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SUKSES ISRAEL

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- RUSSIAN INVASION
- UKRAINIAN FACTOR

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FROM DOWN UNDER: WHY IS AUSTRALIA SO INVOLVED IN THE WAR IN UKRAINE?

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Geographically, Australia is far from the war raging in Ukraine; nevertheless, it is the largest non-NATO contributor of defence assistance to Ukraine. Since the Russian invasion, it has been a close ally by providing military, financial, humanitarian, and political support. Why is Australia so involved in a war in which the battlefield is so far away? This paper analyses the engagement of Australian foreign policy and the geopolitical security power balance through AUKUS and ANZUS. It will also argue that Australian involvement in the conflict has lingered since 2014 by evoking the memories of MH17. It will additionally examine the Australian multicultural social fabric that corroborates with the #StandwithUkraine movement and the impact of the war on the Australian domestic economy. Lastly, it will conclude by identifying what lessons Australian foreign policy should learn from Ukraine, and advocating for the need to focus on the post-war recovery.

Foreign Policy: Geographically Distant but Not Neutral

Since 24 February 2022, Australia has officially advocated and supported Ukraine. It is an integral part of the Australian Foreign Policy principles, the belief in a global order built on the UN Charter, international law and institutions, and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity. On a multilateral level, it has condemned Russia's invasion, through several official statements claiming

that "Australia is part of this strong, unified coalition against Russia's illegal war"¹. It has also advocated for the protection of civilians, humanitarian access inside Ukraine and safe passage for civilians trying to flee the violence. Australia has voted in favour of Ukraine in all UN General Assembly's resolutions on the matter. That includes the unprecedented majority vote for UN General Assembly Resolution ES11/1² on 02 March, condemning the unilateral aggression and claiming for complete complete withdrawal,

1 H. M. Payne, *Statement to the Senate on Ukraine, 2022*
[<https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/speech/statement-senate-ukraine>]

2 *UN General Assembly Resolution ES 11/1* (Resolution passed with 141 voting in favour out of 193 members. Only 5 Russia, Belarus, Syria, North Korea and Eritrea voted against and there were 35 abstentions)
[<https://www.un.org/en/ga/sessions/emergency11th.shtml>]

as well as for the suspension of Russia from the UN Human Rights Council on 07 April. It has also shown diplomatic support for the decision of the International Court of Justice on 16 March.^{3,4}



Australia is the most significant non-NATO contributor to Ukraine in defence of its sovereignty. Australia alone has provided USD100 million in military assistance

On a bilateral level, there is evidence of a strong and continuous relationship. President Zelenskyy addressed the Australian Parliament on 31 March 2022, and presented to other Australian audiences, including universities. Notably, Australian political support has been constant, despite the internal shift in domestic politics after the federal elections on 21 May 2022. The visit of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese to Kyiv in July demonstrated the clear support of Australia, as well as the national uniformity of the Australian foreign policy on this conflict, regardless of political parties' disputes.

Military and Economic Support

Australia is the most significant non-NATO contributor to Ukraine in defence of its sovereignty. Australia alone has provided USD100 million in military assistance,

including 14 armoured personnel carriers, 60 Bushmaster protected mobility vehicles, 28 Armoured Vehicles M113AS4, and demining equipment supplied by Australia's defence industry⁵. It is worthwhile observing that on each Bushmaster, a Ukrainian flag was painted on either side with the words "United with Ukraine" stencilled in English and Ukrainian, to acknowledge the commitment and support of Australia⁶. Moreover, understanding the importance of cyber security in this conflict, US\$6 million has been donated to assist Ukraine's Border Guard Service in upgrading border management equipment, and enhancing border operations in the field. Additionally, almost USD2 million in financial and equipment aid was donated regarding radiation detection through the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), to help protect against chemical attacks⁷. The additional contribution to NATO's Ukraine Comprehensive Assistance Package Trust Fund brings Australia's total military assistance to Ukraine to approximately USD 270 million⁸. More than just tanks, USD 45 million in humanitarian assistance has been provided through trusted partners, to help meet the urgent needs of the Ukrainian people. To support Ukraine's energy security, 70,000 tonnes of thermal coal worth USD 22.6 million has also been delivered. The supply of humanitarian relief was also announced in cooperation with

3 *Joint Statement on Supporting Ukraine in Its Proceedings at the International Court of Justice*, European Council, 2022.

4 D. Crowe, *Australia Asked to Help in Ukraine War Crimes Investigation*, "The Sydney Morning Herald", 2022 [https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/joint-statement-supporting-ukraine-its-proceedings-international-court-justice]

5 *Australia to Gift 20 Bushmasters to Government of Ukraine*, Australian Government Defense news release, 2022 [https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/minister/peter-dutton/statements/australia-gift-20-bushmasters-government-ukraine]

6 *Australia Increases Support to Ukraine*, Australian Government Defense news release, 2022 [https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/minister/rmarles/media-releases/australia-increases-support-ukraine]

7 *Invasion of Ukraine by Russia*, DFAT news release, 2022 [https://www.dfat.gov.au/crisis-hub/invasion-ukraine-russia]

8 *Visit to Kyiv and Further Australian Support to Ukraine*, Prime Minister of Australia news release, 2022, [https://www.pm.gov.au/media/visit-kyiv-and-further-australian-support-ukraine]

the United Kingdom, including blankets, hygiene kits, kitchen sets and lighting for displaced Ukrainians⁹. A special 8000 visa program was implemented, to assist further Ukrainians who have been forced to flee¹⁰.

With its partners, including Canada, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States, Australia prohibited imports of Russian gold, to reduce its ability to fund the war, and implemented duty-free access for Ukrainian imports to Australia for a period of 12 months¹¹. They have also banned the import of Russian oil, petroleum, coal and gas, prohibited the export of alumina, bauxite and luxury goods to Russia, and introduced an additional tariff of 35% on imports from Russia and Belarus.



It can be argued that the Australian involvement in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict dates back to 17 July 2014, when Malaysian commercial aircraft MH17 was shot out of the sky over territory in eastern Ukraine controlled by the Russian proxies

At the same time, Australia and its partners are imposing a high economic toll on Russia, by focusing on the elites and high-level political decision-makers in Russia and Belarus. Australia has listed more than

843 individuals and 62 entities, including President Putin and his circle of oligarchs. This represents the largest ever imposition of sanctions by Australia against a single country. Notably, the listings include 80% of Russia's banking sector and all government entities that handle Russia's sovereign debt. Lastly, Australia committed almost USD 1 million to support the International Criminal Court investigation into reported Russian war crimes¹².

Memories of MH17 and the Australian National Interest

So, why is Australia so involved in a war that is geographically so far away? It can be argued that the Australian involvement in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict dates back to 17 July 2014, when Malaysian commercial aircraft MH17 was shot out of the sky over territory in eastern Ukraine controlled by the Russian proxies. All 298 people on board, including 38 Australians, were killed. Since then, under the premise of National Interest, Australia has been in a close relationship with Ukraine through a joint investigation team (JIT), in partnership with Belgium, Malaysia, and the Netherlands. Five years later, the JIT concluded that the plane was shot down by a Russian missile from its 53rd Antiaircraft Missile Brigade. Claiming for justice, Australia has been a vivid advocate for resolutions on the matter, including at the UN Security Council¹³. The evidence files have been on hold in Canberra, waiting for the right political momentum, to be handed

9 *Invasion of Ukraine by Russia*, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2022.

10 O. Oleinikova, J. Dantas, T. Bogachenko, *Australia's Special Visa Program for Ukrainians to End, Despite War Raging On*, "The Conversation", 15 July 2022 [<https://theconversation.com/australias-special-visa-program-for-ukrainians-to-end-despite-war-raging-on-186829>]

11 *Trade Assistance to Ukraine*, Minister for Trade and Tourism news release, 2022 [<https://www.trademinister.gov.au/minister/don-farrell/media-release/trade-assistance-ukraine>]

12 *Invasion of Ukraine by Russia*, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2022.

13 N. O'Malley, *Mh17: Votes Unanimously to Support Australia's Resolution for Access to Crash Site*, "The Morning Herald", 22 July 2014 [<https://www.smh.com.au/world/mh17-un-votes-unanimously-to-support-australias-resolution-for-access-to-crash-site-20140722-zvhm4.html>]

over as a former case to the International Criminal Court. On the 8th anniversary of the tragedy, the Australian Government states that it “will pursue every available avenue to ensure Russia is held to account”¹⁴.

The memories of MH17 are still very present in Australian people. Due to the death of Australian citizens, the episode makes Australians equal victims of Russia’s aggression in a war that is technically not theirs. To keep the Australian Government engaged in supporting Ukraine, President Zelenskyy strategically referred to that incident when addressing the Australian Parliament and other Aussie audiences.¹⁵

#StandwithUkraine

It is estimated that a community of Ukrainian-born people or their descendants of 30,000 to 50,000 lives in Australia. Although the first and second migration waves came after WWI and WWII, respectively, a more significant wave of migration arrived following Ukraine’s independence in 1991¹⁶. According to the Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations, the Australian Ukrainian community is proactive in encouraging its members to maintain their religion, language, culture and heritage, whilst being active members of the broader Australian community.

Australia’s social fabric is multi-cultural, where 50% of its population has either been born overseas or one of the parents comes from abroad. Thus, Australian citizens have a strong sense of empathy through diversity.

This so-called mateship, allied with a robust sense of equality and justice, explains why the Australian people #standwithUkraine and join forces on an individual level to support Ukrainians, expressing this through protests on the streets and donations. But the advocacy towards the Ukrainian cause might exceed common sense in the domestic bread-and-butter affairs. There are allegations that the Russian community, and consequently former Soviet citizens as well, from countries such as Kazakhstan, Estonia and Belarus, have been discriminated against in Australia despite this not being their personal war, as they are just normal working people, and they were mainly born here. Some claim to have lost their jobs or not been able to find one because of their Russian background. Nevertheless, there is also the beauty of unity in multiculturalism. In an act of solidarity, when the invasion started, hundreds of Australians of Ukrainian descent joined those with Russian heritage to demonstrate against the Russian invasion of Ukraine in downtown Sydney¹⁷.

AUKUS, AUZUS, and Geopolitical Security: The Middle Power Syndrome

The past 25 years under prime ministers Howard, Rudd, Gillard, Abbott, and Turnbull were years of sclerosis and decline in Australia’s foreign policy. Despite being a natural regional leader in Southeast Asia and the Pacific, Australia has gradually acquired the image of the “cute little koala” that follows the United Kingdom and US foreign policy via an

14 *Anniversary of the Downing of Flight Mh17*, Australia Minister of Foreign Affairs news release, 17 July 2022 [<https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/penny-wong/media-release/anniversary-downing-flight-mh17>]

15 E. Sakzewski, *How Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s Speeches to Parliaments Tap into Key Sensitivities*, “ABC News”, 2022 [<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-04-01/volodymyr-zelensky-speech-to-australian-parliament-meaning/100913466>]

16 *Ukraine Born Community Information*, Department of Home Affairs, 2016.

17 *Ukrainians, Russians in Australia Unite against Putin’s War*, “Aljazeera”, 2022 [<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/27/ukrainians-and-russians-in-australia-unite-against-putins-war>]

unquestioned strategic alignment. By just coping with policies without any creativity, it has limited its power of bargain and prestige in the vast international arena. Particularly since the Afghanistan war in 2001, Australia has adopted a play-it-safe foreign policy, based on the orthodoxy of national security. Nevertheless, with the increased perception of the necessity to counterbalance China's economic and military presence, it exacerbates the middle power syndrome long taken for granted¹⁸.



By showing strong support for Ukraine, this is also an opportunity to regain a position on the international stage for further national interest negotiation. But most of all, to re-earn its reputation in spheres of human rights

When the Russian military seized the Donbas region in 2014, there seemed little doubt that the balance of power had moved in Russia's favour. But geopolitical security architecture is not something only exclusive to Eurocentrics. A NATO-alike platform has been in place since 1951 between Australia, New Zealand, and the United States (ANZUS or ANZUS Treaty) for collective security on military matters in the Pacific Ocean region. Despite some disagreement regarding New Zealand's choice of a nuclear-free zone in its territorial waters, and the historical changes in international order since the end of Cold War, ANZUS has been reignited since 2007. The treaty provides that an armed attack from anywhere, not only in the region, on

any of the three parties, would be deemed dangerous to the others, and that each should act to meet the common threat. Australia and New Zealand agree that the war in Ukraine is a Russian war, not the West versus Russia as if we were back in the era of the bipolar order¹⁹.

The wider Indo-Pacific region has witnessed a rise in tension, such as China's actions in the South China Sea, and towards Hong Kong and Taiwan, the military coup in Myanmar, and the threat to regional peace and stability posed by North Korea's repeated ballistic missile tests. To stabilise the new balance of powers in the global order, in late 2021, a trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States (AUKUS) was established, and included nuclear submarine purchase and cooperation on artificial intelligence, cyber, quantum, underwater systems, and long-range strike capabilities. All this reaffirmed the Australian foreign mantra of "trade profitably with China while securely protected by US military power". China has little tolerance for Australia trying to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. On this complex chessboard, fighting against Russia can directly impact the ambiguous Sino-Australian relations. And therefore, it limits its influence in any major international affair.

In the pragmatic game of politics, it is well known that there is no free lunch. By showing strong support for Ukraine, this is also an opportunity to regain a position on the international stage for further national interest negotiation. But most of all, to re-earn its reputation in spheres of human rights and respect for international

18 T. Kevin, *Australian Foreign Policy Needs a Shake-up after Two Decades of Sclerotic Decline*, "The Conversation", 01 October 2015 [<https://theconversation.com/australian-foreign-policy-needs-a-shake-up-after-two-decades-of-sclerotic-decline-48016>]

19 *Jacinda interview by New Zealand Prime Minister Ardern*, 07 July 2022 [<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/address-new-zealand-prime-minister-jacinda-ardern>]

law long lost with its policy of stopping the boats full of refugees, offshore asylum detention, Aboriginal segregation, a poor record on climate change and even the use of illegal listening devices in sovereign offices abroad. Furthermore, it is also a call to seek a more independent foreign policy, such as that held by New Zealand, as the US is not the prudent custodian of international peace it once allegedly was. To continue supporting Ukraine is fundamental to defending the sacrosanct principle of sovereignty in international law. But it is also time to revive the art of diplomacy, both in style and substance, from a broader perspective with a little more questioning and forethought.



Australia is far from the war raging in Ukraine. Yet, Australia has been very close to the action, as it has been intensely involved with the conflict in Ukraine since 2014, by providing political, financial, military, and humanitarian support

The AUKUS submarine deal will initially cost at least US\$116 Million, not including the additional US\$584 million in compensation to France. With a historical deficit in Australia's balance of trade for decades and an economy in decline, it is not clear to the taxpayers where all the financial and military support to Ukraine will come from. Nevertheless, all military assistance to Ukraine equally helps the arms industry within Australia, both for job creation and to review its production capabilities.

Uke Lessons to Kangaroos

The Ukrainian military reinvented itself in the space of 8 years, and their people have shown herculean resistance. It is fundamental to identify lessons from the Ukraine situation.

First, if AUKUS is to empower the Australian military capacity in the event of a conflict within its sphere of direct influence, it will be expected to do a much heavier lifting than it is doing so far away²⁰. If that is the case, the political and financial means must be foreseeable. Canberra is not moving fast enough to prepare for a future in which Australian sovereignty and strategic interests might be directly challenged by a hostile great power. The Australian Defence Forces (ADF) must review its strength, structure, size and operational fighting capability. It lacks the range and depth to pose dilemmas for a highly capable adversary in Australia's immediate region, such as China. Although the ADF has dismissed its longstanding assumption that Australia would have 10 years of strategic warning in advance of any conflict, too many of its planned military investments are set to deliver at some time in the 2030s and 2040s²¹. If the incidence and severity of climate-related disasters impacting the Pacific neighbours increase, Australia has a moral and strategic responsibility to do more and to do so more rapidly. The current warfare in Ukraine and the use of the asymmetrical responses, as well as a certain type of ammunition, provide a lessons-learned opportunity for Australia.

Second, if the Russian invasion of Ukraine turns into a long war, a key factor will be whether material support to the Ukrainians

20 E. Buchanan, *Australia's Ukraine Policy*, Australian Institute of International Affairs, 04 March 2022 [<https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/australias-ukraine-policy/>]

21 A. Townshend, *Russia's Ukraine Invasion Must Be Australia's Clarion Call*, United States Study Center, April 2022, #26 [<https://www.uscc.edu.au/analysis/russias-ukraine-invasion-must-be-australias-clarion-call>]

is sufficient to sustain their operational success. As the case of Afghanistan shows, defence forces cannot be solely dependent on foreign supplies. Although AUKUS will assist with equipment and technology, not a single missile is currently produced in Australia²².

Third, President Zelenskyy has strategically been able to capture as much support as possible worldwide, not only in Europe or among NATO members²³. The more assistance he gets, the greater his country's resilience to win the war and to recover from it. Thus, it is time for Australia to recapture the spirit of being a middle power and to review its foreign policy with more independence from the UK and US. Importantly, with the decline of the US as the hegemon, Australia must seek further alliances with more regional strategic partners, such as Japan and India, under the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD). In addition, Australia is one of the NATO Enhanced Opportunities Partners, alongside Ukraine, Finland, Georgia, Jordan, and Sweden. Each of the partners has a tailor-made relationship with NATO, based on areas of mutual interest. Nevertheless, that is a space to enhance the bilateral relationship between Australia and Ukraine, as well as with allies and partners that have made significant contributions to NATO-led operations and missions under the NATO Partnership Interoperability Initiative (PII).

Conclusion

Australia is far from the war raging in Ukraine. Yet, Australia has been very close to the action, as it has been intensely involved with the conflict in Ukraine since 2014, by providing political, financial, military, and humanitarian

support. Most importantly, the Australian people #standwithUkraine, including the Russian and Ukraine community.

If Kangaroos can learn anything, it is that it is time to get ready for great power competition worldwide. Though this European security crisis is unfolding far beyond the region, Australia's response aligns with its strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific. And therefore, it is creating the momentum to revisit its role as a middle power.

Notably, the support to Ukraine must be continuous to be sustainable. Not just a one-time announcement in the heat of the moment, and a photo opportunity of visits to a devastated area. It is time for the international community to start thinking about the post-recovery. The long-term financial impact of all the military, economic and humanitarian support might also result in a catastrophe in the domestic economy and a too-high political cost for a recently elected government. Nevertheless, this is necessary. The Australian involvement in the war in Ukraine goes beyond a simple and genuine act of solidarity and justice. It also advances Australia's international image and the perspectives of realpolitik from down under.

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22 M. Shoebridge, *Seven Lessons for Australia from Ukraine*, "Australian Review", 08 April 2022 [https://www.afr.com/policy/foreign-affairs/seven-lessons-for-australia-from-ukraine-20220405-p5ab2c]

23 *More Than Applause: What Zelensky Needs from His Address to the Australian Parliament*, ASPI Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 30 March 2022 [https://www.aspi.org.au/more-than-applause-what-zelensky-needs-from-his-address-to-the-australian-parliament/]

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