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Master thesis

**“Sino-American hegemony: Paving the way towards an era of Cold
Peace?”**

*An assessment of divergent understandings of global leadership through the
lens of the Russia-Ukraine crisis*

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Abstract

The presented research investigates the individual understanding of the United States of America and the People's Republic of China regarding hegemony, illustrated through the positioning during the Russia-Ukraine conflict. In order to create a holistic comprehension this thesis first highlights key events and drivers that led up to the military altercation on the European continent and consecutively portrays the overreaching Sino-American competition depicted in this crisis. In addition, contemporary literature is consulted to specify the research's departure point, as the world is witnessing an emerging bipolarity.

The conducted research is guided by a qualitative content analysis of officially published press releases and press briefings of the two great powers to constitute underlying norm priorities and examine target audiences that are sought to be convinced of these values. Hence, the analysis is theoretically underpinned by the concept of strategic rhetorical dissociation and the theory of hegemony in international society to comprehensively establish the respective understandings of hegemony by the United States of America and the People's Republic of China.

This thesis concludes that the Sino-American hegemonic understandings differ in their normative priorities as well as their anticipation of which states the governments want to pursue to accept their global leadership. Furthermore, it is summarized that future cooperation will become increasingly tumultuous. The research additionally provides recommendation for further studies and considerations, when applying the chosen theories.

Keywords: hegemony, bipolarity, the English School, China, US, norm prioritization, alliance systems

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1 Introduction

Ever since the 24th of February 2022 the European continent has been shaken up by the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine. While the two countries have, as of today, not found a way to reach peaceful negotiations, global forces have taken their stance and engaged in the confrontation through subverted economic and political mechanisms. During the course of history, the Ukraine has been part of several states and suffered under the division of its territory until the declaration on independence belatedly in 1991 (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2015). The Ukrainian territory has historically often been an essential pivot for powerful countries from east and west to widen their influence.

To understand how the conflict grew to what the world is now witnessing, one first has to examine the historic events leading up to February 2022 and the resulting political tensions that shaped sentiments in Russia, the Ukraine and the surrounding regions. This account then serves as a basis for an analysis of divergent views on global leadership in the Sino-American context.

The dispute in Eastern Europe initially stemmed from internal differences about how the Ukrainian future should be shaped, resulting in two dominant positions. On the one hand, pro-European citizens wanting to pursue a closer EU-Ukraine relationship and, on the other hand, pro-Russian supporters preferring strengthened ties with the Russian Federation (hereinafter Russia). Thus, various political development in favor of the establishment of a pro-EU government, ultimately led to a referendum in Crimea, a peninsular with a majority of ethnically Russians. The results constituted that the citizens wanted to largely belong to Russia, which was accepted by the Russian President Vladimir Putin and was followed by the necessary measures to acknowledge Crimea as a part of Russia in 2014. Since then, ongoing tensions and altercations between pro-European and pro-Russian forces determined the situation in Crimea. The first Minsk agreement in 2015, a convention installing ceasefire in the region, facilitated through the Normandie format, mediated by Germany and France, was breached shortly after its implementation. A second agreement was agreed upon, which could not provide sustainable ceasefire to the region. (Landeszentrale für politische Bildung - Baden-Württemberg, n.d.)

Six years after the initial annexing of Crimea the disputes in the region increased and Russia's military presence was enhanced along the Ukrainian border. The negotiations about security guarantees between Russia, the US and NATO failed, as the United States of America (hereinafter US or America) made no concessions to refrain from appointing Ukraine the

NATO membership. In addition, Putin proclaimed that the US purposefully used Ukraine to foster anti-Russian sentiments and increased the military threat towards Russia when discussing the option of NATO membership (Janowski et al., 2022).

In the beginning of 2022, the tensions heightened as Vladimir Putin recognized Donetsk and Luhansk as independent republics, while simultaneously voicing concerns over the Ukrainian state authorities implementing radical neo-Nazi practices and encouraging Russophobia (Putin, 2021). Further, claiming that the population of Donetsk and Luhansk is subject of “ethnic cleansing” (ibid.), which was underlined by Russia’s foreign minister Sergey Lavrov, who declared that the events in the Donbas region “have all the marking of genocide” (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2022). These sentiments and critical issues eventually led to the Russian military operation on Ukrainian territory on the 24th of February of 2022. Similarly, to the annexing of Crimea, which was not recognized and condemned by the international community for breaching international law, the military operation was counterposed with condemnation and severe sanctions imposed by numerous states on Russia.

Even though at first glance the dispute is regional, it is additionally a depiction of the increasing competition between the United States of America and the People’s Republic of China (hereinafter China), as the international community is trapped in the development of blocs (Reichart, 2022; Villar, 2022). Europe is seemingly allying with the US, whereas Russia and China are establishing a counterbalance. However, alliances and ideological blocs are not only visible during the ongoing European crisis but equally in terms of visions for the future world order (Backfisch & Hautkapp, 2022; Reichart, 2022; Weisflog, 2022).

The Sino-American competition that can be studied through a look at Russia and the Ukraine today is not a new phenomenon. Tensions between east and west have been extensively debated, both in public and academic spheres, with experts trying to forecast tendencies for the restructuring of global orders. While conflicting ideologies and political decisions by such great powers consistently attain the most attention in this context, contemporary criticism has proposed that smaller states and their potency to (de)legitimize leading nations need to be considered in future discussions. Subverted, this can be observed when assessing how both great powers are building their alliance system and making use of strategic partnerships with smaller countries. While the American network has been extensive and omnipresent throughout history, recent decades have seen a separation of diplomatic influence, as also European countries engage more frequently with Chinese approaches, such as the Belt and Road initiatives (Knott, 2021). Simultaneously, China has been carefully crafting alliances around

the world, according to what Xi Jinping called the development of “a circle of friends across the whole world” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 2017). As of today, China has surpassed the US in regard to foreign embassies and consulates globally (Knott, 2021).

In sum, the Sino-American struggle for power and the restructuring of the world order is opening the discussion on how the two contemporary great powers are envisioning their global leadership roles and which position subordinate states will occupy in this quest for international influence.

1.1 Review of 21st Century Bipolarity

Hereinafter, literature regarding the structure of the international system and the Sino-American competition is reviewed to illustrate contemporary hypotheses and predictions in the international relations (IR) realm. Thereby, it enables the research to display what is already known or assumed about the power struggle between the US and China and thus creates a comprehensive foundation from which this research is departing. Beyond that, this allows for the later findings to be located in the published understandings of other scholars and thus creates value.

Richard Maher (2018) in the *Political Science Quarterly* anticipates that US predominance can still be observed in the future, as China admittedly has the power capabilities to shape global proceedings but is not yet a “true peer competitor” (Maher, 2018, p. 499). Nevertheless, he declares that the clear gap in power created between the US, China and other states of the international community can be used to identify the system as “loose bipolarity” (ibid., p. 497). Even though, the structure will include two power houses again, according to Maher it will differ decisive from the Cold War era, as the Soviet Union (SU) was able to compete militarily but not economically. In contrast, China is expected to surpass America in the economic realm. However, the author stipulates that “the poles that make up bipolar [...] systems are never exactly equal in material capabilities” (ibid., p. 499)¹.

The scholar adds that China’s growing influence will fundamentally shape global politics, and introduces three categories where transitions be most crucial, being “alliance relations, global economic interdependence, and the prospects for global multilateralism” (Maher, 2018, p. 500).

¹ Bipolarity describes the distribution of power between two states within the politically order, who dominantly influence the sectors of military mechanisms and economy (Tomja, 2014).

‘Alliance relations’ will not be as distinct as in the ages of US-Soviet power competition, differing national interest between allied states might lead to fragmentations or the development of alliances with China. Additionally, the ‘economic interdependence’ in highly complex network of global trade routes and agreements is more sensitive and “economic fates [...] are tied together” (Maher, 2018, p. 510). Therefore, Maher describes that the establishment of blocs cannot be ruled out and would thus mirror the Cold War system.

Besides alliance relations and economic interdependency, US-China bipolarity will affect the structures and distribution of responsibilities of the international order. Maher highlights that even though China largely benefitted from the existing liberal international order (LIO)², the Chinese government has voiced criticism and the need to readjust mechanisms and processes within this order. Albeit the author does not predict a Chinese replacement of the current structure he illustrates that China has made advances to establish multilateral organizations, which might be able or designed to challenge the US-led institutions. Moreover, Maher examines that the necessary cooperation when combating global challenges poses an essential obstacle in the emerging bipolarity between the two states, as “incompatible interests and preferences on how to manage these challenges” (Maher, 2018, p.523) will make it difficult to reach mutual beneficial solutions. (ibid.)

Lastly, the scholar concludes that the bipolarity between the US and China will certainly affect the international system, whereby in some policy areas the impact will be more rigorous than in others. Furthermore, it must be observed how smaller states will readjust their behavior and alliance relations, when an alternative to the US is presented. (Maher, 2018)

Similarly, to Maher, Suisheng Zhao (2022) forecasts in his article *The US-China Rivalry in the Emerging Bipolar World: Hostility, Alignment, and Power Balance* that the international order will be shaped by bipolarity in the future and will largely impact the global political sphere (Kupchan 2019, as cited in Zhao, 2022). In contrast to the former scholarly opinion, Zhao is convinced that less powerful but nevertheless influential states e.g., Russia or India has can interfere in the US-China rivalry. He continues in accordance with the former article presented, that the contemporary superpower competition is distinct from the Cold War era, as it entails other challenges such as “misplaced hostility and the attempts to force their allies and partners to take a side” (Zhao, 2022, p. 170).

² The liberal international order refers to the world’s structure based on rules, which have been institutionalized in organizations like the United Nations (Kundnani, 2017).

The author presents that even though China opposes the Cold War mentality it has initiated similar measures to challenge the US and created hostile sentiments to the Western ideologies represented by the American government, and vice versa. Furthermore, the tightening cooperation between China, Russia, and Iran cannot be regarded more than strategic “transactional” (Zhao, 2022, p.172) partnerships and thus has not established comparable alliances. In contrast to the non-existent alliance system of China, US partners have seemingly pondered their benefits of either committing to US-led companionship or economic advantages provided by the Chinese growth model. Hence, the alliances are described as fragile and therefore “the emerging bipolar world has not been dominated by two rigid antagonistic alliance systems” (ibid., p.177).

The article concludes that the Sino-American power competition is best described by “survival versus collapse” (Zhao, 2022, p.184), as no state can completely dominate the other and military conflicts are too costly because of interdependencies. Zhao joins Maher in his belief that cooperation between the two superpowers will be troublesome but indispensable as “that is the true test of statecraft” (Loong, 2020 as cited in Zhao, 2022, p.184).

While the other articles examine the possible impacts and changes in the international system due to US-China bipolarity, Øystein Tunsjø (2018) in his book *The Return of Bipolarity in World Politics* introduces an approach to measure the power capabilities of China to confront US predominance. In Chapter 3 titled *Contemporary U.S. – China Bipolarity* he proclaims that even though China can be considered as superpower it is not yet equaling the US in regard to power parity. In order to assess Chinese power capabilities Tunsjø analyzes seven categories including “China’s economy, military, population, geography, resource endowment, political stability, and competence rates” (Tunsjø, 2018, p. 49)S. 49). The author concludes that China is further narrowing the economic and military gap to amount to the US’s position through its high quantity manufacturing and economically outperforming other countries. Hence, an asymmetry between the US and China, which will continue according to the author, can be observed but is comparable to Cold War period and therefore not an exclusion criterion for bipolarity. (ibid.)

In addition to the extensive measurement method applied in this chapter, Tunsjø further compares China’s capabilities with other major powers to examine if China is contemporarily the only state which could confront the US. Russia and India cannot compete economically, although Russia has similar natural assets. The region of central Asia has historically been Russian dominated, but through the establishment of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) China changed the power balances to its favor. Likewise, European countries and Japan cannot equal China's power potency, even if all factors were combined. Thus, the US is internationally and regionally the sole state, that could challenge the Chinese rise, as no other country possesses the needed overarching competencies. (Tunsjø, 2018)

The aforementioned literature does acknowledge the possibility of a bipolar world with the US and China as leaders in the future. However, Cliff Kupchan (2021), director of research of Eurasia Group, claims that the forecasted bipolarity is already existing and uses the term "Cold Peace" (Kupchan, 2021, p. 123) to describe the current global circumstances, explaining that the confrontation between the two state actors will be mainly in the economic and less military, in comparison to the Cold War era. Moreover, he argues that even though a bipolar structure exists, it is asymmetrical due to the American predominance within the military realm. Nonetheless, China is continuously decreasing the difference between itself and the US economy, which will eventually lead to a "graduation of full bipolarity" (ibid., p.125), according to Kupchan.

In the course of his writing, the author introduces a new concept with the name of bipolarity plus, which describes the interconnection between national elite agendas, nuclear weapons and bipolarity. Kupchan proclaims that these factors will shape the "diffuse yet functioning" (Kupchan, 2021, p. 128) LIO, as the divergent interests and normative foundations of the two countries entail high conflict potential. The article continues to illustrate the impact of bipolarity plus on several suborders of the international system, e.g., the technology sector, trade relations and security concerns. Aside from the implications this bipolarity holds, the author describes the revisionist nature that China could embody in the newly emerging system by introducing four possible scenarios: A conservative China, which does not pursue systematic adjustments due to the generated benefits by the established order, a more aggressive approach were the normative framework is largely acknowledged but the desire for modification maintains, an exit scenario were the Chinese government would attempt to create an alternative order and lastly the option of war to overthrow the international order. Even though, according to Kupchan, there are indications that China is creating institutions which could function as substitutes for Western organizations, he suggests that China is fluctuating between the aggressive and conservative approach (ibid.).

Kupchan's concluding remarks include the necessity for a refined examination of the competition between the two great powers, especially in order to "assess the underlying nature

of contemporary international relations” (Kupchan, 2021, p. 136). Further, he advocates to refrain from producing Cold War references and instead closely examine the impact of this dichotomous leadership on the suborders within the liberal international order. (ibid.)

1.2 Implications and Research Gap

During the review of contemporary literature regarding bipolarity in the international system several reoccurring themes have been observed. The scholarly opinions on the emergence of a bipolar structure do not differ drastically, as all articles either forecasts an upcoming global leadership by two countries or claim that bipolarity is already existing. Further, the asymmetry within this bipolarity is acknowledged by all papers, especially when measuring the military capabilities of the US and China. Nevertheless, only Tunsjø in his extensive comparison between the two countries clarifies that China is the only current great power that can challenge and compete with the American dominance (Tunsjø, 2018).

Furthermore, it is evident that the focus in all comparative research is predominantly on material capabilities, like military resources and economic success. Even though, the importance of alliance relations and the approaches of smaller states are addressed it is not equally extensively discussed. Additionally, the entirety of articles reviewed argues that the cooperation between the American and Chinese side will be highly complicated and have far-reaching consequences for the international realm, as interests and ideologies differ and become increasingly hostile. Nonetheless, there is consensus between all scholars that the new Sino-American bipolarity will be and is distinct from the era of the Cold War, as there are fundamental differences in the national composition of the SU and thus of China, as well as the general structure of global networks and relations in comparison to those decades ago.

As a result, a research gap is detected as the competition between the US and China is largely portrayed and researched through material power capacities, almost entirely excluding influential factors like value systems and normative beliefs. Moreover, the importance of other state actors within the international community is only discussed marginal and their ability to legitimize leadership through alliances and partnerships is almost neglected. Hence, it seems that world leadership can be obtained through military dominance and economic prosperity and therefore is decoupled from the individual visions of leading states and their understanding of world structure, as well as anticipated partnerships networks to sustain their influence.

1.3 Problem Formulation

As established in the introduction the Russia-Ukraine crisis can be regarded as contemporary event, which exemplifies once more the power struggle between China and the US on the macrolevel. It is evident that the Sino-American competition will shape the future of global politics and the systems structure in general. Since, the two states are not only competing for military dominance and economic success, but likewise for allies and partners. Thus, it is vital to understand the countries strategies to legitimize their actions in time of turmoil to further study possible adjustments in the structure of this globalized world.

Beyond the practical implications for the political landscape, the detected research gap likewise poses the question if world dominance can be reduced to material resources. Therefore, the importance of norms and values to obtain global influence must be acknowledged to holistically grasp the visions of the US and China for the international community and regarding the ongoing conflict. Additionally, as previously illustrated alliance systems seem to be underestimated, even though IR literature partially recognizes its ability to legitimize approaches and norms proposed by great powers. Thereby, the research contributes to the discussion on the involvement of smaller states and their engagement in power politics through alliance systems and how they are perceived and utilized by the ruling states.

Subsequently the research question answered by the presented master thesis reads: ***How does the positioning of the US and China towards the Russia-Ukraine crisis illustrate their global leadership understanding?***

Therefore, this paper examines the possible differences and similarities in Chinese and American understanding of their respective global leadership roles. These implications derive from the research of norm prioritizations and target audiences detected in the positioning of the US and China during the Russia-Ukraine crisis.

2 Methodology

In the following chapter the methodological approach is outlined to create a transparent and replicable research design. The research design illustrates the thesis's structure and its fundamental assumptions about ontology, as well as epistemology. Further, the theoretical framework and its value for this research are vindicated. Afterwards, the application of a

qualitative content analysis and its utilization in this thesis is described. This chapter is completed by a reflection on the research limitations.

2.1 Research Design

As the former presented research question is concerned with the global leadership understanding of the US and China in their respective interpretation, the research strategy of this thesis follows a comparative qualitative approach (Bryman, 2016). Firstly, a comparative research design provides the opportunity to create a profound understanding of social phenomena, because of the contrasting between two or more actors, countries, or cases with the same method. Thereby, qualitative research enables the analysis to illustrate the individual realities constructed by the two states studied and its individual positioning towards the Russia-Ukraine altercation.

Thus, this has several implications for the underlying ontological and epistemological underpinnings. The ontological considerations thereof are constructivist. This allows the thesis to acknowledge the multiplicity of realities, here those of China and the US rather than constraining itself to one given and stagnant truth and hence adequately depict the differences and similarities in framing the Russia-Ukraine crisis. Following the constructivist ontology, the epistemology which underlines this paper is interpretivist. Interpretivism aspires to understand the behavior of actors, especially in a social context. Additionally, it seeks to explore the deeper meaning behind certain actions and is based on the recognition of differences between humans and social entities, which consequently allows the research to examine the legitimization strategies of the US & China (Bryman, 2016). Even though the chosen theory of hegemony in international society includes realist elements (Clark, 2011), that allude to a more positivist methodology, a closer examination reveals that the accentuation of ideas and values within this theory cannot be complemented with numeric quantitative methods. Moreover, a positivist approach would limit the study to one reality where belief systems are static. Therefore, the normative factors contained in the ES need a constructivist foundation to be appropriately interpreted and of value for the answering of the research question.

The following structure of the thesis is illustrated in the figure one below:

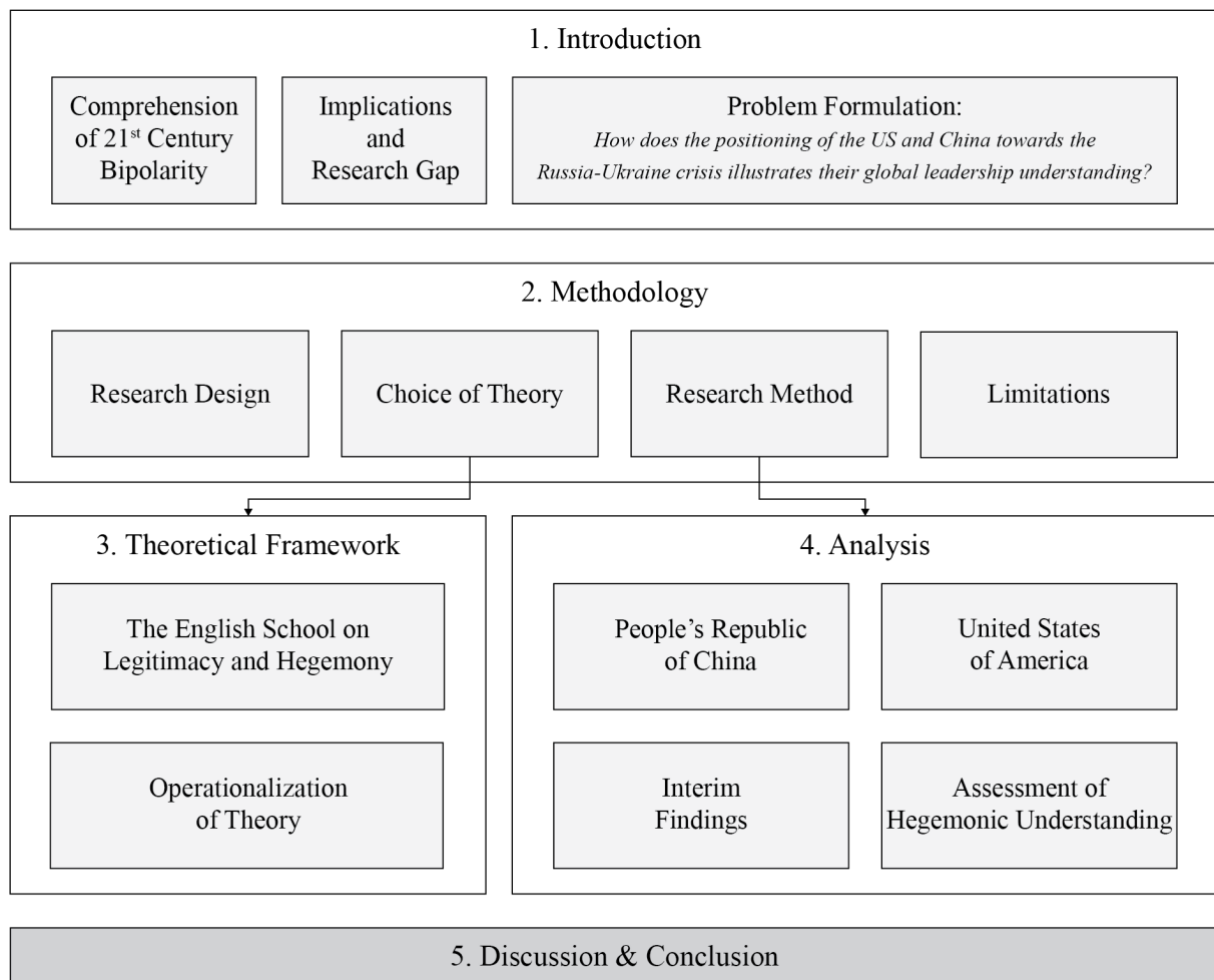


Figure 1: Detailed illustration of the research design

2.2 Choice of Theory

The literature on power relations is complex and provides all kinds of conceptualities, but mostly in the light of realism and liberalism and leave only a narrow field of combining the elementary assumptions regarding global dominance from both schools. Thus, it is necessary to open the research field of power dynamics between the US and China to a more holistic approach. Therefore, this research work is based on the foundational assumptions of the English school of international society (ES) and more specifically on Ian Clark's theory of hegemony in international society, which is perceived as a combination of the classical IR paradigms.

The combination between anarchical society and interstate cooperation, and the fundamental ES presumption of shared beliefs between the participating states enables this research to examine Sino-American power competition through a normative lens. Further, Ian Clark (2011), in his work *Hegemony in the international society*, has constituted how hegemony can be incorporated in the structure of an anarchical society and how great powers must be enabled

by other participant within the global sphere, which subsequently ties it to legitimacy. Consequently, allowing this paper to consider the detected research gap of alliance systems and their importance to sustaining power. Additionally, the theory exemplifies different types of hegemony considering its composition and constituencies (ibid.), which provides the research with an in-depth and comprehensive framework to assess the global leadership understanding of the two countries within the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Moreover, the chosen theory offers the possibility to not only assess hegemony in relation to subordinate states, but also to acknowledge the cooperation between the great powers in charge and their mutual or differing understanding of world guidance (ibid.), which allows this thesis to fully examine the nature of a Sino-American bipolarity. Hence, hegemony in international society presents a holistic framework to examine the global leadership understanding of China and the US in terms of its composition, to which audiences the two states anticipate appealing in order to generate legitimacy from subordinate states and the cooperation between these powers.

2.3 Research Method

The later applied method is a qualitative content analysis (QCA), which emphasis lies on creating meaning in political communication (Williamson et al., 2018) and thus is tightly interlinked with the interpretative epistemological foundation of this thesis. QCA enables studies to classify reoccurring subjects in sampled data and likewise considers the frequency of these themes as essential, while likewise allowing a “subjective interpretation of the content and text” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). As the research objective aims to examine possible similarities and differences between the Chinese and American global leadership understanding, it is therefore necessary to review textual communication by the respective states to extract categories where prioritizations of norms or approaches can be observed and subsequently interpreted.

Albeit, to conduct an in-depth study this thesis focusses on the European crisis between Russia and Ukraine and the framing of the conflict by China and the US as it is contemporary and politically relevant. Furthermore, the crisis is an enabling factor to observe similar or differing norm agendas between the US and China in their rhetoric when trying to obtain legitimacy and justifying their positioning.

In consequence, the delineation of this research to the conflict influences the data sampling process and later the establishing of categories (Williamson et al., 2018). Thus, the method of

purposive sampling was used, which constitutes that the data must relate either to the chosen exemplification or the actors involved, more precisely the method speaks of ‘units’ to be able to consciously collect data relevant to the research question (Bryman, 2016). As the thesis is both considering the official positioning of the US and China towards the Russia-Ukraine crisis and their understanding of hegemony deriving from the former, the primary sources collected as the ‘units’ of analysis are therefore official state documents explicitly addressing the ongoing combat. These written communications were retrieved from the official websites of ‘The White House’ and ‘The State Council of the People’s Republic of China’ and their respective foreign ministry websites from the 24th of February until the 1st of May 2022. The websites’ archives were filtered for statements and press releases directly addressing the conflict, with search keywords like Russia, Ukraine etc. Further, this data collection is considered to best reflect the states stance and actions, as it is composed and published by official government sources and thus believed to reliably represent the national approach to international crisis. In total 150 statements from both governments were submitted to QCA, albeit not all documents are referenced in the later analysis due to repetitive rhetoric and better readability. However, state documents require to be attentively investigated with special cautiousness as a result of their inherit biases (Bryman, 2016). Nonetheless, precisely these biases and “individual depiction of reality(ies)” entail valuable information for social research and makes them eclectic and meaningful research documents accordingly (Bryman).

Before illustrating the coding process and the formation of categories it is fundamental to define the nature of the conducted QCA. As there are several existing approaches to examine content in qualitative research, this study has chosen a combination of directed and conventional analysis, the former guides the analysis entirely through the emerging categories from the sampled data, whereas the later utilizes categories derived from the chosen theoretical framework (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The main categories delineating audiences, establishing presences and bounded dialogue were transferred from the concept of strategic rhetorical dissociation (hereinafter abbreviated with SRD) to holistically exemplify target audiences and norm prioritization (Sundaram, 2021). In addition, the approach acknowledges the importance of rhetoric in political contexts and communication, allowing the research to conduct interpretative and constructivist methods, as QCA is likewise interested in underlying patterns within communicative means (Williamson et al., 2018).

Hereafter, the documents were loosely open coded and reoccurring themes were established as sub-categories (Bryman, 2016). This research used literal codes, due to the number of

documents analyzed, although statements that were contextually relevant for the profound establishment of categories were included without a literal code. The categories derived from the data were then subjected to the tripartite structure of SRD to create overreaching classifications with theoretical relevance. Sub-categories, as shown in figure two, were developed based on the coded data and the reoccurring themes within.

Main Category according to SRD	Sub-Category	Codes	Quantity
Delineating audience	Partners & allies	Without partners	15
Establishing presence	Sanctions	Economic costs	25
		Severe consequences	
Bounded dialogue	International community	In cooperation with	10
		Act in union	

Figure 2: Exemplification of analytical table for coding and categorization process

Even though, the described coding and categorization process was conducted by one researcher, the reliability of these themes is guaranteed through the consistent revising of the data over the creation time-period and continuous adjustments of the categories during the process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 as cited in Hsiu-Fang & Shannon, 2005).

Thereafter, the categories and respective codes are analyzed with the concept of SRD in order to establish Chinese and American norm prioritizations and targeted audiences to then depart from and use the theory of hegemony in international society. Although, the examined content of the developed categories is most significant for the conducted analysis, the quantity of mentions within the statement of the US and China is regarded as essential indication for norm prioritization. Furthermore, the published documents entailed information about frequency and subjects matter with other states regarding the Russia-Ukraine crisis, which are also seen as demonstration of the ‘bounded dialogue’ main category and therefore included in the later examination. This practice is a necessary part of QCA, as it acknowledges that “counting the frequency of categories can be a very effective indicator of importance” (Williamson et al., 2018, p. 463). The interim findings of this section are then combined with Ian Clark’s theory and ultimately create a detailed portray of the Sino-American understanding of global leadership.

2.4 Limitations

This research thesis is subjected to individual, methodological and theoretical limitations, which should be considered when reproducing the approach or further working with the presented results.

Besides, the volatility of the Russia-Ukraine crisis needs to be considered, as events further develop, and the positioning of the US and China might change during the course of the creation of this thesis. Additionally, as the situation is not yet a historical event with a definite resolution the findings of this research cannot be generalized or provide irrevocable tendencies, rather it should be regarded as an excerpt of this contemporary crisis and which trends and concluding thoughts can be extracted from this at the time being. Nevertheless, through the coding process and reoccurring themes and terminology used in the analysis an apparent pattern was established and thus counterbalances the future statements not included in this thesis.

Despite the theory's emphasis towards subordinate states and their role in enabling and legitimizing a singular hegemon or a collective, the effectiveness and adoption of the norm prioritization framed by the US and China was not covered in this research. This results from an explanatory gap, where the remarks by smaller states towards the crisis might resonate with one of the agendas established, but a causality cannot be proven. Therefore, the presented findings are recognized as foundation, on which basis further research can be conducted and investigate the attitudes of ancillary states.

3 Theoretical Framework

Hereinafter the theory of hegemony in international society, coined by Ian Clark, is explained, and contextualized by its roots in the paradigm of the ES. In order to apply the theory onto the case of Sino-American leadership understanding in times of the Russia-Ukraine conflict the concept of SRD is introduced as subsidiary resource to structure the first section consecutive analysis and extract fundamental norm prioritizations for the later comparison.

3.1 The English School on Legitimacy and Hegemony

The paradigm of ES combines core assumptions of realism and liberalism, establishing the theory as a middle path between the two popular IR paradigms. Accordingly, ES scholars

believe that the international system in which sovereign states operate is anarchical. Additionally, the school of thought acknowledges that shared motives and values exist across borders, which subsequently influence the behavior of individual states. (Jackson et al., 2018)

Within the ES paradigm, so-called ‘institutions’ represent the main components to establish and sustain an international society, which do not relate to organizations, but rather exemplify long-term political practices that have and will shape the behavior of states in the IR realm (Stivachtis, 2017). These practices are the balance of power, the role of great powers, international law, diplomacy, and war (Bull, 1977). As for this research objective, the interplay of great powers and the distribution of dominance is of central interest, it is essential to give an overview of this institution in particular. The great powers are responsible for the leadership of the international community and entail varying “managerial functions” (Bull, 1977, p. 207). The exercising of these responsibilities is nevertheless not only dependent on material capabilities, as described in realist theories, but dominantly influenced by international relations, which the great powers entertain with other states (Clark, 2011). These other state actors then recognize the guidance of the powerful states and legitimize them to lead the international society. In consequence, the hegemonial concept introduced is aligned with the foundational assumptions of the ES paradigm, as it “generally seek(s) to negotiate an accommodation between systems of material power relations, and shared normative frameworks” (Clark, 2011, p. 35).

Thereafter, the theory of hegemony in international society coined by Ian Clark is illustrated to create a thorough understanding of its implications for the composition of Sino-American global leadership. In order to comprehend the later described concept of hegemony, it is fundamental to demonstrate where this terminology is situated in the realm of ES. First, a clear distinction between primacy and hegemony must be made, where primacy simply describes mere predominance and hegemony is “then an institutionalized practice, legitimated within international society” (Clark, 2011, p. 34). This specific differentiation provides the theory with the possibility to align hegemony with the anarchical society. The institutionalization of hegemony can be explained as concept, which is “not found in domestic society” (ibid., 2011, p. 52). Therefore, the sovereignty of states or the anarchical order of the world is not questioned or undermined, but it primarily portrays a practice which shapes the power dynamics in global politics on a regular basis.

In liberal and realist assessments of the hegemon's capabilities to obtain predominance, the focus has been largely on material resources, which would explain their rise to world power. Even

though the relevance of these factors for hegemony cannot be neglected, “what has been largely missing is the social reception” (Clark, 2011, p. 59) of the hegemon by other state actors within the system. Hence, it exists a variety of different types of hegemony, which are influenced by the environment surrounding them and the guaranteed support from other actors (ibid.).

In accordance with the former, the theory stipulates those two characteristics are especially relevant to understand hegemony in international society. First the composing of the hegemon itself and second the constituency where the legitimization of hegemony stems from. The composition can reach from a single reigning hegemon to a collective of several powerful states, which share the leadership of the international society. Moreover, the constituency is also two-fold, a hegemon can appeal to most of the world community, which suggests an inclusive hegemony, but can also choose to only lead a certain grouping of smaller states, which then would be a coalitional hegemony. The collective nature is not only limited to the composition of hegemony but can likewise be pictured in the constituency of this theoretical approach. In conclusion, Clark presents four types of hegemony, as illustrated in figure three below. (Clark, 2011)

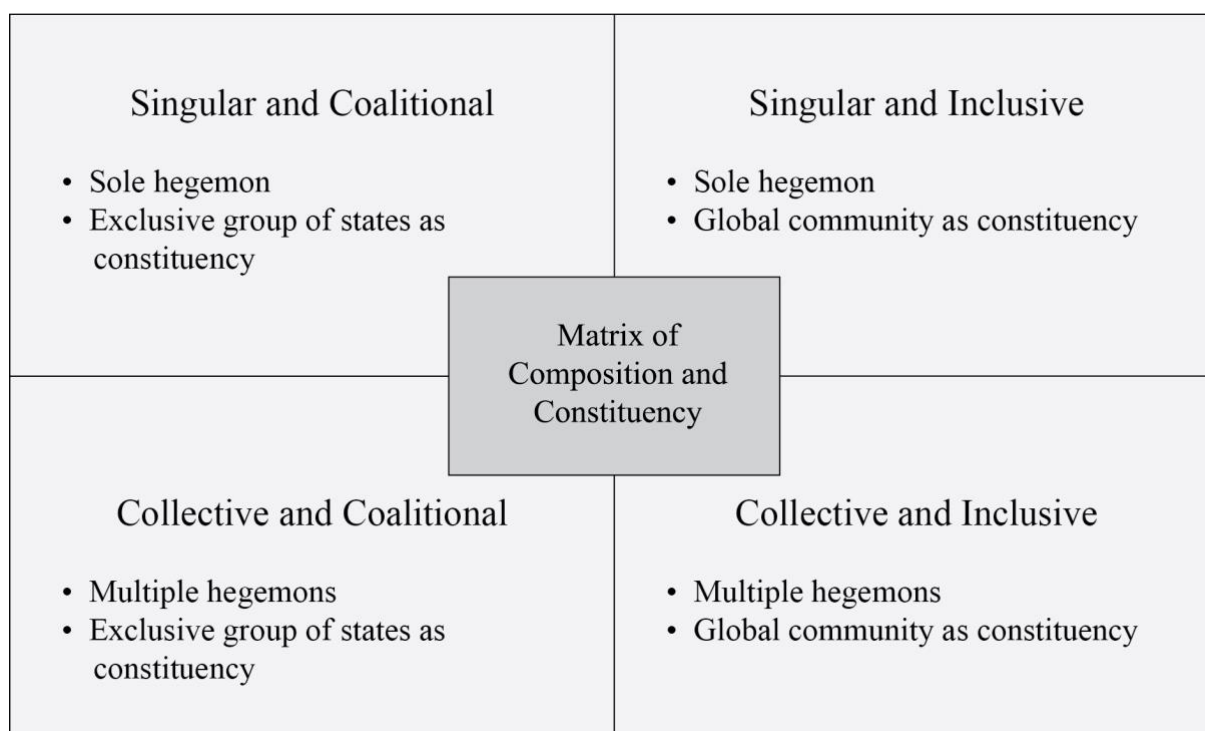


Figure 3: Matrix of composition and constituency (adopted from Clark, 2011, p.61)

In particular, the two types of collective hegemony are more complex when identifying the exact composition and its distribution of power. A coalition on the composition level implies leadership of several powerful states, which guide the global community, whereas a coalition

on the constituency level portrays a group of subordinate states, which legitimizes the guidance of the singular or collective hegemon. Furthermore, different prepositions for collective hegemonial power exist, which include a vertical and horizontal axis. The vertical axis (as shown in figure four) portrays the relationship between the leaders and the remaining states of international society, also called “the putative expression of incipient hierarchy” (Clark, 2011, p. 63) to that, the horizontal axis (as shown in figure four), or “the putative expression of continuing anarchy” (ibid.) depicts the agreement between the powerful states on a collective normative foundation and acknowledges their joint responsibility towards the world order in order to fulfill their managerial functions and effectively guide the international society (ibid.).

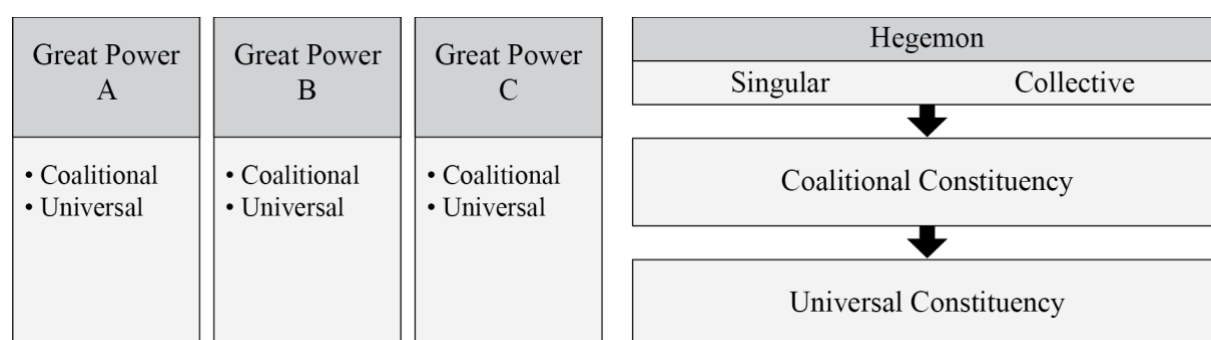


Figure 4: Vertical and horizontal axis of legitimacy (adopted from Clark, 2011, p.64)

Besides the vertical and horizontal legitimization axes, ES scholars further distinguish between output and input legitimacy, as “rules tend to achieve compliance when they, themselves comply with secondary rules” (Franck, 1988 as cited in Clark, 2011). Hence, these two distinct strands of legitimacy give insights, where the legitimization from constituencies and other hegemon stems from, as input legitimacy lays its emphasis on the beliefs and norms which influence a certain process and the representativeness of all interest, whereas output legitimacy focusses on the effectiveness of the outcome and its successful product (Clark, 2011).

At last, the theory proclaims that a single universal hegemon is “the least attainable in practice” (Clark, 2011, p. 66) because it must appeal to all of international society to generate its legitimacy for power. Therefore, a joint hegemony combines “the best of both worlds” (ibid., p. 64), as it provides guidance through the centralization of power, while constantly reassessing and auditing themselves by the other states in the same power position. This essentially also entails that legitimacy is not only granted “by the lesser members of international society alone, but also by the other members of the peer group” (ibid., p. 65). Hence, the combination of power by several states creates a legitimacy constituency itself. As this is in accordance with the

previous illustrated bipolar structure of the world and the Sino-American power competition, this thesis chose to mainly focus on the collective composition of hegemons.

3.2 Operationalization of Theory: Strategic Rhetorical Dissociation (SRD)

In order to be able to understand a possible shared normative framework among great powers and to examine the constituencies of the US and China, as proclaimed by the above-described theory, it is necessary to first assess the norms and values that guide the positioning of the Chinese and American administration through the Russian-Ukraine crisis. Therefore, the concept of SRD is utilized to examine proposed norm agendas by the two states and their prioritization within this hierarchy (Sundaram, 2021). For this reasoning, SRD is a valuable supplementary concept to first establish a holistic foundation and thus allow the later analysis to compare the Chinese and American norm prioritization in accordance with Ian Clark's hegemony theory and subsequently deduce their respective global leadership understanding.

SRD illustrates how political actors are prioritizing norms and justifying such normative hierarchies to selected audiences in order to gain legitimacy from other participating actors and subsequently achieve a desired policy outcome (Sundaram, 2021). This process is three folded and can be categorized as follows: delineating audience types, establishing presence and bounded dialogue. The first category of **delineating audiences** examines how actors perceive their audiences and subsequently to which extent these audience types might react to a presented prioritization of norms. Through the differentiation of positive, neutral, or negative audiences towards a norm prioritization it is possible to either convince or maintain already favorable audiences. This process is inherently dynamic and everchanging as recipients could reevaluate their stance during a debate and consequently reassess if they want to agree with the proposed strategy of the actor. **Establishing presence** explains how actors engage with audiences, which they consider to be already sympathetic to their justifications. In addition, a certain value or norm is established to be worthy of being prioritized in the context of an international situation. Nevertheless, this does only imply that in this specific circumstance the chosen norm is more urgent to consider and is not inherently superior to other value beliefs. Additionally, to the individual prioritization of norms, political actors can also engage in sidelining different proposed norm prioritization in order to decrease their respective legitimacy. Therefore, it is important to the political actor who proposed such prioritization to sustain the approval of the delineated audiences and on the other hand also includes rejecting audiences to minimize opposition. Lastly, **bounded dialogue** describes how actors are continuing debates with

restricted sympathetic audiences to strengthen their proposition and in consequence limit the differing views or hierarchies of norms from gaining momentum. (Sundaram, 2021)

Furthermore, SRD believes that a universal consensus on how norms are ought to be prioritized or applied does not exist and therefore are dependent on the political context and dynamic of an unfolding situation (Sundaram, 2021). Furthermore, it enables the research to include all belief systems, Western and Non-Western, in equal manner to examine, which values, and norms are prioritized by the two countries assessed. In addition, it takes subsidiary actors and their responsibility to accept or reject the suggested norm agendas into consideration and hence can be naturally interlinked with the former introduced theory of hegemony in international society.

4 Analysis

The subsequent analysis chapter is dichotomous, as it first examines the norm prioritization and target audiences brought forward by the US and China, in consideration of the former illustrated concept of SRD. Due to the contemporary nature of the Russia-Ukraine altercation and its subsequent lack of data it is first necessary to examine basic assumptions and characteristics of the Chinese and American positioning. These interim findings are then applied to the theory of hegemony in international society in order to investigate the two states respective understanding of global leadership. The overall structure of the analysis is portrayed in figure five below to create a transparent and comprehensive understanding of the analytical process.

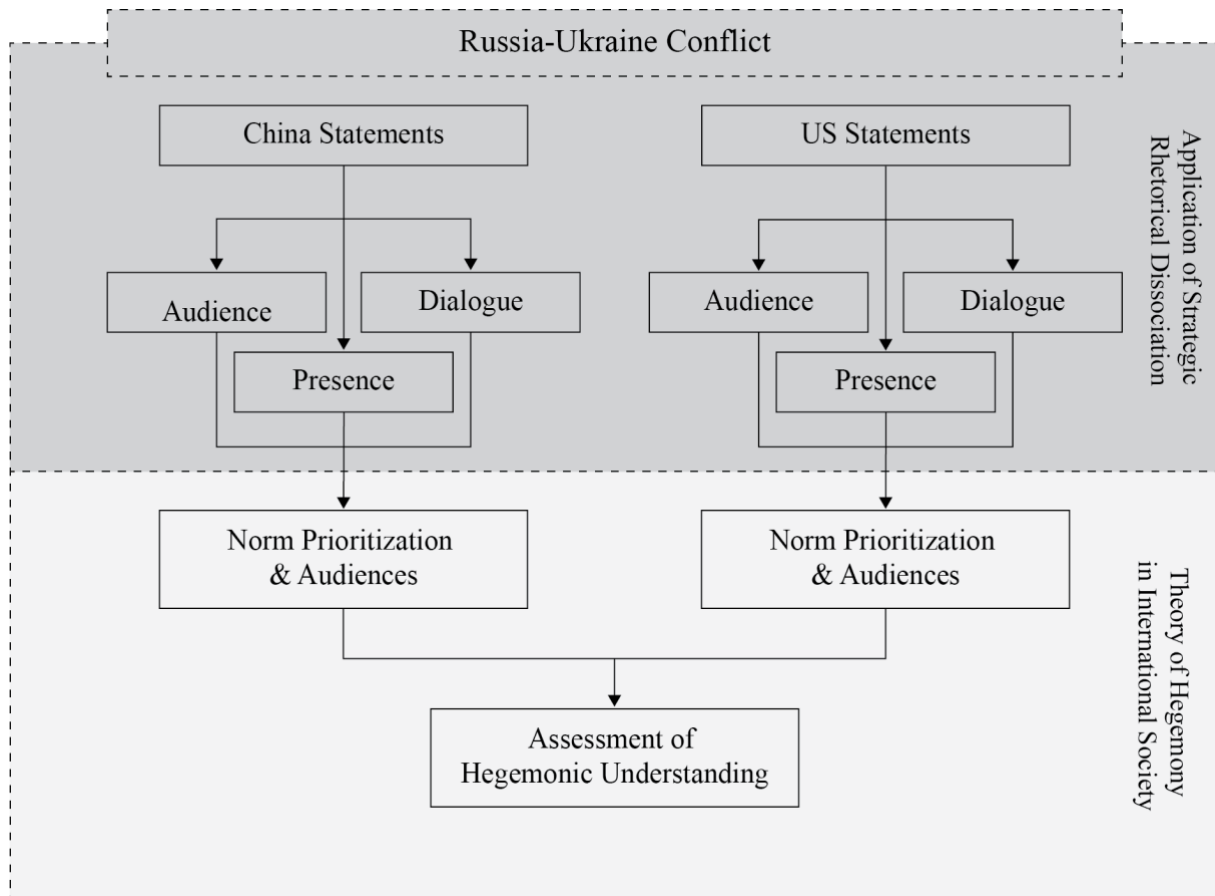


Figure 5: Illustration of analytical process

4.1 People’s Republic of China

Before evaluating Chinese statements according to the concept of SRD it is necessary to first understand the general positioning of China within this conflict and how it defines its role and obligations.

Firstly, China is clear in stating that it “is not a party involved” (The State Council, 2022g) and has a “objective and fair” (The State Council, 2022j) position towards the unfolding situation in Ukraine. Furthermore, the government emphasizes several times that due to China being a “responsible major country” (MOFA, 2022l) it will take the necessary measures to “play a positive role in seeking and realizing peace” (MOFA, 2022c). In addition, China is repeatedly referring to being “a permanent member of the Security Council” (The State Council, 2022b), which could let one assume that it wants to highlight its right of co-determination and equally its influence to shape the conflict resolution. Nonetheless, it accentuates that safeguarding peace and encourage negotiations will be “in our own way” (The State Council, 2022g), which could

imply that this approach entails different prioritization of norms than other actors, eventually indirectly suggesting the US.

Further, it has been observed that the Chinese statements 16 times entail the affirmation that China is “earnestly abiding by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter” (The State Council, 2022b) and is stipulating that it “firmly defend(s) international equity and justice” (MOFA, 2022a). This emphasis could supposedly mean that all measures and efforts taken are grounded on internationally recognized principles and are therefore in accordance with international law and not divergent from other approaches. Besides China’s own prescription to these norms, it also suggests that these obligations and guidelines “must be observed” (MOFA, 2022j), “jointly upheld” (MOFA, 2022b) and that “all countries should adhere to” (MOFA, 2022c) them. This could be interpreted as a call for the world community to base their actions on a joint foundation and the constructive role China wishes to portray in this ongoing turmoil. In addition, the phrase that “time will prove that China’s position is on the right side of history” (MOFA, 2022n), which could advert to the accusations made by some international actors towards China’s approach to Russia and is therefore in accordance with the aforementioned own path that the Chinese government wants to pursue. This strengthens the argument that China supposedly believes firmly in their stance and that it is the most adequate approach to resolve this crisis and presumably future ones.

Delineating audience

During the evaluation of China’s remarks towards the Russia-Ukraine crisis, a clear targeting of a sympathetic audience has not been found, whereas an indication for a possible negative listenership has been detected. Furthermore, two dominant themes have reoccurred, being the international community and developing states, that China might consider as benevolent or neutral. A presumed negative audience can be observed through the remarks made by China that states who associate with the US-led approach of conflict resolution are “irresponsible” (MOFA, 2022a) and those who oppose such a strategy on the contrary “hold[ing] just positions” (MOFA, 2022x). In reversion of the argument, this could be illustrating that those countries might perceive the Chinese approach similarly and are thereof fundamentally negative to the norm prioritization of China. Despite that, this could also emanate that the Chinese government does not want to convince the delineated negative audiences, as they do not align with their principles.

The Chinese government calls on the international community “to take a responsible attitude” (MOFA, 2022f), “play(ing) a[sic!] active role” (MOFA, 2022l) in resolving the conflict and

that it “should jointly support the peace talks between Russia and Ukraine” (MOFA, 2022j). These requests might imply that China perceives itself as enabling actor for joint efforts in conflict resolution and further as leading country to facilitate and encourage peaceful measures. Additionally, this could be undermined by the Chinese emphasis that it “is ready to work with the international community” (The State Council, 2022k) and to “work alongside the international community” (MOFA, 2022g), accentuating this intent even more by using the word “willing” (The State Council, 2022f) in some passages. By insinuating a joint working group, it can be assumed that China is attempting to allude to the international society to follow their approach and thereof its norm prioritization.

Moreover, in several Chinese press releases the clear demand that the global collective “should focus” (MOFA, 2022l), “should help” (MOFA, 2022u), and “should [...] give peace and chance” (MOFA, 2022s) might suggest that the above made claim can be strengthened, because China is actively advising directions for cooperative attempts to prevent the European crisis from deteriorating. Further, the recommendation to “form synergy and speak with one voice” (The State Council, 2022m) might expressly underline the desire to create a unilateral approach and include all countries. The interpretation of a Chinese-led conflict resolution could be underscored, when taking into consideration that China’s comments are expressing a “common interest” (The State Council, 2022g) and “common aspiration” (ibid.), implying a global consensus on the matter. Nevertheless, it should be noted that it can be assumed that all participants of international society hope to see a peacefully and immediate settlement of the crisis. On the other hand, the presumably definite Chinese belief that “a vast majority” (MOFA, 2022q) of countries have a complete aligned consensus on how to settle the Russia-Ukraine situation could allude to the presumption that China categorizes most countries as positive or neutral towards their approach.

The Chinese side strongly emphasizes its responsibility to “firmly safeguard the legitimate and legal rights and interests of developing countries, especially small and medium-sized countries” (The State Council, 2022b). In addition, the government stipulates and assumingly wants to draw attention to the threat posed by the ongoing crisis, when addressing that “their economic development and social stability have come under severe threat, risking political turbulence” (MOFA, 2022s). A possible interpretation could read as follows, China wants to establish a like-minded audience among the developing world and portray itself as a protector of smaller states “with weak economic foundations” (ibid.). In doing so, it can be assumed that this audience might be in favor of the norm prioritization proposed by China. Furthermore, Chinese

officials stipulate that they “hope that the US can truly work with most developing countries in the world” (MOFA, 2022l), implying that the American counterpart is not equally involved in the interests and concerns of the respective states. Thus, it can be assumed that China does not only perceive itself as protector but likewise as facilitator of political and economic interaction between the global south and the US, as it has the necessary insights and understanding of both sides. This could further strengthen the perception that the Chinese government wishes to establish developing countries as audience, which is in favor and thereof offers their assistance in promoting multilateral relations between both parties.

Establishing presence

Through the process of establishing presence, influential actors are advocating for a temporary prioritization of norms due to special circumstances in the global or national sphere. The assessment of the sampled data produced five main categories, which might be from importance for the Chinese government when approaching the Russia-Ukraine conflict. These namely are dialogue and negotiations, humanitarian crisis, European security mechanisms, security concerns and sovereignty.

Dialogue and negotiations

The intense emphasis and frequent repetition of China to “end the conflict through dialogue and negotiation” (The State Council, 2022n) implies a strong prioritization of these means, as they are mentioned 84 times in the evaluated statements. In addition, China stresses that the suggested approach is “the fundamental way out of the Ukraine crisis” (MOFA, 2022k), “the only right path” (MOFA, 2022o) and “the most realistic and feasible way to defuse the crisis” (ibid.). The quoted statements strengthen the argument that in the Chinese hierarchization of norms the peaceful resolution of the conflict through diplomatic rather than military solutions are ranked the highest. This is furthered undermined by statements, where China is accentuating that they “support[s] and encourage[s] all efforts that are conducive to a peaceful settlement of the crisis in Ukraine” (MOFA, 2022p). However, the examined statements let one assume that China is directing the responsibility to foster such peace talks to “the parties concerned” (MOFA, 2022j), “relevant sides” (MOFA, 2022b) and actors who are “directly concerned” (MOFA, 2022a).

As it is evident that diplomatic efforts are welcomed and appreciated, it is nonetheless ambiguous who these parties specifically are. On the one hand China “encourage(s) the two sides”(MOFA, 2022i), which can be presumed to be Russia and Ukraine in the given context,

which is made even clearer in several other statements where the two state actors are directly addresses with “direct negotiations between Russia and Ukraine” (The State Council, 2022e) and “calls on Ukraine and Russia to find a solution” (The State Council, 2022d). On the other hand, China is stipulating that “the US and NATO should also engage in dialogue with Russia to address the root cause of the Ukraine crisis” in order to “ease the security concerns of both Russia and Ukraine” (MOFA, 2022n). These remarks allude to the presumption that China might considers the US and NATO states as involved parties in this conflict and hence might want to seek an understanding by all actors with concerns and individual interests.

Humanitarian crisis and casualties

The most important norm above mentioned is followed by the reoccurring subject of the humanitarian situation in Ukraine and the necessary measures that must be guaranteed to avoid further deteriorating of the situation. China mentioned the humanitarian crisis 59 times, including the addressing of civilian casualties. China’s foreign minister Wang Yi explicitly stated that “the top priority now is to avoid a humanitarian crisis” (The State Council, 2022k), emphasizing the seriousness of problem when using words like “a large-scale” (The State Council, 2022k) and “massive” (MOFA, 2022j). Furthermore, the country is especially concerned with civilians’ security and demands on several occasions that this “should be effectively safeguarded” (The State Council, 2022b) to “avoid civilian casualties” (MOFA, 2022f). Additionally, the “the safe and timely access of humanitarian aid” (The State Council, 2022d) must be provided. The importance of this issue to the Chinese side could be assumed from the former listed statements and is made even more evident when China stated that they “do not wish to see civilians trapped in the conflicts and deeply sympathize with them” (MOFA, 2022j). Thus, the expressed deep concerns and the grief “for the increasing number of civilian casualties and refugees” (MOFA, 2022m) could allude to the fact that China’s second norm is the safety of civilians.

This assumption could be strengthened by the Chinese governments “six-point initiative on the humanitarian situation in Ukraine” (MOFA, 2022n) in order to avert a worsening of the situation. Beyond the initiative, China has “provided humanitarian assistance to Ukraine” including indispensable supplies like “food, baby formula, sleeping bags, quilts and damp-proof mats” (MOFA, 2022m). Further, the government proclaims that it “stands ready to provide further humanitarian assistance to Ukraine and other affected countries” (MOFA, 2022n) and “play[] a positive role in evacuating citizens of other countries” (The State Council, 2022g). The efforts made by China to help displaced or harmed Ukrainian civilians might support the

previously made reasoning that this matter is of utmost urgency and relevance on the agenda for this conflict, further reinforced by the statement that the country “attaches great importance to the humanitarian situation in Ukraine” (MOFA, 2022r).

China’s emphasis on this subject is also reflected in the international context, considering statements where Chinese officials stressed that efforts should be made “jointly” (The State Council, 2022m) and closely “working with the international community” (MOFA, 2022r) to prevent the crisis from deteriorating for the population in Ukraine. Further, it can be anticipated that China not only wishes to put their initiative forward, but also “welcome(s) all initiatives and measures proposed by all parties” (MOFA, 2022m) and therefore wants to encourage other states to provide help to ease the overall situation. Aside from the call for support of other nations, the Chinese government presumably addresses the appeal towards the international society that “humanitarian issues should not be politized” (MOFA, 2022r). Hence, this might indicate that the subject is not tied to conditionalities or previous negative sentiments but can be rather understood as universal act of help granted to the ones in need.

Security concerns

In addition to the already presented norms the issue of legitimate security concerns has been observed during the coding of the respective documents. It can be assumed that China has a definite stance towards the critical discussion, which countries security is endangered, as it states in 33 passages that “addressing the legitimate concerns of all parties” (MOFA, 2022b) is obligatory to sustainably resolve the present conflict. Some statements do not only include the concerned parties but specify that “all countries’ legitimate concerns” (MOFA, 2022a) should be taking into account. Elaborating further that a mere addressing is not sufficient but all considerations and interests “must be taken seriously” (The State Council, 2022g) and “should be respected and resolved” (MOFA, 2022a). These remarks give the impression that China is referring to the Russia-Ukraine matter as a European security issue. Withal, two comments include the specific wording of “both sides” (MOFA, 2022e) or, where China is supposedly referring to Russia and Ukraine and their security interests in this conflict. Even though, the Chinese expressions mostly include all involved parties or countries indirectly affected by this altercation it can be assumed that the norm of respecting security concerns is not equally applicable. This interpretation results from the observation that one third of the statements referencing security solicitudes specifically express the understanding of “Russia’s legitimate security concerns” (The State Council, 2022a) and the appeal that Russian interests “ought to be taken seriously and properly addressed” (MOFA, 2022d). It could be questioned why

specific remarks concerning the Ukrainian position are not made publicly and if the prioritization of security concern is in favor of all actors. In alignment with the concept of rhetorical dissociation the temporary prioritization of norms, in this context the security concerns of mostly Russia, can be observed.

European security mechanisms

Besides the Chinese emphasis on a peaceful conflict resolution and the prevention of a drastic humanitarian crisis a fourth theme within the officially released press statements emerged. The desire to build “a balanced, effective and sustainable European security mechanism” (The State Council, 2022a) in order to achieve the overarching aim of “long-term peace in Europe” (The State Council, 2022j). However, the establishment of such a scheme provides not only the possibility of peace creation, but simultaneously should also institute “long-term stability on the European continent” (The State Council, 2022c). Aside from the intention to facilitate such a project no concrete measures on the process and the parties involved have been stated by China. Nevertheless, the consequent repetition of this phrase, more than 25 times throughout the documents, implies that it is prioritized on the Chinese norm hierarchy, which resulted from this conflict.

Interlinked with the aspiration of a joint European security is the strong notion emphasized by China to “adhere to the principle of indivisible security”(MOFA, 2022g). The repeated use of the two statements could be interpreted as a general intent to encourage Europe to facilitate their own security architecture without the involvement of transatlantic ties.

Sovereignty

Another theme which occurs prominently in the analyzed documents is the Chinese accentuation of their stance towards the principle of sovereignty. It can be assumed that China is strongly believing in “respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries” (The State Council, 2022d), as this precise sentence is mentioned 24 times. Further, the government also actively “advocate(s)” (MOFA, 2022f) for the “safeguarding” (The State Council, 2022b) of these rights, as “the Chinese people have deep understanding and strong feelings about state sovereignty and territorial integrity through first-hand experience” (MOFA, 2022a). The historical references and continuous repetition could imply that China is a representant of this norm and will therefore prioritize it within the approach to solving the conflict. Although, the importance of this principle for the Chinese side can be presumably observed, it is not clear, which intent lies behind the expression of such remarks. The statements

could suggest that sovereignty and territorial integrity are universal rights, which are applicable to every state. Taking into consideration the context the comments have been released in, the Russia-Ukraine crisis, it might be assumed that the Ukrainian sovereignty is meant indirectly. Two other remarks could strengthen the presumption, as China directly mentions that “Ukraine’s sovereignty and security should be upheld” (MOFA, 2022v). It could be speculated if China wants to remain neutral and refrain from picking a side and hence does not explicitly state, which countries’ territorial integrity is meant. Consequently, even though these principles have been referred to several times, the indefinite positioning on this issue might imply that this norm is prioritized.

In alignment with the sovereignty of states, China declares on 22 occasions that it “recognizes the complex and special historical context of the Ukraine issue” (The State Council, 2022a) and that it is crucial to understand and consider these “historical merits” (MOFA, 2022s) of the conflict. This allusion might refer to the tightly interwoven history of Russia, Ukraine and partially NATO and could imply that essential factors of this crisis lie in the past interactions of all parties. As these remarks are often made after the declaration of upholding sovereignty and territorial integrity it could seem as the two principles having a conditionality, when conflicts and debates have occurred historically. Nonetheless, the breaching of these rights is thus not justified, but one could get the impression that there seems to be a difference in Chinese rhetoric. In summary, the sovereignty of a country should be upheld as declared by China, and suggests a norm prioritization, even though it is weaker than those mentioned previously. Despite, this declaration the continuous indication of the historical background could question the universality and general applicability of these norms to the Ukraine issue.

Sideline opponents

During the assessment of China’s remarks concerning the conflict it has been largely observed that an extensive number of statements, in total 133, are critically directed at the US. These entail criticism and accusations towards the overall positioning of the US, as well as specific condemnation of implemented measures by the American government.

China’s attitude towards the US could be interpreted as very hostile as it seems to accuse the US of ulterior motives in the Russia-Ukraine crisis, as it remarks that “the real agenda is to prolong US’ hegemony and power politics” (MOFA, 2022t). Likewise, the Chinese government refers to the American approach as “bullying and hegemonic practices against the trend of time”, which could display a general rejection of US strategies both in the ongoing conflict, as well as in other policy areas. Furthermore, the Chinese comments might suggest that the LIO

and its legal liabilities only apply to an exclusive group rather than to every country in the international community in equal terms. This assumption could be underlined by the statement that “the US applies the self-claimed “rules-based order” as “rules of the gang”” (MOFA, 2022t), which yet again could insinuate that basic principles and rights are on the one hand not granted to every state actor and on the other hand interpreted to America’s advantageous gain to sustain their power. The accentuation of ‘rules’ in relation to a certain group could also be understood as a hint towards an ideological alliance, where rights and statutes only apply to those, who have similar ideological viewpoints. In contrary, it could be assumed that China portrays itself to be inherently different and would not engage in such practices, as it “opposes hegemony and power politics” (The State Council, 2022l). Additionally, the official remarks might indicate that China’s critical stance towards US dominance is shared by other state actors since it states that “hegemonic practices [...] have been met with stronger criticism and rejection in the international community” (MOFA, 2022t). Hence, China therefore could be supported in its claims and address like-minded countries, even though lacking to mention, which specific countries and how many other states share the same sentiments.

Beside the general presumed Chinese hostility towards America, the most dominant theme observed in the categorization process, is China’s perception of a “Cold War zero-sum mentality” (MOFA, 2022k) allegedly reinforced by the American authorities. Additionally, the Chinese government argues that “the US is obsessed with drawing ideological lines when forming closed and exclusive cliques” (MOFA, 2022t), which have been characteristics of the Cold War era. The accentuation of ‘obsessed’ and ‘closed’ could suggest an underlying Chinese disagreement with the US strategy of solving the conflict through methods similar to the military and economic standoff between the SU and America. The utilization of words and phrases like “discard” (MOFA, 2022c), it should be “completely abandoned” (The State Council, 2022b), and the “call[] for resolute opposition” (The State Council, 2022i) towards such a resurging understanding of global order could substantiate the negative sentiments assumed. Moreover, in accordance with the Cold War analogies, the Chinese government explicitly expresses their stance towards the previously addressed development of political cliques, as it declares that all countries should “refrain from bloc confrontation” (MOFA, 2022n) and labels this approach as “outdated” (MOFA, 2022s), which consequently could further strengthen the general position of China, introduced above, towards a two-tier system. Conversely, the Chinese government emphasizes its refrain from such exclusive bloc development as it states that it “has never invaded other countries, launched proxy wars, sought spheres of influence or engaged in any military bloc confrontation” (The State Council, 2022b).

Besides the opposition of military alliances, the previous quote could further indicate that China is not only referencing back to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict but criticizing the overall military engagement of the US. This seems to be also manifested with the line of reasoning that “neither the world nor Europe needs a new Cold War” (MOFA, 2022q), presumably suggesting that the American policies and measures would eventually lead to subsequent military stand-offs and ideological hostilities. Through the clarification by China’s official remark that “it has no interest in the friend-or-foe dichotomous” (MOFA, 2022a) the above made presumptions of hostilities and disapproval with US measures are further enhanced, as it specifically voices disinterest.

The statements also include references to the US-led NATO, as the government indirectly proclaims that “regional security cannot be guaranteed by reinforcing and even expanding military blocs” (The State Council, 2022b), which could be attributed to the growing number of participatory states of the transatlantic military alliance. In addition, it seemingly adds to the Russian accusation that the extended NATO territory threatened Russia’s security, as depicted in the introductory section of this paper. Moreover, in a more comprehensive manner China characterizes NATO as “relic” (MOFA, 2022s) stemming from the Cold War period, which should have been “disbanded” (MOFA, 2022q) after the Soviet downfall, possibly implying that the military alliance has no foundation in contemporary times. The Chinese remark could also entail that the expansion and upholding of NATO is not necessary anymore due to China’s assumed belief that diplomatic solution will prevail, and military wars are outdated. Accordingly, this could be enhanced to the following rhetorical question made by an official spokesperson of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs as stated below.

“It (NATO) said it was to prevent war in Europe. Is war averted? It advertised its commitment to peaceful settlement of the crisis. But from providing military aid to beefing up military deterrence, did it do anything good for peace?”(MOFA, 2022l)

Even though, it is not directly stated, but rather asked in a suggestive way, one could assume that the Chinese government wants to question the peace and security mission behind the transatlantic cooperation and imply the contrary that the alliance has not prevented wars and brought irrevocable stability to Europe.

Moreover, China’s comments contain direct accusations of the NATO’s involvement in the deteriorating situation in Ukraine, as it claims that “NATO [...] pushed the Russia-Ukraine tension to the breaking point” (MOFA, 2022h), which could presumably be intensified through the repetition of “five consecutive rounds of NATO’s expansion eastward” (The State Council,

2022c). Through these comments it might be assumed that the responsibility for the European crisis is partially transferred onto the military alliance, because in the Chinese opinion that had an “negative impact [...] on Russia’s security” (The State Council, 2022e), which should be considered as illustrated above. Beyond that, China speaks of “Western arrogance and successive mistakes over the last 30-plus years” (MOFA, 2022s) strengthening the assumption, that the inherit key driver of the military altercation lies in the West. In order to supposedly underline its narrative, the Chinese comments reference various US scholars and politicians, for example “George Kennan” (MOFA, 2022l), “Thomas L. Friedman” (MOFA, 2022g) and “Dr. Kissinger” (ibid.), who have allegedly been of the same opinion that “Ukraine becoming a member of NATO would be a “red line”” (ibid.). Through consulting the political attitudes of US nationals, it could be presumed that China wishes to enhance the plausibility of their standpoint and illustrate that this opinion is shared elsewhere.

In addition to the more general critique towards NATO, the Chinese government also voices disagreement with the US’s role in the alliance, which could be portrayed through the remark that “the US was fully capable of pushing for NATO’s eastward expansion but sent no troops to support Ukrainian people” (MOFA, 2022m). From this it might be extracted that the US initially wanted to expand NATO towards the East and supposedly holds the decisive power, thereof not considering the consequences for its European partners. Aside from that, it might also imply that the alliance is merely addressing Europe’s interest, but the American self-interests in sustaining its hegemony and expanding its geopolitical and ideological ideas.

Alongside with the allegations and critiques towards NATO, it is also made clear in the statements that “China [...] objects unilateral sanctions that have no basis in international law” (The State Council, 2022c) and that the government believes that “sanctions are never the fundamental or effective way to solve problems” (MOFA, 2022b). These remarks might be directly referring to the large-scale of sanctions that have been imposed by the US and Europe and thus can be interpreted as open criticism to the approach of these countries. By implying that these measures have no legal foundation and frequently using the word “illegal” (The State Council, 2022i). China could be accusing the respective countries of unjust behavior and unjustifiable actions in their path to resolving the conflict. While concurrently suggesting that their approach of dialogue and negotiations is in accordance with international principles and therefore more just. Moreover, the Chinese comments strongly condemn using sanctions as they “will only further complicate and amplify the situation” (The State Council, 2022k), “never guarantee peace and stability”(MOFA, 2022h) and “disrupt the process of political settlement”

(MOFA, 2022c). These arguments have also been the reasoning to abstain from the UN resolution, China says, which could underline the dichotomy of the righteousness of the Chinese position and the unjust US strategy.

In addition to the overall stand towards sanction, China remarks that these could cause a “multiple-lose scenario” (The State Council, 2022c) as they will “only create shocks to world economic recovery and do no good to any parties” (MOFA, 2022j). In publicly addressing the economic consequences, especially considering the Covid-19 pandemic, China might aim to generate a picture of itself as protector of global supply chains. This assumption could further be enhanced as the Chinese statements are concerned with the “damage on the people’s livelihood of various countries” (The State Council, 2022h), “food shortage” (MOFA, 2022u), and “irreparable losses” (MOFA, 2022o) to the world. Hence, the government might insinuate that it considers the later consequences of all countries and thus being a responsible major country, as already proclaimed above.

Moreover, the Chinese side also voices direct objection to the US’s approach, as the following statement expresses the opinion that “the US has been [...] coercing other countries to take side” (MOFA, 2022r) and “pressuring” (MOFA, 2022s) other nation states to impose sanctions on Russia. These statements might imply that most countries do not want to participate in sanctioning Russia, but have no other possibility, thus it is not taken into consideration that states voluntarily participate in these restrictions. Additionally, China advises the US and others “not to hurt the legitimate rights and interests of China and other parties” (MOFA, 2022e) and declaring “strong countermeasures” (MOFA, 2022k) if this should be the case. These comments could contain two elements, on the one hand China is presumably using the argumentation of an unlawful approach again, and, on the other, it might be contradicting itself when announcing counter measures, which could be sanctions and therefore equally unjust.

Aside, from accusations of breaching international law and rights of other state actors, China also states that “the US is actually exploiting sanctions for ill-gotten gains” (MOFA, 2022s) and has been benefitting from the European need for energy, especially “American arms dealers and oil and gas companies have made a fortune”(MOFA, 2022w). This could be interlinked with the former accusations that the American approach is mainly motivated by self-interest and the desire to sustain its hegemony.

In summary, it could be assumed that China is viewing itself in a position, where its upholding international law, considering economic prosperity globally and has a genuine interest in rebuilding peace and stability, contrary to the US, who imposes severe costs on the global

community and will not be able to facilitate peace. Besides, China's government considers the US-led NATO responsible for the heightened tension in Ukraine, and thus opposes the American approach to global security, as it accuses the US of bullying others into complying with rules, which have no universal applications, as they seem to vary in interpretations depending on the ideological agreement. Lastly, it has been made clear that the Chinese government seems to be convinced that all measures and policies implemented are only for the ulterior motive of sustaining US hegemony. Through the illustrated sidelining of the US, China could presumably convince neutral or negative audiences to join their norm prioritization and concomitantly maintain its sympathetic supporters.

Bounded dialogue

As already mentioned in the delineating audience section, China assumably regards developing countries as sympathetic audiences and therefore, according to the concept, would foster a bounded dialogue. This seems to be proven by the comment, which proclaims that "China and many fellow developing countries, share the view that war and sanction are not the only two choices" (MOFA, 2022o), as it refers to the target audience and strengthens the assumption that the involved parties held continuous talks over the matter in Europe. Eventually, reaching a joint consensus, which then could confirm the adherence by the developing world towards the Chinese norm hierarchy.

Along with developing countries, the assessed statements allow the hypothesis that other countries have also expressed their positive attitude towards the Chinese approach, as it is affirmed that the "position of China on the Ukraine issue is shared among many countries". In order to presumably support the former made claim China expresses that the overall path "is in line with that of the vast majority of countries in the world" (MOFA, 2022m). Farther, explaining that the fundamental pillars of the Chinese prioritization of norms within this special context, being "resolving the Russian-Ukraine conflict through dialogue and negotiation and oppose unilateral sanctions and long-arm jurisdiction that contravene international law" (MOFA, 2022w), are shared by many countries. The mentioned themes have been made evident in the aforementioned analysis, either as proposed urgent norms or as claims to sideline the counterapproach by the US. Accordingly, this could be considered as bounded dialogue as only receptive audiences are mentioned. Notwithstanding, it should be noted that similarly to the first section of the analysis, China does not specify which countries precisely share the same sentiments, which poses difficulties to establish entirely where a bounded dialogue is forming. This could also be interpreted from the quantification of dialogues which revealed a fragmented

dialogue mechanism with other countries, as China engaged in occasional communication with mostly European countries. The two main recipients with two official published statements of their meetings were Russia and the EU, which subsequently does not allude to the interpretation of a specific sympathetic audience.

Concludingly, it can be observed that main norms of the Chinese hierarchy are peaceful settlement through diplomatic efforts, establishing a European security mechanism and humanitarian assistance. Besides the proposed norms and their justification, it is noticeable that frequent remarks towards the US approach are made in order to presumably sideline the American counterapproach to this conflict. The sections on delineating audiences and bounded dialogue give only fragmented insights into which countries China is specifically addressing or in routine exchange with. Nonetheless, it could be expected that through the emphasis on wording like ‘international community’ and ‘majority of countries’ it seeks to reach a broad audience and therefore has little incentive to clearly categorize.

4.2 United States of America

The US government has a clear stance on the ongoing events in Ukraine, which it emphasizes 64 times in its press releases by labelling it as “premediated, unprovoked, and unjustified war of choice against Ukraine” (USDS, 2022ah). Hence, implying that the altercation between Ukraine and Russia is a war and supposedly invasion and lacks any justification or prior deliberate provocation from the Ukrainian side. Consequently, pinning the responsibility and aggression solely on the Russian government. This could eventually be confirmed by the repetition of “Putin’s war” (USDS, 2022s), alluding that the President of the Russian Federation is the key driver of the conflict and must account for the deteriorating situation.

In addition, the expressions “unlawful” (USDS, 2022o) and “senseless” (USDS, 2022ac) might indicate that the US strongly believes that the concerns and reasoning yielded by the Russian President Vladimir Putin and his government have no foundation in international law and are self-serving declarations for a possible hidden agenda. Further, the frequent use of terminology like “unconscionable” (USDS, 2022aq), “egregious atrocities” (USDS, 2022ao) and “abhorrent attacks on civilians” (USDS, 2022ap) could then reinforce the firm US positioning against this military operation and its consequences.

Similarly, to China, the US might regard itself as on the right path to settle the Russia-Ukraine conflict as it stipulates that “China is already on the wrong side of history” (USDS, 2022y) and

simultaneously implying that the American approach is presumably on the right side. Furthermore, the government is stating that “being [...] engaged as the United States is important” (USDS, 2022w) as in absence of American leadership “either someone else is or doing things in a way that may not actually advance [...] the values that we hold” (USDS, 2022z). These comments could suggest that the US’s governance is needed globally, but equally in the self-interest of the country as it wishes to uphold and defend their own belief systems instead of adapting to rules inflicted by other state actors.

Delineating audience

From the US press publications regarding the European crisis, it can be extracted that the country anticipates working with “other like-minded partners” (USDS, 2022as) and “freedom-loving countries worldwide” (USDS, 2022x), which might allude to the assumption that a sympathetic audience already exists. In addition to that, it is regularly emphasized that the American government “share(s) with our partners and allies’ unity of purpose” (USDS, 2022h), which enhances the presumption that a benevolent audience is supporting the American approach. Also possibly implying that the unity is grounded on a normative foundation when accentuating words like ‘share’ and ‘purpose’. Although the US government does not specify which these compatible actors are, it might imply that these are countries engaged with the US in various formats of agreements and security networks and thus could have similar aims to uphold their belief systems in coordination with the American counterpart. This presumption could be strengthened as the US administration mentions that the coordination to resolve the ongoing military altercation must be “beyond the United States and Europe” (USDS, 2022n). Thereby, possibly emanating that Europe is one sympathetic audience and that the US seeks to start dialogue with other state actors.

Withal, the US also “call(s) on the international community” (USDS, 2022u) to concentrate efforts for humanitarian assistance and joint measures against the worsened situation in Europe. Albeit these remarks can be considered vague and do not categorize further countries into neutral or negative audiences. Nonetheless, it has been declared that the American government “stands with the community of nations” (USDS, 2022x) eventually insinuating that, similarly to China, the US aims for broad legitimacy from the global society to justify their norm prioritization for conflict resolution.

Establishing presence

The assessment of the US statements regarding the ongoing crisis in Ukraine detected five main themes: the enforcement of sanctions, sovereignty of Ukraine, humanitarian and security assistance, the security of NATO territory and accountability. Those categories are further assessed and analyzed below.

Sanctions

A theme which is extensively addressed when assessing official US press releases is their determination to impose “severe consequences” (USDS, 2022a) and “costs” (USDS, 2022ap) on Russia, as it seems that the American government is convinced that sanctions will “reduce its ability to wage war” (USDS, 2022ar). These remarks could imply that the US firmly believes in the effectiveness of imposing sanctions and economic restraints on Russia and would therefore be a supporting mechanism in resolving the European crisis. This could further be amplified by the over 75 incidences where the theme of sanctions has been detected in the evaluated documents and American comments directly characterize that these actions “may have the effect of stopping what Putin has started”. Therefore, it might seem that besides the upholding of Ukrainian sovereignty, the approach of imposing sanctions is highly prioritized in the American norm agenda, as it is described as “the most important instrument of influence [...] on the aggressor” (ibid.).

Further, it has been detected that the US presumably views sanctions as a means to an end as in particular passages a condition might be observed, when the statements emphasize that “if it (Russia) continues its war of choice” (USDS, 2022h) there will be additional consequences and economic restraints imposed. As a result, one could assume that if the Russian military would withdraw its troops, the American government would lift the imposed sanctions. This presumption could additionally be strengthened through the remark that these measures are “not designed to be permanent” (USDS, 2022y), which could be interconnected with the above made claim that the US regards sanctions as effective mechanisms for conflict resolution, but only within a limited scope until the desired aim is reached. From the statements made it could be emanated that these sanctions cause first consequences for Russia, as the US describes the effects as “devastating” (USDS, 2022p) and “having a crippling effect on the Russian economy” (USDS, 2022q). Hence, it could be concluded that sanctions have shown their desired outcome, but nevertheless were not severe enough in order to follow the US logic that eventually the Russian military operation would be stopped if the consequences were too costly.

Besides the presumed American belief that these measures are an effective tool for achieving a certain outcome, the government seems to have the urge to clarify the legality of these sanctions.

This is visible in text passages where the US emphasizes “to work closely with lawmakers” (USDS, 2022x) and “use all authorities” (USDS, 2022ac) and thus implying that all actions are legitimized and approved by high level government bodies and are grounded on a lawful basis. In addition, the US is condemning the Russian efforts to spread the alleged disinformation that “Western sanctions have caused the rise in global food prices”(USDS, 2022ag) and clarifying that this is “a blatant lie” (ibid.). Extending this assumption further this might be a rhetoric to indicate the honesty and upholding of international standards, hence portraying the US government as a responsible major power, who’s main objective lies in the globally agreed frameworks and laws, in contrast to Russia. Moreover, the American statements justify the imposing of sanctions as a reaction to an action, as the government clearly communicated that “if he (Putin) pursued it (the invasion), there’d be massive consequences for Russia” (USDS, 2022r), which adds to the former made claim that these sanctions have been legally imposed and the other party was warned and transparently informed about this approach. Likewise, it has been accentuated that the US “delivered on [...] (the) promise” (ibid.), again possibly suggesting that the American commitment for sovereignty and freedom is not an empty pledge but will be defended in the case of a threat.

In addition, during the course of the conflict it can be detected that the American sanctions have been extended beyond the economic and diplomatic realm. As the remarks of the official spokesperson prove that also other targets like “state-owned enterprises” (USDS, 2022af), “defense establishment” (USDS, 2022ac), “financial institutions” (USDS, 2022aj), “Russian military leaders” (ibid.), “the adult children of President Vladimir Putin” (USDS, 2022aj) and “those around him” (USDS, 2022e) are affected by the far-reaching sanctions. Likewise, the US administration has also expanded the possibility of sanctions to other countries, if any support for Russia would be observed, but specially emphasizing China as it states that “such support would have consequences for our respective relationship with China” (USDS, 2022as). Portraying the country again as representative and responsible global power, who is not hesitant to take drastic measures in light of crisis.

Withal, it must be considered that it exists a strong emphasis that these sanctions are preponderantly imposed in coordination with other allies and partners. Alongside, the American administration “welcomed the growing number of countries applying sanctions [...] implementing them for the first time” (USDS, 2022as) and “the exodus of [...] every leading company” (USDS, 2022z). These two remarks could allude to the assumption that the approach is supported by countries that have not been former associated with such measures and

independent companies, which presumably cannot be largely influenced politically. Therefore, the norm prioritized could be presumed to have already a foundation of legitimacy as other countries are participating in the measures. Further, the subject of sanctions has been extensively justified by the US alluding to the conclusion that it seeks broad legitimacy from sympathetic or even neutral audiences to sustain such measures in the future.

Sovereignty

The US declares to “defend the freedom, territorial integrity, and sovereignty of Ukraine” (USDS, 2022ai) and emphasizes this position in 46 incidences in its officially published statements. Further, the American government frequently highlights its “steadfast support” (USDS, 2022s) through their repetitive rhetoric and accentuation of principles like “freedom, democracy and human rights” (ibid.). Hence, the US could imply that it is an international representative of liberal values and norms, which could be enhanced through the emphasis on words like “unwavering” (USDS, 2022h), “resolute” (USDS, 2022aj) and “strong” (USDS, 2022d) in relation to the American support. Additionally, the US statements highlight the nations clear positioning, when stating to “stand with the people of Ukraine” (USDS, 2022g) and admiring the Ukrainian “bravery and heroism” (USDS, 2022aj) against the Russian military. This could allude to the proposition that the US is siding with the country of Ukraine and encourages it to defend itself against a perceived Russian aggressor. Further, the US could convey the idea that Ukraine has made no-prior mistakes, which could have escalated the situation, as it names the country a “peace-loving nation” (USDS, 2022u). This could be interlinked with the former made claim that President Putin’s war has no lawful basis and might be referencing back to the accentuation of ‘unprovoked war’ above.

In order to protect the Ukrainian sovereignty and to translate its words into deeds the US promises the provision of “security, economic, and humanitarian support” (USDS, 2022j), which might lead to the conclusion that the emphasis on ‘steadfast’ assistance were not empty words, but rather that every tool is used to maintain the integrity of the country. Besides the delivery of aid in all forms, the American government also expresses the decision “to strengthen Ukraine’s position on the battlefield and at the negotiating table” (USDS, 2022an), possibly indicating that diplomatic solutions are vital, but concomitantly suggesting that the US is not hesitant in providing military assistance. Although, by such statements and actions it could endanger itself and possibly be perceived as war party involved and suffer consequences. Moreover, this might also intensify the American determination to uphold this sovereign principle, as the Ukraine has no NATO membership and thus not entitled to receive military

support from the US. Nevertheless, the American promises on this aid then could show its commitment and stance towards democracy and fundamental values. Consequently, this could signal a norm prioritization on the American agenda. Contrary to that, one could also assume that the US's motives might not be inherently altruistic as Ukraine has historically been part of power play due to its bridgehead position and thus could be regarded as essential buffer zone between the NATO territory and Russia.

The illustrated dichotomy could also be seen in the US rhetoric when referring to the ideological underpinnings of Russia, claiming that the Moscow government has “utter contempt for the values of democracy [...] that form the bedrock of the Inter American system” (USDS, 2022aq). Thence, this remark might be in line with the American perception of an ‘unlawful’ war initiated by Russia and coincidentally could emphasize the strong American adherence to these principles. With the presumed aim to counter such altercations in the future the US states that Ukraine must be “fully asserted and protected in advance” (USDS, 2022ai), which might insinuate that a NATO membership is not implausible, regardless of the concerns voiced by the Eastern powers of the globe. It seems that the American authorities rather upset Russia and eventually China, than losing a democratic Ally, which could be ascribed to a possible expansion of its alliance system and a spread of its ideological beliefs.

Lastly, the US seems to underline its above-mentioned commitment to sovereignty of Ukraine through the clear comment that “one country can’t simply go in and change the borders of another by force” (USDS, 2022z) and that in this instance the newly established borders are “not recognized” (USDS, 2022l) by the American government, similar to the annexation of Crimea in 2014. In summary, the US's support for Ukraine's independence seems to be irrevocably, as well as its commitment to the overreaching principles of democracy and territorial integrity, while simultaneously portraying itself as protector of fundamental values. The commitment could be strengthened through the 18 dialogue mechanism that the American administration facilitated with Ukraine. In consequence, this might also be effective in order to persuade yet neutral audiences through its high engagement for a country in need.

Humanitarian aid and security assistance

Along with the already highlighted themes on the American norm agenda, the reoccurring subject of humanitarian aid and security assistance has been identified as significant due to 75 passages, that included these topics.

The US labels itself as “the largest single country donor of humanitarian aid” (USDS, 2022v), as its assistance “amounts to nearly \$405 million” (USDS, 2022g), which might insinuate that is eager to provide those in need with the necessary supplies and subsequently might wishes to be perceived as international power that is reliable in times of turmoil. This could be further accentuated as the American spokesperson terms the aid already provided as “effective” (USDS, 2022q) and “historic” (ibid), assumingly enhancing the image of an efficient and practical US response to humanitarian crisis. Moreover, the American comments also include enumerations of which supplies have been send to Ukraine, among other things containing the “provision of food, safe drinking water, shelter, emergency health care, winterization, and protection” (USDS, 2022g) and the offer for “critical psychosocial support to children, people with disabilities, and older people” (USDS, 2022v). Thus, the American government appears to deliver a broad range of humanitarian aid to the Ukrainian civilians, which thereof could be interpreted as act of a global responsible major country, who is supporting countries in need. However, it could be questioned if this conditional in terms of mode of governance and ideological stance of the recipient country. Nevertheless, the US further stipulates that it will “work to meet their needs” (ibid.) conveying that all requirements would be fulfilled and thus advancing its reliability status to other countries.

Furthermore, the American remarks emphasize that the government is in exchange with various institutions and organizations, as it “worked with our partner the World Health Organization” (USDS, 2022v), “coordinate(s) closely with the UN” (ibid.) and “work(s) through and with nongovernmental [... partners” (ibid.). Hence, one could presume that the US uses every possible channel to provide aid and is engaging the global response to decrease the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Ukraine. Additionally, the American authorities also highlight that independent organizations are used to deliver the supplies and that these are based on “impartiality, humanity, neutrality, and independence” (USDS, 2022g), that might emanate the depiction that the US has no influence on the supply chains and wishes to ensure a fair distribution through regional partners, who assumingly evaluate the needs of civilians best. The US further demands that “safe passage(s) to deliver aid and assistance” (USDS, 2022u) must be established and guaranteed and thereby could highlight its commitment as global humanitarian supporter, which could be enhanced through the remark that the US also “welcome(s) the contribution of other donors” (USDS, 2022g) and presumably hopes that the international community will follow its example.

Beyond the humanitarian aid deliveries, the American government also provides extensive security assistance, which amounts to “\$4.3 billion since the start of the Biden administration” (USDS, 2022at), which could be interpreted as a strong dedication to Ukraine’s defense and is presumably aligned with the former emphasized commitment to sovereignty. In detail the US is providing “lethal defense weapons” (USDS, 2022x) mainly containing “anti-aircraft, anti-tank, and anti-armor systems as well as small arms and munitions” (USDS, 2022x). The accentuation of ‘anti’ could signal the defensive characteristics of these ammunitions, nevertheless through the security assistance the US is supplying Ukraine with combat equipment, which might be perceived as participating in the conflict. However, one could assume that through the emphasis on defensive and small military gear the American government tries to ensure that it is refraining from an active role in the altercation. Moreover, the support has been titled as “effective” (USDS, 2022ac) in its “response to Russia’s brutal war” (ibid.), which continues the above illustrated rhetoric that all US measures implemented have to be understood as counteractions to Russia’s initiation of the military combat. Furthermore, it might be conveyed that the provision of equipment is regarded as necessary and helpful by the US to maintain Ukraine’s integrity and the overall depiction of the American protector of freedom and democracy. The later could be underlined by the US’s statements that will “continue expediting security assistance” (USDS, 2022x), as it might suggest that even though the risk of Russia perceiving these actions as active war participation the US will not abstain to support Ukraine. Hence, this could be referenced back to the assumption that the American administration wishes to presumably establish its reliable image as partner and ally and through that gain legitimacy for its own norm agenda.

Even though, the measures implemented have been enormous, making the American government the largest single donor in assistance it must be questioned which assistance is prioritized in terms of norms and values. Beside the humanitarian aid, security assistance is often mentioned, and new deliveries of weapons and defensive gear confirmed. Thus, in inversion of the argument the security assistance provided could possibly enhance the deterioration of the Ukrainian situation and therefore more humanitarian aid is needed. It could be questioned if the extensive aid can thus unfold its full potential while simultaneously providing arms. This contradiction could lead to a decrease in legitimacy from sympathetic audiences if they themselves are against delivering weaponry to Ukraine and could equally put restraint on advances from neutral and negative audiences.

Security of NATO

The security of NATO territory can also be assumed to be prioritized on the hierarchy of norms proposed by the US. As the American government accentuates 30 times that it “will defend every inch of NATO territory” (USDS, 2022a) and is “committed to defending our NATO Allies” (ibid.), which could be intertwined with the former made assumptions that the American government is standing by their responsibilities towards their partners, again emphasizing their global role as protector of international standards and partnerships. In addition, in several passages the US’s commitment towards NATO’s Article 5, which stipulates that an attack on a NATO ally is likewise an attack on the whole military alliance, is emphasized and described as “ironclad” (USDS, 2022d) and “powerful” (USDS, 2022a). This could be regarded as an indication for the US’s commitment and appreciation for the transatlantic bond and assumingly considers it to be fundamental in the realm of global politics. The aforementioned commitment could also be observed in the American remark to “shore up NATO’s defense” (USDS, 2022b) presumably through provision of troops and equipment and could thereof imply that the US seeks to showcase its active participation, as contributor and partner. Additionally, this could suggest the reassurance towards its allies, that this crisis will be combated with a transatlantic response and the country does not think itself safe due to proximity. Furthermore, it can be detected that the American emphasis when addressing NATO is specifically on “fortify(ing) NATO’s Eastern Flank” (USDS, 2022aa), which could for one thing suggest that the American authorities might expect a Russian attack on allied territory, while at the same time supposedly ensuring security through these measures. Despite the significance of NATO especially for its European counterparts, the US accentuates that the conflict “is much bigger than NATO” (USDS, 2022b) , eventually hinting at ideological hostilities and possible new emerging bloc formations. Overall, this could be a reference to the general structure of world politics with its increasingly developing political camps with different ambitions, assumingly hinting at the perceived Russian Chinese bloc.

Beyond the feared security threat, the US also made remarks regarding the NATO’s joint response to the Russia-Ukraine crisis, when describing it as acting “with speed, with unity, (and) with determination” (USDS, 2022m). Especially, the enumeration of ‘determination’ could imply that the security threat again showcased the importance and necessity of the alliance, as it insinuates that all members have the same objective. This proposition could be further enhanced through the American opinion that “NATO is stronger and more united than ever” (USDS, 2022am), again presumably trying to underscore the solid basis of the alliance. Likewise, it could suggest that the US is devoted to enhancing this unity, eventually not only due to security challenges in the future, but to sustain its European coalition in general. In

particular, this assumption could be consolidated through the American comment that “every ally is one way or another helping to strengthen NATO” (USDS, 2022m). Additionally, this could include the reassurance towards its partners that the US acknowledges the asymmetry within the alliance but is convinced that the balancing of weaknesses and strengths is the key advantage. Apart from the American commitment towards its partners in Europe, the US comments on its “reaffirmed support for NATO’s Asia-Pacific partners” (USDS, 2022ae). Hence, one could assume that through this remark it is evident that the American military does not plan to withdraw from the Western Pacific, even though this is a potential high conflict zone due to the standoff between the US and China. Furthermore, this could include the indirect message addressed to China, that America will not retrack from this region and thus increase Chinese dominance. Nonetheless, the reaffirmation of support could supposedly also be used to maintain the US’s primacy in general, through signaling that the allies on the Asian continent are equally important and not neglected and therefore maintaining a benevolent audience for its own norm prioritization.

Moreover, the US’s statements regarding the Russia-Ukraine military combat, also include suggestions for NATO’s future, as the governmental spokesperson declares the importance of “strengthen(ing) cooperation in NATO operations” (USDS, 2022at) . This could highlight the significance that the US is attributing to this security mechanism, whereas on the contrary it could be questioned why operations should be enhanced with the US even though the partner countries are not in proximity. Eventually, it could be argued that an underlying rationale is to enhance their general global influence through the dependency in security areas. This might be partially observed in passages where the US is encouraging a “stronger European defense” (USDS, 2022al), insinuating that there could be a possibility of a sovereign security mechanism, but simultaneously noting that this would have to be “compatible” with the overall NATO structure. Lastly, the documents introduced “a new NATO Strategic Concept that addresses current and future threats to the international rules-based order” (USDS, 2022ae) , which could be referencing back to the perceived split and the general global structure in the future. Concurrently, this could again emanate the necessity of the alliance.

This norm can be presumed to be from importance as it is repeatedly reaffirmed, nevertheless in comparison with the above it cannot be prioritized as highly. Despite the low prioritization it is certainly visible in the US’s approach towards the conflict and needs to be justified to target audiences. In light of military aggression on the European continent it could be alarming to already negative audiences that transatlantic security cooperation should be further increased.

On the other hand, NATO allies and sympathetic audiences might fear instability and insecurity and therefore welcome this norm proposal.

Accountability

One more theme that has been discovered during the categorization process is the US's emphasis on accountability regarding the Russia-Ukraine crisis. Within the assessed documents the remarks of "hold(ing) the Russian government accountable for its war of choice" (USDS, 2022i) is predominant. It is clarified by the American authorities in 30 passages that "human rights abuses, violations of international humanitarian law, war crimes and crimes against humanity" (USDS, 2022k) must be not only condemned but prosecuted. In various other statements the US specifically emphasis "Putin" (USDS, 2022ak), which could be interlinked with the former stated American perception that this is 'Putin's war'. Thus, presumably ascribing the responsibility to him and less to the Russian nation. This could be enhanced through the used term of "Putin's forces" (ibid.) when demanding to hold war criminals accountable, and consequently seen as implying that a designated group of the military is meant and no generalization towards all involved should be made. In addition, this demand is extended by the US government to also include states that commit "complicity" (USDS, 2022o) and presumably support the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Hence, implying that every country will experience US countermeasures, possibly sanctions, when not following the proposed American approach. This could be exemplified through the US's stance towards Belarus, who it accuses of "facilitation of Russia's combat operation" (USDS, 2022j). It seems that the above-mentioned sanctions and measures targeted at the 'war machinery' and drying out Russian resources are prolonged to "enablers" (USDS, 2022au) of this military operation. Thereof it might be suggested that the US will not allow individuals or states to emerge unscathed. In formulating such demands and its consequent measures it could be estimated that the underlying American motive is to portray itself as protector of not only freedom and peace but likewise just and honorable positions, which would include the prosecution of these war crimes.

Furthermore, the American statements specify that the government will be "using every tool available" (USDS, 2022ab), which might also include sanctions since these are mentioned in relation to accountability in numeral excerpts. Ultimately, this could be linked to the former theme of sanctions and its justification, as it now seems to not only function as means to an end but likewise as means to hold states accountable in extraordinary situations. Thence, it might be regarded as priority on the norm agenda. Beyond that, the US also proposes concrete

measures of actions, for example to “suspend Russian membership of the Human Rights Council” (USDS, 2022ag), which might insinuate that such atrocities are not tolerated and could lead to the exclusion of states from international institutions and thereof limiting their respective decision power in global politics. In consequence, that might establish a precedential case to suspend other perceived challengers of the world order from those institutions, e.g., China.

As a result of the former, the US states that it:

“welcome(s) and support(s) the ongoing work to investigate and gather evidence of these and other potential war crimes and crimes against humanity, including by the ICC Office of the Prosecutor, the Commission of Inquiry mandated by the UN Human Rights Council, the Human Rights Monitoring Mission Ukraine of the OHCHR, and the OSCE’s mission of experts mandated by OSCE Participating States” (USDS, 2022ag).

This remark might enhance the previous made assumption that the US depict itself as facilitator and representative of just and rightful practices. Besides, it could underline the commitment illustrated above within the theme of sovereignty if it supports international criminal prosecution. Lastly, it must be critically noted that these supposedly good efforts could be perceived as hypocritical, due to the US’s history of altercations with other countries. Nevertheless, it seemingly “acknowledge(s) their own shortcomings” (USDS, 2022ad) and commit themselves to the same procedures as proposed above, which might strengthen the argument that it is indeed time for a more stringent approach when sentencing those guilty of such atrocities. Therefore, also enhancing the possibilities to convince neutral or even negative audiences of its just and right position in the world, as well as the will to self-reflect and change.

Sideline opponents

Similar to China, also American comments contain criticism towards the Chinese government regarding its responsibility in the conflict, the affiliation with Russian countermeasures and a possible reputation damage.

Thence, it has been detected that those multiple US remarks are seemingly demanding China to adhere to its membership obligations of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and specifically to acknowledge its role to be “responsible for maintaining peace and security” (USDS, 2022y), which could be assumed to stem from the Chinese government position to not join the US in its strong condemnation. Hence, America might imply that its approach to excoriate the Russian military operation is rightful and in accordance with their UNSC commitments. Thus, China’s abstention is presumably regarded as violation of its international obligations towards the global community in the US’s opinion and possibly assessed as support

for the Russian rationale. In addition, the assumption that the American authorities further interpreted the Chinese stance as support for the Russian actions could be made on basis of the previously mentioned claim that the US considers China to be “on the wrong side of history” (USDS, 2022y). Furthermore, due to the Chinese accentuation of “the sanctity of the principle of sovereignty” (USDS, 2022q), equally observed in the analysis section of establishing presence by China, the US “expects” (ibid.) that the Chinese authorities should stand by their own rule and “make(s) its voice heard” (ibid.). Besides, this presumably includes the accusation of contradicting itself, between the numerous remarks about the upholding of sovereignty and non-interference in the past and its official positioning during the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Consequently, this might imply that US adjudges China for not upholding to its own principle. By doing so it could also be presumed that the American press statements seek to depict the US as generally avowing to its responsibilities and obligations and hence could enhance legitimacy for its norm prioritization rather than the Chinese proposed norm agenda.

In addition, the US voices concerns regarding the spread of allegedly false claims made by Russia about NATO and the events during the ongoing crisis and highlights its apprehension especially regarding the “PRC’s support” (USDS, 2022am). Thus, this might indicate that the American governing bodies views the Chinese position and argumentation is aligned with a Russian misinformative campaign to presumably undermine the approval for the American approach. An underlining for this supposition might be the phrase that “PRC officials echo these conspiracy theories” (USDS, 2022t), as the emphasis on ‘conspiracy’ might insinuate that these allegations are unjust and do not conform with reality. Further, by stating that ‘officials’ are reproducing the Russian presumed disinformation, the US could suggest that this is a governmental position and hence is in accordance with China’s overall opinion. Another explanation could stem from the previously illustrated missing Chinese condemnation of the deteriorating situation in Ukraine and perceived bloc building, with Russia and China as a perceived counterbalance, which contingently lead to the belief within the American government, that China unconditionally supports Russia, when not specifically condemning in a US manner. Apart from these two points of criticism, the US farther might convey that the perceived vague positioning “is doing real damage to China reputationally” (USDS, 2022y). Reasons for this assumption could emanate from the American ideological lens, as it might project its individual disapproval of China’s position onto other countries. Simultaneously suggesting that the US approach entails just and prestigious reputation and thereof not following it, would subsequently lead to a decaying Chinese external perception.

Bounded dialogue

As mentioned in the section of delineating audience, the US have been vague in categorizing their negative and neutral target audiences. By contrast Europe was presumed to be a possible benevolent listenership. This could be considered plausible as throughout the development of the crisis, the American statements include multiple passages where “European partners and allies” (USDS, 2022a) are mentioned. This assumption might be strengthened through the former conducted analysis, where the emphasis and commitment towards NATO and its European partners was voiced, and thus could be regarded as bounded dialogue. Additionally, that might be strengthened to the repetition that all measures and assistance is granted through “closely” (USDS, 2022f) working with its allies. So as to possibly enhance the presumption the emphasis on an “ongoing coordination” (USDS, 2022c) suggests that this dialogue and communication mechanism is sustained. Conclusively the enumeration of the specific partners, like the “G7” (USDS, 2022l), “Turkish allies” (USDS, 2022w), “French partners, [...] German partners, [...] Israeli partner” (ibid.) seems to prove the above made hypothesis of a bounded dialogue with the former assumed delineated audience. Besides the assumptions based on the content of these statements, the quantifying of published dialogues might insinuate the same hypothesis, as the US has held talks with the EU eight times and seven times with NATO until the beginning of May. The international community is addressed likewise with expressions towards the US’s “partners around the world” (ibid.) and its “partners at the UN” (USDS, 2022), but it can only be guessed which specific countries are meant, therefore concrete and extensive bounded dialogue with other countries cannot be detected.

4.3 Interim Findings

The preliminary findings of the performed analysis can be summarized as illustrated below in figure six. The US’s and China’s divergent approach to resolve the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict is evident and therefore a differentiation between norm prioritization can be established. Hereinafter, key characteristics of their proposed approaches are compared.

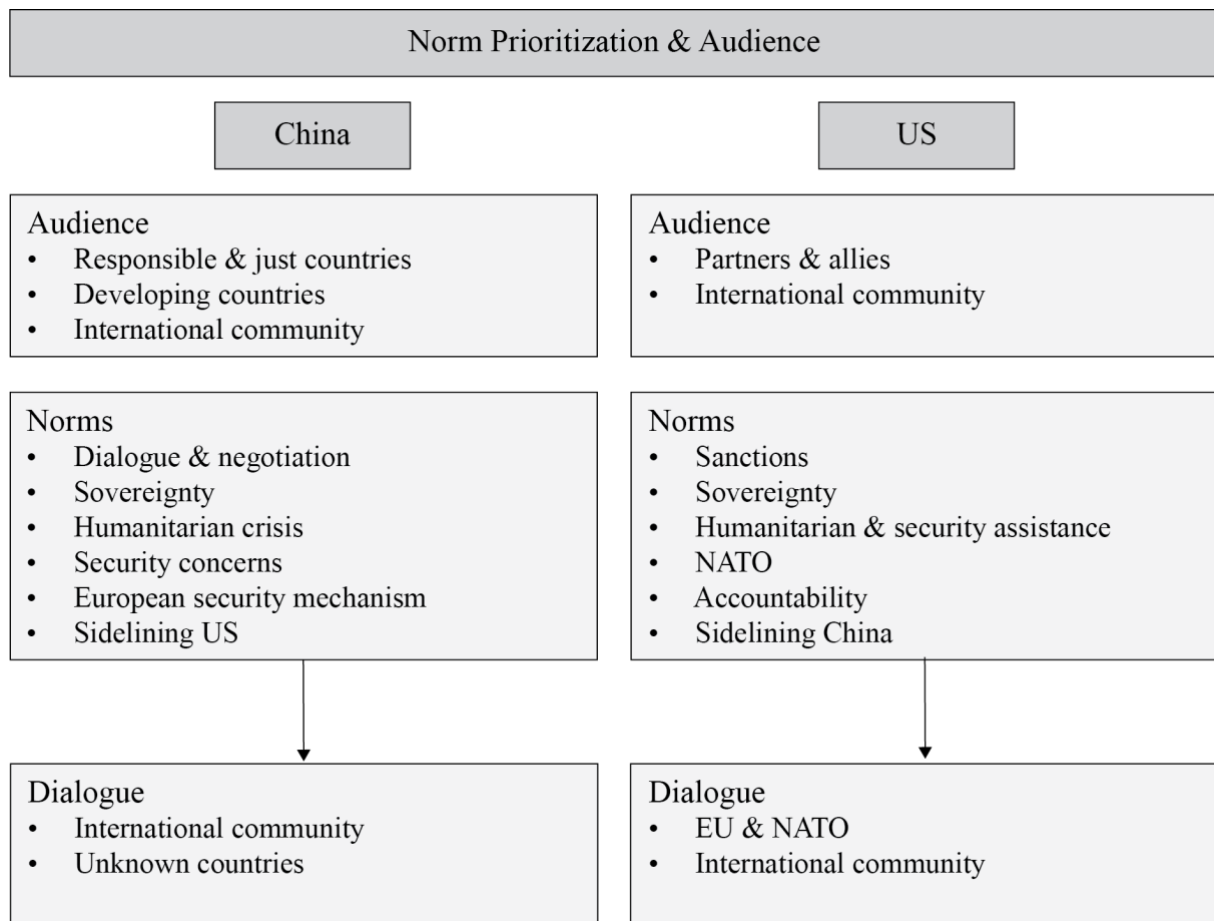


Figure 6: Differences and similarities in Sino-American norm prioritization

Foremost, the analysis illustrates the dissimilarity in delineating their respective audiences, as China only addresses developing countries and illustrates itself as representative of emerging economies, whereas the US is more precise and declares partners and allies, presumably referencing its global alliance network, as targeted audience. Nonetheless, both great powers direct request towards the international community as both governments hope for supporting states to join their respective approaches, albeit China's emphasis on collective efforts can be observed more clearly.

In terms of norm prioritization, the research exemplifies that there are more existing disagreements than parallels. Especially, the overall approach differs tremendously, where the US's norm agenda and measures include more aggressive and proactive elements, e.g., sanctions, delivery of weapons than the Chinese, which primarily accentuates diplomatic negotiations and the need for dialogue. Further, both governments stress the necessity to uphold the principle of sovereignty and refrain from undermining the integrity of other states and seem to have a common understanding on this subject matter. However, China's commitment to this principle has found to be contradictory, due to its multiple comments on the historical context

between Russia and Ukraine and therefore possibly mitigating the Ukrainian right for sovereignty. Contrary, the US's support of this principle can be described as extensive and irrevocably on the surface, but it also utilizes the political significance of sovereignty to justify the implementation of measures, e.g., broad sanction schemes, reinforcement of NATO etc. Hence, the two administrations similarly portray themselves as representing this principle and being a global protector thereof, even though it appears that the consequent preservation of sovereignty is divergent.

Moreover, the US and China accentuate equally the necessity for safe passages to ensure humanitarian aid deliveries and the importance of providing the required supplies. Albeit the US's emphasis gives the impression of being more committed due to the extensive number of monetary resources. These stances are comparable to the findings above, as the general positioning is similar, illustrating oneself as protector of civilians and supporter in times of crisis, but the implementation exhibit differences. Aside from these prioritized norms, the theme of security entails inherently distinctive approaches and viewpoints. China encourages the development of an independent European security mechanism, in accordance with its vast critique and condemnation of NATO's influence, whereas the US does not neglect the need for such efforts, but emphasis that such a structure would be integrated into NATO. Furthermore, the US expresses the essential importance of the military alliance and its commitment to its partners. This is an exemplification of the profoundly diverging approaches and visions for a global security structure. Beyond, the two major countries voice accusations of approaching the conflict resolution the wrong way vice versa. Nonetheless, it has to be noted that the Chinese government statements include numerous passages of in-depth critique addressed to the US.

Lastly, in examining the bounded dialogue of both administrations, it can be established that the US focusses on the communication between its partners and allies, mainly EU and NATO countries, whereas China contrarily is still addressing a broad audience of countries and lays its emphasis on the international community. Thus, it is unclear, which countries are in direct talks with China, however it should be noted that dialogues can be held without publicly publishing a readout or statement. Thereby, the targeted audiences to legitimize the respective norm agendas are differing in preciseness and composition

Concluding, and in accordance with the tool of SRD this demonstrates that almost no common norm prioritization regarding the Russia-Ukraine military altercation can be detected, even though some aspect appears to be similar either the underlying ideological foundation differs or the specific implementation methods. Further, the analysis reveals that the US and China

have dissimilar understandings of their role in the conflict and accountability, as China accuses the US and NATO of being largely responsible for the deteriorating situation, whereas the American administration wants to hold Russia accountable. Additionally, both countries seemingly justify their priorities norms with critiques towards the other, which is particularly the case in China's norm agenda. The Chinese government portrays itself as protector of smaller states with the focus on the prosperity of the global economy and a peaceful diplomatic settlement. Conversely, the US depicts its position in the crisis as protector of democratic independence and facilitator of accountability. Lastly, this deduces an American proactive, aggressive, and peaceful but also vague approach by the Chinese side.

4.4 Assessment of Hegemonic Understanding

Hereinafter the interim findings from the analysis structured in accordance with SRD are reassessed and placed into the context of the hegemony concept in international society in order to evaluate the respective understanding of global leadership by the US and China.

Firstly, it must be examined how the two governments envision their composition of hegemony. As stated in the theory section this research focusses on the two types of collective hegemony since singular hegemony is hardly accomplishable. Besides the delineation of the theory the collective nature can also be observed in the positioning of the US and China towards the Russia-Ukraine military altercation, as both state actors are acknowledging the influential power of the other through the frequent mentioning within their individual statements. These remarks are characterized by reciprocal criticism and often include demands for actions vice versa, e.g., exercising constraint on security assistance or the American request to follow the sanction scheme. Thus, implying that the governments are aware of their global influence and power to resolve this conflict, but are nevertheless disagreeing about a concrete strategy. Moreover, the absence of any direct comments regarding other countries could reinforce the former made assumption that the US and China are aware of their respective authority in international politics and therefore seem to accept a collective composition of hegemony and recognize the leadership status vice versa.

The sole agreement that power is distributed between the US and China is not yet enough to establish an effective collective of great powers, as a shared normative framework is equally important to manage global challenges jointly, as determined by the theory (Clark, 2011). Even though, the American and Chinese governments recognize their respective influential character

the divergent norms proposed regarding the Russia-Ukraine crisis might imply that there is no overreaching consensus regarding the prioritization of norms. In addition, even though, both countries made a strong emphasis to end the conflict the overall resolution strategies do not seem to align or complemented each other naturally. Especially, the extensive Chinese remarks regarding the US's behavior throughout the conflict and the very evident criticism could strengthen this presumption. Hence, according to Clark's theory of hegemony in ES, the legitimization of power is not only essential on the vertical axis, but equally on the horizontal axis between the states in power (*ibid.*). This entails that the US and China exhibit a foundational recognition for their respective position in the international system, but could encounter hardships when trying to legitimize each other, as both state actors presumably do not accept their individual approaches.

Besides the complications on the horizontal legitimization axis, the interim findings also display distinctions in the legitimization on the vertical axis. This is exemplified through the assessment of American norm prioritization, where it is observed that the protection of integrity, freedom and independence of Ukraine are of utmost importance and therefore worth to impose severe sanctions in order to defend the underlying belief of sovereignty. Further, the commitment to their responsibilities towards partners and allies is frequently accentuated, as well as the American efforts of coordinating measures with their European counterparts. Therefore, it could be assumed that the US could be categorized as global power, who emphasizes input legitimacy, as the process seems to be more essential than a solution that might not be in accordance with the liberal belief system, for example a further annexation of Ukrainian territory. Moreover, input legitimacy is characterized by the representation and involvement of other states and their interests, which seems to be evident through the emphasis of joint transatlantic efforts.

Contrary China is assumed to fall into the category of an output oriented major country, as it has repeatedly stated that it has no interest in escalating the situation and wants to establish early ceasefire through diplomatic peace talks. Furthermore, this outcome rational can be attributed to output legitimacy since it is concerned with the performance and successes of a measure which might be insinuated through the strong emphasis on upholding the stability of global supply chains and commodity flows. Nonetheless, China also reveals aspects of input legitimacy, as it claims to be an advocate for smaller, developing countries and campaigns for their stable and prosperous future, thus equally representing other's interest. However, it could

be questioned if this occurs in coordination with the referenced state actors or if it is the Chinese government's individual portrayal of events.

Alongside the evaluated hegemonic composition and legitimization types it is equally necessary to establish the constituencies to which the US and China attempt to justify their norm agenda to. The bounded dialogue of both great power within their press statements might illustrate that, even though the US and China exhibit vagueness in their expressions, the US's dialogue is more precise than the reviewed Chinese communication. As previously mentioned, through the US's close discussions and coordination with countries of the EU and NATO and the absence of reoccurring other states allude to the assumption that the pursued legitimacy is generated through a coalitional leadership style. On the opposite side it has been assessed that the bounded dialogue implemented by China gives minor insights which countries are actively pursued. In consequence, it could be concluded that China follows a leadership style that is universal and aims to convince a vast majority of the international community of their approach and norm prioritization.

In conclusion and consideration of the theory of hegemony in international society, the common denominator between the US and China is the recognition of a collective hegemony, where both states must distribute their managerial functions and combat international obstacles jointly. Nonetheless, a fundamental agreement on norms has not been detected, as well as divergent approaches to horizontal legitimization and constituencies have been illustrated.

5 Discussion

The consecutive discussion is based on the research findings about the divergent Sino-American understanding of global leadership and places them and their significance in relation to the above reviewed literature, as well as critically reevaluating the theoretical underpinnings of ES and its hegemonic theory. The research objective was to examine how the positioning of the US and China in the Russia-Ukraine crisis portrays their respective hegemonic understanding, while focusing on normative factors and subordinate states. The results of the present research let one conclude the existence of a collective hegemonic composition between the US and China, given that both states acknowledge their respective global influence. Moreover, the analysis revealed the presence of significant discrepancies between the horizontal and vertical legitimization axes. These stem from the US's coalitional constituency, which contrasts the presumed inclusive approach by China. Another remarkable finding concerns how the two

countries differ in their focus on and interpretation of input and output legitimacy. Here, the former term exhibits characteristics of representativeness and process-orientation, while the latter largely concentrates on the effectiveness of the measures, essentially translating into an evaluation of successful outcomes.

Given these results, the present study contributes to the existing body of literature addressing the bipolar structure of the global order, the importance of alliance networks and ideological positions, as well as hostilities. Based on this, the findings of this research can be considered significant and as holding valuable implications, both in the academic as well as in a practical realm. Firstly, the establishment of a Sino-American collective hegemony as a theoretical consideration joins the existing literature in its forecast of an emerging bipolar world order, in which the two countries function as the most powerful actors. Consequently, the composition of a collective hegemony could be generalized in parts, however it should be noted that the complex and versatile situation of the Russia-Ukraine crisis constrains this general claim, due to the ongoing conflict and the possibility of changing approaches.

Secondly, the analytical findings underpin the scholarly argument that cooperation between the US and China will be increasingly difficult, as they often acknowledge each other's global influence and geopolitical capabilities, but do not seem to reach fundamental common ground to guide the international system with joint communication, shared normative frameworks or similar ideological belief systems. As demonstrated by the present analysis, these differences largely stem from divergent opinions regarding claims of legitimization. Adding to this are the ideological hostilities that have been extensively studied in the context of this paper: These are not to be regarded as simple overreaching disagreements between governance approaches, such as multilateralism or protectionism, but more fragmented complexities. These tensions are increasingly highlighted when examining conflict resolution strategies and the ways in which policymakers frame their statements regarding a crisis. Concludingly, the findings of this in-depth analysis add pivotal insights into the underlying differences and normative distinctions between the US and China. Besides the general composition of hegemony also the findings on the constituencies have been shown extensively since they illustrate the targeted audiences and possible alliances that the two countries aim to build or sustain. Therefore, the role of subordinate states has been highlighted and its increasingly importance established. In contrast to the literature this research has shown the essential role that the other members of international society increasingly occupy. It has been shown that these states will hold decisive legitimization power, when remaining and joining partnership networks or alliances. This can

be especially observed in the contemporary Russia-Ukraine conflict, where the effects of sanctions and assistance are largely facilitated through multiple states coordinated efforts. Nevertheless, in accordance with the theory of hegemony in international society not only alliances and partnerships are essential to legitimize and maintain power, but equally a universal approach could provide the support for global leadership. Furthermore, these findings should partially be considered carefully, as it is questionable if alliances or general constituencies are static in nature or could ambiguously change according to the situation evaluated. In consideration of the former, the analytical process has shown some potential for improvement regarding the theoretical framework. Even though it is necessary to conduct a thorough analysis of the hegemonic composition and its implications, as presented in this research, to comprehend the rationales and synergy of collective hegemons, it is equally important to consider the compartmentalized nature of the global world order to suggest reliable tendencies of future cooperation between the two great powers. Especially in fast-paced times where states engage in several policy areas and numerous new challenges are emerging it is necessary to question the if stagnant coalitional constituencies can be defined. This is also illustrated by the divergent understanding of the two theories, where SRD stipulates the ambiguousness of audiences, whereas Clark's theory supposedly assumes relatively static constituencies.

Taken these findings and their implications together, it can be said that they present an important contribution to the existing body of academic literature. Given the volatile nature of the current conflict, the findings have to be critically reassessed when applied to other contexts and have to be interpreted alongside a close monitoring of the ongoing situation. Nevertheless, as much of the reviewed literature rests on events that date back before the events of February 2022, or even precede the beginning of the latest tensions in 2014, the current study allows for a contemporary and relevant examination of geopolitics in the 21st century. As the situation in the Ukraine has shaken up society and politics alike, it also calls for a reconsideration of current academic consensus on global bipolarity, the world order, and the future of geopolitical tensions. Thus, an analysis of the recent event is a useful and necessary way to challenge existing notions and provide a basis for future directions of research.

This paper then outlines a number of recommendations for researchers wanting to build on these first insights and policymakers wanting to extract practical directions from this discussion: In order to profoundly assess the implications of the Sino-American collective hegemony for the international society, one should evaluate these comprehensions in fragmented areas. The basis for such a research strategy could be the article *China in a World of Orders* published by

Alastair Iain Johnston, who suggested to separate the diffused LIO into smaller policy segments to examine the alleged revisionist nature of China holistically. The scholar presents seven different sub-world orders and measure the Chinese support or rejection to come to a decisive conclusion about its positioning towards the current global order (Johnston, 2019). Therefore, this research could be applied to the proposed seven policy categories to create a holistic overview if ideological hostilities and normative distinctions are similarly observed in all sections. This would enable a definite conclusion if and where cooperation becomes difficult and in which policy departments the US and China might have common dominators. From this it could be assumed that for every policy area a distinctive norm prioritization and targeted audience exists. Nonetheless, it should be considered that the audiences or subsidiary states, who hold decisive power as previously stated, might fluctuate in-between the great power approaches, according to their self-interest. Overall, the overarching academic debate around international relations, hegemony and competing views is one that is subject to change and needs to be reassessed consistently. The current paper poses no exception to this, and the findings need to be handled with careful consideration. Nevertheless, the recommendations outlined here can serve as an important asset for ongoing interpretation of the Russia-Ukraine crisis.

6 Conclusion

The present thesis has started with trying to understand how the conflict in the Ukraine emerged and how it could be linked to Sino-American dominated geopolitics. Through a thorough review of literature and a detailed qualitative content analysis, statements from both the US and China were reviewed, in order to answer the question of how does the positioning of the US and China towards the Russia-Ukraine crisis illustrate their hegemonic understanding?

Inevitably, this question cannot be answered in a simple manner, as demonstrated by the complexities inherent in the topic, that have been showcased repeatedly throughout this paper. Nevertheless, a number of important insights can be summarized that, together, serve as a just answer to the presented question: It is evident that both countries are aware that an effective conflict resolution cannot be reached without a joint understanding, as they frequently reference one another in their statements and actively try to persuade each other vice-versa to follow their respective approach. Furthermore, applying Clark's hegemony matrix it can be established that the Sino-American bipolarity can be regarded as collective hegemony.

Nevertheless, the differences in their divergent hegemonic understanding are evident throughout the analysis. In regard to the resolving of the Russia-Ukraine crisis no shared normative framework, which is essential for collective leadership, has been observed. Thus, according to Clark this causes restraints in the horizontal legitimization process of the two great powers, as it seems that even though the influential power is acknowledged but the suggested approaches are not tolerated or based on common denominator. This is strengthened by the identified attacks to sideline their opponent and subsequently justify their own proposed norm agenda.

Additionally, the bounded dialogue exhibits clear differences and only marginal similarities. Although both countries address the joint efforts made by the international community to foster an environment of peaceful conflict settlement, the specific target audiences are distinguished. China has been analyzed to appeal to a broader audience, thus pursuing a collective inclusive hegemony, whereas the US seems to have its focus on already established alliance systems and partnerships and actively targets those delineated sympathetic audiences, making it a more coalitional hegemon in the matrix of Clark.

At last, this thesis arrives at the conclusion that both in the realms of norms and supporting states, the US and China have divergent understandings of their global leadership role. What is happening in the Ukraine is only one manifestation of how these interpretations shape global conflict resolution, crisis responses and geopolitical tensions. It then seems evident, that these self-perceptions and understandings will continue to influence power dynamics and tensions, both between these two states directly, as well as through the emergence of crises in other regions that are affected by such ideological hostilities. As the turmoil on the European continent is still ongoing, as of May 2022, and a final settlement has yet to be reached, it needs to be further observed how and if the US and China will be able to align their visions in order to alleviate the tensions. As they are widely regarded to be the most powerful global actors of the contemporary geopolitical world, they will need to use their joint managerial functions and collaborative efforts to prevent further escalation and eventually aid the negotiation of peaceful settlements.

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