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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR: AN INTRACTABLE CHALLENGE TO THE CONCEPT OF A GLOBAL SOCIETY AND LIBERAL ETHICS

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Abstract

It is now over a year since Russian launched its so-called special military operation against Ukraine. Several states, as well as the North-Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the United Nations, and other International Organizations condemned the war from inception. At the same time, there other states that have opted to remain neutral. Regardless, the initial general belief that this conflict would not degenerate into a long drawn -out war has waned in the face of escalation and increasing involvement of NATO, thus raising fears of an outbreak of a Third World War (WWIII). This article conceptually examines the challenges that the Russia-Ukraine war poses to the prospect of a global society and ethics of liberalism in international relations. In so doing, it unravels glaring limitations and questions on both counts. Ultimately, it advances the argument that vital states' interests, competition for power and security in an anarchic international system still hold great sway in international relations. As such, liberalism ethics that has fueled the concept of a global society are altogether proven to be untenable in the midst power politics power politics and nationalism that continues to characterize the international system.

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Introduction:-

The Russia-Ukraine armed conflict has been raging for over a year. When it sparked off, it was met with condemnation from several states. Meanwhile, other states, such as South Africa, opted to take a neutral position. In any case, the initial general belief was that the conflict would not degenerate into a long drawn -out war or special military operation as dubbed by Russia. However, the contrary has become true, and there is no end in sight yet. To the contrary, there has been a great deal of escalation that has generated fears for a break out a Third World War (WWIII).

The largest global military alliance NATO, though the most critical voice of Russia-Ukraine war, had from the onset insisted that it would not get involved militarily on Ukraine's side. It had vowed to hold this position provided its territorial integrity was neither threatened nor suffered aggression at Russia's hands. However, January 2023, brought with it a change in NATO's stand-aside approach. Though, NATO had already been providing military and humanitarian aid to Ukraine, it acted by providing the embattled state of Ukraine with heavy military armaments,

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such as the German Leopard tanks. This changed the complexion of the war. Despite the rhetoric from the NATO states to justify this scale up of military aid to Ukraine, this action bore all the essential ingredients of serving as a harbinger to a proxy war between NATO and Russia.

This article examines the challenges that the Russia-Ukraine war poses to the prospect of a global society and ethics of liberalism in international relations. In so doing, it unravels glaring limitations and questions on both counts. Ultimately, it advances the argument that vital states' interests, competition for power and security in an anarchic international system is far from being constricted in the face of what has been glorified, by some scholars of international relations, as the coming of age of global society whose conception fundamentally draws upon ideas of liberalism.

Ethics of Liberalism in International Relations

Liberalism in international relations is an ethical framework that promotes the idea of cooperation and peaceful relations between nations. Liberalism anchors on an understanding that by working together countries would achieve mutual benefits, and that democratic principles and human rights should be respected worldwide. The ethical values of liberalism are deeply embedded in the liberal international order, which has shaped the post-World War II international system.

One of the key ethical principles of liberalism is the promotion of human rights. Liberalism seeks to uphold individual freedoms and civil liberties, and to protect these rights from violations by authoritarian regimes or other states. According to Claude, one of the core values of liberalism is human rights protection and it is central to the international order that liberals seek to promote" (Claude, 2002).

Another important ethical principle of liberalism is the promotion of democracy. Liberal theorists argue that democratic countries are more likely to resolve conflicts peacefully, and that democratic institutions can provide a bulwark against authoritarianism and political repression. As Francis Fukuyama has written, "democracy is not just a matter of institutions, but of values, and it is these values that underpin the liberal international order" (Fukuyama, 2014). Hence, it emphasizes the importance of individual agency and empowerment, both domestically and internationally. Liberal theorists argue that individuals need to demand for their interests and goals with freedom and it should be protected by the state and international community. In Sen's view, "the promotion of individual freedom and agency is a central aspect of the liberal vision, both at the national and international levels" (Sen, 1999).

Ethically, liberalism also promotes economic interdependence. Liberal theorists believe that economic cooperation and trade can create mutual benefits and promote peace between countries. For Keohane and Nye, "economic interdependence can create a sense of shared interests and mutual dependence, which can help to prevent conflict and promote cooperation" (Keohane and Nye, 2000). Liberal theorists argue that economic interdependence through free trade can promote peace and prosperity, as it encourages countries to rely on each other for mutual benefit. In the same vein, Adam Smith argued that trade would positively be attained where there is tolerable administration of justice, easy taxes and peace (Smith, 1776).

Additionally, liberalism emphasizes the importance of international law and institutions in promoting stability and order. Liberal theorists argue that international law and institutions can help to prevent conflicts and provide a framework for resolving disputes peacefully. "International law and institutions are essential to the liberal international order, as they provide a basis for cooperation and help to constrain the exercise of power by states" (Slaughter, 2004). Liberalism thus promotes the idea of cosmopolitanism, or a sense of global citizenship and responsibility. Liberal theorists argue that people have obligations to others beyond their national borders and that these obligations should be reflected in international policies and practices. In Nussbaum's perspective, "liberals believe that all human beings have equal worth and dignity, and that we have a duty to promote the well-being of all people, regardless of their nationality" (Nussbaum, 2006).

Liberalism favors the promotion of peace and conflict resolution through diplomacy and dialogue in international relations. Liberal theorists argue that peaceful conflict resolution should be prioritized over military solutions and that dialogue should be used to address disagreements and find common ground. On this score, Doyle observes that "liberals believe that conflicts can and should be resolved peacefully, and that diplomacy and dialogue are essential tools for achieving this goal" (Doyle, 2016).

Furthermore, liberalism advocates for the idea of protecting human rights by use of military force or humanitarian intervention aimed at preventing atrocities. Liberal theorists argue that the international community has a responsibility to intervene to protect the rights of the citizens in from gross abuses by the state. According to Samantha Power, a leading scholar and former US ambassador to the United Nations, the critical concern of the liberal international order is humanitarian intervention, as it reflects the commitment to protect human rights and prevent atrocities" (Power, 2002).

Liberalism promotes the idea of multilateralism, or the belief that international cooperation should be pursued through collective action and institutions that involve multiple states. Liberal theorists argue that multilateralism is essential for addressing global challenges and promoting stability and order. Liberals "believe that multilateralism is the best way to address the challenges of globalization, as it allows for cooperation and coordination among many actors" (Nye, 2004).

Liberalism also believes in the promotion of democracy and human rights in international relations. Liberal theorists argue that democracy and human rights are essential for the protection of individual freedom and the development of just societies. As such, "the spread of democracy and human rights is a key aspect of the liberal vision, as it promotes the values of individual freedom, equality, and justice" (Fukuyama, 1992). These ideas emphasize the importance of cooperation, respect for individual rights, and the use of non-violent means to achieve peace and stability in the world.

Furthermore, liberalism promotes the idea that shared the shared community is the essential to all human beings which is the corn-stone of cosmopolitanism, and that international cooperation should be guided by a sense of common humanity. Liberal theorists argue that cosmopolitanism can promote a sense of moral responsibility, as well as empathy, and solidarity for the well-being of others. In his contribution Nussbaum stress that cosmopolitanism has the importance of recognizing the dignity and worth of all human beings, despite national, ethnic, or religious affiliations" (Nussbaum, 1997).

In summary, the ethics of liberalism in international relations are multifaceted and include the promotion of human rights, democracy, economic interdependence, global cooperation, international law and institutions, cosmopolitanism, the promotion of peace, conflict resolution through diplomacy and dialogue, humanitarian intervention, and the promotion of individual freedom and agency. These ethical principles reflect the commitment to human rights, democracy, and cooperation that are central to the liberal international order. All these are reflected in the concept and prospect of a global society.

Claims of a Global Society

In the recent years, International Relation has experienced a gigantic increase in the concept of global society. Global society refers to the idea that people around the world are increasingly interconnected and interdependent, creating a sense of global community that transcends national boundaries (Wendt, 1992). This perspective challenges traditional notions of state sovereignty and emphasizes the importance of holistic strategy to curb the various emanating challenges globally such as conflict, climate change and poverty.

Wendt (1999) one of key proponents of the global society concept is Alexander Wendt, who argues that the state-centric model of international relations is outdated and that we should focus on understanding the emerging global system as a complex social network of actors. The behaviour of individuals and groups across the border are shaped by set of values, identities and norms that prevail in the global society. Another influential scholar in this field is John W. Meyer, who emphasizes the role of institutions in shaping global society (Meyer, 2000). Meyer stresses that institutions, including the United Nations and international NGOs, create a sense of shared purpose and help to coordinate action across borders.

Despite the growing interest in the concept of global society, there is still debate among scholars about its exact nature and scope. Some argue that global society is still a relatively weak force compared to national identities and interests (Haas, 2000), while others suggest that it represents a fundamental shift in the nature of global politics (Keohane and Nye, 2000).

Other scholars have also contributed to the understanding of global society in international relations. For instance, David Held emphasizes the importance of globalization in creating a global society (Held, 1995). According to

Held, the process of globalization has led to the formation of a global public sphere where people from around the world can communicate and exchange ideas. This has facilitated the growth of a global civil society that transcends national boundaries and seeks to address global challenges. Additionally, Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink argue that international norms and values have played a significant role in shaping global society (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). They suggest that norms such as human rights and environmental protection have become increasingly widespread and are now part of the global discourse. The global discourse on these issues precipitated transnational advocacy networks with a view work to promote these.

The concept of global society also has practical implications for international relations. For example, it suggests that states must team up to address global challenges, and that holistic action is necessary to achieve meaningful progress. This has led to the formation of international and regional organizations such as the United Nations and the European Union respectively, which seek to promote cooperation and coordination among states.

In sum, the concept of global society offers a commendable framework for understanding the complex and interconnected nature of the world we live in. With respect to incidences of war and international peace, such as the Russia-Ukrainian war, this globalist view supplements ethics of liberalism.

Relationship between the Concept of a Global Society and Liberalism

As observed earlier, the notion of a global society refers to a world in which people, economies, and cultures are increasingly interconnected and interdependent. Liberalism, on the other hand, is a political philosophy that emphasizes individual liberty, limited government, and free markets. While these two concepts may seem unrelated at first glance, they are actually closely intertwined, as the principles of liberalism have helped to shape the development of a global society.

One way in which liberalism has contributed to the birth of a global society is through the promotion of free trade and globalization. Liberal theorists argue that open markets and free trade can lead to economic growth and greater prosperity for all nations. This idea has been a driving force behind the trend toward globalization, which has facilitated the exchange of goods, services, and ideas across borders (Friedman, 1999).

Liberalism has also played a role in promoting the spread of democratic values and institutions around the world. Democracy has been viewed by Liberal theorists as the best form of government, as it allows individuals to exercise their rights and freedoms while promoting peace and stability (Diamond & Morlino, 2004). As a result, liberal governments and organizations have often worked to support democratic transitions in other countries, contributing to the development of a global society based on democratic principles. On this front, they argue that individuals have inherent rights that should be protected by the state, including the right to freedom of expression, association, and religion (Rawls, 1971). This emphasis on individual rights has helped to shape the development of international human rights law and has led to the creation of international organizations like the United Nations, which work to promote and protect human rights around the world.

Moreover, liberalism has also contributed to the development of a global civil society, which is made up of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), social movements, and other groups that work to promote social, economic, and environmental justice. Liberal theorists argue that civil society plays an important role in promoting democracy and holding governments accountable (Keane, 2003). The growth of civil society has been facilitated by advances in communication technology and has enabled individuals and organizations to coordinate their efforts across borders in pursuit of common goals.

Thus, the concept of a global society and liberalism are closely linked, as the principles of liberalism have helped to shape the emergence of a world that is increasingly interconnected and interdependent. By promoting free trade, globalization, and democratic values, liberalism has contributed to the development of a global society that emphasizes individual freedom and economic prosperity.

Challenges in Understanding the outbreak the Russia-Ukraine War in Liberalism Terms

It is a challenging task understanding the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine War in liberalism terms. Liberalism posits that democracy, rule of law, individual rights, and free markets are essential for peace and stability (Heywood, 2020). In this regard, the Russia-Ukraine conflict can be seen as a clash between the liberal and illiberal worldviews. Russia, under the leadership of President Putin, has been criticized for its authoritarian rule, violation of human

rights, and disregard for the rule of law (Sakwa, 2019). On the other hand, Ukraine has been striving to align with the West and embrace liberal values, including democracy and market reforms (Sasse, 2021).

Liberalism tends to emphasize the role of economic interdependence and trade in promoting peace and cooperation between states (Keohane & Nye, 2020). Nevertheless, Russia's energy exports to Europe, including natural gas, have been used as a political tool to exert pressure on Ukraine and other neighbouring countries (Sakwa, 2019). This has undermined the liberal idea of free trade and economic interdependence as a means of promoting peace.

Another challenge of explaining the Russia-Ukraine conflict in liberal terms is the role of identity politics. Liberalism emphasizes individual rights and freedoms, but identity politics is often based on collective identities, such as ethnicity and nationality (Kymlicka, 2019). The conflict in Ukraine has been fueled by competing national and linguistic identities, with Ukrainian and Russian-speaking populations often taking different sides. This highlights the difficulty of reconciling liberal values of individual rights and freedoms with the demands of collective identity groups.

Additionally, the Russia-Ukraine conflict has exposed the limits of liberal internationalism, which aims to promote democracy and human rights globally. The conflict has demonstrated that liberal values are not universal and that they can be challenged by authoritarian states that promote alternative values, such as sovereignty and national interest (Zakaria, 2021). In this way, it has revealed the challenges of building democratic institutions in post-Soviet states, which are based on free and fair elections, human rights, and the rule of law (Sakwa, 2019). Liberal democracy as a model for political change in non-Western societies has thus virtually become untenable. This is because this conflict has raised questions about the effectiveness of liberal democracy promotion as a foreign policy tool and the need to consider alternative approaches.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has revealed the limits of international law and institutions in resolving disputes between states. The conflict has shown that international law can be ignored or violated by powerful states, undermining the liberal idea of a rules-based international order (García-Salmones Rovira & Sadurski, 2021). This highlights the need for stronger international institutions and mechanisms to enforce international law and norms. Similarly, whereas Liberalism emphasizes the importance of cooperation and negotiation to address security challenges, the conflict has been marked by military confrontation and violence (Hurrell, 2019). This also demonstrates the difficulty of reconciling liberal values of peace and cooperation with the realities of power politics and strategic competition.

It is worthwhile to note that the Russia-Ukraine conflict has roots in the Soviet era and the legacy of Soviet policies towards Ukraine, such as the forced collectivization of agriculture, political repression, and Russification (Motyl, 2018). These historical factors have contributed to the development of distinct national identities in Ukraine and Russia, and shaped the dynamics of the conflict. Besides, Ukraine's transition to democracy and market economy after the collapse of the Soviet Union has been marked by corruption, oligarchic rule, and weak institutions, which have contributed to the country's vulnerability to external pressure and internal conflict (Tismaneanu, 2019).

The conflict has been influenced by the domestic politics of Russia and Ukraine, including the role of political elites, civil society, and public opinion (Petro, 2017). To compound the situation, the conflict has deep historical roots, dating back to the Soviet era and the legacy of the Cold War (Kuzio, 2021). Moreover, it has been shaped by cultural differences between Russia and Ukraine, including language, religion, and political culture (Glebov, 2019). There have been centuries of territorial disputes, cultural and linguistic divisions, and the legacy of Soviet rule (Tsygankov, 2018). The Russian-speaking population in Ukraine has historical and cultural ties to Russia, and their demands for autonomy and recognition have been a major source of tension in the conflict. The Russian government has also been accused of using state-controlled media to spread disinformation and propaganda, creating a distorted view of the conflict among the Russian public (Pomerantsev, 2019). This has exacerbated tensions and contributed to the polarization of public opinion (Wilson, 2019). This has also been an affront on the liberal values of free speech, press freedom, and transparency in contexts where media independence is under threat.

This highlights the challenge of promoting liberal values of democracy and political accountability in authoritarian contexts. Furthermore, it highlights the challenges of reconciling cultural differences with national unity and sovereignty. Apparently, in such contexts where cultural identity is closely tied to political power and territorial claims, the influence liberal values are constricted (Sakwa, 2015). Whereas liberalism promotes the principles of

individualism, tolerance, and diversity, the conflict has been fueled by the politics of identity and nationalism, both in Russia and Ukraine. Russia has justified its intervention in Ukraine as protecting the rights of Russian speakers and ethnic Russians in Ukraine, while Ukraine has promoted a narrative of defending its territorial integrity and national identity against Russian aggression (Wilson, 2018).

It has also increasingly become hard to explain the Russia-Ukraine conflict in terms of the role of economic interests as perceived by liberalism. Liberalism emphasizes the importance of free trade and economic interdependence as a means of promoting peace and cooperation. Nonetheless, economic interests have also played a role in the conflict (Hill, 2018). The conflict has disrupted trade relations between Russia and Ukraine, and has had wider economic consequences for the region and beyond. Geopolitical factors have been involved in shaping the conflict in that it has been influenced by the strategic interests of external actors, such as the United States, NATO, and the European Union, who have sought to promote their own geopolitical agendas in the region (Sauer, 2020). In the wake of this, it has become challenging to reconcile liberal values of self-determination, collective identities (national identity) and sovereignty with the strategic interests of external actors. As noted by Kuus, the conflict has specifically raised questions about the legitimacy of the Ukrainian government and the right of the Crimean Peninsula to self-determination (Kuus, 2017).

Moreover, the conflict has highlighted the challenges of balancing the competing interests of national security and human rights. Liberalism emphasizes the importance of protecting human rights and individual liberties, but the conflict has been marked by human rights abuses, including the annexation of Crimea and the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine (Krylova, 2018). This has raised questions about the legitimacy of using military force to protect national security, and the limits of liberal values in the face of security threats.

The role of international institutions and norms in shaping the conflict has also been cast into question by the conflict. The legitimacy and effectiveness of international norms and institutions, such as the United Nations, the European Union, and NATO, in resolving conflicts and promoting peace (Emerson, 2019) has been difficult to appreciate. In the face of this, liberal values of multilateralism, collective security, and international cooperation in contexts where geopolitical tensions and power politics prevail have been hard to promote. For one thing, the conflict has exposed the divisions and distrust between Russia and the West, as well as the limitations of existing security mechanisms such as the OSCE and NATO (Kupchan, 2019). For another, the conflict has highlighted the importance of military power and deterrence in preventing aggression and promoting stability, which is at odds with liberal values of disarmament and conflict resolution through peaceful means (Trenin, 2017). Consequently, it is clearly not easy to reconcile liberal values of peace and security with the realities of power politics and geopolitical competition.

The conflict has raised questions about the role of international law and the responsibility to protect in preventing human rights abuses and protecting vulnerable populations. The conflict has resulted in the displacement of millions of people, widespread human rights abuses, and violations of international law, which has highlighted the limitations of liberal theories in promoting human security and protecting vulnerable populations (Bilan, 2019). Russia's annexation of Crimea and intervention in eastern Ukraine have been widely condemned as violations of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, but Russia has justified its actions as protecting the rights of Russian speakers and ethnic Russians in Ukraine (Wilson, 2018). As such, human rights and the responsibility to protect are not always reconcilable with the realities of power politics and geopolitical interests.

The West has imposed economic sanctions on Russia in response to its annexation of Crimea and intervention in eastern Ukraine, but the impact of these sanctions has been limited and has not led to a resolution of the conflict (Hill, 2018). Liberalism values the principles of free trade and economic interdependence, but the conflict has shown that economic interdependence alone is not enough to prevent conflicts or mitigate the effects of sanctions and embargoes (Ding, 2017). The ineffectiveness of economic sanctions as a tool of liberal foreign policy reveals the discrepancy between peaceful conflict resolution and economic interdependence, on the one hand, and with the realities of power politics and geopolitical rivalries, on the other hand.

Finally, the conflict has exposed the limitations of liberal theories of international relations in explaining the behavior of non-liberal actors such as Russia. Russian foreign policy is guided by a vision of a multi-polar world order, which challenges the liberal vision of a rules-based international order dominated by the West (Tsygankov,

2018). This highlights the challenge of reconciling liberal values of universalism and international cooperation with the realities of divergent worldviews and geopolitical interests.

Implications of Russia-Ukraine War for Globalism and Liberal Ethics

The Russia-Ukraine conflict raises a range of ethical issues related to the humanitarian crisis, responsibility for protecting civilians, media coverage, and propaganda. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that prioritizes the protection of human rights, promotes impartiality and accuracy in media coverage, and seeks to address the root causes of the conflict. Furthermore, it requires addressing the complex interplay of historical legacies, cultural differences, economic interdependence, power politics, sovereignty, interventionism, democracy, institutional development, regional security dynamics and divergent worldviews.

The conflict highlights the limitations of liberal theories and the notions of a Global Society. In its face, liberal values cannot be fully reconciled with the realities of power politics, identity politics, economic interdependence, media manipulation, geopolitical factors and national security interests. Promoting values and institutions of collective security, free trade, civil society, and grassroots movements, and proponents of a Global Society and liberals cannot in itself create a more peaceful and prosperous world for all people. Explaining the outbreak of war in liberalism terms requires an understanding of the complex ways in which war can challenge and undermine the fundamental principles of liberalism, including individual freedom, democracy, and global cooperation that lies at the heart of the concept of a Global Society.

There is a tension between the principles of liberalism and the realities of power politics. While liberalism, just like those who speak of a global society, values cooperation, diplomacy, multilateralism and peaceful means for conflict resolution, the anarchic nature of the international system can make it difficult to achieve these goals. This anarchy refers to the absence of a central government to make and enforcement rules of engagement in this system. As a result, in any case, liberal democracies may feel compelled to engage in military action in order to protect their national interests or respond to threats from other countries (Ikenberry, 2009). NATO is on this course, at least indirectly, in the Russia-Ukraine war.

As evidenced by the Russia-Ukraine conflict, war can have a destabilizing effect on international relations, which can make it more difficult for liberal democracies to engage in cooperative diplomacy and global governance. This can result in a retreat from multilateralism and an emphasis on unilateral action and nationalism. This militates against claims of a global society for collective actions to address global challenges such as climate change, poverty, and conflict. Furthermore, an outbreak of war can lead to a breakdown of democratic institutions, as governments prioritize national security over individual freedom and expand their control over the economy and society (Chenoweth, 2017). This can result in a weakening of the rule of law, international cooperation, civil liberties, and of other democratic principles, which are central to the liberal conception of democracy (Diamond, 1999). All this defies the existence of a shared set of values, norms, and identities that shape the behaviour of individuals and groups across borders in the global society.

Furthermore, explaining the outbreak of war in liberalism terms can be complicated by the fact that liberalism itself is not a monolithic ideology, but rather encompasses a range of different perspectives and approaches. For example, some strands of liberal thought prioritize individual rights and freedoms above all else, while others prioritize economic liberalism and free markets. This diversity of perspectives can make it difficult to arrive at a clear and unified position on the causes and consequences of war within liberal discourse. Some liberal theorists argue that war is an inevitable product of the anarchic international system, while others view it as a result of domestic political factors such as nationalism, populism, and economic inequality.

Conclusion

The realities of power politics and nationalism with what Russia-Ukraine war has demonstrated make it difficult to practically achieve the goals of collective security, peace, cooperation, democracy, and individual freedom. Moreover, the outbreak of war has revealed underlying power imbalances and inequalities within the international system, which can undermine the liberal ideal of equal rights and opportunities for all individuals and nations. Respect for national sovereignty is a fundamental principle of international relations, and the annexation of Crimea and other Ukrainian territories raises concerns about the use of force to alter borders. These developments and the actual outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war make it hard believe in the emergency of a global society and the sway of liberal ethics in international relations as they raise complex ethical questions related to the use of force, self-

determination, media and propaganda, and economic interests and collective global action. Addressing these ethical considerations will require careful reflection, dialogue, and engagement among all parties involved.

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