

Socio-Economic Perils of Russo-Ukrainian War: The 2014 and 2022 Experiences

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ABSTRACT

Moscow's war against Ukraine in 2014 and its continuation from February 2022 may be described as an asymmetrical war. This is because Russian military far outnumbered that of Ukraine. The war has been described as the most devastated in Europe since 1945 as thousands of lives have been destroyed. Russia has not been able to defeat Ukraine in over eighteen months into the war but it (Russia) has equally refused to cease fire despite the economic sanctions by United States of America and other western powers. The country (Russia) has remained resolute in its determination to continue with the war against Ukraine. There are many arguments in literatures on causes of the war. Some of these arguments include territorial disputes over Crimea and Donbas region, Russia's perception of North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) expansion as a threat, ideological and cultural differences between Russia and Ukraine, legacies of the Soviet Union, including the collapse of Soviet Union and the rise of nationalism. Scholars have not reached any consensus about which of these factors is most important, and there is no single explanation that captured all the complexities of the conflict. This paper argues that although there are historical, political and economic factors that contributed to the outbreak of the war, the eastward expansion of NATO is the primary reason. The article is exploratory and analytical. It critically analyzes some tertiary sources (internet materials) and at the same time uses critical theory in international relations to explain the causes of the war. It also draws some important sources, including records of governmental and nongovernmental organizations. The paper concluded that the war has negatively affected the world socio-economically and any peace process that did not include internationally-monitored referendum in disputed areas like Crimea and Donbas cannot be said to be a complete peace process.

Keywords: Perils, skirmishes, disputes, diplomacy, NATO,

INTRODUCTION

The renewed war that started in Europe in February, 2022 in Eastern Europe is what analysts have described as the resumption of Cold war that started in late 1940s. Vladimir Putin, the man described by Craig (2018) as the Russian Mafia declared a war on an independent Republic of Ukraine on the 24th February, 2022 eight years after that of 2014. In his speech to declare military operations in Ukraine, Putin noted that he decided to pursue "special military operations" against Ukraine after securing approval from the Russian Federation Council. He equally justified the legality of his declaration of the military action by citing Article 51 of Part 7 of the UN Charter, as well as the treaties of friendship and mutual assistance ratified by the Duma on February 22 with the Donetsk and the Luhansk People's Republics (Aljazeera, Feb.24, 2022).

Although, Putin described his actions in Ukraine as “special military operations”, there is no better word to describe Russian action in Ukraine than a declaration of war.

The major justification for February 2022 attack on Ukraine was that Donetsk and Luhansk have been subjected to mass killings by Ukrainian government for years, hence, there is need for Russia to demilitarize and denazified Ukraine and equally punish Ukrainian government for their countless crimes against armless civilians of those new nations as well as the Russians who are domiciled there.

Pundits and scholars of international relations have disagreed with Putin on his use of the word “denazification” to justify his military actions against Ukraine. According to Olivia (2022), David, an American author and historian whose research interest areas covered the history of Central and Eastern Europe and the Holocaust pointed out that denazification was the process undergone in Germany after the Second World War whereby the Americans worked assiduously to remove the German Nazis from the public life specifically between 1940s and 1950s. (Olivia, 2022) maintained that the word denazification as used by Putin to justify his war in Ukraine is a “very powerful piece of propaganda”.

Undoubtedly, Russian military is mightier and extremely superior to that of Ukraine and for this reason, it was expected that Russian forces will quickly advance into Ukraine and outrun the country in few days if not in few hours but unexpectedly, Ukraine put up a formidable defense that has continued to challenge Russian forces maximally. Lawrence (2022) rightly observed that Ukrainians demonstrated a spirited resistance.

Public commentators at various quarters have continued to guess the reasons Russia invaded Ukraine. Some are of the opinion that the desire for Ukraine to join NATO is the principal reason for Russian aggressions in Ukraine while others maintained that Russia invaded Ukraine to prove to the entire world that they are still militarily strong. There are also opinions suggesting that Russian invasion is an attempt by Russia to bring back the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR). It is therefore the objective of this paper to establish a position on the primary reason for Russian invasion of Ukraine using critical theory as a guide. The study equally analyzes some news paper publications on the war but with great caution since most of the news platforms are disseminating propaganda from governments deliberately or with little or no fact-finding.

HISTORY OF RUSSO-UKRAINIAN POLITICAL RELATIONSHIP

Ukraine has long historical ties with Russia. It (Ukraine) was traditionally, a part of the Russian empire for some centuries. One can say that the history of Ukraine is a complex one. Sometimes around the middle of the fifteenth century, Ukraine fell under the Polish rule and was under the leadership of the crown of Poland kingdom where Ukrainian elites and the Noble class were Polanized and made to abandon Ukrainian culture. Ukraine continued as a Polish territory until early 18th century when internal crises engulfed Poland (Neil, 2016). Russia intervened and used the opportunity of their intervention to annex Ukraine. Between 1772 and 1795, Polish territories were severely aggrandized due to internal upheavals that rendered them extremely weaker. It was at this point that Russia acquired the then Ukrainian territories in Poland’s custody. The only areas Russia was not able to aggrandize to herself were Galicia and Bukovyna (Neil 2016).

Jon and Louis (2022), while quoting Frank Sysyn (2020) an astute historian and director of the Toronto office of the Canadian institute of Ukrainian studies of the University of Alberta noted that Ukrainians and Russians lived in two separate states, until 1654. “For almost 400 years, from the 13th to the 17th centuries, they were not in the same political structure and lived under different religious influences.

It will be instructive to delve briefly into the specific historical tragedy that bedeviled Poland, weakened it to pave ways for the aggrandizement of her dominated Ukrainian territories majorly by Russia and Austria

empires. The Polish political crisis in question has been traced to the nationalism of the Cossacks. The Cossacks were a group with historically opaque ethnic origins. They have strong historical and cultural affinity with both Russians and Ukrainians. Hence, they were semi-independent nomads that found themselves under the leadership of the Polish but later became determined to gain full independence for themselves and to secure independence from the then “almighty” Poland and have their own separate territory. They consequently went into an alliance with Russia specifically in 1654. Their alliance with Russia was helpful to their course and eventually, they established a territory known as Hetmanate which they controlled by themselves (Jon and Louis2022).

The Hetmanate of 1654 has been described as an early form of what later became known as Ukraine and it included Ukraine’s modern-day capital, Kyiv. Mapmakers of that time labeled Cossack areas as Ukraine (Jon and Louis2022).

Russia couldn’t leave Ukraine alone after helping them out of Polish domination. The Ukrainian territory that included the then Hetmanate of Cossacks soon fell under the control of Russia. Ukraine remained a part of Russia until the collapsed of czarist Russia in 1917. The political revolution that temporarily consumed Russia in 1917 gave Ukraine a short-lived freedom from 1917 to 1920. Unfortunately for Ukraine, Russia conquered the country again and they were forced to endure a brutal Soviet rule until 1991 when Ukraine regained her political Independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union (Alexander, 2014). The collapse of USSR is of course, a turning point in the History of international system.

APPLICATION OF CRITICAL THEORY IN EXPLAINING THE CAUSES OF RUSSO-UKRAINIAN WAR

There are a number of theories and frameworks that could be used to explain the causes of Russo-Ukrainian conflict including realism, constructivism, Liberalism and Critical theory among others. This study uses critical theory to better explain the causes of the war. Critical theory was first developed in the 1930s by the Frankfurt School of German philosophers and social scientists. The core idea of critical theory is that power and inequality are deeply embedded in social, political and economic structures. Nationalism, imperialism, and economic inequalities can be seen as the specific causes of the war. The argument here is that the Russia-Ukraine conflict is a result of these structures of power and inequality.

Taras and Paul (2018) rightly noted that Scholars writing about this conflict face a choice that is likely to lead them to being criticized no matter what they do. For instance, scholars and commentators who blame the conflict on Russia’s aggression face accusation that they ignore the actions of the US, NATO, EU and Ukrainian nationalists. North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was established in 1940s primarily to confront USSR where Russia was the principal actor and if Ukraine successfully joined NATO, it simply means that NATO military infrastructures will be moving close to Russian territory with a possible goal of attacking Russia in the future. It is therefore natural for Russia to ensure that Ukraine never joined NATO in their (Russian) national interest. This is not to argue that Russian attack of Ukraine is the best way to persuade Ukraine not to join NATO. Those who are blaming the conflict on USA, her allies and Ukraine can also be accused of defending an attack on a frail and weaker neighbor which of course, is a clear violation of international charters. German aggressions on her weaker neighbors in 1930s were equally condemned and Germany was made to pay reparations for causing troubles in the international system. Those who try to take a more ‘balanced’ perspective risk being seen as naïve or as apologists by both the previous groups (Arij & Simon, 2022). This is why it is more appropriate to apply a theory into understanding the causes of the war. For instance, nationalism can best be seen as a reason for 2014 Russian attack on Ukraine. In 2014, the major issue that led Russia into attacking Ukraine was the controversy over the Crimean Peninsula. Crimea was part of Russia in 1780s until 1954 when Ukraine acquired the peninsula by “gift”. Moreover, majority of the Crimean population speak Russian and not Ukrainian language. Up till

today, several western historians, and opponents of American foreign policy on the subject matter strongly believe that Russia is right on his claims not only in the Crimean peninsula but also in the Donbas. Mark (2022) in his analysis about the crises noted that the referendum that ceded Crimean peninsula to Russia 'was joyfully received by most Crimeans. He further maintained that there is no doubt that the majority of the population of Crimea supported joining the Russian Federation (Mark, 2022).

Critical theory on imperialism also emphasizes on the way global system creates a hierarchy of power and wealth. This also means a lot when explaining the causes of the war. It is a truism that Russia is a core, rich and powerful country compared to Ukraine. Russian attack on Ukraine in this case is an example of a "core" country trying to use its power to exploit a weaker country, Ukraine.

THE CASUALTIES

The Russo-Ukrainian conflict of 2022 has been described as the most dreaded war in continental Europe since 1945. The war has led to the destruction of lives and properties.

The casualties estimated by NATO and reported by Beaumont (2022) put the figures in the first four weeks of the 2022 war, at 7,000 soldiers from Russian side and 15,000 soldiers from the side of Ukrainians. The wounded troops who cannot quickly get back to duty are more than double, the number of neutralized soldiers (Beaumont, 2022).

Statista (2022) while quoting United Nations' High Commission for Human Rights also claimed that they verified a total of 1,232 civilian deaths as of March 30, 2022, 112 of whom were children while, 1,935 secured varying degrees of injury.

Ingrid (2022), reported how Russia on their own part, claimed to have killed about 14,000 Ukrainian troops as at March 25, 2022, although, the Ukrainian president, Zelenskyy maintained that Russia killed 2,500 to 3,000 Ukrainian troops within four weeks of Russian invasion of Ukrainian territories. An independent third party figures may be different from what is stated above. The United Nations has recorded 2,729 civilian deaths among Ukrainians related to the violence, mostly due to shelling and missile strikes, (Luminous, 2022).

However, on Sunday 22nd May, 2022, Ukraine's president gave an insight into the level of losses being suffered by Ukrainian forces in the Donbas, saying between 50 to 100 Ukrainians could be dying every day, (Luminous, 2022). Zelenskyy, the president of Ukraine confirmed the heavy casualties on his country just as United Kingdom likened the casualty situations to that of what Russian forces suffered in its nine years war in Afghanistan.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) verified a total of 3,942 civilian deaths during Russia's military attack on Ukraine as of May 23, 2022. Among them, 258 were children. Furthermore, 4,591 people were reported to have been injured. However, OHCHR specified that the real numbers could be higher (Luminous, 2022).

According to a release from an adviser to the Ukrainian president on 11th November, 2022, 30,000 Ukrainian soldiers have died as a result of the war between February 24, 2022 and November 11, 2022 (Focus, 2022) as cited in Ivan (2023). Ivan (2023) observed how several videos of dead bodies adjudged to be those of Ukrainian soldiers were uploaded on many Telegram channels. In November 2022 alone, the officials of the government of Ukraine came up with a figure of 15,000 missing soldiers and civilians excluding the three thousand, three hundred and ninety two (3,392) Prisoners of War (POW) being held hostage in Russia (Deutsch, 2022).

While the casualty figure against Ukraine is on the high side, media has continued to release some minimal casualties against Russia. For instance, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reported that for over a year of the war from February 24, 2022 to February 17, 2023, only sixteen thousand (16,000) Russians have been killed (Ivshina, 2023).

Ivan (2023) rightly noted that media sources cannot be relied upon in a scholarly work of this nature. Studies by Boyd-Barret (2016) Katchanovski and Morley (2012) as cited in Ivan (2023) showed that in any conflicts involving foreign countries like Ukraine, western media usually push forward narratives in line with the interests of their home governments and political elites and for this reason, we cannot base our analysis on the data from such media platforms.

Ivan (2023) estimated based on the officially admitted casualty figures that at least, one thousand (1000) lives have been lost in the first year of the war. Going by this, and in line with scholarly established view that any military action that claimed up to 1000 lives is better described as war, the situation in Eastern Europe today is a full scale war.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES

There are some verifiable evidences that Russia has destroyed Ukrainian cultural sites, churches, schools and electricity facilities amongst other critical infrastructures. Despite being a signatory to the convention for the protection of cultural heritage at the time of war, Russia has attacked scores of historic and religious centers. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)'s first preliminary list of totally or partially damaged sites featured 29 religious sites, 16 historical buildings, four museums and four monuments. Within 48 days of the war, 938 schools were damaged while 87 educational facilities were completely destroyed, (Agency report, 2022).

Since the war is being fought majorly on the Ukrainian soil, Russia is only able to lose some military infrastructures apart from the human losses estimated earlier. Luminous (2022) estimated that Russia has lost 7 Ships/boats, 76 Fuel tanks, 119 Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) operational-tactical level, 25 Special equipment, and 4 Mobile Short-Range Ballistic Missile (SRBM) system.

Every war equally has the economic related implications like decline in the working population, inflation and rise in debt profile couple with disruption to normal economic activities. The economic sanctions by the United States of America and most of the western Powers have worsened the Post-covid19 economy globally. The global economic projection on 2022 before the outbreak of the war placed global Gross Domestic Product at 5% but the economic growth of the world went at 3.1% (Brian, 2022). The exportation of Russian oil has equally reduced and this will obviously have some negative economic implications on Russia.

Both Russia and Ukraine are classified as being amongst the leading producers of agricultural products globally. The two Nations are net exporters of agricultural products. Ukraine and Russia play leading supply roles in the international market of agricultural products (FAO, 2022). Just one year before the February 2022 Russian invasion, both Russia and Ukraine were amongst the top three World's exporters of maize, sunflower seeds and oil. Russia is also the world's major exporter of nitrogen fertilizers, the second leading supplier of potassium fertilizers and the third largest exporter of phosphorous fertilizers. Countries, most especially the less developed ones depend heavily on Russia and Ukraine for the importation of foodstuffs. The outbreak of the conflict is already affecting crops harvesting. Ukraine, in the first week of May, 2022 announced the closure of Skadovsk and Kherson Sea Ports. This simply means halt on food exportation and by implications; the less developed states depending on Ukraine for foodstuffs may be

heading towards food crises.

The sanctions plashed on Russia have equally led to drastic reduction in exportation. This has in turn, led to drastic reduction in the food supply gaps and may raise international food prices by 8 to 22 percent above their already elevated baseline levels, (FAO,2022)

CONCLUSION

The current war can be described as the most devastated in the history of Ukraine and Russia conflicts. As noted earlier, the magnitude of casualties and other loses clearly show that Europe is battling with the greatest crisis since 1945. When the Ukrainian president Zelenkyy alerted in November 13th, 2021 that nearly one hundred thousand (100,000) Russian troops have assembled on the border with Ukraine, timely high powered diplomatic arrangements would have deescalated the tension. The placement of about eight thousand, five hundred (8,500) troops on heightened alert to be deployed to Europe by US in 24th January, 2022 may have provoked Russia into further military actions in the interest of their national security.

Rather than removing Russia from G8 (Group of 8 industrialized nations) in 2014 and the western economic sanctions that followed the February 24th, 2022 attacks, it would have been better for the West not to have taken sides with Ukraine but plays the roles of mediators. This would have made Russia feel secure at any negotiation table. Moreover, such negotiation table would better be handled by the United Nations Organization (UNO). The January 10, 2022 negotiations meeting held between the American and Russian diplomats may have made significant progress that would have led to de-escalation in Eastern Europe if America had not taken sides with Ukraine openly. The meeting between Russia and NATO , two days after the US and Russian diplomatic meeting could not also resolve matters probably because Russia still holds the view that the continued existence of NATO is dangerous to their security interests since NATO itself primarily, was created to combat Russia.

Every war has always ended at the negotiation table. It is therefore recommended that the United Nations and other relevant actors of the international community should intensify more efforts at ensuring a lasting solution to the problem. The solution should be aimed at a “win win approach” for both Russia and Ukraine. More specifically, the peace processes should include yet another internationally-monitored referendum in disputed areas like Crimea and Donbas so as to have complete peace processes that will enable the people decide their own future. While efforts at ending the war are ongoing, efforts should be made to keep international trade in food and fertilizers open to meet domestic and global demand. Supply chains should be kept fully operational, including by protecting standing crops, livestock, and food processing infrastructure. Countries that depend on Russia and Ukraine for food exportation are strongly advised to look for other means of filling the gap, including intensification of domestic productions and exportation from other countries.

The conflict has equally caused some refugees crisis and to address this, the Nations hosting these refugees should ensure that the victims have access to job opportunities. The existing social protection laws of those countries hosting the refugees should also be enjoyed by them (the refugees).

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