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Shrouded in Secrecy: Explaining Why Some Countries Refuse to Disclose Their Military Aid to Ukraine

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This research note examines the communication strategies employed by Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries in disclosing or withholding information about their military aid to Ukraine following the Russian invasion. Using a comparative case study design, this research note analyzes the contrasting approaches of Romania and Poland. It explores three competing explanations for the secrecy or transparency surrounding military aid: domestic backlash avoidance, external security considerations, and bureaucratic culture. The findings reveal that electoral incentives drove both Romania's secrecy and Poland's transparency. This research note makes an empirical contribution to the understanding of foreign policy secrecy and the politics of military assistance in international relations, highlighting how political leaders may rely on secrecy to prevent the politicization of military aid.

Esta nota de investigación estudia las estrategias de comunicación empleadas por los países de Europa Central y Oriental (ECO) para revelar u ocultar información sobre la ayuda militar que prestan a Ucrania tras la invasión rusa. Esta nota de investigación utiliza un diseño de estudio de caso comparativo con el fin de analizar los enfoques diferentes por parte de Rumania y Polonia. La nota de investigación estudia tres explicaciones, que rivalizan entre ellas, relativas al secretismo o a la transparencia que rodean la ayuda militar: la prevención de reacciones negativas internas, consideraciones en materia de seguridad externa y cultura burocrática. Nuestras conclusiones revelan que los incentivos electorales impulsaron tanto el secretismo que tuvo lugar en Rumania como la transparencia que se pudo observar en Polonia. Esta nota de investigación realiza una contribución empírica con respecto a la comprensión del secretismo en la política exterior y la política de asistencia militar en el ámbito de las relaciones internacionales, destacando cómo los líderes políticos pueden confiar en el secretismo con el fin de evitar la politización de la ayuda militar.

Cette note de recherche examine les stratégies de communication employées par les pays de l'Europe centrale et de l'Est (ECE) lorsqu'il s'agit de divulguer ou non des informations quant à l'aide militaire qu'ils accordent à l'Ukraine après l'invasion de la Russie. À l'aide d'une conception d'étude de cas comparative, cette note de recherche analyse les approches opposées de la Roumanie et de la Pologne. Elle s'intéresse à trois explications concurrentes du secret ou de la transparence entourant l'aide militaire : évitement d'un retour de bâton, considérations de sécurité extérieure et culture bureaucratique. D'après les conclusions, les incitations

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électorales expliquent tant le secret adopté par la Roumanie que la transparence de la Pologne. Cette note de recherche apporte une contribution empirique à la compréhension du secret en politique étrangère et de la politique de l'assistance militaire en relations internationales, en mettant en évidence que les dirigeants politiques peuvent compter sur le secret pour éviter la politisation de l'aide militaire.

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, NATO and EU member countries have supported Ukraine by providing significant military aid. This assistance includes heavy weapons, munition, intelligence, and military training (Trebesch 2023). Countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), which share security challenges and geographic proximity with Ukraine, have led in providing military aid on a per capita basis (Lanoszka and Becker 2023; Mills 2023). However, there is an intriguing variation in the communication strategies employed by CEE countries regarding these deliveries of military aid to Ukraine. Some countries have disclosed the content and value of their military aid to Ukraine, while others have adopted the opposite position and refused to disclose their assistance.

This research note probes why some CEE countries refuse to disclose their military aid to Ukraine when others have done so. I rely on the literature on foreign policy secrecy to derive three competing arguments that could explain this empirical puzzle. The first argues that governments resort to secrecy to mitigate potential domestic backlash against unpopular policies (Carson 2018; O'Rourke 2018; Smith 2019). The second emphasizes the influence of other states in shaping decisions to withhold or disclose information driven by strategic advantages or national security concerns (Slantchev 2010; Carnegie and Carson 2019; Poznansky 2020; Merrel and Abrahams 2021). The third explores organizational cultures within security bureaucracies, positing that secrecy is ingrained in their "standard operating procedures" or "strategic cultures" (Maras 2017; Rittberger and Goetz 2018).

To test these competing explanations, I employ a most-similar comparative case study research design and rely on elite interviews and thematic analysis to identify the critical motivation(s) driving the policy choices for either secrecy or transparency. In doing so, I map the decision-making process and unpack the drivers of secrecy or transparency in the cases of Romania and Poland. Despite their similar background conditions, the two countries adopted rather contrasting communication strategies regarding military aid to Ukraine. Romania decided on a full-blown policy of secrecy and ambiguity regarding the content of its military aid, while Poland has been more transparent—even if also ambiguous at times—about its assistance to Kyiv's military effort, actively promoting its assistance.

I find evidence for both the electoral and cultural logic operating in the two cases but for different actors within each state. However, in line with the first set of electoral-oriented explanations, I find that both Romania's choice of secrecy and Poland's decision to disclose its military aid early on were *primarily* driven by the electoral incentives of governing elites, as these are the ones that vary between the cases. I find that in Romania's case, political elites decided to maintain secrecy to prevent a populist-driven domestic backlash, thus not providing political ammunition to far-right parties opposed to military aid for Ukraine. Conversely, Poland's leaders decided from the outset to disclose more about the contents of military aid, with a keen eye on potential electoral benefits coming from such transparency. The Polish voters have demonstrated robust popular support for Ukraine's war effort, incentivizing politicians to promote their aid efforts openly.

This research contributes empirically to the foreign policy secrecy literature, providing a relevant case study amid the Russo–Ukrainian War. It also enhances our understanding of the politics of military assistance in international relations, reveal-

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ing how secrecy can be employed to avoid politicizing military aid. The subsequent sections delineate the theoretical framework, research design, and case analyses.

Disclosure of Military Aid to Ukraine

Since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries have been among the staunchest supporters of Kyiv's war effort. These countries have provided significant military aid in coordination with the United States and their NATO allies in Western Europe (Trebesch et al. 2023, 1–3). This assistance has been crucial in helping Ukraine defend itself against Russia's illegal aggression (Mills 2023, 21–40; Marsh 2023). However, CEE countries have also showcased significant variation in how they disclose their military aid to Ukraine. CEE countries are situated on a spectrum when it comes to the disclosure of the content and value of their military aid to Ukraine. Some countries are closer to the transparency end of the spectrum, while others are at the opposite end, adopting a more secretive approach.

Among these, Poland and Romania are two of the countries to have adopted rather contrasting communication strategies regarding their military aid to Ukraine. While both countries actively rely on communicative ambiguity, Romania has adopted an official policy of complete secrecy about the content and value of its military aid to Ukraine while Poland has been more transparent and provided more information about the contents and value of its assistance to Kyiv's war effort. Romania avoids discussing the content and value of its aid even after Volodymir Zelensy's public announcement that Romania has sent over fifteen packages of military aid to Ukraine (Costiță 2023). This position in favor of secrecy has been explicitly stated by Bogdan Aurescu, the Romanian foreign affairs minister at the time, during an interview for the HARDtalk show on BBC from March 30, 2023. Aurescu stated that "it is my government's policy not to comment on the extent of military support that Romania is providing to Ukraine" (Aurescu 2023). Conversely, Polish leaders have repeatedly communicated the contents and value of the country's military aid to Ukraine. For instance, in June 2022, Polish President Andrzej Duda stated that "we are giving Ukraine the greatest military aid we have ever provided to any country [. . .] we are also the main [supplier of] heavy weapons to Ukraine. We are talking about hundreds of tanks, combat vehicles, artillery, as well as drones, anti-aircraft launchers, ammunition, spare parts and other equipment." He also added that "we estimate [we have given] at least $1.7 billion in the form of military aid alone" (Ptak 2022).

These differences are remarkable, considering that both countries face the same security environment, are members of the EU and NATO, and maintain strong relations with and benefit from security guarantees from the United States. Moreover, both countries are the two regional leaders that see Russia as the region's primary source of security threats, developing Russia-centric security policies. Similarly to almost all CEE countries, with the notable exception of Hungary, which does not provide military aid, both have declared their support for Ukraine's defense. Romania and Poland took visible political steps to back up that position in international forums. Considering these similarities, why has Romania decided on a rather strict policy of secrecy while Poland has been more forthcoming in disclosing its aid, even though it also relies on a certain degree of ambiguity?

Theories of Foreign Policy Secrecy and Transparency

The existing theories of foreign policy secrecy provide different answers regarding the motivations behind a state's decision not to disclose—in other words, to keep secret—important actions related to its foreign and security policy. The literature on foreign policy secrecy is defined by three competing explanations that look at

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either domestic or international factors shaping a state's decision to disclose some aspects of its foreign policy behavior.

First, foreign policy scholars assert that governments resort to secrecy to mitigate domestic audience costs (Brown and Marcum 2011). Decision-makers aim to maintain secrecy over potentially unpopular foreign policy actions to avoid political repercussions, whether from the public or influential societal groups. Realists, like Morgenthau (1948) and Krasner (1976), argue that bypassing domestic opinion is crucial for effective foreign policy, treating secrecy as a necessary element for state behavior to safeguard national security. By maintaining secrecy, they can do so without domestic blowback.

Liberal theorists also highlight domestic audience costs in democracies, emphasizing the role of public opinion in shaping foreign policy decisions (Doyle 1986; Downes and Lilley 2010; Toms and Weeks 2013; O'Rourke 2018). Covert actions, including secret deals through international organizations, may be undertaken to navigate domestic opposition, as the United States has done on several occasions (Dreher and Jensen 2007; Vreeland and Dreher 2014; Dreher et al. 2018). In his new theory of foreign policy secrecy, Carson (2018) suggests that decision-makers may choose secrecy to resist domestic pressure to escalate a war or support an ally in a limited war. According to Carson, secrecy enables "commitment dilution" and "challenges minimization," but it requires collusion between adversaries to keep their behavior secret from domestic audiences. Yarhi-Milo (2013) has made a similar argument, arguing that states give secret security reassurances when the domestic public is opposed. Political elites may avoid engaging in conflicts desired by the domestic public while also maintaining the credibility of their assurances because of the audience costs entailed by their disclosure (Schuessler 2015).

Second, scholars have considered the role of other states as a motivator for foreign policy secrecy. This literature argues that states maintain secrecy for informational advantages in an environment defined by uncertainty or address status-related concerns (Carnegie 2021, 215). Secrecy offers tactical benefits, such as deceiving rivals about capabilities that may affect strategic calculations or serve as surprise elements (Betts 2010; O'Rourke 2018; Coe and Vaynman 2020). Weak states may keep their actions secret to avoid retaliation from stronger actors (Gibbs 1995; Colaresi 2014). Maintaining secrecy helps actors avoid blame or attribution for certain actions and provides opportunities for blaming others (Meirowitz and Sartori 2018). Slantchev (2010) has shown that states that maintain secrecy about their capabilities and actions can surprise their rivals during a war but only when they are relatively weak. However, these are not without risks and potential costs that limit the benefits brought by strategic surprise (O'Rourke 2018). Scholars have also found that status can play a role in disclosure decisions, as uncertainty about military capabilities enhances international reputation (Carnegie and Dolan 2021; Spaniel and Poznansky 2018).

Third, foreign policy scholars have looked at bureaucratic practices and rules to explain why states may keep secrets (Gibbs 1995). These arguments can have either rationalist or constructivist foundations. Rationalists argue that bureaucratic politics may lead to reliance on secrecy due to inter-agency competition, producing distinctive "standard operating procedures" (Anderson 1981; Allison and Zelikow 1999). Different security institutions deal with classified information and develop internal practices that value secrecy and opaque behavior for idiosyncratic reasons (Morrell and Kosal 2021). Constructivists highlight the role of strategic cultures shaped by historical, geographical, and political factors, where secrecy becomes ingrained in institutional thinking and behavior (Johnston 1995; Mahnken 2011; Grey 2014). According to this perspective, security organizations operate according to a logic of habit, and their choice to maintain secrecy emerges without much rational calculation (Hopf 2010).

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Conversely, scholars of foreign policy have identified several correlative reasons for why states may want to disclose and even vocally publicize their foreign and security policy actions. Research looking at the domestic politics of foreign policy has pointed out that leaders may publicize their foreign policy behavior to gain political legitimacy or build electoral or political support among key domestic constituencies (Entman 2004; Riemer and Sobelman 2023; Saunders 2024; Trenta, Fahey, and Atkinson 2024). Other scholars have shown how publicizing foreign policy actions can help leaders shape the public agenda or balance international negotiations with domestic political priorities in typical two-level games (see Putnam 1988; Fearon 1997). To this end, the diversionary theory of war points to cases where leaders seek to divert attention from domestic issues by publicizing major operations abroad, in a "Wag the Dog" fashion (see Hagan 2017). Finally, publicizing popular foreign policy measures can be weaponized against domestic or foreign political rivals espousing alternative positions (Saunders 2015; Dylan and Maguire 2022; Riemer and Sobelman 2023).

At the international level, scholars have argued that states often publicize their forceful foreign policy actions to signal resolve to rivals in international affairs or to reassure allies and partners during conflicts (Kertzer 2016; Yoder and Spaniel 2022). Scholars of strategic studies have pointed to the importance of publicizing military capabilities and behavior to enhance deterrence against aggression or to force diplomatic concessions during current or future diplomatic negotiations (Green and Long 2019; Cho, Haynes, and Yoder 2024). Publicizing important foreign and security measures has also been said to help in building reputation and enhance a country's status in the international system or to enhance the credibility of one's position (Sartori 2002; Brooks and Wohlforth 2008; Pu 2024).

In summary, theories of foreign policy secrecy and transparency consider different and potentially but not necessarily conflicting explanations for why states may withhold or disclose information about their capabilities or foreign policy capabilities or behavior. When it comes to foreign policy secrecy, domestic factors include avoiding audience costs and organizational cultures, while international factors involve security and status-related considerations. The next sections will empirically test these arguments.

Research Design and Methods

I employ a most-similar comparative case study research design for exploring and explaining the decision-making process and the underlying motivations driving the reliance on foreign policy secrecy (Gerring 2016, 64–5). This design yields a deep understanding of decision contexts and motivators. It identifies factors influencing outcomes through systematic negative and positive case study comparisons, offering insights applicable to similar cases.

This research focuses on Poland and Romania. Both share key background conditions but differ in disclosing military aid to Ukraine. On a spectrum from transparency to secrecy, Romania maintains an official policy of secrecy regarding the content and value of its military aid, while Poland is closer to the transparency end of the spectrum, disclosing more of its aid than Romania does. I treat Romania as a "positive" case study, while Poland is a "negative" case where the outcome is not present. Starting from these contrasting outcomes, I compare the factors that may explain them, looking for the causes of observed effects.

Romania and Poland, with similar backgrounds and Russia-centric security policies, are ideal study cases. Both are EU and NATO members, have strategic US partnerships, neighbor Ukraine, and face war externalities. Both support Ukraine publicly but differ only in their military aid communication policies (see table 1).

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Table 1. Background conditions for Poland and Romania

Background condition	Poland	Romania
Disclosure of military aid	Yes	No
Russia-centric security policy	Yes	Yes
NATO and EU membership	Yes	Yes
Strategic partnership with United States	Yes	Yes
Neighboring Ukraine	Yes	Yes
Historical grievances with Ukraine	Yes	Yes
Exposure to negative externalities of the war	Yes	Yes
President and Prime Minister are from the same party	Yes	Yes
Political support for Ukraine	Yes	Yes

Elite Interviews and Thematic Analysis

I interviewed foreign policy elites and experts in both countries to study leaders' decision-making processes and underlying motivations (Markiewicz 2023). These include politically appointed high-ranking dignitaries directly involved in the decision-making process, advisors to dignitaries, and foreign policy experts from the two countries' MFAs and important think tanks. Online Appendix B contains more details about the background of the interviewees. Between October and December 2023 and in April 2024, I conducted sixteen interviews in Bucharest and Warsaw (seven in Poland and nine in Bucharest) using a snowballing recruitment strategy starting from recommendations from current and former high-ranking officials involved in the two countries' decision-making processes, as well as policy experts with access to the decision-making processes. The interviews relied on semi-structured questions to uncover insights into the decision-making process and motivations behind disclosing or withholding information about military aid to Ukraine. While not all interviewees were dignitaries directly involved in the decision-making processes in the two countries, all were selected for their access to the higher echelons of the government and for their practical experience in the diplomatic and foreign policy world of the two countries.

I then performed a thematic analysis of the interview notes to identify recurring patterns or themes related to motivations for disclosing or withholding military aid to Ukraine. Thematic analysis, a qualitative approach, is effective for examining rich, textual data like interview transcripts and interview notes (Nowell et al. 2017). This content was coded using a deductive approach based on empirical expectations derived from the three alternative explanations. The goal was to ensure that emerging themes accurately represented the data and were empirically relevant for testing theoretical explanations. Finally, I condensed and summarized the data, extracting quotes that best exemplified each theme, synthesized in the Transparency Index.

Transparency

To ensure research transparency, I rely on the Annotation for Transparency Inquiry to annotate specific passages in the text and link them to empirical evidence from Online Appendix A (Karcher and Weber 2019). This provides direct access to the raw data material and provides support for key inferences or empirical assertions that are important for the overall purpose or argument of this research note (Moravcsik 2019). This follows the recommendations of best practice derived from the Statement on Data Access and Research Transparency (see Bonneau and Kanthak 2015; Jacobs et al. 2021).

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Secrecy: Romania

Mapping the Decision-Making Process

The sudden onset of the Russian invasion of Ukraine caught significant portions of the Romanian political establishment off guard. Despite the United States' efforts to pre-emptively debunk Russia's propaganda publicizing intelligence gathered on the impending invasion, a pervasive sense of uncertainty and anxiety gripped Bucharest (Nicolae 2022; Ruse 2023). Once the invasion started, Romanian leaders swiftly and unequivocally condemned Russia's aggression against Ukraine and affirmed their unwavering support for Kyiv's internationally recognized borders and sovereignty (Lupițu 2022; Roman 2022).

In the first weeks of the war, as Ukraine was able to hold off the Russian invasion, Romania coordinated with NATO allies and began providing both humanitarian and military aid. According to several interviewees, the decision appears to have been made initially within the Presidential Administration, with input from the security and defense agencies. Subsequently, this decision was formally endorsed by the Supreme Council of National Defense (CSAT), the country's primary national security and defense body (ROInt02a and ROInt04a). The Ministry of Defense (MoD), the intelligence agencies (SRI , the domestic intelligence service,and SIE), the foreign intelligence service, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the main institutions responsible for national security, were tasked with carrying out the various components of this "multidimensional" assistance to Ukraine (Aurescu 2022). As such, the decision-making process was defined by the interaction of security professionals and political leaders, especially the President and other civilian ministers holding seats in the CSAT.

At this time, no major decision-making body appears to have formally decided how to classify information about the military aid provided to Ukraine. The national security agencies responsible for carrying out the decisions regarding military aid to Ukraine followed their organizational cultures and standard operating procedures, which mandate secrecy for most if not all of their activities (ROInt01a; ROInt01c; ROInt03a; and ROInt07). Romania's national security and foreign policy establishment has a long history of secrecy, which is partly a political legacy of the former communist regime (Zulean 2012). During the chaotic early days of the conflict, when all state institutions were overwhelmed, the security institutions defaulted to secrecy, failing to provide timely public updates regarding their activities.

The government's formal decision regarding the communication strategy to be followed regarding Romania's military aid to Ukraine was adopted only in response to demands for transparency from the Romanian media and civil society. When news of military aid from other Western partners to Ukraine began to emerge, Romanian opinion leaders demanded that the government provide details on the country's aid (Deleanu 2022; Gusilov 2023).

These public demands forced the government to respond, but the outcome was the opposite of the demanded transparency. Instead, to avoid disclosing the extent of its aid to Ukraine, the Romanian government adopted a policy of secrecy, formalizing the status quo (RoInt02b). This decision seems to have been adopted in the same closed-door format involving high-ranking security and political officials.

Exploring the Motivations for Secrecy

The elite interviews uncover two main themes regarding the motivations driving the government's policy for secrecy on military aid to Ukraine. On one side, the security professionals and their organizations expressed a strong preference for secrecy, per their standard operating procedures and organizational cultures. On the other side, political elites also expressed a preference for secrecy due to concerns about a

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possible domestic backlash from a reluctant public. No references to deterrence or other external factors emerged as a driving motivation in any of the interviews.

The representatives of the main defense and security institutions, including the MoD and the main intelligence agencies, expressed implicitly or explicitly a preference for secrecy. According to the interviewees, the security establishment habitually values secrecy as an end-in-itself, and its bureaucratic behavior is defined by a lack of transparency and covert action (ROInt01a; ROInt03a; and ROInt07). As a Romanian high-ranking official put it,

> There is a tendency in security institutions not to think about decisions but to operate out of inertia. Not even people in the ministry or from the intelligence services can really justify why it was decided to keep secret the military aid (ROInt07).

In line with the third set of theoretical explanations, the strategic culture of the Romanian security and defense institutions seems to have informed their almost habitual preference for secrecy. However, this preference for the secrecy of security institutions does not explain why political leaders decided to endorse such a policy, considering the position of NATO and EU allies.

The driving motivation of civilian political elites for adopting a policy of secrecy was linked to domestic political considerations. The governing elites sought to avoid public debates about the country's military aid in a complicated context, with a growing far-right movement threatening the political survival of the governing coalition. As an official argued,

> Given the economic situation in the country, the decision-makers at the Cotroceni [the headquarters of the Presidential Administration] did not want to launch public discussions about the money we are spending in Ukraine when we do not have enough for our internal needs (ROInt04a).

The governing parties decided to avoid giving electoral ammunition to an increasingly popular far-right that instrumentalized historical grievances defining Romanian–Ukrainian relations in the context of the war (Global Focus 2024a, 4; Global Focus 2024b). Accused of getting too involved in the war in the context of a relatively reluctant public, the governing parties staunchly refused to disclose the content and total value of the country's military aid to Ukraine (ROInt01c; ROInt03b; ROInt04a; and ROInt08). This stance has been maintained even though it has become an open secret that Romania does send military—and not only humanitarian or economic—aid to Ukraine, but without any information regarding the content or value of this aid. Moreover, some interviewees claimed that the governing elites may have also sought to manage intra-elite disagreements regarding the country's Ukraine policy. As a government official described it,

> A large part of the Romanian elite does not care much about Ukraine. They still have a besieged fortress mentality, where Ukraine is a regional rival. And to avoid dissension within the establishment, which is more nationalistic, it was decided that since we've kept it secret until now, we should continue in the same way (ROInt02b).

This position was also reinforced by the relative public reluctance to provide military aid to Ukraine (see Stolle 2023 for a detailed comparative analysis). In the wake of the Russian invasion, the Romanian public showed high levels of support for Ukrainian refugees and agreed with the government's measures assisting the growing waves of refugees fleeing the war (Soare 2023). However, this has not fully extended to the provision of military aid. The Flash Eurobarometer (2022) fielded just days after the invasion started, in March 2022, showed that 72 percent of Romanians totally agreed or tended to agree with supplying weapons to Ukraine, signaling a rallying around Ukraine effect (European Commission 2022). However,

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subsequent surveys fielded by different Romanian pollsters showcase significantly lower levels of public support for deliveries of military aid. According to several survey waves conducted by the Romanian pollster Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy (IRES), by August 2022, only 40 percent of Romanians supported the delivery of weapons to Ukraine, remaining at roughly the same level of support in February 2023 (42 percent) (IRES 2023). Other pollsters have provided similar findings, with Avangarde, another major pollster, showing that at the 1-year anniversary of the war, in March 2023, only 32 percent of Romanians supported the delivery of weapons to Ukraine (Câmpeanu 2023).

To summarize, two main themes emerge from the elite interviews analyzed regarding the underlying motivations driving the policy of secrecy on military aid to Ukraine. Both the security establishment and the civilian political leadership preferred to keep secret the military aid to Ukraine but for different reasons. The security professionals were acting out of habit, following their organizational cultures, while political officials were driven by electoral considerations. The two sets of decision-makers converged on the same policy that refused to disclose Romania's aid to Ukraine.

Transparency: Poland

Mapping the Decision-Making Process

The Russian military build-up along Ukraine's borders in the months and weeks leading up to the invasion caused alarm and a sense of crisis in Warsaw. As Mateusz Morawiecki, the Polish Prime Minister at the time, aptly expressed, "living close to a neighbor like Russia, we have the feeling of living at the foot of a volcano" (Williams and Baczynska 2022). This tense atmosphere spurred the signing of a new trilateral security pact between Poland, the United Kingdom, and Ukraine, which would prove instrumental in facilitating coordination efforts once the invasion commenced.

Poland was one of the few countries that began supplying weapons to Ukraine before the invasion, along with Britain and the United States. On January 28, 2022, Poland's National Security Council (NSC) convened to discuss the regional security situation and decided to provide Ukraine with "defensive" ammunition and other military equipment. Following the meeting, Paweł Soloch, the head of the National Security Bureau (BNS), the body that oversees the NSC's operations, announced that the Council "has decided to hand over defensive ammunition to the Ukrainian side, which is to be used for defense, not for attack" (Wilczek 2022). The Polish Council of Ministers formalized the NSC's decision in the following week, openly publishing the decision to provide Ukraine with ammunition and military equipment free of charge (Polish Cabinet 2022). Morawiecki said that this military aid consisted of "tens of thousands of bullets and artillery ammunition, MANPADs, light mortars, reconnaissance UAVs, and other types of defensive weapons" (De Filippis 2022). The military support increased significantly once the invasion began, reaching a total of three billion euros and placing Poland sixth on the Kiel Institute's Ukraine Support Tracker Ranking (Trebesch et al. 2023).

Poland's early and decisive support for Ukraine reflected its deep concern about Russia's aggression and its security. Poland has a long history of conflict with Russia, and its leaders were acutely aware of the threat posed by Russia's military buildup on Ukraine's borders. By providing military aid to Ukraine, Poland was seeking to enhance its national security as the capture and subsequent occupation of Ukraine by Russia would have significantly expanded the line of military contact between the Polish and Russian military. However, this does not explain why the country decided to openly publicize the value and contents of its military aid to Ukraine.

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Exploring the Motivations for Transparency

The elite interviews undertaken with Polish officials and security experts uncover the same two themes that were present in the Romanian context, showcasing the similar dynamics that were taking place in Warsaw and Bucharest but with vastly different outcomes. The Polish security officials were also very keen on maintaining secrecy about the country's efforts in support of Kyiv's defenses, but the political leadership had different incentives and sought to adopt a policy of relative transparency.

The Polish MoD opposed disclosing the value and contents of the country's military aid to Ukraine, an expression of the security sector's strategic culture of secrecy and covert action (PLInt01). As a prominent Polish security expert put it,

> The Ministry of Defense and most security officials were opposed to publishing a list with the contents of Poland's aid to Ukraine. It went against everything they believed should be done during times of war (PLInt02).

According to several interviewees, Polish security officials from the MoD and BND sought to limit the public availability of specific information regarding the country's transfers of military equipment and ammunition to Ukraine. This is likely informed by a similar strategic culture that values covert action and secrecy as an end-in-itself.

However, the dynamic of civil–military relations in Poland left little leeway to the Polish security and defense professionals. The Political leadership overruled the preference of the MoD for secrecy and decided to formally adopt a communication strategy of transparency by disclosing the content of the country's military aid to Ukraine, even if not in its entirety. Both the head of the Bureau of National Security and the political leadership communicated early on the contents of the country's military aid.

The reasons for this communications strategy were related to what a former official in the BNS described as the "electoral imperatives dictated by the pre-electoral season in Poland" (PLInt01). Before and during the Russian invasion, Poland had a strong public outcry for the government to do more to help Ukraine. The two countries have strong historical and cultural ties and Poland has a large Ukrainian diaspora (Vermeersch 2007; Stryje and Konieczna-Salamatin 2021).

According to the Flash Eurobarometer (European Commission 2022), fielded in the early weeks of the war, 55 percent of Poles "totally agreed" with the delivery of military equipment to Ukraine, with an additional 32 percent "tended to agree." Similarly, a YouGov survey from late June–July 2022 found that "two thirds of Poles (68 percent) support sending further weapons to Ukraine, the joint-highest level of support for this measure, alongside Britain" (Smith 2022). Overall, the strong support for providing military aid to Ukraine remained relatively high as of 2024, with the European Council of Foreign Relations reporting in February 2024 that "67 percent of Poles think that the European Union and its member states should provide economic and military support to Ukraine for as long as necessary" (Bendyk 2024).

Faced with a strong public outcry for the government to provide military aid, the governing parties had important domestic incentives to capitalize electorally on this public mobilization by disclosing the government's efforts to militarily aid Ukraine (PLInt01; PLInt02; and PLInt04). As a high-ranking Polish diplomat put it,

> The President and PiS would have suffered electorally if they did not publicly show the degree of military support for Ukraine, considering the criticisms coming from the opposition and the immense popular pressure to support the Ukrainians (PLInt03).

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By overruling the policy preferences of the military regarding the disclosure of military aid to Ukraine, the governing elites were seeking to safeguard their popular support and prepare the ground for the upcoming legislative elections (PLInt04).

To summarize, the Polish case showcases the same policy dynamics over the disclosure of military aid to Ukraine, but the outcome was vastly different from the one in Romania. While the security officials in Poland would have preferred a policy of secrecy, the different policy incentives present in Poland made political elites adopt a policy of transparency regarding the country's military aid to Ukraine. By adopting a communication strategy defined by transparency, Polish political elites sought to effectively answer the public outcry emerging from across society and undercut the opposing parties that were increasingly criticizing the government for not doing enough to support the Ukrainians.

Discussion

Romania and Poland's contrasting approaches regarding the disclosure of their military aid to Ukraine raise intriguing questions about their motivations. The findings from the previous two sections suggest that domestic electoral considerations best explain the two governments contrasting positions. However, I find evidence for both rational-electoral and cultural motivations for different sets of actors (politicians vs. security officials), which were in tension in Poland and overlapping in Romania.

Both the Romanian and Polish security establishments preferred to maintain secrecy over their country's military aid to Ukraine. Informed by similar strategic cultures and standard operating procedures, the Romanian and Polish militaries sought to limit the disclosure of military-sensitive information about the transfer of their capabilities to Ukraine. However, the political elites of the two countries had different electoral incentives, leading them to adopt opposing positions on the matter.

Romania's domestic context, characterized by the emergence of a strong far-right movement critical of Ukraine and a reluctant public, has driven the political leadership in Bucharest to adopt a communication strategy defined by secrecy. Consequently, Romania steadfastly refuses to publicly disclose the details of its military aid to Kyiv's war effort (Aurescu 2023). Conversely, Poland's distinct domestic context has led Warsaw's political elites to take the opposite approach and openly disclose the country's military aid to Ukraine. Amidst a public outcry, opposition criticism, and broad support for providing military aid to Ukraine, Poland's political leadership faced few electoral costs and potentially significant benefits from publicizing its aid to Ukraine. As such, electoral incentives are the key factor differentiating the Romanian and Polish approaches towards communication of their military aid to Ukraine.

The interviews have not produced any mention related to rational-strategic motivations, such as deterring Russia to explain the policy decisions on secrecy. Recent scholarship has pointed to deterrence by delivery of arms as a NATO strategy in response to the Russian invasion (Lupovici 2023). Both Romania and Poland have been fully aligned with NATO's changes in its deterrence posture vis-à-vis Russia and both countries have advocated for a more forceful show of force (Mälksoo 2024). To this end, both Romania and Poland coordinated their positions within NATO through the Bucharest-Nine format (Bucharest-Nine 2023). As such, there is no variation in this regard that could point toward the validity of this set of explanations in these particular cases. Despite this joint alignment behind NATO's deterrence strategy, Romania has decided to keep the content and value of its military aid secret, while Poland was more transparent.

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Conclusions

The contrasting cases of Romania and Poland give credence to theoretical arguments focused on the domestic sources of foreign policy secrecy. Both Romanian and Polish choices over whether to disclose or not their military aid to Ukraine were driven by domestic political considerations. While I find evidence pointing to the presence of both electoral and cultural motivations for secrecy, the primary motivation explaining the contrasting outcomes from these two cases is electoral. These motivations are the ones that vary between the two cases.

The findings of this research note have interesting implications for our understanding of foreign policy secrecy. For instance, in the context of the conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, we would expect that democratic leaders, such as the US President or European heads of government, would decide whether to publicize or not their military aid to Ukraine according to domestic reactions. In the case of the United States, we could reasonably expect the US President to adopt a policy of secrecy regarding the country's aid to Israel as the American public becomes more reluctant to support military efforts in Gaza.

Another implication of these findings is that the three different motivations considered in this research note can co-exist simultaneously, informing the preferences of different sets of decision-makers. If this is the case, then this raises important questions regarding the conditions under which one or another prevails and ends up defining the foreign policy behavior of governments (see also Payne 2023). In the Polish case, the domestic electoral concerns of political leaders trumped the preferences of security officials, showcasing a particular configuration of civil–military relations. In other contexts, these dynamics can be significantly different or may lead to forms of bargaining between the two sides. As such, these findings point to important avenues for building on recent research on civil–military relations amid the politicization of foreign and defense policies.

Supplementary Information

Supplementary information is available at the *Foreign Policy Analysis* data archive.

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