



**The Russo-Ukraine War and Changing Global Power Dynamics (2014-23):  
A Neorealist Perspective**

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**Abstract:**

The Russo-Ukraine War in 2022, despite historical evidence of enduring tensions between the two nations, came as a surprise for the world, challenging the U.S.-led global political order. Understanding the drivers of conflict and shifting balance of power, especially in Eurasia, is critical for academic discourse in international relations and assessing future geopolitical trends. The paper investigates the Russo-Ukraine War using a neorealist lens as a theoretical framework, adopting qualitative research methodology with a thematic analysis technique. For focused research, besides investigating the broader historical linkages of the conflict, the time horizon is delimited from 2014-23. The research questions focus on the genesis of the conflict by exploring key drivers, intersecting interests of the global powers and how the War is impacting the geopolitical landscape of Eurasia in particular and global political order in general. The study addresses the research gaps in exploring different scenarios as the end state of the conflict and their implications for the global powers and world order. Findings from detailed discussion reveal that the Russo-Ukraine War is not just a territorial dispute between the two nations but has broader geostrategic implications for the region and beyond. The conflict has the potential to reshape the alliances and exacerbate the global powers' competition, redefining the context and complexion of the emerging world order.

**Keywords:** Russo-Ukraine War, neorealism, global power dynamics, multipolar world order, strategic triangles, potential scenarios

**INTRODUCTION**

Since the end of the Cold War, the world has been accustomed to a unipolar world order solely steered by the U.S. with Western allies onboard. During this period, nothing more significant than the War in Ukraine can be traced that challenged the U.S. dominance and liberal hegemony despite the presence of revisionist states challenging the world order (Hynek & Střítecký 2020, 931-39). The maxims of Western dominance, liberal capitalists' economy, the dogma of democratic norms, and selected application of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) – when considered in the national interests of these powers, remained the prime notions of international relations (Yilmaz 2008, 44-58). Regions like Asia and Africa often served as playgrounds for power play among extra-regional

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forces, where conflicts such as in Afghanistan and Iraq manifested how global powers and the international system justified the interventions as political necessity for global governance and order.

However, Afghanistan proved to be a game changer, and the West was humbled by the withdrawal, marking a significant turning point in global geopolitics. The failure in Afghanistan and the economic recession following the COVID-19 pandemic afforded an excellent window of opportunity to the revision states like China and Russia (Kaura 2019, 49-66). Russia, in particular, exploited the opening to reassert its geopolitical ambitions, addressing its security concerns by invading Ukraine. The War tested the effectiveness of the European alliance, the international institutions' efficacy in implementing international law, and the role of the global powers in upholding the international order (Mróz, 2023). The ongoing Russo-Ukraine conflict has different contextual meanings based on the analysts' perspective, where few may term it as an imperialist war, while others would categorize it as a proxy war or a limited war. In either context, the Russo-Ukraine war has disrupted the regional balance of power with far-reaching implications for the future complexion of global political hierarchy and order.

This research focuses on analyzing the shift in geopolitical trends in Eurasia with the Russo-Ukraine war as the major driver of change, using a neorealist theoretical lens primarily focusing on the critical timeframe from 2014-23, when Crimea was annexed, and full-scale military operation was launched. The study investigates the historical linkages of the recent conflict, intersecting interests of the key stakeholders, broader implications for the geopolitical landscape of Eurasia and possible scenarios as the end state of the War.

The ongoing Russo-Ukraine War in its historical context is not merely a conflict between two nations but rather reflects a broader geopolitical struggle among direct stakeholders like Russia, Ukraine, and NATO/EU and extra-regional powers like the U.S. and China. The War significantly altered the geostrategic landscape of Eurasia, challenged the prevalent balance of power, and triggered new realignments. However, there is limited academic analysis of the evolving driver of change, geopolitical implications for the region and probable scenarios hinting towards prospects. This paper attempts to address these gaps by investigating key players' intersecting interests, including those of the stakeholders, and projecting scenarios following the War with special reference to the emerging world political order.

The paper has the following objectives: to investigate the continuing drivers of the Russo-Ukraine conflict, the intersecting interests of various stakeholders like Russia, Ukraine, and EU/ NATO, and extra regional characters like the U.S. and China, and; to analyze the implications of the ongoing War on the Eurasian geopolitical landscape and project scenarios shaping the emerging balance of power and realignments in the region.

The study focuses on the following questions: What are the key drivers of the Russo-Ukraine conflict, and how can the intersecting interests of key stakeholders and external players shape the conflict? What are the effects of the War on the region's geopolitical landscape, and how will different possible scenarios influence the balance of power and regional realignments?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Not enough literature is available on the subject matter, especially focusing on the future of realignment of power and functioning order systems for world politics post-Russo-Ukraine War. It allows one to flag specific landmarks, which would help score future scenarios. However, the reviewed literature includes thematic clusters like neorealism as a theoretical foundation, genesis of the conflict, intersecting interests of the key players, geopolitical implications for Eurasia, global realignment and impact of the War on emerging world order.

For this research, neorealism has been selected as a theoretical lens, which is a later evolution of realism as regarded as a dominant theory in contextualizing global conflicts. Classical realism, as pioneered by Morgenthau, emphasizes local and human factors (Morgenthau, 1948), while on the other hand, neorealism, as expounded by Kenneth Waltz, is more concerned with international systems and structures that shape states' behavior (Waltz, 1979). Both theories answer the same riddle of international relations: Why are states power-hungry and always pursue maximizing their power? The realists attribute it to human nature, while neo-realists attribute it to the structure and complexion of the international system (Mearsheimer 2013, 77-93). When investigated using a neorealist lens, the Russo-Ukraine War explicitly illuminates the dynamics of a power struggle between Russia and the West, Russia's desire to maintain its regional control and hegemony and the EU/NATO's eastward expansion challenging the balance of power.

Besides the historical lineages between Russia and Ukraine with sporadic evidence of grievances, especially for distinct national Ukrainian identity during the Soviet period, the genesis of the recent conflict can be traced back to the disintegration of the empire in 1991 and the independence of Ukraine. This marked the beginning of an era of clash of interests among Russia, Ukraine and the West. Russia viewed Ukraine's tilt towards the EU and NATO's eastward expansion as an existential threat, while the West regarded it as Ukraine's sovereign right to choose sides. 2014 witnessed the climax of tensions when Russia, following Ukraine's Euromaidan protests, annexed Crimea. Scholars like Sakwa (2014) argue that the conflict is not just a territorial dispute but a wider geopolitical contestation for influence and control of Eurasia. At the same time, scholars like Plokhly (2021) talked about Ukraine's challenges since independence, especially in balancing relations with Russia and the West at the same time. Similarly, Paull (2023) argued that Ukraine's nuclear disarmament in 1996 drastically disturbed the balance of power in favor of Russia.

The intersecting geostrategic interests of the global players and the direct stakeholders stay at the core of the conflict. Russia desires to reassert its control over the region and extend its area of influence (Hedlund, 2023; Sarotte, 2021), while on the other hand, the West seeks to expand its security parameters by integrating Ukraine. In the context of the interests of extra-regional actors, Götz & Staun (2022) believe that the U.S. takes the conflict as an opportunity to limit the Russian influence in the region, while China seeks to leverage the situation while maintaining its strategic flexibility and strengthening its ties with Russia. Neorealism explains these conflicting interests of different key players as states' desire to maximize their stature in the international system.

The War had significant implications for Eurasia and the world's political order in general. Plokhly (2023) expects new realignments as an outcome of the War, shaping military alliances, energy security collaborations and economic partnerships. He argues that NATO's extended involvement in

Eurasia has set a new era of geopolitical competition, strained Russia-EU relations and pushed it closer to China. This manifests the neorealist principle of realignment of states with a shift in the balance of power. In a similar context, many scholars, including Ashford (2023), believe that the world's political systems are moving towards a multipolar system, with the U.S., China and Russia as the power centers. Kissinger (2022), while criticizing the liberal international order, highlights that the War in Ukraine reflects states pursuing their narrow national interests while ignoring the collective global governance.

Despite existing literature on the Russo-Ukraine War and its geopolitical implications, there remains a gap in analyzing the interplay of tangent interests of the global powers and possible scenarios as the end result of the conflict shaping the complexion of the emerging balance of power in Eurasia and beyond. This paper aims to address these gaps, using the neorealist theoretical framework as a lens.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The paper is based on the neo-realist theoretical framework or structural realism. The theory suggests that "states which are more capable than others would control international politics." Neorealism emphasizes the 'anarchic character of the international system' where states act on self-help principles to pursue their security interests. The theory rests on three core principles: the anarchic nature of the international system, the polarity or distribution of power and the security dilemma. The approach considers power politics as the norm for international relations, conflict and competition as continuing features and finds limited scope for cooperation.

As stated above, the realists view the international system as an enduring anarchic structure, suggesting that there is no universally accepted governance authority in the world. States, therefore, work on a self-help basis to secure and maximize their interests. The War in Ukraine explicitly exemplifies this principle of neorealism, where, on the one hand, Russia perceives NATO's eastward expansion as a direct threat to its security. At the same time, Ukraine adopts a self-help approach and believes joining the E.U. and NATO is a guarantee of its security and sovereignty.

Similarly, the neorealists view the distribution of power in the international system as a means of international peace and stability. The Russo-Ukraine war is unfolding in a multipolar world, where power is no longer concentrated in a single power or pole like in the past. In the emerging international system, power is now distributed among three global powers: The U.S., China, and Russia, where all powers act to balance out the others. Russia's desire to reassert itself as a regional dominant power drives its actions in Ukraine, while the U.S.-led NATO seeks to counter Russia's influence, especially extending across Eastern Europe, where Ukraine may just prove to be the starting point. On the other hand, though avoiding direct involvement, China leverages its indirect support for Russia to strategically position itself in the global geostrategic landscape. The balancing act on the part of all states to counter others' excessive influence is an attempt to either preserve the status quo or enhance their stature and relevance. In the same perspective, where the U.S.-led West is working to conserve the status quo of the global political order, Russia and China have gradually gathered enough military and economic muscles post-Cold War to challenge the status quo. Chinese still opted for a cautious approach against Taiwan to antagonize the world.

Contrastingly, Russia was more unequivocal in a display of force in Ukraine to reclaim its anticipated global status.

In addition to the above, the Russo-Ukraine war is a textbook case of the 'Security Dilemma', where steps taken by one state to address its security concerns lead to insecurity in others. The Russian invasion can be termed a response to being encircled in its backyard by NATO's expansionist designs in Eastern Europe, threatening Russia's security. Similarly, Kyiv's desire to align itself with the E.U. and NATO prompted security apprehensions for Moscow. The actions and counteractions from both sides and the role played by NATO have exacerbated the fears of insecurity, thus setting in a cycle of enhanced security mechanisms.

Another important facet of neorealism is the assumption that states are rational actors in international relations, meaning that states make well-calculated and rational decisions, especially in the context of their survival and security. Where decisions taken by Russia, Ukraine and China are rational to safeguard their interests, the E.U.'s decision, aligned with liberals' approach to imposing sanctions on Russian oil and gas, is harming its economy and exacerbating its people's suffering. In contrast, few consider Russia's decision to invade Ukraine irrational and has set off a twisted spiral of irrational decisions by all so-called rationalist actors.

The realists, especially the neoliberals, believe that military power is still the leading and most important actor in international politics. Though the West imposed unprecedented economic sanctions without any matching military response from NATO, their efficacy to subdue Russia is far from the desired end state.

The realists also believe that the concept of the balance of power is still alive and equally applicable to the past. Ukraine's invasion has alarmed many European states to improve their relative balance of power to counter any future threat toward them. Countries like Sweden and Finland, divorcing their neutrality of the past and opting to join NATO, while all European countries significantly increasing their defense spending, is a case in point.

On the contrary, the principal claims of liberalism that international law, international institutions, and economic interdependence can avert the chances of a conflict have failed the practical test. Furthermore, the US-led liberal order appears to be losing its place in the realm of the Russo-Ukraine war, leaving the existing world order anchored in liberalist schools vulnerable to defend.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative approach using the thematic analysis technique has been used to analyze the Russo-Ukraine War under the lens of neorealism. The research design primarily relies on secondary data sources while conducting a detailed literature review of the existing academic discussions on the subject. Despite exploring the historical context of the conflict, the research focuses on the time horizon from 2014-23, from the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and a full-scale military operation in 2022.

The study, grounded in qualitative research, divided the content into various relevant thematic clusters like the historical genesis of the conflict, key drivers of the change, intersecting interests of the key stakeholders, implications for the Eurasian geopolitical landscape, global power realignments and emerging world political order.

The secondary data sources used in the paper include books, journals, media reports, certain speech excerpts of the states' premiers like Putin, and writings of foreign policy practitioners like Kissinger. In addition, the dependence on secondary data and the dynamic nature of the ongoing conflict have been defined as the study's limitations. Moreover, regarding ethical considerations, an earnest endeavor has been made to offer diverse perspectives pursuing an objective and balanced analysis.

### **THE GENESIS OF THE RUSSO-UKRAINE WAR**

Before we discuss the Russo-Ukraine War and its likely impact on the transformation of world order, it is pertinent to sketch its relation with different strategic triangles in East Asia and the Asia Pacific.

Focusing on strategic triangles allows us to view the spectrum of bipolarity vs. multilateralism (Rozman, 2022). During this transformation period, one can find various strategic triangles besides the traditional or great strategic ones since the demise of the Cold War Era: U.S.-Russia- China, where bilateral relations between the two impact the third. Within the purview of the great strategic triangle, the relations and their impact can be measured from three angles: cooperation, competition, and redemption (Dittmer 1981, 485).

From these three perspectives, the bilateral relations of the Sino-US, the Sino-Russia, and the Russo-US significantly impact the third and one. In addition to the Great Strategic Triangle, other triangles within East Asia and beyond will play a significant role in future realignments and thus must be kept in sight. A few of the critical triangles and Quads are China – Russia- North Korea, China- North Korea – The United States, South Korea- China – the United States, China – South Korea – Japan, South Korea – Japan - the United States, Japan – the United States – China, Japan – the United States – Russia, Japan – the United States – Australia – India (the Quad) and India – Israel – the United States – E.U. (the West Asian Quad). Besides the European security alliance of NATO, all these diplomatic formations have the potential to influence the outcome of the prevailing interregnum significantly. The Russo-Ukraine War and its implications for challenging the existing world order need to be seen through the prism of the great strategic triangle: Russia, the United States, and China.

With the disintegration of the former Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine was one of the fifteen independent sovereign states that emerged on the map of the world. Russia has never been at peace since then with this new arrangement, especially concerning Ukraine, the most industrialized state out of the fourteen. Thus, Russia had been endeavoring to reverse the order or, at the least, modify it as per its own choice.

The seed of recent conflict can be traced back to April 2010, when Viktor Yanukovich - a pro-Russian political candidate of the Party of Regions, was elected as President of Ukraine. Immediately after assuming office, he signed an agreement with Russia, which was not liked by the local public and Europe. According to this agreement, Russia will offer gas at a 30% discount price to Ukraine, and in return, Ukraine will extend the presence of the Russian naval fleet for the next 25 years in the Black Sea at Sevastopol (Harding, 2010), which was to finish by 2017. The domestic situation further worsened when, in 2013, the President initially edged toward the European Union Association Agreement (EUAA) being a popular local demand but later signed off unilaterally. It

resulted in domestic unrest, causing Viktor Yanukovich to step down and leave the country as a consequence of the Euromaidan Movement. Where Kyiv was satisfied with this change, as part of the anti-Euromaidan movement, it sparked protests against the center in Eastern Ukraine – Donbas region, predominantly Russian-speaking areas.

When this whole drama was happening in Kyiv, Russia made a strategic move to annex Crimea on 16 Mar 2014. It was staged as a result of the referendum, where 95.5% of the people of Crimea voted for Russia (Simpson, 2014). This way, 2014 was an important year for Ukraine for three reasons: Firstly, the Euromaidan Movement ended. Secondly, new president Petro Oleksiyovych (pro-west) was elected, and thirdly, Ukraine lost Crimea. The Minsk Agreement of 2014 to normalize the situation in the region failed, and the uneasy peace continued till recently when Russia launched a three-pronged attack on Ukraine in February 2022.

### **The War, Interests of Different Players and Emerging Regional Security Landscape**

To investigate the answer to one of the most important questions concerning the War is why Ukraine is important to Russia. The diplomatic answer to this question can be found in the Article by Vladimir Putin: On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians (Putin, 2022), where he concluded that Ukrainians and Russians are one nation owing to historical lineages. In a nutshell, Ukraine, like none other, carries a position for Russia due to its geostrategic location- a gateway between Europe and Russia, on the mouth of the Black Sea; the Eastern portion is pro-Russian, a cultural semblance of centuries, Russian territorial claims over Crimea (annexed by Russia in 2014) and Donbas region. In the ensuing paragraphs, the politico-military objectives of both sides, Russia, Ukraine and NATO, are discussed to set the foundation for analyzing their stakes and impact on each.

As Putin states, he wants to restore "historic Russia," which includes part of Ukraine, if not the whole of Ukraine. For Putin, the ongoing War in Ukraine is not just a war for the conquest of physical spaces but rather far beyond that. The ulterior motives can be Russia's power projection, cow Kyiv into submission, inducing a wedge between the United States and other European NATO allies, exerting a push on the presence of the United States from Eastern Europe, and winning domestic support for his autocratic kleptocracy. In sum, it is an attempt of a revisionist state against the status quo to challenge the world order.

On the sidelines of this conflict, Russia and China, the leading members of SCO and the most prominent critics of the US-architected international order, have stepped up their efforts to craft a regional cooperative framework as an anti-western partnership. In a way, the 2022 SCO summit attended by Heads of State of all members was a big show hinting towards an alliance disengaged from the West. Besides other initiatives taken during this summit, urging to enhance regional cooperation and the agreement on increasing the share of national currencies in bilateral trade proposed by Russia were clear signs of defiance to the existing world order (Garewal & Farwa 2022, 46).

Where it has been viewed with concern in the West, it has offered a breather to economically struggling Moscow amid U.S. sanctions. It has rung the bells in Washington and across the European Union. Whatever may be the historical reasons behind this conflict, from cultural and historical lineage, long outstanding territorial claims of Russia over Crimea and the Donbas region, and the

Kremlin's fear of Ukraine joining NATO/EU, thus threatening its backyard, it was a sleeping volcano waiting to erupt for long. It is believed that things are far more complicated than they appear, with many far-reaching spirals and undercurrents. It makes Ukraine a test case for finally deciding the future outlook of regional and international power politics.

Notwithstanding the historical burden of a humiliating defeat in Afghanistan, which resulted in the fragmentation and splintering of the former USSR, the question arises: Why would Russia go for another misadventure?

The only plausible answer that comes to mind from a rational or logical approach would be whether Putin misread the risk vs. benefit calculus or whether it was a compulsion to safeguard Russia's national interests. In other words, we must see whether it is a matter of choice or compulsion! To answer this riddle, one has to sketch out Putin's personality, which by any definition or standard cannot be judged as irrational at least once his own political career and national existence or survival are the stakes for any lousy bargain. So, one can safely rule out the possibility that Putin made a blind gamble.

It would bring the question, if it were a good gamble, why did Russia invade Ukraine? One can debate, but we must see what awaits to find the answer. However, one can assume that Russia considered it the most appropriate time to put the chips down to reassert its international stature and role. It was very much expected, though Russia had to wait a long time. Nevertheless, what else would Putin have wished for when the chastening withdrawal from Afghanistan humbled the Biden administration, the shocks of the coronavirus pandemic stressed Europe and the USA, the change of battens in Germany and Britain, and the French premier being more concerned for his reelection.

Juxtaposed, Russia could exploit the levers of Europe's dependence on Russian oil and gas. All seemed perfect for Russia. A lot is still to roll out before we can comment on this, but if Russia loses this War, it will cease to exist as Russia anymore. Europe and the United States would defang Russia to avert any chances of future aggressions skirting Europe. It makes the ongoing War a now-or-never scenario for Russia's survival in its existing geographical frontiers. When stakes are so high, one can expect a fierce showdown from both sides. After facing the reversals since the start of the War, it appears Putin must have curtailed its politico-military objectives in Ukraine. From subduing Kyiv and regime change of Zelenskyy to more affordable objectives in Eastern Ukraine in the Donbas region and Southern oblasts of Zaporizhzhia and Kherson.

Fundamentally, the War in Ukraine is a proxy war for NATO, where the United States and NATO would desire a severely weakened and humbled or further disintegrated Russia, which is no longer a threat to the prevailing international order. It appears to be an over-ambitious politico-military objective against a nuclear Russia hosting the biggest stockpile of nukes. Then what can be the realist objectives of NATO once it cannot afford to enter into a direct military conflict with Russia? In this regard, western powers have limited options: on the one hand, to improve the resilience of Ukraine through continued support, and on the other hand, to coerce the Kremlin through suffocating economic sanctions. Within this limited space for maneuverability, NATO presumably can opt for one out of the three strategic objectives as end states:

1. To enforce a ceasefire
2. To force a withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukraine



### 3. To aim for the overthrow of Putin's regime

Out of these desired end states, enforcing a ceasefire through the mediation of China appears to be a plausible option, that too only if Russia is brought to the verge of economic collapse through continued meaningful, effective sanctions and militarily through cooperative resilience of NATO in Ukraine.

The space for prolonged War is further curtailed by the fact that in the scenario mentioned above, desperate Russia still has the option to go nuclear, though it is a remote possibility. Apropos, NATO would endeavor to keep Russia's nuclear threshold in mind. In this case, the perceived strategy of the United States would revolve around five steering points: firstly, to avoid confrontation between the militaries of Russia and NATO. Secondly, the conflict should be confined to the geographical boundaries of Ukraine. Thirdly, empowering Ukraine through capacity building to fight this War on behalf of the United States and NATO, fourthly further cementing NATO unity, and finally, not to sever Russia to an extent where it can legitimize its use of nuclear weapons.

For similar reasons, though fighting this War on behalf of Europe, Ukraine was not previously granted membership in the European Union and NATO. These reasons are: firstly, if Ukraine is accepted into NATO, it will have to deploy its forces inside Ukraine for collective defense in case of any conflict with Russia, which will bring both into a confrontation, which NATO would never like. Secondly, even in case of a no-peace no-war scenario, NATO would opt for a cautious approach for not antagonizing Russia for Ukraine. Thirdly, if given the status of European Union member, Ukrainians may migrate to other parts of Europe, creating population or migration overload.

### **Implications of War for Russia, Europe, and the United States**

The world, in general, and the West are already facing economic decline due to the conflict. Europe is facing a shortfall of gas for domestic and commercial use and is looking for alternatives to Russian gas, which would cost time and extra expenses. Similarly, suspended supplies of oil and grains imported from Russia and Ukraine have become a nightmare for Europe. The sanctions imposed on Russia are hurting the countries who have imposed these far more than Russia itself, which has found other buyers for her exports. These sanctions, as perceived, could not achieve the desired impact primarily for two reasons. Firstly, where many countries condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine, only forty states agreed to participate in the imposition of sanctions, meaning other states are still providing evasion of sanctions to Russia.

Secondly, the slipway to the Russian economy by purchasing oil and gas is offered by China, India, and other non-European countries and by European states. So, these sanctions cannot be termed more than a doughnut with a hole, as referred to by Kazuto Suzuki (Kazuto, 2022). The impact of sanctions is always felt by sanctioning and a sanctioned state if there is an environment of higher interdependence. Regarding sanctions on Russia, sanctioning states are under more incredible duress and highly dependent on Russian energy imports, which account for 40% of their total need. As per the World Bank report, gas prices remain as high as 75% than in previous years for countries of the European Union (World Bank, 2022). So, these sanctions are the epitome of self-inflicting injury for Europe and nothing less. Where the ongoing winters will suffocate Europe, the prolonged war can choke their economy and seriously impact public opinion against their policies.

On the other hand, Russia is still managing its energy exports to other buyers, though at a lower price. This protracted tug-of-war will hurt Europe more than Russia.

In addition to the above, the stance of the Kremlin to sell its energy products only in Ruble has further complicated the situation for Europe and the United States, thereby challenging the hegemony of the petrodollar, a symbol of West architected world order. If the Kremlin succeeds in this venture, combined with China's already pursuing bilateral trade in the Yuan, it will create a big dent in the prevailing world order. In the past, leaders like Gaddafi of Libya followed the footprint of Saddam, who challenged the petrodollar hegemony and offered an alternative to oil trade through the Gold Dinar (Siraj 2019, 87). However, removing Putin would not be easy.

Where this war has impacted the governments, the European public has also been hit hard due to inflation, record high prices of food items, and non-availability of fertilizers for their cultivation from Russia and Ukraine. As per the European Parliament report on EU food policy implications, wheat prices have increased by 70%, EU food prices by 5.6% compared to last year, and oilseed prices are rising to record highs. In addition, 52% of maize imported in the past from Ukraine and used in animal feed is not available this year due to the closure of the Black Sea port and non-operational railway system, which will pose a severe challenge for the EU's poultry, meat, and dairy industry. Juxtaposed, amid sanctions, the EU is not in a position to find a cost-effective and timely alternative to the fertilizer import share of Russia and Belarus, 60% and 35%, respectively (Laaninen, 2022). Moreover, fertilizer prices remain very high in the EU with the suspended gas supply through the Nord Stream 1 pipeline. It would impact the upcoming cultivation season in Europe and the lives of farmers who are not concerned with the war between Russia and Ukraine.

Ukraine is the worst to face the brunt when the EU is under economic stress. As per the World Bank report, Ukraine's GDP growth for 2022 was expected to be -35%, while Russia's projected GDP growth rate for the same period is -4.5% (World Bank, 2022). The GDP growth index of other Central Asian states in 2022 is also not encouraging, as reflected by the World Bank in its Economic Report for Europe and Central Asia-Fall 2022.

The economic crunch, coupled with capital flight and mass migration of human resource capital, would continue hurting Ukraine. Even if the war stops, the rehabilitation of Ukraine would not be easy for Kyiv and its Western allies, which would require \$349 Billion, as estimated by the World Bank (World Bank, 2022).

In its Economic Report of Europe and Central Asia- Fall 2022, the World Bank refers to Kammer hinting that prices hike and rising inflation rates may contribute to social unrest in certain countries (Kammer et. al., 2022). If this phenomenon unfolds, it will force the nations to rethink and redesign their policies toward ongoing conflict in Eurasia. The social unrest may also force countries to question the validity of the prevalent world order.

### **Probable Scenarios and Implications for Emerging World Order**

#### ***If Russia Wins, Who Will Lose?***

Though conflicts do not offer classical zero-sum game results, the magnitude of losses versus gains still exemplifies the scorecard. In any conflict, nations only go to war as an option of last resort. Aggressors opt for this choice only when it assures a favorable risk versus benefit matrix. In this

case, Russia, being the aggressor, must have conducted an in-depth analysis of its adversaries' collective responses. Russia might have misread the environment, precluding the possibility of all-out moral, material, and monetary support of Ukraine's Western sympathizers, thus tilting the balance of forces against it.

Nonetheless, being cognizant of the consequences of a defeat, it is anticipated that Russia would go to any limit to avert a total loss or humiliation. The weapon of last resort would be the use of nukes, which the world, in any case, cannot afford. Russia's complete or partial success would not be accepted to NATO, considering they have missed the opportunity to defang Russia once and for all. On the other hand, if Russia manages to impose submission on Ukraine, it would surely hurt the future viability of the existing world order, which is already challenged. It will also encourage China to exercise its potential to become an acknowledged superpower.

### ***If Russia Loses, Who Will Win?***

Total annihilation of nuclear Russia would be neither a possible nor a desirable one, even by the United States and its allies. However, they would indeed aim at chastening Russia with new geographic boundaries. It again may be a challenging swoop as Russia would be a tough nut to crack even when humbled. Nevertheless, in any case, if Russia withdraws from its stated claims of this war, the United States and its European allies would be considered victorious, thus able to reassert and consolidate the prevailing world order. In this scenario, China will be left alone to challenge the status quo of Western dominance. The dominion of SCO would also be marginalized to a great extent.

### ***If Both Lose, Who Will Win?***

The war, if stretched beyond the culmination point of both states, with exhausted war stamina, would either result in a stalemate- protracted conflict scenario or Russia ceding to post-war bargains and demands of Western allies. On the other hand, it will be a test case for Europe to assist Ukraine in its resuscitation and rehabilitation.

### ***A Stalemate - Protracted Conflict Scenario***

It would be tough for Russia to prolong this war for obvious economic costs, especially under a sanctions umbrella. It would also frustrate NATO to support Ukraine in kind and cash indefinitely. However, if Russia finds sufficient buyers to purchase its oil and gas, this option from short to midterm will suit Russia. It is a test of nerves and war stamina for both sides, and we will have to wait to see who blinks first.

### **Broader Implications for Global Political Order and Systems**

By witnessing recent geopolitical and economic developments, one can safely assume that the prevalent world order is under serious duress. The West-orchestrated order has been challenged in several ways in the last decade, especially in the past few years. The abrupt exit of the United States and its allies from Afghanistan proved to be a significant landmark hinting towards the possible downfall of Western supremacy. However, it was hastened by the West's protracted economic turmoil due to COVID-19, from which still most states could not get out. It was followed by the war in Ukraine, causing a global energy security crisis, especially in Europe. Seeing the inadvertent withdrawal of the U.S. and its allies from Afghanistan, Russia and China stripped off their

composure of uneasy peace to put up an overt challenge to the prevalent world order. Russia was the first to go, where it launched a Special Military Operation in Ukraine, while China followed suit to step up its efforts to reclaim Taiwan Island.

The present study focuses on finding the potential of the Russo-Ukraine war to challenge the world order or at least set it as a starting point. It makes the ongoing military conflict in Eurasia crucial for both sides: revisionist Russia and the pro-status quo West. Whoever wins will be empowered to dictate the future of world politics and hierarchy. In this scenario, more than physical gains, the notion of victory would be crafted in the cognitive domain, in which the West, with a leading media campaign, would outpace Russia. However, Russia endeavored to put his victory trophies as embellishing truths on the table.

So far, we have witnessed governments being implicated in the ills of this war, but sooner or later, it will start impacting the lives of the public. The higher global inflation rates, declining economic and business activities, and the worst impact on the European economy have the chances of social unrest. It would force the countries to rethink and realign themselves with emerging global political trends. It is too early to predict who would blink first, but this campaign is the last ditched effort for Putin and the West before we witness a new set of rules to articulate world order. In a nutshell, this war may or may not be able to change the world order entirely, but it will set the process in motion.

## **CONCLUSION**

The war in Ukraine is a classical reflection of core principles of neorealism, manifesting states behavior in an anarchic international system, pursuing their national interests concerning their security and desires for power projection. Where Russia's military operation can be seen as a result of a security dilemma and to secure its national interests, Ukraine's response reflects its endeavor to secure its sovereignty. The war has exposed the visible shift in global power dynamics, accelerating the drive towards a multipolar global political order with increased frictions, competition, and conflict between status quo and revisionist states while enhancing strategic cooperation within challenging states, such as Russia and China.

The study's key findings underscore a transformation and realignment of the alliances, increased competition among global powers, a potential remodeling of the global balance of power in the coming years, the emergence of a new era in global power politics and likely weakening of liberal global order.

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