

War in Ukraine: A power play between Democracy and Authoritarianism

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Abstract

This article provides an analytical discussion of the crisis of democracy and the rise of authoritarianism in the context of the Russia-Ukraine War. Some of the fundamental aspects of the post-Cold War international order are addressed in this respect, including emerging powers, anti-Westernism, authoritarianism, and new threats in international relations. It is argued that the post-Cold War period brought both stability and instability to the global world order. On the one hand, the United States' victory in the ideological conflict between the East and the West led to the dominance of the Western system and its influence in the Middle East and Central Eastern European region with the call for democracy. On the other hand, the growing intervention of the US in intra-state disputes through the deployment of NATO has become a major concern to Russia and many other nations along the eastern border. This intensified anti-Western sentiment in emerging countries, with the rise of many Authoritarian governments. Many of the conflicts that the world has witnessed since the end of the Cold War are the result of such anti-Western feelings. This resulted at the beginning of a new era of war and conflict on a global scale. Russia's war in Ukraine is one of the recent examples. Russia is attempting to maintain its sphere of influence to avoid joining NATO and the West, regardless of the cost or repercussions of the war. As a result of these conflicts between great powers, several new powers emerged, resulting in a multi-polar world order. Today, it is emphasized that the ability and willingness of great powers to cooperate in addressing these dangers will determine the course of the world.

1. Introduction:

The events that occurred between 1989 and 1992 in Soviet Russia marked the end of the Cold War, which had a dual impact on international relations. On the one hand, the Cold War came to an end with the Soviet disintegration and military withdrawal from Eastern Europe and the Third World developing countries that allowed democratization to proceed in many states that were formerly part of the communist government and ruled by a Marxist dictatorship. This led to a major decrease in interstate conflicts, some of which were brought on by ideological rivalry between superpowers during the Cold War. On the other hand, the disintegration of the "Soviet Union" was followed by the emergence or rise of several major conflicts that had remained largely dormant in the period Cold War began to resurface. Several of these new conflicts have occurred in the former Soviet Union, such as the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, the war in Chechnya, and Russian involvement in many other war crimes with former allies such as the Russo-Georgian War, Russia's military intervention in the Syrian Civil War, and the ongoing war in Ukraine, which erupted in 2014. Even though there were many conflicts occurred between Russia and the former states of the Soviet Union, there were also conflicts that started in several other nations outside of it. Many Third World conflicts in which the Western powers were not directly involved during the Cold War continued after it. Especially, the United States' interventions in Panama, Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo in the name of Western-style democracy, humanitarianism with American-

guaranteed peace, and liberal internationalism with a variety of economic and social programmes. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, America launched large-scale military operations to protect itself against potential nuclear weapons in Iraq and future threats by al Qaeda while waging smaller-scale wars in Africa, Asia, and Arabia. The revival of great power rivalry and the growing threats from China and Russia indicate the end of this era. Thus, it may be claimed that the end of the Cold War resulted in both stability and instability in global relations.

2. Rising Powers and Emerging World Order

The New World Order that arose in the post-Cold War period has been interpreted differently by the experts and still, various opinions are unfolding. A particular group of intellectuals claimed it marked the "End of History" (Fukuyama, 1992) by saying that the international order was unipolar, with the United States of America (USA) as the sole superpower, from a military/political point of view. American military power played a major role in many regions of conflicts and disputes. For example, in the Persian Gulf, it protects weaker states against attack by their powerful neighbours. It indirectly safeguards China and other Asian nations from the disadvantages of a highly rearmed-Japan. Moreover, American military strength plays a major role in the organizing of military alliances like NATO and the American Peacekeeping Mission. With its military and political power, America has created an influence on other nations, and any nation planning the use of force outside of its boundaries must be aware of this fact. Another group of scholars believes that with the end of conflicts and rivalry between the two blocs

at the end of the Cold War, the world has entered an era of new threats. There is a lot of instability and uncertainty about the future of the international order in the post-Cold War era. The world is not in chaos; things are still managed, and international organizations are striving for peace and democracy, particularly in developing countries. However, the pace of instability and uncertainty is becoming faster. Russia's invasion of Ukraine is one good example. Many now think that the second Cold War is about to break out and the rising military power of Russia will lead to the creation of a new bipolar world order, in which the US and Russia would work together to control each of their respective regions of interest. These scholars argue that "there will be great divisions among humankind and the dominant source of conflicts will be cultural. Nation-states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations" (Huntington, 1993). The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. It is in this context, the two major theses of the post-Cold War world order: Francis Fukuyama's "end of history" and Huntington's "clash of Civilizations" were largely reenvisioned by various scholars. One group of scholars argue that history has restarted with Russia's invasion of Ukraine in contradiction to what Fukuyama said in his thesis. The other group of scholars argues in support of Fukuyama's line pointing to Ukraine's ambition to integrate with the European Union for economic progress rather than Russia, which is significantly poorer and less economically dynamic. Similarly, Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis also received two opposite views in the context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. A group of scholars argues that the post-Cold War unipolar world dominated by the United States has crumbled and been replaced with a more multipolar one in which "specific divergences between the world's leading powers have generally adopted the civilizational pattern." The United States is leading a Christian and post-Christian west against an Eastern Orthodox Christian Russia, together with China, India, and the majority of Middle Eastern and Latin American countries, and some countries in Africa who remain neutral, for somewhat different reasons (Linker, 2022). Some other scholars argue that there are a large number of intracivilizational conflicts and geopolitical actions that seem to be more in line with traditional Great Power politics and the efforts of smaller and weaker governments to defend themselves by allying with bigger ones. The world reverting to its pre-1945 multipolar norm of competing for Great Powers, spheres of influence, defence alliances, and foreign policies based on self-interest and national glory (Linker, 2022). From the economic/political point of view, there are still many who believe that the emergence of new powers, such as Russia, India, South Africa and Brazil is an indication of the arrival of multipolar world order (Murrey & Brown, 2013). Although the United States is unquestionably a great economic power, it is not the only one (Yilmaz, 2008). Other power centres include the European Union, the Organization of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, and other nation-states that are not even members of these integrations or organizations. Globally, there is a redistribution of economic and political power. In reality,

the United States insisted that the costs be shared with other important nations. when it conducted military operations in Kuwait, Afghanistan, Iraq, and other places to "stabilize" the world. There is also a shift of power from the trans-Atlantic to the Indo-Pacific region (Gupta & Nafey, 2021). After three decades after the end of the Cold War, we are in an unsettled and contested period of global, regional, and major power balancing. The world has entered an incomplete transition era in which the global order, weakened by geopolitics, has been replaced with a New World Order that has been the subject of many interpretations whether it is a unipolar or bipolar or multipolar system. In such a situation, most of the theories that emerged in the post-Cold War period have been largely criticized and few are discarded. Thus, the post-Cold War international order can be viewed as a combination of unipolar, bipolar, and multipolar systems, where international politics is dominated by at least five great powers: the US, Russia, Europe, China and Japan (Yilmaz, 2008).

3. US Hegemony and the Rise of anti-Westernism

The most notable aspect of the post-Cold War era is that the West won the ideological conflict between the East and the West. The world started to be dominated by the Western system and its influences. Since the end of the Cold War, the United States, for example, has significantly extended its influence in the Caucasus region and the Middle East. Strategically, the US enhanced its power in the Middle East through its foreign policies and plans, allowing the country to establish its hegemonic role in world affairs. Since the 1990s, the US involvement in two Gulf Wars against Iraq, has consistently supported Israeli interests, has been involved in the Israel-Palestine conflict, and has attempted to weaken rival Middle Eastern countries. Following the events of September 11, 2001, the United States maintained its hegemony in the area by launching military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. The United States expanded into the Caucasus region which was once part of Russia's sphere of influence. The prime motive to enter this region is to get benefit from the energy-rich region and made new allies with the former parts of the Soviet Union, such as Georgia, Azerbaijan and Ukraine. The United States' expansion of the security alliance "NATO" further expanded its influence. At first, Russia made many threats, including the establishment of a counter-defence group, to stop NATO's growth. However, the "partnership for peace" eventually convinced it, through which it was able to keep many of its advantages in nations in Eastern Europe. Similarly, the European Union's expansion into Eastern Europe represented Western supremacy once more. Eight previously communist nations, including Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Hungary, Slovenia, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic, joined the Union, particularly with the 2004 enlargement. Additionally, Bulgaria and Romania, two formerly communist nations, joined as full members in 2007. While all of these causes govern Western hegemony in the post-Cold War era, the implications of this dominance have resulted in several reactions and challenges to the West. An anti-Western feeling developed in Islamic nations and elsewhere appears to be fueling terrorism, a significant threat to democracy in the post-Cold War era (Yilmaz, 2008). Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a recent example of such anti-Westernism as a result of the US desire for Ukraine to join

NATO. Therefore, the US expansion into the Middle-east region and the development of a counter-reaction to it with anti-Westernism is a subject of intense debate. This kind of phenomenon is most comparable to what Samuel P. Huntington (1993) discusses in his well-known book "Clash of Civilizations."

4. The Crisis of Democracy and Rise of Authoritarianism

In much of the 21st century, the opponents of the Western liberal democracies have worked tirelessly to undermine the global system of order and continuously giving more efforts to achieve their target. The results of their effort are now visible. Many dictatorship leaders joined with a global power like China and Russia to successfully change the global order, undermining the belief that democracy is the only viable path to wealth and security, and promoting increasingly authoritarian forms of government (Reppucci & Slipowitz, 2022). In recent years, authoritarian regimes have taken control of countries in most of the world. As a result, democracies are under attack from the inside by illiberal forces, especially corrupt politicians attempting to distort and destabilize the very institutions that brought them to power. Nicaragua's incumbent president was reelected with a manipulated and closely controlled election in 2021 after his security forces detained opposition candidates and deregistered civil society groups. Sudan's generals took control once more, overturning democratic advancements gained since the departure of the previous dictator Omar al-Bashir in 2019. When the United States unexpectedly removed its armed forces from Afghanistan, the elected government in Kabul fell and was replaced by the Taliban, reverting the nation to a regime that is diametrically hostile to democracy, pluralism, and equality. The freely elected states such as Brazil, India, and many other smaller nations are also affected by increasing authoritarianism (Repucci & Slipowitz, 2022). With such practices, over the last two decades and a half, due to their own political and economic might as well as the waning influence of democracies, autocrats have created a more favourable international environment for themselves. In the globalization era, the international system is interconnected and the leaders with authoritarian practices are no longer isolated one. Instead, they are actively collaborating to promote new forms of authoritarianism and reject democratic pressure. While many democracies have sought to respond to manipulated elections with measures like sanctions and the withholding of aid, the impact has been diminished by authoritarian coalitions (Repucci & Slipowitz, 2022). In certain circumstances, authoritarian support is primarily economic. To counterbalance the sanctions imposed by democracies for its electoral fraud and mass arrests of the opposition, the governments of Russia, China, and Turkey, for instance, have given trade and investment to the Venezuelan dictatorship. There are some other cases where the support is direct and open: the Kremlin sent Russian propagandists to stand in for striking Belarusian journalists during the 2020 rallies against rigged elections in Belarus and offered its security forces to support the Belarusian government's harsh dispersal of protesters. President Vladimir Putin's dictatorship destroyed the appearance of

competition in Russia's September 2021 parliamentary elections by imprisoning opposition leader Aleksey Navalny and branding his movement "extremist," thereby barring any candidates even closely connected with it from contesting (Repucci & Slipowitz, 2022). Yet again, the recent attack on Ukraine is a clear indication of the violation of international obligations and imposing authoritarian rule against liberal democracies. In this increasing authoritarian practice in the international system, the last two decades saw a dark shadow on the remaining democracies. In this crisis of democracy, autocrats remained determined to keep and expand their power, and they continued to make gains according to their interests. The time has come to recognize the risks to uphold the international norms that democracies have long fought for while holding autocrats accountable to the limits of human experience.

5. A New Era of War and Conflict

The post-Cold War period has seen the emergence of several new challenges that nation-states and even big powers cannot fully control. One of the most serious challenges in this respect is the intra-national conflicts or conflicts that occur within state borders. Most of these are ethnic conflicts over political control, succession or self-determination (Yilmaz, 2008). Recently the Ethno-political movements have resurfaced in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Africa, and several other regions around the world. These conflicts are more deadly, expensive, and destructive than any in history. Although intra-state disputes appear to be local, due to global interconnectedness and numerous international backing, they can swiftly take on an international dimension. Indeed, when third parties give political and economic support with military assistance, as well as protection and bases for individuals participating in local conflicts, these wars invariably take on an international dimension. Religious militancy is another rising concern in the post-Cold War era. An atmosphere of religious militancy, termed "religious fundamentalism" at times, persists in many Islamic republics. It often involves support for violence against discrimination and oppression seen to be placed on Islamic countries by the West or its supporters. Some scholars argue that it is culture, rather than religion, is fueling conflicts uniquely by producing intolerant and incompatible conceptions of identity and allegiance among rival civilizations. Huntington (1993) contends that even more than ethnicity, when individuals define their identities in terms of their ethnic and religious backgrounds, they are more prone to see "us" against "them" relationships between themselves and those of other ethnic and religious backgrounds (Huntington, 1993). Huntington's theory may be contentious, but it may be backed up by the governments of nations like Iran and Sudan as well as Islamic groups across the world, many of whom easily use the rhetoric of cultural conflict. The religiously-driven violent conflict gradually turned into terrorism in many cases. In reality, religious fundamentalism serves as the ideological foundation for some of the most deadly terrorist groups operating today, like Islamic Jihad and Al-Qaeda. Whether or not it is fueled by religious fundamentalism, it has emerged as a real menace in the post-Cold War era, especially following the September 11 attacks. The United

States declared war on terrorism, and many countries backed him up. However, it is a matter of fact that terrorist organizations do not fight against the norms of war. The United States and its allies have been largely effective in defeating and punishing regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq accused of aiding terrorist actions. On the contrary, United States incursions and growing power in the Middle East - and worldwide - provoked widespread opposition, fuelling several terrorist organizations. As a result, regardless of how strong the United States and its allies are with their military strength, the danger presented by numerous terrorist organizations continued to persist even in the present times. The growing influence of the United States in the Middle East and the Eastern European regions further provoked widespread opposition by Russia. For example, the United States presence in the South Caucasus region: Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia, in particular, posed a significant security concern to Russia. The growing influence of the United States in the Eastern European regions which were formerly parts of the Soviet Union is a big threat to Russia. The Georgian conflict in 2008 and the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine demonstrate how far Russia is determined to protect its interests in former allies. These are some of the new conflicts that arouse in the post-Cold War period. However, this new era of conflicts has many dimensions, and the nature of war also took a major shift in the postCold War era. Most importantly, technological advancements are influencing the changing character of warfare. In contemporary times, there is a fear about the growing potential of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning to increase cyber-attacks as well as a threat from physical, chemical and biological weapons. New technologies make biological attacks easier by simplifying the creation and manufacture of weapons and the mechanisms that produce them. International concern is also growing about the development of so-called nuclear weapons. The continued presence of nuclear weapons poses a growing threat to humanity at large. While the number of nuclear weapons has declined from over 60,000 during the Cold War to around 14,000 now (UN, 2020). At the same time, nuclear-armed states' ties are worsening, and differences over the speed and extent of disarmament are increasing. Nuclear weapons must be eliminated, which would require a renewed commitment to mutual respect and collaboration among the world's most powerful countries.

6. War in Ukraine

By 2020, the entire post-Cold War European security architecture, including the legacy of the detente years of the 1970s, was in ruins as a result of the West's combined negligence, or at least tolerance, and Russia's radical approach to dealing with Western dominance in its central-eastern European region and perceived threats. Following the annexation of Crimea, NATO began to focus more intently on how to defend its eastern member nations, establishing multinational military troops along its eastern frontiers. Despite their small size, they provided more demonstration of NATO's aggressiveness in eastern frontiers which is perceived as a big threat from Moscow's perspective. Many believe that, as the world has witnessed in 2014 and again

in 2022 with Putin's war in Ukraine, it appears that the Cold War era has not ended yet because, no European big power has attacked a smaller neighbour to grab its land since 1945 (Haesebrouck, Taghon & Coppenolle, 2022). Putin's use of dictatorial strategies, first invading Georgia, then annexing Crimea and establishing the Donbas puppet republics, and now the conflict in Ukraine highly resembles the dictatorial strategies of Hitler. West has always maintained that Ukraine's independence and territorial integrity are sacred and that it is free to choose its partnerships. But at the same time, despite Ukraine's expected fourteen- year membership in NATO, the West was unable to defend it, leaving Ukraine at the mercy of Putin. Though for good reasons the United States took a back step to outrightly oppose Russia's action, it indirectly sends weapons to Ukraine. Due to such decisions of the United States to deal with Ukraine's conflict on its safer side, it received a lot of criticism. Many scholars blame the United States for repeating the same mistake that it did with Afghanistan. Hew Strachan, a British military historian argues, "one year after the Taliban took over Kabul, the US and NATO have moved on to support for Ukraine, even if by proxy, has helped to erase the memory of their failure in Afghanistan. However, a refusal to understand what went wrong risks repeating the same mistakes in Ukraine" (Strachan, 2022). Washington is sending money to Ukraine in the form of economic aid as well as arms and ammunition. The \$40 billion allowed by the US Congress in May of this year is a sizable amount, particularly for a nation coping with record-high inflation and unmanageable national debt. None of this appears to matter to the White House, which has committed to back Ukraine with all of its resources for "as long as it takes." Kyiv's victory is critical to the future of the "liberal international order" (Malic, 2022). Even though the US strategy for arming the Ukrainians appears to be partially based on the "logic" of arming the Afghan Mujahideen in the 1980s, Washington's method of gradually increasing funding to the government in Kyiv is more similar to another Afghan adventure that America owned for 20 years, which ended disastrously last year. Biden promised Americans on July 8, last year, that the last US soldiers will leave Afghanistan by the end of August 2021. In less than six months later, the same Biden would be rallying US allies for a confrontation with nuclear-armed Russia, all while handing blank checks to Kyiv. As of July 2022, the Biden administration has supplied \$8.2 billion worth of armaments to Ukraine. We have seen remarkable similarities in both Wars. Looking at these two situations, we may develop a US approach for dealing with old adversaries or new friends seriously, without demeaning them and while recognizing their security concerns, even if their opinions fundamentally differ from the US. Secondly, taking former rivals seriously, once they decide, they no longer want to be friends with the US. In this way, many critics use similar arguments, blaming the West for Russia's attack on Ukraine. Furthermore, there is a fundamental distinction between invading an independent nation on the one hand and failing to take the prospect of such an invasion seriously on the other. In 1939, Hitler attacked Poland, not the British and French, who had sanctioned the annexation of the Sudetenland a year earlier to maintain the peace. Putin, invaded Ukraine, not the West (Haesebrouck, Taghon & Coppenolle, 2022). It was Putin's decision, and thirty years of resentment of what the West did to Russia in the 1990s, while justifiable at times, do

not excuse it. Having said that, it's worth recalling what Hans Morgenthau wrote over sixty years ago. He argued in his theory of international relations that "a country's economic and military prowess can only lead to temporary victories if its diplomacy and statecraft are inadequate" (Neacsu, 2009). Perhaps in the 1990s, despite all of its might, the West was not able to organize a new inclusive order in Europe alongside Russia. Ukraine is now paying the price for what has been missing in the relationship of the West with Russia.

7. Conclusion

One of the important contemporary criticism and much of the discourse in the West is the idea that Russia's invasion of Ukraine would exacerbate tensions between democracies and authoritarianism and make this division more clear of the future of the international system. President Joe Biden declared following the Russian invasion: "We are reentering a major war for freedom, between democracy and autocracy in the conflict between liberty and freedom" (Youngs, 2022). To oppose Russia, the EU and the US are attempting to work more closely with authoritarian states. To replace Russian gas, the United States as well as certain European nations are negotiating with Gulf nations and softening their stances toward Venezuela, an oil exporter. In its effort to persuade the Gulf States to denounce Russia at the UN, the United States used a lot of political capital. Regardless of how unlikely the possibilities are, democratic nations are likely to seize any opportunity to increase tensions between Russia and China and to cooperate with the latter in crisis resolution. While attempting to lessen their reliance on China for trade, the EU trying to cooperate with China. Authoritarian nations also exhibit similar dynamics. There are now very few indications of a unified coalition of "autocracy support," even if autocrats are known to learn strategies from one another and China's internal authoritarian conduct has an impact on its activity abroad (Youngs, 2022). China seeks a world with several balancing powers rather than an absolute or strongly ideological democracy-autocracy division, even though it frequently appears to be spearheading an authoritarian push. Before the invasion, China was both Russia's and Ukraine's biggest trading partner. While much has been said about China's reaction to Russia's incursion, many other nondemocratic regimes explicitly prioritize various interests that do not completely align with an ideological division. International politics will continue to be characterized by overlapping centres of power and fluctuating coalitions, rather than two homogeneous blocs of democracies and autocracies. On the one hand, much geopolitical policy is still anti-democratic. However, even if it does not become the major driver of international affairs, the democracy-autocracy split will gain prominence as a result of the Ukrainian conflict. Rather than serving as the main organizing principle for international relations, this divide will be one of several structuring elements. Because it will not replace the emerging international order's multipolar structure, the question is whether the various processes will fit together in a coherent liberal-democratic convergence or will work

in an incoherent clash (Youngs, 2022). At this juncture, there is more conflict than fusion. This is due to how the Western "defending democracy" narrative is being presented. The issue is not merely that European nations and the US want to strengthen collaboration with other democracies, but also the nature of those deeper alliances, how they will work, and what they will be used for. Western democracies may be more dedicated to using force to defend themselves, but this is not the same as advancing democracy worldwide. For the time being, the emphasis on "defending democracy" is mostly on democracies defending themselves with more enthusiasm, rather than on extending the democratic rights of citizens worldwide (Youngs, 2022). The connections between democratic countries' decisions about democracy support such as how to finance democratic action, which agents are best supported for the change, and where and when conditionality is appropriate and their broad geopolitics have not yet been strengthened and mutually enhanced. The interaction of democracies and autocracies in the international system remains remarkably disconnected from their support for democratic practice in practically all Western governments. Russia's invasion of Ukraine will alter the dynamics between these two levels and need a closer connection between geopolitical and operational levels of democracy-related concerns throughout the global system.

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