

RUSSIA'S HOBBSIAN WAR AND UKRAINE'S KANTIAN IDEA OF UNIVERSAL PEACE – ONTOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE CONTEMPORARY EASTERN EUROPEAN WAR PARADIGM FROM AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE –

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In this scientific endeavour, we propose as the main research objective the examination of the ideological component of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict, analyzed from the perspective of the two great philosophers of Western science and culture – Thomas Hobbes and Immanuel Kant, as well as their significant integration into the current context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Such an approach can serve as a working tool that will lead to a better understanding of the conflict and a necessary perspective for planning military operations, but also for managing post-conflict operations.

By engaging with these philosophical frameworks, the study aims to uncover the underlying moral and political principles that influence decision-making processes at both strategic and operational levels, thereby contributing to more comprehensive conflict resolution strategies.

Keywords: Ukrainian-Russian conflict; Thomas Hobbes; Immanuel Kant; political sciences; Eastern Europe;

Editor's note: The English quotations were drawn from the public-domain electronic editions available at Luminarium (Renaissance Editions), based on the University of Adelaide mirror of the ERIS Project text (<https://www.luminarium.org/renaissance-editions/hobbes/leviathan.html>), and at the International Relations and Security Network, (<https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/125464/605.pdf>).

PROLEGOMENA

The period immediately following the Cold War, instead of leading to a new era of order and stability in international relations, witnessed a series of violent outbreaks and growing instability, especially in developing countries. Much has changed globally in the two decades since 1989, but the main issues that define relations between people and between people and states have remained largely the same.

Political thinking and decision-making are inspired by the political, economic and social context in which it develops, meaning the malleability and adaptability of intentions depending on independent factors; this does not apply to Russia, for example, where, for centuries, they have been marching on a conception similar to Lucius Accius' thought: *"let them hate me, but fear me"* (dictionar-citate.blogspot.com, 2011).

In the present scientific endeavour, we propose as our main research objective the ideological component of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict analysed from the perspective of two great philosophers of Western science and culture. We are considering the study of the representative ideas of the two great scholastics, Thomas Hobbes and Immanuel Kant, as well as their significant integration into the current context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Such an approach can constitute a working tool at the disposal of the intelligence analyst and commanders, a tool that leads to a better understanding of the conflict and allows for the achievement of a forecast and a perspective necessary for the planning of military operations, but also for the management of post-conflict operations.

The scientific research methods used were observation, analysis and case study, having an inter- and transdisciplinary character, carried out through investigation, interpretation and rational study of the results obtained by prestigious researchers from various disciplines, such as military sciences, philosophy, political sciences, psychology, sociology, social psychology, cultural anthropology, management of strategic, operational and tactical analysis and planning.

We believe that an analytical approach to the ideological spectrum of the conflict space in the context of culture and the laws that govern mass movements can lead to the understanding of crises and conflicts, resulting in both their anticipation and the influence and shaping of the environment and the collective mentality residing in that space.

Also, this type of approach can contribute to the success of operations, by reducing risks and exploiting opportunities, due to the possibility of influencing collective behaviours and perceptions early on. Thus, in order to respond to what people think collectively, in the conflict space, it will be necessary to identify how they develop cognitive activities that can lead to the crystallisation of the laws of thought in their dynamics. By understanding these, we can anticipate reactions in different contexts, which can lead to the creation of a perspective, in the sense of knowing what are the motives based on which certain events occur with the possibility of generating the most appropriate responses to the newly created situation. In addition, this type of approach could improve leadership and planning capacity not only at the operational and tactical level, but also at the strategic level.

THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR EVENT ANALYZED THROUGH HOBBSIAN PERSPECTIVE

Thomas Hobbes places three causes at the root of interhuman conflicts: rivalry, distrust and the desire for glory. All of these are fed by the lack of resources and cohesion between people. In Hobbes's view, persons invested with absolute power should exercise that authority only for the purpose of peace and defence, essential characteristics for supporting the state of well-being and prosperity that every citizen needs. All those leaders who pursue goals that do not have peace and defence in mind will never manage to maintain their received authority.

Even though, in the first years after the collapse of the USSR, the Russian Federation was weakened and strongly affected by the new international realities and could not cope militarily and politically with NATO expansion, it nevertheless tried to limit the presence and influence of the US in Europe by creating a buffer zone, that is, the space of former Eastern Europe. Simultaneously, it initiated an aggressive lobby against NATO expansion, by all possible diplomatic means. *"Historically, Russia's geographical vulnerability has made establishing buffer zones critical to national security. Erosion of the buffer, as in NATO expansion eastward, is viewed by the Kremlin as a threat to vital security interests and may result in attempts to reestablish a more secure perimeter (as in Ukraine)* (Ziegler, 2020-2021).

The Kremlin's interventions in international conflicts can also be interpreted and analyzed from the somewhat surprising perspective of cultural diplomacy by exercising Russia's influence in the ex-Soviet space, especially since this geographical area represented the foundation of the grandeur and hegemonic ambitions of Russian leaders. However, as Professor de Tinguy argues, the erosion of Russian positions is also cultural. The affirmation of identity encompasses all new states through the promotion of national culture and through historiographical revisions, symbols of independence and rupture with the past (de Tinguy, 2008, pp. 42-43).

From a Hobbesian perspective, approaching the issue in the sense anthropologically, Russia can be defined as a “...mortal God...” and “...an artificial man, though of a greater stature and strength than the natural, for whose protection and defense it was intended...” (Hobbes, 2023, pp. 5, 134).

Continuing the Hobbesian perspective, Russia, through the actions carried out against Ukraine, would aim to transform Ukraine into a civil community, which in Hobbesian language can be translated as the place “...where sovereign power is acquired by force (...) when many together, for fear of death or bonds do authorise all the actions of that man or assembly, that hath their lives and liberty in his power...” (ibid., XX, *Despre dominația paternă și cea despotică/Of Domination Paternal and Despotical*, art. 1, p. 155¹).

The ability to be a good connoisseur of war events can also be proven by the fact that, several centuries earlier, Hobbes described the context in which social disorder and chaos can arise: “For those men that are so remissly governed that they dare take up arms to defend or introduce an opinion are still in war; and their condition, not peace, but only of cessation of arms for fear of one another; and they live, as it were, in the procincts of battle continually” (ibid., XVIII, *Despre drepturile suveranilor prin instituire/Of the Rights of Sovereigns by Institution*, art. 9, p. 141). The state of affairs described by Hobbes can be easily observed even by individuals less familiar with the principles of *ars bellum* within the current context of the situation in Russia.

If, in certain circles, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia has received a certain validation and, from the point of view of some, acquires a certain solidity, we propose for analysis Hobbes’s opinion on the concept of justice: “...As I have heard some say that justice is but a word, without substance; and that whatsoever a man can by force or art acquire to himself (...) is his own, which I have already shown to be false (...) Wherein they argue as ill, as if the savage people of America should deny there were any grounds of principles of reason so to build a house as to last as long as the materials, because they never yet saw any so well built... excepting by external violence” (ibid., *Despre funcția reprezentantului suveran/On the Office of the Sovereign Representative*, art. 5, p. 259).

The analysis of the conflict in Ukraine from a Hobbesian perspective could continue, but for reasons of space, we stop here. Hobbes’s objective regarding violence and war is assumed, which can be proven by his own words: “And such are those which I I have in this discourse set forth: which, whether they come not into the sight of those that have power to make use of them, or be neglected by them or not”

¹ To clarify, in Chapter XVIII – Of the Rights of Sovereigns by Institution, Hobbes develops extensively about the civil community, but he does not conceptually define the civil community, but only reiterates what was known at that time about the paradigm of the reality of a civil community (author’s note).

(ibid.). Through this quote, we can realize that he did not write the famous treatise to gain any material or other benefits from any power contemporary worldly and certainly not to win the sympathy of his followers. At the same time, he still hopes for some understanding for those in power, in order to be able to participate in the effort to change things in the world.

KANTIAN PERCEPTION OF PEACE

The paradigm of democracy claims that democratic states do not have conflicts. According to this theory, a Europe of democratic regimes, which share common ideals and values, such as respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms, the rule of law, freedom of the press etc., is a Europe in which there are no conflicts. However, reality proposes an antinomic perspective. Within the European space, there are democratic states that are still facing this problem. The European Union is trying to promote democracy, with the aim of creating a security zone that goes beyond the European space.

The ideological orientation of Ukrainians began to manifest itself with the dismemberment of the USSR, which gave Ukraine the opportunity to act according to its own desires, at least apparently, but the division of the population between East and West influenced the political leadership in Kiev to often oscillate between the West and the East (Brookings, 2015).

From a geopolitical perspective, the involvement of the Russian Federation and USA in supporting candidates in the 2004 and 2010 presidential elections transformed the vote of the Ukrainian population into a geostrategic option for the rulers in Kiev, in the sense of guiding Ukraine's course in a certain geopolitical direction.

Particularly relevant is Vladimir Putin's speech during the NATO-Russia Council meeting held on the sidelines of the NATO summit, in which he even brought up the territorial integrity of Ukraine, declaring that " [...] *Ukraine is a very complicated state. Ukraine, in the form it currently exists, was created in Soviet times, it received its territories from Poland – after the Second World War, from Czechoslovakia, from Romania – and at present not all the problems issues have been solved as yet in the border region with Romania in the Black Sea. Then, it received huge territories from Russia in the east and south of the country. It is a complicated state formation. If we introduce into it NATO problems, other problems, it may put the state on the verge of its existence. Complicated internal political problems are taking place there. We should also act very, very carefully. We do not have any right to veto and, probably, we do not pretend to have. But I want that all of us, when deciding such issues, realize that have there our interests as well. Well, seventeen million Russians currently live in Ukraine.*

Who may state that we do not have any interests there? South, the south of Ukraine, completely, there are only Russians" (Text of Putin's speech at NATO Summit, 2008).

What President Putin says is contradicted by Kant through the second article of the peace essay: *"No independent states, large or small, shall come under the dominion of another state by inheritance, exchange, purchase or donation"* (Kant, 2008, p. 64). From the Kantian perspective, a state represents the community of people, to which no one else can dictate except their own conscience. Annexing this state means denying its existence as a collective moral person.

Analyzing Russia's large-scale war of aggression in Ukraine, we can observe a war of conquest initiated by Moscow, a neo-colonial war, of the metropolis against the former component that wants to break away completely – Ukraine, a state that is waging its true war of independence. The course already seems clear to some who are more concerned, of course, not to humiliate Russia than with the victims it is causing in Ukraine and the war crimes or the act of aggression of which it is guilty. Of course, no one sets out to humiliate Russia, but, for its own good and the future of its citizens, it must be defeated and, subsequently, held accountable (Chifu, 2023, p. 19). This is necessary because *"No state shall by force interfere with the constitution or government of another state"* (Kant, p. 66).

After the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, in December 2004, the new leadership in this country expressed its intention of European integration of Ukraine and of continuing efforts to create a state of law based on the principles of a market economy. Ukraine is one of the ENP member states (European Neighbourhood Policy) that signed, in February 2005, an Individual Action Plan with the EU.

The resilience of the Ukrainian society comes from multiple sources and is an element of inspiration from which we can learn. Resilience finds its foundations in society. Society generates reserve forces in large-scale, long-term war. This is a lesson to learn! But what also matters is the motivation to wage a war and to accept the destruction of one's own territory for a higher goal – real independence, the survival of the nation, identity, prestige and national dignity. Resilience is about both the front line, the ability, will and desire to fight, and what happens behind the front line – the population's support for the war effort. The patriotism, bravery, self-denial and self-sacrifice of a nation cannot be replaced by anything else.

In a Kantian perspective, resilience finds its foundation and relevance in the conditioning of a state of peace: this is not a state of beginnings, but one acquired through legal means, mutually guaranteed by neighbouring states. In a situation where civil life is legislated, the law can end hostilities in two ways: either by coercing the neighbour, or by coercing them to leave their neighbourhood, each

preserving their own social existence. The lack of a constitution and civil law, however, makes the one who lives outside them, by their way of living unfettered, inconvenient to the one who has opted for coercion and civil freedom.

In Kantian terms, the resilience of Ukrainian society derives its relevance from the purity of the republican constitution, grounded in the original social contract as articulated within the concept of law. Being founded on the principle of freedom and equality of citizens, in the matter of declaring a war, the citizens of this society are the ones who bear the burden of the struggle: war expenses, the repair of the destruction caused and, last but not least, the debts contracted.

All of these have a common goal: freedom and the ability to live freely within their borders. Freedom can also be translated into the ability to disapprove, to allow the leap towards perfection. It is the instrument of human dignity under the condition of the appropriation of moral law (Kant, p. 46).

Victory and peace in Ukraine depend on this capacity of Western democratic societies to support the war. In fact, if we want to have peace, it does not mean moving towards excessive negotiations and concessions. This is not peace. Peace is not the absence of war at a given moment. It is the situation in which no one challenges the limits created by international law. Peace implies respect for the rules-based international order, the fact that these rules can be imposed, as well as the capacity and political determination to enforce these rules. The war in Ukraine has demonstrated that credible deterrence results from the combination of capabilities and political will – that is, the desire and determination to fight – rather from that sheer strategic weight or numerical superiority.

Unlike Rousseau, for whom the solution to war is a social one – the establishment of a beneficial society meant to correct the principle vice of real society – the corruption of humanity's positive moral core in the natural state; international confederations do not have, within this political theory, the maximum value that the Kantian *Weltanschauung* offers them, where the perspective is the opposite, because war is rooted in human nature and, therefore, the ideal state lacks the means to master it; only an international league could bring about perpetual peace, not through the concerted efforts of human beings, but through the hidden plan of nature, acted upon by two non-moral factors: catastrophes and the convergence of selfish interests.

From a Kantian perspective, there can be no logical international order without an international public law. The Kantian moral imperative conditions peace, because it expresses the moral *summum*, morality being a social and, therefore, political excellence, as the community formed according to moral principles restricts and suppresses phenomena that contradict moral principles. For Kant, the struggle between individual desires and the moral law characterizes man in general and at all times.

HOBBSIAN WAR TENDENCIES AND KANTIAN PERSPECTIVES ON THE UKRAINE – RUSSIA CONFLICT. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Both *Leviathan* and *Perpetual Peace* appeared either in the aftermath of a war or during the course of one, a fact that draws attention to the relevance of these works in the current context of the conflict unfolding on the territory of Ukraine². The difference of more than one hundred years between the moments of their publication is thus diminished, since both bring to the forefront an ontological approach to war from a strictly anthropological perspective. Both authors are concerned with an introspective analysis of the human being and of human behaviour in times of hardship, circumstances that only war can provide.

The invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation tends to become the most important military conflict after the Second World War. The Russian-Ukrainian war is not just a regional war. It is the war that marks a rupture in the relations between Russia and the West, a war that will have profound repercussions for both Europe and the entire world. Its global consequences will be considerably greater than the September 11 attacks. For the first time, a military conflict has the potential to involve Russia, NATO and China. Russia and the NATO states have already positioned themselves and are active parties in the conflict, but China seems, for now, undecided.

According to several specialists, Russia seeks to present itself as an authoritarian leader that has stepped out from the forefront of creativity, economic and technological competition and geopolitical capacity through its own destructive manner of managing creative energies and of closing the system in order to preserve the Putinist regime, as well as through the power of a leader who aspires to be more long-lived than Stalin (Chifu, p. 19).

At the beginning of 2022, the situation in Eastern Europe was particularly volatile and complex, being amplified by the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic and the implementation of drastic restrictive measures by the states in the region, in order to escape the fifth wave of infections. In addition, the preconditions for the outbreak of global economic, financial and social crises, not just in this region, had already been outlined. We can also take into account the fact that, throughout 2021, the situation on the border with Ukraine significantly worsened, with the Kremlin intensifying its military presence in the area and conducting joint operational and strategic level exercises with Belarus, including nuclear missiles.

² *Leviathan* was published during the English Civil War (1642-1651), and *Perpetual Peace* following the Franco-Prussian War, concluded by the Peace of Basel on 5 April 1795 (Author's note).

This strategic repositioning of Russian troops near the Ukrainian borders and the increase in its nuclear deterrence posture took place against the backdrop of the operationalisation of the the Russian Federation's anti-access/area-denial systems of in the Black Sea, the eastern Mediterranean Sea, the Baltic Sea and the Arctic Ocean, which began after the hybrid war waged by Russia in Ukraine. Thus, during the operational-strategic exercise "Zapad (West) 2021" in western Russia and southern Belarus, the Russian military forces on the border with Ukraine significantly changed, by bringing approximately 20,000–30,000 troops and equipment from other districts and relocating them to training grounds near the western border. In its report of 28 July 2021, the American Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) concluded that: "... *taken together, the scale of the Russian build-up near Ukraine this year [2021] suggested that Russian forces were prepared to undertake deep offensive operations, rather than be used simply as a deterrent against perceived Ukrainian attempts to retake Donbas*" (Ioniță, 2023, p. 11).

As the security relationship between Russia and the West has deteriorated in recent years, Europe and the West have pursued a dual approach. On the one hand, the West has sought to maintain dialogue with Russia and pursue a political solution in Ukraine through the Minsk Process. On the other hand, NATO has taken steps to strengthen its deterrence capability, particularly along its eastern flank. Through the *Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP)* initiative, it has deployed additional, rotational forces to Poland and the Baltic states. Europe has also maintained relative unity on a number of issues in its relations with Russia.

For more than seven years, EU sanctions against Russia for its actions in Ukraine have remained in place, and additional EU sanctions followed the poisoning of opposition leader Alexei Navalny with Novichok in 2020. This situation has, in our view, seriously affected the level of trust in Russia, which can be analyzed through a Kantian perspective in the following way: "*No state shall, during war, permit such acts of hostility which would make mutual confidence in the subsequent peace impossible: such are the employment of assassins (percussores), poisoners (venefici), breach of capitulation, and incitement to treason (perduellio) in the opposing state*" (Kant, p. 67).

These are dishonourable stratagems. Even during a war, it is essential to maintain a level of trust in the enemy's way of thinking, otherwise no peace could be concluded, and hostilities would degenerate into a war of extermination (*bellum internecinum*); in the natural state, war is only a sad emergency means by which a state defends its right to freedom and the free decision of its own destiny.

The image of Russia finds its counterpart in Hobbesian language through the iconic representation of the Leviathan, the well-known biblical monster that we learn about in the Book of Job as being without equal. Hobbes also presents it in this manner, with some of the following attributes: instability, intolerance and lack of peace/freedom. Changing the paradigm while retaining Hobbesian concepts, this analysis can also be applied to the image that Russia, whose expansionist tendencies have been manifesting in the most repulsive way. Through its actions, Russia has generated a complex and profound state of instability, undermining the peace and freedom of Ukrainian society, with consequences for an indeterminate period for the future.

Russia's instability and unpredictability represent a different status from that of other countries in Eastern Europe, because it implies that these will soon be implicit problems of the European Union; they could block the EU's expansion and provoke a crisis within it: also, the states of Eastern Europe are perceived as being similar to Western ones.

CONCLUSIONS

The transformations that have taken place in the international security environment over the past decade, especially in its most recent period, have focused the attention of the international community on clarifying a vision that would contribute to the consolidation of world peace and security, therefore to the reduction of conflict situations of any nature, implicitly, to the reduction, until elimination, where possible, of the causes that generate them.

The influence of Hobbes, in general, and of *Leviathan*, in particular, on subsequent eras is difficult to assess, mainly because many authors have failed to acknowledge the extent of their influence coming the English philosopher, often fearing accusations of atheism or "*Hobbism*". Despite some ideas that remain a testament to the era in which he lived and the logic he adopted (such as the theory of absolute power or the public censorship of subversive writings) and regardless of whether or not he is considered an unwitting precursor of liberalism, many of Hobbes' ideas have demonstrated their primacy and even modernity.

War, regardless of its nature, as well as concepts such as political stability, individual freedom, freedom of conscience, education and peace are just a few of the concepts that preoccupied Thomas Hobbes, thus providing us with the necessary framework through which to analyse the war launched by the Russian Federation in Ukraine. Of course, it is not the only or perhaps the most appropriate way to examine this important conflict, but what is striking is that more than three

centuries after Hobbes managed to make his work known, human society, in terms of certain customs, appears to have changed little, a context in which the perspective announced in the title also intervenes: that of anthropology. Through this article, we aim to bring to attention facts that have been recognised for more than three centuries and, with or without science, have been manifested by the protagonists of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

By bringing these aspects to attention, we seek to raise the question of how long it takes for humanity to prove the progress it has achieved, if in the face of contexts, such as that of the conflict presented here very succinctly, we continue to witness the relevance of works written long ago, and in this sense, *Leviathan* serves or may serve as simple example. Certainly, a more thorough research might reveal older studies or works better suited to contextualising the Russian-Ukrainian conflict from an anthropological perspective.

Perpetual Peace, due to the hopes that its humanist message of universal peace and equity instils, is – among Kant’s short works – one of the most cited and read. Between dream and reality, “*perpetual peace*” leads us to think of the hope of the ordinary person to someday reach – through the absence of social conflicts – the state of maximum prosperity. From Kant’s point of view, the state of peace is not a state of beginnings, but one acquired through legal means, mutually guaranteed by neighbouring states. Reason condemns war in the name of moral law, making the establishment of peace an immediate duty, based on a contract between peoples.

From our perspective, Ukraine, and the manner in which Ukrainian society faces this war, unwanted even in the darkest of dreams, fits the pattern presented by Immanuel Kant through the point of view of the desire for respect of sovereignty, territorial integrity, individual freedom, freedom of thought and, last but not least, the capacity for self-determination.

Regarding this context, we adhere to Kant’s view that when a large and powerful state has expansionist tendencies towards another, smaller state, the latter is justified in defending itself even through attacks launched against the invader, without having first committed any offense. Also, from a Kantian perspective, the attacked state has every right to seek any alliances necessary to escape the terror imposed by the invader, in order to restore, although with great difficulty in the case of Ukraine, the initial state of affairs.

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