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Saving Russia. Neorealist Theorists and the Interpretation of the Kremlin’s International Policy according to the Actor-Network Concept

Abstract

The Russian-Ukrainian war of 2014–2024 and the destructive role of Russia negatively affects regional and global aspects of the life of peoples and states. It has created a threat of serious chaos in international relations. Russia’s aggressive policy has caused a crisis in world politics that even the great powers of today cannot overcome. The return to a new Cold War and the outbreak of a major war in Europe threatens the entire modern international system with dangerous turbulence. The purpose of the study is to analyze the concept of effectiveness and the role of influential international actors in the modern Russian-Ukrainian war in the field of actor-network theory. The research methodology is based on the principles of science, objectivity, historicism and the basic conceptual and theoretical provisions of the study of world politics and international relations. Actor-network theory was introduced by Michel Callon and Bruno Latour in the second half of the 1980s. In accordance with this theory, relations between participants are determined by the network itself and are marked by the intensity and orientation of the network of interactions. In the sense of international relations and world politics, this means that they are under the strong or even decisive influence of powerful international actors (big powers and flexible interstate coalitions). Russia is seen as one of the most influential international players or “core of localities” that interact. Accordingly, other influential international actors are very cautious about the complete break of relations with Russia; they do not consider the possibility of its complete defeat in the aggressive war against Ukraine. Such a position was reflected and substantiated in various theoretical approaches, examples of which are the ideas of neorealism representatives such as John Mearsheimer, Farid Zakaria and Henry Kissinger.

Keywords: Russian aggression, Russian-Ukrainian war 2014–2024, actor-network theory, realism / neorealism in international relations



Introduction

Statement and relevance of the problem. The Russian-Ukrainian war of 2014–2024 is multifaceted and multidimensional in understanding. In one way or another, it affects the regional and global aspects of the life of peoples and states. Russia's initially hybrid (from February 26, 2014), and then full-scale (from February 24, 2022) aggression against Ukraine has as its consequence the dismantling of the entire post-bipolar (post-Westphalian) structure of international relations. It directly led to the need to consider the special danger of chaos in the field of world politics by the great powers of today. The superimposition of the full-scale phase of the Russian-Ukrainian war on the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, and in addition to this, the new powerful migration challenge outlined a trend towards deglobalization and fragmentation of international relations.

Based on such contradictory and obviously threatening trends, which are expressed on the radars of the Russian-Ukrainian war, we will try to realize the main goal of the study – to explain the effectiveness and role of influential international players in the events of the modern Russian-Ukrainian war in the field of actor-network theory. The actor-network theoretical construction itself, from the point of view of its influence on the sphere of international relations, as evidenced by *the analysis of the academic literature*, was only fragmentarily considered in the works of foreign and Ukrainian academics. They emphasized the theoretical aspects of modern international relations (A. Acharya, B. Badie, B. Buzan, T. Herasymchuk, J. Mearsheimer, M. Pietras, S. Tolstov)¹; contents and challenges, regional and global aspects of post-bipolarity (Y. Bartosiak, S. Belen, N. Nechayeva-Yuriy-

¹ A. Acharya, *Constructing Global Order: Agency and Change in World Politics*, Cambridge and New York 2018; A. Acharya, B. Buzan, *The Making of Global International Relations. Origins and Evolution of IR at its Centenary*, Cambridge and New York 2019; B. Badie, *New Perspectives on the International Order. No Longer Alone in This World*, London 2019; B. Buzan, G. Lawson, *The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of International Relations* (Cambridge studies in international relations; 135), Cambridge 2015; T. Herasymchuk, *Mizhnarodnyy poriyadok XXI stolittya: osnovni teoretyko-kontseptual'ni pidkhody* [International order of the 21st century: basic theoretical and conceptual approaches], "Mizhnarodni zv'yazky Ukrainy: naukovy poshuky i znakhidky" 2016, vol. 25, pp. 335–355 (in Ukrainian); A. Kyrydon, S. Troyan, *Conceptual Fundamentals of Post-Westphalian International Relations*, "Roczniki Nauk Społecznych" 2020, vol. 12 (48), no. 4, pp. 69–85; A. Kyrydon, S. Troyan, *International relations as a system and a discipline: From the westphalian to the post-westphalian world order*, "Studia i Analizy Nauk o Polityce" 2021, no. 1, pp. 107–121; J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, New York 2001; J. Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities*, New Haven, Conn 2018; N. Nechayeva-Yuriyichuk, S. Troyan, *Evolution of the Westphalian Order under the Influence of the World Wars: Historical and International Relations Aspects*, "Codrul Cosminului" 2020, vol. 26, no. 1, July, pp. 187–206; N. Nechayeva-Yuriyichuk, S. Troyan, *Modern problems of international security: a look through the prism of J. Mearsheimer's structural theory of offensive realism*, "Studii Naționale de Securitate: Revistă științifico-practică" 2022, no. 1 (5), pp. 90–103; M. Pietras (ed.), *Międzynarodowe stosunki polityczne* [International Political Relations], Lublin 2021 (in Polish); S. Tolstov, *Mizhnarodna systema pochatku XXI stolittya* [The International System of the Beginning of the XXI Century], "Foreign Affairs" 2013, vol. 9, pp. 8–11; vol. 10, pp. 8–13; vol. 11, pp. 12–17 (in Ukrainian); S. Troyan, *Świat po zimnej wojnie: zasady ewolucji współczesnego porządku międzynarodowego* [The world after the Cold War: principles of evolution of the contemporary international order], in: *Ład światowy w perspektywie relacji transatlantycznych*, W. Gizicki (ed.), Lublin 2014, pp. 37–46 (in Polish); S. Troyan, *Persha i Druha svitovi viyny u paradyhmi evolyutsiyi Vestfal's koho svitoporyadku* [The First and Second World Wars in the paradigm of the evolution of the Westphalian world order], "Ukraine–Europe–World" 2019, vol. 23, pp. 49–60 (in Ukrainian); F. Zakaria, *The post-American World*, N.Y.-L. 2008.

chuk, R. Kuźniar, V. Fisanov, F. Zakaria)²; prerequisites, reasons and characteristics of Russia's modern aggression against Ukraine (M. von Herpen, S. Fedunyak, Y. Felshtinsky, A. Kyrydon, S. Troyan, M. Stanczew, S. Vidnyans'kyi)³.

The research methodology is based on the principles of science, objectivity, historicism and two conceptual and theoretical positions of the study of world politics and international relations. The first concerns the causality of the evolution of the modern post-Westphalian period of international relations and its transition to the Neo-Post bipolar stage, which is characterized by a return to the new Cold War and the outbreak of a major war in Europe, which threatens the entire modern international system with chaos. The second concerns the social construction of world politics under the influence, first, of the vigorous activity of influential international players on behalf of great powers and flexible interstate coalitions. According to the conclusions of Western academics D. Nouk and J. Kuklinski, actors are divided into “centers” that form the poles of networks, and so-called “cliques” – communication formations characterized by the highest degree of intensity of internal interactions. At the same time, relations between participants are determined by the network itself and are characterized by intensity (frequency and volumes of distribution and transfer of various resources) and directionality (directions of resource movement within the structure of network interactions)⁴. These ideas make it possible to address the actual problem of the influence of powerful international players on changes in the core of the security domain in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war of 2014–2024, based on the involvement of middle-level theoretical developments, in particular Actor-Network Theory.

² J. Bartosiak, G. Friedman, *Wojna w kosmosie. Przewrót w geopolityce* [War in space. A revolution in geopolitics], Warszawa 2023 (in Polish); S. Bielen, *Turbulence in the Post-Cold War Era*, Warszawa 2021; V. Fisanov, *Ukrayina u mizhnarodnykh vidnosynakh Postvestfal's'koyi doby: zmina heostrategichnoyi roli* [Ukraine in international relations of the Post-Westphalian era: changing geostrategic role], “Istoryko-politychni problemy suchasnoho svitu: Modern Historical and Political” 2022, vol. 46, pp. 51–61 (in Ukrainian); R. Kuźniar, *Zmierzch liberalnego porządku międzynarodowego 2011–2021* [The Twilight of the Liberal International Order 2011–2021], Warszawa 2022 (in Polish); N. Nechayeva-Yuriychuk, “Nichoho ne sudylosya”. *Shans, yakyy dala svitovi pandemiya COVID-19 (notatky na polyakh knyhy Farida Zakariyi)* [“Nothing was destined”. The chance given to the world by the COVID-19 pandemic (notes in the margins of Farid Zakaria's book)], “Wschód Europy” 2023, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 211–221 (in Ukrainian); F. Zakaria, *Ten Lessons for a Post-Pandemic World*, Dublin 2021.

³ S. Fedunyak, *Vplyv rosiys'ko-ukrayins'koyi viyny na diyal'nist' providnykh instytutiv bezpeky v konteksti formuvannya novoyi modeli mizhnarodnykh vidnosyn* [The impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war on the activities of leading security institutions in the context of the formation of a new model of international relations], “Mediaforum” 2022, vol. 11, pp. 131–140 (in Ukrainian); Y. Felshtinsky, M. Stanczew, *Blowing Up Ukraine: The Return of Russian Terror and the Threat of World War III*, London 2022; M.H. Van Herpen, *Putin's Wars: The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism. Second Edition*, Lanham 2015; S. Troyan, A. Kyrydon, *The Russian-Ukrainian war (2014–2022): Basic preconditions and causes*, “Balkan Social Science Review” 2022, vol. 20, pp. 157–179; S. Troyan, A. Kyrydon, *Wojna rosyjsko-ukraińska w kontekście bezpieczeństwa globalnego* [The Russian-Ukrainian war in the context of global security], “Kultura – Historia – Globalizacja” 2023, no. 29, pp. 75–92 (in Polish); S.V. Vidnyans'kyi, *Ukrayina – Yevropeys'kyi Soyuz: novyy etap vzayemovidnosyn v umovakh rosiys'ko-ukrayins'koyi viyny 2014–2022 rr.* [Ukraine – European Union: a new stage of relations in the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war 2014–2022], “Mizhnarodni zv'yazky Ukrainy: naukovy poshuky i znakhidky” 2022, vol. 31, pp. 10–37 (in Ukrainian).

⁴ D. Knoke, J. Kuklinski, *Network Analysis*, Beverly Hills 1982; D. Knoke, F. Pappi, J. Broadbent, J. Tsujinaka, *Comparing Policy Networks: Labour Politics in the US, Germany and Japan*, Cambridge 1996.

Basic Provisions of the Actor-Network Theory

The answer to the question of why Russia cannot lose (and especially completely) in its unjust and groundless war against Ukraine, why it is necessary to “save Putin’s face”, etc. are mostly within the plane of the actor-network approach to the analysis of social processes.

The actor-network theory was first presented in an expanded form by Michel Callon and Bruno Latour in the second half of the 1980s⁵. Later, it was actualized first in the scientific field of sociology of science and technology, and later in sociology and social philosophy⁶. In its essence, as emphasized by the Ukrainian researcher A.M. Kyrydon, “the actor-network theory is a social-constructivist model, the main principle of which is the concept of a heterogeneous network, where the latter acts as an actor of interactions. That is, an actor is a network that is quite dynamic, and any object is thought of as an effect of a network of relations”⁷.

At the same time, all elements of this network are equally important. Interaction takes place in it through the mediation of actants, that is, agents. There is no global factor; instead, there is only a chain of interconnected localities. There is also no concept of a large or a small object: one cannot say, for example, that one association is larger than another, but some are clearly superior to others due to a greater number of reliable connections with various participants of the relevant network of actors under consideration⁸.

In the sense of application to the subject field of international relations and world politics, the international-actor theoretical construction is based on an understanding of the determinability of the influence, first, of the scope of interactions of the most powerful modern centers of power on the stability of the international system. Within the framework of this theory, Russia is certainly considered as one of the most influential international players or, according to B. Latour, a kind of “core of localities” that interact⁹.

⁵ M. Callon, J. Law, A. Rip (eds.), *Mapping the Dynamics of Science and Technology: Sociology of Science in the Real World*, London 1986; B. Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford 2005; B. Latour, *Pieriesborka sotsyal'noho: vviedeniye v aktorno-sietievuyu teoriyu* [Reorganization of the social: introduction to actor-network theory], Moskva 2014 (in Russian).

⁶ M.I. Akulov, *Kontseptsiya chasu v aktorno-merezheviy teorii: osoblyvosti pobudovy ta kontseptual'ni superechnosti* [The concept of time in the actor-network theory: peculiarities of construction and conceptual contradictions], Kyiv 2021 (in Ukrainian); A.V. Deyneka, *Stratehiyi pozytsionuvannya aktorno-merezhevoyi teorii v dyskursi suchasnoho sotsiologichnoho teoretyzuvannya* [Positioning strategies of actor-network theory in the discourse of modern sociological theorizing], “Aktual'ni problemy sotsiologii, psikhologii ta pedahohiky” 2017, vol. 1 (32), pp. 60–77 (in Ukrainian); A.V. Deyneka, *Evrystychnyy potentsial aktorno-merezhevoyi teorii dlya sotsiologichnoyi kontseptualizatsiyi ahentnosti*. [Heuristic potential of actor-network theory for sociological conceptualization of agency], Kyiv 2019 (in Ukrainian); S. Solod'ko, *Aktorno-merezheva teoriya yak sotsiologichna skladova intelektual'noho proektu Bruno Latoura* [Actor-network theory as a sociological component of the intellectual project of Bruno Latour], “Sotsiologiya: teoriya, metody, marketynh” 2014, vol. 4, pp. 156–170 (in Ukrainian).

⁷ A.M. Kyrydon, *Aktorno-merezheva teoriya* [Actor-network theory] 2019, <https://vue.gov.ua/> (date accessed: 27.12.2023) (in Ukrainian).

⁸ B. Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford 2005, pp. 173, 193, 199, 213–214.

⁹ S. Bieleń, *Turbulence in the Post-Cold War Era*, Warszawa 2021; J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy...; J. Mearsheimer, The Great Delusion...; F. Zakaria, The post-American World*.

The main principles of the actor-network theory when applied to the analysis of international relations are reduced to the following provisions:

- in international politics, they are major actors, primarily great powers, occupy the main positions and play the main role;
- influential international players in the regional and global dimensions create powerful nodes and networks of interactions, on which the current course and development prospects of both the world and individual regions largely depend;
- a violation of the balance of relations with a great power threatens the entire system of international relations, causing destabilization and turbulence;
- hence, even in the situation of an obvious violation by a great power of the existing international legal regime, other influential players seek first to “appease” the violator (or an outright aggressor, as the situation looks like in the case of Russia, which unleashed first a hybrid, and then a full-scale war against of Ukraine).

Therefore, from the standpoint of the actor-network paradigm in the event of Russia’s aggression and war against Ukraine, the actions and main efforts of the international community in the person of major international actors, like states and organizations, are aimed primarily at achieving a compromise, the desire to “save Russia” and prevent a threatening destabilization of the situation as a result, for example, of the complete military defeat of Moscow.

Such an understanding is influenced by a number of factors, among which those that affect a significant number of Russia’s ties in the network of current international relations stand out: the place of a permanent member in the UN Security Council with the right to a decisive vote; one of the two (one of which is the USA) most powerful nuclear potentials of our time; the second world military power as of 2022; huge raw (primarily, energy) resources; the largest territory on the planet with more than 140 million (albeit unevenly distributed) demographic potential; one of the twenty most powerful economies in the world in terms of total GDP in 2022, etc.¹⁰

In a formal way, Ukraine loses the competition by all indicators of actor-network connections and relations, and, until the beginning of 2022, it was not objectively considered even as an influential regional state. Ukraine took 74th place in the UN global ranking according to the overall index of the Human Development Index, 58th place in the world economic ranking according to the total GDP and 15th place according to the indicator of military potential in the world in 2022¹¹. Hence, the difficulty of making a firm, consistent, unequivocal choice in favor of supporting Ukraine as a weak link in the network of global interactions is obvious. At the same time, there is an urgent need to counteract Russia, one of the most influential (“core state”) in the complex of connections that in the international field create chains of interconnected localities in a common network.

¹⁰ GFP, *Military Strength Ranking, 2023*, <https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.php> (date accessed: 30.12.2023); VVP, *VVP stran mira* [GDP of the world – 2022], <https://fingeniy.com/vvp-stran-mira-2022-rejting-i-dolya-stran-v-mirovom-vvp/> (date accessed: 30.12.2023) (in Russian).

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

Russian Aggression against Ukraine and Anti-Russian Sanctions of the West

After the start of Russia's hybrid war against Ukraine in 2014, the anti-Russian sanctions introduced by Western countries and their partners (since the beginning of March 2014) turned out to be too weak and inconsistent to stop the aggressor state. Only after the transition of the war into a full-scale one (from February 24, 2022) did the collective West begin to get rid of its illusions about Russia, and Ukraine, finally, gradually began to receive unprecedented political and diplomatic support, informational, logistical and (which is extremely important for a successful warfare) military-technical assistance. However, the problems of the complexity and inconsistency of the complex reaction, primarily of the Western countries and their partners, to the annexationist policy of the Russian Federation towards Ukraine remain relevant. In general, this fits into the basic principles of actor-network theory in the context of studying the role and influence of various international actors/agents in the modern world political network of connections and interactions.

The pressure of the powerful complex of sanctions of the Western countries and their allies on the Russian Federation has covered almost all its vital spheres – politics, economy, finance, military, science, and technology, etc. During the spring of 2022 – the winter of 2023, Ukraine gradually began to receive increasingly powerful and qualitatively and quantitatively large and significant quantities of weapons. Military assistance (primarily from NATO and EU countries) became an important factor, together with the motivation and success of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, for the transition of the initiative in the conduct of the war to the Ukrainian side (summer-autumn 2022). In general, from the beginning of the full-scale invasion, as of the end of February 2023, the amount of international aid exceeded 38 billion dollars. Thanks to the inflow of international financial assistance, international reserves have been growing since October 2022, reaching \$ 29.9 billion as of the end of January 2023. In addition, from February 24 to November 20, 2022, international partners pledged to provide Ukraine with 113.1 billion euros, according to the calculations of the Kiel Institute of the World Economy; as of January 2023, this figure has increased to more than 141 billion euros. During the period from January 24, 2022, to January 15, 2023, the largest military aid was sent by the USA – 44.3 billion dollars¹².

A powerful factor in supporting Ukraine was the creation of a new international coalition in support of Ukraine. On April 26, 2022, the first meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, and a meeting in the Ramstein format (named after the American military base in Germany), took place. Meetings in the Ramstein format are a series of diplomatic meetings of ministers of defense and representatives of the top military leadership of several dozen countries of the world to coordinate the provision of military assistance to Ukraine. Ten meetings have been held so far. The upward dynamics of the number of participating countries (as of March 2023, it unites 54 states of the world)¹³ and the nature

¹² V. Horodyns'ka, *Vijs'kova tekhnika ta mil'yardy dolariv: shcho otrymala Ukrayina vid partneriv za rik viyny* [Military equipment and billions of dollars: what Ukraine received from partners during the year of the war], 2023, https://24tv.ua/economy/mizhnarodna-dopomoga-2023-skilki-viyskovoyi-finansovoyi-dopomogi_n2270406 (date accessed: 29.12.2023) (in Ukrainian).

¹³ O. Reznikov, *Antykremliivs'ka koalitsiya vzhe skladayet'sya z 54 krayin, yaki viryat' u peremohu Ukrayiny* [The anti-Kremlin coalition already consists of 54 countries that believe in the victory of Ukraine], 2023, <https://vechirniy.kyiv.ua/news/78967/> (date accessed: 30.12.2023) (in Ukrainian).

of the decisions made show that the coalition is gradually turning from a military to a political one.

For the first time after December 14, 1939 (when the USSR was expelled from the League of Nations for direct aggression against Finland), Russia, as the successor of the Soviet Union, began to be excluded from membership and work in international associations and organizations. It was excluded from the G8 group of great powers, in which it has been since 1997; it was deprived of the right to membership in PACE; it was excluded from the UN Human Rights Council. Finally, in March and October 2022 and in February 2023, the UN General Assembly condemned Russia's aggression against Ukraine with the demand for its immediate ending and the restoration of Ukraine's full sovereignty within the internationally recognized borders of 1991 (each of the resolutions received support with 141–144 votes “for” from 193 member states of the UN)¹⁴.

Russian aggression had opposite consequences for the Kremlin in terms of strengthening Ukraine's European and Euro-Atlantic integration plans. In almost four months, Ukraine quickly overcame the path from applying for membership to being accepted as a candidate for EU membership on June 23, 2022¹⁵. A few months later (September 30, 2022), Ukraine filed an application to be admitted to the NATO bloc under an accelerated procedure¹⁶. The significance of these steps becomes clear because the Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine, signed in 2014 (came into effect in full after the completion of the ratification process by all European entities, as of September 1, 2017), did not contain membership prospects for our country. As for NATO, the Bucharest Summit (April 2008), after the rejection of the Membership Action Plan (MAP), left a possibility for Ukraine's membership in the Alliance, but it was not supported by any real prospects, even with the beginning of full-scale Russian aggression.

However, it is obvious that during the eight years of the Russian-Ukrainian hybrid war, the West pursued a policy of “pacification” of the Russian aggressor, which also enabled the escalation of the conflict. Crimea was recognized by Western countries and the world community as illegally annexed. However, this issue was not the subject of international negotiations. It was the fault of the Ukrainian side too, which de facto agreed to withdraw the issue of the Russian annexation of Crimea, which was contrary to the international legal obligations of the Russia, from the agenda of the Normandy format negotiations (a political-diplomatic process, in which the Russian occupant was not a criminal, but an equal partner with the ability to impose its position and demands on Ukraine and Western states (primarily, Germany and France)). Despite the sanctions introduced against Russia since March 2014, the EU states continued to increase economic cooperation. It developed

¹⁴ Henasambleya OON, *Henasambleya OON ukhvalyla rezolyutsiyu z vymohoyu do Rosiyi pokynuty Ukrainu zarady vseosyazhnoho, spravedyvoho i mitsnogo myru: 141 krayina “za”* [The UN General Assembly adopted a resolution demanding that Russia leave Ukraine for the sake of a comprehensive, just and durable peace: 141 countries “for”], 2023, <https://ukrainian.voanews.com/a/oon-uchvalyla-rezoljuciju-shodo-vijny/6976346.html> (date accessed: 30.12.2023) (in Ukrainian).

¹⁵ Ukraina, *Ukrayina otrymala status kandydata na chlenstvo v YES* [Ukraine received the status of a candidate for EU membership], 2022, <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/news/ukrayina-otrymala-status-kandidata-na-chlenstvo-v-yes> (date accessed: 30.12.2023) (in Ukrainian).

¹⁶ Ukraina, *Ukrayina podaye zayavku na vstup do NATO* [Ukraine applies to join NATO], 2022, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-politics/3583117-ukraina-podae-zaavku-na-vstup-do-nato-zelenskij.html> (date accessed: 30.12.2023) (in Ukrainian).

especially actively in the energy sector. The second line of the Nord Stream-2 gas pipeline was even built; however, it was not put into operation prior to the full-scale phase of Russia's war against Ukraine.

Western states also fulfilled their obligations to the Russian Federation under contracts, including in the field of military weapons and technologies, which were concluded before February 2014. Even after a year of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine and a powerful anti-Russian sanctions policy, as evidenced by the materials of the Atlantic Council online discussions of the March 29, 2023, Western technological components continue to be used in Russian weapons¹⁷. This most often happens through Hong Kong, Turkey and neighboring countries and regions.

Such a policy of "double standards" and "cautious steps" of the West in relation to Russia is partially preserved despite the mentioned cardinal changes after February 24, 2022. One gets the impression, fully motivated and verified by facts, that the Western allies and other partners of Ukraine sometimes act with excessive caution, trying too not to provoke the Russian nuclear monster, or to some extent delaying or limiting actions with various conditions ("we cannot weaken our defense capability", "there are no weapons and equipment ready for transfer", "it takes several months of training of Ukrainians to work with the relevant complexes and systems", etc.) the urgent and needed military and military-technical assistance for our country. Even the indisputable successes of Ukraine not only in countering Russian aggression, but also in liberating its temporarily occupied territories and protecting universal human values and principles of international law, along with clear nuclear blackmail by Russia, its perfidious, unmotivated aggressive, genocidal war, do not encourage Western partners and allies to decide on unambiguously more decisive steps and measures with the aim of immediately stopping Russian aggression and restoring Ukraine's full sovereignty over its territories temporarily occupied by Russia.

Theoretical and conceptual explanations of this phenomenon are found, including in the plane of actor-network theory in the sense of its application to the explanation of processes and phenomena of international life and world politics. They are clearly traced in the approaches of supporters of various paradigmatic directions, like neorealism, neo-Marxism, and constructivism. We will demonstrate this on the example of influential Western representatives of neorealism in international relations – John Mearsheimer, Farid Zakaria and Henry Kissinger. These authors (like many other representatives of the Western neorealist paradigm of international relations) remain supporters of the determining influence of leading state actors and influential interstate coalitions on world politics. They aim not so much at an objective study of international reality as at subordinating this reality to the theoretical concepts created by them. The interpretations offered by them of the full-scale conventional Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the ways to resolve the crisis in modern international relations demonstrate, first, the orientation of their theoretical concepts to the preservation of the status quo of the international system, and not to the objective analysis of its changes.

¹⁷ Y. Danylenko, *Yak zupynyty potraplyannya zakhidnykh komponentiv do rosiys'kykh raket. Holovne z dyskusiyi Atlantic Council* [How to stop Western components from entering Russian missiles. Highlights from the Atlantic Council discussion], 2022, <https://speka.media/yak-zupyniti-potraplyannya-zaxidnix-komponentiv-dorsiiskix-raket-golovne-z-diskusiyi-atlantic-council-9d4519> (date accessed: 29.12.2023) (in Ukrainian).

Western Realist / Neorealist Paradigm in the Context of Actor-Network Theory: the Russia Case

Russia's interests in the context of "offensive realism" by John Mearsheimer

The theoretical and conceptual approach of the famous American political scientist-internationalist, professor at the University of Chicago, representative of "Offensive Realism", John Mearsheimer, is indicative in the sense of considering the influence of an international actor on networks and nodes of interactions. The basic principles of his approach expand the scope of neo-realist theory, provide a theoretical justification for the behavior of revisionist states, including the modern Russian Federation¹⁸. The main provisions of offensive realism include the following: first, states are rarely satisfied with the level of influence on the world stage and always try to gain an advantage over others in order to achieve complete security; secondly, great powers recognize that the best way to ensure their security is to achieve hegemony "now", thus eliminating any possibility of challenge by another great power; thirdly, the best strategy for a state to increase its relative strength before achieving hegemony is to rely on offensive tactics¹⁹.

J. Mearsheimer's offensive realism models a pessimistic picture of international politics. It is characterized by dangerous interstate security competition, which can lead to conflict and war. According to the Western scientist, the conflict between the great powers is eternal. Therefore, the main subject of interest of J. Mearsheimer within the framework of the theory of offensive realism is the actions of great powers that shape international politics. The American international political scientist believes that the fate of all countries, both large and small, largely depends on the actions of players with the greatest potential, primarily military one.

In the spring of 2022, after the start of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, the influential British magazine *The Economist* published a discussion article by J. Mearsheimer on the topic of why "the West bears the main responsibility for the Ukrainian crisis"²⁰. The American academic believes that the reckless expansion of NATO provoked Russia. He examines the war waged by the Russian Federation against independent Ukraine through the prism of the most dangerous international conflict since the Caribbean missile crisis of 1962. Understanding the root causes of modern warfare is very important if we want to prevent the situation from worsening and find a way to overcome armed confrontation. According to J. Mearsheimer, the decisive factor is that Russia perceives NATO as a threat. And it doesn't matter if this perception has any basis. That is why the USA was wrong to support the eastward expansion of NATO, and therefore they are to blame for the war and its terrible consequences.

It is certain – writes J. Mearsheimer – that Vladimir Putin started the war and is responsible for the way it is conducted. But why he did so is another matter. The main opinion in the West is that he is an irrational, outright aggressor who wants to create a great Russia like the former Soviet Union was. Thus, he alone bears full responsibility for the Ukrainian crisis²¹.

¹⁸ J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy ...*; J. Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion ...*

¹⁹ N. Nechayeva-Yuriichuk, S. Troyan, *Modern problems ...*, pp. 93–94.

²⁰ J. Mearsheimer, *John Mearsheimer on why the West is principally responsible for the Ukrainian crisis*, "The Economist" 2022, 19 March.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

The American researcher believes that this point of view oversimplifies the existing situation, which requires a deep analysis both in terms of understanding the causes of war and ways to stop it and prevent it in the future. This approach of J. Mearsheimer attracts attention from the point of view of understanding modern international security in the context of combining the structural theory of offensive realism with the actor-network theory and possible conclusions for Ukraine. In the publication of the American political scientist-internationalist, there are only calls to take into account the interests of major international actors, in particular Russia, but there is no place for the desire of a huge number of Ukrainians to escape from the influence of official Moscow. However, J. Mearsheimer's statement that the state's security level depends on the extent to which it can convince potential adversaries of its strength is of great importance for Ukraine. That is, in carrying out interactions with influential actors of world politics, it is important for Ukraine to use the actual advantages of the actor-network approach emphasizing the nature of relations and the quality of contacts with allied states and strategic partners.

Farid Zakaria on the Appropriateness of the Russian-Ukrainian Compromise

Another well-known American political scientist and journalist, Farid Zakaria, spoke in a similar way, doubting the possibility of a complete victory for Ukraine and the need to consider the interests of Russia. The author of the *The Post-American World*²² and *Ten Lessons for a Post-Pandemic World*²³ bestsellers emphasized in his interview in the fall of 2019 that “in the short term, the danger is coming from Russia. This is an embittered country that wants to be a predator, wants to show that it is still powerful”²⁴.

At the same time, considering the lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic for the world, he did not consider the fact that the coronavirus danger was imposed on the course of Russian aggression against Ukraine since 2014, which had serious global consequences. The Ukrainian researcher N. Nechayeva-Yuriychuk aptly drew attention to this limitation of the American author:

In our opinion, the proposed scheme looks incomplete due to the absence in it of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and the subsequent annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, which was a blatant unilateral disregard for the norms of international law and proved the existing international system's unpreparedness for an adequate response to modern challenges and threats to its own stability. We believe that if the author as an international political scientist had paid attention to this crisis, the analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the further development of humanity would have been more

²² F. Zakaria, *The post-American World*, N.Y.-L. 2008.

²³ F. Zakaria, *Ten Lessons for a Post-Pandemic World*, Dublin 2021.

²⁴ Y. Panyushkina, “Populizm ne vyrishuye problem, a prosto znakhodyt’ vynykh”. *Veduchyy CNN Farid Zakariya pro holovni vyklyky suchasnosti* [“Populism doesn't solve problems, it just finds the culprits”. CNN presenter Farid Zakaria on the main challenges of our time], 2019, <https://thepage.ua/ua/interview/populizm-ne-virishuye-problem-a-prosto-znahodit-vinnih-veduchij-cnn-farid-zakariya-pro-golovni-viklyki-suchasnosti> (date accessed: 30.12.2023) (in Ukrainian).

thorough and comprehensive in the context of the very title of the work: *Ten Lessons for a Post-Pandemic World*, and not for the USA or individual states²⁵.

In general, F. Zakaria considered the actions of Russia and V. Putin personally in relation to Ukraine completely predictable and emphasized that this was an attempt by a former superpower, humiliated by its condition (“a declining state”, as H. Kissinger also called Russia), but clinging to “some symbol of greatness”, to subjugate Ukraine²⁶. At the same time, the political journalist is convinced that the West should have made much more effort to help Russia and restore its position, although he did not deny the fact that the USA and Western Europe provided Moscow with huge aid packages and even created a new G 8 forum in 1997. However, to his credit, F. Zakaria quite reasonably pointed out the biggest problem of the West in its attitude to Russia’s war in Ukraine was to understand it through the prism of the politics of the great powers, while imperialism was a more suitable basis.

Later, F. Zakaria, in the spirit of a compromise position both towards taking into account the interests of a great power – Russia, and Ukraine, which resolutely fights for the right to be free and independent, expresses the point of view that “the goal should be an independent Ukraine that controls at least the territory, which she had until February 24, and with some obligations in the field of security from the West”²⁷.

The American political scientist asserts that now “none of the parties is strong enough to win the war, and neither is weak enough to seek peace”²⁸.

Accordingly, from his point of view, the overall prospect of a total victory for Ukraine seems doubtful, although its allies and partners should provide more ammunition, weapons, and finances to counter Russian aggression, so that Ukraine has “enough success and momentum on the battlefield” and enters negotiations, “having a very strong position”²⁹.

F. Zakaria, reasonably, very much doubts the complete victory of Ukraine, having two main reasons for this. First, Ukraine’s allies and partners have been fulfilling its needs for weapons, ammunition and military equipment for too long and not always consistently, which limits the Ukrainian side’s capabilities primarily in terms of de-occupying its own territory. Second, Ukraine and Russia are in different weight categories as state entities: the Russian Federation is more than three times larger than Ukraine in terms of population, almost 15 times larger in terms of GDP, has 10 times more defense budget, and prevailed by an order of magnitude in terms of quantitative indicators of almost all types of weapons. In addition, the war is taking place on Ukrainian land, which is accompanied by the destruc-

²⁵ N. Nechayeva-Yuriychuk, “*Nichoho ne sudylosya*”. *Shans, yakyy dala svitovi pandemiya COVID-19 (notatky na polyakh knyhy Farida Zakariyi)* [“Nothing was destined”. The chance given to the world by the COVID-19 pandemic (notes in the margins of Farid Zakaria’s book)], “*Wschód Europy*” 2023, vol. 9, no. 1, p. 213 (in Ukrainian).

²⁶ F. Zakaria, *Opinion Russia is the last multinational empire, fighting to keep its colonies*, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/03/31/ukraine-fighting-russia-imperialism-eastern-europe-algeria-kenya/?fbclid=IwAR38R0WBY5I9A90i_Rk2-Xe21UZz2yPX2IY3tL9m4VQG4B8aBQbI_sx-q-0 (date accessed: 30.12.2023).

²⁷ F. Zakaria, *Opinion: It’s time to start thinking about the endgame in Ukraine*, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/06/16/ukraine-war-endgame-russia-europe-us-goals/> (date accessed: 30.12.2023).

²⁸ F. Zakaria, *Opinion: There is a path to ending the Ukraine war*, 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/02/24/opinions/fareed-zakaria-ukraine-column/index.html> (date accessed: 30.12.2023).

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

tion of settlements, industrial and agricultural enterprises, infrastructure facilities, and the impoverishment of people. Millions of Ukrainians have left their homes, lost them or gone abroad. Emphasizing how destructive this war is for our country, F. Zakaria offers a solution of territorial concessions in exchange for peace, which is unacceptable for Ukraine.

Finally, on February 28, 2023, in a column on his author's website, he wrote a conclusion and proposal:

One can imagine a ceasefire that will return to Ukraine all the lands captured since February 2022. Those seized before, as Crimea in 2014, will be subject to international arbitration, including local referendums, conducted by international groups, not Moscow. In addition, Kyiv will receive security guarantees from NATO, although they will not extend to these disputed territories. This compromise, simply put, Crimea and part of Donbas for de facto membership in NATO and the EU, can be sold to Ukrainians, because they will achieve their long-standing goal of becoming part of the West. This may be acceptable for Russia, because it can claim that it is protecting some Russian-speaking parts of Ukraine³⁰.

Of course, this proposal of the American international political scientist is far from the classic policy of "Finlandization of Ukraine", but it does not consider Ukraine's legitimate desire to restore the territorial integrity of the state. At the same time, within the framework of the actor-network approach, it is proposed that Russia, as an influential subject of international relations and which illegally seized Ukrainian territories, keeps it, and this is presented as a compromise way out of a difficult situation that threatens the entire international order with chaos and unpredictable turbulence.

Henry Kissinger's Pro-Russian Realpolitik

In the context of the problem raised by us, the idea of the exchange of territories for peace as the main result of the Russian-Ukrainian war is conceptually inherent in the worldview of the former Secretary of State and National Security Advisor to the US President, H. Kissinger. This does not contradict the fact that the American statesman emphasizes that there are no justifications for the actions of Russia, which seeks to return Ukraine to a dependent and subordinate position. Back in 2016, the American statesman came out in support of "Russian domination in the former Soviet republics, starting from Belarus and Ukraine and ending with Georgia and Kazakhstan", as well as the development of "a plan for the political and economic development of Ukraine".

The main idea of H. Kissinger was that Russia "guarantees the security of the east of Ukraine and gradually withdraws from there", while the West, for its part, closes its eyes to the "Crimean issue". In practice, this meant that the occupation of Crimea would not be officially recognized but would cease to be a contentious issue for the US and Russia. The concept was even called "constructive cooperation" and "normalization of relations"³¹.

³⁰ Ibidem.

³¹ H. Roloff, P. Tiedev, *Vermittlungen zwischen Washington und Moskau. Kissinger soll neuen Kalten Krieg verhindern* [Negotiations between Washington and Moscow. Kissinger is supposed to prevent a new Cold War], 2016, <https://www.bild.de/politik/ausland/donald-trump/kissinger-will-zwischen-russland-und-usa-vermitteln-49482764.bild.html> (date accessed: 30.12.2023) (in German).

In the conditions of full-scale Russian aggression against Ukraine, on May 24, 2022, during the World Economic Forum in Davos, H. Kissinger expressed the opinion that as a result of the Russian war in Ukraine, the international community will need to seek agreements with Russia. He suggested concluding a peace agreement between Ukraine and Russia, which should provide for a return to the situation before the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. At the same time, to avoid a war against Russia itself, the West should allow it to keep Crimea, which Russia took from Ukraine in 2014³².

This caused serious criticism in political, scientific and expert circles. We will give only one demonstrative example of such a critical approach to the position of “the last of the Mohicans”. Alexander Motyl, an American historian and professor of Political Science at Rutgers University in Newark (New Jersey), rightly noted:

Kissinger’s recent speech at the World Economic Forum perfectly illustrates how out of touch he is with today’s realities – on the international scene, in Russia and, of course, in Ukraine. Like Metternich, Kissinger makes a fatal mistake, believing that a few wise politicians can impose their will on the world. Worse, he believes they can stop internal change and the power of nationalism. Many years ago, Senator William Fulbright called it the “arrogance of power” (we add that with elements of immorality and cynicism – authors)³³.

At the end of 2022, in a column entitled “How to Avoid a New World War” for the British *The Spectator Weekly*, H. Kissinger again expressed a view similar to the previous one. “I have repeatedly expressed my support for the military efforts of the allies aimed at stopping Russia’s aggression in Ukraine. But the time is approaching to rely on the strategic changes that have already been made and integrate them into a new structure for achieving peace through negotiations”³⁴ – emphasized the authoritative American practitioner and theoretician in the field of international relations. He called for peace and dialogue based on the cessation of hostilities, the establishment of a demarcation line as of February 24, 2022, and only after that discuss on the return of occupied Crimea to Ukraine. In the case of impossibility of implementing this plan, referendums can be held on “especially disputed territories that have repeatedly changed hands over the centuries”³⁵.

Another thesis of the former US Secretary of State is deep, but quite controversial in the context of the current stage of the modern Russian-Ukrainian war-The desire for peace and order consists of two components, which are sometimes considered contradictory: the desire for security elements and the demand for acts of reconciliation. If we cannot achieve both [we are talking about security and peace with the actual legalization of Ukrainian territories seized by Russia as a result of the end of the Russian-Ukrainian war since 2014 – A.K, S.T.], we will not be able to achieve either³⁶.

³² Y. Matviychuk, *Na Zakhodi hostro krytykuyut’ Kissingera, yakyy “zapponuvav Ukrayini pominyaty terytoriyi na myr”* [Kissinger is sharply criticized in the West, who “offered Ukraine to exchange territories for peace”], 2022, <https://ukrainian.voanews.com/a/reakcia-na-slova-kissingera-pro-ukrainu/6589368.html> (date accessed: 30.12.2023) (in Ukrainian).

³³ A.J. Motyl, *Kissinger is dead wrong about the Russian war against Ukraine*, 2023, https://www.factsanddarts.com/index.php/current-affairs/kissinger-dead-wrong-about-russian-war-against-ukraine?fbclid=IwAR3q8o-DBWPmW95WLmVf11CT59mM8iosFKk2uw14vMNS4srAZpF_-J_bAwQg (date accessed: 30.12.2023).

³⁴ H. Kissinger, *How to avoid another world war*, 2022, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/the-push-for-peace/> (date accessed: 30.12.2023).

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

However, H. Kissinger nevertheless considers the new balance of power in favor of Ukraine, noting that the peace process should connect Ukraine with NATO, since Kyiv's neutrality no longer makes sense, especially after Finland and Sweden joining the alliance. Such a position was voiced by him in January 2023, during a speech at the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos. At the same time, the peace process can pursue a double goal – to confirm the freedom of Ukraine and to define a new international structure in which Russia should find a place, since, despite its “propensity for violence”, it “makes a decisive contribution to the global balance and balance of power”³⁷. In fact, the outlined approach, on the one hand, will only confirm the war as a tool for changing borders, and, on the other hand, it is aimed at satisfying the interests of a powerful international actor, which is contrary to the UN Charter.

Such a vision of the situation fits perfectly into the meaningful composition of the actor-network theory, which prefers a more powerful international player. It is aimed at ending the war while preserving, at least partially, the interests and gains of Russia, without considering the completely legitimate desire of Ukraine to restore its territorial integrity and sovereignty within the internationally recognized borders of 1991. At the same time, for Ukraine, this means that in the long term, it is necessary to strengthen its potential as a regional and global state to effectively secure its national interests.

Conclusions

The actor-network theory was introduced in the second half of the 1980s. This theory gives the network priority in relations between participants, which depend on the intensity of interactions. In the sense of international relations and world politics, this means that they are under the strong or even decisive influence of powerful international actors (big states and flexible interstate coalitions) that interact in the sphere of regional and global politics. Russia is seen as one of the most influential international players or “core localities” interacting. Accordingly, other influential international actors are very cautious about a complete break in relations with Russia; they do not consider the possibility of its complete defeat in an aggressive war against Ukraine. Such a position was reflected and substantiated in various theoretical approaches, examples of which are the ideas of Western representatives of neorealism (John Mearsheimer, Farid Zakaria, Henry Kissinger and others).

The main subject of scientific interest of the representatives of the modern neorealist approach in international relations is the actions of the great powers. This is caused by the fact that the most influential, powerful states shape the agenda and rules of the game on the world stage. Therefore, the proper scientific explanation by neorealists of the current situation on the international arena analyzed above, understanding the reasons for growth and ways to overcome modern tensions in the field of international relations, is very important. It is characteristic of J. Mearsheimer, G. Kissinger, F. Zakaria and other Western representatives of neorealism that such an understanding lies precisely in the plane of actor-network theory. According to this, the international actor structure of modern global

³⁷ Ibidem.

and regional relations is characterized by tradition and stability. It is based on the understanding of the determining influence on them, first, of the complex of interactions of the most powerful modern centers of power. Such priority interactions between major international actors were characteristic and defining for previous international eras – Westphalia, Vienna, Versailles-Washington and Yalta-Potsdam.

In other words, J. Mearsheimer, F. Zakaria, G. Kissinger and other representatives of the Western neorealist paradigm in international relations, although they are forced to respond to serious challenges faced by the modern system of international relations, are largely captive to their traditional approaches of determining the influence of powerful state international actors and coalitions on the nature and course of the world political process. The analysis of their texts carried out in the article indicates that these authors aim not so much at an objective exploration of international reality as at the subordination of this reality to the theoretical concepts they have created. Their proposed interpretations of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and ways of resolving the crisis further demonstrate that their theoretical concepts are aimed at maintaining the status quo of the international system rather than objectively analyzing its changes.

Within the framework of this theory, Russia is considered as one of the most influential international players / actors, the destabilization, defeat or destruction of which threatens the stability of the entire system of international relations. That is why certain allies and partners of Ukraine are still trying to find a “soft” option for defeating Russia in the conditions of war and providing aid to Ukraine, seeking to avoid domestic and foreign political turbulence as much as possible, and the collapse of the modern Russian state. At the same time, the current course and incompleteness of the armed Russian-Ukrainian conflict prompt the following: first, a careful analysis of both its individual variables and the general impact on the transformation trends of the modern system of international relations; secondly, clarification of the role in this system of individual actors who, to some degree or other, seek to fit into the new world order, preserve or strengthen their positions in the new international architecture.

In this sense, the war against Ukraine has turned into an existential threat for Russia. This threat is caused by the danger of defeat, the loss of leading positions in global and regional actor-network interactions, as well as the growth of turbulence within the Russian state and society. At the same time, for Ukraine and most of its allies and partners, victory in the war also has no less existential weight. Its meaning lies in strengthening democratic positions, openness, integration and security imperatives of development, returning, ultimately, to stability and key international legal foundations and rules of functioning of bilateral and multilateral cooperation. At the same time, according to Western neorealists, such as J. Mearsheimer, G. Kissinger, and F. Zakaria, turbulence and conflict in modern international relations can be overcome only based on taking into account the interests of all the most powerful international players. The Russian Federation occupies a prominent place among them in view of its potential, intensity and depth of actor-network interactions. From here, it is through the “rescue of Russia” that the representatives of the Western neorealist approach in international relations see an effective way to overcome the conflict-causing anarchy in international relations of the era of the “twilight of democracy” and transition to a stable polyarchic world order.

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