A SHIFT IN IR APPROACH AFTER UKRAINE WAR: REMILITARIZATION OF EUROPE, AN INTERPRETATION THROUGH THE REALIST LENS

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Abstract. *In the research my aim will be to give an explanation on the response and actions of the European countries during the Ukraine war through a realist perspective. The Ukraine war is potentially the new case that has left space for interpretation on the realist interpretation as well as possibly giving room for arguments in criticism of the liberal or neoliberal thinking. Priority will be given to the time frames surrounding the annexation of Crimea and up until the Ukraine War. The conflict's origins and its effects will then be largely interpreted from a realism standpoint. The process of analyzing will be as mentioned priorly in explaining the occurrences during the Ukrainian revolution and the potential clash of interest between the major power or actors (USA, EU, Russia). Further explanation will be given in the approaches of the European country's response to the threat of the Ukraine war, in which the majority of countries choose to increase their military capabilities. It must be noted in my findings that some of the diplomatic elements despite their presence throughout the conflict, the outcomes of them were not very successive, leaving again most of the countries to choose further rearmament rather than diplomatic language. The highlighted aspect in this case is the increase of importance in military power and military alliances as a form of balancing power and maintaining security as well as deterring potential aggression.*

Introduction

The 2022 start of the Ukrainian war has had a tremendous effect on Europe's security environment. The conflict, which developed as a result of the escalating tensions brought on by Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014 and its support for separatist rebels in eastern Ukraine, exposed the weakness of the post-Cold War security order and raised concerns about the likelihood of conflict in the area. The Georgian war, which broke out after the recognition of the separatist republics of southern Ossetia and Abkhazia, can be linked back to comparable actions or behaviors

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on the part of the Russian state. Even in the case of Ukraine, this string of "repeated" incidents eventually escalated to the catastrophic level of the current armed conflict.

The situation of the Ukrainian invasion has led to an increase in the importance of military power, particularly in Europe. The invasion by Russia demonstrated the willingness of a great power to use military force to pursue its interests and expand its sphere of influence, which posed a significant threat to the security of Ukraine and the wider region. As a result, many European countries have increased their military spending and taken steps to enhance their military capabilities in response to this perceived threat. This behavior from a realist perspective can be interpreted and argued that states act to maximize their security and ensure their survival, and in this context, it is not surprising that European states would seek to enhance their military capabilities in response to this threat.

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine were a result of diplomatic failures, and military force has played a significant role in shaping the situation on the ground. This has led the states to rely more on the military power as a means of protecting national interests and resolving conflicts. The invasion has highlighted the importance of military alliances, such as NATO, in ensuring the security of member states. The alliance has played a significant role in providing military support to Ukraine and deterring potential Russian aggression against other member states. This has led to a renewed focus on the importance of military alliances and collective defense as a means of protecting national interests and maintaining regional stability.

The Ukraine war highlighted the limitations of international institutions such as the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in preventing or resolving conflicts. Realists argue that international institutions are often weak and cannot adequately enforce international law or prevent conflicts. As a result, states must rely on their own military power to ensure their security.

Moreover, the situation in Ukraine has led to increased cooperation and coordination among European states in the realm of defense and security. Countries such as Poland and the Baltic states have pushed for greater NATO presence and have increased their own military capabilities to deter potential aggressors. European states have also taken steps to increase their military interoperability and cooperation, including the establishment of the European Union Military Staff and the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) framework.

Furthermore, the Ukraine crisis has highlighted the importance of military power and deterrence in international relations. Many policymakers and analysts argue that a strong military presence and credible threat of retaliation can deter potential aggressors and prevent conflict. This has led to an increased emphasis on military capabilities and deterrence in Europe and beyond.

The Ukraine crisis has certainly reinforced the realist perspectives, as states have become more focused on power and security issues in response to the conflict. Many countries have increased their military spending and modernized their military capabilities, as they seek to bolster their defense capabilities and deter potential aggression. Additionally, the crisis has led to increased competition between major powers, particularly between the United States and Russia, as they seek to assert their influence and protect their interests in the region.

Methodology

In this text the main aspect was the Interpretation of the European IR after the start of the Ukraine war, through a realist perspective or approach. The materials that I have obtained for the interpretation of the topic are based on quantitative method: Sources used are based on International Relations theories from Realist explanation on the behavior and actions of the

European states or countries, mainly from authors such as Hans Morgenthau, John J Mearsheimer as well as Kenneth Waltz. As well as a part of my research was based on some statistical data to monitor and explain the developments of military expenditures from Crimean annexation till the Ukraine war. Hence through the confirmation and testing of the Realist IR theory in the studying of the topic, is done through deductive research.

Literature Review

According to Hans Morgenthau, his theory of realism in international relations, emphasizes the importance of power, self-interest, and the struggle for survival in shaping the behavior of states. The central argument is that the international system is characterized by anarchy, which means that there is no higher authority or government above states that can enforce rules or resolve disputes. As a result, states must rely on their own power to protect themselves and advance their interests. Morgenthau argues that this leads to a constant struggle for power and security among states, and that this struggle is the defining feature of international politics. Morgenthau also emphasizes the importance of national interest in shaping state behavior. He argues that states are motivated primarily by self-interest and that their actions are driven by a desire to maximize their power and security. This means that states will often engage in aggressive behavior if they perceive it to be in their national interest, regardless of the moral or ethical implications of their actions. (Morgenthau, 1948: 97-121)

In addition to his emphasis on power and self-interest, Morgenthau also discusses the importance of diplomacy and international law in shaping state behavior. He argues that diplomacy and negotiation are essential tools for managing conflicts and maintaining stability in the international system. However, he also recognizes that international law is often weak and ineffective in the face of power politics, and that states will often ignore or circumvent international norms and treaties if it is in their national interest to do so. While Morgenthau recognizes the importance of diplomacy and international law, he argues that these institutions are often weak and ineffectual in the face of the harsh realities of power politics. (Morgenthau, 1948: 300-346)

As was previously mentioned, the self-interest factor plays a significant role in determining how nations, or more specifically, states, act or behave, and it is this component that has the creates the feasibility to lead the states into an armed conflict. Desire for power which is seen as necessary tool for achieving the said national interest is the element that predisposes the states for further competition into the international arena. (Morgenthau, 1948: 110-150) Reinhold Niebuhr has argued that moral considerations were often secondary to the pursuit of power, and that states would justify their actions based on moral principles only if it served their own self-interest or would manipulate or conform and align it in accordance to their interest. In the aspect of morality, it has historically has been utilized as a tool in inciting and motivating the masses or the general public in accepting and supporting the cause of that particular

state. This cases of linking moral causes with the actions of their respective states, is seen as a necessary form of legitimizing their actions and in turn generating support through this "moral channel". (Niebuhr, 2021: 10-67) It must be mentioned that despite the use of morality for justifications of immoral actions, the use of force was sometimes necessary to maintain stability and order in the international system. This context however was contested by Reinhold Niebuhr as being only one element of the state's behavior, while he agrees on the use of force in pursuit of state interest, he also believed that states had a responsibility to act morally and to consider the well-being of others in their pursuit of power. (Pedro, 2017) Realists, however, have critiqued the latter as a situation that rarely arises since they believe that the state's interest will take precedence in decisions that may be morally dubious and have an impact on others.

On the aspect of responding to the competitive nature of survival in an anarchic system, especially to the circumstances and conditions of the contemporary International Arena, conventional deterrence is argued as an alternative solution in providing the countries necessary tool for survival. Mearsheimer argues that conventional forces play a critical role in deterring potential adversaries and in defending against conventional military threats. The author gives a detailed definition of conventional deterrence from his book "Conventional Deterrence", and also it outlines the key components of a successful deterrence strategy. A successful deterrence strategy requires a credible threat of punishment, a clear understanding of the adversary's objectives, and the ability to signal resolve and commitment to follow through on threats. (Mearsheimer,1985: 23-66)

A historical overview of conventional deterrence can be presented on significant occasions such as the Cold War, the Gulf War, and the Kosovo War. These case studies are used as examples that highlight the fundamental concepts of conventional deterrence and to highlight the significance of conventional forces in deterrence tactics.

Conventional forces are critical for deterring potential adversaries and for defending against conventional military threats. Despite the presence of nuclear weapons which are considered a factor in impeding any other nuclear threats, they are not sufficient for deterrence because they are not effective in deterring conventional military threats, which are more likely to occur than nuclear threats. (Mearsheimer, 1985: 165-188).

Another issue is the inability of the international institution to prevent or handle conflicts. A critique presented by Mearsheimer is the idea that international institutions cannot effectively manage conflicts between states and promote international cooperation. Mearsheimer argues that international institutions are largely ineffective in achieving these goals because they are unable to overcome the basic problem of anarchy in the international system. (Mearsheimer, 1995: 5-18)

The idea of the potential benefits that states can attain with each other through international cooperation, and that international institutions can play a role in promoting and enhancing or facilitating that aspect is based on the idea of liberal institutionalism. Although it must be recognized that international institutions can sometimes help to mitigate conflicts between states as well as promote cooperation on certain aspects or issues, however these benefits are limited and often overstated. The primary issue of the international institutions lies on the aspect that they are fundamentally limited in their ability to promote international cooperation because they are unable to address the underlying problem of anarchy in the international system.

Thus, anarchy creates a situation in which states are primarily concerned with their own security and self-interest, and are therefore unlikely to cooperate unless it is in their immediate self-interest to do so. Several historical examples can be used to support this claim, such as the League of Nations' inability to stop the start of World War II and the United Nations' sporadic effectiveness in averting hostilities and fostering international cooperation. In the context of nations and international institutions, it is important to note that strong governments frequently use these organizations to promote their own interests rather than the interests of all the member states as a whole.

Mearsheimer suggests a realist strategy for handling international affairs that places a strong emphasis on the role that power and self-interest play in influencing state action. He contends that since states act rationally and want to maximize their own security and survival, their major motivations are the pursuit of power and self-interest. (Mearsheimer, 1995: 18-32)

Military alliances are formed as a countermeasure when states are weak or unable to completely provide the security that ensures their survival against stronger or more powerful states in the international system. This is established also in response to instances where international institutions or organizations are unable or powerless to control one state's violent actions. As explained by Kenneth Waltz's, where in his view, alliances are a sort of balance, which is the main strategy used by states to maintain their sovereignty and security. Waltz defines a military alliance as "a coalition of states that have pledged to aid each other in the event of an attack by an external actor." He notes that alliances are a common feature of the international system and have played an important role in shaping the behavior of states throughout history. (Waltz, 2010: 161-193)

Waltz argues that alliances are a response to the balance of power in the international system. When one state becomes dominant, other states will seek to balance its power through the formation of alliances. This can take the form of defensive alliances, in which states pledge to aid each other in the event of an attack, or offensive alliances, in which states pledge to cooperate in order to expand their power. (Waltz, 2010: 102-128)

According to Waltz, alliances are a means of achieving security in an anarchic system. By aligning with other states, a state can increase its own power and deter potential threats. However, Waltz also notes that alliances can be a source of instability and conflict. Offensive alliances, in particular, can lead to arms races and wars of aggression. Waltz distinguishes between two types of military alliances: formal and informal. Formal alliances are codified in a treaty or agreement, and often include specific obligations and commitments. Informal alliances, on the other hand, are based on shared interests and common goals, and may not be explicitly defined. Waltz argues that formal alliances are more stable than informal alliances, because they provide a clear framework for cooperation and communication. However, he notes that formal alliances can also be a source of conflict, because they can create a sense of obligation and entrapment. (Waltz, 2010: 102-128)

Waltz also discusses the impact of military alliances on the balance of power in the international system. He notes that alliances can either reinforce or undermine the balance of power, depending on their composition and objectives. Defensive alliances, for example, can help to balance power by deterring potential aggressors.

Offensive alliances, however, can upset the balance of power by creating a dominant coalition that can threaten the security of other states. (Waltz, 2010: 161-193)

1.The Crimean annexation and Ukraine war

The relations between Russia and Ukraine started to deteriorate shortly after the fall of president Viktor Yanukovych as a result of the Ukrainian revolution or Euromaidan revolution from 2013 until 2014. The revolution was sparked by Yanukovych's decision to abandon an association agreement with the European Union in favor of closer ties with Russia, which was seen as a betrayal by many Ukrainians who wanted their country to align more closely with the West. The revolution also reflected deeper grievances over corruption, economic stagnation, and political repression under Yanukovych's rule. (Sobolieva, 2022) The EU and the US supported the protesters and called for Yanukovych to step down, while Russia supported Yanukovych and accused the West of meddling in Ukraine's internal affairs. Once Viktor Yanukovych was overthrown, the newly established government signed the association agreement with the EU that Yanukovych had reneged on and forged deeper connections with the West. However, in light of these events, Russia responded by annexing Crimea and supporting the Pro-Russian separatist states of Luhansk and Donetsk. (Ellyatt, 2022)

Mearsheimer contends that the conflict in Ukraine was driven by Russia's desire to protect its strategic interests and prevent the expansion of Western influence. He argues that the West's support for the 2014 Ukrainian revolution and its efforts to integrate Ukraine into Western institutions threatened Russia's security and strategic position. Russia perceived these actions as a threat to its security and strategic interests and responded by annexing Crimea and supporting separatist rebels in Eastern Ukraine. The West failed to appreciate Russia's concerns and interests and pursued policies that were seen as aggressive and threatening by Moscow, which contributed to the escalation of the conflict. (Mearsheimer 2014, 1-12)

The Minsk accords were diplomatic attempt to reconciliate and further deescalate the situation of Ukraine and Russia. It consists of two agreements, Minsk I and Minsk II. The first agreement was signed in September 2014, but it failed to bring an end to the fighting in eastern Ukraine. The second agreement, Minsk II, was signed in February 2015 and included more detailed provisions for a ceasefire and a political settlement of the conflict. (Ukraine crisis: Leaders agree peace roadmap, 2015)

However, the Accords proved to be incapable of resolving the conflict and deescalate the tensions between Ukraine, Russia and the separatist groups, where it eventually was meaningless with Russian invasion on 23 February of 2022. It was a diplomatic failure of the western EU and USA to find a solution and reconcile, as well as failing to bring the Russian and Ukrainian government to the table for any kind of negotiation. (Nossel, 2022) Failure of the diplomacy was due to power imbalance, the power imbalance between Ukraine and Russia made it difficult for Ukraine to negotiate on equal terms with Russia. Due to Russia's size and might, Ukraine was unable to compete on its own terms. As argued and linked with Morgenthau's approach, Russia as a regional power not wanting any western encroachment in its sphere of influence. The clash of interest between the major powers would make the treaty meaningless, thus leading to the behavior of Russia with fully mobilizing its army to attack Ukraine. (Morgenthau, 1967: 1-12)

The inability of the International Organization or Intergovernmental organization to stop or constrain Russia was also visible, and also the aspect of the diplomacy is not been productive in further generating any positive outcome or potential for either of the countries to come to the negotiation table. This as mentioned from the realist perspective that the inability of the international institutions lies from the limitations that they have for promoting any form of cooperation and they are unable to solve the problem of the anarchy in the international arena. (Mearsheimer,1995:30-41) Even in international organizations like the United Nations, the Security Council, which consists of 5 nations (the United States, Russia, United Kingdom, France, and China), holds permanent seats and has veto power over all decisions. So, it becomes more challenging for these institutions to act and implement a suitable response in accordance with the situation that is currently occurring in Ukraine.

2.Europe Remilitarization as a response to the Ukraine war

Even after the Crimean annexation from Russia, many European countries fell the lack of the security aspect as the Russian aggression was successful in obtaining the territories as well as try to negate the sphere of influence of the western powers such as USA and EU. As a result of the Crimean annexation, many European countries increased their military expenditures. According to SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) Military Expenditure Database, after Russian aggression on Crimea, a significant number of European countries increased their military expenses. Countries such as Germany (from 44.5 billion dollars in 2013 to 53.4 billion in 2021), Poland (from 8.6 billion dollars in 2013 to 14.6 billion dollars in 2021), Spain (from 13.2 in 2013 to 18.8 billion dollars in 2021), Greece (from 4.4 billion in 2014 to 6.3 billion in 2021), Slovenia (from 530 million dollars in 2014 to 864 million in 2021), Estonia (from 413 million dollars in 2014 to 676 million dollars in 2021), Latvia (from 405 million dollars in 2014 to 673 million dollars in 2021), Lithuania (from 475 million dollars in 2014 to 986 million dollars in 2021), Denmark (from 3.1 billion dollars in 2014 to 3.7 billion in 2021), Norway (from 6.9 in 2014 to 7.5 in 2021).

However, the increase of tensions and insecurities among European countries rose during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Germany especially would mark on what was called the turning point for the German state "Zeitenwende", Chancellor Olaf Scholz pledged to increase defense spending by €100 billion. For the first time after 7 decades Germany would undertake the role of a strong military power and presence in Europe and will be the largest military spender in Europe. With Russia's invasion of Ukraine, according to Scholz, it has become obvious that "we need to invest much more in our country's security, in order to safeguard our freedom and our democracy." (Mackenzie, 2022) Not only Europeans, but especially Germans, were taken aback by German Chancellor Martin Schulz's plan to more than increase the financing for his country's military. Years of dealing with the country's own past have kept it from developing a sizable military, but now a conflict is edging closer to Europe. (Schmitz, 2022).

Germanies chancellor is planning to modernize the countries army, and by the end of 2024 it will plan to spend over 2% of its GDP yearly on defense. These expenditures are seen as a necessary action in order to maintain the security of its citizens and Europe. (Jennen, Pearson, & Delfs, 2022) This expenditure has led to Germany radically change its former approaches and reestablish itself as a potential military power in the region (Hoff, 2022) Days later, Belgium said on February 25 that

it will increase its defense spending from its current level of €4.2 billion (0.9% of GDP) to €6.9 billion (1.54% of GDP) by 2030. Romania said on March 1 that starting in 2023, it will increase its defense spending from 2.02% to 2.5% of GDP. (Mackenzie, 2022) Mateusz Morawiecki, the prime minister of Poland, announced on Monday that his nation is planning on further increasing its defense spending to 4% of GDP. (Welle, 2023). Sweden, for instance, has also increased its military spending as a result of the conflict in Ukraine as well. As reported by supreme commander of the Swedish armed forces of a war that has never seen before since World War 2, and the need to increase its military capabilities in order to face this challenge and threat (Nezirevic, 2023).

This reaction and response of European countries in remilitarizing is according to Morgenthau, an action that is taken for the aim of deterring potential adversaries, in this case Russia.

In the context of Europe, the Ukraine war may have led some states to believe that their security is threatened, leading them to increase their military capabilities as a means of deterrence. For example, Poland has increased its defense spending since the Ukraine war, with the aim of strengthening its military capabilities and deterring potential Russian aggression. Similarly, the Baltic states have sought to enhance their military capabilities as a means of deterring Russia, including through the establishment of a joint military unit. These behaviors can be attested also from the argument presented by Mearsheimer in conventional deterrence. According to Mearsheimer, states can use their military capabilities to deter potential aggressors from taking hostile actions. In the aftermath of the Ukraine war, some European states may have sought to increase their conventional military capabilities as a means of deterrence against Russian aggression. Mearsheimer has also argued that the remilitarization of Europe is driven in part by the decline of US power and influence in the region. According to Mearsheimer, the US has been the dominant military power in Europe since the end of World War II, but its military presence has declined in recent years. This has created a power vacuum in Europe, which other states are seeking to fill through the remilitarization of their own military capabilities. (Mearsheimer, 1985)

In the case of military alliances where there has been the case of multiple countries attempting to join military alliances such as the case of Sweden with NATO, where they feel that from the realist perspective are not able or capable to fully handle alone the matter of their national security. Thus, leaving these countries to balance the power of the state of Russia, and eventually maintain their security. (Waltz, 2010:161-193)

Furthermore, many EU countries as well as NATO members have played a vital role in arming the Ukraine government in its war against Russia. In providing multiple military equipment as well as various kinds of military weaponry, from rifles, to missiles, drones, tanks etc., etc. One interpretation of this move is that it is driven by the desire to contain Russian power and influence in the region. Russia's annexation of Crimea and involvement in the Ukraine conflict represents a threat to the balance of power in the region, and therefore NATO and the EU are seeking to limit Russia's influence through the arming of Ukraine. In this view, arming Ukraine is a means of creating a deterrence against Russian aggression and maintaining a balance of power in the region.

Another interpretation is that arming Ukraine is a means of expanding NATO and EU influence in the region. Realists argue that states will seek to expand their influence and power whenever possible, and the arming of Ukraine can be seen as a means of advancing the interests of NATO and the EU in the region. This can be

viewed as a way of increasing the number of states that are aligned with NATO and the EU, thereby expanding their sphere of influence. Or this can be an interpretation of both containing as well as expanding the sphere of influence.

Conclusion

According to the realist interpretation, the situation of the Ukrainian invasion has led to an increase in the importance of military power for several reasons. Realism is a theory of international relations that focuses on the importance of power, security, and self-help in international politics. Realists believe that states are the primary actors in international relations and that their behavior is driven by their pursuit of power and self-interest.

Firstly, the Ukrainian invasion has demonstrated the importance of military power in deterring aggression and maintaining the security of states. Realists argue that states can only rely on themselves for their security, and that military power is essential to deter potential aggressors and protect a state's territorial integrity. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has shown that states that lack sufficient military power are vulnerable to aggression and territorial expansion by more powerful states.

Secondly, the Ukrainian invasion has highlighted the importance of military alliances in balancing power and deterring aggression. Realists argue that states will form alliances with other states that share their security interests and have compatible military capabilities. The conflict in Ukraine has led to the formation of new military alliances, such as the Enhanced Forward Presence in the Baltics and the Black Sea region, as well as increased cooperation between NATO and non-NATO countries in the region.

Lastly, the Ukrainian invasion has shown that military power can be used as a tool of coercion and influence in international politics. Realists argue that states use their military power to gain advantage over other states and to achieve their political objectives. Russia's invasion of Ukraine was a deliberate attempt to assert its influence over Ukraine and the region, and to challenge the international order.

In summary, the realist interpretation suggests that the situation of the Ukrainian invasion has increased the importance of military power in international politics. Military power is essential for deterring aggression, maintaining security, balancing power, and achieving political objectives.

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