

The Imperial Ambitions of the Great Powers: Explaining the War in Ukraine from the Perspective of Global Justice

Christopher Ryan Maboloc

Abstract

The position of Russian President Vladimir Putin in starting the war in Ukraine proceeds from political realism or the imperial ambition of global powers. The propensity for conflict governs the global political order. President Putin thinks that the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is an existential threat as far as Russia is concerned. In the absence of a universal standard of justice in the world, Russia thinks that it was justifiable to invade Ukraine. NATO Secretary Jens Stoltenberg has argued that the right thing to do is to prevent Russia from imposing its will on a sovereign country. But while the West is trying to find a way to help Ukraine on moral and political grounds, it can be argued that the US and some of its Allies are a complicit to the absence of justice in the world. The reason is that the conflict in Ukraine also reveals the hypocrisy of the US when it comes to its own wars, for instance, in Iraq and Afghanistan. I argue from the perspective of global justice. I believe that the moral position is for President Putin to acknowledge his mistake but at the same time, the moral endgame should not appear as if the West has won this proxy war but for the world to finally realize the primacy of the respect for human rights and the dignity of peoples over all forms of hegemonic power.

Keywords: Sovereignty; War in Ukraine; Global Justice; Political Realism; Hegemony;

Introduction

According to John Mearsheimer (2001), the idea of global justice does not exist in international relations. The global political order is not governed by any standard of justice. Political realism in international relations means that way (Waltz 2010). The Great Powers dominate the whole world on the basis of their military might and technological superiority. The brutal reality is that there is an imbalance in political power, and as a result, millions have been displaced in major conflicts and thousands of lives have been sacrificed because of military actions and political positioning by dominant states, all because the Great Powers compete for hegemony. What is called a “special military operation” by the Russian Army is

Christopher Ryan Maboloc is Ateneo de Davao University Davao City affiliate

Corresponding Author :

Christopher Ryan Maboloc is Ateneo de Davao University Davao City affiliate, Philippines
Email : crbmaboloc@addu.edu.ph

actually an invasion that seeks the annihilation of a sovereign country that has destroyed major cities and displaced millions of people, causing a ripple effect across Europe and the rest of the world.

Russia's war in Ukraine, which President Vladimir Putin started on February 24, 2022, by calling it a special military operation, has now turned into some sort of a proxy war between Kremlin and the West. Today, discussions center on the delivery of superior armaments and weaponry, especially Leopard 2 tanks, to defend against more onslaught. Russia is said to be building a force of 300,000 newly conscripted Russian men, which means that the end of this conflict is nowhere in sight. Recently, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was in Britain and France, begging his allies to send fighter jets. During the early part of this war, President Putin has warned that any country that intervenes will face consequences. The statement is a veiled nuclear threat. US President Joseph Biden is aware of the possible eventuality of a nuclear Armageddon if no immediate solution is found to conclude the Ukrainian war.

In the months following the conflict, the West has limited its options to financial sanctions against Russia and providing military hardware and weapons to help Ukraine. President Putin, however, has remained unperturbed, while changing a few times his top generals who are commanding the Russian army in Ukraine. The main argument of the Russian leader is that this war is necessary to protect Russia. Nevertheless, his critics in the West mention that he is wrong to invade Ukraine on the basis of a perceived existential threat. President Putin has since declared that the goal of denazifying Ukraine has been achieved, with former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev saying that the war will find its climax by the end of 2023. Thus far, Putin's war has resulted to the annexation of four regions in Ukraine on September 30, 2022, although Russian forces do not have absolute control of Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia

As mentioned above, the current perspective in explaining the war in Ukraine is rooted in the concept of political realism that seeks to legitimize the aggressive nature of power and the primacy of pursuing a country's national interest. Such explains what it means to be under the threat of being attacked by a powerful state that no longer wants to listen to reason. For instance, it is understandable while Poland joined NATO, although it was not approached by the military alliance. Sweden and Finland are now in the same predicament, although Turkey's President Recep Erdogan has expressed reservations against Sweden. I argue from the position of global justice. The moral position when it comes to this war must be

articulated. Europe cannot afford to go lose its moral sense and plunge the continent into a nuclear holocaust. Wars are about the oppression of millions of innocent civilians who are caught in the crossfire. The history of humanity must be guided by fundamental moral principles that respect the dignity of peoples, more than the dangerous rhetoric based on the idea of mutual security. Political realism tends to undermine the powerful role public morals possess in helping maintain global peace.

Literature Review

This study examines the works of Mearsheimer (2001, 2016, 2018) and Waltz (2010) in understanding the position of political realism as a background for the conflict in Ukraine. The absence of a standard of justice in the world has been elaborated by Nagel (2005) and Beitz (1999). International politics and the global order have been explained extensively in the works of Rosenne (1984) and Bull (1995). To understand the present conflict in Ukraine, the present investigation considered the essays of Walt (2022a, 2022b), Simmons (2022), Kocho-Williams, et al. (2022) and Smolenski and Dutkiewicz (2022). While the unfolding of events in Ukraine have been fast, this study is founded in the initial stages of the war as it seeks to highlight the discourse on political realism as opposed to the perspective of global justice.

Results and Discussions

The War in Ukraine: What does Putin want?

It may be of interest if we begin with the assumption that the war could have been averted by means of diplomacy. The basic argument is that Russia is being portrayed as an aggressor but the explanation is that Western powers should have heeded Russia's call that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) must not expand into the Black Sea. For years, the United States and its allies had the window to deal with Russia's concerns. However, while the opportunity was there, commentators on international relations and ethicists opine that the United States has always preferred a military option and response to any potential conflict, as may be gleaned from the wars it has started in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan. The obvious reason is to simply show the world that it is the remaining superpower and for this reason, it has the muscle to unilaterally decide the fate of sovereign nations.

This unilateralism is most apparent in the war in Iraq. Arguing that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction (WMD), then President George W. Bush defied the United Nations Security Council and invaded Iraq. This unilateral decision to exact revenge on a sovereign country that the US thinks helped mastermind the 9/11 Terror Attacks at the time was purported to prevent Iraq from using WMDs, put an end to Saddam Hussein's support for terrorist organizations, and to "free the Iraqi people." As the events unfolded, it has been shown that Iraq had no WMDs. The US later admitted that it acted on wrong intelligence reports. And while it may have succeeded in deposing the Iraqi dictator, the US spent billions of dollars to install a democratic government that only faltered as the remnants of the Iraqi army splintered into terror cells that later gave rise to ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and Libya) and ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria).

The basic point is that the United States often engages in saber-rattling and interfere in the affairs of sovereign states. In the war in Ukraine, the US is again acting as global police that believes it possesses the moral ascendancy. The agenda of the US is simply to protect its interest and maintain its dominance in global affairs. But this issue needs to be clarified and refined in such a way that it does not cover up the reality of global hegemony. While the events in Ukraine are unfolding on a daily basis, with Russia making strategic moves such as the occupation of the nuclear facility in Zaporizhzhia, the world should not forget the failures of the US and its allies in Afghanistan. In this way, the US cannot wash its hands and act as the moral compass in the world. In truth, the aggression of Russia cannot be distinguished from the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, which have also devastated both countries.

The reality of power is a puzzle to many. Stephen Walt (2022a, March 8) explains that "the Great Powers act in terrible ways." The United States, Russia, and China, often find justifications for their roue behavior. The claim that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction was a lie used to justify the US Invasion of Iraq. The Chinese, meanwhile, refuses to recognize the Arbitral Tribunal in The Hague as it continues with its territorial incursion into the South China Sea. Russia has used all means, including propaganda, to annex Crimea. Putin is using the concept of national security to attack Ukraine. Putin's reasoning, however, is typical of how countries with military might behave. Adolf Hitler justified the territorial ambitions of Germany as a type of revenge for its humiliation after its defeat in the Great War that saw its society and economy spiral, only to be rebuilt by starting to rearm itself and violating the Treaty of Versailles in the process. By means of propaganda, the German people accepted the Nazi justification for Hitler's "lebensraum" or living space (Halborn 1969, 795).

Political realism teaches that, states will only behave and cooperate with other states if there is mutual benefit (Bull 1995). Walt (2022a, March 8) argues that when it comes to powerful states, “the idea that others must threaten them in the future makes them worry about their security and lead them to compete for power.” In the mind of Putin, NATO has been aggressively leaning toward compromising Russia's security and national interest. This may have started in a 2008 Conference in which the trans-Atlantic alliance appears to welcome expansion near Russia's border by considering Ukraine's possible inclusion into NATO (Kocho-Williams 2022, January 31). Putin used what he deems as an “existential threat” as a pretext to start his war against Ukraine. Walt (2022a, March 8) argues that “moral condemnation won't help.” The behavior of Great Powers is not founded on any moral precept. It is rooted on how they react, using their military strength or economic leverage, when a vital interest is threatened.

In rural Russia, most people blame the West for the war in Ukraine (Simmons 2022, March 17). Partly, this may be due to Russian propaganda. Russia appears to be challenging the dominance of the US in world affairs and Putin's bravado seems to show that he is willing and able to defy Western liberal democracy. The West has been reduced into its illusion of grandeur in terms of maintaining world peace. Walt (2022a, March 8) explains that in this case, it has become apparent that “international law is a weak barrier to global threat.” President Joseph Biden has since accused Putin of being a “war criminal” although it is apparent that the Russian leader won't be affected by any type of name-calling. The West's dalliances with the ideals of liberalism hangs in the balance. Surely, Putin is to be held accountable for everything that his army has done, from the destruction to the deaths of thousands and the exodus of millions, but it must be noted that this war, as a matter of consequence, has actually destroyed the paradigm of “making Europe a zone of peace” (Ibid).

Mearsheimer, the most influential International Relations theorist today, advances the idea of “offensive realism.” He argues that there is a security competition between states, which explains the situation in Eastern Europe, the South China Sea, and the Korean Peninsula. States are aggressive, just like the case of Russia, in order to maintain their position. The same is done by enhancing one's power and diminishing that of their enemies. As opposed to this, in his book *The Great Delusion*, Mearsheimer (2018) explains how Western liberalism wants to control the world by imposing democracy on certain states, promoting a global free market economy, and developing international relations. Mearsheimer argues, as what has happened in Iraq and recently, in Afghanistan, that this

strategy employed by the US fails because of the reality of nationalism (Ibid.). Ethnic groups adhere to their beliefs and tradition. The imposition of Western values, in this way, is seen as inimical to their way of life and seen as adversarial to their sense of identity.

While Putin, Walt (2022a, March 8) argues, “bears accountability for this war, liberals have produced the opposite results by dismissing Putin's protests.” In a talk at the University of Chicago, Mearsheimer (2016), explains that the Ukraine war was a result of fundamental and precipitating causes. The primary cause, he alleges, appears to be the expansionist paradigm of NATO. The events in Ukraine sometime in 2014, meanwhile, precipitated the resolve of Putin to invade the country (Ibid.). Mearsheimer thinks that the changing of the regime in Ukraine in 2014 caused Putin’s so called “war of choice.” The greater danger, of course, is that Putin is ready, willing, and able to escalate this conflict into a nuclear war should NATO intervene. Russia, being a nuclear state, possesses around 40% of the nuclear stockpile in the world. This means that NATO is helpless in acquiescing to the request of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky for a “NO FLY ZONE” since that would constitute the first act of entering into World War 3.

Walt notes, however, that Putin may have miscalculated the political resolve of Ukrainians, especially its young and charismatic president. Zelensky has vowed to stay the course and die with his soldiers to protect Ukraine. The West, in fact, bears the moral obligation to support him, but is also aware of the risks that a nuclear war can bring into the continent. Indeed, there is no justification for the Russian invasion. Walt (2022a, March 8) thinks that Putin also overcalculated the “West's hostility towards Russia.” What is certain right now is that the end to this war is not imminent. Putin is seeking no less than regime change to install his own puppet government in Ukraine and this is perhaps the reason why he said the negotiations between Russia and Ukraine have met a dead end. But his biggest mistake, so far, is thinking, that “this war will be swift and easy” (Ibid.). According to Walt, the biggest dilemma for the West is how to stop him, knowing that “the prospect of losing may force him to escalate the war effort” (Ibid.). The economic sanctions, meanwhile, do not seem to work in terms of deterring Putin, who has vowed defying Western sanctions. He has demanded that countries buying its oil and gas exports should pay in Russian ruble, warning that the sanctions can have severe consequences. Walt argues that “sanctions are ways of weaponizing interdependence, but they do not change the resolve of an aggressor” (Ibid.).

Part of what the Russian President wants is historical, part of it is about the desire of Russia to return to Superpower status. Putin, a former KGB spy and colonel, has the mindset

of the old Soviet Union and still considers the West as Russia's enemy. He believes that Russia and Ukraine are one. Putin, incidentally, is obsessed with the glory of the former Soviet Union

When the former Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, it signaled the end of the Cold War, and the weakening of the superpower status of Russia. The US won the Cold War with the reunification of Western and Eastern Germany. President Ronald Reagan's mighty words to the Russian leader Mikhail Gorbachev – “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall” – still reverberates to this day. One report says that then US President Barack Obama was quoted to have told Putin that Russia is just a regional power. That hurt Putin's ego.

Ukraine has a history of subservience. During Soviet leader Joseph Stalin's collectivization program in the 1930s, a million Ukrainians died from forced famine. In 2015, Ukraine gave up all of its nuclear arsenal to Russia in exchange for concessions under a corrupt president. Viktor Yanukovich was widely considered as a figurehead who was controlled by Russia. Yet, Putin does not recognize Zelensky and the legitimacy of the present Ukrainian government, though the West is correct in saying that this does not give him the right to invade the country. NATO is also sending mixed signals, suggesting that it won't be easy for Ukraine to join the alliance (Wong and Jakes 2022, January 13). Putin's strategy is to exploit the conflict within Eastern Ukraine, called the Donbas Region, which is now held by separatist rebels. At the early part of the war, Donetsk and Luhansk declared their independence from Ukraine. Russia is in fact deterring NATO member states from accepting Ukraine to be a part of the alliance. Although Putin seeks to divide nationalist sentiments in Ukraine, the invasion has instead strengthened it.

US Intelligence reports were right about the impending invasion. Soon after, major cities of Kharkiv and Mariupol and the port city of Odessa are destroyed by Russian bombardments (Singh, Ambrose and Chao-Fong 2022, March 18). Ukrainians, while emboldened, do not have enough military weapons to effectively counter the invasion and so it had to rely on arms sent by the US and its allies, who had to sneak in anti-tank weapons into Poland and from there, into Ukraine. The US is allotting another 800 million dollars, after an initial one-billion-dollar arms package, as announced by Pentagon (US Department of Defense 2022, April 13). The United States, Great Britain, Germany, Australia, and Japan have since imposed crippling sanctions on Russian banks and froze the assets of Russian oligarchs. The work on Nord 2 gas pipeline, which intends to supply natural gas from Russia

to Western Europe, had been indefinitely suspended by Germany (Marsh and Chambers 2022, February 22).

Some analysts, including Fareed Zakaria, believe that Russia has China to lean on while the sanctions are in place (Marie-Slaughter et al., 2022, March 21). This, in the process, will result to a shift in US foreign policy (Ibid.). According to Walt, others are saying that if Ukraine overcomes Putin, then it will be a new lease on the life of liberal democracy. But if Russia somewhat gains an advantage from this war, there are others who say that some parts of the world might fall into a totalitarian abyss (Walt 2022b, April 15). Walt argues, however, that the Ukraine war alters the unipolar world in which we live in (Ibid.). The United States will no longer be in total control of global affairs and this means the opportunity for Russia and China to rise into global dominance in the near future. The strategy of the West is to cut off Russia from the West. Russia is being alienated from the global financial market. In response, Russia has since forged an eternal friendship with China, which means that the sanctions, while so severe from the perspective of the West, will allow the Russian economy to survive in the short term.

International Anarchism and the Question of Sovereignty

Without outside help, the current Ukrainian government will find it difficult to stop Putin from inflicting more destruction. However, the United Nations (UN) will once again be rendered helpless since any resolution from the UN Security Council, Russia being a permanent member, will require a unanimous vote. Russia has been expelled from the United Nations Human Rights Council. The West has accused the Russian Army of war crimes, although it seems a farfetched idea to bring Putin into the International War Crimes Tribunal to try him for the alleged atrocities committed against Ukrainian civilians. It is improbable that the Russian state will deliver its leader before the international court to answer the accusations against him. NATO member states, however, remain non-committal to a military intervention to help defend the beleaguered country. Putin has put Europe on its toes.

While the burden to help the powerless is obvious, Thomas Nagel thinks justice in the world is impossible. According to Charles Beitz (1999), no world government exists to control the global state of affairs. To explain, Nagel (2005) says that the duty of justice is strictly a domestic one. Justice is that obligation restricted to one's fellow citizens. Justice is rooted in the principle that is meant to promote the interests of citizens. The reason for the existence of the state, in the words of Machiavelli, is the protection of its interests.

Consequently, states are never equal in terms of their status in the global political order. Citizenship, in this sense, is a matter of right. It is only conferred to people whose presence in the state is legally binding. While there appears to be an overwhelming sympathy for the Ukrainian people, the world can only help in a limited way. When it comes to the question of justice, states always fall short of expectation. In the end, Ukraine, like Afghanistan, will be abandoned by the powers that be.

International anarchism is founded in the basic principle that power, politics, and mutual benefit govern the global state of affairs. The existence of the state is attached to the concept of sovereignty. Thomas Hobbes, in his *Leviathan*, thought of sovereignty as the controlling power when it comes to the selfish interests of citizens. The commonality in terms of culture, tradition, and history means that citizens value their national identity. It defines for them how they are to cooperate with each other in terms of the distribution of rights and the assignment of duties and obligations. Hobbes (1961) wrote that it is based on its authority or power to sanction citizens. In short, it is about instilling fear. This ideal of state and society is limited to the domestic case and does not extend beyond borders. While the United States is acting like the global police, it is actually doing so in order to protect its own interests. For this reason, states that are ruined by war and conflict are left to their own.

In his book, *The Law of Peoples*, John Rawls (1999b, 37) writes that people are only equal as “parties to the agreements that bind them.” For Rawls, the authority of sovereignty is one that rightly belongs to the state. Sovereignty is not guided by any motive that is outside the sphere of one’s community. The role of sovereignty is limited to the protection of the interests of citizens. With this, Rawls only meant to say that such an arrangement is one that is exclusive to the basic structure. “Government,” Rawls (1999a, 205) writes in *A Theory of Justice*, “is assumed to aim at the common good, that is, at maintaining conditions and achieving objectives that are similarly to everyone’s advantage.” In this regard, Rawls adheres to the idea in the *Law of Peoples* that states possess the capacity to establish and protect their own basic structure. A state, however, does not exist in a vacuum. It must deal with other states in the conduct of its affairs. Rawls’s position, hence, is naïve to the reality of the times. According to Beitz (1999), mutual compliance cannot be expected when it comes to how countries are supposed to cooperate due to the absence of uniform rules and law.

Nagel (2005) says that both the protection of human rights and the provision of any basic human aid would be easier if regimes found to be responsible for the oppression or destitution of their own subjects are regarded as having forfeited their sovereign rights. The

problem with this position is that it hides the structural injustices in the world and in the case of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the unilateral capacity of powerful military states to dictate the destiny of other people. The same holds true for the US on its War on Terror when it enters the jurisdiction of other countries without asking permission, such as in the case of the operation against Al Qaeda founder Osama Bin Laden in Pakistan. The US actually thinks that it is the global sovereign that imprints its standard of justice around the world. While the standard of justice in a society does not apply to the world as a whole, this is not the case in the mind of the US. Russia can say that it is simply acting in the same way as the US.

It is apparent that what is happening to Ukraine in terms of the limited intervention of the West is something that is expected. Why? It is because the NATO has found the Russian nuclear deterrent as a limit-case. Putin seeks to eliminate the unity within Ukraine but he seems to have failed to do so. The Ukrainian people, by seeing Putin as a common enemy, is bestowing upon each other the obligation of justice. Poland and other states near the Ukrainian border have shown greater sympathy to the Ukrainian people displaced by this conflict. The member states of NATO already see that they have an obligation to protect the well-being of their neighbor. But this is only because Poland and others identify the concerns of Ukraine as somewhat relevant to their own defense against any possible Russian aggression in the future. It should be noted that the same sentiment was not apparent when it comes to refugees from Syria or Iraq. And yet, the conflict in Ukraine brings into light the basic question about humanity and the respect for human rights. It can be said that without any universal principle that is based on the minimum respect for the rights of people, it is morally untenable for the global community to stay helpless when in fact it can do more in order to create a just world.

Political Realism, Self-Determination, and Human Rights

There is nothing to be desired in war. War is hell (Smolenski and Dutkiewicz 2022, March 4). In the history of humankind, people celebrate victors but forget the vanquished. The history of the world is soaked in blood. But while this is so, the West often paints a romantic picture of global conflicts, parading the triumph of liberal democracies against its enemies, proud of the history of its people but oblivious to the millions of lives lost. The problem of the West, hence, is that it seeks to explain everything based on its hegemonic rules, imposing its brand on theorizing on a people that it actually understands the least. Nevertheless, the West love to portray itself as a hero while leaving innocent civilians in cold blood. The US cannot avoid its hypocrisy, as it has caused great destruction in countries such

as Iraq and Afghanistan. In essence, the explanation of the West goes like this, says Jan Smolenski and Jan Dutkiewicz (2022, March 4):

After the breakup of the Soviet Union, NATO promised Russia it would not expand. But in 1997 it nonetheless expanded. In 2007, ignoring Russian complaints, it opened the way for expansion into Georgia and Ukraine. Russia was forced to react, hence its invasion and occupation of Georgia that year. Later, when the U.S.-sponsored protests deposed Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich for abandoning the country's pro-Western course, Putin again reacted, this time invading and occupying Donbass and Crimea in 2014. And now he is trying to take over Ukraine to head off American influence in the region.

The Ukraine war is being portrayed by Western pundits as some form of a tactical game in which the right move will depend on big power players – in this case, NATO, US and Russia. But this fails to recognize the importance of Ukraine itself, which is apparently the victim in this proxy war between the West and Putin. The realist position often neglects the right to self-determination of smaller or less powerful states. More so, the approach tends to nullify the rights of ordinary people to live in peace and determine the meaning of their own lives. After the Cold War, it appears that the world has been divided into two empires, one, the US-led Western liberal democracies, and two, Russia and China. But this simplistic configuration of power undermines the dignity of nations and the universal rights of people in Eastern Europe, whose realities on the ground and history have been largely ignored in this conflict. Smolenski and Dutkiewicz explain that “by focusing almost exclusively on the wrongs of NATO, critics ignore the broader question of Eastern European states’ right to self-determination, including the right to join military alliances. Westsplainign ignores Eastern European history and the perspective of the Eastern Europeans, and it selectively omits facts on the ground about NATO expansion” (Ibid.).

The position of Smolenski and Dutkiewicz, however, much as they want to criticize the approach of Mearsheimer and others, is no different from the rhetoric of the West. They propose that Russia is to be blamed too and that Mearsheimer and others are incorrect in restraining NATO from its engagements in the region. Smolenski and Dutkiewicz mention that much of what has happened in Eastern Europe was a result of Soviet influence and action. Soviet Russia invaded Hungary and Czechoslovakia when both attempted to steer clear out of Moscow's influence (Ibid.). It should also be noted that Poland was not approached by NATO. Rather, as it seeks to secure its future by means of an independent foreign policy, Poland sought membership into NATO. This action is perfectly understandable when it comes to the real politics involving states. But war is not just about

states. Wars are about the oppression of people who are caught in the crossfire. There has to be a more fundamental principle to guide countries and their conduct when it comes to international relations, more than the dangerous rhetoric based on the idea of mutual security.

In this view, this paper proposes the stronger enforcement of the international human rights regime. Political realism tends to undermine the powerful role public morals possess in helping maintain global peace. While states do not adhere to any universal moral principle in the conduct of their affairs in the global arena, it can be argued that the international actors can do something to advance what is called customary law (Rosenne 1984). For instance, what Russia is doing is clearly wrong in the bar of public opinion. It is for this reason that Putin employs propaganda in order to condition the mind of Russians. The spin done to present the war as beneficial to state interests is meant to convince the public that the war is necessary. However, it is apparent that opinions against the same are crucial. Our intuitions tell us that bombarding civilian targets is unacceptable in the same way as subduing dissenting opinion is wrong. This implies, according to Beitz (1999), that the interests of people cannot be separated from the interests of the state. It is the state's primary obligation, for instance, to protect and defend the human rights of its citizens and consequently, to ensure the respect for the dignity of its people.

In what way is the respect for human dignity critical to the survival of states? Indeed, the Nuremberg Trials serve as the model in punishing crimes perpetrated by state actors. Without it, the various war crimes committed by the Nazi Regime might not have been prosecuted. The Holocaust is one of the greatest evils committed by any state. Hitler used the industrial machine and military complex of Germany to round up, transport, and gas millions of Jews in Europe. The International Criminal Court, in this sense, matters in the pursuit of a just global order. It is critical in paving the way for the universal respect for and the protection of human rights. If states are left to their own to unilaterally dictate the fate of humanity, this will make the use of force and not the enforcement of law as the supreme rule. It is the reality of the times that in supra-national relations, the law has no meaning if it does not have the capacity to punish or sanction erring states. To counter this position, it can be said that the force of law does not come from the power to punish or sanction but its legitimacy. A law is legitimate because persons, institutions and governments recognize the moral power of rules.

What is the meaning of this moral power? It is about the recognition of the purpose and intent of law, which is the protecting of the interest of people. State-centric approaches in IR

diminish the value of persons, reducing them into collaterals and meaningless subjects. When it comes to the realities of war, the world understands that it cannot allow millions to suffer and die of starvation. This is the role that is assumed by international organizations that bring food and aid inside a warzone. For instance, hundreds of thousands of children are under the threat of dying in Yemen from starvation due to the war in that country. Nevertheless, the latent bias against a people persists even in the midst of a great conflict. In this regard, the world must see and act to stop the devastation in Ukraine. In the 1994 Rwandan ethnic massacre, 800,000 Tutsis died because the world refused to act. Societies often possess very limited insights as to the evils of war. The suffering of other people is mostly unknown to the world. From a moral end, this is unacceptable in a civilized world. An international human rights regime, in this way, should be endorsed more strongly, one that is based on the respect for human dignity, equal worth and the equal rights of all men.

An international human rights regime is enforceable. The shifting of the gear when it comes to this does not depend on the military power of the state. It comes from the force of public morals. People recognize their moral obligations toward each other. States are aware of their international duties. A covenant that secures the rights and welfare of people must be respected by states. In this way, the purpose of enforcing the universal respect for human rights is rooted in humanity's pursuit of justice. While Mearsheimer (2018) is correct that peoples do have varying conceptions of the meaning of the good, this should not prevent societies and states from coming into agreement that human life and dignity must be respected by everyone. But there is a tendency for liberal states to enforce its will abroad by introducing rules that appear adversarial to ethnic tribes in other territories. While Mearsheimer calls for restraint on the part of US foreign policy when it comes to its position as the global police, the other side of the story is that it is not politically untenable for states to comply with universal norms respecting human rights. Russia must exercise self-restraint and put an end to its violent actions.

Conclusion

What is apparent in the sign of the times is the imperial ambitions of Russia. As a Great Power, Russia simply wants to maintain its sphere of influence and protect its position in the global hegemonic order. But it is not only Russia. The US has been aggressively pursuing its war of revenge against global terrorists and nothing seems to prevent it from dismantling the basic structures of other countries. The Arab Spring, which was supported by the US, has resulted to the expulsion of dictators in Egypt and Libya, but the same has not

created a more peaceful world. The US wants to showcase itself as the light of the world, but it cannot set a people free when its ways and means in the past and the present are nothing but the hypocritical stance of an oppressor who wants to feed a slice of bread to the oppressed while grabbing it by the neck. In this way, international anarchism does not make the actions of powerful states right. To say that such is the acceptable scheme in international relations is to accept the injustices done against powerless states.

It must be admitted that Russia's war in Ukraine can yield no more than a vicious cycle. The room for dialogue and diplomacy should be found. States naturally seek to gain from its military actions and Russia obviously wants an assurance from NATO that it won't expand further into the Russian border. Russia wants to control Ukraine to warn its enemies. It has annexed four of Ukraine's regions. Such action, which is rooted in a dangerous predator-prey situation between states, appears is at the heart of political realism. The consequences to human life are immeasurable. The irreparable and blatant violation of human dignity and human rights are apparent. However, the war in Ukraine should also remind us of the hypocrisy of the West. The military interventions of the United States and its allies have caused also destruction in such countries as Iraq and Afghanistan instead of establishing democracy in those states. However, Vladimir Putin should put this conflict to an end and must be held accountable for this war.

References

- Ball, T. 2022, April 15. "Russia's nuclear warning as NATO considers expansion." *The Times*. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/russias-nuclear-warning-as-nato-considers-expansion-p88621l63>. Accessed April 15, 2022.
- Beitz, C. 1999. *Political Theory and International Relations*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Bull, H. 1995. *The Anarchical Society. A Study of Order in World Politics*. Second Edition. New York, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Halborn, H. 1969. *A Modern History of Germany*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Hobbes, T. 1961. *The Leviathan*. In *Great Political Theories*. London: Harper.

- Kocho-Williams, A. 2022, January 31. "What's NATO and why does Ukraine want to join?" *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/whats-nato-and-why-does-ukraine-want-to-join-175821>. Accessed April 1, 2022.
- Marie-Slaughter, A; Mahhubani, K; Walt, S; Nakayama, T; O'Neil, S; Mohan, R. & Niblett, R. 2022, March 21. "US Grand Strategy after Ukraine." In *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/21/us-geopolitics-security-strategy-war-russia-ukraine-china-indo-pacific-europe/>. Accessed April 5, 2022.
- Marsh, S. and Chambers, M. 2022, February 22. "Germany freezes Nord stream 2 gas project as Ukraine crisis worsens." In *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/germanys-scholz-halts-nord-stream-2-certification-2022-02-22/>. Accessed April 1, 2022/
- Mearsheimer, J. 2001. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York, W.W. Norton.
- Mearsheimer, J. 2016. "Why is Ukraine the West's fault?" University of Chicago. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JrMiSQAGOS4>
- Mearsheimer, J. 2018. *The Great Delusion*. New Haven: Yales University Press.
- Nagel, T. 2005. "The Problem of Global Justice." In *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 33 (3): 113-147.
- Rawls, J. 1999a. *A Theory of Justice*, 2nd edition. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
- Rawls, J. 1999b. *The Law of Peoples*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Rosenne, S. 1984. *Practice and Methods of International Law*. London: Oceana Publications, Inc.
- Simmons, A. 2022, March 17. "In rural Russia, locals blame the West for the war in Ukraine, back Putin." *Wall Street Journal*. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/in-rural-russia-locals-blame-the-west-for-conflict-in-ukraine-back-putin-11647541758>. Accessed April 3, 2022.
- Singh, M, Ambrose, T. & Chao-Fong, L. 2022, March 18. "Russia and Ukraine war: what we know on day 23 of the invasion." *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/18/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-23-of-the-invasion>. Accessed April 3, 2022.
- Smolenski, J. & Dutkiewicz, J. 2022, March 4. "The American pundits who can't resist Westplaining Ukraine." *The New Republic*. <https://newrepublic.com/article/165603/carlson-russia-ukraine-imperialism-nato>. Accessed April 13, 2022.

- US Department of Defense. 2022, April 13. "800 million dollars in additional security assistance for Ukraine." <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/2999113/800-million-in-additional-security-assistance-for-ukraine/>. Accessed April 14, 2022.
- Walt, S. 2022a, March 8. "An International Relations Theory Guide to the War in Ukraine," in *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/08/an-international-relations-theory-guide-to-ukraines-war/>. Accessed April 5, 2022.
- Walt, S. 2022b, April 4. "The Ukraine War doesn't change everything." In *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/04/13/ukraine-war-realism-great-powers-unipolarity/>. Accessed April 15, 2022.
- Waltz, K. 2010. *Theory of International Politics*. Chicago: Waveland Press.
- Wong, E. and Jakes, L. 2022, January 13. "NATO won't let Ukraine join soon: Here's why." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/13/us/politics/nato-ukraine.html>. Accessed April 3, 2022.