

THE CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE THEORIES OF REALISM AND LIBERALISM IN THE DEVELOPMENTS OF UKRAINE, ANALYSIS BASED ON THE THEORY OF DEFENSIVE REALISM AND OFFENSIVE REALISM

EHSAN SAJEDI HOSSEINI

PhD Student, International Relations, Cyprus International University.

Abstract

In the framework of realism paradigm, the main goal of countries is not international security and global governance, but national survival. The school of realism considers security as the highest goal. In aggressive realism, international chaos is a strong incentive for states to maximize their relative power. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between the principles of aggressive realism and Putin's doctrine in the Ukraine crisis, which is based on reducing security threats. Three key issues 1- The ineffectiveness of liberal international institutions 2- The logic of power 3- The chaos of the international system can be seen in the aggressive behavior of the Russian president in the Ukraine crisis. The main goal of the Russian president is to turn Russia into a regional hegemonic power, and the goal of the West and the European Union is to expand NATO eastwards in the form of a policy of restraining Russia and preventing it from becoming a major regional power. According to the theory of liberalism, economic cooperation reduces military conflicts, and if Russia were to integrate into the world economy, it would not act aggressively and would not violate international laws. But this country has not had the political and economic capacity to integrate and expand its economic partners with the West. The West believes that democratic values are considered a threat to Russia's political structure. Western policy is based on the values of liberalism and the software in which NATO has expanded; According to the theory of liberalism, international sanctions and global cooperation have isolated Russia and weakened its political and military prestige and economic power.

Keywords: Aggressive Realism, Liberal International Institutions, International System, Security Threats, Hegemonic Power.

INTRODUCTION

Russia's attack on a part of Ukraine is now at the top of the world's agenda. There are different views on this action of Moscow in the international and regional arena, but the analysis in this article is based on some components of the theory of realism regarding the recent event. In the framework of the paradigm of realism, security in political and military forms is defined as protecting the borders and preserving the territorial integrity and values of a state against the dangers of a hostile international environment. In this approach, the main goal of countries is not international security and global governance, but national survival. The school of realism considers security as the highest goal and states that governments seeking security may take actions that lead to conflict with others. From the point of view of the neo-realists, Russia's attack on Ukraine can be seen as one to take revenge on the West, especially America and Europe, who were advancing eastward and confronting Russia through NATO and Ukraine. Second, the strategic resources of Ukraine and the fact that Ukraine is a very important

communication route for Russia and the transfer of energy to the West. Therefore, Ukraine is a strategic location and resource, and the most important security concern is the strengthening of the European Union and some European countries in the east and near the borders of Russia.

Research questions:

Which of the theories of realism and liberalism in international relations better analyze Russia's invasion of Ukraine?

Will the soft tools of liberalism such as international institutions and dependencies and economic cooperation ultimately prevent Russia from winning over Ukraine?

RESEARCH LITERATURE

The literature of this research in relation to the Ukrainian war is based on the findings of Mr. Stephen Walt's guide to the theory of international relations in the Ukrainian war, which is a guide to the analysis of events based on the theories of liberalism and realism; Aggressive realism is a structural theory and part of the school of neorealism, which was first proposed by John Mearsheimer. According to its realism basis, this theory claims that the chaos of the world system causes the aggressive behavior of governments in international politics. Defensive realism is a structural theory derived from the theory of international politics of Kent Waltz, who believes that the chaotic international system encourages states to turn to the policy of moderation and balance of power.

The theoretical framework of realism and non-realism:

In the assumptions of realism and non-realism, governments are the main players in international relations. Moral foundations are not considered in the case of governments. Governments calculate their interests based on power and security, and international institutions do not play a significant role in international relations.

The policy of balance of power prevails in international relations. The anarchic international system and the law of self-help is the guide of governments. The main goal of governments is their survival. Kent Waltz presented the theory of realism in 1979, he believes that the insecurity and anarchy of the politics of the international system does not originate from human nature, but rather the lack of a central power in the international system. Rather, the reason is the absence of a central power in the international system. Kent Waltz considers the first priority to influence the structure of the international system; and he considers other theories such as liberalism approaches and capitalist theories which consider the economy as the foundation, as well as classical realists who only emphasize on the individual and his nature, as reductionist. **(Waltz, 1979)**

In the view of realism, due to the absence of a dominant central authority in the international system and the anarchic nature of the international environment, governments, as the main players in international relations, make their survival and security their guide. From the point of view of aggressive realists, the anarchic nature of the international system often has a Hobbesian structure in which security is a rare element. Therefore, governments wisely seek

to maximize their security and relative power, and adopting aggressive behaviors leads to conflict with other actors. All powers are inherently enemies; For example, we can refer to the behavior of England and France towards the unification of Germany at the end of the Cold War. Despite the fact that they have always been close allies for forty-five years, they felt threatened by the threats of a united Germany. (Mearshiemer,2001;Waltz,2003)

Realism and liberalism:

For realists, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 remind us that great powers sometimes act in dangerous and foolish ways when they feel their interests and security are at stake. Realists know that mere moral condemnation does not prevent these behaviors. It is quite logical that Eastern European countries want to enter NATO or come close to it, considering their concerns about Russia; but it should also be easy to understand why Russian leaders, not just Putin, find this development troubling. Seeing these events through the lens of realism does not mean approving Russia's illegal actions, but simply condemning such behavior to let us know the title of a tragic but recurring aspect of human affairs. Realists have long emphasized the dangers of an overly idealistic foreign policy, including the idea of NATO expansion. (Walt, 2022; Waltz, 2003)

As a political philosophy, liberalism is an admirable basis for organizing society, but as an approach to world politics and a guide to foreign policy, liberalism's shortcomings have once again become apparent. As before, international law and international institutions have proven to be a weak barrier against the predatory behavior of great powers. But they can facilitate more effective collective responses for the interests of aligned governments. Economic interdependence did not stop Moscow from starting its invasion, soft power could not stop Russian tanks, and the negative vote of the United Nations General Assembly did not have much effect in condemning this invasion. This war has destroyed the belief that war is no longer conceivable in Europe and the related claim that NATO's eastward expansion will create an ever-expanding zone of peace. But realism hardly tells us the whole story; For example, realists rightly underestimate the role of norms as powerful constraints on the behavior of great powers, but norms have played a role in interpreting the global response to Russian aggression. If Russian forces act more aggressively in the coming months, the current efforts to isolate and exclude Russia will intensify. Referring to the principles and concepts contained in the theory of realism, it can be said that Russian leaders consider the attack on Ukraine within the framework of national interests and dealing with security threats. In the framework of this theory, like the action of the Soviet Union during Khrushchev's time to install nuclear weapons in Cuba and the swift reaction of Kennedy, the policy of NATO's advance to the east and membership of republics separated from the former Soviet Union threatens the security of this country. (Walt, 2022)

Defensive realism:

Defensive realism is a structural theory in international relations that is derived from the school of neorealism. This theory finds its basis in the international politics theory of Kenneth Waltz, a political scientist. Its fans are Robert jervis, Stephen Walt and others.

Hypothesis:

- 1) The spread of aggressive realism disrupts the willingness of states to conform to the theory of the balance of power and thus reduces the main goal of the state, which is to ensure security.
- 2) The anarchic nature of the international system encourages governments to adopt defensive and moderate policies. States are not inherently aggressive, and the first concern of states is not to maximize power, but to maintain their position in the system.
- 3) States that strive to achieve hegemony in the international system are balanced by other states that seek to maintain the status quo.
- 4) Aggression aimed at achieving security by governments is self-destructive.
- 5) Governments are not as vulnerable as humans in their natural state, and destroying them is a difficult and long task. Governments should wait for definitive evidence of an attack instead of conducting pre-emptive attacks.
- 6) International anarchy is usually benign. As a result, governments only show aggressive behavior when they feel that other actors are a threat against them, which is often at the level of creating a balance of power and deterring the threat.

(Taliaferro, 2000; Waltz, 1979)

Offensive Realist:

It is a structural theory in international relations and belongs to the neorealist school of thought, which was proposed by political researcher John Mearsheimer in response to defensive realism.

Hypothesis:

- 1) Due to the anarchic nature of the international system, conflict is inevitable. This anarchy is generally a Hobbesian situation in which security is scarce and governments try to achieve it by maximizing their relative advantages.
- 2) They consider the government as a wise actor and the main agents in the international system. They believe in the systemic pressures of the international system on governments.
- 3) The international system provides strong incentives for great powers to resort to aggressive measures and increase their security and ensure their survival.
- 4) Due to chaos, the international system leads governments to constantly fear each other and resort to self-help mechanisms to meet their needs.
- 5) The best strategy of the government to increase its relative power to reach hegemony is to rely on offensive tactics.
- 6) International organizations are not considered important; because they consider international institutions as tools of great powers to facilitate the achievement of their goals.

- 7) They are against the issue of disarmament of the great powers that give order to the international system. Because this reduces their power compared to weaker powers and disrupts the existing order. **(Kirshner,2012; Snyder,2002)**

Grounds and reasons for Putin's attack on Ukraine:

Ukraine is the most prominent country located in Eastern Europe in geo-economic, geostrategic and geopolitical dimensions. This country is in the center of attention of big regional and extra-regional powers. With the beginning of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia was under the pressure of two currents from the West, one was the expansion of the European Union and the other was the expansion of NATO. In 2014, the republics of Donetsk and Luhansk achieved internal autonomy.

The majority of people in these areas are Russian. This was an issue that Zelensky did not pay attention to after coming to power, and due to inappropriate interactions, the people of these two republics demanded to join Russia, and eventually Russia recognized the independence of the two republics of Donetsk and Luhansk. Currently, the Russian forces entered the war against the Ukrainian forces to support these two areas. Russia's main concerns are the progress of the North Atlantic Treaty to the east and Russia's territorial borders. The membership of Ukraine and Georgia in NATO is Russia's red line because it is considered a direct threat to the national security of this country. **(Ross Smith & Dawson, 2022)**

Analysis of the Ukrainian war based on the theory of liberalism and realism:

Proponents of the theory of liberalism provide a moral interpretation of the relations governing international relations and believe that within the framework of international institutions, laws and regulations, many disputes and conflicts can be resolved through diplomacy and prevent the occurrence of war. If we want to analyze the performance of Russian leaders in this crisis based on the theory of liberalism, Russia's efforts in the last two decades to deal with NATO's advance to the east and Russia's security borders have been fruitless.

In Russia's attack on Ukraine, the most basic principles of international law, which is respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of this country, have been disregarded. And Russian leaders have come to the conclusion that they cannot prevent NATO's eastward advance and its security borders by resorting to peaceful means.

Due to the growth of liberal democratic values in Ukraine, Russia is worried about its expansion. If we want to analyze Russia's action in the framework of realist theory, it seems that the leaders of this country are trying to use force to neutralize the security threats caused by Ukraine's membership in NATO with military action. Power and balance of power and security are the basic concepts of the proponents of this theory. **(Walt, 2022; Jervis, 1999)**

CONCLUSION

There is a significant relationship between the principles of aggressive realism and Putin's doctrine in the Ukraine crisis, which is based on reducing security threats. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea is a manifestation of the objectification of the theory of new

Russian offensive realism. Three key issues 1- Inefficiency of liberal international institutions 2- The logic of power 3- The anarchy of the international system can be seen in the aggressive behavior of the Russian president in the Ukraine crisis. In aggressive realism, international anarchy is a strong incentive for states to try to maximize their relative power. Due to the prevailing Hobbesian situation in the international system and the scarcity of security goods, the governments are trying to become the strongest actor in the international system or become a regional hegemony; The main goal of the Russian president in the annexation of Crimea and the war in Ukraine is to prepare and turn Russia into a regional hegemonic power.

The goal of the West and the European Union from NATO's eastward expansion policy is based on supporting independent countries in the form of a policy of containing Russia and preventing it from becoming a major regional power. According to the theory of offensive realism, in order to become a regional hegemony, foreign policy strategy should be designed in line with the preparation of power and wealth. In fact, the superiority of the West in the Ukraine war leads to changes in the balance of power in favor of the West and geopolitical changes, the expansion of NATO and the strategy of containing Russia to Russia's borders, control of energy resources and the weakening of Russia's position in the international system.

From the point of view of defensive realism, governments start to make aggressive moves in situations such as Russia's attack on Ukraine, when they feel threatened, and basically the reactions are in the form of a balance of terror or threats; But Russia's reaction in the Ukraine crisis is the occupation of Ukraine's territory and is beyond defensive.

Currently, based on the theory of liberalism, international sanctions and global cooperation have isolated Russia and weakened its political and military credibility and economic power. The norms of liberalism are gradually expanding in Russia and the former Soviet republics. Therefore, democratic values are considered a threat to the political structure of Russia.

Western policy is based on the values of liberalism and the software within which NATO has been expanded; the West believes that if democratic countries are integrated into the global economy, they will not act aggressively; But Russia's aggressive policy has been in violation of international laws. Russia could prevent Ukraine from getting closer to NATO with efficient diplomatic and economic tools, especially in the field of energy, and prevent it from entering into difficult conditions caused by comprehensive sanctions.

Reference

- 1) Jervis, Robert. (1999) Realism, Neoliberalism, and Cooperation: understanding the debate: international security.vol.24, No.1, pp42-63.
- 2) John J. Mearsheimer (1990) International Security Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 5-56.
- 3) Kirshner, Jonathan. (2012) "The Tragedy of Offensive Realism: Classical Realism and the Rise of China." European Journal of International Relations 18:1 pp 53–75.
- 4) Mearsheimer, John, j. (2001) the Tragedy of Great Power Politics, New York: w. w. Norton & company.
- 5) Ross Smith, Nicholas and Dawson, Grant. (2022) Mearsheimer, Realism, and the Ukraine War: From the journal Analyse & Kritik. available from: <https://doi.org/10.1515/auk-2022-2023>.

- 6) Snyder, Glenn H. (2002) "Mearsheimer's World—Offensive Realism and the Struggle for Security: A Review Essay." *International Security* vol.27. No.1, pp 149–173.
- 7) Taliaferro, Jeffery W. (2000-2001) "Security Seeking Under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited" *International Security* vol.25. No. 3 pp. 128–161.
- 8) Walt, Stephen M. (1987) *The Origins of Alliance*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs, Published: Cornell University Press.
- 9) Waltz, Kenneth N. (1979) *Theory of International Politics*. Publisher: New York: McGraw Hill.
- 10) Waltz, Kenneth (2003) *Interview: Conversation with History*: Institute of International Studies. UC Berkeley.
- 11) Walt, Stephen M. (2022) *An International Relations Theory Guide to the War in Ukraine*.