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Defining Peace: A content analysis of Brazil's, China's, and the European Union's discourses on the Ukraine War

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
  	Since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, many political leaders have vowed to settle this conflict. Although Brazil, China, and the European Union were among these voices, some have accused these international actors of propelling the war. This study offers a content analysis of the speeches proffered by Lula da Silva, Ursula Von der Leyen, and Xi Jinping, the political leaders of these three actors. This analysis concluded that Ursula Von der Leyen mentions peace fewer times, accounts solely for Russia's responsibility for the war, and presents a perspective akin to International Relations neoliberal theory. Meanwhile, Lula da Silva provides some views closer to Johan Galtung's theories. Nevertheless, the Brazilian president does not clearly explain the beginning of the war, affirming that negotiation is the pathway to peace. Finally, Xi Jinping stresses his Global Security Initiative and avoids calling "war" what is happening in Ukraine.

Once again, in the centre of Europe, innocent women, men and children are dying or fear for their lives. We condemn this barbaric attack. (Von der Leyen, 2022b).

Conflict and war benefit no one. (…) Dialogue and negotiation are the only viable solution to the Ukraine crisis. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2022b).

I want to end the war. What I think, in the case of Ukraine and Russia, is that you need someone to speak for peace. (Lula da Silva, 2023).

Introduction

In February 2022, Russian troops trespassed the Ukrainian border. Since then, several political leaders have pleaded for terminating the war and re-establishing peace. As the three quotations presented above demonstrate, among these voices are the governments of Brazil, China, and the European Union Commission. However, even though these three defend the settlement of this conflict, they mutually accuse each other of propelling the war. When the Brazilian president visited Portugal, some local parties accused him of being complacent with Russia (Correia, 2023). Also, European leaders and NATO have affirmed that China intended to support the Russian war effort (Fernandes, 2023). In the meantime, the Brazilian president indicated that the EU puts more fuel to the conflict since it sends weaponry to Ukraine (Silva, 2023). His Chinese counterpart also criticizes

the EU and what he considers a "cold war mentality" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2022c). The exception to this exchange of accusations is Brazil and China.

Hence, a paradox arises: one defender of ending the war points out that the other defender puts more fuel to the conflict. Thus, some crucial questions pop up: What are these political leaders discussing about conflict resolution and peace? Are they talking in the same terms? Do they comprehend peace in different definitions? Once these are three key players in the international arena, understanding their perspectives on the Ukraine War gains prominent importance.

A first possibility to answer such questions would be that such positions might be merely rhetorical, not corresponding with a practical application of conflict resolution. Such actors' *de facto* behaviour might differ from their leaders' discourses. Although this perspective seems entirely plausible, cognitive linguistics literature attests that the language applied indicates a lot about the speaker's personality, perceptions about the world, and ideas (Stemler, 2015). In the case of conflicts, the language used by political leaders reveals how they perceive or attempt to convince their audience regarding what they consider morally right (Demasi, 2022). In the ultimate case, messages evoked by political leaders function as stimuli to other leaders (Jervis, 1967). Thus, such messages do have an impact on other international actors and domestic audiences.

A second possibility is that the messages of one international actor do not arrive correctly to a second international actor. As the literature identifies, in periods of war, the official propaganda dismisses the capacity to hear the other (enemy) side of the conflict (Ron, 2009). Since 2014, John Mearsheimer has claimed that the West has not listened to Russian security concerns in the case of Ukraine and Russia. For the American realist, the West reduces its perspective on Ukraine to its rhetoric of Putin's imperialism (Mearsheimer, 2022). This hypothesis has been primarily discussed in the literature in a reductionist discussion of whether Putin's concerns were legitimate. Albeit answering such interrogations is pivotal, finding robust evidence to support one of these sides seems considerably challenging.

Finally, mutual accusations may arise from incompatible peace and conflict resolution perspectives. Hypothetically, the three leaders might comprehend the concept of peace in different terms. This hypothesis turns us automatically to International Relations (IR) theory and peace studies. Indeed, these disciplines discuss the definition of such a concept, not finding a consensual conceptualization (Gouveia Junior, 2022). Definitions of peace appeared as the mere absence of war or violence (Galtung, 1969) to more complex perspectives like security communities (Adler, 1999) or spaces of tranquillity and cooperation (Anderson, 2004; Gouveia Junior, 2022). The literature dismisses this hypothesis concerning the Brazilian, the Chinese, and the European Union's perspectives on the Ukraine War.

Then, this article will focus on the last hypothesis. As the literature vows, analysis of conflict resolution and peace, its properties, and conceptualizations should be more studied (Diehl, 2016; Gleditsch et al., 2014; Gouveia Junior, 2022). This investigation seeks to mitigate such gap, opening new boundaries for further research and searching for substantive evidence to answer the proposed research question.

On this behalf, I proceeded with a content analysis. This method of textual analysis arguably is the most indicated to research aiming to answer "what" questions (Hardy et al., 2004; Pashakhanlou, 2016). My analysis concentrated on official discourses proffered by the presidents of Brazil, Lula da Silva, of China, Xi Jinping, and of the EU Commission, Ursula Von der Leyen. Such examination strives to comprehend what these leaders discuss about conflict resolution and peace in Ukraine and how they conceptualize and believe peace/war emerges and ends.

In the next section, I present a theoretical discussion on peace and war. Such debate will offer the ground for the empirical analysis. After presenting my methodology, I divided my results into two sections: a quantitative content analysis and a qualitative content analysis. The conclusions are presented straight after the results.

International Relations Theory and The Conceptualization of War and Peace

The first scholars to focus on international relations sought to understand why wars emerge and how to create international peace (Richmond, 2008). Since then, theories and approaches have proposed various definitions and conceptualizations of peace/war. Once this study seeks to discuss the purpose and conflict resolution processes defended by decision-makers, introducing IR theories becomes inevitable.

For decades, the realist and the liberal traditions dominated the literature. Whereas the former believed states could achieve international peace, many perceived the realists as more pessimistic (Richmond, 2008). The realist tradition introduced the idea of international anarchy because of the lack of international governance. Earlier realists, like Hans Morgenthau (1948), will argue that states will always seek power under this system. For a neorealist, due to international anarchism, states' vulnerability within the system leads states to seek their security (Waltz, 1988). Thus, one state does not know other states' expectations, being encouraged to invest in military power (Mearsheimer, 1994; Waltz, 1988).

Thereby, bellicism is an inherent consequence of anarchy. John Mearsheimer (1994: 12) elucidates this view well, arguing that "[p]eace, if one defines that concept as a state of tranquillity or mutual concord, is not likely to break out in this world." Most realists comprehend peace as the absence of war. A few tools can mitigate the tendency to violence, like balance of power (Morgenthau, 1948) and nuclear weapons (Waltz, 1993). Even though fear and confrontation permeate the system, the Cold War is also considered a peaceful moment for realist authors (Gaddis, 1986; Waltz, 1988).

The liberal IR tradition is considerably more optimistic about international possibilities for peace (Richmond, 2008). Immanuel Kant is a massive influencer of this tradition, primarily due to his piece *Perpetual Peace*. The philosopher proposes a few steps to establish international peace, including spreading the Republican forms of government (Kant, 1795). From this perspective, many liberal approaches emerged to explain peace and war internationally.

The early idealists, including US President Woodrow Wilson, believed that international organizations of states, like the League of Nations, would disentangle states' propensity for war (Richmond, 2008). Thereupon, some authors like Joseph Nye and Robert Keohane would introduce a theoretical framework called neoliberalism (Jervis, 1999). Neoliberals do not deny the existence of anarchy and its perils. However, for these scholars, international organizations, economic interdependence, and cooperation foster peace and reduce conflict risks (Keohane and Nye, 1973; Keohane and Martin, 1995; Nye, 1971). Through information sharing, international organizations arguably lessen states' mistrust (Keohane and Martin, 1995).

Another perspective prompted by the liberal tradition is the democratic peace theory. Supported by robust quantitative data, this theory contends that democracies never fight each other (Chan, 1997; Russett et al., 1995). Albeit the result seems quasi-consensual, the explanation for this peaceful behaviour is more controversial. Whereas some authors highlight how the democratic voting process discourages political leaders from going to war, others reinforce how existing democracies share some ideological and identitarian features (Chan, 1997).

While realism and liberalism were the two mainstream IR theories for decades, in the 90s, a new stream of thought came to challenge their dominance: constructivism. Emmanuel Adler might be the constructivist writer who gave more attention to theorizing peace and war (Gouveia Junior, 2022). For Adler (1999), peace must be something rather than a mere absence of war. Otherwise, peace does not exist. Then, Adler (1999) proposes that peace represents a security community, a transnational area where actors peacefully conduct changes. Security communities are socially constructed places. Therefore, for a constructivist, peace/war materializes according to shared identities and ideas (Richmond, 2008).

Although many other IR theories discuss how conflicts arise and cease, in my analysis, I will only look at realism, liberalism, and constructivism. This choice is because previous authors have identified these three as the most applied theories among scholars (Maliniak et al., 2012; Snyder, 2009; Walt, 1998). Nevertheless, IR is one of many disciplines concerned with conflict resolution. Peace and conflict studies also dive into such theoretical debates.

Johan Galtung might be the most prominent author from this tradition (Wallensteen, 1988). Refuting to conceptualize peace as a mere absence of war, he argues that peace is the absence of all forms of violence, which "is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations" (Galtung, 1969: 168). Such a broad definition became a target of harsh criticism (Adler, 1999; Boulding, 1978; Schmidt, 1968). Notwithstanding, it allowed Galtung to formulate two ground-breaking concepts: positive and negative peace. The former represents the absence of structural violence, while the latter propounds the absence of physical violence (Galtung, 1969). Later, he proposed the concept of cultural violence, framing the idea of the violence triangle (Galtung, 1990, 1996). For the Norwegian scholar, achieving peace requires finding innovative and harmonious paths to solve conflicts (Galtung, 1996, 2006). Conflict resolution must not only stop a war but also construct a long-lasting peace (Galtung, 1996). From this perspective, Galtung (1990) proposes a differentiation between peace-making, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding.

Many authors deserve a deep analysis within the frame of peace and conflict studies. Nevertheless, it is feasible to delve only into some works in an article. Because of his importance to peace studies, I focused only on Johan Galtung. Considering the three IR mainstream traditions (realism, liberalism, and constructivism) and Johan Galtung's work, I have enough lenses to examine how political leaders present their views on peace.

Methodology

This article proceeds with a content analysis of the official portals of three international actors and their leaders: the European Union (EU) and its president of the EU Commission, Ursula Von der Leyen; Brazil and its president, Lula da Silva; and China and its premier, Xi Jinping. I opted to analyse the discourses of these three leaders for a few reasons. First, the three have been active actors in the Ukraine war. While the EU and China, due to their political and economic size, automatically play a decisive role in global affairs, the Brazilian leader attempted to bring his country to a central position in solving the Ukraine War[1]. Secondly, the three actors represent three different parts of the international system. The EU is central in the Western Hemisphere and supports the Ukrainian war effort. Meanwhile, China represents an antagonist to Western preponderance with an indirect pro-Russia posture (Júnior and Branco, 2022; Sjoli, 2023). Finally, Brazil seeks to maintain a non-aligned position, condemning Russia's military operation without resorting to sanctions (Júnior and Branco, 2022). As China and Brazil are states and the European Union is an international organization, I must refer that comparisons between the EU and other states' foreign policies are

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[1] The result of this attempt is debatable once some authors perceive Brazilian position as merely rhetorical. See Sjoli (2023).

considerably common in the literature (Tocci and Manners, 2008). Foreign policy is a component of the EU, and it will not be problematic to carry out such a comparison.

Thus, I conducted a content analysis of the discourses of these three leaders. I comprehend content analysis as "a research method that systematically analyses the content of communication" (Pashakhanlou, 2017: 3) and "attempt to infer the characteristics and intentions of sources from inspection of the messages they produce" (Holsti apud Jervis, 1967: 367). Content analysis can be conducted in different formats, including text, visual, or audio (Stemler, 2015). This method is particularly efficient in answering "what" research questions rather than "how" and "why" questions (Hardy et al., 2004; Pashakhanlou, 2017). Since this study seeks to comprehend what international actors and their political leaders are defending for resolving the Ukraine War, content analysis works better than other potential methods of textual analysis, like discourse analysis. Furthermore, since the development of new technologies, the IR literature has witnessed a re-emergence of content analysis (Pashakhanlou, 2017; Stemler, 2015).

However, a purely quantitative content analysis can mislead the conclusions of a study. A mere word counting may only provide part of the picture of an IR complex research (Bennett, 2015). Hence, I followed the proposal advanced by Pashakhanlou (2017) of a "fully integrated content analysis." This proposal identifies the necessity to converge a quantitative with a qualitative content analysis while proceeding with a computerized and manual research design (Pashakhanlou, 2017). Such an approach brings content analysis closer to discourse analysis since it comprehends that objective counting cannot measure meaning (Hardy et al., 2004). Several authors have defended combining quantitative and qualitative methods for analysing textual data (Bennett, 2015; Hardy et al., 2004; Pashakhanlou, 2017). Arguably, such multi-method fosters the reliability and validity of the content analysis, mitigating the flaws of this method (Bennett, 2015).

Thus, I divided the results into two sections: the quantitative content analysis and the qualitative content analysis. The former indicates the general recurrence and application of the words, and the latter provides a deeper analysis of the contexts in which these leaders applied some recurrent words. I used the software "Sketch Engine" for both parts. This computerized tool is used primarily in social sciences research and allowed me to identify word recurrence and its application. In the quantitative content analysis, the results reproduce the recurrence of words in the three official portals, including direct citations of leaders and parts written by journalists. For the qualitative content analysis, I considered only direct citations of the three political leaders.

I gathered my dataset from official sources to analyse how the three political leaders discussed peace and conflict resolution. Regarding Von der Leyen, I collected her statements from the European Union Commission portal (www.ec.commission.eu). Concerning Lula da Silva, I got his comments from the governmental portal in English and Portuguese (www.gov.br). Meanwhile, for the Chinese leader, I only considered the official pages written in English because of linguistic limitations. Thus, I included texts from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (www.fmprc.gov.cn).

In the three official portals, I searched their internal research engine for the combination of "statement on Ukraine" and the leaders' names. For instance, I searched the Brazilian governmental portal for "statement on Ukraine Lula." I gathered all the results, excluding only the joint statements of these leaders. I restricted the search between January 2022 and June 2023. Unfortunately, in the Brazilian portal, the data collected in English was considerably small. It comprises only 16320 words. Thus, I made a second dataset for Lula da Silva's speeches in Portuguese. When linguistics inferences did not require the text to be in English, I used the data in Portuguese. Concerning Xi Jinping, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs website shows any official activities as a result of the search. Some of them did not mention directly the Chinese president.

My dataset comprised a total of 169307 words, divided as follows:

Table 1- Distribution of words per international actor

Actor	Words
Brazil	79032
China	54356
European Union	35919

Data composed by articles [online] from gov.br, fmprc.gov.cn, ec.commission.eu.

I must highlight that although the European Union data is smaller than the other two, it includes mainly direct citations of Ursula Von der Leyen. Thus, it was not a problem for the qualitative content analysis. Meanwhile, the Brazilian and Chinese portals display texts in which official journalists quote the two leaders in Lula da Silva's and Xi Jinping's datasets. This difference is due to how the three official portals displayed their information. While the Commission website offers complete samples of Von der Leyen statements, the Chinese and Brazilian portals quote their presidents akin to journalistic news. Hence, the quantitative content analysis focuses on the words used by the official portals, while the qualitative part dives into the leaders' discourses.

Conceptual Analysis - General Comparison

The first quantitative content analysis conducted was the identification of the recurrence of four keywords: peace, war, Ukraine, and Russia. I depicted these results, including the media of words per one thousand words spoken, in Table 2. This table also indicates some characteristics of my data. For example, summing up the four words, the Brazilian portal has considerably fewer mentions per one thousand words. It indicates that Lula da Silva probably talks more about issues beyond the Ukraine War in the articles collected.

Table 2 – Mentions and mentions per one thousand words (peace, war, Russia, Ukraine)

Words	Brazil	China	European Union
Peace (total mentions)	148	159	16
Peace (mentions/one thousand words)	1,87	2,92	0,44
War (total mentions)	110	27	136
War (mentions/one thousand words)	1,39	0,49	3,77
Russia (total mentions)	81	369	159
Russia (mentions/one thousand words)	1,02	6,78	4,41
Ukraine (total mentions)	144	152	339
Ukraine (mentions/one thousand words)	1,82	2,79	9,42

Data composed by articles [online] from gov.br, fmprc.gov.cn, ec.commission.eu.

Table 2 also offers some initial results. First, Von der Leyen seldom talks about peace. Indeed, the EU portal is the one that discussed more about war. In the contrary direction, assuming the entire articles published in the Brazilian official portal, "peace" (161 times) was more cited than "war" (113 times). Nonetheless, when considering only Lula's speeches, I found that he still mentions the word "war" (42 times) more than "peace" (34 times). It is a bewitching result, given that the Brazilian recurrently contends that some political leaders have only discussed the war to the detriment of peace. The same happened to China, where peace (165 times) arose more frequently than war (27 times). Nevertheless, I must reinforce that the Chinese portal avoids using this word in referring to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. They mentioned "crisis," for instance, 91 times.

Concerning the number of mentions of "Russia" and "Ukraine," the European Union portal includes more mentions of the word "Ukraine," while the Chinese website mentions the word "Russia." The Brazilian dataset stands in the middle, with a more balanced citation. It coincides with the postures of the three states towards the two countries. I must note, however, that "Russia" probably appeared more in the Chinese data because their portal included many articles not directly connected to Ukraine in the research results.

Having concluded this initial identification, I analyse the three portals' most used terms. A vital outcome of this analysis is the difference between how the official communication channels call what is happening in Ukraine. Xi Jinping and his Ministry of Foreign Affairs refer to it as the "Ukraine issue" (26 times) or the "Ukraine crisis" (55 times). Therefore, like the Russian president, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs avoids using "war" to refer to Ukraine. In the meantime, Lula and the Brazilian official portal utilize a variety of terms, "war in Ukraine" (11 times) being the most applied, followed by "Ukraine War" (7 times), "Conflict in Ukraine" (6 times), and "Ukrainian issue" (4 times).

Notwithstanding, the most important result of this analysis is regarding Von der Leyen. The Commission president calls it the "Russian war" (13 times), the "Putin's War" (13 times), or the "Kremlin War" (1 time). This reference is particularly representative. The EU reinforces Russia's accountability for the occurrence of the conflict through this terminology. Usually, we name wars after the location where they occur. If this is not the case, the Vietnam War and the Iraq War would be called the US War. However, Von der Leyen avoids using the expression war in Ukraine or Ukraine War. This combination, "war in Ukraine," only arose five times; in three, it appeared as "Russian war in Ukraine."

Another ubiquitous method in content analysis studies is identifying modifiers of particular words. Below, I present the most used modifiers and words modified in the three datasets. The only expressive result concerns China. The word "crisis" accompanied "Ukraine" many times. Furthermore, "peace talks" indicate a defence of peace negotiation. On the other hand, "nuclear" was the most used modifier of the word "war." It suggests that nuclear war is a primary concern for China.

Table 3 – Most used modifiers for "peace", "war", "Russia" and "Ukraine".

Word	Condition	Brazil*	China	European Union
Ukraine	Modifier	War (2)	Crisis (55)	Member (2)
Ukraine	Modified by	President (1)	Eastern (1)	Russian-occupied (2)
Russia	Modifier	-	Circumstance (2)	
Russia	Modified by	-	Leadership (5)	
Peace	Modifier	Agreement (2)	Talks (32)	-
Peace	Modified by	World (4)	World (20)	Lasting (3)
War	Modifier	President (1)	Benefit (1)	Crime (5)
War	Modified by	Ukraine (2)	Nuclear (11)	Brutal (6)

Data composed by articles [online] from gov.br, fmprc.gov.cn, ec.commission.eu.

*Since modifiers are not used in Portuguese, I used the dataset in English.

Another stimulating tool for conceptual analysis is the N-grams. N-grams determine the recurrence of combinations of specific words. The results of N-grams of 3-4 words were quite illustrative. The data of the Brazilian government indicates that "*os dois países*" (the two countries), "*as Nações Unidas*" (the United Nations), and "*o Conselho de segurança*" (the Security Council) are among the most cited N-grams with 63, 57 and 53 mentions respectively. Only the president's name appeared more frequently than these phrases. The combination *Rússia e Ucrânia* (Russia and Ukraine) emerged considerably fewer times, with 22 mentions. This result demonstrates how Lula da Silva and its government give primacy to the United Nations and its Security Council in their official discourses. As depicted later in this article, reframing the Security Council is one of the solutions proposed by the Brazilian president to solve further international conflicts.

The Chinese data N-grams reveal that the most common combinations of three words are "the two sides" (121 times), "between the two" (89 times), and "China and Russia" (76 times). These terms do not necessarily refer to the Ukraine war since many of the excerpts in my dataset also discussed other issues besides this conflict. Meanwhile, only one combination connected to the Ukraine-Russia conflict arises among the fifty most cited: "the Ukraine crises" (44 times). The Chinese N-grams demonstrate that the Russia-Ukraine war did not receive the special attention of Chinese officials in the texts collected.

In the meantime, "the European Union" (81 times), "we have to" (28 times), and "Russian fossil fuels" (23 times) are the three most recurrent combinations mentioned by Von der Leyen in the EU portal. Besides "Russian fossil fuels," "the Russian economy" (13 times) and "dependency on Russia" (12 times) appeared among the most cited terms. It certifies how the economic aspect gains prominence in Von der Leyen's speeches. In particular, she asserts the necessity to surmount the dependence on Russian oil. With the word Ukraine, the most frequent combination is "people of Ukraine" (14 times). This result proposes that the European Union attempts to talk more about the victims of the war. Neither the Brazilian nor the Chinese portals commonly employ this term. Mentioning the victims reinforces the finding that the EU considers Putin guilty of the war.

Qualitative Content Analysis: European Union.

Searching for the positions where the words "war", "peace", "Ukraine", and "Russia" appeared in the European Commissioner dataset can offer some key findings. For Von der Leyen (2023), the reason for the war in Ukraine lies in Putin's imperialistic desires. She affirms that the Russian president aims to bring the world back to a past of "power politics" and "brutal use of force" (Von der Leyen, 2022d). The EU Commission President goes even further, asserting that:

> [t]he playbook of Russia's aggression against Ukraine comes straight out of another century. Treating millions of people not as human beings but as faceless populations to be moved, controlled, or set as a buffer between military forces. Trying to trample the aspiration of an entire nation with tanks." (Von der Leyen, 2022f).

According to the EU leader, Russia is also waging a war in energy (Von der Leyen, 2022g) and in public media (Von der Leyen, 2023). She accuses the Russian president of circulating propaganda and boosting energy prices, expecting to disentangle what she considers to be the EU unity (Von der Leyen, 2022g). Therefore, according to the statements analysed in this study, Von der Leyen affirms that the Ukraine War occurred due to Putin's antiquated perspective of global affairs. Moreover, the Russian president seeks to re-establish an old international order based on power politics while destabilizing the European Union.

Von der Leyen indicates her perspectives about constructing peace on a few occasions. First, she argues that "[t]he very reason why our Union was created is to put an end to all European wars." (Von der Leyen, 2022a). This statement interacts particularly well with neoliberals' assertion that the European Union "has created a Kantian Island of peace in the international system" (Nye and Goldsmith, 2011: 52). For IR neoliberal theorists, economic interdependence diminishes the perils of international anarchy since it raises the losses for going to war (Keohane and Martin, 1995). Speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Von der Leyen reinforces this proposition: "It is difficult to believe that in Davos today we are talking about war. Because the Davos spirit is the antithesis of war, it is about forging ties and together finding solutions for the big challenges of the world." (Von der Leyen, 2022f). Concerning the grain crisis the war created, she affirms that "[g]lobal cooperation is the antidote against Russia's blackmail" (Von der Leyen, 2022f).

Besides the ties created by international organizations and economic interdependence, Von der Leyen stresses how the antithesis of war/peace intertwines with autocracy/democracy. The war in Ukraine appears in her discourses as being Russian aggression against European "energy," "democracy," and "values" (Von der Leyen, 2022g). This connection brings her closer to another liberal theory of IR, the democratic peace theory. The Commission President makes her point clear in such a statement pronounced a few days after the beginning of the invasion:

> This is a clash between the rule of law and the rule of the gun, between democracies and autocracies, between a rules-based order and a world of naked aggression. How we respond today to what Russia is doing will determine the future of the international system. The destiny of Ukraine is at stake, but our own fate also lies in the balance. We must show the power that lies in our democracies, the power of people who choose their independent paths freely and democratically. (Von der Leyen, 2022c).

In her meeting with India's President Narendra Modi, Von der Leyen demonstrates how she perceives democracy as fundamental to any solid peace. She affirms: "I am convinced that democracies will have a crucial role to play in defining the world of tomorrow." (Von der Leyen, 2022e). Indeed, the European leader refers considerably to the words democracies (21 times), democracy (16 times), and democratic (6 times).

Finally, concerning how to end this war, Von der Leyen (2022f) is particularly clear: "Ukraine must win this war. And Putin's aggression must be a failure". The Commissioner reinforces how overcoming the European economic dependence on Russian fuels signifies a fundamental step towards making the invasion a failure (Von der Leyen, 2022b). The economic sanctions arose as another tool to damage the Russian economy. The European politician did not mention "negotiation" or "negotiate" in any official statements considered in this analysis.

China

The data collected in the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs portal indicates a distinct comprehension of Chinese officials concerning the causes of the war. Xi Jinping speaks with Vladimir Putin on the phone on 25th February 2022, a few days after the Russian invasion of Ukraine began. The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs affirms that the Russian president told his Chinese counterpart he initiated his "special military operation" because of NATO's discredit of Russian security concerns (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2022c). Xi Jinping affirms that he comprehends Russia's concerns, rejects the "Cold War mentality," and supports a negotiated cessation of the conflicts (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2022c). Months later, Xi Jinping "explicitly pointed out that we in the international community should reject zero-sum games and jointly oppose hegemonism and power politics." (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2022e).

The foreign ministry Wang Yi fosters Xi Jinping's perspective affirming that "the legitimate security concerns of any country must be respected (...). What has happened on the Ukraine issue has much to do with the long delay in effectively implementing the Minsk II agreements." (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2022a). Wang Yi deepens his thoughts on the causes of the war in Ukraine in a conference with Sergi Lavrov, the Russian ministry of foreign affairs. To the Chinese representative, the war in Ukraine "is both an outburst of long built-up tensions over Europe's security problems, and an outcome of Cold War mentality and bloc confrontation." (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2022d).

Finally, Xi Jinping indicates his views on creating peace in a few passages. His "Global Security Initiative" stands at the centre of his proposal and appeared recurrently in my dataset (13 times). The Chinese president introduced this initiative at the G20 summit in Bali as follows:

> I have put forward the Global Security Initiative (GSI). Our goal is to work with all parties to champion the spirit of the UN Charter, act on the principle of indivisible security, uphold the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security, advocate the resolution of conflicts through negotiation and settlement of disputes through consultation, and support all efforts conducive to the peaceful settlement of crises. (Xi Jinping, 2022).

The Global Security Initiative (GSI) includes six core concepts and principles, twenty priorities of cooperation, and five platforms for cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2023a). Focusing on the core principles, we can find some indications of Xi Jinping's perspectives on peace. First, he advances the concept of "common security," upholding a view of symbiotic world peace. The second principle is sovereignty and territorial integrity, followed by a defence of the United Nations charter. The fourth principle defends the necessity to take the security concerns of all countries seriously. Finally, the fifth principle is to solve conflicts through dialogue, and the sixth principle commits to traditional and non-traditional security.

The second and the fourth principles appeared as a dichotomy regarding the Ukraine War. Xi Jinping's GSI defends the territorial integrity of sovereign states like Ukraine, automatically refusing occupations in territories like the Donbas. Nevertheless, in a few articles in my analysis, I have found that the Chinese leader demonstrates some comprehensiveness regarding Russian reasons to invade Ukraine. On this behalf, the fourth point of China GSI explains this position. According to a few excerpts, Xi Jinping believes that to end the war in Ukraine, negotiation must consider the security concerns of both sides (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2022f; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2023b).

Brazil

In the texts analysed in this study, I did not find a clear indication by the Brazilian president on how he comprehended the beginning of this conflict. In an interview with Brazilian journalists, the president defends the necessity of considering all countries' political interests in peace negotiations (gov.br, 2023b). Hence, he interrogates: "Is NATO the problem? Let us discuss with Americans and Europeans (...) I think that at a negotiation table, we can make miracles." (gov.br, 2023b). Thereby, Lula da Silva indicates that he perceives that any peace negotiation shall consider Russia's security concerns.

Nevertheless, Lula da Silva deplored the Russian invasion of Ukraine in a few opportunities (gov.br, 2023a). Once the criticism of his position rose, Lula attempted in a few moments to clarify his perspective: "I have never equalized Russia and Ukraine. I know what an invasion is and what

territorial integrity is. However, now, the war has already started, and someone needs to talk about peace" [2] (gov.br, 2023c, author's translation).

A few passages expound on how Lula's perspective interacts with the abovementioned theories. The most elucidative of these statements is: "The first step is not peace. The first step is the necessity to stop the war. When this war ends, it is possible that we create conditions to negotiate the end of this war forever and that the countries can put themselves in a deal." [3] (Lula da Silva, 2023e, author's translation). In this excerpt, Lula da Silva demonstrates that for him, only stopping the war does not signify the creation of peace. Such an argument brings him closer to Johan Galtung's differentiation on negative/positive peace or peacekeeping/peacebuilding. I did not find this approach in Xi Jinping or Von der Leyen's speeches.

The word "food" appeared most recurrently cited by the Brazilian president. Although his Chinese and European counterparts also showed profound concerns about the grain deals between Russia and Ukraine, Lula da Silva was the leader who brought this issue to the spotlight. He claimed on different occasions against the unfairness that the poorest states were the ones that suffered the most from famine (gov. br, 2023a). To some extent, his argument lays in an imperative necessity to stop the war to stop food insecurity in the Global South (gov.br, 2023f). This view also brings him closer to Galtung's theorization since the Norwegian scholar endeavours to include famine as a form of structural violence (Galtung, 1969).

In many moments, Lula da Silva uses the phrase *falar em paz* (to talk about peace). Consolidating Brazil as a potential mediator, the Latin American leader asserts that Brazil was willing to call all crucial parties and bring them back to dialogue (gov.br, 2023e). Moreover, he asserts at the G7 meeting in Japan that it is necessary to talk about peace "because no solution will be lasting if it is not based on dialogue" [4] (Lula da Silva, 2023, author's translation).

Lula even proposes the creation of a G20 for peace to deepen the conversations about peace (gov.br, 2023b; gov.br, 2023d). In his words, such a G20 could overcome the dominant discussion on war and open the way to discussions about settling the conflict (gov.br, 2023b). Comparing the current situation caused by the Russian invasion to the 2008 financial crisis, Lula proposes that "when there was the economic crisis in 2008, rapidly, we created the G20, attempting to save the economy. Now, it is important to create another G20 to end the war and to establish peace" [5] (gov.br, 2023d, author's translation). The Brazilian president advances this proposal, especially in conversations with European leaders like Emanuel Macron and Pedro Sanchez.

This claim for a return in peace conversations always accompanied criticism of the Security Council (gov.br, 2023d; Lula da Silva, 2023). At the G7 meeting, after reinforcing the necessity to create bridges of dialogue about peace, Lula da Silva (2023) pointed out the paralysis of the council. The Brazilian leader also criticizes how its members have disrespected the UN charter by waging wars without the Security Council's consent (Lula da Silva, 2023). In another moment, Lula da Silva argues that the US, France, the UK, and Russia have invaded other countries' territories without following international law (gov.br, 2023d). Concerning the Ukraine War, the South American

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[2] Original text: *Eu nunca igualei Rússia e Ucrânia. Eu sei o que é invasão e o que é integridade territorial. Mas agora a guerra já começou e alguém precisa falar em paz.*
[3] Original text: *O primeiro caminho não é da paz. O primeiro caminho é da necessidade de parar a guerra. Quando parar a guerra, é possível que a gente crie condições de negociar o fim dessa guerra para sempre e que os países possam se colocar de acordo.*
[4] Original text: Nenhuma solução será duradoura se não for baseada no diálogo.
[5] Original text: Quando houve a crise econômica de 2008, rapidamente, nós criamos o G20 para tentar salvar a economia. Agora é importante criar um outro G20 para acabar com a guerra e estabelecer a paz.

politician concludes that the absence of discussion about this war at the UN Security Council attests to the necessity to reformulate this institution (gov.br, 2023).

Conclusion

Lula da Silva, Ursula Von der Leyen, and Xi Jinping do not discuss what is happening in Ukraine in the same terms. While the European leader criticizes the "Russia's War," Xi Jinping aims to mitigate the "Ukraine crisis." This identification represents a first step to comprehending how countries perceive and discuss the conflict.

Bringing back Mearsheimer's perspective after the invasion of Crimea in 2014, at that point, he affirmed that "according to the prevailing wisdom of the West, the Ukraine crisis can be blamed almost entirely on Russian aggression (…). But this account is wrong" (Mearsheimer, 2014: 77). The results found in this content analysis show that the EU leader maintains such a view. Nevertheless, the quotes from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicate that neither Xi Jinping nor other Chinese decision-makers agree to blame Russia for the war in Ukraine. Meanwhile, Lula da Silva does not propose a clear explanation for the Ukraine war, blaming Russia and the West.

Von der Leyen's statements reflect an IR neoliberal perspective. She reaffirms that cooperation and democracy are sources of international peace. Furthermore, the European leader highlights the economic necessity to overcome the European dependency on Russian fuels. Xi Jinping and the Chinese government have a more dual approach. While the Chinese excerpts indicate a comprehension of Russia's security concerns, coming closer to realist thoughts, Xi Jinping claims against what the Chinese consider a "Cold War mentality."

Furthermore, the Chinese president recurrently defends negotiation and peace talks, having some affirmations that bring him closer to peace researchers. In the meantime, Lula da Silva appears closer to Johan Galtung's proposals, affirming that only stopping the war does not signify the creation of peace. He argues that through dialogue, leaders could find a solution for the conflict, which is pivotal to mitigating famine. His terminology highlights food insecurity as a form of structural violence.

The three leaders agree on rejecting power politics and using force. They all believe that war is undesirable, arguing for the necessity to stop it. Moreover, they refuse what they consider outdated international behaviour. Especially Xi Jinping and Von der Leyen assert that the crises arose because of old perspectives of the international order. Whereas the Chinese president argues that a Cold War mentality caused the conflict, the European leader claims that Putin has an antique, truculent comprehension of global affairs. Both reject the past, envisioning a world order without armed conflicts. The three leaders also defend the territorial integrity of sovereign states.

Therefore, this study deepens the theoretical discussion on leaders' perspectives on peace. As some scholars have claimed, comprehending peace and war is still necessary. Once political leaders enjoy considerable autonomy in formulating foreign policy, studying leaders' speeches is crucial to understanding conflicts, how they emerge, and how to solve them. Although the three leaders analysed in this study show different beliefs concerning the war in Ukraine, they all share some common claims. I found a convergent rejection of power politics, the use of force, and the international system forged by wars. These results can encourage further research about leaders' perspectives on international conflicts.

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