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**WAR AND REALIGNMENT: HOW HAS
THE UKRAINE CONFLICT TRANSFORMED NATO
AND THE GLOBAL POWER LANDSCAPE**

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Introduction

The post-Cold War international order, once dominated by the United States, is now prone to disruptions by emerging non-Western actors and the resurgence of great-power competition. This article explains how the invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022 led to the realignment of

NATO and the reorganization of the global power landscape. To achieve this goal, three empirical questions arise: Q1. What was NATO's immediate response to the invasion? Q2. How has NATO adapted and realigned its strategic stance? Q3. How has the conflict led to a global power redistribution, marked by a shift towards multipolarity?

Methodology

This study utilizes a qualitative case-study paired with process-tracing to indicate causal sequences from the invasion to the alliance's adaptation and global realignment. The findings are drawn from official document (NATO summit declarations, defense expenditure reports), and institutional analyses (SIPRI, Atlantic Council, Reuters etc.).

NATO's immediate response

This conflict with its subsequent developments serves as a good example of the resurgence of neoclassical realist interpretation of world politics. Neoclassical realism combines structural and classical realism, which claims that the global distribution of power coupled with domestic factors directly influence state behavior. Foreign policy-making is thus a result of leadership viewpoints, public perception, political structures, cultural practices and a state's strategic interests [1, p. 4]. Since no state can predict another state's future actions and intentions, it will constantly seek to secure and guarantee its security and survival. Following this thread, realists will rationalize Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a pre-emptive attempt to counter what it perceived as a rising strategic threat [2].

NATO rapidly adapted to Ukraine's invasion—being a direct threat to European security—by mobilizing and deploying for the first time its NATO Response Force (NRF) to actively defend its Eastern flank [3]. Since then NATO has convened five major summits: an Extraordinary Summit at NATO Headquarters in Brussels (March 2022), one in Madrid (June 2022), Vilnius (2023), Washington (2024) and the Hague (2025). Major decisions have been taken during these summits: adopting a new 'Strategic Concept', committing to support Ukraine, reaffirming collective defense as mentioned in Article 5, formal membership application by Finland and Sweden (June 2022), creating the NATO-Ukraine Council, further increasing NATO's defense budget and investments (2023), establishing 'NATO's Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine (NSATU)' unit (2024), raising the defense-spending goal to 5% by 2035 (2025) [4]. These actions exemplify the neoclassical realist logic: external pressures demand action; yet due to NATO's internal dynamics, risk-minimizing, and political vigilance, the degree of the Alliance's reaction was limited.

NATO's Adaptation and Strategic Realignment

The invasion of Ukraine prompted NATO's notable strategic adjustment, combining both balancing decisions with institutional changes to systemic threats. With the adoption of the new 'Strategic Concept', it shifted from

crisis management to robust collective defense—with over 40,000 troops being stationed across the Eastern border and the expansion of NRF forces to 300,000 troops on high readiness. Additionally, Finland (2023) and Sweden (2024) joined NATO, which further expanded the Alliance's borders [5]. At the same time, NATO's defense budget increased to \$1.5 trillion in 2024—relatively 55% of worldwide military spending—with 23 of 32 members reaching the 2% target [6]. Despite the alliance's unifying front, there have been some internal limitations. From Hungary postponing Sweden's membership and opposing sanctions on Russia, to Spain refusing to increase its military spending and Turkey's transactional diplomacy; show how national goals trump collective objectives. These discrepancies come from domestic political elements, which influence how states perceive and respond to structural pressures [7, pp. 5-7].

Global Power Redistribution

The Ukraine conflict has expedited a shift in global power dynamics, reflecting the vulnerabilities of the post-Cold War order and the rise of transactional multipolarity. Though NATO has been through a period of rejuvenation, the worldwide landscape paints a different reality—one lacking order, predictability, and multilateralism, being defined by rapidly changing alignments and restrictive normative consistency [8, pp. 927-929]. Traditional bloc politics is being replaced by issue-based, adaptable alliances—utilized throughout the Global South and by 'middle powers' like India, Brazil, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, etc. In this context, state behavior changes depending on both external and internal factors, creating an imbalanced landscape, where: authoritarian states like China and Russia challenge and undermine the Western liberal order through coercive diplomacy and strategic power-plays; the US and its allies attempt to maintain institutional legitimacy while adapting to challenges; and middle powers, reinforced by economic diversification, act as 'swing actors' bringing an equilibrium between values and objectives [9] [10, pp. 3-11].

Conclusion

Giuliano da Empoli states that we are entering into 'the hour of the predator' or a 'Borgian world'—an era marked by a resurgence of bold power-plays and flexible structural response. With global competitions rising, alliances will be characterized by a web of power dynamics, where nations react to both external and internal pressures [11]. The degree to which NATO adjusts to the new landscape and effectively incorporate new actors will eventually determine its resilience in an environment marked by shifting alliances and fragmented power. The Ukrainian conflict indicates the decline of universal liberalism and the resurgence of competitive realism in a multipolar landscape.

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