

MIGHT VS. WILL: A REALIST ASSESSMENT OF THE RUSSO-UKRAINIAN CONFLICT AND ITS PROBABLE OUTCOME

MADISON FARHOOD

ABSTRACT

As the Russo-Ukrainian war has continued to unfold as a weaving and complex conflict over the past year, this paper takes an often overlooked approach by using the core assumptions of realism to describe the power balance that has emerged between the two combatant forces over this time period. While this paradigm has been critiqued for being inconsistent with the modern realities of global politics, this paper demonstrates that realism can still be relevant in analyzing international war and conflict. The theoretical analysis begins with a brief overview of classical realism, so as to explain the innate desires nations have in maintaining and increasing their power and influence, and then moves to compare these motivations. By analyzing the use of different power sources by Russia and Ukraine, based on realist assumptions of apparent power versus effective power, this paper claims that while Russia holds stronger apparent military power than Ukraine, Ukraine has more effective military power, thus creating a continuous warfare environment. The article concludes by attempting to provide a 'realist' solution grounded in a reasonable negotiation process respecting the rational interests of all participants. Ultimately, this theoretical perspective attempts to demonstrate the continuing influence that 'power' plays in international relations today, as seen through the case study of the Russo-Ukrainian war.

Keywords: realism, effective power, military power, balance of power, international relations, Russo-Ukrainian war, resolution.

INTRODUCTION

Millions of citizens displaced, hundreds of thousands of soldiers dead, and an aspiring country in ruins, is the result of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine with only relatively small advances being made by the aggressor (Hayden et al., 2022). This paper takes a realist perspective arguing that in the Russo-Ukrainian war, power plays a large role in understanding reasoning, motivations, and the current context of the war. We find that when we compare the 'apparent' military power of both Russia and Ukraine to the 'effective' power they each possess, the two states currently balance each other, creating a somewhat equal playing field between them. Therefore, through the frame and core assumptions of realism, this paper claims that while Russia holds stronger apparent military power than Ukraine, Ukraine has more effective military power, potentially resulting in a never-ending warfare environment. The findings of this analysis explain why there is confusion in the media and general public about Russia's inability to effortlessly sweep through Ukraine, like many commentators initially believed would happen in the beginning stages of this conflict. This prolonged clash of arms between equally balanced powers has resulted in continuing violence and uncertainty as to how the war will conclude.

The paper begins by discussing the core assumptions of Morgenthau's classical realism to set up the theoretical frame of its analysis of the Russo-Ukrainian war. By creating a base-line understanding of realism, this paper is able to deconstruct the multifaceted reasoning behind Russian President Vladimir Putin's desire to invade Ukraine, grounded in his determination to preserve Russia's international standing as a Great Power and to protect its security in Eastern Europe.

By understanding the importance that power plays in the war, this paper then moves to a comparative critique that analyzes the two belligerents' deployment of 'apparent' military power versus 'effective' power. This comparison demonstrates that there are clear disparities in nations' respective capacities to demonstrate and use power. This leads to the conclusion that the two adversaries find themselves in a power stalemate calling for a solution acceptable to both sides to end the conflict. A realist approach of a cessation of hostilities would be based on good-faith negotiations between both nations, resulting in a fair and sustainable peace agreement. It is important to note that this short paper is time sensitive and is documenting the events of an ongoing conflict; therefore after publication, information may no longer reflect new realities on the ground.

WHAT IS REALISM? POWER FOR ALL

Although realism as a paradigm of International Relations (IR) is widely critiqued today, its arguments for states' innate desire for power can have weight in interpreting the Russo-Ukrainian war. Many scholars have critiqued realism for being too narrow (Boyd, 1983). Rosenberg expands on this statement in saying that realism is too limited in multiple ways, mainly in its conception of an anarchic international political order being rooted in the global exploitation of power dynamics by strong states at the expense of weak ones. He believes this conception ignores the many other factors that could contribute to fabricating an anarchical society, such as racial or religious contentions, making the argument limited (Rosenberg, 1990: 299-300). Scholars further believe that realism is limited in other ways such as the paradigm's universal belief that all state interactions are perennially grounded in the same national security motivations. This conception disregards other plausible factors, considerations, and circumstances that could influence states to act in ways of power, such as the various modern globalization processes which were not present during the fabrication of the realist paradigm (Rosenberg, 1990: 297).

Overall, while realism is critiqued as being too shortsighted and unidimensional to explain the complex dynamics of modernity, the next area of this article tackles to show how its core assumptions are still relevant.

Realism emerged as the dominant paradigm of IR after the Second World War in an attempt for scholars to comprehend the motives behind another global conflict and foster a cure to prevent future world conflagrations (Dunne & Schmidt, 2020: 131). A multitude of scholars emerged in the field of IR arguing that idealism, being the prior paradigm enframing the study of war and conflict in the inter-war period from 1919 to 1939, was underestimating "the role of power while also overestimating the degree to which nation-states shared a set of common interests" (Dunne & Schmidt, 2020: 131). Scholars of the time built on the theories of Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* and Jean-Jacque Rousseau's *State of War* to develop the paradigm of realism, focusing on states' constant objective to maintain and gain global power (Rosch, 2013: 7). While there are many types of realism, this paper will focus on Hans Morgenthau's classical realism as a lens to deconstruct the current Russo-Ukrainian war.

Dunne and Schmidt summarize Morgenthau's classical realism approach as anchored by the central belief that "international politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power," which Morgenthau justifies through an explanation of human nature (Dunne & Schmidt, 2020: 136). Morgenthau believes that human interests are consistently driven by the pursuit of power and "opportunities to increase their own power" (Ibid.). Dunne and Schmidt compile Morgenthau's conception of the struggle for power among states into three basic patterns: to keep power, to increase power, and to demonstrate power. Ultimately, through these three basic patterns, Morgenthau attempted to create a universal explanation for why states participate in wars and seek control.

Perhaps the best definition of classical realism has been provided recently by Jonathan Kirshner

(2022) in *An Unwritten Future: Realism and Uncertainty in World Politics*, where he states that:

"Classical Realism is defined by its attentiveness to the inexorable dangers implied by anarchy (latent or present), a need to respect the realities of power (the capabilities of others, the inevitable limits of one's own), and an anticipation that world politics is characterised by conflicts of interest (with the resolution of one disputation soon followed by another), all in the context of irretrievable uncertainty" (Kirshner, 2022: 18).

Classical realists proceed to argue that global peace is maintained by an international balance of state powers, whereas nations balance each other to prevent complete global domination by one of their peers (Dunne & Schimdt, 2020: 137). Ultimately, to realists, power determines outcomes in moments of global contention, such as the current Russo-Ukrainian war (Smith & Dawson, 2022: 131). While it could be argued that realism has been irrelevant in this war as it has been unable to accurately predict any specific 'outcomes' thus far, this paper attempts to disprove such statements and highlights realism's ongoing relevance to the war by comparing and contrasting the two adversaries' different types of power. Before engaging in this comparison, this paper will show how classical realism can provide a baseline explanation of the rationale behind Vladimir Putin's motivation to invade Ukraine. President Putin's desire to invade Ukraine sparked from two motivations rooted in power considerations: namely, to enhance Russia's world status as a Great Power to be feared by enemies and respected by allies, while also to ensure his country's national security by protecting it from the threat posed by an expanding Western alliance of states structured around what he considers to be the Cold War relic of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Realism in Practice: Explaining the Russian Reasoning for War

Classical realism as a paradigm of international relations can provide a basic understanding of Russia's decision to invade Ukraine. Prior to the war, contemporary discussions revolved around the

gradual decay of Russia's international power, ongoing since the fall of its previous incarnation of the USSR in 1991 (Boyd, 2022). Russia is slowly losing its global Great Power status to other dominant and rising nations, namely the United States of America (U.S.) and China (Heim & Miller, 2020: 1-3). Recent sources have described Russia as a "nation in decline" (Nye, 2019: 1). While this decline has been due to a multitude of factors like falling education standards and quality of life, Nye concludes that this comes down to the economic decline Russia has faced from resisting transnational processes of globalization and open international market forces. In contrast to Russia's failing economy, nations like the U.S. and China have flourished by promoting the emergence of highly effective open market forces, which have enormously increased their status as superpowers and their ability to use this power to their advantage to reap economic benefits and further create international alliances (Nye, 2019: 1). It could be argued that Russia's loss of international status has consequently resulted in a decline of its global power. Realism, as demonstrated above, describes this ongoing shift in the distribution of global power as highly concerning to Russia, and therefore rationalizes Russia's decision to take military action to maintain its relative power by reasserting its status as a regional hegemon in Eastern Europe (Kirshner, 2022: 16). Therefore, reasserting control over countries like Ukraine allows Russia to demonstrate its enduring international strength and protect its status as both a historical and present-day dominant nation. This paper will show that President Putin's targeting of Ukraine was thus not a random event but rather a rational, calculated, strategic move on his part.

Ukraine, in recent years, has begun aligning itself more with Western nations which has outwardly been of high concern to Russia (Boyd, 2022). This concern is due to the recent expansion of Western alliances and their promotion of a democratic ideology toward eastern European countries, which poses a threat to Russia and its totalitarian regime (Kasparov & Khodorkovsky, 2023). Since the fall of

the Soviet Union, Russia views itself in stark opposition to the West, thus creating ongoing tension between itself and the U.S. who is viewed as one of the engines promoting the transnational global democratization processes that Putin has often stated to fear (Kasparov & Khodorkovsky, 2023). Due to the existential threat the U.S. poses to the Russian regime, Russia has also felt directly challenged by NATO, a military alliance of which the U.S. exerts an exceptionally large influence over (Boyd, 2022). NATO is a Trans-Atlantic alliance of states whose main objective is to deter Russia's attempts to expand territorially in countries that before 1991 were part of the USSR or members of the Warsaw Pact— a region Russia tellingly designates as its 'near-abroad' (Schnauffer, 2021).

Prior to the start of the recent war, Ukraine was attempting to join NATO and President Putin was alarmed by the eastward movement of the alliance; in particular, he remains concerned with having westward aligned states surrounding Russia for the reasons above (Boyd, 2022). This brief realist analysis depicts Ukraine as the perfect target for two reasons: it allows Russia to conquer land with an aim to regain and maintain its identity as a global power, and second, conquering Ukraine for security reasons allows Russia to protect itself from being encircled by NATO nations who threaten Putin's totalitarian vision of government. Realist John Mearsheimer argues for a similar explanation of the war, namely that the eastward expansion of NATO provoked Russia's sense of insecurity and prompted it to lash out to demonstrate its military power and enhance its strategic security (Edinger, 2022: 1875). This theoretical explanation shows that deep down, Putin's motivations fall under a realist explanation of power for these two reasons. However, analysts challenge the relevance of realism by arguing that power has been so far unable to determine the outcome of the current military conflict (O'Brien, 2022).

What is Wrong: Who Defines Power?

Morgenthau's conception that power determines outcomes remains relevant to the current study and

understanding of international conflicts in IR. Kirshner (2022: 51) recently posited, in support of this assertion, that "[f]or classical realists, then, international politics is less of an active, present struggle for survival... and more about the clash of interests, with outcomes determined by power". However, this approach is not without its own limitations, since it centers its theory around the critical concept of 'power' but never accurately defines the term or how it is measured (Dunne et al., 2020). Rather, classical realists leave their central term of power more or less open for interpretation. This leads individuals to easily associate the complex concept of 'power' with the common conception of apparent power being objective measurable military force of physical resources like the number of guns, soldiers, and tanks that a nation holds (Rosen, 1995). Open interpretation of the term power by realists is why many analysts suggest that Russia has more 'power' than Ukraine, as Russia does have more objectively measurable physical military hardware and manpower in comparison; however, this neglects other forms of power that also play a large role in predicting conflict outcomes (Kirby, 2022). This general assumption – that physical military power equals absolute power – overlooks the importance of 'effective power'. Rosen explains effective power as a set of assets expanding beyond physical force which includes quality of leadership, legitimacy of the cause, morale of the troops, loyalty of the country's population, and allies' support (Rosen, 1995). Classical realism alludes to the importance of both physical apparent power and tactical effective power, however, this is not always clearly articulated by realist analysts.

The remainder of this paper will compare Russia and Ukraine's apparent and effective power levels from a realist perspective. Its findings demonstrate that the two actors involved have equal absolute power, but differential distribution patterns, thus creating a virtual unstable stalemate in the ongoing conflict. The common understanding of apparent military power alone has been unable to determine the outcome of the war because it excludes additional

forms of power which have been vital to Ukraine in resisting Russia's aggression. This paper asserts that the concept of power can still provide explanations of the conduct of current conflicts, and foresees that the most likely outcome of the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war is a sustainable and long-term power rebalancing process between the various actors involved.

CONTRASTING UKRAINE AND RUSSIA'S APPARENT AND EFFECTIVE POWERS - WHO WINS?

Advantage Russia: Apparent Military Power Base

Russia is one of the world's leading nations in terms of military assets. It is ranked second in the world out of 142 nations on the GFP scale on its active military manpower (2023 Military Strength Rating, 2023). Russia's intense focus on military force, defined in terms of hardware and manpower, is demonstrated by its President, Vladimir Putin's nationalist ideology and devotion to authoritarian leadership practices. IR scholars recognize how a leader's ideology that is focused on maximizing its country's power can influence the conduct of international relations. Kirshner (2022: 18) states that although "Classical Realism models its actors as rational... the range of choices they might make... [are] shaped... by varying, implicit theoretical models of how the world works and informed by distinct historical experiences" -and therefore, are impossible to predict". Pisciotta (2020: 87) applies this theoretical approach to present-day Russia and concretely describes Putin's warfare mentality as "a vision of the 'new world' that is one of constant escalation aimed at altering the status quo. He has refused to play by Western rules and does not fear political isolation". This aggression is then reflected in his foreign policy embedded in the history of the Cold War and of the Soviet Union (Kumar, 2016: 211). Carleton, a Professor of Russian Studies, notes that Russia has historically been a militarized country, putting emphasis on security and force measures as illustrated by the conquest of the city of Kazan, on the Volga river, from the Tatars by Russia's first Tsar, Ivan the Terrible, in the 16th century, which

"set imperial expansion" patterns for successive Russian rulers (McNeil, 2022). He further notes that when we look at Russia's warfare history, the nation has often taken the approach of "defensive expansion" like in Kazan's early case, and is rarely seen playing the offence position (McNeil, 2022). Carleton considers this to be a historic legacy that Putin continues to carry today, with his perception of a belligerent and domineering U.S. that attempts to threaten his world vision with the expansion of NATO and the promotion of democracy at Russia's expense. Putin's ideology and Russia's historical context of warfare create fertile grounds for this nation's security strategy to be built upon high levels of apparent military power.

Putin, throughout his time as Russian ruler and to this day, continues to hold statist views supporting strong authoritarianism which sets the tone for Russia's current conceptualization of military power. Analysts and common IR practice suggest how state "defense spending is one of the most commonly used measures for gauging a country's potential military power" (Kofman & Connolly, 2019). In 2021, Russia's military expenditure was 4.1% as a percentage of GDP, whereas Ukraine's was 3.2% (Stockholm International Research Institute, 2023). Russia spent an estimated U.S. \$61.7 billion on defense in 2020, an amount that has slowly been rising (Gatehouse & Leung, 2022). This includes funds for advanced research in the development of hypersonic weapons and air defenses, followed by maintaining a stockpile of nuclear weapons. Research has suggested Russia to have more nuclear warfare materials than all NATO nations combined. BBC News reports how experts "estimate around 1,500 Russian warheads are currently 'deployed', meaning sited at missile and bomber bases or on submarines at sea" (The Visual Journalism Team, 2022). Further, Russia has almost one million active soldiers in Ukraine out of a total reserve of a possible two million troops (Gatehouse & Leung, 2022). These statistics overall encapsulate the scale of Russia's military strength and commitment to apparent power. This statistical

analysis justifies why most analysts believed Russia would effortlessly sweep through Ukraine when it originally invaded it (McNeil, 2022). Although Russia maintains high military strength in terms of hardware and manpower resources, journalist Philips O'Brien accurately notes that, "having good equipment and good doctrine reveals little about how an army will perform in a war" (O'Brien, 2022).

While Russia has a high degree of apparent power, it falls short in terms of effective power, which consists of assets beyond physical resources such as allies' support, quality of leadership, legitimacy of the cause, morale of the troops, and support of the country's population (Rosen, 1995). Russia faces strong global opposition to its invasion as U.S. President Joe Biden has declared to strongly support Ukraine. The Biden-Harris Administration continuously "reaffirms the United States' unwavering support for Ukraine" (Gatehouse & Leung, 2022). Ukrainian President Zelensky has also made an international trip to Washington D.C. during which he tweeted, "On my way to the US to strengthen the resilience and defence capabilities of Ukraine" (Bachega & Tobias, 2022). During this visit, Zelensky was invited by Biden to deliver a speech to the Joint Houses of Congress. Through this speech, Zelensky was able to actively communicate the environment and stakes of the war at hand. He insisted that "[t]his battle is not only for the territory...The battle is not only for life. This struggle will define in what world our children and grandchildren will live," in which he encompasses the fight against totalitarianism and right versus wrong (Segel, 2022). This resulting outpouring of American emotional support alone demonstrates that the largest world power will continue to actively oppose President Putin's aggressive strategy in Europe, as the US historically has always done, resulting in dire consequences for Russia's invasion plans of Ukraine. America's opposition to Putin's attempted takeover of Ukraine is in large measure grounded in the illegitimacy of Russia's cause for taking such action. Putin declared that Russia had "no other choice" than to invade Ukraine as there were "neo-Nazi

grass-roots in the region" that were threatening Russian-speaking Ukrainians (Yellen, 2022). This was a claim found not to be grounded in truth by the Biden-Harris administration, thus having Russia act against both international law principles and the United Nations (UN) Charter, which angered many other nations that abide by these rules (Kirby, 2022). The Kremlin's illegitimate claims for unleashing this war have thus led to poor leadership by Russian military and political officials and lack of support from Russian civilians for this military operation.

Russia's illegitimate justifications for invading Ukraine and poor planning for this military operation's execution have led analysts to also critique Putin for his weak leadership. Kirby describes how the Russian President's ambition to be recognized as a great world leader made him believe he was above the law and beyond failure (Kirby, 2022). He went against international law, and with little planning, believed the sheer size of his military force would easily overturn Ukraine and force it to surrender without putting up much of a fight (Kirby, 2022). Due to high confidence, Putin miscalculated his aggressive takeover attempt and Russian troops were unable to conquer the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv. Kyiv was viewed as the ultimate objective in the war as its capture would topple the Ukrainian government, determining the outcome of the invasion. Due to Putin's poor military leadership and planning, Russian soldiers withdrew from the area north of Kyiv after six weeks of combat (Kirby, 2022). This personal failure can be attributed to a change in Putin's leadership style including multiple factors like age, character, experience, change in beliefs, as well as increasing isolation at the top and unwillingness to listen to opposing points of view (Kaarbo, 2022). Analysts studying the Russian President conclude that these factors can explain his recent blatant "intoxication by power" (Kaarbo, 2022). They note that these changes can have a potential effect on his leadership style becoming self-centered, but these are only hypotheses to support the change in Putin's demeanor observed during this ongoing war (Kaarbo, 2022).

Finally, studies have been collected demonstrating questionable support by Russian citizens for the current military operation, illustrated by the fact that only “one in four Russians support the war” (Lindstaedt, 2022). Researchers find that Russian support for the invasion is not homogenous and somewhat mixed. They further note how this violence has caused contested disputes in the Russian Federation, which from an effective power standpoint, negatively affect Russia’s ability to successfully conduct military operations (Volkov & Kolesnikov, 2022). Ultimately, President Putin has demonstrated a poor quality of leadership, has an illegitimate cause for invasion, few minor allies in support but rather coalitions of powerful states in opposition, and questionable loyalty from his own citizens. This analysis, therefore, determines that Russia has high apparent military power but low effective military power. This is highly different from Ukraine’s situation, which is detailed in the next section.

Ukraine’s Sources of Power: Effective Power

Ukraine’s apparent military power is severely underwhelming in comparison to Russia. While Russia allotted nearly 62 billion USD on defense spending in 2020, Ukraine spent only a mere 5.9 billion USD (Gatehouse & Leung, 2022). This is only a tenth of Russia’s defense budget and is therefore reflective of how limited Ukraine’s overall military is in comparison. Ukraine trails Russia in military hardware and manpower in every capacity, be it through its number of war planes, tanks and armored vehicles, as well as soldiers (Gatehouse & Leung, 2022). Ukraine’s overall lack of military force leaves little doubt in how they place against Russia in terms of apparent military resources; however, Ukraine’s effective power resources are more substantial than Russia’s.

While Russia has might, Ukraine has will. Prior to the invasion of Russia, Ukraine was slowly aligning itself more with the West and was aiming to join NATO. This worked in President Zelensky’s favor as it helped Ukraine gain the assistance of its most vital ally: the United States. U.S. President Joe Biden came

forward at the beginning of the war to show undivided attention to Ukraine; in September of 2022, he reaffirmed this support by stating that “we will stand in solidarity against Russia’s aggression, period” (Shivaram, 2022). Biden’s solidarity comes out of disagreement with Putin’s decision to both disregard the Rules-Based Liberal International Order (RBLIO) and ignore the United Nations Charter (Shivaram, 2022). President Biden and a majority of the US population at large believe in supporting Ukraine to severely sanction Russia’s aggressive actions and to demonstrate the need to maintain international peace and order (Shivaram, 2022). The United States’ demonstration of solidarity with and support for Ukraine includes both economic and security assistance. The United States has been a leading partner for Ukraine, committing humanitarian, financial, and security assistance. Overall, the Biden-Harris Administration has allocated by the end of 2022 a total of 105.7 billion dollars to the nation of Ukraine (Cancian, 2022). Further, the US - the nation with the world’s largest military expenditure - has also decided to supply Ukraine with a Patriot missile system that will help Ukraine “increase its air defence capability” which was originally inferior to the higher technological level of Russia’s offensive military equipment (Bachega & Tobias, 2022), as well as with 31 M1 Abrams Tanks -The US Army’s premier main battle tank (Seligman, 2023).

Analysts have argued that US military aid has completely “changed battlefield dynamics” (Martinez, 2022). Sources note how America’s military assistance has allowed the Ukrainian military forces to “reclaim 54% of the land Russia has captured since the beginning of the war” (Reinhard, 2022). Thanks to such assistance, Ukrainian troops were able to push northward from Kharkiv and force Russian troops to hastily retreat (Martinez, 2022). The United States is only one of many nations supporting Ukraine, but is by far the most important one financially. Others include NATO nations who also stand firmly against Russia’s invasion. This undivided support has included the majority of these

nations providing Ukraine with extensive military resources, such as Germany “sending units of its Iris-T air infrared-guided air defence system” and agreeing to send, together with other European allies, German-manufactured Leopard 2 tanks to the Ukrainian battlefield (Popli, 2022). Further, since the invasion of Russian forces, Sweden and Finland have applied to join NATO to aid Ukraine, thus demonstrating the expansion of global support for Kyiv (Chaterjee, 2022). Also, the European Union as whole has imposed multiple sanctions against the Russian Federation to demonstrate solidarity for Ukraine while attempting to impede Russia’s unacceptable military aggression (Popli, 2022).

Although allied support is vital to Ukraine’s effective power, its success in this conflict is also due to a large extent to the organizational skills and outstanding moral leadership of its President, Volodymyr Zelensky. President Zelensky has gained international prominence as a determined and inspiring leader of Ukraine’s resistance to Russia’s invasion. He has struggled hard for the survival of Ukrainians as he persists to fight Russian troops alongside his citizens. While many world leaders advised him to flee his country, he remains determined to stay home so as to motivate his people - something not expected based on the experience of previous Ukrainian leaders (Susarla, 2022). This heroic attitude also helps foster additional international support from other nations. A news report captures how he makes daily videos inspiring his people to stay resilient while addressing the pain Ukrainian citizens feel (Susarla, 2022). Zelensky’s devotion to inspiring his people has sparked collective action from most Ukrainian citizens and unanimity in their determination to oppose Russia. Ukrainian citizens have dominated international news as being heroic (Tokariuk, 2022). In 2022, the U.S. Times Magazine recognized President Zelensky as “Person of the Year” for having a strong influence on global events (Radford, 2022). Further, fearless Ukrainian citizens have been seen protesting in the cities of Kherson, now liberated, and Melitopol, still under Russian control (Tokariuk, 2022).

The above analysis and evidence capture Ukraine’s tight network of supportive allies, morale of its troops and citizens, and the high quality of leadership President Zelensky exercises, thus generating high levels of effective power. This conclusion demonstrates that while Russia has strong apparent military power and low effective power, Ukraine has high effective power despite mustering only relatively low apparent military capabilities. Through a detailed understanding of the concept of power, the power balance of the two combatants in this war is shown to be relatively even, thus making possible conflict outcomes look unpredictable and uncertain. Ultimately, good-faith negotiations are the only rational and reasonable way out of this conflict for both Russia and Ukraine.

NOW WHAT? REALISM SAYS GOOD-FAITH NEGOTIATIONS

The above comparison demonstrates how there is a stalemate articulated by differing types of power between the two states in conflict. This analysis of differing types of power balancing the forces of the two adversaries explains why a simple understanding of ‘military power’ alone is seen as having been unable to determine the outcome of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. A nearly perfect balance of power in confrontations such as this results in a stalemated, ongoing war. Consequently, further non-military action must now be taken to create peace. A classical realist, Morgenthau, argues that national decision-makers act in a rational manner (Smith & Dawson, 2022). A classical realist will argue that the conflict can only be resolved in a sustainable, long-term manner by determining the rational outcomes for both Russia and Ukraine and ensuring that Presidents Zelensky and Putin find a common ground through the negotiation process. Zelensky desires for peace to return to Ukraine whilst also maintaining its state sovereignty. Therefore, rationality to Zelensky is to pursue war when necessary, that is, when his country’s independence is threatened, which he has demonstrated as shown above. On the other hand,

Putin wants Russia to be recognised as a regional hegemon in Eastern Europe, thus creating a more powerful and respected country, capable of remaining relevant internationally as a great power; he is also going on the offensive for security reasons, to prevent any further expansion of NATO in Russia's 'near-abroad' back-yard. Rationality to Putin would, therefore, entail ending up with more territory than when he entered the war, so as to justify the destruction he caused in both nations. Therefore, a realist would argue for the conflict to be resolved through negotiations in which Russia is awarded those border territories comprising a majority of ethnic Russians who manifest the desire to join it by means of free and fair referendums, but not enough to take away Ukraine's autonomy of action as a sovereign, independent nation.

Putin has stated that he is determined to retain the regions of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia, an area of approximately 35,000 sq. mi., amounting to about 15% of Ukrainian territory, occupied by the Russian army during its initial offensives and proclaimed as integrated into the Russian Federation in September 2022, after a series of "sham referendums" rejected as invalid by the international community (Serhan, 2022; The Visual Journalism Team, 2022). Negotiations could include giving Russia full authority over Crimea, a Ukrainian province it annexed in 2014, along with two of the other regions he proposes to capture that are closest geographically and culturally to Russia. Rationality would grant Putin the area of Luhansk, as he maintains military control over this area, possibly along with the Donetsk region close to the Russian border, also within current Russian control. A realist would argue for this negotiation as a resolution because it serves the rational interests of both leaders: Putin can justify this 'operation' to his Russian citizens and Zelensky can regain peace and sovereignty for Ukraine and its people. Henry Kissinger, former US Secretary of State, proposes a similar solution. Kissinger, in drafting a peace plan proposes that Russia withdraw its troops from the areas of Ukraine it has occupied this year, except for

previously annexed Crimea, and that the future of these formerly occupied territories be settled through a supervised referendum (Kissinger, 2022). While this solution makes sense in theory, in practice a realist lens creates gaps in the argument presented in this paper. Although a realist supports negotiations to be conducted based on rational outcomes for both leaders, Kissinger's advice is flawed. He argues that Russia's motives are driven by power considerations in accordance with realist principles; however, a state driven by realist power considerations would not simply agree to withdraw from the battlefield gains it has been working tirelessly and at great sacrifices to achieve. Commanding troops to leave the occupied areas of Ukraine would rather demonstrate a loss of power and a sense of defeat for Russia, regardless if negotiations might eventually grant Russia some territorial gains. At the same time, this negotiation solution of allowing Russia to keep some of the areas it annexed by force could have adverse consequences for the stability and survival of the RBIL. This resolution allows for the possible consequence of rewarding Putin for initiating a destructive war at the heart of Europe in violation of international norms and UN principles, which poses the possibility of creating the precedent that aggression works in international conflicts and for other aggressive state actors to act similarly to reach their strategic objectives.

This analysis demonstrates that the classical realist resolution to international conflict leaves somewhat to be desired in the current Russo-Ukrainian war. Although not a strict realist resolution, another peace path that has been offered is that Ukraine should be accepted as a NATO member as soon as possible (Khurshudyan & Rauhala, 2022). Analysts have argued that this could deter Russia from any further invasion as this would trigger the security pact of the alliance to intervene in case of continuing or future Russian military aggression (Hoef, 2022). In this case, it would be Russia's rational national interest to remove troops from a conflict that would bring it in direct confrontation with all NATO

member states, and in particular with the U.S.. Although this would work in favor for Ukraine, current NATO members are wary of allowing Ukraine alliance membership at this time, as it would result in all the nations having to join the battle and it is unclear whether this would actually deter Russia, or rather push Putin to escalate the conflict, by deploying nuclear arsenal (Hoef, 2022).

CONCLUSION

While many see realism as dead, this paper reasserts the current relevance of this paradigm and capacity to conceptualize how a sophisticated concept of power provides an explanation of actors' actions in times of conflict, even in the case of the unpredictable Ukrainian-Russian war. The lens of realism explained Putin's motivations behind unleashing the war to be driven by power considerations in two ways: for prestige purposes - to demonstrate and maintain Russia's status and title as an international Great Power, and also for security purposes - while also to protect Russia's near-abroad from being encircled and ultimately absorbed by Western alliances. Furthermore, by comparing the two nations' 'apparent' military power with their 'effective' power, it is apparent that the two balance each other out in terms of overall force, resulting in a prolonged, stalemated conflict. Ultimately, realism demonstrates that this balance predicts the outcome of a continuing war between two nations balancing each other militarily, albeit with mirror-opposite components of apparent and effective power. Realism further asserts that negotiations based on the rational interests of both national leaders is necessary to move forward towards sustainable, long-term peace. This paper ultimately demonstrates the importance of states to keep power, to increase power, and to demonstrate power along multiple vectors, as seen through the Russo-Ukrainian war that constitutes the case study analyzed here.

It is critical to note that this paper was researched and written during an ongoing conflict and is therefore somewhat time-dependent. While the

current facts and understandings within this paper will not change, the outcome of the war remains uncertain. When, if, and how the war actually ends will provide new and interesting information to contrast the solutions this paper purposed from a realist perspective compared to how it actually ends. Based on the future outcome of the Russo-Ukrainian war, the analysis and prognosis of this paper could potentially either prove or disprove the criticism that realism faces today as being too narrow and outdated, as opposed to potentially still relevant. Further, from the perspective of a paper exploring the relevance of the concept of power in the Russo-Ukrainian war and in the conduct of international relations generally, if Russia ultimately defeats Ukraine and annexes a sizeable part of its territory, troubling questions arise as to the destructive nature of the precedent being set for the future course of global politics and as to the very future survival of the Rules-Based Liberal International Order.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bacheaga, H., & Tobias, B. (2022). Zelensky in Washington: Ukraine's leader heads to US for first foreign trip, BBC News, 1. December 2022. [Accessed 22 January, 2023] from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-64047058>
- Barkawi, T. (2020). War and world politics. In Baylis, J., Smith, S., & Owens, P. (Eds.), *The globalization of world politics: an introduction to international relations*. Oxford University Press, 8, 225-240.
- Boyd, R. (1983). On the Current Status of the Issue of Scientific Realism. *Erkenntnis*, 19 (1/2), 45-90. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00174775>
- Boyd, R. (2022). A realist take on the Ukraine War, *Canadian Dimension*, 16. March 2022. [Accessed 20 November, 2022], from <https://canadiandimension.com/articles/view/a-realist-take-on-the-ukraine-war>
- Cancian, F. (2022) Aid to Ukraine Explained in Six Charts, *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 18. November 2022 [Accessed 20 November, 2022]. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/aid-ukraine-explained-six-charts>
- Chatterjee, P. (2022). Sweden and Finland's journey from neutral to Nato, BBC News, 29 June 2022. [Accessed 31 January, 2023] from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61397478>

- Dunne, T., & Schmidt, B. C. (2020). Realism. In Baylis, J., Smith, S., & Owens, P. (Eds.), *The globalization of world politics: an introduction to international relations*. Oxford University Press, 8, 131-144.
- Edinger, H. (2022). Offensive ideas: structural realism, classical realism and Putin's war on Ukraine. *International Affairs*, 98 (6), 1873-1893. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiac217>
- Gatehouse, J., & Leung, A. (2022). Ukraine has will, but Russia has might: How their military forces match up, *CBCnews*, 26. February 2022. [Accessed 20 November, 2022], from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/ukraine-russia-military-comparison-1.6365115>
- Global Firepower (2023) 2023 military strength ranking, *Global Firepower - World Military Strength*. [Accessed 8 January, 2023] from <https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.php>
- Hayda, J., Westerman, A., Nadworny, E., & Harbage, C. (2022). 6 key numbers that reveal the staggering impact of Russia's war in Ukraine, *NPR*, 24. August 2022. [Accessed November 20, 2022] from <https://www.npr.org/2022/08/24/1119202240/ukraine-russia-war-by-numbers>
- Heim, J. L., & Miller, B. M. (2020). Measuring Power, Power Cycles, and the Risk of Great-Power War in the 21st Century, In *Policy File - RAND Corporation*. [Accessed 20 November, 2022] from https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR2900/RR2989/RAND_RR2989.pdf
- Hoef, A. (2022). Why Ukraine must join NATO, *Atlantic Council*, 9 December 2022. [Accessed 31 January, 2023] from <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/why-ukraine-must-join-nato/>
- Kaarbo, J. (2022). What happened to Vladimir Putin?, *International Affairs Blog*, 1 March 2022. [Accessed 22 January, 2023] from <https://medium.com/international-affairs-blog/what-happened-to-vladimir-putin-5755addf2a15>
- Kasparov, G., & Khodorkovsky M., (2023). Don't Fear Putin's Demise. Victory for Ukraine, Democracy for Russia, *Foreign Affairs*, 20 January 2023. [Accessed 22 January, 2023] from <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/dont-fear-putins-demise>
- Khurshudyan, I., & Rauhala, E. (2022). Zelensky pushes 'accelerated' application for Ukraine NATO membership, *The Washington Post*, 30 September 2022. [Accessed 31 January, 2023] from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/09/30/ukraine-application-nato-russia-war/>
- Kirby, P. (2022). Why did Russia invade Ukraine and has Putin's war failed?, *BBC News*, 16. November 2022. [Accessed 8 January, 2023] from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-56720589>
- Kirshner, J. (2022). *An Unwritten Future: Realism and Uncertainty in World Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kissinger, H. (2022). How to avoid another world war, *The Spectator*, 17. December 2022. [Accessed 31 January, 2023] from <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/the-push-for-peace/>
- Kofman, M., & Connolly, R. (2019). Why Russian military expenditure is much higher than commonly understood (as is China's), *War on the Rocks*, 16. December 2019. [Accessed 20 November, 2022] from <https://warontherocks.com/2019/12/why-russian-military-expenditure-is-much-higher-than-commonly-understood-as-is-chinas/>
- Kumar, R. (2016). Russia's Foreign Policy: An Overview of 25 Years of Transition. *International Studies (New Delhi)*, 53 (3-4), 210–226. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020881717745961>
- Lindstaedt, N. (2022). Ukraine war: new figures suggest only one in four Russians support it, but that won't be enough to oust Putin, *The Conversation*. [Accessed 30 January, 2023] from <https://theconversation.com/ukraine-war-new-figures-suggest-only-one-in-four-russians-support-it-but-that-wont-be-enough-to-oust-putin-196163>
- Martinez, L. (2022). How much has US military aid helped Ukraine's stunning offensive, *ABC News*, 13. September 2022. [Accessed 20 November, 2022] from <https://abcnews.go.com/International/us-military-aid-helped-ukraines-stunning-offensive/story?id=89762501>
- McNeil, T. (2022). The Long History of Russia and War, *Global Affairs*, 31. March 2022. [Accessed 22 January, 2023] from <https://now.tufts.edu/2022/03/31/long-history-russia-and-war>
- Nye, J. S., (2019). How to deal with a declining Russia, *Project Syndicate*, 5. November 2019.. [Accessed 22 January, 2023] from <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/dealing-with-danger-of-declining-russia-by-joseph-s-nye-2019-11>
- O'Brien, P. P., (2022). How the West Got Russia's Military So, So Wrong, *The Atlantic*, 31. March 2022.[Accessed 22 January, 2023] from <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/03/russia-ukraine-invasion-military-predictions/629418/>
- Pisciotta, B. (2020). Russian revisionism in the Putin era: An overview of post-communist military interventions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria. *Rivista Italiana Di Scienza Politica*, 50 (1), 87–106. <https://doi.org/10.1017/ipo.2019.18>

- Popli, N. (2022). How NATO Is Responding to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine, *Time*, 24. February 2022. [Accessed 31 January, 2023] from <https://time.com/6151115/nato-russia-ukraine-article-4/>
- Radford, A. (2022) Volodymyr Zelensky is Time Magazine's 2022 Person of the Year, *BBC News*, 7. December 2022. [Accessed 22 January, 2023] from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-63890775>
- Reinhard, S. (2022). Ukraine has reclaimed more than half the territory Russia has taken this year, *The New York Times*, 14. November 2022. [Accessed 31 January 2023] from <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/world/europe/ukraine-maps.html#:~:text=Ukraine%20has%20reclaimed%2054%20percent,for%20the%20Study%20of%20War.>
- Rösch, F. (2013). The human condition of politics: Considering the legacy of Hans J. Morgenthau for international relations. *Journal of International Political Theory*, 9 (1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.3366/jipt.2013.0041>
- Rosen, S. P. (1995). Military Effectiveness: Why Society Matters. *International Security*, 19 (4), 5–31. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539118>
- Rosenberg, J. (1990). What's the Matter with realism? *Review of International Studies*, 16 (4), 285-303. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210500112379>
- Schnauffer, T. A., (2021). The US-NATO Relationship: The Cost of Maintaining Political Pressure on Allies, *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, Georgetown University., 15. January 2021. [Accessed 22 January, 2023] from <https://gija.georgetown.edu/2021/01/15/the-us-nato-relationship-the-cost-of-maintaining-political-pressure-on-allies/>
- Segel, E. (2022). Why Zelensky's Speech To Congress Was A Masterclass In Crisis Communication, *Forbes*, 22. December 2022. [Accessed 22 January, 2023] from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/edwardsegal/2022/12/22/10-crisis-communication-strategies-and-tactics-zelensky-used-in-speech-to-congress/?sh=2819b0377f02>
- Seligman, M. (2023) US to send 31 Abrams tanks to Ukraine, in major reversal, *Politico*, 25. January 2023. [Accessed 28 January, 2023] from <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/01/25/u-s-to-send-31-abrams-tanks-to-ukraine-in-major-reversal-00079437>
- Serhan, Y. (2022) Russia's Annexation of Ukrainian Territory Is a Sign of Military Weakness, *Time*, 29 September 2022. [Accessed 23 January, 2023] from <https://time.com/6217710/russia-annexation-ukraine-donetsk-luhansk-kherson-aporizhzhia/>
- Shivaram, D. (2022). Biden slams Putin's invasion of Ukraine in a speech to the United Nations, *NPR*, 21. September 2022. [Accessed 20 November, 2022] from <https://www.npr.org/2022/09/21/1124095601/biden-ukraine-unga-speech>
- Smith, N. Ross and Dawson, G. (2022) Mearsheimer, Realism, and the Ukraine War, *Analyse & Kritik*, 44 (2), 2022, 175-200. <https://doi.org/10.1515/auk-2022-2023>.
- Stockholm International Research Institute (2023). SIPRI Military Expenditure Database. [Accessed January 31, 2023] from <https://milex.sipri.org/sipri>
- Susarla, A. (2022). Why Zelensky's 'selfie videos' are helping Ukraine win the PR war against Russia, *The Conversation*, 1 March 2022. [Accessed 31 January 2023] from <https://theconversation.com/why-zelenskys-selfie-videos-are-helping-ukraine-win-the-pr-war-against-russia-178117>
- The Visual Journalism Team. (2022). Putin threats: How many nuclear weapons does Russia have?, *BBC News*, 7. October 2022. [Accessed 20 November, 2022] from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60564123>
- Volkov, D., & Kolesnikov, A. (2022). My country, right or wrong: Russian public opinion on Ukraine, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* [Online], 7. September 2022. [Accessed 20 November, 2022] from <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/09/07/my-country-right-or-wrong-russian-public-opinion-on-ukraine-pub-87803>
- Yellen, J. L. (2022). Statement by Secretary of the Treasury Janet L. Yellen on the Biden-Harris Administration's request for emergency supplemental funding for Ukraine, U.S. Department of the Treasury, 15. November 2022. [Accessed 20 November, 2022] from <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1106>