

**Ethical Realism:**

**From Vision to Policy under  
President Barack Obama**

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the theory of ethical realism as defined by analysts Anatol Lieven and John C. Hulsman in their 2006 book *Ethical Realism: A Vision for America's Role in the World*, in which they argue that ethical realism is a viable alternative to the dominant neo-conservatism and interventionism that they claim permeates Washington. They argue that America stands to gain from applying ethical realism as an alternative because of its declining relative power. They argue that future administrations should pursue the Great Capitalist Peace in order to bring peace and stability to the world by not fostering democratic reform but economic growth, which will in turn lead to democratic reform. It is the goal of this thesis to prove that ethical realism is applicable as policy by examining the foreign policy decisions of U.S. President Barack Obama, who is considered to be an ethical realist. This thesis also has the objective to prove Lieven and Hulsman's theorem of the Great Capitalist Peace cannot exist in the real world.

To these ends, this thesis first presents a critical analysis of ethical realism, and then presents three case studies in order to identify the presence of ethical realism in the policy decisions that the Obama administration undertook. The first case study will examine Obama's policy on nuclear disarmament and the non-proliferation efforts on Iran. The second case study will discuss the ongoing crisis in Ukraine and Obama's response. The third and last case study will be on the subject of the Syrian civil war.

This thesis will take the position that Obama is indeed an ethical realist. It follows that ethical realism as a theory can and is implemented into real-world scenarios. However, the Great Capitalist Peace is based on a false pattern, which mistakenly identifies economic prosperity over security as a vital interest. Because of this misinterpretation of the vital interest, the Great Capitalist Peace is impossible to create.

**Keywords:** Barack Obama, foreign policy, international relations, ethical realism, Russia, Syria, Iran, Crimea, Ukraine, nuclear non-proliferation, disarmament, sanctions, balance of power, Hans Morgenthau, Reinhold Niebuhr, George F. Kennan, John C. Hulsman, Anatol Lieven.

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## Introduction

The process of writing this thesis has spanned several years. In a way it began when I walked into the Radboud University campus bookstore and came across a little booklet called *The Godfather Doctrine: A Foreign Policy Parable*, written by John C. Hulsman and A. Wess Mitchell. The booklet draws parallels between three schools of thought utilized in defining foreign policy, to wit neo-conservatism, liberal institutionalism, and realism, and Don Corleone's sons from the famous movie. Being a fan of the movie and having become highly interested in foreign policy during my studies I attempted to find a thesis subject from the booklet. When I approached Dr. Markha Valenta about this in June, 2013 she pointed me towards another book written by Hulsman, this time together with Anatol Lieven, titled *Ethical Realism: An Alternative Vision for America's Role in the World*. This book quickly became the center of my academic aspirations with the dominant question being: why is this not policy?

Foreign policy first started to interest me in high school when we started discussing the Cold War in history class. I cannot remember exactly what drew me to the subject, but the Cold War remained a matter of interest for years to come and in a way it still is. When U.S. foreign policy first entered my academic curriculum I quickly realized that the most effective conduct of foreign policy is directly connected to how well one understands one's opponent. Knowing what motivates him and what goals he is trying to achieve is a tremendous help in achieving one's own goals through compromise, coercion, or persuasion. The same can be said about any human interaction. However, this focus on knowledge and understanding was something I did not see reflected in most of the schools of thought that I came across. Neo-conservatism and liberal institutionalism, to stay with the examples of *The Godfather Doctrine*, hardly held anything I could subscribe to on a personal level. If asked at the time I would likely have identified myself as a realist although I felt that realism did not hold all the answers I was looking for. It seemed too cold and uncaring and because of it unable to account for ethical dilemmas. I felt that the loftier goals humanity should aim for were missing from this theory. I finally found something I could subscribe to when I read *Ethical Realism*.

Ethical realism seeks to combine moralistic views with a strong pragmatic approach to foreign policy. The theory consists of five virtues: prudence, humility, study, responsibility, and patriotism. Through the application of these virtues a sound foreign policy can be crafted

by seeking to identify vital American interests, which should be striven towards with all purpose, while simultaneously acknowledging that the United States has a moral obligation to behave responsibly towards other nations which also have vital interests. Where these vital interests of foreign nations do not clash with vital American interests the United States should accommodate these nations whenever possible. Besides these vital interests the United States should no longer actively promote democracy and human rights but allow these to form and grow naturally by promoting economic growth instead; the idea being that a strong economic middleclass will demand certain things from its government, such as peace, stability, further prosperity, freedom and democracy.

When the book came out in 2006 the United States was gearing up towards a presidential election. Since President George W. Bush was in his second term there would be no incumbent running. An incumbent is always difficult to beat at the polls by virtue of having already won once before. Such a race then is not necessarily suited for a candidate to emerge with radically different ideas. Now that the race was open to new candidates, this seemed to be the best chance in years for an ethical realist candidate to emerge.

Ethical realism seemed especially suited to a candidate like Barack Obama, who campaigned on a platform of change and “vowed to return the US to a moral, benign and cooperative foreign policy based on foundational values and principles” (McCrisken 18). This vow was in line with the ideas behind the policy alternatives put forward by Lieven and Hulsman. One would expect to see overlap since Obama declared in an interview with op-ed columnist David Brooks from April 25, 2007 that one his favorite philosophers is Reinhold Niebuhr, who Lieven and Hulsman portray as one of three founding fathers of ethical realism, the others being Hans Morgenthau and George F. Kennan. More on these three experts of foreign policy will follow when I discuss ethical realism and its origins.

When I first read *Ethical Realism* I believed I found some of the answers I had been looking for. I had found a school that claimed to be realistic and pragmatic in its pursuit of vital national interests while trying to do so from an ethical standpoint. It treated other nations as equals, it did not enforce ideals upon nations that would never accept them, and it wanted to stabilize the world by promoting the economic growth of a strong middleclass instead of democracy. It seemed reasonable, compassionate, diplomatic yet tough where necessary and it wanted to provide a sensible solution to global issues such as nuclear non-proliferation, terrorism, an emerging China, and a re-emerging Russia (about which I had written in the past). All of this seemed commendable, pragmatic, and at least partially attainable to me.

However, as time passed and I continued to think critically about the book, I began to see discrepancies between ethical realism as a theory and how the authors of the book meant the theory to be put into practice. Certain alternatives quite clearly lacked the ethical component to this type of realism while others seemed out of touch with reality, sometimes dangerously so. While I still favored the theory of ethical realism and the pillars it is founded on, the practical problems seemed often too large and complex to be solved by the policy alternatives. The Great Capitalist Peace that they championed seemed especially out of reach as this goal depends on nations sharing the same view of their vital interests, which is not at all likely.

Looking at the world today, as we approach the end of Obama's second term in office, not much seems to have changed for the better. China is still gaining in strength and is becoming more assertive in the region despite Obama's Asia pivot; the threat of terrorism has been given a new face in the form of Islamic State which seeks to carve out territory in the Middle East, causing millions of people to flee from their homes to neighboring states and Europe; the situation between Israel and the Palestinians remains volatile with frequent outbursts of violence; and tensions between the West and Russia have escalated over the conflict in Ukraine and the fight in Syria against Islamic State. Judging from the policy alternatives put forward by Lieven and Hulsman, one might say that these situations could have been avoided if the president had implemented a policy of ethical realism. I argue however that he did follow a policy of ethical realism. It was not the implementation of the theory that was wrong or the main theory of ethical realism that was flawed. The reason that the world today is different from how Lieven and Hulsman expected it to be is because they fit their alternatives to their notion of the Great Capitalist Peace, which depends on mutual vital interests. My argument is that they misinterpreted the compatibility of these vital interests, the nations involved generally had quite oppositional views and that therefore the Great Capitalist Peace could never have come to fruition. To explain this misinterpretation I will analyze the recommendations against J. Samuel Barkin's explanation of predictive versus prescriptive theory. The Great Capitalist Peace is a weakness in the authors' argumentation, one that could potentially damage the entire theory of ethical realism. Instead, I argue that ethical realism is a viable theory that works in practice as long as the Great Capitalist Peace is removed from consideration.

The more politically minded might deny this, but the power of the United States is waning relatively speaking when compared to other nations. While it remains a powerhouse as the sole superpower in the world, other nations or international organizations are gaining



ground economically, militarily, and technologically speaking. This has provided the United States with three possible options. One option is to do nothing, to withdraw from the world and become the isolationist Fortress America that no longer concerns itself with the world at large as long as it is left alone. Another option is to fight back with all means, to lash out against those that seek to weaken the United States in order to remain the indisputable leading power. These two options are both utterly disastrous to the United States and the world beyond it. As strong as the United States is, it cannot survive on its own nor can it conquer its opposition. Yet there are those that champion these options in disregard of the destruction both options will unleash upon the world. For this reason, I join the Anatol Lieven and John C. Hulsman in their belief in the third option: the tightly managed and controlled decline of U.S. power, which will lead to the United States taking a step back from its overbearing presence in world affairs to an important and influential voice that stays on the sidelines unless it is confronted with an issue of vital importance. This third option would scale back some of the United States' foreign entanglements in favor of international regional concerts in which it would take up a strong but not necessarily leading position. This is obviously more difficult to achieve and definitely harder to sell to the public, which has gotten used to being instantly gratified and is therefore drawn towards preferring quick actions over long-term solutions. This is why those who favor a more sensible approach need to add their voice to the discussion, lest this position be over shouted and discarded.

As I stated, even though I am a supporter of the ethical realist theory, I am not blind to the flaws in its approach as presented by the authors. There are no perfect solutions and there are no simple solutions where foreign policy is involved. For example, although the authors favor the creation of regional concerts where nations can discuss their issues, there is a great diplomatic effort involved in bringing these nations together in the first place. It will take quite some convincing to have Israel sit at the same table with nations that call for its destruction, like Iran, and work out a comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian peace. This is an issue that the authors do not discuss. Neither do they examine the likelihood that the United States can succeed in convincing other nations or transnational organizations like the European Union or the United Nations to take responsibility in certain issues. Yet these areas are vital to ethical realist success.

It is therefore my aim to analyze ethical realism as it is put into practice by President Obama and compare and contrast this with the tenets of ethical realism and the policy recommendations in the book. I especially am looking to identify elements of ethical realism, but also to see steps that are necessary for the Great Capitalist Peace to come to fruition. It is

my expectation and my argument that Obama's foreign policy does generally follow the ethical realist tenets, but that it does not actively work towards the Great Capitalist Peace. This last part, I argue, is due to defective reasoning by the authors which lead them to conclude that nations will choose economic prosperity over security interests. This I argue is due to a misapplication of predictive theory as prescriptive theory. I believe this leads to a misidentification of the vital interests of nations, especially in regards to Russia, which makes the Great Capitalist Peace unachievable. However, Obama's policy decisions will show that ethical realism, when separated from this overambitious plan, is not only a viable policy choice, but safeguards the interests of the United States.

To this end I have divided this thesis in to three chapters. However, immediately following this introduction, I will first provide a brief interlude in which I discuss realist thought and the main arguments in the thinking of Hans Morgenthau, Reinhold Niebuhr, and George Kennan. This short overview I believe is necessary in order to place the theory of ethical realism into its proper framework.

The first chapter will summarize *Ethical Realism: An Alternative Vision for America's Role in the World*. While the subject of this thesis is mainly interested in the policy alternatives suggested by Lieven and Hulsman it is important to understand what these policy suggestions are based on. Therefore I have decided to incorporate all of the books main points while still trying to remain as concise as possible. This has resulted in a summary of about twelve pages that I believe reflect the book's contents, but leaves out the non-essential chatter that the authors engage in when trying to elaborate on a point that they had already made. Even though this chatter makes for an enjoyable read and adds to the attempt to convince the reader, it would be needless filler here. After the summary, attention will be given to the critical reception of the book by discussing public reception and peer reviews. To this I will add my own critical analysis, which will include Barkin's explanation on predictive and prescriptive theory.

The second chapter will consist of analyses of President Obama's foreign policy decisions. In particular, it will focus on three case studies in which I examine the policy put in place and contrast it against ethical realism. As subjects for these case studies I have chosen the nuclear non-proliferation effort, the crisis in Ukraine, and the conflict in Syria. My reason for examining these particular case studies is because of the one thing they all have in common: the presence of Russia. As Lieven and Hulsman explain in the book most of the policy alternatives are going to rely on Russia's cooperation in some fashion, especially those focused on stability in Eastern Europe and the Middle East and nuclear non-proliferation.

Their ultimate goal of the Great Capitalist Peace also depends on Russian participation and cooperation. However, what we are seeing in the media today is a Russia that is far from cooperative; in fact, in Ukraine and Syria it is downright antagonistic. It will be informative to see how the Obama administration handled the difficult task of punishing Russia for its behavior while simultaneously needing to attain its support for other policy areas.

With the world being so vastly different from what the authors imagined, despite having an ethical realist president, the question we need to ask ourselves is: were Lieven and Hulsman wrong in their assessment of the success of ethical realism? The goal of this second chapter is to find an answer to this question by explaining how each situation developed, the response to it by both the Russians and the Americans, and to compare and contrast this with the theory of ethical realism. My expectation is that with the exception of nuclear non-proliferation, what each nation defined as their vital interests differed greatly and that these definitions were influenced by factors outside of the expectations of Lieven and Hulsman. These differences do not necessarily make cooperation impossible, which I believe will be shown by examining Obama's policies, but do put the Great Capitalist Peace out of reach.

The final chapter will of course be the conclusion to this thesis in which I will briefly cover the previous chapters. I will also attempt to suggest areas for further research that this thesis could not cover. With President Obama leaving office without another ethical realist to replace him, ethical realism will need all the exposure it can muster if it is to have any influence on the policy choices of the next administration.

## **Interlude: Ethical Realism and the Founding Fathers**

In order to understand ethical realism, it is necessary to have knowledge of the realist theory and the three men Lieven and Hulsman identified as the founding fathers of ethical realism: Hans Morgenthau, Reinhold Niebuhr, and George Kennan. This interlude provides a brief overview of their core beliefs so that readers new to the subject may gain something of a foundation. For more experienced readers, this might serve to refresh the knowledge they already have. This interlude is necessarily and regrettably short. Even though the teachings of Morgenthau, Niebuhr, and Kennan are very educational, to spend much time on them would take the attention away from the actual thesis. This interlude is only offered as background information on realism and ethical realism.

Realism in foreign policy is generally understood as the selfish struggle of a nation to secure its interests, if necessary at the cost of other nations. This is done by enhancing the nation's position in what is known as the balance of power. Only the more powerful nations can ensure that their interests are achieved, so it becomes imperative to struggle to grow in power and also to make sure competing weaker nations do not increase theirs (Pham 258). Power, however, is immensely difficult to measure because it is not limited to merely hard numbers. As Richard Little explains in his work "The Balance of Power in *Politics Among Nations*", power "embraces material factors, such as the number of troops and weapons available to the state, as well as intangible factors, such as troop morale, national character, and the quality of a government and its diplomacy" (139). Because of the intangibles, statesmen can never accurately gauge the power of an opponent. As Hans Morgenthau argued, this potential for miscalculation means statesmen are forced to maximize their power position (ibid.). Should they fail to do so, they risk defeat. Morgenthau strongly believed that in the absence of an international order, nations have a moral obligation to take care of their own interests (Pham 259).

We now live in a multipolar global international community with some modicum of order, in which, Morgenthau argued, the balance of power is much more stable. In a multipolar system there is strength in numbers. Like-minded nations will work together against opposing forces. As nations become dependent on the alliance for their survival the interests of smaller nations need to be heeded lest they defect and jeopardize the balance of

power. Similarly, great powers cannot act unilaterally for fear of alienating their allies. This breeds caution and thereby order and stability (155).

Niebuhr's thinking resembled that of Morgenthau in this matter. As Andy Ulrich argues in his article on Niebuhr's thinking after WWII, in Niebuhr's view, "realism would be tempered with a touch of Wilsonian idealism – big power responsibility would be balanced by small power rights" (8). Think for example of NATO. The United States is the largest military contributor and has enough military power to act unilaterally but it needs the participation of its allies to lend its actions legitimacy. This makes the United States somewhat dependent on weaker powers and gives them leverage to have their interests taken into consideration. Niebuhr and Morgenthau strongly believed in this sense of humility, because it shapes how the United States appears in the eyes of other nations. John D. Carlson explains Niebuhr's point of view: "Humility also becomes a crucial tool of ethical realist statecraft, powerful in limiting one's own moral pretensions, vital to one's image in the eyes of others, and necessary to extending the ethical impact of politics, statesmanship, and war" (642). The third of Morgenthau's nine rules for diplomacy echoes this: "Diplomacy must look at the political scene from the point of view of other nations" (qtd. in Pham 260). This shows that both men put much emphasis on a responsible and careful appearance. Kennan as a diplomat put this to practice, believing that "the United States has always been well served in practicing honesty, decency, and helpfulness in small things. On the other hand, pettiness and a gross insensitivity to others have hindered the advancement of US foreign interests (Mayers 324).

Niebuhr believed that nations needed to move away from selfish thinking in order to focus on long-term interests, which are arguably more beneficial: "A consistent self-interest on the part of a nation will work against its interests because it will fail to do justice to its broader and longer interests, which are involved with those of other nations" (qtd. in Lieven 173). Think for example about the Russian occupation of Crimea. This thesis will cover this subject in more depth, but it is a prime example of Russia choosing short-term and immediate realist interests of power projection over long-term interests of economic cooperation. Another example is the American missile defense program that was launched under President George W. Bush, which aimed to satisfy the American self-interest of survival but damaged relations with Russia, which the United States needs for broader interests like fighting terrorism and bringing stability to the Middle East. Paying more attention to long-term interests would create more stability between nations.

George Kennan differed on this idea of stability and believed that the balance of power was far more fluent. He identified three characteristics of international life, listed in Barton Gellman's book *Contending With Kennan: Toward a Philosophy of American Power*:

1. The balance of power was and would continue to be the only glue binding any international structure.
2. Conflict and change are the very essence of international life, and no status quo, however realistically conceived, could last intact forever.
3. There could be no guarantee that such change would proceed always by peaceful means – nor that peace would always be in the best interests of the United States (34).

The first point illustrates that whether nations cooperate in organizations or act separately, the most powerful nations will always dominate the international spectrum. The second indicates that the United States will eventually lose its position as the most powerful nation, just as for example Britain and Rome did. Of course, this principle is not limited to just the United States. It applies to every nation as everyone is competing with each other. The third point argues that if change does come it could come through war. The Second World War is a prime example, in which Germany upset the status quo and conquered large parts of Europe. Even though the United States officially stayed out of the war until the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt had already commenced to prepare for war in the knowledge that the United States could be best served by joining the Allies. In the future this could again be the case, whether the United States needs to defend itself or if it needs to defeat an upcoming challenger to its hegemony.

This focus of realism on power, order, and stability causes the thought that realism is in its nature amoral. This is not accurate; Niebuhr was a theologian and Morgenthau a philosopher and this shows in their work. Still, some critics of realism argue that realism ignores morality in its deliberations, like Steven P. Lee does in his book *Ethics and War: An Introduction*. Lee argues that realists acknowledge that morals exist, but that they cannot be applied to international relations. To illustrate his point he quotes Hans Morgenthau: "The realist defense of the autonomy of the political sphere against its subversion by other modes of thought does not imply disregard for the existence and importance of these other modes of thought" (qtd. in Lee 15). Yet Morgenthau's words actually mean the exact opposite of how Lee interpreted them. Whereas he takes this quote to mean that Morgenthau is arguing for the exclusion of morality in international relations, Morgenthau is actually saying that realists acknowledge morality's presence in international relations, but do not consider it to

be the driving force. Morality can be applied in a supplementary fashion to realist thought, according to Morgenthau.

Niebuhr did move further away from the classical realist perspective in his views of ethics and realism, as Carlson explains:

“Ethical realism provides a mode of evaluating moral reflections – to identify, temper and refine perfectionist tendencies by fostering a more concerted engagement with political reasons, limits, and realities. Ethical realism assesses the limits of moral analysis, without endorsing the moral disinterest of classical realism” (631).

Max Weber touches more closely upon this when he draws a conclusion on the balance between ethics and statecraft in his work *Politics as a Vocation*: “an ethics of ultimate ends and an ethic of responsibility are not absolute contrasts but rather supplements which only in unison constitute a genuine man – a man who *can* have the “calling for politics”” (qtd. in McCorckle 38, emphasis in original). This is not to say that politicians will never have to act against their ethical opinions. As a statesman, it may be necessary for a president to ignore his personal beliefs or act against them in favor of the greater national interest. Or as Niebuhr put it in *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*:

“The preservation of a democratic civilization requires the wisdom of the serpent and the harmlessness of the dove. The children of light must be armed with the wisdom of the children of darkness but remain free of their malice. They must know the power of self-interest in human society without giving it moral justification. They must have this wisdom in order that they may beguile, deflect, harness and restrain self-interest, individual and collective, for the sake of the community” (qtd. in Harries 156).

This asks a level of responsibility of the statesman that Niebuhr believed went against basic human nature. This is why he preferred a democratic system as it stands a better chance of limiting the use of absolute power.

Even though Niebuhr favored a democratic form of government, he was aware that this system could not be universally applied. Many nations do not have historic traditions and resources that make them suitable for democracy and so he strongly argued against its idolization by Americans (167; Ulrich 10). Kennan was of a similar belief when he argued that post-Nazi Germany was better suited as a monarchical government with certain limits to it rather than a democracy in style of the United States or Great-Britain, because Germany lacked the necessary traditions to make such a system last (Mayers 82). Lieven and Hulsman

build their case of favoring economic growth over the spreading of democracy on these arguments.

Niebuhr's definition of the statesman and the moral character a statesman would require points towards an elitist attitude that was closely mirrored by Kennan. Kennan saw himself as an elitist: "Sometimes I have been charged with being an elitist. Of course I am. What do people expect? God forbid that we should be without an elite. Is everything to be done by gray mediocrity?" (qtd. in Gellman 83). As a diplomat, Kennan believed that only similar elites should be employed on diplomatic missions as he believed "only a first-rate group of trained men could accomplish important tasks" (Mayers 45).

Contrary to Lieven and Hulsman, who argue for the involvement of the public in international affairs through domestic politics, Mayers explains that Kennan believed that the public should only have a small role in foreign policy and definitely should not be a constraint on policymakers "who alone know the details of international problems and can carefully calculate a reasonable diplomacy" (57). In Kennan's view these policymakers should be the diplomats, not the government at home. Diplomats suffer under their government employers because the government, Kennan believed, was not chiefly concerned with the national interest: "Their main concern is domestic politics; and the interests they find themselves pursuing in [this] field of activity are not only often but usually in conflict with the requirements of a sensible national diplomacy" (qtd. in Gellman 93). This focus on diplomacy is echoed by Morgenthau (Pham 259-260), and together with a deeply-rooted sense of pragmatism, responsibility, and humility, it forms the core of ethical realist thought.

Although the next chapter will go into more detail about ethical realism, the thinking of these 'founding fathers' can be identified in the theory. Morgenthau and Niebuhr positions on ethics in realism are present in the virtues of humility and responsibility, which are defined by the state or statesmen thinking critically about the nation's position, interests and capabilities. The thinking of all three men can be found in the virtue of prudence, which dictates that policymakers need to consider their actions carefully and give great thought to the consequences of those actions. Because of his background as a diplomat, Kennan is the driving influence on Lieven and Hulsman for their virtues of study and patriotism. His penchant for knowledge of other nations and his willingness to accept that no nation, particularly his own, is perfect allowed him to understand America's position in the world as seen by others. It is this focus on ethical behavior, focused on long-term interests rather than short-term thinking, combined with the sense of duty and responsibility that separates ethical realism from classical realism.



## **1: *Ethical Realism* Explained and Reviewed**

This chapter will focus exclusively on the book *Ethical Realism: An Alternative Vision for America's Role in the World*. In order to be able to analyze U.S. foreign policy as it relates to ethical realism, we must establish a thorough understanding of this school of thought and its origins. This summary represents the book as it was written by the authors and therefore makes no judgments on theory or feasibility. However, this chapter will have a critical note as well. Attention is given to the reception of the book by briefly discussing reviews written by David Wedgwood Benn, Charles Strohmer, and Bernard J. Dobski, all three established experts in international relations and political science. After discussing their opinions I will deliver my own critical analysis and I will explain what I found to be the most important shortcoming of *Ethical Realism*, namely the idea of the Great Capitalist Peace. I found a discussion on this to be missing in the reviews of Benn, Strohmer, and Dobski. I will argue that the Great Capitalist Peace is inherently flawed and cannot be achieved.

### **1.1 Summary of *Ethical Realism***

The authors have structured the book in such a manner that the actual discussion of what defines ethical realism happens in the third of five chapters. Even though this may seem odd at first, it is a deliberate attempt by the authors to introduce the reader to the idea that a change is needed and that successful events in foreign policy of the past resembled ethical realism, while the failed events mirrored its opposition. This strategy makes it easier to convince the reader that ethical realism must be a viable alternative, especially when the authors then make a compelling case about how ethical realism could be applied in the field by tackling numerous problems that face the United States and the world. It is therefore of the utmost importance to remember that this book was written with an agenda in mind. The book was not just meant to encourage the public to think critically about the nation's course, but also to convince them of the benefits of ethical realism. This may seem like an obvious statement but if we are to judge ethical realism on its merits it is imperative that we do not lose sight of it. As displeasure with experts and politicians blindly following one policy directive is what prompted the authors to write the book one is confident they would welcome such scrutiny.

Although the book as a whole is an interesting read, it needs to be said that not every chapter is relevant to this thesis. The first chapter provides background for ethical realism, but this information is less relevant for my purpose. What is important to note about these first chapter is how it explains the need for long-term thinking and what the dangers are of overreaching. The second chapter is short and provides a critique of neoconservatists and liberal hawks and their arguments for preventive war. For our purpose, this chapter is irrelevant because it teaches nothing of ethical realism, but only serves to note the authors' displeasure with the political thinking done by these two groups.

In the first chapter Lieven and Hulsman draw parallels between the beginning of the Cold War under Presidents Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower and the current battle against global terrorism. The authors picked these two men and that specific moment in history because it represented a complete rethinking of the position of the United States in relation to the world. Fresh to its position of global power the United States was immediately aware of the possible conflict with its former ally, the Soviet Union. This meant that foreign policy had to be shaped accordingly and, while vehemently opposed at first by both the left and the right of the political spectrum, the containment doctrine that was developed would be the guiding light for the next decades until the Cold War was over and the Soviet Union utterly defeated. As the authors write:

“Those who have obviously been proved right were the authors of a tough but restrained strategy of “containing” Soviet expansionism, without launching or unduly risking war; and of meanwhile undermining Communism through the force of the West’s democratic and free market example” (5).

This was achieved through the successful implementation of the Marshall Plan, which created a clear border between capitalism and communism in Europe through the rebuilding and incentivizing of the shattered economies of the European nations. By design the plan would not exclude the Soviets, but core principles of the plan in terms of financial accountability were unacceptable to the Soviet interests and so they declined to take part and forbade their satellite nations to do so as well. This would eventually lead to the downfall of Stalinism in Western Europe. The authors therefore call the Marshall Plan

“an embodiment in action of the principals of ethical realism ... It was deeply moral, generous, and enlightened, but also met all the traditional standards of realism. It was clearly in the national interests of the United States ... It is this combination of the idealistic and the practical that has so often characterized American foreign policy at its best: a mixture worth rediscovering today” (14).

Hulsman and Lieven make the case that a similar rethinking has to happen if the United States is to defeat its new enemies, and they believe the answer lies close to what the containment doctrine managed to do, as they explain in later chapters.

Although the Marshall Plan contained communist influence, the threat of invasion was by no means over, and this is where we see why showing restraint prevents escalation, whereas overreaching is disastrous. This was exemplified by the invasion of South Korea by its Northern neighbor. Knowing that armed conflict could lead to another World War, Truman urged restraint upon General Douglas MacArthur. MacArthur's mission was to roll back the invading army but he was not to seek conflict with the Chinese Communists. When MacArthur did move beyond the parameters set originally and his objective became the eradication of communist forces in the North and the unification of the peninsula, rollback proved to be a disastrous enterprise when the Chinese did enter the war. The administration's restraint showed when it would not move to defeat China but remained focused on restoring the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. When Eisenhower was elected president, it was Truman's policy of containing the conflict he chose to follow instead of the rollback policy he had campaigned on. This led to a peaceful resolution, although not actual peace, between the two Koreas. The authors call this "the beginning of the political bipartisan support for containment" (23). They continue to add that containment worked because the presidents that had created it acted responsibly. They understood that the United States had limits and that military strength cannot achieve victory on its own; successful national security has to be paired to sensible fiscal policy.

Switching to present day, the authors make a point of criticism by drawing a comparison with the immense national debt that has arisen under President George W. Bush, large parts of which have been sold to political and strategic rivals like China, and wasteful spending in Iraq (26). They continue to be critical of the Bush administration over its creation of the Department of Homeland Security, its focus on unnecessary and irrelevant weapons systems that are designed to fight states rather than terrorists, and its strategic overreaching in the political battles it engages in with, among others, Iran, Russia, China, and Venezuela. Where Truman and Eisenhower tried to convince the world that there are advantages to siding with the United States, the Bush administration was at risk of doing the exact opposite.

Lieven and Hulsman come to their alternative vision in the third chapter and this is where the book begins to provide the information directly relevant to this thesis. The chapter first discusses briefly the ideas of Morgenthau, Niebuhr, and Kennan in terms of ethics and

politics before introducing five virtues on which the theory of ethical realism is based and how they would be feature in policy.

The authors explain that ethical realism is something the public can and will understand, because they have been living it most of their lives:

“Ethical realism is tough enough to provide a basis for the harsh actions the United States may well need to take in the future to defend itself, its values, and its allies. Unlike some strands of “classical” realism, it is not cynical, indifferent to the long-term interests of humanity, or attracted to ruthlessness for its own sake. It is rooted in the commonsensical, everyday morality and generosity of spirit that Americans practice themselves and expect of their neighbors” (53).

They argue that statesmen should be guided by a moral compass and an open mind, because blindly fighting for a nation’s interests is too cold and uncaring to find many friends in the world. Ethical realism is about seeing the global reality as it is but also about having the responsibility to change it for the better by being guided by moral convictions and resolve.

To guide these moral convictions, ethical realism is based on five virtues: prudence, humility, study, responsibility, and patriotism. These virtues feature prominently in the discussion on Obama’s policies in the second chapter of this thesis, which is why it is necessary to understand them correctly. Following these virtues the United States could craft a policy that would genuinely respect the views and interests of other nations, but would not diminish the commitment to its own vital interests. The United States would no longer be under the illusion that it can act as it pleases because it is stronger than its opponents and is the force of good in the world.

### Prudence

The first and foremost virtue is prudence, because as Hans Morgenthau, forefather of ethical realism said: “There can be no political morality without prudence... without consideration of the political consequences of seemingly moral action” (qtd. in Lieven & Hulsman 67). Prudence has to be the guiding light for foreign policy, especially when military operations are involved. Practicing prudence in setting strategic goals boils down to having a plan in accordance to one’s limits, a backup plan, and a plan for after the operation. Prudence was absent in the planning and execution of the invasion of Iraq, as the authors argue, but also in the thinking of neoconservatists and liberal hawks alike. At the time of writing *Ethical*

*Realism* there were too many goals that intertwined or conflicted with each other to have a practical approach to any of them.

### Humility

The United States is not perfect. Even though it is strong, it has limits to its capabilities. It is a force of good in the world, but it can make mistakes and it can be morally wrong. Ignoring this is detrimental to the interests in the United States as it drives possibly cooperative nations away. Therefore it is vital that the United States is aware of the mistakes it has made in the past and that it learns from these mistakes what and where its limits are. It is impossible to be strong and influential everywhere and at times the United States is going to have to rely on other nations. This means that it should respect the perhaps differing views of these nations and it needs to accept that at times foreign interests need to be accommodated.

### Study

In order to be involved with another country the United States needs to understand it. It needs to have a grasp of the history, the traditions, and the interests of that country. It has to have a clear image of what is at play in that country so that it does not go in blind. This also means that it has to accept that not everyone shares the West's values and that this is not necessary for the United States to achieve its vital goals. Study will also create specific solutions to specific problems, since no situation is similar and there can be no all-encompassing solution in matters of foreign policy.

### Responsibility

It is not enough to have good intentions. As any action carries a consequence, the United States has to think critically about what actions are necessary to achieve the goal in mind but also about what will follow after. The authors do not dispute that the United States will need to be ruthless at times, but state that this is only acceptable when absolutely necessary in the defense of the country or against threats to civilization. In other words, there needs to be a true justification for the desired action that goes far beyond good intentions.

### Patriotism

A distinction has to be made between patriotism and nationalism. While nationalism means loving one's country for what it can be, the ideal picture, patriotism means loving

one's country for what is and was in the past. Having this realistic view of one's country and still loving it creates a sense of duty and honesty, but also gives the enlightened patriot the ability to recognize this in patriots of other countries. This in turn leads to the understanding that these other patriots will not ignore their loyalty for the sake of the United States. If the United States needs them to do so anyway, it will have to be prepared and willing to do the same.

The authors introduce their notion of the Great Capitalist Peace in the fourth chapter, which is also of specific importance to the subject of this thesis. The chapter is divided into several sections, the first of which explains the origins of the Great Capitalist Peace which lies in the British Empire. The second discusses the need for a reduced role for American power in the world while maintaining influence. The third argues that the spreading of democracy cannot establish peace and order. The fourth and final section gives more information on the Great Capitalist Peace itself.

In order to limit the American pursuit of power, while at the same time maintaining America's position in the world, the focus would have to shift to a policy where "U.S. power is used more effectively but in more limited ways – indeed, more effectively because of these limits" (91). The authors suggest a modern form of the British power projection of the nineteenth century, which was successful for the most part because of Britain's leading role in the world economy. The authors claim the same could work for the United States:

"This alternative depends on America as global leader, and therefore ultimately upon its military and economic strength, and upon American will. It does not, however, require America to be an empire, or even the global hegemon... On the contrary, at the heart of this idea is the creation of a network of states, all of which have a vital economic and security stake in defending the existing order. America will, of course, retain enough military power to defend its own vital interests, but it will take care not to threaten those of other regional powers, unless primary American interests are genuinely threatened" (91).

Even though U.S. military power is unrivaled in the world, its relevancy is limited in combating the threats that the United States faces today. Although no state could stand against the United States, organizations like Al Qaeda fare much better; not because of its strength, but because U.S. military presence or actions on foreign soil without consideration of that particular country's interests, culture, and traditions, creates exactly the anti-American

sentiment that makes a state fertile ground for recruitment. This will come up in the case study on Syria.

Besides the military and political limits to American power, another significant factor is that power projection is limited by location. There are areas in the world where the United States is not the most influential player. Within the former Soviet Union Russia is more influential than the United States, because of its presence. There is no doubt that the United States and/or NATO could deploy troops in Eastern Europe if necessary but the willingness to do so is questionable, as we will see in the case study on the Ukraine crisis.

The answer to these problems for liberal hawks and neoconservatives is the spreading of democracy. Even though the authors believe this to be a worthwhile goal that would create stability to last long after U.S. power has faded, the model on which the spreading of democracy is based, including the willingness of states to convert to a democratic system, is not universally applicable. As the authors explain, it worked well in the former Soviet Union where certain nations were eager to limit Moscow's influence. In areas of the world where anti-Americanism is part of a state's nationalism there is no such willingness to adopt a system pushed by the enemy. Democracy cannot and should not be forced and therefore the effectiveness of the spreading of democracy to regions where the result of global stability would be greatest is severely hampered.

The answer the authors provide is a system of basic free market economics, in other words their Great Capitalist Peace. It was not democracy that brought down Communism in the Soviet Union or in China, they argue; it was the strength of capitalism. Both nations have adopted some version of a free economy. Like American elites, the elites of these nations have strong interests in maintaining a strong international market economy. International unrest and crises jeopardize economic stability, which is detrimental to these interests. The elites, and the population judging them, are therefore better served by peace and order (116).

However, the Great Capitalist Peace also depends on the United States giving due regard to the vital interests of other major states. This is not the same as acquiescence to the definition of interests of these states, "but it must, through prudence, responsibility, understanding, and a decent respect to the opinions of mankind, use the same rough standards toward them that it has always applied to its own vital interests and those of its key allies" (118).

The authors set up a list that such universal rules for an orderly and peaceful international community must include:

- Security against invasion and armed coercion,

- Territorial integrity,
- Basic national cohesion and internal order,
- Governments in their immediate neighborhood that guarantee a reasonable level of order, and
- A reasonable degree of their own independence in national economic decision-making (118).

The fifth chapter explains the authors' vision for the future. They begin the chapter by discussing the importance of letting go of America's unipolar position as it is unrealistic in these times. Instead the United States should consider the opinions of other states or agents. They then introduce economic policies in a section on developmental realism, before providing policy recommendations on certain key areas for America's interests. The first step in the way forward for the United States would be for it to abandon its attempts to be dominant everywhere, in favor of being the only great power present everywhere. The difference lies in that being present means the United States has an important seat at the table, but that it does not dictate the conversation. The sole exception to this is near its own borders: the Caribbean and Central America. Otherwise, the United States should promote regional concerts of power. The goal for all the nations involved in such an organization is to ensure no regional hegemon emerges. A hegemon would cripple the ability of other states to pursue their vital interests. Should a regional hegemon emerge regardless and it exerts its dominance, and is hostile to vital U.S. interests, then the United States should support rival regional states. Should that strategy fail, only then should the United States opt for sanctions or in extreme cases war (122).

For nations to develop into stable democracies, it is necessary for the United States and other wealthy democracies to provide financial and political support to foster the growth of a strong middle class. They quote from Aristotle's *The Politics* to do so: "where the middle class is large, there is least likely to be faction and dissension" (qtd. in Lieven & Hulsman 132). Merely promoting democracy is not enough, the middle class needs to be doing well economically before it will create the stability the Great Capitalist Peace aims for.

To achieve this, the authors have developed a strategy that exists of two parts. The first part is the promotion of policies and projects that will visibly benefit the majority of the population. These policies and projects have to incorporate elements of social justice and the resulting economic growth has to spread to the masses. The second part is the growth of the middle class by making it easier to get loans for small businesses and home ownership, i.e. the reforming to well-funded banking systems from the local to the national level (133).



This plan requires long-term thinking. Economic change cannot come overnight; it may take decades to provide the necessary results. This makes it vulnerable to changing political tides in Western domestic politics. A new Truman-Eisenhower moment would be required for such a policy to succeed.

However, the authors do not advocate developmental aid for a wide range of countries around the world. Aid would not be given on basis of need but on the nations' importance to vital U.S. national interests (which, the authors admit, would exclude most of non-Muslim sub-Saharan Africa) and on the responsibility of recipient governments to use the money as it is intended (134-135). The goal is to show that it is better to work with the United States than to act against it.

The authors then provide policy recommendations on the Greater Middle East, Israeli-Palestinian peace, containing civil war in Iraq, how to approach Iran, and on working with Russia and China. For our purpose, special credence should be given to the recommendations on Iran and Russia.

For the Greater Middle East, the authors recommend the creation of a regional concert, supported by the United States, the European Union, and other major global powers. This would allow the United States to pursue its key goals, but since it is not doing so as the unilateral regional hegemon the negativity resulting from U.S. influence in the region is diminished (140).

To create a long-lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians, the Palestinians would have to give up the right of refugee return to Israel except for limited cases of family reunification. Refugees would need to be compensated for lost land and property at a level set by an international tribunal. Compensation should not only allow them to live in prosperity but should also transform economic prospects of countries where they live. The overwhelming share should be paid by Europe because of its historical responsibility for anti-Semitism. The Palestinian Authority and all major Arab states must sign the settlement treaty, recognize Israel within the borders agreed, and formally pledge not to support violence. Israel must do the same and recognize an independent Palestinian state with full sovereign rights. The border should be set along the lines of the 1967 boundaries, but must leave room for the Palestinian state to be contiguous and viable, and allow free access to the outside world. The settlement would have to be comprehensive and final. Finally, the U.S. should put pressure on the European Union to allow both states into its accession process (141-144).

The best way to contain the Iraqi civil war would be through the aforementioned regional concert. Iraq's neighbors all have a stake in the stability of the country and the

region. They would have to form an agreement to respect Iraq's existing borders, to accept a federal framework for Iraq with guaranteed ethnic power-sharing at the center, and to agree not to arm opposing factions. This agreement should be witnessed and guaranteed by the United States, the United Nations, the European Union, the Arab League, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (147).

Relevant to the second chapter of this thesis is the policy recommendation towards Iran, and specifically its focus on nuclear non-proliferation. In order to deal with Iran, contact would have to be increased, again through regional concerts, but also by increasing already established contact such as the United Nations and the International Contact Group on Afghanistan. This will build mutual confidence on big issues and international respect and credibility. The authors identify two vital interests for the U.S.: First, to prevent Iran from becoming once again a sponsor of international terrorism. Should Iran encourage Hezbollah to launch new terrorist campaigns, the terrorist threat would be dramatically increased and any U.S. administration would likely see no other course of action than to attack Iran, which could lead to a destructive full-scale war with global consequences. Second, Iran must be prevented from acquiring nuclear weapons. The authors believe the risk of these weapons ending up with terrorist groups to be small. The much greater threat is the example it sets when the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is shown as having no significance and the United States' failure to prevent a state from creating these weapons. They expect this would cause a significant increase in the number of nations that would go nuclear (154). This greatly increases the chance of these weapons again being used in conflict.

Policy-wise, Iran would have to be made part of the Great Capitalist Peace so that it will see, like Brazil and South Africa realized before, that the possession of nuclear weapons is irrelevant to its real national needs. Internationally a red line must be drawn at weaponization. All major global powers would have to sign an agreement wherein they will publicly state what actions each signatory will take, should Iran weaponize. Especially Russia needs to be made to respond as promised (156-157). A breaking of their given word would have to result in serious consequences in every aspect of relations.

Russia will naturally focus much in the oncoming chapter, particularly in the case study on Ukraine. In its approach to Russia, the United States needs to step away from attacking President Putin. He has broad support in his country and is the democratically elected leader. To criticize him is to insult the Russian people and this strengthens his support. Instead, the real primary interests of the United States concerning Russia need to be made clear to Russian leadership so a consensus may be reached where possible, while

simultaneously showing preparedness to exert serious pressure if necessary. Reaching consensus will mean Russia needs to be accommodated in issues of their primary interest which are of less interest to the United States. The over-encompassing goal is to make Russia a great power stakeholder in the Great Capitalist Peace (163-164).

The authors argue that the United States only has four vital interests in the former Soviet Union, three of which it shares with Russia. They present them in order of importance:

1. To keep Russian weapons and materials of mass destruction out of the hands of terrorists, and to persuade Russia to take a more active stance on non-proliferation towards potentially dangerous nations.
2. To help prevent Islamist revolution and the creation of safe havens for Islamist terrorists in the Muslim regions of Central Asia and the Caucasus.
3. To maintain open international access to the energy reserves of Central Asia and the Caucasus.
4. To prevent any outbreak of major new conflict within or between states in the region, especially when these states border America's allies (165). Somewhat prophetically, the authors specifically name Ukraine as an example where prevention of conflict should be the focus, instead of promoting a pro-American democratic leadership (166).

These four areas are important to remember for the case studies in chapter 2. The case study on non-proliferation discusses the first point, the second area concerns the case study on Syria, and the third and fourth will be discussed in more detail in the case study on Ukraine.

Although Lieven and Hulsman note China as a key factor in the Great Capitalist Peace, the lack of its participation in other fields makes it of less importance for our purpose. However it needs to be said that in order to maintain stable and peaceful relationship between China and the United States, both nations need to accept three essential truths:

- Domination of East Asia is now impossible for the United States. China is too strong.
- Replacing the United States as unilateral hegemon is impossible for China. Other powers in the region, such as Japan and Vietnam, will not allow this.
- Conflict between the two nations would destroy both. The United States would be unable to maintain its global leadership, while China's aspirations to become a great economic power would be set back for years to come (170-171).

These truths should be incorporated into a reshaping of America's current approach to China, which, while focusing on integrating China into the international system, is not

reflective of the changing power status quo. China is becoming stronger and will not be lectured to on their economy.

Militarily, the United States should increase security operations with nations in the region through bilateral initiatives in order to show it will defend Taiwan as pledged, but will not create an anti-Chinese alliance if China keeps following the “China’s Peaceful Rise” policy. This policy entails increasing its influence in the region through multilateral initiatives (172-173).

Also, the United States should work to diminish and eventually remove its ground troops from Korea. These troops are mostly no longer wanted by the South Koreans and do not serve a constructive purpose as the United States relies far more on air and naval superiority in the region. This would also make China responsible for stymieing North Korea’s nuclear ambitions, as well as a possible reunification. China would gain prestige and influence from this, while the United States removes its troops from harm’s way (174).

On Taiwan, the United States should make it abundantly clear it will defend it against Chinese aggression. However, it should also work to reduce tensions with China on the issue and discourage Taiwan from declaring independence. Instead, efforts should be made to enact a peaceful and agreed to unification, which will over time increase plurality in China and loosen the hold of the Communist Party (175-176).

## **1.2 Reviews**

In their introduction, the authors mention that they, and specifically John Hulsman, are taking a professional risk in writing this book (xxi). They feel that the risk is worth taking to put America on a better foreign policy path. This acknowledgement of possible professional repercussions was proven to be accurate when Hulsman was fired from the Heritage Foundation, where he had worked as a senior foreign policy analyst for seven years, after refusing to inform the Foundation of what would be in the book (Strohmer).

It is therefore not surprising that the authors are lauded by their peers for their courage in openly voicing their dissatisfaction with America’s stagnated discussions on foreign policy. David Wedgwood Benn, Charles Strohmer, and Bernard J. Dobski, while not necessarily in agreement with the content of the book, all recognize the bravery of the two authors in breaking away from their respective political sides and suggesting a radically new approach.

Yet despite the real risk that Lieven and Hulsman took, it is remarkable how little seems to have been written about the book by scholars. These three reviews were all the

academic discourse that could be found, although the book is referenced in textbooks such as Duncan Bell's work *Ethics and World Politics* (101). This is surprising because over the last decade there have been plenty of academics that have called for, or argued against, the thinking about international relations to return to a more ethical or realist framework. These are academics like Duncan Bell, Steven P. Lee, J. Samuel Barkin, Joseph S. Nye Jr., Joel H. Rosenthal and Christian Barry, Mario Telò, to name but a few. Of special note because of its focus on the discussion between realists and the feasibility of realism is the anthology *Realism and the Balancing of Power*, edited by John A. Vasquez and Colin Elman.

Perhaps the sheer volume of academics writing about the subject is why *Ethical Realism* becomes overshadowed, but more likely it is because the book had a different target audience. While academics will definitely find interesting points in it, the core target audience was the voters and not the academic world. Lieven and Hulsman had the goal to inform and convince the voting public that they could and should demand better of their leaders; that there were alternatives to the neo-conservatism of the George W. Bush administration or the interventionist stranglehold that gripped both Democrat and Republican think-tanks alike in Washington. Through their colloquial and sometimes blunt language they spoke to the public directly, because that was where the power to effect change was situated.

This in itself is surprising as realist thought in international relations focuses rather exclusively on the state and not on the domestic actors, of which the general public is one. George Kennan was far from positive about possible interference from the public in international matters: "As for the role of public opinion in Foreign Policy, Kennan has long maintained that it should be minor, not a heavy constraint on trained policymakers who alone know the details of international problems and can carefully calculate a reasonable diplomacy" (Mayers 57). By looking to persuade the general public to demand ethical realism from their leaders, Lieven and Hulsman are actively inspiring the interference in international relations that Kennan objected to.

It follows then that we should look to how the public received the book. Surprisingly, *The Washington Post*, a website that offers many book reviews on political books, has no review on file and neither does *The Independent*. Only the *International New York Times* offers a full review of the book by James Traub, and his underlying tone is defined by skepticism. Regarding the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq he says: "Bush and his pals got us into this mess, but prudence and humility will not suffice to get us out", which comes across as a rather damning statement. However, his last paragraph shows that in general he has a positive outlook on the book when he calls it "passionately argued," and a reminder that

“once we knew how to confront an adversary without sacrificing something essential of ourselves”. Still, it is remarkable that a book that was intended to inform and persuade the public managed to be missed by the public eye. Perhaps the answer lies in Traub’s skepticism. If Lieven and Hulsman are correct that Washington is permeated with interventionists and neo-conservatives, many would have passed on this book. Because I was looking for a school of thought that matched my own, I may have been more receptive to it than the intended audience. Even though it was not intended for the academic theater, there is where we find the most useful critical view and where we must thus return.

Of the three academic reviewers, Strohmer is by far the most positive about *Ethical Realism*. In fact, one is hard pressed to find any critical notes on the material in his review, published on his website charlesstrohmer.com. Evidently a supporter of the type of systematic changes Lieven and Hulsman put forward, Strohmer champions the book as “an important voice in the mix”. Strohmer provides perhaps the best summary of the books reception:

“Ethical Realism will not interest those who are so ideologically entrenched that their truth has become for them the whole truth. And even those who believe that ethical realism is the sensible way ahead may balk at some of the book’s policy suggestions. For many in Washington, however, this thoughtful collaboration will affirm the bipartisan humility that is now needed, even in the face of personal costs.”

His views on the book indicate that even though it will affirm people’s positions, it seems lacking in its ability to convince readers to change their minds. If correct, this would be detrimental to its purpose.

Benn and Dobski, however, provide strong criticisms on certain key issues of the book. Benn argues that while the authors claim that spreading democracy does not bring disputes to an end, there are serious concerns in the West about the “democratic deficit” as he calls it. Furthermore, he points out that while the authors question the effectiveness of the United Nations, there is no substitute global platform where nations meet as equals. In these criticisms, Benn seems to show a misunderstanding of the authors’ arguments. While it is true that the authors do not believe that the spreading of democracy is a policy goal in itself, they do urge that the United States push non-democratic nations towards it as part of a more responsible and interest-oriented policy. As for the United Nations, the authors do not claim it needs to be done away with or replaced. It is still a valuable tool for any nation. Their argument, however, is that regional concerts are more effective because the nations involved would have a far greater stake in positive results and there would be far less interference and

bureaucratic static from nations outside the region.

Dobski goes into much further detail in his review than Strohmer and Benn. While he calls the book a welcome contribution to the debate on foreign policy, he charges that Lieven and Hulsman have not paid “sufficient attention to the theoretical tradition from which they derive their ‘ethical’ inspiration. ... To put the issue simply, one never gets a sense from the authors as to what is so ‘ethical’ about the realism they advocate” (Dobski 177). Dobski also raises the argument that certain policies may be prudent but are not necessarily principled and when American principles are not present in policy, can it truly be in the American interest (179)? Continuing, Dobski asks how ethical it is to leave China in charge of solving the humanitarian crisis that will arise in the Korean peninsula when China has a horrendous track-record on humanitarian issues. To put it simply, Dobski is of the opinion that even though the authors delivered “serious, thoughtful and human strategies aimed at securing both America’s national interests and a decent and stable international order” (180), their policy alternatives fall short in certain key areas and might therefore not be sufficient in restoring the United States to a more responsible and ethical foreign policy. Dobski is correct in saying that the authors brush over certain areas too easily and sometimes offer a simplified few of the political situations they discuss. In the following paragraphs, I will go into more detail about these flaws as I deliver my own critical view of the book.

In my opinion, strong criticism should be placed on the presentation of the policy alternatives. The authors spend much of the book explaining the need for ethical realism but in their policy suggestions the virtues – prudence, humility, study, responsibility, and patriotism – are missing from the explanation. The reader is forced to just understand how these virtues are being applied. This is a weakness of the book because at times it is difficult to see how this should be done. Dobski example of China’s role in a possible Korean crisis shows this quite clearly as the failure to account for China’s history towards North Korean refugees shows a lack or absence of the virtue of study.

Although Dobski gave only the example of China the same issue arises for the resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where much emphasis is placed on the role that the European Union should play because of its historical responsibility for anti-Semitism. This glosses over the problem of getting European nations to admit to this responsibility and the even larger issue of getting nations to pledge not to use force against Israel or to support terrorist groups to do so. It completely disregards the historic contentions that resulted from the creation of Israel in 1948 or were already in place because of the League of Nations

mandate of 1922. Next to that, it ignores the far-stretching consequences of allowing the United States to influence the European Union in regards to membership and thereby compromising its sovereignty as an entity.

However, what is missing from the academics' criticisms and something that I focus on this thesis is the improbable feasibility of the Great Capitalist Peace, the global society that would reach its stable condition first and foremost through economic growth, which would in turn foster democratic restructuring. As Lieven and Hulsman argue, democratically chosen governments will choose peace and prosperity over war, seeing as they are held accountable by the voters and therefore governments will come to work with others and set aside their differences.

This theory is much too simplistic. It fails to take into account the differences in democratic systems, especially concerning the distribution of legislative, judicial, and executive powers, the different resources a nation has to employ these powers, as well as the historic background of the population. First off, there is not one blanket model for a democratic society. This is why democracy in the United States works differently from how it is applied in the Netherlands, for example, and yet they are both functioning democratic systems. No foreign body or nation would ever think to argue that either of the two would need serious democratic reform on a systematic level. Similarly, Russia and China have their own democratic systems of a sort, and while the West often calls on them to implement reforms, there is no blueprint for this and the call for change can only be successful when it comes from the nations' population. This is dependent though on the premise that society wants to change but this is not always the case. Russia, for instance, has a long history of powerful leaders in the tsars. From the Russian perspective, it makes sense that in their democracy the President is also a powerful figure with far-stretching authority. It is after all part of their history and tradition, and Russia's constitution is therefore shaped to reflect that Vladimir Putin himself indicated as much at a summit in Bratislava on February 24, 2005:

“We are going to remain committed to the fundamental principles of democracy that have been established around the world. But of course, all the modern institutions of democracy should be adequate to the current status of the development of Russia, to our history, and our traditions” (Bush 2005 I: 315)

Vladimir Putin sparked protests though when he had the constitution amended to allow for his third term, but as Michael Rywkin explains in his article “Quo Vadis, Russia?” his political opponents see him as the lesser evil when compared to their other opponents and



there is no popular alternative (75). It is therefore unlikely that society will turn against him enough to limit his power, or to force changes to the democratic system.

Simultaneously, Russia has suffered much at the hands of foreign entities over the centuries, creating a layer of distrust of other nations, a disregard of foreign opinions, and a sense of nationalism based on the idea that together Russians can keep out the forces that seek to undermine and destroy outside influences. This is why the United States and the West in general make for an easy scapegoat when Russian leaders are faced with domestic problems; when Vladimir Putin was elected for a third term allegations of election tampering sparked demonstrations and he subsequently blamed the United States for fermenting civil unrest (McFaul 167-170).

Russia is also a prime example of how the national interest can be defined as different from economic prosperity. While Russia under Putin was doing well economically, much of that has been sacrificed these last few years over the ongoing situation in Ukraine. From the standpoint of the Great Capitalist Peace, Russia would have opted to stay out of Ukraine and continued its economic climb. However, the inclusion of ethnic Russians living in Crimea trumped economic arguments and even arguments for peace. That the Russian population not just allowed this to happen but actually supported this decision also goes back to Russia's history. As said before, the Russian population has had much to endure over the course of history. Foreign invaders, two World Wars, and economic downfall during the communist regimes gave rise to a population that has gotten used to a degree of sacrifice and suffering and because of it has a higher threshold for pain than Western nations often take into account. Combined with the perception that history has generally shown Russia to overcome its enemies by merely being patient, Russia became an entity that endures and will outlast the opposition. This is exactly what Russia is banking on in Ukraine because sanctions against Russia work both ways: they hurt Russia but also the nations that enacted the sanctions, who now lost a trading partner, not to mention the retaliatory moves by Russia on trade not subject to sanctions. The Russians are very much prepared to have this situation drag on, because in their view the longer it does the more the current situation becomes the new status quo and the West will bend, which is made all the more likely considering that shorter term limits mean American and European leaders change much more frequently than Russian leaders. Michael Rywkin shows he is of the same belief when he discussed Russia's reasoning for invading Ukraine: "This reveals Moscow's conviction that the West has no stamina and will shy away from the slightest danger of military confrontation, while Moscow can survive any sanctions imposed by others" (97-98).

This serves as an example that the Great Capitalist Peace is inherently flawed as it depends on the assumption that possible economic prosperity trumps national and ethnic sentiments, which it hardly ever does. Those sentiments are what give a nation and its people an identity and they have been fostered for centuries. Another example of how nations choose identity over economic prosperity is the way member-states of the European Union actively resist the body to become ever closer for fear of losing their sovereignty and identity. If economic progress was paramount nations would not resist letting the EU become closer-knit, as the people would prosper under this tighter union. However, in spite of possible economic gain the Dutch held a referendum on an association treaty between the EU and Ukraine and soundly rejected it. Going even further, the United Kingdom just held a referendum on the continuation of UK's membership in the EU, sparked by an unwillingness to lose its identity and sovereignty, and chose to leave. These are two examples of democratic societies using those democratic principles to define their national interest as being different from economic prosperity. So then if economic growth and increase of a wealthy middle class is not paramount in the definition of what is the national interest, how could it ever create the Great Capitalist Peace? The answer to this question is quite simply that it cannot achieve that goal. Democracies will at times go to war, despite their economic interests, much like Kennan argued (see Interlude).

Basically, the problems that face ethical realism are captured beautifully by the words of one of the founding fathers himself: Hans Morgenthau.

“The first lesson the student of international politics must learn and never forget is that the complexities of international affairs make simple solutions and trustworthy prophecies impossible. Here the scholar and the charlatan part company. Knowledge of the forces that determine politics among nations, and of the ways by which their political relations unfold, reveals the ambiguity of the facts of international politics” (qtd. in Barkin 118).

Barkin goes on to explain what this quote means by explaining the difference between predictive and prescriptive theory. Predictive theory is defined by Barkin as “an approach to the study of international relations that begins with the premise that these politics are essentially patterned, and that social science should focus on what the patterns are” (125). Basically, this means that political actors will always act according to the pattern unless the current event is too disruptive for the pattern to hold. In essence, in this theory the actors cannot and will not change their minds.

Prescriptive theory, practiced by the classical realists, on the other hand focuses on the current event instead of a pattern. Context takes the prominent position, because every event is essentially unique and requires a different approach (125).

Barkin argues that when realist policy theorists confuse the two, they fail. Predictive theory cannot use a prescriptive approach, because actors are pattern-bound and will always act in a certain way and that makes a policy prescription obsolete. Likewise, prescriptive theory has no use of a predictive method, because if all events are unique there are no patterns to see, which means predictive theory cannot be applied (127-128).

Since Lieven and Hulsman wrote *Ethical Realism* as policy recommendations, for it to be effective it cannot simultaneously be predictive and prescriptive. Yet we see signs of this regardless, especially in the implementation of the Great Capitalist Peace. After all, it is based on the assumption of a pattern in which states will always identify economic growth as a vital interest and the resulting growth of the middle class will in turn force democratic changes, which will bring peace and stability. If this is the pattern however, why would these nations have to be convinced that creating the stability necessary for economic growth is vital? If nations always act on their identified vital interests they would already be pursuing these interests, yet the book is straightforward in saying that they are not. The pattern therefore must be wrong and subsequently so must the assumption be that this would result in lasting peace.

Interestingly enough, this predictive problem does not concern the policy recommendations to the same extent. In fact, most of the recommendations are prescriptive in nature, with only the logical and expected level of predictive reasoning that Barkin allows for (124). After all, a prescription without an added predicted outcome is hardly going to convince anyone. In their outline of the recommended policies the authors give their expected results, but this is based on reasonable reactions to policy instead of patterns. They treat the areas of contention as unique (albeit sometimes connected) events that require a tailor-made solution, just as prescriptive realists ought to. From this follows that the policy recommendations stand a much better chance of being successfully implemented than the Great Capitalist Peace does.

This chapter has focused on the book *Ethical Realism* and the theory as explained by John Hulsman and Anatol Lieven through a summary of its main arguments and a critical examination of its weaknesses. From this examination it has become clear that the authors have created a viable theory but that their policy recommendations are at times not detailed enough. At certain points the authors fail to explain why other nations would follow the lead

of the United States or did not consider historical roots to issues that make their policy recommendations flawed and likely to fail.

Their policy prescription on the creation of the Great Capitalist Peace is particularly flawed; this chapter has shown that nations will at times identify different vital interests than economic growth. The best example of this is Russia and its preference for choosing strategic security over its economic interests. As Russia's cooperation is vital to the Great Capitalist Peace, this failure to identify these different interests makes the plan impossible to implement. The reason for this failure becomes evident from Barkin's explanation of predictive theory and prescriptive theory and how misapplication of either leads to flawed policy prescriptions.

This strengthens the main argument of this thesis that ethical realism is essentially viable and has been successfully implemented by the Obama administration, where it serves as an alternative to neoconservative and interventionist thinking. The expectation is that ethical realist thinking can be clearly identified in Obama's policy decisions concerning the three cases studies presented in the next chapter but that the situations these case studies cover are not conducive to the Great Capitalist Peace. Ethical realism as a theory then is expected to be stronger and more convincing without this overly ambitious and foundationally flawed policy.

## 2: Ethical Realism in Obama's Foreign Policy

Barack Obama inherited an already strained relationship with Russia from his predecessor. Even though President George W. Bush had initially forged and fostered a personal friendship with Russia's Vladimir Putin, the relationship between both nations became strained towards the end of Bush's second term in office. The cooling of friendly ties was mainly caused by a misunderstanding of the other's position. While Russia considered itself an equal partner to the U.S., it in turn saw Russia as an ally but not an equal (Spanger and Hughes 3; Ambrosio 1205). For example, it was giving support to the Americans in their fight against terrorism, yet received none in return. This made Russia resentful and so it started to pursue methods that would curb American hegemony. For more on this subject, see Thomas Ambrosio's *Challenging America's Global Preeminence: Russia's Quest for Multipolarity*, Hans-Joachim Spanger and Katherine Hughes' *Between Ground Zero and Square One: How George W. Bush Failed on Russia*, Robert E. Kanet's works *The New Security Environment: The Impact on Russia, Central and Eastern Europe* and *Russia: Re-Emerging Great Power*, and James M. Goldgeier and Michael A. McFaul's book *Power & Purpose: U.S. Policy toward Russia after the Cold War*.

However, Obama assuming office marked an important opportunity to turn matters around. One year earlier, on May 7 2008, Dmitry Medvedev replaced Vladimir Putin as President of Russia. As both countries now had new leaders a new bond could be created. According to the Obama administration a reset was in order because "when the United States and Russia are not able to work together on big issues, it's not good for either of our nations, nor is it good for the world" (Obama 2010 I: 467). As Obama described it during a speech at the New Economic School during a visit to Moscow in July of 2009:

"This must be more than a fresh start between the Kremlin and the White House .... It must be a sustained effort among the American and Russian people to identify mutual interests, and expand dialogue and cooperation that can pave the way to progress"  
(Obama 2009 II: 1059).

To this end, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met with her Russian colleague Sergei Lavrov in March of 2009 and presented him with an item that would symbolize this new beginning: a button with the word 'reset' written on it in Russian. Unfortunately, as Lavrov

explained, the actual word written on the button meant “overcharge” (Dougherty). In hindsight, one could argue that this was the more accurate prediction of the things to come.

Looking at the state of affairs between the United States and Russia today relations between the two nations seem to be at a low point. The Russian invasion of Crimea and its further involvement in Ukraine, its support for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, and its military efforts in the ongoing war there, are all indications of an increased tension. That Russia was able to do these things without a strong American response has been the subject of much debate. Some have pointed to a possibly imperial agenda of reelected Russian President Vladimir Putin’s that seeks to restore Russia to its great power status (Oldberg 13; Rywkin 235), others have pointed to America’s relative decline in the world, and still others have blamed Obama of practicing a failed foreign policy agenda that opened the way for Russia to do as it pleases without serious repercussions (Applebaum 40). Drowned out by the noise from these groups are those who believe this is the unavoidable byproduct of a mostly successful American foreign policy, which takes into account the limits of American power and focuses on the essential interests the United States has abroad. This camp refers to Obama as an ethical realist, who understands that involvement in Syria could easily lead to another disastrous war, who realizes that Eastern Europe will always be of more interest to Russia than to the United States, and who knows that even when the United States has the capacity to act it is not always best to do so.

Should this camp be right in their assertion, it would speak favorably for the possible application of ethical realism as foreign policy alternative. In fact, if Obama is an ethical realist, as John Hulsman claimed on his website on March 23, 2016, ethical realism is no longer an alternative but current policy. This chapter argues that this is indeed the case. In order to examine whether Obama’s foreign policy is ethical realist, this chapter will focus on the decisions and events concerning foreign policy towards nuclear non-proliferation, the conflict in Ukraine, and the crisis in Syria. Russia features heavily in these case studies, since policy towards Russia impacts the approach to other issues and regions. As Obama stated during a news conference in London with Prime Minister Gordon Brown on April 1, 2009, when asked about an upcoming meeting with President Medvedev and his aims for that meeting:

“There are very real differences between the United States and Russia, and I have no interest in papering those over. But there are a broad set of common interests that we can pursue. Both countries, I believe, have an interest in reducing nuclear stockpiles and

promoting nuclear nonproliferation. Both countries have an interest in reducing the threat of terrorism. Both countries have an interest in stabilizing the world economy. Both countries have an interest in finding a sustainable path for energy and dealing with some of the threats of climate change ... So on a whole range of issues, from Afghanistan to Iran to the topics that will be consuming most of our time here at the G-20, I think there's great potential for concerted action. And that's what we'll be pursuing" (Obama 2009 I: 389).

On April 3, after the meeting with President Medvedev, Obama would reiterate this position and included NATO:

"I think there is great potential to improve U.S.-Russian relations. I think that it is important for NATO allies to engage Russia and to recognize that they have legitimate interests. In some cases we've got common interests, but we also have some disagreements. I think that we should be in a dialog with them about how we can maintain stability while respecting the autonomy and independence of all countries in Europe, west, east, central, wherever they are" (411).

The recognition of both common goals and areas of disagreement speaks to an ethical realist outlook on the relationship with Russia. This pragmatic approach to the differences and similarities in interests is exactly what Lieven and Hulsman are looking for in the tenets of humility and patriotism. Humility explains that in disagreements with Russia, the United States and NATO could be wrong, while patriotism dictates that they need to acknowledge that Russia's issues are legitimate and that it cannot be forced to change its position. The U.S.-Russian relationship is therefore the perfect setting of where political theory will meet political reality and so it becomes the focal point of this chapter, which will analyze the foreign policy decisions of the Obama administration in light of the ethical realist theory.

To this end I present three case studies on the areas where the relationship between the United States and Russia is of particular importance. The first will be the effort of the Obama administration to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and the reduction of the weapons already in existence, in which the goals of the United States and Russia are mostly aligned. The second case study will cover the crisis in Ukraine where Russia is antagonistic and the United States cannot act forcibly. The third study will be on Syria, where Russia is also antagonistic in its support for Assad, but simultaneously serving the American vital interest of fighting terrorism. These studies sufficiently show the inherent difficulties of practicing

global foreign policy and from the analyses it can be concluded whether the Obama administration adheres to the tenets of ethical realism and if the situation could possibly bring about the Great Capitalist Peace. It is this study's expectation that Obama's foreign policy does meet the requirements to be considered ethical realist, but that in their attempt to be predictive where they should have been prescriptive Lieven and Hulsman have mistakenly identified Russian interests as compatible with U.S. interests. This mistake made the Great Capitalist Peace seem like a realistic possibility when it was in fact unachievable.

## **2.1 U.S. – Russian Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation in Iran**

Before Barack Obama became President, his predecessor George W. Bush had followed a policy that, while not necessarily focused on the creation of new weapons of mass destruction, certainly had the intent of preventing the United States from being struck by such weapons. This was evident in his push for America's withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty and his plans for a missile defense system, which sparked outrage from Russia despite American reassurances that Russia's nuclear capabilities were not what the system would be focused on (Newhouse 101). The signing of the 2002 Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty also did nothing to promote non-proliferation considering that it only cut deployed weapons, but allowed these weapons to be put in storage for later use (Berryman 35; Woolf 6). In an effort to reiterate America's role and responsibility in removing nuclear weapons from the world, Obama spoke in Prague April 5, 2009, and delivered a historic speech in which he became the first U.S. President to openly commit himself to a world without nuclear weapons:

“... as the only nuclear power to have used a nuclear weapon, the United States has a moral responsibility to act. We cannot succeed in this endeavor alone, but we can lead it, we can start it. So today, I state clearly and with conviction America's commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons” (Obama 2009 I: 442).

Besides this being a groundbreaking statement, the implications of it are enormous. The complete removal of nuclear weapons from the world entails convincing nations that still rely on nuclear deterrents, like Pakistan and India, to change their defense strategies. A rising power like China which, in terms of military technology, lags behind the United States also relies on its nuclear capabilities to somewhat equalize the power discrepancy, despite being a signatory to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which also calls for



disarmament. In this sense, working towards total disarmament seems more like utopianism than realism. With so many weapons in existence and nations relying on them for their strategies, disarmament feels like an impossible task. It is in Obama's ethical realist policy towards disarmament that the tenets of humility, responsibility, and prudence can be recognized. This study will first discuss Obama's policy towards Russia in terms of disarmament. Then it will discuss the existence of the tenets of ethical realism in these policy decisions, before ending with the argumentation that, because of a faulty application of predictive and prescriptive theory, disarmament policy cannot lead to the Great Capitalist Peace.

Realist theory actually works both in favor and against disarmament. If we follow the realist claim that all nations seek power, disarmament does not make sense at first glance. As nuclear weapons are incredibly powerful, acquiring a nuclear arsenal provides a huge step up for nations in terms of the balance of power. Dismantling it equals a possible step down. However, realist theory also states that the primary interest of all nations is survival, which is why they seek power in the first place. The existence of nuclear weapons is the greatest threat to any nation's survival because of the utter destruction they can cause. This threat will only be removed if all nuclear weapons are disposed of. Realist thinking would also mean that total disarmament would have to happen simultaneously and under strict regulations. To be the last nation to have nuclear weapons would put the balance of power decisively in favor of that nation. This is part of the reason why the American Congress generally opposes unilateral disarmament efforts and why Obama promised in his speech in Prague to keep America's nuclear strike capabilities intact. This scenario in which one nation holds all the nuclear weapons creates a level of distrust that makes total disarmament unlikely to realists and is why Lieven and Hulsman do not argue for it. They limit their stance to a prevention of other nations, with Iran being the quintessential example, from acquiring nuclear weapons. Under ethical realist thought nuclear weapons remain a definite part of the world, although safely getting rid of excess weapons or weapons that have become obsolete is necessary in order to prevent them from falling into terrorist hands. As Obama's policy is focused both on removal of nuclear weapons and non-proliferation, this case study will also examine both aspects in an attempt to find the tenets of ethical realism being put to use. First, this study will discuss the disarmament policies before then moving onto the prevention attempts focused on Iran.

In the second half of 2009, Obama actively pursued the agenda he announced in Prague to reduce and prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. To this end, he traveled to Moscow in early July to meet with his Russian counterpart to discuss a follow-up to the

Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, known as New START. The original treaty had been signed on July 31, 1991, but was due to expire on December 5, 2009. On this July meeting, both presidents drew up a list of ten provisions the new treaty would have to contain, among which and number one on the list was the provision that both nations would decrease their number of delivery vehicles to somewhere in the range of 500 to 1,100, and cut the number of associated warheads to between 1,500 and 1,675. The specific numbers would be negotiated at a later date and be incorporated into the treaty (Obama 2009 II: 1069). The new START treaty would be signed on April 8, 2010, in Prague.

The proposed reductions are impressive on paper, but in reality the Obama administration has not been very successful in reducing the American stockpile. Hans M. Kristensen from the Federation of Atomic Scientists (FAS for short) put the total number of warheads at 4,571 in 2015, which he says is only 702 warheads lower than the last count under the George W. Bush administration (Kristensen). By 2018, the number of warheads needs to be reduced to 1,550, the finalized number under the treaty. However, over the years the Obama administration has been reducing the stockpile more slowly on average. Figure 1, taken from Kristensen's article on the FAS website, shows exactly how this decrease has happened since 2009:

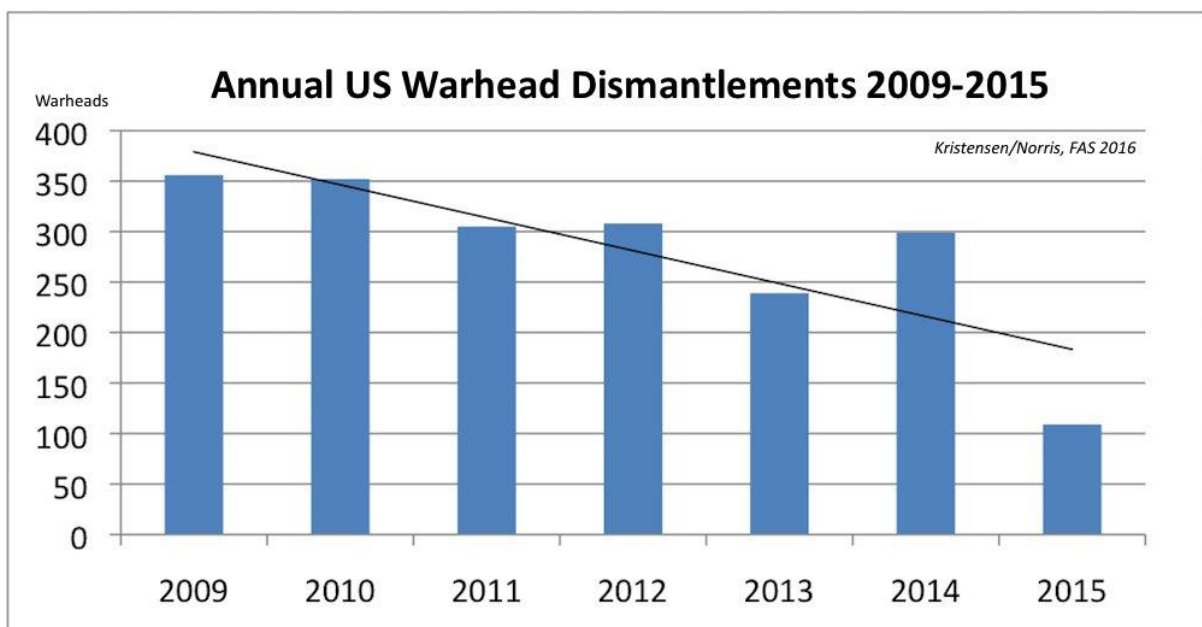


Fig. 1. Hans M. Kristensen and Robert Norris, “Annual US Warhead Dismantlements 2009-2015”, *Federation of Atomic Scientists*.

Although Kristensen names several possible causes as to why the Obama administration slowed down its reductions, such as opposition from Congress and backlog reductions overall, for the purpose of this thesis especially the 2015 figures are of interests. This absolute low of just 109 warheads removed coincides with the highpoint of the crisis in Ukraine. This chapter will discuss the crisis there in more detail in its separate case study but this table shows a correlation between the crisis and the low number of warheads removed. From a strategic standpoint this makes sense as the United States was closer to direct conflict with Russia than it had been in years. Even though I will argue that conflict was not in the interest of the United States at the time, it is only sensible that it planned as if it was going to be fighting. Such a war would have begun as a conventional war but when the two nations that own most of the world's nuclear weapons go to war there are no guarantees that it will remain so. In other words, despite the United States having "excess capacity" in Kristener's words, the drop in removals for 2015 may well have been intentional because the warheads that would have been disposed of might have factored in deployment scenarios should nuclear war break out.

Planning for a war in this manner despite not wanting it to be necessary shows prudent ethical realist thought in the sense that it considered the limits of the American nuclear arsenal and found that slowing reduction further in preparation for even a remote possibility that they would need to be used was preferable. In the words of Lieven and Hulsman, "Prudence leads to the safeguarding of resources for when they are absolutely needed. It is the single most important ethical trait a state's leader can possess in order to prepare for short-term crises and to resist long-term historical decline" (69-70). Even though the reduction of nuclear weapons has a deep moral foundation, in this scenario the strategic consequences were more vital. However, prudence is also present in the act of reduction itself when the strategic importance of the availability of these weapons is less. Lieven and Hulsman argued that the U.S. national debt had grown to such immense proportions that it was becoming a threat to security (26). Doing away with the excess nuclear capacity and weapons and systems that have become obsolete or are approaching the end of their lifespan is a great way for the United States to eventually cut spending on maintenance, operation, and security costs. In this sense multilateral reduction is the prudent course of action as these excess resources are no longer necessary and can therefore be disposed of, without risking political consequences that would disturb the status quo. After all, the multilateral nature of the disposal agreement results in an unchanged balance of power.

Through the reduction of nuclear warheads and delivery systems the United States fulfills the ethical realist tenets of humility and responsibility as well. Humility requires seeing “one’s own nation as others see it” (Lieven and Hulsman 72), and so for an American ethical realist like Obama, the United States, through its superior nuclear capabilities and its historic role as the only nation to have ever used nuclear weapons in times of war, must acknowledge it looks like the greatest threat to other nations, as imagined as that threat may be. It is the appearance that matters. Therefore it is befitting for the United States to take on the role of being the driving force behind multilateral disarmament treaties. This creates trust and goodwill, which Lieven and Hulsman claim the United States “desperately needs” (73). Ethical realist responsibility states that “One must weigh the likely consequences and perhaps most important, judge what actions are truly necessary to achieve essential goals” (77). Considering that is not a goal of the United States to fight a nuclear war, only to be prepared for one, responsibility here allows the United States to see that even with a greatly reduced nuclear arsenal it will still be able to maintain strong enough capabilities in the nuclear triad (missiles launched from land or sea and bombs dropped by planes) and thereby retain the principle of mutually assured destruction towards other nations with nuclear weapons.

On May 27, 2016, President Obama made an historic visit to the Japanese city of Hiroshima. This visit serves as a prime example of how the ethical realist tenet of humility is present in the policy of disarmament. While acknowledging the more than 100,000 deaths that were caused by the bombing of Hiroshima by the United States, the President did not offer an apology (Liptak and Griffiths). As Senator J. William Fulbright wrote: “Only a nation at peace with itself, with its transgressions as well as its achievements, is capable of a generous understanding of others” (qtd. in Lieven and Hulsman 72). However, “apology for the past and awareness of the past are two very different things” (Lieven and Hulsman 73). Lieven and Hulsman did not mean for the United States to apologize for everything that it did that the world perceived as wrong, but they wished for the nation to understand how its actions affected other nations. What this means is that, although the actions of the United States were horrific and that it needs to accept this as an element of its past, apologizing for every perceived crime of the past only serves to undermine its authority and ethical realist decision-making.

This study has identified the elements of ethical realism present in Obama’s efforts to reduce America’s nuclear arsenal. Humility, prudence, and responsibility are all important factors in his policies, even when disarmament is slowed due to a new potential conflict with Russia emerging. Russia for one is dependent for much of its influence in the world on its

nuclear capabilities. These capabilities allow Russia to speak on equal footing with the United States, while reducing its stockpiles gives it credibility and responsibility in the eyes of the world (Berryman 33). Just like the United States, Russia will only disarm as much as maintaining a capable nuclear triad allows. Although the United States and Russia share this view on nuclear disarmament, *Ethical Realism* does not explain how these policies might lead to the Great Capitalist Peace. Despite the argument of reduced costs in maintenance and security, there is not a clear economic incentive for reducing nuclear stockpiles. Disarmament cannot be directly linked to economic growth or the growth of the necessary middle class. Only the Cooperative Threat Reduction program offered economic stimulus to Russia through American investment and Lieven and Hulsman argued for its continuation and funding (165), but the *Boston Globe* reported on January 2015 that Russia ended the program (Bender), which had offered at least \$2 billion to Russia. As Bender reports, Russia claims it will finance its own programs, but with the nation being in economic downfall the effectiveness remains to be seen. Russia's unilateral decision to cancel its participation in this program reveals that Russia chose strategic concerns (U.S. oversight on its nuclear facilities) over economic ones (economic stimulation). This goes against the reasoning behind the Great Capitalist Peace, which argues that nations will choose economic cooperation and stability. This is explained by Barkin's notion of predictive and prescriptive theory (124-129). Lieven and Hulsman were trying to be prescriptive in their support of the CTR program when they argued for its continued implementation, but in actuality they were basing this argument on predictive reasoning, which Barkin says leads to failures in both (127). Predictive theory requires a pattern, in this case the economic stimulation through the CTR program. The program had been in effect since the 1990s to much success and mutual satisfaction. In their argumentation, Lieven and Hulsman clearly show that they expect this to continue; that Russia will continue to see the economic benefits, as well as the stability and trust that disarmament creates, as one of its vital interests. However, when confronted with increased tension, Russia opted to leave the program, thereby breaking the pattern and the feasibility of the policy recommendation. From this follows that this policy area was flawed in the sense that it did not consider Russia to make its own choices based on other interests. True prescriptive theory would have considered this agency in times of tension and therefore warned against the weakness it provides for the Great Capitalist Peace. In conclusion, while ethical realism is present in the policies enacted towards nuclear disarmament and despite the presence of compatible views on the matter between the United States and Russia, nuclear disarmament does not contribute to the Great Capitalist Peace.

The above is focused on nations that have already developed nuclear weapons, but this case study now turns its focus to those nations that aspire to create such an arsenal, chiefly Iran, and the non-proliferation efforts aimed to prevent that from happening. Here again we will see the tenets of prudence, humility, and responsibility at work, while we also see the mistaken application of predictive theory as prescriptive theory when applied to the Great Capitalist Peace. First an overview of the policy choices will be given before turning to the tenets of ethical realism and their application. After that, the study will discuss why this cannot lead to the Great Capitalist Peace.

Cooperation with Russia was vital to Obama in the matter of non-proliferation also. When, during a press conference in L'Aquila, Italy on July 10, 2009, a reporter from *The Washington Post* asked why North Korea and Iran would listen to the United States and Russia, Obama answered:

“I don't think it matters so much necessarily that they will listen to the United States or Russia individually. But it gives us the capacity, as the two nuclear superpowers, to make appeals to the broader world community in a consistent way about the dangers of nuclear proliferation and the need to reduce that danger and hopefully at some point in time eliminate it” (1080).

On September 23, before the United Nations General Assembly, he would elaborate on his views:

“We respect their rights as members of the community of nations. I have said before, and I will repeat, I am committed to diplomacy that opens a path to greater prosperity and more secure peace for both nations if they live up to their obligations.

But if the Governments of Iran and North Korea choose to ignore international standards, if they put the pursuit of nuclear weapons ahead of regional stability and the security and opportunity of their own people, if they are oblivious to the dangers of escalating nuclear arms races in both east Asia and the Middle East, then they must be held accountable, The world must stand together to demonstrate that international law is not an empty promise and that treaties will be enforced. We must insist that the future does not belong to fear” (1443).

Later that same day, after meeting with President Medvedev, he explained the cooperative course Russia and the United States had settled on in order to curb Iran's nuclear ambitions:

“I believe that Russia and the United States shares [sic] the strategic objective that Iran can pursue peaceful energy sources but that it should not pursue nuclear weapons. I believe we also share the view that this should be resolved diplomatically, and I am on record as being committed to negotiating with Iran in a serious fashion to resolve this issue.

Russia, as major leader, I think, believes that such an approach is possible as well, but I think we also both agree that if Iran does not respond to serious negotiations and resolve this issue in a way that assures the international community that it's meeting its commitments and is not developing nuclear weapons, then we will have to take additional actions and that sanctions, serious additional sanctions, remain a possibility” (1448).

On the subject of sanctions, President Medvedev would state something that would hold true several years later: “As to also have sanctions, Russia's belief is very simple, and I stated it recently. Sanctions rarely lead to productive results. But in some cases sanctions are inevitable” (1449).

Despite the misgivings on sanctions Russia did support them in early February of 2010, when Iran rejected a deal that had international approval. The Security Council of the United Nations had to discuss the possibility of further sanctions and Russia was firmly in the corner of the United States, despite their sales of nuclear technology to Iran (Goldgeier and McFaul 158; Rywkin 104). Obama acknowledged this during a news conference on February 9, 2010: “One thing I'm pleased about is to see how forward leaning the Russians have been on this issue. I think they clearly have seen that Iran hasn't been serious about solving what is a solvable dispute between Iran and the international community” (Obama 2010 I: 192).

The Security Council would indeed impose sanctions on Iran, and in acknowledgment of Russian support and furthered cooperation between Russia and the U.S., Obama said the following on June 24, 2010, during a visit by Medvedev to Washington:

“Along with our international partners, we passed and are enforcing new U.N. sanctions against North Korea. We offered Iran the prospect of a better future, and when they refused, we joined with

Russia and our partners on the Security Council to impose the toughest sanctions ever faced by the Government of Iran.

Together, our nations have deepened our cooperation against violent extremism, as terrorists threaten both our peoples, be it in Times Square or in Moscow. And today, we've agreed to expand our cooperation on intelligence and counterterrorism. Russian transit routes now play a vital role in supplying American and NATO forces in Afghanistan. And to prevent terrorists from acquiring nuclear weapons, we came together at our Nuclear Security Summit, where our two nations made numerous commitments, including agreeing to eliminate enough plutonium for about 17,000 warheads" (856).

What the cooperation on nuclear non-proliferation shows is that, even though Russia and the United States are opponents in certain theaters, they choose to set those differences aside when there is a risk of a new nation ascending to the nuclear stage, especially if this nation is potentially hostile. There are several realist arguments for this. First and foremost, nuclear weapons are devastating. The political power a nuclear arsenal projects is therefore incredible, especially against nations that have no nuclear capabilities of their own. Hence it is in the interest of those who do have such weapons to limit their spread as their own power would diminish in relative terms (Thayer 3). Besides that, one cannot discount the possibility that, at some point, a hostile nation will have to be dealt with through offensive action. The risk of a potential nuclear retaliatory strike on one's nation or one's allies is too great. For this reason, it is paramount that nations, like Iran, that call for the destruction of other nations are prevented from acquiring the weapons that would achieve those goals. Furthermore, the principle of mutually assured destruction, which governed the actions of nuclear powers for much of the time since these weapons were first developed, does not apply to all situations. Should terrorist groups somehow manage to get hold of a nuclear weapon the principle becomes useless. It only works when both parties care about self-preservation; a nuclear attack would lead to the user's own destruction through retaliation. A terrorist organization does not necessarily fear its annihilation if it achieves its goals in the process and their flexible nature would make this difficult to accomplish even if they did. This is why fifteen years after 9/11 Al Qaida is still a factor in the Middle East. As most terrorist organizations do not hold territory but operate in several countries in smaller groups, a nuclear retaliatory strike would also be impossible and would predominantly kill innocents. With mutually



assured destruction thus losing much of its effectiveness, the two greatest nuclear powerhouses and coincidentally two of the largest forces in the fight against terrorism have a clear realist interest in controlling, limiting, and preventing the spread of nuclear weapons.

Despite the Russian reservations on the effectiveness of sanctions, Iran would eventually come to the table to discuss a diplomatic solution in November 2013. In a historic event, the parties involved managed to strike a permanent deal called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on July 14, 2015. According to the document “Parameters for a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action Regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran’s Nuclear Program”, published on the website of the White House, this deal called for a significant reduction of Iran’s abilities to enrich uranium and would put its nuclear power program under inspection of the International Atomic Energy Agency. In return for this rollback, the United States and Europe would lift those sanctions against Iran that were put in place specifically for its nuclear program. Other sanctions such as those in place for Iran’s support of terrorism and its abuses of human rights were to remain in place. The lifted sanctions allow nations to develop economic ties with Iran fostering economic growth and thereby draw Iran into the world as a partner rather than an adversary.

This deal resembles what Lieven and Hulsman had in mind (155-156), but with certain key differences. They believed that such a deal would only come to pass through a regional concert and as part of the Great Capitalist Peace. Both the regional concert and the Great Capitalist Peace did not materialize, but a deal was reached nonetheless with the same desired outcome: Iran was made to see that seeking nuclear weapons was not a viable vital interest when compared to economic prosperity.

In Obama’s approach to Iran we can clearly identify the five tenets of ethical realism. His implementation of economic sanctions against Iran paired with the continued assurances that the diplomatic door was still open after Iran had rejected an earlier deal exemplified his adherence to prudence. He was fully aware that these sanctions would hurt Iran as a consequence, but his willingness to talk with Iran promised alleviation from this economic pain. As prudence requires, he weighed the likely consequences of his options before enacting them. Had he kept the diplomatic option off the table, all he would have accomplished was the further antagonizing of Iran and pushed them to increase their nuclear efforts. Had he only kept the diplomatic door open, Iran would have felt no pressure to give up their efforts and seek a diplomatic solution. Just as with disarmament policies, Obama practiced humility in his leading role in pushing for sanctions and opening negotiations with Iran. He acknowledged that as the largest nuclear power and the only nation to have ever used them in war the United

States holds an historic responsibility to attempt to prevent other nations from creating nuclear weapons. Furthermore, in combination with the study tenet, he realized that Iran sees the United States as an adversary and so Obama ensured the cooperation of Russia, which has friendly relations with Iran, and Europe, which has better economic incentives for Iran and lends more international credibility to the deal. Responsibility was present in how these talks and the sanctions that would be lifted were specific to the subject of nuclear non-proliferation. Even though the United States has many other differences with the government of Iran, Obama focused solely on this particular issue to prevent overreaching. He was therefore careful and deliberate in his aim, which he made sure was condensed enough to be achievable. Attempting to fix all problems at once would have resulted in failure. Through the tenets of study and patriotism the Obama administration was able to identify the Iran government as being vastly different from the adverse governments of the past. It recognized that Hassan Rouhani, the current President of Iran, was willing to improve relations with the West, even if Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei was not. However, even Khamenei has since come out in favor of this deal, despite his issuing of warnings that Iran will abandon the deal should a new U.S. president violate the terms first, and his accusations that the United States has fallen behind on its economic promises even though Iran has fulfilled its obligations (Dehghanpisheh).

Still, these issues aside, the policy that allowed for this deal to be struck in the first place was a complete implementation of ethical realist thought. It was tough in its sanctions, but diplomatic in showing openness for discussion. It was purposefully contained to one specific issue rather than broad in its goals, thereby making it achievable. Finally, it showed Iran that both sides stood to gain from an agreement: Iran would become a more reliable partner and experience economic growth, while the region in particular but also the world in general became safer. In conclusion this policy was both ethical and realist and serves as a success story for the ethical realist theory through the complete implementation of its tenets.

That success however does not carry over into the Great Capitalist Peace. That goal depends on economic cooperation and enticement convincing the public to demand political reforms and stability. However, in the case of Iran, it was economic antagonizing that eventually led to the Iranian public to elect a more pro-Western president in the hope of fostering better relations and thereby improving their lot in life. This change therefore had already taken place without the increased economic prosperity and the growth of the middleclass, and cannot be called actual democratic reform. This means that while the result is economic cooperation and increased stability, it cannot actually be attributed to the Great

Capitalist Peace, and results are fragile. Next to that, Lieven and Hulsman argued for the creation of a regional concert to draw Iran into this process (155), but the concert never materialized. Here we again see a misapplication of predictive and prescriptive theory. This recommendation for a regional concert was supposed to be prescriptive and fitted to the specific needs of Iran. However, the idea of regional concerts is predicated on earlier successes of concerts like the European Union, the African Union, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. These concerts form the pattern that regional concerts will work everywhere and it was applied by the authors to Iran. However, patterns are inherent to predictive theory only and go against the unique circumstances of the Iran issue. The patterned policy recommendation did not anticipate the change of heart in the Iranian people happening without this concert, which denied them their agency, the ability to make their own decisions (for more on agency, see Barkin 100-117), which prescriptive theory should have allowed for. The pattern simply did not allow for this and in combination with the desired results happening without the concert, it follows that the policy recommendation for the Great Capitalist Peace was flawed. Economic prosperity can become an interest without regional concerts and does not need the overarching principles of the Great Capitalist Peace.

## **2.2 Ukraine, Crimea, and Russian Interests**

The case study below will discuss the ethical realist policies undertaken by President Obama in the ongoing Crimean crisis in Ukraine. First an overview of the developments that lead to Russia seizing and annexing Crimea will be given. Attention will also be given to Russia's motivations, as they offer a good example of realist thinking and are important in order to understand Obama's ethical realist response. Then Obama's decisions will be compared to the ethical realist tenets to show that his policy was indeed ethical realist in nature. Lastly, this case study will argue that Lieven and Hulsman failed to identify Russia's actual interests but instead, through predictive reasoning, came to a mistaken definition which leads to the downfall of notion of the Great Capitalist Peace.

Although this case study is about American and Russian foreign policy in regards to the Crimean crisis, it is crucial that we understand the true nature of this conflict as there are important historical factors that influence these policies. When examining the root source of a conflict it is often impossible to pinpoint the historical catalyst. Almost always there are multiple factors that are in greater or lesser form responsible for the creation of the conflict. Even though it would be easy to claim that the Crimea crisis began with the Russian

occupation, this would ultimately be a false statement. Ukrainian history is far more complex, and contains several relevant events for this case study. The *BBC* website contains a comprehensive timeline of Ukrainian history, dating from 1917 up to 2015. From that timeline, the events that were crucial in the development of the current situation were extrapolated in order to provide a brief overview before moving on to the policy discussion.

The current conflict in Ukraine, while coming to a head in recent years, can arguably be attributed to events that took place as early as 1954, when Nikita Khrushchev transferred authority of Crimea to Ukraine as a gift, claiming that Crimea and Ukraine enjoyed close ties in culture, agriculture and economy. As Mark Kramer of the Wilson Center's Cold War International History Project points out in his article "Why Did Russia Give Away Crimea Sixty Years Ago?" about the transfer, this reasoning makes little sense as even then Crimea was predominantly populated by Russians. It is far more likely that these ethnic Russians would now serve to strengthen the Russian minority in Ukraine and support the pro-Soviet Union factions, which had just fought and won a civil war in newly annexed territories.

The later relevant events for the purpose of this study begin in 1991, when Ukraine declared independence from Russia after a coup by hardline Communist party members in Moscow failed on August 19 (*BBC*). The failure to retake power, and therefore the continuation of Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of decentralization of authority to the republics of the former Soviet Union, made it possible for Ukraine to pursue its own policies. Under President Leonid Kuchma, Ukraine would begin the difficult task of balancing positive relations with both the West and Russia.

Its connection with Russia remained important to Ukraine despite its independence. Russia was still the foremost power in the region, and thus remaining on friendly terms was of vital importance. To this end, Ukraine and Russia signed a Treaty of Friendship in 1997 and came to an agreement about access to ports in Crimea for Russia's Black Sea fleet (*ibid.*; Nygren 149). This agreement would be extended in 2010 and allowed for Russian forces to move between bases through Ukrainian territory. At the time relations between the two nations were still positive, although it would not be long before cracks started to become visible.

In 2001, it became apparent that corruption runs rampant in the nation, when the Parliament passed a vote of no-confidence for the government of Viktor Yushchenko. Yushchenko had been trying to fight corruption and combined with the economic reforms he had tried to pass, he had made an enemy of several powerful businessmen. This was a setback

for relations with Europe, which had been very supportive of Yushchenko and his efforts (ibid.).

A year later, the relationship with the West deteriorated further when it was discovered President Kuchma authorized the sale of radar systems to Iraq. Opposition parties called for his resignation because of corruption and misrule. This call would grow louder and louder (ibid.).

The end of 2004 brought on what is referred to as the “Orange Revolution” (Applebaum 42). Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych won the presidency, but after observers report that the elections were rigged on a large scale, his opponent, the pro-West and anti-corruption minded Viktor Yushchenko, effectively fought the results (*BBC*). New elections were held and Yushchenko became the new president. Although this boosted relations with the West, relations with Russia deteriorated.

In early 2006, Russia used Ukraine’s dependence on Russian gas as a pressure method, after negotiations about gas prices stagnated (ibid.). Russia cut off the supply and claimed that Ukraine was siphoning off gas meant for European customers. The cut off meant gas delivery to European countries suffered greatly. As Ukraine’s reputation as a reliable partner to Europe was at stake, and Russia’s profit from gas export was diminishing as well, it would not take long before a new deal was struck. However, this gas dispute would carry on for years to come. Relations between the two nations were severely damaged, as was Yushchenko’s reputation. During parliamentary elections, Yushchenko’s party would come in third, which forced him to name Viktor Yanukovych Prime Minister. New elections in 2007 gave pro-Russian parties a narrow majority in Parliament. Yushchenko named Yulia Tymoshenko Prime Minister as part of the coalition he needed to be able to govern (ibid.). Tymoshenko had a pro-EU stance, while she remained cautious about antagonizing Russia. Yushchenko and Tymoshenko had on previous occasions been both allies and fierce competitors. A previous partnership between the two in their roles as President and Prime Minister had ended when Yushchenko fired Tymoshenko on his implication that she was corrupt (ibid.). The two now joined forces to counter the pro-Russian Yanukovych.

In January of 2009 the conflict between Russia and Ukraine over the supplying of gas flared up again. Due to the economic crisis, Ukraine had fallen behind on payments. New negotiations over prices again lead to nothing, and Russia decided to stop supplying altogether. A week later a new deal was reached, but Yushchenko’s credibility suffered because of the dispute, making a return to power possible for Yanukovych (ibid.).

The presidential elections of 2010 saw Yanukovich emerge victorious. Tymoshenko was forced to resign the position of Prime Minister after a vote of no-confidence (ibid.). In the summer, the Ukraine parliament voted to abandon NATO membership in favor of a 'neutral' stance. In a political move by her opponents, Tymoshenko was charged with abuse of power and sentenced to prison in 2011. The sentence leads to international boycotts of events (ibid.).

In the summer of 2012 Ukraine moved even closer to Russia by pushing a bill through Parliament that recognized Russian as a regional language. This sparked protests in Kiev, which the police ended through the use of tear gas (ibid.). Parliamentary elections gave the pro-Russia parties an immense victory, although the West expressed doubts about the validity of the results. These events were a clear sign that political infighting had pushed Ukraine to the breaking point. The continuing switches between the Pro-Russian and the Pro-West governments had hardened the political field in Ukraine, laying the foundation for the Maidan revolution that would follow.

Despite having moved closer to Russia, Ukraine was still seeking economic integration with Europe in 2013. Citing safety standards, Russia blocked the import of confection from Ukraine in retaliation (ibid.). In order to restore relations with Russia Ukraine abandoned an association treaty with the European Union, sparking mass domestic protests.

These protests take a horrible turn when seventy-seven protesters were killed in February 2014 (ibid.). Yanukovich was forced to flee the country. Russia condemned the coup, and occupied and annexed Crimea in March after gunmen seized government buildings (ibid.; Applebaum 42). In response, the United States and Europe commenced sanctions against Russia (ibid.). Pro-Russian separatists seized territory along the Russian border, prompting a military response by the government. Petro Poroshenko, a pro-Western businessman, won the presidency and signed the association treaty that Yanukovich abandoned (ibid.). A peace plan quickly fell apart after the ceasefire was immediately violated (ibid.). Russian troops and military equipment were seen moving into eastern Ukraine. A pledge for regional autonomy was revoked after separatists held elections not allowed under the peace plan (ibid.). Ukraine's neutral stance was abandoned in an overwhelming vote and the nation started to move towards European integration and NATO membership once more, thereby effectively severing its ties with Russia in the hope of finding aid and support from the West.

Early 2015 saw a renewed offensive by separatists, backed by Russian support (ibid.). New ceasefire talks set up by Germany and France were held with fragile results (ibid.; Applebaum 43). The political struggle between Ukraine and Russia would continue, however,

with both nations blaming each other for failing to live up to their responsibilities under the peace agreement. At the time of writing this case study, the situation is still far from resolved.

This timeline shows the complex situation that has led to the current state of affairs. The gifting of Crimea to Ukraine for services rendered during the civil war as well as the strengthening of pro-Russian movements laid the groundwork for future conflict. The influx of ethnic Russians into Ukraine had the side effect that once the Soviet Union fell apart, Ukraine would for years to come be faced with two strong camps; one pro-Western, seeking economic integration with Europe, and one pro-Russian, seeking closer bonds with Russia. The election results, with prominent positions switching back and forth between the two nations, ensured that no real progress could be made either way and kept Ukraine searching for its identity. Piling on to an already complicated issue was the rampant corruption. When businessmen are able to influence politics to the point that they can have someone removed from office by having politicians issue a vote of no-confidence, it becomes painfully clear that the system is broken and this opens up the nation to outside interference, something Russia knows how to exploit very well.

Another question that needs to be examined is why Russia is so antagonistic towards Ukraine. Although the timeline at several points mentions disputes over gas prices, these instances seem an inadequate explanation for such animosity and covert invasion of another nation. Economic integration with Europe would on the one hand partially remove Ukraine from Russian influence, as Russia would no longer be able to dominate Ukraine in bilateral agreements, but on the other hand Russia would benefit from a prosperous Ukraine through increased gas revenues and Ukraine paying off its debts. Economic integration alone therefore fails to explain this animosity.

The most logical answer to this question would be that the risk of Ukraine ascending to NATO membership is detrimental to Russia's sphere of influence. Besides Russia, Ukraine is the largest nation in the region that is not a member of NATO. Should Ukraine join the alliance, NATO obtains a much better position to deploy in Eastern Europe. Although Russia already shares borders with NATO members Latvia and Estonia, NATO would be able to employ a pincer movement towards Moscow, should war ever break out. As remote as the chance of this is, having Ukraine as a NATO member on its border is a strategic threat to Russia (Mearsheimer 82). NATO argues that it has no desire for war against Russia or that it is not in the alliance's interest (*ibid.*), but Russia looks at this much differently. It argues that since Russia will use military force against foreign countries for domestic reasons, so will NATO possibly develop other reasons to justify the use of military force against targets

including Russia. Even though NATO and Russia have enjoyed a peaceful but sometimes tense partnership, there are no guarantees for the future. Russia learned that lesson the hard way.

Aside from this, Russia also has another reason to oppose Ukraine's NATO membership: it would effectively cut off Russian access to the Black Sea. Russia had an agreement with Ukraine for the use of its naval bases (Nygren 149). When Ukraine becomes a member of NATO, this situation cannot remain as NATO requires that members have no unallied bases on their territory (Nygren 153). This is why Russia's primary goal in this conflict was control of Crimea. The Crimean peninsula would otherwise sever Russia's ability to deploy into the Black Sea. While Crimea and Russia are separated by the Kerch Strait, deployment through it when Ukraine and thus Crimea are part of NATO would be a tactical weakness for Russia, as NATO ships could easily blockade it if necessary. Russia would lose their naval presence in the area, and the assets it currently has there would quickly become too costly to maintain as most are old and approaching obsolescence. The limited number of naval bases and docking space therein would drastically cut the number of ships Russia would be able to station there, further weakening its position. It follows that access to the Black Sea is vital to Russia's power projection abilities in the region. Losing access would be disastrous.

A counterargument to Russia's necessity of access to Crimea can be made that Russia's ability to deploy is limited as it is and therefore Crimea is of limited use. Even when Russia can move into the Black Sea, it would find itself surrounded by NATO members and the only way into the Mediterranean is through the Bosphorus sea canal that flows through Turkey, also a NATO member. Although it is undoubtedly true that access to Crimea only displaces Russia's problem to the Bosphorus, the ability to move through the Crimea region allows Russia to put naval pressure on Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey, but also on nations like Georgia, with which it fought a war in 2008 after it also was considered for NATO membership (Mearsheimer 79). In essence, the Russian strategy for the Black Sea is rooted in realist principles. Realist theory dictates that states act to increase or retain their power relative to other nations, which is precisely what possession of Crimea allows Russia to do.

However, realist theory normally considers the state as the only actor, leaving the population largely ignored. As has been previously stated, Lieven and Hulsman break with this tradition by tying the Great Capitalist Peace to the active participation of the public, as the public holds the power to force their government to change. It follows then that the role of the Russian people is a factor that should not be ignored, especially since Crimea is home to a large population of ethnic Russians. In her book *Beyond Crimea: The New Russian Empire*,



Agnia Grigas takes an in-depth look at how Russia utilizes these groups of ethnic Russians, or “compatriots” as she says the Russian governments calls them (2), who are spread out over the former territories to craft itself a new empire. Grigas explains that the Soviet authorities actively pushed the spread of Russians over Soviet territory for three reasons. The first reason was to increase the labor force to support industrialization. A second reason was to create a “Soviet identity” based off the Russian population, and a third to use that identity to unify the fifteen republics through ethnicity, culture, politics, and economy (5). After the fall of the Soviet Union, these ethnic Russians remained behind, although in the case of Crimea they were allowed a high level of autonomy. Their presence in these former territories allows Russia to recreate its empire of old, as Grigas asserts. She uses polling data by the Levada Analytical Center to support her assertion and shows that this is the will of the people. According to the poll, the Russian public sees the restoration of “Russia’s superpower status” as a primary expectation (qtd. in Grigas 17). In order to restore this superpower status, Russia needs to think strategically about its power projection options and thus take advantage of unrest in neighboring countries when it can claim its ethnic and historic people are under threat. When the Russian population identifies the restoration of Russia’s power as their nation’s vital interest instead of the economic growth Lieven and Hulsman predicted, it becomes apparent that the Great Capitalist Peace is unachievable.

Surprisingly enough, that same poll, held over 2012 and 2013, indicates that Russians would not have supported the invasion of Crimea at the time. Thirty-four percent of those asked answered the question of how they would describe the current relationship with Ukraine as ‘normal and peaceful’, up from twenty-seven percent the year before (Levada 169). Fifty-eight percent agreed with the statement that “Russia and Ukraine should be friendly states – with open borders, no visas and no customs”. Fifty percent believed in 2012 that relations with Ukraine would remain the same, while twenty-eight percent believed they would improve, up from twenty-four (170). Unfortunately, no data was reported on this for 2013. From this polling data, one can draw the conclusion that while Russians sought an increase in power for their nation vis-à-vis the rest of the world, they did not believe this should come at the expense of Ukraine. This poll coincides with the pro-Russian President Yanukovich being in power in Ukraine, meaning that Ukraine was closer to Russia. Thusly, Russians were expectedly favorable to Ukraine and did not consider Ukraine an opponent. The invasion of Crimea was not yet thought of as necessary for Russia’s superpower aspirations.

That Russia pursues these aspirations comes as no surprise. While President Obama can confidently claim that ‘Russia’s position in the world is significantly diminished’ and the

invasion of Crimea and giving aid to Assad do not suddenly make Vladimir Putin more influential (Goldberg), in the hearts and minds of the Russian population, the Cold War era constituted Russia's glory days in terms of power and influence. It only makes sense that they believe Russia's rightful place in the world is as one of the two superpowers in the world. From the moment that Vladimir Putin first took office, Russia has been on a quest to restore its position and to create multipolarity to counter US hegemony. From their historical and cultural perspective, it is Russia's birthright to aspire to that position. Russia has no interest in being a junior partner to anyone or in any organization (Kramer 737; Oldberg 22; Berryman 45), because of its previous position. It follows then that it will undertake policies that increase its power, despite the damage this does to its economy or its credibility abroad. This is why we have seen Russia wage war in Georgia, annex Crimea, and become militarily involved in Syria.

Realist theory would normally dictate that it is not in the interest of the United States to allow another superpower to emerge, or in Russia's case reemerge. After all, realists argue that this would upset the balance of power, which at this moment favors the United States as the sole superpower. From this would follow that the United States needs to respond in a way that increases its own power, or limits Russian power. Punitively limiting Russian power would take the form of military action or sanctions. Before moving onto discussing the punitive method that were available to Obama, focus is first given to how power is defined and how it is put to use in ethical realist theory.

Power is at the core of realist thought and obviously Russia's definition of power lies in the ability to do violence upon its enemies. However, under Obama the United States has employed a much different definition. In the interview with Jeffrey Goldberg, Obama defines true power as the ability to "get what you want without having to exert violence". This sounds more like a definition of diplomacy than of power. The capability to do violence is an intrinsic part of power; while diplomacy is a necessary part of power, so is the use or threat of effective force. Finding a good workable balance between the two is what Joseph S. Nye Jr. in his preface to *The Future of Power* calls "smart power": "the combination of the hard power of coercion and payment with the soft power of persuasion and attraction" (xiii). While Obama may prefer the use of soft power to hard power, the fact that America's military is unparalleled counts for much in US foreign policy. In essence, it allows the President to approach foreign policy events with the carrot of diplomacy, when the implication of the military stick is already well-established in the minds of his opponents. In this balance, soft power takes precedence in the hope that hard power will not become necessary.

The American balance equation for the use of hard or soft power in Eastern Europe is much different from the Russian one. As Obama rightly identifies, Russia has more at stake in the region and therefore has “escalatory dominance”, meaning the ability to threaten or even use violence as it has, because a military response from NATO is unlikely when Russia is not targeting NATO members. To Goldberg he said: “the idea that talking tough or engaging in some military action that is tangential to that particular area is somehow going to influence the decision making of Russia or China is contrary to all the evidence we have seen over the last fifty years.” What this means is that much of the hard power options become ineffective. Russia is fully aware it would eventually lose a direct conventional war with the United States, but it also knows the United States would never start one over Ukraine. While this by itself does not make hard power the *de facto* *modus operandi* for Russia, its soft power capabilities fell apart with the Maidan revolution in Ukraine. The uprising left Russia without influential allies in Ukraine’s government, meaning it also lost a willing ear to hear its interests. Although using military force has damaged Russia’s credibility and further weakened its soft power possibilities, it has gained influence over territory that is strategically useful. Russia operates under the belief that over time a reputation can be rebuilt, while territorial gains can last forever if there is no opposing force. Even though Lieven and Hulsman identified Russian use of force as a red line for American policy (166), punishing this behavior is difficult since Russia holds the greater power in the region.

In fact, options for the United States to act on this Russian aggression are limited to economic methods as military force is out of the question. Stationing troops in NATO countries in the region as it has (Applebaum 43), while helping to strengthen the faith of allies in U.S. willingness to come to their aid, does nothing to intimidate Russia into submission. The United States, together with Europe, decided to impose sanctions against Russia, especially on the wealthy members of the upper class with connections to Vladimir Putin. They thought to achieve this through the freezing of assets, impacting the financial sector by making it impossible for Russian banks to get long-term loans, and targeting energy companies by suspending exports of services and technology (BBC; Mearsheimer 86), in the hope of pressuring him into changing course.

However, as Dmitry Medvedev pointed out during that joint statement on September 23, 2009 (referred to in the case study on nuclear non-proliferation), “sanctions rarely lead to productive results” (Obama 2009 II: 1449). Nye echoes this sentiment, albeit with more nuance. He uses a study by Gary Clyde Hufbauer, Jeffrey J. Scott, and Kimberly Ann Elliott, which concluded that in 115 cases where major countries used sanctions during the period

from 1950 to 1990 “in about a third of the cases, sanctions made at least a modest contribution to obtaining the goals of those using them. The study found that sanctions were most likely to be successful when the objective was modest and clear, the target was in a weakened position to begin with, economic relations were great, sanctions were heavy, and the duration was limited”(Nye 73). However, he admits that other pundits, like Robert A. Pape, argue that of those 115 cases there were only 5 successes (ibid.). Yet even if we accept the first study, this still means that astonishingly in two-thirds of the cases economic sanctions did not work. This does not bode well for the sanctions against Russia, which are not sufficiently heavy, of which the goal is not modest or clear, and which have yet to produce results after two years. Nye is right, though, to ask what alternative there is (ibid.). Nye asks the question for sanctions in general, but it is of specific importance to the Ukraine situation.

The United States has to be very careful in its approach. Any policy is going to have to be punitive in nature but not so severe that it escalates the conflict, or spills over into other policy areas where the United States relies on Russian cooperation, like for example happened when Russian economic coercion caused the government of Kyrgyzstan to close the Manas Air Base, which the United States was allowed to use for transport to and from Afghanistan (McFaul 168). It also has to be cautious to prevent repercussions against its European allies. Countries in Central and Southern Europe, like Italy, depend heavily on Russian gas exports. Germany’s economic ties to Russia run deep, and with Germany being the economic motor behind the European Union, it and other European nations through it are going to feel the negative effects of sanctions and counter sanctions. Although a harsh truth for Ukraine, since there is no military option available and as sanctions will not work, there is no way for the United States to punish Russia in a way that satisfies the ethical realist virtues of prudence and responsibility, or that does not jeopardize the vital American interests in Eastern Europe. Justice for Ukraine seems therefore unlikely.

As discussed in chapter 1, Lieven and Hulsman considered the following vital U.S. interests in Eastern Europe, three of which, they claimed were also in Russia’s interest:

1. Nuclear non-proliferation,
2. Help prevent Islamist revolution and the creation of safe havens for Islamist terrorists,
3. Preservation of reasonably open international access to the energy reserves of Central Asia and the Caucasus, and last but not least,
4. Prevention of any outbreak of major new conflict within or between states in the region, especially concerning the states bordering allies (165).

Especially in regard to the fourth interest, they argue that Ukraine should not be pushed to become a pro-American “democracy” or to become a buffer against Russia. Furthermore, they state that a red line has to be drawn at Russian military action against or within Ukraine, and that expanding NATO to include Ukraine would likely trigger such action (166).

However, they also say that “any possibility of U.S. soldiers fighting Russians in Russia’s backyard ... should be categorically excluded” (ibid.). This shows the limits of American involvement under ethical realism. After all, how can the United States draw a red line at Russian armed action, without the inclusion of an armed response? That instantly undermines any credible deterrent against Russia. Unfortunately, Lieven and Hulsman offer no means to establish and enforce this red line, which shows a tremendous weakness in their theory.

When looking at the timeline in retrospect and the current situation, it is clear that the United States did not secure the fourth vital interest. Considering that these vital interests were deemed essential to the creation of the Great Capitalist Peace, this could well be a mortal blow to Lieven and Hulsman’s theory. The failure however should not be attributed to U.S. foreign policy, it lies in the way Lieven and Hulsman build their argument, which is centered on the United States. In this approach they neglect the fact that the choice of policy belongs to Ukraine and Russia. The timeline above is a prime evidence of my main argument: although nations can individually implement a foreign policy based on ethical realism, the Great Capitalist Peace depends on other nations acknowledging the same vital interests. Once sides differ in their view, the ability to implement the Great Capitalist Peace falls apart. In the case of Ukraine, Lieven and Hulsman failed to incorporate Ukraine’s and Russia’s domestic situations. The United States may not have pushed Ukraine to become a democracy with focus on the West, but Ukraine decided to become one after all in the aftermath of the Maidan revolution. Similarly, although the policy alternative in *Ethical Realism* argues for a possible Ukraine membership of NATO to be a long-term plan, there was nothing the United States could do to prevent Ukraine’s new government to decide to make membership a priority, thereby provoking Russia into action.

The Great Capitalist Peace depends for a large part on the willingness of nations to shape their foreign and domestic policies in terms of cooperation and mutual understanding of vital interests. Without this shared outlook, the Great Capitalist Peace cannot come to fruition, as nations will sacrifice the economic prosperity that it promises for short-term gains. As is evident, Ukraine and Russia have very differing interests. While both would eventually profit from stability in the region, Ukraine believes it will never be free of Russia’s influence if it

does not join the West soon, which is why it put NATO membership and association with the EU back on the table. Similarly, Russia knows it cannot achieve its superpower aspirations in the future if it allows Ukraine (or parts thereof) to slip from its grasp now, because its buffer against NATO would be gone and it would no longer be able to dominate Ukraine in bilateral economic agreements. The long-term nature of the Great Capitalist Peace is not compatible with their world views, which are guided by immediate threats and goals. In that regard, they have opted for realism over ethical realism.

Even though the authors failed to take into account this difference in the definition of interest, their argument for a restructuring for America's presence in the world closely mimicked the Obama administration's position towards the resolution of the conflict. Although John Kerry, Secretary of State for the United States, has made several trips to Kyiv in order to convince the Ukrainian government to hasten implementation of the Minsk II agreement that was signed on February 11, 2015, which among other things calls for a cease-fire and constitutional reform to allow for greater autonomy in the border regions, the United States was not the driving force behind the agreement itself. In fact, it did not take part in drafting the agreement but instead let France and Germany take the lead, thereby making the situation a predominately European problem to which only secondary attention would be given by the United States while it was focused on Syria (Applebaum 43). This means that the Obama administration does not consider Ukraine a vital interest for the United States. The United States is not directly connected to Ukraine's energy infrastructure and Ukraine itself only serves as a strategic advantage for a war that the United States never wants to have to fight. While the Americans would definitely come to the aid of an ally, Ukraine is not one, meaning that any help given to the Ukraine government is done so to reestablish stability in the region but not in essence to help Ukraine. Such help is more a signal to Russia that this type of behavior will not be tolerated when those nations in the region that are allies are targeted and a reassurance to allies that the United States will not abandon them. The decision to not become involved and to let other nations take point in order to resolve the situation indicates that what the United States defines as its vital interests differs from what Lieven and Hulsman argued.

The explanation for this difference lies in the intricacy of the nature of global foreign policy. Obama was acutely aware that taking military action would only escalate the conflict, that his forces were still tied up in Afghanistan and Iraq, and that U.S. resources would be of better use in fighting IS. Understanding that Europe has far more interest in stabilizing Eastern Europe and that they can put more effective power to bear because of their proximity

and economic ties with Russia allowed Obama to take a supporting role, while freeing up the assets he needed in Syria. It is therefore not the case that preventing conflict between Russia and Ukraine is not of interest to the United States in the region, it is more that the United States was not the best suited to resolve this particular conflict while it was taking the lead on fighting terrorism, which serves the vital interests of Europe and Russia as well. To achieve this vital interest, the United States relies on Russian support. Russia allows an American airlift to and from Afghanistan to operate through an airbase on its soil, Russia retains more influence in Iran and its support is therefore of the utmost importance in curbing Iran's nuclear ambitions, and as Assad's strongest ally, the United States needs Russia to cooperate and support peace plans there. In other words, vital interests elsewhere are of a much higher priority than stability in Eastern Europe when the fate of allies is not directly at stake.

When compared to the tenets of ethical realism, we immediately see the presence of prudence, responsibility, and humility in this foreign policy choice; prudence lets the ethical realist understand the consequences of taking action and plan accordingly, while responsibility and humility let him do so within the limits of his abilities and morality. In other words, prudence and responsibility let Obama identify that U.S. involvement would exacerbate the conflict and threatened his ambitions elsewhere. Although it would be more ethical to oppose Russia directly and help Ukraine achieve justice for the violation of its sovereignty, with Russia possessing escalatory dominance in Eastern Europe the political consequences paired with the limited available resources and the lacking will of the public to fight a war with Russia over a non-ally, the prudent and responsible choice would be not to become involved militarily, but only punish Russia through sanctions. Military efforts would only be responsibly implemented as reassurances of actual allies without risk of escalation. Responsibility and humility helped him recognize that both the situation and U.S. interests were best served by removing the United States from the peace process and to let European nations take the lead. This creates trust and credibility for Europe and prevents disagreements between the United States and Russia from spilling over into other arenas. Patriotism is also present in this policy and in fact mirrors Lieven and Hulsman's opinion of how it should be implemented: "... the United States can demand that Russia rule out certain methods in trying to maintain its influence over countries in the former Soviet Union. But it cannot demand that Russian officials abandon that influence over a region of vital interest to Russia" (82). The acknowledgement of Russia's escalatory dominance by Obama paired with rhetoric and sanctions but not rollback is exactly what Lieven and Hulsman prescribed.

Thus, while stabilizing the region is not currently in the interest of Russia, and the suggested policy alternative therefore became unworkable, Obama was still able to follow an ethical realist course. Even though this course does not work towards the Great Capitalist Peace directly, it does allow Obama to achieve other vital interests, while simultaneously allowing European allies to come into their own as responsible partners instead of coat-tailing the United States.

This means that Lieven and Hulsman's assessment of the situation in Eastern Europe was flawed, but was there reason to assume so when they wrote their book nearly ten years before this conflict erupted? At the time, the domestic political situation in Ukraine was not stable and corruption was rampant, but with the pro-West Yushchenko being elected and Russia and Ukraine not yet butting heads over energy prices, economic prosperity was definitely appealing to Ukraine. The same was true for Russia, which tried to engage both Europe and Asia in economic cooperation (Rangsimaporn 376). While Vladimir Putin's first tenure as president would end two years after the book was published, under his leadership Russia endured eight years of strong economic growth until the beginning of the global economic crisis. It was perfectly reasonable to assume that Russia would be interested in stronger economic cooperation. The invasion of Georgia that was the first showcase of Russia's renewed superpower aspirations was still two years away. The development of current events, then, went completely against reasonable expectations and so was impossible to foresee. By the time Obama assumed office the Great Capitalist Peace had already become unattainable.

Even though the above explains that Lieven and Hulsman could not have expected the development of current events, there are signs that they committed the sin of combining predictive theory with prescriptive intentions. This shows particularly in their suggestion that a European Security Council should be created including Russia, the United States, Turkey, France, Britain, and Germany as members with veto powers for all. They suggest that this concert would prevent Russia from being outvoted like it is in other concerts (Lieven and Hulsman 168). It is their belief that the stability and cooperation this would promote will contribute to the realization of the Great Capitalist Peace.

In other words, the authors once again identified a pattern: repeated Russian frustration in multilateral bodies. In their effort to be prescriptive and thereby break the pattern, however, they inadvertently argue for its continuance by suggesting a new concert while failing to explain how this concert would yield different results. Considering Russia's aspirations and the fact this concert would concern itself with security it stands to reason that Russia would



not merely be outnumbered, it would be actively facing a veto from other members. It follows then that their prescriptive suggestion leads to the predictive result and becomes ineffective. This specific recommendation is of note because it is the only one where the authors step away from the prescriptive approach they applied to the other policy recommendations, which are tailor-made and specific for Russia and could not be implemented in any other theater.

From this case study we can conclude several points about the possibility of implementing ethical realism and the realization of the Great Capitalist Peace. Even though the situation in Eastern Europe had changed drastically since the writing of the book, the lessons of ethical realism were visible in the policy actions taken by the Obama administration. Adhering to the tenets of prudence, responsibility, and humility, Obama prioritized the vital interests of the United States and accordingly ranked stability in the Ukraine lower than fighting terrorism. Acknowledging that he needed Russian cooperation elsewhere he kept the United States out of both the conflict as well as the resolution process, allowing European nations to show their abilities as capable partners, which in turn takes some of the weight and responsibility for Europe's security concerns from the shoulders of the United States. This helps the United States create a global presence that is influential but not overbearing, which is what Anatol Lieven and John Hulsman argue for in *Ethical Realism*.

However, this case study also shows the inherent flaw in the reasoning behind the Great Capitalist Peace. The theory that nations will identify economic growth as a common vital interest was proven to be false when Russia chose its security concerns in the Black Sea over its continued economic growth. Although it has retained its military presence in the area, its economy has suffered greatly from the cost of deployment and the punitive economic sanctions. The flaw originated when the authors applied predictive theory rather than prescriptive theory, which lies at the foundation of realist thought. They identified a pattern in which nations sought out economic cooperation, fostered economic growth, and in turn reaped stability. From this they extrapolated the predictive formula of the Great Capitalist Peace and as the overarching policy recommendation in *Ethical Realism* mistakenly applied it to a nation as Russia, which through its actions showed that some nations do not fit the pattern and make it therefore impossible for the Great Capitalist Peace to be realized. Had the authors followed the previously mentioned "first lesson" of Hans Morgenthau perhaps they would have kept to a prescriptive theory approach, as they did in the more specific policy recommendations in regards to Russia.

### 2.3 Syria: Abandonment and Return to Ethical Realism

Applying the ethical realist theory to Syria is more difficult than in the case of Ukraine. Lieven and Hulsman provided clear policy ideas for Ukraine and Russia, but Syria was not considered a major interest at the time. The Arab Spring and the ensuing civil war was still some time in the future, which meant the United States had more pressing interests in Iraq, Iran, and Israel. Thus we can really only focus on the tenets and if and how they were applied under Obama, with the exception of the suggested general policy the United States should follow for the Greater Middle East. This case study obviously cannot examine how Lieven and Hulsman would see this lead to the Great Capitalist Peace, their book is too old.

Despite this, Syria is still an important case for the viability of ethical realism, because this is one instance in which President Obama temporarily moved away from his ethical realist principles and nearly involved the United States in another war in the Middle East. It thereby provides valuable insight into why ethical realism is preferable to interventionism. To determine whether this is indeed the case, an examination is needed of the careful approach to Syria when the situation was developing, the reaction to the chemical weapons attack and the red line that was subsequently not enforced, and the policy of training and arming rebels in Syria. These three areas show very different approaches, and in case of the last one, it is completely opposite to what Obama wanted to do in Ukraine. Although ethical realism is best suited to a case-by-case approach, it will be interesting to determine how and why Obama came to the conclusion that involvement was warranted in Syria but not in Ukraine.

What makes Syria even more complex is that, where in the conflict in Ukraine there are two clear opponents, Ukraine and Russia, the Syrian conflict is comprised of the government's forces, several Islamic and Kurdish rebel factions that also fight amongst themselves, Islamic State which fights everyone, and Russia which is on the side of the Syrian government but against everyone else. It is my expectation that the tenets of ethical realism will apply to most aspects of these three areas, but that in the case of the chemical attack Obama made a mistake that forced him to deviate from his beliefs right up to his decision not to attack. I believe that decision will be shown to be an ethical realist policy. This case study will first cover the unfolding of events, before moving on to the analysis of the ethical realist theory.

Before moving on to the situational developments, the general policy recommendation needs to be explained. This policy entailed the creation of a regional

concert that would provide a platform to tackle all the region's problems and conflicts. The concert would have to be sponsored by the United States, the European Union, and other major world powers (Lieven and Hulsman 140). The idea behind this regional concert is that most issues that face the region are intimately linked and therefore need to be solved simultaneously. By taking a place on the sidelines, the United States would retain its influence and its ability to achieve key interests, but it would also remove the issue of unilateral regional hegemony and some of the negativity associated with it.

Needless to say, this policy alternative did not come to fruition. No regional concert was created and the United States will still act unilaterally in matters it deems vital to its interests, especially where fighting terrorism is concerned. However, Obama did try to scale down U.S. involvement through his efforts to end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but with his time as President coming to an end without the wars actually having ended it is likely he will fail to keep this promise (Shinkman).

During Obama's first term, a situation developed in the Middle East that would become known as the Arab Spring. The population of several countries in the region rose up against the totalitarian regimes governing them, with mixed results. In Egypt, protests forced President Hosni Mubarak to step down in February 2011 although this would not bring the freedoms the protesters were seeking (Blight et al.). Later that same month, protesters took to the streets in Libya. The regime of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi responded with violence, causing hundreds of deaths, leading to rebellion. The offensive to destroy the rebel forces sparked a UN resolution authorizing the use of force, but not the deployment of troops (Watt et al). This meant that there would be no UN peace keeping mission or sanctioned NATO forces on the ground. This led to NATO creating and enforcing a no-fly zone. Rebels forced Gaddafi to flee in August and take control of Tripoli. A transitional government was put in place (Blight et al).

In Syria, however, the situation escalated even further. Although the Arab Spring started later in Syria than it did in Egypt and Libya, it did not take long before the death toll reached into the hundreds (Marsh; Ibrahim 83). While the Assad government at first tried to compromise with the protesters by ending the rule of emergency law that had been in place for forty-eight years, security forces became more and more violent in their dispersing of protests over time. On May 9, the European Union imposed arms sanctions against Syria (Traynor). The US followed suit and Obama called for Assad to step down (Ibrahim 83). However, he did not promise use of force, despite increasing pressure to do so. In 2012, as the violent situation continued to develop, Obama spoke of what would trigger a military

response against Assad's regime: "We have been very clear to the Assad regime...that a red line for us is we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilized. That would change my calculus. That would change my equation" (qtd. in Goldberg).

As Goldberg explains, this statement was highly uncharacteristic of Obama, who had never before drawn a line in the sand for the use of force when not directly tied to matters of national security. According to Goldberg, Obama is of the belief that humanitarian disasters that do not directly pose a security threat to the United States do not warrant putting the lives of American soldiers at risk.

This strong language on the use of chemical weapons against Assad would come back to haunt Obama the next year on August 21, 2013. When rebel-controlled Ghouta was struck by missiles carrying sarin gas the red line appeared to have been crossed. Over 1,400 people were murdered, and the Assad regime was the likely suspect. Because of the 'red line' statement, Obama now had to take action:

"It is important for us to recognize that when over 1,000 people are killed, including hundreds of innocent children, through the use of a weapon that 98 or 99 percent of humanity says should not be used even in war, and there is no action, then we're sending a signal that that international norm doesn't mean much. And that is a danger to our national security" (qtd. in Goldberg).

Having thusly tied credibility to national security – another uncharacteristic move by Obama, who, Goldberg states, is of the opinion that "the preservation of credibility ... led to Vietnam" – Obama proceeded with plans for the attack. However, problems started to emerge that made Obama question himself. Even though France and the British prime minister had pledged their support, Germany and the British Parliament did not (Goldberg). Domestic support for an intervention in Syria was low as well. With the moment of attack drawing near, Obama finally decided not to attack. Goldberg says Obama gave four reasons that guided his decision to hold back:

1. UN inspectors were still on the ground and were at risk,
2. Prime Minister Cameron's failure to obtain consent from Parliament, thereby weakening allied support,
3. An attack would damage Assad, but not eliminate the weapons, as the strikes would be against the military units that could use them. Assad could claim victory over the US's failure to eliminate the weapons,

4. The belief that the scope of executive power in national-security is broad but not limitless.

This left the problem of what to do with Syria's chemical weapons. Obama put the matter to Congress, which was unenthusiastic about a strike on Syria (ibid.). Luckily, Vladimir Putin, who had replaced Dmitry Medvedev for a third term as Russian president, provided a window of opportunity. Obama spoke to him at the G-20 meeting in St. Petersburg and told him that if Putin could force Assad to give up his chemical weapons, it would make a military strike unnecessary. Kerry and Lavrov subsequently engineered the removal of much of Syria's chemical weapons stockpile (ibid.).

Considering that domestic difficulties following his election led Vladimir Putin to once again paint the United States as an enemy fomenting unrest (McFaul 169-170), his willingness to help the U.S. with this sensitive security issue might at first glance seem remarkable. In truth, it is a prime example of how both countries can work together to achieve their interests. While a failed attack by the U.S. on Assad would be a disaster for Obama, a successful one would weaken or even potentially remove the one ally Russia has in the Middle East. Therefore, it was in both countries' interest to prevent the attack from taking place.

That is not to say that keeping Assad in power is vital to Russian interests, as it is an unlikely outcome in the long term. What is of far more importance is the continued leasing of the naval base in Tartus, Syria, as it provides the only possibility for Russia to have a naval presence in the region at all (Deman). As long as Assad remains in power, the use of the base is guaranteed. Should Assad be overthrown by the opposition forces, they will likely punish Russia for their strong military and political support by cancelling the lease contract. This is why Russia proposed a peace plan in November, 2015 that allowed for a transitional government including opposition groups and would allow for elections to be held at a future moment in time (Marcus). Elections provide the best chance for Russia to retain its presence in the region as long as Assad's party remains influential in government. To this end, under the guise of fighting terrorism, Russia launched a military campaign in September, 2015. This campaign, consisting mostly of airstrikes, seemed more effectively targeted against Assad's opposition instead of Islamic State, as the BBC reported. Weakening opposition forces would make Assad stronger in future negotiations.

For Obama, this outcome was by far the best-case scenario. Although he might have come off as weak to the international community, and U.S. credibility was arguably damaged

by not attacking Syria after having pledged to do so, Obama managed to steer clear of starting another war that would tie up American resources and military personnel for several years to come. While he handed a political win to Vladimir Putin, Putin's own military actions in Syria have left Russia's military overextended between Syria and the situation in Crimea, which puts even further strain on Russia's declining economy. Mearsheimer argues that Russia cannot even afford to occupy Crimea (85), so prolonged activity in Syria on top of that is devastating. It would only be a matter of time before Russia could no longer afford its current deployments, and accordingly, in March of 2016, Russia announced its partial withdrawal from Syria, claiming victory in that the Russian forces had achieved most of its goals. Russia would remain committed to a diplomatic solution (Slim and Issa). Assad's future, however, is far from certain and his opposition is once more able to move against him and reclaim lost ground, although currently Assad is still firmly in place. In all, then, Obama has not lost much and has in fact strengthened his hand against Russia in other areas by refraining from taking military actions. The chemical weapons have been removed, Assad's position is still uncertain, and Russia has weakened itself through its actions. Obama avoided involving his country in yet another costly war, which would have likely sparked more international backlash than choosing not to attack, and, through his prudence, showed Washington and a few foreign allies there are alternatives to interventionism. If he seems weaker now in their eyes because of it that is a cost he will likely be glad to bear.

However, the situation in Syria is made all the more complex by the presence of Islamic State, a name that is sometimes shortened to IS, ISIS or ISIL, and also sometimes referred to by its opponents as Daesh (Irshaid). Fighting terrorism is obviously a vital interest for the United States, but seldom has this fight been this complicated. Whereas the United States could previously send in its armed forces to fight terrorists directly, the situation on the ground and at home makes that level of deployment undesirable and potentially disastrous. As was the case with the planned attack on Syria for the chemical weapons attack, domestic support for another lengthy military mission in the Middle East is low, as is Obama's desire to start a new war while he is still finishing up two others (Goldberg; Ibrahim 84). Next to that, his final term in office is coming to a close and a new deployment would become a heated subject for discussion and could hurt the chances of the Democratic presidential candidate, but also become problematic for Democrats running in the House and Senate elections.

Within Syria, a large American force would do more harm than good. Although it would be more capable in combatting IS than Syrian government and rebel forces, its very

presence would strengthen IS and its cause. Anti-American sentiments in the region are already high because of the previous wars and would only increase further. American soldiers would become highly rated targets for terrorists and casualty numbers would therefore be considerable. Even though America's military might could decimate IS, American losses during such a war could easily be turned into a moral victory for IS. IS does not need to defeat the United States, it merely needs to inflict enough harm and be patient as a prolonged presence turns minds, both foreign and domestic, against the United States.

Subsequently, the method the United States is using to fight this war is through local militias and rebel forces. However, this has produced negative results. The Pentagon set up a program at the cost of \$500 million to train and arm Syrian rebel units. The goal of this program was to train thousands of fighters in combat so that they could target IS. However, the program was canceled in October of 2015, when it became evident that the program had produced only a few fighters. Senior officials in the White House and the Pentagon stated this was partially caused by rebel groups prioritizing fighting Assad over fighting Islamic State (Shear et al.). Participation in the program hinged on the promise not to target Assad, which was an unacceptable condition for most rebel forces. Besides the few participants, this program also suffered from forces that received American aid being utterly defeated, surrendering, or fleeing the battlefield while leaving their weapons behind for IS to capture. Another issue is that the Arab rebel groups do not want to cooperate and coordinate with the Kurdish fighters, who they see as their enemy (ibid.).

All these varying interests make for a very difficult quagmire for policy makers to navigate, and the past events show this complexity. Any number of factors could knock a policy direction off course or derail it completely. This is why this study's argument here is that while Obama tried to act according to his ethical realist perspective, unforeseen events forced him to deviate onto a path that could have been disastrous for the United States for years to come, had he not stepped back from his decision to attack the Assad regime at the last moment. Since then, he tried to focus his efforts on fighting Islamic State, whose defeat constitutes a vital interest for the United States, but a failure to understand the desires of the rebel groups he needed on his side and contradicting policies between the Pentagon and the CIA showcase a further abandonment of the ethical realist principles. In Syria, however, we also see what happens when vital interests clash, for while fighting Islamic State is a vital interest, so is maintaining good relations with Russia. Although these two interests are not mutually exclusive, Russia's vital interests in Syria forced Obama to compromise on Assad's position, meaning that the effectiveness of supporting rebel groups was undermined.

In an article titled “Four Hard Conclusions, if the Syrian War is to End” on his website John Hulsman even admits that the current conflict will likely result in a shattered Syria, with either a fictional central government or an officially recognized decentralized nation-state with more autonomy for the separate parts, with the exception of IS. Although this sounds like he is giving up on Syria, he is arguing for the ethical realist outcome. Syria is too divided to ever come together again. The war has given an outlet to ethnic tensions that were already present, and no side is willing to concede to another for its future governance (ibid.). In essence, this means that Syria is unsalvageable. As cold as this may sound, it is a reality policy makers will need to come to grips with. The words of Niebuhr speak to this: “God grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference” (qtd. in Lieven and Hulsman 70).

There is no geopolitical entity with the resources to prevent Syria from falling. What the West, together with Russia and regional actors, can do and should do, in Hulsman’s words, is to undertake the already tremendous task of preventing Syria from shattering completely. The even greater instability that scenario would cause serves no one’s interests but IS, and so would the worsening of the humanitarian disaster that is already occurring.

President Obama’s first instinct to call for Assad to step down without a promise to intervene shows ethical realist thought. Although the United States could easily have intervened had it chosen to do so, this would not have been prudent or responsible and would have been a horrible breach of the tenet of humility. Intervention would have given credence to the idea that the United States can do no wrong, which is exactly what Lieven and Hulsman argue is the antithesis of humility (70-71) and would only have fueled anti-American sentiments, especially in the Middle East region. This also explains why it would not have been prudent; prudence relies, in Morgenthau’s words, on “consideration of the political consequences of seemingly moral action” (qtd. in Lieven and Hulsman 67). Helping the Syrian population achieve freedom is morally right, but the political consequences for Obama’s policy in the Middle East would have been disastrous. Seeing as there is no domestic support from the public for another prolonged war in the Middle East, the responsibility tenet, which relies on consideration of the will of the people and government leaders for such action (77), was also not present.

Instead, Obama realized that Assad’s position and the rebellion against him was very much a domestic issue, not vital to American interests in the region. Since all parties involved also consider Islamic State an enemy, picking sides would have weakened the fight against the terrorist organization. After all, the Syrian government was one of the stronger



military forces in the area. Removing them, as the United States did in Iraq, creates the exact turmoil that terrorist groups thrive on. Despite the eventual failure of the program, the arming and training of rebel forces on the promise of not attacking Assad seemed the prudent thing to do. It was moral in that it let the Syrians fight for their own future and freedom, while keeping Americans out of direct conflicts. It did show a lack of the study tenet however, as these groups found the condition that they could not fight Assad unacceptable, and this could and should have been to the Obama administration.

After the sarin gas attack, Obama's earlier words about the red line forced him to temporarily abandon ethical realist thought. The decision to attack for the sake of the international norm and U.S. credibility went against not only Obama's earlier convictions, but also against the tenet of prudence. Tied to this is a lack of responsibility. Ethical responsibility dictates that "having good intentions is not remotely adequate" (Lieven and Hulsman 77). The targets chosen showed a lack of prudence since they could potentially escalate the conflict without removing the chemical weapons from Assad's arsenal. After all, the targets were units that could potentially use the weapons and not the actual weapons. This means that even though the United States was prepared to take action for the right reasons, punishing the use of chemical weapons, the consequences of such an attack were not given proper credence. An attack could actually bolster Assad's position, considering that the weapons would not actually be targeted. It would spark a backlash from several nations, first and foremost from Russia, for the violation of Syria's sovereignty without a mandate from the United Nations and without clear evidence, and it would jeopardize Russia's necessary cooperation in foreign policy areas that have a higher priority, such as fighting Islamic State. Domestically there was little support to become involved in Syria, meaning that a strike could be damaging to Obama's position, and potentially even negatively impact elections for Democratic candidates.

The above made the attack unacceptable in terms of ethical realist thought. However, the final decision not to go through with it but to work through diplomatic channels to remove the weapons was a showcase of all the ethical realist tenets at work. It showed prudence in its acceptance that military action was, while perhaps morally right, was undesirable because of the consequences described above, and would likely not remain limited to one instance. This one attack could easily have led to a prolonged mission especially if Assad used this as a pretext for further use of chemical weapons. It showed humility in its realization that to attack was a mistake in this scenario, and yet more so in admitting this to Russia. In doing so Obama acknowledged that announcing the attack was a

mistake and accepted responsibility for this by trying a diplomatic approach first. By approaching Russia for help it practiced the tenet of study by understanding the most viable diplomatic routes, as well as the tenet of responsibility by acknowledging that the United States did not have the diplomatic capabilities to achieve this result alone. Russia, with its close ties to Assad was far better positioned to convince Syria to give up the chemical weapons. The tenet of patriotism was clearly visible in the realization that the Syrian government would be willing to surrender the weapons rather than face a possible attack. It would stand much more to gain by being seemingly responsible enough to give them up rather than seem guilty of having used them, which risked its very survival.

Judging from the aftermath of the decision to keep the United States out of the Syrian conflict, it becomes evident that Obama has returned to a more ethical realist policy. Although the situation in Syria is far from resolved, Obama's return to an ethical realist policy of wait-and-see has resulted in the weakening of America's opponents. Despite Russia's interference, which resulted in the overextension of its military and severe pressure on its economy, Assad's position is far from secure. Russia's presence also resulted in heavy losses for Islamic State, thereby helping the United States achieve one of its vital interests without risk to American troops.

This case study shows that in Syria ethical realism was a better policy choice than the interventionism that Lieven and Hulsman say grips Washington. Whenever the Obama administration followed a largely ethical realist policy, the United States was met with positive results, albeit still far from reaching a satisfactory resolution and although mistakes were made in the training and equipping of rebel forces. When Obama shortly ventured into the realm of interventionism, he risked plunging the United States into a war for which there was no domestic support, hardly any international support, and which threatened the vital interest of fighting terrorism. Although it could be argued that intervention would have been a just war, it was definitely not ethical realist (for more on just war theory, see Jean Bethke Elshtain's *Just War against Terror: The Burden of American Power in a Violent World*).

The temporary lapse from ethical realism can be explained through the people that surround Obama in the White House. Obama is an ethical realist but as is evident from the Goldberg article in *The Atlantic*, he is outnumbered. Secretary of State John Kerry, security advisor Susan Rice, and U.N. ambassador Samantha Power were all decisively in favor of intervening in Syria and it is therefore likely that they managed to influence his thinking on this matter (for more on the influences on the decision making process, see *Understanding Foreign Policy Decision Making* by Alex Mintz and Karl deRouen Jr.). This is a situation

that worried Anatol Lieven in 2010. Discussing the restraint the administration needed to practice, he expressed his apprehensive feelings towards the advisors:

“President Obama himself may be capable of this, given his richly mixed origins and links with Africa. I have grave doubts, however, whether his subordinates like Clinton, and the intellectuals who advise them, will be capable of such an intellectual and moral leap. It would require a degree of imagination and vision that they have never demonstrated, and a capacity to distance themselves from the US nationalist mythology in which they were raised” (Lieven 181).

He finishes with the advice that they would do well to study the teachings of Reinhold Niebuhr in order to find the moral courage to stand up to the powerful establishments that resist such change (182), in the same way he and Hulsman broke away from the prevalent influence of interventionism on Washington’s think-tanks. Lieven here asks the administration officials to think about the true national interest, despite the misgivings of politicians or a possible backlash from the public or other influential factors. From their stance on Syria, however, it can be concluded that they did not find this moral courage but instead influenced Obama’s thinking on the wisdom of attacking. Luckily for the United States, Obama’s ethical realist mindset reasserted itself and prevented the American escalation of the conflict.

There is an argument to be made that it is easier for Obama to stand up to powerful establishments because as President he is a powerful establishment and so he is on somewhat equal footing. Choosing his own path then becomes not so much moral courage but professional integrity. His staff members do not carry the same clout and so will find it more difficult. However, to say that they cannot make that choice denies them their individual agency, their ability to make their own reasonable choices. From the ethical realist view people have a responsibility to strive towards morality. In the words of Morgenthau:

“We have no choice between power and the common good. To act successfully, that is according to the rules of the political art, is political wisdom. To know with despair that the political act is inevitably evil, and to act nonetheless is moral courage. To chose (sic) among several expedient actions the least evil one is moral judgment” (qtd. in Lieven and Hulsman 59).

Ethical realism is not perfect and neither are its proponents, but it is certainly less evil than neo-conservatism and interventionism.

## 2.4 Conclusion: Ethical Realism in Practice

What this chapter attempted to do was to show how President Barack Obama used ethical realist thought in his foreign policy. To do this end, it focused on three specific case studies that showed the successes but also some of the failures of his policy.

In regards to nuclear disarmament, we have seen that he worked diligently in an ethical realist fashion to create a new treaty with the Russians and agreed to an immense reduction of the American nuclear arsenal, while retaining an effective nuclear triad. However, in its implementation the Obama administration lagged behind and will seemingly not reach the agreed limit in 2018. Realist thought explains that this is most recently due to increased tensions between the United States and Russia over the Crimean crisis.

In the case of Iran, Obama's policy ran parallel to ethical thought. In all aspects of the chosen policy the tenets of ethical realism can be identified and the outcome of this policy is a success that speaks to how this theory can provide beneficial outcomes if applied correctly. Although the issue is still far from resolved, Iran has complied with the provisions of the agreement and for the moment given up its nuclear weapons program. This achievement for Obama came from an approach that was focused on a vital interest instead of a blanket approach, that was tough and punitive where required and willing to compromise where possible, and relied on an understanding of which foreign powers were necessary to make the negotiations a success.

The crisis in Ukraine shows the complexities of international relations and how reality sometimes necessitates a different interpretation of the vital interest. When the authors of *Ethical Realism* identified peace and stability in Eastern Europe as vital to U.S. foreign policy in the region, they did not provide a description of where this interest stands in regards to vital interests identified in other regions. Through its policy decisions the Obama administration did offer a sense of its priorities when it chose not to antagonize Russia by supporting Ukraine, but instead identified Russian support in fighting terrorism and nuclear non-proliferation as more important than the situation in Ukraine. The manner in which it did so was ethical realist in nature as the administration recognized that it had fewer interests in the region than Russia did and that its interests elsewhere could be compromised if it took a leading role in resolving this conflict. In keeping itself from the negotiations of the agreement the United States took on the ethical realist idea of limited engagement for a reduced but influential role in the world.

The Syria case study is an example of how ethical realism offers better alternatives than interventionism. When Obama steered an ethical realist course by monitoring the situation and admonishing President Assad the United States was in no danger of entanglement in another costly war. Such a war would have been disastrous for America's interests in the region. These interests then came under threat when Obama drew a red line at the use of chemical weapons and these were subsequently used. Turning towards interventionism, the administration prepared to attack. These preparations showed violations of the tenets of prudence, responsibility, and study. It follows that an attack on Syria was ill-advised. By returning to ethical realist thought the attack was cancelled and the chemical weapons were removed through diplomatic channels soon after.

Although further implementation of ethical realism through the training of Syrian rebels in the fight against Islamic State was flawed through a misapplication of the study tenet, the ethical realist course did manage to keep the United States out of another conflict and more importantly is working towards a completion of America's vital interests. Islamic State is losing ground in the region and Russia has put its already struggling economy under more stress through its military campaign and has weakened its grip on Eastern Europe as a result. The region is still far from stable however and ethical realist theory would expect Syria to never be completely whole again. It will be necessary for the United States to act diplomatically when Syria eventually falls to prevent an IS resurgence and an even greater humanitarian disaster.

What became clear from these case studies is that the Great Capitalist Peace is not viable. This was most evident in the Ukraine case study where Russia identified power interests as more important than economic growth. It sought to increase its power projection by seizing Crimea and by supporting its Syrian ally President Assad. This has severely damaged Russia's economy for years to come. Evidently, Lieven and Hulsman's argument that nations prefer stability and economic growth over war was flawed. As Russia was named essential to the establishment of the Great Capitalist Peace, it follows that this plan will not see fruition. The flaw was located in the application of predictive theory in a prescriptive setting. Although treating areas as unique, the authors nevertheless applied predictive patterns (the choosing of economic interests over strategic ones and the success of regional concerts). This caused their policy prescription of the Great Capitalist Peace to be founded on mistaken principles, which led to its inevitable collapse.

### 3: Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to prove my argument that ethical realism is a viable theory and can be successfully applied as U.S. policy. It has also undertaken to prove that the Great Capitalist Peace envisioned by Anatol Lieven and John C. Hulsman is flawed and cannot be implemented in reality. In order to do so, this thesis first summarized their book *Ethical Realism: A Vision for America's Role in the World* and delivered a critical examination of the book's main points. This chapter found that the theory, which is based on the virtues of prudence, humility, study, responsibility, and patriotism, is sound. Policy based on these virtues would be a responsible and fitting method for the United States to pursue its vital interests, even though certain suggestions were too loosely defined. However, the Great Capitalist Peace was found to be based on mistaken assumptions by the authors. They identified a pattern that showed that nations had previously set aside differences in favor of mutually beneficial economic prosperity. These nations had come together in their vital interests and created a stable environment based on capitalist principles that would allow for peace. Mistakenly, they predicted that this pattern would fit other nations as well, despite arguing that ethical realism should be implemented on a case-by-case basis and therefore patterns become incompatible with the theory.

Their mistake became obvious in the case studies of chapter 2. The case study on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation was still promising. The United States worked together with Russia to create plans that would drastically scale back their nuclear arsenals. This policy was ethical realist in the responsibility the United States took upon itself as the possessor of the world's largest nuclear arsenal, while making sure that because of the bipolar nature of the agreement and the maintenance of the nuclear triad this policy was prudent as well. However, as a crisis developed in Ukraine by the Russian annexation of Crimea, the number of warheads disposed of dropped significantly showing that even on areas of bipolar cooperation there are realist limits to the stability this creates.

This stability cannot be said to fit the Great Capitalist Peace, however. A clear significant economic advantage to disarmament is missing from this policy area that Lieven and Hulsman consider vital. From this follows that the policy is ethical realist, but does not work towards the Great Capitalist Peace.

Cooperation on the issue of Iran's nuclear aspirations on the other hand showed promising results, as an historic deal was struck in which Iran freely and willingly destroyed

its enrichment facilities necessary for the creation of nuclear weapons for which it would be rewarded by the lifting of sanctions. Obama's ethical realist based diplomacy can be attributed to this success, as it ensured that Russia as Iran's supporter was present and in favor and that the European Union and its most economically powerful members participated as they together with Iran stand most to gain from the lifting of sanctions. The tenets of prudence, humility, responsibility, study, and patriotism were all visible in this chosen policy.

The agreement prudently focused only on non-proliferation and not the many other issues that the U.S. has with the government of Iran, and the United States was humble in its acknowledgement of the leading role it needs to take on this issue. The government acted responsible in implementing sanctions but keeping the diplomatic door open, thereby making it clear that it would not attack Iran or enforce regime change, which would drive it further away. The tenets of study and patriotism were combined in the administration's understanding that the newly installed Rouhani government was willing to work with the West on this issue, but that it needed profitable results for Iran in return for giving up its aspirations in order to gain the eventual and provisional support of Grand Ayatollah Khamenei.

In all, the Iran deal was a perfect showcase for the viability of ethical realism as a policy, but at the same time it cannot be called a success for the Great Capitalist Peace as the required methods that define it were absent. The formula that economic incentives lead to economic growth, which leads to a growth of the middleclass, which in turn will demand political reforms and stability, was absent. Iran faced economic disincentives that forced a change in viewpoint and led to the deal, but it has not undergone any actual democratic reforms. In essence, what happened in Iran does not meet the required criteria for the Great Capitalist Peace.

The second case study discussed the crisis in Ukraine and once again elements of ethical realism stood at the core of Obama's foreign policy. Identifying that the United States had no vital interests in Ukraine but that vital interests elsewhere would be put in jeopardy should he act too forcibly against Russia, he adopted a policy of sanctions and let Europe, which is more served by stability in Eastern Europe and good relations with both Russia and Ukraine, take the lead in attempts to resolve the matter. This prudently kept the United States focused on areas that are of more importance, while it responsibly acknowledged it was not the best suited to solve the crisis. Even though some might not consider it ethical to allow Russia to violate the sovereignty of another nation, realist thought says that with Russia's dominance in the region and Ukraine not being an ally, this was not a war the United States should have wanted to get involved in. Considering the losses that would likely have been

incurred, the huge economic cost of fighting such a war, and the possibility that such a war moves from conventional to nuclear warfare, it is ethical realist not to become more involved beyond placing economic sanctions on Russia.

This case study is arguably the best instance of why the Great Capitalist Peace will not work. Russia had enjoyed several years of economic growth and cooperation, yet instead of considering these economic interests as vital, it chose to pursue strategic security when it became faced with the possibility of losing access to Crimea to NATO. Lieven and Hulsman misread the Russian population, which is far more interested in restoring Russia to a superpower status than in economic prosperity. They have heard the promise of wealth before but few have achieved it for themselves. Power, on the other hand, they are familiar with and they are willing to endure hardship for Russia to claim what they see is its rightful place. From this follows that Russia, considered essential for the creation of the Great Capitalist Peace, has far different interests which condemns Lieven and Hulsman's goal to impossibility.

In the third case study it becomes evident exactly why ethical realism is preferable to interventionism. Obama started out on Syria in an ethical realist matter, both prudent and responsible. His policy was restrained as he considered Syria not to be a vital interest when the domestic situation there worsened. He called for Assad to step down, but pledged no intervention. Intervention would have involved the United States in another war with all the dire consequences that come with it. As the United States had no interests in the region besides fighting terrorism and that this interest had not come under threat, Obama prudently decided not to get involved.

He uncharacteristically pivoted towards interventionism when he called the use of chemical weapons a 'red line'. When this red line was crossed he moved to attack Assad's forces in order to defend the credibility of the United States. War for the sake of credibility is something Lieven and Hulsman argue against and is decidedly not ethical realist. When it became evident that the attack would not have the desired effect, Obama returned to his ethical realist way of thinking and called it off. Practicing humility, prudence, and responsibility, he worked with the Russians, who have a far greater interest in Syria and Assad, to remove the chemical weapons. That is something an attack would never have achieved, which shows that the diplomatic way of ethical realism yields better results. Russia is an excellent showcase, because they did become militarily involved in Syria. They did so supposedly to fight Islamic State but more likely to prop up Assad. Either way, it has spread its forces thin and weakened its economy even further with no tangible results at the moment.



Meanwhile, the United States has not become involved to any significant extent and therefore only incurred little cost. However, Obama's ethical realism was not successfully implemented completely. The program wherein Syrian rebels would be trained and equipped by the United States on the promise that they would only fight IS and not Assad showed a clear lack of the study tenet. These rebels see Assad just as much as an enemy as they do IS. Such a promise undermines their goals in this war and so the program was a complete failure. The Syria case study shows that while Obama is an ethical realist by nature, he is not perfect and can sometimes stray from the path.

Considering the disastrous future John Hulsman sees for Syria, it is evident that the Great Capitalist Peace does not apply. As the country is currently still involved in a civil war that will determine Syria's future for better or worse, there is no party that is willing to accept economic incentives over peace. Depending on who, if anyone, emerges victorious, economic incentives and cooperation could be useful tools in the rebuilding effort. In that case economic interests may indeed lead to democratic reforms and the creation of a semblance of the Great Capitalist Peace.

It is therefore the conclusion of this thesis that ethical realism can indeed be successfully implemented in real-world situations. The three case studies make it clear that elements of ethical realism were present in Barack Obama's policies in Iran, Syria, Ukraine and vis-à-vis Russia on nuclear proliferation. It has also shown to be preferable to interventionism in the case of Syria, where it kept the United States from involving itself in yet another war in the Middle East. However, ethical realism requires adherence to its tenets in order to be successful, and Obama's record is clearly not perfect.

The second conclusion of this thesis is that the Great Capitalist Peace is not viable. In none of the case studies have we seen evidence that this lofty goal could be achieved. As was explained in the first chapter and in the case studies, this is due to a misunderstanding of predictive and prescriptive theory and the identification of a pattern that was but should not have been universally applied. Despite successes in certain regions such as Western Europe, not every nation will accept economic interests as vital over other interests like security.

There is much more work that can be done on ethical realism and the Obama administration. After eight years of having an ethical realist in the White House, there are many more foreign policy decisions. Because of the limits in terms of length, unfortunately I was unable to discuss these here. However, situations like Benghazi in Libya, Obama's efforts on climate change, or the fight against terrorism and the use of drones, are but a few instances where Obama's decisions may yield valuable insight into the usefulness of ethical realism as

policy. Another area could be the rising national debt. Lieven and Hulsman argued strongly that this in itself was becoming a national security threat, and although the Military Expenditure Database of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute put the total U.S. spending on the military for 2014 at \$610 billion, down from \$682 billion two years before and its all-time high of \$711 billion in 2011 (SIPRI), the White House's Office of Management and Business (OMB) estimates at the national debt at \$19.4 trillion for 2015, an increase of \$10 trillion since President Obama took office. Of course, the causes of this spike are varied and not all related to foreign policy but Lieven and Hulsman argue that national security, the greatest of national interests, is largely dependent on a healthy financial system. They are highly critical of the Bush administration and wonder what Presidents Truman and Eisenhower would have to say about the increased debt under Bush (26), which went from \$5.6 trillion in 2000 to \$8.9 trillion in 2007 (OMB). One can only wonder at how stupefied Truman and Eisenhower would be if they were confronted with the current situation.

An interesting contrast that needs to be taken into account on the balancing of budgets is that while President Eisenhower did indeed report a surplus of \$1 billion on the budget for the 1960 fiscal year following a \$12.4 billion deficit the previous year (Freeburg) the gross national debt rose by \$3 billion and in fact rose overall throughout his two terms in office, with the exception being the years 1956 and 1957 when the debt decreased (OMB). This shows that U.S. solvency is not necessarily aided by a balanced budget and increased trade (which happened under Eisenhower) will only have limited effects on the national debt. The connections between budget, debt, foreign policy, and national security could therefore make for an interesting research subject.

Going back to its roots, a study could be undertaken on the founders of ethical realism to see if Lieven and Hulsman have understood their theories correctly. This would fit in with the current movement that sees growing reexaminations of Morgenthau and Niebuhr and would provide insight into the foundational validity of ethical realism.

Other studies could examine the other non-classical realist schools, such as neorealism and cosmopolitan realism, in order to find perhaps an even better realist alternative to interventionism and neo-conservatism. Until such time that a 'great peace' is possible, the world will need to understand that there are alternatives to overbearing and blanketing schools of thought like them that, while not necessarily peaceful, do bring balance between powers.

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