Piotr Pietrzak
ORCID: 0000-0003-0464-1991
Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Sofia, Bulgaria
In Statu Nascendi Think Tank
e-mail: pietrzak_ir@hotmail.com

The Russia – Ukraine War and the Renaissance of IR Realism

"[**The IR theory***] is like a powerful flashlight in a dark room: even though it cannot illuminate every nook and cranny, most of the time it is an excellent tool for navigating through the darkness"[1].

John J. Mearsheimer

Abstract

The primary objective of this article is to present an interpretation of Russia's war in Ukraine from the perspective of the oldest - realist theory of international relations (IR). Contrary to popular belief, realist approaches are neither homogeneous nor entirely predictable. This school of thought encompasses diverse perspectives from both practitioners and theoreticians, including Zbigniew Brzezinski, Henry Kissinger, John Mearsheimer, Kenneth Waltz, Stephen Walt, and others. By rigorously examining these different viewpoints, we aim to expose the weakest links in our analysis and shed light on various hidden dimensions of the ongoing contemporary conflict, with the aim of preventing future outbreaks of similar conflicts and further deterioration of existing ones.

---

[1] In his original argument outlined in *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (2001), John J. Mearsheimer claims that "In short, offensive realism is like a powerful flashlight in a dark room: even though it cannot illuminate every nook and cranny, most of the time it is an excellent tool for navigating through the darkness." In this respect, the only reason why I have paraphrased this statement, **to extend its scope to the entire IR theory***, is to assert that by employing all branches and sub-branches of the International Relations theory, we should be able to illuminate even more in the darkness in question, for engaging in a more coordinated effort by many different scholars from different backgrounds can prove to be much more effective in navigating through it, to the actual light, clarity and fundamental truth about the international relations.

Introduction

The publication of this research coincides with the two-year anniversary of the outbreak of the full-blown war in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, a decade after the events that led to the annexation of Crimea in 2014. It is expected that this conflict will continue for the foreseeable future despite already resulting in the deaths of more than 600,000 people. There are also nearly 3.7 million internally displaced people in Ukraine, with nearly 6.5 million refugees from Ukraine recorded globally and approximately 14.6 million people in desperate need of humanitarian assistance (as of February 2024) (Pietrzak, 2024b; UNHCR, 2024).

The primary objective of this research is to assertively provide an *ad hoc* realist interpretation of the Russia's war in Ukraine within an IR perspective. To accomplish this, we will compare six distinct realist standpoints and doctrines. These have been formulated to elucidate the evolving dynamics of conflict, viewed through the lenses of IR theory and geopolitics. Our analysis will carefully examine the differences and similarities among them, encompassing: 1) the Giedroyc-Mieroszewski doctrine, 2) the Brzezinski doctrine, 3) the reformulated Kissinger doctrine, 4) Mearsheimer's position, 5) Waltz's structural theory, and finally, 6) Walt's balance of threat theory.

This research also utilizes my scientific invention called *in statu nascendi* ontology, which gives special attention to attaining broader clarity, accountability, and pluralism that thrives in situations requiring further flexible adjustment to convey certain unpredictable trajectories, which are not clearly manifested at first. By scrutinizing the ontological foundations of conflicts in a more contemplative, albeit at times lengthy, manner we can glean insights into their evolving nature and their current stage which in turn foster a deeper understanding of the situation on the ground in the context of regional and global dynamics (Pietrzak, 2021; Pietrzak, 2024a).

Methodology

The prevailing notion in the literature on the subject suggests that social science stands to gain significant advantages by adopting an ad hoc comparative method (CM). This approach enables us to highlight essential aspects of two or more ongoing confrontations of regional or global significance. Essentially, in this respect, a well-implemented comparative analysis offers a unique opportu-

nity to assess the applicability of various theories in given circumstances. This is done by highlighting both specific and holistic modes of analysis that try to capture any given phenomenon. The use of such method promises profound insights into the intricacies of modern conflicts, endeavoring to use the best narrative to illuminate pathways towards comprehension and resolution, for every conflict has to end (Sartori, 1991).

Naturally, CM is not without its flaws, and its limitations are well known not only to social scientists but also to scholars in other branches of science. Everyone knows that comparing has to be done wisely; otherwise, we end up comparing apples and oranges (Sartori, 1991).

In this respect, Przeworski and Teune (1970) suggest that comparative studies are most effective when examining countries with similar characteristics, as fewer differences allow for more rigorous study design. However, they are also very convinced that CM should not be employed solely to identify similarities between two or more subjects. It is crucial to utilize it to discern perceptual illusions from clear behavioral patterns to offer credible predictions of behavior. In this paper we will try to reinforce CM with CT and *in statu nascendi* ontology. CM is used to delve into the complexities, fluidity, and inherent unpredictability of any ongoing conflict, for by identifying differences and deriving lessons from them, we become more aware of how to avoid unnecessary conceptual traps and planning fallacies (Kahneman, 2011; Przeworski,Teune, 1970).

The realist ir and the Russian war in Ukraine

Insensitive as it sounds, Russia's war in Ukraine may be the best thing that has happened to the realist IR theory for quite some time, for it will lead us to significant advancements in the study of international relations, making it a transformational moment for the discipline. It surely marks the renaissance of this particular approach and situates it as the strongest tool in the conceptual toolbox that we use to describe social reality. For some reason, IR theory remains silent about the political doctrine that shapes various policymaking debates. In this respect, we can identify a clear pattern that prevents the theoretician from comprehending the policymaking aspect of various important debates. This is not a nuisance, but rather a serious limitation that shows that IR theory is not scientifically objective but rather unable to present the whole spectrum of the regional and global reality at hand, even from a realist perspective.

Coining ad hoc doctrines related to the conflict in Ukraine or any other conflict makes sense conceptually, for their use has proven to be very rewarding to convey otherwise not easily explainable policy with its socio-political underpin-

nings, genesis, and internal dynamics. My students and colleagues have proven to be very receptive to my conceptual contributions to the literature on the subject, so there is an objective reason to use them. Doctrines describe certain patterns and internal logic for certain actions, and they should not be seen as set in stone, but rather as a mental shortcut. As much as the sixth great debate should have a scientific character, we first need to prepare the ground for this exciting academic adventure.

This endeavor starts with **the Giedroyc-Mieroszewski doctrine**, which consistently highlights the structural importance of an independent Ukraine, explicitly suggesting that, from the Polish and Central European perspective, an independent Ukraine is crucial for realizing the dream of an independent and peaceful Europe. As an independent country, Ukraine's borders should be protected. There is no agreement as to who wrote that "without an independent Ukraine, there cannot be an independent Poland," but it had to be either Józef Piłsudski, the father of Polish independence, or Jerzy Giedroyć, the editor-in-chief of the highly influential Paris-based periodical Kultura (Pietrzak, 2023a). Still, we need to emphasize that although the doctrine underscores the importance of a strong Polish-Ukrainian alliance to counter Russia's expansionist policies, it is not only Poland and Ukraine but also other countries such as the Baltic states and others that are heavily influenced by this doctrine. This is because it suggests a pragmatic and cosmopolitan outlook, leading modern Central and Eastern European countries to cultivate amiable relations with their neighbors (Just to clarify, the Giedroyc-Mieroszewski doctrine is not strictly a realist doctrine. However, it is utilized by realist scholars with more liberal mindsets in countries bordering Russia, as well as others, to justify various donations of military equipment and humanitarian aid to the embattled regime in Ukraine).

The Brzezinski doctrine consistently underlies a more instrumental blueprint suggesting refraining from openly engaging in an open-ended conflict with Russia on behalf of Ukraine (Pietrzak, 2023b). It is fueled partly by George Kennan's containment policy, rooted in the Truman Doctrine, which sought to halt communism by creating blockades in strategic areas, preventing Russia's expansion in the post-Soviet area. It stresses the importance of acting not unilaterally but as part of a robust transatlantic coalition relying on conventional warfare and nuclear deterrence to make it unequivocally clear to Russia that NATO already sees Ukraine as a potential member state and will do its utmost not to allow it to slip back into the Russian sphere of influence. Zbigniew Brzezinski famously claimed that "without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be a Eurasian empire." He also asserted that "Russia cannot be in Europe without Ukraine […], whereas Ukraine can be in Europe without Russia being in Europe" (Brzezinski, 1997, p. 46).

This doctrine would advocate more comprehensive support to Ukraine across various domains—military, political, logistical, diplomatic, and material (Brzezinski, 2010; Pietrzak, 2024a, 2024b, 2024f, 2023c).

Subsequently, the next doctrine worth our attention is **the reformulated Kissinger doctrine,** which evolved significantly, marked by a clear shift in January 2023. Before his last public appearance at Davos, Kissinger consistently opposed Ukraine's NATO aspirations, expressing skepticism from 2004 to 2016. At the start of the 2022 war, he proposed a peace plan for Ukraine, meticulously assessing its potential advantages and drawbacks, emphasizing the need for a multifaceted approach. Kissinger urged a pragmatic and diplomatic strategy rooted in compromise and dialogue, focusing on practical outcomes over ideological or moral principles. He even considered the temporary return to pre-2022 borders between Russia and Ukraine as a possible solution to end hostilities. However, unexpectedly, less than a year before his death, Kissinger announced at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2023 that NATO membership for Ukraine would be an "appropriate outcome." He argued that a neutral Ukraine was no longer meaningful or viable, emphasizing its importance to Russia. This change of mind indicated a clear proposal for Ukraine's future in NATO and the EU (Pietrzak, 2024d).

The magnitude of Kissinger's shift can be compared to a development during the second great debate in international relations when behaviorists managed to successfully persuade Kenneth Waltz, initially aligned with the traditionalist or classical realist camp, to undergo a significant shift and align himself with the behaviorists' camp on the notion of the importance of structure in IR theory. The reason Kissinger's shift is so important is that it was made after very long contemplation and after acknowledging that the peace plan that he had suggested some half a year earlier may have been faulty, which sent a very strong message. Kissinger had consistently and passionately opposed Ukraine's NATO aspirations for at least thirty years. He expressed skepticism in 2004, 2008, 2014, and 2016. At the beginning of the 2022 war, he presented a peace plan for Ukraine, meticulously assessing its potential advantages and drawbacks. The plan explored the benefits of halting hostilities between Russia and Ukraine within the broader context of policymaking discourse, conflict management, and a significant shift in the global balance of power. This approach was based on a compromise that would compel the weaker side, Ukraine, to offer considerable territorial concessions to Russia. With his shift at Davos, Kissinger had clearly come to the conclusion that Western and Eastern nuclear deterrents cancel each other out. In any confrontation between NATO and Russia, the combatants would have to rely on conventional forces. Nonetheless, Kissinger's refor-

mulated position emphasizes the importance of addressing multiple aspects of a conflict simultaneously to establish a stable and lasting peace. This may involve addressing underlying causes of the conflict while working to build trust, promote dialogue, and implement conflict resolution mechanisms; he suggests that admitting Ukraine to NATO could also be good for Russia, which is a very bold statement considering that Russia is still governed by Vladimir Putin.

As a matter of fact, both of Kissinger's proposals are very sound and forthcoming in discussing both the benefits and the costs involved in the realization of those strategies. There would be a considerable price to pay for a negotiated peace with Russia, which would probably involve ceding large areas of Ukraine to Russia in exchange for suspension of the hostilities. There is also a cost to pursuing ultimate victory in the war, the loss of human life. If current fatality rates continue, over 1.3 million soldiers and civilians on both sides, equal to the population of Cyprus, will be killed by 2027, half a decade into the war. In this respect, Kissinger never suggested which of his two proposals was better, indicating that the final choice is the Ukrainians'. The first, even if it seems easier to implement, may be more costly, as it ultimately would allow Russia, the aggressor, to substantially benefit from the invasion, which might generate even more casualties in the future if Putin starts another war against Ukraine or other neighboring countries. Therefore, it might also be pragmatic to pursue an end of the confrontation in which all Russian forces withdraw from all occupied territories because it would result in more strategic advantages.

Still, Kissinger's shift of opinion does not automatically warrant the change of opinion of all of NATO, for both the decision-making community and the broader public are heavily influenced by other less sympathetic arguments regarding Ukraine's transatlantic aspirations, some made by **Mearsheimer**. If the search for a peace formula for Ukraine were a contest of who is more skillful at influencing global public opinion, Mearsheimer would be a clear winner. His video titled "Why is Ukraine the West's Fault? Featuring John Mearsheimer," posted on The University of Chicago official channel some eight years ago, has garnered an impressive 29 million views as of February 13, 2024, almost ten years after the annexation of Crimea. Mearsheimer is popular because Kissinger does not have a monopoly on pragmatism; Mearsheimer's approach can also be seen as pragmatic. It is just a different type of pragmatism that is more dispassionate, conservative, and very static that still believes that Ukraine belongs to a buffer zone between NATO and Russia, so it is natural for Russia to want it in its sphere of influence. This pragmatism recognizes the limits of the West's insistence on promoting democracy and human rights in Ukraine, which has exacerbated the conflict by fueling tensions between Ukraine's pro-Russian and

pro-Western factions. Mearsheimer does not argue that Russia is ultimately im-moral to pursue such a policy; he argues that the West was very confused in its projection of values and interests in Ukraine both in 1993 and 2014 (Chotiner, 2022; Mearsheimer, 1993, 2014; Pawłuszko, 2024).

On the one hand, the West was promoting Western values and ways of doing things, but it did not follow up with any serious offer of NATO or EU member-ship. Meanwhile, the West refused to recognize that there are historical ties be-tween Ukraine and Russia. It offered Ukraine various assurances, but it did not follow through on delivering them in 2014. Mearsheimer may have a point that Western policy towards Ukraine was hypocritical (Mearsheimer, 2014). This may have been the case before Zelensky, under Yanukovich, who was clearly pro-Russian, but not after 2022, for Russia prefers to enslave neighboring na-tions instead of persuading them to follow its lead.

The debate between Kissingerian and Mearsheimerian attitudes towards the war in Ukraine should include debate on NATO's values and interests. Mear-sheimer's idea of comprehensive conservative restraint could be beneficial during times of peace as it does not affect global equilibrium. However, current circum-stances can hardly be described as a status quo, for Russia's intent was clear in openly attacking Ukraine, a potential NATO candidate: it clearly hoped to shift the balance of power in its favor. In order to restore global equilibrium and make it clear that such hawkish behavior will not be accepted in the future, NATO must help Ukraine on its transatlantic path. But this strategy is for defensive purposes, for it was not NATO that triggered the 2022 escalation, but Russia, and NATO is just trying to deal with the consequences in the most pragmatic manner possible. Implementing this strategy would be in accordance with the values and interests of all NATO member states, for protecting Ukraine clearly means strengthening NATO's eastern flank. Still, Kissinger's shift to supporting Ukraine's transatlantic aspirations should be seen as a pragmatic move, but it's not a done deal, Ukraine has to earn its right to membership by successfully defending itself from Russian aggression. In the end, Kissinger suggested that "the courage of the current pe-riod and the heroism of the current period will be matched by a vision of a pro-cess which uses this time as a step towards the objective of (…) strengthening of Europe, opening to Russia […] and the […] fulfillment of the hopes which have characterized the […] fulfillment of the principles of America in bringing about a more peaceful world order" (Pietrzak, 2024d, 2024f).

His declaration does not state when Ukraine should be admitted to NATO, whether today, next month, or next year. He rather reassures Ukraine and NATO that there is light at the end of this tunnel, in the same manner that Brzezinski reassured Poland at the beginning of the 1990s that its transatlantic aspirations

could not be dismissed. Kissinger clearly suggests that at the end of the process, after victory is achieved, Ukraine's NATO membership should be seriously considered, but for this to happen, NATO should offer Ukraine a clear path to membership (Please see: Bharti, Aryal, 2024).

Mearsheimer's assessment of the situation at hand, formulated after 2014, is a dogma that now is no longer relevant but was in 2014 and 2015 when Ukraine was still desperately trying to recover from the Yanukovich kleptocracy and during the Poroshenko era when the Ukrainian president was seemingly more interested in protecting his own personal interests at the expense of the *bonum commune*. Most of Mearsheimer's accusations against Ukraine under Zelensky's regime have been invalidated by the tremendous progress this administration has made fighting corruption and nepotism. Unlike Ashraf Ghani, Afghanistan's president who fled as the Taliban entered Kabul, Zelensky did not flee Kiev when Russian tanks crossed the Ukrainian border in 2022 but stayed and organized the successful defense of a country that was predicted to be conquered in four days. Although Mearsheimer's ideas are getting some traction, we need to treat them skeptically and critically, for even though they challenge the mainstream narrative of the Biden Administration, they are not taken very seriously by the NATO and the EU's decision-makers who prefer to embrace Giedroyć, Brzezinski, and Kissinger's way of approaching the conflict in Ukraine (Alaverdov, Tchabashvili, 2024; Akhtar, Javaid, 2024; Javaid, 2024; Pietrzak, 2023c, 2023d).

Possibly, if we were to ask Kenneth Waltz for some of his structuralist suggestions in this regard, he might speculate on the casus belli for both outbreaks of hostilities in 2014 and 2022. If he were alive today, he might have suggested that the most recent escalation of the Russian war in Ukraine could have been averted with a slightly firmer response from the EU and NATO in 2008, 2014, 2015, or 2022. Still, Waltz would argue that a peaceful solution between Russia and Ukraine will be attained at some point. As he argued, war in general should be seen more as an anomaly and not a constant feature of global politics, as history exemplifies long periods of peace between wars. So, we should not try to attribute wars to human nature; one would have to identify some other independent variable that explains the relationship between human nature and fluctuations in war and peace.

In his 1959 work *Man, the State, and War,* Waltz refutes the notion that the human nature of individuals (such as Napoleon Bonaparte or Adolf Hitler) or the domestic makeup of states can cause wars. Instead, he argues that the origin of war lies at the systemic level. Therefore, social reality should be viewed through the prism of a sophisticated and interlinked global structure of power, which remains anarchic. He argues that unlike the domestic realm governed by sovereign bodies,

international politics is inhabited by a network of autonomous nation-states and international organizations. Since there is no central authority, everything that happens to each actor has its origins within the structure of power by default. This means that any change, even minor, in the structure of power resulting from political agency or an event may trigger an inevitable reaction in the behavior or situation of other players. From his perspective, absolute selfishness in the pursuit of power could be extremely damaging to countries because accumulating excessive power is likely to encourage weaker powers to form power-balancing coalitions against them. Nevertheless, regardless of rationality, certain states may still decide to risk being selfish (irrational) in pursuing their goals at the expense of other international actors. In this case, Waltz advises taking into consideration the social structure of power, as its main goal should be to survive in the hostile environment of international politics. For these reasons, Waltz holds the view that pursuing relative gains strategies should be preferred in bilateral and multilateral relations between countries, and endeavors to maximize collective gains should be considered of secondary importance. This standpoint suggests that unlike individuals, nation-states and their (rational) leaders should consider the broader picture and long-term goals before entering unending conflicts. The problem starts when we realize that global leaders also tend to be irrational, which is clearly no longer an anomaly when it comes to Russia.

Subsequently, in his 1979 work *Theory of International Politics*, Waltz explains that anarchy does not necessarily imply that violence must be seen as an everyday occurrence in international relations, but one must be aware that the threat of violence will always be present. The lack of central authority in the system means that states must fend for themselves in this self-help system, as relying on the goodwill of others to rescue them in times of trouble can be considered naive conduct. Although systemic factors largely remain beyond the reach of states and statesmen, there are certain ways to protect themselves against threats: either by building up military capacity or forming alliances. Of the two, Waltz favors the tendency of states to build balancing behaviors to protect themselves and one another.

But we need to remember that Kenneth Waltz is also known for his controversial ideas. He argued that the proliferation of nuclear weapons would increase the probability of international peace because the costs of nuclear war were too great for nuclear-capable antagonists to fight one another to the bitter end. Therefore, from his perspective, limited proliferation of nuclear weapons is to be accepted as it would help build peace between historic antagonists. In one of his last articles, he expanded this argument to Iran, suggesting that if this country were allowed to build up its nuclear capability, it would stabilize not

only itself but also the entire region, as its leadership would behave more sensibly about its international conduct. Of course, considering the events of October 7th, 2023, and Iran's close ties with Hamas, Waltz would undoubtedly reconsider advocating for Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon. However, employing similar arguments regarding Ukraine would undoubtedly be more prudent. Despite a few isolated incidents, the Zelensky Administration consistently behaves as a rational international actor, striving to adhere to the rules of engagement and all Geneva Conventions, despite being a victim of Russian aggression.

Anyone remotely familiar with contemporary Ukrainian history knows that from a geostrategic perspective, the year 1994 should be seen as a greater tragedy than the Chernobyl disaster of 1986. This was the year of the most significant voluntary geostrategic blunder: after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine inherited a massive one-third of the Soviet nuclear arsenal, which was the third largest in the world at the time, along with significant means for its design and production. At that time, Ukraine possessed more nuclear weapons than Britain, France, and China combined. However, under Western pressure, Ukrainian authorities decided to voluntarily surrender those weapons in exchange for vaguely worded security assurances regarding its territorial integrity, as codified in the Budapest Memorandum signed in 1994 by the US, UK, and Russia.

The only Western political commentator who warned Ukraine about the potential geostrategic consequences of this decision was Mearsheimer, who suggested that if Ukraine gave up those weapons, its territorial integrity might be put into question in the future. Ultimately, the members of the Ukrainian political establishment failed to listen to him and failed to ask themselves a fundamental question: can they trust Russia to respect the provisions of the Budapest Memorandum? Surely, the perception of Russia was different in 1994, in 2004, and in 2014, and surely it is much different in 2024. If they had not listened to the liberals back in 1994, Russia would not have been so assertive today. Does this mean that Ukraine should acquire a bomb? Some may think that this is a credible piece of advice if their knocking on the doors of NATO and the EU remains unanswered.

Another interesting idea elaborated by an IR realist (that can be seen as **the Walt doctrine**) is Stephen M. Walt's balance of threat theory, which was proposed in his article "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," published in the journal *International Security* in 1985 and later further elaborated in his book *The Origins of Alliances* (1987), suggesting that the behavior of states is determined by the threat that they perceive from other states. Walt contends that states generally balance by allying against a perceived threat, but very weak states are more likely to ally with a rising threat to protect their own national

security. He points to the the alliances of European states before and during World War I and World War II when nations with a significantly greater combined power allied against the threat of German expansionism (Ozigci, 2023, 2024). Nowadays, Europeans are uncomfortable with how Russia pursues its neo-imperialist policies in its neighborhood.

Conclusion

As the results of this investigation show, the realist IR theory is not homogenous, it is very diversified, and it is good to get to understand those differences before we try to pigeonhole all of the realist approaches into one basket. Taken together all of the discussed approaches provide us with some distinctive findings.

Realists used to be called traditionalists, and traditional military wisdom holds that conflicts are generally waged to gain territory, control valuable resources, or gain a strategic advantage, and successful military campaigns are usually swift, decisive, and timely. Still the realist school recognizes that there is an inseparable link between theory and practice that connects the policymakers, diplomats, and various field practitioners who rely on our theoretical approaches and paradigms. We should anticipate that the field of conflict management will witness debates that are as impactful as those ongoing within IR theory. It is critical to acknowledge that realist scholars cannot function without the voices of other non-realist scholars, for they make our deliberations a worthy endeavor. The main responsibility of the realist IR thinker is to present the world of politics the way it is, not the way he hopes it will look, and this school of thought has been doing this for the last five centuries. From the realist perspective, there is nothing romantic about war (Pietrzak, 2022d, 2023b).

Still, it is also recommended to look beyond traditional state-centric approaches and consider the multifaceted nature of regional conflicts of global importance, and in order to do so, we need to broaden the scope of IR theory by incorporating cultural and regional perspectives into the analysis of international politics. In this respect we can also try to incorporate certain findings of **Peter Katzenstein**, who emphasized studying regional dynamics and argued that regions are not merely secondary actors in global politics but have their own unique dynamics and patterns of interaction. He argued that states are not solely defined by their material capabilities or geopolitical interests but are also deeply influenced by their cultural backgrounds and societal norms. He emphasized the importance of understanding how culture shapes state behavior, alliances, and conflict resolution (Katzenstein, 2018).

In this respect, I also postulate using our experiences from within theory and practice in a more effective manner, specifically, to use experiences from conflict management to bring peace, stability, and tranquility to theoretical deliberations. **Ontology *in statu nascendi*** also suggests that in the face of an inter-paradigmatic war within our discipline, we must proactively establish the conditions for dialogue. Utilizing proven mediating methods such as Track 1, Track 1.5, Track 2, and Track 3, as described by **Philip Gamaghelyan**, known for his significant contributions to peace initiatives in various complex settings, including Nagorno-Karabakh, Syria, Turkish-Armenian relations, Arab-Israeli conflicts, India-Pakistan disputes, Afghanistan, and Georgian-South Ossetian tensions, is crucial to engage representatives from realism, liberalism, constructivism, Marxism, feminism, postcolonialism, poststructuralism, and the English school. Gamaghelyan's transformative approach is also worth our attention, for it challenges traditional framings, advocating a more inclusive and flexible strategy in approaching conflict situations. We notice his dedication to individualizing conflict resolution and addressing the complexities of conflicts in real time (Gamaghelyan, 2017; Pietrzak, 2024g).

Ultimately, we live in the 21st century in a situation where regional and local conflicts are changing so rapidly that we cannot capture or properly describe them; we cannot tell people what's happening in various conflict zones. Hence, we must be very flexible in discussing specific global developments. Imagine if we could get the best from all of the approaches. We can mix and match all the concepts, ideas, processes, and theories that have developed paradigms. By revisiting the main currents of the fifth and sixth debates we can focus our attention on decentralization and relationality, addressing contemporary global challenges such as inequality and climate change in a more specific manner by promoting an open interdisciplinary conversation to attain a far-reaching clarity in deliberations on international relations, promoting flexible, interdisciplinary, and diversified approaches through the integration of diverse theoretical frameworks (Albertini, Pietrzak, 2020; Kavalski, 2007; Kuhn, 1970; Latifur, Feng, 2002; Pietrzak, 2024a).

References

Alaverdov, E., Tchabashvili, Z. (2024). The Role of the International Community in Turning Afghanistan Into a Failed State and Its Impact on International and Regional Security. *Dealing with Regional Conflicts of Global Importance,* edited by P. Pietrzak, 28–43. Hershey, PA: IGI Global, https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-9467-7.ch002.

Albertini, T., Pietrzak, P. (2020). Clarity is what I seek first: An interview with Professor Tamara Albertini by P. Pietrzak. *In Statu Nascendi – Journal of Political Philosophy and International Relations*, 3 (2).

Akhtar, M. N., Javaid, F. (2024). The Role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in the Afghan Crisis. *Dealing with Regional Conflicts of Global Importance,* edited by P. Pietrzak, 44–62. Hershey, PA: IGI Global. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-9467-7.ch003.

Bag, A., Souvik R., Shah, A. I. (2024). Decoding the US-NATO Dynamics: A Thorough Analysis of Donald Trump and Joe Biden's Foreign Policy Approaches. *Dealing with Regional Conflicts of Global Importance,* edited by P.Pietrzak, 104–123. Hershey, PA: IGI Global, https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-9467-7.ch006.

Bharti, S. S., Aryal, S. K. (2024). The Global Aspirations of the European Union and Dealing with Regional Conflicts. *Analyzing Global Responses to Contemporary Regional Conflicts,* edited by P. Pietrzak, 236–251. Hershey, PA: IGI Global, https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-2837-8.ch011.

Brzezinski, Z. (2010*). Out of Control: Global Turmoil on the Eve of the Twenty-first Century*. Touchstone.

Brzezinski, Z. (1997). *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, Washington DC: Basic Books.

Chotiner, I. (2022, March 1). Why John Mearsheimer Blames the U.S. for the Crisis in Ukraine. *The New Yorker*. https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/why-john-mearsheimer-blames-the-us-for-the-crisis-in-ukraine.

Gamaghelyan, P. (2017). *Conflict Resolution Beyond the Realist Paradigm: Transformative Strategies and Inclusive Practices in Nagorno-Karabakh and Syria*. La Vergne: Ibidem Press.

Gamaghelyan, P. (2017). *Conflict resolution beyond the international relations paradigm: Evolving designs as a transformative practice in Nagorno-Karabakh and Syria.*

Javaid, F. (2024). Challenges and Opportunities for Regional Connectivity: Afghanistan's Role Between Pakistan and the Central Asian Region. *Analyzing Global Responses to Contemporary Regional Conflicts,* edited by P. Pietrzak, 275–297. Hershey, PA: IGI Global, https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-2837-8.ch013.

Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, Fast and Slow.* Penguin UK.

Katzenstein, P. (2018). The Second Coming? Reflections on a Global Theory of International Relations, *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 11 (4): 373–390.

Kavalski, E. (2007). The fifth debate and the emergence of complex international relations theory: notes on the application of complex theory to the study of international life. Cambridge Review of International Affairs, 20 (3): 435–454, https://doi.org/10.1080/09557570701574154.

Kuhn, T. S. (1970). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. University of Chicago Press.

Latifur, K., Feng, L. (2002). Ontology Construction for Information Selection. *14th IEEE International Conference on Tools with Artificial Intelligence (ICTAI 2002). Proceedings.* 122–127.

Mearsheimer, J. J. (2002). *The tragedy of great power politics*. West Lafayette, IN, C-SPAN Archives.

Mearsheimer, J. J. (2014). Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault. *Foreign Affairs* 93 (5): 77–89.

Mearsheimer, J. J. (1993). The case for a Ukrainian nuclear deterrent. *Foreign Affairs* (New York, N.Y.): 50–66.

Ozigci, Y. E. (2024). On the Mutual Inherence of Regional and Global References: The Case of the "Near-Abroad" and "Post-Bipolarity". *Analyzing Global Responses to Contemporary Regional Conflicts,* edited by P. Pietrzak, 52–72. Hershey, PA: IGI Global, https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-2837-8.ch003.

Ozigci, Y. E. (2023). On the German Foreign Policy Sonderweg: The Mittellage and the Mitteleuropa. *Statu Nascendi – Journal of Political Philosophy and International Relations*, 2: 165–192.

Pawłuszko, T. [Forthcoming 2024]. War in Ukraine and the Limits of International Relations Theory in Pietrzak, P. (Ed.). (2025*). Exploring the Implications of Local and Regional Conflicts.* IGI Global. https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-2877-4.

Pietrzak, P. (2024a). The Sixth Great Debate in International Relations Theory Revolves Around Clarity: Ontology *in statu nascendi* as a Cutting-Edge Tool for Conflict Management. *Dealing with Regional Conflicts of Global Importance,* edited by P. Pietrzak, 1–27. Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2024. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-9467-7.ch001.

Pietrzak, P. (2024b). Poland, a Benign but Not a Naïve Power in Its Response to Russia's War in Ukraine (2022-Present): Assertive Pursuit of Enlightened Self-Interest – Forging New Alliances and Strengthening Existing Ones. *Dealing with Regional Conflicts of Global Importance,* edited by P. Pietrzak, 124–160. Hershey, PA: IGI Global, https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-9467-7.ch007.

Pietrzak, P. (2024c). The Geoeconomics of NATO's Responses to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine (2022-Present). *Analyzing Global Responses to Contemporary Regional Conflicts,* edited by P. Pietrzak, 1–38. Hershey, PA: IGI Global, https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-2837-8.ch001.

Pietrzak, P. (2024d). Henry Kissinger's Shift on Ukraine and Its Implications for Russia: The Commencement but Not a Conclusion of the Sixth Great Debate in International Relations. *Analyzing Global Responses to Contemporary Regional Conflicts,* edited by P. Pietrzak, 133–162. Hershey, PA: IGI Global, https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-2837-8.ch007.

Pietrzak, P. (2024f). The Sikorski – Tusk Doctrine, and Poland's Response to Russia's War in Ukraine: Policy Recommendations for Poland Ahead of the Presidential Elections in 2025. *Exploring the Implications of Local and Regional Conflicts,* edited by P. Pietrzak. Hershey, PA: IGI Global, DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3693-2877-4.

Pietrzak. P. [Forthcoming 2024g]. The Changing Conceptual Landscape of the Russian War in Ukraine (2014–Present) & Syria (2011-Present), *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs.*

Pietrzak. P. (2023e). Exploring Conflicts in Ethiopia (2020–2022) and Ukraine (2014-, 2022). *Modern World Challenges: Regulating Human Rights, Social Security, and Welfare in Contemporary Multicultural World*, edited by Aytekin Demircioğlu, Emilia Alaverdov.

Pietrzak, P. (2023d). The Giedroyć-Mieroszewski Doctrine and Poland's Response to Russia's Assault on Ukraine. *Modern Diplomacy*. Retrieved from https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2023/02/03/the-giedroyc-mieroszewski-doctrine-and-polands-response-to-russias-assault-on-ukraine.

Pietrzak, P. (2023c). The Brzezinski Doctrine and NATO's Response to Russia's Assault on Ukraine. *Modern Diplomacy*. Retrieved from https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2023/01/12/the-brzezinski-doctrine-and-natos-response-to-russias-assault-on-ukraine/>.

Pietrzak, P. (2023b). Approaching regional conflicts through the prism of ontology *in statu nascendi* – the new compartmentalization of IR theory. *In Statu Nascendi – Journal of Political Philosophy and International Relations*, 6 (1): p. 93–148, ISBN: 9783838217826.

Pietrzak, P. (2022d). Introducing the idea of Ontology *in statu nascendi* to the broader International Relations Theory, *International Conference Proceeding Series – International Conference on Economics and Social Sciences in Serik*, Turkey on 21–23 Oct 2022.

Pietrzak, P. (2022b). A Comparative Study of Russia's War in Ukraine (2014-, including its 2022 escalation), Russia's aggression in Georgia (2008), and Russia's Military Operations in Syria (2015-). *International Conference Proceeding Series – VII. International Middle East Symposium: Political and Social Stability in the Middle East* (May 10–11th, 2022, Online).

Pietrzak, P. (2022a). The Putinization of the situation of women and children during the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. *In Statu Nascendi*, 5 (2). *Journal of Political Philosophy and International Relations: Special Issue: Gender Equality in Politics and International Relations*: 19–76.

Pietrzak, P. (2021). *On the Idea of Humanitarian Intervention*: *A New Compartmentalization of IR Theories.* Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag.

Пиетшак, П. (2022). Балканският полуостров „*in statu nascendi*" и защо понятието „балканизация" не е вече адекватно? *Международни отношения,* LI, N 2: 59–64.

Pinto, H. S., Gomez-Perez, A., Martins, J. P. (1999). Some Issues on Ontology Integration. *Proceedings of IJCAI99's Workshop on Ontologies and Problem Solving Methods: Lessons Learned and Future Trends,* 7.1–7.12.

Pinto, H. S., Martins, J. P. (2001). A Methodology for Ontology Integration. *Proceedings of the First International Conference on Knowledge Capture*, K-CAP'01: 131–138. ACM Press.

Przeworski, A., Teune, H. (1970). *The Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry.* New York: Wiley-Interscience.

Sartori, G. (1991). Comparing and Miscomparing, *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 3(3): 243–257, https://doi.org/10.1177/0951692891003003001.

Unrefugees (2024). Ukraine Refugee Crisis : Aid, Statistics and News | USA for UNHCR, https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/ukraine.

Walt, S. (2015). What Should We Do if the Islamic State Wins? *Foreign Policy*. Available at:<https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/06/10/what-should-we-do-if-isis-islamic-state-wins-containment/[Accessed on 13/08/2015 at 09:10].

Walt, S. (1987). *The origins of alliance.* Cornell University Press: New York.

Waltz, K. N. (2000). Structural realism after the cold war. *International Security* 25 (1).

Waltz, K. N. (1979). *Theory of World Politics*. Massachusetts: Addison & Wesley.

Waltz, K. N. Why Iran Should Get the Bomb. Nuclear Balancing Would Mean Stability. *Foreign Policy,* July/August 2012 Issue, Available at: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/iran/2012-06-15/why-iran-should-get-bomb.

*

Wojna rosyjsko-ukraińska i renesans realizmu IR

Streszczenie

Głównym celem tego artykułu jest przedstawienie interpretacji wojny Rosji w Ukrainie z perspektywy najstarszej – realistycznej teorii stosunków międzynarodowych (IR). Wbrew powszechnemu przekonaniu, podejścia realistyczne nie są jednorodne ani całkowicie przewidywalne. Ta szkoła myślenia obejmuje różnorodne perspektywy zarówno praktyków, jak i teoretyków, w tym Zbigniewa Brzezińskiego, Henry'ego Kissingera, Johna Mearsheimera, Kennetha Waltza, Stephena Walta, oraz innych badaczy. Poprzez rygorystyczne badanie tych różnych stanowisk dążymy do ujawnienia najsłabszych ogniw w naszej analizie oraz do rzucenia światła na różne ukryte wymiary trwającego współczesnego konfliktu, aby zapobiec przyszłym wybuchom podobnych konfliktów i dalszemu pogorszeniu istniejących.

Słowa kluczowe: wojna Rosji w Ukrainie, teoria stosunków międzynarodowych, realizm, Brzeziński, Kissinger, Mearsheimer, Waltz, Walt