



ANALYSIS OF THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Introduction

Russia posed a grave danger to the post-Soviet world order with the Russo-Ukrainian war. Whether this was a result of a typical security concern, or whether it had deeper reasons that has not surfaced much should be a topic of inquiry. Russian side, initially, justified the 'intervention' as saving compatriots abroad. Nevertheless, the west knows that even that being the case the war was extremely destabilizing of the established world order. The goal of this paper is to qualitatively analyze the war with three theories of IR, which are realism, liberalism, and constructivism. This paper answers the following question: What were the main factors contributing to the occurrence of the war between Ukraine and Russia in the framework of IR theories?

Realism

With this approach, the article mainly analyzes the topic from the security and power relations perspective. The first explanation of the conflict is that it was the result of western expansion, which distorted the balance between the east and west. The war was a natural response to NATO and EU expansion. Since it was obvious that Ukraine was a red line for Russia, the west should have avoided such an expansion that is clearly destabilizing the balance of power.

Therefore, if the 'enemy' is gaining an advantage without harming Russia directly that is still concerning and is actually a direct threat to the security of the state. For instance, the territory of Crimea had significant importance for Russia for centuries. It was a geostrategic

location that increased Russia's influence in the Black Sea region. The port of Sevastopol had been serving Russian interests for a long time, and Russia could not have risked losing it. Even though, Russia had a lease till 2042 on its naval base at the Crimean port of Sevastopol, in Realpolitik this was not a guarantee that one day Ukraine would not expel Russian Black Sea Fleet. As a result of Ukraine's democratization and westernization, this port could have fallen into the hands of NATO. In this view, Russia as a great power did what it had to do.

Furthermore, Ukraine joining NATO meant that Russia would share a threateningly long border with an institution that it deems to be concerning for its security. In the Realist view, states will act to secure or protect their interests. Ukraine had an important geopolitical location. For centuries, Russia tried to secure its neighbourhood and create a buffer zone against the west. Russia always had this feeling, since the Russian Empire, that the only way to protect the motherland is to create a security belt around the nation. During the Soviet era, it had successfully done so, but after the demise of the Union, the nation had lost its security belt. This was humiliating for them, and they had to reestablish that order as much as possible. This mentality brought the necessity to keep Ukraine on its side at all costs, and the cost was war.

Liberalism

The Liberalist view starts by analyzing the illegitimate domestic system of the state and then proceeds with how the inability of the west to integrate Russia into the new world order was the cause of the war. The liberal view suggests that an illegitimate domestic system, lack of communication, weak domestic or international institution are permissive of war. In this case, the belief is that Russia's domestic system is constituted in a way that benefits elites internally, and then these elites influence the way the foreign policy works. From a liberalist perspective, this idea describes the situation in Russia.

Furthermore, Ukraine joining NATO meant that democratic ideals would spread to other states that are important for Russia. Democratic processes and institutions would break the power of the ruling elites and curb their propensity for violence. Liberal minded thinkers like Thomas Paine, Jonathan Dymond, and Michael Howard add that war was the result of an illegitimate domestic system that aims to use war not for glory or survival but for feeding that corrupt system. In this case, President Putin has used war as a tool to guarantee its position as a leader of Russia that drives the country in the international arena to its 'rightful' place. One can say that war in 2008 with Georgia and 2015 intervention in Syria were also ways Putin tried to gain domestic support against its deteriorating popularity. The broader goal is "striving

to be a great power abroad while ensuring the continuation of the regime at home”. Thus, the story of ‘saving compatriots abroad’ was a reasonable justification for the war, and the legitimization of the war became easier domestically for that reason.

From a different angle, the theory also discusses western expansion as a subject of inquiry. Since the 2000s, NATO and the EU tried to expand through Eastern Europe, which was once a Soviet sphere of influence. A natural response to this was Russian discontent. In the liberal view, states have to unilaterally or multilaterally restrain themselves from excessive expansion. The Liberalist view partly blames the west for being oblivious to a once-a-major power Russia after 1992. The lack of communication, ignoring Russia’s place in the European continent, inability to make Russia a part of the international community are the main arguments that this theory brings. For instance, it is well known that Russia was not so happy with the instalments of the missile defence system in its neighbourhood; it was also not so content with the expansion of western institutions to that area. The west knew this, as the liberal perspective suggests, however they ignored that and proceeded with what was the opposite of Russia’s demands. The war in Ukraine, therefore, could be explained by the west’s inability to grasp the measures Russia would take if they proceeded with violating Russia’s demands. If the west tried rapprochement with Russia then it could have resulted in a convergence of the values of both sides, thus increasing the understanding between Russia and the west.

The economic collapse of Russia after 1992, drifted the country away from Europe. Liberal theory suggests that if the west tried to cooperate with Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union; if they tried broadening Russia’s interests and universalizing it with those of the west, then today there would be more understanding and cooperation between these regions, and Russia would have felt less threatened by NATO expansion.

Constructivism

The theory of constructivism concentrates on ideas, norms, identities, beliefs, and history. It encompasses the domestic system and then explains how that affects foreign policy, i.e. how actions are determined endogenously. The theory has some similarities with the liberalist perspective, in that, it tries to see the problem by first explaining how the domestic system of Russia influences its foreign policy. Mainly, why that domestic system is legitimate among Russian people and how that system created the current authoritarian and aggressive nature of Russian politics is a topic that constructivism discusses. The theory believes that the identity of Russia creates its interests. In this case, the identity of Russia is perceived to be

nationalist and militarist. Therefore, whenever Russia conducts such a war, it is believed to be a result of its nature.

Constructivism, then, proceeds with using some concepts from historical sociology to explain the issue. For instance, this article earlier mentioned that, the territory of Ukraine and mainly Crimea was a part of Russia for a long time, and that it had significant importance for them. After they had lost it in 1992, Russia felt insecure and humiliated. A once-a-major power Russia felt that it had the right to take back what was historically its. The similarities between disputed territories and Russia add more to the pro-Russian narrative. Therefore, the public opinion, shaped by historical processes, is partly permissive of such actions that endorse the aggressive politics of Russia.

In addition, certain historical events add to the point of constructivism. One important factor that increases the significance of this theory is the constant forced Russification and settlements that was implemented by the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. These factors have caused significant changes in the demographics of these territories and their identity. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, these factors had still been influencing the perceptions of Ukraine and Russia. Consequently, the historical processes mentioned above encouraged Russia to take such an action.

One interesting argument by constructivists is that, since the 1990s, Russia has constantly questioned the sovereignty of Ukraine. For instance, in 2003 during the Tuzla conflict, Ukraine had a pro-Russian president and government. NATO enlargement was not a central topic, however, the tensions between Russia and Ukraine still were present. The same thing happened in 1994 with regards to Crimea. These examples demonstrate that Russia did not simply respond to NATO expansion, as realists and liberalists claim, but that, since the demise of the Soviet Union, it already felt that these territories were rightfully theirs.

In the end, constructivism argues that since the Russian Empire, this nation was a great power, it had a security belt around it, and it always aspired to expand its territory in the name of either pan-Slavism, communism, or recently Eurasianism. The history, the people and the elites, and their identities were the determinants of Russia's actions. And this identity is characterized as being nationalist, militarist, adventurist and expansionist.

Conclusion

As a final observation, all three theories present different perspectives with certain similarities. Each has its valuable view that contributes to the understanding of the complexity of this issue. The research paper has analyzed the war from power relations, east-west

communication, domestic system and lastly from a historical perspective. Within the framework of realist theory, the paper concludes that the war occurred as a result of excessive expansion by western institutions. Specifically, NATO was perceived by Russia to be a threat to its sovereignty, territorial integrity and to its influence over a post-Soviet country, which it deems to be a vital interest. A great power has to protect its vital interests at any cost, and that is what Russia did. Liberalist perspective adds that the war was a consequence of the west disregarding Russia as an important player and that the lack of communication between east and west is crucial to understanding the given war. Moreover, they mention the illegitimate domestic order that currently exists in Russia is permissive of war. The constructivist theory goes to analyze the issue from a historical perspective. It claims that the ability of Russian elites to utilize domestic authority maximally, which is permissive of aggressive politics, inclined Russia to act as such. It also adds that norms, ideas, beliefs, the identity of Russia have contributed to the occurrence of this event. Constructivists also deny the idea that the conflict was mainly a result of western expansion. They claim that Russia already questioned Ukrainian sovereignty even before the 2000s when the country had a pro-Russian president and government.

After devising the perspectives these theories provide, the paper concludes that two main factors contributed to the occurrence of this war. These factors are western expansion and the domestic system of Russia. Realism and liberalism state that the western expansion threatened Russia, however, their rationale is different. Realism believes it was a wrong move in all aspects since it crossed the vital interest of Russia, but liberalism believes that it was not intrinsically a wrong move but a misconducted process that excluded Russia's concerns. The second factor is found in liberalist and constructivist theories. They claim that the domestic system was permissive of such a war. Liberalist viewpoint is that an illegitimately constituted system pushes elites to act aggressively and be more belligerent, while constructivism sees the war from a historical sociological perspective, claiming that the historical identity of Russia contributed the most to the war. In short, the nationalist spirit of the Russian people made it easier for Russia to initiate such a war.

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