

## Marriott International as an American Multinational Corporation and Its Business Decisions in Russia Following the Invasion of Ukraine

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**Abstract:** *Multinational corporations such as Marriott International not only conduct cross-border business activities but also face geopolitical pressures that may influence corporate decisions. This study aims to analyze Marriott International's decision to cease its operations in Russia following Russia's invasion of Ukraine and to understand the role of multinational corporations as non-state actors in responding to geopolitical crises through the perspective of Legitimacy Theory. This qualitative study employs a case study method. Population and sample are not applicable because the study does not involve respondents but focuses on the case of Marriott International. Primary data were obtained through observations and interactions during the internship program at Aloft Surabaya Pakuwon City, while secondary data were collected from academic journal articles and reliable information sources. The research instruments consisted of observation, internship experience, and secondary source review, while the data were analyzed descriptively and interpretatively using Legitimacy Theory. The results show that Marriott's withdrawal from Russia was associated with international sanctions, geopolitical pressures, public expectations, and reputational risks. In conclusion, the decision demonstrates that multinational corporations function as non-state actors that adapt their business strategies to international norms and pressures to maintain legitimacy and long-term business sustainability.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions provide students with opportunities to acquire knowledge, values, norms, and experience as preparation to contribute to society (Muslihati et al., 2023; Taufik & Kismono, 2026). The younger generation is expected to become actors in promoting social and economic development and strengthening the country's global competitiveness as future workers and leaders. In this context, an internship serves as a means of understanding the application of academic knowledge in the workplace (Muslihati et al., 2023; Taufik & Kismono, 2026). The internship at Aloft Surabaya Pakuwon City provides an opportunity to understand how Marriott International develops its business as one of the global hospitality companies. The selection of

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Aloft Surabaya Pakuwon City is also related to its status as a relatively new branch of the Marriott Group in Indonesia, providing an opportunity to gain an understanding from the early stage of the branch's development (Hudoyo, 2025).

Marriott International is one of the leading hospitality companies in the world, developing from a small business in the United States into a global company with various properties and brand segments, ranging from luxury to lifestyle (Our Story of Innovation, n.d.). Aloft Surabaya Pakuwon City operates under Marriott International's Aloft Hotels lifestyle brand, with a modern, vibrant, and technology-based concept. The hotel is located in the Pakuwon City area of East Surabaya, directly connected to Pakuwon City Mall, and was launched on August 22, 2025, as the first Marriott hotel in East Surabaya. The establishment of the hotel is in line with Marriott's expansion in the Indonesian market, particularly in the lifestyle hotel sector, which targets young business travelers and urban communities (PWON Opens Aloft Surabaya Pakuwon City, Eastern Surabaya's First Marriott Hotel, 2025).

The research problem concerns how multinational corporations conduct their business activities while simultaneously facing the dynamics of international relations (Li et al., 2022). From an international relations perspective, Marriott International can be viewed as a non-state player that facilitates cross-border economic exchanges through its global hospitality business activities (White, 2015; Westermann-Behaylo et al., 2015). The company's activities involve interactions with local and foreign customers and demonstrate the involvement of commercial entities in international economic interactions and integration into the global market (Dinesh, n.d.). Therefore, Marriott International's activities are not only related to operational and professional activities but are also connected to developments in the international environment (Li et al., 2022).

This issue becomes more apparent through Marriott International's decision to cease its operations in Russia following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The decision demonstrates that corporate business strategies can be influenced by external factors such as geopolitical tensions (Wroten, 2022; Evenett & Pisani, 2023). From an international relations perspective, this action illustrates how multinational corporations as non-state actors can adjust their commercial strategies to global politics, including sanctions regimes, reputational risks, and legitimacy issues within the international community (Li et al., 2022; Balyuk & Fedyk, 2023). Marriott's decision to leave the Russian market demonstrates the intersection between corporate governance and global politics, in which corporate decisions become part of the broader global response to war (Kovalenko, 2025; Ó Laoghaire, 2024).

In this context, the company's decision to cease operations in Russia can be analyzed through Legitimacy Theory. This theory emphasizes the need for organizations to adjust their operational activities to social norms, values, expectations, and demands in order to achieve legitimate status as part of corporate social responsibility (Dare John Olateju, 2021; Suchman, 1995). Organizations need to integrate their values with those of the social system in which they operate to gain social acceptance and support and reduce threats to organizational survival (Gulluscio, 2023; Suchman, 1995). The Russian invasion of Ukraine also changed public expectations and increased pressure on companies to adjust their business strategies (Freeman, 2022; Evenett & Pisani, 2023). Research indicates that multinational corporations tend to make strategic decisions to protect their brand reputation and legitimacy when facing geopolitical pressures and stakeholder demands (Richter, 2024; Patel & Richter, 2025).

Based on these conditions, this study aims to analyze Marriott International's decision to cease its operations in Russia and to understand how this decision reflects the role of multinational corporations in responding to geopolitical crises. This study is important because the decisions of multinational corporations are not only related to economic interests but may also involve

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geopolitical pressures, international sanctions, reputation, and legitimacy in the eyes of the global public (Freeman, 2022; Li et al., 2022; Ó Laoghaire, 2024). The novelty of this study lies in analyzing Marriott International as a non-state actor responding to a geopolitical crisis through the perspective of Legitimacy Theory, with a focus on the relationship between corporate strategy, international pressure, and legitimacy. Therefore, this study is directed toward answering the following research question: How does Marriott International's withdrawal from Russia reflect the role of multinational corporations in responding to geopolitical crises?

## METHOD

The research method used in this study is qualitative (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The primary data was obtained from the author's first hand experience through the internship program at Marriott International such as observing operational activities, interacting with the staff and understanding the company's systems and policies (Yin, 2018). However, such data is mostly confined to the operational and administrative aspects.

Current research does not directly capture the internal affairs of the internship placement, such as Marriott International's decision to close its operations in Russia in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. That's because the internship was conducted in a brand new building that opened in August 2025 and hence has no direct institutional knowledge or internal record of the 2022 geopolitical event (Pakuwon Jati, 2025). Also, the discussion about geopolitical decisions from a commercial perspective is usually at the global or corporate level and not at the property level.

Thus, this research leans more on secondary data to address the research aim. Secondary data was gathered from academic journal papers and reliable sources of information which discussed the decision to withdraw and the effect it had on world politics (Bowen, 2009; Snyder, 2019). The sources supply the required context for considering the responses of multinational corporations to geopolitical crises, and to their legitimacy within the international system (Bowen, 2009; Yin, 2018).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Lesson Learned

In the Author's studies in the International Relations program, the author's gained knowledge and abilities in a variety of fields that were relevant during my internship at Marriott International. The author studied International Political Economy, Public Speaking and Transnational Advocacy, which created a solid basis for understanding and interpreting the company's and clients' contacts with different backgrounds. In addition, the ability to speak English properly, as well as contributing to the analytical skills gained during periods of study in higher education, proved to be quite useful in the daily business activities, especially in dealing with clients from other countries and carrying out administrative duties associated with the company.

The author developed various soft skills throughout the internship, such as adaptability to different and diverse cultures, good interaction across gaps in culture, and maintaining a professional appearance in a global business environment. The author learned to be flexible to evolving demands of the work, and to complete tasks in a team. The frequent interactions with clients from a variety of ethnic backgrounds boosted interpersonal skills and cultural awareness, which are key competences of the global hospitality industry.

From the cognitive standpoint, the author's capability of analyzing market conditions was improved with the help of the regular competitor analysis and reporting activities during the internship. The author had the opportunity to move beyond theory and to apply analytical

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frameworks in an actual context. Furthermore, the author started to realize that the decision-making processes in multinational companies are not only directed by economic considerations, but also by external influences such as shifts in geopolitical power and pressures from the global community at large (Li et al., 2022).

The author acknowledges that there are major limits, particularly when attempting to acquire a more profound and critical understanding of the complicated links that exist between business strategy and global political issues, such as international policy frameworks and business responses to crises. This points to the necessity for additional improvement in integrating theoretical ideas with real-world global occurrences. The author aims to increase practical skills, in accordance with continual self-improvement and professional development, by acquiring more experience in international working environments and by regularly keeping up with global trends that influence practices of multinational company.

The author is also committed to developing the analytical ability and professional communication skills necessary to handle the junction between business and political affairs (Key Skills Needed for a Career in International Relations and Diplomacy, 2026). The author is willing to work in a multinational company like Marriott International or other companies in the future since it gives opportunities to grow in global workforce environment and to be part of the larger dynamics of the world economy. Therefore, this internship is a crucial first step for the author to be ready to pursue a professional career at the worldwide level after completing degree in International Relations study.

### **Understanding the Case Study of Marriott International as an American Multinational Corporation Following the Russian Invasion of Ukraine**

Marriott International is one of the largest American multinational corporations operating in the global hospitality industry. As a multinational corporation, Marriott conducts its business activities across various countries and is strongly influenced by international political, economic, and social conditions (Li et al., 2022). The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 became a major geopolitical event that significantly affected international business operations, particularly for Western multinational corporations operating in Russia (Evenett & Pisani, 2023). The Russian invasion of Ukraine has, in this context, resulted in important modifications to international standards around abuses of sovereignty and international law (Nyquist, 2022). In response to the situation, Marriott International announced the suspension of its operations in Russia as part of its compliance with international sanctions and global business regulations (Marriott International Statement, 2022). From the perspective of Legitimacy Theory, Marriott International's withdrawal from Russia can be understood as an effort to maintain corporate legitimacy and protect its global reputation among stakeholders, including customers, investors, and international business partners (Gulluscio, 2023; Suchman, 1995). Continuing operations in Russia during the conflict could have negatively affected public perception toward the company and created reputational risks in international markets (Patel & Richter, 2025). Therefore, the case demonstrates that multinational corporations are not only economic actors but also influential non-state actors that increasingly participate in responding to global political crises and international norms (Li et al., 2022).

### **Legitimacy Theory and Marriott International's Withdrawal from Russia**

Marriott International's decision to suspend operations in Russia can be analyzed through the perspective of Legitimacy Theory. According to Legitimacy Theory, corporations are expected to operate in accordance with social values, ethical standards, and stakeholder expectations in order to maintain legitimacy within society (Gulluscio, 2023; Suchman, 1995). In the context of the

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Russia-Ukraine conflict, public expectations toward multinational corporations shifted significantly, particularly regarding corporate responsibility in responding to violations of sovereignty and international law (Evenett & Pisani, 2023). Consequently, multinational corporations faced increasing pressure from governments, consumers, investors, and international stakeholders to demonstrate alignment with international norms and humanitarian concerns (Freeman, 2022). As per the Legitimacy Theory, Marriott international departure from Russia can be seen as an attempt to remain legitimate with international stakeholders (Suchman, 1995). Continuing activities in Russia could produce bad opinions by the foreign public, investors and consumers which could affect the company's overall reputation (Hartwell, n.d.). The decision was consequently taken on economic factors and the requirement to keep in line with growing global regulations. Against this backdrop, Marriott International's exit from Russia is a strategic move to safeguard its validity in the public perceptions of important stakeholders like as clients, investors, business partners and the international community as a whole (Marriott International Statement, 2022).

Further, this example shows that multinational firms do not stand idly or neutrally in the face of global crises. Instead, they can be powerful agents that shape international reactions (Stephanie Tonn Goulart Moura, 2025; Li et al., 2022). At the same time, it is crucial to recognize critically that such judgments rarely happen on normative grounds alone. Marriott's exit is also a determined judgment of long-term strategic goals, including managing reputational risk, complying with foreign legislation and sustainability of its global operations (Neb, 2026; Patel & Richter, 2025). The interrelation of these elements implies that legitimacy and economic rationality are not mutually exclusive but rather work in unison (Suchman, 1995). The corporation is keeping pace with global expectations, this not only maintains its reputation but also secures its position in crucial international markets (Fefelov, 2024).

### **Multinational Corporations as Non-State Actors in International Relations**

The case of Marriott International also demonstrates the growing role of multinational corporations as non-state actors in international relations. Traditionally, international politics was primarily dominated by states. However, globalization has increased the influence of multinational corporations in shaping international economic and political dynamics (Li et al., 2022). In this context, Marriott International's withdrawal from Russia reflects how multinational corporations may indirectly participate in global governance mechanisms through compliance with international sanctions and alignment with international political pressures (Jafaar, 2019; Evenett & Pisani, 2023).

Moreover, Marriott's business decision illustrates that multinational corporations do not remain passive during global crises. Instead, corporations can contribute to broader international responses by adjusting their business strategies according to geopolitical developments and global public expectations (Toniolo, 2022; Li et al., 2022). Marriott's withdrawal strengthened international pressure on Russia alongside actions taken by governments and other multinational corporations. This situation highlights the increasingly important role of multinational corporations in influencing international political and economic environments (Stephanie Tonn Goulart Moura, 2025; Evenett & Pisani, 2023).

#### **Global Governance and Corporate Response to Geopolitical Crisis**

The Russia-Ukraine conflict demonstrates how global governance mechanisms increasingly involve the participation of multinational corporations alongside states and international organizations (Li et al., 2022). In the contemporary international system, geopolitical crises generate pressures not only on governments but also on private sector actors operating

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globally. Through economic sanctions, political expectations, and public pressure, multinational corporations are often encouraged to adjust their business strategies in response to international conflicts and humanitarian issues (Freeman, 2022; Evenett & Pisani, 2023).

In this context, Marriott International's withdrawal from Russia reflects how multinational corporations adapt to evolving global norms and governance structures. The company's decision can be understood as part of a broader international response aimed at increasing economic and political pressure on Russia following the invasion of Ukraine. Although multinational corporations are not formal political institutions, their business decisions may indirectly contribute to the implementation of international sanctions and the reinforcement of global political objectives (Richter, 2024; Evenett & Pisani, 2023).

Moreover, the case illustrates the increasing interconnectedness between global politics and international business operations. Global corporations must continuously monitor geopolitical developments because international crises may directly influence market stability, stakeholder trust, and long-term business sustainability (Patel & Richter, 2025). Consequently, multinational corporations are becoming more involved in global governance processes through their adaptation to international norms, sanctions regimes, and political expectations established by the international community (Kirste, 2024; Li et al., 2022).

### **The Relationship Between Global Politics and Multinational Corporate Decision-Making**

The case of Marriott International highlights the increasingly close relationship between global politics and multinational corporate decision-making. In the era of globalization, multinational corporations operate across multiple countries and are therefore highly influenced by international political developments, economic sanctions, diplomatic tensions, and global public opinion. As a result, corporate decisions are no longer determined solely by market considerations, but are also shaped by geopolitical conditions and international political pressures (Xiaojun Du, 2022; Li et al., 2022).

Marriott International's withdrawal from Russia demonstrates how geopolitical crises may significantly affect multinational business strategies and operational decisions (Evenett & Pisani, 2023). The company's response to the Russia-Ukraine conflict reflects the growing expectation that multinational corporations should align their activities with international norms and broader global interests. This situation illustrates that business operations and international politics are increasingly interconnected within the contemporary global system, particularly in relation to issues of legitimacy, sanctions, and corporate responsibility (Suchman, 1995; Patel & Richter, 2025). Ultimately, the case demonstrates that multinational corporations have become increasingly influential actors within international relations. Through their global operations and strategic business decisions, corporations are capable of shaping economic relations, influencing international political environments, and contributing indirectly to global governance mechanisms (SINGH, 2025; Li et al., 2022). Therefore, Marriott International's withdrawal from Russia reflects not only a corporate business strategy, but also the broader transformation of multinational corporations into significant participants within the contemporary international system.

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the general discussion, it can be stated that the internship program at Aloft Surabaya Pakuwon City as a part of Marriot worldwide has been successful to provide the practical and analytical perspective of the function of multinational firms in the global network system. Through the author's active participation in administrative and operational business processes, the author was able to integrate theoretical knowledge from International Relations with real-world

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business practices, particularly within the context of a global hospitality setting. Along with expanding his knowledge of the operations of global businesses across boundaries and their relationships with many stakeholders, the author was able to strengthen his professional abilities through the internship. These skills included communication, data management, and adaptability.

This research from the perspective of International Relations shows the role of multinational corporations, such as Marriott International, as powerful non-state actors that are not purely economically driven but also influenced by broader geopolitics. For example, how it was that Marriott International ceased operations in Russia in response of the Russian invasion of Ukraine highlights how business policies are influenced by external influences such as international sanctions, public expectation, and reputational concerns. The choice of a business might be considered as an attempt to conform with the global norms and maintain its legitimacy in the eyes of the international stakeholders, as per the Legitimacy Theory.

Additionally, conclusions drawn indicate that economic rationality and legitimacy are not mutually exclusive but rather connected with one another. Marriott's choice is a strategic way of addressing concerns over the company's reputation, achieving regulatory compliance, and ensuring the company's continuing existence in the long term. This case demonstrates how multinational corporate actions can help to the creation of common solutions to geopolitical concerns while at the same time respecting international standards. This is yet another evidence of the growing relevance of multinational corporations in global governance.

In conclusion, this internship and the analysis that followed confirm the growing role of multinational companies as actors in international relations. Their decisions for companies can both reflect and shape global political movements, especially during times of crisis. Therefore, an understanding of the junction between business strategy and geopolitical setting is necessary to analyze the changing role of non-state actors in the modern era international system.

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