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The Ideology Critique of Mearsheimer's Theory of Offensive Neorealism: The Case of Russia-Ukraine War and Its Ideologization in Indonesia

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This article examines the ideology critique of Mearsheimer's theory of offensive neorealism. Mearsheimer's offensive realism is currently one of the most dominant theories in International Relations that is used to understand international politics, especially in Indonesia. This is evident when Indonesian scholars are discussing the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Most of them are using Mearsheimer's theory to explain the invasion, as they consider Mearsheimer as the master who understands deeply the dynamics of relationship between Russia, Ukraine that led to war. However, Mearsheimer's approach is problematic, especially in its methodology and assumptions that overly simplify the reality of world politics. This article is using the critical theory approach to argue that the theory of offensive neorealism is ideological because this theory is believed as a 'faith', unquestioningly used to make sense of the reality of the Russia-Ukraine War, without questioning its epistemological and methodological assumptions. This article will conduct the ideology critique of Mearsheimer's theory in order to argue that offensive neorealism is a theory that simplifies reality to support great-power countries and their ideologies in order to maintain their positions. It does not matter whether you are against or pro-Ukraine, because, in the end, this theory only represents the interests of great powers like Russia and America. The weak states should instead "realistically" accept big power countries' conducts and ideologies unquestioningly. Essentially, the theory of offensive neorealism does not represent the interests of small countries as it maintains great powers' dominance in both power and ideology over these small countries.

Introduction

Neorealism is one of the mainstream theoretical approaches of International Relations. This theoretical approach was first popularized by an American IR scholar, Kenneth N. Waltz, in his masterpiece *The Theory of International Politics* (1979). Today, another American IR scholar, John J. Mearsheimer, is considered as one of the foremost *neorealist* scholars, based on his work, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (2001). In his book,

Mearsheimer classified neorealism into two major strands: Waltz's defensive neorealism and his own *offensive neorealism*. There are similarities between these two approaches, notably their assumptions that international structure is very much deterministic in the realm of an anarchical system. Under the anarchical international system, states are forced to rely on their own power to survive. The strong has the privilege to do whatever they wish to do whereas the weak cannot. The strong will survive, while the weak will perish and will be absorbed, and thus states are forced to compete against each other, and conflicts are always possible.

The difference between these two approaches is in how they understand the relationship between power. For Mearsheimer, for the 'great powers' to survive, they must maximize their power and to maintain their hegemonic position (the first among all states) in the system. In contrast, Waltz's *defensive realism* argues that states are trying to maintain stability of international system by maximizing *its security* and preserving the distribution of power among states.

Mearsheimer's theory is widely used to explain Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. He argues that the United States' actions led to the invasion because it backed NATO's expansion to Ukraine. NATO's expansion is essentially a direct threat to Russia as a regional hegemon in Eastern Europe. Facing a loss of its hegemonic position, Russia has no other choice but to prevent the expansion by invading Ukraine. And it is possible that as war goes on and Russia keeps losing, Russia may end up using nuclear weapons to salvage what is left on the battlefield.

Mearsheimer's theory are used by many Indonesian foreign policy experts and academics to understand and explain Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which is noted by Dharmaputra (2022) as 'westsplaining Ukraine'. For example, Wahid Supriyadi, former Indonesian Ambassador to Russia, in line with Mearsheimer's argument, stated that Ukraine's desire to join the NATO led to Russian invasion to Ukraine, as Russia had no desire to see Ukraine, as a buffer state, host NATO's military equipment. In addition, a video of Connie Rahakundini Bakrie, a military and intelligence analyst, that shows her pro-Russian position has been seen by 3 million people. Essentially, this condition reflects that many of Indonesian foreign policy experts are simply not critical of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, accepting as normal that a great power can simply invade its weaker neighbors. Of course, this does not mean that every Indonesian IR scholar or foreign policy expert is pro-Russia. There are many that support Ukraine, but their voices are often drowned within local discourse.

The fact that most Indonesian IR scholars *believe* his views uncritically means that Mearsheimer's view is *ideological* in the sense that his theory is accepted *dogmatically*. There is no other theory used to understand the reality of Russia-Ukraine war, except based on Mearsheimer's theory. At this point, we would like to further develop Dharmaputra's (2022) work by contributing ideology critique to Mearsheimer's theory. In this article, we will problematize the methodological assumptions of Mearsheimer's theory. Even though this critique is almost similar to what many IR scholars' criticism regarding the neorealism approach in general, we will expand on the criticism by focusing on the Russia-Ukraine war.

This article uses qualitative method in which the interpretative mechanism is adopted in a sense more critical rather than understanding (phenomenological approach). We are questioning the philosophical foundations of the neorealism approach. Instead of using case study, we will use a meta-theory approach in order to criticize the theoretical building-blocks of *offensive realism*. Therefore, this paper will not test any theory. This meta-theory mechanism tries to display the contradiction in terms of neorealism arguments as well as its methodological assumptions based on self-reflection. This kind of self-reflection is different from neither deductive nor inductive research method. In this context, Indonesia's understanding of the Russia-Ukraine war based on *offensive realism* is the consequence of social construction of international reality represented by dogmatic mind of *offensive neorealism* approach. Hence, the problem is not the reality, rather it is the philosophical assumptions of *offensive realism*. We could understand the Russia-Ukraine war differently and perhaps much better by utilizing area studies or postcolonial or imperialism studies or many more approaches in IR that were displayed in the late IR debate around the 1980s and 1990s (Waeber, 1997). In short, *offensive realism* acts as horse blinders, preventing us from looking from different perspective, such as from the Ukrainians' viewpoint.

Moreover, this article is not an external criticism in the sense of liberalism versus realism debates. We will not provide an alternative approach to make sense of the reality of the Russia-Ukraine war. Instead, this article focuses on ideology critique of Mearsheimer's theory to emancipate the mindset of the theory users, especially IR scholars who have deeply believed in the offensive neorealism approach as a 'faith' or using David Lake's term is the 'isms' as 'sects' (Lake, 2011: 471).

This paper is divided into four parts. The first part discusses theory as ideology and self-reflection as ideology critique as a conceptual framework deriving from critical theory. Ideology critique or self-reflection is an important concept to criticize the theory

that becomes an ideology of the users. Self-reflection mechanism is important to break the faith in a theory by reflecting on the philosophical foundation of the theory or basic assumptions of a theory that are dogmatized by the users. The next section addresses neo-realism reflecting the reality of the Russia-Ukraine war. The reality is constructed by the abstraction of offensive neorealism assumptions which provide consequences not to calculate Ukraine's position and in general ignore weak states. The third section discusses the ideology critique of offensive neorealism. The last section summarizes the findings and its implication in the practical realm.

Theoretical Framework

In this section, we do not have enough space to go deeply into intellectual debates between IR scholars who pro and contra stark distinction between theory and ideology. We will explain the substance of debates for only utilizing our goal to unmask the ideological dogma of Mearsheimer's theory. The pro-separation between theory and ideology argued that the norm of objectivity in scientific research is possible. Ideology is a simplification of reality for political purposes whereas theory, in turn, is used to make complex reality comprehensible. This argument emphasizes an assertion that rationality should proceed according to a strict deductive mechanism. It is the mainstream of Western philosophy to achieve scientific accuracy. It produces dichotomous ways of thinking between ideology and theory. (Baggini, 2018: 53; Dreyer, 2014: 269; Omelicheva and Zubytka, 2016: 30; Martill & Schindler, 2020). Scientification of IR is important to address IR as a discipline and science (George, 1976; Bleiker, 1997; Krombach, 1992; Jackson, 2017). Having taught IR, especially about the theory and methodology in more than eight universities in Indonesia, we are convinced that scientification of IR is very much massive in Indonesia, particularly in cities in Java such as Jakarta and Yogyakarta, and other parts of East Java where these regions happen to be the core of IR influencers. It is also supported by Hadiwinata (2022) and Puspitasari, Wardhani, and Dharmaputra (2022) that IR in Indonesia is dominated by Western IR, especially the American social science and English school. Most of the references, curriculums and perspectives of IR in Indonesia have been preoccupied with Western IR (American IR school of thought) since the beginning of the development of IR around the 1960s when the Rockefeller Foundation and Ford Foundation were the important funding for liberal order agenda (Mas'oe'd, 2020; Hadiwinata, 2022). From this point of view, IR is a discipline instead of an interdisciplinary field or multidisciplinary or transdisciplinary or anti-discipline, that is limited in the frame of positivist scientism

(Jackson, 2017; Corry, 2022:2). A discipline is a subject matter that only can be applied by using positivism methodology and theory testing by using an empirical case study based on the correspondence theory of truth. It is impossible to include normative or value-laden into IR because it is not in the discipline or impossible to be verified or falsified.

However, our argument in this paper, academia, to be more specific, scientification, is ideological. There is no separation between ideology and theory. Therefore, theory as the core of scientification is ideological. Hence, theory should naturally be normative, not objective. Theory and political ideology (view) are always in the same bucket, just like the genie in the bottle that we cannot split them. The imported knowledge of scientific IR since the beginning, is part of the expansion of liberal ideology to build liberal order, including in Indonesia (Mas'oeud 2020; Hadiwinata, 2022). In the history of IR theories, since Carr and Morgenthau, knowledge has played an important role. However, that knowledge shapes the beliefs and interests of international subjects. Hence, IR theories are ideological. This mode of theorizing first entered International Relations through Mannheim, where Carr and Morgenthau brought his knowledge into realism as a "particular ideology". This realism knowledge of "particular ideology" has been further developed by Foucauldian and practice-based approaches since the 1990s in the frame of knowledge as a form of productive power in the practice of scientification of IR (Allan, 2018). In this paper, to put it simply, the term ideology and ideological are limited to the same meaning. Ideology and ideological, in the mask of science, is a *dogmatic*, uncritically accept everything stated by the theory as correct.

Accordingly, Martill and Schindler (2020:1) and Sofer (1987) argue that academic theories of IR are involved in political and ideological foreign policy decision-making. For example, decision-making theory in rational choice theory is believed a scientific process. In fact, it is being used for American political and ideological purposes. All constructions of liberal theories are rooted and in line with the expansion of the American liberal order. Politicians and (ideologists) use theories of IR to help them to understand the world politics and to solve the problem for their political and ideological purpose. In short, they use, whether implicitly or explicitly, theoretical tools from IR theorists as (international) political weapons. Therefore, IR theorists are impartial and instrumental. Furthermore, in the globalization era where there is economic openness, liberalism IR theory and realism IR theory are always in dispute to win. This signifies a problem for IR theories since theories are not necessarily neutral and objective since they have a clear political stance in the conflicts of today. In short, theories are difficult to

achieve an objective view to solve conflict as a whole. Partial IR theories lack analytical purchase. (Martill and Schindler, 2020:3). It can be concluded that the commitment to constructing IR theories as research-explanatory tools and differentiating them from ideologies to build its scientific credibility is difficult to achieve and almost impossible unless we consider the critical theory to emancipate IR theorists. Hence, it speaks of emancipated world politics. It is what Devetak (1995) calls the project of modernity where he adopted Habermas's view. The main purpose of critical international theory in the discipline of IR is the emancipation of the theorists, not objectivity/neutrality as Morgenthau (1946) calls 'scientific man' expected or attempt to.

In this section, we will not explore extensively about critical theory in IR. There is a different discussion on that matter. In this paper, we will use reflexive methodology as one of the critical theory philosophical legacies as Hoffman calls critical interpretivism (Hoffman, 1991). This method does not need an empirical case study to criticize or to find weaknesses in theory or to fail a theory because it directly challenges the theoretical foundations of a theory. A case study is just a steppingstone to voice a theory or a part of theories because a case study will be known or understood if there is a theory; data cannot talk by itself. In short, our method is a meta-theory mechanism. Therefore, this paper is beyond deductive or inductive movement and certainly does not contain positivism methodology in any kind of variants of positivism. This is, what popularly Cox calls critical international theory or Weber calls Between 'isses'. Critical international theory is important to emancipate IR scholars (theorists) from the dogmatism of theories that they believe in so much as 'faith'. IR scholars such as Andrew Linklater, Robert Cox (in some of his work), Nicholas Rengger, and Ben Thirkell-White, James Bohman, Mark Hoffman are supporters of critical international theory (theories).

In emancipating the dogmatic mind of neorealism, we will use a reflexive mind or self-reflection (Devetak, 2013). We will focus on questioning the philosophical foundation of offensive neorealism. At this level, we argue that neorealism, especially offensive realism, is ideological. Therefore, we will use ideology critique whilst also define the meaning of critique. At the end of this paper, we will prove that offensive neorealism is in prisoner of its dangerous doctrine. In ideology critique, we will use the Indonesian philosopher as expert of critical theorist, Fransisco Budi Hardiman. Hardiman (1993:185-187) illustrates the meaning of Habermas' critique which he called self-reflection.

Hardiman (1993:185-187) starts with the first critique of the construction of Habermas' critical theory which is derived from Kant's transcendentalism. It is a

reflection on the possible conditions of our knowledge, statement, and actions as subjects who think, speak, and act. Habermas refers to this critique as 'irrational reconstruction'. It tries to explain how Habermas works in reflecting theories about existing knowledge. A critical thinker carries out critique on the methodology if he reconstructs rules for activities of thinking, speaking, and acting in which he himself is involved in describing those rules, in such a way that he remains to obey the rules he is currently working on. While Kant was being critical in the first critique on the methodology or the activity of knowing (and he discovers the *a priori* categories of human knowledge), Habermas did so on the three interrelated activities of knowing, acting, and speaking (and he found out categories of action and cognitive interests). From this point of view, Mearsheimer and his followers have not yet reached what Kant is achieved. Hence, the theory of the offensive neo-realism assumption has become ideological.

Hardiman (1993:185-187) continues with the second critique on the practice of science is taken from Hegel's idealism and Marx's materialism. In this sense, the critique reflects on the unconsciously generated obstacles that cause the subject (individual or certain social groups) to submit to them in the process of the subject's self-formation. Habermas calls this critique 'self-reflection'. Habermas did this upon the philosophy of science developed in the early days of the history of modern positivism. In other words, the critique is a reflection of false consciousness. What Mearsheimer believe in his assumption of offensive neorealism is false consciousness.

After Hardiman (1993:185-187) explores the root of Habermas's critical theory from Kant, Hegel, Marx, Comte and Mach, he further conceives that Habermas applied the above critiques to theories about science (philosophy of science) developed throughout histories, such as Peirce's pragmatism and Dilthey's historicism. In his exploration of Peirce's pragmatism, Habermas tries to explain how through Peirce's reflection on the logic of research in the empirical-analytical sciences, the connection between the empirical-analytical sciences and the categories of rational-purposeful action comes out, with monologues propositions (syllogistic arguments) and becomes as what he called 'technical interest'. In his exploration of Dilthey's historicism, Habermas tries to explain how through Dilthey's reflection on the hermeneutical method of the historical-hermeneutical sciences, the connection between the historical-hermeneutical sciences and the categories of communicative action is clearly present through everyday language (language game) which he calls 'practical interests'. At this point of understanding, the theory is not objective, but it is always for someone and some purpose

(Cox, 1981:128). The science claimed in neorealism in general is in fact not objective. It is always instrumentally full of interest (technical and practical).

As Hardiman (1993:185-187) explored, Habermas continues to reflect on the interest of the ratio itself, the concept of which is explained in Kant's transcendentalism and Fichte's practical idealism. From Kant, Habermas learns about the concept of transcendental pure interest and from Fichte, he finds about the empirical interest of rationale aligns with Fichte's preference for practical ratio over pure ratio. The transcendental nature of the interest shows that interest is linked with a transcendental aspect of the ratio and is independent of ever-changing empirical conditions. Meanwhile, the empirical nature of the interest stresses that interest is related to the empirical aspect of the ratio that depends on the changing empirical conditions.

In an empirical sense, an interest means the will to free oneself from dogmatism or everyday natural consciousness or the will to free oneself from the physical and psychological limitations of humans as a species. In other words, reflections on Kant's and Fichte's works are Habermas' attempts to explain the status of human ratio emancipatory interests. Habermas' explanation of the interest ratio is both transcendental and empirical, or 'quasi-transcendental'. He made these efforts so that interests are not misunderstood as merely biological and psychological interests (naturalism) that can fall into determinism or be misunderstood as pure interests (transcendentalism) that are ahistorical, asocial, and apolitical. This interest is understood as 'inter-esse' (being in between), which is the intermediary between life and knowledge and the empirical and transcendental aspect.

From his study, Habermas explains that technical and practical interests are rooted in their own rational interests, namely emancipatory interests. In his reflections on Marxian psychoanalysis and ideological critique, Habermas shows that both are examples of critical sciences that use self-reflection as their methodology. He uses the second critique to show that both sciences are concerned with emancipatory practice and ultimately with emancipatory interests themselves. At this level of understanding, Habermas would like to guide a theorist or a user, in this context, Mearsheimer (and his followers) to emancipate himself, liberating his false consciousness of the assumptions of offensive neorealism.

The Ideology of Mearsheimer's Theory of Offensive Neorealism

The devastating conflict between Russia and Ukraine has resulted in dire consequences; thousands of people have been killed, millions of people were displaced, and cities were

destroyed. John J. Mearsheimer, a realist scholar from the University of Chicago asserted that the Ukrainian crisis involves not only Russia, but the United States (US) is also responsible for the conflict. In his lecture at the University of Chicago, Mearsheimer provided some background of the conflict in which the US has been involved. There are four core strategic interests of the US, namely the Western hemisphere, Europe, Northeast Asia, and the Persian Gulf. He highlighted that although other areas are important for the US, Europe has always been an integral part of America's foreign policy. The reason for this is not only because Europe has great power, but also its historical relations with Europe during World War II when the US did not withdraw from Europe which led to an element of stability during the Cold War era (University of Chicago, 2015). While Europe and the US play the leading roles in international diplomacy and military strength, the US puts more attention to whatever happens in Europe, including the crisis in Ukraine (Mearsheimer, 1993).

Furthermore, in his lecture, Mearsheimer showed a map of Ukraine where the people of Ukraine are divided into two: the Western Ukraine where most people speak Ukrainian and some other regions in the East, such as Donbas, Crimea, and Kharkiv, which are occupied by Russian-speaking people (University of Chicago, 2015). As the country is badly divided, Mearsheimer also mentioned that during the presidential election in 2004, the population in the East would choose Viktor Yanukovich who is viewed as a pro-Russian as their leader. Yanukovich then won the 2010 election, defeating Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko. Yanukovich's political decision to pursue closer ties with Russia and reject the European Union (EU)-Ukraine Association Agreement led to a series of protests in Kyiv, which is called "Euromaidan" in 2013. Based on statistics shown by Mearsheimer, people in the East have little interest in joining the EU, while their Western counterparts want to be a part of the association (Mearsheimer, 2014; Roman, et. al., 2017).

According to Mearsheimer (2014), the US and its European allies are the ones to blame for the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Their desire to detach Ukraine from Russian influence and incorporate it into the West has become the main deep cause of this mess. There are three key elements to execute the strategy. The first one is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) expansion where the Bill Clinton administration has moved NATO eastward toward Russia's border since the Cold War. Next is the EU expansion which aims to integrate Ukraine's economy into the West. Lastly, the fostering of an Orange Revolution where the US promoted democracy in Ukraine. When these

strategies are incorporated, Russia would see the West as a threat and Ukraine would be peeled away from Russia (Mearsheimer, 1993; Pavliuk, 2002).

There are two tranches of NATO expansion in Europe. It started in 1999 when Poland, The Czech Republic, and Hungary were incorporated into NATO and then it continued in 2004 when the Baltic states, such as Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia joined the organization. Mearsheimer suggested that since the mid-1990s, the Soviets adamantly opposed NATO expansion to Eastern Europe. However, they were just too weak to resist its influence and some states on Russia's border were becoming NATO's member states (University of Chicago, 2015). The peak of the conflict was in 2008 at NATO's Bucharest Summit where NATO stated that "NATO welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO". This move was unacceptable for Russians as Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister responded to the Bucharest Summit, "Georgia's and Ukraine's membership in the alliance is a huge strategic mistake which will have the most serious consequences for pan-European security" (University of Chicago, 2015).

Moreover, Russia's President, Vladimir Putin, said that Georgia and Ukraine becoming part of NATO is a direct threat to Russia. The war between Russia and Georgia in August 2008 – just four months after the Bucharest Summit – is proof that Russia declined Georgia's strategy to move closer to NATO. Mearsheimer (2014) thinks the Bucharest Summit is an important event that sends a signal that Russia really sees NATO as a threat and does not admit NATO expansion to Georgia and Ukraine, not to mention the other strategies promoted by the West, such as EU expansion and democracy promotion.

Mearsheimer views the coup of February 22nd 2014, as an important event that threw the crisis into gear. It all started in 2013 when Yanukovych did not accept the EU deal to form an association agreement that might bring Ukraine and the EU closer together. Yanukovych's rejection led to a massive protest at the "Maidan" or the city center in Kyiv in December 2013. Not long after, Putin offered a US\$15 billion loan to Ukraine – a lot more than what the EU could offer. Yanukovych's positive response to Putin's deal led to civil unrest that caused deaths in protest. The turmoil finally caused the removal of Yanukovych from power, but the protesters refused to accept the deal which brought about significant fascist elements among protesters. As a result, Yanukovych fled for his life to Russia (McFaul, et. al., 2014).

On February 23rd 2014, the parliament voted to repeal Russian as an official language in Ukraine. This event led to the seizing of checkpoints in Crimea by the Russian military forces on February 27th 2014. Their presence was not meant to conquer or invade Crimea, but they were there since the beginning as a consequence of a leasing agreement where there is a naval base in Sevastopol. However, on the next day, more Russian troops came and in March, Russia finally incorporated Crimea after a series of referendum events. This event has caused a conflict in Eastern Ukraine although, according to Mearsheimer, there is no hard evidence that showed Russia's physical involvement (University of Chicago, 2015).

As one of the prominent neorealist scholars, Mearsheimer views Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a preemptive act to anticipate the adversaries. This is because the US-backed NATO invasion of Ukraine is seen as a direct threat to Russia that may increase the likelihood of war between nuclear-armed powers and underlie Putin's aggressive action toward Ukraine. Neorealism believes that power as the role of power politics is significant in international relations and that competition and conflict are the keys to pursuing the interests of states. The conditions of international anarchy drive states to trump other international variables, such as norms, multilateralism, economic independence, and morality. In an anarchic world, strong powers have the privilege to try whatever they wish to try. Therefore, anarchy encourages competition, especially the ones that contribute to security.

As we already mentioned elsewhere above, there are two types of neorealism and structural realism. The first one is Mearsheimer's offensive neorealism and the second one is Kenneth Waltz's defensive realism. Offensive realism looks at the accumulation of power in a state which will lead to a hegemon. According to Mearsheimer, great powers are trying to find a way to survive in a world where there is no single agency to protect them. On the other hand, the anarchic system benefits them to seek opportunities to gain power at the expense of rivals. This is due to states' realistic assumption that other states are inherently aggressive. Therefore, Mearsheimer's notion focuses more on how states are trying to survive by maximizing their power in order to become the hegemon in the system. In contrast, Waltz's defensive realism views states as an entity trying to maintain the stability of the international system by maximizing its security and preserving the distribution of power. In an anarchic structure of the international system, states execute a moderate policy to attain their national security by acting as security maximisers (Smith & Dawson, 2022).

In the case of the Ukrainian crisis, the expansion of the EU and NATO eastwards has generated more complex structural geopolitics of Eastern Europe. Ukraine's strategy to maintain positive relationships with both East and West through its multi-vector foreign policy was quite successful in the 1990s and early 2000s. However, there was a backlash in the mid-2000s when Ukraine found itself situated in a geographic corridor between Russia and the West (the EU and NATO) called 'the shared neighborhood'. The West's strategy of institutional expansion and democracy promotion to Eastern Europe has provoked Russia to generate a strong response in Ukraine, for example, the annexation of Crimea. Moreover, the Russian attack on Georgia upon the Bucharest Summit was a warning for the countries of the Russian sphere not to seek NATO membership. It is obvious that in the perspective of structural realism, the changing power structure of Eastern Europe is feared as it would lead to greater instability and conflict. Moreover, the West failed to care about Russia's signal to stay away from its sphere. As neorealists would suggest, Russia's actions are a local great power's attempt to maintain a sphere of influence around its border to increase external pressure. This attempt is common for great powers to pursue as they have the desire to defend their powers in an anarchic realm.

Ideology Critique of Mearsheimer's Theory of Offensive Neorealism

Mearsheimer's theory of Neorealism is ideological because this theory was established from scientific postulation. Scientific postulation is a grand narrative which IR scholars rely on to make sense of world politics. Scientific postulation is like a 'bible text' for IR scholars to operationalize the way they see world politics. It is the most legitimate and authoritative foundation as a belief system which critical IR scholars call 'foundationalism' (Lapid, 1989; Waever, 1997; Chernoff, 2009) and in a clear argument, Monteiro and Ruby (2009) call an imperial foundational project. The project is to proceed the IR discipline to be unified increasingly by a self-conscious endeavor on the part of its practitioners to make it a 'science' (Hollis and Smith, 1990:16). Substantially and methodologically, as a science, offensive neorealism is not different from defensive neorealism. As Mearsheimer also claims himself a structural realism similar to Waltz, believing in dependent and independent variables as the logic of causality. The structure is an independent variable that is very much deterministic to make sense of world politics/international relations as a dependent variable. The states neorealism is a simple theory to explain world politics based on data as a tool to justify the theory (Mearsheimer, 2014). Therefore, the deductive method is an important logic to be applied. Data can

‘speak’ from a theory. As the result, a theory always gets confirmation and/or verification in order to achieve correspondence of truth through deductive nomology.

As Mearsheimer and Waltz believe, neorealism as a theory is becoming ‘a belief system’, meaning ideological. However, this belief system (ideology) is not perfect as we expected. The first ideology critique is on scientific postulations as the foundation of neorealism or what we call the mainstream American IR school of thought. The reality of world politics cannot be detached from our views, interest and intention. Neorealism cannot be neutral, or objective and the theorist cannot be independent. Mearsheimer is very much consistent to speak on behalf of American interests, especially in his analysis of Russia and Ukraine entitled “Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West’s Fault,” (2014). However, Mearsheimer’s dogmatic view makes his sense abandon many facts. As the proof that Motyl (2014) has provided, Mearsheimer fails to display an adequate knowledge of data. At that period, Mearsheimer’s neorealism as what he assumes rational and objectivity fail him because he invokes Russian historical memory, ideology, and political culture—or perceptions. Structural realism's assumption of a rational leader is not applicable or contradicts the perceptions of a leader. When Kant in the frame of critical theory was constructed by the new truth of knowledge, he realizes (reflects) it. In contrast, Mearsheimer keeps on his arguments consistently and dogmatically up to now (2022).

Secondly, Mearsheimer’s is too preoccupied with his own assumption about a threat. There is no convincing proof or whatsoever that the West threatens Russia by eagerly democratizing Ukraine. A lot of proofs appear otherwise. The West is not a threat to Russia, but it is Russian perception culturally and ideologically that are eager to imperialize Ukraine. In regard to perceptions, Putin’s life is imprisoned in his memory of the past. In other words, it is wrong to believe that the West Westernized Eastern Europe (Ukraine) and Russia feel threatened. Motyl (2014) continues to argue that “Neither NATO nor any major NATO country has ever stated that Ukraine should be incorporated immediately into the alliance. No NATO member state would invoke Article 5 and rush to Ukraine’s assistance in case of an attack by Russia”. In addition, there is no proof that the Western presidents or prime ministers asked to Ukraine to democratize the country by requesting an authoritarian regime, Yanukovych to resign during the Maidan revolution. In fact, Ukrainian felt that the West less supported them to advance Ukraine’s integration into Western institutions. Another fact that Mearsheimer ignored was Putin explicitly abolished the 1994 Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances, signed by Russia, the UK, and the USA in rationalizing his

annexation of Crimea. Hence the Ukrainians do not have any security guarantee from Russia, the UK, and the USA.

Those above mentioned second points of argument clearly enlighten us to realize that Mearsheimer's offensive neorealism justifies Russia's perception, including history, memory, and cultural imperialism. One of the neorealism postulations mentions that the anarchical structure of the international system has not changed. Russia remains in power in the system. In the frame of Waltzian, history has been experiencing changes such as World War I and World War II in the international system, but the system itself remains to maintain great power like Russia. Hence many neorealists believe the same key patterns that have shaped international politics in the past and the future as well, especially the tendency for powerful states to maintain the system balance of power politics. In regard to this logic, neorealism as its claim neutral and objective supports Russia's imperialism of Ukraine. Schweller (1996) argues that neorealism's lack of state behavior analysis in fact actually exhibits a profound status quo bias. Neorealism substantially makes sense of the world on the basis of status quo power. Mearsheimer's neorealism serves status quo imperialistic ideology.

Those points above clearly differ from Waltz's main argument that focuses on maintaining power (capabilities) distribution. Mearsheimer perceives the world as a zero-sum reality, one state's gain is another's loss. As the consequence, the struggle for power is strategically conducted on how states maximize their relative power politics. It will automatically make sense that international relations are determined or agreed to the ideology of the powerful state in the anarchical structure of the international system. Schmidt (2004: 433) argues that Mearsheimer believes power is the main currency of international politics. Mearsheimer (2001:56) defines power largely in military terms. Mearsheimer believes that force by violence is the rationale of world politics. Hence the hierarchy of structure of the international system depends on military power. In short, IR is a discipline in academia that maintains the powerful states, situated the powerful states on the highest structure in the international system. As a result, if mainstream IR actually believes in these ideas of offensive neorealism, IR is representing the ideological status quo.

There are two theories according to Cox (1981): problem-solving theory/traditional theory and critical theory/constitutive theory. Problem-solving theory is "knowledge that is confined to the problem-solving mode performs the ideological function of perpetuating the international status quo" (Linklater, 2007: 48). The problem-solving mode is to solve a given reality such as accepting social, power relations, and

institution taken for granted, including supporting the existing great power and its ideological agenda, such as establishing a liberal world order. In contrast to problem-solving approach, critical theory or constitutive theory is knowledge to emancipate the mind of the theorists or IR scholars to be free from their truth claims or dogmatic postulates. Hence, they should question the existing reality such as questioning social, and power relations and institutions. If it is only one given reality, it means this reality is ideological. The order of reality conditionally upholds the status quo of the powerful states. Meanwhile, critical theory acknowledges a normative adoption in favor of a social and political order different from the predominating order. However, it depends on the constraints of the range of choices to alternative orders which are possible to transform the existing world” (Cox 1981:130).

Ashley (1984) called neorealism as an ‘orrery of errors’ as it is bounded by structuralism, statism, utilitarianism, and positivism in a machine-like self-enclosing unity. It resulted in an unbroken chain of self-regarding, self-reinforcing commitments that seem designed to defy criticism or to resist scrutiny. He categorized the four elements of the orrery of errors into statism, utilitarianism, positivism, and structuralism. Neorealism is statist as Ashley (1984) put it as the state is an entity whose existence, boundaries, identifying structures, constituencies, legitimations and interests can be treated as given, independent of transnational class and human interests, and indisputable. For purposes of theory, the state is always perceived as an entity capable of having certain objectives or interests and of deciding among and deploying alternative means in their services. It does matter the context, textually a state is taken for granted like this definition. In the international context, neorealist theory cannot recognize the global collectivist concepts that are irreducible to logical combinations of state-bounded relations. Concepts of transnational class relations or the interests of humankind, can be granted an objective status only to the extent they can be interpreted as aggregations of relations and interests in the nation-state system (Ashley, 1984).

In terms of utilitarianism, Ashley (1984) did not refer to the utilitarianism as Bentham’s and Mill’s morality, but it is characterized by its individualist and rationalist premises which is machine-like. The rationality that constructs microeconomic theories of politics, game theory, exchange theory, and rational choice theory. It is instrumental in terms of economic rationality that Weber called substantive rationality or Habermas called practical reason (practical interest). This kind of utilitarianism is very much inhuman; it is atomizing the individual actors similar to a computer in the system. Based

on the utilitarian theory, the actors behave rationally in the narrow instrumentalist sense (Ashley, 1984:243); it is instrumentally used by the status quo or great power.

Moreover, the positivism that neorealism holds will limit the range of scientific criticism that may exclude the discussions of forms of social consensus that might be value-laden, historically contingent, and susceptible to change. As the norm of scientism, we think we cannot say otherwise (Ashley, 1984: 254). Lastly, the structuralist suggests that a structural totality, or profound social subjectivity, may exist independently of, before, and as a part of the elements. Therefore, the states-as-actors behavior may persist those states must rely on themselves, making it an excuse for domination (Ashley, 1984). This logic is what offensive neorealism argues under the condition of the anarchical system, self-help is important to survive by invasion. It is what Russia now is attacking and invading Ukraine. Self-help is only an excuse for Russia to invade Ukraine and scientifically, it is objective and rational.

In regard to this framework, offensive neorealism claims, such as scientific approach, objectivity, and power, should be questioned. Mearsheimer should examine his own thought reflectively in order to emancipate himself because he has been dogmatized by his own mind. The purpose of the reflective mind is to emancipate Mearsheimer from the set of offensive neorealism systems of mind where he discovers himself. By reflexive mind, he can liberate himself from his own creation of (the dogmatism) of offensive neorealism and come into self-consciousness. The implication of this is ending to normative choice to free Ukraine from imperialism. In short, critical theory suggest the transformation of the political community from the act of Russian imperialism, including the megalomania of the great power into a more ethical discourse of world order where Ukraine wisely can have choices. World leaders should question great power politics.

Unfortunately, Indonesia is a post-colonial, anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism the period of the Sukarno regime, nowadays, under the Jokowi regime, the Indonesian government is reluctant to support Ukraine's liberation, as they do not show clear stance between both sides. For example, Jokowi's statement on Twitter to stop the war without mentioning the country, including the abstention of Indonesia position on the United Nations (UN) resolution suspending Russia from the Human Rights Council. This position is securing Indonesian national interest by ignoring, letting big power of world politics acts as they wish which anarchical international system is conditioned states to do so. In short, it is what Mearsheimer's theory is all about.

Even though clearly, the Indonesian constitution is against the imperialistic act. In fact, Indonesians are indirectly dogmatized by Mearsheimer neorealism, preoccupying the discussion of the role great powers, ignoring, marginalizing the role of weak states. As the views of Indonesians and its government are only concerning on the role of great powers in the anarchical international system, as the consequences, they support great power imperialistic action. Hence, they are apologetic for wishing for the transformation of the political community. We conclude that they believe in neorealism dogmatic claims: power relations, the anarchical structure of the international system, self-help, neutrality and objectivity of viewing world politics, and monolithic methodology by just copying reality without reflexive mind and normative investigation. As Dharmaputra (2022) argue that many Indonesians at the officials, scholars, and societal level seem reluctant to criticize the order of great power where they can act in whatever they like. In short, Indonesians are blinded by the reality of world politics that constructed by Mearsheimer's theory.

Dharmaputra (2022:118) mentions the initial governmental states in news (Nikkei, CNBC) to stop the Russia-Ukraine war because it brings suffering to mankind (9 March 2022). However, the official statement is unwilling to directly mention Russia as imperialist state. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs statement on 25th February never mentioned Russia's colonialization of Ukraine and keep repeating the Indonesian position as a neutral state, asking "all parties" to stop the war. In the United Nations, Indonesia is also officially stance in abstention when it comes to suspending Russia from the Human Rights Council. Another proof of Indonesian pro-status quo and ideological is the invitation Jokowi administration to both Russia and Ukraine in G20, November 2022.

Dharmaputra mentions the societal level, where the Putin-Russia imperialistic movement is idolized by Indonesians because they challenge the arrogance of the West. Dharmaputra (2022:120-121) displays data from social media and news, quotes from *Al-Jazeera* (19 March 2022), *Kompas* and *Media Indonesia*. Where All of those news illustrating that many Indonesians and commentators expressed advocacy for Russia and tolerate Russia's invasion of Ukraine by saying Russia's situation is understandable. They also said that Russia taught a lesson to the US, NATO, and its allies (Bakrie, 2022; Fitriani, 2022). It is the West's fault. This logic is in line with Mearsheimer's thesis (2014): "Why the Ukraine crisis is the West's fault: the liberal delusions that provoked Putin" and are still consistent up to now (Mearsheimer, 2004). The same as other facts, Dharmaputra (2022:120-121) provided from most Indonesian users on Instagram and

TikTok supported Russia. In addition, the SMRC survey found that only 20% actually supported Russia. In the context of the Lowy Institute Survey that only 17% of Indonesian follow news from abroad, it means that 20% is a lot of numbers. All these imply that the Indonesians are imprisoned by neorealism ideology. They only view world politics from the great power games; Perceiving Russia has the guts to challenge the West, (the US and its allies). In regard to this logic, a former Ambassador to Poland, Darmansjah Djumala associated a great power with an elephant. Ukraine as a small state is flanked by two 'elephants.' Former Ambassadors to Russia and former Deputy Ambassador to Russia (Hamid Awaluddin, Wahid Supriyadi, Agus Sriyono, respectively) had nostalgic memories from their work experience in Russia, and Indonesia-Russia historical relations to justify the status quo of Russia and her imperialistic ideology in world politics. We believe that imagining Russia as a great power and Putin's hypermasculinity as a hero to Indonesians is very much ideological. It fits enough to neorealism assumptions as they are already infiltrated by neorealism unconsciously; of course, a dogmatism without a critical mind is truly installed unconsciously. As we mentioned above as well, neorealism is the dominant IR approach of the American school of thought in Indonesia where convincingly IR scholars and IR teachers view world politics from the eyes of great power. In short, neorealism is a popular IR theory in Indonesia.

Finally, Dharmaputra (2022:123) shows academias and public intellectuals support for Russia, such as a popular video by Connie Bakrie that has been seen more than 3 million times. When Bakrie visited Russia on 24-27 October 2022, she admired Putin's speech. In between Putin's speech and the Q&A session, Connie was invited to ask a couple of questions. She stood up and said: "Your fans in Indonesia are amazing. Everybody says 'Uraa!' all the time... Can I have a picture with you (Putin) later?" And Putin replied, "Yes with great pleasure.... Such a beautiful woman naturally". Another example is a Russian expert who got a Doctoral Degree from Saint Petersburg State University and a lecturer from Prof. Dr. Moestopo (Beragama) University, Fadra (2022), IR professor Evi Fitriani from the University of Indonesia (Hutt, 2022), European Studies expert from Gadjah Mada University, Muhadi Sugiono (Kompas, 2022) expressed their analytical influenced by neorealism 'dogma' in which they focus on 'lords of the jungle' who control the world politics. They blamed the US, NATO, and its allies for provoking Russia, using Mearsheimer's metaphor called "poke the bear in the eye" (Mearsheimer, 2022). For Mearsheimer, world politics is like a jungle, great power situated in the anarchical structure of the international system, this situation is tragic for great power"

(Mearsheimer, 2001). It can be concluded that Mearsheimer's theory of neorealism is very powerful to dogmatize many people, especially in Indonesia. Interestingly, Indonesian IR scholars' discourses are framed by Mearsheimer's theory and sing the same song that Mearsheimer sings.

Conclusion

We have done our job to conduct reflexive practice by disclosing the ideological mask of Mearsheimer's theory of neorealism. This theory is not scientifically objective and neutral, but legitimizes the status quo, ideologically supporting great power politics, methodologically Western's bias worldview. The theory is always for someone and some purpose as Cox's dictum has always been acknowledged by IR scholars up to now. It is important for IR theory to have emancipated interest and normative orientation. We need to be cautious of IR scholars who claim himself/herself to be objective and neutral, using IR theory just for a tool to make sense of world politics. This statement must be full of instrumental (technical) interest and directed to an ideological position, supporting the status quo and maintaining existing powerful states and an ideological theorist who hides behind the objectivity and neutrality claim.

In the case of Indonesia, politicians and scholars seem to endorse the role of big powers between Russia and the US along with its allies. This kind of action may lead to an ideological positioning in which aligns with neorealism approach while it is clearly written on the constitution that Indonesia condemns any actions of colonialism. Thus, we need to be critical to the Indonesian IR scholars claims on neutral and objective IR research where in fact they use the framework of Mearsheimer's theory. We can see this Russia-Ukraine crisis from different perspectives. Several instances are the area studies where portraying Russia as the hero may seem problematic as it overlooks the collective trauma of the ex-Soviet countries, including the complexity of race, religion, and class from within the Eastern European region. Next is the post-colonialism in how Ukraine is in a helpless situation; being threatened by Russia's dominance and being NATO's puppet all at once; appearing the question: Can the Ukrainian speak? Lastly, imperialism sees neither the West nor the Russia as great powers to put Ukraine under the field of their influence. As a country which had been colonized for years, Indonesia should be sympathetic to Ukraine and not the other way around.

In addition, Indonesian IR scholars should normatively criticize many Western IR theorists who theoretically sustain the role of great power under anarchical international system. In other words, Indonesian IR scholars should further analyze the complexity of the problem, not simplifying or reducing it by putting heavily in the role of

big power relations analysis only. In short, we need to build normative theoretical foundations for mankind and humanity, including nature and the universe (earth). We need to be clear to place our normative position. The debate of IR theories should be in the normative (axiological) matter, not in the epistemological, methodological, and ontological matters. We should bring back normative debates in IR trajectory and realm. Otherwise, we will doom because whereas the IR scholars are ignorance by saying a theory is only a tool, hiding their ideological investigation (research) in the claims of objectivity and neutrality of the scientific dogma, the real of world politics is full of the greediness of human desire to struggle for power in order to either survive for his/herself (self-help) or an excuse to imperialize others.

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