

Love Thy Neighbors: Countering the Growing Impatience in International Politics- Ukraine-Russia Conflict

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Abstract

Globalization and rapid expansion of communication and information technologies have brought about tremendous changes in the ways the world traditionally interacted. This has eventually led to what is often called a 'borderless society'. However, the more the societies are growing borderless, the more strain is being put up on the concept of sovereignty and inviolability of territories. With the world continuing to embark upon wider areas of engagement, the principles of coexistence and interdependence have given way to narrow personal interests and hasty policy making. The paper, therefore, analyzes the existing Ukraine-Russia Conflict as a case study for bringing into light the growing impatience that is felt immensely now-a-days in international politics. Keeping in mind the indigenous political pursuits of a state, the paper seeks to explore the multitude of means through which national interests can be brought at par with the interests of the neighboring states and international community at large. In the end, the challenges faced by both the states have been analyzed to proffer suitable recommendations to address the future challenges.

Key words: international politics, interests, challenges

Introduction

In International Politics, security is a key factor to determine interstate cooperation at regional level. The national security of one state is closely related to the national security of its geopolitical neighbors. Guided by this approach, the former colony of the Soviet Empire, Ukraine, has always been subject to external interferences in its national security policy owing to the presence of its powerful neighbor Russia on its border which sees changes in Ukraine national security policy as one in its own state. Since the demise of the Soviet Empire, the two states have always been at daggers drawn but the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 came as the last straw that broke the camel's back and with this the impatience in international politics further mounted up.

The Growing Impatience in International Politics

The nature of international politics in global order has always been dynamic and unsettling. However, the structure of global politics at the end of the second decade of the 21st century has been more anarchic and complex than ever before. The repercussions of the Cold War can still be felt in international politics.

In the post- Cold War era, the world order cannot be regarded as purely unipolar or purely bipolar, instead it observed dominance of at least five states namely the United States, Europe, China, Russia and Japan. These states dominated international politics in one way or another. The challenges and turbulence it brought to

international politics can be gauged from the number of conflicts that took place in the post-Cold War era in which recently, Ukraine-Russia conflict has gained currency. Some of these conflicts have been between former Soviet colonies, for instance to name the few are war between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh and conflict in Chechnya. However, international politics also witnessed troubled relationships between the states that were not colonies of the Soviet Empire yet their international relations were equally turbulent. Within this category, conflicts in the wider part of the world can be cited (Kotlyar, 2020).

In Asia, four full-fledged wars between India and Pakistan over Kashmir dispute have been fought since 1947 with number of local skirmishes continuing till date (Iqbal & Hussain, 2018). The takeover of Taliban government over Afghanistan (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan [UNAMA], 2021) is another recent example. Likewise, the Persian Gulf war between Iraq and Iran (Alahmad & Keshavarzian, 2010), the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine (White & Adu, 2021), the ethnic confrontation between Tutsi and Hutu leading to Rwanda Genocide (Rieder & Elbert, 2013) and the ongoing conflicts in Yemen, Syria, Libya and many other Middle Eastern and African countries are some of the conflicts that manifest the growing impatience in international politics. The list of conflicts is by no means exhaustive and contemporarily it is supplemented by the Ukraine-Russia Conflict.

Western Dominance and the Former Soviet Empire

After the collapse of the Soviet Empire, Russia was on weak footing to curtail the ever-growing Western influence. The region of Caucasus was formerly under the control of Russia but the United States managed to enter this energy rich region with the help of some of its Allies like Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine. Likewise, the Western dominance also kept growing stronger as NATO expanded further in Eastern Europe. In 1999, under the Clinton Administration, NATO expanded to bring in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. In 2004, further eight former Soviet states joined NATO including Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. In 2008, NATO at one of its sessions in Bucharest, considered joining Georgia and Ukraine. France and Germany opposed this view for the fear of the Russian aggression. It was in this backdrop that Russia invaded Georgia in 2008. In 2009, Albania and Croatia joined NATO and this Western influence continued to grow.

The influence of the European Union is also of no lesser degree than NATO. The EU launched its Eastern Partner Initiative in 2008. Russia considered the program as hostile to its national interests. Russia perceives EU expansion as a stalking horse for NATO. Therefore, it can be stated that Western dominance causes instability in international politics. Particularly, one of the greatest challenges that now faces the world is the prevalence of interstate conflicts such as the conflict between Russia and Ukraine (Mearsheimer, 2014).

Identifying Causes of Ukraine-Russia Conflict

The inducements for present confrontation are manifold. The confrontation has deep historical roots. It begins with Konotop Battle of 1659 where Ukrainian troops of Hetmanate defeated the Moscow Army. Later on, the Russian army under Tsar I secured their influence on Hetmanate territory. During the Ukrainian Revolution of

1917-1921, Russia made all attempts to prevent the establishment of the independent Ukraine. Further in World War II, the US spread its influence to territories of western Ukraine but the local population there largely resisted (Kotlyar,2020).

Russia under Putin has always been on critical terms with its neighboring Ukraine. Putin's political history is clearly indicative of the fact that for him the collapse of the USSR has been a painful fact. In this regard, his statement from 2005 can be aptly stated wherein he mentions collapse of the Soviet empire as the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century.

The relation between two states especially worsened when in 2014, Russia began a military operation to capture the Crimean Peninsula. After the military operation had been carried on for a considerable period of time, ultimately on 15th March, a referendum was held wherein Crimea voted for joining the Peninsula to Russia. Three days later, on 18 March, the Kremlin signed a treaty on the admission of the Republic of Crimea to the Russian (Welt, 2021).

Violating the rules and principles of International Law, bilateral and multilateral agreements, the Russian Federation annexed the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol, occupied certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

The two states signed the Russian Federation and the Ukraine on Cooperation in the Use of the Sea of Azov and the Strait of Kerch Agreement in 2003. However, Russia violating the terms of the treaty, annexed Crimea in 2014. On 19 February 2018, Ukraine filed a memorandum in the International Court of Arbitration against the Russian Federation in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which alleges Russia's violation of Ukraine's rights in the Black Sea and in the Sea of Azov, as well as in the Kerch Strait.

The two states have been on deteriorating terms since long and till date no development towards improvement in bilateral relationship can be observed.

Understanding Putin's Objection on NATO Eastward Expansion

The threats that Russia senses due to NATO eastward expansion have been put in unambiguous words by Putin several times. As previously mentioned in the paper, several former colonies and several neighboring states of Russia have already joined hands with the West. It is in this backdrop that Russia perceives its geostrategic interests at stake. When it comes to Vladimir Putin's stance, he has put it straight by pointing at an analogy of Ukraine to Russia with Mexico and Canada to America. Putin interrogates America's reaction if missiles were deployed at its border through the states of Mexico and Canada. An apt interpretation of Putin's sentiments suggests that for Russia to wage war in Ukraine was a resort of last and unpleasant instance but forced by threats of national disintegration due to intervention of foreign elements, it took this step with heavy heart (Nigam, 2021; Roth, 2021).

Impact of Ukraine-Russia Conflict

The crisis in Ukraine has set shockwaves to the world at large. As bombing continues in Kyiv, the nation-states across the globe continue to suffer in one way or another. This may turn out to be advantageous for some states but the proportionality of harm outstands the meager benefit it may produce for a lesser number of states. The impact of the conflict can be systematically categorized into two broader categories. One is on the regional level and the other is on the global level. On the regional level, its immense consequences are evaluated in the context of two South Asian States that are China and Pakistan. On the global level, its effects on Middle Eastern and African States have been taken within the scope of this paper.

Evaluating Impact on the Regional Level- South Asia

By virtue of its geo-strategic and geopolitical importance, South Asia has always been the area of power struggle between great powers like the United States, China and Russia. In this backdrop, the consequences of Ukraine Conflict have been evaluated in the context of two South Asian States as follow:

Pakistan as a Case Study

The impact of the conflict on Pakistan and the country's response to it can be evaluated under the following heads:

Pakistan Position on Conflict

Pakistan political history is marked with troubled relationships with its neighboring countries especially India, Afghanistan and Iran. Pakistan standing with the West is already on weak footing and the country is suffering with economic woes exacerbated by debts from the IMF and being on FATF. Pakistan faced a serious balance of payment crisis by the end of 2017-2018 and is still facing the same (Ali, 2022). It is in these conditions that the Ukraine-Russia war broke out and further led the country into tunnels of gloominess.

Under the prevailing situation, being a neutral third party is in the best interest of Pakistan. Likewise, Pakistan has so far adopted the policy of non-alignment in the conflict. If Pakistan takes a side in this dispute, it will be unable to enable the warring parties in negotiating and resolving the crisis.

Impact of Conflict on Geo-Political Relevance of Pakistan

On the face of the globe, Pakistan occupies a fundamental geo-strategic position. Owing to this unique geographic location, it has enormous potential to perform a leading role in world politics. Pakistan is situated at a gateway to the Middle East and Central Asian States (CARs). In this regard, Pakistan's Gwadar and Karachi Sea Ports provide ideal port and transit facilities for CARs to establish their trade links with the outer world for the benefit of the entire region. Pakistan has served as a frontline state against the Soviet Occupation from 1979 to 1989, in post 9/11, its participation in US led alliances in GWOT and now post US withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Due to its conflict with Ukraine, Russia is now badly in urgent need of expanding its customer base. In this regard, Pakistan has remained a viable customer of gas and oil. Pakistan's own gas reserves are rapidly depleting and taking into consideration all these ongoing crises, Pakistan has signed an agreement with Russia to import natural gas. In the year 2015 and 2021, Pakistan also signed a Project with Russia that amounts to 2.5 billion USD. Under the project, a 1100-kilometer gas pipeline, known as the Pakistan Stream Gas Pipeline Project, from Karachi to Punjab will be constructed. All these developments in bilateral relationship between two countries are apparently to its favor yet the impact of this seemingly friendly relationship between Russia and Pakistan remains to be seen (Owais, 2007).

Economic Impact on Pakistan

Throughout history, Pakistan has been on good terms with Ukraine and Russia and has sustained its bilateral economic ties with both. Pakistan exports to Russia in 1996 were just 13.1 M USD but in 2020 the export rate will increase as much as 279 M USD. On the other hand, Russia's export was just 67.6M in 1996 but in 2020, they have gone as high as 699M USD. Likewise, for a given year Pakistan exports to Ukraine have increased from 18.1 M USD to 573M USD and Ukraine export to Pakistan has increased from 2.98M USD to 82.1M USD (Qiser, 2022).

However, the ongoing conflict has brought this economic tie under huge strain. This is an especially alarming situation in a country like Pakistan which is already struggling with numerous problems.

After US, Europe, NATO and its allies, Germany and many other states have expanded sanctions on Russia. These sanctions will have an effect on the global market. Likewise, Pakistan will continue to suffer in many ways.

Pakistan, already suffering from a grappling economy, has record high inflation for a two years period from 2022 at around 10%. The inflation will in turn lead to a wage-price spiral, in which due to rising living costs, individuals demand more wages. This will exacerbate economic instability. Furthermore, if wages are not raised, as a last option businesses would have to lay off their workforces, resulting in an increased unemployment.

The disruption in the food value chain will be significant. Russia and Ukraine together constitute 21% of global wheat export in the year 2021. In the fiscal year 2021, Pakistan alone consisted of 39% wheat imports from Ukraine. It also imports corn, barley, grain, seeds among other items from Ukraine. This disruption in supply leads to high prices of food commodities. The inflation in the food market also relates to cut in supply of fertilizers. Likewise, there will be a surge in electricity rates too. One cannot deny that the natural outcome of high inflation, fewer jobs and more people falling below poverty line, their inability to make both ends meet will eventually deteriorate the law-and-order situation in the country (Shakil, 2022).

In the wake of global pandemic where the whole world suffered, the impact for poor countries like Pakistan was especially disastrous. It had not yet come out of the cascading effect of those crises that a new challenge in the form of Russia-Ukraine

conflict had ensued. It is now at Pakistan's wise disposal of all the means at hand that the country can counter this growing insurgency.

China as a Case Study

In the Ukrainian-Russian Conflict, China's position can be evaluated with respect to three categories of interests. Firstly, China wants to sustain its brotherly ties with Russia. Secondly, Beijing would never want to give up on the West in pursuance of narrow national interest as its prosperous future is directly proportional to stable economic ties with the West. Last yet equally important to China is preservation of its commitment enshrined in its foreign policy to safeguard sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states. China so far seems to be advocating a non-position on conflict by neither praising any state's stance nor condemning invasion of Russia. However, it remains uncertain how long China will maintain its policy of neutrality for as the tensions between two states continue to grow, the world-states will eventually be forced to open up about their choices (International Crisis Group, 2022).

Evaluating Impact on Global Level- Middle Eastern and North African States

The reality of how vulnerable states are to the outcome of Ukraine-Russia conflict is actually a question of how much dependent the states are for their national existence on Ukraine and Russia. When it comes to Middle Eastern and African States, it is observed that Russia enjoys working ties with many states of Middle East and North Africa. For these states Russia provides high level diplomatic assistance, active military engagement, a stable source of food and energy security and arms and ammunition aid. Therefore, the probability of these states of non-allegiance to Russia is less likely yet if continued for a long time, Russia will soon not be in a position to provide assistance to Middle Eastern and North African States under the tightening sanctions and weakening diplomatic relationship with super powers of the world. It is then under this change of events that Russia will begin to lose its influence over these states and it is then that these states will have to make a choice whether to hold on to Russia or to let go of it (Wehrey, 2022; Rumley, 2022; Welsh, 2022).

Recommendations

Following way outs can be adopted by both states to buffer their rapidly deteriorating relationships:

A Sustainable Solution underpins Geo-Strategic Interests

Primarily, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine requires an addressal of each state's specific national interest. Yet, the fact remains that conflict between two states cannot be considered as merely their own conflict rather the implications of conflict go well beyond the borders. Therefore, on a broader spectrum, the geo-strategic interest of states must be counted first when designing a policy-solution to war.

Temper Antagonistic Rhetoric by beginning with less divisive topics

Firstly, discussions should be carried out on less divisive topics encompassing issues on sub-regional level rather than on continent wide level. These less divisive topics can range from trade, maritime environment, issues related to Black Sea, the Baltic Sea and other narrower grounds. There can be no better solution to temper antagonistic rhetoric than willingness of European States themselves in making table talks and acknowledging legitimate concerns of Russians while also putting forward their own. This could be an important step because once discussions are underway, they might give way to topics of major concern.

Replacing “All or Nothing” Approach

Sanctions to Russia are not a new thing. Bringing Russia suddenly under heavy sanctions may not be as effective as if the international community takes the approach of linking incremental sanctions to incremental relaxation of sanctions. This will be more effective than an all or nothing approach.

Provisions for Security Reservation

The concept of ‘Security Reservation’ is based on the notion that energy should not be used as a weapon in times of war. It entails limitation on deployment of weapons only on a handful of positions and for calculated time. Practically, this step is hard to follow yet it makes sense if nations show willingness to adopt it.

Infusing Sense of Belonging on Inter-State Level

States must now establish a new security architecture based on a sense of belonging, putting aside ethnocentrism and eurocentrism. Therefore, to overcome growing impatience in international politics, the state must adopt a more liberal outlook of acknowledging the nation's cultural, historical and ideological narrative.

Proactive Approach

In order to deal with the complete subject-matter of national security, the state must establish pro-active negotiation capacity, through early-stage consultation and international community assistance.

Trust-Building

It is certainly one of the most important reasons that two states have so far been unable to resolve their problems and all the efforts entailing negotiation and mediation have failed. It is advisable that the two must put forward their respective concerns in presence of the third-party mediators i.e. those states that enjoy a high degree of trust with both Ukraine and Russia.

Conclusion

To conclude, it can be stated that it is true that no conflict can be defined as totally local in the modern times, as the global community has to suffer from the consequences in one way or another. The impact of the Ukraine-Russia Conflict has

been felt in all parts of the world today. Russia sees Western expansion on its border as a threat to its sovereignty and it is willing to take all types of pain instead of acquiescence to Western order. On the other hand, Ukraine has its reasons to continue to resist Russia's interventions. It is the national interest which is at stake for both the states and, it is only through mutual understanding of both states' national security threats that any viable solution can be implemented. Adoption of humanitarian principles by both the states is favorable not only in promoting peace and brotherhood between them but for the international community at large.

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