

**UKRAINIAN–RUSSIAN CONFLICT:
THE REVIVAL OF CLASSIC IR REALISM?**

VIKTORIYA FEDORCHAK*

Abstract. *After the end of the Cold War, the international community was enthusiastic about building a global, integrated community driven by the economic interests of prosperity and growth. Hopes were oriented towards the dominance of international organizations in problem-resolution and the rule of law. More than two decades after the end of the Cold War, IR specialists observe the revival of the Cold War discourse and the return of classic IR realism into academic and political discourses. The aim of the offered article is to demonstrate that in the contemporary world of inequality, just as during the Cold War, reaction to and resolution of conflicts depends primarily on the position and interests of the main actors of IR. The offered paper explores the interests of the most influential states regarding the recent conflict in Ukraine in the context of IR realism and the implications of these interests in the resolution of conflict or rather the establishment of a frozen status. Consequently, the paper addresses the topics of political and military inequality in asymmetric conflicts between global power and a developing state.*

Keywords: *Ukrainian–Russian conflict, international relations, liberalism, realism.*

Introduction

Attending a conference devoted to the 10th anniversary of the concept of Responsibility to Protect¹ in one of the British universities, the author expected to hear about the complexity of its implementation in the contemporary reality of international relations and challenges – and its evolution. Thus, one could have expected to hear an optimistic neo-liberal discourse of humanitarian interventions and how successful the implementation of the principle was on various occasions during the last decade. One of the prominent speakers outlined exactly this

* PhD., Assistant Professor at School of Politics and International Relations, the University of Nottingham, UK; Viktoriya.Fedorchak@nottingham.ac.uk.

¹ The Responsibility to Protect (R to P or R2P) – “is a new international security and human rights norm to address the international community’s failure to prevent and stop genocides, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity” Retrieved from <http://www.responsibilitytoprotect.org/>.
Pol. Sc. Int. Rel., XIII, 2, pp. 5–17, Bucharest, 2016.

optimistic perspective on the subject matter. Often, when you deliver a lecture or presentation, you meet another person's eyes and see a reflection on your speech. It must have been that case, because when the speaker looked at me, he paused and all of a sudden, started explaining that "R2P was demonstrated to function well except in those occasions when geopolitical interests were involved". After this statement, the speaker began discussing the cases of Ukraine, Georgia and Syria, and how the interests of the global powers clashed in those countries, resulting in a stalemate. The change of emphasis in his narration made me smile at the irony that a celebration of the anniversary of that very practice which demonstrated the functionality of IR Liberalism coincided with events that demonstrated the strong positions of traditional IR Realism. Coming from the country that was denied its sovereignty in the medieval tradition of aggression, the author considered this irony to be particularly bitter.

Classic IR Realism

The classic realist theory of international relations argues that international relations are driven by a nation's self-interest, or competition for dominance. Consequently, the primary actors of international relations are considered to be states that are driven by personal gain and considerations of security. In such framework altruism, ethics and morality are of little concern, since power and strategic objectives prevail over any humanist or moral goals. According to Niccolo Machiavelli, the prominent classic IR theorist, the end justifies the means, suggesting that a state can use many means at its disposal for the achievement of the desired goal within the framework of national interest: "*I believe that this follows from severity being badly of properly used. Those may be called properly used, if of evil it is lawful to speak well, that are applied at one blow and are necessary to one's security, and that are not persisted in afterward unless they can be turned to the advantage of the subjects*"².

While Thomas Hobbes argued in favor of the social contract and the existence of a state for the security purposes of its citizens, a few centuries later Hans Morgenthau crystallized the principles of IR realism³. In his work *Politics among Nations*, first of all, Morgenthau emphasized that: "*Political realism believes that politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature which remained unchanged through the entire human history. Secondly, the main signpost that helps political realism to find its way through the landscape of international politics is the concept of interest defined in terms of power*"⁴.

In other words, the driving forces behind state actions are not humanistic and moral considerations but the purposes of gaining power and supremacy over other competitors in the international arena.

² Machiavelli, N., *The Prince* (W. K. Marriott, Trans.), New York: Sterling Publishing, 2008, 97.

³ Donnelly, J., *Realism and international relations*, Cambridge, CB: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 7.

⁴ Morgenthau, H., *Politics among nations: The struggle for power and peace*, London: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 1992, 4-5.

Moreover, he argued that although political realism proclaims that the concept of self-interest considers power as “*an objective category which is universally valid, but it does not endow that concept with a meaning that is fixed once and for all*”⁵. Thus, the essence of power and national interest might change, but it does not mean that the significance of the concept of self-interest based on power is undermined. Furthermore, “*political realism is aware of the moral significance of political action... political realism refuses to identify the moral aspirations of a particular nation with the moral laws that govern the universe*”⁶. Thus, it can be argued that the nature of IR or political realism is in conflicting nature with the relationship between states and the dominance of self-interest over the benefits of common actions. Inevitably, the final means of achieving a state’s self-interest remains military force. In the context of IR realism, a Clausewitzian approach to war remains as sound as ever: “*Each tries through physical force to compel the other to do his will; his immediate aim is to throw his opponent in order to make him incapable of further resistance. War is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will*”⁷.

In terms of the above outlined discourse of classic IR realism, any further discussion of the Ukrainian case aims to prove that Russian actions correspond to the following principles of political realism: power-driven self-interest; prevalence of strategic and military objectives of a single state over the interests of any other members of the existing international relations system; the use of war and distortion of the international law for aggressive territorial gain; dominance of military interest over humanitarian or moral considerations.

It has to be outlined that this author does not intend to suggest the world did not change since the times of Morgenthau. In fact, after the end of the Cold War, international relations were perceived as being driven by economic and mutual gain inside the global society. In other words, states were more likely to cooperate through international organizations, according to the principles of international law. However, the primary argument of this article is that in the case of recent events in the Ukraine, Russian actions demonstrate that the era of relative post-Cold War cooperation and liberal IR discourse is over; strategic and geopolitical interests remain predominant in Russian foreign policy. Thus, is the world the same as in 1948? No. However, is IR realism more present in international relations in 2015 rather than in 2000? Yes.

Pacta Sunt Servanda

One of the manifestations of IR Liberalism (Neo-Liberalism and even Post-Liberalism⁸) is the dominance of international cooperation through international organizations and inter-state agreements for the establishment of global stability

⁵ Morgenthau, *Politics among nations*, 10.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

⁷ Clausewitz, C. V., *On war* (M.E. Howard & P. Paret Trans.), Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989, 75.

⁸ For the sake of consistency of this article Liberal and Realist approaches are contrasted in their general principles rather than emphasizing the diversity of theoretical concepts within each approach.

and security⁹. In this regard, the main rationale is based upon the supremacy of international relations laws, protecting states' sovereignty and territorial integrity, which was a logical decision in the context of human history of wars fought for strategically valuable territories and resources. Thus, these principles were meant to protect the existing system of international relations, irrespective of its bipolar or multipolar nature, after the end of the Cold War.

In the case of Ukraine, its sovereignty and territorial integrity were meant to be secured by those principles of international law embodied in various treaties. First of all, when Ukraine gave up its nuclear potential, the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances was signed between Ukraine, Russia, the UK and the US, on December 5, 1994, according to which three great powers agreed to become the guarantors of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity¹⁰. In 2014, the celebration of the 20th anniversary of this memorandum was darkened by the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and the beginning of Russian aggression in the East. Apparently, the translation of the Latin "pacta sunt servanda" (agreements must be kept) into Russian has an entirely different meaning.

Another aspect of the Liberal perspective on security and institutional collaboration is the post-Cold War cooperation between Ukraine and the NATO, which resulted in signing the NATO-Ukrainian Charter on a Distinctive Partnership on July 9th, 1997. Accordingly, two points of the agreement are particularly relevant in the contemporary discourse. Both NATO and Ukraine were committed to: "*The recognition that security of all states in the OSCE area is indivisible, that no state should pursue its security at the expense of that of another state, and that no state can regard any part of the OSCE region as its sphere of influence respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of all other states, for the inviolability of frontiers, and the development of good-neighborly relations*"¹¹.

Since Ukraine is not a member of NATO, military actions would not follow one state's aggression against Ukraine; however, it would be expected "*to react politically when Ukraine is attacked*"¹². The recent announcements about the creation of six new command posts on the Eastern border of the Alliance and the creation of the 5,000 rapid reaction force are considered insufficient in order to stop Russian aggression, even by former NATO Assistant General for Defense Planning and Operations, Edgar Buckley¹³. Thus, in terms of the Liberal theory of IR, there are international organizations like the UN and NATO, there are agreements signed to secure Ukrainian sovereignty according to the principle of international law, and

⁹ Menon, R. & Rumer, E. *Conflict in Ukraine: The unwinding of the post-Cold War order*; Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2015.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹¹ NATO-Ukrainian Charter on a Distinctive Partnership, July 9, 1997, [http:// www.nato .int/cps/en/ natohq/official_texts_25457.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_25457.htm).

¹² Buckley, E. & Pascu, I. NATO's Article 5 and Russian hybrid warfare. 2015, March 17, 2015, *Atlantic Council*. <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/natosource/nato-s-article-5-and-russian-hybrid-warfare>.

¹³ *Ibid.*

there is a globalized interdependent world aiming at building global security; yet, Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity were practically non-existent for a participant in the same system of international relations; the participant who violated all above-mentioned treaties and principles, and acted according to his strategic interests and expansionist plans. In this regard, the Russian approach to contemporary warfare and the achievement of its strategic objectives is conducted through the manipulation of legitimate excuses of Liberal IR context (protection of the rights of Russian-speaking population and humanitarian support), and the straightforward IR realistic strategic interest of the state. Thus, it can be argued that Russia used the gray zones of international law and distorted its principles for the sake of good old-fashioned state interests of territorial gain and geostrategic superiority. However, it brings a new definition of contemporary war – hybrid warfare.

Concerns about the fragility and imperfection of international law are not new. They are mentioned from time to time, and nothing changes. Or rather, it does change. The violation of the laws of international relations is getting worse. Using a spurious referendum for the annexation of territory is one thing; adding to that state-sponsored terrorism is a matter of an entirely different complexity. Bringing armed green men without insignia into the territory of a sovereign state and using them in order to overthrow a legitimate government in the region can be viewed as a traditional-style military *coup d'état* or a new form of state-sponsored terrorism. In any case, the problem of the green men is not the aggressive nature of their use, but their gray and invisible status in international law. This was exactly the point of using them and not the Russian army. In order to apply international law and the UN's legal procedural apparatus, their identification is essential, if one aims to take certain actions against them. Their status was even more blurred by the fact that they were brought in white trucks with so-called "humanitarian support" for Crimean and Eastern Ukrainian separatists¹⁴.

The Reality of IR realism

The reality of the contemporary IR is that post-Cold War altruism is over, and the true nature of interstate relations is back upon the table of discussions. The Russian war in Ukraine is already called hybrid warfare, since it uses both traditional and unconventional means of fighting wars. While the Kremlin's initial discourse and comments regarding the situation in Ukraine were oriented towards condemning illegal actions against the legitimate government, soon the emphasis was placed on the necessity of protecting the rights of Ukrainian minorities, meaning by this the Russian-speaking population¹⁵. For the record, the Russian-speaking population was never a minority in a practically bilingual country. The

¹⁴ Stepanova, A., "Ukrainian crisis and international law as the most cynical thing ever existed", 2014, August 27. *Beyond The EU*, <http://beyondthe.eu/ukrainian-crisis-international-law-cynical-thing-ever-existed/>.

¹⁵ Burke-White, W., "Crimea and the International Legal Order", *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, 56, 2014, 70.

media discourse about protecting the rights of minorities was immediately supported by military actions, in the form of deploying green men troops into Crimea, and taking the Supreme Council of Crimea under their control¹⁶. Although this action was an actual intervention into the territory of a sovereign country, it was once again semi-legitimate, because technically the green men had no insignia and did not belong to the Russian army. They were just well-armed individuals, who were simply dropped off Russian ships in the Black Sea, or from helicopters. Whereas these actions were not exactly an intervention and not a terrorist act, but something in-between, yet they proved to be very effective for Kremlin's plans. The main purpose of the green men was to clear the territory of representatives of the Ukrainian administration and Ukrainian military dislocated in the region.

Having done the dirty work with military means, Kremlin was very prompt in using legal means to gain Crimea before the international community realized what had happened and what needed to be done next. The next step was to clear the territory of Ukrainian population and pro-Ukrainian sympathizers. People were given a choice to stay or to leave, although the question was more, did they want to stay in occupied territory or in Ukraine. With the number of ethnic Ukrainians decreasing even further, a supposedly legitimate referendum was announced by Kremlin's puppet government of Sergei Aksenov. However, this referendum was illegitimate because it contradicted the Ukrainian Constitution of 1996 (Article 73) and the Law of Ukraine on "All-Ukrainian Referendum" (Article 3) of 2012, which state that any territorial changes in Ukraine require all citizens of Ukraine to participate in the decision, irrespective of their place of residence¹⁷. The international community, including NATO and the UN, did not recognize this referendum and supported Ukraine's sovereign integrity.

Moreover, for the Kremlin strategy, this reaction of the international community had little impact if any. Putin could easily proceed with the second stage of his expansion strategy. Not waiting for all of the Western states to express their concern, he continued with further attempts to legitimize his annexation of Crimea. On 18th March 2014, two days after the Crimean referendum, the treaty of incorporation of Crimea into the Russian Federation was signed. Moreover, "*in ticking-off the international legal boxes of self-determination, Putin simultaneously sought to expand those boxes*"¹⁸. Immediately, the process of changing citizenship started. Those who wished to keep Ukrainian citizenship were asked to leave. They could be allowed to stay or return to their previous place of residence only by getting visas. New passports were issued to the proud citizens of the Russian Federation, yet with a slight modification. None of the Crimean people who had lived all their lives in this territory were given correct address registration for their actual residence. In the field of registration, the regions of Vladivostok and Yakutia were stated.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Stepanova, A., "International Law on Legality of the Crimea Secession", *Beyond The EU*, 2014, April, 15, Retrieved from <http://beyondthe.eu/international-law-crimea-secession/>.

¹⁸ Burke-White, W. "Crimea and the International Legal Order", 70.

To systematize Russian actions in Ukraine, the Potomac Group has developed a four-stage model of Russian hybrid warfare in Ukraine¹⁹. The first stage, of political subversion, is characterized by hidden insurgent or terrorist activities aimed at seizing governmental buildings, political assassinations, agitation, propaganda campaigns and infiltration of agents²⁰. This was demonstrated during the events of the uprising in Independence Square, February 2014, when a youth was shot down by Russian snipers; FSB agents were kidnapping leaders of the uprising, an action paralleled with propaganda in the Russian and Russia-controlled Ukrainian media.

The second stage is called proxy sanctum, characterized by; consolidation of controlled areas, recruiting local supporters of the aggression (as was the case for Eastern Ukraine where separatists were recruited from released prisoners), destruction of governmental infrastructure (military bases in Crimea, border posts in Eastern Ukraine).

The third stage is the intervention, which includes threats and preparation of invasion, destruction of governmental forces, logistics and fire support, combined with cyber disruptions²¹. This stage was demonstrated in the East of Ukraine, where so-called “humanitarian green men” occupied the territory and provided military support for the separatists. The next strategic step was bringing Russian troops to Ukrainian borders, with the fire support of Soviet multiple rocket – the BM-21 (Grad) – in early July 2014²².

The fourth stage outlined by the Potomac Group is a coercive deterrence which is characterized by public discussions of nuclear power, fly-by force demonstrations (as in the case of air zones of Baltic countries and the UK), hints of escalation²³.

Although these stages demonstrate a model which can explain the development of Russian hybrid warfare in Ukraine, it misses out on a few aspects of its hybrid nature. First of all, except for the above-outlined hidden stage of political subversion, there was a preparatory stage beginning from the time of Kuchma’s presidency in Ukraine, in 1994. It was, not accidentally, the year when Ukraine gave up its nuclear potential. Starting from his presidency, Ukraine began to come closer to the Russian realm of influence²⁴. From this time, a kaleidoscope of puppet governments aimed at weakening Ukraine economically, politically and militarily were brought to power. Although the Orange Revolution suggested a certain democratic change, Yushchenko’s government did as little for strengthening Ukraine’s capacity to survive just as any other Russian-controlled government, as was demonstrated in Yushchenko’s gas wars and thefts from the National Budget.

¹⁹ Johnson, F. J., “Update: Russia’s hybrid war in Ukraine ‘is working’”, February 26, 2015, *HIS Jane’s Defence Weekly*. Retrieved from <http://www.janes.com/article/49469/update-russia-s-hybrid-war-in-ukraine-is-working>.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Weiss, M., & Miller, J., “Russia is firing missiles at Ukraine”, *Foreign Policy*, 2014, July 17. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/07/16/russia_is_firing_missiles_at_ukraine_grad_rockets_us_sanctions.

²³ Johnson, “Update: Russia’s hybrid war in Ukraine.”

²⁴ Kuzio, T., “Neither East Nor West: Ukraine’s Security Policy Under Kuchma”, *Problems of Post-Communism*, 52, 2005, 60.

The rule of the last pro-Russian government of Yanukovich demonstrated that the main purpose of all puppet governments was to prepare Ukraine for the Russian invasion, resulting in an unconditional capitulation of the country.

This conclusion is conditioned by a few considerations: Over more than 20 years of independence, Ukrainian economic infrastructure across the country was virtually destroyed; governments sponsored only economic sectors that were related to Russian capital and oligarchy, which meant that the Eastern region was developing, while donations from the entire country's local budgets had to pay for it. Moreover, the country was not only deprived of its nuclear deterrence, but its conventional forces were utterly shattered, without any financing or technological improvement of their defense capabilities. In other words, the country was aimed to be offered in a lovely package with a red ribbon for Russia to take. At the time of the invasion and the annexation of Crimea, Ukrainian soldiers did not even have socks in supply, not to mention that, during the first six months of Grad attacks, they had neither bullets nor guns to match the bullets they had. The country was not prepared at all. It was *made* unprepared.

This preparatory phase for the occupation is essential for understanding the Russian way of establishing its global and strategic interests – it uses mixed methods for achieving the traditional objective of regional strategic and military supremacy. In this case, instead of direct intervention when the country was militarily ready to fight back, the Kremlin applied a politico-economic approach to weaken the country from the inside in order to maximize the effect of attrition warfare during the annexation of desired territories. This long-termed planning and weakening of the enemy before the attack is not news for strategic thought; however, neither is the legitimization of one's aggressive actions with a seemingly just cause. In this regard, another feature of Russian warfare and one of the elements which can be traced through each stage of war outlined by the Potomac Group is the use of propaganda and distortion of information in order to undermine the clearly illegitimate nature of the annexation and invasion of a sovereign state. For this reasons, one of the key elements in Russian military strategy is the manipulation of legitimacy and its consequent distortion in the public opinion perception of Western countries.

The Ukrainian Case and International Law

So, what does the Crimean case demonstrate regarding international law and state-sponsored terrorism? First of all, just like 100 years ago, the international community could not stop a straightforward territorial aggression of one state against another. The proclaimed democratic values and restraining leverage of globalization as well as economic incentives prove to be irrelevant when military and strategic concerns are at stake. In other words, the recent events in Ukraine bring back a realistic paradigm in the theory of international relations.

Secondly, the Crimean case demonstrated not only that classic aggression works nowadays as well as ever before, but also that the international community's intervention is limited by the means of international law and the UN.

However, international condemnation and sanctions against Russia did not change the fact of the intervention and annexation of Ukrainian territories.

Thirdly, the very notion of legitimacy was compromised. The Kremlin's actions demonstrate that there are no legitimate actions according to international law principles or national legislature; what counted was the ability of a state to sell a semi-legitimate action to a certain segment of public opinion that knows little about the matter, or about why Ukrainians should be independent and how different they are from Russians, or that having the green men on the territory of a sovereign state is a move against any state's sovereignty and independence.

The best example of this argument is a comment on an article about the potential consequences of the Crimean referendum for Ukraine and Western countries, in *The Independent* newspaper. One of the readers stated: "*I never thought I would ever say this in my life time but I'm with Russia on this one. The principle of self-determination is not some spurious attempt at legitimizing a dispute, it is a basic human right. The fact that the US, UK and NATO oppose it for the Crimea is deeply disturbing*"²⁵.

What is actually disturbing is how the lack of knowledge on the subject makes public opinion easily manipulated by Russia's fake legitimization. Although it can be argued that every person is entitled to his/her opinion, and public opinion is far from the actual decision and policy-making, the point here is that pretended legitimization and abuse of the principles of international law and human rights devalue their original meaning and what they stand for. This is far more dangerous than straightforward military aggression, because it leaves people in Western countries in doubt about what is actually going on in the Ukraine. Thus, Putin's government conducts a PR campaign mixing old-style military means with a semi-legitimate campaign covering his expansionist intentions.

Position of Other Parties

It is justified to say that Ukrainian-Russian conflict is far from being just a two-state conflict without any geopolitical context. The Ukraine's geographical position, between the West and Russia, made it the primary ground for the establishment of borders between NATO and Russia. There were various triggers that Russia could perceive as threatening its geopolitical and strategic interests in Ukraine. In this regard, both European and NATO enlargements, which could be perceived as means of moving Ukraine out of Russian influence, were stimulating Russian pressure on the Ukrainian puppet governments – which resulted in the further escalation of the conflict.

These triggers included NATO summit in Bucharest in April 2008, when Georgian and Ukrainian memberships were considered, yet, vetoed by France and Germany. As a reply, Russian invasion into Georgia took place in August 2008.

²⁵ Geordie' Comment to Morris, N. & Dejevsky, M., "Ukraine crisis: Decision time for Crimea in referendum which could change the complexion of Europe", 2014, March 14, *The Independent*, <http://www.independent.co.uk>.

Moreover, at the same time, the EU was launching its Eastern Partnership Initiative aimed at strengthening the development of potential members²⁶. The potential of moving EU and NATO borders closer to Russia was viewed as a tremendous strategic threat, fear of which was further fueled by overthrowing Yanukovich's presidency²⁷. John Mearsheimer argued that it was the last straw for Putin: "*He responded by taking Crimea, a peninsula he feared would host a NATO base, and working to destabilize Ukraine until it abandoned its efforts to join the West*"²⁸.

Therefore, the conflict is, in fact, contextualized in terms of the traditional Cold War antagonism between the West and Russia. Although the discourse might have changed slightly, the nature of that antagonism prevails. In this context, it is worth outlining the position of various stakeholders. Regarding the EU, although various member-countries expressed mixed feelings about the conflict, the common position was aimed towards the necessity of resolving the conflict and achieving ceasefire agreements. This was the first occasion when Germany took leading position in negotiating conflict-resolution on an international scale²⁹. For the EU, the primary objective was to avoid a full-blooded warfare close to its borders, especially with constant pressure from Poland, a country that remembered Soviet rule way too well.

From the official perspective, NATO condemned Russian actions as illegitimate and against the norms of international law. The organization called upon Russia to abide by agreements achieved in Minsk. According to the joint statement of the NATO-Ukraine Commission on 13th May 2015, NATO recognized the independence, peace and integrity of Ukraine and "*condemn Russia's aggressive actions and continued violation of international law and its international obligations; we call on Russia to fully abide by international law*"³⁰. Regarding America's position on Ukraine, irrespective of the division of views in American domestic politics, the official position advocated using the soft power of a certain isolation of Russia in the international arena, which was once again reaffirmed in President Obama's Press Conference after the G7 Summit 8th June 2015: "*With respect to security, the G7 remains strongly united in support for Ukraine. We'll continue to provide economic and technical assistance that Ukraine needs as it moves ahead of critical reforms to transform its economy and strengthen its democracy. As we've seen in recent days, Russian*

²⁶ Mearsheimer, J. I., "Why the Ukraine crisis is the west's fault: The liberal delusions that provoked Putin", *Foreign Affairs*, 2014, September/October, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-08-18/why-ukraine-crisis-west-s-fault>.

²⁷ Freedman, L., "Ukraine and the art of crisis management", *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, 56, 2014, 7-42.

²⁸ Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine crisis is the west's fault".

²⁹ Speck, U., "German power and the Ukraine conflict", 2015, March 26, *Carnegie Europe*. <http://carnegieeurope.eu/2015/03/26/german-power-and-ukraine-conflict>.

³⁰ "Joint statement of the NATO-Ukraine commission" NATO, last modified May 13, 2015, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_119425.htm.

forces continue to operate in eastern Ukraine, violating Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity"³¹.

Thus, the position of the EU, NATO and USA remained within the framework of using economic and political sanctions against Russia. The EU and USA continue to provide economic and advisory support to Ukraine, condemning Russian actions, which might seem to bring the conflict to at least a cease-fire stage in the occupied territories; yet actual warfare takes place in the East of Ukraine and there is no ceasefire there. Analyzing Ukrainian–Russian conflict, Lawrence Freedman made a conclusion that, *"the Western response reflected the fact that Ukraine was not a core interest. What did matter, however, was a pattern of Russian behavior that threatened to unsettle not only Ukraine but the whole region, including members of NATO. This required reaffirming the benefits of alliance to those members and drawing Moscow's attention to the potential costs of continuing with a campaign of detraction, deception and destabilization against Ukraine"*³².

Discussion

So, why can it be argued that classic IR realism is revived in the case of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict? First of all, Russian actions demonstrated the dominance of a very straightforward self-interest – that of keeping Ukrainian territory under Russian control in the classic military-strategic way of territorial intervention and annexation of the Crimean peninsula. Secondly, the moral or ethical aspect of the action is absent; just as the beginning of the WWII started with a pretext of legitimacy, so did the Ukrainian-Russian conflict start from a pretext of protecting the rights of Russian-speaking population. However, the core of Russian interest in Ukraine was strategic and military, in terms of opposing potential NATO and European expansion. Moreover, that self-interest was fulfilled through military actions, irrespective of how they were advertised and justified by the Russian media, and undermined both the sovereignty of Ukraine and the principle according to which the contemporary system of international relations functions – the rule of international law.

Although it can be argued that violation of international law does not mean the revival of realist IR paradigms, the dominance of self-interest, particularly a geostrategic one, and its execution through military means places both Machiavelli's ideas and Morgenthau's discourse back on the table of discussion. Moreover, Lawrence Freedman's evaluation demonstrates that Western response was conditioned by the fact that core Western interests were not yet at stake at this stage of conflict development. Once again, the situation in Ukraine, and not just in Ukraine, but also in Libya and Syria, proves that ethics, morality and protection of human rights are in fact differently perceived by governments and individuals.

³¹ The White House. Remarks by President Obama in Press Conference after G7 Summit, *Elmou Briefing Center*, 2015, June 8th, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/06/08/remarks-president-obama-press-conference-after-g7-summit>.

³² Freedman, "Ukraine and the art of crisis management", 9.

This aspect once again demonstrates that classic IR realism is far from being forgotten or irrelevant in explaining contemporary international relations.

Moreover, with the contemporary trends in international relations, it might soon become the predominant paradigm. After all, it is hard not to agree that *“the crisis represented a sharp geopolitical jolt, a reminder that hard power never quite goes away and that, however much we may wish it were not so, the role of force remains formidable when it comes to setting borders and changing regimes”*³³.

Conclusion

Taking into consideration all the above-mentioned arguments, it can be concluded that the case of Russian war in Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea, the long-term preparation for invasion through puppet governments, the hybrid nature of Russian warfare and manipulation of the legitimacy of international law all argue in favor of a revival of the Realist paradigm in IR or even its constancy, irrespective of the epoch of human development. As it was mentioned at the beginning of this paper and on various occasions in conferences the author has attended, humanitarianism and Liberalism in IR have their place in the contemporary world.

However, when global interests clash and military-strategic objectives are at stake, Liberal means of IR regulation are of little influence. Taking into account the contemporary and historical discourses of Russian foreign policy and its strategic ambitions, it is not surprising that post-Soviet academia remained loyal to a dominance of the Realist paradigm over the Liberal one. After all, military doctrine states that war is another means of achieving political objectives, as it has been throughout the history of human civilization.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Buckley, E., & Pascu, I. “NATO’s Article 5 and Russian hybrid warfare”, *Atlantic Council*, March 17, 2015, Retrieved from <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/natosource/nato-s-article-5-and-russian-hybrid-warfare>;
- Burke-White, W., “Crimea and the International Legal Order”, *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, 56, 2014, 65-80;
- Clausewitz, C. V., *On war*, M.E. Howard & P. Paret Trans, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989;
- Donnelly, J. *Realism and international relations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000;
- Freedman, L., “Ukraine and the art of crisis management”, *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, 56, 2014, 7-42;
- Geordie’ Comment to Morris, N., & Dejevsky, M., 2014, March 14, “Ukraine crisis: Decision time for Crimea in referendum which could change the complexion of Europe”, *The Independent*, Retrieved from <http://www.independent.co.uk>;
- Johnson, F. J., “Update: Russia’s hybrid war in Ukraine ‘is working’”, *HIS Jane’s Defence Weekly*, February 26, 2015, Retrieved from <http://www.janes.com/article/49469/update-russia-s-hybrid-war-in-ukraine-is-working>;

³³ Freedman, “Ukraine and the art of crisis management”, 8.

- Kuzio, T., “Neither East Nor West: Ukraine’s Security Policy Under Kuchma”, *Problems of Post-Communism*, 52, 2005, 59-68;
- Machiavelli, N., *The Prince*, W. K. Marriott, Trans., New York: Sterling Publishing, 2008;
- Mearsheimer, J. I., “Why the Ukraine crisis is the west’s fault: The liberal delusions that provoked Putin”, *Foreign Affairs*, September/October, 2014, Retrieved from <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-08-18/why-ukraine-crisis-west-s-fault>;
- Menon, R., & Rumer, E. B., *Conflict in Ukraine: The unwinding of the post-Cold War order*, Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2015;
- Morgenthau, H., *Politics among nations: The struggle for power and peace*, London: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 1992;
- NATO Joint statement of the NATO-Ukraine commission, May 13, 2015, Retrieved from http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_119425.htm;
- NATO-Ukrainian Charter on a Distinctive Partnership, July 9, 1997, Retrieved from http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_25457.htm;
- Speck, U., “German power and the Ukraine conflict”, *Carnegie Europe*, March 26, 2015, Retrieved from <http://carnegieeurope.eu/2015/03/26/german-power-and-ukraine-conflict>;
- Stepanova, A., “International Law on Legality of the Crimea Secession”, *Beyond The EU*, April, 15, 2014, Retrieved from <http://beyondthe.eu/international-law-crimea-secession/>;
- Stepanova, A., “Ukrainian crisis and international law as the most cynical thing ever existed”, *Beyond The EU*, August, 27, 2014, Retrieved from <http://beyondthe.eu/ukrainian-crisis-international-law-cynical-thing-ever-existed/>;
- The White House, Remarks by President Obama in Press Conference after G7 Summit, *Elmou Briefing Center*, Retrieved June 8, 2015, from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/06/08/remarks-president-obama-press-conference-after-g7-summit>;
- Weiss, M., & Miller, J., “Russia is firing missiles at Ukraine”, *Foreign Policy*, July 17, 2014, Retrieved from http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/07/16/russia_is_firing_missiles_at_ukraine_grad_rockets_us_sanctions.