

THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR AND THE EXPANSION OF ILLIBERAL STATES' INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

When Russia invaded Ukraine, the Western countries went all out against Russia and in support of Ukraine. Because the invasion was against the liberal global order. But Russia was not isolated worldwide. The majority of nations in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East disregarded Western sanctions against Russia and backed Ukraine. Furthermore, many of these nations distanced themselves from Western ideas of world order and maintained close political, economic, and (partially) military ties with Russia. This political alliance brought a divergent world order that is in Western and non-Western alignment. The main argument of this paper was that the war in Ukraine and the non-alignment of some countries with the Western countries provided the opportunity for illiberal states to penetrate with illiberal ideas, drive these ideas, and be completely independent from the Western block. Illiberal states expanded their institutions to all the divergent states. We situated this study within the realist school of thought. The study found that the BRICS (now BRICS+), the SCO, and the Eurasian Economic Union have all gained a new front since the war in 2022. Russia started gaining more sympathy and started moving on to the numerical and economic strength of these institutions to withstand the oil sanction from the West.

Introduction

The invasion of Ukraine by Russia on February 24, 2022, brought a huge turnaround to the world system. Brunk and Hakimi (2022) forecast that the war will reshape the world. One thing that the war awoke was the challenge from illiberal states seeking an alternative to the liberal international order. Thus, the illiberal states started to champion, through the expansion of illiberal states' institutions, a new world order. A move away from liberal democratic principles like freedom, individual rights, and the rule of law is referred to as illiberalism. Boyle (2016) asserts that there is mounting evidence that the world is experiencing a "resurgence of authoritarianism," with more nations reverting to authoritarian governance and other illiberal systems. Illiberal states are states that challenge the liberal international order, states as; Russia, China, India, Singapore, Turkey, and many others. When the UN nations sanctioned Russia, Russia was not completely isolated by the whole world's countries. The majority of nations in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East disregarded Western sanctions against Russia and backed Ukraine. Furthermore, many of these

nations distanced themselves from Western ideas of world order, maintained close political, economic, and (partially) military ties with Russia, and refrained from the UN General Assembly's condemnation of Russian aggression (Jacob 2022; Madhav 2022). According to Miliband (2023), the war in Ukraine united the West but divided the world. These allies with Russia intensified the importance of the expansion of the illiberal institutions, driving the ideas of these states, and completely cut off from Western institutions. This supports the reason for the expansion of these illiberal states' institutions.

The illiberal states aim to create a system that is more accepting of autocracy, spheres of influence, and regional blocs (Ikenberry, 2022). The system is reflected in the institutions formed by these illiberal states, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), BRICS, Union of South American Nations (USAN), and Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). These institutions are in contrast to the institutions of the world global order; which are, the United Nations (UN), North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), World Trade Organisation (WTO), and the European Union (EU) (Schirm, 2023). With these institutions, illiberal states have become key players in international organizations. The war in Ukraine gave the illiberal states a new way to propel their ideas and institutions to another level. The world is increasingly splitting into two opposed blocs, according to data collated by Cambridge University: inhabitants of more authoritarian countries, primarily in developing economies and the Global South, who support China and Russia, and liberal democracies that support the United States. Even though this gap was first discernible ten years ago, it has notably widened since Russia invaded Ukraine (Gottlies, 2023).

Many scholars have written extensively on the impact of the Russian- Ukraine war on the world's international system, coming from different angles. For example, Nowinska and Olesen (2025) in their study on inter-state war dynamics and investment, studied the impact of the Russian-Ukraine war on investment, according to the scholars, an increase in hostilities and the projected investment outlook may affect businesses' willingness to keep making investments in a nation involved in an interstate conflict. Yildirim and Onen (2023); Glauber and Laborde (2022); Hellenger (2022), Clapp (2022), and a few others studied the impact of the war on the food system. As captured by Yildirim and Onen (2023), the invasion's disruption of wheat shipments from Ukrainian ports to other countries increased prices and put the least developed countries most dependent on grain imports at risk of starvation. Scholars have also projected the impact of the war on the liberal international order. For instance, Brunk and Hakimi (2022) studied what the impact of the war will be on the future of world order. According to them, at the end of the war, the current world order will take a new shape, either to a great or small extent. What these scholars know was that the world will not be the same after the war, but Brunk and Hakimi did not inform us in what aspect the war will affect the world. Brunk and Hakimi were not alone in their projection; Therme (2022), Jang (2022), Lukyanov (2022), Chatterjee and Petrone

(2024), and a few others shared the same sentiment. We want to join the debate from the angle of the illiberal state's institutions. Outside, Schirm (2023) linked the Russian-Ukraine war to the domestic politics of the BRICS, but much has not been done to situate the Russian- Ukraine war with the expansion of the illiberal state's institutions, of which BRICS is only one. It is on this gap that we situate this present study. Thus, we raise the question: How does the Russo/Ukrainian war account for the expansion of the illiberal state's institutions?

The state of knowledge on the Russian-Ukraine war and its impacts on the expansion of illiberal states' institutions across the world

This review is explored under the following themes: The Russia- Ukraine and illiberal states' institutions

The Russia-Ukraine war

The Russian invasion of Ukraine came as a shock to the whole world. It is the recent war in Europe. It has recorded a devastating impact on not just Ukrainians but the world at large. Under this section, we will review relevant literature on two major variables of this study, viz, the Russian-Ukrainian war and illiberal states' Institutions. The commencement of the recent Ukrainian invasion by Russia took place on the twenty-fourth of February in the year 2022. Incidents of aggression carried out by Russian military units were documented in prominent urban centers throughout Ukraine, which encompassed Berdyansk, Chernihiv, Kharkiv, Odesa, Sumy, as well as the nation's capital, Kyiv. The confirmation of 10,582 civilian fatalities in Ukraine amid the conflict by Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) was recorded as of February 2024. The incursion emerged as the most extensive assault on a European nation post-World War II (Oksamutna, 2023). It is approximated to have resulted in tens of thousands of civilian casualties in Ukraine and hundreds of thousands of military casualties. As of June 2022, approximately 20% of Ukrainian land was under Russian military control. Out of a populace of 41 million in January 2022, around 8 million Ukrainians had been internally displaced, and over 8.2 million had sought refuge outside the nation by April 2023, leading to the most significant refugee crisis in Europe since World War II. Widespread environmental degradation triggered by the conflict, often termed as an ecocide, played a role in global food shortages.

Sonin (2024) is concerned that the war is reshaping the institutional landscape globally when it comes to the infrastructure of security around the world. Milberg and Lies (2024) contend that the authoritarianism which have become pervasive in recent times due to the war that erupted in Ukraine under the inspiration of Russia cannot be divorced from the interconnection between economics and politics. Heusala et al. (2024) are concerned that the war in Ukraine has heightened the phenomenon of undocumented migrants across the world, especially in Eastern Europe. Still, others, such as Fernandez et al. (2024), are interested in the collapse of the institutions of the

non-aligned movement, which was well cultivated during the Cold War period and has flourished in the post-Cold War era. As captured by Oksamytna (2023), the utilization of discourses promoting Russian supremacy and Ukrainian "inferiority" facilitated the Russian aggression against Ukraine. These discourses have been prevalent in Russia for centuries and have been recently emphasized by the Russian media. The narratives not only claimed that Ukrainians lacked ingenuity, civic-mindedness, and courage but also portrayed the nation as "fragmented" and "disordered." This led to the misguided belief that Ukraine would not be capable or willing to mount a strong resistance against the invasion. Consequently, the anticipation of Russia behaving as a modern, financially prudent power obscured the domestic support for its imperial aggression. The targeting of Ukrainians, seen as culturally akin to Russians but unjustly "favored" by the West, fueled the desire to violently re-establish the hierarchy. The absence of compassion hidden behind the "brotherhood" rhetoric, the Ukrainian resistance against Russian "saviorism," and the relatively decent living conditions in Ukraine all played a role in the brutality exhibited by the invading forces.

The war in Ukraine has so far reconfigured the nature of the international system and international politics. As most non-Western countries do not concur with the sanction imposed on Ukraine, this has brought a demarcation between the Western-led international liberal order and what Schirm (2023) termed the Southern World Order (SWO). In support of this, Miliband (2023) notes that the war in Ukraine only united the West but divided the world by deepening the gap between the West and non-Western states. According to Brunk and Hakimi (2022), who studied the impact of the Russian- Ukraine war on the future world order, the fundamental tenet of the post-World War II order—that international borders cannot be altered solely by force—is something that Russian President Vladimir Putin has made clear by invading Ukraine. Thus, Brunk and Hakimi thought that the Russian invasion of Ukraine was Putin's direct attack on the liberal order. According to scholars, when Putin intensified his rhetoric on Ukraine in the summer of 2021, he openly contested the current global order.

Although Brunk and Hakimi noted that after the war, a lot of change would happen in the world, the scholars did not point out those changes. One thing was made certain from the work of Brunk and Hakimi, and that thing was that the invasion of Ukraine was made for expansion. The interest of Brunk and Hakimi was the implication of the Ukraine invasion to the international law, especially the one on territorial integrity and sovereignty. Ike, Udumaga, and Osudibia (2024) aligned their study with that of Brunk and Halimi when they noted that the war was a direct violation of international law, especially on the loss of lives and assets. But that is not the concern of this paper.

In a similar study, Jang (2022), who studied the Russian Ukraine war and change in the international order, was also of the opinion that the war will bring a change to the present liberal order. According to the scholar, the current international

order, which has been established and functioning since the end of the Cold War, will undergo significant upheaval as a result of this war. This change, according to the scholar, will depend on the development and method of the ending of the war. What will drive the change is what Jang failed to identify. But in this study, we believe that the illiberal institutions will drive the change. Gottlieb (2023) studied Ukraine and the end of the 'New World Order'. The major argument of Gottlieb was that the present world order is leaking oil and that the West should find measures to address the ill-nature of the order by forming a new leadership style to make other parts of the world feel involved in the administration of the global order. To the scholar, the world needs a change, and if the West fails to take the initiative to introduce such change and allow Russia and another illiberal state to champion it, it will spell doom for the present world order, which, according to the scholars, has benefited the world at large. While Gottlieb was speaking in favor of the liberal order, he condemned the projection of Western interest over world interest.

According to Gottlieb, the expansion of liberal state institutions like the United Nations, North Atlantic Treaty Organisations, World Trade Organisations, and the European Union have redirected the focus of the liberal global order to Western things. According to the study, what the West, led by the U.S., sees as a world problem is a problem of the West; no wonder the majority of the world remains neutral in the continued war in Ukraine. Gottlieb studied some characteristics of the institutions of the LGO, neglecting the existence of other institutions operating in the world system. Gottlieb was also of the opinion that the war in Ukraine was a result of the style of global order led by the United States. Gottlieb was not alone in this. Tonlorenzi (2023), in the study of the Ukrainian Russian conflict, was also interested in finding how the global liberal order contributed to the conflict in Ukraine. According to Tonlorenzi, the conflict in Ukraine is a conflict between two ideologies. One is the liberal order, and the other is the realist ideology championed by the illiberal states. Tonlorenze declared himself a realist, and as such, he has identified fault in the American-led liberal order, just as Gottlieb did. According to the scholar, to determine the origins of the current conflict, we must look back at the shift from communism to capitalism. Tonlorenzi recounted how the attempt of NATO to enter the East stirred the conflict in Ukraine. The scholar did well in providing an ideological basis for the conflict in Ukraine from the historical point of view. But the study failed in addressing what the implication of the conflict entails for the present world order.

According to Verma and Brosig (2024), the war in Ukraine has led to the emergence of a second wave of non-alignment; the first was experienced during the Cold War. Verma and Brosig's study was on the Russia- Ukraine war, the evolving global order, the global south, and the emergence of non-alignment 2.0. Their study is a testament that the war in Ukraine has created two worlds. These scholars believe that the global south has not fully pitched their tent on any side, either to the western ideological spectrum or the non-western philosophical underpinnings. Although Verma

and Brosig captured that the non-alignment status of the global south was without any clear political direction, they believe that there is an advantage to even developing their institutions. As much as Verma and Brosig have indices to support their claim that the global south is non-aligned. We do not believe that all the countries of the Global South are non-aligned. Also, that Verma and Brosig identified that the non-alignment of the global south lacks political and economic path, shows that there is a big opportunity for the non-western states to penetrate with their institutions not the global south. For instance, in 2023, 6 emerging market group countries from the global south were invited to join the BRICS. How far these non-Western institutions could succeed is not known yet.

Illiberal States' Institutions

The emergence of illiberal states dates back to 1789. But gained tremendous momentum after the end of the Cold War. The new trend of illiberal states is championed by Russia and China. As captured by Polyakova, Tausing, Reinert, Kirisci, Sloat, Kirchck, Hooper, Eisen, and Keneaty (2019), authoritarian governments in China and Russia are becoming more confident. In a time of great power competition, the rise of so-called illiberal states within NATO and the EU poses a threat to Western collective action. The trend is being driven by Hungary, Poland, and Turkey, while Slovakia and the Czech Republic are showing warning indications. Given that these countries were formerly the shining examples of liberal democratic transition, the reversal in Central and Eastern Europe is especially startling.

Boyle (2016), on the other hand, paid attention to the emerging illiberal order around the world. The scholar observed that those sovereign states associated with illiberal tendencies are dissatisfied with the infrastructures of the liberal international order. As noted by the author, the foundations of the current international order are being challenged by an increasing number of emerging, frequently illiberal states that do not believe that a US-created order reflects their strength or aligns with their interests. As more nations revert toward authoritarian leadership and other types of illiberal governance, there is mounting evidence that the globe is experiencing a "resurgence of authoritarianism" (Boyle, 2016). Boyle was more interested in the idea of illiberal than in the institutions, this was not because there were no illiberal institutions during the time of the scholar, but because the expansion of these institutions is not made clear then, as it is today, the study also did not cover till the invasion of Ukraine by Russian.

In another likely study, Polyakona et al. (2019) studied the anatomy of illiberal states; they assessed and responded to the democratic decline in Turkey. The focus of these scholars was on how illiberalism was penetrating Europe and other NATO nations. For instance, since 2016, Turkey has been anti-democratic practices, thereby there have been calls to throw Turkey out of NATO. Thus, the concern of these scholars was on the impact of the expansion of illiberalism to the democratic world order. Polyakona and the others discussed extensively how leaders in some countries

easily switched from the liberal democracy that brought them to power to illiberal authoritarianism. The scholars did not mention the institutions responsible for this democratic decline. Thus, like Boyle, the study neglected the aspect that we are interested in, but the study was indeed a testament that there is an expansion of illiberal practices to Europe and other NATO-dominated territories.

A study very close to this study was the study by Schirm (2023) on alternative world order. Russian's Ukraine war and the domestic politics of the BRICS. The BRICS is one of the illiberal states' institutions, which we are interested in studying its expansion. The interest of Schirm was to study the emergence and growth of the divergent world order, which he termed the southern world order (SWO). According to the scholar, those non-western countries, although having different ideas, still interact with the western institutions, thereby having what the scholar termed dual-membership. The main concern of Schirm was to understudy the politics of some of the illiberal states that belong to the liberal institutions while forming alternatives. One thing Schirm succeeded in establishing is that the war in Ukraine has widened the gap between the western-led international liberal order and the illiberal states. More illiberal states seem to have emerged during this period. Schirm study was limited to three countries that are members of the BRICS. The scholar was not interested in the expansion of the illiberal institutions but rather the politics these countries play in aligning them with the West in certain aspects. Although Schirm recognised that there are alternative institutions, the study was limited only to BRICS, thereby creating the gap for further studies like this present study.

Methodology

This study adopted the qualitative research methodology. The qualitative method, according to Peter (2018), is a set of non-statistical inquiry techniques and processes used to gather data about social phenomena. The uses for these data go beyond simple description of events and phenomena; rather, they are used for creating understanding for subjective interpretation and for critical analysis as well. Researchers who deploy this method rely largely on descriptive accounts of the reality of the study (Sodaro, 2008). In this study, most of the data relied upon for the analyses is extracted from policy briefs on liberal international order, journal articles, online articles, and online news. Content analysis was used to analyse the data collected. This means that we followed logical induction to analyse the information generated, as Asika (2006) noted that content analysis deals with summarizing the information generated in the research verbally. The aim was not just to understand the manifest but also the latent content of the data.

Theorizing the Russia-Ukrainian War and Expansionism through the Lens of Realism

This study is anchored on the theory of realism as a framework of analysis. Realism is one of the three core theories and approaches to the study of international relations

which have dominated scholarship and divided humanity over the past century of human existence, the others being Liberalism and Marxism (Gilpin, 1985:25). Realism is the philosophy of "Is" instead of the philosophy of "ought to be ". It deals with what exists instead of what should exist. It operates in the realm of empirically verifiable issues and corresponds to the standard of positivism instead of rationalism. When applied to the study of politics, realism is sometimes called *realpolitik*, which connotes dealing with the world the way it is instead of seeking in vain to change it to suit any utopian or impossible dream. When applied to international relations, states must base their conduct in dealing with other nations on facts instead of fiction (Igwe, 2003).

Realism is synonymous with the power theory and the genealogy of its exponents is traceable to the classical works of Nicolo Machiavelli (1513), Thomas Hobbes (1651), Nicholas Spykman (1942), E H Carr (1946), Hans Morgenthau (1967), Kenneth Waltz (1959), (1979), Raymond Aaron (1984), George Kennan (2007), Onuoha (2008) and a host of others that made a befitting contribution to the refinement of the theory of realism. According to them, power is inherent in every interaction and process that exists within a given system. Therefore, the realist paradigm is associated with three interrelated arguments: (i) They insist that the major actor in international politics is the state. Other perspectives contend that analysis of international relations should encompass other relevant factors such as non-state actors. (ii) They argued that the international system is anarchical. Therefore, they believe that it is dominated by sovereign states, each of which is not beholden to a higher authority. Thus, the realist maintained that there is little if any, international society can do, hence the survival of any state depends on the amount of power it wields. Power is therefore perceived as both a means and an end itself. (iv) The realists believe that since international relations among nation-states are played in an anarchical environment where every nation is competing for survival, nations' survival is dependent on the power they wield, therefore, nations are encouraged to pursue it at all costs. Although there are many variations of realism, all of them make use of the core concepts of national interest and the power struggle.

According to realism, states exist within an anarchic international system in which they are ultimately dependent on their capabilities, or power, to further their national interests. It accepts conditions as they are and defines the ends and means of policy by the measure of anticipated gains, cost, and chances of success. The realist supports the presence of Institutions like the BRICS, USAN, SCO, etc, although, to the realist, states are the major international actors. First of all, illiberal states felt like they were not bound by any law to join the liberal democrats, as they argued that it serves only the interest of the West. The illiberal states also argued that they have their own right to propagate their own non-liberal ideas, and in so doing, they formed their own institutions to drive these ideas. Even before the invasion of Ukraine, Analysts and observers generally concur that Russia aims to subvert the liberal international order headed by the United States. However, there was a great deal of debate over the

character and scope of Moscow's challenge, the fundamental causes of Russian revisionism, and the appropriate course of action for the West (Gotz & Merlen, 2019). According to Gotz and Merlen (2019) The Russian leadership has vocally and often voiced its displeasure with the current international order, which is led by the United States. Russian and her allies has noted that there should not be anything like unipolar world system, that every country should be viewed based on its sovereignty.

Discussion

The incursion into Ukraine highlights the fragility of the US-led Pax Americana over European nations, alongside Russia's dominance in the area. When Russia initiated a large-scale war of aggression against Ukraine in February 2022, one of the many worries raised by analysts was the failure of Western deterrence (Drezner, 2022). Brunk and Hakimi (2022) argued that Russia's invasion of Ukraine was part of a strategy to weaken the American-led global order. They noted that in a speech at the Munich Conference on Security Policy in 2007, Putin hinted at his desire to dismantle the existing system. He stated his belief that "we had reached a crucial moment where we needed to carefully consider the framework of global security." Brunk and Hakimi pointed out that Putin's critique was directed at the United States and NATO, asserting that NATO "has exceeded its national boundaries in every respect" and sought to create a "unipolar world" with "one center of authority, one center of power, one center of decision-making." "No one feels secure in this world order." According to Brunk and Hakimi (2022), Russia's invasion of Ukraine was an expansionist move; Putin believed that Ukraine could not be allowed full sovereignty, as it would pose a threat to Russia through its alignment with the West. Shiffrinson (2022) predicted that Moscow would simply expand its objectives, test the resolve of the United States' NATO partners, and ultimately jeopardize European security if it was not challenged in Ukraine. In this article, we contend that the Russian invasion of Ukraine has facilitated the growth of illiberal state institutions in non-Western countries that are not overtly opposed to Russia.

Need for Expansion

One might ask if there is a need for the expansion of these illiberal state institutions. The answer is in the affirmative. This is because the war in Ukraine brought about divergent countries who do not completely align themselves with the West, especially concerning the sanction on Russia. These non-Western countries are still forced to interact with Western countries because they do not have their own institutions, which can help them interact politically and economically. In this regard, Schirm (2023) poignantly posited that those nations still have close ties to the West today. These relationships include dual participation in the non-Western and Western-dominated organizations that make up the two global orders, as well as strong political and economic ties with Western nations. To give these non-Western states a sense of belonging, it behooves Russia and its allies to expand their institutions to these states.

Expansion of BRICS

BRICS stands for Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. They were the five countries that formed the group in 2009 (Although South Africa joined in 2010). The idea behind BRICS (now BRICS+) was that international organizations were no longer helpful to emerging nations and were too heavily dominated by Western nations (Ferragamo, 2024). According to analysts, Russian President Vladimir Putin's increasing ambition to establish a counterbalance to the West was the driving force behind Russia's first call for a meeting of the BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, China, and India). In 2009, Russia held the first official BRIC summit, and a year later, South Africa accepted China's request to join, creating the five-nation alliance that would last for almost ten years (Ferragamo, 2024; Curtis, 2024).

The BRICS+ nations, according to Ferragamos (2024), aim to create a counterbalance to the Western perspective that they perceive as predominating in important international organizations, including the UN Security Council, the Group of Seven (G7), and the World Bank. This was supported by Patrick (2024), who captured that Important rising players believe that the Western-dominated, rules-based international order, and especially the system of global economic governance, is both skewed against their interests and fundamentally out of date. This belief is reflected in the creation of BRICS (and now BRICS+). With half of the world's population, 40% of its trade, and 40% of its crude oil production and exports, BRICS+ appears to be a powerful economic bloc. By establishing a parallel energy trading system, strengthening member-to-member commercial ties, developing an alternative development finance system, decreasing reliance on the dollar in foreign exchange transactions, and expanding technology cooperation in various fields, the coalition can use its influence to both demand and implement a more equitable international order (Patrick, 2024). Building on its aim to establish a counterbalance to Western power in international institutions, the BRICS group has grown into a significant political force over the past 20 years (Ferragamo, 2024). The sanctions on oil and other needs, according to some commentators, are bringing the BRICS nations closer together. BRICS+ provided Russia with the best friendship and partnership within this period. Schirm (2023) asserts that the BRICS+ nations' stance on the Russian war in Ukraine is different from that of the West. India abstained at the UN and continued to import more oil and a significant portion of its weapons from Russia; South Africa also abstained at the UN, denounced Western sanctions against Russia, and held naval drills with Russia and the PRC in February 2023; China abstained at the UN and emphasized its friendship and close economic ties with Russia; and Brazil denounced Russia's war at the UN but emphasized its strong economic ties with Moscow (Smith 2023).

In fact, since the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, BRICS+ appeared to have a more anti-Western dimension. Russia seems to have more and stronger support from BRICS against U.S.-led Western ideas and order. For instance, in their 2023 summit, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the president of Brazil, led the call to create a new currency

for the BRICS. Using a combined basket of BRICS currencies or creating a new cryptocurrency were two further monetary proposals presented at the 2023 summit (Ferragamos, 2024). Although Skeptics claim that the union's attempts to establish its currency and provide a viable substitute for current institutions face possibly insurmountable obstacles, some analysts warn that the bloc could threaten the Western-led world order (Ferragamos, 2024). As captured by Patrick (2024), challenging the dollar's role and attempting to lessen U.S. influence over the global economy, the BRICS coalition has intensified its anti-Western hegemony efforts.

Another domain where BRICS+ has gained significance is in its membership; between 2023 and 2024, the coalition expanded from 5 to 10 members, with more still on the horizon. In 2024, Putin extended invitations to over a dozen additional countries that have either applied for or are contemplating joining BRICS (Patrick, 2024). Six new nations—Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)—were welcomed to the 2023 BRICS summit, signaling a new phase of expansion. Ferragamos (2024) noted that all invited countries accepted the invitation, except for Argentina, whose newly elected president, Javier Milei, has vowed to align the country with the West and stated it would not "form alliances with communists." Although Saudi Arabia reportedly accepted the invitation, it has delayed its formal entry without offering a clear explanation. Putin asserts that 34 countries have shown interest in joining the group "in one way or another." Among the approximately two dozen nations that have seemingly submitted membership applications are Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Kazakhstan, Myanmar, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, Thailand, Venezuela, and Vietnam. There could be additional candidates in the pipeline, including Indonesia, which applied a decade ago but later withdrew its request. Turkey, a NATO member seeking to keep its options open, is the latest contender. In other words, the group appears poised for further expansion (Patrick, 2024). As per Ferragamos (2024), the growth of the group in 2023 reflects its rising influence. The geopolitical implications of the group's expansion in 2023 are significant. The ten BRICS+ countries now represent approximately half of the global population and over a quarter of the world's economy, highlighting their growing economic and demographic strength. The coalition is positioned to impact the conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine, the global economic framework, the competition between China and the West, and the transition to clean energy. According to Curtis (2024), Iran's involvement in the 2023 expansion has led some analysts to argue that China and Russia are gaining a new ally in their efforts to steer BRICS towards becoming an "anti-West" coalition. The expansion of BRICS+ also provides fresh opportunities for Russia and China to promote their non-Western ideologies. The inclusion of Ethiopia and Egypt will amplify African perspectives. Furthermore, Egypt has maintained strong political and economic ties with both Russia and China. As a new BRICS member, Egypt aims to enhance its struggling economy and attract more investments. Ethiopia, the third-largest economy in sub-Saharan Africa, has long been

courted by China, which has invested billions to position the country as a key player in its Belt and Road Initiative (Ferragamos, 2024). According to Ferragamos (2024), China believes it is in a geopolitical and economic rivalry with the United States, while Iran and Russia are ardent opponents of American influence. "Iran's membership in the bloc is opposition to American unilateralism," former Iranian President Ibrahim Raisi stated to his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, the two largest economies in the Arab world and the second and eighth-largest oil producers in the world, would join. Understanding the politics of the BRICS+ group of developing powers is particularly crucial for comprehending the alternative ideas of world order held by the "Political South" (Armijo and Roberts 2014; Cooper 2016; Hopewell 2017; Kiron & Larionova 2022; Schirm, 2023). None of the BRICS+ nations backed Western assistance for Ukraine or sanctions against Russia (Schirm, 2023). The People's Republic of China is at the forefront of shaping its international framework and stands out as the most influential country within the BRICS+ group (Caffarena 2017; Heldt 2022; McDonagh 2022; Schweller and Pu 2018). Nevertheless, Russia was instrumental in the establishment of the BRICS political alliance during the 2000s (Roberts et al. 2018). Together with various developing countries, the emerging powers of BRICS+ have opposed Western interpretations of global order to different extents and have declined to impose sanctions on Russia.

Western countries have largely downplayed the growth of this coalition. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has primarily dismissed efforts to reduce the country's reliance on the dollar, while National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan has indicated that the U.S. does not see BRICS as a geopolitical adversary. Likewise, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock has downplayed the development of relationships among BRICS members. Some political analysts argue that the ambitions of the BRICS nations are exaggerated, and the significant domestic challenges faced by their members are substantial enough to prevent any real threat to the economic stability of the West. However, several European leaders have cautioned that anti-Western sentiment is intensifying. They assert that this expansion is a result of the West's inadequate response to the needs of low-income countries. They argue that Western nations must begin to seriously reform their financial systems. The rise and growth of BRICS+ echo the words of Antonio Gramsci, who stated, "The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born" (Patrick, 2024, p. 3). According to Patrick (2024), the importance of BRICS expansion is vital in today's context, as it reflects a growing dissatisfaction with and a desire to challenge the structural advantages that advanced market democracies continue to possess. The primary objective of BRICS+ is to diminish these excessive privileges, including through the creation of alternative, parallel organizations.

Expansion of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

It was known as the "Shanghai 5" when they came into on board in 1996, because it was made of 5 countries, namely. China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan,

and Tajikistan. In 2001, they changed their name to the present Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (Gill & Freeman, 2024). As at 2017, the organisation has just 8 members. Nevertheless, the membership has increased now to 10, with the joining of Iran in July 2023, and Belarus in 2024 (July 4).

China, one of the group's founding members, has always had a deep interest in Central Asia, particularly since the Soviet Union broke up. Under the aegis of the Belt and Road Initiative, China's focus on the area has recently shifted from primarily economic goals to highlight its role as a more active political and security actor (Gill & Freeman, 2024). The May 2023 China-Central Asia leaders' conference and the March 2024 creation of a permanent Secretariat to coordinate the C5 + China (or China-Central Asia mechanism, as China refers to it) in Xi'an, in the Shaanxi province of China, represented significant advancements in this process. According to Gill and Freeman (2024), Beijing has long been concerned about the security of Central Asia, particularly its borders with China's unrest-plagued Xinjiang provinces. However, China seems to have increased its willingness to supply security items in the region in recent years, especially when Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. This covers the supply of monitoring and policing tools, assistance for Tajikistan's border security and counterterrorism capacities, training for police and military personnel, and the export of weaponry.

Russia started playing the politics of expansion since its full invasion of Ukraine. For instance, as captured by Guo (2024), Belarus, a Russian ally, just joined, marking an attempt to oppose Western institutions run by the United States and its allies and to change the organization in Eurasia. Belarus is located in Eastern Europe, and its accession shows that the SCO wants to become a more varied and powerful Eurasian organization rather than just focusing on China's security concerns. Its status rises along with its geographic and geopolitical reach as a result of this expansion. Although he did not name specific nations, the SCO Secretary-General recently stated that the organization has received membership applications from nations outside of the area, including those in the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. This interest from the Global South shows how popular the "SCO family" is becoming and portends the organization's future growth in several ways (Guo, 2024). According to Seiwert (2024), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which was formerly limited to China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, is gradually broadening its geographic and geopolitical scope, as seen by Belarus's accession to the organization. The SCO's changing focus is most clearly in line with China's and Russia's changing interests in the organization; as founding members, they were instrumental in establishing a framework for greater regional security and economic cooperation, and now, 23 years later, they are prepared to give up that role to increase the SCO's international influence. The SCO's members account for about 25% of the global economic output and half of its population, making it an increasingly alluring instrument for Moscow and Beijing's geopolitical goals. Moscow has had to

look for allies outside of Europe even more since launching its full-scale assault against Ukraine in 2022. The Kremlin has taken a "the more, the merrier" stance toward membership because it now views the SCO as a helpful platform for mobilizing support and refuting Western accusations of its international isolation. Thus, the war in Ukraine has influenced the expansion of the organisation since 2022.

Expansion of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU)

Three former Soviet member states, who signed the treaty that gave birth to the Eurasian Economic Union in 2009, are Belarusia, Kazakhstan, and Russia. Armenia later joined on October 9, 2014, and Kyrgyzstan joined on December 23, 2014, to expand the EAEU. According to Rodeheffer (2024), the EAEU has functioned as a mechanism for Moscow to subvert sanctions since its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, although Kazakhstan has now suggested it will comply with certain restrictions.

Statistically, there has been a clear change in the trade partnership of the group with Russia since the invasion of Ukraine and the sanctions that followed. For instance, only 8.8% of Russia's overall trade volume was with other EAEU members in 2021, the year before the invasion of Ukraine, a figure that has hardly altered since the organization's founding (Kommersant, 2022). But today, according to Rodeheffer (2024), the Kremlin's push for import substitution policies to replace European and US corporations that left Russia and Belarus after the invasion led to an increase in trade volumes between Russia and the other EAEU members in the months after the invasion of Ukraine. As a result of reselling sanctioned commodities to Russia and Belaru, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia profited.

Expansion to MENA

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) exhibit the most noticeable example of the expansion of the illiberal states' institutions (Lovotti, 2019). The Middle East emerges as a pivotal geographical domain where the illiberal states can wield considerable influence. amid Russia facing substantial punitive economic sanctions from Western countries in response to the conflict in Ukraine, cooperative Middle Eastern nations have the potential to offer Moscow opportunities to tap into commercial and financial sectors for obtaining vital supplies (such as microchips) and mitigating Russia's economic isolation. According to Brookes (2024), Russia holds the second position globally in terms of arms exports, following the United States. This ranking extends to the transfer of defense equipment to the Middle Eastern region as well. The sale of arms constitutes a significant aspect of Russia's interactions on the international stage. Noteworthy defense clients of Russia include Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Iran.

Conclusion

This work began by appraising how the war between Russia and Ukraine reverted the liberal world order into an illiberal world order. One certain thing the war did was to widen the gap between the Western and non-Western states. It, therefore,

the non-western states and the illiberal states to have more in common, thereby solidifying their unions. Thus, this study found that the BRICS (now BRICS+), the SCO, and the Eurasian Economic Union all gained new entrants since the war began in 2022. Russia started gaining more sympathy and started moving the numerical and economic strength of these institutions to withstand the oil sanction from the West.

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