. The international community condemned the invasion as unlawful and the referendum on joining Crimea to Russia as illegitimate,⁹¹ yet responded with sanctions that proved relatively light and ineffective.⁹²

Overview of Outcomes

Democratic and International Norms

When adhering to the expectations set forth by the US and NATO, particularly those pertaining to international norms, Ukraine found success in securing commitments. Ukraine followed the US expectation of “respect for international law and obligations,” as stated by then-US Secretary of State James Baker, by surrendering its nuclear arsenal.⁹³ In these negotiations, Ukraine won security assurances through the Budapest Memorandum.⁹⁴ The relative success of this strategy can be attributed to the benefits of increased status, the structure of international law and the world order, and adherence to the explicitly stated goals of the partners (the US & NATO) Ukraine was trying to court.

Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine has further suggested that international law and norms are a mobilizing force in geopolitics.⁹⁵ In a speech on the eve of Russia’s invasion, Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky was explicit in contrasting Ukraine’s desire for peace with

⁹⁰ John O. Loughlin and Gerard Toal, “The Crimea Conundrum: Legitimacy and Public Opinion after Annexation,” *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 60, no. 1 (January 2, 2019): 6-27–27.

⁹¹ Jonathan Masters and John Bellinger, “Why the Crimean Referendum Is Illegitimate,” Council on Foreign Relations (Council on Foreign Relations, 2014), <https://www.cfr.org/interview/why-crimean-referendum-illegitimate>.

⁹² Rachel Treisman, “The U.S. Keeps Turning to Sanctions despite Their Mixed Record,” NPR (NPR, February 24, 2022), <https://www.npr.org/2022/02/24/1082902551/ukraine-russia-sanctions>.

⁹³ “The Collapse of the Soviet Union,” U.S. Department of State.

⁹⁴ Pifer, “Why Care about Ukraine and the Budapest Memorandum,” 2022.

⁹⁵ Dayal and Cronin-Furman, “Russia's Invasion Has Created Victims the World Recognizes,” 2022.

Russia's non-adherence to international norms.⁹⁶ In the months since the war began, Ukraine has been successful in securing military equipment and financial support.⁹⁷

Democratic norms have been less reliably effective in aiding Ukraine's diplomatic efforts. Ukraine's adherence to the Western value of nuclear non-proliferation may have been more important to its diplomatic success than its adherence to democratic norms. When asked if Ukrainian President Kravchuk had gone beyond his authority in negotiating nuclear disarmament, US President Clinton responded, "I think, you know, we have to let President Kravchuk make his own judgments about what he can and cannot do with his government."⁹⁸ This statement seems to indicate that the Clinton administration was less concerned about Kravchuk's usurpation of power and more concerned about a deal which aligned Ukraine with US goals. Despite its authoritarian tendencies,⁹⁹ the Kuchma administration was successful in securing enhanced partnerships like the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership in 1997.¹⁰⁰ When Ukraine showed signs of becoming more democratic, such as in the wake of the Orange Revolution under the leadership of Yushchenko, other factors prevented Ukraine from actualizing its goals of allying itself with the West—namely an ineffective government which lacked a firm public backing.¹⁰¹ Despite scholarship suggesting that adherence to democratic norms can earn nations geopolitically significant status as a "good state,"¹⁰² Ukraine's history suggests that international norms—the norms that served the US and its allies—matter much more than democratic norms in securing Western commitments.

⁹⁶ Volodymyr Zelensky, "Full Translation: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Feb. 23 Speech," Translated by Dominic Cruz Bustillos, Lawfare, 24 Feb. 2022, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/full-translation-ukrainian-president-volodymyr-zelenskyy-feb-23-speech>.

⁹⁷ Jonathan Masters, "Ukraine: Conflict at the Crossroads of Europe and Russia," 2022.

⁹⁸ "The President's News Conference with Visegrad Leaders in 1994," GovInfo, 1994, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/WCPD-1994-01-17/pdf/WCPD-1994-01-17-Pg41.pdf>.

⁹⁹ Sasse, "Constitution Making in Ukraine: Refocusing the Debate," 2016.

¹⁰⁰ Nato, "Relations with Ukraine," 2022.

¹⁰¹ Dickinson, "How Ukraine's Orange Revolution Shaped Twenty-First Century Geopolitics," 2020.

¹⁰² Renshon, "Fighting for status;" Ward, Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers.

Strategic Alignment

The candor and strength of Ukrainian alignment with the West has likely been a significant factor in the procurement of security agreements. The Kuchma administration was successful in achieving further alignment with NATO in the 1997 Charter on a distinctive partnership.¹⁰³ NATO did not agree to Ukraine's first attempt at securing this Charter, but in 1997, after Ukraine openly supported NATO enlargement, the Charter was accepted.¹⁰⁴ In response to Ukraine's unambiguous support of NATO policies, I suggest that NATO had more incentive to accept further alignment with Ukraine—not only as a reward for Ukraine's support, but also to avoid looking like an unreliable ally to other nations. This example suggests that when Ukraine aligns itself with the West, the West may align itself with Ukraine. We can contrast this with the Yanukovich years—when Ukraine's allegiances were not clearly with the West, no major agreements were advanced.¹⁰⁵ When Ukraine did not align itself with the West, the West did not respond with efforts to align itself with Ukraine.

But this point needs clarification, as it has not always proved true. The openly pro-Western Yushchenko government was not able to secure agreements from the West.¹⁰⁶ Thus it seems likely that alignment with the West is a condition needed for achieving security agreements, but not the only necessary condition.

Domestic Support

Ukraine's diplomatic success was limited when there was a known lack of domestic support for its international policies. In the Yushchenko years, despite adherence to democratic and international norms, and open alignment with the West, no security agreement was

¹⁰³ Bukkvoll, "Ukraine and NATO: The Politics of Soft Cooperation," 366.

¹⁰⁴ Bukkvoll, "Ukraine and NATO: The Politics of Soft Cooperation," 367-372.

¹⁰⁵ Elizabeth Piper, "Special Report: Why Ukraine Spurned the EU and Embraced Russia," 2013.

¹⁰⁶ Dickinson, "How Ukraine's Orange Revolution Shaped Twenty-First Century Geopolitics," 2020.

achieved.¹⁰⁷ These years were characterized by a disorganized government and a foreign policy which was not widely supported by the Ukrainian people;¹⁰⁸ the lack of domestic support proved consequential.

Local domestic legitimacy of Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea may have also been influential. People living in Crimea were not as aghast as was the international community at Russia's defiance of international law and norms.¹⁰⁹ Although Ukraine managed to procure international solidarity among Western nations, the actions taken by Western nations were not effective in reversing Russia's gains¹¹⁰ (nor were they effective in preventing another invasion by Russia in 2022).

The history of Ukrainian politics and diplomacy since independence has shown that adherence to international (Western) norms and expectations, open alignment with the West, and domestic support for the current administration and its foreign policy are all significant factors in securing security agreements with the US and NATO. Adherence to democratic norms may have a positive impact on Ukrainian diplomatic efforts but has shown less immediate significance when compared to these other factors.

Taiwan

Historical Context

Civil War and the ROC on Taiwan (1949-1979)

The US maintains security commitments to Taiwan with a long historical precedent.¹¹¹

When communist forces of the People's Republic of China (PRC) defeated the nationalist

¹⁰⁷ Dickinson, "How Ukraine's Orange Revolution Shaped Twenty-First Century Geopolitics," 2020.

¹⁰⁸ Pifer, "Ukraine and NATO Following Bucharest," 2016.

¹⁰⁹ O'Loughlin and Toal, "The Crimea Conundrum: Legitimacy and Public Opinion after Annexation," 2019.

¹¹⁰ Rachel Treisman, "The U.S. Keeps Turning to Sanctions despite Their Mixed Record," 2022.

¹¹¹ Richard Bush, "The United States Security Partnership with Taiwan," The Brookings Institution, 2016, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/fp_20160713_taiwan_alliance.pdf

Republic of China (ROC) in 1949, Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek retreated to Taiwan.¹¹² As the US created the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) to combat communism in the region, and debated signing a mutual defense agreement with the Nationalists in Taiwan, the PRC responded by shelling the islands of Jinmen, Dachen, and Mazu in the First Taiwan Straits Crisis.¹¹³ In light of this threat and a larger foreign policy objective of combating the spread of communism, the US continued to back Taiwan; in 1955, the two nations signed a mutual defense treaty, cementing the US' military commitments to defending the ROC.¹¹⁴ In the same year, the US congress passed the "Formosa Resolution," giving the president Congressional preauthorization to deploy troops to defend the islands of the Taiwan Strait.¹¹⁵

The PRC backed down, but this episode was repeated in 1958 when the mainland again bombarded these islands.¹¹⁶ The Eisenhower administration rejected the proposal of nuclear retaliation against the PRC,¹¹⁷ instead committing to directly supply Taiwanese garrisons.¹¹⁸ This led to a stalemate where for two decades, the PRC and ROC forces agreed to shell each other on opposite days.¹¹⁹

After a failed effort by the US to negotiate an agreement by which the ROC would maintain power in the UN, the ROC was officially replaced by the PRC at the UN and in the UN

¹¹² "The Chinese Revolution of 1949," U.S. Department of State (U.S. Department of State), accessed November 9, 2022, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/chinese-rev>.

¹¹³ "The Taiwan Straits Crises: 1954–55 and 1958," U.S. Department of State (U.S. Department of State), accessed November 9, 2022, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1953-1960/taiwan-strait-crises>.

¹¹⁴ "Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of China; December 2, 1954," Avalon Project (Lillian Goldman Law Library, 2008), https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/chin001.asp.

¹¹⁵ "JOINT RESOLUTION January 29, 1955," govinfo (United States Government Publishing Office), accessed November 9, 2022, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-69/pdf/STATUTE-69-Pg7.pdf>.

¹¹⁶ "The Taiwan Straits Crises: 1954–55 and 1958," U.S. Department of State, accessed 2022.

¹¹⁷ Anthony Kuhn and Emily Feng, "What 3 Past Taiwan Strait Crises Can Teach Us about U.S.-China Tensions Today," NPR (NPR, August 2, 2022), <https://www.npr.org/2022/08/02/1115234980/what-3-past-taiwan-strait-crises-can-teach-us-about-u-s-china-tensions-today>.

¹¹⁸ "The Taiwan Straits Crises: 1954–55 and 1958," U.S. Department of State, accessed 2022.

¹¹⁹ Kuhn and Feng, "What 3 Past Taiwan Strait Crises Can Teach Us about U.S.-China Tensions Today," 2022.

Security Council.¹²⁰ Beginning to normalize US-China relations, US president Richard Nixon traveled to China in 1972 and signed the Shanghai Communique, opening dialogue between the two countries over difficult issues including Taiwan.¹²¹ China affirmed its position that “the liberation of Taiwan is China's internal affair in which no other country has the right to interfere; and all US forces and military installations must be withdrawn from Taiwan.”¹²² Although some scholars argue the policy has roots in the Truman era (the 1950s),¹²³ the Nixon/Carter era of the 1970s can be described as the beginning of the US policy of strategic ambiguity—intentionally vague commitments with the object of neither provoking the PRC nor leaving Taiwan undefended.¹²⁴

Taiwan Relations Act & the Six Assurances (1979-1990)

In 1979, the US shifted official diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing with the “Taiwan Relations Act.” This act promised to provide Taiwan with arms, to regard any non-peaceful efforts at reunification with Taiwan as “a threat,” and “to maintain the capacity of the United States to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or the social or economic system, of the people on Taiwan.”¹²⁵ This allowed for commercial activity between Taiwan and the US, and laid out a promise to defend Taiwan without officially contravening the one-China policy.¹²⁶

¹²⁰ James Carter, “When the PRC Won the 'China' Seat at the UN,” The China Project, October 28, 2020, <https://thechinaproject.com/2020/10/21/when-the-prc-won-the-china-seat-at-the-un/>.

¹²¹ “Timeline: U.S.-China Relations,” Council on Foreign Relations (Council on Foreign Relations, 2022), <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-china-relations>.

¹²² “Joint Communique of the United States of America and the People's Republic of China (Shanghai Communique),” Joint communique of the United States of America and the People's Republic of China (shanghai communique), accessed November 12, 2022, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/china-us/26012.htm>.

¹²³ Richard Hu, “US Taiwan Strait Policy: The Origins of Strategic Ambiguity,” (2013): 290-292.

¹²⁴ “What Is America's Policy of ‘Strategic Ambiguity’ over Taiwan?,” The Economist (The Economist Newspaper, 2022), <https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2022/05/23/what-is-americas-policy-of-strategic-ambiguity-over-taiwan>.

¹²⁵ United States Congress, “Taiwan Relations Act,” 1979, <https://www.congress.gov/96/statute/STATUTE-93/STATUTE-93-Pg14.pdf>.

¹²⁶ “Timeline: U.S.-China Relations,” Council on Foreign Relations, 2022.

The Reagan Administration attempted to maintain normalized relations with the PRC, negotiating a joint communique with purposefully vague language. The US read the communique as linking reductions in arms sales to Taiwan to PRC commitments to peace, while the PRC emphasized US pledges to respect PRC sovereignty and reduce arms sales.¹²⁷ In response to these negotiations, in 1982 the Taiwanese government presented “Six Assurances” the US should use as guidelines for conducting US-Taiwan relations:¹²⁸

1. The United States would not set a date for termination of arms sales to Taiwan.
2. The United States would not alter the terms of the Taiwan Relations Act.
3. The United States would not consult with China in advance before making decisions about U.S. arms sales to Taiwan.
4. The United States would not mediate between Taiwan and China.
5. The United States would not alter its position about the sovereignty of Taiwan which was, that the question was one to be decided peacefully by the Chinese themselves, and would not pressure Taiwan to enter into negotiations with China.
6. The United States would not formally recognize Chinese sovereignty over Taiwan.

The US agreed to these assurances. The “Six Assurances,” in conjunction with the joint communique, the one-China policy, and the Taiwan-Relations act, make up the tangled framework of strategic ambiguity that defines US-China relations.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ “The August 17, 1982 U.S.-China Communiqué on Arms Sales to Taiwan,” U.S. Department of State (U.S. Department of State), accessed November 16, 2022, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1981-1988/china-communiqué>.

¹²⁸ “The ‘Six Assurances’ to Taiwan,” Taiwan Documents Project, accessed November 16, 2022, <http://www.taiwandocuments.org/assurances.htm>.

¹²⁹ “What Is America's Policy of ‘Strategic Ambiguity’ over Taiwan?,” The Economist, 2022.

Factors Influencing Western Support

My analysis of Taiwan's actions will begin in the early 1990s. At this point, a new world order was forming from the ashes of the Cold War,¹³⁰ the PRC was instituting trade reforms which brought it closer to the West,¹³¹ and Taiwan's government was implementing major democratizing changes.¹³² To establish how Taiwan as we currently know it can exercise influence in the current world order, the time frame of 1990-present day is most apt.

The three internal factors influencing the success of foreign policy—*Democratic Norms*, *Strategic Alignment*, and *Domestic Support*—were and are influential in Taiwan's foreign policy. In this section I will explain how and to what extent each of these factors is influential.

Democratic Norms

Emerging from a Cold-War era in which the US had embraced strongmen in Asia, the Clinton Administration made the promotion of democracy an express goal of its foreign policy.¹³³ Since the 1970s, Taiwan's economic development and growing political opposition had paved the way for democratic transition.¹³⁴ In 1987, the ruling Kuomintang (KMT) regime in Taiwan took major steps to guide the country towards democratic reform—opposition parties were legalized and martial law, in place since 1949, was lifted.¹³⁵ Consequently, Taiwan was well

¹³⁰ Muzaffer Ercan Yilmaz, "The New World Order?: An Outline of the Post-Cold War Era," *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations* 7, no. 4 (2008): 44-58.

¹³¹ Aaron Friedberg, "The future of US-China relations: Is conflict inevitable?," *International security* 30, no. 2 (2005): 16.

¹³² Reuters Staff, "Timeline: Taiwan's Road to Democracy," Reuters (Reuters, December 13, 2011), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-taiwan-election-timeline/timeline-taiwans-road-to-democracy-idUSTRE7BC0E320111213>.

¹³³ Micheal J. Green and Daniel Twining, "Democracy and American Grand Strategy in Asia: The Realist Principles Behind an Enduring Idealism," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 30, no. 1 (April 1, 2008): 5.

¹³⁴ Hung-Mao Tien and Chyuan-jeng Shiau, "Taiwan's Democratization: A Summary," *World Affairs* 155, no. 2 (January 1, 1992): 58-61, <https://search-ebscohost-com.avoserv2.library.fordham.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edshol&AN=edshol.hein.journals.wrldaf155.17&site=eds-live>.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

positioned to take advantage of the stated goals of the Clinton administration as it took office in 1993.

Lee Teng-hui (in office 1988-2000) defied PRC intimidation—months of missile tests and war games—to become Taiwan’s first democratically elected president in 1996.¹³⁶ The Clinton Administration reversed a 15-year practice against granting visas to Taiwanese leaders in authorizing then-President-Elect Lee Teng-hui, to visit the US.¹³⁷ Lee emphasized Taiwan’s democratic achievements in pursuing a more active foreign policy.¹³⁸

In 2000, the first transfer of party leadership occurred as the KMT party was defeated by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP).¹³⁹ From his inaugural speech in 2000, president Chen Shui-bian expressed his goal of turning Taiwan into Asia’s most democratic state.¹⁴⁰ President Chen called for the codification of international human rights standards into national legislation, and established an independent national human rights commission.¹⁴¹

Democratic values have not been uniformly championed. There were violent protests in the wake of the 2000 election.¹⁴² During his presidency from 2008-2016, Ma Ying-Jeou ended some of President Chen’s work towards human rights transparency, and emphasized economic

¹³⁶ Ben Blanchard and Yimou Lee, “Taiwan’s ‘Mr Democracy’ Lee Teng-Hui Championed Island, Defied China,” Reuters (Reuters, July 30, 2020), <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-taiwan-lee-obituary/taiwans-mr-democracy-lee-teng-hui-championed-island-defied-china-idUKKCN24V29C>.

¹³⁷ “Timeline: U.S.-China Relations,” Council on Foreign Relations, 2022.

¹³⁸ Christian Schafferer, “Taiwan’s Defensive Democratization,” *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 47, no. 1 (January 2020): 41–69. doi:10.1080/00927678.2020.1730041.

¹³⁹ Emerson Niou and Philip Paolino, “The rise of the opposition party in Taiwan: explaining Chen Shui-bian’s victory in the 2000 Presidential election,” *Electoral Studies* 22, no. 4 (2003): 721-740.

¹⁴⁰ “Chen Shui-Bian, ‘Taiwan Stands up: Presidential Inauguration Address,’ May 20, 2000,” USC Annenberg (USC US-China Institute, May 20, 2000), <https://china.usc.edu/chen-shui-bian-%E2%80%9Ctaiwan-stands-presidential-inauguration-address%E2%80%9D-may-20-2000>.

¹⁴¹ Christian Schafferer, “Consolidation of democracy and historical legacies: a case study of Taiwan,” *Journal of Contemporary Eastern Asia* 9, no. 1 (2010): 23-41.

¹⁴² “Violent Protests in Taiwan Follow Election Defeat,” *The New York Times* (The New York Times, March 20, 2000), <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/world/asia/032000taiwan-election.html>.

cooperation with mainland China over democratic norms.¹⁴³ Yet since the late 1980s, Taiwan has made steady progress towards becoming more democratic.¹⁴⁴

Strategic Alignment

For decades, the peace existing across the Taiwan Strait has been based on an accepted non-alignment.¹⁴⁵ Any official change in this policy could risk provoking Beijing. But subtle shifts, both to court support and to maintain this strategic ambiguity, have been executed by Taiwan in recent decades. This careful dance has allowed Taiwan to maintain its position as too great a risk for Beijing to invade while not threatening PRC legitimacy and provoking an attack.

The change of the 1990s demonstrated this careful non-alignment in the modern era. As Taiwan became more democratic and more active in its foreign policy roles in the late 1990s, president Lee gave up claims to represent China internationally, labeling his government “the Republic of China on Taiwan.”¹⁴⁶ This balancing act gave concessions to China by negating ROC symbolic independence while allowing Taiwan to pursue more practical power and influence.

Even with this careful, ambiguous policy, the Lee and Chen presidencies were seen by some, on both sides of the strait, as too explicitly friendly with the West. Throughout his tenure (2008-2016), president Ma Ying-Jeou called for more cooperation with mainland China and openly accepted the contentious “1992 consensus”¹⁴⁷ (an agreement between the PRC and Taiwan’s KMT party on the existence of only “one China”).¹⁴⁸ Ma’s policy was designed to

¹⁴³ Schafferer, “Taiwan’s Defensive Democratization.”

¹⁴⁴ “Timeline: U.S.-China Relations,” Council on Foreign Relations, 2022.

¹⁴⁵ J. C. Chang, *US Policy Toward Taiwan* (Doctoral dissertation, Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University), 2001.

¹⁴⁶ Schafferer, “Taiwan’s Defensive Democratization,” 2020.

¹⁴⁷ Kaocheng Wang, “Taiwan’s Diplomatic Policy under the MA Ying-Jeou Administration” (Tamkang University, n.d.), accessed 2022.

¹⁴⁸ Derek Grossman and Brandon Alexander Millan, “Taiwan's KMT May Have a Serious '1992 Consensus' Problem,” RAND Corporation, September 25, 2020, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2020/09/taiwans-kmt-may-have-a-serious-1992-consensus-problem.html>.

reduce tension across the strait by creating a “diplomatic truce” between mainland China and Taiwan.¹⁴⁹ Despite diplomatic concessions toward China, the government’s defense policy remained reliant on a strong military, and Ma pressured the US to sell modern arms to Taiwan.¹⁵⁰

While ambiguity is still a feature of cross-strait relations, Taiwan is moving towards more explicitly aligning itself with the West. The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), in power since January 2016, has taken a more defiant stance towards Beijing, and has rejected the 1992 consensus.¹⁵¹ In a 2020 interview with the BBC, Taiwan’s president Tsai Ing-Wen stated, “The ambiguity can no longer serve the purposes it was intended to serve.”¹⁵² She goes on to reference a growing spirit of independence¹⁵³ in Taiwan: “We don't have a need to declare ourselves an independent state. We are an independent country already and we call ourselves the Republic of China (Taiwan)... We have a separate identity and we're a country of our own.” After these strong words, she was careful to clarify: “But [for] more than three years, we have been telling China that maintaining a status quo remains our policy... I think that is a very friendly gesture to China.”¹⁵⁴ On the one hand, it seems Taiwanese leadership is advocating for a change in the status quo with an end to ambiguity. But Tsai’s desire to end ambiguity is not a desire for a change in policy; she is unambiguous in her goal of maintaining the official status quo. Her strong words of independence can be read as a response to increased Chinese military activity.

¹⁴⁹ Wang, “Taiwan’s Diplomatic Policy under the MA Ying-Jeou Administration,” 1-2.

¹⁵⁰ Fu S. Mei, “Taiwan's Defense Transformation and Challenges under Ma Ying-Jeou,” Jamestown, September 18, 2016, <https://jamestown.org/program/taiwans-defense-transformation-and-challenges-under-ma-ying-jeou/>.

¹⁵¹ Grossman and Millan, “Taiwan's KMT May Have a Serious '1992 Consensus' Problem,” 2020.

¹⁵² John Sudworth, “China Needs to Show Taiwan Respect, Says President,” BBC News, BBC, January 14, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-51104246>.

¹⁵³ Dennis V. Hickey, “More and More Taiwanese Favor Independence – and Think the US Would Help Fight for It,” – The Diplomat. for The Diplomat, December 3, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/12/more-and-more-taiwanese-favor-independence-and-think-the-us-would-help-fight-for-it/>.

¹⁵⁴ Sudworth, “China Needs to Show Taiwan Respect, Says President,” 2020.

President Tsai’s cautiously-bold speech is consistent with Taiwan’s policies more broadly in recent years. During her presidency, Taiwan has ramped up its diplomatic efforts with foreign nations, spending more on its foreign ministry, taking more meetings with foreign ambassadors, and publicizing meetings with Western leaders at every opportunity.¹⁵⁵ Simultaneously, president Tsai has consistently downplayed the role of the US in Taiwan’s defense, advocating allocating more resources so that Taiwan is able to defend itself in the event of an attack.¹⁵⁶

Domestic Support

Domestic opinion in Taiwan has largely been in line with the cautious ambiguity described above. Comprehensive polling administered since 1994 by the Election Studies Center of National Chengchi University shows that a majority of Taiwan’s population typically favors a policy to either “maintain the status quo, decide at a later date” or “maintain the status quo indefinitely.”¹⁵⁷ The percentage of citizens who favor independence “as soon as possible” has never risen above 7.8%, while citizens favoring reunification “as soon as possible” has never risen above 4.4%.¹⁵⁸

Domestic opinion also shows an approval for democratic institutions. Beginning with an electoral rebuke of mainland China’s intimidation in the 1996 presidential elections, Taiwanese

¹⁵⁵ Damien Cave and Amy Chang Chien, “How Taiwan's 'Adorable' and Ambitious Diplomacy Aims to Keep the Island Safe,” *The New York Times* (*The New York Times*, October 20, 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/20/world/asia/taiwan-diplomacy-china.html>.

¹⁵⁶ Shelley Rigger et al., “How Are People Feeling in the ‘Most Dangerous Place on Earth’?” *Brookings* (*Brookings*, March 9, 2022), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/10/13/how-are-people-feeling-in-the-most-dangerous-place-on-earth/>.

¹⁵⁷ “Taiwan Independence vs. Unification with the Mainland(1994/12~2022/06),” *Election Study Center, National Chengchi University* (*National Chengchi University*, 2022), <https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/PageDoc/Detail?fid=7801&id=6963>.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

voters have signaled support for democracy.¹⁵⁹ A recent poll found 74.5% of people in Taiwan support continued efforts to better the legal system and strengthen democracy.¹⁶⁰

There is some evidence that domestic opinion in Taiwan is changing, but public opinion remains nuanced. A growing number of Taiwanese see Taiwan as an independent nation. Still, “a plurality of respondents (46 percent as compared to 57 percent in 2019) continue to support the ‘one China, different interpretations’ formula.” In spite of a growing number of Taiwanese citizens favoring decreased trade relations with the PRC, polling indicates that “a plurality of Taiwanese—40.2 percent—still favor strengthening economic and trade relations with the mainland.”¹⁶¹

The PRC’s repression of democracy in Hong-Kong has demonstrated the dangers of negotiating with Beijing.¹⁶² Taiwanese citizens have become more skeptical of a “one-country-two-systems” articulation of cross-strait relations, given the outcome of a similar model in Hong Kong.¹⁶³ Over 80% of the public support the steps the current (DPP) government has taken to enhance Taiwan's self-defense ability in the face of political and military pressures from the mainland.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁹ Patrick E. Tyler, “Taiwan's Leader Wins Its Election and a Mandate,” *The New York Times* (*The New York Times*, March 24, 1996), <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/03/24/world/taiwan-s-leader-wins-its-election-and-a-mandate.html>.

¹⁶⁰ “Summarized Results of the Public Opinion Survey on the ‘Public's View on Current Cross-Strait Relations’” (National Chengchi University, 2020), <https://ws.mac.gov.tw/001/Upload/297/refile/8010/6003/d204fc4f-e2be-42a0-9269-db78d1c22dfb.pdf>, 4.

¹⁶¹ Hickey, “More and More Taiwanese Favor Independence – and Think the US Would Help Fight for It.”

¹⁶² Lindsay Maizland, “Hong Kong's Freedoms: What China Promised and How It's Cracking Down,” *Council on Foreign Relations* (Council on Foreign Relations, 2022), <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/hong-kong-freedoms-democracy-protests-china-crackdown#chapter-title-0-4>.

¹⁶³ “Summarized Results of the Public Opinion Survey on the ‘Public's View on Current Cross-Strait Relations’,” National Chengchi University.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 4.

Overview of Outcomes

Democratic Norms

Reliance on democratic norms has reliably helped Taiwan to position itself as a Western ally. While the ROC held strong defensive commitments from the US long before Taiwan democratized,¹⁶⁵ Taiwan's democratic reforms have allowed the island to appeal to Western countries as more than simply an ally of convenience.¹⁶⁶ Take Taiwan's first democratic presidential election, for example—in 1996, the Clinton Administration reversed a 15 year practice against granting visas to Taiwanese leaders to allow a visit from then-president-elect Lee Teng-hui.¹⁶⁷ In response to missile tests and threats by the PRC (the third Taiwan strait crisis), the Clinton Administration sent two aircraft carrier battle groups to the Taiwan Strait; Lee was democratically elected and the PRC did not invade.¹⁶⁸ Lee used his visit to the US to promote the narrative of a democratic Taiwan seeking recognition and engagement with the international community.¹⁶⁹

To what extent can we credit Taiwan's democratization for its foreign policy successes? This is a difficult question to answer with certainty, but it is possible to examine US interests and how Taiwan's democratization serves the US's stated goals. Democracy has remained a pillar of US foreign policy in the Asia-Pacific. Despite questions around the efficacy of a US foreign policy promoting democracy—which were prevalent in the wake of the second Iraq war—democratic norms have remained a key goal of US strategy in the region.¹⁷⁰ Shared democratic values, respect of a rules based system, and projection of soft-power all contribute to

¹⁶⁵ Bush, "The United States Security Partnership with Taiwan."

¹⁶⁶ Green and Twining, "Democracy and American Grand Strategy in Asia: The Realist Principles Behind an Enduring Idealism," 22-23.

¹⁶⁷ "Timeline: U.S.-China Relations," Council on Foreign Relations, 2022.

¹⁶⁸ Kuhn and Feng, "What 3 Past Taiwan Strait Crises Can Teach Us about U.s.-China Tensions Today," 2022.

¹⁶⁹ Schafferer, "Taiwan's Defensive Democratization," 2020.

¹⁷⁰ Green and Twining, "Democracy and American Grand Strategy in Asia: The Realist Principles Behind an Enduring Idealism."

an enduring US strategic interest in democracy;¹⁷¹ this interest is manifest in the Asia-Pacific, where strong democratic ideas and institutions have developed in Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, India, and Australia.¹⁷²

In spite of threats from mainland China, Taiwan was able to democratize without provoking an attack. Meanwhile, Taiwan has retained US public support, and has continued to secure the sale of advanced weaponry to bolster its defense capabilities.¹⁷³

Strategic Alignment

The guiding principle of Taiwan's foreign policy has been non-alignment. While Taiwan has strategic, economic, and political interests which make it a practical partner of the West,¹⁷⁴ its contentious status as a part of China creates the need for the ROC to avoid making statements which might provoke Beijing.¹⁷⁵ Beijing maintains Taiwan is a part of China, and Taiwan has strong economic ties with the mainland.¹⁷⁶ Maintaining this paradigm, Taiwan has managed to advance its own power and influence.

The Lee presidency accomplished this careful non-alignment by conceding the ROC's claims to official international recognition as Taiwan advanced its practical diplomatic influence.¹⁷⁷ This careful give-and-take is mirrored in US legislation concerning China, such as the US China Relations Act of 2000. This legislation normalized trade relations with Beijing and paved the way for the PRC's entry into the WTO.¹⁷⁸ The language of this bill explicitly links the

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 22-23.

¹⁷² Ibid, 21.

¹⁷³ "Factbox: U.S. Arms Sales to Taiwan in Past Decade," Reuters (Reuters, June 6, 2019), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-taiwan-china-defence-factbox/factbox-u-s-arms-sales-to-taiwan-in-past-decade-idUSKCN1T717N>.

¹⁷⁴ Green and Twining, "Democracy and American Grand Strategy in Asia: The Realist Principles Behind an Enduring Idealism."

¹⁷⁵ Chang, US Policy Toward Taiwan.

¹⁷⁶ Lindsay Maizland, "Why China-Taiwan Relations Are So Tense," Council on Foreign Relations (Council on Foreign Relations, 2022), <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-taiwan-relations-tension-us-policy-biden>.

¹⁷⁷ Schafferer, "Taiwan's Defensive Democratization."

¹⁷⁸ "Timeline: U.S.-China Relations," Council on Foreign Relations.

PRC's accession to the WTO with the nomination and approval of Taiwan as a WTO member.¹⁷⁹

As the US-PRC relationship strengthened, the US ensured Taiwan's status as a trade partner without referring to Taiwan by "state," "nation," or any other terminology that might have provoked Beijing.

During the Ma Ying-Jeou presidency (2008-2016), Taiwan aimed to improve diplomatic and economic relations with China by limiting contentious efforts to court international recognition.¹⁸⁰ Still, Taiwan's defense objectives and successes throughout this period were consistent. President Ma endeavored to modernize Taiwan's military, and pressured the Obama administration to provide modern weaponry such as F-16 fighter planes.¹⁸¹ Despite Ma's diplomatic posturing towards the mainland, Taiwan secured consistent arms sales from the United States, including modern frigates and F-16s.¹⁸² It seems that Taiwan's success in securing its defense is less a consequence of the specific policies of any one administration, and more a result of its intentional positioning as a non-threat to China while garnering practical support from the US.

In recent years, Tsai Ing-Wen and the DPP have been more explicit in describing Taiwan as independent, as well as resisting mainland aggression.¹⁸³ Yet Taiwan continues to frame its power not in terms of its alliances with the West—even if, in reality, the importance of these alliances is hard to dispute—but in its own independent identity and ability to defend itself. This image of Taiwan fits better with the PRC's long standing idea that the Taiwan issue is between

¹⁷⁹ "Text - H.R.4444 - 106th Congress (1999-2000)," Congress.gov, 2000, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/106th-congress/house-bill/4444/text>.

¹⁸⁰ Wang, "Taiwan's Diplomatic Policy under the MA Ying-Jeou Administration."

¹⁸¹ Mei, "Taiwan's Defense Transformation and Challenges under Ma Ying-Jeou."

¹⁸² "Factbox: U.S. Arms Sales to Taiwan in Past Decade," Reuters.

¹⁸³ Sudworth, "China Needs to Show Taiwan Respect, Says President."

China and Taiwan alone.¹⁸⁴ In this way, Taiwan may be better able to grow more powerful without creating an issue between the US and China.

Domestic Support

Domestic support within Taiwan has largely been in line with Taiwan's cautious approach to questions of independence.¹⁸⁵ Taiwanese largely support and wish to protect democracy,¹⁸⁶ and are not in favor of rapid changes in their relationship to the mainland.¹⁸⁷ As public opinion has largely been in line with foreign policy decisions, and thanks to the strength of Taiwan's democracy, there is no evidence that Taiwanese public opinion has been a major limiting factor in the success of Taiwan in securing defense objectives.

There are, however, some areas where domestic support has limited the policy options of Taiwanese parties. Polling indicates that Beijing's view of the 1992 consensus is wildly unpopular, meaning that the KMT platform—of openly accepting the 1992 consensus—undermines the KMT's electoral chances and the legitimacy of such a proclamation were the KMT to win control of the government.¹⁸⁸

Analysis: Comparing the Strategies and Outcomes of Ukraine & Taiwan

Historical Context - Taiwan and Ukraine Compared

The histories of Ukraine and Taiwan have important similarities. Both have a long history of violent action by a large, aggressive neighbor. Ukraine faced Russification and Soviet repression for decades, including a deadly manufactured famine.¹⁸⁹ The Republic of China on

¹⁸⁴ "Joint Communique of the United States of America and the People's Republic of China (Shanghai Communique)," accessed 2022.

¹⁸⁵ "Taiwan Independence vs. Unification with the Mainland(1994/12~2022/06)," Election Study Center, National Chengchi University (National Chengchi University, 2022), <https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/PageDoc/Detail?fid=7801&id=6963>.

¹⁸⁶ "Summarized Results of the Public Opinion Survey on the 'Public's View on Current Cross-Strait Relations,'" National Chengchi University.

¹⁸⁷ "Taiwan Independence vs. Unification with the Mainland(1994/12~2022/06)," Election Study Center.

¹⁸⁸ Grossman and Millan, "Taiwan's KMT May Have a Serious '1992 Consensus' Problem."

¹⁸⁹ "Holodomor," College of Liberal Arts (University of Minnesota).

Taiwan has been threatened by a more powerful mainland China since its retreat to the island in 1949.¹⁹⁰ The Taiwan Strait crises and PRC threats have been a fixture of Taiwan's security situation for decades.¹⁹¹

There are, however, important differences to note. While both states were born out of a larger nation, the ROC has been independent of mainland China since 1949,¹⁹² while Ukraine only gained independence in 1991.¹⁹³ Ukraine's status as an independent state is widely recognized by the international community.¹⁹⁴ Taiwan has not been officially recognized by the US or much of the international community for decades.¹⁹⁵ Prior to independence, Ukraine was a member of the Soviet Union, and as such a longtime rival of the US.¹⁹⁶ Taiwan has a long history of partnership and security from the US.¹⁹⁷ These factors may contribute to some of the differences we see in the strategic alignment of Taiwan and Ukraine. These factors almost certainly contribute to the differences between Ukraine and Taiwan in the relative importance of international and democratic norms in their diplomatic efforts.

Factors & Outcomes

Democratic & International Norms

Where Ukraine has been more active in leveraging international law and norms to its advantage,¹⁹⁸ Taiwan has largely avoided references to international law in its policy.¹⁹⁹ What might explain this difference? The realpolitik of international law poses challenges for Taiwan.

¹⁹⁰ "The Chinese Revolution of 1949," U.S. Department of State.

¹⁹¹ Kuhn and Feng, "What 3 Past Taiwan Strait Crises Can Teach Us about U.s.-China Tensions Today," 2022.

¹⁹² "The Chinese Revolution of 1949," U.S. Department of State.

¹⁹³ Council on Foreign Relations, "A Historical Timeline of Post-Independence Ukraine."

¹⁹⁴ Dayal and Cronin-Furman, "Russia's Invasion Has Created Victims the World Recognizes."

¹⁹⁵ Carter, "When the PRC Won the 'China' Seat at the UN;" United States Congress, "Taiwan Relations Act."

¹⁹⁶ Council on Foreign Relations, "A Historical Timeline of Post-Independence Ukraine."

¹⁹⁷ Richard Bush, "The United States Security Partnership with Taiwan," The Brookings Institution, 2016,

https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/fp_20160713_taiwan_alliance.pdf.

¹⁹⁸ Dayal and Cronin-Furman, "Russia's Invasion Has Created Victims the World Recognizes."

¹⁹⁹ Schafferer, "Taiwan's Defensive Democratization."

On one hand, Taiwan's legal status as a quasi-independent state²⁰⁰ is more precarious than that of Ukraine. Yet on the other hand, the US maintains security commitments to Taiwan with a long historical precedent.²⁰¹ Thus Taiwan gains less by referencing international law, but may gain more support among the US public by highlighting its commitment to democratic values.²⁰² Yet Ukraine, which is recognized internationally, has been able to contrast itself with Russia's non-adherence to international norms in the wake of the 2022 invasion. Given the liberal world order's commitment to upholding legal norms,²⁰³ Ukraine has garnered international solidarity and substantial military support using this strategy.²⁰⁴

Ukraine and Taiwan also differ in the effectiveness of adherence to democratic norms in securing diplomatic objectives. Ukraine's adherence to democratic norms has not been effective compared to other factors. Governments which reversed some democratic trends and exhibited authoritarian tendencies, such as the Kuchma Administration,²⁰⁵ were successful in securing enhanced security partnership with the United States (in this case, the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership in 1997).²⁰⁶ The reformist government of Yushchenko was not effective in securing further alignment with the West in spite of its democratic principles.²⁰⁷ This breaks with the guidance of existing research, which indicates states can gain power by gaining status as a "good state" in the eyes of the liberal world order.²⁰⁸ Why was being a "good" and democratic state less effective in Ukraine than previously hypothesized? In the case of the Yushchenko government,

²⁰⁰Li Kua-teng "What Is Taiwan's Legal Status According to International Law, Japan, and the US?," The News Lens, December 2, 2019, <https://international.thenewslens.com/feature/taiwan-for-sale-2020/128242>

²⁰¹ Richard Bush, "The United States Security Partnership with Taiwan."

²⁰² Green and Twining, "Democracy and American Grand Strategy in Asia: The Realist Principles Behind an Enduring Idealism;" Hickey, "More and More Taiwanese Favor Independence – and Think the US Would Help Fight for It."

²⁰³ Dayal and Cronin-Furman, "Russia's Invasion Has Created Victims the World Recognizes."

²⁰⁴ Jonathan Masters, "Ukraine: Conflict at the Crossroads of Europe and Russia;" Volodymyr Zelensky, "Full Translation: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Feb. 23 Speech."

²⁰⁵ Sasse, "Constitution Making in Ukraine: Refocusing the Debate."

²⁰⁶ Nato, "Relations with Ukraine," 2022.

²⁰⁷ Dickinson, "How Ukraine's Orange Revolution Shaped Twenty-First Century Geopolitics."

²⁰⁸ Renshon, "Fighting for status;" Ward, Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers.

political gridlock cost the Administration domestic support.²⁰⁹ What is more, Yushchenko's foreign policy was not in line with the opinions of the broader Russian population.²¹⁰ When domestic support is not present, states may cease to realize the benefits of status vis-a-vis democratic norms.

In contrast, Taiwan's foreign policy initiatives have often referenced democratic norms to some apparent success. Taiwan's democratic reforms have made the state an asset to US Asia-Pacific policy championing the promotion of democracy.²¹¹ The effectiveness of this was most evident in the third Taiwan strait crisis, when the PRC threatened Taiwan with missile tests in response to a democratic presidential election; the US showed robust support for Taiwan's democratization by sending two aircraft carrier battle groups to the strait.²¹²

Strategic Alignment

A major difference is evident when examining the strategic alignment efforts of Ukraine compared to those of Taiwan. While Ukraine has sought to align itself with the West with the goal of winning firmer commitments, Taiwan's strategy has been to employ an ambiguity in its statements of official alignment even as it ensures practical alliances with the United States. Both have shown some success. Ukraine has secured commitments when publicly aligning itself with Western objectives, such as when Ukraine secured the 1997 Charter on a Distinctive Partnership only after supporting NATO enlargement and more actively aligning itself with the West.²¹³

Taiwan has secured consistent sales of modern weaponry from the United States in the face of

²⁰⁹ Richard Balmforth, "Where Did Ukraine's Yushchenko Go Wrong?," Reuters (Thomson Reuters, January 11, 2010), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-election-yushchenko/where-did-ukraines-yushchenko-go-wrong-idUSTR E60A2ZM20100111>.

²¹⁰ Pifer, "Ukraine and NATO Following Bucharest."

²¹¹ Green and Twining, "Democracy and American Grand Strategy in Asia: The Realist Principles Behind an Enduring Idealism," 22-23.

²¹² Kuhn and Feng, "What 3 Past Taiwan Strait Crises Can Teach Us about U.s.-China Tensions Today."

²¹³ Bukkvoll, "Ukraine and NATO: The Politics of Soft Cooperation," 367-372.

PRC threats while consistently framing its goal as self-defense (rather than further political partnership with the United States).

This difference in strategy is likely due to the differences in Ukraine and Taiwan's international status. As previously noted, the pseudo-independent nature of Taiwan's existence necessitates a more cautious approach in the rhetoric of Taiwanese leadership, and a more nuanced diplomatic strategy. Additionally, the ROC has been strategically aligned with the US for as long as the PRC has existed, making public declarations of alignment less necessary for Taiwan. Ukraine's status as an independent nation may have emboldened Ukrainian leaders to take more risks, as well as creating more incentives for the US to agree to Ukrainian proposals in response to Ukrainian alignment.

I would be remiss not to address the obvious difference in outcome between Ukraine and Taiwan at this time. Ukraine has been invaded by Russia, while Taiwan—despite ever-present and increasing threats from PRC leadership—is at peace and has full control of its territory. These different approaches to strategic alignment may well have played a role in these different outcomes. I find too many differences in the histories and circumstances of each state to say for certain that this was a major causal factor, but neither do I find reason to discount the possibility. It may well be that Ukraine's unambiguous strategic alignment with the West was a miscalculation, inspiring a threatened Russia to lash out, as some scholars have suggested.²¹⁴ This topic merits further investigation.

Still, it is fair to say that Ukraine and Taiwan have employed different strategies in regards to official statements of alignment, and each strategy has shown some success. It seems unlikely that either nation could have successfully employed the other's strategy given their

²¹⁴ Chotiner, "Why John Mearsheimer Blames the U.S. for the Crisis in Ukraine;" Marten, "NATO enlargement: evaluating its consequences in Russia," *International Politics* 57, no. 3 (2020): 401-426.

different circumstances. Taiwan's strategy of ambiguity may be a lesson to states whose national status is unclear; Ukraine's clear alignment may be a cautionary tale or an inspiration for smaller nations, depending on how one interprets the facts (and depending on the outcome of the current war).

Domestic Support

The lessons we can gather from Ukraine and Taiwan in regard to domestic support are not dissimilar, but Ukraine provides much more evidence for the power of domestic opinion in the success or failure of a smaller nation in achieving security agreements. Ukraine's history since independence shows that lack of domestic support can be an important limiting factor when public opinion is not in line with diplomatic objectives. As previously noted, the Yushchenko Administration was ineffective due to political gridlock and domestic opinion which was more nuanced—read “pro Russian”—than Yushchenko's foreign policy goals.²¹⁵ Similarly, support for Russia within Crimea was not insignificant; this support may have helped legitimize the 2014 invasion and undermined the Ukrainian government's attempts to secure international support.²¹⁶ Ukraine managed to garner international solidarity and sanctions from Western nations, but no response significant enough to reverse Russia's gains²¹⁷ (nor prevent another invasion by Russia in 2022).

Taiwan's history provides fewer points from which to draw conclusions on this matter, as Taiwanese foreign policy has largely been in line with Taiwanese public opinion.²¹⁸ This in itself is telling, as Taiwan's diplomacy has not been limited by domestic opinion in the manner observed in Ukraine.

²¹⁵ Balmforth, “Where Did Ukraine's Yushchenko Go Wrong?”

²¹⁶ O'Loughlin and Toal, “The Crimea Conundrum: Legitimacy and Public Opinion after Annexation,” 2019.

²¹⁷ Treisman, “The U.S. Keeps Turning to Sanctions despite Their Mixed Record.”

²¹⁸ “Taiwan Independence vs. Unification with the Mainland(1994/12~2022/06),” National Chengchi University.

Conclusions

In examining how factors internal to Ukraine and Taiwan impact their success in achieving security partnerships with the United States, I find that Ukraine and Taiwan have been successful by employing different strategies. I argue that Ukraine and Taiwan find diplomatic success by emphasizing distinct norms and employing distinct messaging around strategic alignment, while domestic support is a prerequisite for diplomatic success in both cases. This argument is based on three basic findings: First, while Ukraine has rallied US support by emphasizing international norms, and has had inconsistent success when upholding democratic norms, Taiwan has secured military defense and weapons sales while democratizing and promoting its democratic values internationally. Second, while Ukraine found some success in securing commitments from the US by openly conveying its strategic alignment with NATO, Europe, and the US—with the obvious caveat that Ukraine failed to secure a strong enough commitment to prevent Russian invasion—Taiwan’s diplomatic success and security was contingent upon not appearing to align itself more closely with the West. Third, in both cases, domestic support for foreign policy objectives was of benefit to the realization of those objectives. At some points in Ukraine’s history, when at times public opinion was not in support of the current administration and its foreign policy, the US was more hesitant to increase its partnership.

The three-decade timescale of this research was chosen so that these conclusions are more sound, and not unduly impacted by the specific characteristics of any one administration or world event. To conclude anything about the relative importance and efficacy of the factors discussed it was necessary to examine how they operated over the course of several administrations. The result of this is stronger conclusions but conclusions with limitations—they

speaking less to the modern issues faced by Ukraine and Taiwan. An in-depth examination of the foreign policy strategies of current administrations in Ukraine and Taiwan could yield results which might be more relevant to short term policy decisions and further enhance our understanding of an ever-changing geopolitical landscape.

My analysis is focused specifically on outcomes in terms of US commitments to Taiwan and Ukraine. This focus was chosen because the US is a major defense partner of both states, as well as the leader of the liberal world order under which appeals to democratic and international norms are made. Though we might expect the rest of the liberal world to adopt a similar approach to the US, not every country has the same concerns and motivations. Further research is needed to clarify how the factors identified here affect Ukraine and Taiwan's success in securing commitments from EU countries and other regional powers. How did Ukraine and Taiwan's strategic alignment with Europe differ, both in application and in its consequences? Domestic support of pro EU-policies, especially in the case of Ukraine, may well have had different implications than pro-US policies.

Here I provided new insights into the diplomacy of smaller states. An in-depth look at the actions and outcomes of Ukraine and Taiwan should shed more light on what kind of strategies are being employed by smaller states, and what strategies are more and less effective. Moreover, by comparing what has been effective and ineffective in Ukraine with similar factors in Taiwan, we can gather insights as to how different circumstances might impact the actions and efficacy of smaller-state foreign policy. It is my hope that this paper contributes to the discussion of the agency of smaller states in international relations, particularly states who can leverage their status as geopolitical flashpoints.

I claimed that Ukraine and Taiwan are representative of a unique type of state in their status as flashpoints in international relations, and thus face unique challenges and unique opportunities to leverage that status into increased influence. These challenges and opportunities were particularly evident in the distinct approaches to strategic alignment adopted by each state. While Taiwan's status as a flashpoint seemed to necessitate its non-alignment, Ukraine has occasionally leveraged its flashpoint status when openly aligning itself with the West, creating a greater incentive for NATO and the US to reward strategic alignment. While my research did not solve the question on when and how strategic alignment is effective, it did illustrate two cases in which different approaches to alignment can be effective in different ways, in addition to detailing the historical context precipitating these distinct approaches.

These findings should inform how scholars understand the cost/benefit analysis smaller states make regarding strategic alignment, when and how an adherence to democratic and international norms can empower states, and the importance of considering domestic public opinion as a relevant factor in geopolitics. If we are better aware of how smaller states win Western support, we can better understand the dynamics of small state diplomacy and US foreign policy. As we develop a better understanding of how flashpoints—states at the crux of geopolitical conflict—navigate the consequences of strategic alignment and diplomatic messaging, we can appreciate the nuances inherent to each geopolitical dispute. A greater understanding of the factors contributing to the outcomes of geopolitical tensions can only help leaders around the globe to respond more sensibly to threats, react more carefully to changes, and craft better foreign policy.

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