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A Comparison of Vietnam's and China's National Interests: A Case Study of the 2022 Russia-Ukraine War

Martina Mahrima Ningtyas, Pantri Muthriana Erza Killian
Brawijaya University
Malang, Indonesian

Email correstpondence : martinatyas12@student.ub.ac.id

Abstract

Objective: The objective of this study is to compare the national interests of China and Vietnam regarding the 2022 Russia-Ukraine War. This study also seeks to identify similarities and differences in the intensity of the two countries' national interests.

Design/Methodology/Approach: This is a comparative study using the Most Similar System Design (MSSD) approach. The data used are secondary data obtained through *a literature review* and analysis of previous studies. The analysis process employs thematic data analysis techniques.

Findings: The study shows that although both China and Vietnam abstained in the UN General Assembly vote, their national interests differ in terms of priority and intensity. In this regard, China categorizes defense, economic, and ideological interests as major issues, while global order interests are considered peripheral. Meanwhile, Vietnam categorizes its defense and economic interests as major issues, while ideological interests and global order interests are regarded as peripheral.

Practical Implications: This study can serve as a reference for policymakers seeking to understand the differences in the priorities of China's and Vietnam's national interests regarding the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Originality/Value: This study offers a comparative perspective on understanding the national interests of China and Vietnam through Donald E. Nuechterlein's matrix. In this regard, the similarity in the two countries' decisions to abstain is also closely tied to their respective national interests.

Keywords: National interests, China, Vietnam, Russia–Ukraine

Research Type: Research Article

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Perbandingan Kepentingan Nasional Vietnam-China : Studi Kasus Perang Rusia- Ukraina 2022

Abstrak

Tujuan : Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk membandingkan kepentingan nasional dari China-Vietnam pada perang Rusia-Ukraina tahun 2022. Penelitian ini juga berusaha mengidentifikasi persamaan serta perbedaan intensitas kepentingan nasional kedua negara.

Desain/metodologi/pendekatan : Penelitian studi komparatif yang menggunakan pendekatan Most Similar System Design (MSSD. Jenis data yang digunakan adalah data sekunder yang diperoleh melalui *literature review* serta analisis studi terdahulu. Proses analisis menggunakan teknik analisis data tematik.

Temuan : Penelitian menunjukkan bahwa meskipun Tiongkok dan Vietnam sama-sama abstain dalam pemungutan suara Majelis Umum PBB, kepentingan nasional keduanya berbeda dalam hal prioritas dan intensitas. Dalam hal ini China mengkategorikan kepentingan pertahanan, ekonomi, dan ideologis sebagai isu major serta kepentingan tatanan sebagai isu periferal. Sedangkan Vietnam mengkategorikan kepentingan pertahanan dan ekonomi Vietnam dikategorikan sebagai isu major, sementara kepentingan ideologis dan kepentingan tatanan dunia dianggap sebagai isu periferal.

Implikasi Praktis : Dapat menjadi acuan bagi para pembuat kebijakan yang ingin memahami perbedaan prioritas kepentingan nasional Tiongkok dan Vietnam dalam konflik Rusia-Ukraina.

Originalitas/Nilai : Penelitian ini memberikan sudut pandang komparatif dalam memahami kepentingan nasional China dan Vietnam melalui matriks Donald E. Nuechterlein. Dalam hal ini kesamaan sikap abstain kedua negara ini juga tidak lepas dari adanya prioritas kepentingan nasional kedua negara tersebut.

Kata Kunci : Kepentingan nasional, China, Vietnam, Rusia–Ukraina

Jenis Penelitian : Artikel Penelitian

INTRODUCTION

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, relations between Russia and Ukraine have deteriorated, even though the two countries share a direct land border (Saeri et al., 2023). Tensions between the two countries stem from several issues, including territorial disputes, political differences, identity, economic and trade relations, and energy interdependence (Saeri et al., 2023). In 2014, Russia and Ukraine were embroiled in a conflict marked by Russia's military actions. On February 24, 2022, Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The 2022 Russia-Ukraine conflict is a continuation of the 2014 conflict. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine is inextricably linked to the political and security contestation between Russia and *the North Atlantic Treaty Organization* (NATO) (Simatupang et al., 2024). Russia considers Ukraine's potential accession to NATO a major security threat. Russia believes that, in the context of coexistence with the West, former Warsaw Pact and former Soviet Union states should not join NATO (Setiyono, 2024) .

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has also had far-reaching implications for the international community (Prasetyo et al., 2024). These implications span security, politics, and the economy. These developments have elicited varied responses from countries around the world. Many countries condemned Russia's invasion. Western actors, including the European Union, imposed extensive financial and trade sanctions on Russia (Saeri et al., 2023). The Russia-Ukraine conflict has also prompted international institutions, such as the United Nations, to convene emergency meetings to address the conflict. On March 2, 2022, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution ES-11/1, calling for an end to Russia's use of force against Ukraine. The resolution received 141 votes in favor, 5 against, 35 abstentions, and 13 countries did not vote (Iqbal & Oktaviani, 2023). China and Vietnam were among the 35 countries that abstained.

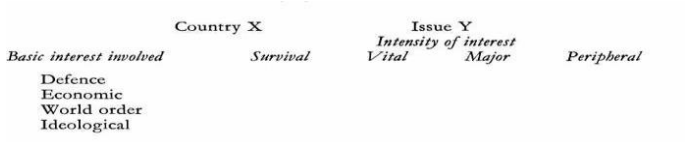
Vietnam is a communist country that was once under the influence of the Soviet Union. Vietnam's political system initially adopted the model used in the Soviet Union. This is what led to Vietnam having close ties with the Soviet Union. Vietnam has therefore continued to maintain close relations with Russia, reflecting the historical ties established during the Soviet era. In the UN General Assembly resolution condemning Russia's attack on Ukraine, Vietnam decided to abstain (Storey, 2024). In this instance, Vietnam chose to remain neutral and did not impose unilateral sanctions on Russia. Vietnam's decision to abstain also reflects the dilemma it faces. Vietnam has strong historical and defense ties with Russia, but at the same time, it is developing security relations with the United States. This situation places Vietnam in a position where it must maintain relations with various powers.

Historical ties are not unique to Vietnam; China also maintains good relations with Russia. During the UN General Assembly session, China also decided to abstain. Although China chose to abstain, its position showed a degree of alignment with Russia. This was evident during the UN General Assembly session, where China neither condemned Russia for its aggression nor supported Ukraine's resistance. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Yi rejected the use of the term "invasion" to describe Russia's actions against Ukraine (Arfiansyah, 2022). At the same time, China has sought to maintain its strategic relationship with Russia while avoiding more

significant repercussions in its relations with the United States and Western nations (Garcia, 2024).

During the 2022 UN General Assembly vote on the Russia–Ukraine conflict, both China and Vietnam abstained. This decision was influenced by the historical and existing ties between both countries and Russia. Although both abstained, the two nations demonstrated differing stances. China maintained its strategic closeness to Russia, while Vietnam tended to keep its distance from great-power rivalry. This difference highlights the importance of examining the national interests underlying the two countries' stances. China's and Vietnam's decisions to abstain is inextricably linked to their respective national interests. In this framework, Donald E. Nuechterlein classifies a national interest into four fundamental categories: defense interests, economic interests, world order interests, and ideological interests (Nuechterlein, 1976). In addition, Nuechterlein proposes a "intensity of feeling" matrix that illustrates the order of priority of these interests. The four levels of intensity in the matrix are *Survival Issues, Vital Issues, Major Issues,* and *Peripheral Issues.*

Figure 1. The Concept of National Interests According to Donald E. Nuechterlein



Source: Nuechterlein (1976)

In previous studies, many have discussed the responses of individual countries, including both China and Vietnam. Several studies, such as Xu and Zhao's "*China's Discursive Strategic Neutrality Position in the Russo-Ukrainian War: Insights from China's Strategic Narratives*," explain China's neutrality regarding the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Another study, by Thi Yen titled "*US-Vietnam Defense Diplomacy: Challenges from the Ukraine War*," explains Vietnam's neutrality. To date, there has been no specific research examining the differences in China's and Vietnam's national interests regarding the Russia-Ukraine War. Therefore, the objective of this study is to compare China's and Vietnam's national interests in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Using Nuechterlein's framework, these differences are analyzed based on the intensity of national interests.

Literature Review

Several studies have examined the responses of two communist countries—China and Vietnam—to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Duben and Wang-Kaeding explain that China's neutral response is considered somewhat ambiguous, as its behavior has leaned more toward a pro-Russian stance. This study also notes that China's response is driven by geopolitical and domestic considerations (regime security and ideology) (Düben & Wang-Kaeding, 2024). Another study by Xu and Zhao states that China's neutrality in this conflict is also defined as "discursive strategic neutrality." "Discursive strategic neutrality" refers to a stance in which a

country takes no side in order to balance its interests and adapt to shifting political dynamics(Xu & Zhao, 2025) . Stanislav stated that since the 2014 Russia-Ukraine conflict, China's neutrality has been defined as "neutral, but pro-Russia". This study also notes that China itself defines Russia's invasion as a "crisis," not a "war"(But, 2022). Nadkarni and others explain that China's position in this conflict tends to support Russia diplomatically, while remaining cautious not to become directly involved in the war. This study also notes that China views the expansion of U.S. and NATO influence into Eastern Europe as a cause of the Russia-Ukraine conflict (Nadkarni et al., 2024). Meanwhile, Yuliantoro and Bromokusomo also explain that China's neutrality is inextricably linked to shared interests between the two parties. One such interest is the desire to reduce U.S. dominance in the international order (Yuliantoro & Bromokusomo, 2023).

Another study examines Vietnam's response to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Storey explains that Vietnam has chosen a neutral stance and has not openly sided with either Russia or Ukraine. However, neutrality does not mean Vietnam lacks interests. Vietnam strives to maintain good relations with all parties and avoid involvement in the conflict (Storey, 2024). Asri also explains that Vietnam adopts a cautious stance due to its diplomatic relationships. Therefore, Vietnam does not directly condemn Russia but continues to advocate for a peaceful resolution to the conflict (Asri, 2023). Another study by Zareba also noted that Vietnam's neutral stance creates a dilemma. Vietnam prioritizes national sovereignty and international law as key principles of its foreign policy (Zaręba, 2022). A separate study by Thi Yen further noted that this neutral response is rooted in the consistency of its foreign policy—namely, the spirit of independence, peace, respect for international law, and impartiality. This study also explains that Vietnam's neutrality is a smart strategy to avoid becoming embroiled in the conflict(Yen, 2024). Vietnam also faces a dilemma in that it must be cautious about purchasing weapons from Russia due to Western sanctions. On the other hand, however, Russia is a strategic arms supplier to Vietnam. The dilemma faced by Vietnam is also mentioned in another study. Vuving notes that Vietnam is confronted with two dilemmas. The moral dilemma relates to the fact that its ally, Russia, has violated the sovereignty of another nation (Vuving, 2025). Meanwhile, the strategic dilemma concerns the relationships between Russia and China, as well as between the West and the United States.

This analysis of China's and Vietnam's responses serve as evidence that their approaches to neutrality differ. In this regard, China and Vietnam—both communist countries—have adopted different stances on neutrality regarding the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Their decisions to remain neutral are also closely tied to the national interests of both nations. Some of these studies focus primarily on explaining the stance of a single country without examining or comparing it to other nations. What is particularly noteworthy is that no study has yet compared the interests of these two countries regarding the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a comparative research design. A comparative study involves systematically comparing two or more objects or phenomena to identify

similarities and differences based on specific aspects (Morlino, 2018). In this comparative study, the author employs the Most Similar System Design (MSSD) approach. MSSD is an approach used to conduct comparative research by comparing two or more objects that tend to be similar—as evidenced by a set of shared attributes—but differ in terms of the outcomes under investigation (Kinanti & Fahadayna, 2024). In this study, the data used consists of secondary data. Secondary data refers to data obtained through *a literature review* of previous sources, which is used to elaborate on and provide further insights into this study. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis method used to identify and interpret patterns of meaning or themes within the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study employs Donald E. Nuechterlein's theory of national interests. According to Nuechterlein, national interests can shape a country's foreign policy. He categorizes national interests into four fundamental categories: defense interests, economic interests, world order interests, and ideological interests. China and Vietnam have different configurations of national interests in relation to the Russia–Ukraine conflict.

Defense Interests

Defense interests relate to efforts to protect the state, its citizens, and its system of government from external threats. In this regard, both China and Vietnam strive to safeguard their respective national defenses.

Cooperation in the defense sector is a key aspect supporting the strategic relationship between China and Russia. In fact, cooperation between China and Russia continues to grow, including joint military patrols, joint military exercises, and collaboration in military technology (Ji & Wu, 2024). In 2019, China and Russia launched a series *of "Marine Security Belt"* cooperation *initiatives* in the northern Indian Ocean (Schulenburg & Green, 2025). They have also participated in *Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW)* exercises. These joint exercises were further strengthened through five active "*Joint Sea*" exercises conducted between 2019 and 2025 (Schulenburg & Green, 2025). Furthermore, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Putin planned to expand their cooperation in February 2022, stating that "The friendship between the two countries knows no bounds; there are no off-limits areas for cooperation" (Crabtree & Graham, 2023). This was evidenced by the fact that in May 2022, the two countries conducted joint air patrols around Japan (Takahashi, 2022).

Essentially, China has not explicitly stated that it stands with Russia. However, some of China's actions indicate its support for Russia. On the other hand, China also maintains diplomatic relations with Ukraine. During the Cold War, Ukraine was a constituent republic of the Soviet Union. One of the factors leading to this conflict was Ukraine's desire to join NATO. However, China has strained relations with NATO, particularly with the United States. The United States itself has shown its support for Ukraine and strongly condemned Russia's invasion. To protect its national interests, China has exercised restraint by refraining from direct involvement in the conflict.

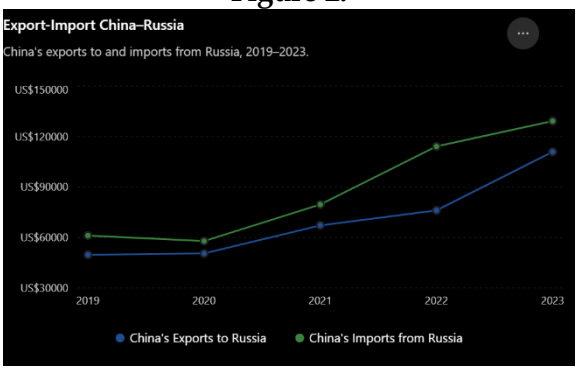
In this conflict, Vietnam has also maintained a neutral stance and abstained from taking sides. In February 2022, Vietnam did not condemn Russia's aggression. Nevertheless, Vietnam recognizes the use of force and threats against other nations as one of the principles of its national security policy (Zaręba, 2022). Vietnam faces a dilemma in deciding which side to take, as it maintains diplomatic relations with both Russia and Ukraine. Since the Cold War, Vietnam and Russia have maintained cooperative relations in the defense sector (Parameswaran, 2020). The Cam Ranh Base in southern Vietnam has been a symbol of military cooperation between Moscow and Hanoi since the Cold War era (Zaręba, 2022). This cooperation has continued, with Vietnam purchasing fighter jets and military weapons from Russia. On February 3, 2020, Vietnamese Defense Minister Ngo Xuan Lich also made an official visit to Russia (Zaręba, 2022). During this meeting, the two ministers signed a joint vision statement on defense cooperation for the 2020–2025 period. This demonstrates that both countries are striving to strengthen their cooperation in the defense sector. However, this relationship does not automatically mean that Vietnam has decided to support Russia in this conflict. Vietnam also maintains diplomatic relations with the United States. Furthermore, Vietnam has established strategic security and defense ties with the United States (Dung, 2022). In 2016, the United States lifted the arms embargo it had imposed on Vietnam. This subsequently opened opportunities for cooperation between Washington and Hanoi (Zaręba, 2022). Furthermore, Vietnam also maintains bilateral cooperation with Ukraine on various issues. These circumstances have prompted Vietnam to avoid taking a direct stance in favor of either side. To preserve these relationships, Vietnam has decided to remain neutral.

Based on Nuechterlein's matrix, the defense interests of both China and Vietnam are categorized as major issues. For China, the conflict is relevant to its strategic defense relationship with Russia and its broader security environment involving the United States and NATO. For Vietnam, the conflict is relevant to its longstanding defense relationship with Russia and its developing security relations with the United States. However, the conflict does not directly threaten the survival or fundamental security of either country. Therefore, these interests are categorized as major issues rather than vital or survival issues.

Economic Interests

Economic interests are those related to improving a nation's economic well-being and its cooperative relationships with other countries. Previous studies have also demonstrated that economic policies toward external actors can reflect national interests. For instance, shows how international trade policy may be employed to protect the economic interests of states (Permatasari, 2022). In the Russia-Ukraine conflict, China has also sought to protect its existing cooperation with other nations, particularly Russia and Ukraine. Russia has been one of China's strategic partners since the mid-2000s (Kluge, 2024). China maintains strong economic ties with Russia through trade and energy cooperation. The value of China–Russia trade has even increased following the Russia–Ukraine conflict, although China's trade with the United States remains larger in value. This can be seen in the export-import graph below.

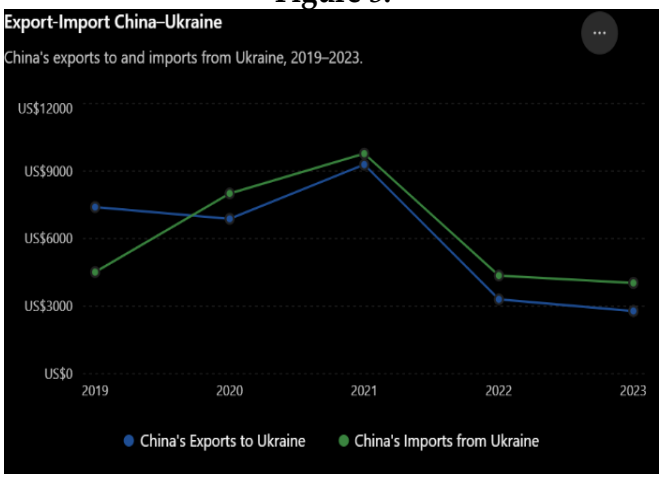
Figure 2.



Source: World Integrated Trade Solution

The graph shows that trade between China and Russia tended to increase during 2019–2023. The increase became even more pronounced after the Russia–Ukraine conflict began, particularly in China's imports from Russia, which rose more sharply than China's exports to Russia. This pattern indicates the strengthening of economic ties between the two countries and Russia's importance as one of China's trading partners. The energy sector has played an important role in strengthening economic relations between China and Russia (Albuquerque et al., 2023).

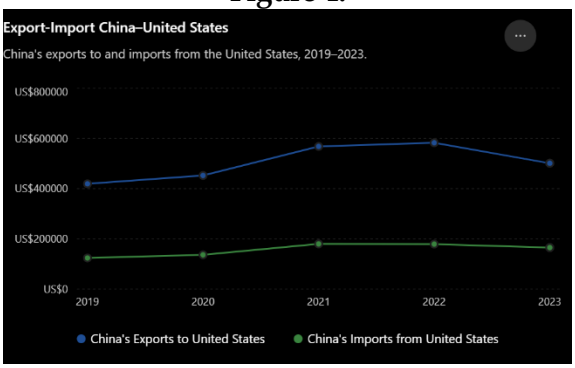
Figure 3.



Source: World Integrated Trade Solution

China also engages in trade with Ukraine. However, the value of exports and imports between China and Ukraine is not as large as that with Russia. Nevertheless, the value of trade between China and Ukraine has declined since the conflict began. Although the value of trade between China and Ukraine is not as substantial as that with Russia, U.S. support for Ukraine has become one of China's considerations in the Russia–Ukraine conflict.

Figure 4.

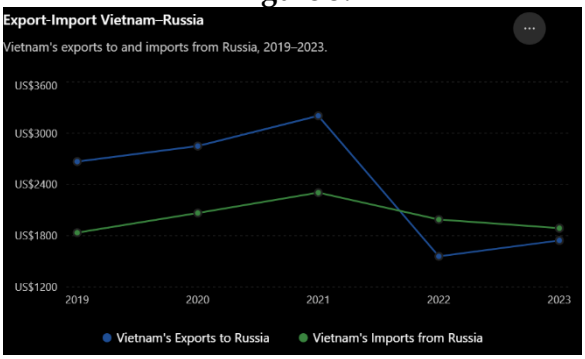


Source: World Integrated Trade Solution

The graph shows that the United States remains an important trading partner for China, with the value of China's exports to the United States far exceeding its exports to Russia. Although trade values fluctuated between 2019 and 2023, the scale of China's economic ties with the United States indicates that relations with Western nations remain a key consideration for China in addressing the Russia–Ukraine conflict.

These economic interests are also a key consideration for Vietnam regarding the Russia–Ukraine conflict. Like China, Vietnam maintains economic ties with both Russia and Ukraine. These economic ties encompass trade, exports, imports, and other areas. The value of Vietnam's exports and imports is illustrated in the graph below

Figure 5.

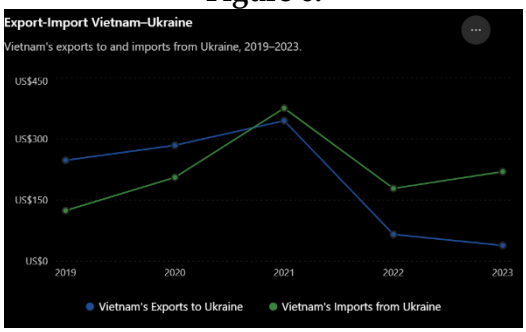


Source: World Integrated Trade Solution

Trade between Vietnam and Russia showed an increase through 2021 but then declined following the outbreak of the Russia–Ukraine conflict in 2022. Vietnam's exports to Russia experienced a sharp decline in 2022 and rebounded slightly in 2023, while Vietnam's imports from Russia also decreased. This situation indicates that economic relations between the two countries have continued but have undergone changes following the outbreak of the conflict.

Trade relations are not limited to Russia; Vietnam also maintains economic cooperation with Ukraine.

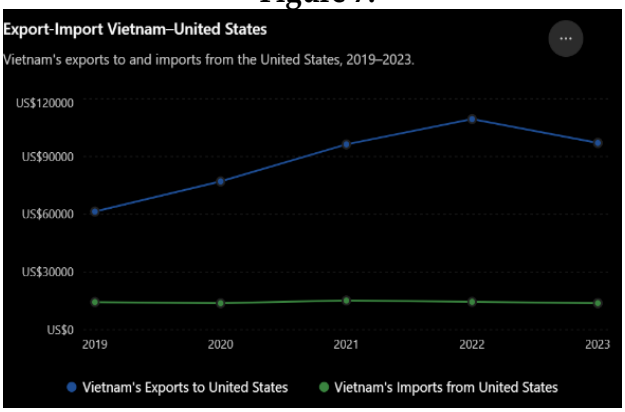
Figure 6.



Source: World Integrated Trade Solution

The graph above shows that Vietnam's trade with Ukraine increased through 2021 but experienced a sharp decline in 2022. Vietnam's exports to Ukraine declined again in 2023, while imports began to rise once more. This pattern indicates that the Russia–Ukraine conflict has had a noticeable impact on trade relations between Vietnam and Ukraine. Additionally, Vietnam maintains trade relations with the United States. This is illustrated in the graph below.

Figure 7.



Source: World Integrated Trade Solution

The graph shows that Vietnam's exports to the United States increased steadily from 2019, peaking in 2022 before experiencing a slight decline in 2023. Meanwhile, the value of Vietnam's imports from the United States has been relatively lower and has remained relatively stable. This situation underscores the importance of the U.S. market for Vietnam's trade and demonstrates that Vietnam's economic ties are not solely centered on Russia.

In terms *of economic* interests, both China and Vietnam fall into the "major issue" category. China has strong economic ties with Russia through trade and energy cooperation, but at the same time needs to maintain its economic relations with Western nations, particularly the United States. Vietnam also has an interest in maintaining trade relations with both Russia and Ukraine, even though the conflict does not pose a direct threat to its overall economic stability.

***World Order* Interests**

The United Nations (UN) is an international organization whose primary mission is to maintain international peace and security (Fadillah et al., 2018). Currently, there are 193 member states of the UN (Ulfah, 2021). Every UN member state is committed to contributing to the maintenance of world peace. This is also the case for China and Vietnam, which are two of the 193 UN member states. The Russia-Ukraine conflict has not only impacted the countries directly involved in the war; it has also affected the global economy. This conflict has disrupted supply chains for food resources and energy availability (Prasetyo et al., 2024).

China is one of the countries currently experiencing rapid development, particularly in the economic sphere. This economic growth is accompanied by a shift in China's role in global politics (Febianto, 2024). China no longer isolates itself from the international community, making it an active and influential actor on the global stage. China is one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (Alya et al., 2024). During the Russia-Ukraine conflict, China decided to abstain during the UN General Assembly resolution vote. China also refused to label Russia's actions against Ukraine as an invasion (BBC News Indonesia, 2022). Nevertheless, China has also sought to help resolve the Russia-Ukraine conflict. China proposed that Russia and Ukraine engage in negotiations to prevent the conflict from escalating.

Vietnam is one of the countries in the Southeast Asian region. The Russia-Ukraine conflict has also impacted countries in Southeast Asia. Russia and Ukraine are major suppliers of metals and several other commodities, such as energy (Intan, 2022). However, the Russia-Ukraine conflict has caused a rise in oil prices, creating a new challenge for the global economy, including the Southeast Asian region (Bakrie et al., 2022). This is because Russia was the ninth-largest trading partner for Southeast Asia in 2019 (Prasetyo et al., 2024). Although Vietnam decided to abstain, it also urges all parties involved in the conflict to exercise restraint, reduce tensions, and continue dialogue to find a solution to the conflict. Vietnam's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bui Thanh Son, stated that Vietnam is also committed to resolving disputes through peaceful means, adhering to the principles of the UN Charter and international law—particularly the principle of respecting the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of all nations (VOVWorld, 2022).

Based on Nuechterlein's matrix, the world order interests of both China and Vietnam are categorized as peripheral issues. Although both countries demonstrate an interest in international peace and stability, the Russia–Ukraine conflict does not directly threaten their national survival or core national interests. Therefore, their world order interests are classified as peripheral rather than major, vital, or survival issues.

Ideological Interests

Ideological interests relate to a state's efforts to uphold and protect the value system or ideology that forms the foundation of its political life. Both China and Vietnam maintain communist political systems, but the Russia–Ukraine conflict holds different ideological significance for the two countries. The Russia–Ukraine conflict involves major powers that are indirectly involved. One of the causes of Russia's invasion of Ukraine is Ukraine's desire to join NATO (Azzahra & Simanungkalit,

2024). Ukraine's desire to join NATO poses a threat to Russia. Ukraine's accession to NATO would expand Western influence and weaken Russia's influence in the region (Munayah, 2025). According to a survey *by The Chicago Council on Global Affairs*, the majority of the Russian public also agrees that the United States and NATO are the primary sources of tension between Russia and Ukraine. Russia itself has strained relations with Western nations, particularly the United States. In this regard, China essentially shares the same interests as Russia. China and Russia are cooperating to counter U.S. dominance (Welle, 2025). Since 2018, China and the United States have been engaged in a trade war that has created global economic tensions (Kementerian Pertahanan Republik Indonesia, 2025). This has become one of the factors contributing to tensions between China and the United States.

China is one of the countries that still adheres to communist ideology. The form of communism embraced by China has introduced a new dynamic, making China even more open to the outside world. China has become an increasingly active actor on the international stage. Nevertheless, the Communist Party of China also strives to maintain its legitimacy. For China, the Russia–Ukraine conflict is linked to the competition for influence between Russia and Western nations, particularly the United States. China and Russia share a common stance in opposing Western dominance; consequently, their strategic relationship is shaped by a shared interest in establishing an international order not dominated by a single power. China's refusal to label Russia's actions as an "invasion" and its avoidance of directly condemning Russia indicate a certain alignment with Russia's position in its dealings with Western nations.

On the other hand, the Russia-Ukraine conflict fundamentally has no bearing on Vietnam's ideology. Just like China, Vietnam's embrace of communism does not lead it to isolate itself from the outside world. In fact, Vietnam's economy itself tends to rely on free markets. Its relationship with the United States has also encouraged Vietnam to become a liberal nation. Nevertheless, Vietnam continues to strive to maintain its own ideology in the contemporary world. It is also working to adapt to existing civilizations.

China's ideological interest is categorized as a major issue, whereas Vietnam's ideological interest is categorized as a peripheral issue. For China, the conflict is relevant to its ideological and strategic position in relation to Western influence. For Vietnam, the conflict does not directly threaten its political system or ideological foundations, making ideological interests less central to its response.

Donald E. Nuechterlein's Matrix

Donald E. Nuechterlein's matrix is used to analyze the intensity of national interests in relation to specific international issues. The matrix illustrates the relative priority of different national interests through four levels of intensity: Survival Issues, Vital Issues, Major Issues, and Peripheral Issues. In this study, the matrix is used to compare the intensity of China's and Vietnam's national interests in relation to the Russia–Ukraine conflict.

Table 1. Analysis of the Intensity of National Interests

Interests	China	Vietnam
Defense Interest	Major Issue	Major Issue
Economic Interest	Major Issue	Major Issue
World Order Interest	Peripheral Issue	Peripheral Issue
Ideological Interest	Major Issue	Peripheral Issue

The matrix shows that China and Vietnam share similar levels of intensity in their defense, economic, and world order interests, but differ in their ideological interests. Both countries' defense and economic interests are categorized as major issues, indicating that the Russia–Ukraine conflict is relevant to their strategic and economic relations but does not directly threaten their national survival. Their world order interests are categorized as peripheral because both countries express support for international stability and peaceful conflict resolution, but the conflict does not directly affect their core national interests.

The main difference lies in the ideological dimension. China's ideological interest is categorized as a major issue because the conflict is connected to broader competition between Russia and Western powers, particularly the United States, which is relevant to China's strategic and ideological positioning. In contrast, Vietnam's ideological interest is categorized as a peripheral issue because the conflict does not directly affect the stability of Vietnam's political system or its ideological foundations.

These differences indicate that the similar abstention decisions of China and Vietnam do not necessarily reflect identical configurations of national interests. China's position is associated with the maintenance of its strategic relationship with Russia while managing its relations with Western countries. Vietnam's position, in contrast, reflects the importance of maintaining flexibility in its relations with multiple powers.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that China and Vietnam's decisions to abstain from voting on UN General Assembly Resolution ES-11/1 regarding the Russia–Ukraine conflict were not based on entirely identical national interests. Although both countries have historical ties with Russia and are equally seeking to avoid direct involvement in the conflict, there are differences in their priority interests that influence each country's foreign policy.

Based on an analysis using Donald E. Nuechterlein's national interest matrix, China prioritizes defense, economic, and ideological interests as *major issues*. Strategic relations with Russia, economic interests, and shared perspectives on countering Western dominance are factors influencing China's stance on the conflict. Meanwhile, Vietnam prioritizes defense and economic interests as *major issues*, while ideological interests *are considered peripheral*. This indicates that Vietnam places greater emphasis on a strategy of balancing its relations with various powers—including both Russia and Western nations—rather than upholding ideological interests.

Thus, the main difference between China and Vietnam lies in the orientation of the interests underpinning their stances. China tends to maintain strategic relations with Russia within the context of global power competition, whereas Vietnam places greater emphasis on diplomatic flexibility to preserve the stability of its international relations. The abstentions cast by both countries do not indicate identical positions but rather represent an adjustment of foreign policy based on their respective national interests.

PRACTICAL & THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Practically, this study can serve as a reference for policymakers to understand the differences in China's and Vietnam's national interests when responding to international conflicts, particularly when formulating diplomatic strategies toward these two countries. In this regard, although both countries abstained, their considerations regarding national interests are not necessarily the same. Theoretically, this study reinforces the use of Donald E. Nuechterlein's national interest framework in analyzing differences in interests among countries when responding to international issues. The results show that Nuechterlein's intensity matrix can be used to identify differences in the national interest priorities of the two countries across the dimensions of defense, economy, world order, and ideology.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

In this study, the researcher also used AI as a research tool. The researcher used AI to analyze some slightly complex data, such as in the section on economic significance. In addition, the researcher also used AI to help correct the grammar in this paper. The use of AI is not intended to replace the author's role in the research process. AI was also not used as the primary source of data or scientific references in this paper. The author bears full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the entire content of this article.

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