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HUMANITARIAN DETERRENCE: AFFECTIVE LEGITIMATION OF COERCIVE POLICIES IN RESPONSE TO RUSSIA'S WAR AGAINST UKRAINE

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Abstract. *Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine generated an extensive humanitarian mobilization in Western democracies in which compassion for civilian suffering became increasingly intertwined with support for sanctions, military assistance, and long-term security commitments. This article conceptualizes this configuration as humanitarian deterrence: a mode of legitimizing coercive policies in which humanitarian emotions and moral narratives provide an affective infrastructure for sustaining deterrence, and develops the concept through Luc Boltanski's politics of compassion and Arlie Hochschild's theory of feeling rules. Drawing on an interpretive analysis of political rhetoric and a secondary analysis of public-opinion data from the European Union and the United States between 2022 and 2025, the study reconstructs an affective-moral chain linking humanitarian shock, narrative articulation, political translation, and the contested normalization of prolonged support. The analysis suggests that compassion, empathy, and moral outrage can operate as a bridge between care and coercion by rendering sanctions, arms deliveries, and other security measures intelligible as expressions of responsibility toward the victim of aggression rather than solely as responses to strategic threat. The article argues that humanitarian deterrence constitutes a contingent rather than irreversible form of political legitimacy, whose durability depends on the continued reproduction of moral narratives, institutional trust, and political consensus and may weaken under conditions of economic pressure, partisan counter-mobilization, declining public attention, and competing interpretations of responsibility.*

Key words: *Humanitarian deterrence, Russian-Ukrainian war, politics of emotions, security policy, coercive policies, normalization of war.*

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Introduction [1]

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, was not only a military and geopolitical turning point (Zaporozhchenko, 2024), but also a large-scale humanitarian mobilization in the European public sphere, based on collectively shared humanitarian compassion (Frizell et al., 2025). The war was almost instantly framed as a moral catastrophe requiring recognition of the suffering and protection of the victims (Szabó & Lipiński, 2024), as well as immediate responsibility on the part of the societies hosting Ukrainian refugees (Thomson et al., 2023). Several factors contributed to the formation of this humanitarian frame: the unprecedented scale and speed of forced displacement, primarily of women and children (Andrews et al., 2023; Schrooten, 2025); a huge array of visual evidence of destruction and civilian casualties in the news media and social networks (Elareshi et al., 2025); the institutional readiness of the European Union to quickly translate humanitarian compassion into legally binding forms of political action, in particular through the activation of the temporary protection mechanism based on EU Council Decision 2022/382 (Xhardez & Soennecken, 2023).

In this article, humanitarian compassion is used as a key analytical category that allows us to conceptually organize the dynamics described above. As an analytical tool, this concept does not describe individual experiences as such but rather captures collectively shared and normatively structured forms of public moral orientation. Humanitarian compassion is understood not as an individual emotional reaction or empathy as an individual psychological capacity for sympathy, but as a sustained orientation toward recognizing the victim's suffering, attributing injustice, and expecting a collective response. Humanitarian emotions such as empathy, moral outrage, and a sense of duty are seen not as private experiences, but as affective components and carriers of this compassion, while humanitarian moral mobilization refers to a public process in which this orientation becomes the dominant framework for interpreting war and a source of legitimacy for political action.

From a sociological point of view, such humanitarian moral mobilization can be interpreted as a type of "moral shock" or "shock event" (Vinnykova & Zaporozhchenko, 2023), as well as a mediatized mobilization of solidarity. Through the regimes of visibility of suffering in the public space, emotions were produced and stabilized, which together constituted humanitarian compassion as a publicly shared moral orientation. However, already during 2022, this stage of humanitarian moral mobilization became structurally intertwined with processes traditionally associated with security and military policy. Sanctions regimes, expanding weapons deliveries, growing defense budgets, and the formation of long-term commitments to military support for Ukraine became central elements of the Western states' response to the Russian invasion (Meissner & Graziani, 2023). Crucially, these measures did not supplant humanitarian rhetoric but, on the contrary, were largely articulated through it. These mechanisms were presented not only

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as a rational strategic necessity (Rajmil et al., 2025), but also as a moral duty arising from humanitarian compassion for the victim of aggression and responsibility for preventing further violence (Kurnyshova, 2025).

This dynamic points to an important empirical and theoretical paradox. On the one hand, in classical conceptual models, humanitarianism is associated with the logic of aid, protection, and minimization of violence (Barnett, 2011), while sanctions, militarization, and deterrence policies belong to the sphere of coercion, threats, and controlled escalation (Finnemore, 2003). In the case of the Russian-Ukrainian war, humanitarian emotions did not act as antagonists to coercive measures but, on the contrary, became one of the key resources for their public legitimization. Humanitarian compassion and the associated affective structures not only coexisted with the expansion of military-political support, but also contributed to its normalization, institutionalization, and sustainability over time (Floyd & Webber, 2024). Thus, in the context of Western democracies' response to the Russian-Ukrainian war, humanitarian affect functioned not as a constraint on violence, but as a mediator between the moral imagination of war and practices of coercion.

On the other hand, classic studies of suffering mediation show that compassion in the public sphere is not a natural or universal reaction (Chouliaraki, 2006), but is formed through cultural scenarios, visual conventions, and moral addresses (Boltanski, 1999). In the context of (post)humanitarianism, the media can simultaneously enhance empathy and transform it into emotionally charged but politically ambivalent forms of solidarity (Chouliaraki, 2013). Consequently, the dominance of humanitarian-compassionate language in the first months of the Russian-Ukrainian war should be understood not as a neutral background, but as a specific moral-communicative regime that set the legitimate vocabulary for interpreting the war (e.g., "innocent victims", "defense", "humanitarian responsibility") and simultaneously structured the boundaries of involvement and subsequent political decisions (Diab, 2025).

Despite growing attention to the role of emotions in international politics and research on affect in security (Gürkan & Terzi, 2024; Shah, 2024), existing theoretical approaches (e.g., Hutchison, 2016; Solomon, 2014) only partially explain this transformation of humanitarian compassion into a resource for deterrence policy. As a rule, studies of emotions in international relations focus either on points of crisis mobilization and securitization or on individual and collective affective responses, without tracing their institutional and temporal stabilization. Studies of humanitarianism, in turn, focus primarily on the ethics of aid, victim protection, and humanitarian crisis management (Barnett, 2011; Fassin, 2012), while theories of security and deterrence rely on rationalist, strategic, and institutional models that give little consideration to the moral and emotional grounds for public support for coercive measures (D'Arcy & Herath, 2011; Kuo et al., 2020). As a result, humanitarianism and security are analyzed as parallel but analytically weakly related fields. Consequently, the question of how humanitarian compassion can not only limit violence but also actively participate in legitimizing military escalation and long-term coercive regimes in democratic societies in the context of protracted war remains insufficiently explored.

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Based on this paradox, the article formulates the following research question: *How and through what emotional and moral-rhetorical mechanisms is humanitarian compassion transformed into a resource for public and institutional legitimization of sanctions and military measures in response to Russia's war against Ukraine*? In answering this question, the article proposes the analytical concept of humanitarian deterrence, which we understand as a contextually specific form of deterrence policy in which coercive measures are justified and normalized through humanitarian emotions, moral narratives, and the symbolic privilege of the position of the victim of aggression in the public sphere. Unlike classical models of deterrence, which rely primarily on rationalism, balance of power, and strategic calculations, humanitarian deterrence is based on affective structures of public support, linking security issues with moral responsibility and emotional forms of solidarity.

The Ukrainian case is considered in the article not as an object of direct analysis of public opinion within Ukraine, but as a critical context within which a specific configuration of humanitarian mobilization and deterrence policy has formed and stabilized in European and American societies. It was Russia's war against Ukraine that became the conflict in which humanitarian compassion and moral interpretation of aggression were particularly closely intertwined with the expansion of sanctions and military measures aimed at supporting the victim. This allows us to view the Russian-Ukrainian war as an analytical "empirical laboratory" of Western public reactions, in which humanitarian emotions and related affective structures cease to perform an exclusively restrictive function in relation to violence and begin to act as a productive resource for its political rationalization and long-term normalization.

Theoretically, the article aims to contribute to several areas of research. First, it shifts the focus of deterrence research from rationalist models and threat logic to an analysis of the affective and moral mechanisms of public legitimization of deterrence policy in democratic societies. Second, the article expands research on humanitarianism by showing that humanitarian compassion can function not only as a basis for aid or intervention, but also as the infrastructure for long-term regimes of coercion. Third, it clarifies the role of emotions in international politics, demonstrating that humanitarian compassion can perform a productive rather than a restrictive function in relation to coercive policies. In doing so, the article offers a conceptual language for analyzing contemporary conflicts in which humanitarian mobilization and the institutionalization of military support do not oppose each other but form a stable and mutually reinforcing configuration.

Theoretical Framework: Between Emotions and Security

The starting point for theoretical analysis is the concept of compassion politics developed by Luc Boltanski in his work *Distant Suffering*. In this work, Boltanski shows that the public representation of suffering, especially in the context of mediatized visuality, fundamentally changes the social status of the emotion of compassion, transforming it from an individual affect into a collectively shared moral resource (Boltanski, 1999). Through visual and discursive mediation, suffering is separated from the specific context of experience and translated into a universalizable moral category accessible to public

interpretation, evaluation, and normative judgment. In this process, suffering ceases to be a private fact of biography and acquires a political dimension, as its public visibility creates an expectation of response, involvement, and responsibility on the part of the observer (Chouliaraki, 2006).

A key element of Boltanski's politics of compassion is that publicly recognized suffering constitutes a moral obligation without being rigidly tied to a specific type of political response. Compassion functions not as a spontaneous emotional response, but as a mechanism of moral address, establishing an asymmetrical relationship between victim and observer and thereby producing a structural demand for action (Cohen, 2001). The observer, whether an individual, a state, or the international community, finds themselves interpellated into a position of moral duty, and failure to respond to publicly articulated suffering carries the potential for moral discredit.

However, despite the analytical power of this approach, Boltanski deliberately leaves open the question of what forms of political action are legitimized within the framework of compassion politics and how this moral obligation can support not only practices of aid and protection but also measures of coercion. This gap is particularly evident in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war, where humanitarian visibility and moral asymmetry between the victim and the aggressor have been closely linked not only to humanitarian aid, but also to the justification of sanctions regimes, the militarization of support, and long-term deterrence strategies. In Boltanski's logic, the politics of compassion primarily captures the moment of moral interpellation in which suffering becomes publicly visible and generates a demand for a response. Much less clear is how this demand stabilizes over time, especially in the context of a protracted war accompanied by mounting economic, social, and political costs. To answer this question, the concept of the politics of compassion needs to be supplemented with tools for analyzing sustainable forms of emotional regulation.

In our opinion, Arlie Hochschild's sociology of emotions offers such an addition. Unlike Boltanski, who focuses on the public visibility of suffering and the moral asymmetry between the victim and the observer, Hochschild views emotions as socially regulated and institutionally supported practices. Introducing the concept of feeling rules, she shows that societies form normative expectations about what feelings should be experienced, expressed, or suppressed in specific situations (Hochschild, 1983, pp. 56–57). Emotions in this sense become markers of belonging to a moral and political community, while deviation from the "right" feelings can be interpreted as a form of social or political deviance (Hochschild, 1979).

Within this theoretical framework, the politics of compassion ceases to be an episodic effect of media visibility and begins to be seen as part of a broader structure of emotional governance. While Boltanski helps us understand why publicly articulated suffering produces a moral demand for action, Hochschild provides the tools to analyze how this demand is transformed into a stable emotional regime that sustains long-term engagement, loyalty, and willingness to accept the costs associated with war. This opens an analytical opportunity to examine how humanitarian emotions not only initiate a

response but also stabilize long-term forms of political action, including sanctions, military support, and deterrence strategies.

It is this synthesis that takes the analysis beyond the narrow confines of the humanities and raises the question of the functioning of humanitarian emotions in the field of security. In existing security theory, the most influential approach remains the theory of securitization associated with the Copenhagen School (Buzan et al., 1998), in which the legitimization of coercive policies relies primarily on the articulation of threats and the mobilization of negative emotions, primarily fear and anxiety (Balzacq, 2011; Vuori, 2008). However, this approach proves to be limited when analyzing situations in which support for sanctions and military aid is formed not through the experience of a direct threat to one's own security, but through a moral reaction to the suffering of others. In the case of the Russian-Ukrainian war, humanitarian emotions such as compassion, empathy, and moral outrage form not a logic of exclusivity, but a logic of responsibility and duty, which remains insufficiently conceptualized within the framework of classical securitization.

Despite significant differences between these approaches, both focus on intervention, aid, and crisis response as key forms of political action. The literature on humanitarian intervention and humanitarianism, in turn, focuses on moral arguments for protecting victims and preventing suffering (Finnemore, 2003; Barnett, 2011; Weiss, 2016). Even critical approaches that analyze humanitarianism as a form of power or moral governance (Fassin, 2012; Chandler, 2010), predominantly consider intervention and aid as the main forms of political action, leaving long-term sanctions regimes, institutionalized military support, and deterrence strategies on the periphery of analysis. Research in the field of affective politics and emotion management (Ahmed, 2004; Berlant, 2011; Hutchison, 2016) convincingly shows that emotions are a structural element of political governance, but even in this body of literature, the question of what institutional and normative mechanisms humanitarian emotions use to ensure the sustainability of deterrence policy, rather than just intervention or short-term mobilization of solidarity, remains insufficiently explored.

Thus, at the intersection of theories of compassion, emotional regulation, and security, a persistent theoretical gap emerges, related not to a lack of attention to emotions as such, but to their insufficient analytical differentiation in the context of coercive policies. Existing approaches explain how humanitarian emotions trigger moral mobilization, solidarity, and support for humanitarian interventions, but they do not offer conceptual tools for analyzing how exactly these emotions become institutionalized and begin to function as the infrastructure of long-term deterrence policies. It is this analytical gap that determines the analytical expediency of introducing the concept of humanitarian deterrence, which allows us to conceptualize situations in which humanitarian emotions and narratives not only accompany coercive measures but become their key resource, linking moral concern for the victim with sustainable regimes of sanctions and military support.

Humanitarian Deterrence: An Attempt at Conceptualization

We propose to consider humanitarian deterrence as a contextually specific form of moral and affective legitimization and maintenance of deterrence policy based on moral emotions, humanitarian narratives, and the symbolic authority of the suffering of victims of aggression. Unlike classical models of deterrence, which rely on rational calculation, the threat of retaliation, and the balance of material forces (Schelling, 1966; Freedman, 2004), humanitarian deterrence functions primarily through affective mobilization: compassion, empathy, and moral outrage are transformed into sustained public support for sanctions, military, and other coercive measures. This is not an alternative to strategic deterrence, but rather a specific mechanism for its moral and emotional legitimization in democratic societies. The key feature of humanitarian deterrence is that it does not oppose humanitarianism and security as mutually exclusive logic, but links them into a single affective-political configuration. Compassion for the victims of aggression is not limited to the sphere of aid, protection, or humanitarian response (Barnett, 2011), but becomes the moral basis for a prolonged confrontation, presented as necessary, responsible, and ethically justified.

At the same time, to prevent conceptual expansion, humanitarian deterrence requires a clear analytical distinction from several related mechanisms for legitimizing coercive policies. It cannot be reduced to mobilization through fear or the perception of a direct threat to one's own security, even if such elements may coexist with humanitarian rhetoric. Similarly, humanitarian deterrence should be distinguished from punitive and repressive frames, in which sanctions or military measures are justified primarily as punishment for the aggressors' violation of norms, as well as from purely legal or sovereigntist justifications for coercive measures that are not based on affective-moral mobilization. Finally, this concept does not cover cases of elite humanitarian discourse that do not find a sustained response at the level of mass public opinion.

Theoretically, humanitarian deterrence differs fundamentally from classical military deterrence, as traditional models are based on the premise of a rational actor who is sensitive to the threat of punishment and focused on strategic communication with the adversary through the demonstration of capabilities and balance of power (Schelling, 1966). Humanitarian deterrence, on the contrary, is addressed primarily to one's own societies and allies; its function is not to directly prevent aggression through intimidation, but to ensure the public legitimacy, sustainability, and reproducibility of deterrence measures through moral and emotional mobilization. Unlike liberal humanitarianism and humanitarian intervention, where moral emotions are directed at limiting violence and imply a temporary nature of intervention (Finnemore, 2003; Weiss, 2016), in the configuration under consideration, humanitarian emotions serve as the basis for sanctions, weapons deliveries, and long-term military support, without losing their normative status.

The moral focus shifts from the aggressor to the victim, whose suffering retains symbolic priority in public discourse and serves as a source of normative stability for deterrence policy. Finally, humanitarian deterrence is not reduced to the moral economy of sanctions, in which coercive measures are legitimized through discourse on just

punishment or retribution against the aggressor (Drezner, 2011). In the configuration under consideration, sanctions and military aid are justified primarily as an expression of solidarity with the victim and as a continuation of humanitarian duty by other means.

Analytically, humanitarian deterrence can be described as a set of interrelated processes (see Table 1). Within this configuration, moral emotions are sequentially transformed from an affective impulse into a stable form of political legitimacy. The starting point for this configuration is an affective trigger—a humanitarian shock caused by visualized suffering, the destruction of civilian infrastructure, and the death of civilians. In the words of Luc Boltanski, it is precisely the public and mediatized representation of suffering that translates private pain into a collectively recognized moral fact, endowed with symbolic authority and capable of interpellating the observer into a position of responsibility (Boltanski, 1999). This moment is not neutral: it produces a moral asymmetry between the victim and the observer and thus forms a structural demand for a response. However, the affective impulse itself remains unstable and short-lived, since its political effectiveness is ensured through *narrative articulation*, in which suffering is interpreted as a violation of fundamental moral norms and as a challenge to the entire moral community. It is at this stage, in Boltanski's logic, that compassion ceases to be a situational emotion and becomes the basis of moral obligation, while in Hochschild's terms, "feeling rules" are formed and consolidated, setting normative expectations about which emotions are appropriate and obligatory in the public sphere (Hochschild, 1983). Narratives of victim innocence, asymmetry of responsibility, and civilizational confrontation stabilize affect and embed it in a broader structure of collective identity and moral loyalty.

Table 1. The Analytical Value of The Concept of Humanitarian Deterrence.

Analytical measurement	What existing approaches capture	What the concept of humanitarian deterrence allows us to see
Source of legitimacy of coercive policy	Threat, fear, strategic necessity, punishment of the aggressor	Emotions and humanitarian narratives as a relatively autonomous source of legitimacy
Target of deterrence	Opponent (rational actor, sensitive to threats)	Own societies and allies as key audiences for support
Role of emotions	Auxiliary factor of mobilization or control	Central infrastructure for the normative sustainability of deterrence policy
Temporal logic	Short-term response to a threat or crisis	The process of normalizing long-term confrontation as morally necessary

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Link between humanitarianism and security	Tension or competition between logics	Affective-moral integration of humanitarianism into security policy
Interpretation of costs	Inevitable side effects of strategy	Ethically justified and normatively interpreted price of solidarity with the victim
Figure of moral authority	State, norms, international law	The victim of aggression and their suffering as a symbolic source of norms
Type of political stability	Institutional and strategic	Emotionally normative and affectively reproducible
Mechanism of legitimacy reproduction	Institutional decisions, strategic signals, legal procedures	Routinization of moral expectations, institutionalization of "feeling rules," and affective reproduction of support for deterrence policy

Humanitarian emotions are then subjected to *political translation*: they are transformed into concrete decisions, such as sanctions regimes, weapons deliveries, the institutionalization of long-term military support, and others. It is fundamentally important that, in the logic of humanitarian deterrence, these measures are represented not as a departure from humanitarianism or its forced negation, but as its continuation and even radicalization. In the logic of humanitarian deterrence, coercive and military measures are reinterpreted as forms of humanitarian responsibility aimed at protecting victims and preventing further suffering, which allows them to remain publicly acceptable and normatively legitimate.

At a subsequent stage, a contested *normalization of war* may occur, during which economic costs, military escalation, and the protracted nature of confrontation are framed as morally necessary and ethically justified, although this framing remains potentially reversible (Zaporozhchenko, 2025). Hochschild's perspective is particularly important here: thanks to the institutionalization of emotional regimes, compassion, empathy, and moral outrage cease to be a temporary reaction to a crisis and become a stable norm of public sentiment, deviation from which can be interpreted as moral and political deviance (Hochschild, 1979). As a result, support for deterrence policy may persist as costs rise, although its durability depends on the continued reproduction of solidarity with the victim and of humanitarian duty.

Our proposed approach does not deny the strategic and material dimensions of deterrence but shows that, in democratic societies, these dimensions depend on affective and normative regimes of public legitimation. However, because this legitimacy is affectively and narratively mediated, it is neither automatic nor irreversible. The same

democratic openness that enables humanitarian solidarity also permits counter-mobilization: rising costs can be reframed as unfair burdens, strategic disagreement as futile escalation, and humanitarian concern as an imposition by political elites. Humanitarian deterrence should therefore be understood not as a guaranteed equilibrium, but as a conditionally stabilized form of legitimacy whose durability depends on the continued alignment of moral narratives, institutional trust, and cross-party political support.

Methodology

The methodological design of the article focuses on identifying stable empirical links between humanitarian emotions, moral frameworks for interpreting war, and public support for deterrence measures, rather than establishing strict causal relationships. The study follows an interpretive and conceptually oriented logic of analysis, in which empirical material is used to operationalize and illustrate the analytical concept of humanitarian deterrence. In this regard, the empirical focus is on the countries of the European Union and the United States, where sanctions, military aid, and long-term security commitments require sustained public support and moral justification (Risse-Kappen, 1991). Unlike authoritarian regimes, where coercive foreign policy can rely primarily on administrative coercion and control over the public sphere, in liberal democracies the legitimacy of such measures is structurally dependent on the dynamics of public approval, emotional engagement, and moral narratives.

Within this empirical analysis, an analytical distinction is made between three subgroups of cases reflecting different configurations of interaction between humanitarian emotions and security policy. First, Eastern European countries (primarily Poland and the Baltic states) are considered as cases in which humanitarian empathy for the victim of aggression is articulated in close connection with high sensitivity to issues of their own security, which allows us to trace a relatively direct and consistent translation of humanitarian narratives into support for militarized forms of assistance. Second, Western European countries (particularly Germany and France) represent more ambivalent configurations, in which a strong humanitarian discourse coexists with contradictory debates around weapons deliveries. These cases allow for an analytical reconstruction of the mechanisms of political translation of humanitarian frameworks in support of coercive policies under normative, historical, and institutional constraints. Third, the United States is considered a separate analytical case, combining developed humanitarian rhetoric with a central role in the global architecture of deterrence, which allows us to extend the analysis beyond the European context and test the analytical transferability of the proposed concept.

The time frame of the study covers the period from February 2022 to 2025, which allows us to trace the dynamics of humanitarian deterrence over time: from the initial humanitarian shock and intense emotional mobilization in 2022, through a phase of stabilization and institutionalization of support in 2023, to a phase of routinization, differentiated support, and growing contestation over costs, instruments, and time horizons in 2024-2025. This time frame makes it possible to analyze humanitarian

deterrence not as a short-term response to war, but as a sustainable affective-moral regime.

The core of the empirical analysis consists of a secondary analysis of sociological data collected in 2022-2025 in EU countries and the US. The main sources of data are Eurobarometer, Pew Research Center, and individual national studies recording levels of public support for sanctions, financial and military aid to Ukraine, as well as moral interpretations of the responsibility and suffering of the Ukrainian population. This data is used not for statistical testing of causal hypotheses, but to identify stable configurations of public attitudes and moral frameworks within which deterrence policy acquires humanitarian legitimacy. Political speeches, humanitarian campaigns, and media materials are used as contextual and interpretive material to reconstruct dominant humanitarian narratives and institutionalized "feeling rules" that regulate acceptable forms of public emotional involvement and moral justification of coercive policies. Their function is not to illustrate individual cases, but to clarify the logic of affective-normative translation, through which humanitarian emotions begin to function as mechanisms for legitimizing deterrence policies.

Although the war in Ukraine serves as an empirical trigger for the processes analyzed in the article, Ukrainian public opinion is not included as a primary empirical object. This is because the concept of humanitarian deterrence focuses on analyzing the mechanisms of moral and emotional legitimization of coercive policies in democratic third-party countries, where sanctions, military aid, and long-term security commitments require sustained public justification. Public opinion in Ukraine is formed in conditions of existential defense and national survival and is subject to a different affective and normative logic, which makes it analytically incomparable with the processes discussed in the article and takes it beyond the scope of this study.

Empirically Grounding Humanitarian Deterrence: An Affective-Moral Chain

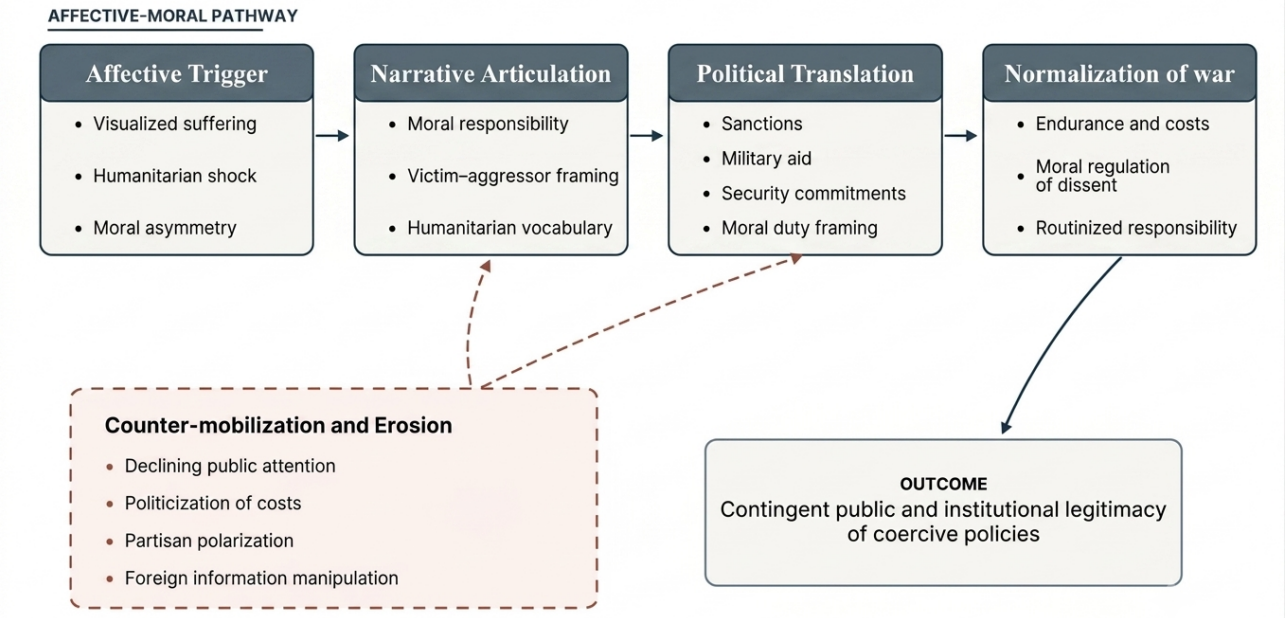
The starting point for empirical analysis is the thesis that humanitarian emotions in the context of war acquire political significance not as isolated or short-term affective reactions, but through the processes of their public articulation, moral interpretation, and institutionalization. In the context of a protracted war, the initial humanitarian shock and empathy for the victims of aggression do not disappear but are gradually transformed into a stable moral and normative framework for interpreting the war. Thus, support for deterrence measures begins to be perceived not as a situational political choice, but as a socially expected and morally justified position. Accordingly, the empirical analysis in this article focuses not on individual emotional experiences as such, but on the processes of transforming humanitarian emotions into publicly legitimized moral orientations that ensure the reproducibility of support for coercive policies over time.

This analytical focus allows us to shift our attention from short-term emotional reactions to the mechanisms of their normative stabilization and political institutionalization. In the logic set out in the theoretical section of the article, this transformation is not spontaneous or linear in nature. It is mediated, first, by the public

visualization of suffering, second, by the narrative articulation of moral responsibility, and third, by the institutionalization of "feeling rules" that regulate acceptable forms of public emotional involvement and delineate the boundaries of legitimate moral responses to war. It is precisely this consistent transformation of humanitarian affects into normatively established forms of political legitimation that constitutes the empirical core of humanitarian deterrence.

In accordance with the proposed conceptual framework, analytical measures of humanitarian deterrence (see Figure 1) are used in this section not as a set of direct empirical indicators, but as analytical guidelines for structuring and interpreting empirical material. This approach allows us to reconstruct a holistic affective-normative configuration within which publicly articulated humanitarian emotions and related moral orientations begin to function as the infrastructure for the public and institutional legitimization of deterrence policy in democratic societies. The differences between the stages of the affective-moral chain are determined not by the intensity of emotions, but by the social and normative functions that humanitarian affects begin to perform at each stage: from initial moral interpellation to routine responsibility.

Figure 1. The Affective-Moral Chain of Humanitarian Deterrence



Although the empirical material covers several regional contexts, the comparative logic of the study is not limited to comparing countries or levels of support for deterrence policies as such. Eastern Europe, Western Europe, and the United States are viewed as analytical variations of the same mechanism of political translation of humanitarian emotions into sustained support for coercive policies, functioning in different normative, institutional, and historical conditions. Comparative analysis shows that humanitarian deterrence is not a uniform process, but is implemented through various modes of such translation, differing in the dominant types of moral argumentation, the ratio of

humanitarian and securitization frameworks in public discourse, and the sustainability of public support for deterrence measures over time. It is these differing modes of translation, rather than the levels of support themselves, that constitute the main comparative result of the empirical analysis.

Affective trigger

In the analytical logic of humanitarian deterrence, the affective trigger is the starting point and threshold moment of the entire affective-moral chain. This is not simply a surge of emotions in response to war and violence, but a specific form of humanitarian shock resulting from the public and mediatized visualization of suffering. Unlike abstract knowledge about war, humanitarian shock is associated with an intense emotional experience in which the suffering of the victim acquires immediate moral significance and demands a response from the observer. It is at this moment that war ceases to be perceived as a distant geopolitical event and begins to be interpreted as a moral catastrophe affecting the moral side of the community. Following the logic of Luc Boltanski, an affective trigger should be understood as the result of the public representation of suffering, in which individual emotions are transformed into a collectively shared moral fact (Boltanski, 1999). Visuality plays a key role in this process: images of destroyed cities, killed civilians, and mass forced displacement of the population not only evoke empathy but also form an asymmetrical moral relationship between the victim and the observer.

Indirect empirical confirmation of this dynamic is the sharp surge in media attention to the war in Ukraine in the first weeks after the full-scale invasion. Infographic reviews show that in February-March 2022, the topic of Ukraine appeared repeatedly on the covers of leading Western publications, occupying a central place in the global media agenda, while in subsequent years the intensity of coverage decreased significantly, reflecting the weakening of the novelty effect and the gradual routinization of the war (Slovo i Dilo, 2026). At the same time, major international newsrooms mobilized significant reporting resources in the early stages of the war and sent journalists directly to the combat zone, which testified to the high priority of the war in international information flows (Eddy & Fletcher, 2022). At the same time, studies of media framing show that the impact was formed not only through individual visual images or texts, but also through stable narrative and discursive structures that presented the war as a morally significant event (Verbytska, 2024).

Affective triggers are difficult to operate directly in mass surveys, as emotional states cannot be observed directly and are measured using validated indicators with limited accuracy and sensitivity. Instead, sociological data records socially acceptable and institutionalized forms of expression of affective mobilization. In this analysis, such forms, primarily public support for humanitarian aid, sanctions, and other forms of engagement, are considered indirect indicators of humanitarian shock, reflecting respondents' willingness to approve measures associated with material, symbolic, and normative costs. Such support is interpreted not as direct evidence of specific emotions, but as an observable manifestation of a broader affective-moral orientation formed in the context of intense and mediatized perceptions of war. Indicative in this regard are the data from

the Flash Eurobarometer conducted in April 2022, according to which 93% of European Union citizens approved of providing humanitarian aid to Ukraine, and 80% were in favor of imposing economic sanctions against Russia (Eurobarometer, 2022).

In the proposed analytical logic, these data are interpreted as empirical evidence of the action of an affective trigger, in which publicly visualized suffering and moral interpretation of war expand the boundaries of what is acceptable and make coercive measures symbolically acceptable even before their detailed political interpretation. Further confirmation of early affective mobilization is provided by the high degree of cross-national consistency in moral assessments in the first months of the war. International surveys recorded almost universal attribution of responsibility for the war to Russia and a sharp deterioration in its moral image in public opinion. According to the Pew Research Center, by 2023, the median share of negative assessments of Russia in 24 countries had reached 82%, suggesting that the moral asymmetry established during the early phase of the war remained highly salient one year later (Pew Research Center, 2023). In this context, it is important to emphasize that this convergence of assessments arose before the development of sustainable political strategies and institutional responses, which further indicates the primacy of the affective mechanism.

At the level of individual states, the early effect of the humanitarian shock was even more pronounced. In Poland, for example, a high degree of emotional and moral involvement was already evident in the spring of 2022: according to the Public Opinion Research Center, most respondents supported not only humanitarian aid to Ukraine, but also the transfer of heavy weapons, including tanks (CBOS, 2022). Similar dynamics were observed in the Baltic states, where humanitarian solidarity was practically inseparable from support for coercive measures: according to Eurobarometer, as early as April 2022, approval for financing military equipment supplies to Ukraine stood at 87% in Estonia, 84% in Lithuania, and 72% in Latvia, with equally high support for humanitarian aid—93-96% (Eurobarometer, 2022).

This willingness to approve tough measures at the earliest stage of the war indicates that the humanitarian shock almost immediately transformed into a publicly expressed willingness to accept coercive forms of support even before their strategic and institutional rationalization had been fully developed. In this context, support for sanctions and military aid was not the result of a firmly established political position, but rather a consequence of a temporary shift in the boundaries of what was acceptable, within which measures usually perceived as risky or politically controversial became symbolically acceptable in the context of the moral catastrophe being experienced.

Thus, the affective trigger should be viewed as a threshold mechanism that does not explain the stability of support for deterrence policy and does not predetermine the choice of specific instruments but creates the initial moral-affective condition without which further stabilization of humanitarian deterrence would be impossible. Empirically, the affective trigger is recorded not through stable interpretations of war or support for specific political measures, but through a sharp shift in the boundaries of moral acceptability. Its key indicator is the rapid growth of virtually unanimous support for humanitarian aid and sanctions in the absence of formed strategic expectations and high

uncertainty about costs. At this stage, war becomes normatively significant, but not yet institutionally meaningful.

Narrative articulation

In the logic of humanitarian deterrence, an affective trigger alone is not a sufficient condition for sustained political mobilization. For humanitarian emotions to go beyond a short-term reaction and become socially reproducible, they must be interpreted and consolidated in the form of narratives. It is this process that is defined in this analysis as narrative articulation. At this stage, the emotional response to suffering takes on a cognitive and normative form, allowing it to function as the basis for collective assessments and expectations. Following the logic of Luc Boltanski, emotions acquire political significance not in themselves, but insofar as they are embedded in interpretive frameworks that determine who is a victim, what the suffering consists of, and what forms of responsibility arise from it (Boltanski, 1999).

Thus, narrative articulation serves as a link between affective reactions and stable patterns of understanding war. In the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, such interpretive frameworks are shaped around a morally asymmetrical narrative in which Ukraine is constituted as an innocent victim of unprovoked violence, and Russia as the subject of aggression and violation of basic norms of international order. These narratives form a normative space within which some reactions to war are perceived as morally obligatory, while others are perceived as problematic or unacceptable. According to Arlie Hochschild, it is at the level of narrative articulation that the "feeling rules" are formed, determining which emotions are considered appropriate, expected, and socially sanctioned in the public sphere (Hochschild, 1983).

In this study, narrative articulation is understood not as a collection of specific texts or discursive statements, but as stable cognitive-normative patterns of interpreting war, shared in the public sphere and reproduced in the mass consciousness. Accordingly, empirical analysis is focused not on reconstructing narratives at the level of language, but on identifying their social stability and normative power through public opinion data. As an example, Eurobarometer data show that a significant proportion of European Union citizens consistently perceive Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a threat to the security of the EU and their countries throughout 2022-2025. According to research, about 76% of Europeans believe that the invasion poses a threat to the security of the European Union, and a significant proportion also support strengthening European security as a response to this threat (Eurobarometer, 2024a).

Survey data also reflect the persistence of the moral interpretation of the war as a key issue requiring a collective response, as a significant proportion of respondents continue to view Russia's war against Ukraine as one of the main challenges for the European Union, even against the backdrop of competing agendas such as migration or climate change. For example, in a survey conducted at the end of 2025, almost 47% of respondents indicated that the war remains a central issue for the EU (Eurobarometer, 2025a). Additional data from autumn 2025 shows that almost three-quarters of Europeans consider the invasion a threat not only to the EU, but also to the security of

their own countries, with these figures remaining virtually unchanged compared to earlier waves of surveys (Eurobarometer, 2025b).

As shown in Table 2, public perception of the Russian-Ukrainian war in European Union countries and the US in 2022-2025 is characterized by a stable morally asymmetrical narrative structure. Regardless of the national context, the dominant framework remains the interpretation of Russia as the unambiguous aggressor and Ukraine as the victim of unprovoked violence. This pattern is reflected in various empirical indicators: attribution of responsibility for the war, assessments of its moral acceptability, perception of the war as a threat to democratic and liberal values, and normative expectations of the need for a collective response. It is crucial that this framework remains highly stable over time, despite rising economic costs, intensifying domestic political debates, and signs of social fatigue with the war.

Table 2. Narrative Articulation of The Russian-Ukrainian War: Moral Frames in Public Opinion in the EU and the USA, 2022-2025 [1]

Country / region	The dominant interpretation of the war	Attitude toward responsibility	Attitude toward compromise beneficial to Russia	Sociological interpretation
Germany	War as unprovoked aggression	Russia as the main and unequivocal culprit	High level of rejection of territorial concessions by Ukraine	The narrative of victimhood stabilizes the morally asymmetrical interpretation of war
France	War as a violation of international and moral norms	Asymmetry of responsibility (aggressor ↔ victim)	Prevalence of rejection of a "bad peace"	The humanitarian framework limits the space for neutral or pragmatic discourse
United Kingdom	War as an existential challenge to the democratic order	Personalization of Russia's responsibility	High level of support for continued aid without concessions	The narrative of moral responsibility reinforces the willingness for long-term deterrence
Poland	War as an existential threat and moral injustice	Maximum moral condemnation of Russia	Almost complete rejection of compromises	Historical memory reinforces the narrative articulation of humanitarian deterrence

[1] To create this table, we used data from Eurobarometer 2022-2024, Pew Research Center 2023-2024, CBOS 2022, More in Common 2025, which are listed in the bibliography.

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Baltic States	War as confirmation of imperial aggression	Moral and historical asymmetry	Consistent rejection of any concessions	The narrative of victimhood is directly linked to the willingness to militarize aid
United States	War as a moral test of global leadership	Broad consensus on Russia's responsibility	Sanctions and support are perceived as morally justified	The narrative of humanitarian responsibility supports deterrence in the context of partisan polarization

Moving to the American context, Pew Research Center data also shows a stable narrative structure, despite pronounced political polarization on specific forms of support for Ukraine. Although assessments of the acceptability and scope of military aid vary significantly depending on party affiliation, the general moral context of the war remains unchanged in the public perception, with the war being interpreted as unprovoked aggression and a violation of the international order. Thus, in 2024, about 54% of Americans said they supported continuing military aid to Ukraine, and a significant portion of respondents, regardless of party affiliation, indicated that the US bears a certain moral and political responsibility for protecting Ukraine (Pew Research Center, 2024b). Similar patterns can be seen in European Union countries, where support for measures aimed at strengthening security, sanctions, and aid to Ukraine is systematically correlated with how respondents interpret the nature of the war. The data show that respondents who perceive the war as unprovoked aggression and a fundamental violation of international norms are significantly more likely to consider measures involving economic and political costs to be acceptable (Martín & Indelicato, 2025). In this case, we are not talking about a direct causal relationship, but rather a coincidence of stable cognitive-normative patterns of perception with an orientation toward a specific set of political responses.

Taken together, these observations suggest that narrative articulation performs not only a communicative but also a normative function, as it sets the boundaries of acceptable emotions and interpretations of war, shaping modes of public discourse in which the suffering of victims is systematically linked to expectations of collective responsibility. Narrative articulation manifests itself in the stabilization of the moral asymmetry of war and the formation of a stable interpretive framework within which war is understood as unprovoked aggression against an innocent victim. Empirically, this is expressed in the reproducibility of the attribution of responsibility, in the stability of normative assessments of the nature of war, and in the formation of socially sanctioned "feeling rules" that determine which emotions and interpretations are considered appropriate in the public sphere.

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Political translation

In the logic of humanitarian deterrence, political translation represents a critical stage at which humanitarian emotions and morally articulated interpretations of war are transformed into public support for specific coercive policy measures. If the affective trigger initiates moral attention and narrative articulation stabilizes the meaning of war, then political translation links these affective-normative structures to institutionalized decisions, including economic sanctions, military aid, increased defense spending, and long-term security commitments. Crucially, within the framework of humanitarian deterrence, this translation is not achieved by opposing humanitarianism and security. On the contrary, coercive measures are publicly represented as a continuation of humanitarian responsibility: necessary and morally justified instruments for protecting victims of aggression and preventing further suffering. In this way, humanitarian empathy becomes a resource for legitimizing policies that, in other theoretical models, would be seen as contradicting humanitarian principles on limiting violence.

From an analytical point of view, political translation should not be understood as a direct or automatic transformation of emotions into political preferences. It is a process of symbolic and normative mediation, in which humanitarian emotions are "recoded" into forms of support compatible with the institutional logic of democratic states. Political measures begin to be perceived not as purely technical instruments of foreign policy, but as expressions of solidarity, moral duty, and collective responsibility, which reduces the perceived tension between humanitarian concern and the use of coercion and makes the costs associated with deterrence policy normatively acceptable. Since this process is primarily addressed to domestic audiences in supportive societies, humanitarian deterrence functions not so much as a strategy for directly influencing the adversary, but rather as a mechanism for maintaining public consent and political stability within democratic coalitions.

Eurobarometer data show a consistent correlation between the dominant moral interpretation of the war and high levels of support for deterrence policies. In surveys conducted in 2023-2024, most respondents in European Union countries interpreted Russia's invasion of Ukraine as unprovoked aggression and a fundamental violation of international norms (Eurobarometer, 2024a), while the same waves recorded consistently high levels of support for economic sanctions, financial aid to Ukraine, and strengthening European security (Eurobarometer, 2023). Comparative analysis shows that the mechanisms of political translation vary depending on the context: in Poland and the Baltic states, where early moral identification with Ukraine was particularly pronounced, support for sanctions and military aid formed quickly and remained relatively stable over time (CBOS, 2022), while in Western European societies, including Germany and France, political translation was more gradual and controversial (Eurobarometer, 2025c).

The American context represents an extreme case of the political translation of humanitarian emotions, as it combines a stable moral interpretation of the war with a high degree of domestic political polarization on instrumental issues. Pew Research Center data show that in 2023-2024, support for military aid to Ukraine showed marked partisan differentiation, while key moral frameworks for perceiving the war (attributing

responsibility to Russia and perceiving sanctions as a morally justified response) maintained a significantly higher level of bipartisan agreement (Pew Research Center, 2024b). Thus, in 2024, economic sanctions against Russia were supported by about 77% of Democratic Party supporters and 66% of Republicans (Pew Research Center, 2024c). Significantly, later data also indicate that this asymmetry persisted: a 2025 survey recorded an increase in disagreements over possible US political strategies and confidence in specific management decisions regarding the war, while the basic moral condemnation of Russia's actions remained the dominant consensus background of public opinion (Pew Research Center, 2025).

This pattern indicates that the political translation of humanitarian emotions can be sustainable even in the absence of consensus on the specific forms and extent of involvement. In this sense, political translation completes the affective-moral chain of humanitarian deterrence, paving the way for its long-term normalization. Its key empirical feature is the legitimization of sanctions, military aid, and increased defense spending in terms of humanitarian responsibility, even in the face of growing economic and social costs and the absence of a complete instrumental consensus. This is demonstrated by data from the Pew Research Center, which shows the simultaneous stability of the moral interpretation of war and the pronounced polarization of assessments of specific policy instruments in the United States.

Normalization and the fragility of moral support

In the logic of humanitarian deterrence, normalization represents its most paradoxical, but not necessarily final, stage. It describes a transition from crisis-driven and affectively intense mobilization to a routine moral obligation, within which support for deterrence policy is reproduced through institutionalized expectations and "feeling rules". Yet routinization is simultaneously a source of resilience and vulnerability. As the immediate intensity of humanitarian shock declines, support becomes increasingly dependent on institutional trust, consistent political cues, and the continued credibility of the moral distinction between aggressor and victim. If this alignment weakens, the same economic and political costs that were previously interpreted as the price of solidarity may be recoded as an unfair burden, futile escalation, or an externally imposed commitment.

Normalization should therefore be treated as a conditionally stabilized and potentially reversible achievement rather than as the endpoint of the affective-moral chain. This distinction makes it possible to separate the decline of emotional intensity from the erosion of moral and political support. The former may facilitate the routinization of responsibility, whereas the latter occurs when sympathy for the victim is detached from support for particular policy instruments. Citizens may continue to condemn Russian aggression and recognize Ukrainian suffering while becoming less willing to accept sanctions, weapons deliveries, higher defense spending, or open-ended commitments.

Empirically, the normalization process is clearest in the discrepancy between growing concern about domestic socio-economic pressures and the relative sustainability of support for coercive measures. Eurobarometer data for 2023-2024 show the growing

salience of inflation, energy prices, and social insecurity alongside relatively stable support for economic sanctions against Russia, financial assistance to Ukraine, and stronger EU defense capabilities (Eurobarometer, 2024a; Eurobarometer, 2024b). This pattern suggests that support for coercive policies has become less dependent on immediate emotional intensity and increasingly embedded in stable moral expectations formed at earlier stages of the affective-moral chain.

Across EU and NATO member states, these pressures take different institutional forms. In EU politics, they are often articulated through Eurosceptic and anti-establishment narratives, whereas in the United States and some other non-EU NATO settings, they are more closely associated with partisan polarization and resistance to open-ended commitments. Recent evidence, however, points to a differentiated pattern rather than either a linear decline or unconditional stability. According to Standard Eurobarometer 103, conducted in spring 2025, 76 per cent of EU citizens supported continued financial and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine and 72 per cent supported economic sanctions against Russia, whereas 59 per cent approved of the EU financing the purchase and supply of military equipment to Ukraine (European Commission, 2025).

NATO-wide polling conducted in April-May 2024 similarly found that 61 per cent of respondents supported their country's continued assistance to Ukraine, while trust in national media reporting on the war had declined to 44 per cent (NATO, 2024). Research based on surveys conducted in six European countries in 2024 finds little evidence of generalized war fatigue, yet it also identifies a small but firmly opposed minority and shows that preferences are structured by economic evaluations and national identities (Eck & Michel, 2025). Taken together, these patterns indicate that broad-based moral condemnation of Russian aggression can persist even as the consensus surrounding particular policy instruments, associated costs, and time horizons becomes more fragile.

However, normalization is not limited to the stabilization of public opinion and is most clearly manifested at the level of political discourse, where stable ideas about acceptable time horizons, costs, and obligations are formed. In Table 3, we record these discursive shifts, identifying five interrelated markers of war normalization that mark the transition from a crisis mode of public argumentation to a routine moral-normative order in which support for deterrence policy becomes politically self-evident and institutionally entrenched. To empirically record the process of war normalization, we use interpretive analysis of the political rhetoric of key actors in the European Union and the United States, which includes public statements by political leaders made between 2022 and 2025 (official addresses, parliamentary speeches, press conferences, keynote speeches). This analysis is not discourse analysis in the strict methodological sense but uses political statements as empirical markers of normative and moral shifts in the public legitimization of deterrence policy.

The analytical marker was considered present if the speech clearly articulated the corresponding normative shift: (1) recognition of the protracted nature of war as an inevitable political horizon; (2) presentation of economic and social costs as a morally justified and inevitable price; (3) rejection of a justificatory register in favor of routine responsibility; (4) normative distinction between acceptable and problematic dissent; (5)

preservation of humanitarian language as a routinized background norm. The analysis considered not individual formulas, but their reproducibility and function in the structure of argumentation, that is, the ability of recurring statements to stabilize a certain regime of moral interpretation of the war and related coercive measures. The statements were selected based on their public visibility and relevance to debates on Ukraine, sanctions, military aid, and long-term security commitments.

Table 3. Analytical Markers of The Normalization of War in European and US Political Rhetoric, 2022-2025 [1]

Normalization mechanism	Sociological significance	Examples
Temporal normalization	The war and support for Ukraine are represented as a prolonged, indefinite situation rather than a temporary crisis	"*For as long as it takes*" (Janet Yellen, 2022) "*We are determined to stand with Ukraine's brave defenders for as long as it takes*" (Lloyd Austin, 2023) "*We will support Ukraine for as long as it takes*" (David McAllister, 2023)
Cost normalization	Economic and social costs are recognized as inevitable and normal rather than exceptional or temporary	"*Europe must agree to pay the price of peace, freedom and democracy*" (Emmanuel Macron, 2022) "*Supporting Ukraine has a price, and we are ready to pay it*" (Kaja Kallas, 2022) "*…Today's disbursement and agreements are also an investment in a shared common future*" (Ursula von der Leyen, 2025)
Disappearance of the justificatory register	Support for sanctions and military aid no longer requires detailed moral or political justification and is presented as self-evident	"*And we will continue to support Ukraine – for as long as necessary*" (Olaf Scholz, 2023) "*We are in it for as long as it takes and stand by our Ukrainian friends*" (Ursula von der Leyen, 2023) "*French and European support for Ukraine … will be there for as long as it takes*" (French Presidency, 2023)
Moral regulation of disagreement	Fatigue and doubts are recognized as understandable, but refusal to support is	"*We mustn't show any 'war fatigue', we must be supportive, ready to help*" (Andrzej Duda, 2022)

[1] To ensure transparency and analytical traceability, the sources of all empirical quotations used in the analysis are listed in the Appendix.

	marked as morally problematic	"*I understand that people are tired, but we cannot afford to give up*" (Kaja Kallas, 2022). "*We must not allow fatigue to weaken our resolve*" (Ursula von der Leyen, 2022)
Humanitarianism as a background norm	Humanitarian discourse is maintained, but in a less emotional and more institutionalized form	"*NATO stands with Ukraine and its peopl*e" (Jens Stoltenberg, 2023) "*Our support for Ukraine is a matter of principles*" (Josep Borrell, 2023) "*Supporting Ukraine means supporting the principles of humanity and international law*" (Ursula von der Leyen, 2024)

Taken together, the discursive markers summarized in Table 3 should be viewed not as a set of rhetorical formulas, but as indicators of a shift in the mode of public legitimization of coercive measures. Instead of simply repeating humanitarian justifications, political rhetoric is gradually rebuilding the moral status of the war and long-term support for Ukraine. It is not violence as such that is being normalized, but the expectation of endurance, self-sacrifice, and sustained commitment as morally self-evident things. First, temporal normalization, articulated in the repeated formula "*for as long as it takes*", transforms the war from an exceptional crisis into a long and indefinite horizon of responsibility. Such a time frame does not mobilize urgency but stabilizes commitment, eliminating expectations of a resolution to the war as a condition for the legitimacy of support. Support for sanctions and military aid is justified not by the prospect of quick success, but by a moral obligation to persevere regardless of the duration of the war.

Secondly, references to "*the price we have to pay*" and "*necessary sacrifices*", which regularly appear in public statements by political leaders, function not as an excuse for current difficulties, but as a moral signal that accepting costs is a manifestation of solidarity and responsibility. In this configuration, growing economic and social costs are interpreted not as a sign of policy failure, but as proof of its moral seriousness and normative justification. Third, the disappearance of detailed justifications marks an important transformation of the regime of legitimacy, as political leaders are increasingly less likely to articulate why support should continue, and are increasingly limited to declarative formulas such as "*we will continue to support Ukraine*" or "*this support will not stop*". As a result, coercive measures acquire the status of a morally self-evident basis for political action: support for sanctions and military aid ceases to be discussed as a choice among alternatives and begins to be perceived as a normative given.

Finally, the distinction between legitimate solidarity and problematic dissent demonstrates the regulatory function of humanitarian emotions in the public sphere. Dissent with continued support is increasingly represented not simply as a strategic or economic position, but as a moral deviation, that is, a refusal to take responsibility for the

victims of aggression. This boundary is articulated through recurring formulas of solidarity, such as "*standing with Ukraine*" or the opposition between support and indifference, within which refusal to participate in deterrence policy acquires a morally problematic status. Thus, humanitarian emotions begin to function as a mechanism for the normative distinction between acceptable and unacceptable positions. This distinction clearly illustrates how the rules of emotion operate in the political sphere, determining which emotional and moral orientations are considered socially acceptable.

It is fundamentally important that such discursive shifts do not eliminate political struggle or war fatigue; on the contrary, they redistribute the space of war: disagreements shift from the question of the basic legitimacy of coercive measures to secondary parameters such as scale, timing, and instruments of support. In this sense, normalization does not mean depoliticization, but rather the stabilization of the moral framework within which political discussion continues. In other words, war remains politically controversial, but its moral framework as a space of obligations and responsibilities takes on a routine and institutionally reproducible character.

Normalization of war within the framework of humanitarian deterrence does not mean suppressing humanitarian discourse. On the contrary, humanitarian narratives continue to be reproduced in political rhetoric and institutional documents, but in a less emotionally charged and more technocratic form. Humanitarianism loses its function of affective shock and transforms into a stable normative framework that allows for the maintenance of sanctions, military aid, and increased defense spending without the need for constant emotional mobilization. Normalization is also evident in the moral regulation of dissent, as discourses of war fatigue are increasingly recognized as emotionally understandable and psychologically acceptable but become normatively problematic when they transform into a refusal to support deterrence policy.

Empirically, this is reflected in the discrepancy between growing concerns about domestic socio-economic problems and continued support for key elements of deterrence policy. Eurobarometer data show that inflation and the cost of living have gained salience in the public agenda, while support for sanctions against Russia and financial aid to Ukraine has remained relatively stable (Eurobarometer, 2024a; Eurobarometer, 2024b). This discrepancy points to an institutionalized form of moral regulation, in which fatigue is accepted as a feeling but not legitimized as a political position. Similar mechanisms of moral differentiation between acceptable feelings and unacceptable political positions have also been observed in recent studies of foreign policy legitimacy in the context of protracted war (see, for example, Holesch & Martill, 2026).

Threats to moral support for Ukraine arise from the interaction between endogenous democratic contestation and exogenous manipulation. Endogenously, electoral competition, cost-of-living pressures, the unequal distribution of policy costs, partisan polarization, and competing international crises create opportunities to detach sympathy for Ukrainians from support for sanctions or military assistance. Comparative party research shows that support for Ukraine is far from uniform and that populism and EU-scepticism are major predictors of party-level dissent, especially among opposition parties (Hooghe et al., 2024). Research on European radical-right communication further

demonstrates that parties with previous affinities to the Russian regime do not necessarily defend Russia explicitly; they may instead blur the issue, redirect attention away from the war, and incorporate it into anti-EU or anti-establishment narratives (Wang & Altiparmakis, 2025).

Exogenously, Russian foreign information manipulation and interference efforts seek to intensify these pre-existing cleavages. EEAS monitoring identifies the sustainability of international support for Ukraine as a target of Russian information manipulation and documents attempts to exacerbate divisions around immigration, energy prices, and the cost of living (European External Action Service, 2025). Such operations should not be understood as producing discontent from nothing. Rather, they amplify locally rooted grievances and provide narrative resources through which ordinary democratic disagreement can be transformed into a challenge to coalition legitimacy. This does not imply that all domestic opposition to supporting Ukraine is externally coordinated; analytically, the more defensible claim is that domestic actors may independently or strategically reproduce frames compatible with Russian objectives. These endogenous and exogenous pressures do not invalidate humanitarian deterrence; rather, they identify narrative articulation and political translation as the stages at which its moral infrastructure is most vulnerable.

Conclusion

The article does not aim to describe individual public reactions to the Russian-Ukrainian war or to assess the effectiveness of specific deterrence policies. Its more ambitious task is to conceptualize the mechanism by which humanitarian emotions, traditionally seen as constraints on violence, can become a source of long-term legitimacy for coercive policies in democratic societies. The proposed model of humanitarian deterrence shows that affect, morality, and coercion do not form a linear or mutually exclusive sequence, but rather a complex procedural configuration of mutual conditionality, within which humanitarianism does not weaken the politics of power, but transforms its conditions of possibility.

The key contribution of the article is a theoretical shift in analytical focus from the question of support for specific political measures to the question of the moral endurance of the political order in conditions of protracted violence. Unlike common approaches that interpret public support for sanctions or military aid as either the result of rational calculation or the effect of short-term emotional mobilization, the concept of humanitarian deterrence allows us to view this support as the product of a deeper moral and normative transformation. In this context, the sustainability of coercive policies is explained not by the preservation of intense emotions, but by their institutionalization and routinization in the form of a background moral obligation.

The proposed affective-moral chain therefore describes neither an automatic nor an irreversible consolidation of support. A decline in affective intensity may enable the routinization of moral responsibility, but it also increases dependence on institutional trust, elite consistency, and the continued credibility of the moral asymmetry between

aggressor and victim. Where these conditions are undermined by economic conflict, partisan counter-mobilization, declining media trust, or foreign information manipulation, humanitarian deterrence may fragment: sympathy for Ukraine can persist while support for sanctions, arms deliveries, or open-ended commitments declines. Its key theoretical implication is therefore not that humanitarian emotions guarantee durable coercive policies, but that they create a contingent moral infrastructure whose reproduction is itself an object of political struggle.

First, it calls into question the normative assumption that humanitarian emotions are inherently oriented toward de-escalation and the limitation of violence. As the analysis shows, humanitarianism can function not only as a critique of force, but also as a moral infrastructure for its long-term legitimization, especially in the context of asymmetrically interpreted conflicts. Second, the article contributes to the sociology of emotions by demonstrating that the political significance of affect is determined not by its intensity, but by the degree of its institutional consolidation in narratives, "feeling rules", and discursive expectations. At the same time, the results of the study also indicate the limits of the applicability of the proposed model. Institutional consolidation should therefore be understood as a variable achievement: it increases the durability of moral commitments, but also exposes them to counter-framing, partisan appropriation, and crises of institutional credibility.

Humanitarian deterrence relies on the specific configuration of liberal democratic societies, characterized by high media coverage of suffering, the normative significance of humanitarian discourse, and the institutional capacity to transform moral expectations into sustainable political practices. In other contexts, such as authoritarian societies or societies with stable hybrid political systems, a similar affective-moral chain may be interrupted, transformed, or not arise at all. Finally, the proposed analysis has a broader critical impulse, as it shows that the moral legitimization of politics in wartime is neither spontaneous nor neutral, but is formed through a combination of affective, narrative, and institutional mechanisms. Understanding these mechanisms is especially important in a world where wars are increasingly protracted and the distinction between humanitarian concern and strategic coercion is becoming less clear.

Although the empirical analysis focuses on the West's response to Russia's war against Ukraine, the concept of humanitarian deterrence is not limited to this case. Similar affective-moral dynamics can be observed in other protracted conflicts characterized by mass civilian suffering, where humanitarian considerations are intertwined with long-term coercive policies such as sanctions regimes or sustained military assistance. In this broader perspective, humanitarian deterrence provides an analytical framework for studying how contemporary societies come to perceive war not simply as an exceptional violation, but as a normal element of social order, which profoundly changes the political function of violence, morality, and international obligations.

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Appendix

1. Scholz, O. *Speech at the World Economic Forum*, Davos, 18 January 2023.
2. von der Leyen, U. *Speech at the World Economic Forum*, Davos, 17 January 2023.
3. French Presidency (Élysée). *Statement reported by Reuters*, 18 October 2023.
4. von der Leyen, U. *Speech at the European Parliament*, 17 July 2024.
5. von der Leyen, U. Statement on EU support for Ukraine, 9 April 2025.
6. Stoltenberg, J. *Press conference*, NATO Headquarters, 15 February 2023.
7. Macron, E. *Address to the French Nation*, 2 March 2022.
8. Kallas, K. *Speech to the Riigikogu*, 25 April 2022.
9. Duda, A. *Address to the United Nations General Assembly*, 20 September 2022.
10. Kallas, K. *Interview with Reuters*, 19 August 2022.
11. von der Leyen, U. *Speech at the European Parliament*, 14 September 2022.
12. Borrell, J. *Speech on EU support for Ukraine*, European External Action Service, 3 April 2023.
13. Austin, L. J. *Press conference at NATO Headquarters*, Brussels, 15 February 2023.
14. Yellen, J. L. *Interview with CBS News*, 11 December 2022.
15. McAllister, D. *Statement in the European Parliament*, 30 January 2023.