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America in our Living Room – The Influence of Public Diplomacy and Soft Power on European Union aid to Ukraine

Bachelor Project – Foreign Policy in Times of US Decline

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1. Introduction

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in early 2022 was an unexpected event that shook the Western world to its core. The invasion rests on old Russian claims on Eastern Ukraine, and a supposed Russian imperative to 'de-nazify' the state ever since the people of Ukraine overthrew the pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovych during the Euromaidan in 2013. Following the invasion, many Western leaders have pledged their support to Ukraine, claiming to aid the state in its moments of greatest need ("New aid for Ukraine", 2022) – but this support has not always been steadfast.

Despite early warnings by United States intelligence (Gustafson, Lomas, Wagner, 2024) many Western states scrambled to put together a minimal, albeit embarrassing aid package for Ukraine (von der Burchard, 2022). This aid package however was not Germany's first consideration, as they had planned to send no material aid in the first place – and even prohibited Estonia from sending old German howitzers and other equipment out of their own stockpile (Eccles & von der Burchard, 2022). Over the coming months several heads of state – including President Joe Biden – would continue to pressure Germany to increase their aid to Ukraine (Ward, Seligman, McLeary, 2023) to the point that it has approved sending relatively new Leopard 2A6 main battle tanks to Ukraine. Germany has seen a stark change in its policy regarding aiding Ukraine – from sending nothing, to sending merely basic clothing, to basic small arms and strictly defensive equipment, to finally sending hardware that can effectively be used for counterattacks on the Ukrainian eastern front.

It is quite impressive that Germany has managed to shift its policy so drastically over the course of a year of conflict. It however does not stand alone in this policy shift; France's first few aid packages consisted exclusively of emergency medical aid, but have since increased to artillery systems, light reconnaissance vehicles and tanks (France Diplomacy, 2022). Much pressure has come from both within and without; The United States has consistently played its part in pressuring Europe to aid Ukraine in the past: "Nevertheless, once again, it is the United States that has played a crucial role of a leader in the West's response to Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Had the US responded less decisively ... I worry that Europe's support for Ukraine might have been more limited and less united." (Dempsey, 2022, p.3). Internally across Europe many groups have rallied in protest in support of ever-increasing material support for Ukraine, even two years after the war started and economic impacts of the war on Europe have had time to materialize ("Europeans rally for Ukraine", 2024).

In this paper I will research the interaction between American soft power and the public diplomacy presumably caused by it on the policy decisions of EU member states. This is relevant because the European Union as an entity is at an impasse; it can continue to rely on its American commitments or cultivate strategic autonomy of its own. The EU has shown signs of exploring options of strategic autonomy by discussing the creation of an EU nuclear arms program in its parliament (Vela & Camut, 2024), commencing EU military exercises (Tidey, 2023), and the open calling of the formation of a European army by EU member state ministers (Weir, 2024).

2. Literature Review

Joseph Nye's Journey of Soft Power

Soft power as a concept was initially coined by Nye in his book *Bound to Lead* (1990). The world was in a different place by the 90's compared to the majority of the 20th century – the Cold War was at an end, the United States was considered to be in a state of decline according to Nye (2017), and books such as Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* prophesized the end of American hegemony. Up until this point power was only really viewed in the lens of realist thinking such as Waltz's balance of power (1967). In the academic world of international relations, the main method of convincing another state or group of people to change their course of action was primarily through military or economic coercion.

Nye was convinced that another form of power must exist that is able to convince others to change their trajectory. In a statement looking back upon his creation of the concept, Nye states that "Sometimes people influence others by ideas and attractions that sets the agenda for others or gets them to want what you want. Then carrots and sticks are less necessary, or can be used more frugally because others see them as legitimate" (Nye, 2017, p. 2). He stated this because it was the American universalistic culture that transcended the world, American cars, culture, and movies that rigorously spread the American way of life and thinking across the globe. He referred to Lundestad (1998) who claimed that if the Americans had created an empire in Europe, it was an empire by invitation. Nye states that he picked the term 'soft'

power as it was somewhat of an oxymoron at the time – the goal was to change the way people think about the term 'power' (Nye, 2017).

Nye significantly expanded on the concept of soft power in his book *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (2004). Soft power was to be considered just an aspect of power, one that had to be combined with other forms of power to achieve any sort of success. When states manage to competently combine hard and soft power to the right proportions in the correct situations, they manifest 'smart power'. Further advances of the term came in Nye's *The Future of Power* (2011) in which states making good use of cybertechnology harness 'cyber power'.

Altogether, soft power as a concept has had a massive impact on how non-coercive methods of power have been perceived both on the world stage as well as in the academic world. It is often employed as a method to measure to what degree competing rising powers to the United States are performing (Li, 2009)

The evolution of Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy in of itself is a relatively old term. Its first recorded use was found in the London Times of January 1856 in which it was used in place of civility (Cull, 2020). It would be used in this context a multitude more times, but it would not be until one hundred years later until anyone came close to the modern definition of the concept. Gullion (as quoted through Cull – a public diplomacy historian, as no other sources are left on the author) defines public diplomacy in 1965 as

> "[The] influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies. It encompasses dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy; the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with those of another; the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy" (Cull, 2008).

The core of the concept has mostly remained unchanged ever since. More additions have been added on top of the concept, such as the more specified distinction between government-to-government communications and government-to-citizen communications by Snow (2020). The concept has grown ever more privately focused with the dawn of globalisation and the diminishing influence of states compared to private institutions and

organisations, with the concept developing into a posterchild of international organisations and multilateralism (Vlahos, 2020).

3. Theoretical Framework

The goal of this theoretical framework is to put forth a foundational review that will be used to further develop the justification of combining the concepts of soft power and public diplomacy into one cohesive framework to work out an analysis that can answer the research question of this thesis. This theoretical analysis serves to further explain the core concepts of public diplomacy and soft power in detail so that the research itself remains grounded in the literature that came before it, while also introducing the most important facets to the reader.

Soft Power

Fundamentally, power itself from an IR perspective is a contested topic, ranging from the ability to get what we want (Boulding, 1989) to dictionary definitions, such as the ability to control people and events. Soft power is an attempt by Nye (1990) to split the definition of power into multiple facets to explain power dynamics in a post-Cold War world. Nye claims that this separation is necessary because not every kind of power can be used effectively in every situation. In a later paper Nye (2021) claims that "we cannot say that an actor 'has power' without specifying power 'to do what'" (p. 197). A great fighter might overpower his opponents in combat, yet his abilities might prove useless in the negotiations of a trade deal.

Another important aspect of Nye's definition of power is that it cannot necessarily be accurately measured. Nye claims that policymakers often like to quantify power and conflate it with the definition of resources (p. 197). Writing policy is much simpler if one only has to take into account a nation's economy, material wealth, population, and military strength. A concrete take on power makes policy-making straightforward and predictable. Nye states that resources play a role in power but are often highly contextual. Having a large number of artillery pieces for the United States might be useful against a peer opponent like the Soviet Union, yet extremely ineffective against guerilla warfare in Vietnam and the Middle East. Nye writes a succinct analogy: "Holding a strong poker hand does not win if the game is bridge. Even if the game is poker, if you play your hand poorly, or fall victim to bluff and deception, you can still lose" (p. 198). An important variable according to Nye is power

conversion; the ability to 'extract' behavioural outcomes from resources. Power conversion acts as a force multiplier, and as such muddies the waters for those that attempt to measure power.

The part that separates soft power from other definitions of power is how it manages to alter the behaviour of others. Soft power according to Nye (2008) is "getting others to want the outcomes that you want – [it] co-opts people rather than coerces them" (p. 95). Soft power does not necessarily pressure others into a particular outcome but shapes the preferences of others so that they voluntarily alter behaviour to align with your desires. Nye compares it to a politician's ability to set the agenda and the framework in a debate to steer it in a particular direction. A politician in this role does not pressure others into a certain position through use of force but frames the debate in such a way that it can only lead to particular outcomes. However, one must not be mistaken to assume that soft power thus sprouts out of nothingness or cannot be measured to some degree. Soft power can be generated out of resources, and according to Nye these resources can be measured in terms of soft power generation through the use of polls or focus groups (p. 95).

Sometimes the use of a resource can determine whether it is soft or hard power. Nye (2021) makes an example of the use of the American fleet. One might be mistaken that a military asset such as a fleet can be used to wage a war or threaten intervention, both examples of hard power. However, America's use of Carrier Strike Group 9 for Indonesian tsunami relief shows that a traditional source of hard power can be used as a source of goodwill with other states as well – a source of soft power (Elleman, 2007).

Soft power resources are generally (with some exceptions like in the previous paragraph) quite different from hard power resources. Nye (2011) mentions three main resources states have that generate soft power – culture, political values, and foreign policies. The sources of soft power have important implications. If a state does not adhere to its political values consistently, they may not be taken seriously. Additionally, if a state 'sells' one picture of foreign policies to its audience at home but acts differently abroad it might undercut its potential soft power. A state that ardently upholds its political values both at home and abroad and 'puts their money where their mouth is' in relation to their foreign policy is going to see a lot more success in soft power than a state that is often in conflict with their own ideals and acts erratically and unpredictably on the world stage.

Public Diplomacy

The very foundation of public diplomacy is a rather simple concept. It is the ability of a state to communicate with publics abroad, the citizens of other states. Traditionally this meant informing the publics of other states, influencing them through propaganda efforts, and attempting to persuade foreign publics to engage in activism to support one's own national objectives and foreign policies (Snow, 2020). Public diplomacy used to focus on a one-directional approach in which a state essentially broadcasts its information with the global public in an attempt to persuade and influence them. Snow calls this form of public diplomacy government to (global) public (G2P) diplomacy.

According to Snow (2020), public diplomacy has shifted from this one-directional approach to one in which both government, private individuals, and organizations influence public attitudes in a way that influence foreign policy – otherwise known as private-to-private diplomacy (P2P). Public diplomacy has since expanded greatly in literature to include corporate endeavours and businesses (Pratkanis, 2020), cultural variables (Rhoads, 2020), and psychology (Kilbane, 2020). Snow accredits this shift in public diplomacy to a great leap forward in communicative technologies that allow citizens from around the world to not only more effectively take in information, but also engage in foreign policy dialogue themselves. These leaps in technology have been nothing but positive for the global public, but quite problematic for diplomats and policy makers alike: "On balance, technology is making public affairs and public communication harder, not easier. The Internet spreads rumours faster than authorities can set the record straight … using information to control rumours will be a major issue" (Johnson, 2006, p. 45). Additionally, an ever-more globalized world has led to an increase in cross-border networks between private individuals which facilitates communication and dialogue between publics of different countries.

The very nature of public diplomacy as a means to influence the public requires a well-educated population to function. One cannot incline a public to pressure its government to perform a punitive action on an adversary if that public knows nothing about said adversary, let alone can point at it on a map. Public diplomacy is thus dependent on a great degree of civic participation according to Snow (2020). Snow describes a decline in civic participation despite the technological advances facilitating two-way public diplomacy in her first chapter of her comprehensive book on public diplomacy and blames it on crisis-driven policies that heavily favour one-way informative (or even propagandic) public diplomacy broadcasting

following 9/11 and the subsequent uptick in terrorism in the Western world in the last 20 years. Snow claims that governments have retreated from the public space in terms of foreign policy and have returned to playing an informative role rather than encouraging dialogue with global publics.

Two-level Games

A rather popular paper by Putnam (1988) added a completely new take on state-to-state interactions in international decision-making. Putnam combined the fields of comparative politics and international relations to recognize that domestic-level actors have the potential to influence negotiations made between state-level actors. Putnam describes negotiations as a game that takes place on two levels – level 1 is the negotiations that take place at the international level between governments, while level 2 takes place intranationally between the government and their domestic interest groups. At level 1, both states have defined objectives that fall within a set range of outcomes – known as win-sets – and the goal of the chief negotiators is to come to an outcome that falls in the overlap between both states' win-sets. Putnam claims that negotiations that take place at the 2nd level – between the state and the domestic actors – can influence the size of a state's win-set range and thus alter the acceptable outcomes for a bout of negotiations.

It is within a state's interest to keep their public 'on the same page' as the government, because a wildly divergent demand from their main domestic interest groups could hamper a state's ability to negotiate in its own favour. Decisions that help nationally, could possibly unfold counter-productively on the international stage: "The paradoxical fact that institutional arrangements which strengthen decision-makers at home may weaken their international bargaining position, and vice versa" (p. 460).

Theoretical argument

The link between public diplomacy and soft power is not an unfounded one. Nye (2008) expands on his definition of soft power and manages to tie it in with public diplomacy. Nye argues that while soft power is generated through (im)material resources, public diplomacy functions as an instrument to mobilize said resources to communicate and convince foreign publics. An added caveat is that the context of the broadcasting state's culture, values and

policies must resonate with the target state: "Exporting Hollywood films full of nudity and violence to conserve Muslim countries may produce repulsion rather than soft power" (p. 95). Through combining government-to-government (G2G) interactions as soft power with government-to-private (G2P) and private-to-private (P2P) interactions as public diplomacy, states may more effectively influence the decisions of their targets.

While authors such as Nye (2008) have connected soft power and public diplomacy, there is no research connecting it to two-level games. This proposed interconnection of theories depends on the fact that public diplomacy is intended to mobilize and inform the public of another state. Putnam's (1998) two-level game only functions if domestic interest groups are mobilized to a degree that they are willing to play a role in negotiations and influence the win-set of their state. A certain chain of events thus plays out in which soft power engages the target government, while public diplomacy slowly influences and mobilizes the foreign public until the government relents and gives in to demands, or at the very least shifts its stance noticeably.

When including these three theories to make up a process with interlinking steps, it would look as follows: (1) State A exerts public diplomacy and soft power to influence the populace of state B through the dispensation of information and propaganda, while also making demands of state B on a G2G level. (2) Citizens of state B become influenced by the influence exerted by state A. (3) State B responds according to public opinion and is more likely to support positions by state A.

4. Research Design

Method

The goal of this research is to deductively research whether soft power and public diplomacy have altered the behaviour of nations regarding aid to Ukraine. The most compelling method for researching a process and its causal mechanisms is process tracing. This is because process tracing is effective at tracing the real-world case flow of causal mechanisms, often used for historical cases (Beach & Petersen, 2019).

Process tracing as described by Beach and Petersen can be divided into two main components – Theorization of the causal mechanisms themselves through the usage of linking causes and outcomes together and analysing observable proof of theorized mechanisms. The point of process tracing according to Beach and Petersen is not to focus on the causes and outcomes themselves, but the linking process that sits between them. In this paper I will measure the variables pertaining to public diplomacy, soft power and EU aid to Ukraine in both 2022 and 2023 to track and compare the differences.

Case Selection

With theory testing process tracing in mind, a method in which I attempt to test the explanatory capability of a theory through deductive means, the best course of action is a typical case study. Typical case studies are used to "probe causal mechanisms that may either confirm or disconfirm a given theory" (Gerring, 2008). The theories of soft power and public diplomacy both imply through their structure that they should have a positive impact on funding – with soft power implying that a state should alter their course of action after enough influence and public diplomacy implying that with enough of a citizenry informed or convinced, a government should switch positions. A typical case study can go in-depth on these theories under this specific circumstance, and either confirm it or completely overturn the hypothesis.

Process tracing expectations

In this paper I hypothesize that the influence of public diplomacy and soft power have had a positive effect on European funding of Ukraine. The expected outcome from this research is that the exertion of American soft power and public diplomacy on the citizens of Europe will continue to improve EU citizens' opinion on continued funding of Ukraine, which will in turn push their governments to expand their funding of Ukraine. In short, the hypothesized chain of events through process-tracing is as follows:

1. The United States exerts soft power on the European Union, while also influencing European citizens' opinion on the war in Ukraine through Public Diplomacy.
2. European citizens mobilize and pressure their governments to send more aid to Ukraine.
3. European state interests shift and are more willing to provide additional aid to Ukraine.

Operationalization

Research methods that have been used to measure and describe soft power have had a wide breadth of options since the term was coined by Nye. The difficulties surrounding the study of soft power can be attributed to the fact that soft power is an intangible resource such as culture or ideology. Yeo, Lee and Eschbach (2023) go around this issue in their research on soft power by measuring what they call 'positive voluntary actions' – spontaneous actions by non-government individuals towards a foreign state, often in support of this state. These actions can range from protests in support of state actions, positive messaging on social media, and even high viewership of movies featuring this state in cinemas. The main metric described by this research however is public support databases. Research using this metric are based on the principle of voluntarism in soft power described by Nye (1990) – the fact that soft power entails that a state is not coerced into an action but does so voluntarily. This research will in turn also use public support as the main metric for the influence of soft power exerted on Europe. Since the public diplomacy will focus on EU actions taken, the public support should reflect this for an accurate result. Data on EU citizens' opinions of EU financial and material support will reflect American soft power in the EU pertaining to the war of Ukraine.

Public diplomacy as an action on the other hand is relatively easy to measure. Public diplomacy efforts are conscious and deliberate actions made by governments to speak to foreign publics. American public diplomacy could thus be measured by counting the American educational and cultural programs that mention the war in Ukraine, in addition to mentions in embassy and consulate websites (Brown, 2018). Additional forms of public diplomacy to measure are U.S. endorsed public and expert speakers abroad, and government officials that are alumni of U.S. foreign exchange programs – of which 485 are current or former heads of state according to Brown. The aims of public diplomacy efforts in the European Union are clearly stated in policy documents, and their intent can be determined through an in-depth analysis of American policy and state goals in official documentation.

The measuring of aid to Ukraine is relatively straightforward. Aid to Ukraine can be measured in material sent, as well as total financial funding. Material sent is the more complicated variable out of the two because the contents of material aid can vary wildly in importance. Germany sending medical aid in large numbers is a much smaller deal than if the German Armed Forces donated a platoon of last generation Leopard 2A7 main battle tanks

directly to the Ukrainian Armed Forces. The kind of material sent is doubly important because public speakers from the United States can have a direct impact on the kind of material sent, such as if a speaker pushes nations to send more armoured vehicles, and France follows by sending AMX-10 RC armoured fighting vehicles (AFV's).

Data Collection

While some of the research has already been abstracted when operationalizing sections of the research into researchable topics, these new variables must now be collected from sources. The research will use hybrid methodologies of data collection as the variables vary greatly in their form and scope. The data collected comes from two timeframes, 2022 and 2023. This is done so the impact of the public diplomacy report can be inspected in the 2023 frame and compared to the aid and public support before the report.

The aid provided by the European Union and its member states comes in two main forms: direct funding and delivered materiel. Funding has been recorded by the Kiel Institute for the World Economy in their working paper described as the Ukraine Support Tracker. This tracker focuses on bilateral donations from EU member states (Antezza et. al., 2024). The tracker focuses on aid described as "already been delivered or is earmarked for delivery" (p. 2). This means that it does not count commitment that have not been sent or are not ready to be sent as of yet. The data also covers aid directly given by the European Union, as it accounts for a sizeable amount of the aid sent. While the main working paper has data and descriptions from 2022 up to 2023, the dataset provided has continuous data up to April 2024. Official sources on material equipment donated or sold to Ukraine are hard to come by. Many states obfuscate the exact numbers of equipment they send to Ukraine to keep vital information out of the hands of the Russians. It is thus unavoidable to deal with estimates and not exact numbers. Data can vary by quantity, but also by date given to Ukraine, as many weapons and equipment arrive to the front completely unannounced. Military data has not been aggregated by the EU and must be reported separately for each country with notable donations. The most accurate source for Ukrainian materiel is Oryxspioenkop, a Dutch open-source defence analyst group, with Forbes calling them "the most reliable source in the conflict so far" (Hambling, 2022). This source will be consulted for any equipment sent to Ukraine from the European Union.

Public support from the European Union has been consistently measured by the Eurobarometer. The Eurobarometer is a polling bureau employed by EU institutions, notably the Commission and Parliament. Eurobarometers in 2022, 2023, and 2024 all have polls on EU response to the war in Ukraine (European Commission, 2022). These polls include results such as whether citizens are satisfied with the EU response (both aid and sanctions), or whether citizens agree with certain types of responses. The Eurobarometers in question rely on surveys handed out to all 27 EU member states to gather data for their database (European Commission, 2023).

American public diplomacy in the European Union is generally handled by the American Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. This Under Secretary divides its goals under the 'Policy Issues' term, which the agency uses to subdivide the American goals of public diplomacy abroad (U.S. Department of State, 2024). The spending of this agency, and thus the American budget for public diplomacy, is reported in the Comprehensive Annual Reports on Public Diplomacy and International Broadcasting. This funding – along with the descriptions of the policy issues on the official websites and statements made by government officials – will provide the data for the public diplomacy variable.

5. Analysis

Step 1: American public diplomacy and soft power

This step corresponds to the first process-tracing step, the influencing of the EU by the US. The United States influences the European Union and its member states through two main mechanisms – soft power and public diplomacy. In this thesis, public diplomacy will be measured by intent and expenditure of the American Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. This Under Secretary publishes its main goals and expenditures for the financial year in the Comprehensive Annual Report on Public Diplomacy & International Broadcasting. This section of the results will shed light on the hypothesized first step in the chain of events as described by the process-tracing method.

Broadly, the department has seen an increase in spending in Europe in the 2022 fiscal year. 25,8% of the department's spending has been invested into the Europe & Eurasia region, a percentage increase of 8,24% compared to the previous year. All other regions either saw a

decline or a much lower rise in spending. International organisations for example accounted for the 2nd highest increase in spending, which went up by only 4,02% comparatively, half the growth that Europe saw. The Near East plateaued with a decrease in 0,26%. On the other hand, regions such as the Western Hemisphere (The America's) and the East Asia & Pacific saw a sharp decline of 5,25% and 5,34% respectively. These numbers broadly indicate that the United States has made a deliberate pivot to focus more of its public diplomacy efforts in Europe. When looking to Europe the most impressive increase in spending is Ukraine, which saw its spending increase from 11,76 million in 2021 to 20,45 million in 2022 – an increase of 73,89% (Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, p. 5).

The American implementation of the educational section of public diplomacy has been significant. The report states that "[Foreign Press Centers] have hosted 76 in-person or virtual press briefings, including 25 press engagements with senior U.S. government officials explaining the U.S. response to Russia's war against Ukraine" (Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, p. 57). The Office of Research (RE) provides the U.S. government with data-driven insights for messaging and campaign strategies based on the foreign public's beliefs. The agency carried out research on the European support for Ukraine that states that "This research provided communicators with an early warning that European support for Ukraine had fallen, should not be taken for granted, and must be supported with diplomatic efforts" (p. 61). Additionally, the research states that "As events unfolded in Ukraine, Research and Analytics had to realign over $1.1 million in FY 2022 funding from other priority communications campaigns to support on-the-spot Russia/Ukraine research and analysis" (p. 62). The research finishes by saying the funding is not adequate: "However, Research and Analytics annual base funding was inadequate to meet ongoing stakeholder requests for this work. – To meet stakeholder demand amid these budget challenges, Research and Analytics secured $1.907.750 in Ukraine supplemental funding in early 2023" (p. 61). It is obvious that large sums of money are being reallocated to support the large Public Diplomacy project the United States is implementing in Europe.

It is also important to analyse what the Under Secretary's public diplomacy goals in Europe are. The Global Engagement Center (GEC) is a subdepartment of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Global Affairs tasked with "[the ability to] direct, lead, synchronize, integrate, and coordinate efforts of the federal government to recognize, expose, and counter foreign state and foreign non-state propaganda and disinformation efforts aimed at undermining or influencing policies, security, or the stability of the United States and its

allies" (p. 64). Since 2022 this subdepartment has focused on exposing Russian disinformation in Ukraine. Over 20 reports have been published with varying topics such as exposing Russian disinformation, shedding light on Russian state-funded media such as Russia Today and Sputnik, and debunking Russian historic narratives regarding Ukrainian statehood and potential danger of Russian retaliation caused by continued US/EU aid to Ukraine (p. 68).

The American Bureau for European and Eurasian Affairs additionally states U.S. foreign policy objectives such as to "strengthen European support for Ukraine, defend against Russian malign influence, and counter disinformation in all forms" (p. 103). It aims to do this by highlighting the atrocities committed by the Russian Armed Forces in Ukraine, bringing to light how Russia is coercing EU states through the energy sector, and emphasising transatlantic bonds such as NATO. This campaign was committed and acted upon by using U.S. assets such as "the full range of public diplomacy tools … media interviews, digital assets, meetings with think tank representatives, outreach to the diaspora community, alumni engagement, American Space programming, and support to "third party voices", including amplifying Ukrainian civil society voices with broader European publics" (p. 104).

This report by American public diplomacy officials makes it quite clear that the United States is allocating a great deal of funding and assets to boost public diplomacy in Europe – not just with the stated goal to educate the European publics on the war in Ukraine and the vital aspect of continued European support, but also additional efforts to combat Russian disinformation campaigns.

Step 2: Shifting EU opinion – unexpected results

This is the second process tracing step and gives us information on how EU citizens have changed their perception on the war and their demands on the government accordingly. The American exertion of influence and public diplomacy has presumably shifted or at least influenced the public opinion regarding the war in Ukraine. Using data from Eurobarometer 97 and 99 (Summer 2022 and Spring 2023 respectively) this hypothesis will be challenged.

With American public diplomacy focusing on strengthening European support and aid for Ukraine, the expectation is that general support for Ukraine in all categories would rise. However, the data is more complicated than that. EU citizens were asked whether they agree

with the EU financing the purchase and supply of military equipment to Ukraine. Eurobarometer sees an EU average of 68% support for financing military equipment (European Commission, 2022). Eurobarometer 99 sees that support decline down to 64% on average, with three states of Cyprus, Malta, and Austria declining with at least 10% individually (European Commission, 2023). Additionally, the 2022 survey had a total of two states that had a majority disagree with military aid, but that has climbed to a total of six states in 2023.

Humanitarian support agreement has also dropped. EU support for humanitarian aid has dropped from 92% to 88%. Support for financial aid has dropped from 81% to 75%, and imposing further sanctions on Russia has dropped from 78% to 72% (European Commission, 2022, p. 14; European Commission, 2023, p. 11).

On an ideational level, responders were asked whether by standing against Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the EU was defending European values. The 2022 survey averages across the EU at an incredible 79% in agreement. The 2023 survey falls by 4% to 75% agreeing. Of the 27 member states, 19 of them have had their result lowered after a year, with only four countries increasing and the remaining four experiencing no change in opinion. This poll did relatively poorly, with only four EU states seeing a marginal increase in agreement (European Commission, 2022, p. 20; European Commission, 2023, p. 21).

Despite American public diplomacy, the public in Europe seems ever less willing to contribute to the aid of Ukraine. The overall numbers are still very much in the positive, but the effects of the war on the European economy may be overshadowing American attempts at convincing the European public. 83% of responders state that the war in Ukraine has had serious economic consequences on their country, with 61% stating that they personally suffered serious financial consequences due to the war (European Commission, 2023, p. 30). The Eurobarometer states that "The highest level of agreement [to being personally impacted] are observed to be amongst those aged 25-54 (63%) … those who have difficulties paying bills most of the time (78%) … and those who consider themselves belonging to the working class (71%)" (p. 33). The analysis shows that the bulk of sceptics are among those that were already suffering from financial difficulties, meaning that the middle and upper classes are mostly isolated from the largest impacts of the war, and are thus more likely to continue supporting Ukraine: "In contrast, the lowest levels of agreement are seen amongst those aged

15-24 (56%), students (51%), those who never or almost never have difficulties paying bills (53%), and those who consider themselves belonging to the upper class (40%)" (p. 33).

At the same time, the United States is also directly attempting to influence the European Union, but without using the public as a middleman for influence. Early in the war, Biden went to Brussels with the goal of rallying EU states into giving aid to Ukraine (Pettypiece, 2022). During the lulls of European aid early in the war, the United States also shared its frustration with Europe regarding the EU's delays in economic aid to Ukraine, adding additional pressure on the state level (Stein, 2022). There are no additional moments of pressure from the United States in 2023 due to the rise of congressional friction on aid to Ukraine, resulting on the U.S. focusing its pressure through the means of public diplomacy (Zengerle & Cowan, 2024).

Step 3: European Aid to Ukraine

This is the third step of process tracing and should give answers on whether the shift in public opinion regarding the war in Ukraine has shifted government aid. While the impact of public diplomacy on public opinion could not be established through data, it is to be seen whether this decline in public opinion still tracks with overall support from the EU to Ukraine. In this section of analysis, the aid to Ukraine from 2022 will be compared to the aid given in 2023. This aid varies from financial aid to military materiel sent, along with other auxiliary methods of aid.

Early in the war, total EU aid to Ukraine was relatively low. Support to the Ukrainian government, so non-humanitarian and non-military, numbered 26,2 billion euros. This number rose to 36,7 billion in 2023, an increase of 40% (Antezza et al, 2023, p. 62). This number has been attributed to the large fall in U.S. aid to Ukraine due to lack of bipartisan support (Kapur & Tsirkin, 2023).

Equipment by individual countries is hardly ever stated by countries as mentioned in the data collection section, but the data has been semi-reliably documented by Oryxspioenkop, a Dutch open-source defence analysis group.

Germany had sent one Surface-to-air missile system (SAM system) in 2022, coupled with 30 self-propelled anti-aircraft guns and 14 self-propelled artillery pieces (Oryxspioenkop, 2022). When compared to 2023 this increased to 5 SAM systems, 46 self-propelled anti-aircraft guns

and 16 self-propelled artillery pieces. The largest increase was in SAM systems, the most expensive and sought after equipment to deny airspace to Russian fighter jets (Stoltenberg, 2024).

When comparing ground vehicles sent by Germany, the contrast is massive. In 2022 Germany had sent exchanged Czech T-72's, Soviet tanks from the 70's, in addition to 28 M-55's – a tank model from 1947. In addition to this, Germany had sent 70 Eastern-bloc infantry fighting vehicles (IFV's) and 54 armoured personnel carriers (APC's). In 2023 however Germany had sent an additional 20 Leopard 1A5's, more modern tanks from the 70's, along with 18 state-of-the-art Leopard 2A6's. These were accompanied with an additional 60 IFV's, this time Marder 1A3's built in the 90's, along with 28 Bandvagn BV 206s APC's from the 90's. It is clear that Germany was sending the absolute minimum equipment in 2022. The heavy equipment sent was both small in number as well as extremely old and likely inefficient on the modern battlefield. This contrasts heavily with the 2023 contributions which include heavy vehicles equipped with some of the most modern technology.

The other major supplier of equipment within the EU were the French Armed Forces. The French had sent 2 air defence systems in 2022, along with 18 self-propelled artillery pieces and 15 towed artillery pieces. In 2023 France had sent an additional 2 air defence systems, another 12 self-propelled artillery pieces and 5 more towed artillery pieces. France had sent no tanks in 2022, no IFV's and 60 APC's from the 80's. This changed to 40 AMX-10 RC light tanks from the 80's, no additional IFV's or APC's. While the French contributions seem to lack in comparison to Germany's, the equipment sent must also be considered. The additional French air defence systems sent in 2023 were SCALP-EG "Storm Shadow" systems, which have the capability to strike deep into Russian territory. This is notable because prior to this, sending equipment that could strike into Russia was considered a 'red line' (Orlova, 2023). French willingness to send equipment that escalates Western involvement is notable and is worth mentioning and including into the analysis.

Another watershed moment in the conflict is the procurement of F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine. The procurement of fighter jets has been done in the past, but these models were relatively old Soviet models given to bulk up their current inventory. The donation and sale of F-16's is important because the capabilities of these jets far exceed anything Ukraine currently fields in the war (Melkozerova et al, 2024). This is why it is important to note that both the

Netherlands and Denmark have pledged to give up to 61 F-16's in 2023, even though they have yet to be delivered due to the Ukrainian crew still having to be trained and acclimatized to the new fighter jet and its systems (Sabbagh, 2023).

While the difference in aid sent is large, the most outstanding difference is in equipment sent by European Union countries. While initially hesitant to upset Russia too much, European states have gradually increased the equipment sent to Ukraine despite plateauing and decreasing support at home.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

The results paint an unexpected picture overall. The theory implied that the domain of public diplomacy, paired with soft power and their pressure on the state would push states to increase their aid over time. In practice however, American public diplomacy sharply increased in Europe with much more money put into the European sector than any other global region for public diplomacy. They stated clear goals of maintaining European public opinion in relation to the war in Ukraine but failed to keep the support high according to the Eurobarometers.

The cause of this would be hard to pinpoint and is likely a complicated interconnected bundle of factors, but lengthy wars have had an adverse effect on public support in democracies according to Gartner and Segura (1998). They state that the adverse economic effects paired with the bad optics of ever-increasing casualties that occur in warfare were the main driving forces of reduced public support in the Korean war and in Vietnam. The Ukrainian Memory Book project has verified at least 30.000 Ukrainian troops killed in the conflict with an estimated 90.000-100.000 wounded by the end of 2023 (Havrylets, 2023). These losses hit public support even harder when also considering that Ukraine launched a failed counteroffensive in 2023 with severe losses and little land gained, and much lost soon after (Zafra, McClure, 2023).

On the other hand, the lowering public support over time had an unexpected effect on aid provided. While public support for the war gradually dropped over the course of a year, the aid provided by key European states such as France and Germany sharply increased in both quantity and quality. This could be attributed to securitization theory, in which states

transform political problems into security questions, and frame them in such a way that they de-politicize the issue in the name of national security. This securitization has continued to escalate over time, with leaders such as President Macron claiming that Europe's security is at stake in Ukraine – and that France might send troops into Ukraine themselves to avoid a total collapse of the frontline if the Ukrainians are overwhelmed ("Macron warns Europe's security at stake", 2024).

The prevalence of the U.S. utilising public diplomacy as a means to convince Europeans and their leaders rather than direct statements to EU state governments is a notable curiosity in this research. One possible explanation for the United States limiting its pressure on EU states is that it wants to show a united front to the rest of the world regarding Ukraine. If the United States were constantly bickering with Europe to determine just how much aid has to be sent, the West would look divided. This would likely cause major morale problems in Ukraine while also giving a 'PR win' to Russia. If the U.S. limits its public dissatisfaction to European aid to a minimum, its only avenue of pressure is influencing the citizens themselves and letting them pressure their states – this is what we see happening in the statistics.

While this research does not necessarily disprove the effects of soft power and public diplomacy on public opinion, nor public opinion's effect on government actions, it does shed light on the fact that the influence of other factors have the ability to distort or completely undermine the efforts of public diplomacy, soft power and public opinion. This thesis does come with inherent limitations, such as the abstraction of public diplomacy to the openly stated goals presented and funding provided by the United States government and has no real way of measuring the impact of non-governmental influence exacted on the European public by outside sources – including Russian disinformation efforts. Additionally, the lack of concrete data on materiel provided or aid sent makes it impossible to research the matter of Ukrainian aid through the means of quantitative data analysis, and thus I am forced to qualitatively assess European efforts based on rough estimates.

The surprising subversion of process-tracing expectations does open up future research recommendations. The effect and extent of securitization on European efforts to aid Ukraine can add substantive information to the domain of international relations. Additionally, monitoring the impact of Russian disinformation and its effects on the European public would provide valuable empirical data necessary to conduct further research on the topic of the war in Ukraine.

As the war continues, it is important to realize that we as citizens of the European Union and members of NATO have sat securely in a state of uninterrupted peace on our own soil for nearly a century, while fellow Europeans are fighting a war of aggression and national erasure against an overwhelmingly powerful opponent that refuses to relent. Continued aid to Ukraine is not just vital to European security, but a moral obligation of protecting the innocent from aggressor states on our own continent.

'Slava Ukraini, heroiam slava'
(Glory to Ukraine, glory to the Heroes – Ukrainian national salute, symbol of national sovereignty)

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