

Radical Changes: The World in the Aftermath of the Russia - Ukraine Crisis



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Executive Summary

Recent decades presented an ostensibly stable world order where many believed that the role of traditional armies had significantly diminished in favour of covert targeted attacks, whether in the cyberspace or through unmanned-drones. Similarly, in an economically interconnected global system, war was often deemed unprofitable, due to its disrupting effect on global supply chains and the threat it presents to common interests between countries. However, The Russian invasion of Ukraine had exceeded all such previous expectations, and is set to have deeper ramifications on the balance of power and in paving the way to a contemporary multi-polar world system. In its wake, the crisis had drawn the world into a myriad of economic challenges; disrupting financial markets worldwide and contributing to inflated prices for the export of energy, basic commodities and industrial goods. Thus, creating rippling effects globally and negatively impacting the growth trajectory of developing countries.

Amongst the rhetoric behind the Russian invasion of Ukraine, are the accusations formed by the Russian President Vladimir Putin in condemning the “West” (particularly NATO, the European Union and the United States) in ignoring Russia’s demands to end NATO’s expansion policy, and to return to the 1997 borders.

Thus, in this new world order, Russia leads a prototype of a country that is firm in preserving its strategic interests, through harnessing its physical power, regardless of the costs imposed by the international community.

Additionally, in its invasion of Ukraine, Russia has invoked Article 51 of the UN Charter, green-lighting military action on the pretext of “peacekeeping” in the Donbass region, without promptly notifying the Security Council (UNSC), all while holding the council’s presidency. Thus, adding another dimension to the crisis, where one of the five UNSC permanent member is able to protect its unilateral decisions with a veto, therefore undermining of the role of the Security Council and raising questions regarding its efficacy in preventing war and maintaining peace.

From a geopolitical standpoint, the Ukrainian crisis reaches counties in the Middle East and Africa; creating new and varying dynamics in their relations and interactions with the West on one side and Russia on the other. Additionally, the Ukrainian crisis launched priority files on the global scene, those include, the energy crisis and food security, presenting both challenges and opportunities for countries in Middle East and Africa.

While Arab and African oil-producing countries stand to benefit from the surge in global oil prices that the crisis had created, they will still have to import manufactured goods at inflated rates. Diplomatic missions from the United Nations and the United States were dispatched in an attempt to persuade the oil-producers in the Gulf to increase their oil production capacity to lower the prices, however the Gulf countries adhered to the production agreements of the “OPEC+” group, in maintaining the current production pace. Still, European countries must quickly find an alternative to the ‘Russian gas’, and a more reliable alternative can be found in the Middle East, where countries like Qatar, Algeria and Egypt would be able to satisfy in-part the European gas intake. Also, questions are raised concerning Iran potentially leveraging the current energy crisis (and the need for increased steady oil supplies in the market) in the Vienna negotiations around the Iran nuclear deal.

In the end, it seems that oil and gas exporting countries are the biggest winners from the substantial surge in energy prices, and an ongoing crisis in Ukraine, while the rest of impacted countries stumble in keeping up with the global economic changes and prices inflation.

As for the file of food security, the Russian-Ukrainian crisis had a severe impact on the global grain markets, since both countries combined provide about 30% of the global wheat exports and 19% of the corn exports. Thus, the ongoing turmoil between the two countries, and the interruption of navigation from the Black Sea ports are projected to have an impact on grain importing countries within the Middle East and in Africa. It is likely that countries will see the impact through higher prices, rather than actual shortage of commodities. Additionally, ‘other’ wheat-exporting countries such as (Canada, Australia, and the United States) will benefit from the increase in prices, while supplying countries in the Middle East and Africa.

Still, the food security crisis is prevalent most in Lebanon, which has a reduced storage capacity for imported food commodities due to the destruction that befall the majority of its warehouses in the explosion that rocked the Beirut port in 2020. Yet, Lebanon pales in comparison to war-torn Yemen, where the UN World Food Program has warned that the Ukrainian crisis and its impact on increased fuel and food prices, is more likely to push more of Yemen’s population

into starvation, in light of severed supply lines for humanitarian aid. Arguably, the Ukrainian crisis threatens not only to disrupt humanitarian aid, but also military and peacekeeping support in both the Middle East and throughout African continent, with the 'West' preoccupied with Russia and Ukraine.

Through a read of the energy and food security crisis, it can be assumed that the 'West' must reformulate its strategies and relations with countries in the Middle East and Africa, which have followed a balanced and diversified policy in their alliances and foreign relations. On the one hand, they are under no obligation to meet American and European demands of boycotting Russia, or supplying more oil in an attempt to lower prices and increase exports to European markets. While on the other hand, countries in the Middle East and Africa maintain substantial diplomatic and trade relations with Russia, from basic food commodities, to essential Russian military supplies and arms.

From the current variables of the Ukrainian crisis, three scenarios can be deduced for the upcoming period:

Resorting to nuclear deterrence: Although President Putin has put his nuclear capabilities on alert, the nuclear option remains far-fetched. Presumably, this is due to the diminished nuclear terror over the year, with the collapse of the 'brinkmanship theory' in the aftermath of the Cold War. Today, nuclear capabilities have become a contributing factor to the classification of power between countries that own them, more so than they are an effective means of nuclear deterrence.

The continuation of the conflict: If the current situation continues at its current pace, this would increase Russia's political and economic isolation, which may present mounting internal pressure on the government. Still, the continuation of the crisis leads to an explicit change in the balance of global powers, where Russia becomes a representative of the 'hard powers' (rouge states) that refuses to abide by international laws that govern international peace and security. This may also result in the establishment of alliances between Russia and similar countries in both the economic and military spheres, presenting a clear dichotomy to the Western bloc.

The Diplomatic solution: The most likely scenario is reaching a diplomatic solution between Russia and Ukraine, through mediation efforts between the two countries in Minsk. This may result in a political settlement to the crisis, where negotiations come within the framework of everyone's need to get out of this global crisis and towards prospects for peaceful solution.

If Russia is serious in its negotiations, then it must recognise Ukraine's sovereignty over its territory, and return to the Minsk agreements on the "Donbass region" problem. While the main condition for Ukraine will be the immediate withdrawal of Russian forces from the country, and the declaration of a cessation of war. For a successful peaceful resolution to the war, on its side, Ukraine will have to declare itself a militarily neutral state between Russia and NATO, while curbing its ambitions to join the European Union, and work to consolidate a minimum level of relations between itself and Russia.