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Abstract (English)

This thesis explores the concept of preventive diplomacy through the lens of classical realism, focusing particularly on the contributions of Hans J. Morgenthau, who saw diplomacy as a tool for preventing war and conflict. This study traces deeper historical roots of diplomacy and preventive diplomacy as well and reinterprets its practice as consistent with the realist understanding of power, interest, and prudence in international relations. By analyzing the historical evolution of diplomacy and applying Morgenthau's theoretical principles, the research evaluates two critical case studies: the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 as a success in preventive diplomacy, and the Russia–Ukraine conflict as a failure, providing reasons for such outcomes. Through this comparative analysis, the thesis argues that preventive diplomacy is most effective when it adheres to realist principles such as recognizing power asymmetries, prioritizing national interest, and employing pragmatic, measured negotiation, always considering the consequences of potential war. Failures in preventive diplomacy could be linked to the neglect of these principles, underlying the importance of realism in both understanding and practicing diplomacy, which confirms realists' concerns about power struggles. The study contributes to the broader discourse on conflict prevention and foreign policy strategy, offering insights relevant to both scholars and practitioners in international relations.

Zusammenfassung (Deutsch)

Diese Masterarbeit untersucht das Konzept der präventiven Diplomatie aus der Perspektive des klassischen Realismus, insbesondere unter Bezugnahme auf die Beiträge von Hans J. Morgenthau. Während präventive Diplomatie häufig mit institutionellen Bemühungen nach dem Kalten Krieg zur Verhinderung von Konflikten in Verbindung gebracht wird, verfolgt diese Studie ihre tieferen historischen Wurzeln und interpretiert ihre Praxis im Einklang mit dem realistischen Verständnis von Macht, Interesse und politischer Klugheit in den internationalen Beziehungen. Anhand der historischen Entwicklung der Diplomatie und der Anwendung morgenthauischer Prinzipien analysiert die Arbeit zwei zentrale Fallstudien: die Kuba-Krise von 1962 als Erfolg präventiver Diplomatie und den Russland–Ukraine-Konflikt als deren Scheitern. Die vergleichende Analyse zeigt, dass präventive Diplomatie besonders wirksam ist, wenn sie sich an realistischen Grundsätzen orientiert – wie der Anerkennung von Machtasymmetrien, der Priorisierung nationaler Interessen und pragmatischer, abgewogener Verhandlungsführung. Misserfolge in der präventiven Diplomatie lassen sich häufig auf die Missachtung dieser Prinzipien zurückführen. Die Arbeit leistet einen Beitrag zur Debatte über Konfliktprävention und außenpolitische Strategien und bietet Erkenntnisse, die sowohl für die Wissenschaft als auch für die Praxis der internationalen Beziehungen von Bedeutung sind.

Pledge of honesty:

“On my honor as a student of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna, I submit this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance in it.”

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

Diplomacy, as a cornerstone of international relations, has always been a tool shaping the interactions between different entities throughout history, offering room for conducting foreign policy when states were not known in a modern form. Today, diplomacy is primarily associated with states, as they are officially represented through their permanent diplomatic missions. It is a way of peacefully influencing decisions and perceptions of other states and non-state actors, aiming at bridging the gap between conflicting interests and strengthening relationships. Diplomacy has been used to overcome obstacles and contradictions, propose solutions to every problem, and teach people and states to understand each other, despite unimaginably different interests. Through the art of diplomacy, intellectual power has become more important and influential than physical, which was and still is the game-changer in the state system, especially in the period of history when it was not organized and regulated as today.

History has shown that war can be prevented only through diplomacy, and war can be a goal only in the absence of diplomacy. Various forms of diplomacy can be applied, including representations, negotiations, and conflict resolution, but a unifying characteristic that sums up everything else should be the aim of a peaceful settlement. Diplomacy, unfortunately, sometimes reacts too late or after disastrous events take away millions of lives and erase cities, only because statesmen were not able to negotiate and reach an agreement before disagreement escalates into war. The main idea behind diplomacy, as an art of its kind, is to settle disputes at the beginning of even a flaming desire to wage a war, to cut it off at the first stage. Diplomacy, which is not capable of preventing war and killing, is purposeless. In a world where competing interests cannot be reconciled, where no overarching authority can deal with the whole world or does not exist to take care of rules, punishment, and enforcement, diplomacy is the only non-violent means for states to pursue their national interest while mitigating tensions that could otherwise lead to war. Among the various manifestations of diplomacy, preventive diplomacy has emerged as an essential concept, aiming not only to resolve conflicts after they begin but to prevent them from occurring. It is preventive diplomacy that highlights the nobility that is woven into diplomacy, the force above all forces, the art above all arts.

The idea of preventing conflict through dialogue, compromise, and recognition of interests is not novel or invented. Ancient civilizations, from Egypt and Mesopotamia and China, and India to Greece and the Roman Empire, to Renaissance and modern systems in which states are main players in international relations, engaged in forms of diplomacy that aimed to avoid unnecessary confrontation. It looked promising after the League of Nations and the United Nations that we entered into a new reality, a rule-based state system governed by common principles and a single institution in which every state would be protected, but not only because big ones would also abide by the rules, but because everyone would be willing to give up something to protect system. Unfortunately, dreams did not come true. Thomas Jefferson believed that states also could behave morally like people do, fulfilling their promises and duties, without trying to circumvent rules, causing trouble for others. Indeed, it was naïve to expect such behavior from states seeking to increase their power and influence, but it is great to know that somebody recognized the necessity of having such a system. Preventive diplomacy, instead of being promoted and certain, over time became neglected. The effectiveness of preventive diplomacy varies from case to case, not being a rule for everyone when having disagreements, even though it can benefit everyone. Some conflicts have been successfully prevented through timely diplomatic interference, while others, despite negotiations, have erupted into wars and/or aggression.

It is not an easy task to understand why preventive diplomacy succeeds in some cases and fails in others, but whenever some factor should be explained systematically, theory comes into the game. The theory that explains the behavior of states, the nature of power, and the human component of states served in this thesis as an important ingredient to the topic. Classical realism, and especially Hans Morgenthau's contribution, offers valuable insights into power politics, underlying diplomacy as a necessary tool for achieving peace. He emphasized that international politics is guided not by subjective and biased but by objective laws ingrained in eternal human nature, underlying that the struggle for power and the chasing of national interest are constant and enduring characteristics of state behavior. Diplomacy, he claims, is not idealistic wishful thinking but a necessary institution guided by prudence, pragmatism, and understanding of power relations where every state is focused on its survival.¹

By placing preventive diplomacy within the framework of classical realism, this thesis explores its historical evolution and practical application in international affairs, offering answers to the

¹ Hans J Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985). (p. 13)

crucial questions for understanding diplomacy and its goals. Through a comparative study of two cases, the successful one on the Cuban Missile Crisis and the failed one on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, this research aims to evaluate the conditions under which preventive diplomacy can function effectively. It examines and seeks to provide a clear picture of what lessons can be drawn for the sake of the future of global peace and stability.

1.2 Research Question and Hypothesis

This thesis is guided by the following research question:

How does preventive diplomacy function as a mechanism to maintain international peace, and what insights can be gained from its historical evolution and application through the lens of Morgenthau's classical realism?

The central **hypothesis** is that preventive diplomacy has an incredible probability of succeeding when it aligns with the principles of classical realism, embodied in Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations*. Recognizing power structures, the relevance and need for the pursuit of national interest, and the importance of grounding the practice of diplomacy in prudence and pragmatism is key to achieving sustainable peace and preventing war. Failures in preventive diplomacy often arise when these principles are ignored, when moral idealism replaces realism, or when diplomatic engagement is delayed, avoided, or neglected. The reason for that could be mishandling, misperception, mistrust, unawareness, or rigid geopolitical ambitions.

1.3 Relevance of the Study

The relevance of this study lies in its ability to complement and address both theory and practice in the understanding of preventive diplomacy. As the international system, theoretically explained by Morgenthau, manifests itself in practice, there is a necessity to turn to preventive diplomacy. Since states struggle to protect their competing national interests, followed by rising tensions, the avoidance of multilateral norms, and the reemergence of great power rivalry, there is an ultimate need to revisit the foundational principles that guide conflict prevention. In a world where every great power seeks something from the other great power, with constant tensions between Russia and Ukraine, India and Pakistan, Israel, and Iran, gradually including the whole region in conflicts, there is an urgent need to set rules that would underline preventive diplomacy. While liberal

theories emphasize institutions, norms, and cooperation, classical realism reminds us of the inevitable and enduring relevance of power, sovereignty, and national interest.

This study examines preventive diplomacy through the lens of Morgenthau's classical realism, providing pragmatic explanations of peace efforts. It questions the assumption that diplomacy can always prevail simply through dialogue, which is a pillar of human virtues, and instead seeks to understand the preconditions, incentives, foreknowledge, and constraints that shape diplomatic outcomes, in both cases, successful and unsuccessful.

Furthermore, this research aims to contribute to the broader field of political science and international relations by demonstrating how history and theory can be merged to inform policymakers and decision-makers in their future work. It aims to speak directly to statesmen, diplomats, and scholars who seek to develop more effective strategies for avoiding war in a polarized world but also to motivate them to raise their voices against destruction, war, and aggression.

1.4 Objectives of the Thesis

The main objectives of this thesis are:

- To trace the historical development of diplomacy, with a specific focus on the goal of diplomacy as a skill that encompasses all other skills and knowledge, and the emergence of preventive diplomacy as a distinct diplomatic practice, contributing to the most important purpose of the state system – protecting and maintaining peace.
- To present and analyze Hans Morgenthau's theory of classical realism, especially his views and thoughts on the role of diplomacy in managing power, mitigating the imposition of someone else's power, and preventing conflict, which he believed is significant.
- To apply the framework of classical realism to two empirical case studies, one successful story (Cuban Missile Crisis) and one failure story (Russia–Ukraine conflict), to identify key factors that contributed to the effectiveness or breakdown of preventive diplomacy.
- To offer a comparative analysis that reveals extensive patterns, insights, and implications for the use of preventive diplomacy in contemporary international relations, which is necessary for overcoming the repetitiveness of mistakes.
- To contribute to academic literature and policy debates by analyzing and articulating the conditions under which preventive diplomacy can be effectively applied in future global crises.

2. The History of Diplomacy

2.1. Origins of Diplomacy

This chapter shows the history of diplomacy and its roots, depicting how diplomacy evolved from the ancient world to modern international affairs. Understanding how diplomacy becomes deeply ingrained in modern societies, especially in the government of every country, requires bridging the gap between its beginnings and its current application. History is a necessary tool for dealing with contemporary events and the future, helping us to achieve an understanding of outcomes, and aiming to overcome the misunderstanding that comes hand in hand with diplomacy. Although “diplomacy” often alludes to the official interaction between states, the term itself has an important meaning, originating from the Greek term *diplōma*, meaning “folded document,” which signified a privilege granted by a ruler.² The historical background offers an important perspective on how diplomacy evolved from the ancient practices of envoys and messengers, followed by treaties between rulers, to the formal, institutionalized permanent diplomacy that is practiced now.

As with every term often used in public, there is a significant distinction between people's perception of diplomacy and the official meaning, even if both include certain qualities and virtues. Diplomacy with its practices, routines, and hierarchical order is an art of its kind, regulated to serve the rigidity of states. Citizens see diplomacy as behavior composed of certain qualities, virtues, skills, and unexpected positive outcomes, often not linked with the state. Diplomacy is a mystery that goes with meaningful and profound service, with a deep understanding of multiple fields, fulfilled by erudition. With diplomacy, hand by hand, the idea of sovereignty started to gain incredible attention, but not immediately or early in history. Only the ruler (later, the government) could transfer his power to his servants to achieve goals when it came to his relations with the

² Sally Marks and Chas W Freeman, “Diplomacy | Nature, Purpose, History, & Practice,” in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/diplomacy>. “What Is Diplomacy?” www.cyber-diplomacy-toolbox.com, n.d., <https://www.cyber-diplomacy-toolbox.com/Diplomacy.html>.

outside world. The development of diplomacy is inextricably linked with the concept of sovereignty, especially as it began to gain prominence in ancient civilizations.

2.2. Diplomacy and Sovereignty: An Ancient Connection

Classical realism, mainly as reflected in the thoughts of its great representative, Hans Morgenthau, possesses strong theoretical frameworks to explain why diplomacy is important, and, at the same time, contends that the craving for power and the necessity to maintain sovereignty are crucial to diplomacy. The link between Sovereignty and Diplomacy is essential for understanding the development of international relations. Sovereignty, the supreme authority within a territory, has been closely tied to diplomatic practices for a very long time, particularly in how states negotiate, establish power, and maintain the most important role of the state, its independence.³

In ancient times, until the 16th century, sovereignty was completely embodied in the person of the ruler. The ruler's authority was absolute, and diplomacy entirely depended on his will. It was not questionable or possible to overthrow or diminish it. During these long centuries, people were still unaware of their power, and depended on the intention of their monarch, without having an insight into how both the monarchy and its diplomacy worked. All institutionalized power was given to the emperor, who was then free to give the mandate for certain quests to people whom he trusted. The only bright case in the development of that idea could be seen in the city-state (*polis*) of Athens. They possessed unique attitudes, virtues, and a high dialogue culture, which led to their deep understanding of both institutions and power. They recognized that power lay in society, and in every free citizen, which spawned their comprehension of an incredible and revolutionary idea for that period of history – popular sovereignty.

The idea of popular sovereignty was born and practiced there through direct democracy, where people (*demos*) were able to make decisions for themselves. In some other parts of the world, that was impossible. Revolutionary ideas were never adopted immediately by people, yet here they look completely different. Later, with the flourishing of education, this principle was recognized

³ Hans J Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985). (p. 243)

and included in almost all modern constitutions. Even today, although democracy is recognized worldwide as a protector of human dignity and divine values, direct diplomacy is practiced in just a few states, particularly in Switzerland. Absolutists were forced to abandon their unlimited power, to obey the will of the people in whose hands the power resided. “It became the cornerstone of international relations with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648.”⁴ So, the recognition and acceptance of the modern principle known as state sovereignty could be traced back to the Treaty of Westphalia signed in 1648. Before that, a form of sovereignty of the ruler, the divineness of his personality, was practiced. That principle was clearly stated by the king of France, Louis XIV, who provided his understanding of sovereignty, replaced by the other rulers: “I am the state”.⁵

History remembers that the Thirty Years’ War finally ended with the treaty that created the state system. Today, the state system, diplomacy, and international law are unimaginable without this backbone principle. The principle of territorial integrity protects the internationally recognized borders of every state. The principle of non-interference in domestic matters confirms the right of every state to carry out its domestic politics without interference from other states, while the principle of state equality recognizes the importance of sovereign equality.⁶ This resulted in a more structured and institutionalized form of diplomacy, with permanent embassies, defined diplomatic procedures, and the introduction of international law as a cornerstone for diplomatic interactions.

2.3. Early Diplomatic Practices in Ancient Civilizations

Every system has its periodization, even though the periodization may differ from author to author. Deciding which periodization of the history of diplomacy to exonerate is both important and burdensome, not only due to numerous available options but also because of the impact that the chosen periodization has on the topic and

thesis. We chose the following periodization because it offers a logical, clear, and straightforward approach. Generally, both political history and the history of diplomacy can be divided into two major periods. The era before the 15th century and the period following it. The period of ancient

⁴ George Soros, “The People’s Sovereignty,” Foreign Policy, October 28, 2009, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/28/the-peoples-sovereignty/>.

⁵ “Absolute Monarch: The Reign of Louis XIV in France | Knowitall.org,” www.knowitall.org, n.d., <https://www.knowitall.org/lessons/absolute-monarch-reign-louis-xiv-france>.

⁶ Daud Hassan, “The Rise of the Territorial State and the Treaty of Westphalia,” 2007, <https://opus.lib.uts.edu.au/bitstream/10453/3289/1/2006006060.pdf>.

times is separated into two parts, the antiquity and the Middle Ages. The period after the 15th century is again divided into two parts: from the 15th century to the Versailles Conference, and from the Versailles Conference until today, which is contemporary diplomacy.⁷

“Antiquity covers the period from the first ever known written trace of history to the collapse of the Western Roman Empire in 476.”⁸ Diplomacy was practiced during a given period, not as a permanent service, and not often during the peaceful years, depicting the ad-hoc nature of diplomacy. Primarily, it was a dispute resolution force, a temporary solution that had certain goals that should be achieved. It was not permanent service, inextricably embodied in the soul of the state, an inevitable duty of the state, as it is today. The ongoing live discussion about the very first gesture, which can be seen as a diplomatic one, and do we can talk about diplomacy before the first state in modern-day language appeared, should stay open. Of course, with the creation of the states and their newborn need to cooperate with the other states, professional diplomats and diplomatic missions become part of the official state’s organization. Fortunately, diplomacy as a skill of doing state business for the state and in the name of the state, was created unofficially much earlier in what we call today “primitive” (but in some sense very progressive) old tribes and civilizations. Many historically recognized ancient nations, such as the Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Phoenicians, Jews, Persians, Romans, Greeks, Hindus, and others, especially their rulers, used diplomacy and its skills in achieving their foreign policy goals in given social and international relations. Some of those great civilizations, such as Egypt and the Persian Empire, left us a written legacy, significantly important for history, diplomacy, and various other fields. Among others, agreements, diplomatic correspondence, and other witnesses create lively pictures of how big powers conduct their relationships with others in antique.

With greater literacy, civilization started to evolve, strengthening interconnectedness between people and states, and deepening trust while setting the stage for negotiations. As an example of the early practice of diplomacy, the *Amarna Letters* from the 14th century BCE are pure treasure, demonstrating the early use of correspondence dealing with international relations among the Great Powers of the Middle East. Babylonian king Kadashman-Enlil wrote a letter to Pharaoh Amenhotep III suggesting a marriage alliance. The letter indicates the exchange of daughters to

⁷ David. Đ Dašić, *ISTORIJA DIPLOMATIJE: Evolucija Diplomatskog Metoda u Političkoj Istoriji*, Third (Belgrade, Makedonska 25: Institut za međunarodnu politiku i privredu, 2022). (pp. 37-44)

⁸ Ibidem (p. 37)

strengthen the two royal countries' diplomatic relations.⁹ As a conflict prevention tool, marriage was used between two royal families very often. By sharing blood, they created a strong alliance, building an inextricable connection for the future. This gesture shows how smartly they used soft power, aiming for long-lasting peace and security through marriage, avoiding confrontation whenever they could. The outcome of marriage was peace, undeniably long-lasting because fighting from that moment meant fighting against the family. This was particularly important in times when wars were a usual foreign policy tool, something that was deeply ingrained into society.

The dominant form of new alliances and diplomacy practices was treaties and marriages, but there are also some useful examples of diplomatic relations that equally helped in strengthening ties between ancient states. A significant case is the amazing, advanced maritime practices of the Phoenicians, which were not merely tools for trade, as they appear at first sight, but also incredible strategic diplomacy, never seen before. The Phoenicians conducted naval voyages into the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea, and they even successfully circumnavigated Africa. Their remarkable navigational expertise enabled them to build colonies and staging posts in the most remarkable sites throughout the Mediterranean, securing long-term diplomatic and commercial partnerships with neighboring civilizations. Regularly, they sailed from all around the Mediterranean, expanding their influence and securing their place as intermediaries and negotiators in not only trade but also in diplomacy. In a time when nobody knew how to navigate the open seas, they adjusted their routes, considering conditions, settled in key locations, they offered themselves as a great partner able to foster alliances. They can be presented as founders of “soft diplomacy”, based on mutual economic interests, which include collaboration based on loyalty rather than on formal treaties or marriages.¹⁰

“The Phoenician fleet, considered to this day to be the first naval power in history”.¹¹ They smartly used a new approach to diplomacy by building relationships through the economy and trade, forecasting the importance of the economy as a significant force in gaining influence and power. Diplomacy and trade have always been capable of finding opportunities rather than destroying them. They went on naval expeditions with specific skills that gave them an undeniable advantage when nobody knew how to conquer long distances. They were mediators, negotiators, and diplomats

⁹ William L Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore, Md: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

¹⁰ María Eugenia Aubet, *The Phoenicians and the West: Politics, Colonies and Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). (p. 140)

¹¹ Ibidem. (p. 154)

who succeeded in linking civilizations at a time when strategy and foreign policy did not exist. Their strategy overstepped the time in which they lived, proving that diplomacy should represent a preventive force, involving soft power skills, building bridges, and offering partnerships, rather than a reactive force, which is unable to provide a window for cooperation. The Phoenicians' role as pioneers in maritime diplomacy shows how the early practices of diplomacy were diverse, adapting to different needs and circumstances.

Thus, diplomacy in antiquity not only involved traditional marriage alliances and treaties but also included a wide variety of practices – maritime expeditions, gift exchanges, and alliances built on mutual interests, as seen in both the East and the West. For instance, in Letter E5, sent by the Pharaoh of Egypt, a bed of ebony, overlaid with gold, and other furniture for a new house is included as part of the preparations for the arrival of the Babylonian princess.¹² The gold gifts, showing care and attention, ensured impression, thankfulness, and loyalty. In modern-day diplomacy, gifts are considered unsafe and impolite when conducting diplomatic relations. Only presents with symbolic value are acceptable today, but until the Dutch Republic, this practice was overwhelmingly welcomed, accepted, and helpful. In 1651, they recognized the importance of legal regulation, preventing potential bribery and forbidding receiving any gift, services, or anything else from foreign countries.¹³

These are examples of bilateral diplomacy, but we can find one of the most important examples of multilateral diplomacy in the 14th and 15th centuries BC. The Club of Great Powers was a regional system of diplomacy in the Middle East with a few characteristics, such as the Akkadian language, mutual recognition, and respect for the other big kingdoms. They cooperated equally both in diplomacy and the economy, using marriage as a privilege of the dynasties. First associations were established between Egypt, Mitanni, and Babylon. Later, growing powers were also recognized and became a part of the alliance.¹⁴ The power of the alliance was known to them; instead of making adversaries, they built relationships based on interests, although they did not know the outcome, with the clear goal of protecting their territories and people. A few millennia later, alliances remained crucial tools in achieving welfare, stability, protection, and prosperity.

¹² William L Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore, Md: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

¹³ Solene Aubert, "Symbolic and Problematic: Gifts in Diplomacy," *Harvard International Review*, April 20, 2022, <https://hir.harvard.edu/symbolic-and-problematic-gifts-in-diplomacy/>.

¹⁴ William H Stiebing and Susan N Helft, *Ancient Near Eastern History and Culture* (Taylor & Francis, 2023), (p. 257)

In the beginning, messages spreading between empires were through envoys and messengers, who were entrusted to travel, meet, and deliver them to another ruler. Later, with the development of cuneiform, a revolutionary tool appeared, changing the way of conducting international affairs. The first surviving (or ever-known) international agreement was signed around 1259 BC between Ramesses II and Hattuşilli III, rulers of the Egyptian Empire and the Hittite Empire, respectively.¹⁵ Written formalization of the agreed obligation appeared to be a new reality about 3000 years ago and continued to be the main tool for conducting international relations. The written agreements, which are the main force in public international law, will never become obsolete, and their sacred function will remain the driving mechanism for the regulation of relations among nations.

In addition to the formal diplomatic exchanges observed in the Middle East, ancient China established a comprehensive system of rituals to determine its diplomatic interactions. The Chinese tribute system was fundamental to this, serving as both a philosophical underpinning and an institutional practice under the Pax Sinica, institutionalizing customs of Chinese mentality. Two thousand years of lasting peace under Chinese rule. This system not only organized diplomatic relations between China and its neighbors but also ensured cooperation by upholding procedural justice, as evidenced by the Chinese world's hierarchical order. In ancient China, the tribute system laid the groundwork for peacetime diplomacy, similar to royal weddings and gift exchanges worked in the Middle East.¹⁶

Ancient India's approach could serve as an important, doable example when writing about that period, serving in modern times as a role model for smart and prudent diplomacy, looking for the future by strengthening relationships with others. For instance, the Maurya Empire under Chandragupta Maurya maintained diplomatic connections with the Hellenistic world, most notably through a peace treaty with Seleucus I of the Seleucid Empire. This treaty was significant since it included territorial deals and resulted in the formation of diplomatic missions between the two empires. These contacts show that diplomacy was an important instrument for sustaining peace and building relationships between civilizations, everywhere, not just in the Middle East, as a region that invented written agreements and marriage diplomacy. The Maurya Empire's diplomatic

¹⁵ "TREATY between the HITTITES and EGYPT," web.archive.org, February 11, 2015, <https://web.archive.org/web/20150211153235/https://pantherfile.uwm.edu/prec/www/course/egypt/274RH/Texts/HittiteEgyptianTreaty.htm>.

¹⁶ Zhang Yongjin, *System, Empire and State in Chinese International Studies* (British International Studies Association, 2001). (p. 57)

activities, which included the exchange of messengers, demonstrate the worldwide nature of early diplomacy and its importance in shaping interstate relations long before the modern era.¹⁷

2.4. The Evolution of Diplomacy: From Ancient to Modern Times

When discussing the present, it is essential to understand the past and link it with the present, because that could help us predict future events, or prevent different negative outcomes, which could potentially lead to catastrophe. History contains numerous “what if” scenarios, always setting the stage for interpretations. If we could be smarter in making decisions, we would be wiser in analyzing yesterday, that is, the past. That is the reason why it is essential to understand how diplomacy worked in the past to be able to understand contemporary diplomacy, which remains crucial for conducting international relations. Permanent diplomacy includes tools, skills, and mutual recognition, but diplomacy, as an art of politeness, has always been a virtue-based service. Diplomacy is based on people, even if covered by institutions they represent, people have always been unchangeable forces, naturally driven to strengthen their ties, seeking understanding and acceptance from others, the same today as it was thousands of years ago. Trust, understanding, politeness, kindness, and virtues are foundational elements that make diplomacy an indispensable part of the state's structure, becoming the pillar for building bridges between nations. These qualities are essential and highlight the inevitable role of diplomacy by emphasizing the need for skilled, well-educated, and resilient individuals ready to take responsibility and engage in an important diplomatic service. Diplomats are not only committed to defending their country's interests but also must demonstrate a willingness to listen, understand diverse perspectives, and recognize the needs of others, making a difference in such a world. Those traits underline diplomacy's unique ability to promote dialogue, build relationships, and resolve conflicts, fostering cooperation and respect among people and states. Countries engage respectfully on the global stage, defending their positions constructively in the arena with others only through diplomacy.

¹⁷ Hellenistic History, “Greek Kings and Indian Emperors: Diplomacy between the Hellenistic Kingdoms and Mauryan India,” Hellenistic History - Delve into the Ancient World! (Hellenistic History, March 29, 2021), <https://www.hellenistichistory.com/2021/03/29/greek-kings-and-indian-emperors-diplomacy-between-the-hellenistic-kingdoms-and-mauryan-india/>.

Diplomacy means to speak when the silence is relentless and to be silent when the noise is unbearable. We could better understand events from the past, and learn lessons that could be beneficial for the future by using examples from the practitioner's experience. We have more in common than we believe because mankind has always depended on relationships, even if institutions are properly established. In the next chapters, it will be shown how diplomacy managed to prevent wars and severe disasters. Even if we believe that everything has changed over time and even if we perceive ourselves as more developed than people from ancient times, we can witness that in diplomacy, people have always been the center of the universe. Diplomacy maintained the gravitation on this planet, providing the stage for people and nations both to compete and cooperate, inventing a noble way of communication.

In the period between medieval to modern times, formal institutions in diplomacy, as in other areas, underwent less change than one could expect.¹⁸ While technological advancements, such as the ability to communicate instantly, as opposed to relying on messengers, have modernized diplomacy, the fundamental need for effective communication remains unchanged. Diplomacy continues to rely heavily on human skills and interactions, human brilliance, or constraints. As Aghybai Dynkenuly Smagulow smartly puts it: “Diplomacy is an essentially political activity and well-resourced and skillful, a major ingredient of power.”¹⁹ Ultimately, diplomacy still hinges on people and their ability to engage, negotiate, and build relationships. This ingredient, which accompanies power in various fields, is an x-factor, vital for every playground on which one state could step.

2.5. The Emergence of Preventive Diplomacy

The existence of diplomacy justifies the uncertainty of politics, even though politics is just the will of the government, not always the will of the nation, even though is conducted by people from a certain nation. People could complain about certain decisions, not possessing the information needed to distinguish. Diplomacy is invented to serve, and it should be a preventive force, not always a reactive force, which often is. It should be our solution, not a compulsion after severe

¹⁸ Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, by Garrett Mattingly. (HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY, Boston The Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1955), <https://ia902707.us.archive.org/7/items/renaissancediplo00matt/renaissancediplo00matt.pdf>.

¹⁹ Chokan Smagulov, “Diplomatic and Consular Services Introductory Lecture by Agymbay Smagulov Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipot,” Агыбай Смагулов (Агыбай Смагулов, July 9, 2024), <https://www.agymbaymagulov.com/post/diplomatic-and-consular-servicesintroductory-lecture-by-agymbay-smagulovambassador-extraordinary-and#:~:text=%E2%80%9CDiplomacy%20is%20an%20essentially%20political.>

casualties, numerous victims, and destructive wars. No state is innocuous, and no decision is innocuous, but prevention is the essence of diplomacy. Every decision has far-reaching consequences that sometimes cannot be fixed or replaced for the better. Surely, preventive diplomacy can be traced to multiple practices among the mentioned kingdoms throughout history. The goal is evident: to prevent conflicts before escalating into war.

The concept of preventive diplomacy has its logical path, meaning that it could be traced back to ancient practices such as marriage diplomacy and the foundation of permanent diplomacy, as we have it today, which had its introduction in the Italian Renaissance, especially in Tuscany and the Po valleys.²⁰ Ambassadors were tasked with maintaining peace and stability among the states. Ambassadors were always empowered by rulers with the role of dealing with peace, maintaining it, and preventing conflict.

The concept garnered attention at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, where diplomatic efforts established a balance of power aimed at preventing future conflicts. To maintain peace, the Congress of Vienna established buffer states, restored monarchs, and instituted regular diplomatic meetings (the Concert of Europe). The formation of long-term alliances, such as the Holy Alliance and Quadruple Alliance, exemplifies early preventive diplomacy by attempting to resolve crises via negotiations and collaboration before they escalate. As one of the most prominent diplomats and academics, Henry Kissinger said, “One of the new necessities is that a world comprising several states of comparable strength must base its order on some concept of equilibrium.”²¹ This was the intervention advocating for the balance of power and its preservation.

However, the formalization of the term preventive diplomacy could be found in the new world of multilateral diplomacy that was founded after World War II, specifically the United Nations' efforts to prevent conflicts from escalating, as outlined in Chapter VI of the UN Charter. This policy prioritizes early warning, mediation, and diplomacy to address potential threats to international peace and security before they occur.²²

²⁰ Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, by Garrett Mattingly. (HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY, Boston The Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1955), <https://ia902707.us.archive.org/7/items/renaissancediplo00matt/renaissancediplo00matt.pdf>. (p. 55)

²¹ Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster Rockefeller Center, 1994), http://lib.ysu.am/disciplines_bk/1f6300e67784b164a9857efd25ed325b.pdf. (p. 19)

²² United Nations, “United Nations Charter,” United Nations, 1945, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text>.

3. Theoretical Framework – Morgenthau’s Classical Realism

3.1. Introduction to Classical Realism

Classical Realism emerged in the 20th century mostly as a reaction to the idealistic perspectives that had been dominant in international relations after World War I. This theory states that human nature, burdened by a constant fight for power, and focused on self-interest, is the main force that shapes how states act. In line with realist thoughts, states cannot exist in harmony with other states because there is no authority above that can control the tension between them and maintain peace. Since every state completely depends on its capacity to protect itself and pursue its *raison d’etat*, states will probably fight for supremacy. Primarily, the state should safeguard its existence by using a panoply of means.²³

The main thinker who set fertile ground for the thriving of this theory was Hans Morgenthau, who particularly accelerated recognition of the classical realism theory by publishing his praiseworthy book *Politics Among the Nations*. Morgenthau introduced the revolutionary idea underlying the six principles of political realism, in which he strived to explain the enduring nature of international politics, grounded in human nature and the pursuit of power.²⁴ To translate it into the language of reality, which forces people to protect themselves, and find the best way to survive, without compromising their personality, there is a great observation of Professor Schuett: “To speak of an imperial service revolver in the hands of a liberal Professor of International Law, at the time of Hitler’s rise and the politics of fierce nationalism, is to speak about realism versus idealism.”²⁵

²³ Duncan Bell, “Realism | Definition, Theories, & Facts,” in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, September 5, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/realism-political-and-social-science>.

²⁴ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 1st ed. (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1948). (p. 13)

²⁵ Robert Schuett, *Hans Kelsen’s Political Realism* (EUP, 2022). (p. 95)

In his first principle, Morgenthau asserted that political realism holds the view that politics, much like society as a whole, is governed by “objective laws rooted in human nature”.²⁶ Ultimately, human nature has never changed; it has always been self-centered, and only by recognizing the unchangeable spirit of every generation can we approach problems, prepared to understand differences between us, shaped by the same (human) nature. The second principle expands on this by asserting that the concept of *raison d’etat* is defined mainly by power. States' quest for survival and security is primarily motivated by the need to achieve and maintain power. Of course, states are acting through people, people are led by motives, ideals, and inner self-visions, but to look for hints of foreign affairs solely in the intentions of politicians is both useless and deceitful. Morgenthau's third principle introduces flexibility, implying that, while the pursuit of power is constant, how states articulate their interests varies depending on historical or contemporary conditions under which foreign policy should be pursued. Struggle for power is ubiquitous, and omnipotent states are susceptible to changing their foreign policies to achieve their goals. This enables classical realism to adapt to various political conditions while keeping its fundamental emphasis on power. The fourth and fifth principles introduce morals into the realist paradigm, warning against universalizing moral ideas that are incapable of being applied to the act of the state but rather must be chosen in certain circumstances in a certain way. Morgenthau acknowledges the moral significance of political actions but emphasizes that state leaders must exercise caution and sound judgment. Political morality, he argues, is impossible without prudence, which means considering the political repercussions of seemingly moral actions. He regards prudence as the foremost virtue in politics, defining it as careful consideration of the consequences of different political choices. Finally, Morgenthau's sixth premise sets politics apart from other areas of human action. For classical realism, international politics follows its logic, which is influenced by the balance of power, the lack of overarching authority, and the constant possibility of conflict. Morgenthau's six principles offer a thorough foundation for classical realism, highlighting the significance of power, the influence of human nature, and the constraints inherent in the international system.²⁷

3.2. Morgenthau contribution

²⁶ Dinesh, “Morgenthau’s Realist Theory (6 Principles),” Your Article Library, March 31, 2015, <https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/international-politics/morgenthau-realism-theory-6-principles/48472>.

²⁷ Hans J Morgenthau and Kenneth W Thompson, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (Brief Ed.) (北京大学出版社, Beijing: Peking University Press, 2004). (pp. 1-6)

Hans Morgenthau is still one of the most influential geniuses in political science and philosophy, especially international relations nowadays, when we witness another big war on European soil, because of his role in shaping classical realism. His pivotal work, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, published in 1948, set the ground for the realist school of thought by underscoring the predominant role of power in international politics and implicit struggles between states. His work sets up the basis for understanding the behavior of states whenever the balance of power is shifted or disturbed, which is happening in today's world. The significance of his work is not only in his explanations but in his vision, not only in his assessments but in his judgments.

Even if the theory in most cases cannot apply to practice, his theory offers a practical framework for understanding how the international system works, and how states see themselves, especially knowing that there is no overarching authority above them. He claims that diplomacy can be used for conflict prevention. The notion of power as the defining characteristic of international relations is the center of his work. He claims that states act following their power to ensure their survival because there is no overarching authority that can guarantee their security. However, he makes the distinction between physical force and political power, which is held by people with authority.²⁸

He argues: "Political power is a psychological relation between those who exercise it and those over whom it is exercised."²⁹ That is why human nature always desires to rule and lead, or to be ruled, even though human beings have no such power to decide for themselves. Kelsen, on the other hand, provides insights into human mentality, picturing it as intriguing by saying, "If we must be ruled, then we only want to be ruled by ourselves."³⁰

Political power is more influential whenever it is derived from real and honest people's will, which is only possible in democratic societies where legitimacy plays an important role if such a society exists. Morgenthau claims that human nature is inherently driven by a will to dominate over someone, and this assumption is important, especially because that is the distinction between neorealism and classical realism. Local and international politics have the same feature, characterized by the

²⁸ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 1st ed. (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1948). (p. 13)

²⁹ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 1st ed. (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1948). (p. 14)

³⁰ Hans Kelsen, *The Essence and Value of Democracy* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2013), https://ppotoda.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/The-Essence-and-Value-of-Democracy-by-Hans-Kelsen-N-Urbinati-C-In-vernizzi-Accetti-eds.-z-lib.org_.pdf (p. 28)

constant power struggle, shaped by different conditions in which both take place.³¹ On the other hand, some authors perceive his work differently, underlying morality, spirituality, and feelings of human beings, stating that “rather than self-seeking, power-hungry agents, states can also embody norms of prudence and justice, but only contingently and concerning their historical experience”.³²

At the individual, personal level, the perception of an ideal human being can dominate and be dominated.³³ The ego of the person is mirrored in the egos of the states, often leading to misunderstanding and conflicts. Because of that, people should be governed and controlled by the functional state, aiming to provide all services developed over time. State and freedom are considered differently over time, which was depicted by Kelsen, who claims that the idea of freedom evolved. The main perception was that freedom meant being liberated from the state's hand and later developed to be able to take part in the rule.³⁴

Even Aristotle, who lived in a time when the perception of the state was completely different or not established noticed:

“He who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, might be either a beast or a god: he is not a part of a state.”³⁵

However, Morgenthau's contribution to classical realism surpasses theoretical assumptions. He contributed to the understanding of the dynamics of power, conflicts, and even diplomacy in international affairs. By dealing with power, which is at the center of his investigation and work, he underlines the importance of understanding political policy, leaning on three bases: “It seeks to either keep power, to increase power, or demonstrate power”.³⁶

³¹ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 1st ed. (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1948). (p. 17)

³² Henry Delfiner, “Realism Reconsidered: The Legacy of Hans Morgenthau in International Relations,” *Society* 45, no. 5 (July 2, 2008): 476–78, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-008-9130-4>. (p. 19)

³³ Henry Delfiner, “Realism Reconsidered: The Legacy of Hans Morgenthau in International Relations,” *Society* 45, no. 5 (July 2, 2008): 476–78, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-008-9130-4>. (p. 26)

³⁴ Hans Kelsen, *The Essence and Value of Democracy* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2013), https://ppotoda.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/The-Essence-and-Value-of-Democracy-by-Hans-Kelsen-N-Urbinati-C-In-vernizzi-Accetti-eds.-z-lib.org_.pdf. (p. 32)

³⁵ Aristotle, “Politics” 1999, <https://historyofeconomicthought.mcmaster.ca/aristotle/Politics.pdf>. (p. 65)

³⁶ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 1st ed. (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1948). (p. 21)

His conviction that unchangeable principles derived from human nature govern international politics placed a greater emphasis on empirical observation than on moral goals, although, as we have seen, some authors interpret that his thoughts are not exempt from morality. On this point, Morgenthau did not advocate for a pessimistic worldview, but exclusively for a pragmatic one. He urged statesmen and policymakers to consider the world *as it is*, rather than *as it should be*, instead of thinking about desirable to focus on reality. This has made classical realism a durable and adaptable theory throughout time in international relations.

Another key element of Morgenthau's work is his emphasis on the balance of power as a stabilizing mechanism in the international anarchic system. The concept of balance can be seen in many different sciences, meaning almost the same thing, starting from the very lexical meaning of the word. By balancing, someone is in the position to observe two or more sides and to decide on their own how they will deal with them. In terms of political science, if there are several equally powerful states, and there is none of them is willing to risk and attack the other because the power of the other is comparable, the balance of power is achieved.³⁷ The idea of the balance of power was mentioned for the first time in 1553 when Mary, the Queen of Hungary, directed a letter to her ambassador explaining the relationship between Italy and France by stating how they were scared of each other, which led to the aim to balance the power between them.³⁸

He claims that the balance of power is needed because "without a state of equilibrium among them one element will gain ascendancy over the others, encroach upon their interests and rights, and might ultimately destroy them."³⁹ He believed that maintaining equilibrium among great powers is essential to avoid large-scale conflicts, preventing them from taking harsh steps against each other. This principle resonated strongly in the context of the Cold War, where the balance between the United States and the Soviet Union was seen as a deterrent against confrontation. Regarding that, it seems today impossible that we will ever witness a direct war between the US and Russia. Morgenthau claims that weak nations were not able to become independent because they fought fiercely against their adversaries or occupiers, but only because of the balance of power.⁴⁰

Morgenthau also played an instrumental role in shaping the ethical dimensions of realism, even though his theory is perceived as liberated from ethics. Despite his and the realists' prudent and

³⁷ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 1st ed. (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1948). (p. 125)

³⁸ Ibidem, (p.144)

³⁹ Ibidem, (p. 126)

⁴⁰ Ibidem, (p.133)

balanced approach to international affairs, strictly linked with the state's survival, which further shapes the behavior of the state, the ethical component cannot be erased. States do not have the will; the states will be promoted, formulated, and reflected by people, which leads to the conclusion that states are inextricably linked to morality since people in their inner selves seek to act, at least sometimes, in a moral way.⁴¹

Unlike later realists, such as those aligned with structural or neorealist traditions, such as Kenneth Waltz, Morgenthau insisted on the moral responsibility of statesmen.⁴² He recognized that political action is burdened with moral consequences, but he nevertheless warned against imposing abstract moral principles on complex political reality, aiming to prevent statesmen from overthinking when necessary to act. Prudent statecraft should adapt to certain situations because sometimes a reaction is needed, while sometimes a reaction is needless and inefficient; it is always up to the statesmen to assess the interests of their country and nation.⁴³

Moreover, Morgenthau stressed the autonomy of the political sphere. In his view, political action cannot be reduced to economics, ethics, or law alone. Although these fields are intertwined, each has its own logic, principles, and rules. He sought to safeguard the independence of political judgment in a world that is plagued by ideology and polarization, claiming that politics is governed by its set of laws, distinct from morality or ideology. In this regard, he managed to systematize realism while humanizing it. Aristotle, Hobbes, and Thucydides were an inspiration for his work, diving into history, literature, and philosophy, the mother of all sciences.

Finally, Morgenthau's scientific legacy continues to influence both academics and diplomacy, helping us to understand the intricacies and logic behind decisions taken by politicians. His work is highly relevant, and it has been in the spotlight in recent years, not only because of the ongoing wars but also because of his eternal relevance. Morgenthau helps us to understand how and why states compete and clash while providing a reasonable impulse of human nature within the anarchical international system.

3.3. Preventive Diplomacy in Classical Realism

⁴¹ Francesco Bortoluzzi, "A Moral Vindication of Morgenthau's Classical Realism," *E-International Relations*, December 26, 2015, <https://www.e-ir.info/2015/12/26/a-moral-vindication-of-morgenthau-classical-realism/>.

⁴² Anatol Lieven, "The Ethics of Realism," Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, July 5, 2022, <https://quincyinst.org/2022/07/05/the-ethics-of-realism/>.

⁴³ Michael P. Federici, "The Politics of Prudence: Introduction to the 2023 Edition | the Russell Kirk Center," Kirkcenter.org, 2023, <https://kirkcenter.org/reviews/the-politics-of-prudence-introduction-to-the-2023-edition/>.

Although the term “preventive diplomacy” only entered mainstream usage in the late 20th century in the United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali’s 1992 *Agenda for Peace*⁴⁴, its principles have long been part of statecraft, even though not precisely worded. Long before the term existed, rulers and diplomats engaged in strategies that we now recognize as preventive diplomacy. Managed and overcame tensions, resolved disputes peacefully, prevented the escalation of conflicts before they became unsolvable, and many more actions with the same aim.

From the Amarna letters of the 14th century BCE to ancient royal marriages as a diplomatic tool, to the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, where modern diplomacy was born and recognized, and Bismarck’s web of alliances in the 19th century⁴⁵. These engagements were driven by interests and strategic calculations, and they were used as a tool for solving the issues. The diplomatic traditions of Renaissance Italy, where permanent embassies and showcasing of ambassadors’ credentials, reporting, and even the first appearance of public diplomacy, show the deep historical roots of conflict prevention efforts.⁴⁶

These examples reveal that preventive diplomacy was not born because of idealism or morality, but because of necessity. It was announced and crafted to preserve power, deter aggression, and maintain stability, aiming to preserve rulers and their territory, which are principles closely aligned with the principles of classical realism. The United Nations has given preventive diplomacy a formal position and a global framework; the practice itself is timeless, inextricably embedded in the historical evolution of international affairs and the exercise of power.

From a classical realist perspective, preventive diplomacy finds its strongest theoretical justification in the writings of Hans Morgenthau, who promoted diplomacy as an essential tool of foreign policy, advocating for the prevention of conflict through diplomacy. Morgenthau claims that the central objective of diplomacy is to promote national interest through peaceful means and that every war is a failure of diplomacy.⁴⁷ Although he never used the phrase “preventive diplomacy”,

⁴⁴ Boutros Boutros-Ghali and Un Secretary-General, “An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-Keeping: Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to the Statement Adopted by the Summit Meeting of the Security Council on 31 January 1992 /: Boutros Boutros-Ghali,” *Digitallibrary.un.org*, 1992, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/145749?ln=en&v=pdf>.

⁴⁵ “Blacksacademy.net: Bismarck and the Alliance System,” Blacksacademy.net, 2024, <https://www.blacksacademy.net/pages/hy-015-bismarck-alliance-system.php>.

⁴⁶ Jovan Kurbalija, “Renaissance Diplomacy: Compromise as a Solution to Conflict,” Diplo, 2021, <https://www.diplomacy.edu/histories/renaissance-diplomacy-compromise-as-a-solution-to-conflict/>.

And pickvisa.com, “The First Embassy in History,” pickvisa.com, n.d., <https://pickvisa.com/blog/first-embassy-in-history>.

⁴⁷ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 1st ed. (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1948). (p. 419)

the logic behind his words and the sense of it is unmistakable. He even uses the example of the Congress of Berlin in 1878 as preventive diplomacy, calling it “successful war-preventing diplomacy”.⁴⁸ Furthermore, his words, written almost 80 years ago his words still resonate, leaving a strong impression on today's world, which they unmistakably describe:

“Diplomacy can make peace more secure than it is today, and the world state can make peace more secure than it would be if nations were to abide by the rules of diplomacy.”⁴⁹ Even Churchill recognized the importance of preventing a war since there was a significant danger of escalation between the West and the Soviets, emphasizing that a timely settlement with them was a necessity.⁵⁰

At the heart of Morgenthau’s classical realism is the belief that politics is a power struggle, which is inherently driven by a will to rule and dominate. States, composed of individuals, act following this principle, seeking survival and advantage in an anarchic international system, which cannot be controlled from within. An insistence on prudence, and an overestimated idea that wise statesmen, understanding both power and its limits, can manage conflicts before they erupt into violence, is the core of Morgenthau’s theory.

Morgenthau outlines four fundamental tasks of diplomacy:

1. Determining the national interest and its compatibility with the power available.
2. Assessing the interests and motivations of other actors.
3. Reconciling conflicting interests through compromise when possible.
4. Employing a balance of power strategy to avoid domination and instability.⁵¹

Each of these tasks bears preventive logic, identifying potential problems, obstacles, and threats, combining them with competing interests, and crafting policies aimed at avoiding confrontation. In this regard, diplomacy is not simply reactive; it is anticipatory, which is the state of the art

⁴⁸ Ibidem, (p. 444)

⁴⁹ Ibidem, (p. 445)

⁵⁰“FOREIGN AFFAIRS (Hansard, 23 January 1948),” Parliament.uk, 2025, https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1948/jan/23/foreign-affairs#S5CV0446P0_19480123_HOC_99.

⁵¹ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 1st ed. (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1948). (pp. 419-421)

leading to understanding and respect. Preventive diplomacy is, can be said, one of the most effective expressions of classical realism. It does not wait for war or conflict; it acts to prevent it.

The balance of power plays a significant role in his work and complements the aims of preventive diplomacy. The perfect strategy to reduce the likelihood of war is to maintain equilibrium between competing powers, deterring them from each other in a military sense. Preventive diplomacy, in realist terms, can thus be seen as a method to correct power shifts that could lead to instability and cause war. Whether through direct negotiations, good offices, mediation, alliance-building, or backchannel negotiations, preventive diplomacy functions as a mechanism for preserving the status quo, which classical realists see as crucial for international stability.⁵²

Importantly, Morgenthau's classical realism does not overestimate diplomatic capacity, knowing its constraints. Preventive diplomacy, from this perspective, is not about the assumption that all conflicts can be prevented or reconciled, but about recognizing that pragmatic, smart, and prudent diplomacy can mitigate risks inherent in power politics. It operates not despite power struggles, but because of them. In a world where anarchy persists and state interests dominate, the realist diplomat must use every available tool, above all preventive diplomacy, to avoid unnecessary costly wars while pursuing national interests. Therefore, his realism accepts the idea of preventive diplomacy, showing how diplomacy, if properly practiced, is itself a form of prevention.

4. Case Study 1 – Success in Preventive Diplomacy: The Cuban Missile Crisis (1962)

4.1. Introduction to the Case

The Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 remains one of the most intensively studied and instructive episodes of international diplomacy, involving two main actors on the global stage. One of the crucial moments in the history of the Cold War occurred within thirteen days, pushing two great powers to the edge of never-before-seen nuclear war.⁵³ The crisis was triggered by the Soviet

⁵² Julian Korab-Karpowicz, "Political Realism in International Relations," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Stanford, July 26, 2010), <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/realism-intl-relations/>.

⁵³ DCUK EDITORIAL, "Eight Dangers of the New Cold War," Declassified UK, March 11, 2022, <https://www.declassifieduk.org/eight-dangers-of-the-new-cold-war/>.

Union, which deployed nuclear missiles in Cuba, around 150 kilometers from the seashore of the United States.

Before the Soviet deployment of missiles, just a year before, the US was undertaking Project Mon-goose, aiming to remove from office the communist regime in Cuba using all the necessary measures, including political, military, and economic. Cuba was excluded from the Organization of American States, the trade embargo was imposed, and propaganda against Fidel Castro skyrocketed. As a sign of the seriousness of the US, they conducted military exercises near Cuba, naming them Lantfibex 1-62 and Quick Kick. The result of the US preparing for a possible war with all means against Cuba was the Soviet-Cuba alliance, aimed at deterring the US from conducting military actions against Cuba and securing its existence. These activities were accompanied by two agreements dealing with the supply of weapons and military equipment. Fidel Castro undoubtedly accepted the proposal from Soviet Prime Minister Nikita Khrushchev regarding the missile shield plan, and the big crisis began.⁵⁴

The US intelligence spotted evidence of the missile sites in Cuba on September 4, when President Kennedy warned the public about the positioning of the Soviet weapons in Cuba. The US then sent aircraft to photograph those sites, providing images of them, and leading to what is today known as the Cuban Missile Crisis.⁵⁵ Since they were not prepared for such a confrontation, their surprise was bigger and the reaction should have been fast but not thoughtless, foreshadowing, but not real, serious, but not excessive.

What followed was not only a global stalemate between superpowers but also a test of whether diplomacy could prevent catastrophe. This case represents a rare moment in history where diplomacy reacted with urgency and prudence, preventing a global conflict with possibly devastating outcomes. The Cuban Missile Crisis exemplifies a success story of preventive diplomacy, not only because war was avoided, but also because the understanding between the parties involved was established. The crisis was successfully managed because communication between the Soviets and the US was directly through the White House and the Kremlin, without interference from different sides.⁵⁶ It opened direct channels of communication between Moscow and Washington, starting a

⁵⁴ Историко-документальный департамент МИД России, “К Карибскому кризису 1962 года,” Idd.mid.ru, 2024, https://idd.mid.ru/informational_materials/k-karibskomu-krizisu-1962-goda/.

⁵⁵ Office Of The Historian, “The Cuban Missile Crisis, October 1962,” Office of the Historian (United States Department of State, 2017), <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/cuban-missile-crisis>.

⁵⁶ Ibidem.

more cautious approach to the Cold War competition.⁵⁷ Direct communication opens the path where trust is the ultimate goal, the necessity because there is no foreseeable peace without believing that the counterpart will fulfill everything that was agreed.

4.2. Diplomatic Actions Taken

The American discovery of Soviet missile installations in Cuba triggered a series of high-level meetings, leading to Kennedy's decision to impose a quarantine on Cuba. "The use of 'quarantine' legally distinguished this action from a blockade, which assumed a state of war existed; the use of 'quarantine' instead of 'blockade' also enabled the United States to receive the support of the Organization of American States."⁵⁸ This action was deliberately chosen over immediate military strikes, reflecting a foreseen possibility of escalation. The diplomatic efforts were different:

1. **Public and Private Channels:** While Kennedy addressed the American public and the world via a televised speech, warning of Soviet aggression, secret backchannel communications were underway. Attorney General Robert Kennedy met with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin in Washington, conveying messages between the U.S. and Soviet leadership secretly, and sharing their messages on how to prevent large-scale war between Russia and the US, which has the potential to kill millions of its people. During the meeting, Robert Kennedy confirmed the US's willingness to withdraw from Turkey if the Soviets withdrew from Cuba. This is a great example of how responsible people who can predict the consequences and who do care about their citizens respect each other's interests.⁵⁹ The most convinced optimists could not have predicted that both sides would be interested in listening to the other side and providing the resolution before the escalation.
2. **United Nations Engagement:** U Thant, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, played a vital mediating role. He urged both parties to exercise restraint while advocating for de-escalation while being concerned about the future of the world, which was endangered. Kennedy recognized and confirmed his decisive role by saying: "U Thant has put the world deeply in his debt."⁶⁰ U Thant has urged Khrushchev and Kennedy to rethink

⁵⁷ Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation, "Hot Line Agreement," U.S. Department of State, June 20, 1963, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/t/isn/4785.htm>.

⁵⁸ Office Of The Historian, "The Cuban Missile Crisis, October 1962," Office of the Historian (United States Department of State, 2017), <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/cuban-missile-crisis>.

⁵⁹ "Soviet Embassy, Telegram to the Soviet Foreign Ministry from Ambassador Dobrynin Reporting on Meeting with Robert Kennedy | National Security Archive," nsarchive.gwu.edu, n.d., <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/29362-document-1-soviet-embassy-telegram-soviet-foreign-ministry-ambassador-dobrynin>.

⁶⁰ "Cuban Missile Crisis Resolved: Untold Story of an Unsung Hero," walterdorn.net, n.d., <https://walterdorn.net/8-cuban-missile-crisis-resolved-untold-story-of-an-unsung-hero>.

their actions, offering a place and time for a peaceful solution. He offered the plan both publicly and privately, sending letters to all parties involved, easing tensions after the US spy plane was shot down, and personally persuading Fidel Castro to cooperate, helping to make missile withdrawals. His diplomacy enabled both sides to save face and avoid war, making it one of the UN's most effective peace interventions, inscribing him as one of the most successful UN officials in history.⁶¹

3. **The Pope's intervention:** On 25 October 1962, when the situation did not look promising, when escalation was easy to forecast, the turning point in the calming all parties involved was the letter Pope John XXIII sent to all the people in the world, urging for peace and diplomacy, and to the Russian Prime Minister Khrushchev. He used both his religious and secular authority to convey the message that probably contributed to de-escalation, instead of predicted escalation.⁶² People with important religious roles are always important in such decisive moments, sometimes to help, sometimes to add fuel to the fire.
4. **Exchange of Letters:** Direct and honest communication was crucial in easing the situation and preventing great consequences that could have happened if the agreement had not been reached. On October 27, Khrushchev sent a letter to President Kennedy, making a proposal that was accepted by the US, stating that the Soviet Union was willing to withdraw its missiles from Cuba. In return, they requested the same from the US, removing them from Turkey, which was a fair proposal, knowing that the US presence in Turkey was equally dangerous and annoying for the Soviets. He urged them to reach an agreement between the Soviet Union and the US and to solve the most problematic issue between them since World War II.⁶³
5. **Secret Concessions:** An important but initially undisclosed element of the agreement was the US decision to dismantle its Jupiter missiles in Turkey. Even though it was not publicly announced, as explained, this move was significant for convincing the Soviets to give up their intentions in Cuba. Their concessions were part of the broader agreement to recognize each other's interests and consider them, aiming to reestablish the trust among them. The dismantling of the US missiles from Turkey was not an easy task since Turkey was not

⁶¹ Ibidem

⁶² Maiora Labs Srl, "THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS: DIPLOMATIC MEDIATION of POPE JOHN XXIII - AESI," AESI, May 8, 2022, <https://aesieuropa.eu/the-cuban-missile-crisis-diplomatic-mediation-of-pope-john-xxiii>.

⁶³ John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, "Letter from Chairman Khrushchev to President Kennedy, October 27, 1962 - Cuban Missile Crisis - John F. Kennedy Presidential Library & Museum," microsites.jfklibrary.org, October 27, 1962, <https://microsites.jfklibrary.org/cmc/oct27/doc4.html>.

willing to approve it without being granted something in return for it.⁶⁴ If the promise was given with no secrecy, that could have caused certain problems, while under the radar was much more convenient and smarter.

6. **Establishment of Preventive Mechanisms:** In the aftermath of the crisis, both sides agreed to install a direct “hotline” between Washington and Moscow to avoid future misunderstandings, enhance crisis management, and build trust. That was a sign of goodwill between two great powers, summarizing what diplomacy truly means: a channel for communication, a solution for disputes, and above all, a means for achieving peace or preventing a war.

The combination of formal diplomacy, backchannel negotiation, and strategic signaling under immense pressure enabled both superpowers to take a breath, move towards peace, and solve the biggest obstacle during the Cold War. As Professor Schuett argued, complementing the reasons for success in this case, providing a real answer as to why politics and diplomacy are sometimes successful while sometimes a disaster: “Politics is not the realm of Nature, God or any other natural law”.⁶⁵

4.3. Analysis Using Classical Realism

From the perspective of classical realism, the Cuban Missile Crisis is an archetypal case of diplomacy driven by rational calculations of national interest, the balance of power, and the desire to avoid mutually assured destruction. Hans Morgenthau’s principles are visibly at play throughout the crisis.

Morgenthau argued that international politics is governed by “objective laws rooted in human nature.”⁶⁶ That nature, which he was convinced, strives for power, and he assured that the fundamental motivator of state behavior is the pursuit of power. The Soviet Union's decision to position its nuclear missiles in Cuba was a strategic effort to shift the balance of power in its favor, shedding

⁶⁴William Burr and Leopoldo Nuti, “The Jupiter Missiles and the Endgame of the Cuban Missile Crisis: Sealing the Deal with Italy and Turkey | Wilson Center,” www.wilsoncenter.org, April 20, 2023, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/jupiter-missiles-and-endgame-cuban-missile-crisis-sealing-deal-italy-and-turkey>.

⁶⁵ Schuett, Robert. 2022. *Hans Kelsen's Political Realism*. EUP. (p. 3)

⁶⁶ Dinesh, “Morgenthau’s Realist Theory (6 Principles),” Your Article Library, March 31, 2015, <https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/international-politics/morgenthau-realism-theory-6-principles/48472>.

light on their importance, especially in response to American missiles stationed in Turkey and Italy. For the Soviets, placing missiles in Cuba was a way to deter and balance the US. If they failed in doing so, there would be a bigger difference in power between them, threatening to disturb the whole system. The balance of power, if interrupted, can be rehabilitated only if the weaker side's military power becomes greater and respected.⁶⁷

However, once the missiles were discovered, the US responded in a manner consistent with Morgenthau's idea of prudence, the superior virtue of political action. Rather than launching a pre-emptive strike, President Kennedy ordered a blockade to prevent the possibility of nuclear war, which would have happened if the US decided to attack and destroy missiles.⁶⁸ This decision is a realist-based understanding of power relations, which argues that strength has to be shown, but the approach should have been conscious of the catastrophic consequences of nuclear confrontation. The proof of this claim is that Kennedy rewrote his letter with the help of his associates to make it sound conciliatory.⁶⁹

Cuba, in this case of the great power's competition, was put aside, as it did not exist. Cuba was not seen as historically significant, although it played a huge role, especially because the playground for them was its territory. The US and the Soviets (today Russia) will always fight indirectly, ignoring the suffering of others, and avoiding confrontation.⁷⁰ Cuba saw the missile crisis as an opportunity to shed light on weak states, which are ruled by the hegemony of the strong, influential, and big powers.⁷¹

The use of backchannel diplomacy is another illustration of Morgenthau's realism, where the art of diplomacy lies not in legal norms or morality, but in careful negotiations that preserve the national interest while respecting the security needs of others, which ensures balance and

⁶⁷Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 1st ed. (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1948). (p. 285)

⁶⁸ Michael Hankins, "The Cuban Missile Crisis," National Air and Space Museum (Smithsonian, October 27, 2023), <https://airandspace.si.edu/stories/editorial/cuban-missile-crisis>.

⁶⁹ Michael Dobbs, "Why We Should Still Study the Cuban Missile Crisis," 2008, <https://americainclass.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/2-Dobbs-Why-Study-Missile-Crisis.pdf>.

⁷⁰ Tarak Barkawi and Mark Laffey, "The Postcolonial Moment in Security Studies," *Review of International Studies* 32, no. 2 (April 2006): 329–52, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210506007054>.

⁷¹ Mark Laffey and Jutta Weldes, "Decolonizing the Cuban Missile Crisis," *International Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (September 2008): 555–77.

understanding. Kennedy's administration showed adaptability in a strategy based on a changing political landscape, which corresponds with the realists' approach.⁷²

Furthermore, the compromise aiming at the removal of US missiles from Turkey was kept secret, acknowledging the importance of secrecy for both parties, which is another sign of pragmatic diplomacy. The decision to offer this concession secretly preserved the public narrative of American strength while giving the Soviets a reason to withdraw without humiliation and public pressure.

Finally, the outcome reinforced Morgenthau's belief that diplomacy, when grounded in recognition of reality and led by prudent people, can serve as an instrument of peace, preventing war and disaster. The establishment of a permanent hotline is an example of institutionalized mechanisms and tools for future conflict prevention and managing crises. As Professor Schuet noted, the essence of international affairs is military power, which reminds us of the system of anarchy, which every state wants to avoid.⁷³ The anarchy, which is the only eternal element of the state system, has caused the self-protection narrative, which has been stated by Hans Morgenthau, providing just two options for states: to protect by attacking or to be attacked while waiting. That's what eventually caused the War in Ukraine, the necessity of an actor, which perceives itself as a great power that shall lead the world, to show that appeasement is a weakness, and that the army is capable of re-establishing respect.

4.4. Lessons Learned

The Cuban Missile Crisis teaches us that preventive diplomacy is not a passive or abstract process but a highly strategic, dynamic, and power-conscious engagement between states increasingly worried about their existence, as well as the existence of their citizens. The lessons from history are important concerning future endeavors, especially taking into consideration that we live in interesting times when yesterday was almost irrelevant to today if lessons were not digested. Several crucial lessons can be derived from this case.

First, diplomacy must be flexible, trustworthy, and multi-layered. Both sides employed formal institutional mechanisms (such as the United Nations) and informal channels, ensuring that diplomatic communication remained open even during the most dangerous moments, not giving a

⁷²“Back-Channel Diplomacy - (US History – 1945 to Present) - Vocab, Definition, Explanations | Fiveable,” Fiveable.me, 2018, <https://library.fiveable.me/key-terms/united-states-history-since-1945/back-channel-diplomacy>.

⁷³ Schuett, Robert. 2022. *Hans Kelsen's Political Realism*. EUP. (p. 97)

chance for escalation, being aware of what could have happened if just one side had not abided by the unofficially agreed-upon rules. Successful preventive diplomacy often requires going beyond the confines of official procedures to explore alternative avenues of negotiation, which is more than essential in such events when mistrust and competition exist. Trust and direct communication, with no interference, are essential for diplomacy to be able to give the best results. Honest discussion is only possible when trust is established and maintained over time, which was the case between the two leaders. If trust were disturbed when the exchange between the US and the Soviets began, it could be incredibly difficult to regain it.⁷⁴

Second, prudence in leadership is crucial. Both leaders, Kennedy and Khrushchev, demonstrated a cautious decision-making approach, which Morgenthau praised. Their willingness to compromise, listen to the other side, take into consideration different opinions, and above all, open the door for a mutually acceptable solution led to the resolution of the dispute. Since both sides were willing to sacrifice something, a solution was reached.⁷⁵

Third, diplomacy works when it is possible to achieve negotiations, no matter how difficult the issue is or how different the interests are. States take care of their interests and threaten other states that they consider a threat so that they intimidate them with their power, but if the conflicting parties are ready for negotiations, the negotiations have a chance of being successful. Otherwise, if the threat of the use of force does not accompany the negotiations and turns into coercion, the negotiations can become a disaster that causes even deeper disturbances. When it comes to big powers, it affects the entire international system. This is the main reason why today's war in Ukraine is still going on: there is no direct communication, the parties are deaf to each other's demands, and the EU is trying to force Ukraine to fight to the last breath, regardless of whether it makes sense or not.⁷⁶

Fourth, public signaling and private concessions can work in tandem. The United States' ability to maintain a strong public stance while offering secret diplomatic concessions ensured that national security goals were met without causing troubles that could not be solved or managed. The mix of public and secret diplomacy was successful because it enabled both sides to convince the public that their interests were served and that they would not be humiliated in any way after the crisis

⁷⁴ "Lessons from the Cuban Missile Crisis for Modern Diplomacy," Mexicohistorico.com, 2025, <https://www.mexicohistorico.com/paginas/lessons-from-the-cuban-missile-crisis-for-modern-diplomacy-5a3200e2.html>.

⁷⁵ Ibidem.

⁷⁶ "Strategic Prudence: Is Nuclear Deterrence Still in Place?" Russia in Global Affairs, 2022, <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/strategic-prudence/>.

was over. It was not in anyone's interest to have a nuclear war because they knew what that meant. Secrecy and trust built up in a short period have shown that excellence in collecting, analyzing, and presenting information in a clear, understandable, and productive way is essential for diplomacy. Although this was known in theory, it has now been confirmed in practice that there is no good diplomacy or negotiations without it. Public diplomacy worked exceptionally well while secrecy worked even better, which made it possible to analyze the moves of all three parties with relative certainty today, which was also contributed to by the declassification of documents.⁷⁷

Fifth, although it is important to solve the current crisis, which can escalate into a much bigger problem, especially when it comes to the threat of a nuclear attack, it is even more important to create a hotline that will enable direct and immediate relations between the two countries. Not only because you need to have an open relationship without intermediaries, but also because it enables other crises in which they may not be directly involved to be solved with their reaction and intervention. We see today that the Russian-Ukrainian war can be resolved with the help of direct communication between the two powers that have openly different interests and see the situation on completely different grounds. Most importantly, the armed control agreements added to the feeling that we can live in a more peaceful world than we used to live in before, even though the results were not promising.⁷⁸

Sixth, this case underlines that successful diplomacy must recognize and respect the security dilemmas of all parties involved. The crisis de-escalated only after the US recognized that the Soviet action was meaningful because they wanted to show what it was like to have nuclear missiles on their borders by placing missiles in Cuba, demonstrating that the American threat to the Soviets by placing missiles in Turkey was such that it could not be tolerated. John F. Kennedy urged Khrushchev to stop provoking war, eliminate threats to peace and stability, and relinquish the struggle for domination. He called for an end to the arms race for the sake of humanity and history, which will remember their effort to solve the issue, abandoning destruction by withdrawing

⁷⁷ National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 395, "CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS REVELATIONS: KENNEDY'S SECRET APPROACH to CASTRO," Gwu.edu, 2012, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB395/>.

⁷⁸ Eszter Simon and Agnes Simon, "Trusting through the Moscow-Washington Hotline: A Role Theoretical Explanation of the Hotline's Contribution to Crisis Stability," *Journal of Global Security Studies* 5, no. 4 (January 7, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogz062>.

missiles from Cuba. Participation in dispute resolution by negotiations and finding an eternal and peaceful solution that is suitable and sustainable for both sides.⁷⁹

Ultimately, the Cuban Missile Crisis illustrates that even in the face of existential threats, diplomacy grounded in realism, based and anchored in prudence, strategic interest, and mutual recognition, can prevail and save the world from catastrophe. President Kennedy showed incredible virtues, managing a crisis tailored and careful manner, without provoking undesirable reactions. His prudence could be depicted in the case of not giving the deadline to the Soviets, knowing such a strict request could only prevent negotiations, instead of war. The Cuban Missile Crisis still serves as one of the most powerful examples of successful preventive diplomacy in modern history. An example that could teach us how to preserve peace is by being honest and open, through direct negotiations, and respecting our counterparts.

5. Case Study on Failure in Preventive Diplomacy – The Case of Russia and Ukraine

5.1. Introduction to the Case

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine culminating in Russia's invasion in February 2022, represents one of the most influential and significant geopolitical crises of the 21st century. Despite their close ties in history, common language, religion, and Slavic roots, they fiercely fight over Eastern Ukraine. The consequences are visible, although the war is still ongoing, and the real ones would be seen after the war where everything covered would be uncovered. However, the hate among them is unbearable, and it will take generations to reconcile. This confrontation is deeply rooted in complex political interests, and it has profound implications for the international order. Understanding the failure of preventive diplomacy in this context requires a comprehensive examination of history, the evolution of tensions, international efforts to avert the conflict, and especially Russian behavior and its traces.

⁷⁹ John F. Kennedy, "Radio and Television Report to the American People on the Soviet Arms Buildup in Cuba, October 22, 1962 | JFK Library," [www.jfklibrary.org](https://www.jfklibrary.org/archives/other-resources/john-f-kennedy-speeches/cuba-radio-and-television-report-19621022), October 22, 1962, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/archives/other-resources/john-f-kennedy-speeches/cuba-radio-and-television-report-19621022>.

5.2. Historical Context

Since this is not a thesis focused solely on history, it is necessary to draw the line from which the case can be unwinded. The relationship between Russia and Ukraine has been historically intricate, marked by periods of unity and discord. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine emerged as an independent state, which was the first step in its separation from Russian history (or an attempt to do so), which ultimately caused terrible consequences. Despite enjoying independence, Ukraine remained closely linked to Russia through the economy, gas supply, cultural connections, and political interactions.⁸⁰ However, Ukraine's aspiration to build closer ties with the West, especially with the EU and NATO, began to strain its relationship with Russia, its age-old friend. Moscow perceived these engagements as interference in its traditional, eternal, and logical sphere of influence, viewing Ukraine's shift of orientation as a threat to its regional stability and desirable hegemony.⁸¹

5.3. Escalation of Tensions

Tensions rose dramatically in 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea following the removal from office of Ukraine's President, Viktor Yanukovich, who was perceived as a Russian puppet.⁸² The Russian annexation of this strategically important peninsula was criticized by the West and led to economic sanctions imposed on Russia.⁸³ The same year, pro-Russian separatist movements gained momentum in Eastern Ukraine, mainly in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions, leading to a long-lasting conflict that still affects people, with disastrous humanitarian crises. Pro-Russian separatists fought against the Ukrainian army in those regions, backed by Russia. Interestingly, in 1991, 83% of the citizens of the Donbas region were for an independent Ukraine.⁸⁴ In response to

⁸⁰ Council on Foreign Relations, "Ukraine's Struggle for Independence in Russia's Shadow," Council on Foreign Relations, 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/ukraines-struggle-independence-russias-shadow>.

⁸¹ Vladimir Putin, "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians," President of Russia (Kremlin, July 12, 2021), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>.

⁸² BBC, "Profile: Ukraine's Ousted President Viktor Yanukovich," *BBC News*, February 28, 2014, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25182830>.

⁸³ Edward Christie, "Sanctions after Crimea: Have They Worked?," *NATO Review*, July 13, 2015, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2015/07/13/sanctions-after-crimea-have-they-worked/index.html>.

⁸⁴ David Gormezano, "In Ukraine's Donbas, Ten Years of War and Russification," *France 24*, April 8, 2024, <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20240408-ukraine-donbas-ten-years-of-war-russification-russia-donetsk-luhansk>.

the conflict, which was foreseen to speedily escalate, several diplomatic initiatives were undertaken to facilitate peace and prevent war.

The most notable diplomatic effort was the Minsk Agreements, even if they sought to solve the problem, they did not manage to do it. The Minsk Agreements were announced in 2014 and 2015 by the OSCE and aimed at establishing a ceasefire before a final solution was found. Both sides agreed to abide by the agreements, but despite the promising prospects for resolution, the outcomes were not commendable. The implementation was weak, facing frequent violations and non-stop mutual accusations of non-compliance.⁸⁵

5.4. Preventive Diplomacy Efforts

Preventive diplomacy, as underscored in the previous chapters, involves actions taken to prevent disputes from intensifying into more serious conflicts. In the case of Russia and Ukraine, preventive diplomacy efforts included negotiations facilitated by international organizations, direct dialogues between the conflicting parties, and interventions by third parties aiming to promote negotiations, mediations, and propose solutions. For instance, the Minsk agreements were negotiated under the patronage of the OSCE, Germany, and France, and signed by conflicting parties and the OSCE envoys.⁸⁶

Some authors are convinced that war could have been prevented: “If the US and the West had been more prudent about changing the status quo in Russia’s sphere of influence if Ukraine’s domestic politics had been more unified, and if the Ukrainian president had been more adept at crisis management, this tragedy could have been avoided.”⁸⁷ The West tested Russia’s seriousness when considering the expansion of NATO to the East, especially knowing the importance of Ukraine to Russia both historically and strategically. Does freedom and democracy in this case mean the spread of freedom and democracy, or is it a playground for challenging the aggressive power? What is democracy? According to Erica Benner, “It’s an imperfect scheme for sharing power with people who have very different goals, not a machine destined to perfectly realize one ideological

⁸⁵ Marie Dumoulin, “Ukraine, Russia, and the Minsk Agreements: A Post-Mortem,” European Council on Foreign Relations, February 19, 2024, <https://ecfr.eu/article/ukraine-russia-and-the-minsk-agreements-a-post-mortem/>.

⁸⁶ Ibidem

⁸⁷ Moon Chung-in, “The Ukraine War Is a Tragedy That Could Have Been Avoided,” Asia Global Voices, 2022, <https://www.asiaglobalonline.hku.hk/asia-global-voices/ukraine-war-tragedy-could-have-been-avoided?page=1>.

program”.⁸⁸ It seems we have forgotten what democracy stands for and what the guiding principles are in achieving it, if possible.

However, these diplomatic efforts were hindered by deep mistrust, different geopolitical interests, dishonesty, and contradicting narratives. Russia insisted on maintaining its sphere of influence, based on history and ingrained in its state habitus, which clashed with Ukraine’s wish to pursue its sovereign, independent policy and follow its strategic path toward the West. The mix of Ukrainian misconception and Russian aggressiveness caused disaster. The ambiguity of external actors when dealing with this question, and the involvement of the US and the EU, covered the real intentions of all actors, further complicating the diplomatic landscape and preventing a stable solution. The failure of preventive diplomacy in the Russia-Ukraine conflict depicts the complexities inherent in international affairs, especially when national interest, historical grievances, geopolitical games, and misunderstanding of foreign involvement mix.

5.5. Diplomatic Failures That Led to the War

The eruption of war between Russia and Ukraine on February 24, 2022, was preceded by a series of diplomatic engagements aimed at preventing such an escalation, which could have been expected if not negotiated. Despite these initiatives, diplomacy failed in its essence to pave the way for a peaceful solution. This section examines the key diplomatic failures that contributed to the war, which was a catastrophe that has been ongoing for more than 3 years.

The Budapest Memorandum (1994)

As a result of the Soviet Union’s dissolution, Ukraine kept and held a significant nuclear arsenal, the third by size worldwide, capable of threatening other big powers.⁸⁹ Maybe the most relevant and far-reaching decision was to give it back to Russia, relinquish these weapons, and join the

⁸⁸ Erica Benner and Elze Vermaas, “Is Democracy Worth the Trouble?” (Green European Journal, 2024), <https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/wp-content/uploads/pdf/is-democracy-worth-the-trouble.pdf>.

⁸⁹ Daryl G. Kimball, “Ukraine, Nuclear Weapons, and Security Assurances at a Glance | Arms Control Association,” Armscontrol.org, 2014, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/ukraine-nuclear-weapons-and-security-assurances-glance>.

Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. This decision has shaped the destiny of Ukraine, as we can see today. In return for abandoning its nuclear arsenal, Ukraine received security assurances (not guarantees as expected, which meant military intervention in case of violating the agreement) from Russia, the US, and the UK through the Budapest Memorandum of 1994. The signatories promised to respect all principles guiding international relations today, the existing borders of Ukraine, and its sovereignty, as well as to abstain from the threat of using force or the use of force against Ukraine.⁹⁰ Since the Memorandum was not binding for the US and the UK, it was not serious to expect them to intervene if Russia attacked Ukraine, which had happened in 2014 and 2022. So, from this historical distance, it could be claimed that the assurances were symbolic because they lacked the enforcement mechanism and the expected seriousness. When Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, it violated not only the principles of international law but also the terms of the Budapest Memorandum.⁹¹ The West's response was limited to simple condemnation and economic sanctions, which did not prevent Russia from waging a war. This showed the ineffectiveness of the Budapest Memorandum, especially in the part that confirmed territorial integrity and Ukrainian security. The ineffectiveness of any agreement when dealing with the great powers is one of the main characteristics of the world order in which we live today.

Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation, 1997

Three years after the Budapest Memorandum, the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership between Ukraine and Russia was signed. The treaty confirmed the close historical ties and friendship between Ukraine and Russia, promoting good-neighborly relations between the two states, seeking to establish useful cooperation beneficial for both sides that protects the fundamental interests of the Russian and Ukrainian nations, and serves the purpose of peace and international security. They committed themselves to the norms of international law and particularly to the principles proclaimed in the UN Charter, underlying some of them confirming the awareness of both sides. These include respect for principles of state sovereignty, territorial integrity, and inviolability of the existing and recognized boundaries between them. The Treaty directly states the obligations of mutual respect, sovereign equality, and peaceful dispute settlement, and repeats the

⁹⁰ Steven Pifer, "Budapest Memorandum Myths," Stanford.edu, December 3, 2024, <https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/news/budapest-memorandum-myths>.

⁹¹ "Memorandum on Security Assurances: The Budapest Memorandum of 1994," 2014, https://policymemos.hks.harvard.edu/files/policymemos/files/2-23-22_ukraine-the_budapest_memo.pdf?m=1645824948.

Budapest memorandum regarding the use of force, including economic pressure, that would interfere with the interests of either nation.⁹² Mainly everything that was later ignored and violated. In March 2019, the treaty was unilaterally terminated by Ukraine, 5 years after the annexation of Crimea.⁹³

The Minsk Agreements (2014 and 2015)

In response to the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, the Minsk Agreements were formulated to establish a ceasefire and outline a political process to resolve the disputes between Russia and Ukraine. The agreements included provisions for decentralization of power, withdrawal of heavy weaponry, formation of security zones, the release of hostages, the holding of local elections in the conflict zones, and many others.⁹⁴

Despite initial optimism, the Minsk Agreements faced significant challenges:

- **Ambiguity in Terms:** The language of the agreements was often vague, leading to different and precarious interpretations by the parties involved. This ambiguity obstructed effective implementation and ensured deeper misunderstanding.⁹⁵
- **Lack of Enforcement:** There were no concrete and strong mechanisms to enforce the agreements or to hold violators accountable. Ceasefire violations were common from both sides, undermining trust in the diplomatic process.⁹⁶ There was no honest approach to resolving the conflict, even though they played a game in which both sides lost (later proven) their desirable position.

⁹² “Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation,” May 31, 1997, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%203007/Part/volume-3007-I-52240.pdf>.

⁹³ Yulia Ioffe, “Termination of the Treaty of Friendship between Ukraine and Russia – Too Little Too Late?,” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4256851>.

⁹⁴ “Full Text of the Minsk Agreement,” @FinancialTimes (Financial Times, February 12, 2015), <https://www.ft.com/content/21b8f98e-b2a5-11e4-b234-00144feab7de>.

⁹⁵ Mykhailo Soldatenko, “In the Shadow of the Minsk Agreements: Lessons for a Potential Ukraine-Russia Armistice,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 2025, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2025/02/ukraine-russia-ceasefire-security-agreement?lang=en>.

⁹⁶ Tetiana Kyselova and Yuna Potomkina, “How Not to End the War in Ukraine,” *Foreign Affairs*, March 2025, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/russia/how-not-end-war-ukraine>.

- **External Influences:** Both Russia and Western countries interfered in Ukraine's internal affairs, further complicating the situation. While Russia did that obviously, the West had a different approach, in gloves, giving them more time for preparation, but a hopeless one rather than inspiring, which was confirmed by the former German Chancellor, Ms. Angela Merkel. These engagements show how big powers manipulate weaker ones, rather than genuinely support peace.⁹⁷

NATO's Eastern Expansion

NATO's expansion eastward since the end of the Cold War has been a constant issue. The promise by US Secretary of State James Baker that NATO would not expand even a meter eastward, given to Mikhail Gorbachev, has been confirmed since the documents have been declassified.⁹⁸ Russia, firstly, opposed any NATO enlargement towards the East, but later on, as we witnessed, only the Ukrainian attempt to come closer to the alliance was threatened with war since that was perceived as a direct threat to Russian security.⁹⁹ Ukraine's expressed interest was fueled by the support of the majority of the EU countries, except for some 7 member states, which made it even worse.¹⁰⁰ Everything exploded in 2022 when Russia invaded Ukraine, cutting the centuries-long friendship between them. Diplomatic attempts failed to address Russia's security concerns, leading to increased tension, especially between the EU member states and Russia. The situation eased when Donald Trump won the elections in the US because he showed a willingness to take into consideration Russia's interests.¹⁰¹ Someone would say that he is repeating the same mistake as Neville Chamberlain did with Hitler by appeasing him, yet we would soon see what was going to happen. The big resolution or big catastrophe, no other possibility is real. Critics argue that the West underestimated Russia's resolve to prevent Ukraine's NATO accession, which led to the failure of preventive diplomacy.

⁹⁷ "Real Intention behind Minsk Agreements Further Destroys Credibility of the West - Global Times," Global-times.cn, 2022, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202212/1281708.shtml>.

⁹⁸ National Security Archive, "NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard | National Security Archive," Gwu.edu, December 12, 2017, <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2017-12-12/nato-expansion-what-gorbachev-heard-western-leaders-early>.

⁹⁹ "CIAO: Strategic Analysis: NATO Eastward Expansion and Russian Security," ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu, n.d., https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/olj/sa/sa_98meo02.html.

¹⁰⁰ Kateryna Denisova, "At Least 7 Countries Resisting Ukraine's NATO Membership Invitation, Politico Reports," The Kyiv Independent, October 24, 2024, <https://kyivindependent.com/at-least-7-countries-resist/>.

¹⁰¹ Tim Ross, "29 Times Donald Trump Did What Putin Wanted," POLITICO, February 21, 2025, <https://www.politico.eu/article/donald-trump-vladimir-putin-volodymyr-zelenskyy-united-states-russia-policy/>.

Misjudgments by Global Powers

Diplomatic miscalculations by major global powers also played a role in the escalation:

- **Overestimation of Deterrence:** Western nations relied heavily on economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation as deterrents against Russian aggression. It is not clear how they wanted to exclude the biggest country in the world from the international order, but that will be analyzed in the future by scholars. However, these measures failed to prevent Russia's military actions, suggesting an overestimation of their effectiveness, and built morale in Russia since they had the perception they were fighting against a collective West, and not just Ukraine.¹⁰² Another misperception is that there will be reconciliation after the war between them knowing that both sides have relatives in each country, but it would be difficult to expect such an outcome.
- **Underestimation of Russian Intentions:** There was a prevailing belief among some Western policymakers that Russia would not invade due to the potential economic and political costs, wrongly assessing Russia's foreign policy.¹⁰³ The wrong perception of Russian intentions did show the unpreparedness of Europe to challenge Russia both militarily and politically.

5.6. Analysis Using Classical Realism

When applying classical realism to the failure of preventive diplomacy in the case of Russia and Ukraine, several essential truths about the nature of international politics, the behavior of states (especially great powers), and the limitations of diplomatic tools are revealed, providing insights into the world governed by power. Even Morgenthau himself, as the most cited realist, was anxious about Soviet imperial aspirations, which are portrayed in Putin's Russian imperial ambitions, maybe provoked and coercive, but definitive.¹⁰⁴ However, in *Politics Among Nations*, Morgenthau stated that one of the reasons why someone would attack a foreign country and try to spread its

¹⁰² Erika Szyszczak, "Sanctions Effectiveness: What Lessons Three Years into the War on Ukraine? - Economics Observatory," Economics Observatory, February 19, 2025, <https://www.economicsobservatory.com/sanctions-effectiveness-what-lessons-three-years-into-the-war-on-ukraine>.

¹⁰³ Jake Epstein, "Europe Didn't Want to Believe Russia Would Actually Invade Ukraine Even as the US Kept Warning It Was Coming, Top EU Diplomat Says," Business Insider, October 11, 2022, <https://www.businessinsider.com/europe-didnt-believe-russia-would-invade-ukraine-despite-us-warnings-2022-10>.

¹⁰⁴ Felix Rösch, "Realism, the War in the Ukraine, and the Limits of Diplomacy," *Analyse & Kritik* 44, no. 2 (September 19, 2022): 201–18, <https://doi.org/10.1515/auk-2022-2030>.

influence over national boundaries is dissatisfaction with the power gained within national borders.¹⁰⁵ That could be the case, looking at the Russian struggle to expand existing, internationally recognized borders.

At the essence of classical realism lies Hans Morgenthau's belief that international affairs are governed by 'objective laws' rooted in an unchanging human nature, mirrored by its imperfection.¹⁰⁶ In line with this, states are rational actors seeking the conquest of more power and ensuring security in an anarchic international system where no central authority can enforce rules or ensure peace, which is a clear sign that no actor can rely on another. Therefore, the behavior of states is driven primarily by their national interests, especially the imperative of survival. If survival is in danger, the states are like hungry beasts, wounded and weak, looking for a meal.

However, Russia's actions in Ukraine reflect a classic realist pursuit of power since the strategic national interests are endangered. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 dramatically reduced Russia's geopolitical influence, causing the necessity for revenge. In the decades that followed, the eastward expansion of NATO and the European Union posed, in Moscow's perception, a direct threat to the Russian implied sphere of influence. That was predicted by Boris Yeltsin in the 1990s when the collective West turned a blind eye to the illegal dissolution of Yugoslavia, rewarding the separatists with recognition, which happened again with the Kosovo case after, again, illegal, bombing of Serbia.

He stated:

This [bombing] is the first sign of what could happen when NATO comes right up to the Russian Federation's borders...The flame of war could burst out across the whole of Europe."¹⁰⁷

On the other hand, the US played the slam the weak adversary when he was on the ground, hoping or aiming for Russia to be weaker and weaker and the US to be stronger and stronger. That prospect, if it could have been possible, would have led to the internal splitting of Russia and internal decolonization. That would have been great news for the US, having the archenemy on their

¹⁰⁵ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 1st ed. (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1948). (p. 74)

¹⁰⁶ Dinesh, "Morgenthau's Realist Theory (6 Principles)," Your Article Library, March 31, 2015, <https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/international-politics/morgenthau-realism-theory-6-principles/48472>.

¹⁰⁷ "YELTSIN SEES WAR THREAT IN NATO ENLARGEMENT," Jamestown, September 8, 1995, <https://jamestown.org/program/yeltsin-sees-war-threat-in-nato-enlargement/>.

knee.¹⁰⁸ Concerning classical realism, reducing the power of your enemy is the way of securing your position in a strictly self-help international scene or system. Just two months before invading Ukraine, at his annual news conference in the Kremlin, Putin was questioning the West, drawing his conclusions that Russia had never made advances toward the US, the UK, or any other country's boundaries, noting that NATO approached the borders of Russia.¹⁰⁹ That was the obvious threat to Russia's security and sphere of influence, as it was just a matter of time before they would attack.

It seems that the threat of Ukraine becoming a NATO member was the red line for Russia, which they did not want to be crossed. According to the head of the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, Kirill Budanov, Russia started preparing for a war against Ukraine in 2007, so, 15 years before the invasion had happened.¹¹⁰

Ukraine, once an essence of the Soviet Union and deeply connected to Russia through history, language, and culture, became a symbolic and strategic buffer zone, dividing Russia and the EU. As Ukraine changed its foreign policy and strategic determination westward, expressing ambitions to join both NATO and the EU, Moscow interpreted these moves as existential threats, preparing to prevent it at all costs. That was obvious for George Kennan, an American historian, and diplomat, who claimed that Russia would react in the future, calling such a move a "tragic mistake".¹¹¹

Classical realism would suggest that Russia's use of military force in 2014 and again in 2022 was not irrational or ideological, but rather a calculated, rational, and prudent move to prevent the permanent loss of strategic position and regional dominance, which was implicit in their case. Russia always wanted to dominate international affairs, to set up the rules, not to blindly follow them. Both sides, the West and Russia, did everything to confront their positions and make bigger divisions between them, instead of sitting next to each other and listening to each other. By taking care of their statements without paying attention to the statements and conclusions of the other side, both sides bear responsibility for the catastrophic outcome still ongoing. Classical realism

¹⁰⁸ Marc Trachtenberg, "Is There Life after NATO?" Cato Institute, October 22, 2024, <https://www.cato.org/policy-analysis/there-life-after-nato#united-states-european-security-after-cold-war>.

¹⁰⁹ President of Russia, "Vladimir Putin's Annual News Conference," President of Russia, December 23, 2021, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/press_conferences/67438.

¹¹⁰ Максим Царук, "В позапрошлом десятилітті: Буданов розказав, коли РФ почала готуватися до війни проти України," Зеркало тижня | Дзеркало тижня | Mirror Weekly (Zn.ua, May 19, 2023), <https://zn.ua/war/v-pozaproshlom-desjatiletii-budanov-rasskazal-kohda-rf-nachala-hotovitsja-k-vojne-protiv-ukrainy.html>.

¹¹¹ Ted Carpenter, "Many Predicted Nato Expansion Would Lead to War. Those Warnings Were Ignored," The Guardian, February 28, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/feb/28/nato-expansion-war-russia-ukraine>.

does not care much about norms and rules, which could be seen as the justification for Russian expansion. So, the story is not as complicated as it looked at at first sight, the state felt threatened, national interest matters, and it is necessary to protect them to preserve and ensure national existence.

“In essence, the two sides have been operating with different playbooks: Putin and his compatriots have been thinking and acting according to realist dictates, whereas their Western counterparts have been adhering to liberal ideas about international politics. The result is that the United States and its allies unknowingly provoked a major crisis over Ukraine.”¹¹²

On the other side, Ukraine's pursuit of independence, sovereignty, and integration with Western institutions aligns with the realist idea of states protecting and pursuing their autonomy and striving for self-preservation, ultimately. However, in the realist world, the ambitions of smaller states are often constrained by the interests of great powers, especially ones that have leaders mirroring leaders in the past with imperial minds. Putin compared himself and his struggle for regaining old Russian territories with Peter the Great.¹¹³ Preventive diplomacy in this case was insufficient because it underestimated the fundamental incompatibility of interests between Russia and Ukraine, particularly the irreconcilable nature of Russia's desire for regional hegemony and Ukraine's aspiration for Western integration.

Moreover, classical realism emphasizes the role of prudence in foreign policy, highlighting the necessity for achieving peace. One could argue that Western powers failed to exercise this prudence by ignoring the security concerns repeatedly voiced by Moscow since the early 2000s since there were signs that war could erupt.¹¹⁴ While those concerns may not have justified aggression, realism teaches that successful diplomacy requires acknowledging, even if not accepting, the interests of all actors involved, balancing the power between the great powers, although ignoring others is much easier. In this case, the West did not try to confront Russia directly but used as much power as it could to weaken its adversary and preserve, not the existence of Ukraine and its

¹¹² John Mearsheimer, “Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin,” *Foreign Affairs*, September 2014, <https://www.mearsheimer.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Why-the-Ukraine-Crisis-Is.pdf>.

¹¹³ Sarah Rainsford, “Putin and Peter the Great: Russian Leader Likens Himself to 18th Century Tsar,” *BBC News*, June 10, 2022, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61767191>.

¹¹⁴ Nathan Hodge CNN Uliana Pavlova and Darya Tarasova, “Vladimir Putin Says the West Has ‘Ignored’ Russia's Key Concerns over Ukraine,” CNN, February 2, 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/02/01/europe/vladimir-putin-west-ignored-russia-concerns-intl/index.html>.

people, but itself, by confronting it indirectly with Russia. Preventive diplomacy was further hampered by the assumption that economic sanctions and international condemnation alone could deter a determined state from pursuing its foreign policy interests, which is perfectly naïve, knowing the habitus of the Russian state. Russia was exaggerating the situation, mixing criminal activities with the state's activities, often blurring the difference between them, and threatening European security.¹¹⁵

In Morgenthau's terms, diplomacy fails when it loses its reality lens, when it becomes either moralistic or legalistic, ignoring the centrality of power and interest, denying compromise and persuasion. This was evident concerning the 2022 invasion, as the diplomatic language from the West emphasized international law and Ukraine's right to choose its alliances and pursue its interests, while Russia focused on perceived threats and red lines, which were crossed with the previous waves of enlargement. The coexistence of these fundamentally different worldviews was impossible because one was typically based on liberal thought calling for the respect of legal norms, while the other was in strategic moves and calculations. Diplomacy, because of that, became performative rather than preventative.

Classical realism helps in explaining why preventive diplomacy failed in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which escalated into a war. Classical realism claims that without genuine compromise, recognition of power realities, shared respect, and prudent statecraft, diplomacy is unlikely to succeed even though the situation on the ground looks promising. Unlikelihood is especially high when a powerful state believes its vital interests are at stake, as was the case regarding Ukraine. The tragedy is when the intentions of others and the overestimation of moral arguments, which should have prevented the state from waging war, are expected in a system completely shaped by power.

5.7. Lessons Learned

The case of Russia and Ukraine offers a wise lesson in the limits of preventive diplomacy, especially when geopolitical struggles, unresolved historical grievances, incapable leaders, and mismatched power perceptions mix, making a beast wanting fresh blood, in a world where everybody

¹¹⁵ Robert Schuett and Philipp Schramm, "Gangs of Geopolitics," *Global Policy Journal*, April 22, 2025, <https://www.globalpolicyjournal.com/blog/22/04/2025/gangs-geopolitics>.

is starving. Several key lessons from this case are critical for scholars and practitioners of diplomacy.

Firstly, this case confirms that preventive diplomacy is only as effective as the willingness of all parties to engage in genuine negotiation, which until today has not happened. Diplomatic processes that ignore the essential interests or fears of one actor, especially a powerful one, are unlikely to succeed, offering a window only for more conflicts in the future. In this context, the West's efforts to prevent war focused largely on reinforcing Ukraine's sovereignty and deterring Russia, providing help to Ukraine to defeat Russia, and isolating Russia, but without a platform where Russia's strategic insecurities could be addressed seriously and credibly, offering solutions for every side. It may be unpleasant and annoying for Western countries, but it is, and it is very necessary.

Secondly, the case illustrates the danger of ambiguous or unenforceable agreements. The Budapest Memorandum, while politically significant, lacked binding enforcement mechanisms, which shows the reality and vulnerability of international law. The failure to prevent the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and offer Ukraine any protection undermined the credibility of security assurances (even if Ukraine got the guarantees, it would be the same) and set a dangerous precedent that led to the war and broader division between West and East. Preventive diplomacy must provide mechanisms for accountability and deterrence, if not, agreements would be symbolic and serve the goal only temporarily.

Thirdly, misperceptions and mistrust between the West and Russia remain major obstacles to successful diplomacy. Both Russia and the West misread each other's intentions or understood but ignored such intentions. On the one hand, Russia underestimated the resilience of the Ukrainian state and the unity of the Western response, helping them to build a strong Ukrainian nation, while the West underestimated Russia's willingness to protect what they see as an essential and integral part of their sphere of influence, including through war, to secure its strategic interests, which were threatened, or they saw it like that.

Fourthly, this case demonstrates the need for proactive and continuous engagement, respecting counterparts, and understanding their changing positions, indicating the necessity for negotiations whenever war is an option. Preventive diplomacy is not a one-time intervention but an ongoing process, seeking to find solutions even if it seems impossible to reach an agreement. In the years between 2014 and 2022, diplomatic momentum declined, and a stalemate in diplomacy was obvious. The Minsk process lost credibility, not only because it lacked enforcement but also because the

Western engagement with Russia became more reactive than strategic. A lack of consistent, high-level diplomacy and leaders willing to sit at the same table created a vacuum that allowed military logic to prevail over political dialogue, which is the failure of diplomacy.

From a classical realist standpoint, the ultimate lesson is that diplomacy must be rooted in an honest assessment of power relations and interests, having peaceful solutions as an essential goal. Realism advocates for diplomacy, but it demands diplomacy to be serious, prudent, and aligned with the realities of international politics, recognizing the momentum and necessities. Moral appeals, sanctions, or public diplomacy alone cannot substitute for strategic engagement when dealing with great rival powers and intentions.

Finally, the Russia-Ukraine intricate case urges us to reconsider the role of diplomacy in maintaining long-lasting peace, offering strong and reliable tools for solving problems, while ignoring it, the war is unavoidable. Preventive diplomacy should serve as part of a broader architecture of peacebuilding, grounded in the recognition of mutual interests, balance of power, and clear and honest channels of communication. Only then can the tragedies of suffering and war be prevented. In any case, when there is no communication and respect, diplomacy loses its purpose.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Comparison of the Two Cases

The distinction between the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 and the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2014 which escalated into war in 2022 and still is ongoing, provides insights into the essence of preventive diplomacy, profoundly discovering both success and failure. The success of preventive diplomacy enabled not only the Soviets, Cubans, and Americans but the whole world to breathe a sigh of relief. The struggle for positioning and power between two major players in the international scene threatened international stability more than ever before. If nuclear war could not have been prevented, it would have led to the annihilation of the world we know today. On the other hand,

the world is constantly and unstoppable changing every minute since the war in Ukraine started, producing more and more history every day, preventing us from obtaining relevant and credible information. The reappearance of the great power competition in which there are now more actors than it was in 1962, shows how power politics is shaped by human nature to dominate and shape world order, rather than following the rules others constructed. The national interest, as an alternative to institutionalized rules applicable to everyone, is in place, providing little window for cooperation. Both cases involve confrontation, miscalculations, strategic moves, and the constant threat of conflict. However, the outcomes are completely different, highlighting essential factors that contribute to the efficacy of diplomacy, as the major and penetrative force or tool.

In the Cuban Missile Crisis, the United States and the Soviet Union from the beginning were not reluctant to engage in intense negotiations that ultimately led to a peaceful resolution. Key elements contributing to this success included:

- **Direct Communication Channels:** The establishment of backchannel communications allowed for honest discussions and swift decision-making, which contributed to the understanding of the seriousness of the situation, even though they had diverted interests and views. Direct communication has enabled the clear sharing of information between two leaders, without interference from a third party or misinterpretation by foreign service officials. This proved that direct contact can soften the tensions, instead of worsening them.
- **Mutual Recognition of Core Interests:** Both parties acknowledged each other's security concerns, facilitating compromises such as the US pledge not to invade Cuba and the secret agreement obligating the Americans to remove missiles from Turkey. Kennedy understood Khrushchev's concerns, especially his comparison of how the US was threatening the Soviet Union from Turkey, and their expected response. Neither side looked weak or humiliated, which has always been the path towards success. The opposite case is how Germany was treated after WW1, leading to anger and a desire for revenge.
- **Third-Party Mediation:** UN Secretary-General U Thant played an essential role in critical moments when everything could have erupted if even one small step was wrong, calling for peace, urging for conscience, and offering a platform for dialogue. A neutral, well-intentioned stance is what is missing in today's world, burdened by inciting conflicts and infuriated leaders, instead of advocates for resolution. Pope St. John XXIII mediated between the Soviets and Americans and conveyed a message of brotherhood directed to non-catholic people. He underlined the necessity of respecting the diversity of mentalities,

religions, and interests. He called for an agreement that would serve the needs of all parties involved and for the sacrifices that need to be made for the sake of humanity. Both U Thant and Pope St John XXIII took an initiative that sobered deeply divided sides, making what was imaginable possible.

- **Leadership Prudence:** Leaders on both sides exercised restraint, prioritizing global stability over nationalistic fervor, providing the window for negotiations. What was seen as intelligent diplomacy from Morgenthau's point of view was put in place, promoting compromise while persuading the other side. The third resource of diplomacy at the disposal of every state, the threat of force, was peaceful and smart, not leading to misunderstanding but to promising and prudent oaths. Kennedy and Khrushchev were aware of their national interest but even more aware of the consequences if the compromise was not achieved. Their crisis management, accompanied by sober minds, proved that every conflict can and has to be solved by diplomatic means.

Conversely, the Russia–Ukraine conflict has been marked by a series of diplomatic failures:

- **Erosion of Trust:** Historical grievances and mutual suspicions undermined confidence-building measures, leading to the worst war on European soil since WW2. Once brothers and friends, deeply intertwined historically, politically, and economically, became arch enemies, unwilling to compromise and deaf to the interests of each other. Whenever brotherhood and friendship have been destroyed, animosity is aroused to the point of intolerance, leading to unbearable hatred. That is the case today, without the possibility of resolving it in a desirable way for both sides, as was seen in the Cuban Missile Crisis.
- **Ineffective Agreements:** Initiatives like the Minsk Agreements failed to produce lasting peace due to a lack of enforcement and different interpretations. The ineffectiveness of agreements was not only due to the inability of all parties involved to enforce them but also because there was no willingness from the states involved in the conflict to genuinely resolve the dispute. Furthermore, guarantees were not given to Ukraine, even though it looks like that could not make any difference afterward, but it has shown the level of dedication and truth that was invested in this case.
- **External Influences:** NATO's eastward expansion was perceived by Russia as a direct threat, exacerbating tensions, while the foreign interference in the conflict brought nothing positive. The EU's involvement, especially after the aggression in 2022, fueled tensions, instead of providing a platform for negotiations and resolving the case. Their reluctance to

consider Russian interests, no matter how wrong or insane they were while arming Ukraine and advocating for Russian capitulation, made the situation worse. If the EU and the US could have shown the desire for peace, instead of provoking Russia, the war would have been stopped, or it would not have happened. Here, direct communication was cut off, which provided a greater gap for manipulations and misinterpretations, and less for peace and diplomacy.

- **Absence of Effective Mediation:** Unlike the Cuban crisis, there was no neutral third party with sufficient influence to mediate effectively between the conflicting sides, even if there existed states providing good offices or bringing them to the table. The situation becomes better with Trump's involvement and Saudi Arabia as a hosting state, but things have not changed significantly. The negotiations would become effective only when the two sides decide to compromise and sit together at the highest level. So, Putin and Zelensky have changed their attitude and course and prudently assessed their needs and possibilities to be able to reach an agreement. If not, the longer the war lasts, the longer its consequences will be felt and the longer they will be able to cause frustrations that lead to new wars and destruction.

These contrasting outcomes underscore the importance of timely, inclusive, and well-structured diplomatic efforts in preventing conflicts, making diplomacy the most valuable tool in international affairs.

6.2. Insights from Classical Realism

Classical realism, as formulated and rooted in *Politics Among Nations* written by Hans Morgenthau, emphasizes the role of power, national interest, and human nature in international relations. Applying this theoretical lens to the two cases provides a deeper understanding of their trajectories.

In the Cuban Missile Crisis:

- **Balance of Power:** The US and the Soviet Union recognized the dangers of upsetting the strategic equilibrium, strictly dividing the zone of interests between them, leading to mutual concessions. The balance of power was disturbed when the US came that close to the Soviets, threatening their existence, while the installation of the missiles on Cuba's soil did the same to the US, marking the existential threat. The balance of power was re-established

when they reached an agreement to give up their nuclear deployment stationed in Turkey and Cuba. When there was no unbearable threat for either, the equilibrium was allowed to exist since the power was comparable, as well as influence.

- **Rational State Behavior:** Both states acted in a manner consistent with preserving their national interests while avoiding catastrophic war, which is extremely difficult in decisive moments. The art of diplomacy is striving for a calm, rational, and conciliatory approach while protecting your national interests and affirming and recognizing the national interests of the other side. Whoever manages to be the one who can ensure the preservation of the state and give the concessions necessary for peace to be achieved is the winner.
- **Diplomatic Prudence:** Leaders demonstrated foresight and caution, aligning with Morgenthau's emphasis on prudence as an essential virtue in statecraft, ensuring the survival of their countries as well as the whole world. Their patience, clear-minded vision, and awareness were remarkable. They embark immediately on direct communication soberly, helping them to understand each other's grievances and concerns.

In contrast, the Russia–Ukraine conflict reflects several departures from classical realist prescriptions:

- **Perceived Zero-Sum Game:** Russia viewed Ukraine's Western alignment as a loss to its sphere of influence, not only regional but also broader since Russia is the biggest country in the world on the surface, prompting aggressive actions. When the state's existence feels threatened, it reacts in a self-help mood, acting aggressively. The NATO expansion was perceived as an attack on Russia's essential interests, but the rapid approach of NATO towards Ukraine crossed the red line.
- **Underestimation of Adversary Resolve:** Miscalculations regarding Ukraine's resistance and Western support led to protracted conflict, putting both sides in a stalemate, and making it disappointing and unbearable. A wrong assessment of the enemy's power and more of the enemy's intentions provided the wrong bases for resolution. The need for a peaceful solution, on the one hand, and stubbornness increased over time, on the other hand, keeping the situation unresolvable without a miracle.
- **Neglect of Diplomatic Channels:** Opportunities for dialogue were often overshadowed by military strategies and unilateral actions, or interference of actors interested in war, rather than peace. The prominent one is the case of allegations against the former UK prime minister Boris Johnson, who sabotaged Ukraine from signing a peace agreement with Russia

at the beginning of the war. Since that, no direct communication or negotiations have happened until the Saudi-hosted, US-backed negotiations, which produced nothing but disappointment. Whenever diplomacy is not the first solution, war is likely to happen, and a resolution is far from being reached. After the war starts, if diplomacy is not again a solution, a peaceful resolution becomes more and more unlikely.

These observations suggest that adherence to classical realist principles, such as recognizing the power dynamics, limits of power, and above all the importance of diplomacy, can either prevent or motivate wars, depending on the leadership and all the other factors already explained and observed both in theory and practice.

6.3. Implications for Future Practice

The lessons derived from these cases have significant implications for contemporary and future diplomatic endeavors, as history has always been the teacher of life:

- **Early Engagement:** Proactive diplomacy, initiated before conflicts escalate, can address grievances and build trust, providing pathways for dispute resolution and managing crises wisely. Approachable sides could always be in a position to understand their counterpart's concerns rather than the side that is reluctant to negotiate and listen to the others.
- **Inclusive Dialogues:** Engaging all stakeholders, above all great powers with different interests, smaller states, and non-state actors, ensures that agreements are comprehensive and sustainable. The more actors are involved in dialogue, the more difficult it is to achieve a compromise, but if the agreement is reached, peace is more sustainable.
- **Strengthening International Institutions:** Bodies like the United Nations can play crucial roles in mediation, provided they are empowered and supported by member states, even if they lack enforcement mechanisms. Although such institutions are more aligned with liberal thought and principles, they can be beneficial for both realists and liberals, building bridges that can lead to more trust in international affairs.
- **Balancing Deterrence and Diplomacy:** While maintaining credible defense capabilities is essential, it should be complemented by consistent diplomatic outreach because diplomacy always matters, and it will always be a tool that cannot be avoided. Whenever diplomacy is neglected, problems culminate in conflicts and wars. In the self-driven international scene, deterrence is important for the balance of power, but without diplomatic maneuvers, it cannot be sufficient.

- **Cultural and Historical Sensitivity:** Understanding the historical contexts and cultural nuances of conflicting parties can inform more effective negotiation strategies, leading to the preservation of relationships, even though sometimes it looks like they should be cut. There is no one truth in life or history, especially in international affairs. Every side has its truth that should not be questioned, making international relations more complex and unpredictable than, for instance, domestic politics.

By integrating these practices, the international community can enhance its capacity to prevent and resolve conflicts, which should have to be the goal.

6.4. Summary of Findings

This thesis has explored the mechanisms and outcomes of preventive diplomacy through the comparative analysis of two significant cases, the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Russia-Ukraine conflict, offering important lessons and reasons for success or failure. Key findings include:

- **The Efficacy of Preventive Diplomacy:** When acting with foresight, inclusivity, understanding, and respect for mutual interests, preventive diplomacy can prevent conflicts, invasions, aggressions, and wars, serving mankind generously. Preventive diplomacy can strengthen the institutional understanding of peace and interests, without compromising any of it.
- **The Role of Leadership:** The disposition and decisions of national leaders are critical determinants of diplomatic success or failure since the responsibility lies in their hands. If the leaders are unaware of their responsibility and without sufficient knowledge of history, psychology, diplomacy, law, and many other fields, they cannot make the right decisions. The role of leaders is often overlooked but it is prominent and outstanding because sometimes one decision could make a difference between peace and war.
- **The Importance of International Frameworks:** Strong international agreements and institutions provide essential platforms for conflict resolution, could prevent escalation, and support international society. Although the significance of such institutions and agreements has declined significantly, that can be the only way to achieve a predictable and fair international system, leading to a compromise before installing systems that aim to destroy others.
- **The Relevance of Classical Realism:** Despite evolving global dynamics, classical realism offers strong, relevant, and enduring insights into state behavior and the conduct of

diplomacy, providing an understanding of the state's behavior, as well as insights into leadership decision-making processes and the reasoning behind it. Classical Realism, especially Morgenthau's thoughts, applies to international relations, offering a lens for the justification of attitudes, interests, and actions.

These findings contribute to a nuanced understanding of the conditions under which preventive diplomacy can be most effective.

6.5. Contributions to the Field

This research contributes to the field of international relations by:

- **Bridging Theory and Practice:** Demonstrating how classical realist theory can inform practical diplomatic strategies, offering answers to all people concerned, as well as the practitioners in the field of diplomacy, but also to decision-makers at every level. The theory could be the basis for diplomats, practitioners, and politicians, serving as an example of excellence.
- **Providing Comparative Analysis:** Offering a detailed comparison of two distinct cases enhances the understanding of preventive diplomacy, indicating what are the mistakes and advantages leading to war or resolution, which could serve as an example for future cases whenever conflict is about to happen.
- **Informing Policy Development:** The insights gained can guide or at least help policymakers in crafting more effective conflict prevention and resolution strategies, applying them to certain cases. It can raise awareness of how important it is to act proactively and preventively rather than react after everything escalates into war, which brings nothing good.

By integrating theoretical frameworks with empirical analysis, this thesis enriches the discourse on preventive diplomacy and its application in contemporary geopolitics, urging for diplomacy and negotiation, rather than threatening the existence of adversaries.

6.6. Suggestions for Further Research

Future studies could explore:

- **Regional Applications:** Investigating preventive diplomacy in different geopolitical contexts, such as the regions that are often under fire, like the Middle East, West Africa, East Asia, and the Western Balkans.
- **Non-State Actors:** Examining the role of NGOs, multinational corporations, and other non-state entities in conflict prevention, providing additional panels for dispute resolution. They have become increasingly important and they should be included in the process.
- **Technological Impacts:** Assessing how advancements in communication and surveillance technologies influence diplomatic practices, especially secret diplomacy, which could make a difference in future high-risk conflicts. As we can see today, the war is more and more conducted with the help of drones, and that should be assessed.
- **Longitudinal Studies:** Conduct long-term analyses of preventive diplomacy's effectiveness in various conflicts, since there have been significant numbers of both successful and failed preventive diplomacy cases, both offering significant lessons. Applying positive cases when dealing with the negative ones, ask what if.

Such research would deepen the understanding of preventive diplomacy's complexities and enhance its efficacy in an increasingly interconnected world where everyone can approach, surveil, and spy on everyone, but it is more prone to use destruction than construction.

Morgenthau's insights into diplomacy show its importance, how diplomacy can serve the state, and his vision, strengthening the nation's position, cultivating all other elements of state power, and illustrating the effectiveness of diplomatic missions, calling it the most important factor.

Finally, Hans Morgenthau underlined that the power of a state depends on various factors, but the most important, relevant, and unsteady is diplomacy. All the other determinants are just fashioned material, but the quality of diplomacy can integrate it into the full spectrum, giving them special characteristics and values, enriching the raw power of the state by ennobling potential. "The conduct of a nation's foreign affairs by its diplomats is for national power in peace what military strategy and tactics by its military leaders are for national power in war."¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 1st ed. (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1948). p. 105

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