



Globalization Weaponized, Dominance Fragmented, World Stability Ruptured

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Abstract

The current Russia-Ukraine military conflict reveals how the laws established by the United Nations to guide “war behavior” need to be realistically reconsidered in light of the changes since WWII that now characterize military conflicts. Today dominant nations circumvent rules of engagement by resorting to new tactics. It also unmask a prevalent “global dominance by the West” favoring marketplaces for military weapons disguised in humanitarian rhetoric which reveals hypocrisy and double standards. This is reminiscent of how the COVID-19 pandemic has unmasked existing racial and economic inequalities especially in the prosperous West. But whereas the Pandemic was well managed by the United Nations, filtering down to local populations, demonstrating the strength of a globalized, inter-connected world, the current Russia-Ukraine conflict weaponized globalization when it dismantled economic linkages. Also the Pandemic has led to the creation of a vaccine against the virus, whereas the Russia-Ukraine war is yet to lead to a “vaccine”, as it were, against the use of military warfare as a solution to global issues of insecurity. This article suggests possibilities that might lead to a better path for humankind.

The Russia-Ukraine series of military confrontations and counter confrontations in a conflict over Ukrainian sovereignty felt like a bombshell (as it were), violently thrusting the world into a shock that rocked the ‘world order’ to the core. Notably, the humanitarian dimension (loss of civilian life and ensuing flood of refugees fleeing the conflict area) attracted the most attention in the media. In this humanitarian context, I invoke a few lines written by the late Palestinian Poet Mahmoud Darwish:

*The war will end.
The leaders will shake hands.
The old woman will keep waiting for her martyred son.
That girl will wait for her beloved husband.
And those children will wait for their hero father.
I don't know who sold our homeland
But I saw who paid the price.*

– **Mahmoud Darwish**¹

1. Back to Back: From the COVID Pandemic to War Panic

This article addresses the underlying processes leading to and resulting from the conflict over Ukraine between the Russian Federation and the United States of America (along with its partner, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)). The military encroachment of Russia onto its border-neighbor Ukraine was met with direct and indirect military activity by NATO and the United States. First, it is contended that there is a remarkable similarity at some level between this tumultuous event (the Russia-Ukraine war) and the COVID-19 Pandemic. The world is just now (February 2022) emerging from under the weight of the turbulent two-year pandemic and its devastation on people's health, livelihood and social well-being, as well as its serious devastation to the world economy, wondering whether life can ever go 'back to normal' after the fear, loss of life, social isolation that ensued (El Guindi 2020; El Guindi 2020 (April 27)), when it finds itself violently thrust into a bigger shock that rocks the people and the world order to the core.

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Calls for a path alternative to war were made by academicians, scientists, scholars, and public intellectuals. Prominent among them, only as an example, is the famous quote by the late anthropologist Margaret Mead,² *“Our first and most pressing problem is how to do away with warfare as a method of solving conflicts ...”*. Another from the late prominent media icon Walter Cronkite, *“War itself is, of course, a form of madness. It’s hardly a civilized pursuit. It’s amazing how we spend so much time inventing devices to kill each other and so little time working on how to achieve peace.”*

2. Can Humans Carve an Alternative to War?

Clearly, the current intense efforts by nations and politicians to “solve” the current war problem, ranging from face-to-face negotiations between the two parties of direct confrontation, to telephone calls by world leaders, to appeals by the United Nations, to mediation efforts (such as those by NATO members who are not an involved party to the conflict, Turkey, and even indirect messages) suggest that in today's complex interlinked world efforts for cessation of military operations and suggesting compromises take place in parallel with the ongoing military conflict. Modern communication and United Nations' rules of engagement make it possible. Humanitarian corridors for the passage of civilians escaping the 'war zone', and neighboring countries to receive them made possible by UN coordination are also part of the character of current military confrontations. But voices grew, demonstrating that this war showed a double-standard in humanitarian empathy, and racism was revealed in rescue efforts for refugees pointing to an aspect of this war which

unmasked systemic biases by the West toward the East. Brown-skinned people in very similar, recent wars have not produced the same reaction, and blatant racism was explicitly expressed toward them, suggesting a justification of atrocities against peoples of darker skin is justified. It is interesting how the Pandemic had also unmasked similar patterns of systemic racism and inequalities based on skin color and economic status.

There is sufficient scientific evidence showing how humans have been resorting to violent conflict for millennia. These almost always were motivated by defense or plunder of food resources. Fortresses were built and walls divided groups. Weaker groups lost almost always. It is remarkable that the present Russia-Ukraine conflict is not just over security, but also over world dominance, marketing products of the military-industrial complex, dominating the world market of energy sources and its flow, and prominently using the globalized trade network and economic partnerships as weapons toward these ends. The ensuing food insecurity threatening people's lives around the world is not on the minds of nations trying to preserve their dominance. The term 'peace' in this context becomes elusive.

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Civilians are always the victims of any war, deliberately as in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and many other examples, or as unintentional consequence that is not given priority or consideration in this rush to plunder and dominate. The United States in its invasion of Iraq, used the vocabulary of ‘collateral damage’ for the loss of human life (El Guindi 1991a; El Guindi 1991b). The deep generational damage to human life occurred when depleted uranium was ‘dumped’ on Iraqi territory in such volume that today reports show deformities among newborn Iraqis are staggering, and were not even considered collateral damage. It was part of the mission of exporting democracy and freedom, to one of the most prosperous nations in the Arab World. But there is another damage receiving less attention, the damage to the cradle of ‘Civilization’ (by direct invitation of former US Secretary of State who led a commission to charge the United States with war crimes, to document the civilizational loss caused by the war. See El Guindi 1992).

Demonizing, threatening or enforcing sanctions, taking measure of economic strangling, or providing military or financial assistance to one of the warring parties is taking sides rather

than preventing war (for expounding on the dangers see the opinion article Hedges 2022 (March 15)). Transparent rules need to apply to the use, distribution and sale of arms and military weapons manufactured and owned by nation-states. Arming 'the other side' prevents negotiation aimed at ceasing hostilities. Intense campaigns of psychological deprecation, propaganda, demonization and other forms to diminish the other, are aimed to form camps (those with us and those against us) by galvanizing sentiment, instead of stabilizing relations.

“Is respect for national sovereignty a privilege granted only by the West for the West?”

3. Demonizing Russia

What has demonizing Saddam Hussein, Hafez El Asad, Mo'ammar Qaddafi and numerous Balkan leaders achieved? It is worth pondering over that mechanism deployed to invalidate or as in some of those cases to justify invasion of territories, breaking up regions and even eliminating leaders (under the regime change idea). Even if we leave out this element, let us consider whether this approach has successfully accomplished the contemplated goals. Moreover, is such action not considered a violation of sovereignty and hence against UN principles? Or is respect for national sovereignty a privilege granted only by the West for the West? Coverage of events pertaining to the current Russia-Ukraine uncovered a layer of racism and double-standards in comments on record that justify raising this as an issue.

A recently published opinion piece by Patrick Cockburn (Cockburn 2022 (March 15)) with the title “Demonizing Russia Risks Making Compromise Impossible, and Prolonging the War” brings up the point that in order to achieve compromise which is always the goal in military combat situations such as the present Russia-Ukraine conflict in which Russia has a number of demands from Ukraine, primarily, becoming a de-militarized, neutral country rather than seeking membership in NATO, and recognizing the independence of the Donbas (Donetsk-Luhansk) region on the eastern border, a border shared with Russia, as well as the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula (access to the Black Sea) as part of the Russian Federation. Negotiation between parties from the countries in the conflict is ongoing as I write (March 17, 2022) and prediction of its outcome is not possible. I am certain, though, that taking sides (by declarations or arming, even when for humanitarian purposes) or demonizing Russia (as the cause of all evil in the world) as is widely occurring, as Cockburn suggests, cannot be helpful for the process.

In 1945, the United Nations was established and its Charter was formulated as a framework of legal principles with rules of law to be followed by the international body of nations. Three of the principles of direct concern here are: 1) sovereign equality, 2) a duty to settle international disputes by peaceful means, and 3) a duty to refrain from the threat of or actual use of force against the territorial integrity or the political independence of any state. Yet, the United Nations has not been able to prevent use of force to settle disputes in the present conflict or the even more devastating aggression against Yugoslavia, Iraq, Libya, Syria and

more. Why? True, its Charter includes the statement that “The threat or use of force to resolve disputes is prohibited under Article 2 of the UN Charter”. But has it been able to act on such prohibitions? I think not. I suggest a few reasons: by granting dominant powers to veto UN resolutions or actions, it has nullified the principles calling for equal application of the law.

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By having a veto structure, the United Nations acknowledges the dominance of certain nations and control over the destiny of other nations. While the veto structure acts sometimes to balance possible biases, it simultaneously reaffirms the dominance structure and ironically leads to its own paralysis, the inability to enact its own rules. It is time to reconsider the veto structure itself and replacing it with a structure that acknowledges the equality of nations under UN law. This move would create a new approach that is built on trust instead of dominance among member nations.

Another point is that nations have now resorted to circumventions of the chartered principles, by avoiding direct military confrontations. Wars today take the form of ‘proxy’ combat, use of mercenaries and militias, contract military units, and volunteer fighters. Dominant nations also participate by providing military equipment indirectly into the war zone. This way the legal formulation is circumvented to achieve the same actions the law was established to prevent in the first place. It is possible that amendments to the Charter along these two suggestions would allow the United Nations to focus on the prevention of war rather than finding itself as a part of brokering for compromises after the damage has been done.

To metaphorically apply what has been learned as the world was faced with the rapidly transmissible virus COVID-19 and its mutations, expert knowledge must be deployed to determine the underlying conditions that lead to specific hostilities for use to prevent a clash before the damage is done. It should aim to deter hostile action, not deal with it as it escalates. Developing a “vaccine”, as it were, instead of minimizing the effect of the infection. This is the challenge that the United Nations and concerned Academies and think tanks must work on—not to negotiate ‘peace’ agreements after the damage is done, but finding ways to prevent it from happening in the first place. We do have the knowledge that would make this possible. What we do not have is the will of political leaders, particularly those running for office on a war agenda, but mostly by the dominant nations who are unable or unwilling to change from a dominance mode that serves their self-interest to a ‘working together’ mode for a stable and secure world.

The dominance hierarchy of nations needs to be dismantled in favor of a community of exchanging partnerships. Ironically, this war might have begun the process of dismantling the

dominance hierarchy of nations and the illusion of superiority of values held by Europe and the West. Values must be situated in different world traditions, not in terms set by Western historical formations.

4. The Rupture of World Stability & the Insecurity of Energy and Food

Ironically, while globalization processes are being weaponized in the conflict by the escalating destabilizing sanctions, which are threatening alliances that keep energy sources and essential foods flowing around the world (Mauss 1954 [1922]), they have been simultaneously demonstrating how entrenched these processes have become and how interlinked the planet earth is today whether by communication technologies and media platforms or dependence on the flow of energy and food among nations through partnerships and alliances. One act in one part of the globe shakes up fundamental parts in a distant part whether it is involved in the direct conflict or not. That is the key driving the engine of globalization. It is a key that ought not to be weaponized. Whether we agree with globalization or not, the world, as has also been shown during the Pandemic, is now vitally interconnected, and any senseless military confrontations can destroy humanity in many ways and damage what it has achieved so far. It is already a big loss that is being felt worldwide, not only in the interruption to our flow of sustenance resources, but also in the dislocation of innocent civilians, the extensive loss of lives, the growing distrust between East and West, and in some ways, very serious interruption to efforts for a sustainable drive toward a more livable planet. Instead of focusing on climate change (McDermot 2022 (March 4)) all attention now is on dealing with war and its shockwaves that perhaps are carving a path, not to prevent wars, but to de-globalize our world.

Anthropology has documented the genius of small-scale societies in historically dealing with preventing full-scale hostilities among groups. It goes back to the unique capacity of humans to form social groups, larger than limited dyadic units, and creating alliances among them by exchanges of trade and by linkages through marriage. Heads of tribes and small groups, just like royal marriages of Europe and the Middle East, have been getting married politically to women from a group other than their own to ensure ‘alliance’. The marriage between the former Shah of Iran and the former King of Egypt is well known. Today, the Emir of Qatar uses the privilege of the tradition of multiple wives by first marrying his cousin, in conformity with tradition, and then marrying women from other tribes in the nation. This in most times ensures a bonding that favors alliance over conflict. The choice of course remains with particularly dominant parties (or their leaders) in an exchange whether to use the alliance for hostilities or for peaceful relations.

The theory by the famous anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, known as “alliance theory” (Lévi- Strauss 1949), describes the universality of alliance through exchange systems of goods and services and through marriages across groups. This is not different from one major aspect of today’s globalization, global interlinkages among nation-states through the exchange of goods and services. This aspect, unfortunately, is threatened when armed conflict occurs, as is the situation today for the Russia-Ukraine war. Exchanges of energy sources, essential food, raw materials for industry are all destabilized. Interlinkages are used negatively in the conflict to penalize and take sides.

It is no contradiction to state that the United States had enjoyed being the only world power since the dismantling of the Soviet Union (Blum 2005). Nor has it been hidden that Russia has been re-emerging stronger and transformed since the break-up and is justifiably now seeking a place in the power equation. Why is this bad? There is no need for a self-serving clinging to a tired, over-militarized dominance structure. To quote former South African President, the late Nelson Mandela (1997), “How can they have the arrogance to dictate to us where we should go or which countries should be our friends? Gaddafi is my friend. He supported us when we were alone and when those who tried to prevent my visit here today were our enemies. They have no morals. We cannot accept that a state assumes the role of the world policeman”.

Unilateral dominance by military-driven power is when war becomes the only path to take to make room for ‘others’ in the world structure. Human cognition and creative capacity allow for imaginative and flexible solutions to problems. This is the most needed opportunity to apply such capacity. Drop the ego-centered, individual-focused, dominance-driven, or politically-motivated (such as running for office) world structure and adopt one of inclusivity. Instead of military coalitions claiming to be defending freedom and democracy, which are deployed by a dominant individual or regional powers such as NATO or AUKUS, what about a different paradigm that envisions a common destiny based on trade (El Guindi 2019) or a civilization-based national entity with non-invasive intentions, building a ring of exchanges of services and goods, equally established among nations? (El Guindi 2022) Such alternatives are worth trying. The only outcome would be a prosperous and secure world of sharing resources, services and protection of security. How can that be bad for the world?

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Notes

1. Darwish, Palestine's eminent poet is considered by Israel to be as "resistance poet". He was placed under house arrest when his poem "Identity Card" was turned into a protest song. He wrote that poem when he was just 24. He was pushed to live in exile and he shunted between Beirut and Paris for 26 years. Only in 1996, he was allowed to settle in Ramallah, a major city in the West Bank. In his lifetime, he published eight books of prose and 30 poetry collections. He also founded and edited *Al-Karmel*, a literary magazine in 1981. He died in 2008 in Houston, Texas following a prolonged illness. He published his first collection of poems, *Leaves of Olives*, in 1964, when he was 22.
2. Mead p. 351, *Telling it Like It Is*, https://www.google.com/books/edition/Telling_It_Like_It_Is/w8_p1eGVj8gC?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=date+of++%E2%80%9COur+first+and+most+pressing+problem+is+how+to+do+away+with+warfare+as+a+method+of+solving+conflicts+%E2%80%A6%E2%80%9D+Margaret+Mead&pg=PA351&printsec=frontcover
3. To quote former President George H. Bush (1992) "A world once divided into two armed camps now recognizes one sole and pre-eminent power, the United States of America ... the world trusts us with power ..."; and another quote from former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright (1999) "The United States is good. We try to do our best everywhere"; and another from former President Clinton (1996) "... I was determined that our country would go into the 21st century still the world's greatest force for peace and freedom, for democracy and security and prosperity". These quotes are published in Blum 2005.