

Research Paper

Morality and Politics post Ukraine

By Dominique Bocquet

RP - 04/22

The war in Ukraine ignited fierce opposition on grounds of principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. Populations weighed in the balance of power. Yet, for principles invoked against Russia to find universal resonance, the West should ensure it acts in accordance with these principles. Global solidarity implies treating all peoples equally.



THINK • STIMULATE • BRIDGE

About Policy Center for the New South

The Policy Center for the New South (PCNS) is a Moroccan think tank aiming to contribute to the improvement of economic and social public policies that challenge Morocco and the rest of the Africa as integral parts of the global South.

The PCNS pleads for an open, accountable and enterprising «new South» that defines its own narratives and mental maps around the Mediterranean and South Atlantic basins, as part of a forward-looking relationship with the rest of the world. Through its analytical endeavours, the think tank aims to support the development of public policies in Africa and to give the floor to experts from the South. This stance is focused on dialogue and partnership, and aims to cultivate African expertise and excellence needed for the accurate analysis of African and global challenges and the suggestion of appropriate solutions.

As such, the PCNS brings together researchers, publishes their work and capitalizes on a network of renowned partners, representative of different regions of the world. The PCNS hosts a series of gatherings of different formats and scales throughout the year, the most important being the annual international conferences «The Atlantic Dialogues» and «African Peace and Security Annual Conference» (APSACO).

Finally, the think tank is developing a community of young leaders through the Atlantic Dialogues Emerging Leaders program (ADEL) a space for cooperation and networking between a new generation of decision-makers and entrepreneurs from the government, business and social sectors. Through this initiative, which already counts more than 300 members, the Policy Center for the New South contributes to intergenerational dialogue and the emergence of tomorrow's leaders.

Policy Center for the New South

Building C, Suncity Complex, Al Bortokal Street, Hay Riad 10100 - Rabat

Email : contact@policycenter.ma

Phone : +212 5 37 54 04 04 / Fax : +212 5 37 71 31 54

Website : www.policycenter.ma

©2022 Policy Center for the New South. All rights reserved

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not reflect those of their institutions.

RESEARCH PAPER

Morality and Politics post Ukraine

By Dominique Bocquet



THINK • STIMULATE • BRIDGE

INTRODUCTION

There can be no doubt that there will be a “before” and an “after” to the war in Ukraine. The fact that a global power with a huge nuclear arsenal invades a neighboring country is no small thing by any standard.

Indignation arose from the outset, exacerbated by the conflict’s human toll: bombing of civilian targets, evidence of massacres and displacement of 10 million people in the very first month of the conflict.

Beyond the emotional response, one question arises: Will ethical and moral considerations to international relations be diminished or strengthened by these events?

It is fundamental to elect the appropriate perspective in answering this question.

Two opposing views initially emerge.

The first one is pessimistic and sees in the brutal use of force a severe blow to morality. No law, principle or international institution shielded Ukraine from assault. Morality proved powerless in preventing the worst. Faith in its power is bound to be undermined. Some people’s cynicism leads to others’ resignation.

The opposite view offers a less bleak interpretation, and yields vastly different results. It emphasizes the stigma attached to Russia’s offensive by public opinion and governments. This opprobrium neither erases the deaths nor immediately stops the war, but rather sanctions the immorality of aggression. The progressively escalating repercussions (loss of credit, isolation, sanctions, etc.) punish and weaken Russia’s regime, dissuading other countries from following suit. The weight of moral considerations is ultimately supported by public opinion’s capacity for judgment and memory.

Which of these two interpretations will prevail? Time will tell, but one can already outline the matter. This requires rejecting the naïve approach to international politics from the outset, as it rarely applies in reality. Demanding that political actions only obey moral principles is to ignore history. Up to the eve of Russia’s offensive, some for instance rejected delivering lethal weapons to Ukraine in the name of “morality”. Had they been followed by all Ukraine’s friends, Ukraine would have been swept away.

Morality should consider the balance of power. The contrary would erect morality on hollow ground and endorse a vacuous morality. Monique Canto-Sperber writes in her work *The Morality of the World* (cited in the bibliography): “No plea in favor of moral resources to act on our world can prevail if it does not first depict the world to which these resources apply. Moral judgments not rooted in fact are often arbitrary and unwarranted.”

Moral considerations can be made into strengths, but only under specific conditions. That is the way suggested by philosophers.

Already in the 17th century, philosopher Blaise Pascal wrote: “Force leads the world, not law. Being unable to ensure that what is strong is just, let us ensure that what is just is strong”.

In doing so, he outlined a path to embrace morality. The war in Ukraine is very instructive in this respect¹.

1. Oussama Tayebi assisted me in this reflection, specifically through in-depth bibliographic research. Oussama Tayebi, Mehdi Benomar and Jamal Machrouh kindly reread this Research Paper and shared their often-valuable observations with me. I extend my thanks to all of them.

I. LIMITATIONS OF A PURELY MORAL APPROACH TO THE CONFLICT

1. The West's temptation for a purely moral criticism of Russia's offensive

International relations are about the security and place of nations. They offer no other choice but establish a balance of power to survive and assert relevance. Power relations can nevertheless be shaped by specific institutions and principles. This requires strong enough consensus in their favor. This is precisely the aspiration of the "liberal" school of international relations: Bring states to adhere to standards and commit to human rights. This school of thought seeks to produce a virtuous circle in which the use of violence and force is minimized.

Multilateral institutions established after World War II are part of this vision, albeit in a fragile and precarious way:

- Institutions become paralyzed when their decision-making mechanisms are obstructed. This is the case here: Russia, a permanent UN Security Council member, has veto power. Hence the Security Council's demoralizing inaction;
- The issue of principles is more complex: Even if flouted, they retain effect when violators incur the opprobrium of public opinion.

In invoking principles, some Westerners tend towards a purely moral interpretation of war. They balance Russia's recourse to force on one hand, with the primacy of law which the West claims to embody, on the other.

Things are not quite as simple; ironically, such an interpretation downplays the break brought to international relations by Russia's offensive.

2. Putin a "realist", or a sham

Contrary to superficial perception, Putin's offensive is not rooted in the "realist school" of international relations, that of *realpolitik* as embodied by statesmen like Metternich and Bismarck in the 19th century, and Henri Kissinger and Hubert Védrine more recently.

Proponents of the realist school admittedly advocate for using power relations, deeming them decisive at the international level. Yet they make sure not to unnecessarily alienate third countries and, aware of its consequences, often seek to avoid war.

The concept of international order is essential in their view. For this, they advocate for policy control, careful study of the adversary and restraint in the use of force. Putin is a long way from this. To criticize him only from a moral perspective is to grant him a badge of undeserved realism.

In *War and Peace among Nations*, Raymond Aron points out that war is at times an ultimate means, never an end in itself. Political objectives should take precedence: "power consists in constraining the other, not in annihilating him/her". Under Putin, Russia has slipped into a sort of blind faith in war.

3. Challenging the international order and its resonance

Russia's transgression extends beyond merely over-stepping the line separating good from evil: rather than immorality, it is anomia we should be talking about. By flouting the rights, the international system grants Ukraine, the invasion also reflects a willingness to breach the rules of the game.

Elsewhere on the planet, a twofold perspective emerges: While the brutality of Russia's offensive outrages and worries, challenging the international order is not without resonance, particularly in Africa and Asia.

This echo compels the West to ask itself a few questions. The "moral scandal" invoked by it, is not universal fact. This conflict is not felt in the same way everywhere.

4. The UN General Assembly vote divide

With the UN Security Council at a standstill, a draft resolution condemning Russia's aggression was put to the UN General Assembly. The vote is not legally binding (monopoly of the UN Security Council). Each country freely expressing its opinion.

141 out of 193 member countries approved the resolution. This is a substantial majority by number of States. Only 5 countries voted against it. Besides being small, the make-up of this group speaks for itself: Belarus, North Korea, Eritrea, Syria (in addition, of course, to Russia).

Yet 35 countries abstained or declined to take part in the vote. Some of these countries are very populous, and countries not voting for the resolution account for just over one-half the population of Africa, a large majority of the population of Asia and a majority of the global population. Some view this as a resurgence of the "non-aligned" movement, born in Bandoeng in 1955 and embodied in the Cold War by a Third World that refused to choose between the two blocs.

While some of these countries have specific political reasons to spare Russia, others are driven by doubts of the West's sincerity, its ability to act in accordance with stated principles, and place an identical value on peace and human life throughout the world. Europe is perceived as having a selective sensitivity, acute when it comes to the suffering of Europeans, less acute when the victims live or come from elsewhere...

Accordingly, a moralistic reading of the war should not be our sole interpretation.

II. THE CONFLICT UNFOLDS: A SUBTLER BALANCE OF POWER THAN EXPECTED

1. "Melian" dialogue leading up to hostilities

Starting in late 2021, large numbers of Russian troops amassed on Ukraine's borders (up to 140,000 men, perhaps more). This was prelude to either an offensive, or intended to seriously intimidate.

Simultaneously, Russia's discourse fluctuated (Putin's July 2021 article on historical Ukraine-Russia ties and reassuring words, and at other times, denying Ukraine's right to independence and making demands related to Donbass).

As noted by Jamal Machrouh in an Opinion published by PCNS in March 2022, this discourse evokes an episode from Thucydides' Peloponnesian War (late 5th century BC), the "Melian dialogue". In this episode, as Athens wishes to seize Melos (a city close to its rival Sparta), it invoked Melos' wrongs, all the while asserting that being strongest, it could enforce its own version of facts.

This strongman's law invoking the truth is thus not recent. It is a call back to reality to all those who, forgetting Pascal, believe the world governed by justice. The novelty is that public opinion is now a significant factor.

2. Decoding Russia's intentions: Distrust among Westerners and memories of Iraq

Before hostilities broke out, the United States and the United Kingdom were certain Russia would invade Ukraine. As early as late 2021, they emphasized the invasion was imminent, both to alert Ukrainians and their supporters and to deprive Moscow of the element of surprise. Conversely, up until the eve of hostilities, France and Germany still believed it possible to preserve peace via diplomacy.

This too brings to mind a certain past; in 2002-2003, Washington and London invoked alleged weapons of mass destruction to justify invading Iraq.

This episode seems to have contributed to Vladimir Putin's personal transformation: Becoming convinced the strongest could dictate his/her interpretation of the facts.

In 2021, France and Germany feared renewed disinformation. They were wrong, but their wariness recalls a law of life, that is moral in essence: he who manipulates information sees his credit eroded.²

Alongside legal principles, trust is a value that has been cultivated for centuries in international relations: personal trust between sovereigns and leaders, and loyalty to one's word, all the more so when in writing (treaties).

If it intends to capitalize politically on its values, the West needs to earn trust and, for a start, instill it in its own midst. A great deal of trust prevailed for a long time among North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies. General de Gaulle, although obsessed with independence from Washington, unhesitatingly supported the United States in the Cuban crisis of 1963. When the U.S. ambassador in Paris brought documents proving Soviet missile installations on the island to his office at the Elysée Palace, General de Gaulle declined to examine them, replying, "The word of the President of the United States is sufficient for me." Such levels of trust are more common than one might think in international relations.

The outbreak of hostilities brought other, equally valuable lessons.

3. Ukraine's resistance, a good sign for "justice"?

Despite all the means deployed in the offensive; Ukraine was not crushed. Ukraine was able to avoid an early quick capture of Kiev and other cities, before initiating a broader response of its own. It inflicted heavy losses on Russian forces (20% of whom were reported put out of action in the first month of hostilities), even before receiving the bulk of Western weapon deliveries.

2. This is not to say that an equal signal should be drawn between George Bush and Putin. Removing Saddam Hussein from power, the executioner of a part of his people and a proven war criminal, was probably a geopolitical error and a mistake. But it is not an act of the same nature as wanting to oust Volodymyr Zelensky, a popular personality and elected leader, to take over his country.

The resistance showed a greater readiness of Ukrainian forces than had been expected. Above all however, it reflected popular support for the leadership. Authorities did not shy away from arming the population. Many Ukrainian expatriates of combat age went back to the homeland to fight.

Heavy weapons alone are not enough to conquer cities. In case of urban guerrilla warfare, populations play a decisive role. The same goes for territorial occupation.

“Let’s ensure that what is right is strong,” Pascal said. This is true to some extent in this case: The right of peoples to self-determination carries a force within it. Popular sentiment functions as a power equalizer that enables Ukraine to stand-up to its aggressor.

President Zelensky brilliantly played this card, rallying his fellow citizens, making sure essential services continued in the country and... winning the international “communication battle”.

In this way, power relationships, including military ones, are not necessarily disconnected from principles.

4. Civilian attacks, imperishable marks

As early as the time of Thucydides, it was understood that the deliberate killing of innocent civilians is not part of acceptable warfare. Humanitarian law therefore rests on ancient foundations. While it is too early to assess the extent of humanitarian abuses of the Russian army, it is clear that perfectly preventable crimes took place.

49 hospitals were shelled in the first month of conflict. The killing of unarmed people and the obstruction of humanitarian corridors created the sense that Russia’s army was taking revenge for its failures on civilian populations. Events like these remain etched in people’s memories.

Politically, they undo past efforts to build Russian soft power. Their cost will be high and protracted.

5. NATO military aid to Ukraine, putting the debate into context

In accordance with Cold War-era conduct, NATO did not send troops to Ukraine, as this would have made them co-belligerents. The risk of escalation are too great with two global nuclear powers (or alliances) in direct confrontation. Ukraine received indirect Western military assistance: training, weapons supplies, intelligence sharing, etc.

Ukrainian leaders lobbied NATO countries, sometimes criticizing the inadequacy of aid, to gain as much support as possible. They played their part. A few outside observers went further, claiming that Western restraint was morally indefensible. This is where another distinction should be made; the one Max Weber made between ethics of conviction and ethics of responsibility.

Ethics of conviction are placed in the absolute, while ethics of responsibility are inscribed in reality. It does not forego morality, but evaluates actions according to practical results: for instance, would it really be “moral” to risk a nuclear war? Would destroying humanity to save Ukraine save Ukraine?... Such questions call for seeking other avenues of action.

As wars of national liberation demonstrate, direct foreign intervention is not always essential to victory. Foreign intervention alongside national authorities, on the other hand, can complicate getting the endorsement of populations.

If populations are determined to defend their country, indirect aid is effective. An example of this is the destruction of hundreds of Russian tanks at the beginning of the war, using portable missiles supplied to Ukraine by friendly countries.

III. CONFLICT EFFECTS: THE KNOWN AND THE UNKNOWN

Beyond military considerations, the onset of hostilities carries political consequences. Some of these are visible already, and do not favor Moscow.

1. Immediate geopolitical consequences that speak for themselves

In just a few days, the conflict produced three unanticipated and partly irreversible political effects for Moscow:

First effect: Spectacular affirmation of the Ukrainian nation

Moscow's denial of Ukraine as a nation was met with scathing response: Almost unanimous hostility to the invaders confirming the decision made in 1991 (84% participation and 92% yes in the referendum on Ukraine's independence from Russia). Attacks on civilian targets and atrocities only render popular sentiment irreversible.

Second effect: Accelerating transition towards a political Europe

Moscow counted on the division of Europeans. They reacted almost unanimously. A number of political novelties occurred, including the involvement of the European Commission in the politico-military debate, the purchase of arms for Ukraine out of the European budget, and the historic increase in Germany's military budget. Not only are these advances, but taboos removed on the march towards a political Europe. The latter could thus experience a ratchet effect and lasting progress.

It is yet early to speak of irreversibility in the unity of the 27. Robustness of the consensus remains to be verified. Hungary, for instance, gave out signals to Moscow in agreeing to pay for Russian gas purchases in rubles (on 6 April 2022, a matter not yet covered by European Council decisions). Yet, immediately afterwards, the European Council approved new sanctions on Russia (on 7 April 2022).

Third effect not anticipated by Moscow: Restoring the transatlantic link

Along with strong US support for Ukraine, comes intense EU-US cooperation and a rather balanced EU-US relationship. The Europeans managed to consolidate their political union without tensions within NATO. Of course, there is no guarantee this strengthening will be permanent. Two factors however, seem durable: US desire to reassert its standing as a superpower (against the backdrop of withdrawal from Afghanistan and systemic rivalry with China) and the European defense drive (greater effort towards better NATO burden-sharing, a traditional Washington demand).

2/ What long-term global geopolitical implications?

Impact on global geopolitical balances is a product of opposing forces, rendering any assessment difficult. Abstentions by major countries in the vote on the Ukraine resolution leaves future positions undefined.

Western cohesion and its impact on third countries

The new-found NATO bond could become a pole of attraction... or, conversely, a source of concern for third parties.

Janan Ganesh argues that, thanks to Putin, the United States is again able to wield the leverage it had during the Cold War: namely, the repulsive effect of the opposing camp. The authoritarian regime in Beijing would also be part of this.

Yet the balance has shifted. China's success means the West no longer has the monopoly on prosperity it did during the Cold War. Furthermore, globalization made people more critical of free trade, and even of freedom itself.

The West should not only be true to its own values but also seek to make these values more attractive.

The Russia-China alliance and non-aligned countries tested by the war in Ukraine

At the Beijing Winter Olympics, before the conflict, Russia and China pledged unlimited friendship. Both huge neighbors share a common dissatisfaction with the current world order. Both intend to resist Western pressure for greater freedom of expression.

China is systemically at odds with the United States, and stands to gain from Russia's lands and raw materials.

Russia's isolation since the war can only drive it towards Beijing, which is not upset to see its neighbor needing it.

China, however, is a trading country, and fears Putin's logic of confrontation. The excesses of Russia's leader make him an embarrassing ally.

What is true for China, a systemic rival of the United States and the West, could also be true for countries that fear China, including India.

Delhi has moved closer to Washington in recent years, notably with the 2020 creation of Quad, along with Japan and Australia. Despite its authoritarian tendencies and recent identity drift by the Modi government, India has long prided itself on a democratic and pluralist culture. It cannot simultaneously play this card and ostensibly ally itself with Putin.

IV. ECONOMIC SANCTIONS, A DIFFERENT DEBATE

The day after the offensive, the United States and the European Union (EU) quickly imposed economic sanctions on Russia, including trade embargo on specific purchases, blocking access of Russian banks to the Swift system, freezing of foreign reserves, measures against oligarchs and people close to Putin, etc. These measures were subsequently progressively tightened.

These measures aim to punish and dissuade rather than alter military balance in the short term. They are political in logic: Weaken, perhaps suffocate a target country economically, sanction the entourage of the regime, and confront populations with the drawbacks of war.

Economic sanctions are age-old. Some present-day sanctions are nonetheless unique (freezing foreign exchange reserves), and others most likely will have consequences on the West itself (renouncing Russian

gas). Sanctions were often used as a complement to war in the past. In our case, they serve in part as a substitute for a West unwilling to confront Russia militarily.

1. Preliminary question: Cost of sanctions for those who impose them...

Sanctions carry a cost for the West, and some consider them absurd. They are mistaken: Steadfastness has a cost. To accept no sacrifice is to give up on action. And economic costs are more palatable than human casualties (including moral ones...).

Proportion is everything. Is the self-inflicted damage sustainable and accepted by the population? Is it warranted by the harm inflicted on the other party?

Gas is specific in that transporting it requires long-to-build infrastructure (pipe-lines and/or liquefied gas terminals). Supplier-customer relations are rigid and switching partners is complicated for both sides. Europe is relatively dependent on Russian gas, and renouncing it is a real test. Sacrifices on one hand. Against, a way to prove its determination on the other.

2. Consequences of sanctions on target country

Sanctions are best aimed at the elite and at diminishing a country's potential. Often, however, they also cause hardship for civilian populations, the assumption being that they, in turn will place pressure on the government. The practice is at times criticized.

Whatever criticism should then be put into perspective, since sanctions, again, are a substitute for warfare: deprivation suffered by civilians must be balanced against the threat to human life arising from military operations.

Target countries seek to avoid the sanctioning partner, thereby diminishing the latter's future ability to exert pressure. This is facilitated by the non-universality of the sanctions: except for a few particularly loyal allies of the West (Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, etc.), most so-called "southern" countries declined to implement them, including India and Brazil, who see the sanctions as an expression of Western economic, financial and technological domination.

In the case of gas, switching clients is slow and difficult because of cumbersome infrastructure. In the case of oil, parties are replaceable, as was the case for China and India buying hydrocarbons from Russia. Which purchases were made at heavy discount, further damaging to Russia.

So, on one hand, sanctions on Russia seem to be already "biting", while on the other, medium-term consequences remain unclear. This is a test of Western clout and influence.

And lastly, for those who impose them, sanctions in the tug-of-war with Russia indicate reduced recourse to military action. We shall therefore refrain from passing definitive moral judgement.

V. OFFERING RUSSIA AN ACCEPTABLE ORDER: DUTY OR UTOPIA?

Morality should not discount the rules of common sense. Among these, is the notion of peaceful coexistence, inseparable from peace. For peace to last, it must be acceptable to all. Russia is entitled to security. Its' specific geopolitical circumstances leave it anxious in this respect.

It is a huge country, wedged between the Arctic Ocean and continental borders; geography historically complicated its access to ice-free waters. Much of its territory is unsuitable for agriculture, even uninhabitable because of the climate. Moscow, the capital, and many of its' major cities lie close to the territory's Western boundary, with little buffer. Russians remember Napoleon's 1812 campaign to seize their capital and the German invasion of 1941, stopping a few kilometers short of Moscow.

Geopoliticians have known this for a while. So how do we deal with it, if only for the sake of ethics of responsibility?

The West is blamed for awakening Russia's anxieties after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Broadly, three Western initiatives aroused strong reaction from Moscow:

- NATO operations in Yugoslavia with no UN mandate. This was certainly done to halt the massacres. Russia, however, sees it as a breach on its' prerogatives as a permanent Security Council member, and therefore a challenge to its' role as a world power. This prompted Russia to reassert this role in 1999 with the "Primakov doctrine", for a Foreign Minister and subsequently Prime Minister of Russia;
- NATO's geographic expansion, initially effectively to countries of Central Europe and the Balkans, and then virtually, via US statements supporting memberships for Georgia and Ukraine (2008), statements admittedly subsequently countered by European positions, but nonetheless deemed worrisome by Moscow;
- European Union overtures towards Ukraine's accession, along with the country's growing interest in its' western neighbors and declining interest in Russia, not only economically, but also in terms of values and implementation of the rule of law.

Vladimir Putin clearly raised these concerns in the days leading up to Russia's offensive. Unlike other arguments used by Moscow, these, as we have seen, are not fabricated.

How do you deal with them? This is extremely sensitive, for three reasons:

1. Anxiety and concern are in essence subjective. Individuals who profess to feel them can invoke and magnify them at will. Hence, such perceptions cannot justify the use of force;
2. Russia's actions do not inspire goodwill in interlocutors. From the bombing of Grozny (Chechnya) in 1999, Europe finds itself in a conundrum: To be conciliatory towards a power that acts brutally is to show weakness. The West is caught in a contradiction, with little or no way out. Certainly, the idea of Ukraine joining NATO could have been avoided in 2008. But isn't threatening countries the most effective way to push them into alliances? In retrospect, Russia's attitude justifies the NATO membership of Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Baltic States: these countries shudder at the idea they might not have enjoyed such US backing in 2022;
3. Russia's greatest weaknesses come from within, namely in its authoritarian regime and its economic failures. The Russian Empire collapsed twice in the 20th century: in 1917 with the overthrow of the Tsars and in 1991 with the fall of the Soviet Union. Both shocks came from within.

The West never showed any real inclination to attack Russia. Admittedly, it could have done a better job supporting Russia in its attempt to build a market economy in the 1990s. But responsibilities are not to be confused: The responsibility for this lies first and foremost with the Russians themselves. The absence of the rule of law and good governance proved insurmountable obstacles.

The West also believed in change through trade. "Sweet trade" theories date back to the 18th century. Both Kant and Montesquieu insisted on the non-violent enrichment trade enables, in which they saw an

incentive to peaceful morals. When states trade with each other, they have plenty to lose in conflict. The cost of war between them therefore becomes higher. This argument, however, assumes partner are acting rationally.

Germany used the notion of change through trade (*Wandel durch Handel*) to justify the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project, locking-in heavy investments and the prospect of dependency on Russian gas. Political disillusion is cruel, and the huge investment most likely will come to naught. In his book "*Le commerce et la force*" (op. cit.), Maxence Brischoux suggests revisiting the trade-politics relationship. He argues the Ancients (Socrates, Plato...) distrusted the political effects of trade: the inequality and greed it fosters undermines the very virtues essential to the Republic. The book shows that commerce was always based on political order, even among so-called "maritime" powers (ancient Athens, 19th century England, the United States after 1945...).

This is all the truer for "continental" powers, Russia being as a prime example of the such: trade reinforces an authoritarian and neo-imperialist state, which in all cases is stays at the center of the game.

Primarily built on raw materials, trade here is based on pre-existing, non-renewable resources, primarily fossil fuels. The model favors the hoarding of wealth by a select few. It does not drive genuine development of productive capacity and human capital. Hence, Russia's economic and social failures.

Failures by the regime create a deeper political problem as they trigger an inner angst: if independent former USSR members succeed, Russia's own cohesion may be threatened.

Should Ukraine give up its development just because it worries Moscow?

CONCLUSION

Ukraine's resistance is the conflict's first moral lesson. The people's determination for independence made a difference. The resistance proves the idea of the right of peoples to self-determination holds in itself its' own strength. Hence, justice is not always doomed to failure.

Conversely, the aggressor's cynicism produced weakness as it led to overlooking a number of human factors: The motivation of Ukrainian forces, the lack of motivation of Russian soldiers and the public's reaction.

The right of peoples is itself attached to other notions, notably sovereignty and territorial integrity of States. Violating these notions comes at a high cost for Russia: opprobrium. No one knows how long the stigma will last, or what consequences it will have on the future of the regime. Most observers believe the episode likely to deter other powers tempted by similar endeavors elsewhere on the planet.

The resilience of democracy is another lesson of the war.

Jean-Marie Guéhenno analyzes the crisis of democracy starting in the late twentieth century. Recently, he finds it draws two types of criticism: geopoliticians fearing democracies are militarily weak, and populists judging democracies too open to the outside world, sometimes to the point of praising the sovereignty of authoritarian regimes.

The war in Ukraine put democratic fundamentals back at the center of the debate, putting forces in Western Europe who saw fit to display political proximity to Russia's regime on the defensive and revealing Ukraine's surprising internal cohesion around its president. This unity contrasts with the inconsistencies and failures observed in the Russian camp, which is particularly vertical and authoritarian.

The often-observed association between autocratic regimes and bellicose attitudes is illustrated in the

authoritarian and adventurist drift of Russia's regime. No democracy is perfect. But a country whose leaders are accountable is, with few exceptions, more likely to have peaceful and human rights-conscious foreign policies.

However, setting morality on realistic footing means not reducing it to mere notarial judgment, simply keeping score. We should also do everything possible to broaden its scope, supporting countries under attack and tenaciously denouncing aggressors.

Finally, the best way to serve morality is to act in exemplary fashion.

As the transatlantic bond enjoys renewed vigor, the West should look inward. Among other things, it needs to fulfill two fundamental prerequisites:

- truth cannot be divided and recourse to manipulation should be seen as a violation of multilateral values, wherever it comes from;
- selective emotion is inadmissible, all human lives have the same value.

Truth is the first pillar of justice. However, truth should not be dictated by a limited circle of countries. In practical terms, the place of journalists and experts from Africa, Latin America and Asia in media commentary and analysis of international realities is a condition for shared truths in the future.

Similarly, international solidarity is not divisible. The sensitivity of opinion should extend to all continents. The collective capacity to bring help to populations should be replicated for all types of disasters: war, famine, drought, insecurity, accidents...

The corollary to this collective capacity should be the full responsibility of national authorities in all countries. Those authorities ought to be able to count on continental solidarity, which implies appropriate institutions on all continents, failing which some countries would be on unequal footing.

It is only on these terms that common values can be affirmed and give rise to universal morality.
Dominique Bocquet, PCNS Senior Fellow

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Morality and politics in international relations

- Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, Athens, end of the 5th century BC
- Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, Paris, 1669.
- Max Weber, *The Scholar and the Politician*, Lectures delivered in 1919 (available in German, English and French).
- Raymond Aron, *Paix et guerre entre les nations*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1962.
- Monique Canto-Sperber, *La morale du monde*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 2010.
- Jean-Marie Guéhenno, *La fin de la démocratie*, Paris, Flammarion, 1995.
- Jean-Marie Guéhenno, *Notre Premier XXIème siècle, De la globalisation à l'émiettement du monde*, Paris, Flammarion, 2021.

2. Trade, peace and force

- Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois*, Geneva, 1748.
- Emmanuel Kant, *Towards Perpetual Peace*, Königsberg, 1795.
- Maxence Brischoux, *Le commerce et la force*, Calmann-Lévy, Paris, 2021.

3. Ukrainian conflict

- "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians", Vladimir Putin, 12 July 21), Article by Vladimir Putin "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians" - President of Russia ([kremlin.ru](https://www.kremlin.ru))
- - Russia-Ukraine between melial dialogue and UN impotence, Jamal Machrouh, Opinion, PCNS, March 2022 <https://www.policycenter.ma/publications/russieukraine-entre-dialogue-melien-et-impuissance-onusienne>
- - The war between Russia and Ukraine: a turning point and a fatal blow for multilateralism, Mohammed Loulichki, Policy Brief, PCNS, March 2022 <https://www.policycenter.ma/publications/la-guerre-entre-la-russie-et-lukraine-un-tournant-et-un-coup-fatal-pour-le>
- - Janan Ganesh, The US will be the ultimate winner of Ukraine's crisis, Financial Times, 5 April 2022 <https://on.ft.com/3KdFsPw>

4. Russian history and Ukrainian history

- Michel Eltchaninoff, *Dans la tête de Vladimir Poutine*, Paris, Actes Sud, 2022.
- Serhii Plokyh (2016), *The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine*, London, Penguin Press, 2021. Lorrain Pierre, *L'Ukraine, une histoire entre deux destinins*, Paris, Editions Bartillat, 2019.
- Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime* (New York, Scribner's, 1974; Penguin ed., 1977; Ebook, 2015).

About the Author Dominique Bocquet

Dominique Bocquet is a graduate of Sciences-Po, a graduate of history and a former student of ENA. He is a member of the Editorial Board of the French Review Commentaire and Knight of the Legion of Honor. He lectures at Sciences Po and the ENA and is active in several European think tanks.

He is the author of several books and reports, including "Génération Europe" (Editions François Bourin, 1989), in collaboration with Philippe Delleur; "France and Germany, a couple running out of ideas" (Notes from the Saint-Simon Foundation, 1996); "What economic efficiency for Lomé?" (Report for the Minister of Economy, Finance and Industry, June 1998) "Bringing the EDF into the EU's Budget, a step forward in modernizing aid" (Report for the Minister for the Economy, Finance and Industry, July 2003). He also published a book on OECD, Reasoned Globalization, The Discreet Revolutions of OECD (La Documentation française, Paris, 2012).

Policy Center for the New South

Building C, Suncity Complex, Al Bortokal Street, Hay Riad 10100 - Rabat.

Email : contact@policycenter.ma

Phone : +212 (0) 537 54 04 04 / Fax : +212 (0) 537 71 31 54

Website : www.policycenter.ma



THINK • STIMULATE • BRIDGE