
Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: A Study of Regional Power Dynamics and Geopolitical Governance

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Abstract

The military invasion of Ukraine by Russia that commenced in February 2022 represents a deep international conflict of major geopolitical character with severe human and international impact. Moreover, it focuses on analyzing the relationship between territoriality, governance, and political factors with regard to Ukraine, Russia and the global environment. The study describes the effects of the conflict in Ukraine at political, economic, and social levels, where the Russian invasion brought destabilization. We then elucidate the global consequences with emphasis on the disintegration of transnational mobility of people, money and goods, food staples in particular, and oil. These disruptions crystalize the change in the agency of the state and non-state actors and the struggle for geopolitical power. The international response reveals a duality: on the positive side, there is unity amongst countries to support Ukraine, but on the negative side, this crisis deepens injustice issues around global issues such as climate and food. The war brings into focus factors of security, sovereignty and sustainability and raises questions about the ability of international organizations to manage emergent global concerns. This paper claims that the conflict exposes structural vulnerabilities in global systems and provides an imperative to rethink the role of international structures – principally the UN, NATO and the EU – in managing contemporary Global crises. Last, the study analyzes possible consequences in the future for Ukraine and its manifestations, like reconstruction in terms of NATO and EU membership and considers the consequences for the global community with regard to the maintenance of peace, security and justice. The crisis in Ukraine is the matrix of a new world where territorial conflicts, competition for resources, and the polarization of political space are gaining importance.

Keywords: Russia, Ukraine, Geopolitics, Global Governance, Sovereignty, Security, Climate Justice, European Union, NATO.

Introduction

COVID-19, which began the world disruption ushered in, was followed by cascading crises of superimposed disruptions in the supply chain, inflation, energy crises, declining exports, hunger, depreciating currency, and bottlenecks in logistics. Of all these crises, the recent Russo-Ukrainian war starting in February 2022 is the most distinguishing. It has greatly escalated geopolitical adversarial and has become one of the largest proxy wars in Europe since World War II (Dodds et al., 2020 Territory, Politics, Governance, 2022). Sanctioned as a "special military operation," the invasion has manifested human, political, economic and environmental costs, enhancing regional instability and contributing to worldwide conflicts (Marten, 2022; Hryhorczuk, 2024). More to the point, this conflict has revealed the weakness and instability of international systems, energy markets and food chains, reshaping norms of sovereignty and governance (Navarro & Singh, 2024). There have been numerous changes in the conflict in Ukraine that have influenced scholarly practices and the research environment. While on paper, restrictions remain relatively liberal for researchers wishing to access archives in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, in practice, these have become significantly tighter over recent years because of the growing political risks, security concerns, and practical difficulties. These barriers, alongside persistent COVID-19 restrictions concerning physical movement, have limited more conventional forms of scholarly investigation. As a result, scholars have had to employ digital strategies and conduct research through tools and instruments in an attempt to keep working (Kinne et al., 2023; Bradley et al., 2024). This study analytically explores emergent pervasive crises that undergird today's world with a lens on their deep consequences on global order and knowledge systems. These interactions bring to the perspective that geopolitical changes and systemic shifts call for cross-discipline paradigms tasked with the task of solving complex problems resulting from transitions (Stokes et al., 2023; Navarro et al., 2024). For that reason, such approaches are important not only to explain the current consequences of the conflict in Ukraine but also to shed light on the long-term effects of the conflict on governance and sovereignty frameworks and Global power realignment (Hryhorczuk, 2024). These diversified and escalating forms of crises require fresh approaches to scholarly analyses that address the political, economic, environmental and social contexts in which they occur. These approaches highlight synchronistic, interprofessional approaches to knowledge production that specialize in yielding practical solutions to global disruptions. For the academic community, which is searching for a new place in the world and adapting to new changes in geopolitics, the need to view all pertinent phenomena more as effects of a variety of causes is becoming increasingly apparent (Meyerson, 2024; Carter & Owens, 2024). The recently continued Russia-Ukraine conflict has caused many negative impacts on human, social, economic and environmental aspects. From the data obtained from the U.S. government as of August 2023, more than 190000 military deaths, 300000 wounded, and over 260000 civilians dead (Cooper et al., 2023). Damage and destruction in infrastructure and housing have particularly been instrumental in projecting reconstruction costs, and it is difficult to reach \$ 411 billion in the next decade (World Bank, 2023). These examples show the complex effects of the conflict on international research, administration, and scholarship, most especially in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, where searches in archives are always associated with risks and limitations (Walt, 2023). It caricatures the relations between territories, politics, and governance and makes use of them. There is plenty of discussion among scholars regarding the triggers of the war, with some believing it was instigated due to security issues with NATO enlarging, as Mearsheimer (2022) has it, or due to internal factors, as Klinke (2023a) and Galeotti (2022) have it, where Putin wants to solidify his authoritarian rule. They stress that Ukrainian scholars have to inculcate the understanding of Ukraine as an autonomous political and cultural subject that was ignored in Western scholarship (Baradrin, 2023). Contemporary scholars are meeting these difficulties through the use of technology and

other sources to record the cultural losses of Ukraine and the other changes in the global relations brought about by the war (Walt, 2023). This war points to the fact that cross-disciplinary approaches are required to analyze and define the impact of the war on alliances, sovereignty, and power relations in the global system. Also, it strengthens the argument that Ukraine makes for seeking NATO and EU integration, which dovetails with the restructuring of world politics (Baradrin, 2023; Mearsheimer, 2022). Russian information sources have effectively become closed, which is different from the time before the end of the 2010s, which can be called relatively open. This restriction has caused a problem for source-based research, and it has forced literature to adopt approaches that match life in the 2020s. Khromeychuk (2022) dismisses the Western representation of Ukraine as a geopolitical pawn on the world map while disregarding Ukrainian opinions and input. Such a gap suggests that it is high time to involve Ukrainian scholars in the debates on authoritarianism and governance, as well as the spatialities of Putin's regime (Lyubchenko, 2022; Paustyan, 2022). The importance of spatial concepts, as foregrounded by Agnew (2013), characterized by territory and place, is relevant in the analysis of how geopolitics and governance engage in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. The war also shows that territories and politics are simultaneously instruments for constructing hostile initiatives and resources for survival. It is a multi-layered conflict that entails local destruction, displacement, and International Relations, both related to the stability offered by Russia's territorial aggression and change as achieved by transnationalism and flows of people, capital, and ideas (Brusylovska & Maksymenko, 2023; Biden, 2023). Different stories surround the war – Russia talks about the construction of some entity, "Greater Russia," while the West has presented it as a battle between democracy and the authoritarian regime.

1-The Geopolitical Dynamics of Territory and Governance in the Russo-Ukrainian Conflict

The Russo-Ukrainian War again underlines the importance of territory and infrastructure for today's wars. 'Such weapons are held in trenches, tunnels, and land where there is an ongoing change of possession; drones control this and are altering strategic dynamics' (Bille, 2020). Civilian assets have been courted, and pieces of infrastructure have been attacked, such as the Kakhovka Dam attack in June 2023, causing total flooding and 40,000 displaced, in addition to losses in homes and agricultural land. On the same note, issues such as threats to Nuclear power like the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant create a near disaster to that of Chernobyl and destruction to critical infrastructure like the Nord Stream 2 pipeline (Bille, 2020). Ukraine's geopolitical orientation remained ambiguous since it gained independence in 1991; its political orientation was between the EU and Russia. Its course has been turbulent due to the Orange Revolution (2004–2005), the Maidan protest (2013–2014), and the Russia-Ukraine conflict in Crimea in the same year. Consequently, the 2022 invasion highlighted that both Russian and Ukrainian Russian-speaking populations in Ukraine do not want to be joined with "greater Russia" (Ortmann, 2023). In Russia, the war has supported nationalist rhetoric, arguing that Ukraine is a historically vassal state and Western sanctions – as attacks on Russian sovereignty. The Moscow political leader uses discourse to argue that Ukraine's independence is viable only with the help of cooperation with Russia (Putin, 2021). Since Crimea's seizure and, particularly due to military spending, Russia has felt increased pressure on its economy, with the rouble reducing its value in 2023 and the economic contraction predicted to worsen (Kurmanaev & Safronova, 2023). For Ukraine, the conflict is fundamental because their sovereignty and territorial integrity are at stake. The victory on the part of Russia would reduce Ukraine's capability for autonomous governance and the definition of its international role. On the same note, a Russian failure may jeopardize Putin's regime and increase uncertainty and problems for Russia (Kurmanaev & Safronova, 2023).

2. The Reordering of Geopolitical and Economic Dynamics

Ukraine, Russia, and the Global Shifts The ongoing war in Ukraine due to Russian aggression led to the internal and external human displacement rate higher than in any other European country – more than a third of Ukraine's pre-invasion population. This consists of 5 million IDPs and 6.28 million refugees in other countries (UNHCR, 2023a; 2023b). Germany, Poland, and the Czech Republic are examples of nations that have economically and politically weakened while hosting refugees, the Polish right-wing party has more power, and Russia has been spreading negative things about Ukraine (Bronert, 2023; Havlík & Kluknavská, 2023). The fact that the crisis is ongoing, we can not but worry about the feasibility of political support for refugees (Roy, 2023). According to June 2023 statistics, Ukrainians are the largest group of LM employed in the EU; of LM in the EU using TP (temporary protection), 98.2% are Ukrainians (Eurostat, 2023a). However, refugees' choice of temporary protection creates a challenge to arriving at an accurate refugee estimate (Andrews et al., 2023). This is also a cause for questions on how the continuous war changes conventional migration trends and affects varying racial, gender, and socio-political aspects in the host countries. Regardless, Ukrainian refugees are more welcome politically rather than other refugees from conflicts such as from Afghanistan and Syria due to cultural recalling (Eurostat, 2023b). However, current female refugees have different issues related to political instability, violation of their rights with increased rates of violence, and the search for care services and education for children amid becoming heads of families (Andrews et al., 2023; Pertek et al., 2022). It has also produced considerable and profound changes to world economic activity, including the decimation of Russia's export of commodities that had turned it into the EU's biggest energy provider (Eurostat, 2023b). The decision of Germany to rely on natural gas, particularly after the 2011 Fukushima disaster, was a strategic blunder (Hansen, 2023). The following increase in energy prices has affected the political backing for the German coalition government and promoted the rise of the right-wing parties (Hansen, 2023). This paper affirms that Ukraine, as a global producer of agricultural products, has contributed significantly to worsening political crises in Africa by impacting global food prices (Roth, 2023). Türkiye has geared itself up as a facilitator of these shifts within geopolitical structures and frameworks, especially in the agreement to export Ukrainian grain through the Black Sea. This is typical of the new world processes, when, despite the sanctions, Russia continues to actively cooperate with other countries such as Brazil, China or India in the sphere of energy exports or in other forms (Braw, 2022). Last but not least, the political impacts of the invasion are multilateral. The US, UK, and EU have created a narrative that Russia is a villain state, while China, India and Türkiye have actively worked to strengthen their positions as neutral mediators (Moisio, 2022). On the other hand, Russians carry on capital flight, in part through non-state actors such as the Wagner Group, which mines natural resources in Africa for its military operations (Marten, 2019; Pokalova, 2023).

3-Geopolitical Agency and Territorial Dynamics: The Role of Small States and Middle Powers in Global Politics

When it comes to geopolitical tensions and their consequences, power politics and actions of the key players, including Russia, are prominent Although the situation and main issues related to the Ukraine-Russia War have been studied from different theoretical and methodological perspectives, and different approaches have been applied, there is still a lack of attention to the opinions and perspectives of actors that matters most to the small states and middle powers, which are situated beyond the European continent (Moisio (2024, p. 2) challenges the realist approach that considers the sovereignty of the territorial state as a smaller state, such as Ukraine, as an object of the great power and the state within the model of security competition. From this vantage point, it is not uncommon to speak about small states as pieces on an international chessboard. But, a close look at the AMMs of the smaller states offers a great way of identifying more active participation

in setting an international political agenda. For example, comparing the responses of two small states in Asia – Singapore and Taiwan – is depicted as showing how small states are capable of territorializing their position in different and often more nuanced ways. After the war between Russia and Ukraine, the Singaporean government expressed its position on the conflict immediately, stressing that crucial matters are intertwined within the frameworks of law, sovereignty, and survival of small states (Moisio, 2024). In the words of Singapore's Foreign Minister, Dr. Vivian Balakrishnan, the invasion was a 'clear and gross violation' of inviolable norms of International Law and the United Nations Charter, which bars the use of force and aggression against sovereign states (Balakrishnan, 2024). He called Russia's move more of a "failure of history and crazy decisions" and warned that a world order where the powerful do as they please while the weak endure would be dangerous for the existence of small states. This view underlines Singapore's desire not only to operate as a responsible diplomatic player but also to fully adhere to both international norms and international law, irrespective of the stances that other leading powers may take. He accused Russia of acting on the principles of "historical mistakes and lunacy" and said that the "might makes right" paradigm, where "might do as pleases and right suffers," would be fatal for the preservation of the smaller states. This is the reason why Singapore has been maintaining diplomatic principles and international laws regardless of the stands that other leading world powers took on certain issues. On a different note, a few Singaporean academics have tried to understand why the Singaporean public has remained 'unimpressed' by the war in Ukraine in spite of the Singaporean government's heavy engagement. According to George et al. (2024), although it is easy for citizens to watch geopolitics from the great power prism, they also uphold the need to protect Singapore as a small state in a contested region. These scholars align with the state argument focusing on commitment to norms that shield weaker actors, claiming that local citizens' judgment should be based on facts, conscience and a commitment to 'peaceful co-existence.' (George et al., 2024). That insight lies at the heart of the argument that smaller states are still capable of shaping a world in line with the principles of international justice for the weaker state. Small states' sovereignty can also invoked through understanding the reactions of the Taiwanese authorities towards the Russia- Ukraine situation. Like Singapore, Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-Wen came out early to denounce Russia's invasion of Ukraine and support the "determination of the Ukrainian people to defend their homeland," which has moved 'free people of the world' (cited in Parello-Plesner, 2024). Nonetheless, unlike Singapore, the Tsai administration engaged in policy actions to enhance the Taiwanese defense power. In particular, the population of Taiwan has decided to prolong compulsory military conscription and increase it from four to twelve months starting in 2024, and this decision is connected with the strengthening of the defense against foreign invasions. In June 2024, Taiwan's military also released a newly updated civil defense handbook that, for the first time, compels people to differentiate between Chinese and Taiwanese soldiers based on their outfits, camouflage, and badges (Reuters, 2024). These measures are evidence of Taiwan's readiness for the probability of Chinese integration, a topic that is often considered with increasing likelihood in strategic planning meetings. Taiwanese Deputy Foreign Minister Roy Chun Lee has stated that for China, the conflict in Ukraine is an 'experiment' that is to prepare for the capture of Taiwan (Standish, 2024:1). Taiwanese users have also compared both geopolitical situations with the help of the "Ukraine Today, Taiwan Tomorrow" saying which unites these two conflicts. In the eyes of these people, Putin's recent statement, "There is no Ukraine, and it is a part of Russia," has the same tune as Xi saying, "There is no Taiwan, there is only one Chinese nation" (Baron, 2024, p. 2). In this context, the geopolitical configuration of the world and the consequent distribution of power and prerogatives among nations were respectively described and analyzed.

4-The Reordering of Flows and Politico-Economic Alignments in the Ukraine Conflict

This paper has shown that the disruption of Ukraine's grain exports has had significant impacts on the Global South, particularly on food insecurity and the political crisis in Sudan. With the rising power in the region, Turkey was involved in the brokerage of a United Nations-backed deal to help the shipping of grain from Ukraine (Roth, 2023). Grossly, Russia has strengthened its so-called "win-win" commercial ties with countries including China, India and Saudi Arabia; it has assured its potential to trade in resources in the face of the economic boycott (Braw, 2022). These geopolitical realignments have created a very complicated web of relationships that threaten the West in their intended crusade to isolate Russia economically and politically. Furthermore, financial and military assistance provided to individual military forces from NATO member states, especially the United States, has aggravated political division in donor states. Discussions on the degree of financing and military assistance to Ukraine became sharp in the US; some factions reproached the Biden administration's policy (Krastev & Leonard, 2023). In Europe, there is a difference in public opinion; some countries want peace even if it means foregoing justice, but there are countries that seek justice before dialogue (Moisio, 2022). Ideas and narratives have also flowed within and between these conflicting camps, with Russia constructing its actions with reference to a cultural-economic vision of a Greater Russia and the West counterpoising to this image the image of 'the Russian bear.' This is evident in the political stances of countries such as Poland, which have had to position themselves either in the Western or Russian columns (Moisio, 2022). At the same time, countries such as China, India, and Turkey work to improve their geopolitical status through mediation, which indicates a change in power balance at the international level. Ukraine's own leaders, particularly President Zelensky, have become strong voices for the nation and often undertake international relations, all of which make Ukraine a global player (Andrews et al., 2023). Therefore, the war in Ukraine has become the main cause of the reorientation of people, commodities, and capital movement in the changed geopolitical and economic landscape. The effects of the war are also obvious and mediated by factors such as Migration, energy security, agricultural trade and military interferences. This reordering of flows has not only altered the international systems structurally but also boosted new political and economic formations with implications for the international order.

5-Territorial Dynamics and Governance in the Russia-Ukraine Conflict

Ukraine received quite a high-profile example of relationships between territory and politics /governance, particularly in terms of control over the territories/. Basically, the conflict is a war of territory and resources, and the territorial fight is evolving and very changeable considering that the front lines change day by day. These struggles include various forms of positional trolling, from foxholes to open-field battles. Currently, social media, together with real-time military coverage, has increased citizen involvement, with critics, including retired military officers, providing diagnostic analysis of the emerging scenario (Bille, 2020). One of the notable aspects of this kind of conflict is the use of drones as a weapon and tool for reconnaissance (Bille, 2020). Geographical targeting and elimination of infrastructure assets, including transport and energy systems, have emerged prominently as critical features of operational planning in both the Ukrainian and the Russian campaigns. Infrastructure warfare can be illustrated by an example from June 2023, when Russian forces allegedly flooded the Kakhovka dam and a hydropower station built in 1956 across the Dnipro River. The event caused flooding, which forced about 40,000 residents from both Ukrainian and Russian-occupied territories to be relocated due to impacts on lives and settlement, population infrastructure, and agriculture chances (Bille, 2020). Along with the systematic destruction of the infrastructure of Ukraine, the country has teetered on the verge of a potential nuclear catastrophe, including the capture of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, where Russian forces were accused of trying to blow up the station. Speaking of threats, this one

reminds me of the Chernobyl tragedy of 1986; it is even more apparent what extreme consequences the ongoing war poses. On the other hand, Ukrainian forces are being accused of attacking the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, which was meant to bring natural gas to Germany. This goes further to prove that territorial domination in this conflict entails more than mere capture but entails destructive interference with critical infrastructure (Bille, 2020). These actions raise important questions about Russia's long-term objectives: Is Russia trying to create a "Russified" Ukraine within its power, or is it trying to dismantle Ukraine through "infrared" – the destruction of Ukraine's post-Soviet infrastructure? Broad strategic interests are also at play: Ukraine has been struggling with its national and state identity since receiving independence in 1991 with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Ukraine, as the newly independent state, tried to orient to the West while the country still has historical relations with Russia. These geopolitical relations add a layer to the geography and the politics of the conflict. Ukraine is the largest country in the European Union area after Russia, and it is still searching for its position in the community of Western states. It is either to adopt Westerners, like other former members of the Warsaw Pact, who are now embracing both NATO and EU or to remain at Russia's periphery on the socio-cultural and economic frontier eastward. The last two decades have pressed the matter of Ukrainian education as far as the Ukrainian Orange Revolution in 2004–2005, the Maidan Uprising of the late winter of 2013–2014 concerning the government's refusal to sign the EU association agreement due to pressure from Russia and Russia's unlawful occupation of the Crimean peninsula in March 2014. As in many other aspects of Ukrainian life, the political processes in the country are split along the line of language, with the part of the country where Ukrainian is the main language opposing the part where Russian is the major language, where part of the population demanded more autonomy and at some times independence (Marlin, 2016). However, the large-scale Russian aggression of February 2022 showed that the majority of Russian-speaking autonomists in the eastern oblasts would actually like to stay in Ukraine with the recognition of their autonomy rather than in 'Greater Russia. This underlines the existing interdependence and independence between language communities and geopolitical attitudes in Ukraine, and eventually, we can identify that the linguistic cleavage in the country does not solely correlate with the political or regional identities. What might have come as a surprise to many within the Federation and others outside it was that Putin was popular when he invaded Ukraine in February 2022. While Russia's action unilaterally annuls international law of territory and borders and the norms of warfare (Lizotte et al., 2022), many Russian nationalists did not see this aggression as an invasion but as a part of a Greater Russia. Culturally, even during the time when Ukraine was more or less autonomous between 1991 and 2022, it was regarded as having political tendencies* hostile to Russia (Ortmann, 2023). Hence, the potential membership of Ukraine in NATO and the European Union is anathema to many; declarations by Putin (2021) that Ukraine after Maidan is a 'puppet' state of the West, the 'true sovereignty of Ukraine,' a chimera except in tandem with Russia. The economic penalties introduced by the West as a response to the Crimean annexation, combined with the ongoing agitation of specific foreign companies with regard to their oil and gas interests in Russia, have provided extra impetus to Putin's nationalist agenda. In essence, he portrays Russia as a target of aggression by the West, which rationalizes the invasion and strengthens home support for the war. As he did with the Chechen wars, Putin has applied external mobilization and war in order not only to shift focus off internal problems such as corruption, the disparity in incomes, economic stagnation, and reducing the standard of living (German, 2003; Stoner, 2023), but also to garner domestic support. Moscow and St. Petersburg: elites managing or evading the war and enclave economic responses to sanctions Russia continues to provide no signs of undoing the Crimean annexation of 2014; elites in Moscow and St Petersburg have found ways of operating the conflict's economic damage; here we find responses of enclaves insulation against the provisions of the

sanctions: shifting trading partners conclusively towards China and India, the use of second. As for the Russian Federation and Ukraine, the sweeping effects will be felt. For Ukraine, the conflict is existential: According to Nuland, 'The proven qualities of Putin's Russia gives the essence of what for Ukraine would mean the complete elimination of its sovereignty in a victory for Russia. For Putin, even a partial victory would entail claims on the sovereignty of Ukraine's political and economic independence and shrinkage of the territory. For Russia, an unfavorable outcome is a threat to Putin's regime and an uncertain and potentially dangerous future. This shocking shedding of values is particularly evident with the Russian rouble, which has been trading below 100 roubles per US dollar since the invasion of Ukraine in the summer of 2023. The US and other Western economies have restricted Russia by freezing its currency reserves, and the tanking rouble has led to a sudden hike in the interest rate in the summer of 2023. Many global experts expect more economic decline and decay in the cost of living for Russians (Kurmanaev & Safronova, 2023).

6-The Territorialized Agency of Small States and Middle Powers in the Context of the Ukraine–Russia War

The context of the conflict in Ukraine–Russia is most commonly defined by great powers such as Russia. However, it is important to remember the subjectivity of the smaller states and middle powers, especially those that are outside the EU and whose response to the war has not elicited a lot of literature. As Moisiu (2022, p. 2) argues, when realists map the distribution of power in the international system, often depicting Ukraine and similar states as mere 'bits players,' this simplification risks masking more complex modalities by which these states participate in international discourse. To this, Moisiu argues that the territorial sovereignty of smaller states is seen as being dominated by great powers, but the reactions to the invasion of Ukraine by Russia show that small and middle powers such as Singapore or Taiwan are not passive actors in international politics. For instance, Singapore, without any hesitation, immediately criticized Russia and referred to the invasion as a clear violation of the UN charter. Foreign Minister Dr Vivian Balakrishnan noted that such actions jeopardize state sovereignty and the existence of smaller states in a world based on the principle that "might is right." Singapore's government did not take a side in the geopolitical struggle and called for the preservation of international law. This position, which may be seen as opposite to the positions of the major powers, is symbolic of Singapore's determination to uphold diplomatic conduct that protects the sovereignty of small states. Singapore scholars have also pointed out that while the government has taken a highly publicized stand on the war, the people of Singapore have been comparatively restrained. George et al. (2022) note that people look at the issue from the prism of the international structure of power but stress that Singapore, as one of the Small States of the World, 'must' defend itself. Regarding the need to have an appreciation of Singapore's place within the international structure, there is an agreement with the nation to use norms of international relations to offer to weaker players in the system. Taiwan, like the West, condemns the Russian invasion of Ukraine. However, the implications of the Taiwanese stance are a little more nuanced. Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-Wen criticized Moscow, calling its actions aggression following sanctions imposed by the USA on Russian politicians and businesses supporting Ukraine's crisis. However, Taiwan is also not limited to rhetorical action; steps have been made physically to enhance defense strength, including prolonging compulsory military training from four to twelve months beginning in 2024 as well as distribution of a new Civil Defense Handbook to prepare the population for conflict (Reuters, 2023). Some officials, such as Deputy Foreign Minister Roy Chun Lee, used the war as an example of what could happen to Taiwan when China moved on it, with Taiwanese citizens using slogans such as 'Ukraine Today, Taiwan Tomorrow' (Baron, 2022). It is noteworthy that this rhetorical link emphasizes the supposed similarity between Russia's aggression toward Ukraine and Chinese actions toward Taiwan, seeing them within a framework of territorial rivalry by great powers.

Similar to Asian nations, African states are trapped in between the ensuing interests of powerful countries. Russia aims to up its foothold in Africa and has discredited its present acts, saying it was an anti-colonialism movement (Fabricius, 2023a). While some African states have publicly supported Russia or spurned UN votes to condemn the military campaign in Ukraine, others, including Ghana and Mozambique, have decried the war's effects on Africa and international security (Ramani, 2023). South Africa's foreign policy credentials are thus aligned with the international non-aligned movement. It participates in naval exercises with both Russia and China, and it tried to mediate via the Africa Peace Initiative (API), which aims to negotiate the Ukraine conflict through diplomatic means between Kyiv and Moscow (Singh & Reva, 2023). Though there have been some concerns about the sources of finance of the API, it is worth noting that it is an example of a small state balancing its diplomatic weight between extra-regional powers. These diverse responses from Singapore, Taiwan, and various African nations illustrate two critical points: first, the deep relevance of the topic in the present Ukraine–Russia War is not confined to merely European states; instead, it enlists consequence-ridden regions like Asia and African where the S and M powers have a pivotal say in the debate. Second, these states have shifted to assuming middle powers' character, which puts them in the middle of geopolitical realities through their histories, geography, and political affiliation. What their actions show is that the agency of these smaller states is not simply existential or territorially and politically inconsequential but determinative of outcomes on the global stage.

The Future of Global Geopolitics: A Cold War 2.0 or Multipolar World?

It's in Africa and other areas of the Global South that some ideas may be gained for those who are trying to read signs of future geopolitics. There can exist quite a future of an ideologically defined new Cold War/War 2.0. The world is currently witnessing the growing geopolitical influence of Russia and China on one side, with the United States and European countries on the other. The very growing strategic partnership between Russia and China, declared at some point as a 'fraternity without end,' as Xi and Putin stated in a statement at the Winter Olympic Games of February 2022, is based on a commodity exchange (China purchasing affordable Russian oil and gas, with Chinese investments in the Russian upstream energy sector) and the convergence of the two powers' opposition to the hegemonic American-made international liberal order (Xu, 2022). These antagonisms are played out through various channels: A realization of projection of military power, economic relations and commercial trade and pressures through bilateral and multilateral agreements. In this context, a number of states described as 'swing states of the world,' ranging from Argentina and Brazil to India, South Africa, and Saudi Arabia, have become strategic partners. As over 40 countries from Africa, the Middle East, South America, Eastern Europe and many other nations, including Cuba and Iran, the sworn enemies of the US, have shown their intentions to join BRICS, the reformed bloc will have the potential to shift the gears of geopolitical order and interstate relations (López, 2024). As envisaged in January 2024, the BRICS will co-opt new members, including Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, UAE and Saudi Arabia (Tass, 2024). The new Cold War is, however, characterized by the fact that there are no 'superpowers.' First-tier states, including America and the People's Republic of China, are now trapped in very complex mixed interdependencies encompassing trade, investment, technology, ideas, and communications (Murton, 2024). China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), more broadly, has been addressed in this regard, and the latest literature shows how China's connectivity with regional partners is conditioned by a set of geo-economic and geopolitical variables (Sidaway & Woon, 2024). China especially intends to become a global agenda setter like the United States, more evident through the 12 proposals presented to address the conflict in Ukraine (Chang-Liao, 2024). Thus, NATO countries – the United States, and entities of EU, as well as Indo-Pacific –Australia or South Korea, have to deal with many potential rivals and adversaries balancing both economic and strategic

cooperation, whether in the QUAD framework with USA, Australia, India, and Japan. On the other hand, a new 'realist' geopolitical structure incorporating a multipolar world may arise whereby power relations affect economic potential—founded in the arrangements for Russian oil and gas, whereby short-term expediency has repercussions (Chang-Liao, 2023). This multipolar world also encourages regional territorial imperialism. If Russia starts the process of reincorporation of part or all of Ukraine into a 'Greater Russia,' China may begin this process to reincorporate Taiwan in 2024 (Xu & Zhang, 2014). It is still uncertain whether China will take over Taiwan within the next few years and even establish sovereignty over the South China Sea (Chang-Liao, 2023). Amidst this, it is the international organizations and international legal spaces, particularly the UN, NATO and especially the EU, that are now before a point of rebirth, according to Mercer in 2024. However, the United Nations General Assembly has issued a resolution against the Russian invasion of Ukraine, though Russia has used its veto power in the Security Council (Åslund, 2023). The newcomer's residency, employment rights and healthcare services, the EU when, through measures such as the Temporary Protection Directive, has responded to the Ukraine crisis (European Council, 2024). To this end, the following actions indicate that the EU is gradually applying the new foreign policy directive to 'speak the language of geopolitics' coupled with its aggressive policy of military and economic interventionism agenda. The role of Russia in the global climate change policy is also affected by the invasion of Ukraine in a way that cannot be underestimated. The UN Environment Program (2024) observes that realistic paths toward the fabricated Paris targets are still obscured; new studies ratify an increase in global temperature to above 1.5° due to global conflicts and political insecurity (Schipper et al., 2024). Such geopolitical imperatives worsen exposure, most adversely for countries that are already struggling with climate-related calamities (UNEP 2024). Instead, the establishment of the Loss & Damage Fund at COP27 (2022) and bound's significance emphasizes the role played by countries willing to address vulnerable nations suffering from climate-related loss and damage, like Pakistan and the Philippines (Wyns, 2024). Finally, it is also unknown what will happen to Ukraine and what will happen in the country after the war. Different conflict aftermaths are being considered, whether it be Ukraine's continued division or its territories' reunification (Mitoulis et al., 2024). Since Ukraine starts a long process of reconstruction, partnerships will be essential to rebuilding basics such as infrastructure; many nations have offered to adopt cities such as Mariupol and Kharkiv (Visit Ukraine, 2024). The possibility of Ukraine's accession into the EU and NATO is still being discussed, especially with the country in search of long-term security and economic reconstruction (Ratten, 2024).

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