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# RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE: A TURNING POINT IN THE WORLD ORDER?

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***The Russian invasion of Ukraine has sparked debate over its implications for the world order. Although there is no unanimously accepted perception of 'world order', one can assume that the existing one can be described as a system of actors and their relations, developed after World War II as a combination of liberalist and realist elements. This could mean that the order stands for a liberalist international political economy, in addition to liberal internationalism establishing international institutions. At the same time, the importance of realism-based elements, i.e. nuclear deterrence and sovereignty, should not be neglected. The Russian invasion may have smashed the world order; but Russia lacks the required power elements for constructing what it desires to replace it with.***

## Introduction

The rise in international issues in recent years, from the financial crisis to climate change and, more recently, the COVID pandemic, has impacted the international system more than at any time before. The coincidence of these issues with those political events where major powers are engaged, like the rise in Euro-scepticism, the Sino-US trade war, the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and now the Russian invasion of Ukraine, have made some scholars assume the emergence of a new world order<sup>1</sup>. Such an idea has also been reflected in Moscow and Beijing's discourses, including

when Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, in his meeting with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, said that Russia and China, together with their sympathisers, "will move towards a multipolar, just, and democratic world order"<sup>2</sup>. However, the question of whether the war in Ukraine is actually the beginning of a new world order has remained open due to the ambiguities around the concept of world order itself. The new order is being discussed, but there is no unanimity about the definition of «world order». This essay discusses whether the Ukraine War will result in a new world order considering the abovementioned required clarities.

1 Haass, Richard. Liberal world order, RIP. Project Syndicate, 2018, p 21.

2 Russian FM hails China as part of emerging 'just world order', france24, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220330-russian-fm-hails-china-as-part-of-emerging-just-world-order>,

## From the World Order to the New World Order

Without falling into a cycle of quasi-philosophical discussion of concepts, we must first outline the meaning of the 'order' before delving into the war's repercussions. The world order as we know it now is generally referred to as the liberal one<sup>3</sup>. In the later years of World War II, the United States, in cooperation with the United Kingdom and other major powers, worked on the model of the international order, which would secure the absence of conditions that caused world wars in the past<sup>4</sup>. Even though multiple sources have mentioned the start of this liberal world order as during World War II, according to Andersen<sup>5</sup>, the development of this model took a little bit of time at first, and it only started working properly at the beginning of the 1990s when the Cold War ended. Subsequently, Kaiser<sup>6</sup> clarified that even though we can ascribe the start of the liberal world order to the time when the Soviet Union collapsed, its roots stretched back to the start of the 20th century. We can say that the current, Western-oriented world order has been here for thirty years at least<sup>7</sup>.

Although we are calling today's world order 'liberal' and putting the United States at its centre, according to Ikenberry (2018), the way the world is working today is a result of two international projects. One of them is the Westphalian Project which, since the beginning of the 17th century, has been

based on concepts such as sovereignty, territorial integrity, self-determination, and non-discrimination. Initially, the Westphalian Project was a European one, but due to capitalism and the strong and significant values and ideas it provided, was adapted globally. The other significant project underpinning the current order is that of liberal internationalism. It brought about ideas of openness, cooperation, common institutions, shared sovereignty, and the rule of law.

A specifically important feature of international order is reflected in common institutions, which are supposed to promote peace and provide economic development, trade, and investment for the whole globe. These are the United Nations, World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and World Trade Organization. The connection between these organisations is also known as Charter liberalism<sup>8</sup>. Finally, the definition of order in international society theory cannot be neglected. Hedley Bull defines the international order as "a pattern or disposition of international activity that sustains those goals of the society of states that are elementary, primary or universal"<sup>9</sup>.

Nevertheless, these assumptions have not escaped the attention of critics. Charles Glaser argued that since any international situation that accepts national sovereignty as a norm can be considered an international order, it does not look like a conducive

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- 3 Erslev Andersen, Lars. The desire for order: A theoretical approach to (world) order. No. 2019: 6. DIIS Working Paper, 2019.
  - 4 Ikenberry, G. John. "The end of liberal international order?" *International Affairs* 94.1, 2018, pp 7-23.
  - 5 Erslev Andersen, Lars. The desire for order: A theoretical approach to (world) order. No. 2019: 6. DIIS Working Paper, 2019.
  - 6 David Kaiser, Russian invasion could change the world order, "Responsible Statecraft", 15 May, 2022, [<https://responsiblistatecraft.org/2022/02/28/with-russian-invasion-comes-new-world-order/>]
  - 7 Ikenberry, G. John. "The end of liberal international order?" *International Affairs* 94.1, 2018: 7-23.
  - 8 Clunan, Anne L. "Russia and the liberal world order." *Ethics & International Affairs* 32.1, 2018, pp 45-59.
  - 9 Robert H. Jackson, and Sørensen, Georg, *Introduction to international relations: theories and approaches*. Fifth edition. Oxford University Press, 2010. pp 133

term<sup>10</sup>. Given such criticisms, we believe that the description of the current international order cannot be flawless by relying solely on sovereignty and liberal terms, especially when it comes to the security structure. In fact, the five permanent member states of the UN Security Council have created a protective shelter since World War II but gradually, relying on the mutually assured destruction (MAD) doctrine and their nuclear arsenals.

Such a system cannot be described solely within liberalist terms. It is a hybrid order, which includes liberal and realist components. This perception can be added to by the international society theory's distinction between the states in a "system" or "society of states", while it considers order a vital element of both. Comparatively, the states in a society find themselves bound by common interests, values and a set of rules; they have only to consider others' influence as a necessary element in their calculations without being bound by common values and a set of rules<sup>11</sup>. Therefore, the interaction between world powers can be described more as a system than a society, since they have to consider others' potential for annihilation without having a common notion of values.

In addition, it is necessary to note that the world order is multi-layered and contains political, economic and security layers. While a realistic, MAD-based framework defines the global security that the UNSC supposedly safeguards, the world economic order is maintained by liberal ideas and liberal institutionalism frameworks, especially since the collapse of the Soviet Union. This means that even countries like

China, which do not build their economic structure in accordance with free-market ideology, are trying to take full advantage of this framework internationally. Despite the gradual decline of dollar hegemony, the role and importance of the US economy have kept such an economic order in place. Moreover, such a structure has made it possible for the US to punish the so-called rogue states, e.g. North Korea, by imposing primary and secondary sanctions.



***The other significant project underpinning the current order is that of liberal internationalism. It brought about ideas of openness, cooperation, common institutions, shared sovereignty, and the rule of law***

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The current world order can be described as a system of states and international institutions through which political, security and economic relations are regulated by a combination of realist and liberal ideas. While the great powers maintain the whole framework, others can take a free ride in exchange for complying with the system. Otherwise, they can be eliminated (Saddam Hussein's Iraq) or isolated (North Korea). But given that Hedley Bull sees sustaining the international order – order between states – as a responsibility of the great powers<sup>12</sup>, what if a great power, like Russia, indicates noncompliance with the world order? Can one argue that such behaviour will result in a new form of order, considering the great powers' direct participation in the current

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10 Deudney, Daniel; Ikenberry, G. John. "The nature and sources of liberal international order". *Review of International Studies*. 25 (2), April 1999, pp 179–196

11 Robert H. Jackson, and Sørensen, Georg, *Introduction to international relations: theories and approaches*. Fifth edition. Oxford University Press, 2010. pp 139

12 Bull, Hedley, Benedict Kingsbury, and Adam Roberts, eds. *Hugo Grotius and international relations*. Clarendon Press, 1990, pp 191-202

multi-layered world order architecture (for instance, the security order) and the simultaneous economic benefits they gain from the existing structure?

### **The Russia-Ukraine War's Impact on The World Order: Destroying or Constructing?**

It is essential to remember that the current world order was never perfect. As with almost every topic regarding politics, the current world order also has its drawbacks. It has been on life support for a while now<sup>13</sup>, and its fall was just a question of time. However, a relevant question is whether a crash in the international order could lead to a new world order. This can be answered with reference to historical examples.

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**« the UN Security Council has remained powerless to act for a long time and has not held Russia accountable to date. That has disturbed the essential elements of the liberal world order, international law, and the rule of law, which should hold states equally responsible for their actions**

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In the recent past, major events other than war were violating the principles of the liberal international order, the attacks of 9/11 in the US in 2001 being one of them<sup>14</sup>. But did these events result in a new world order? Our brief answer is no. In fact, despite the Bush administration's efforts at coining a "preventative doctrine" as a broad

interpretation of the self-defence concept by attacking Iraq, most international lawyers still do not believe in its legality. One can argue that the US unilateralism of the 2000s destroyed the international order but failed to lead it, especially given the other actors' resistance. Even invoking the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine could not result in unilateral intervention in Libya unless the UNSC showed its green light.

While comparing the significance of war to the importance of the 9/11 events is debatable, the repercussions of US unilateralism in invading Afghanistan and Iraq in the aftermath of 9/11 should not be ignored, as it actually paved the way for a later noncompliance by the Kremlin<sup>15</sup>. Similarly, one can argue that the Russian invasion of Ukraine has also violated the world order. Tisdall<sup>16</sup> has counted several different violations of international law. Russia has continuously broken the laws set up by the United Nations' Charter and avoided legal proceedings over Ukraine at the international court of justice. Through all these events, the UN Security Council has remained powerless to act for a long time and has not held Russia accountable to date. That has disturbed the essential elements of the liberal world order, international law, and the rule of law, which should hold states equally responsible for their actions. Another significant element is human rights, which have been violated. The bombing of the Mariupol maternity hospital, adolescents being raped by soldiers of the Russian army, and the torturing of civilians in Bucha are just a tiny fragment of how Russia has harmed people in Ukraine and violated their fundamental rights.

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13 Damien Cave, The War in Ukraine Holds a Warning for the World Order, "New York Times", 4 March 2022, [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/04/world/ukraine-russia-war-authoritarianism.html>]

14 Bacevich, A. J., The 'end of history' ... again?, *Responsible Statecraft*, 7 March 2022

15 Bacevich, A. J., The 'end of history' ... again?, *Responsible Statecraft*, 7 March 2022

16 Tisdall, S. How Ukraine has become the crucible of the new world order. *The Guardian*. 2022

[<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/12/how-ukraine-has-become-the-crucible-of-the-new-world-order>]



Nevertheless, the critical question remains as to whether the Russian war against Ukraine will result in a new world order. Although some scholars have answered this question affirmatively, we believe the opposite. In short, the adverse impact of the Russian invasion in undermining the existing order is mainly being confused with the constructive force needed for building a new one. Although the current world order was formed initially in the aftermath of World War II, it was not the war itself that established it. Instead, the winners' efforts to build international institutions underpinned the order afterwards, accompanied by the very realist approach, i.e. nuclear deterrence. This system evolved in the already described hybrid world order, especially after the Soviet Union collapsed. This could mean that the war will not result in a new order, as the constructive element is noticeably missing. In fact, any transformation from the current world order to a hypothetically new one provokes resistance from the current order's stakeholders and beneficiaries.



***Although the Kremlin has repeatedly pointed to its desired world order, it remains yet to be clarified what this consists of and how Moscow wants to achieve it***

Despite the threat that the Russian invasion of Ukraine has posed for the current world order, it should not be considered a turning point for building a new world order. In fact, Russian aggression has caused a wobble in the order; however, it is doubtful that it can also construct a new order. Although it is imaginable that the liberal world order is very likely to fall if Russia defeats Ukraine, this is unlikely to happen, given the facts on the ground. Even if Russia ends the war

unilaterally by occupying eastern Ukraine, their ability to keep the occupied territories and tolerate the consequences of sanctions is questionable.

This could mean that the invasion may push others to recognise Russia's ability to use force to achieve its goals, but this is not enough to build a new order. In other words, this will solidify Russian preventative (negative) power but not provide the affirmative (positive) power needed for constructing a new order. This is mainly because the United States, European Union, and NATO want the current liberal order to stay in place. They are trying to win over Russia by diplomatic and pragmatic means – sanctions, disconnecting Russia from SWIFT, and helping Ukraine in every way possible, to name just a few of them.

### **The Kremlin's New World Order: How Far Is It Clear and Achievable?**

Although the Kremlin has repeatedly pointed to its desired world order, it remains yet to be clarified what this consists of and how Moscow wants to achieve it. For instance, Russian foreign minister Lavrov has already delineated three main features of this order: multipolarity, justice, and democracy. However, even achieving the first element looks problematic under the current war conditions.

Recalling the smart power concept theorised by Joseph Nye<sup>17</sup>, a great power needs to develop all the power aspects, not just the military one. In other words, to establish the alleged multipolar world order, where Russia has equivalent power to others, Russia needs to demonstrate its military, economic and soft power at the same time, to impose its will on others. However, one can argue that Russia lacks the two latter elements.

17 Nye, Joseph S. The future of power: Public Affairs, 2011.

Statistics show that the war has had detrimental consequences for the Russian economy. The Russian ruble dropped in value by 22% over a period, and the inflation rate went up by 14%, making all of imported products more expensive<sup>18</sup>. Russia's central bank has been prohibited from utilising its foreign currency reserves, and major banks were cut off from SWIFT, the most extensive international financing system<sup>19</sup>. Moreover, it is predicted that by the end of 2022, inflation will rise by approximately 20%<sup>20</sup>, and GDP is expected to get lower by 12.5% to 16.5%. Since sanctions are still evolving, the situation can worsen over time<sup>21</sup>.

The EU has been working to consolidate such adverse impacts, with the US and its allies. While Russia is the third-placed producer of fossil fuels in the world, it is one of the two countries with the largest natural gas stocks and holds 6.4% of the world's stored oil. In 2021, these fuels constituted half of their exports of \$490 billion, which contributed considerably to the state's economy<sup>22</sup>. According to Myllyvirta & Thieriot<sup>23</sup>, only in the first half of April, Russia's exports lowered by 20%. With a total oil and gas embargo, this effect can

get even larger, causing massive damage to Russia's economy. Although Russia had to make significant discounts to India on its oil exports, to stay in the market, the consequences of the EU's decision to cut gas imports need time to be compensated for, if it becomes operational.

In addition to the economic effects, the war has eroded Russia's soft power, especially its influence through the media. In early March, a few days after the war started, Europe restricted the broadcasting of state-owned and propaganda sharing media RT and Sputnik in all kinds of transmissions, including satellite, online space, or mobile apps<sup>24</sup>. Two months later, at the beginning of May, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen suggested banning other Kremlin-supported broadcasters. These steps from European Union are aimed at lowering the amount of fake news regarding the war<sup>25</sup>. At the same time, Russia had to block social media pages such as Facebook or Twitter to prevent its citizens from being able to support Ukraine openly<sup>26</sup>. Additionally, this goes hand in hand with "disarming" Russia from their opinion-shaping based on untruths, making them lose their soft power in Europe.

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18 Annabelle Liang, Russia's cost of living soars by more than 14%, BBC, 2022, [<https://www.bbc.com/news/business-60856873>]

19 BBC. What sanctions are being imposed on Russia over Ukraine invasion? BBC. 2022, [<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60125659>]

20 Liadze, I., Macchiarelli, C., Mortimer-Lee, P., & Juanino P. S. The Economic Costs of the Russia- Ukraine Conflict. National Institute of Economic and Social Research. [<https://www.niesr.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/PP32-Economic-Costs-Russia-Ukraine.pdf>]

21 Pestova, A., Mamonov, M., & Ongena, S. The price of war: Macroeconomic effects of the 2022 sanctions on Russia. Zurich Open Repository and Archive, University of Zurich. 2022

22 Ibid

23 Myllyvirta, L., & Thieriot, H. Financing Putin's war on Europe: Fossil fuel imports from Russia in the first two months of the invasion. Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air. 2022 [<https://energyandcleanair.org/publication/russian-fossil-exports-first-two-months/>]

24 Kayali, L., & Goujard, C. EU officially boots Russia's RT, Sputnik outlets. Politico. 2 March 2022, [<https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-rt-sputnik-illegal-europe/>]

25 Gijs, C. Commission pitches ban on 3 more Russian broadcasters. Politico. 2022, [<https://www.politico.eu/article/commission-pitches-ban-on-three-more-russian-broadcasters/>]

26 Rohe, M. Russian propaganda effects beyond blind belief. UK in a Changing Europe. 2022, [<https://ukandeu.ac.uk/russian-propaganda-effects-beyond-blind-belief/>]

Russian plans have not been accomplished from a political perspective either, as the war in Ukraine has pitted a line-up of allies against Russia, while China's cautious stance accompanied it. Likewise, while Russia invaded Ukraine under the pretext of preventing NATO expansion to the east, it now has to consider NATO expansion into Sweden and even Finland more seriously. These examples show that Russia has failed to implement its plans against the international organisations as well.

Additionally, sanctions have been welcomed by the EU member states, which were known for their lenient stance on Russia before. While previous predictions indicated a slow decline in the EU's dependence on Russian oil and gas, the invasion of Ukraine hastened the EU's dependence reduction plans, even in Germany. Moreover, the rapid withdrawal of Western technologies from the Russian oil and gas sector is expected to influence Russian oil production<sup>27</sup>. This means that even Russia's position in European energy markets is being totally shaken up, which will have far-reaching consequences. The loss of Russia's footprint in the EU also undermines its power in the West.

## Conclusion

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has stimulated debate around the situation of the world order recently. While some believe that the world is on the eve of a new order due to the war, we stress that it is not. This is mainly because the war has destroyed the world order. However, Russia does not have the potential to construct its desired replacement order, even if such an order is

well-theorised. In fact, the current world order has been developed as a hybrid system that combines realist and liberalist elements, and any actor who dreams of an alternative should be equipped with all three of military, economic and soft power. Nevertheless, Russia lacks the two latter ones and has been harmed due to the war.

Neglecting such a systematic view has resulted in misperceptions that the world order would change, as only Russian military power is counted in the analysis. Moreover, Russia has failed to strengthen or apply its soft power to justify the war in Ukraine; instead, its soft power has been damaged. In the end, one can claim that Russian aggression has impacted the order in the same way as US unilateralism did after 9/11 (and even more destructively); however, it is incapable of providing the grounds for building a new order.

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<sup>27</sup> IEA data is rigorous and objective, it says after being dropped by OPEC+, Euronews, [<https://www.euronews.com/next/2022/04/01/oil-opec-iea>]



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