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Theoretical Decoding of Russia-Ukraine War: Realism vs Liberalism

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Abstract

To analyze the Ukraine conflict, two contrasting theories of international relations (IR), notably Realism and Liberalism has been implemented. In addition to outlining key theoretical concepts, the article explores both of these theories' explanatory potential through a comparative approach while highlighting the developments surrounding the Ukrainian conflict. Based on Mearsheimer's Offensive Realism and Ikenberry's Liberal Internationalism, respectively, this research attempts to understand the Ukrainian conflict and its escalation into a war. This article justifies the theoretical perspective by evaluating the Russian invasion and Ukrainian reaction throughout the war. With a focus on the West, this study is also intended to offer insights into how to end the war in Ukraine through the lens of these theories.

Keywords: Ukraine war, West, NATO, European Union, Offensive realism, economic sanctions, Liberal Internationalism

Following the delay in signing an Association Agreement (AA)¹ between Ukraine and the European Union was decided by President Victor Yanukovich and resulted in a series of violent protests that broke out in Kyiv in November 2013, sparking the start of the Ukrainian war. The EU and Ukraine's trade would have become more liberalized because of this AA's lowered travel restrictions. It would have also steered Ukraine further away from the influence of Russia and toward the West. Russian officials threatened to inflict economic sanctions if Ukraine carried out the AA, which put pressure on the Ukrainian government. The Russian government rejected the AA because it believed that the EU was intervening in its internal matters (Gowan, 2014). The Ukrainian government consequently declared that it will resume talks with Russia and the Eurasian Customs Union while postponing discussions with the EU out of concern for Russian reprisal.

In February 2014, Yanukovich left Kyiv, which led to a worsening of the situation there. The Ukrainian parliament then decided to remove him from office and install a transitional administration to lead the country toward EU membership. Russia meddled in Ukrainian affairs

¹ The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (AA), which aims to promote political association and economic integration while paving the path for future progressive advancements, is the next phase of the two countries' contractual relations.

by sending "little green men"² into the country in February 2014 and by invading Crimea, which it formally annexed in March following a divisive referendum. A low-intensity civil war between pro-Russian separatists and Ukrainian soldiers started in the Donbas area of Ukraine and extended throughout the country before turning into an international issue. US and EU sanctions were imposed on Ukraine in response to Russia's occupation of Eastern Ukraine. Vladimir Putin, the president of Russia, referred to Yanukovich's overthrow as an "anti-constitutional takeover" and said in a later remark that Crimea should belong to a powerful and stable country, which can only be Russian at this point. These claims were used to support the invasion. Russia was strongly criticized by the West for its activities against Ukraine and forced to stop controlling the Crimean Peninsula immediately. Russia and NATO, the Western military alliance, were already at odds before the Russian incursion because NATO believed that the Kremlin's actions violated international law. NATO³ added that Russia's actions went against its vision of a unified, democratic, and prosperous Europe (NATO, 2018). As a result of the Kremlin's choice to act in Ukraine, relations between the West and Russia have been strained.

To establish the two viewpoints, this article looked for pre-existing theories on the Ukraine conflict. Due to the importance of this conflict, international relations (IR) scholars have

² The term "little green men" refers to Russian soldiers without insignia who were sent to Ukraine in 2014 to support separatist forces in Crimea and other parts of eastern Ukraine. This was part of Russia's broader campaign to destabilize Ukraine and exert influence over its affairs.

³ NATO is a security alliance made up of 30 nations from North America and Europe that was established in 1949 with the signing of the Washington Treaty. Protecting the independence and security of the Allies by political and military means is NATO's primary objective.

presented a variety of perspectives on how to comprehend it by concentrating on the ties between the West, Ukraine, and Russia. The goal of this article is to examine the Ukraine issue from the perspectives of two different IR theories. Both Liberal Internationalism and Realism, more specifically Offensive Realism, have unique perspectives on world affairs. By concentrating on just two theorists—John G. Ikenberry for Liberal Internationalism and John J. Mearsheimer for Offensive Realism—this study will seek to establish a more rigorous theoretical debate. It would be logical to conclude that the names of these two IR experts have come to be associated with these two theories, into which their publications provide interesting viewpoints. The theoretical stances of Offensive Realism and Liberal Internationalism will offer a useful lens to view this conflict from a variety of viewpoints as thematic conversations about the Ukraine crisis develop. To assess the specifics of the Ukraine war through the lens of these two theories, this study will employ an analytical method by stressing the contrast and justification of each theory.

Theoretical Analysis of Russia Ukraine Conflict

This article uses an abductive methodology and focuses on the diplomatic, economic, and military aspects of the conflict to evaluate the Ukraine situation from all angles. Mearsheimer's offensive realism and Ikenberry's liberal internationalism will serve as the theoretical foundations for the examination of the situation in Ukraine. To better comprehend the perspectives these two theories offer on the situation in Ukraine, this article will first present an outline of the basic tenets and distinguishing characteristics of realism and liberalism before analyzing the conflict through the lenses of these two theories.

Realism

One of the most established and well-known theories of international relations is the theory of realism. It works under the assumption that states are the key stakeholders in the world system and that hegemonic and self-interest drive most of their actions (Camisão & Antunes, 2018). Realists hold the belief that in a violent and competitive world where governments are constantly vying for influence and power, nations must be ready to use force to protect their interests.

The two fundamental subtypes of realism are offensive and defensive realism. In contrast to offensive realism, which was developed by John J. Mearsheimer, defensive realism contends that states are driven by expansionist goals and aim to expand their power and territory through acts of aggression. States attempt to preserve their survival by maintaining a balance of power in the global order. Offensive realism provides an insightful way to examine the situation of the Ukraine conflict.

The Key Assumptions of Realist Theory

Here are the main assumptions that underlie the theory of realism:

- States are the principal participants in the international system, and their behaviors are motivated by desires for security and dominance.
- Since there is no centralized authority that can compel cooperation or prohibit hostilities, the international system is anarchic.
- States are driven by self-interest, and the desire for power is a key part of international relations.
- The international system is characterized by a lack of confidence, and governments cannot depend on institutions or rules to avert conflict.

- States will employ military force to further their goals because military strength is an essential component of state power.
- States make logical judgments by weighing the advantages and disadvantages of several choices.
- States will adopt policies to increase their relative power in comparison to other states, and the distribution of power within the international system has a significant role in determining how states behave.

Mearsheimer Offensive Realism

Mearsheimer describes offensive realism as a theory that examines how great powers interact in his 2001 book "The Tragedy of Great Power Politics." Mearsheimer thinks that all social science theories should be used to predict future problems, and offensive realism's primary goal is to imagine great power politics in the modern era. An individual's ideas and opinions about an event can be further influenced by knowing what to expect because it encourages the incorporation of evidence from the policy discourse and can also provide a contrasting viewpoint (Mearsheimer, 2001a).

Mearsheimer claims that offensive realism functions as both a normative theory and a descriptive theory. It advances our knowledge of how major powers have conducted themselves in the past and how they will conduct themselves going the future. Because it outlines how governments should behave to live as long as possible on the international stage, it likewise becomes normative (Mearsheimer, 2006).

An explanation of how the conflict fits into the Offensive Realism framework.

The role of force and power in shaping how states to act is heavily stressed in the "offensive realism" theory of international relations. According to this theory, states are primarily driven by a concern for security and self-preservation and aim to maximize their power to ensure their survival. Understanding the goals and strategies of Russia and the West in the context of the crisis in Ukraine can be done with the help of offensive realism.

The crisis in Ukraine might be seen as the result of Russia's will to defend its status as a significant power and to safeguard its sphere of influence from the perspective of offensive realism. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the NATO enlargement, and the expansion of the EU into Eastern Europe, and the threat they posed to Russia's security and dominance were important, and the Russian leadership considered the Ukrainian government's turn to the West as a direct threat to its interests. As a result, Russia intervened militarily in Crimea and eastern Ukraine to preserve its sway and dominance over the region.

The West's response to the war in Ukraine can also be seen as an expression of its power and security interests from the standpoint of aggressive realism (Mearsheimer, 2014d). The West acted to back the Ukrainian government and to diplomatically and economically isolate Russia because it perceived Russia's activities in Ukraine as an imminent threat to its interests and security. For example, sanctions can be seen as an effort to diminish Russia's position of power and influence in the territory.

It is important to keep in mind that offensive realism merely explains why states can act in such a way rather than necessarily predicting or endorsing violent behavior. Both Russia and the West

can be considered behaving in the crisis in Ukraine following their perceptions of interests and security concerns.

Evidence to back up the war allegations stated using an Offensive Realism perspective

For understanding the dynamics of the conflict in Ukraine, offensive realism provides a useful framework. The intentions and activities of Russia and the West in the ongoing war are explained by this theory, which emphasizes the importance of power, military might, and the need for security and self-preservation in determining how governments behave.

The past aggressiveness of Russia towards its neighbors is one piece of evidence that backs up the allegations made about the situation of crises through the use of an Offensive Realism lens. For instance, Russia has a history of intimidating neighboring nations and establishing its supremacy in the region by military force. This includes the 2008 conflict with Georgia, the Eastern Ukraine crisis, and the 2014 invasion of Crimea.

Another piece of evidence supporting the claims made about the conflict from an Offensive Realism perspective is the government of Russia's language and conduct. Officials from Russia have continuously described the conflict as a struggle for influence and power in the region and have taken acts that are compatible with the desire for dominance and self-interest (Gowan, 2014). For instance, Russian authorities have frequently asserted that the conflict in eastern Ukraine is an effort to fend off foreign meddling and that Moscow has to defend the interests of ethnic Russians in the region.

Further supporting the arguments put forth using an Offensive Realism lens is the importance that energy resources played in the conflict. The fight between Russia and Ukraine over energy

resources, notably natural gas pipelines that pass through Ukraine, is frequently used to describe the war between the two countries. Control over energy resources can result in considerable economic and geopolitical advantages, which is consistent with the realist theory that nations are driven by the desire for power.

In conclusion, the arguments stated concerning the conflict between Russia and Ukraine via the perspective of offensive realism are supported by data. The past acts of aggression by Russia against its neighbors, the government's rhetoric and deeds, and the importance of energy resources in the battle all imply that the fight is motivated by the lust for power and self-interest. This supports the realist theory that governments pursue their own goals and are driven by the need for security and supremacy.

Criticism of offensive realism

Arash Heydarian Pashakhanlou asserts that the main criticism of offensive realism is that it places an excessive emphasis on the balance of power between countries, which is largely supported by the notion that governments are rational in the sense that they act to advance their interests. Moreover, offensive realism lacks normative components that may help provide a comprehensive explanation for people's and governments' actions, such as extra explanatory aspects that could help explain people's and governments' behaviors (Pashakhanlou, 2013).

Mearsheimer describes fear as being inherently materialistic since his understanding of power is more closely tied to military force. The primary cause of this anxiety is the disparity in military power between states, which they can use against one another. Because a strong military threatens the large powers' ability to continue existing, they balance their might against those

states (Mearsheimer, 2001). Jack Donnelly contends that offensive realism's account of fear between states leads to an aggressive action rather than the converse, which is that actors retreat to defend themselves, even though psychology research identifies fear as an emotional act (Donnelly, 2000). It could be claimed that fear does not adequately explain governments' actions in international relations.

Liberalism

Realist concepts, which provided simple but powerful reasons for conflict, alliances, imperialism, and impediments to cooperation, predominated in international affairs throughout the Cold War. Also, their focus on competition was congruent with the fundamental aspects of the rivalry between the US and the USSR (Walt, 1998). Realist predictions that were inaccurate or imprecise towards the end of the Cold War⁴ contributed to its decline in favor. The conclusion of the Cold War was supposed to reignite power politics and interstate conflict in Europe, but this was untrue. Furthermore, the Atlantic security community demonstrated that factors other than the Cold War and bipolarity had an impact on it. Due to the expansion of democracy across the continent of Europe, as well as due to economic interconnectedness and supranational institutions that were both made feasible by the EU, a Europe that was largely liberated from realistic prophesies was established (Zank, 2017). Collaboration and interdependence, as opposed to the interstate wars and conflicts that dominated the continent in the 18th and 19th

⁴ The Cold War, which raged between the Western world and the Soviet Union from 1945 to 1991, was a time of political and military hostility. The political and economic climate of the world was significantly impacted, and this had long-lasting effects.

centuries, have been promoted by international organizations. Since the conclusion of the Cold War, liberal ideas have dominated the area of international affairs and acquired a popularity for their ability to explain this tendency.

Immanuel Kant and Jeremy Bentham, two of the most important liberal theorists of the Enlightenment who also helped to develop contemporary liberalism, established fundamental liberal ideas. They argued that, in contrast to the violence and lawlessness of the global system, the human reason might bring about freedom and justice in international relations. Liberalism is favored because it addresses the issues that arise in establishing permanent peace and harmony in international affairs as well as the numerous strategies that could help to achieve these goals (Baylis et al, 2017). Five fundamental concepts can be defined, even though liberalism is a multifaceted, complex heritage. The concepts overlap and are connected in so many ways.

The Key Assumptions of Liberalism Theory

Here are the main assumptions that underlie the theory of liberalism:

- Individuals must be allowed to make decisions about what to do and how to go about accomplishing their objectives without intervention from the government or other parties.
- Elections must be free and fair for political power to be exercised, and citizens must have a say in how their government is run.
- A free market system should be used to run the economy, where supply and demand operate naturally without interference from the government.
- To tackle shared issues and advance peace and stability, states should cooperate.

- Instead of resorting to the use of force, conflicts can be resolved via diplomatic efforts and collaboration among states.

These basic assumptions, when applied to the Ukrainian conflict, imply that the crisis is due to a breakdown in international cooperation as well as a lack of respect and understanding between both the West and Russia. According to liberal theory, the conflict may have been averted if Russia and the West had engaged in constructive communication and collaborated to deal with the present conflict.

Inkenberry Liberal Internationalism

Liberal internationalism is a theory of politics and a method of foreign policy that emphasizes the significance of global collaboration, free markets, and the advancement of liberal democratic principles. Developing an international order based on a set of common values and institutions, such as international law, democracy, and human rights, is the aim of this strategy, according to John G. Ikenberry, a key proponent of liberal internationalism (Ikenberry, 2015a).

Liberal internationalism can be used as a framework to comprehend the underlying tensions and conflicting interests that have driven the conflict between Russia and Ukraine (Ikenberry, 2014b). At its foundation, the conflict can be seen as a battle between two opposing worldviews: one that is founded on liberal democracy, free markets, and cooperative security, and another that is defined by authoritarianism, territorial aggressiveness, and contempt for international regulations.

On the one hand, Ukraine has worked to associate itself with the liberal international order, forging deeper connections with the European Union and the United States and pushing for more

democratization and human rights protection. Russia, on the other hand, has sought to upset this order by attempting to restore its influence over the former Soviet republics as part of its growing aggressive foreign policy, which has entailed the invasion of Crimea and support for separatist insurgents in eastern Ukraine.

The confrontation between Russia and Ukraine emphasizes the value of preserving an international system based on norms and rooted in democratic, human rights-based, and legal principles, according to a liberal internationalist viewpoint. This necessitates a strong set of international institutions and norms that can aid in conflict prevention and peaceful dispute resolution, as well as a dedication to economic interdependence and openness that can aid in fostering shared prosperity and cooperation.

This viewpoint offers a distinct perspective of the war and provides an essential basis for comprehending the potential pathways to resolution. Looking at the issue from the standpoint of liberal internationalism can help us better understand the part that the West can play in promoting peace and democracy in Ukraine and the surrounding area.

The necessity of international action in fostering stability and resolving disputes is also emphasized by Ikenberry's perspective on liberal interventionism. To address the roots of wars and advance peace and stability, he contends that liberal democracies should cooperate through international organizations like the United Nations (Ikenberry, 2011a).

Hence, liberal internationalism offers a framework for comprehending the underlying forces that have led to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine as well as a vision for how the international community can cooperate to advance security, stability, and democratic principles throughout the

region and beyond. In the examination of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, Ikenberry's position on liberal internationalism is still significant and relevant. By viewing the conflict from this viewpoint, we are better able to understand the various avenues leading to peace as well as the role that the West can play in promoting security and democracy in the area.

An explanation of how the war in Ukraine fits into the Liberal Internationalism framework

The political theory of liberal internationalism, which emphasizes the role of international institutions and norms in upholding peace and stability, can be used to analyze the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Liberal internationalism contends that for the sake of advancing democratic values and defending human rights, the international community must engage in armed war (Ikenberry, 2011a). This implies that, in the circumstances of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the international community has a duty to act in order to defend the rights of the Ukrainian people and to advance democratic values in the region.

One of the cornerstones of liberal internationalism is the belief that the international community has a responsibility to advance and safeguard human rights. This implies, concerning the Russia-Ukraine war, that the international community should act to safeguard the civil rights of the conflict's victims—the Ukrainian people (Hurrell, 2015). For instance, the international community should take action to support the development of democratic institutions in Ukraine or to offer aid to those who have been injured by the violence.

Liberal internationalism rests its perspective on the idea that strengthening international institutions and norms is necessary for fostering stability and peace. In light of this, the international community should collaborate with institutions like the United Nations and the

European Union to promote peace and stability in the region in the event of a conflict between Russia and Ukraine (Guzzini, 2015). For instance, the international community might try to use diplomacy to mediate the crisis or impose economic penalties on Russia in retaliation for its activities in Ukraine.

Together with these overarching presumptions, liberal internationalism stresses the significance of advancing democratic values. This means that, concerning the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the international community should assist Ukraine in creating democratic institutions and seek to advance political freedom and human rights throughout the area (Scheffer, 2016). This may entail assisting civil society organizations, fostering independent media, and promoting free and transparent elections.

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine can be examined from the liberal internationalism perspective, which emphasizes the value of international institutions and norms in promoting peace and stability. By considering the main ideas of liberal interventionism, we may better understand the roles that the international community must play in this conflict and the actions that can be taken to achieve peace and stability in the region.

Evidence to back up the war allegations stated using the Liberal Internationalism perspective.

The arguments made concerning the war between Russia and Ukraine through a liberal internationalism lens are backed up by significant evidence. Here is a discussion of the evidence that backs up the claims made about the war from this lens.

First, the 2014 annexation of Crimea by Russia violated international law, particularly the Helsinki Accords and the United Nations Charter, which uphold the values of territorial integrity and peaceful conflict resolution. Thousands of people have died as a result of the subsequent violence in eastern Ukraine, which has also been marked by abuses of human rights and the use of force against civilians (Ikenberry, 2015b). This highlights the need of upholding the rule of law and protecting human rights, which are central tenets of liberal internationalism.

Second, with the application of sanctions by the West against Russia and the disruption of trade between the two nations, the conflict has had a huge economic impact. This emphasizes the significance of economic interconnectedness and openness in fostering shared prosperity and collaboration, another fundamental tenet of liberal internationalism.

Third, the conflict has made clear how important international institutions and norms are to preventing and resolving disputes. The United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and other international organizations have been instrumental in advancing world peace and security, safeguarding human rights, and supporting the rule of law. To preserve a stable and peaceful international order, the liberal internationalist perspective emphasizes the significance of bolstering these institutions and norms.

Finally, the conflict has also highlighted the significance of shared sovereignty and group problem-solving in resolving global concerns. Beyond the immediate area, the conflict has had an impact on international stability and security. The liberal internationalist strategy aims to overcome these difficulties through multilateralism, state cooperation, and the sharing of resources and expertise.

As a result, the war between Russia and Ukraine offers compelling evidence to back up the arguments made about it from the perspective of liberal internationalism. The conflict serves as a reminder of how crucial it is to uphold the rule of law, safeguard human rights, encourage economic openness and interdependence, strengthen international institutions and norms, engage in collective problem-solving, and exercise shared sovereignty to address global challenges.

Criticism of Liberal Internationalism

Despite providing a framework for examining the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, liberal internationalism is not without its critics.

Liberal internationalism has been criticized for being perceived as a project of the United States and other Western powers, which aims to advance its interests and principles at the expense of other nations. Some critics contend that the liberal internationalist approach in the instance of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine indicates a Western bias against Russia and ignores Moscow's legitimate security concerns (Jahn, 2018). They contend that geopolitical factors, rather than a dedication to liberal ideas, are what motivate the West's support for Ukraine's pro-Western government and its condemnation of Russia's actions.

Liberal internationalism is also criticized for putting too much focus on promoting economic openness and the free market at the expense of other crucial principles like social fairness and environmental sustainability (Moravcsik, 2010). Opponents contend that the liberal internationalist perspective, which places a strong emphasis on economic interdependence and the abolition of trade restrictions, hastened the deterioration of social welfare, environmental protection, and labor standards in numerous nations throughout the world.

It is challenging to figure out which perspective will help us better to understand the situation between Russia and Ukraine. Both liberal internationalism and offensive realism are relevant to the conflict and offer insightful insights into how global politics operate.

Finally, some critics claim that the liberal internationalist perspective places too much trust in global institutions and norms, which they claim are ineffectual at addressing the underlying causes of instability and conflict. They contend that international institutions frequently reflect the interests of large, powerful countries and do not effectively represent the concerns of smaller, weaker nations. Additionally, they contend that liberal internationalist approaches are naive in their assumptions of the ability of norms and institutions to influence conduct since they frequently assume that nations that do not share Western values will uphold international norms.

Finally, it must be noted that the Russian-Ukrainian war is a complex and ongoing issue that may be studied from the viewpoints of aggressive realism and liberal internationalism. To fully comprehend the struggle, one must be able to appreciate both perspectives because they both provide insightful analyses of the workings of global politics. If we continue to see the conflict from these angles and gain a deeper comprehension of its underlying issues and motivating factors, we may help to promote regional stability and peace.

Suggestions for responding to Russia's actions toward Ukraine

Using the perspectives of the two theories that were employed in this article, this part will give an account of how to respond to Russia for its activities against Ukraine. Ikenberry asserts that the lone exception is Putin's Russia and that this country may begin the process of becoming a post-liberal society (Ikenberry, 2015). Russia's initiatives to create a hierarchical regional order

in the post-Soviet region and the Ukraine conflict both reinforce this opinion. The explanation given above shows how Ikenberry's thesis acknowledges several hierarchical systems and sees Russia and its predecessor, the Soviet Union, as coercive powers in Eurasia.

Ikenberry hasn't explicitly stated how he thinks Russia should be handled in light of its actions during the Ukraine issue. He claims that liberal ascendancy is still taking place though. While the US-led international order's dilemma is distinct from liberal internationalism's issue, liberal powers nonetheless have a responsibility to ensure that the US-led international system is not under attack by adversaries. Liberal powers must contact potential liberal west members.

Ikenberry began his examination of the development of a post-hegemonic system by giving the US an organizational role. He advances the case that the US, by playing the role of an organizational hub through which other nations connect to it, supplies the organizing infrastructure of international relations within the larger global system. He does this by comparing the realist notion of a "pole" with that of a "hub" (Ikenberry, 2011). Given this organizational capability, one may argue that the US and its allies still have resources available to them that they could use to counterbalance Russia's threatening behavior.

It is especially important to provide Ukraine with military support because of the ongoing armed situation in Eastern Ukraine. An essential part of providing this help is NATO. By viewing NATO's mission through a liberal internationalist perspective, Ikenberry sees two advantages to its continued existence in the post-Cold War era. He claims that NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union was a significant turning point, driven by liberal aspirations

to promote and integrate newly democratic states as well as by a traditional logic of security protection (Ikenberry, 2011).

Liberal states are expected to provide Ukraine military support, if not NATO membership, to woo governments who want to forge stronger ties with the liberal order. Ukraine's attempts to break free of Russian influence, which, as a crucial first step, demands restoring its territorial integrity and denying Moscow a sphere of influence within its borders, make it evident that this policy is necessary. Even though it is non-lethal, NATO's assistance to Ukraine in several areas to boost its military performance and readiness demonstrates, if only partially, the west's support policy towards Ukraine (2018). In addition, the US's transfer of Javelin anti-tank missile systems to Ukraine shows a change from non-lethal to lethal assistance and the willingness of NATO's main power to support Ukraine militarily in a more forceful manner. Following an altercation between Russia and Ukraine in the Sea of Azov, the US and the UK, two other important liberal nations, are assisting the Ukrainian navy there (Peterson, 2018).

But, there is a threat in acting in this way. With the support of the west, Ukraine may decide to begin a military operation to remove Russia's proxies, but if Moscow responds militarily, there is a strong chance that the situation may spiral out of control. Mearsheimer cautions that powerful states are constantly vigilant for challenges in their immediate vicinity (Mearsheimer, 2014). Thus, behavior that Russia deems aggressive may result in a bigger global crisis. Given that the Ukraine crisis has rekindled tensions between the West and Russia, signaling the start of a new phase in bilateral relations and what some see as the beginning of a New Cold War, liberal powers are understandably concerned that Russia's actions could cause wider geopolitical instability. While it would be prudent for the west to refrain from taking any action that could

lead to a military conflict in this regard, the west still has tools at its disposal that can be used to prevent Russia from taking an aggressive stance. It would be sufficient to demonstrate to Russia that adopting the economic restrictions that the west put in place when the conflict in Ukraine started in 2014 would not be in its best interests for it to continue fighting while it is struggling economically.

Mearsheimer advises taking a more cautious stance toward Russia. He claims that the institutional development of the west is the primary source of the conflict and endangers Russia's strategic interests (Mearsheimer, 2014). We can see that Mearsheimer's previous assessments of the relationships between Russia and Ukraine in the early 1990s were more accurate. Because he had projected that relations between Ukraine and Russia would deteriorate over time, Mearsheimer had opposed giving up Ukraine's nuclear weapons when the proposal first came up in 1993. (Mearsheimer, 1993). Thus, Ukraine required a robust deterrence against Russia to guarantee its security (Mearsheimer, 1993). Once Ukraine agreed to give up its nuclear weapons, Mearsheimer appears to have changed his mind about relations between the two countries. His remarks on the Ukraine war imply that Russia's military control solidified following Ukraine's denuclearization in the post-Soviet realm. Considering the current situation, both regional actors, such as Ukraine, and extra-regional actors, such as NATO and the EU, must take Russia's geopolitical sensitivities into account while developing their post-Soviet domain policies (Mearsheimer, 2014).

Mearsheimer advocates approaching the offensive realism movement's crisis-related policy suggestions with extra caution. Mearsheimer contends that hegemony, such as the US, which rules the western hemisphere, must strive to prevent other major powers from obtaining

hegemony in the respective regions. This tactic is justified by the idea that, after the great power has established regional dominance, it will likely cause issues for the hegemon in its zone (Mearsheimer, 2014). Mearsheimer examines the US-China relationship using this theoretical premise as a framework. He believes that the US's greatest rival, China, will attempt to prevent China from attaining regional hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region (Mearsheimer, 2006).

But, according to Mearsheimer, Russia does not possess the essential capability to pose a threat to the US. He argues that this is evidenced by the adverse economic and demographic trends in Russia, which restrict its ability to raise the status of the Soviet Union (Mearsheimer, 2010). Mearsheimer compares Russia to China and Germany, both of which, in his opinion, have higher economic potential than the former (Mearsheimer, 2006). Given the significance of Ukraine from a geostrategic standpoint, Mearsheimer underscores the necessity for caution in dealing with Russia while simultaneously highlighting the fact that Moscow has legitimate security concerns. He claims that to help resolve the situation, the west must make concrete obligations. To defuse the situation, he emphasizes how important it is to persuade Russia that Ukraine won't ally with the West. He asserts that in order to resolve the ongoing unrest, Ukraine must become a neutral state and that this condition must be fulfilled. From this perspective, actions like arming Ukraine or inviting it to join NATO would be risky since they would embolden Russia (Mearsheimer, 2015).

According to Mearsheimer, once Ukraine's neutrality is guaranteed, the IMF, the EU, the west as a whole, and Russia must all cooperate to support Ukraine in resolving its economic problems so that it can establish itself as a viable state. The idea is that Ukraine will be best served if it maintains its neutrality and engages with both the east and the west. However, Mearsheimer's

theory is in opposition to this suggestion. One of Offensive Realism's five main tenets is that there is no way to determine what a nation's ultimate goals are (Mearsheimer, 2014). Hence, there is no guarantee that Russia will support Ukraine's neutrality, should it be declared, and won't try over time to envelop Ukraine with its geopolitics. Because states operate under anarchic systems, there is no centralized entity that could guarantee Ukraine. As was already said, Ukraine's distrust toward Russia reflects this insight as it has maintained suspicion of Russia's goals throughout the post-Cold War era under several governments. In a nutshell, Mearsheimer's offensive realism and Inkberry's liberal internationalism viewpoints can be combined to provide a thorough explanation of the situation in Ukraine and direct the West toward a resolution.

Conclusion

A thorough understanding of the goals and concerns of the contending states is provided by offensive realism. It highlights the importance of power and security in international affairs as well as the self-interested objectives of governments. From this perspective, it is feasible to understand Russian behavior as being driven by a desire to safeguard its security and regional supremacy while warding off perceived challenges from the West. Understanding the causes of the conflict and Russia's intentions is made easier with the help of this viewpoint.

Liberal internationalism, on the other hand, gives a nuanced perspective on how international institutions and norms contribute to maintaining peace and stability. It underlines the necessity of the international community in upholding fundamental international standards like the rule of law and human rights as well as the obligation of the international community to act when these

standards are infringed. According to this viewpoint, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine can be considered a breach of international law, and the international community must work toward a settlement that preserves these laws and safeguards the rights and security of the Ukrainian people.

It is challenging to determine whether perspective provides a greater knowledge of the dispute, despite the fact that both provide significant insights into it. Liberal interventionism and offensive realism both offer unique but complementary viewpoints on the war, and a thorough understanding of the conflict necessitates an appreciation of both.

Liberal internationalism emphasizes the ability of global institutions and cooperation to advance peace and stability, offering what can be considered a more upbeat viewpoint. Yet it's also critical to understand the constraints of this viewpoint and the difficulties in carrying out successful international involvement. On the other hand, offensive realism emphasizes the self-interested objectives of states and the significance of power and security, providing a more realistic and sober explanation of the dynamics of international politics.

Ultimately, both liberal internationalism and offensive realism are pertinent to the confrontation between Russia and Ukraine. By examining the dispute from both angles, we can better comprehend the complicated dynamics and motivations at play and contribute to ongoing discussions and debates in international affairs. A deeper comprehension of the conflict can also assist to advance regional peace and stability by informing practice and policy.

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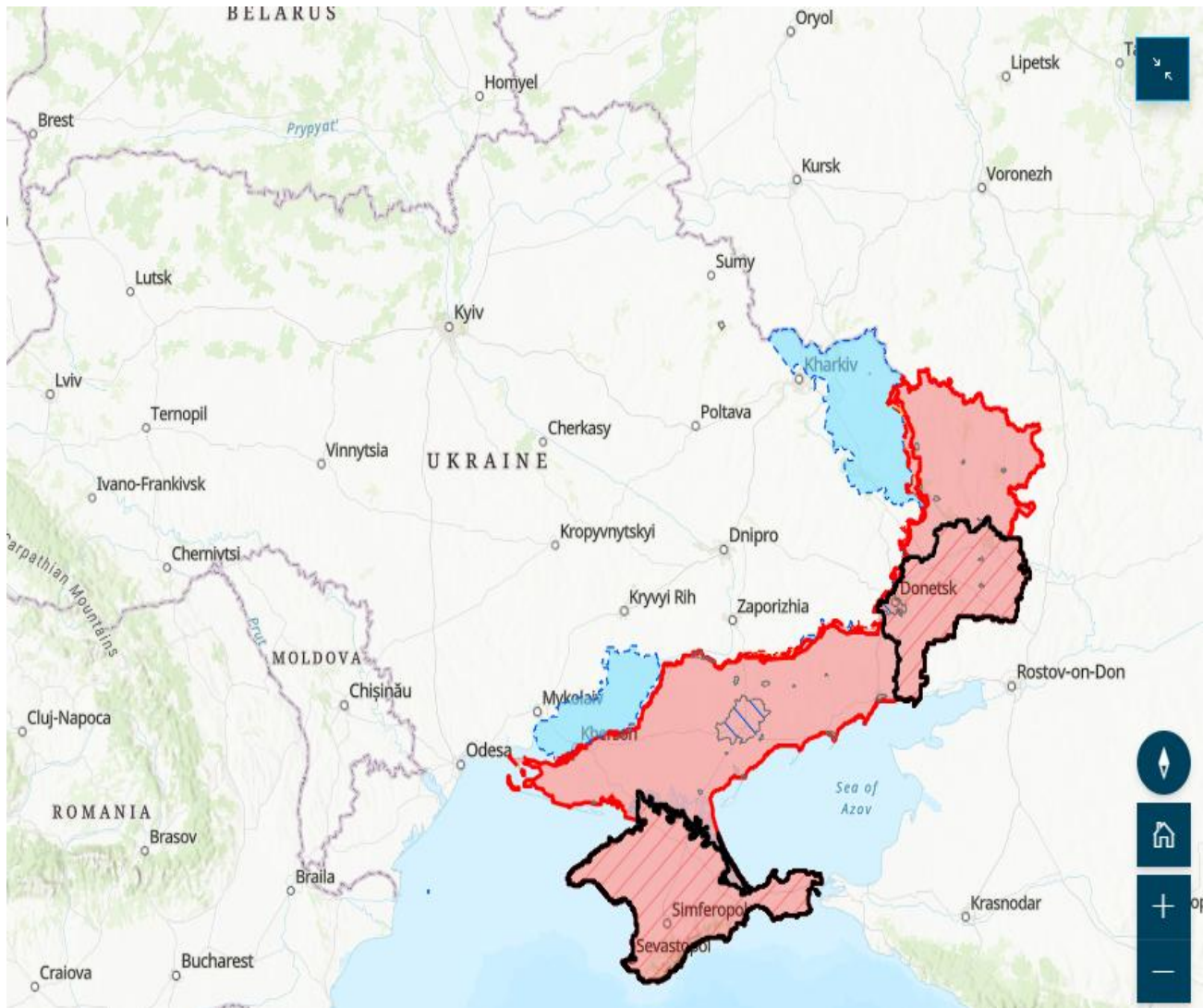
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Appendices 1

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine as of February 23, 2023



- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory

Source: Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

Appendices 2

Areas of Russian Military Control in Ukraine



Source: Institute of study of war