



# A Brief Assessment of Ukraine Turmoil, US' Role and its Impact on the Asia-Pacific

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## *Abstract*

The festering divergences pertaining to the socio-economic, cultural and historical perceptions about identities, escalated to a full blown war on February 24, 2022, when Russian forces started pounding Ukraine, running multiple group operations. The Russian Air Force wreaked havoc in the Ukrainian skies. As per the latest estimates released by the UNHCR office in 2023, the fiasco has led to an unprecedented refugee crisis in Europe with nearly 8 million fleeing the country in search of safer shores, around the neighboring countries or across Europe. Around six million people stand internally displaced. The continuing onslaught has pushed a number of countries into the throes of an acute food crisis. The paper endeavors to discuss the ramifications of this deadly war, sensed around the globe with special emphasis on the Indian Pacific region and how, the US has risen to the occasion to contain its negative consequences. The egregious manner, in which the ongoing blitzkrieg has scarred the collective conscience of the entire civilized world that believes in a rules-based order, is beyond describable and outrageously shocking. It has created insecurities among the smaller countries of the region, given that they have to face a hostile China at their doors. Unilateralism is considered antithetical to the notion of collective decision making, as it precludes dialogue and diplomacy.

**Keyword:** Ukraine, Crisis, Refugee, US, Europe, Unilateralism.

## *Introduction*

The entailments of this grisly war in the Asia-Pacific region is been multi-faceted and do involve significant socio-economic aspects. Amid the skyrocketing commodity prices, slackening global demand and raised economic uncertainty, it is palpable that there would be adverse macro-economic impacts. A handful of economies from the region- Armenia, Cambodia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kiribati, Maldives, Pakistan, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka and Vanuatu, stare at a greater risk because of their exposure to higher energy and food prices, ablated

external financial inflows and etiolated business sentiments. Various policy measures can be undertaken to enhance resilience against future shocks. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP<sup>i</sup>) can prove handy in the formulation and implementation of policies related to energy, trade, investment, transport and fiscal realms. The war has led to comprehensive sanctions against the Russian Federation. This has also given jolt to the world economy as it was still reeling under the duress of Covid-19 induced slowdown. Many economies of the region were already under severe distress, given the loss of business, foreign exchanges, remittances from abroad and tourism. ESCAP (2022) estimates that the total output loss amounts to nearly \$2 trillion while nearly 85 million people have been pushed to the margins. The progress towards achieving the mandates of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has taken a severe beating and years of improvement on various socio-economic indicators have been reversed.<sup>ii</sup>

The chairperson of UNCTAD alleged that we are descending towards an abyss in achieving the SDGs. She called for urgent action and measures to support sustainable development, claiming that warming temperatures and other ongoing crises are wreaking havoc on developing countries and making it difficult for them to meet the SDGs (Rebeca Grynspan, 2023). Due to sustained consumer inflation, poor households have been terribly hit. Some countries have also registered weaker exports and remittances. Investors' confidence and government's debt serviceability has tanked. Among the leading published commentaries on the issue, a few are being reviewed here. While traversing through the sources cited under the reference section, it became evident that a decent amount of research work on the topic and its relevance has been done previously. Critics of Indian foreign policy have failed to notice the nuanced shifts in Indian foreign policy from **non-alignment to multi-alignment**. However, there is a need to take up this topic with renewed zeal on account of the dynamic nature of the field of international relations. New dimensions of space and medical cooperation, cyber security and laying of the supply chains of critical goods imperative for sustaining any future shocks, crude supplies and raising the Indo-Russia relations to untouched heights, in a more comprehensive manner, have emerged on scene.

The major contention to the studies and opinions on the facet of Ukraine-Russia war's effects in the Asia-Pacific region done till date is that the different dimensions in the overall scheme of international relations, haven't been explored sufficiently. Since the clash started, India's relationship with US has been tested but due to unstinting efforts of the diplomats from both US as well as India, things in the near future look smooth. The paper also seeks to engender the idea that if the war doesn't cease soon enough, countries of the Asia-Pacific Region might start looking for security guarantees against the aggression of a larger, more aggressive and equipped neighbor. This will spell disturbance and suspicion around the region. In no time can the military alliances become commonplace if Ukraine gets threatened with Russian nukes. However, if the US somehow shows inclination towards addressing Russia's core issues, it can spell peace for the entire region and beyond. The above prospect can materialize only if Russia agrees on an immediate ceasefire. Sanity won't prevail under the shroud of deadly firing of deadly missiles and tanks.

Further, since supply lines of critical goods have been hit, earlier due to Covid-19 pandemic and later due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict since February 2022, all the responsible stakeholder countries have got a shot in the arm to meet the exigencies and ensure a reliable and robust supply chain mechanism in future. Climate crisis in 2022 has baffled the people world all over the world, with extreme record heat and erratic weather patterns, landslides, flooding, forest fires wreaking havoc, the war is only exacerbating the pain and trauma. On these accounts, a few gaps were observed in the present corpus of literature and commentaries around the theme of the raging war. This paper endeavours to analyze the happenings having ramifications for the entire region and in shaping the contours of the global power dynamics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Through the blended lenses of the Realist, Neo-Realist as well as the Constructivist approach to the International relations, the paper has been attempted. While going through the extant reference points on the literature related to the topic, it was adduced that the aforementioned theories needed better application in understanding the plethora of phenomena occurring around us in the international arena.

### ***Methodology***

So far as the methodology of the study is concerned, qualitative research method has been used. Both primary and secondary data from a few well-researched newspaper columns and articles, research papers, books having relevance to the chosen research paper's topic has been referred to in close details. Analytical approach resonated aptly with the scope and objective of the paper.

### ***Content***

The Ukrainian quagmire has been fledgling for quite a time now. While the theatre of this fiasco lay thousands of miles away from the Asia-Pacific, the overbearing effects of the war is being acutely felt around the globe. This increasing great power conflict will have dramatic ramifications for the global world order as questions over respect for sovereign rights start to be questioned around the world. Lieutenant General P.R. Shankar in his piece argues that the violent Ukraine crisis has altered ground realities that will affect the Indo-Pacific region in many ways. A trans-atlantic US led consolidation and NATO's expansion is visible. The Russia-China axis seems on the cards and though it will be too early to predict, Japan and South Korea's nuclearization is possible in the medium term. An era of restrained globalization, decoupling and recoupling has dawned. In the Ukrainian conflict's spectacle, the bogey of nuclear trump card has been played out by Russia clearly. The upcoming days might lead to arms race in the Asia-Pacific. The Indo-US juggernaut can induce brakes to the Chinese unrelenting expansionist ambitions. A realigned India can put China on tenterhooks by putting it in a two-front situation for perpetuity. India has emerged as a critical player in the Indo-Pacific and its rise and role in the global politics would largely dictate the tenor of the Indo-Pacific architecture. Proxy wars would be more attractive for bigger powers. Hybrid wars will be more often conjuring the headlines.

Japan's new defense minister Yasukazu Hamada in a press conference, had warned against any similar attempts to change the status quo forcefully in the Indo-Pacific region. He further affirmed that the very diabolical act has shaken the plinth of the international order and ought be condemned unequivocally. The global anti-money

laundering agency Asia Pacific Group (APG) said that the Russia's war on Ukraine is a gross violation of the commitment to international cooperation and mutual respect upon which the FATF members concur. And hence, Moscow's observer status was revoked.

Masafumi Ishi in his commentary published on 31.08.2022 with the Japan Institute of International Affairs, titled "The lessons of the Ukraine war for the Indo-Pacific Region: a preview of, rather than a change in, what we will face in 10-15 years" contests that the interactions among the G-3 (USA, China, India) will shape the course of geopolitical dynamics in the days to come. He further elucidates that the positioning of India and Indonesia will shape the dynamics of the Asia-Pacific region. He emphasized the importance of building deterrence in averting such inglorious attacks. Role of clear lines of communication so as to rule out the chances of any misadventure need be firmed up with the regional powers, especially China.

In an article titled "यूक्रेन युद्ध का भू-रणनीतिक पहलू" published with the Observer Research Foundation (Hans Christian Hagman, 9<sup>th</sup> September, 2022), it is being argued that Russia is not vanishing in thin air. It is importance to minimize the destruction unleashed by this demonic war without mortgaging our collective conscience, in the interest of the entire humanity. China and India can use its leverage with Russia to cease the war. The issues of climate change, pollution, space collaboration, renewable energy cooperation, critical minerals, ocean management make it imperative for the powers-be to shed their parochial mindsets and derive maximum tangible output from the coming together of all the responsible stakeholders. Countries are turning inwards and focusing their energies on becoming self-reliant. Countries reliant on Ukraine for foodgrains, minerals, wood, fertilizers, sunflower oil are facing the brunt of this war. On the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's Council of Heads of State in Samarkand, Uzbekistan in September 2022, the Indian Prime Minister clearly said to the Russian President Vladimir Putin that today's age is not that of war. Dialogue and Diplomacy ought be in the foreground.

C Raja Mohan in his opinion piece titled "With Russia's declining influence, India needs a new strategy in Eurasia", dated 20.09.2022, argues that Russia is enmeshed in a lose-lose war with the West and is finding it difficult to retain its traditional primacy in Asia. He further says that Russia is increasingly dependent upon China now. Since its historical influence and clout in the region is no more the same, India needs to chart a new territory to secure its interests in Eurasia. Kremlin's fortunes have winded out and India should actively realign its policies on which its interactions hinge upon.

Brian T. Watson in his column titled "Facing the Ukraine war", dated 15.09.2022, argues that the continuation of this carnage would do inconceivable harm to our shared ecosystem and the survival prospects of our already stretched societies in the face of climate change, pandemic, poverty, overexploitation of earth's resources and food crises.

In a column titled "**End the war**" published in The Hindu Newspaper Delhi edition), dated 23.02.2023, it is being touted that the talks are the only way forward in this bloodbath, which has taken enormous toll on humanity, now being stretched over an year. The US president on a surprised visit to the war-battered country, just before the first anniversary of the launch of the invasion, reiterated its commitment for a full-blown commitment to amp up

Ukraine's resistance capacity as armored vehicles, precision bombs, battle tanks, and missile defence systems continue to arrive there in huge chunks to face a belligerent Russian onslaught. Vladimir Putin on the other hand, reaffirmed its commitment towards a more violent spring offensive, as Russia ditched the New START Treaty that could potentially lead to a nuclear arms race. It is further asserted that the war has now become a global liability and the West, Ukraine and Russia should look for a ceasefire and settlement as soon as possible. With the war extending, the chances of a direct confrontation between NATO and Russia seems likely high as even seen recently during the downing of a hostile Reaper drone of US by Russia in Black sea region.

In a commentary produced for the European Council On Foreign Affairs, by Gustav Gressel, dated 7.02.2023, he insists that Russia is poised to make further inroads into Ukraine in the first half of 2023 though the prospects of holding these areas for long look glum. He contends that Russian hawks believe that the information warfare unleashed by the state, compounded by the cutting back on energy supplies to Europe would keep their assault in good stead. Belarus is hosting thousands of Russian soldiers on its soil for training and maneuvering tactics. Putin doesn't seem to be in haste to cease the war, even as the cascading human and economic costs is clocking alarming proportions. US and its allies are also wholeheartedly backing Ukraine's pushback as they believe that Ukraine must prevail in the war, reducing Russia to a dire strait. He further concludes that the Russian defence production has proved to be exceptionally resilient despite being under a wave of sanctions and the chances of war ending in 2023 appear bleak as Putin is after seeking full-victory ruling out any chances of a stalemate in the immediate future.

The editorial by the Editorial board of the newspaper The Japan Times titled "Hopes and concerns a year after Russia's Ukraine invasion", dated 24.02.2023, opionates that the world is becoming increasingly inured to the rampant violence unleashed by the unilateral measures of the forces of disorder. The plight of the Ukraine and those who collectively believe in the ethos of a world order seem uncertain. The carnage of an inter-state war in this contemporary modern world has been normalized and notions of a civilized, inter-connected world as a global village stands shredded apart. The Hobbesian ghost is well alive and kicking. The flimsy veneer of internationalism is been tossed upside down by the blinding allure of nationalism and schmaltzy glory. However, it has become clear that if a nation is prepared to fight the forces of dark, the larger responsible international community will respond positively holding its side, strength from strength. It is further commented that it is the sheer determination to guard one's territory, uphold shared values of freedom and the right to a dignified existence. In this mayhem causing havoc worldwide in one way or another, the US allies have decided to finally increase their defence budgets upto 2 percent of their GDPs as often demanded by US. The governments in Europe and Asia as well, have woken up to a stark reality staring at their faces; today it is Ukraine, tomorrow it could be anyone among us with another force knocking at its doors. A country's primal interest is to secure its existence only.

The Japanese PM Fumio Kishida often opines that we can't play blind to the earthshaking events transpiring elsewhere in the world as security is indivisible. An isolated geography is no proofing against any impending aggression. If a nation succeeds in redrawing of its national borders upto far away, it will also inspire a prospective

aggressor to repeat similar actions close to home. The Sino-Russia “friendship without limits” seem characteristically portentous. A German think tank The Kiel Institute for the World Economy, has estimated that nearly 128 billion euros till date has been provided or committed for the purpose of Ukraine’s aid in the last year or so, with US leading the pack. And many western allies including US have also cracked whip on Russia in the face of more robust sanctions to paralyze Moscow’s capabilities to recur such invasions in the foreseeable future.

In an editorial published in China Daily, dated 24.02.2023, titled “US animosity toward Russia root cause of Ukraine conflict: China”, it is asserted that the root cause of the ongoing quagmire needs to be addressed to produce a comprehensive, just and lasting peace. It is alleged that US doesn’t want this war to end soon so it is not letting the Ukraine talk earnestly with Russia, pouring fuel to the fire. It is the US which without being directly involved, wishes for the destruction of the Russian state with the latter being reduced to a state of irreparable doom. The US is to blame for waging a deliberate proxy war. The reckless expansion of military blocs should not be pursued at the expense of another important global actor. Cold war mentality ought to be discarded to the bins of history. US should cease the supplies of highly advanced and sophisticated long-range missiles that can hit deep within Russia and the moral high ground claimed by it by imposing unilateral sanctions on Russia along with its Anglo-Saxon allies reeks of hypocrisy as they lack UN authorization.

In a guest editorial published in the Journal of Risk Finance, Vol. 24 No. 1, 2023 pp.1-5, titled “Implications of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict on the Global Financial Markets”, the authors argue that the EU countries’ decision to halt the access of Russian aircrafts and cargo of their airspaces has significantly harmed Asia-Europe as well as Europe-Russia air ties. Land based routes will be impacted as well as transit via Russia has become extremely cumbersome vis-à-vis safety and compliance point of view.

The UNSC resolution passed on 23<sup>rd</sup> of February, 2023 echoed similar sentiments demanding an immediate cessation of hostilities and Russia’s withdrawal of its marauding forces from a sovereign nation’s territory. 141 voted in favour with 7 against it and 32 abstentions were also recorded including that of India, China and Pakistan. The UNGA President Csaba Korosi reiterated the urgency of upholding the UN Charter and international law. He said that the world is facing stark choices about who we are as an international community and it is these choices which would implant us on the path of solidarity and collective resolve to upholding the cherished ideals of the charter. This paper has attempted to cover the inherently transient and ephemeral nature of international politics, in the backdrop of Ukraine war.

### ***Conclusion***

The spiraling effect of the Ukrainian conflict is being on much grander level than what some governments and geopolitical pundits had envisaged. With the dramatic rise in food and energy prices, the lives of nearly a billion people lay at stake in one way or another. The food insecurity would cause further instability and has the potential to ignite riots especially in countries like Pakistan, Myanmar where majoritarianism knows no bounds. Europe seems certainly at the doorsteps of a recession and this will impact the exports from Asia negatively. Some

countries like India and China seem to have taken some prudent steps by procuring crude oil from Russia at cheaper rates in the interests of their respective populace. However, with the war being stretched now for nearly seven months, the exports from Russia of arms in the region would likely see a curtailment. Two potent implications for the Asia-Pacific lurk in the near future. The emergent need to pursue diversification of ties and protectionism, both in the Europe as well as in the region, smaller regional blocs could manifest and countries would shed fear of taking sides on an issue as often observed in the past. Shifting of supply chains to Vietnam, Bangladesh or India is also in the offing and pariah regimes like that of Myanmar can find themselves sidelined.

The war further rings the end of Pax Americana as it happens to be the first time when a major power has attacked another sovereign country since the end of the Cold War and has caused disruptions of this magnitude. The liberal world order consequently stands shaken. However, the possibilities of cooperation within a rules-based framework remain but the institutions put in place to promote the ideas of de-nuclearisation, democracy and human rights certainly are staring at more challenging times and an uncertain future. Russia's time as a world order making and a responsible power seems to be over. It is not yet a depleted force, infact has shown mighty resilience of the highest caliber in the face of the onslaught of strictest of sanctions. It will remain a great power and the developments around the globe signal that it is unlikely to be isolated so easily. Yet, post the war, it seems quite certain that the Russia would find itself relegated as a junior partner to Beijing. The whole saga has triggered anxieties in Beijing about its equation with Taiwan. It fears a new iron curtain in Ukraine will have repercussions for its Silk Road project. India's position has the potential to tip the scales between the Western Bloc and China-Russia grouping. A direct competition with Russia can be seen if China looks for alternative routes via Arctic or Central Asia to channelize its trade monopoly. Similarly, the Indo-Pacific route can also put it at odds with the powers controlling the strategic chokeholds from the Strait of Taiwan to the Malacca Strait. Tensions over Taiwan is likely to increase and since the US seems more willing to stand for its defence, the prospect of a US-China showdown can't be ruled out. Thus, a new modus vivendi in the Taiwan strait and South China sea ought be devised for trust-building and ASEAN's centrality need be reinforced so as to diffuse the slithering tensions in the region.

In addition to cost-cutting measures, there is a need for collaborative efforts to support equitable development in developing countries. The efforts should be supported by a persistent and structural drive to assist countries in strengthening productive capabilities so that they can produce more goods and services with greater value. Long-term strategic investments incorporating the private sector as well as local, regional, and multilateral development banks are urgently required. The importance of capitalising our development institutions was emphasised.

Countries in the region like Japan, Australia, India and USA are tensed about China's ever growing ambitions. India is forced to recalibrate her strategy on border issues to ably deal with any eventuality, if China too, tries to do a Russia. However, with the war being protracted now (nearly seven months), it has somehow reassured India that China would think twice before committing such a tactical blunder. The Ukrainian forces, supplemented by continuous delivery of strategic weapons, tanks, drones, highly sophisticated surveillance technologies by the USA and its allies, has caused significant damage to Russian morale, in terms of men as well as material. India would

sense some relief as the war is reinforcing the adage that wars have no real victors or losers, in today's age. The humane aspects of the sufferings emanating from the brutal nature of war need be put at the center. Broken and torn apart families deserve a voice to narrate their troubles, literally imposed upon them by a reckless regime. The quote cited below would surmise, why this festering tragedy should immediately be ceased ;

“If we don't end the war, war will end us.”- Herbert George Wells

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<sup>i</sup> The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) is the Asia-Pacific region's most inclusive intergovernmental forum. In order to find answers to the challenges of sustainable development, the Commission encourages teamwork among its 53 member countries and 9 associate members. It is one of the United Nations' five regional committees. Its secretariat promotes inclusive, resilient, and sustainable development in the region by producing actionable knowledge and offering expertise and capacity-building

services in promoting national development goals, regional agreements, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It also offers assistance to national partners.

<sup>ii</sup> According to UNCTAD, the financial fallout from Ukraine's conflict could widen the already massive gap in funding required to achieve the SDGs, leading to spiraling credit downgrades and debt problems in developing countries. According to new UNCTAD estimates, the financing gap required to accomplish SDGs such as eliminating poverty and halting climate change is now \$17.9 trillion for the 2020-2025 period. Without accounting for the implications of the Ukraine war, the present annual gap is \$3.6 trillion, which is over a trillion dollars larger than it was prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.