



RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Between (ir)responsibility and (in)appropriateness: Conceptualizing norm-related state behaviour in the Russian war against Ukraine

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## Abstract

The Russian war against Ukraine has challenged fundamental norms such as sovereignty, non-interference and the prohibition of the use of force. It has led to diverse reactions from the international community. Only very few states sided with Russia, some states remained neutral, while the vast majority condemned the attack and supported Ukraine in its right to self-defence. Thus, although there is no legal obligation, many states display behaviour that goes beyond diplomatic support. They support Ukraine financially and even deliver weapons to support Ukraine in its right to self-defence. In this article, we conceptualize different types of actors' behaviour in world politics. We distinguish between responsible, irresponsible, appropriate, and inappropriate behaviour. We apply this typology to states' reaction to the Russian war against Ukraine. The typology enables us to analyse the variation of the responses with reference to norms and responsibility, two core concepts of International Relations (IR) Theory and global politics. Counterintuitively as it might seem, we argue that the support of Ukraine with weapons can be categorized as responsible behaviour as it displays an over-fulfilment of the right to self-defence norm, which leads to the emergence of a new norm: the *responsibility to support* norm.

**Keywords:** international support; non-interference; norm-related behaviour; Russian invasion of Ukraine; sovereignty; Ukraine

## 1. Introduction

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 and the subsequent war have constituted a shock and massive crisis for global politics and the liberal international order. They have brought into question fundamental norms enshrined in the UN Charter, such as sovereignty, non-interference and the prohibition of the use of force. They have also spotlighted the right of self-defence enshrined in Article 51 of the UN Charter. While, eight years before, Russia illegally attacked and annexed Crimea as well as supported secessionist movements in the Donbas (Eisler et al. 2022: 5), this time the invasion was not

a covert operation but rather a visible and apparent attack by Russia (Grant 2015; Zinets and Vasovic 2022). Moreover, another decisive difference was the reaction of the international community. While in 2014, states did condemn Russia and imposed certain sanctions (e.g. European Union External Action 2021), overall the reaction, while justifiable with reference to relevant international norms, remained limited. This time around, things looked different: several states not only used the means available under internationally recognized norms to condemn Russia's behaviour, but went beyond the normative prescription of these norms to support Ukraine militarily.

Against this backdrop, we raise two research questions: First, how can we conceptualize and understand the different behaviour of states in the Russian war against Ukraine? And second, how does this behaviour impact existing norms and the emergence of new norms? To answer these questions, this article introduces a conceptualization of norm-related behaviours grounded in constructivist approaches. Doing so enables us to analyse the responses by states and the variation of the responses with reference to norms and responsibility, two core concepts of international relations (IR) theory and global politics. This analysis allows for a better understanding of state behaviour in global politics and helps to categorize the variation of state behaviours we observe. As counter-intuitive as it might seem – and against insights of more critical approaches in peace and conflict studies – we argue that, in this specific instance, the support of Ukraine with weapons and intelligence can be categorized as 'responsible behaviour'.

To answer our research questions and develop our approach, we proceed as follows. Part II provides an overview of how states reacted to the Russian war against Ukraine and looks at their various justifications and the legal foundations on which they are grounded. Part III offers a brief discussion of the relevant literature on Russia and Ukraine since 2014 and relevant debates within the literature on norms and responsibility. Part IV conceptualizes different types of actors' behaviour in world politics we have developed elsewhere (Gholiagha and Siemknecht *forthcoming*). We distinguish between responsible, irresponsible, appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. By applying the typology to the behaviour of states in the Russian war against Ukraine, we will demonstrate in Part V that the variations of state behaviour in the war can be categorized as one of the four types of actors' behaviour. Zooming into responsible behaviour as one of the four types, we identify and discuss the effects of such behaviour on existing norms and demonstrate how such behaviour can be norm-generative (Part VI). Part VII concludes the article by offering an outlook on future applications of our typology and by presenting some necessary normative reflections.

### *A normative reflection*

Before we proceed, it is important to disclose our own normative positioning. We write and study as Western scholars with the normative conviction that certain human rights and liberties are universal and cannot be negotiated. Concerning the Russian war against Ukraine, we agree with the assessment of many scholars and political actors that Russia is the aggressor, and that Ukraine has a right to self-defence. Thus, we start not from a neutral position (if such a thing exists), but from a normative standpoint that acknowledges the liberal international order that we see manifested in the UN Charter. We know that the reference to the liberal international order is not unproblematic. However, we lack the space to discuss ongoing contestations and the limitations of the order here. Alex Bellamy (2019) has wonderfully summarized the issue.

## II. States' reaction to the Russian invasion and their justifications for support

In response to the Russian aggression, we have seen a wide variety of reactions by states supporting Ukraine, ranging from diplomatic condemnation and the imposition of sanctions to material support in the form of financial aid and weapons delivery. Diplomatic condemnation occurred primarily through the UN General Assembly and other UN bodies. In the first Emergency Special Session on the Russian attack against Ukraine, 141 states voted in favour of UN General Assembly (UNGA) Emergency Special Session Resolution 11/1 on 2 March 2022, condemning Russia aggression against Ukraine and the violation of UN Charter Article 2(4), a picture repeated on 24 March 2022 when 140 states voted in favour of Emergency Special Session Resolution 11/2 (UN General Assembly 2022a, 2022c; United Nations 2022a, 2022b). On 7 April 2022, Russia's membership of the UN Human Rights Council was suspended (UN General Assembly 2022d), while on 12 October 2022, 143 states voted to condemn Russia's illegal annexation of four Ukrainian regions (UN General Assembly 2022e). In November 2022, the UNGA adopted Emergency Special Session Resolution 11/5, which dealt *inter alia* with the issue of remedy and reparations (UN General Assembly 2022b). In February 2023, one year after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the UNGA backed a resolution condemning Russia's invasion and stressing the 'adverse impact of the war on global food security, energy, nuclear security and safety and the environment' (UN General Assembly 2023). The UN Human Rights Council has condemned the attack, as has the G7 (G7 2022). In addition, the Human Rights Council established an independent commission investigating human rights violations and abuses in Ukraine (Human Rights Council 2022).

Moreover, states have called out Russian actions as war crimes and have begun to support Ukraine in collecting evidence of such crimes for later prosecutions. The International Criminal Court (ICC) opened an investigation on 2 March 2022 after a record-breaking 43 member states referred the situation to the Court (ICC 2022). Following the referral and an investigation by the ICC, in March 2023 the Court unsealed an arrest warrant against Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Commissioner for Children's Rights in the Office of the President of the Russian Federation, Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova. An unsealed arrest warrant against an acting president and a president of a country with permanent membership in the UN Security Council is unprecedented. The arrest warrant focuses on the deportation of Ukrainian children as a war crime (ICC 2023; Kersten 2023; Vasiliev 2023).

While most states condemned Russia's behaviour by voting in favour of the above-mentioned resolutions or making statements supporting Ukraine, very few states sided with Russia, voting against the resolutions, and only some abstained. Voting in favour of the resolutions shows the diplomatic support of many states in the UNGA. However, how and to what extent states have assisted Ukraine varies starkly. Some have asserted pressure against Russia by implementing economic sanctions or providing financial support to Ukraine. Other states have gone so far as to provide military intelligence and deliver weapons to Ukraine. This has often included not only the weapons but also munitions or ammunition, technical support, medical treatment and military training (Antezza et al. 2023). In summary, we see that many states support Ukraine *vis-à-vis* Russia, but the level and type of support have varied considerably.

State behaviour beyond diplomatic support is noteworthy because states have no legal obligation to support Ukraine in such a substantive manner, including the delivery of weapons. Neither the UN Charter nor *ius ad bellum* or *ius in bello* obliges states to support another state under attack. The UN Security Council (UNSC) can authorize the use of

force to restore international peace and security under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. Given that the aggressor – in this case, Russia – is a permanent UNSC member, a UN-led or UN-authorized intervention is highly unlikely.<sup>1</sup> In such cases where the Council is unable or unwilling to act, states under attack retain a right to individual and collective self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter.

Individual self-defence is usually understood as defending the state against an armed attack without the direct support of a third party, while collective self-defence refers to a third party assisting the state under attack with force (Padmanabhan and Shih 2012: 4). Ukraine has asked for other states' support, but not for their direct involvement, as states made it clear early on that this was not an option. And even in those few instances where direct involvement was requested by Ukraine, such as calls for the implementation of a no-fly zone, it was strongly rejected by those states supporting Ukraine (McCroary and Lewis 2022). This, in our reading, means that Ukraine is exercising individual self-defence with the support of other states, but that the support does not constitute collective self-defence.<sup>2</sup>

How do states justify their support for Ukraine, especially when it goes beyond diplomatic support? States supporting Ukraine militarily, especially NATO states, refer to Ukraine's right to individual self-defence in their justifications for their military support (Blinken 2023; NATO 2023). In doing so, they underline their responsibility to support Ukraine's right to individual self-defence. Perhaps the most interesting case of military support is Germany. For well-known historical reasons, post-World War II-Germany had a strong conviction that it should not deliver weapons into active conflicts. Yet it took only two days to decide to deliver weapons to Ukraine to enable its self-defence (Herszenhorn et al. 2022). In a special session of the German Bundestag, Chancellor Olaf Scholz (2022) declared that this was the only possible answer to Putin's aggression. In the same session, Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock (2022) clarified that the decision to support the Ukrainian military was not taken lightly, but it was within Germany's and its Allies' responsibility to do so. The notion of responsibility was also reiterated in statements by NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, such as the following in November 2022:

We have a responsibility as Allies, of course, to protect each other as NATO Allies. But we also have a responsibility to ensure that our close partners, especially those who are most vulnerable of Russian, coercion and aggression, like Georgia, that although have experienced Russian military aggression back in 2008, that we support them. And I strongly believe that as long as we don't achieve, or we are not able to, to get full membership for these countries, then we should at least provide them with significant support. If there's any lesson from Ukraine is that we should have supported Ukraine even more, even earlier. (Stoltenberg 2022)

<sup>1</sup>This is one of the reasons that the General Assembly took action under the Uniting for Peace Resolution procedure established in 1950 (Krasno and Das 2008; United Nations 1950). Another route may lie in drawing on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). However, this norm focuses primarily on intrastate conflicts and governments inability to protect their populations from mass atrocity crimes. Even if one were to choose this route, it would fail in light of the veto power of Russia in the UN Security Council. Nevertheless scholars have discussed R2P in the context of Ukraine (Barber 2022; Bosse 2022; Ralph 2022).

<sup>2</sup>We discuss why below in Part V.

This brief discussion of the legal foundations and the illustrations for states' justifications demonstrates that there is no clear legal obligation to support Ukraine with weapons. Existing norms do not obligate such support. Instead, states draw on norms, such as Ukraine's right to self-defence (Article 51, UN Charter) when justifying their behaviour. So, while the support we have seen is clearly permissible, it is not a legal obligation. Therefore, we see the military support for Ukraine as a case where states overfulfil an existing norm.

But what does an overfulfilment of a norm mean? So far, constructivist approaches have not provided a compelling answer to this question. At the same time, the observed behaviour similarly constitutes a puzzle for approaches that do not consider normative questions or ethical issues. Given the normative and moral-based justifications for supporting Ukraine, we hold that by bringing together more critical constructivist perspectives with research on responsibility, we can provide the basis of the necessary conceptualization and a better understanding of such behaviour. Before offering our conceptualization of state behaviour, Part III briefly discusses two strands of literature: current research on the Russian war against Ukraine and existing research on the relationship between norms and responsibility.

### III. A brief survey of the literature

The Russian aggression against Ukraine before 2022 has been subject to ample academic analysis (Eisler et al. 2022, 5). The illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, for example, was studied by Betsy Jose and Christoph H. Stefes (2022) focusing on Russia's normative agenda. In addition, scholars have offered different explanations for the annexation and conducted analyses from different theoretical perspectives and disciplines, including international law, constructivism and area studies (Bering 2017; Gardner 2016; Hopf 2016).

When it comes to the analysis of Russia's full-scale invasion on 24 February 2022, scholarly work has focused on the explanatory power of different IR theories, with a particular focus on the question of whether (neo)realism offers the most convincing explanation (Mearsheimer 2022; Rösch 2022; Walt 2022; van Rythoven 2022; Zürn 2022). From the neorealist perspective, power relations and different geopolitical interests are crucial in explaining the behaviour of Russia and the NATO states. In this sense, weapons delivery would be an expression of security interests by NATO states.

However, these explanations ignore normative and ethical issues related to the question of what behaviour is right (Ralph 2018). Moreover, this perspective fails to explain why not only NATO states but the vast majority of states supported the condemnation of Russia's behaviour in the UNGA, and many non-NATO members also delivered weapons. Thus, we move away from the dominant focus of the debate on whether (neo)realism offers a valid explanation for the Russian war against Ukraine. We do so by shifting from finding explanations for Russia's behaviour to assessing and typologizing the behaviour of states not directly involved in the conflict.

To this end, we suggest focusing on norms given that, while different understandings and types of norms exist, all norms contain normative expectations about a specific behaviour of actors (Jurkovich 2020: 694–95; Winston 2018: 3). Therefore, it seems clear that to understand the variation in state behaviour, we need to understand how the behaviour of actors is related to norms. Importantly, in our understanding, norms are not fixed in their meaning. Rather, we understand them as both procedural and as things (Krook and True 2012), 'as soft institutions' (Orchard and Wiener 2023: 6). Their

meaning is determined *in-use* (Wiener 2009). The long-existing research tradition on norms has answered questions such as how norms emerge (see Finnemore and Sikkink 1998) and why actors comply (Chayes and Chayes 1993; Wiener 2004). Yet, as we have shown elsewhere in more detail (Gholiagha and Sienknecht *forthcoming*), one issue remains under-theorized: situations in which actors overfulfill norms. Conceptualizing such behaviour falls under normative theorizing, which to this day remains a challenge for IR norms scholarship (Erskine 2012; Havercroft 2018). We turn to responsibility literature to fill this gap and enable norms research to study situations of norm overfulfilment.

Regarding responsibility as a second central literature for our contribution, it has received growing attention in IR literature (Erskine 2003b, 2008; Hansen-Magnusson and Vetterlein 2020, 2021; Sienknecht and Vetterlein 2023). Here, relevant work has discussed questions of moral agency (Hoover 2012; Erskine 2003a, 2008) and the capacity to act (Bukovansky et al. 2012). Both concepts are central to assessing whether and how a state should act – in other words, under which conditions and in which situations a state acts responsibly. So far, scholars have discussed the necessity of such responsible behaviour in specific policy fields (Park and Vetterlein 2010) and have focused on the notion of responsibility in context-specific norms such as the responsibility to protect (Arbour 2008). Relevant literature in the field has underlined that responsibility can best be understood as a concept that sets actors, objects and norms in relation to each other (Sienknecht 2021a; Sondermann et al. 2018). We argue and demonstrate in the following section that this relational understanding, combined with an ethical standpoint, helps to distinguish different norm-related behaviour.

#### IV. Conceptualization of state behaviour

This section presents a typology of norm-related behaviour we have developed in more detail elsewhere (Gholiagha and Sienknecht *forthcoming*). The typology is based on norms and responsibility as two central concepts in IR and reference points in global politics. In this section, we present the four types of norm-related behaviour and our typology.

Building on the above presented norm conceptualization, we assume that a shared understanding of the norm in a given situation is possible to identify for researchers. In the context of the Russian war against Ukraine, the prohibition of the use of force (Art. 2 (4) UN Charter) and Ukraine's right to individual self-defence (Art. 51, UN Charter) constitute the most relevant norms and define which behaviour is seen as (in)appropriate for the conflict parties. Of course, this shared understanding is not fixed, but depends on the context in which the norm is applied and the norms' *meaning-in-use* (Gholiagha et al. 2021; Wiener 2009); what is deemed (in)appropriate depends on the position of an actor. What interests us here is what kind of behaviour is regarded as norm-appropriate for the states that are not direct parties to the conflict.<sup>3</sup>

In the remainder of this part, we present our typology of norm-related behaviour. We identify four types of norm-related behaviour: appropriate, inappropriate, irresponsible and responsible. In the following, we detail our core assumptions and conceptual suggestions regarding the distinction of behaviour.

<sup>3</sup>In this context, it is noteworthy that actors' behaviour is far from stable and consistent. Instead, we can observe adjustments according to developments in world politics (e.g. environmental issues) or internal developments (e.g. the emergence of new parties or a general change of mood).

### *Appropriate behaviour*

Following norms research in IR, we define behaviour as appropriate if actors comply with the behaviour prescription of the norm (Katzenstein 1996: 5). Such behaviour is usually identified as compliance (seminal – Chayes and Chayes 1993; critical – Wiener 2004). To take the prohibition of human trafficking under the Palermo Protocol as an example, under Article 5 states have the obligation to criminalize human trafficking (UN General Assembly 2000). Therefore, if states criminalize human trafficking in their national legislation, they comply with the norm, so their behaviour is appropriate.

### *Inappropriate behaviour*

Conversely, behaviour is inappropriate when it is not in line with the behavioural prescription of a norm. Inappropriate behaviour can manifest as norm violation or under-fulfilment. Committing mass atrocities would be a clear case of norm violation. Under-fulfilment is in place when actors generally accept and act in a way that a norm requires but do not fully comply with it. Of course, this is a matter of interpretation. A good example is the ‘Official Development Assistance’ norm. It asks states from the Global North to use 0.7 per cent of their gross national income (GNI) as developmental aid. If a state generally agrees to provide money for developmental aid but falls short of the 0.7 per cent GNI, this constitutes norm under-fulfilment, and hence is *inappropriate behaviour*.<sup>4</sup>

### *Irresponsible behaviour*

Importantly, it does not just matter whether an actor is obliged to act in a certain way or whether a norm prescribes a specific behaviour. What also matters is the issue of capacity, which is a central concept when we discuss questions of responsibility (Barry 2003; Heupel 2013; O’Neill 2005). When an actor can change a situation for the better but chooses not to do so, we speak of irresponsible behaviour.<sup>5</sup> Importantly, whether we can identify a specific norm is secondary; instead, what matters is whether an actor with the capacity to change an unjust situation does so. Take, for example, the debate about ‘loss and damage’ in the negotiations on the climate crisis (UNFCCC 2022). States that have the economic capability (also the result of centuries of fossil-driven industrial development) to support economically less capable states in addressing climate change-induced losses and damages, but choose not to do, so would act irresponsibly. Put differently, if actors do not take action to change an unjust situation, despite the capacity to do so, we speak of *irresponsible behaviour*.

<sup>4</sup>Of course, a variety of behaviour can be deemed inappropriate and it may in some cases be that a range of behaviour is accepted (see Kirgis 1987; Stimmer 2019, who both discuss in the context of appropriate behaviour how a range of behaviour may be deemed appropriate).

<sup>5</sup>This conceptualization does not aim to answer the question of whether not acting might be better in some instances. We focus here on the actual state behaviour, manifested in the act as such and the actor’s justification. Our decision to focus on the decision to act, rather than the consequences of the actions or the hidden intentions of an actor, is an epistemological rather than a normative decision. We are aware of the many instances where good intentions led to negative effects.



### Responsible behaviour

Finally, *responsible behaviour* is defined as instances where an actor goes beyond what the norm requires.<sup>6</sup> We turn to the notion of responsibility to conceptualize such behaviour that goes beyond a norm and over-fulfils its normative expectations. Responsibility is constituted through the relationship between a subject and the things or people (objects) for which the subject accepts responsibility based on norms (Sienknecht 2021a; Zimmerli and Aßländer 1996). This triangular relationship is not static, but dynamic. Norms affect subjects' behaviour, and subjects' behaviour influences for what and whom responsibility is taken, which in turn might lead to norm development. The objects of responsibility could challenge existing norms and advocate for new norms (e.g. in the area of new technologies) with the actors they consider responsible. Following this triangular relationship, we identify three configurations of responsible behaviour on the normative, subject and object dimensions.

Responsible behaviour can manifest on the *normative dimension*. For example, we introduced the 'developmental aid norm' example above as an example of inappropriate behaviour when states fall short of the 0.7 per cent GNI threshold. Conversely, responsible behaviour would be the case when a state provides aid above the 0.7 per cent GNI threshold, thus overfulfilling the normative behavioural prescription of the norm.

Regarding the *subject dimension*, responsible behaviour occurs when new actors come on board. Here, new actors and/or actors that have previously not been a norm addressee follow a norm. An example would be non-governmental organizations that adhere to the 'rescue-at-sea' norm because they think the norm is justified, actors addressed by the norm violating it (such as with push-back operations) or actors addressed by the norm failing to respond appropriately (e.g. downsize or cancel rescue missions).<sup>7</sup>

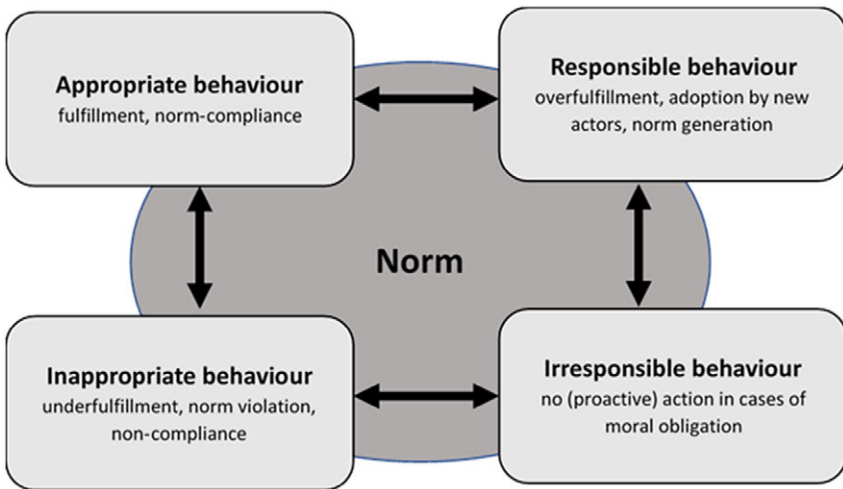
Finally, responsible behaviour can relate to the *object dimension*. Here, actors decide to take responsibility for (new) people or things. An example would be the current debates about artificial intelligence (AI) regulations, where actors try to determine the appropriate course of action. Without a specific norm in place, they might draw on existing norms from other issue areas.

Figure 1 outlines the four types of norm-related behaviour. On the left side, we have either appropriate or inappropriate behaviour in relation to a norm. These two types of behaviour are co-constitutive of each other. On the right side, we have responsible and irresponsible behaviour, again being co-constitutive of each other. Notably, we also have a connection between appropriate behaviour and responsible behaviour. Here, we assume that actors may move from appropriate to responsible behaviour or vice versa, making these two types constitutive of each other. The same holds for inappropriate and irresponsible behaviour.

<sup>6</sup> A different understanding of such behaviour, but one that is less connected to norms, can be found in the notion of 'supererogatory acts [which] are understood as morally praiseworthy if done but *are not required*' (Jurkovich 2020: 699, emphasis in original). The difference from responsible behaviour, in our view, is that this can clearly be traced back to a specific norm and is not only reliant on moral principles.

<sup>7</sup> In our analysis of responses to the Russian war against Ukraine, we are interested primarily in state behaviour. However, the second configuration of responsible behaviour can also be identified in this case. More specifically, the decision of companies to withdraw their business from Russia (e.g. Aldi, BP, IKEA and Starbucks) may be understood as responsible behaviour of actors not bound by the relevant norms, especially given the fact that such a decision means financial loss for these companies (Yale School of Management 2022). Another example of this configuration is NGOs that – with the help of crowdfunding – have collected money to buy weapons for Ukraine (Boffey 2022).





**Figure 1.** A typology of norm-related behaviour.  
Source: Authors.

Before applying our typology to the situation of the Russian war against Ukraine, it is necessary to provide an epistemological reflection. In applying the typology, it becomes apparent that the same behaviour of different actors, or even the same behaviour of the same actor in different situations or different moments, leads to a different assessment of their respective behaviour. While on the face of it this may seem to cause an epistemological challenge, namely that we cannot say with certainty which kind of empirically observed behaviour constitutes which specific type, a closer look reveals a different picture. Given that norms are always and only assessable in their specific context and *meaning-in-use* (Gholiagha et al 2021; Wiener 2009), and also situation-dependent, the seeming epistemology challenge turns into a necessary characteristic of norm-related behaviour. That is to say, our typology does not aim at explaining a specific behaviour but instead at conceptualizing different behaviour, which in turn allows for a better understanding of the differences we can observe empirically. In sum, we focus on the behavioural and value-oriented dimensions of norms by referring to the concept of responsibility. Determining whether a specific behaviour goes beyond what the norm requires can only occur on the empirical level and not on an abstract theoretical or conceptual level.<sup>8</sup>

Take, for example, NATO's decision to intervene in Kosovo. Justifications were based on NATO's assessment that there was impending genocide and the international community was morally obliged to act in the absence of UNSC authorization and in the absence of a clear norm that would legitimize such an intervention (Lang 2009: 186). By intervening militarily, NATO violated several existing norms, such as the prohibition of the use of force, sovereignty and non-interference (Independent International Commission on Kosovo 2000). This makes it clear that NATO did not act in a norm-free environment but decided to prioritize the norm of genocide prevention over the other relevant norms mentioned above. At the same time, the intervention became a turning

<sup>8</sup>We thank one of the reviewers for raising this point.

point in debates about humanitarian interventions (Annan 1999; Habermas 1999; Gholiagha 2015).

The issue of norm violation as part of responsible behaviour raises an important point. Norms never exist in isolation and it is rarely, in a specific situation, only a single norm is perceived as applicable. Often, actors are even in a situation where norms applicable to the same situation are perceived as incompatible with each other. Legal scholarship and IR norms research literature have discussed these cases in detail under the notion of norm conflicts (Michaels and Paulwelyn 2011; Vranes 2006) and norm collisions (Buitelaar and Hirschmann 2021; Gholiagha, Holzscheiter and Liese 2020; Holzscheiter, Gholiagha and Liese 2021; Saltnes 2017), respectively. As a result of such collisions, following a norm as part of responsible behaviour may indeed constitute inappropriate behaviour in relation to other norms.<sup>9</sup>

The second epistemological question is who decides whether a specific behaviour by an actor in a specific situation is, for example, responsible?<sup>10</sup> Here, we would hold that this depends on the assessment of the relevant political actors affected by the political problem. Depending on their positionality and their normative beliefs, that assessment may differ. Take, for example, the UN General Assembly Special Emergency Sessions on the Russian war against Ukraine. Here, most states found Russia violating Article 2(4) of the UN Charter. Our typology can then be used to categorize Russia's behaviour as inappropriate from the perspectives of the international community. In addition, scholars applying the typology must reflect their positionality and be transparent about their assessment. In sum, there exists no Archimedean point from which a situation can be 'objectively' assessed. Therefore, the following assessment is also based on our positionality as liberal Western-educated scholars.

## V. State behaviour in the context of the Russian war against Ukraine

We now apply our typology to states' support for Ukraine.<sup>11</sup> To recall, we take a liberal standpoint in assessing the Russian war against Ukraine. Hence, we share the view of most states that Russia's attack against Ukraine violates international law – for example, Article 2(4) of the UN Charter violates several other international norms and cannot be justified by reference to either international law or relevant norms, such as those found in the UN Charter.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, we agree that Ukraine has the right to defend itself against the Russian invasion. Moreover, in this specific case due to Ukraine's lack of sufficient resources in terms of both finance and weapons, we share the view that not only financial aid but weapons delivery is necessary so Ukraine can fulfil its right to self-defence. In the following, we apply the four types of norm-related behaviour to our

<sup>9</sup>We thank one of the reviewers for raising this point.

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<sup>11</sup>For an overview of support, see the Ukraine Support Tracker from the Kiel Institute for the World Economy (Antezza et al 2023; Trebesch et al. 2023). We do not have sufficient space here to typologize the behaviour of all states, but the following should demonstrate this possibility.

<sup>12</sup>When discussing support for Ukraine, it seems necessary to stress that before Russia's full-scale invasion on 24 February 2022, an ongoing war had been taking place in the Donbas region since 2014, and the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 was also part of that war. In the spring of 2021, experts started to observe a significant build-up of Russian forces at the border with Ukraine, with Russia claiming this was a training exercise (Reuters 2022).

empirical case. Figure 2 summarizes the four types of norm-related behaviour in relation to Ukraine's right to self-defence.

*Appropriate behaviour* of states in this context means adherence to fundamental norms such as the prohibition of the use of force and the right of self-defence. States displaying such behaviour condemned the Russian attack, calling for upholding these norms and stressing that such an attack violated international law. We operationalize such behaviour through diplomatic support for Ukraine. States that fall into those categories have voted in favour of UN resolutions condemning the full-scale Russian invasion of 24 February 2022, have made statements through their governments or heads of state to that effect or have supported measures such as diplomatic or economic sanctions. Examples of this behaviour can be observed from many states: 141 states have adopted a resolution (sponsored by 90 countries) in an emergency special session of the UNGA, which demands Russia's withdrawal from Ukraine's territory and reaffirms Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity (UN General Assembly 2022a). *Stricto sensu*, it would have also been appropriate to intervene in support of Ukraine militarily as an act of collective self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter. Given that, as mentioned above, states clearly rejected calls for direct military involvement, the notion of appropriate behaviour does not comprise the additional support we have observed.

*Inappropriate behaviour* in this context means state behaviour that openly supports Russia. It is inappropriate because supporting an aggressor constitutes a norm violation. Thus, state behaviour that aims to support Russia diplomatically or even by delivering weapons constitutes inappropriate behaviour in the current international order. Examples include states that voted against the UNGA resolutions named above, such as Belarus, North Korea, Syria and Eritrea. Another example would be states that support

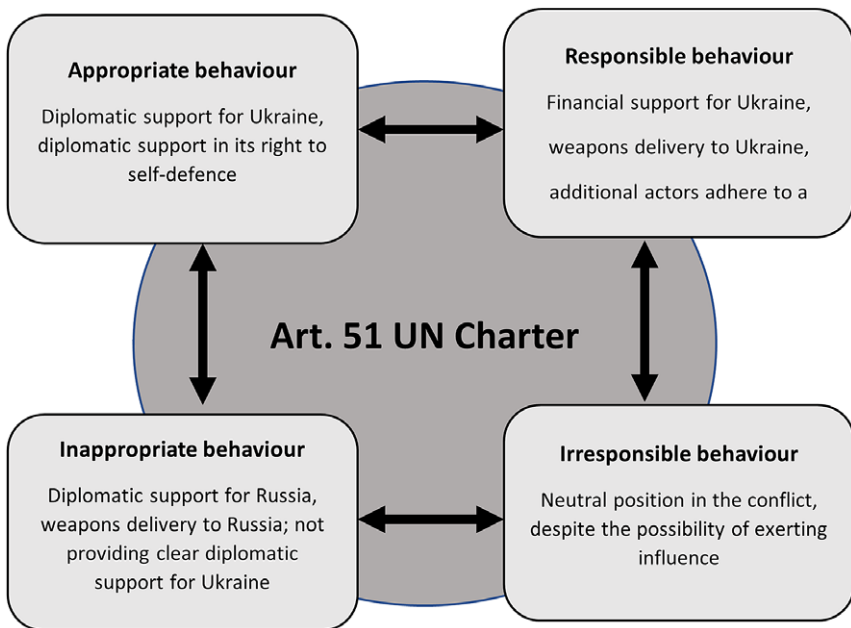


Figure 2. Typology of norm-related behaviour in the Russian war against Ukraine. Source: Authors.

Russia materially by delivering weapons, such as Iran (Wintour 2022). Furthermore, delivering drones and missiles to Russia violates UNSC Resolution 2231 (Arms Control Association 2022; UN Security Council 2015). In addition, not providing diplomatic support – for example, through abstention – would, from our position, also constitute inappropriate behaviour.

The third type of norm-related behaviour is *irresponsible behaviour*. One example of such behaviour is the case of *prima facie* neutral behaviour. While neutrality often entails a positive asset, we define it in this context as *irresponsible behaviour*. One example is states such as China or India, which by taking what seems to be a neutral position in the conflict are actually acting irresponsibly, as they have the means to change the situation by exerting diplomatic pressure on Russia but do not choose to do so.<sup>13</sup> Switzerland constitutes another example of such behaviour, as it has denied medical treatment of wounded Ukrainians, stating that this may pose a risk to its neutral position (Swissinfo 2022). However, on closer inspection, it becomes clear that this decision is not neutral but – following our typology – irresponsible, given that Switzerland would have the capacity to provide treatment and hence improve the situation of wounded Ukrainians.

The fourth type of norm-related behaviour would be *responsible behaviour*, which is described as behaviour that ‘goes beyond behaviour that is regarded as appropriate’ (Gholiagha and Sienknecht forthcoming: 3). In this concrete context, there is no (legal) obligation to support Ukraine financially or militarily, so behaviour that goes beyond the diplomatic support for Ukraine’s right to individual self-defence constitutes responsible behaviour as it displays an over-fulfilment of the normative dimension. The following provides a detailed analysis of this behaviour.

In early 2022, debates about weapons delivery for Ukraine began to increase amidst Ukrainian fears about a Russian attack. Among those who were reluctant was Germany, which in January 2022 only committed to sending 5000 protective helmets to Ukraine (Tagesschau 2022). However, when Russia attacked Ukraine in February 2022, the behaviour of many states changed substantially. Within days after Russia’s attack, the German government – among others – announced the delivery of weapons to Ukraine (Talmom 2022). As the Ukraine Support Tracker data from the Kiel Institute for the World Economy demonstrates, several states began delivering weapons, including heavier weapon systems such as multi-rocket launch systems (Antezza et al. 2023; Trebesch et al. 2023).

How did governments justify the delivery of these weapons? In various speeches and statements, references are made to the right of self-defence of Ukraine that is supported by arms deliveries. Ukrainian freedom, democracy, security and liberty are also recurring themes (Biden 2022; Merkur 2022). However, reference is also made to protecting human rights and preventing crimes (German Federal Foreign Office 2022). Finally, actors often mention that helping Ukraine defend itself is part of something bigger: the defence of freedom or, more specifically, the European peace order (Popp 2022). Table 1 summarizes the reactions, our operationalization and the corresponding type of behaviour.

Before turning to the effects of such behaviour on norm development, we need to engage with one possible counter-argument to our analysis. An alternative assessment to that offered here is that the weapons delivery should be understood as an act of collective self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter (de Hoogh 2022; Haque 2022: 157; ICJ

<sup>13</sup>While China, to the best of our knowledge, has not delivered weapons, it seems to support Russia indirectly through the export of dual-use technology (Talley and DeBarros 2023).

**Table 1.** Reactions, operationalization of reactions, and the corresponding norm-related behaviour

Reaction	Operationalization of reaction	Type of behaviour
Diplomatic support for Ukraine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voted yes in the General Assembly on the Resolution condemning Russia</li> <li>• Sponsored Draft of Resolutions in the UNSC condemning Russia</li> <li>• Expulsion of Russian diplomats</li> <li>• Statements indicate support of Ukraine, reference to the right of self-defence, the prohibition of the use of force, international law, the UN Charter, etc.</li> </ul>	Appropriate
Financial support for Ukraine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided financial support for Ukraine, either directly or through institutions</li> </ul>	Responsible
Weapons delivery to Ukraine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Including ammunition, training, tech support, repair</li> </ul>	Responsible
Inaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Both sides' statements</li> <li>• Not providing support with reference to neutrality</li> </ul>	Irresponsible
Abstention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abstention in UNGA</li> <li>• Absent in UNGA meetings</li> </ul>	Inappropriate
Diplomatic support for Russia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voted no in the UNGA Resolutions Condemning Russia</li> <li>• Voted against Resolutions in UNSC condemning Russia</li> </ul>	Inappropriate
Weapons delivery to Russia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Including ammunition, training, tech support, repair</li> </ul>	Inappropriate

Source: Authors.

1984). As briefly mentioned above, collective self-defence is usually understood as an intervention by third parties to defend a state under attack. States delivering weapons or supporting such delivery have not relied on notions of collective self-defence, but have claimed they only support Ukraine's individual right to self-defence (UN Security Council 2023).<sup>14</sup>

So what follows from the fact that several states display behaviour that exceeds the shared expectations found in the norm of the right to individual self-defence? What makes them go beyond the core of the norm that states have a right to self-defence? In the following section, we want to discuss the reasons for such behaviour, the effect on existing norms and the potential emergence of a new norm. Before doing so, it is important to note that our typology aims to conceptualize and understand different state behaviours rather than explain their possible effects. Nonetheless, in Part VI, we want to indicate and illustrate some of these potential effects regarding reasons for the behaviour displayed, the effect on existing norms and the potential emergence of a new norm due to specific types of behaviour.

<sup>14</sup>We thank one of the reviewers for raising this issue.

## VI. From responsible behaviour towards a *responsibility to support*

Actors may choose to act responsibly for a variety of reasons. They may want to signal that they are legitimate actors and part of a normative community – for example, armed non-state actors (Geis, Clément and Pfeifer 2021; Sienknecht 2021b). Other actors may act responsibly because they are affected by developments that are stronger than others – for example, Pacific island states that are affected earlier and more strongly by the climate crisis, so may be inclined to go beyond agreed norms of climate protection (Carter 2021).

In our empirical case, the very strong support for Ukraine by the Baltic states and states that were part of the former Soviet Union may be explained by their proximity to the conflict. They not only have the experience of Soviet rule, but would most likely be the first targets of attack if Russia were to expand its aggression to other states. The motivations for actors to act might be self-interested and not necessarily morally induced. While these motivations are not irrelevant, we decided to focus on the behaviour displayed by states rather than their underlying intentions, as the former affects global politics while the latter cannot be identified with certainty.<sup>15</sup>

In terms of what follows from responsible behaviour, we assume, on an abstract level, that such behaviour may lead to norm generation, norm strengthening, an increase in the robustness of norms, norm clarification or contestation and change of norms (Ben-Josef Hirsch and Dixon 2021; Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2019; Orchard and Wiener 2023: 14–17; Percy 2019; Stimmer 2019). In the specific case of the support of Ukraine, we identify a strengthening of existing norms, such as the right to self-defence and the prohibition of the use of force. While the prohibition of the use of force norm matters in the overall situation, states refer to Ukraine's right to individual self-defence when it comes to justifying what we have identified here as responsible behaviour. While Ukraine is clearly the addressee of the right to individual self-defence norm, the case is not so clear-cut for supporting states. The very fact that states draw on the norm in their justifications is not only indicative of norm strengthening or normative over-fulfilment, but also indicates that states lack a specific norm on which they can draw and which stipulates to behave in such a way as they did.

Seeing that Ukraine was willing but unable to defend itself successfully has led to states supporting Ukraine with means far beyond diplomatic support. The responsible behaviour of states leads to a broader understanding of the state's right to self-defence. This constitutes a reinterpretation of the norm. We argue that (1) the lack of a specific norm in conjunction with (2) such a reinterpretation and (3) the responsible behaviour displayed lead to a norm-generative moment in which a new norm emerges. We suggest calling that norm the *responsibility to support* (R2S).<sup>16</sup>

As a norm, R2S prescribes as appropriate behaviour that supports a state in its right to self-defence in several ways, ranging from diplomatic and economic support all the way to military support as the *ultima ratio*. While the name of the norm indicates a close relationship with R2P, the decisive difference is that the development of R2P relates to

<sup>15</sup>Of course, in further studies, a more detailed empirical analysis drawing on interviews with state representatives would help to unearth alternative or additional motives for their behaviour.

<sup>16</sup>Norm emergence is a tricky concept because it implies teleology where there really is none (Daese 2013: 47). Of course, at this early stage it is uncertain whether the norm-generative moment and the emergence of the norm really lead to a new norm in global politics. Alternatively, the development described here may as well be understood as what others have called 'norm clarification' (Stimmer 2019). Whether a new norm indeed emerges, as we postulate here, or the developments only lead to a clearer shared understanding of an existing norm cannot be answered at this moment in time.

debates about the prohibition of the use of force under Article 2(4) of the UN Charter, the norm of non-interference and the norm of sovereignty (United Nations 1945; ICISS 2001). In contrast, we argue that the R2S, which emerged as an effect of the responsible behaviour of states in the Russian war against Ukraine, has its normative roots in the norm of self-defence. This distinction matters because military intervention or support in cases where R2P is applied is not novel and may even be seen as appropriate, given that R2P in the formulation found in the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document includes the use of force under Chapter VII of the UN Charter (United Nations 2005).

Moreover, R2P and R2S differ strongly in their relation to other norms. While R2P emerged as a potential solution to solve the tension between human rights protection and sovereignty (Brock 2013; Gholiagha 2022: 120–22), the emergence of R2S is rooted in an over-fulfilment of the norm of self-defence. Should that norm-emerging process continue, states in the future may refer to a responsibility to support as appropriate behaviour instead of justifying their support with reference to other norms or their moral or political responsibility.

## VII. Conclusion

Our article began with the observation that there is a substantial variation in states' response to the Russian war against Ukraine and that many states over-fulfil what is deemed appropriate according to the norms relevant to Russia's full-scale invasion. We also noted that neorealist approaches that engage with the war do not focus on explaining this variation or on states that are not directly involved. Furthermore, the current discussion largely does not answer normative questions about the different state responses to the Russian war against Ukraine.

Against this backdrop, this article has provided a theoretical conceptualization of norm-related behaviour. It has illustrated its applicability by using a typology of norm-related behaviour to grasp the variation in how states support (or do not support) Ukraine against the Russian invasion. We asked two research questions: How can we conceptual and understand the different behaviour of states in the Russian war against Ukraine? And how does this behaviour impact existing norms and the emergence of new norms? We can now provide a conclusive answer to both.

Regarding the first research question, we demonstrated that our typology provides an analytical tool to conceptual different behaviours of states in the Russian war against Ukraine. In addition, it also allowed us to understand such behaviour with reference to relevant norms. Regarding the second research question, we showed how the behaviour we identified as responsible not only constitutes an overfulfilment of the self-defence norm but also has a norm-generative effect that may lead to the emergence of a norm we have identified as a *responsibility to support* (R2S) norm. In doing so, we believe that we have demonstrated that a shift in behaviour can be conceptualized with reference to norm-related behaviour. Hence, we see the Russian war against Ukraine as a clear case for the applicability and necessity of constructivist norms research of world politics.

Our discussion of weapons delivery as responsible behaviour also sheds light on the dynamic component of our typology. Changes in behaviour can be reflected by studying the behaviour of a state at different points in time and tracing shifts in their behaviour from one type to another.

In this conclusion, we also want to briefly reflect on a crucial issue. We had outlined our own normative positioning at the beginning of this contribution. We believe it is also



necessary to provide a normative reflection about our argument that weapons delivery into an ongoing conflict can be considered responsible behaviour. This is a strong normative claim, and we are aware of that. Three caveats are necessary. First, we hold that weapons exports are not conducive to peace in general. We use our typology to analyse an empirical reality: states deliver weapons. Our conceptualization should not be read as a *carte blanche* or a normative argument for any future policy decision. Second, we caution against applying this to all weapons delivery: context matters and who delivers what kind of weapons into what conflict will ultimately be decisive for assessing whether this is responsible behaviour.<sup>17</sup> In our case, drones delivered by Iran to Russia are not a manifestation of responsible behaviour but inappropriate behaviour. Third, we have not discussed why Ukraine gets such massive support while other equally brutal and longer-lasting conflicts do not. There are many potential explanations that require a discussion, for which we do not have space here. Potential explanations include issues of proximity to the conflict, the interpretation that the conflict has ramifications not only for the parties involved but for the liberal international order as such, and the fact that worries exist that, if not stopped, Russia may repeat its behaviour towards other states.

In terms of future research, further and more in-depth empirical analysis of states' behaviour is necessary. In addition, applying our typology to both other conflicts and additional actors may help to clarify the typology and strengthen its validity. It may also provide insights into whether certain norms are more likely to be over-fulfilled than others. Factors may include the regime from which they *come*, its degree of legalization or even the type of norm (permissive, prohibitive, etc.). Furthermore, the norm-generative moment we identified concerning the R2S norm warrants further investigation. Here, the scope conditions we identified empirically (the lack of a specific norm; a reinterpretation (i.e. strengthening, contestation, change or overfulfilment of an existing norm) and a display of responsible behaviour) leading to a norm-generative moment may be used to analyse other empirical cases of norm emergence. Such studies may yield additional scope conditions and insights into norm-generative processes.

Finally, we argue that the emergence of a R2S norm might allow actors to take a step located between supporting states through peaceful means and engaging in a military intervention. Such a norm may lower the threshold for support, and it would be easier to orchestrate support under such a norm, as weapons delivery to a state defending itself would not require a Chapter VII mandate of the UNSC.

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<sup>17</sup>An example for how weapon types may matter in this discussion can be found in the debate about delivering cluster ammunition to Ukraine. See, for example. <<https://www.rand.org/blog/2023/08/why-biden-was-justified-to-send-cluster-munitions-to.html>>

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