



GNOSI: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Human Theory and Praxis

Volume 6, Issue 2, July - December, 2023

ISSN (Online): 2714-2485

Analysing the Russia-Ukraine Conflict from Liberal and Realist Perspectives

Charles BERE BON,
Department of Philosophy,
Rivers State University,
Port Harcourt, Nigeria.
Email: charles.berebon@ust.edu.ng

(Received: May-2023; **Accepted:** August-2023; **Available Online:** September -2023)



This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License
CC-BY-NC-4.0 ©2023 by author (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>)

ABSTRACT

The international world has been confronted with a substantial problem in the form of the continuing war between Russia and Ukraine, which started in February 2022. The origins of the conflict may be attributed to events occurring in 2014. Nevertheless, a multitude of narratives have emerged around the conflict, with some portrayals casting Russia in an antagonistic light, while others present the United States and NATO as the instigators of the war. The continuing conflict has considerable significance within the realm of international relations theory since it represents a notable threat to the established liberal international order, which has endured for a considerable period of time. This essay aims to study the Russia-Ukraine situation through the lens of two prominent international relations theories: realism and liberalism. This study will provide a concise examination of the two dominant theories and their respective interpretations and justifications of the crisis. The issue is also seen as a resurgence of the Cold War inside the global system. This essay aims to examine a realist's perspective on the continuing conflict by analysing its key assumptions and providing insights from both realist and liberal viewpoints. Realists attribute the outbreak of conflict to the perceived threat posed to their respective nations' security resulting from the growth of NATO and the European Union. Conversely, liberals see the primary risk as emanating from an illiberal Russia. The study elucidates several facets of the two theories and their respective explications of the conflict. In conclusion, it may be argued that realism provides a more comprehensive framework for understanding the Russia-Ukraine conflict compared to liberalism, hence placing liberalism at a disadvantage in terms of explanatory power.

Keywords: Realism; Liberalism; Russia; Ukraine; NATO; USA; EU

INTRODUCTION

The ongoing crisis between Russia and Ukraine encompasses not just military conflict but also extends to ideological dimensions. The problem is being examined through the lens of two prevailing ideologies in the field of international politics, namely realism and liberalism, which provide distinct perspectives on the matter. In the context of global interconnectivity, it is noteworthy that the repercussions of the crisis extend beyond the

confines of eastern Europe, exerting a pervasive influence on a global scale (Dicken, 2007). It is widely posited by scholars that the Ukrainian crisis has the potential to engender a novel iteration of the Cold War or, in a dire scenario, evolve into a third global conflict (D'Anieri, 2023). Regardless of the circumstances, it is evident that the situation is progressively deteriorating on a daily basis, resulting in significant hardships for several civilian populations, particularly those residing in Ukraine. The historical ties between Russia and Ukraine may be traced back to the 10th century, resulting in a deep cultural affinity between the two nations (Ploky, 2006). Before Moscow, Kyiv served as the capital city. In the year 1793, the Russian empire undertook the annexation of Ukraine, initiating a process of russification within the region. The geopolitical significance of Ukraine, stemming from its strategic position and territorial extent, renders it a highly consequential country within the European continent. This has historically warranted notable events such as the Mongol invasion in 1240, the invasion by Fascist Germany in 1941, and the ongoing geopolitical tensions between the United States-led NATO alliance and Russia in the year 2022 (Harding, 2022).

Throughout a significant portion of its history, Ukraine has always been subject to varying degrees of Russian influence. In 1917, Ukraine asserted its autonomy from the Russian empire, later reverting to the control of the USSR in 1922. This affiliation persisted until 1991, when the dissolution of the USSR occurred. Following the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), Ukraine achieved its long-awaited independence, emerging as a sovereign country (Lukic & Lynch, 1996). The western region of Ukraine mostly retained its alignment with Western influences, while the eastern region maintained closer ties with Russia. The political landscape of Ukraine underwent a significant transformation as a result of the 2004 Orange Revolution. In the year 2014, two significant occurrences unfolded in Ukraine. Firstly, the Maidan protest emerged, followed by Russia's annexation of Crimea and subsequent backing of the separatist movement in the Donbas area (Kofman, et al., 2017). The inciting event of the continuing conflict occurred when Russian President Putin officially proclaimed the independent status of Luhansk and Donetsk territories.

Nevertheless, realist scholars argue that the underlying origin of the present conflict may be attributed to the expansion of NATO in the Cold War era and the Maidan uprising in 2014 (Menon & Ruger, 2023). Conversely, in accordance with liberal ideology, the primary source of the conflict may be attributed to Russia's illiberal and undemocratic political framework. In the context of the intricate global order, it becomes evident that no one theory can fully explain the functioning of the international system or accurately predict future developments. However, theories may serve as valuable tools for elucidating the dynamics of the international system, identifying potential risks and opportunities, and offering broad strategic frameworks for future decision-making.

A CONCEPTUAL COMPREHENSION OF REALISM AND LIBERALISM

Realism is a prevailing theoretical framework within the discipline of international relations. The theory is sometimes seen as interchangeable with the field of international relations due to its prevailing influence. The origins of realist theory may be seen in the historical contexts of ancient India and Greece. Several prominent critical realism theorists include Kautilya, Thucydides, Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, E.H. Carr, Hans Morgenthau, Kenneth Waltz, and John Mearsheimer. Realism, as a theoretical framework, may be categorised into three distinct branches: classical realism, neo-realism, and neo-classical realism. The notion of classical realism is evident in the works of prominent realist intellectuals such as Kautilya, Thucydides, Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, E.H. Carr, and Hans Morgenthau.

According Barkin (2003), classical realism places significant emphasis on the limitations of politics that are imposed by human nature and the lack of a worldwide governing body. One of the fundamental tenets of realism is its adherence to a pessimistic perspective on the inherent character of human beings. Consequently, realism scholars assert that individuals possess a propensity towards self-centeredness, self-interest, and the pursuit of power. According to Baylis (2020), it is posited that the actions of the state, which are driven by self-interest, may be attributed to the inherent qualities of the individuals comprising the state. Realists assert that international relations mostly revolve around the dynamics of power politics (Umotong, 2012). There are two underlying factors contributing to this phenomenon. Initially, it may be posited that individuals possess inherent tendencies towards self-interest and competition, establishing egoism as a potentially paramount characteristic of human nature. Furthermore, the state system effectively operates within a global context characterised by international anarchy, whereby the sovereign state holds the greatest position of power. One other fundamental premise of realism is the prominence of nations as primary players within the realm of international affairs, with sovereignty serving as their defining characteristic. According to realist theory, the paramount objective of a state is to ensure its own existence and security while also pursuing its national interests. In pursuit of these objectives, governments are unable to depend on other nations for assistance or support. Within an anarchical framework, nation-states are compelled to rely on a self-help mechanism to pursue their own interests. However, this approach engenders apprehension among other nations, manifesting as a security issue.

Neo-realism is considered a distinct branch within the broader framework of realism (Feng & Ruizhuang, 2006). The primary objective of its development was to reinstate the significance of realism within the realm of international affairs. Nonetheless, it acknowledges the perspective of classical realism, which posits that the state has primary agency within the international arena, while also recognising the chaotic nature of the international system (Feng & Ruizhuang, 2006). Nevertheless, it rejected the premise that comprehending the intricacies of human nature is the most effective approach to elucidating the dynamics of international relations. In contrast, proponents of neorealism placed more focus on the structural aspects of international relations than human nature, seeking to enhance its scientific rigour. Neo-realism may be classified into two distinct subgroups, namely aggressive realism and defensive realism. John Mearsheimer espouses the theoretical framework of aggressive realism, while Kenneth Waltz aligns with the theoretical framework of defensive realism. Nevertheless, neo-realists prioritise the preservation and safeguarding of the state's existence and security. However, it is important to note that the two factions within neo-realism diverge in their approaches.

Kenneth Waltz (2004), a prominent proponent of defensive realism, contends that the requisite capacity to provide security is sufficient to deter potential aggressors. The individual maintained the perspective that states do not actively pursue power but rather need it in order to ensure their existence and retain their standing within the global framework. According to Mearsheimer (2014), proponents of defensive realism, such as Kenneth Waltz, believe that nations would refrain from pursuing power accumulation if it jeopardised their own security. Consequently, their primary objective is to acquire sufficient power to guarantee their own existence. According to Waltz (1979), it is essential for nations to exercise caution while pursuing excessive power within the international system, since such endeavours are likely to be met by counterbalancing efforts by other states aiming to preserve the existing order of affairs. According to his perspective, it was his belief that governments should refrain from prioritising the pursuit of hegemonic status. Advocates of defensive realism argue that nations need to

prioritise the preservation of power rather than its expansion. Therefore, defensive realists are sometimes referred to as “security maximizers.”

Conversely, the concept of offensive realism is often attributed to the scholarly work of John Mearsheimer. The individual posited that governments prioritise power as their primary priority and want to attain hegemonic status since they believe that their existence and security can only be guaranteed via the achievement of hegemony. According to Mearsheimer (2001), it is argued that the configuration of the global system incentivizes nations to strive for hegemonic power. Mearsheimer (2001) posited that nations have a tendency to maintain the status quo due to the compelling incentives generated by the international system, which prompt them to actively seek chances to enhance their strength while undermining their competitors. Therefore, defensive realists are sometimes referred to as “power maximizers.”

The emergence of liberalism as a theoretical framework in the field of international relations may be attributed to the contributions of prominent idealist thinkers such as Immanuel Kant, Woodrow Wilson, and Norman Angell, among others. These intellectuals have a profound trust in human rationality and hold the belief that the existing international system, described as a jungle, could be transformed into a more orderly international system akin to a zoo with the aid of international institutions. The League of Nations was established in the aftermath of World War I with the aim of fostering global peace and stability. However, the failure of the League of Nations was a significant factor that contributed to the outbreak of the Second World War. Idealistic individuals who advocated for international cooperation and peace were subjected to substantial criticism by realist philosophers, notably E.H. Carr, as seen in his renowned publication titled “The Twenty Years’ Crisis.” Subsequently, following the conclusion of the Second World War, a noticeable lack of collaboration among nation-states emerged, particularly in the aftermath of the Cold War. This shift in international politics brought liberalism to the forefront, primarily through the conceptual framework of “complex interdependence,” as articulated by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye.

The primary objective of liberalism is to construct a global order that adheres to liberal principles, including democracy, human rights, the significance of international institutions, international commerce, and the establishment of a peaceful zone. Liberals claim that the realm of international relations encompasses more than just states since non-state actors are seen as significant contributors to the dynamics of global politics. In contrast to realist thinkers, liberals hold the belief that historical development is due to the influence of “human reason and the process of social learning” (Rousseau, 2006). Republican liberals, such as Immanuel Kant and Michael Doyle, propose a correlation between the political system and the occurrence of armed conflict. In the event that a political system adheres to democratic principles, it is likely that nation-states will actively pursue peace. Conversely, if a political system leans towards autocracy or military rule, it is more probable that it will foster an environment conducive to international conflict. The underlying assumption of this argument is that countries governed by democratic systems have a higher propensity for peaceful relations, particularly with one another, in comparison to governments governed by other forms of governance.

Scholars such as Richard Rosecrance and Richard Cobden, who adhere to the interdependence liberal perspective, underscore the correlation between the degree of economic interdependence and the characteristics of conflicts. Kant posits that the absence of obstacles to trade among nations would foster a collective pursuit of peace among them (Hinsley, 1967). According to the perspective of interdependence liberals, the presence of interdependence resulting from trade would serve as a deterrent for governments to resort to the use of force against one another since engaging in conflict

would pose harm to the economic well-being of both parties involved (Gartzke & Boehmer, 2001). The proponents argue that the presence of economic interdependence will lead to a decrease in the perceived utility of engaging in armed conflict and foster an environment conducive to enhanced interstate cooperation. In contrast, the liberal institutionalist perspective places significant stress on the function of institutions in the construction of a peaceful global order. The international institution aims to facilitate cooperation among nation-states by means of international agreements or regimes. According to scholars in the field of liberal institutionalism, the establishment of regimes serves as a means of formalising the mutual expectations of all parties involved in an agreement, particularly in cases where there exists a common interest. The proponents of international institutions have a strong belief in their efficacy compared to the balance of power system in mitigating the self-interest of nation-states. They argue that international institutions do this by incentivizing nations to prioritise long-term collaboration above short-term advantages.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF RUSSIA AND UKRAINE

The historical connection between Russia and Ukraine may be traced back to a significant period of around one thousand years, during which Kyiv served as the focal point of the first Slavic state known as Kyivan Rus. This particular region is considered to be the origin of both Ukraine and Russia (Solchanyk, 2000). Kyiv, owing to its strategic and cultural importance, has always served as a focal point for geopolitical conflicts between eastern and western superpowers throughout many historical periods. One of the most lethal assaults occurred in 1240, perpetrated by the Mongols. According to historical analysis, it is widely accepted that the Mongol invasion of Kyiv served as a significant turning point that marked the conclusion of the Kyivan Rus era. The Mongol invasion resulted in two significant outcomes. Firstly, it brought about a transfer of sovereignty from Kyiv to Moscow. Secondly, the aftermath of this assault in the 13th century led to the fragmentation of Kievan Rus into three distinct nations: present-day Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus (Horak, 1972).

During the 14th century, the city of Kyiv and its environs were subjected to the dominion of the influential and growing grand duchy of Lithuania. Subsequently, in the year 1569, Kyiv was included in the political entity known as the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Commonwealth was a political alliance of two sovereign entities, namely the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. It is worth noting that the capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was located in Kyiv. A notable historical event occurred in 1783 when Russia annexed Ukraine, resulting in Crimea becoming a constituent territory of the Russian empire. This arrangement persisted until 1954, when the Soviet government transferred Crimea from the Russian Soviet Federation of Socialist Republics to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

In the 19th century, a significant process of russification was initiated in Ukraine by the Russian empire, using the strategic approach of incorporating ethnic Russians into Ukrainian territories with the aim of bolstering the Russian empire's influence. During the initial months of 1917, the Ukrainian Central Rada issued the "Universal of the Ukrainian People," which asserted Ukraine's self-governance within the Russian Federation. Subsequently, the council formulated the "Declaration of Independence of Ukraine" and officially declared the nation's autonomy on November 2, 1917 (Abramson, 1991). Following the Russian revolution in October 1917, Ukraine underwent a lengthy process of integration into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and remained a constituent component of it until 1991. Following the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), Ukraine attained sovereignty and formed an autonomous state in 1991, with Leonid Makarovych Kravchuk serving as the first president of

independent Ukraine until 1994. On the eve of its independence, Ukraine has the third-biggest nuclear stockpile in the world. In 1994, Ukraine made the decision to become a party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty by formally signing the Budapest Agreement.

The Orange Revolution, which took place in 2004, has great significance in the democratic chronicles of Ukraine (Thomson, 2019). During this period, Ukrainians voiced their dissent over the disputed victory of Yanukovich over Yushchenko, therefore engaging in a collective protest. Subsequent to the culmination of the orange revolution, Viktor Yushchenko became president in February 2010. During his tenure as president, he showed a keen inclination towards pursuing membership in the NATO alliance in 2008, a move that garnered backing from the United States. However, this proposition encountered opposition from France and Germany. The subsequent presidency of Yanukovich and his refusal to sign the EU Association Agreement emerged as a significant catalyst for the Maidan protest in 2014. This decision was influenced by external pressure from Russia. Consequently, Yanukovich departed Ukraine and sought refuge in Russia, leading to the fall of his administration. Subsequently, a referendum was conducted in Crimea during the year 2014, whereby a majority of the populace expressed their preference for Russia. The incident often referred to as the “annexation of Crimea” by Western nations was instead described by Russians as a “democratic process.”

The short historical account demonstrates a strong interconnection between the two countries, particularly in terms of culture. Additionally, several endeavours have been undertaken in the past to foster political proximity between the two nations. The historical conflicts between Ukraine and Russia can be attributed to Ukraine’s pursuit of political sovereignty and independence, while Russia seeks to maintain its sphere of influence over Ukraine, a relationship that dates back to the era of the Russian empire. The ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine may be attributed to the aforementioned cause. Serhii Plokhii (2005) effectively articulates the Ukrainian perspective in his publication titled “The Lost Kingdom,” wherein he asserts that the repercussions of the events of 1917 continue to resonate. Plokhii contends that the emergence of independence from the confines of the imperial context signifies an irreversible transformation, impervious to any conceivable external influence. The perspective of the Russian government is most well conveyed by Vladimir Putin in his address titled, “Ukraine’s geopolitical significance extends beyond its proximity to Russia.” The enduring presence of this element in our historical, cultural, and spiritual milieu is indelible and irremovable. These individuals are our comrades, representing the individuals that we have the most concern for. These individuals play many roles in our lives, serving not just as colleagues and acquaintances but also as familial connections bound by blood relations. The formation of contemporary Ukraine may be attributed mostly to the influence of Bolshevik and Communist Russia, as stated by Lenin (Szporluk, 2020).

REALISM VERSUS LIBERALISM: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine has reignited a longstanding discourse about the prevalence of realism and liberalism in the field of international affairs. In the ongoing conflict, Ukraine is supported by those aligned with liberal ideologies, while Russia is backed by proponents of realism. Realist scholars have provided justifications for Russia’s military action, while liberal scholars have decried the invasion as undemocratic and posing a danger to Ukraine’s human rights and sovereignty. Realist scholars argue that the state assumes a primary role as the principal player within the international system and is driven to undertake all necessary measures to safeguard its

interests within the context of an anarchical global order. Within the context of the international anarchical system, states are unable to depend on other actors and must ensure their own existence by engaging in a self-help mechanism, which entails the pursuit of increased power acquisition.

The prevailing condition of international anarchy necessitates those states, especially those of significant influence, strive for power and prioritise their existence and security. Regrettably, these concerns have the potential to drive countries into perpetrating acts of atrocity. Realists argue that the present conflict between Russia and Ukraine serves as a poignant illustration of how superpowers, when seeing a danger to their fundamental security concerns and national interests, may engage in actions that are deemed reprehensible and lacking in responsibility. According to Robertson-Majo (2019), realism may be succinctly defined by Mearsheimer's assertion that states need to prioritise the pursuit of power with the ultimate objective of achieving hegemony since it is seen as the most effective means of ensuring their existence. The conflict has also underscored Russia's adherence to the realist notion of a 'security crisis'. The measures implemented by Western nations to foster Ukraine's alignment with liberal principles have engendered a perception of unease inside Russia.

The historical relationship between Russia and Ukraine is intricate and interconnected, spanning several millennia. However, according to realist scholars, the proximate cause of the present crisis can be traced back to the Cold War era and the establishment and enlargement of NATO in 1949 and the 1990s. These thinkers argue that Russia was deceived by the West, as the latter failed to uphold its commitment to refrain from expanding NATO eastward after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Realists see the whole of this war as attributable to the actions of the Western nations, with John Mearsheimer being recognised as a key scholar in this perspective. In his 2014 article titled "Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault," Pisciotta (2018) asserts that the Ukraine crisis can be attributed to the "triple package of policies" pursued by the West, namely NATO enlargement, EU expansion, and democracy promotion. According to Mearsheimer (2001), these policies have disregarded Russia's fundamental strategic interests and have contributed to the emergence of a "security dilemma" in the region. The gradual and incremental diffusion of Western liberal principles throughout the former USSR republics, particularly in Georgia and Ukraine, has resulted in a security issue for Russia.

Consequently, Russia undertook military interventions in both Georgia and Ukraine concurrently, in 2008 and 2022, respectively. Realist scholars argue that Ukraine has significant strategic value for Russia and that any kind of western expansion towards Ukraine poses a danger to Russia's interests. Following the conclusion of the Cold War, NATO began a process of expansion towards the nations of Eastern Europe, progressively including former Soviet Union countries into its membership. Nevertheless, Russia consistently issued warnings over the cessation of NATO's advance into Eastern Europe. For instance, President Yeltsin of Russia expressed that "this occurrence serves as an initial indication of the potential consequences that may arise when NATO approaches the borders of the Russian Federation closely." According to Mearsheimer (2001), there is a potential for a widespread outbreak of conflict across Europe. During the 2008 Bucharest summit, a significant development occurred with the issuance of an inaugural declaration about the potential inclusion of Georgia and Ukraine into the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Notably, this proposition encountered opposition from France and Germany. Russia also saw the enlargement of the European Union (EU) as a potential danger, particularly in relation to its growth into Ukraine. Russia sees the development of the European Union as a precursor to the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

Realist scholars, exemplified by Mearsheimer, believe that large powers possess a heightened awareness of potential threats in proximity to their territorial boundaries and actively seek to mitigate these risks using a variety of available strategies. Two notable instances pertaining to the conduct of the United States can be referenced in this context. Firstly, the Monroe Doctrine was implemented to deter European powers from interfering in the Western Hemisphere. Secondly, during the Cold War era, the Cuban Missile Crisis emerged as a paradigmatic case in which the United States responded vehemently. The global community was on the brink of potential nuclear conflicts. Russia's regional tactics demonstrate the consistent characteristics of a great power, including the objective of preserving its regional hegemony. Likewise, in instances when Western powers have sought to expand their sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, Russia has consistently reacted by using a range of measures. In the context of the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict, it is noteworthy to mention that Crimea was annexed by Russia in 2014. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that in 2022, a significant escalation of hostilities occurred, resulting in a full-scale war. Prior to the ongoing war, Ukraine faced a dilemma as it confronted the decision of aligning itself either with the European Union or the Eurasian Economic Union, an entity mostly influenced by Russia. Realist researchers assert that Russia's preference for Ukraine to align with its sphere of influence, as opposed to the West, is a well-established stance. They argue that any perceived challenge to this alignment would be seen by Russia as a danger to its national interests. Consequently, it is suggested that Western nations demonstrate respect for Russia's position in this matter.

In his discourse, Matthew MacKay enumerates three key rationales behind Russia's desire to prevent Ukraine from succumbing to Western influence. First and foremost, the issue at hand pertains to national security and defence. Furthermore, it is worth noting that Ukraine encompasses regions with pro-Russian separatist sentiments, and in addition, it exhibits a significant degree of strong nationalism (MacKay, 2022). According to realist scholars, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia can be rationalised based on three justifications. Firstly, it can be argued that Russia sought to safeguard its national interests, encompassing political, energy, and resource considerations. Secondly, the invasion can be seen as a means for power maximisation, whereby Russia aimed to showcase its hard power capabilities in the region, thereby reinforcing its dominant position. Lastly, the invasion can be perceived as a measure taken by Russia to protect and strengthen its security concerns in the region. The importance of power in international affairs has been underscored by realist academics in light of the ongoing war.

According to Newman et al., (2016), liberal thinkers sought to establish a global framework characterised by principles such as open markets, international institutions, cooperative security, democratic community, progressive transformation, communal problem solving, shared sovereignty, and adherence to the rule of law. Liberals espouse the notion that an ideal global order would include the predominance of political democracy, with economic principles of free trade and globalisation prevailing within the framework of an international organisation. Following the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the ideology of liberalism gained prominence as a prevailing theoretical framework, subsequently shaping the establishment of a new global order founded upon liberal ideals.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has been subject to criticism by intellectuals of a liberal persuasion, who have portrayed it as a significant threat to global peace and security. In contrast to realists, liberal scholars do not attribute the cause of the war solely to the expansion of NATO and the EU. Rather, they contend that the internal political dynamics of Russia, the foreign policy pursued by President Putin, the limited

effectiveness of international institutions, and the extensive westward expansion are the factors that led to the aggressive actions of authoritarian Moscow against democratic Kyiv. Two notable scholars who have significantly contributed to the liberal perspective on this matter are Michael McFaul and John G. Ikenberry (2019). In his paper titled “Faulty Powers: Analysing the Origins of the Ukraine Crisis,” McFaul et al., (2019) argues that the root cause of the Ukraine problem does not lie in the growth of NATO or the EU but rather in the internal political dynamics of Russia. The individual maintained the perspective that Putin, in order to counteract the fraudulent election against him, initiated the construction of a narrative portraying the United States as an adversary in the form of Cold War rhetoric. This strategic manoeuvre aimed to garner more support in his favour, thus influencing the formulation of foreign policy.

One of the primary reasons for the criticism by liberals about the ongoing conflict is the stark contrast between Russia’s authoritarian governance and Ukraine’s democratic governance. Russia perceives democratic Ukraine as a potential menace to its ruling elites, who mostly adhere to authoritarian principles. They have concerns that the proliferation of democracy in Ukraine may engender a contagion effect, ultimately undermining autocratic countries and their established governance. In this context, the viewpoint of a liberal is substantiated by Michael Howard’s assertion that warfare arises from an unjust domestic framework that seeks to use conflict not for honourable purposes or self-preservation but rather to sustain a system plagued by corruption. As previously said, proponents of liberal ideology think that the conflict initiated by Russia primarily serves to bolster its dictatorial political framework. Nevertheless, a limited number of liberal historians argue that with the collapse of the USSR, Western nations neglected to effectively include Russia in their geopolitical sphere, instead opting to isolate the country. On the other hand, diplomatic connections were created with other nations that were once part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The recent developments have engendered heightened anxiety and scepticism inside Russia towards Western nations.

The notion of hierarchical structure, as proposed by Ikenberry, offers valuable insights into the understanding of the present problem. According to Ikenberry & Nexon (2019), there are two prevailing forms of hierarchical structures within the international system. One is characterised by Russia, which relies on force as its primary approach, while the other is represented by the USA, which is grounded in liberal ideals. One perspective is that Russian hegemony seeks to establish a coercive sphere of influence akin to the Soviet Union, with the objective of maintaining control over Ukraine. Conversely, the establishment of United States hegemony would engender a tranquil region founded upon safeguarding and advancing a liberal global framework. The Russian hegemony model poses a political and economic danger to Ukraine and its cultural identity, which is a concern for those with liberal perspectives. According to liberal thinkers, there is a strong inclination for Ukraine to align itself with the liberal order rather than being under Russian hegemony. The annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 and the ongoing conflict in the Donbas area have posed significant threats to Ukraine. Consequently, those with liberal political leanings attribute accountability for the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine to Russia and its policies.

CONCLUSION

The study of international relations is primarily characterised by the prevalence of two prominent theoretical frameworks, namely liberalism and realism. Realism posits that the international system may be likened to the billiard ball model, emphasising the significance of national interest and the function of power. It is widely acknowledged that states strive to safeguard their national interests by using hard force and adhering to the

self-help system as their primary objectives within the context of an anarchic international order. In contrast, liberalism offers an explanation of the global system using the cobweb model, placing more emphasis on the dynamics of cooperation and the use of soft power as a strategic tool. Prior to the era of the Cold War, the prevailing paradigm in the field of international politics was realism. Subsequent to the conclusion of the Cold War, the area of international politics saw the ascendancy of liberalism and other theoretical frameworks as the prevailing paradigms. The post-Cold War period saw a notable level of collaboration among nation-states in the realm of international affairs, leading to a diminished prominence of realism.

The continuing conflict between Russia and Ukraine has once again placed realism at the forefront of global politics, underscoring the significance of this theoretical framework and its associated principles. Both hypotheses provided their own justifications for elucidating the causes of the conflict. According to the perspective of liberals, the continued conflict may be attributed to Russia's opposition to Ukraine's progress towards becoming a fully democratic nation and establishing closer ties with Western nations. Russia, it is said, seeks to maintain its dominant influence over Ukraine rather than allowing it to pursue an independent path aligned with Western values and interests. The conflict once again underscored the inherent limitations of international institutions in the face of clashes between major global powers. Conversely, the perspective of realism posits that the western nations bear primary responsibility for the conflict due to their disregard for Russia's fundamental strategic interests. Undoubtedly, the use of international institutions like NATO and the EU by Western powers to advance democratic principles and Western values played a significant role in exacerbating the tensions between Russia and Ukraine. The theory of liberalism, in its application to Russia, has proven inadequate in explaining the country's actions. According to liberal thought, the occurrence of war is very unlikely due to the presence of intricate economic interdependencies. Nevertheless, in spite of the prevailing economic interdependence between Russia and the European Union (EU), Russia has undertaken a military intervention in Ukraine, demonstrating a prioritisation of its political objectives above its economic ones. In conclusion, the study elucidated the arguments put forward by both schools of thought and ultimately posited that the realism perspective offers a more persuasive explanation for the underlying causes of the conflict when compared to the liberal viewpoint.

REFERENCES

- Abramson, H. (1991). Jewish representation in the independent Ukrainian governments of 1917-1920. *Slavic Review*, 50(3), 542-550.
- Barkin, J. S. (2003). Realist constructivism. *International Studies Review*, 5(3), 325-342.
- Baylis, J. (2020). *The globalization of world politics: An introduction to international relations*. Oxford university press, USA.
- Burchill, S., Linklater, A., Devetak, R., Donnelly, J., Paterson, M., Reus-Smit, C., & True, J. (2005). *Theories of International Relations*, 3rd edn (Basingstoke and New York).
- Carr, E. H. (2016). *The twenty years' crisis, 1919-1939: Reissued with a new preface from Michael Cox*. Springer.
- D'Anieri, P. (2023). *Ukraine and Russia*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dicken, P. (2007). *Global shift: Mapping the changing contours of the world economy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Feng, L., & Ruizhuang, Z. (2006). The typologies of realism. *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 1(1), 109-134.

- Gartzke, E., Li, Q., & Boehmer, C. (2001). Investing in the peace: Economic interdependence and international conflict. *International organization*, 55(2), 391-438.
- Harding, L. (2022). *Invasion: The Inside Story of Russia's Bloody War and Ukraine's Fight for Survival*. Vintage.
- Hinsley, F. H. (1967). *Power and the Pursuit of Peace: Theory and Practice in the History of Relations between States*. Cambridge University Press.
- Horak, S. M. (1972). Periodization and Terminology of the History of Eastern Slavs: Observations and Analyses. *Slavic Review*, 31(4), 853-862.
- Ikenberry, G. J., & Nexon, D. H. (2019). Hegemony studies 3.0: The dynamics of hegemonic orders. *Security Studies*, 28(3), 395-421.
- Jørgensen, K. E. (2010). *International Relations Theory. A New Introduction*. New.
- Kofman, M., Migacheva, K., Nichiporuk, B., Radin, A., & Oberholtzer, J. (2017). *Lessons from Russia's operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine*. Rand Corporation.
- Lukic, R., & Lynch, A. (1996). *Europe from the Balkans to the Urals: The disintegration of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union*. Oxford University Press.
- MacKay, M. (2022). "A Realist Perspective: Russia and Ukraine." *The Geo Politics*. <https://thegeopolitics.com/a-realist-perspective-russia-and-ukraine/>.
- Mearsheimer, J. J. (2001). *The tragedy of great power politics*. WW Norton & Company.
- Mearsheimer, J. J. (2014). Why the Ukraine crisis is the West's fault: the liberal delusions that provoked Putin. *Foreign Aff.*, 93, 77.
- Menon, R., & Ruger, W. (2023). NATO enlargement and US grand strategy: A net assessment. In *Evaluating NATO Enlargement: From Cold War Victory to the Russia-Ukraine War* (pp. 165-208). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Newman, E., Thakur, R., & Triman, J. (2006). *Multilateralism under challenge: Power, international order, and structural change*. Academic Foundation.
- Pisciotta, B. (2018). The US-Russia Conflict in the Ukrainian Crisis: Unipolarism Versus Revisionism?. *US Foreign Policy in a Challenging World: Building Order on Shifting Foundations*, 187-209.
- Plokhy, S. (2005). *Unmaking Imperial Russia: mykhailo Hrushevsky and the writing of Ukrainian history*. University of Toronto Press.
- Plokhy, S. (2006). *The origins of the Slavic nations: Premodern identities in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus*. Cambridge University Press.
- Robertson-Major, J. (2019). *Returning to Machiavelli: Giving Belarus-Russia Relations the Original Realist Treatment* (Doctoral dissertation, School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Glasgow).
- Rousseau, D. L. (2006). *Identifying threats and threatening identities: The social construction of realism and liberalism*. Stanford University Press.
- Solchanyk, R. (2000). *Ukraine and Russia: the post-Soviet transition*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Szporluk, R. (2020). *Russia, Ukraine, and the breakup of the Soviet Union*. Hoover Press.
- Thomson, V. (2019). Europeans but outside of the EU-the EU Soft Power of Attractiveness in Ukraine Between the Orange Revolution and Euromaidan. *Canadian Journal of European and Russian Studies*, 13(2), 64-86.
- Umotong, I. (2012). Religious Factor in African Politics. *African Political Philosophy*, 237-249.
- Walt, S. M. (1998). International relations: One world, many theories. *Foreign policy*, 29-46.
- Waltz, K. (1979). *Theory of International Politics*, McGraw.

Waltz, K. (2004). Neorealism: Confusions and criticisms. *Journal of Politics and Society*, 15(1), 2-6.