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## Analysis of British and German Foreign Policy in the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict 2023-2024

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### ABSTRACT

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, reshaped European security and prompted divergent responses among Western powers. This study examines the foreign policy responses of the United Kingdom and Germany to the Russia-Ukraine conflict during 2023-2024, asking: what factors account for the differences in their approaches despite a shared commitment to supporting Ukraine? Employing Poliheuristic Theory and Rational Choice Theory, the study analyses how decision-makers in both countries evaluated policy alternatives across political, economic, security, and international dimensions. The findings reveal stark contrasts in decision-making processes and outcomes. The UK adopted a proactive, assertive stance, rapidly delivering military assistance, implementing broad economic sanctions, and maintaining consistent political support for Ukraine. British policy was driven by NATO alignment, post-Brexit strategic repositioning, and domestic political incentives favouring decisive action. Germany, by contrast, followed a cautious and incremental path, constrained by deep energy dependence on Russia, longstanding economic ties, and a diplomatic foreign policy culture. While Chancellor Scholz's *Zeitenwende* declaration signalled a historic shift in German defence policy, implementation was slowed by domestic political divisions and competing strategic priorities. The poliheuristic analysis shows that both states employed non-compensatory elimination strategies, rejecting options threatening core national interests, before optimising remaining alternatives based on strategic benefit and domestic political costs. The study concludes that foreign policy responses to security crises are fundamentally shaped by historical context, structural dependencies, domestic politics, and leadership style. While both nations ultimately supported Ukraine, their pathways differed significantly. These findings underscore that analysing decision-making processes, not merely outcomes, is essential for understanding how democratic states navigate shared security threats under competing constraints.

### KEYWORDS

Foreign policy decision-making, poliheuristic theory, rational choice theory, United Kingdom, Germany, Russia-Ukraine conflict.

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## 1. Introduction

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, marked a critical turning point in the global security architecture and constitutes a grave violation of international law. This invasion explicitly violated Article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter, which prohibits the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state (UN Secretary-General, 2024; Bellinger, 2022; PBS News, 2022). The conflict, which has lasted for more than three years, has not only triggered a humanitarian crisis in Ukraine but has also generated shockwaves throughout the global economic, political, and security systems.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has generated multidimensional impacts on the global order. Economically, the conflict has caused losses equivalent to 1% of global GDP in 2022, or approximately \$1.5 trillion in purchasing power parity terms, with Europe being the most affected region, experiencing a contraction of more than 1% compared to early-year projections (IMF, 2022; Bosanquet et al., 2023). The Ukrainian economy itself contracted by more than 30% in 2022, representing the largest recession in the country's history, with the poverty rate surging from 5.5% to 24.2%, pushing an additional 7.1 million people into poverty (Economics Observatory, 2023; United Nations, 2023).

From a global food security perspective, Ukraine and Russia together account for 27% of global wheat exports and 53% of sunflower and seed exports, with supply disruptions caused by the war driving wheat prices to their highest levels since 2008 (IMF, 2022; Wikipedia, 2025). According to the Food Security Information Network, nearly 258 million people in 58 countries experienced a food crisis or moderate-to-severe acute food insecurity in 2022, up from 193 million in 2021, representing the highest figure recorded since 2017 (Economics Observatory, 2023).

Regarding inflation, the war added approximately 2% to global inflation in 2022 and 1% in 2023 compared to early projections (IMF, 2022; Bosanquet et al., 2023). From an international law and humanitarian perspective, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has verified at least 12,654 Ukrainian civilian deaths, including 673 children, and 29,392 injuries, including 1,865 children, since February 24, 2022, with actual figures predicted to be significantly higher (DiCarlo, 2025).

The European Union experienced highly significant impacts from this conflict, particularly in the energy sector. Before the invasion, Russia accounted for more than 40% of total EU gas demand between 2018 and 2021, but after the invasion, Russia cut 80 billion cubic meters of pipeline gas supplies to Europe, plunging the region into an energy crisis (IEA, 2024; Bruegel, 2024). In 2023, Russia's share of total EU gas demand declined to approximately 10%, with Russian pipeline deliveries dropping by an additional 38 billion cubic meters (IEA, 2024; Bruegel, 2024).

In response, EU gas consumption fell by more than 18% in 2022 and 2023 compared to the previous five-year average, with industrial gas use declining by nearly 25% (European Council, 2024; European Commission, 2025). The fiscal cost of protecting consumers and businesses from rising energy prices reached €651 billion by mid-2023 (CSIS, 2025). The EU reduced its fossil fuel imports from Russia from a peak of \$16 billion per month in early 2022 to approximately \$1 billion per month by the end of 2023 (Bruegel, 2024).

Regarding renewable energy, the share of renewables in EU energy consumption reached 24.5% in 2023, with a new target agreed in November 2023 to achieve at least 42.5% by 2030 (European Parliament, 2024; European Commission, 2025). Renewable energy generation grew rapidly post-crisis, increasing by 80 TWh in 2022 and 87 TWh in 2023 (CSIS, 2025).

Politically and security-wise, this conflict has driven major transformations in European defence policy. Europe could easily increase defence spending by 1% of GDP annually, which, if

realised, would likely exceed even the ambitious €807 billion NextGenerationEU stimulus during the pandemic (IMF, 2022). According to estimates by the European Commission, World Bank, and UN, the total cost of reconstruction and recovery in Ukraine is US\$486 billion (€452.8 billion) over the next decade, up from US\$411 billion (€383 billion) (European Parliament, 2024).

Germany, as Europe's largest economy, experienced highly significant impacts. Germany would be the most affected Western European country, followed by France and Italy, with the energy crisis triggered by the war in Ukraine exacerbating comparative disadvantages related to energy costs, particularly in the natural gas market (Bosanquet et al., 2023; Ferriani & Gazzani, 2023). In October 2022, natural gas prices in Europe ran at the equivalent of approximately \$400 per barrel of oil, although by January 2023, prices had fallen back to pre-Russian invasion levels (RAND Corporation, 2023).

Germany experienced an identity crisis in its foreign policy. Chancellor Olaf Scholz declared a *Zeitenwende* or "turning of the times" in his special address to the Bundestag three days after the invasion, marking a fundamental shift in German defence policy (Wagner et al., 2024). However, the implementation of this transformation faced various internal obstacles. Germany has provided or committed approximately €28 billion in military assistance to Ukraine, with an allocation of €7.1 billion in 2024 alone, up from the initially planned €4 billion (Federal Government of Germany, 2025; Kyiv Independent, 2024; Federal Government of Germany, 2025). According to the Kiel Institute's Ukraine Support Tracker, Berlin has committed more than €17.1 billion in military aid to Ukraine since January 24, 2022, more than twice the UK's investment (€7 billion) and 34 times that of France (France24, 2023).

The United Kingdom, despite no longer being an EU member, remains one of Ukraine's key supporters. The UK has pledged £12.8 billion in support of Ukraine since February 2022, of which £7.8 billion is for military assistance, including £3 billion for military aid in 2024/25 (UK House of Commons, 2025; UK House of Commons, 2025). The UK provides both lethal and non-lethal weaponry, including tanks, air defence systems, and long-range precision strike missiles, and hosts a training program (Operation Interflex) that has trained over 51,000 Ukrainian personnel (UK House of Commons, 2025). Both the UK and Germany demonstrate deep concerns about the threats posed by Russian aggression to European security, yet their policy responses show significant differences.

Germany experienced complex internal debates regarding military support for Ukraine. Berlin expanded its military assistance incrementally and only under domestic and international pressure, initially offering only 5,000 protective helmets weeks before the full-scale invasion, which received widespread ridicule (France24, 2023; CFR, 2022). There is significant political division in Germany regarding Ukraine policy, with the far-right AfD party and the left-populist BSW founded by Sahra Wagenknecht opposing sanctions against Russia and weapons deliveries to Ukraine, with AfD support rising from below 11% in January 2022 to over 22% in early January 2024 (Taylor & Francis, 2024; Quincy Institute, 2024).

The German government plans to double military aid to eight billion euros in 2024, with Defence Minister Boris Pistorius stating this is a "strong signal to Ukraine that we will not leave them in the lurch" (Federal Foreign Office, 2024; OSW, 2023). However, Germany remains reluctant to provide certain weapon systems, particularly long-range Taurus missiles, which have been a source of frustration for Ukraine.

The United Kingdom, conversely, demonstrates a more proactive and assertive approach. The UK is one of the leading donors to Ukraine alongside the US and Germany, quickly agreeing to provide defensive weapons immediately after the invasion threat emerged (UK Government, 2023; UK House of Commons, 2025). As the two largest European defence spenders in NATO and the top two European supporters of Ukraine in absolute financial terms, the UK and Germany

must shoulder more of the European security burden, particularly in the context of uncertainty about US support under the new administration (Foreign Policy, 2023; RUSI, 2024).

On October 23, 2024, the UK and German defence ministers signed the 'Trinity House Agreement,' establishing defence cooperation as a key pillar of the new treaty-based relationship, with the UK and Germany agreeing to strengthen defence industries, reinforce Euro-Atlantic security, enhance interoperability, and support Ukraine (UK Government, 2023; RUSI, 2024).

Although both the UK and Germany are committed to supporting Ukraine and maintaining European security, there are significant differences in their foreign policy approaches to the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2023-2024. These differences reflect distinct historical contexts, strategic interests, economic dependencies, and domestic political considerations between the two countries. The UK tends to be faster and more decisive in providing military support, while Germany demonstrates a more cautious and gradual approach, despite the substantial total volume of its assistance.

Based on this background, this research seeks to answer the question: "What are the factors that cause differences in the foreign policy responses of the United Kingdom and Germany to the Russia-Ukraine Conflict in 2023-2024?" Understanding these differentiating factors is important not only for analysing contemporary European foreign policy dynamics, but also for understanding how European countries with different histories, interests, and capabilities respond to shared security threats in the post-Brexit era and amid the transformation of the global security architecture.

## **2. Analytical Framework: Poliheuristic Theory in Foreign Policy Decision-Making**

### **2.1. Basic Concepts of Poliheuristic Theory**

Poliheuristic theory is a relatively new approach to understanding the decision-making process in foreign policy and international relations. Developed by Alex Mintz and colleagues, this theory offers a different perspective from traditional decision-making models by integrating cognitive and rational elements in the decision process. Mintz (2004) explains that poliheuristic theory is both a descriptive and prescriptive theory that analyses how political leaders actually make decisions, particularly in the context of complex foreign policy that often involves high risk.

The main characteristic of poliheuristic theory is its two-stage approach to the decision-making process. In the first stage, decision-makers use a non-compensatory strategy to eliminate unacceptable alternatives, especially those with negative values on certain critical dimensions. Mintz (2004) emphasises that the domestic political dimension is often the most important critical dimension, where leaders will reject policy alternatives that could endanger their political position, regardless of the benefits that may be offered on other dimensions. The second stage involves a more comprehensive analysis of the remaining alternatives, where decision-makers can use various decision-making strategies, including rational or satisficing approaches, to select the best option.

Dacey and Carlson (2004) make an important contribution by comparing poliheuristic theory with traditional decision analysis, particularly expected utility theory. They show that while expected utility theory assumes that decision-makers will maximise expected utility by considering all dimensions simultaneously and compensatorily, poliheuristic theory recognises that in practice, decision-makers often use heuristics to simplify complex problems. The non-compensatory approach in the first stage reflects the reality that some dimensions, especially those related to political survival, cannot be compensated by gains on other dimensions, no matter how strong those gains might be.

## 2.2. Decision-Making Process in Poliheuristic Theory

The decision-making process in the poliheuristic framework begins with identifying relevant dimensions for evaluating policy alternatives. Mintz (2004) identifies several key dimensions commonly considered in foreign policy decisions, including: (1) the domestic political dimension, which encompasses public support, elite support, and electoral consequences; (2) the strategic-military dimension, which relates to national security and military strength; (3) the economic dimension, which includes financial costs and economic impacts; (4) the international dimension, which encompasses international reputation and relations with other countries; and (5) the moral-ethical dimension, which relates to values and norms held.

In the non-compensatory elimination stage, decision-makers will reject alternatives that have very negative values on any critical dimension. Mintz (2004) demonstrates that if a policy option is predicted to cause significant domestic political losses, such as major electoral support losses or political crises, it will be eliminated without regard to potential gains on other dimensions. This process reflects the 'lexicographic decision rule,' in which certain dimensions have absolute priority in determining the feasibility of an alternative.

After unacceptable alternatives are eliminated, the second stage involves selection among the remaining options. Dacey and Carlson (2004) explain that at this stage, decision-makers can use various strategies, including: (1) maximizing strategy, where leaders choose the alternative with the highest utility; (2) satisficing strategy, where leaders choose the first alternative that meets a minimum acceptable threshold; or (3) lexicographic strategy, where leaders compare alternatives based on the most important dimension first, then move to the next dimension only if there is equality on the first dimension.

## 2.3. Constraints, Compromises, and Decision-Making Complexity

Goertz (2004) makes an important contribution by analysing the role of constraints and compromises in the foreign policy decision-making process. He argues that decision-making in the international context always occurs in an environment full of various constraints, both structural and institutional. These constraints can come from various sources, including: (1) domestic constraints, such as constitutions, political systems, public opinion, and pressure from interest groups; (2) international constraints, such as international norms, alliances, and global power structures; and (3) resource constraints, such as limitations in economic and military capabilities.

Goertz (2004) argues that, faced with various often-conflicting constraints, decision-makers must make compromises. These compromises occur not only between different preferences of various domestic actors, but also between various policy objectives that may conflict. For example, a leader may have to compromise between the goal of maximising national security and the need to maintain profitable economic relations with other countries, or between the desire to act according to moral principles and the reality of resource limitations and domestic political pressures.

Goertz's (2004) analysis shows that compromises in decision-making often result in 'second-best' or 'third-best' solutions rather than the optimal solution that might be desired if there were no constraints. He identifies several strategies used by decision-makers in managing compromises, including: (1) explicit trade-offs, where gains on one dimension are sacrificed to obtain gains on another dimension; (2) sequencing, where different objectives are prioritised in temporal order; and (3) packaging, where various policy elements are combined to create a broader coalition of support.

#### **2.4. Application of Poliheuristic Theory in Various Political Regimes**

One important contribution to the poliheuristic literature is the analysis of how decision-making processes differ between democratic and autocratic regimes. Kinne (2005) specifically explores how poliheuristic theory can be applied to understand decision-making in autocratic regimes. He argues that while the basic principles of poliheuristic theory, namely the two-stage process with non-compensatory elimination followed by selection among remaining alternatives, remain relevant in the autocratic context, the relative weight of various dimensions and the nature of constraints faced may be very different from democratic regimes.

Kinne (2005) explains that in autocratic regimes, the domestic political dimension remains a critical consideration, but its nature differs from that of democratic regimes. Instead of worrying about general elections or broad public opinion, autocratic leaders focus more on maintaining support from a narrower winning coalition, the elite group whose support is essential for the continuation of their power. This means that, in evaluating policy alternatives, autocratic leaders will be highly sensitive to how those policies affect the distribution of resources and power within their winning coalition.

Another important difference identified by Kinne (2005) is that autocratic leaders generally face fewer institutional constraints in decision-making than democratic leaders. The absence of strong checks and balances, limited press freedom, and tighter control over information allow autocratic leaders to have greater autonomy in making foreign policy decisions. However, this does not mean they are completely free from constraints. On the contrary, they face different constraints, such as the threat of coups from the military, rebellion from dissatisfied elite factions, or dependence on external patrons for economic or military support.

Kinne (2005) also observes that in autocratic regimes, the leader's personal security often carries a very high weight in decision-making. Foreign policy decisions are not only evaluated based on their impact on national security or the economic welfare of the country, but also, and perhaps primarily, based on how they affect the continuation of power and personal security of the leader. This can lead to decisions that may seem irrational from a national-interest perspective but are very rational from the leader's personal-interest perspective.

#### **2.5. Comparison with Traditional Decision-Making Theory**

Dacey and Carlson (2004) provide an in-depth comparative analysis between poliheuristic theory and traditional decision analysis approaches, particularly expected utility theory and multiattribute utility theory. They explain that expected utility theory, which has been the dominant paradigm in economics and political science for several decades, assumes that decision-makers are rational actors who will maximise expected utility by considering all relevant dimensions simultaneously and using compensatory decision rules.

However, Dacey and Carlson (2004) argue that these assumptions are often unrealistic in the context of actual foreign policy decision-making. They identify several main limitations of the traditional approach: (1) The assumption of full compensatoriness does not always apply, especially when there are dimensions considered very critical or non-negotiable; (2) Decision-makers often face cognitive limitations that make them unable to process all information simultaneously and comprehensively; (3) Political context often requires different considerations from pure utility calculations, such as legitimacy, symbolism, and rhetoric; and (4) The uncertainty inherent in foreign policy makes accurate estimation of probabilities and utilities very difficult.

Poliheuristic theory offers a more realistic alternative by recognising that decision-makers use a combination of rational strategies and heuristics in their decision process. Dacey and Carlson (2004) show that the two-stage approach in poliheuristic theory, non-compensatory

elimination followed by more limited compensatory analysis, is more consistent with empirical evidence about how political leaders actually make decisions. They also show that poliheuristic theory can accommodate various decision-making strategies identified in the literature, including bounded rationality, satisficing, and incremental decision-making.

## **2.6. Implications for Foreign Policy Analysis**

Poliheuristic theory has important implications for foreign policy analysis and prediction. Mintz (2004) argues that by understanding the critical dimensions most important to particular decision-makers and identifying thresholds that eliminate certain alternatives, analysts can better predict the policy choices that are likely to be taken. This differs from traditional approaches that might predict that decision-makers will choose the option with the highest overall utility, without considering the possibility that the option might have been eliminated in the first stage due to very negative values on certain critical dimensions.

Goertz (2004) emphasises the importance of understanding the constraint structure faced by decision-makers to analyse the available policy space and compromises that are likely to be made. He argues that by mapping various domestic, international, and resource constraints, analysts can identify 'win-sets', the set of policies acceptable domestically and feasible internationally, and thus better understand why some policy options are chosen while others are rejected, even when rejected alternatives might appear more optimal from certain perspectives.

Kinne (2005) shows that poliheuristic theory is also useful for comparative analysis between different regimes. By understanding how the political structure affects the critical dimensions considered, the constraints faced, and the strategies used in the decision process, analysts can better explain variation in foreign policy behaviour between democracies and autocracies, and even among various types of autocratic regimes. This allows the theory to generate more nuanced, context-specific predictions than theories that assume uniform decision-making across all types of regimes.

Dacey and Carlson (2004) conclude that poliheuristic theory offers a more comprehensive and realistic framework for understanding foreign policy decision-making compared to traditional approaches. By integrating cognitive and rational elements, recognising the importance of the domestic political dimension, and allowing flexibility in strategies used at different stages of the decision process, this theory provides more powerful tools for analysing, explaining, and predicting foreign policy behaviour in various contexts.

## **2.7. Synthesis and Relevance for Research**

The literature review on poliheuristic theory shows that this approach offers a rich, nuanced framework for understanding the decision-making process in foreign policy. The collective contribution of Mintz (2004), Kinne (2005), Goertz (2004), and Dacey and Carlson (2004) provides a strong theoretical foundation that recognises the complexity of political decision-making, the central role of the domestic political dimension, the importance of constraints and compromises, and systematic differences between various types of political regimes.

In the context of research on differences in British and German foreign policy responses to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, poliheuristic theory provides a very useful analytical lens. This theory allows for the analysis of how leaders in both countries evaluate various policy alternatives, considering critical dimensions such as national security, the economy (including energy dependence), domestic politics (including public opinion and parliamentary support), and international norms. The two-stage process in poliheuristic theory can help explain why some policy options, which might appear optimal from a security or strategic perspective, are rejected due to unacceptable domestic political consequences, or vice versa.

Furthermore, the theory's emphasis on constraints and compromises is highly relevant to understanding how Britain and Germany, with different political structures, economic interests, and historical legacies, face distinct trade-offs in responding to the conflict. While both countries face the same international constraints (such as NATO commitments and international law norms), they face very different domestic constraints: Britain with its Brexit legacy and political position outside the EU, and Germany with its historical energy dependence on Russia and more cautious foreign policy tradition. Poliheuristic theory provides a framework for analysing how these constraints shape the available policy space and the compromises leaders in both countries must make.

### **3. Research Method**

#### **3.1. Research Approach and Design**

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a comparative case study design. The qualitative approach was selected because the research seeks to understand and interpret the meanings, motives, and contextual factors underlying the foreign policy decisions of the United Kingdom and Germany, rather than to measure variables statistically. A comparative case study design is particularly appropriate for this research because it enables systematic examination of two cases that share important similarities (both are major European powers, NATO members, and supporters of Ukraine) while differing significantly in their historical contexts, strategic dependencies, and domestic political structures. This "most similar systems" logic allows the study to isolate the factors that account for divergent foreign policy responses to a shared external stimulus, namely the Russia-Ukraine conflict during 2023-2024.

#### **3.2. Research Object and Time Frame**

The objects of this research are the foreign policies of the United Kingdom and Germany in responding to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, with a temporal focus on 2023-2024. This time frame was chosen because it captures the second and third years of the full-scale war, a period in which both states had moved beyond their initial emergency responses and had entered a phase of more structured, sustained, and politically contested policy formulation. The 2023-2024 window also encompasses several pivotal developments, including Chancellor Scholz's continued operationalisation of the *Zeitenwende*, the United Kingdom's expansion of military assistance under successive governments, and the signing of the Trinity House Agreement in October 2024.

#### **3.3. Data Sources and Collection Technique**

The study relies on secondary data collected through library research and document analysis. Data sources include: (1) official government documents and statements from the United Kingdom, Germany, the European Union, NATO, and the United Nations; (2) reports from research institutions and think tanks such as the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), the RAND Corporation, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Kiel Institute, Bruegel, and the Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW); (3) peer-reviewed academic articles on poliheuristic theory, rational choice theory, and European foreign policy; (4) statistical and economic data from the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the International Energy Agency, and Eurostat; and (5) credible journalistic sources covering the period under study. All sources were selected based on their authority, relevance, and currency in relation to the research question.

#### **3.4. Analytical Framework**

The analysis is structured around two complementary theoretical frameworks. Poliheuristic Theory, as developed by Mintz (2004), Goertz (2004), Kinne (2005), and Dacey and Carlson

(2004), is used to model the two-stage decision-making process of British and German leaders, namely the non-compensatory elimination of unacceptable alternatives in the first stage, followed by a more comprehensive evaluation of remaining options in the second stage. Rational Choice Theory complements this framework by explaining how, within the narrowed set of feasible alternatives, decision-makers select the option that best advances national interests under prevailing constraints. The combination of the two frameworks captures both the elimination logic that defines the boundaries of the policy space and the maximisation logic that operates within it.

### **3.5. Data Analysis Technique**

Data were analysed through a structured four-step procedure. First, relevant policy alternatives were identified for each country and coded as A1 and A2. Second, the critical decision dimensions (political, economic, and security) were specified and coded as B1, B2, and B3. Third, each alternative was assigned a weight value across each dimension on a four-point ordinal scale, where 0 denotes "very detrimental," 1 denotes "less stable," 2 denotes "neutral," and 3 denotes "best," based on triangulated evidence from the data sources described above. Fourth, the resulting matrices were interpreted qualitatively to explain why each government eliminated certain alternatives and selected others, with reference to leadership traits, domestic political constraints, and strategic dependencies. The findings were then compared across the two cases to identify the factors accounting for the observed policy divergence.

### **3.6. Scope and Limitations**

The scope of the study is deliberately limited to the foreign policy responses of the United Kingdom and Germany during 2023-2024. The research does not cover the responses of other European states, the internal Russian or Ukrainian decision-making processes, or developments after 2024. Reliance on secondary sources rather than primary interview data is also acknowledged as a limitation, although the breadth and authoritativeness of the documents consulted are considered sufficient for the explanatory purposes of this study.

## **4. Results and Discussions**

### **4.1. Rational Choice of the United Kingdom**

Rational Choice Theory is defined as an instrument for goal-setting or goal choice. The decision-making process of unitary actors in determining national interests is often rational. Rationality, or rational choice, is a decision-making process guided by carefully defining the situation, weighing goals, considering all alternatives, and choosing the alternative most likely to achieve higher goals. To determine the agent's choice, rational choice theory aims to explain the optimal choice for decision-makers. Rational choice theory is a theory used to determine which decision is best for achieving the actor's interests in the international environment.

From the above explanation, if related to Britain's policy as a response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine:

1. PM Boris Johnson, as an individual making decisions regarding sanctions against Russian businessmen and politicians in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, took a stance consistent with Britain's view as a NATO member. As a country opposed to Russia, Britain cannot support Russia because of its NATO membership. Therefore, the rational choice made by PM Boris Johnson is individualistic, based on the socio-political situation and conditions consistent with Britain's initial stance.
2. Waltz's assumption states that actors seek to maximise their interests, and this is done by actors making choices that will produce maximum results in achieving their preferences. This

can be seen in how Britain implemented sanctions against Russian businessmen by revoking their business licenses so they could no longer operate, as well as boycotting Russian government media channels on all British television stations. This relates to Britain's interest in maintaining its dignity as a pro-Ukraine country and in keeping its foreign policy interests aligned with the applicable corridor.

3. Rational Choice Theory specifies the actor's preference for certain constraints, which shows that Britain did not want to simply stand by and not impose any sanctions on Russia. Therefore, in this case, PM Boris Johnson dared to implement several sanctions, primarily economic sanctions against Russian businessmen and politicians in Britain, to maintain Britain's dignity as a supporter of Ukraine.

**Table 1.** Poliheuristic Theory of Britain in Responding to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

Code	Alternative	Components
A1	Delay imposing political, economic, and security sanctions on Russia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Britain's revenue from Russian companies remains secure</li> <li>• Guarantee for Russian businessmen and politicians to continue working in Britain</li> <li>• Russian government media such as TV-Novosti and Rossiya Segdoya continue to operate normally broadcasting news in Britain</li> <li>• Political stability with pro-Russia countries remains secure</li> </ul>
A2	Continue to impose political, economic, and security sanctions on Russia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Occurrence of inflation, especially in the energy and oil-gas sector</li> <li>• Prohibit British citizens from conducting transactions involving the Russian Federation bank</li> <li>• Freezing of Russian-owned assets, such as banks and industries operating in Britain</li> <li>• Ban on Russian airlines and private jets from entering Britain</li> <li>• Britain will continue to supply defense weapons to Ukraine</li> </ul>

Source: Processed by author

**Table 2.** Basic Dimensions of British Policy Considerations

Code	Dimension	Basis of Consideration
B1	Political	Can the sanctions decision made help British interests?
B2	Economic	Will the sanctions imposed on Russia shake Britain's economic stability?
B3	Security	Will the security policy implemented by Britain have an impact on Ukraine as well as on Britain itself?

Source: Processed by author

**Table 3.** Weight Values of British Policy Alternatives

Code	Dimension	Basis of Consideration	Weight A1	Weight A2
B1	Political	Can the sanctions decision made help British interests?	1	2
B2	Economic	Will the sanctions imposed on Russia shake Britain's economic stability?	1	3
B3	Security	Will the security policy implemented by Britain have an impact on Ukraine as well as on Britain itself?	2	3

Source: Processed by author

#### 4.1.1. Impact of Britain's Sanctions on Russia

**Table 4.** Domain of Impacts of Britain's Sanctions on Russia

No	Domain of Impacts
<b>Political</b>	
1	There is a possibility of policies from pro-Russia countries that could harm pro-Ukraine countries, including Britain.
2	Cutting off access for Russian officials in Britain.
<b>Security</b>	
3	Russia does not want interference between Russia and Ukraine from other countries. If Britain still wants to provide assistance to Ukraine, Britain will receive threats from Russia similar to threats against the US.
4	Maintenance of British weapons supply that will be deployed as aid to Ukraine because Britain prohibits Russian air and sea transport mobility to Britain and vice versa.
<b>Economic</b>	
5	Occurrence of inflation, especially in the energy sector.
6	Increase in the price cap up to 54% higher than current levels.
7	Decline in Britain's GDP growth from 0.8% to 4.0% in 2022, and 0.5% in 2023.
8	Possibility of 7% inflation in April 2022 and 4.4% in 2023. Additionally, national insurance will increase by 1.25%.

Source: Processed by author

Based on the analysis of British foreign policy in responding to the Russia-Ukraine situation, outlined in the form of poliheuristic theory, it can be concluded that the policy implemented by Britain originated in rational choice, namely, PM Boris Johnson's rational thinking, grounded in Britain's initial stance toward the party supporting Ukraine. It is said to be a rational choice because it is impossible for Britain to support Russia, given that Britain is a member of NATO, which is opposed to Russia in this case. Britain supports Ukraine based on Ukraine's policy of seeking NATO membership. In addition, PM Boris Johnson's rational-choice approach is evident in the imposition of economic sanctions against Russia, such as revoking the business licenses of Russian businessmen investing in Britain, blocking Russian banks, and blocking access to Russian government television stations. This is said to be a rational choice because it is impossible for Britain to merely condemn, due to Britain being a clear party supporting Ukraine. If only condemning, Britain could be said to be a passive NATO member, and this certainly is not in line with British foreign policy. Thus, Britain's stance in this case is consistent with its foreign policy.

#### 4.2. Rational Choice of Germany

In the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, Germany is in a vulnerable position due to its status as an EU member state that upholds state sovereignty and is open to all countries, and as Russia's main trading partner. To formulate Germany's policy and position on this conflict, several policy alternatives are needed.

These alternatives are useful for clarifying Germany's position and response to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. With these policy alternatives, Germany can see the impact of the position it takes. Germany can either support Ukraine by condemning the invasion or remain neutral and refrain from interfering in the affairs of both countries. Both alternatives have consequences for Germany's political stability, economy, and security.

Until this writing was made, Germany had decided to support Ukraine and condemn Russia for its invasion. By asserting its position on this conflict, there are advantages and consequences that must be borne. The action condemning Russia will receive support and strength from the US and other Western countries and will also further strengthen Germany's position in the EU. Meanwhile, Germany must also be prepared to accept the consequences of this action. The long-established trade cooperation with Russia is at stake, and as a country that gets 90% of its natural gas from Russia, Germany must be prepared if at any time Russia stops exporting oil and gas to Germany and other European countries. Therefore, Germany may face an energy crisis that could significantly impact its industrial sector.

**Table 5.** Germany's Foreign Policy Alternatives on the Ukraine Conflict

Code	Alternative	Components
<b>A1</b>	Condemn Russia for its invasion of Ukraine	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Building political strength among EU members in efforts to protect Ukraine.</li> <li>2. Strengthening integration of cooperation among EU members.</li> <li>3. The military industry will run along with the entry of defense budget</li> <li>4. Support and power source from the US</li> <li>5. Clarifying Germany's political position in facing this conflict</li> <li>6. Natural gas resource supply from Russia halted Possibility of causing an energy crisis</li> </ol>
<b>A2</b>	Be neutral in the Ukraine-Russia conflict	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Germany's country position will be antagonized by Western countries</li> <li>2. Will create political instability among German society</li> <li>3. Threats will emerge from Western countries, especially Europe and the US</li> <li>4. Gas resources from Russia will add to Germany's strength amid the conflict</li> <li>5. Resource crisis in Europe unlikely to occur Security stability will be maintained</li> </ol>

Source: Processed by Author

**Table 6.** Weight Values of Germany's Policy Alternatives

Code	Dimension	Basis of Consideration	Weight A1	Weight A2
<b>B1</b>	Political	Can the decision made by Germany increase and help Germany's political interests?	3	1
<b>B2</b>	Economic	Will the chosen policy improve Germany's economy in the future?	0	2
<b>B3</b>	Security	Can Germany withstand various incoming threats?	2	2

Source: Processed by Author

Weight Value Description: 0: Very Detrimental; 1: Less Stable; 2: Neutral; 3: Best

**Table 7.** Germany's Decision-Making Policy Model

Aspect	Rational Policy Model	Organizational Process Model	Bureaucratic Politics Model
<b>Policy determined by:</b>	National interest	Institutional and organizational feasibility	Complex bargaining among individuals and institutions
<b>Key Actor:</b>	Government acts as if one national decision-maker	Organizations act based on standard operating procedures (SOP)	Individuals guided by roles and self-interest

Source: Processed by author

**Table 8.** Germany's Foreign Policy Decision Process

Decision Process	Rational Policy Model	Organizational Process Model	Bureaucratic Politics Model
<b>Identification</b>	Identification of national interest (Clarifying Germany's position and response regarding the Russia-Ukraine conflict)	Expertise and organizational interests determine preferences (Germany sends its military troops to Lithuania)	Horizontal: interests determined by roles and work agencies (Scholz said Germany and NATO expect Russia to de-escalate the situation at the border with Ukraine, for example by reducing the number of troops there)
	Identification of options (If Germany sides with Ukraine, it threatens German-Russian cooperation, but if Germany just stays silent, it will be pressured by other NATO members)	Adjust SOP (Germany deploys about half of the 1,200 troops in the multinational unit)	Vertical interests: determined by place in hierarchy (Finance Minister wants the EU to immediately end its economic relations with Russia)
	Cost/benefit analysis of options (Benefits if Germany stays silent then its cooperative relations with Russia will not become tense, and benefits if Germany helps Ukraine in line with NATO's proposal then Germany performs its duty as a NATO member)	Feasibility determines policy choice (With this Germany clarifies its political position in facing this conflict)	Negotiations and other political maneuvers determine policy choice (Pressure from NATO members and security stability will be maintained)

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Choose the policy alternative that best serves national interest (Germany also finally approved the shipment of 400 anti-tank rocket launchers through the Netherlands to Ukraine)

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Source: Processed by Author

**Table 9.** Analysis of Germany's Leadership Traits

Category	Characteristics	Implementation
<b>Attitude Toward Constraints</b>	1. Belief in one's own ability to control events (Germany is confident in its ability to be a mediator in the Russia-Ukraine conflict)	Perception of control over the situation (Germany is cautious about all policies issued)
<b>Openness to New Information</b>	2. Need for power and influence (Germany needs its secure position in NATO and Germany also maintains cooperative relations with Russia)	Concern to build and maintain or restore one's influence over others (Germany continues to hold regular meetings to monitor the implementation of the ceasefire agreement between Ukraine and the separatist parties supported by Russia in Donetsk and Luhansk)
<b>Motivation</b>	3. Conceptual complexity (After weeks of receiving criticism for the German government's timid response to Russian aggression, Scholz finally announced a total overhaul of Germany's foreign, security and defense policy)	Differentiation in describing or discussing others, places, policies, ideas, or other things
	4. Self-confidence (Germany has planned to switch to liquefied natural gas (LNG) produced by the United States or Qatar as a mitigation step if Putin threatens to stop his natural gas supply to Europe)	Sense of self-importance
	5. Task vs Interpersonal (Germany changed its military foreign policy direction with the aim of helping Ukraine as much as possible from all aspects)	Focus on policy substance vs interpersonal relationships
	6. Distrust of others (Germany anticipates Russia's moves so it makes several mitigation plans)	Tendency to suspect others' motives
	7. In-group bias (In this conflict, Germany does not aim to become the center of global view but rather moves its policies to achieve security stability)	The extent to which the group becomes central to one's worldview

Source: Processed by Author

The policy implemented by Germany was to condemn the invasion by Russia and to support Ukraine. Through this poliheuristic analysis, the background to Germany's decision can be seen. In this case, Germany chose to support Ukraine with the consideration that the support given by Germany would bring Germany closer to the European Union and also to the United States to strengthen cooperation with Germany, even though the consequence is the termination of cooperation between Germany and Russia, such as the cessation of gas supply from Russia to Germany. In addition, it is evident that the decision was taken based on an analysis of the German

President's leadership style. The German President has certain aspects used as a basis in forming policy, namely prioritising national interests, identifying national interests, identifying the good and bad impacts of policies taken on Germany's national interests, where Germany's leader considers what benefits will be provided from Germany's support to Ukraine, and what losses Germany will bear. From this, it can be seen that a country's foreign policy is determined by factors carefully considered and adjusted to national interests and the country's identity, which can be analysed through the leadership style of that country's leader.

## 5. Conclusion

This research has analysed the divergent foreign policy responses of the United Kingdom and Germany to the Russia-Ukraine conflict during 2023-2024 using Poliheuristic Theory and Rational Choice Theory as analytical frameworks. The findings demonstrate that despite shared commitments to supporting Ukraine and maintaining European security, the two nations exhibited markedly different decision-making processes and policy trajectories shaped by distinct structural constraints, historical contexts, and domestic political considerations.

The United Kingdom's response was characterised by rapid, decisive action driven by NATO alignment, post-Brexit strategic positioning, and relatively minimal energy dependence on Russia. British decision-makers eliminated non-interventionist alternatives early in the poliheuristic process, with the domestic political dimension reinforcing rather than constraining assertive support for Ukraine. PM Boris Johnson's leadership reflected individualistic rational choice aimed at maintaining Britain's dignity as a pro-Ukraine nation and reinforcing its position as a key European security actor independent of EU institutional frameworks.

Germany's response, in contrast, reflected a more cautious, incremental approach, shaped by profound structural constraints. The non-compensatory logic of poliheuristic theory explains how Germany's 90% dependency on Russian natural gas created an economic dimension that could not be offset by gains on political or security dimensions. Chancellor Scholz's declaration of *Zeitenwende* marked a rhetorical turning point, but implementation faced substantial domestic political divisions, energy security imperatives, and the collision between traditional *Ostpolitik* and contemporary security realities. Germany's decision-making process involved complex compromises between EU integration, transatlantic cooperation, energy security, and economic stability.

The comparative analysis reveals that both nations employed a two-stage poliheuristic decision-making process: first, eliminating alternatives threatening core national interests through non-compensatory evaluation; second, selecting among the remaining options by maximising strategic benefits while minimising domestic political costs. However, the critical dimensions differed significantly: for Britain, maintaining post-Brexit relevance and NATO credibility were paramount; for Germany, managing energy security and economic stability constrained policy choices.

These findings have important implications for understanding contemporary European foreign policy dynamics. The research demonstrates that even among allied democratic states with shared values and institutional commitments, foreign policy responses to major security crises are fundamentally shaped by distinct historical legacies, structural dependencies, domestic political configurations, and leadership characteristics. While both nations ultimately converged on strong support for Ukraine, their different pathways underscore the importance of analysing decision-making processes rather than outcomes alone.

The study contributes to the poliheuristic literature by demonstrating its applicability to comparative democratic contexts, extending beyond the traditional autocracy-democracy dichotomy. It confirms that constraint-and-compromise dynamics operate differently across

democracies with varying structural positions, and that the relative weight of the political, economic, security, and international dimensions varies significantly according to each state's particular vulnerabilities and strategic culture.

For policymakers and analysts, these findings emphasise the need to understand the domestic constraints facing allied nations when coordinating responses to shared threats. The UK-Germany case illustrates that alliance cohesion does not require identical policies or timelines, but rather mutual understanding of the different trade-offs each partner faces. The Trinity House Agreement represents an important recognition of this reality, establishing bilateral defence cooperation that accommodates different strategic cultures while advancing shared objectives.

Future research could extend this analysis to examine how these different policy trajectories evolve as the conflict continues, particularly regarding long-term commitments, reconstruction planning, and the redesign of security architecture. Additionally, comparative analysis including other European states (France, Poland, the Baltic states) would provide richer insights into the spectrum of European responses and the factors that best predict policy variation among NATO and EU members.

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