

## WAR IN UKRAINE – A pivotal moment in peacemaking

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*The war in Ukraine will re-shape international relations and challenge current peacemaking strategies. Peacemakers need to find ways to resolve conflicts between states and deal with the 'weaponisation of everything'. The war will also impact the perennial discussion on the relationship between peace and justice.*

### The New Global Context for Peacemaking

24 February 2022 is a pivotal moment in international relations and peacemaking in particular. The large-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia set off geopolitical shockwaves around the world and could alter the global security landscape as deeply as 9/11 did two decades ago.

9/11 consolidated the post-Cold War security landscape where non-state actors and terrorism were seen to be the main threats to the global security, and states with competing interests engaged jointly in counterterrorism and stabilisation efforts with varying mandates. 24/2 has challenged this trend. The current war in Ukraine accentuates geopolitical divides in which global security risks stem from tensions between states and the conflict paradigm shifts from intra-state to inter-state conflicts. This is a continuation of a longer-term development where conflicts are increasingly driven by states, often via proxies.

The West has re-found a common purpose in resisting Russian aggression and has increased military spending to this end. The European Union (EU) member states were remarkably quick to unify and strongly express their political positions against Russia's actions. To date, through the ill-named Europe-

an Peace Facility (EPF), the EU has provided a total of €3.1 billion to support the Ukrainian armed forces. The transatlantic relationship and the role of the North-Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) became stronger this year, exemplified by the speed of which Finland and Sweden's applications to join NATO have been processed. Domestic political discourse in Western states has strongly disputed Russia's justifications for its invasion of Ukraine and consider it fundamentally wrong and immoral.

A large majority of states condemned the Russian invasion as a

clear violation of international law. This was confirmed by the United Nations General Assembly's resolution in early March to reprimand Russia (141 countries voted in favour, 5 against, 35 abstained), and in October to condemn the annexation of four of Ukraine's regions (143 in favour, 5 against, 35 abstained). Views on the use of sanctions have however differed. This is because a significant number of countries across the world have strong military, economic and political ties with Russia. Moreover, many governments in the global South are unwilling to change their

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Russia's invasion of Ukraine since February 24 will re-shape international relations – potentially as fundamentally as 9/11 did.
- Global security risks stem increasingly from tensions between states, appearing to shift the conflict paradigm from intra-state to inter-state conflicts.
- Many governments have overwhelmingly condemned the Russian invasion as a violation of international norms. But fewer states in the global South have been willing to apply sanctions against Russia. Considerations of power politics and interlaced dependencies have been prevalent.
- Key multilateral organisations responsible for international peace and security have been left in a state of uncertainty.

approach of diversifying their economic, military, political and social ties as a reaction to an increasingly multipolar world. Some governments are for example dependent on the multilateral support to counterterrorism and stabilisation efforts that rely on consensus between key states including Russia. The Western reaction to Russia's invasion of Ukraine also set a new precedent of removing or "unplugging" a major state from key parts of the international system very quickly – a worrying example for many other countries in the world, who fear that the threshold for such action might be lower in the future and that it might be misused. Thus, despite seeing Russia's aggression in Ukraine as violation of international law, some states are not willing to support isolationist approaches championed by Western states.

Overall, in Africa and the Middle East, a number of states openly stated that it is in their interest to remain non-aligned and have good relations with the West as well as with Russia. In the Gulf, this is both related to immediate commercial interests and more principled idea of multipolarity as a desired future global order. More broadly, there have even been discussions about the regeneration of the Non-Aligned Movement that would protect states across the Global South from the spill over of the war in Europe. In Africa, the war has increased calls for African unity and self-reliance. In the Middle East and North Africa, the League of Arab States has expressed its readiness to mediate between Russia and Ukraine, which demonstrates the exceptional unity of the regional organisation in its approach to the war. Also, the African Union made an offer along similar lines.

In much of the post-Soviet space, the geographic proximity to, history and various political, economic and military interdependencies with Russia have yielded divergent responses to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. However, there seems to be two common features. On the one hand, most of the economies remain highly dependent on Russia. Even countries such as Republic of Moldova and Georgia (both of which have applied for EU mem-

bership and received candidate status, respectively) have not joined the sanctions regime due to the vulnerability of their economies and their energy supplies. On the other hand, there seems also to be underlying fear of Russian imperial ambitions and wanton use of military force. Thus, many states in post-Soviet space are currently seeking to rebalance their political and economic relations with Russia, EU, the US, China and Türkiye. This is most apparent in the Caucasus and Central Asia.

In Asia, responses to the invasion varied. States have taken different positions bearing in mind their history, economic setup, the big power rivalry they are exposed to, and bilateral relations with big powers. While the big powers of Asia – China and India – have benefited from short term gains in the form of trade in energy and other natural resources with Russia, two threats appear to be emerging from the conflict in Ukraine. Firstly, at the same time as China has gotten stronger, the weakening global positioning of Russia affects the BRICS bloc (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). Western unity and resolve in the face of war in Europe has also worried the BRICS bloc. Secondly, the contemporary case of "unplugging" Russia from the international system, sparks fears that the threshold for such action might be lower in the future. More broadly, the war in Ukraine and related western acts have put a question mark on the feasibility of approaches adopted by many countries in South and North-East Asia, where countries have strong dependencies from both US and China.

Concerning the great powers, it is still uncertain how the war in Ukraine will impact the current trajectory of US-China relations – this being the most significant bilateral relationship concerning the emerging international order. The US is trying to gradually pivot its foreign and defence focus from Transatlantic towards Indo-Pacific. US and Chinese positions in different peacemaking efforts should be seen in that context. With China's growing global influence and assertiveness in the Asia region in particular, tensions between the US and China have in-

creased. In this context, the international dynamics around the war in Ukraine can be seen as deepening the US-China rivalry.

The war in Ukraine has left key multilateral organisations, such as United Nations (UN) and the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE), in a state of uncertainty. The conflict between Ukraine and Russia has played out in practically all major international forums and summits. While some achievements have been done, such as the grain deal, where UN together with Türkiye played a pivotal role, these organisations have not been able to enable any significant progress in ending the war. On the other hand, despite the tensions, the organisations are not fully paralysed, and have been able to take decisions on the renewal of the mandates in different places, such as UN on Sudan, Mali and Somalia, and work according to their mandates, such as the OSCE in the western Balkans. Thus, overall it seems that the main focus is currently on attempts to limit the impact of political divide in Ukraine to other regions and conflicts, and keeping the organisations functional during this difficult period. The bigger changes – if any – are expected only after war in Ukraine has ended, and depends not only on the end result but also on how it will be achieved.

### **Resolving conflicts within and between states**

Since the end of the Cold War, the practice of conflict resolution has mostly focused on preventing and resolving intra-state conflicts. In these contexts, peace mediation efforts tend towards transitional governance and power-sharing arrangements as an alternative to continued violence. These efforts include for instance mechanisms that are designed for managing the fragmentation of the society. However, already before the war in Ukraine, this approach was challenged. In several conflicts, many actors participating the civil war and related negotiations

have been acting more as proxies of foreign states rather than representatives of different segments of the society. These kinds of internationalised conflicts have become more common in recent years.

The international peace mediation community therefore needs to find ways to better support peacemaking between states. While conflict resolution mechanisms designed for managing and ending civil wars are still needed, they are not enough. Addressing societal fragmentation and political tensions contribute only indirectly to ending wars between states. Especially transitional governance arrangements and role of international community therein have a very different potential when solving crises inside states versus in inter-state wars. In civil wars, lack of state legitimacy to govern is often one of the key issues addressed in the process. In inter-state conflict, however, this topic is rarely on the table unless the other side achieves military victory.

We need conflict resolution mechanisms that tackle different dimensions of conflict. We may also need to think how key principles such as inclusivity and local ownership are applied, if the keys to end the war are not in the hands of the local populations or even national authorities. New approaches to understand what actors are best suited to mediate between the states, and what kind of mediation networks are needed to resolve post-modern conflicts, are genuinely needed.

### **Dealing with the weaponisation of everything**

The prevailing military context of the peace mediation for the last 20 years has been asymmetric warfare, whereby all means available to challenge the ability of an existing order to function in a given geographical area are used. These actions have ranged from international terrorism, unconventional strategies,

guerrilla tactics, and they exist on a spectrum ranging from setting up rival local governance structures all the way to cyber-attacks. Peace mediation actors have developed many tools to deal with the issues related to the conflicts – military or civilian.

The war in Ukraine has intensified this trend. The political context in which contemporary warfare is taking place is best described as the weaponisation of different aspects of inter-state relations, rather than an asymmetric warfare per se. Those involved in the war between Russia and Ukraine do not currently make choices between traditional and hybrid warfare but use both types of weapons in a well-orchestrated manner. Throughout the war we have witnessed unforeseen economic and technological sanctions, weaponisation of energy delivery and trade, changes in visa policies and leveraging food and commodity markets, among many other means. Digital technologies and social media have played a critical role in war fighting on both sides.

Information technologies are crucial as they fulfil a dual purpose: to legitimise one's own war efforts and to delegitimise and dehumanise an opponent. In Ukraine, the campaigns by the Ukraine leadership have been critical in building the motivation in the traditional battlefield and ensuring support from the West. In Russia, there have been two very separate information campaigns. Internally the war has been downplayed to a targeted "special operation". Simultaneously, externally and to some extent internally, the conflict is portrayed as a full-fledged war of resistance to counter "Western aggression against Russia", thus blurring Russia's culpability for starting the war against Ukraine.

The peacemaking community faces a real challenge in dealing with this weaponisation. At a very practical level, dealing with different weaponised areas of inter-state interaction require manifold and new types of expertise, ranging from the finan-

cial sector (sanctions) to energy infrastructure. Consequently, groups participating in acts of warfare are expanding and there is a need to include these actors to peacemaking efforts. There is also a need to acknowledge that peacemaking itself can be weaponised, which means that peacemakers must better understand their own role in the conflict dynamics.

### **Shifting balance of justice and political expediency**

The perennial discussion in peacemaking field concerns the relationship between peace and justice – to what extent peacemaking activities should be guided by considerations of internationally agreed rules and norms and to what extent by political expediency and power wielded by actors on the ground. The war in Ukraine has meant that this question is increasingly being asked in relation to relationships between states and broader global dynamics.

Those who emphasise the importance of upholding norms see the potential failure to support Ukraine's territorial integrity as a point of no return for the rules-based international order. In Western Europe this is most often seen in the context of countering Russian aggression. On a wider, global scale, this is seen more as a precedent which can have implications elsewhere. This is especially the case in East Asia.

Those, on the other hand, who emphasise the role of political expediency or stability see the situation as an inevitable power-driven development that cannot be prevented but only adjusted to minimise harm. Here, the underlying fear is that while Russia's actions are against international rules and norms, the lack of political consensus around interpreting these rules and norms may



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Current peace mediation strategies focus on intra-state conflicts, emphasising a rules-based approach and power sharing as the standard conflict resolution blueprint. Peacemakers must take into account the following three developments that challenge this paradigm.
- The international peace mediation community needs to find ways to better support the peace making between states. New approaches to understand what actors are best suited to mediate between the states and what kind of mediation networks are genuinely needed.
- The ‘weaponisation of everything’ requires manifold and new types of expertise from peacemakers. Groups participating in acts of warfare are expanding and there is a need for include these actors to peacemaking efforts.
- There is an increasing gulf between seeking justice and political expediency in peacemaking, leading to greater regionalisation. Private peacemaking actors in such a context can be helpful in paving the way for creative solutions.

lead to a situation where similar acts of isolation and “unplugging” may be used in other cases.

As a result, the rhetoric used in the West concerning Ukraine has pushed the commonly shared idea of peacemaking significantly towards questions of justice while discussions in many parts of the rest of the world have moved in the opposite direction to emphasise need for political expediency, arguing that the West’s emphasis on justice is actually yet another form of political expediency. It is unclear where this debate will land, but it will certainly have a significant effect on the future of peacemaking.

Peacemaking actors need to take into account the fact that in the absence of strong unified institutions, who can make political interpretations of international rules and norms – such as UNSC – more and more official conflict resolution

efforts will probably be interpreted as precedents of future peacemaking efforts and as touchstones of an emerging global order. This will be especially prevalent in cases with strong international involvement. It is also conceivable that there will be different correspondences between justice and political expediency in different regions – such the OSCE compared to ASEAN regions – that reflect their different institutional acquis. This development would shift peacemaking practice towards a greater regionalisation. Private peacemaking actors in such a context may be helpful, as they may face less pressure to set patterns for future peacemaking practice and can therefore pave the way for creative solutions.

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