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## US, China and the Russo-Ukraine War: The Conditions for Generating a Mutually Perceived Hurting Stalemate and Consequent Ceasefire In Moscow and Kyiv

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### Abstract

*A prerequisite for a lasting ceasefire is the emergence of a prevailing view in Moscow and Kyiv that the fighting has reached a hurting stalemate. In sum, they both lose more through continuing warfare than by a ceasefire. This study applies social identity dynamics of nationalism to this escalatory conflict. It generates findings that imply that China as a third-party great power intervening mediator can potentially play a pivotal role. Shifting the respective prevailing views in Moscow and Kyiv of their interaction from a zero-sum foundation requires proffering powerful economic and political third-party incentives. Effective inducement would facilitate national defense, development and prestige for Moscow as well as Kyiv. China arguably has the underutilized potential power capabilities necessary to alter the respective prevailing views of strategic relationships among the great powers within Moscow, Brussels and Washington. A prerequisite for success in striving effectively towards this strategic goal is cooperation with the Beijing despite skepticism from Washington. This study utilizes a process tracing methodological approach. It highlights that the foundations of the Russo-Ukraine war lie in the institutionalization within Euro-Atlantic integration of the Cold War assumption that the USSR was an imperialist revisionist actor. Russia is the USSR's successor state. Moscow's prevailing view is that Russian national self-determination was unjustly circumscribed in the multinational Soviet totalitarian Communist system. The Euro-Atlantic community is perceived as a neo-colonial imperial threat by allying with post-1991 Ukrainian nationalism at Russia's expense. The study finds that acknowledging Eurasian regional multipolarity is necessary, if not sufficient, to coopt Beijing into a global political stabilization strategy. It functionally aims to promote international balancing to lessen potentials for horizontal as well as vertical escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict.*

**Keywords:** European Union, NATO, Realism, Russia, Ukraine, United States

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The economic challenges confronting the Russian government's pursuit of its European and global foreign policy aims are daunting. Washington's prevailing view saw China's economic and political relationship with Russia as critical for the Russian leadership to entertain its February 2022 regional European and global objectives. The Biden administration in 2022 viewed Beijing as a de facto ally of Moscow. In this worldview, the coordination of European Union resources via the North Atlantic alliance was necessary to contain Russia's challenge to the US-led hegemonic order in Europe. This coordination via the EU was also necessary to meet the greater long term Chinese challenge.

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The US administration's policy towards the Russo-Ukrainian conflict in 2022 reflected the US administration's focus on containing China. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 intensified the US' public rhetorical narrative discourse on the role and function of China in international politics. On the eve of the February 2022 Russian invasion, US Defense Department press secretary, John Kirby, highlighted the February 4, 2022 joint statement of Putin and Chinese president Xi:

*“The February 4 statement that that Xi and Putin put out, which certainly we took as tacit approval for what Mr. Putin is doing. You can point also to concerning comments by the Chinese Foreign Minister yesterday, that made it clear that they weren't going to support any, what they called, unlawful unilateral sanctions against Russia and then blame the United States for contributing security assistance to Ukraine, somehow blaming us for this issue. No mention whatsoever in their statement about the 150,000+ soldiers and the threats that Mr. Putin has been lobbying against Ukraine now for many weeks including just yesterday” [1].*

The lengthy February 4 Putin-Xi statement declared the “friendship” between the two countries having “no limits” [2,para.51]. One journalist's analysis underlined textual absences and perspectives in the statement that indicated distancing between Moscow and Beijing over the looming Russian invasion [3]. The evident limits on Beijing's cooperation with Moscow over the following months, e.g., the absence of Chinese arms sales to Russia, changed the US prevailing view. A separation emerged publicly in the nature of the respective challenges that Beijing and Moscow posed to US interests, as articulated, e.g., in the US national security strategy of October 2022. It describes competitor China as a “pacing challenge” for the US, while Russia is an “acute threat” [4,p.20,12].

This study argues that China's mediation between Moscow and the US-led Western alliance is a necessary part of an international diplomatic formula to bring about a ceasefire in Ukraine. The Russo-Ukrainian conflict is also a proxy struggle between Washington and Moscow as each aims to contain the other [5]. The alleviation of this conflict spiral requires Beijing's diplomatic mediation. Beijing's intercession is necessary to assuage Moscow's prevailing view that the US aims to subjugate and subordinate Russia to second-rate power status in international affairs. Beijing has the diplomatic bargaining leverage capability potential necessary for negotiating with Washington, Brussels and Moscow to defuse this conflict spiral.

The more basic axiom of this paper is that an accurate understanding of the ultimate intentions driving Russian government belligerency is critical. Building in tests to determine the prevailing worldview in Moscow and the constituency carriers articulating these competing worldviews is necessary. These tests should be theory-informed. For example, Russia's GDP is about equivalent to that of Italy. Assuming that its violent belligerency in Ukraine is part of an ultimate strategic intent to overturn the global order as a militant, revisionist great power is doubtful. If Moscow's belligerency ultimately derives from perceived threat from the US, then China's prospective mediation is plausible. It assumes that Chinese foreign policy ultimate intention is also cautiously expansionist within the global, US-led capitalist order.

Obstacles to this intervention include the functional national systemic ambitions of the US to institutionalize its global hegemony in response to a rising China. China's integration into the world international trade system incentivizes the awareness of deep interdependency that motivates continuing cooperation. Concomitant with intensifying military security competition, the reconciliation of these trends, points to a neo-Cold War interaction, i.e., a “chilly war” merging from “strategic competition” [6,p.83]. The Cold War-founded US bureaucratic instruments for implementing containment towards the USSR have a functional predisposition to shift towards a new focus on China [7]. This shift began long before the Biden administration. The prevailing view in Beijing sees US strategy under the Biden administration orienting towards the inclusion of Moscow as a proxy target for containment of China [8]. US high-level tactical aims under the Trump administration focused more on decoupling Moscow from Beijing by decoupling the US from NATO. The Trump administration operationally appeared more sensitive to Moscow's claims of functional encirclement by the US-led Euro-Atlantic alliance. The US would assuage Moscow's concerns regarding US encirclement while incorporating Russia into US-led containment of Beijing. The pro-establishment Biden administration replaced the populist reactionary Trump administration. The reassertion of the traditional US national security establishment under Biden administration served to reinforce Moscow's traditional suspicions of Euro-Atlantic encirclement.

## 2. THEORY

Touval and Zartman (2001) warn against underemphasizing the importance of the role of the respective interests of the contestant and mediating parties in a violent international conflict [9]. Cottam and Gallucci (1978) conceptualize this consideration within the component of “General Strategy Interactive Setting.” It is part of their comprehensive framework checklist for disaggregating and analyzing bargaining leverage in dyadic diplomatic bargaining interaction which Figure 1 below schematically outlines. .

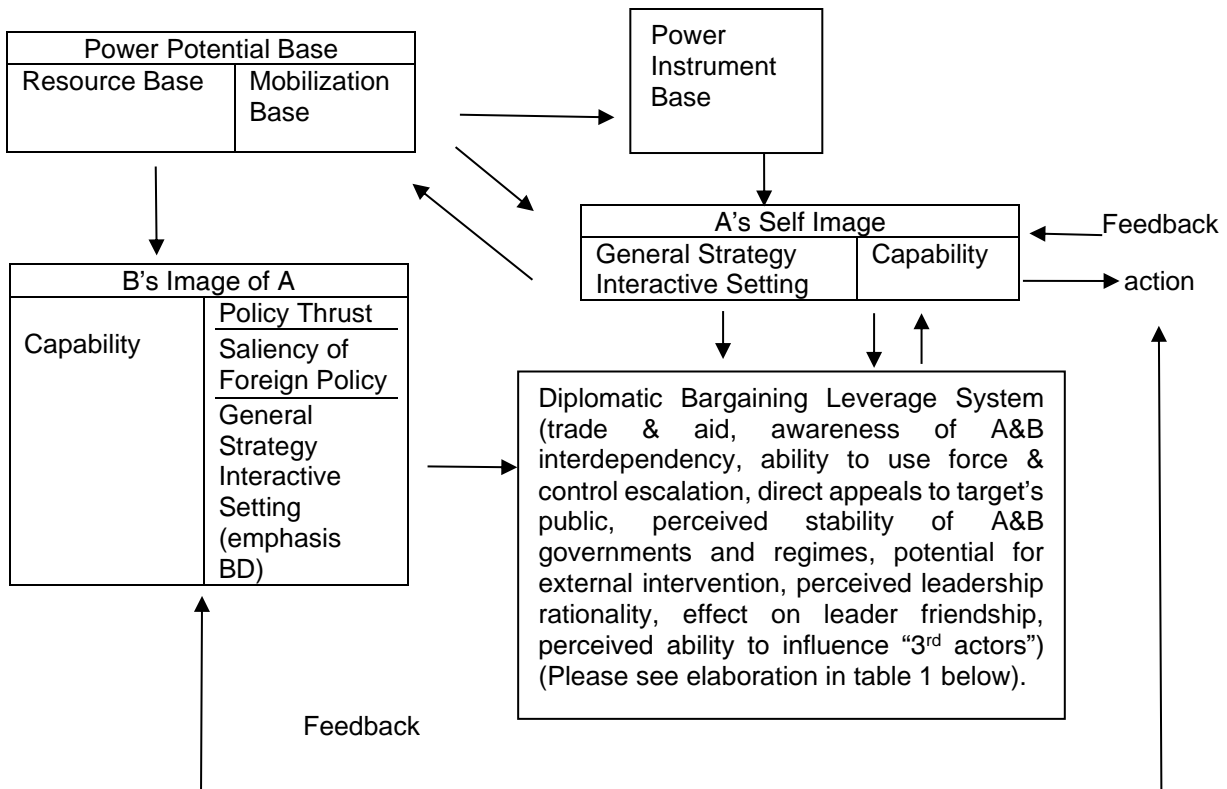


Figure 1. Schematic Representation of Actor Power and Foreign Policy Influence [10,p.9]

Table 1 below explicates the diplomatic bargaining leverage components that derive from the influence generation dyadic framework outlined above in Figure 1.

Table 1. An all-inclusive list of diplomatic bargaining levers [10,p.48-49]

<b>BARGAINING BASE</b>	
<b>"Passive" (tacit bargaining) levers</b>	<b>"Active" levers</b>
<b>1. Perceived public attitudes</b>	1. Perceived ability to give or withhold aid.
<b>2. Perceived possible great power involvement.</b>	2. Perceived ability to influence the actions of a third country.
<b>3. Awareness of interdependence.</b>	3. Perceived ability to use force.
<b>4. Perceived long-term power alterations.</b>	4. Perceived trade opportunities.
<b>5. Perceived economic/and/or political stability.</b>	5. Perceived ability to deal with domestic political dissatisfaction.
<b>6. Perceived irrationality of leaders.</b>	6. Perceived transnational appeal of ideology.
<b>7. Perceived adverse effect on friendship.</b>	7. Perceived willingness to alter relationship type.

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## 8. Perceived likelihood of accidental war.

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This analysis disaggregates these diplomatic levers in order to highlight them. So-called passive levers the analyst assumes to be constant in magnitude for the dyadic diplomatic case under study. An effective political strategic context may focus on increasing the magnitude of one or more of them. For example, state A may develop and deploy nuclear weapons to increase the salience of “perceived likelihood of accidental war” in a dispute with state B. Manipulation of a lever may affect the efficacy of others, e.g., after an effective long-term program of nuclear and missile weapons development, state A persuades state B that state A’s regime is surprisingly stable. The dynamic interactive attempted utilization of these levers also itself conceivably affects their salience and intensity. For example, state B’s persistent threat to use of massive force to disarm a newly nuclear state A may increase public attitudinal support for an otherwise polarizing regime in state A. The broader “general strategy interactive setting” of the diplomatic interaction also determines the efficacy of leverage. For example, if the prevailing view in state A is that state B’s leadership is irrevocably committed to regime change in state A, then state A will react differently to state B’s aid offers than if state A saw state B as an ally.

In sum, critical is how do dyadic diplomatic bargaining interlocutors perceive the ultimate interests/intentions/motivations behind their diplomatic interlocutor’s own use of his capabilities. The effectiveness of the utilization of leverage is critically dependent upon the respective ultimate interest/motives of the contestants and mediators as perceived by their targets. All the parties in a violent international conflict, including prospective mediators, make an interest calculation. The latter involves much more than the simple settlement of the dispute. “These calculations include relations among the conflicting parties and third parties and the costs and benefits of all of them in both conflict and conciliation. Leverage comes from harnessing those interests and from the third party’s ability to play on perceptions of needs, above all on the needs for a solution” [9,p.442]. To actualize a political environment that is ripe for resolution, shaping respective perceptions of relative power capabilities is a necessary but not sufficient consideration. The estimations of the costs and benefits of a ceasefire depend critically on the perceived motivations of the diplomatic target by the initiator, whether an adversary or a mediator. Herrmann’s analysis (1995) of US foreign policy at the end of the Cold War leading into the first Gulf War underlines the necessity of inferring state target motivation. It requires determining the functionally, if not explicitly, assumed motivations for a state’s behavior to formulate appropriate political strategy in response. He notes,

*“The interdependent nature of estimates of power and assumptions about motivations. Americans who assume that Moscow was highly expansionist and opportunistic would attribute Soviet passivity in the Gulf to its lack of capability and to successful American deterrence. They might not look as hard at the empirical evidence concerning Soviet capability. After all, if Moscow was seen to have the capability to do more and was not actively doing it, then this would challenge the basic perception of an expansionist and opportunistic adversary” [11,p.200].*

## 3. EXPERIMENTS

A prerequisite for mediator effectiveness in promoting a durable ceasefire includes having an accurate understanding of the motivations of the contestants in a conflict. The effective mediator utilizes its power capabilities to shape trends in prevailing perceptions, attitudes and values of target states. It encourages the political rise of domestic constituencies within contestant states that see the conflict as in a hurting stalemate, i.e., not as an existential zero-sum struggle for survival. Concomitantly, the respective prevailing worldviews within the governments of the contestants should view the ultimate foreign policy motivations of the prospective mediator accordingly. These motivations should be seen as ultimately not dangerous, if not benign. Since Moscow’s prevailing view sees the US/NATO/EU as one of the contestants in the indirect, violent conflict in Ukraine, Washington’s inferred motivations of Chinese foreign policy are critical. In this regard, one observer perceives China as “consciously targeting what it perceives to be US hegemony [...] to split American alliances in Europe and Asia” [12,p.264]. Such an observer will more likely respond differently to China’s application of its diplomatic bargaining leverage than if the observer perceived China as defending status quo interests.

Touval and Zartman (2001) highlight that mediation acts as a catalyst to negotiation [9]. If the adversaries had not so involved themselves in their conflict to the point of accepting mediation, then they would have been able to accomplish a ceasefire on their own. Mediation facilitates this settlement. They note that when the conflict becomes so-called twice dominant, only then does mediation become necessary. It is twice dominant in that the conflict provides the elements of the dispute, as well as preventing parties from seeking and finding a way out of it. Cottam and Cottam (2001) utilize the findings of social identity theory [13]. They would highlight that the parties have locked themselves into intense social competition, i.e., their interaction has become functionally perceived as zero-sum in nature, hence it is intensely hostile. The prevailing view in both capitals is that one party's prospective gains come directly at the expense of the other party. Mediation that is more effective in generating a more enduring ceasefire likely includes introducing situational options, as contestants themselves perceive them, to engage in social creativity. To rephrase, the contestants must perceive desirable and feasible alternative options for achieving national security, development and dignity that the current ongoing violent conflict obstructs. These social creativity options should be perceived as substantive and meaningful to allow for compromise on maximal objectives over which much blood and treasure has already been spilled. In sum, creating conditions by which the contestants may view a ceasefire as beneficial means each side perceiving a net positive outcome through concluding the violence. The effective mediator must have the power potential base to create environmental political circumstances that the contestants can perceive and view as realistic. NATO and the EU can offer to a post-settlement Ukraine the option to accede to them. China can offer greater material trade benefits to Russia and Ukraine via integration in its Belt and Road initiative. China can also affirm Russia's claim to great power equivalency by reestablishing the primacy of the UN Security Council as a global great power forum for conflict resolution. The emplacement of Chinese peacekeeping troops along a ceasefire line with the imprimatur of the UN Security Council would affirm this status.

Several weeks after the February 24, 2022, invasion, Russian invasion, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin articulated one of the US' strategic goals: "We want to see Russia weakened to the degree that it can't do the kinds of things that it has done in invading Ukraine. So it has already lost a lot of military capability, and a lot of its troops, quite frankly. And we want to see them not have the capability to very quickly reproduce that capability" [*sic*] [14,paras.34-35]. Arguably, according to this study's framework, this statement was a disincentive for Russian acceptance of a ceasefire by reinforcing perceptions in Moscow that the conflict is zero-sum.

The study attempts analytically to infer the prerequisites for Washington's acceptance of the political strategy proposed here for a durable ceasefire in the Russo-Ukrainian war. Such a durable ceasefire requires Washington's acquiescence to close economic collaboration between Beijing and Moscow. It also requires acceptance of the Putin regime authorities as international interlocutors in negotiating international treaty agreements. This point is noteworthy; a month after the launch of the invasion, US President Biden controversially suggested in presumably unscripted comments that Putin should be removed from power [15].

Presently, the drastic escalation of the conflict in February 2022 has resulted in ongoing violence on a scale not seen in Europe since the mid-twentieth century. The violence of the Russo-Ukrainian war reflects the internecine violence of the Balkan wars of the 1990s but on a magnitude larger scale. Collectively, emotions and perceptions have intensified and simplified in directions that make circumvention of social competition much less likely without external mediation. The creation of substantive social creativity options requires resources that only major power intervention can potentially provide. The pope's offer of mediation without the backing of coordinated multilateral great power political strategic application of power capabilities would probably not be effective. One hypothetical scenario could involve the NATO/EU and China coordinating through the UN Security Council to institute a ceasefire. Integration of both Ukraine and Russia into China's Belt and Road initiative while beginning NATO and EU accession procedures for Kyiv would provide incentives to compromise. "In 2019 China was Ukraine's largest trading partner" and China enterprises already had directed agriculture and Belt and Road-related investment to Ukraine [16,p.733].

Shifting from the respective maximal public demands of Moscow and Kyiv require creating conditions of hurting stalemate, i.e., the perceived benefits from compromising outweigh the perceived costs of continuing the war. Acquiescing to the loss of Crimea and other territories in return for NATO and EU accession would be a compromise. For Russia, collaboration on equal terms with China and Euro-Atlantic structures to regulate global affairs through a reinvigorated UN Security Council would motivate compromise. It would require China to mediate between the US and Russia, possibly with the collaboration of European powers such as France, to restrain US unilateralism. Paris, Moscow and Beijing failed to prevent the US-led invasion of Iraq

in 2003. Subsequent developments over the next twenty years would seem to make future potential US military interventions for regime change unlikely. They include not only the disintegration of Iraq, the US defeat in Afghanistan, and Russian intervention in Syria, but also the rise of Donald Trump. Targeted assassinations of high-level Iranian officials continued under the Trump administration. Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine makes further direct US escalation of military intervention in the Middle East more precarious as Russia more closely allies with Iran. China has raised its mediatory profile in the region [17].

Touval and Zartman (2001) note mediation does not provide deep reconciliation or cancel the causes of the dispute [9]. It can only cut through some layers, providing a means for the parties to live together despite their dispute. The parties may well fall out of their mediated settlement if they are left to their own instincts. Many cases exist of the hard-bargained agreement having fallen apart under new conditions or revived enmities.

The theoretical framework of Cottam and Gallucci (1978) allows for reframing this statement as a power issue [10]. In short, the mediator uses its diplomatic bargaining leverage to shape the behavior of the adversarial parties. Adherence to the ceasefire implies that the prevailing political view, in this case in both Kyiv and Moscow, has to emerge that neither side will gain a decisive power advantage over the other. This inference in turn implies that Beijing would need at least to coordinate its policies with other major powers. One tactical aim would be to undercut perceptual trends in the Ukrainian polity that it has sufficient international support to compensate for its own power disadvantage towards Russia. The extended intensity of this violent international conflict has hardened collective prevailing view stereotypes of Self and Other. The political capacity to push Kyiv and Moscow towards a durable ceasefire magnifies the diplomatic bargaining resources necessary for potential efficacy. The Ukrainian public opinion demands on the Kyiv leadership not to compromise had been highly significant and constraining leading up to the February 2022 invasion. Demonstrations broke out in Ukrainian cities in response to Zelensky signing on October 1, 2019, in Minsk against the internationally-brokered "Steinmeier formula." It would have allowed for the organization of local elections in the rebel eastern regions [18,p.116].

The national fury over Ukrainian losses and Russian war crimes will require effective utilization of Western and Chinese diplomatic bargaining leverage to maintain a ceasefire. The absence of a coordinated international community response immediately following the February 24, 2022, invasion evidently dissuaded Kyiv from agreeing to a ceasefire. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson rejected the possibility of London and Washington's support for prospective Ukrainian concessions to Moscow in return for security guarantees, labelling Putin a "war criminal" [19,p.4].

In terms of the framework of this analysis, creation of opportunities for reintegration of Russia into the so-called international community is a prerequisite for a sustainable ceasefire. Moscow currently (December 2023) claims to represent the interests of the developing world against repression serving the interests of the "golden billion" under the supremacy of the "Anglo-Saxons" [20,paras.28,20]. The UN Security Council would appear to be potentially ideally suited to be the UN oversight organization for implementing the ceasefire. Empirical research in social psychology indicates that shame through perceived failure can correlate with a positive response approach to social interaction. If the consequent damage, including to "social image" is perceived as repairable, then shame may motivate constructive re-engagement [21,p.998-999]. Moscow's consequent call for the reinvigoration of the UN system may point to a route for reparability for the failures and atrocities which Russia's violent intervention in Ukraine has triggered. According to Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov,

*"Clearly, everything that is happening in and around Ukraine is part of the unfolding fight for the future international order. What's at stake today is whether the world order will be truly fair, democratic and polycentric, as the UN Charter says, which proclaims the sovereign equality of all countries, or whether the United States and the coalition that it is leading will implement their agenda at the expense of other countries including pumping resources over to suit their needs. This is precisely the goal of the rules-based order concept. The Western capitals want to replace international law, primarily the UN Charter's goals and principles, with these rules that were made up by no one knows who" [22,para.9].*

The functional aim of this public rhetoric is to influence the audience for it in this global region, the so-called Global South. The analytical value of this rhetoric includes the projection of the initiator of its own motivations on the international community. Lavrov's statements imply perception of threat from the US-led alliance. If the prevailing view in Moscow reflected perception of opportunity, then Russian influence advancement rhetoric towards the global community would differ. It would focus on and justify Russian leadership. It would

parallel Hitlerian Germany's claim to offer European and global order and regeneration under its leadership. Kershaw describes German "political culture" at the time of Hitler's rise,

*"Among its components were: an understanding of nationality that rested upon ethnicity (and was hence open to notions of restoration of national strength through 'ethnic cleansing'); an imperialist idea that looked not in the main to overseas colonies, but to German dominance in the ethnic m lange of eastern Europe, at the expense of the Slav population; a presumption of Germany's rightful position as a great power, accompanied by deep resentment at the country's treatment since the war and its national weakness and humiliation; and a visceral detestation of bolshevism coupled with the sense that Germany was the last bulwark in the defence of western civilization" [sic] [23,p.226].*

Similar characterizations are evident in regard to the 2022 Russian prevailing view regarding Ukraine. Regarding the so-called West, the Russian prevailing view does not demonstrate contempt. Russian nationalistic universalism, with its focus on national sovereign and self-determination, reflects a worldview of perceived threat. The Ukraine crisis provided Moscow with a perceived opportunity derivative of its perceived competitive threat from NATO/EU to restore its equal global superpower status. A comparison of Moscow's derivative perception of opportunity towards Ukraine with 1914 Vienna's perceived opportunity towards Serbia is available elsewhere [5].

To meet the global Western threat, Russia's derivative, self-serving perception of opportunity towards lesser powers in the former Soviet space does reflect this global perception of threat to its status. The so-called "Russian World," requiring Moscow's leadership, perceived political degeneracy in a Kyiv regime that ultimately lacked the will and determination to resist. As with stereotype-based foreign policy thrusts, this gross simplification led to gross miscalculation. Moscow would invade with only 190,000 troops "at the very most," a small fraction of what would be needed to occupy the entire country [24,para.5]. The politically prevailing view in Moscow anticipated little Ukrainian resistance in quickly toppling the pro-Western regime [25]. Nation states such as Russia, Germany, US and others are comparatively more prone to stereotyping and consequent foreign policy failures than non-nation states, *ceteris paribus* [13].

This study conceptualizes a theory as being an explanation for identified political outcomes because of identified essential political causes. It assumes the only purpose of theory is to ask questions about the real world and solve real political problems. The problem to solve is how to bring about a durable ceasefire in Ukraine.

## **Realism**

The purpose of this presentation is to highlight key points in classical realist's typology of international relations behavior. Hans J. Morgenthau's theoretical insights for a theory of international political relations have been important in developing the most influential theory of international relations, the theory of so-called realism in international relations. This study attempts to use the strong points of Morgenthau's ideas while correcting for his weaknesses. It highlights the different key concepts and issues in the field of international relations as well.

## **Power, National Interest, and Policy Typologies**

The two vital concepts in Hans Morgenthau's theory of realism in international relations are power and national interest. First, power is equivalent to capabilities; it determines the range of policy options which a government has in its foreign policy. Second, Morgenthau's realism assumes that a so-called objective national interest exists in the form of the optimization of political influence of a country in the external international political environment. The national interest of a state is to expand to the objectively correct limits of its geopolitical sphere of influence [26]. These limits derive from the relative power capability base which each state has. However, the relative power capability among states is changing, so the boundaries of a state's appropriate sphere of influence should change as well to avoid overextension.

The essence of overextension is extending a country's dominance beyond its domestic political tolerance levels which derive from the public's tolerance of resource demands. The 2021 US military withdrawal from Afghanistan may imply that the US was overextended. The long-term presence of the US in South Korea since 1945, despite a military campaign to oust it, implies that the US is not overextended there. Despite claims that

the US invasion of Iraq was a foreign policy failure, US troops remain, anchored in the Kurdish north of the country. While Slavic and heretofore predominantly Russian Orthodox Ukraine borders Russia, the US alliance with Ukrainian nationalism against Russian irredentism favors US intervention. Russia remains a presence in Communist Cuba 150 kilometers from Florida since 1960. An evidently critical factor determining overextension appears to be whether or not the great power is an ally or foe of the national self-determination drive of the target national community. Each case displays highly idiosyncratic circumstances. Postwar west European nationalisms tended to ally with the US, tolerating a high level of US influence against the perceived shared threat from Moscow. The nuclear setting prevents purposive selection of use of direct military force against the great power competitor.

Fozouni notes that Morgenthau defaults to “quality of diplomacy” as a residual category into which to place these critical unique circumstances [26,p.493]. They determine expansion, stasis or retraction of state influence, i.e., the optimization of a state’s power [26,p.481]. In cases of overextension, eventually, a political systemic correction occurs as a result of shocking, public foreign policy failure. States, like people, rarely decline gracefully because of nationalistic values; instead, they experience international humiliation due to exposed weakness. According to Morgenthau’s theory of realism, states act as if extending and institutionalizing their relative political influence in the world is their primary imperative. Classical realism presumes the competitive state self-help nature of the anarchic international system. It incentivizes states to subordinate the panoply of state foreign policy motivations to the functional goal of defending and expanding the state’s international influence where perceived to be possible [27]. Jervis (1976) recounts Wolfers’ analogy of how a diverse set of individuals in a household reflect a variety of individual behavioral idiosyncracies when their survival is not at risk [28,p19]. Should that house catch on fire, these behavioral idiosyncracies will subordinate to the imperative facing the individual in the latter’s interaction with the other household members to survive [29].

This study critiques this realist portrayal of international relations, highlighting Morgenthau’s approach to theory building. Morgenthau knew what a state’s motivations in world politics were, or that is, what they were going to be: power and influence. He did not need to ask, ‘why did they want power and influence?’ because, apparently, this question does not matter. He knew that there was a political foreign policy making process inside a government, and that it was complex. Morgenthau saw patterns and tendencies that push it in certain directions, which he saw as being overwhelming.

Governments consist of groups of people, and people lie to each other and to themselves as Sigmund Freud realized. They may not admit they crave power for its own sake, typically even to themselves. Human psychosocial behavior reflects the “*animus dominandi*,” i.e., the drive to dominate for its own sake, within human nature, that drives politics [30,p.209]. Solomon (2012) here notes that “Morgenthau’s understanding of human nature is rooted in Freudian theory.” Realists tend to be skeptics regarding the role of ethics in international relations. Ethics is the science of morals, but leaders confront the imperative of determining what is the right thing for a state leader to do in world filled with power hungry states. In terms of ethics and morality, Morgenthau emphasized the necessity of leadership decisions on the basis of an understanding of the consequences of one’s foreign policy decisions. In a world of states seeking influence despite resistance, a balance of power through creation of spheres of influence was necessary to prevent disastrous wars of global conquest. As in the Second World War, such attempts which would be the greatest source of human misery.

For Morgenthau, consequences were most important: prevent war between the Great Powers at any price in an uncertain world with no world government. The international political realist’s rules of diplomacy/strategy– Great Powers should keep a “balance of power” among spheres of influence: 1) Do not over-extend; 2) Do not under-extend; 3) Do not allow a lesser power to make policy for its patron, i.e., do not let the tail, i.e., the minor power client ally of the great power, wag the dog, i.e., the great power.

Morgenthau’s international relations theory of political realism is concerned ultimately about the optimization of power. A state should reach the natural limits of my sphere of influence, but at the same time do not commit the transgression of over extension. Power is “the exercise of influence over the minds and actions of men” [10,p.4].

Morgenthau identifies 3 pattern types or categories of foreign policy behavior: 1) status quo, i.e., a status quo policy posture aims to maintain the influence of an actor in international relations; 2) imperialist, i.e., an imperialist policy posture will emerge when an actor recognizes that it has the ability to expand its influence and if it has the opportunity to expand their influence, it will; 3) prestige, i.e., a prestige policy posture will be on display when an actor, which has been exercising great influence, begins to experience a decline in its relative power potential base. Table 2 below outlines Morgenthau’s theory in terms of its predictions regarding great power behavior in international relations.



**Table 2. Predictive foreign policy implications of Morgenthau’s classical realism**

Country	Power Potential Base	Influence Exercised	Foreign Policy Posture Will Be
<b>A</b>	1	2	Imperialist
<b>B</b>	1	1	Status Quo
<b>C</b>	2	1	Prestige

A central question for strategies in international conflict resolution is whether the primary motivation for great power belligerency is ultimately offensive or defense. The other great power actors, when confronting a belligerently imperialist rival, would tend to engage in containment. Determining the ultimate source of a belligerent state’s motivations lie in determining whether it is an imperialist power, and not a belligerent, defensive actor. This question is evident in the so-called Thucydides trap, i.e., China as analogous to Sparta and is the US to analogous to Athens in a contemporary analogy of the lead up to the Peloponnesian War. The US emerged as an aspiring global hegemon after the disintegration of the USSR [31].

According to realists, a decision maker or analyst, in trying to determine how the international political system constrains or directs North and South Korean, Ukrainian or EU foreign policy, should determine, 1) what are the conflicts between the Great Powers, and 2) how intense are these conflicts. If the conflicts between the great powers are intense, then they will shape the behavior of everyone else in the international system, e.g., during the Cold War. The attentiveness and engagement of great powers to conflicts involving lesser powers will correlate with the intensity of conflicts between the great powers themselves. This predisposition toward major power competitive interference involving third actors increased in salience in the postwar nuclear setting as the US and the USSR avoided direct military conflict [32]. Political strategic planning to avoid unintended great power conflict escalation requires an accurate determination of the prevailing view in each capital of the challenges in the foreign environment. In sum, if Moscow’s 2023 prevailing view is one of Anglo-Saxon, Cold War-type encirclement, then the consequent strategy for conflict control would imply a détente basis. It would differ from a containment strategy which would derive from the assumption that the motivation for the belligerency of Putin’s Moscow is more akin to that of Hitler’s Berlin in 1939. This issue of motivation is distinct from the issue of capabilities. For example, Brussels may not have had the capacity to oppose the US, as in the lead up to the Iraq 2003 invasion. An over-extended actor t may sustain unacceptable political consequences for attempting to do so.

**Nationalistic Universalism**

Popovic (2020) highlights Hans J. Morgenthau’s conceptualization of “nationalistic universalism,” i.e., the pattern tendency of States to claim to advance universal morality and ethics: “[E]ach nation comes to know again universal morality, that is, its own national one which is taken to be the one which all other nations ought to accept as their own” [33,p.124-25]. This analysis restates Morgenthau’s conceptualization of nationalistic universalism to broaden it as a behavior pattern in international relations. Nationalistic universalism is the tendency of state regime authorities to cloak the output of their foreign policy making process in broadly appealing religious or ideological symbols. Nationalistic universalism is thus a rhetorical ethical appeal towards international audiences. To the extent that this appeal persuades international audience members, then those members become functional agents of national influence for the appellant state. As Morgenthau (1974) wrote, “A great power imbued with the conviction that its particular conception of justice reflects the order of the universe is tempted [...] to make the order prevail in the rest of the world [...] The result is either war or what the Soviet Union calls ‘competitive coexistence,’ in which two incompatible conceptions of justice compete for universal allegiance” [34,p.173-73]. A state’s ultimate foreign policy motivations are rarely if ever what a state leader claims they are. Table 3 below highlights Morgenthau’s theory in terms of its predictions of the rhetorical behavior of state leaders. These behaviors derive from their respective prevailing view of either threat or opportunity emanating from the international environment.

**Table 3. Nationalistic universalism cases**

	<b>Denmark (1940)</b>	<b>UK (1900)</b>	<b>UK (1988)</b>
<b>Power Potential Base (scale of 1-5)</b>	4	1	2 (and declining)
<b>Geopolitical prevailing view</b>	Threat	Opportunity	Threat
<b>Symbol system (to attempt to persuade domestic public to acquiesce to material sacrifices to create foreign policy instruments to achieve foreign policy aims</b>	'liberal democracy'	'liberal democracy'	'liberal democracy'
<b>Nationalistic universalism</b>	'national self- determination'	'civilizing mission'	'national self- determination'

Table 4 below focuses on the respective nationalistic universalisms of the Cold War US and USSR. Their rhetorical perspectives correlate with their changing respective prevailing views of the nature of the challenge emanating from the international environment.

**Table 4. The Cold War international political system**

	<b>USSR [1950 (height)]</b>	<b>USSR [1988 (end)]</b>	<b>US (1950)</b>	<b>USA (1988)</b>
<b>Power Potential Base</b>	1	1 (declining)	1	1
<b>Geopolitical prevailing view</b>	Opportunit y	Threat	Opportunity	Neither O nor T
<b>Symbol system</b>	Marxism	Marxism	liberal democracy	liberal democracy
<b>Nationalistic universalis m</b>	'advance the dialectic'	'each country determine s its own pace'	'modernization ' (i.e., civilizing mission 2.0)	'national self- determination'/'modernizatio n'

Table 5 below comparatively outlines today's respective rhetorical nationalistic universalisms that correlate with the respective prevailing views in Washington, Moscow and Beijing. Again, they derive from the perceived nature of the challenge emanating from the international environment: threat or opportunity.

**Table 5. The international political system in 2023**

	<b>US</b>	<b>Russia</b>	<b>China</b>
<b>Power Potential Base</b>	1	2	2

<b>Geopolitical Prevailing View</b>	T/O	T/O	T
<b>Domestic audience symbol system</b>	liberal democracy	order	Marxism
<b>Nationalistic universalism</b>	(T/O): ‘rules-based international order’/‘global war on terrorism’ (i.e., civilizing mission 3.0)	(T/O): national self-determination/ ‘Russian World’	national self-determination

A plausible classical realist claim is that the US twenty-first century “global war on terrorism” is a rephrasing of earlier forms of imperial hegemonic expansion [45,p.357]. In the nineteenth century, London’s civilizing mission justified British expansion, and the latter twentieth century’s Cold War so-called modernization that Washington promoted. The global war on terrorism derives from a perceived opportunity to advance US hegemony in different regions by overcoming minor power rejectionist actors. These so-called rogue states include the Taliban’s Afghanistan, North Korea, Baathist Iraq, the Iranian Islamic Republic and Gaddafi’s Libya. US leading the rules-based international order is Washington’s global narrative for what some international relations theorists describe as US benign global hegemony confronting the perceived threat from China and Russia. Europe and US East Asian allies, i.e., South Korea, Japan and Taiwan, together with the EU under US leadership confront Moscow and Beijing. With the allyship of Eastern Europe, i.e., “new Europe,” the US perceives opportunity towards the European Union indirectly to contain and subordinate Moscow and Beijing [46]. The mix of perceived threats and opportunities reflects US post-Cold War international preeminence, comparable to the United Kingdom’s position in the nineteenth century.

This challenge is the final dilemma for mediators: “how to disengage from a mediating role without endangering the carefully brokered settlement” [9,p.442]. It means resolving the dispute, putting in question all of the above statements about how mediation is not about conflict resolution. The main obstacle to fulfilling this role is the US, which some argue is a main obstacle to a ceasefire besides Ukraine itself [35].

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Process Tracing the Lead Up to the Full-Scale Russian Invasion of Ukraine in February 2022

Within a few months of Joe Biden’s 2021 inauguration, Moscow visibly mobilized its military resources to the border with Ukraine [36]. A consequence of this conflict spiral included the new Zelensky government’s departure from its 2019 Ukrainian presidential campaign’s public ambiguity towards NATO integration to full support [37]. The Zelensky government’s policy revision paralleled the preceding Poroshenko government’s policy revision, against which Zelensky campaigned. Zelensky had advocated resolving the Donbas conflict through dialogue with Moscow. In early 2021, he publicly reinvigorated Kyiv’s commitment to recovery of the territory annexed or occupied by Moscow in 2014. He sought international support and suppressed pro-Russian Ukrainian political figures [38]. In late 2021, with Russia’s troop buildup on the Ukraine border, the Zelensky government proclaimed the US’ statement of “ironclad support” for Ukraine’s “sovereignty and territorial integrity” [39]. Yamazoe (2021) highlights research findings that “avoiding loss, rather than gaining profit, provides greater incentive for people to take actions that are accompanied by high risks,” to explain Putin’s interventions in Ukraine and Syria [38,p.2].

The evident subordination of the EU was its inability to contain the US as the G.W. Bush administration decided to invade in 2003 to install a friendly regime in Baghdad. Most of the current and future members of the EU at least publicly supported the US-led coalition’s invasion, despite opposition from Paris and Berlin. EU Commission president Romano Prodi noted the high-profile failure of the EU to act in opposition to the US at the start of the US-led March 2003 invasion of Iraq:

*“Whatever the outcome of the war, there can be no denying this is a bad time for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, for the European Union as a whole, for the authority of the U.N., for NATO, and for transatlantic relations. [...] These difficult circumstances also show it is time to draw the lessons from this crisis. Europe can make an effective contribution to peace in the world only if its nations pull together within the European Union. We all agree that we owe our wealth and prosperity to the Union. It is not in our interest to continue relying on others when it comes to defending our values militarily” [40,p.8].*

Twenty years since this public debacle, the EU has not demonstrated a significant military capacity to act independently from the US, not to mention to oppose or contain the US. In 2009, France rejoined the NATO military command structure, 2 years after Putin’s 2007 Munich speech and 1 year after Russia’s intervention in Georgia.

The George W. Bush administration successfully insisted that NATO declare Georgia and Ukraine as prospective NATO members at the 2008 Bucharest summit. The G.W. Bush administration overrode French and German objections. “In May 2008, George W. Bush declared at a conference in Bucharest that Georgia and Ukraine would become members of NATO, overriding the express wishes of America’s French and German allies. It was a wildly provocative move” [41,p.52]. In August 2008, in response to President Mikheil Saakashvili’s attempt to reassert central government control over rebellious provinces, Russia intervened militarily to dismember Georgia. In February 2014, US Deputy Secretary of State Victoria Nuland used an expletive to dismiss disdainfully EU misgivings over Western intervention in internal Ukrainian affairs. In sum, the EU does not convince the other first-rank, i.e., so called great powers, that it is itself a great power. This analysis defines a state as being a first-rank power on the basis of its relative power potential base.

A great power is a state that has the power capacity to construct diplomatic bargaining instruments that it can employ to formulate and pursue foreign policy aims self-sufficiently. Such a state has the potential power base to formulate its foreign policy aims independently of the strategic options perceived by it stemming from the foreign policies of other state actors. The sheer economic size of the EU single market, and the economic trade and aid diplomatic bargaining leverage that stem from it, place the EU in the near great power category. What the EU lacks is the capacity, as perceived by the other actors in the international system, to formulate its foreign policy aims independently of the strategic thrust of US foreign policy. This strong parametric constraint stems from the EU’s constitution by 27 member states, including a number of powerful but comparatively second-rank nation states. These 27 national polities are generally especially sensitive to US influence. The capability base advantage of the US is important. Equally important, if not more so, is the prevailing view in these polities, that ultimate US foreign policy intentions are benign. In sum, the prevailing worldview within each of these states is that US foreign policy motivations are supportive of the high level strategic foreign policy aims of each of them, respectively.

For the EU’s east European states, e.g., Poland, these aims include national defense against Russia and Germany. Close alliance with the US permits the actualization of these aims simultaneously without requiring difficult tradeoffs from among Poland’s foreign policy aims. Poland’s postwar history, together with the post-1989 international political system in which the liberal democratic regime emerged, strongly incentivized its Euro-Atlantic integration. It disincentivized following the lead of Paris and Berlin in the lead up to the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq. Doubts about the cohesiveness of the EU outside of the overarching political and economic hegemony of the US further incentivizes close cooperation with the US. For aspiring EU member states, the road to Brussels goes through Washington. This attitude received confirmation with the subsequent events immediately following the 2003 US invasion of Iraq. None of the EU candidate members paid a significant price for their rejection of French and German leadership on this issue opposing the US invasion. French President Jacques Chirac rebuked the EU candidate members for their support of the impending US-led invasion, declaring that they had “lost a good opportunity to keep quiet” [42]. It produced a furious east European response [43].

Russian nationalistic universalism since the consolidation of the Putin regime is defensive in character. It repeatedly declares its opposition to global domination by the “golden billion.” The US as its leader justifies its hegemony in terms of an international “rules-based order” the so-called rules of which it capriciously and self-servingly defines [44,para.29]. This nationalistic universalism of Moscow in 2023 does not reflect an imperialist power seeking to justify its hegemonic power and influence expansion. It is a nationalistic universalism of declining power manifesting a prestige strategy. It is revivifying the old Soviet Union’s claim to fight Western imperialism, without the Communist ideological element.

Russia stereotyped Kiev as unable to govern itself because of its subversion by Euro-Atlantic structures. The evidence was the inability of the Ukraine to reform its economy and return the country to a standard of living even at the 1991 level. Its separation from the motherland, in other words, led to its degeneracy and degradation through Euro-Atlantic subversion. This derivative stereotype of degeneracy and opportunity had its foundation in overarching perception of threat from Euro-Atlantic structures. The golden billion nationalistic universalism is a post-Soviet rephrasing of self-determination/each country determines its own course. It justifies Russian irredentism as a regional high level tactical maneuver against a US global threat.

In May 2023, French President Emmanuel Macron acknowledged the sincerity of east European commitment in 2003 to their close alliance with the US [47]. The latter's call for European support over the objections of Paris and Berlin for the impending invasion of Iraq reflected east Europe's overriding concern over a resurgent Russia. Washington through NATO was the perceived cornerstone for east European security, not the EU. Nearly twenty-years later, that concern appeared justified, but Macron highlighted the emergence of Trump indicates that Washington's commitment to European security may not be steadfast. He reiterated again the desirability of EU "strategic autonomy" in defense [48,para.7].

"Liberal intergovernmentalism" is today the ascendant theoretical perspective for the analysis of European integration [49,p.29]. The European integration strategy aimed partly to coordinate liberal intergovernmental pursuit of respective national interest. This coordination would reinforcement incentives for further harmonization largely through processes of neo-functional "spillover" [50,p.13]. It functionally served to avoid conflict spirals by incentivizing mutual confidence-building among the member states. Partly in recognition of its conflict amelioration functions, the EU received the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize [51]. Ironically and tragically, the excessive dependence of European integration on the US security architecture has in turn supported US unipolarity and expansion. It has inadvertently contributed to the intensification of a conflict spiral between the West and Moscow. It is also extending this spiral to include China as China and Russia ally against an expansionist Washington.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This study applies a political psychological theoretical framework for analyzing nationalism to the Russo-Ukrainian war within its evolving international political systemic context. The process tracing qualitative methodological approach highlights the roots of the current conflict lie in the Cold War. Differing prevailing views in Moscow and Washington reflect their differences in perception of the sources of that long conflict. This analysis' findings imply the need to alter attitudinal and perceptual trends tending to drive the prevailing views in Kyiv, Washington and Moscow towards functionally regarding the conflict in zero-sum terms. China as a third-party great power has the potential to provide incentives in a mediating interventional role to offer substantive national security, development and prestige opportunities to Kyiv and Moscow. In return, Beijing would seek and gain acknowledgment of its equality of international status with Washington and its allies. Its manifestation would likely include a shift towards the original format of the United Nations Security Council as an institutional design for facilitating great power cooperation. It would imply recognition of the existence of a multipolar international system. Political circles within Washington are likely to be resistant to accommodating Russian and Chinese influence expansion. This analysis implies supporting the strategic aim of Moscow and Beijing to create and institutionalize a multipolar international political system. Great power status equality would evoke similarly the long nineteenth century Concert of Europe system applied globally.

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