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## The Causes, Effects and The Mediation Roles of Major Actors in The Russian-Ukraine Conflict

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### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the causes, effects, and mediating roles of major actors in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. The causes are rooted in historical, political, and territorial disputes, with Russia's opposition to Ukraine's Western alignment playing a central role. The conflict has led to devastating humanitarian, economic, and geopolitical consequences, affecting not only Ukraine and Russia but also global markets and international relations. The paper also examines the efforts of key actors, including the United Nations, the European Union, the United States, and other international actors, to mediate the conflict through diplomacy, sanctions, and humanitarian assistance. Through this analysis, the paper examined the complexity of the conflict and the challenges of achieving peace. This paper concluded that the ongoing conflict has had dire economic consequences not only in the conflict zone but also globally. Africa and Asia are most affected because both regions are net exporters of food, petroleum products, fertilizers, and Steel to many countries worldwide. The paper recommended, among others, that the unilateral sanctions on Russia by the United Nations and other international actors will further worsen the conflict and impede the resolution process, and that the United Nations should step down its sanctions and mediation roles and allow states with a relatively neutral posture to mediate between Russia and Ukraine with a view to achieving rapprochement.

## 1. Introduction

Conflict is inevitable in every human society that is characterized by ethnic, religious, ideological, and other forms of pluralism. Conflicts sometimes herald some positive effects and are desirable to effect change, generate new ideas, and express strong feelings among different individuals, groups, classes, nations, and states. However, conflict is said to be a mirage when it becomes destructive and uncontrollable to the point of killing and maiming defenseless civilians, as well as violating human rights and defying peaceful mediation by third-party international or regional actors. The Russo-Ukraine conflict, which officially began in 2014 with Russia's annexation of the Crimean peninsula and eventually devolved into a full-blown war with the February 24, 2022 invasion of Ukraine, is currently a major problem to entire Europe and the rest of the world. It is deeply rooted in ideological, ethnic, and religious dualism.

The Russia - Ukraine strained relationship which officially began in 2014 with Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula was followed by the war in the Donbas region between the two states in April 2014. Eventually, a full-blown armed war between Russia and Ukraine on February 24, 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine, has no doubt remained one of the most significant causes of stress in Europe and the rest of the globe. The conflict which is

still ongoing has recorded dire economic consequences not just in the conflict zone (Europe) but across the entire globe; African and Asian countries that are several miles away from the conflict zone are even most affected economically because several of these countries are reliant on food and energy imports from Ukraine and Russia respectively.

The war has equally recorded outrageous civilian deaths, millions of refugees, human rights violations as well as skyrocketing prices of food and energy products. The war has occasioned supply chain disruption, which poses a serious problem to all states of the world because of the interdependent nature of the international system. Moreover, the United Nations' inability to effectively mediate to achieve rapproches between the warring states has also prompted other state actors such as China, Turkey, South Africa, and others to delve into the mediation between Russia and Ukraine.

Against this backdrop, it is pertinent to state that several views abound as to the cause(s) of the Russia-Ukraine conflict but most of these views of scholars are either Pro-West or Pro-Russian in nature, those which are Pro-West considered Russia as belligerent and aggressive state that is poised in establishing a confederation that has some sort of resemblance to the former Soviet Union and are therefore the principal cause of the War in Ukraine. Whereas those who are pro-Russia accused the West as the principal cause of the war and that should the West did not pursue NATO's expansion to Ukraine, there would not have been a war in Ukraine. Therefore, the problem of this research is to fill this gap by rendering an unbiased view of the cause(s) of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and critically straying the economic consequences and the mediation roles of the major actors in the conflict.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

A theoretical framework helps to structure and explain facts or events. So, it becomes very important to relate any scholarly work or analysis to a theoretical framework to aid its understanding and the development of knowledge that serves as the lens through which any phenomenon can be analyzed. Here, we examine two theories, conflict and system theory, that better explain the Russia-Ukraine conflict with a special focus on its causes, effects, and consequences. The synergy between these theories is expedient on the fact that both theories address specific aspects of the study.

### **2.1. Conflict Theory**

Conflict theory is traced to Karl Marx's works, and it is seen as a perspective in sociology and social psychology that emphasizes dialectic materialism and interpretation of history. Karl Marx is unarguably referred to as the father of conflict theory, and conflict basically refers to a condition in which one identifiable group of human beings, whether primordial or linguistic. Cultural, religious, ideological, and socioeconomic engage in conscious opposition to one or more other human groups because they are pursuing what appear to be incompatible goals. Against this backdrop, the conflict theory is adopted for this study because of its appropriateness in explaining the causes of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Moreover, conflict theory substantially addresses all the perceived causes of the Russia – Ukraine conflict, which has to do with ethnic, religious, cultural, and ideological inclination from both states, regional and global levels, as well as the quest for hegemony by the West and the Russian federation.

## 2.2. System Theory

System theory is probably the most used theory in international relations. Borrowed from Biological and Engineering sciences into the Social Sciences, its emphasis is on the working mechanism of a set-up for goal attainment. A system is said to be a whole that functions as a whole by virtue of its interdependence on the various parts. A system is further seen as an autonomous unit of complex elements that interact and are capable of adapting within itself. Each set of elements is interdependent. These elements are Individuals, Associations, Organizations, Nations, and States, and a disruption in one part or unit affects the whole. Although Systems theory was first introduced in the 1940s by biologist Ludwig von Braniff and furthered by W. Ross Ashby and George Bateson in international relations, the likes of Morton Kaplan, Karl W. Deutch, and Stanley Hoffman, amongst others, are considered proponents of system theory.

Systems theories in International relations (IR) focus on the structure of the international system to explain the behavior and interactions of the system's units. The units consist primarily of states, which collectively constitute a system of states. Most systems theories treat the relationship between the international system and state as reciprocal, but explanatory preference is often given to the former when shaping the behavior and interactions of the latter. The formal treatment of the international system and its impact on states developed in the second half of the 20th century, with systemic thinking becoming most central to IR after the publication of Kenneth Waltz's Theory of International Politics For the next two decades.

Against this backdrop, this study also adopted the System theory as a complementary theory for its appropriateness in explaining the global economic effects of the Russia-Ukraine conflict as the media roles of the international actors in the conflict, The interdependent nature of the international system is such that a dysfunctionality in one or more States constitute dire consequences on others as rightly postulated by the system theory. Hence, system theory became apt in explaining the dire consequences of the ongoing Russia – Ukraine conflict, which has led to the astronomical increase in prices of Oil and Gas as well as the disruption of the supply chain of food commodities, leading to hardship and high cost of living across the globe.

The relevance of conflict and system theories in this study is premised on the fact that both theories help explain critical aspects of the study. Conflict theory, for instance, helps us to critically explain the causes of the Russia - Ukraine conflict, which has its roots in the clash of interests for hegemony, whether ideological, Religious, Ethnic, Socio-economic, or otherwise. However, system theory became apt in explaining the consequences or effects of the Russia-Ukraine conflict on the global economy. Stressing that the conflict led to a disruption in the supply chain of oil and gas, grains, and other vital products of Russia and Ukraine, it posed a very serious economic challenge to the entire international system, which is practically interdependent. It is pertinent to state that Nigeria, which lies several miles from the conflict zone, is not left out in these economic challenges. For instance, Nigeria, which relies on the importation of refined petroleum for local consumption, now sells petrol for as high as #1,350 to #1,400 per liter at the government's removal of subsidies also prices of food commodities such as flour, cereals, and several other have soared astronomically.

### **3. Discussion**

#### **3.1. The Causes of the Russia - Ukraine Conflict**

The Russian invasion of Ukraine could be conveniently termed the largest military invasion of a sovereign nation since World War II. This led experts and scholars in the field of international relations, diplomacy, and intelligence to begin to unravel their observations, opinions, deductions, and analyses of the Russian invasion of Ukrainian territory right from the invasion of the Crimea peninsula (Blidaru, 2018). The literature surrounding the cause of this conflict is grouped or can be categorized into three major approaches. The first approach comprises those who are of the view that the Western powers, such as the United States and its North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies, are the aggressors and the cause of conflict while Russia is only protecting its interests. On the contrary, the second approach sees Russia as the aggressor who opted to go back to pre-Cold War status. The third approach sees the conflict from the lens of a renewed geopolitical conflict between NATO and Russia as well as the Ukrainian's quest to assert its identity and nationality.

#### **3.2. The Impacts of the Russia – Ukraine Conflict on Africa**

Although the conflict zone lies over a thousand miles away from Africa African countries in particular are not spared from its consequences, which endanger fragile food systems and foreshadow worrying impacts on food security and nutrition on the continent. These consequences threaten to hinder continental and global efforts to end hunger and poverty and to achieve sustainable development goals in Africa. The vulnerability of the continent's food systems cannot be overemphasized. A food system has various elements and activities related to food production, processing, distribution, and consumption, as well as the associated output of such activities. Africa's food systems are unarguably fragile to the impact of external shocks, including geopolitical conflict, due to the inherent environmental, socioeconomic, and institutional features and traits of the agricultural and food sectors. For instance, with their significant contributions to economic growth (around 25% of GDP) and employment (around 50% of the labor force), food systems largely determine economic development and the provision of other essential socio-economic services in Africa (Abu, 2022).

In recent years, land and water resources in many African countries have been dwindling at an alarming rate. Climate and nature-induced changes are increasingly bringing stringent conditions for agricultural production to many regions of the continent. Moreover, the continent's rapid urbanization is associated with high rates of urban expansion over prime agricultural lands. Taken together, these challenges hinder the capacity of Africa's food systems to meet the food security of its rapidly rising population. Hence, African countries' overbearing reliance on the international market to meet their domestic need for food and over 80% of food consumed domestically in Africa is imported from outside the continent. Therefore, the characteristics of African food systems increase her vulnerability to exogenous/external shocks and add further sustainability pressure to efforts aimed at eradicating hunger, reducing poverty, and achieving food security. Two major factors that make it more devastating is that first is to do with the timing of the invasion, which coincided with a period when food supply chains (FSCs) in Africa were still struggling to recover from

the Covid-19 pandemic, which disrupted FSC activities over the last two years right along the chain. Compared to other developing regions, African FSCs bore the full brunt of the pandemic due to their resource constraints and limited governance capacity, which prevented governments from responding adequately to the consequences of the pandemic for hunger, poverty, and inequality.

On this note, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations estimated that the pandemic has added up to 40 million undernourished people in Africa and has increased the proportion of Africans who are food stressed by 30% and who are food crisis by 35% (Abu, 2022). On top of this, the 2019 plague of desert locusts across several East African countries threatened over 13 million people in the Horn of Africa with acute food insecurity. As for today, FAO estimates show that about a fifth of the continent's population suffers from hunger; a higher proportion than in any other region. The second factor is related to who the two parties involved in the conflict are; both Russia and Ukraine are major players in the global food market, with a joint share of around 12% of globally traded calories. It is pertinent to state that Russia and Ukraine jointly provide almost two-thirds of traded sunflower oil, a quarter of global wheat exports, a third of maize, and a fifth of barley. In 2020, the two countries collectively supplied agricultural and food products to African markets worth a total of around USD 7 billion (Abu, 2022). The truth is that most African countries depend heavily on wheat imports from Russia and Ukraine to keep hunger at bay. For instance, Benin and Somalia obtain all their wheat exclusively from Ukraine and Russia. In 2019–2020, Egypt depended on Russia and Ukraine for 82% of its wheat imports, and it was a similar story in Sudan (75%), Congo-Brazzaville (69%), and Senegal (66%) (Abu, 2022).

**Disruption to energy markets and shipping routes:** Since Russia is a major exporter of oil and energy products worldwide, global oil prices have soared since the start of the war, to exceed the USD 100/ barrel threshold for the first time in eight years. The war has also rendered many parts of the Black Sea dangerous or unpassable and has led to the closure of most Ukrainian ports, through which more than two-thirds of Ukrainian food and grain exports used to be distributed. This has translated into higher ocean shipping charges for food commodities and increased costs for alternative air and rail transportation. Half the countries of Africa – 27 out of 54 – are defined by the World Bank as low-income countries. Theoretically, there is a strong correlation between global oil and food prices in low-income countries, as direct and indirect energy use can account for more than half of the total variable costs of agricultural production. Examples of energy use in agricultural production include fuel consumption for agricultural machinery and the operation of production facilities, electricity use in irrigation, and the energy required for downstream activities, such as cooling, processing, transporting, and distributing food products. Therefore, rising energy bills have spillover effects on various activities along the food chain that undoubtedly increase food production costs and ultimately lead to higher food prices.

**Shortage and the rising price of fertilizers:** Russia is the world's top producer of natural gas, which is an important component of the ammonia and urea used in the fertilizer industry. Before the conflict, fertilizer markets were already under severe supply stress due to the sanctions imposed by the EU and the US on Belarus in 2021 and the sharp spikes in the

price of natural gas in 2021. In the wake of the invasion, the Russian Industry Ministry imposed a temporary embargo on fertilizer exports to guarantee supplies to domestic farmers. Other countries, such as China, have also suspended their exports of certain fertilizers to ensure adequate supplies for domestic food production. In Africa, fertilizer use varies considerably and depends on multiple factors, including soil quality and weather conditions but fertilizer consumption as a share of production on the continent ranges from 20% to around 80%, which implies that agricultural production is vulnerable to price rises and the availability of fertilizers. The shortage or unaffordability of fertilizers can significantly reduce agricultural production and yields in Africa at a time of dwindling global stocks and surging global food prices.

### **3.3. The Effects of the Russia - Ukraine Conflict on the Nigerian State**

Despite Nigeria's distance from the conflict zone, it has its fair share of the consequences of the conflict due to Russia's global economic influence and Nigeria's reliance on international trade and imports. As a result, it is critical to emphasize the economic impact of the ongoing Russia - Ukraine conflict on Nigeria. Following Russia's attack on Ukraine, crude oil prices have skyrocketed, with Brent trading above \$100 per barrel and Bonny Light trading at \$110. Nigeria, which imports refined petroleum products, is bearing the brunt of the increase in crude oil prices, as the cost of diesel has risen to more than N800 per litre and the Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) has risen to N520 per litre at the recent removal of fuel subsidy. Owing to the fragile state of power generation and distribution in Nigeria, there has been a forced increase in demand for diesel in the local market, causing the landing cost of refined products to skyrocket. Given that the majority of the country's businesses rely on generators for power, the rise in fuel prices has become a significant impediment to doing business in Nigeria. In a related vein, Nigeria is presently dealing with a fuel shortage as a possible result of the conflict, as prices of PMS have risen from N175 per litre to between N613 to N630 per litre as at May 29, 2023 when President Bola Tinubu's administration officially declared the removal of subsidy, implying over 400 percent increase with its attendant ripple effect on prices of goods and services across the country. In the upcoming months, this is probably going to get worse as ships bringing petroleum products into the nation can run into problems; although the petroleum industry in Nigeria is heavily laden with corruption, but the latest crisis has added a new twist to it all (Efebeh, 2018). In most areas of Nigeria, the price of transportation has increased in step with the price of petroleum products (Maijama'a & Musa, 2022).

In Nigeria, particularly in Lagos State, the cost of ride-hailing services has increased dramatically during the past six months. Given the amount of traffic that wreaks daily havoc on the state, higher transportation expenditures are the last thing Lagos residents' desire. In the specific scenario of Nigeria, increased oil prices in the international market have resulted in higher petroleum product and subsidy expenditures, which have then increased the cost of borrowing for the government and cause the fiscal deficit to exceed projections. This has made an already risky financial situation worse. The Russia-Ukraine conflict has impact on the Federation Account because the Nigeria National Petroleum Company (NNPC) Ltd will not contribute as much money due to an increase in subsidy commitment. This could have an impact on how funding is distributed to different levels of government, particularly in states that rely heavily on monthly allocations from the Federation Account.

Due to the sensitive nature global oil market which has seen the prices of oil responding with astronomical increase in the prices of jet fuel; the cost of air travel has also increased dramatically during the past several weeks. The airline industry in the country has been forced to reduce the frequency of its operations. Airlines' prices increased by at least 100% in February, with an economy one-way ticket costing more than N50,000. Nigerians who can afford it will have to pay much more for both domestic and international travel as airline costs rise. People who work in industrial areas such as Lagos State, Port Harcourt, and others but live in other states are also affected by this because they will have to reduce the frequency of their travels. Durum wheat, a basic crop predominantly imported by Nigeria that has undergone astronomical price increase since the invasion started, is one of the food staples that Russia exports in large quantities, just like the crude oil market does (Maijama'a & Musa, 2022). The war between Russia and Ukraine has caused wheat prices to reach their highest point in a week. Nigeria, which consumes wheat as the third-most other grain in the nation, is a significant importer of wheat products.

According to Nigeria Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria imported more durum wheat worth over N128.1 billion in the first nine months of 2021 than it did in the entire year of 2020. Since Nigeria relies heavily on imports to meet domestic demand and already struggles with high inflation and disruptions in the food supply chain, the rise in commodity prices puts further pressure on the local market. The conflict has also disrupted wheat supply on the global market. As a result, there is a chance that the price of wheat will rise, affecting the cost of flour and, as a result, the price of bread and other baked goods (Ozili, 2022). Expectedly, the disruption in the wheat supply occasioned by the Russian/Ukraine conflict has resulted in astronomical rise in the prices of flour and thus of bread and other baked goods in Nigeria. Prices of the big size of bread that used to sell for N450 and the small size for N200, rose to N1,200 to N700 respectively, since the conflict started between the duo in February of 2022. Nigeria already spends more than half of its budget on food, and if food prices continue to rise at the unprecedented rates they are, Nigerians' purchasing power will decrease.

The Central Bank often intervenes in the market to fix currency rates in Nigeria's controlled floating exchange rate regime. However, a sizable amount of cash is exchanged in an unreported and in-monitorable manner of the black market. Given that Nigerians would obtain foreign exchange from any source in order to meet their commercial obligations, Nigeria is vulnerable to further naira depreciation. Inflationary pressures are also affecting developed economies, with the US inflation rate reaching a 40-year high in February 2022. Given Nigerians' proclivity for imports, we would simply be introducing foreign inflation into an already sick economy. Nigeria's foreign exchange liquidity will be strained further as a result of a lack of FPIs and FDIs, as well as a drop in Diasporas remittances from Nigerians living in Russia, Ukraine, and other nearby countries, leaving the country vulnerable to further depreciation. It would be unfavorable if a lack of foreign capital reversed the current accounts and world trade balance's upward trend. It is also worth noting that thousands of Nigerians have joined the thousands of Nigerian youths who have remained at home as a result of the months-long ASUU strike and the inability to continue attending lectures in Ukraine as a result of the disruption.

### 3.4. Leaders and Interests in the Russian - Ukraine Crisis

The influence of particular leaders and their interests is crucial for the understanding of the conflict, which is partially fueled by the complex relationship of the involved individuals as well as their personal aims in the conflict. In Russia, Putin is an undeniable leader of internal and external politics. For years, he served in the Soviet army and then affiliated himself with politics. Putin is serving his fourth term as the president; he once acted as president and was the prime minister twice. In total, he has spent over twenty years governing Russia. Putin is seen as a continuator of the USSR with expansionist ambitions. Putin wants Crimea, Luhansk, and Donetsk to be recognized as Russian territories and, perhaps, that he himself is recognized as the savior of Russian minority oppressed on the Ukrainian territory. Putin wants to maintain the Russian position of great power in the international arena, as well as his own position as the great leader of the Russian population.

This is evidenced by the constitutional amendments in 2008 that introduced a six-year presidential term and by recent intended constitutional amendments that would allow Putin to run for a president again, for the fourth time. Moreover, the presidential elections that took place in 2018 were initially planned to take place on March 11 but this date was changed to March 18, thus, commemorating the annexation of Crimea. Sperling (2015) noted that “At the center of Putin’s macho aura is his image as a tough guy who will not allow Western countries to weaken Russia by dictating what its domestic and foreign policies should be.” Such representation of Putin parallels with the divided perceptions regarding the conflict and whether it should be understood as the West’s fault, as suggested by Mearsheimer (2014), or Russian aggressiveness and lack of respect for international law. In 2019, in an interview, Putin said that “there are no common democratic standards” (Barber & Foy, 2019).

This emphasizes the difficulty in imposing predominantly Western European democratic ideology on a region that is so divided in its perceptions of such ideology. According to Sperling (2021) “Putin has fused a patriotic nationalism with sexual politics to frame the Ukraine crisis as part of a cultural battle with an amoral and untrustworthy West”. In order to achieve his goals, Putin openly blamed NATO and the European Union for the crisis as they try to contain Russia. Moreover, the use of propaganda shaped the Russian’s perception of their leader: “The Kremlin’s message is that Putin will protect Russia’s national interests and the interests of Russians abroad, as in Crimea- and will do so unapologetically” (Sperling, 2015). That Putin has successfully maintained the nostalgia for the Soviet tradition among Russian society can be observed based on the aforementioned statistics. In 2017, 58% of the interviewed Russian population stated they regret the collapse of the USSR, dropping from 66% in 1992 (Levada, 2017). Putin’s firm position in regard to the conflict, his diplomatic expertise gained during the last two decades of governing the country, and his goals of uniting the Russian population hinder the resolution of the conflict.

Such a resolution might necessitate a fundamental change in the attitude of the parties involved, yet Putin seems unshakeable, especially granted recent proposed constitutional amendments. While it is much easier to point to a single leader in Russia due to Putin’s long-lasting high political position, the situation is not as clear in Ukraine. The Ukrainians have been dissatisfied with their presidents’ inability to fulfill the election promises. After the Orange

Revolution Viktor Yushchenko promised de-Sovietization of the government; however, due to divisions within his coalition, the reforms were thwarted and never implemented to the dissatisfaction of the majority of Ukrainians (Barrett, 2018). The next to come was Victor Yanukovich whom Putin saw “as a pliable agent in Kyiv and helped the Party of Regions to persuade Ukrainians that Yushchenko and his policies were a tool of Western Meddling” thus leading to the election of the biggest enemy of the Western Ukrainians in 2004 (Barrett, 2018, 89). The Ukrainians approved Yanukovich’s leadership and, according to the GALLUP poll (Ray, 2015), the approval rate was approximately 46%. Nonetheless, this approval rate quickly dropped to 29% in 2011 only to remain at the same level until 2013.

### **3.5. China Mediation Role in the Russia – Ukraine Conflict**

China which has relatively demonstrated neutrality in the still ongoing Russia – Ukraine war has mediated in several ways and one of its prominent moves in the Political Settlement of the war in Ukraine is its 12-points peace proposal reeled out for the interest of achieving rapprochement between the warring states which includes:

- a. **Respect for the sovereignty of all countries:** This is no doubt is a universally recognized international law and one of the fundamental purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter and there Beijing sued that must be strictly observed. The sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all countries must be effectively upheld whether big or small, strong or weak, rich or poor all States are equal members of the international community. Therefore, all parties and/or States should jointly uphold the basic norms governing international relations and defend international fairness and justice. Equal and uniform application of international law should be promoted, while double standards must be rejected.
- b. **Abandoning the Cold War mentality:** The Cold War mentality between the Washington and its NATO allies and Moscow is one very crucial factor that has characterized the Russia-Ukraine conflict and is such that depicts a continuation of a Cold War even in the Post-Cold War era. The security or the struggle for hegemony of a country should not be pursued at the expense of others. Also, the security of a region should not be achieved by strengthening or expanding military blocs. The legitimate security interests and concerns of all countries must be taken seriously and addressed properly. There is no simple solution to a complex issue. All parties should, following the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security and bearing in mind the long-term peace and stability of the world, help forge a balanced, effective and sustainable European security architecture. All parties should oppose the pursuit of one’s own security at the cost of others’ security, prevent bloc confrontation, and work together for peace and stability on the Eurasian Continent.
- c. **Ceasing hostilities:** Conflict and war benefit no one rather it heralds dire consequences. All parties must stay rational and exercise restraint, avoid fanning the flames and aggravating tensions, and prevent the crisis from deteriorating further or even spiraling out of control. All parties should support Russia and Ukraine in working in the same direction and resuming direct dialogue as quickly as possible, so as to gradually deescalate the situation and ultimately reach a comprehensive ceasefire.

- d. **Resuming peace talks:** Dialogue and negotiation are the only viable solution to the Ukraine crisis. All efforts conducive to the peaceful settlement of the crisis must be encouraged and supported. The international community should stay committed to the right approach of promoting talks for peace, help parties to the conflict open the door to a political settlement as soon as possible, and create conditions and platforms for the resumption of negotiation. China will continue to play a constructive role in this regard.
- e. **Resolving the humanitarian crisis:** All measures conducive to easing the humanitarian crisis must be encouraged and supported. Humanitarian operations should follow the principles of neutrality and impartiality, and humanitarian issues should not be politicized. The safety of civilians must be effectively protected, and humanitarian corridors should be set up for the evacuation of civilians from conflict zones. Efforts are needed to increase humanitarian assistance to relevant areas, improve humanitarian conditions, and provide rapid, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access, with a view to preventing a humanitarian crisis on a larger scale. The UN should be supported in playing a coordinating role in channeling humanitarian aid to conflict zones.
- f. **Protecting civilians and prisoners of war (POWs):** Parties to the conflict should strictly abide by international humanitarian law, avoid attacking civilians or civilian facilities, protect women, children and other victims of the conflict, and respect the basic rights of POWs. China supports the exchange of POWs between Russia and Ukraine, and calls on all parties to create more favorable conditions for this purpose.
- g. **Keeping nuclear power plants safe:** China opposes armed attacks against nuclear power plants or other peaceful nuclear facilities, and calls on all parties to comply with international law including the Convention on Nuclear Safety (CNS) and resolutely avoid man-made nuclear accidents. China supports the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in playing a constructive role in promoting the safety and security of peaceful nuclear facilities.
- h. **Reducing strategic risks:** nuclear weapons must not be used and nuclear wars must not be fought. The threat or use of nuclear weapons should be opposed. Nuclear proliferation must be prevented and nuclear crisis avoided. China opposes the research, development and use of chemical and biological weapons by any country under any circumstances.
- i. **Facilitating grain exports:** All parties need to implement the Black Sea Grain Initiative signed by Russia, Türkiye, Ukraine and the UN fully and effectively in a balanced manner, and support the UN in playing an important role in this regard. The cooperation initiative on global food security proposed by China provides a feasible solution to the global food crisis.
- j. **Stopping unilateral sanctions:** Unilateral sanctions and maximum pressure cannot solve the issue; they only create new problems. China opposes unilateral sanctions unauthorized by the UN Security Council. Relevant countries should stop abusing unilateral sanctions and “long-arm jurisdiction” against other countries, so as to do their share in deescalating the Ukraine crisis and create conditions for developing countries to grow their economies and better the lives of their people.
- k. **Keeping industrial and supply chains stable:** All parties should earnestly maintain the existing world economic system and oppose using the world economy as a tool or

weapon for political purposes. Joint efforts are needed to mitigate the spillovers of the crisis and prevent it from disrupting international cooperation in energy, finance, food trade and transportation and undermining the global economic recovery.

1. **Promoting post-conflict reconstruction:** The international community needs to take measures to support post-conflict reconstruction in conflict zones. China stands ready to provide assistance and play a constructive role in this endeavor.

### **3.6. Turkiye Mediation Role in the Russia Ukraine Conflict**

It is pertinent to state that since the full-scale war waged by Russia against Ukraine began in February 2022 many key players beyond the aggressor and the victim (Russia and Ukraine) has emerged and Turkey is unarguably one of these key players and has acted as a mediator since the early days of the invasion and tried so far to successfully balance being pro-Ukrainian without being openly anti-Russian. For instance, Ankara and the United Nations (UN) played a pivotal role in brokering the Black Sea Grain Initiative, widely known as the ‘grain deal’, an agreement to restart crucial grain exports out of Ukraine’s Black Sea ports. At the same time, Turkiye did not join Western sanctions against Russia. It took advantage of Russia’s vulnerable position to seek a discount on its Russian gas imports, which comprise roughly 45% of total gas imports (Soylu, 2022), and boost its ambition of becoming an energy hub for Europe.

Turkiye’s position in this war matters not only because of its precious diplomatic stance and geographical location as the transit corridor to Europe, Asia and Africa, although not always selfless mediation but also because of its broader role in the Black Sea region and the ‘neighbourhood’ shared by the EU and Russia. Turkiye is a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member and at least formally, a European Union (EU) candidate; it also holds significant diplomatic, strategic, and economic ties with Russia. Over the last ten years, Ankara's foreign policy has grown more assertive, becoming more active in the Middle East, South Caucasus, and the Eastern Mediterranean. This increased assertiveness goes hand-in-hand with a deterioration of relations with the West to the extent that some scholars openly talk about the De-Europeanization of Turkiye's foreign policy, understood as ‘the loss or weakening of the EU/Europe as a normative/political context and as a reference point in domestic settings and national public debates’ in Turkey (Ayдын-Düzgit & Kaliber, 2016: 5).

### **3.7. Africa’s Mediation Role in the Russia-Ukraine Conflict**

Russia’s military intervention in Ukraine not only affects its immediate geographical vicinity but also relatively distant regions such as Africa. The cessation of grain and fertilizer trade due to the war has further complicated issues in Africa, where some countries are already struggling with famine. In other words, despite being perceived as a distant geography, the continent of Africa is deeply impacted by the Russia-Ukraine conflict. It is based on this impact and the influence of political objectives of African leaders that prompted some leaders of African countries to engage in diplomatic initiatives aimed at achieving peace between Russia and Ukraine. While it is not expected that these initiatives will be effective in the short term, the visits have generated significant international attention and once again highlighted the fact that the war affects not only the immediate region but also different geographies of the world. Another interesting point is that while the African delegation continues its engagements, Ukraine is being bombed, the delegation has to take shelter in bunkers (Gurseler, 2023).

As evident, prominent leaders of the African continent, under the presidency of South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, have organized diplomatic visits to both Ukraine and Russia. The delegation includes President Ramaphosa himself, as well as Senegal's leader Macky Sall, Zambian President Hakainde Hichilema and, Comoros President Azali Assoumani. Participation from countries such as Uganda and Egypt have also been ensured. The delegation held meetings with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. The Russian and Ukrainian leaders conveyed the terms of their respective plans to their African counterparts. In addition, the United States and the United Kingdom have cautiously expressed support for the "Africa Peace Initiative." Ramaphosa shared with the public that United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has been informed about the initiative and the plan. There are some points of criticism regarding the visit. For instance, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and Ugandan leader Yoweri Museveni were initially scheduled to participate in the discussions but withdrew their decisions at the last moment. Some argue that the withdrawal of these two leaders from the delegation has affected the credibility of the diplomatic mission.

During the visit, Ramaphosa highlighted the importance of the diplomatic mission, emphasizing that it was the first time African leaders undertook a peace mission outside the continent. He also emphasized that the delegation maintained a neutral stance. According to African leaders, this stance demonstrates the significance of the mission and the delegation's desire to gain the trust of both Russia and Ukraine (Gurseler, 2023). However, as mentioned earlier, it should be noted that the diplomatic mission faced various criticisms.

The peace plan proposed by African leaders consists of 10 articles. The draft includes provisions for the preservation of the territorial integrity of both Russia and Ukraine, as well as the continuation of grain imports. The plan calls for the reduction of violence in the conflict, the immediate commencement of negotiations between Russia and Ukraine, the release of war criminals, and increased humanitarian support. When considering the needs of Africa, the reopening of grain movements in the Black Sea for the import of grain from Russia or Ukraine and diplomatic engagement have emerged as the most prominent topics. According to the African Development Bank, the war has created a shortfall of approximately 30 million tons in grain supply to Africa. The continent is also facing a shortage of fertilizers due to the conflict.

Despite these calls, Ukrainian President Zelensky has expressed that Ukraine will not participate in peace negotiations while its territories are under occupation. Ukraine reiterates the call for the Russian Army to withdraw from the occupied territories before any talks or plans. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has announced that they accept the main outlines of the African plan. Putin, on the other hand, stated that Russia is always ready to negotiate with Ukraine and claimed that it is the Kiev government that rejects negotiations. He conveyed Russia's positions to the African leaders during their meetings. Putin reminded that the Minsk Agreement was signed between Russia and Ukraine, and according to him, it is Ukraine that has "abandoned" the peace table. He also emphasized that the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic in Ukrainian territories have been recognized by Russia after an 8-year process. According to Putin, the recognition of these entities by Russia is in accordance with international law and the UN Charter. In this context, Putin emphasized

that the UN Charter includes the right to self-determination and argued that the Luhansk and Donetsk administrations could declare their independence. After Kiev responded to this situation in Donbass with military force, Putin stated that Russia was exercising its legitimate right to self-defense as stated in Article 51 of the UN Charter (Gurseler, 2023).

There are also various topics being examined and evaluated regarding the visits of African leaders to Russia and Ukraine. These include Russia's and Ukraine's relations with African states. Furthermore, South Africa's central role in the diplomatic visits has led to a reevaluation of relations along the Moscow-Cape Town axis. However, due to the close relations between the parties, the purpose of the delegation has been questioned by Western circles. Russia's relations with African states have developed in parallel with the onset and deepening of the Ukraine crisis. Following the annexation of Crimea by Russia, which led to its isolation in the international community, Russia has sought the support of African countries. Especially considering the votes condemning Russia's occupation in the United Nations General Assembly, it is understood why Moscow needed the support of Africa. While some African states did not accept these resolutions, there were also African countries like Kenya that either accepted or abstained from the decision.

Russia's increasing visibility in African countries such as Mali and the Central African Republic is seen as a way for Moscow to address its deteriorating relations with the West in Africa. Russia organizes summits with African countries to enhance relations and further cooperation. The first summit took place in Sochi in 2019. It has been announced that the second summit will be held in St. Petersburg in July 2023. In fact, the second summit was originally planned to take place earlier but was postponed due to the war in Ukraine.

Putin, especially from his second term as president, aimed to develop relations with African countries. It should be remembered that with the establishment of the Russian Federation, Moscow's focus shifted to its immediate neighborhood, and relations with the continent took a back seat on the agenda. This void was filled by Western countries. However, with Putin assuming the leadership position after Boris Yeltsin, interest in Africa increased. The memory of Soviet Union-Africa relations during the Cold War era has diminished the difference between Russia and other actors. Particularly, some countries still value the Soviet Union's support for national liberation movements, providing weapons, and training independent/national liberation leaders in the Soviet Union during the decolonization era. Therefore, the experience of the Cold War is among the factors that facilitate Putin's Africa policy. It is also evident that Russia is one of the leading actors in arms trade with the continent, which further demonstrates its engagement in Africa.

Wagner Group, which is considered as a paramilitary force/private military company by some sources, also plays a role in increasing Russia's visibility and hence its influence in Africa. Especially in countries like Mali, the Central African Republic, and Libya, Wagner fills the void left by France's withdrawal from certain countries. In Mali, for example, Wagner is involved in combating terrorists, while in other instances, it is involved in protecting regimes and securing mining operations. Furthermore, there have been occasional protests in certain countries that are pro-Russia and anti-France, which are frequently covered in Western media. However, the uncertain future of Wagner, the group that enhances Russia's visibility in Africa,

may raise questions about Moscow's influence. This is because on June 24, 2023, the Wagner group rebelled against the Putin regime and took control of the city of Rostov. They even advanced towards Moscow. The uprising of Wagner against the Kremlin will also lead to discussions about the fate of their activities in the continent. Lavrov has already stated that the responsibility for the contracts signed with Wagner lies with the African countries themselves. For example, Wagner operates in the Central African Republic. Additionally, alongside the Wagner militants, Lavrov has emphasized that there are hundreds of Russian military advisors working in the country.

At this point, it is necessary to examine Ukraine's relations with Africa. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba occasionally undertakes visits to African countries. For example, during his visit to Ethiopia, Kuleba called on African leaders to abandon their neutral/indifferent stance towards Russia's war against Ukraine. Some African countries, including Ethiopia, have remained neutral in the voting of the United Nations General Assembly resolutions that oppose Russia's policies.

Kuleba expressing Ukraine's discomfort with the stance exhibited by certain African states and calling on African countries to support Ukraine is significant. He states that the neutral stance of African leaders actually implies a violation of the principle of inviolability of borders in their own regions and remaining indifferent to major crimes that may occur in their own regions. In this context, in December 2022, the Ukrainian Foreign Minister called for support for the 10-point peace plan prepared by President Zelensky. Kuleba emphasizes that for any peace plan to be accepted by Kyiv, respect for Ukraine's territorial integrity is required, and the demand for an immediate ceasefire will not be accepted. In addition to the demand for support in the war, Kuleba also aims to expand relations and cooperation in various fields. He emphasizes that maintaining trade relations in areas such as energy and technology will mutually benefit both parties.

As mentioned earlier, during his visits in May 2023, Kuleba also met with officials in Morocco and Rwanda. In October 2022, the Ukrainian Foreign Minister visited Senegal, Ivory Coast, Ghana, and Kenya. It is evident from these engagements that Ukraine, despite Russia's increased presence in Africa, is also taking an offensive approach to develop its relations with African countries. In this regard, the Ukrainian government has announced their goal of opening 10 new embassies in Africa, starting with Rwanda and Mozambique. They have also expressed that agricultural imports to the continent will increase and military relations will develop. Kuleba frequently states that strong cooperation is aimed between African countries and Ukraine, which should be based on mutual respect and common interests. During his May 2023 visits, Kuleba also met with officials from the African Union and announced the goal of creating a new roadmap for relations.

One of the underlying reasons for Ukraine's goal of gaining support from different regions like Africa is the desire for the Russia-Ukraine War not to be perceived as a Western war. Kiev also occasionally expresses that it has not been able to secure the support of African countries against Russia. It should be noted that Zelensky addressed the African Union Summit in June 2023. With only 4 out of 55 heads of state attending the summit, it can be said that African leaders approached Zelensky with caution.

During the virtual meeting, Zelensky stated that they are aware of the importance of grain imports for Africa. He claimed that Russia is responsible for the increase in food prices on the continent and mentioned that food prices have risen worldwide, but African countries are the most affected. Zelensky expressed their desire for the development of relations with African countries and assessed these countries as hostages of Russia's war against Ukraine. He also mentioned that Ukraine will appoint a Special Representative for Africa who will start his duty soon. Additionally, he stated that the outreach to African countries will continue and called for a summit focusing on political and economic areas between African countries and Ukraine (Gurseler, 2023). It is alleged that the initiative by African leaders aims to resume grain trade rather than providing a platform for peace negotiations between Russia and Ukraine. It is worth noting that South Africa plays a key role in this regard. In recent times, military exercises have taken place between Russia and South Africa. South Africa has drawn criticism from the Western world for its abstention in the United Nations General Assembly resolutions condemning Russia's occupation.

Furthermore, President Ramaphosa's invitation to Putin to visit South Africa during the BRICS Summit scheduled for August 2023 has also sparked various criticisms. However, it is not yet clear whether Putin will visit this country to attend the BRICS Summit. The issue of Putin being handed over to the International Criminal Court (ICC) will come up, increasing pressure on the Cape Town government. It should be remembered that the ICC has issued an arrest warrant against the Russian leader on charges of international crimes committed in Ukraine. Additionally, it is known that some American officials have raised allegations of South Africa supplying weapons to Russia. Although Cape Town has stated that it did not take sides in the war, these allegations also bring about discussions on the neutrality of Africa's peace initiative.

Indeed, the desire to secure the import of grain and fertilizer has influenced Africa's peace initiative. The disruption of grain and fertilizer trade due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict has further complicated the existing challenges of food scarcity in some African countries. Ensuring a stable supply of these essential commodities has been a key concern for African leaders, as they recognize the impact of the conflict on their agricultural sector and food security. By advocating for peace and diplomatic efforts between Russia and Ukraine, African leaders aim to address not only the immediate crisis but also the long-term stability of agricultural trade and food availability in the region.

#### **4. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The inevitability of the Russia-Ukraine conflict is basically premised first on the ethno-religious and ideological dualism and incompatibility amongst the Ukrainians who are polarized ideologically to the West and the Russian Federation and this gave room to both the Russian federation and the Western World to advance their ideological hegemony and preponderance over the other. Beyond leveraging on the ideological the ethnic, religious and ideological differences of the Ukrainian state, Russia considers Ukraine as its sphere of influence and that expansion of NATO and Western ideological principles into Ukraine poses an existential threat to Russia and must be resisted at all cause. To Russia, US and its NATO

allies want to make Ukraine its bulwark right in Russia's border, hence the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and a full-blown war in February, 2022.

To Washington and its allies Ukraine has the right to choose the system of Government and political ideology she desires and must not to be allowed to be externally controlled by the Russian federation. Beyond all of these postulations as factors that led to conflict there is the struggle for ideological hegemony and control between Russia and the United States which actually began at the end of Second World War in 1945 and continued as a Cold War until 1991 when the Cold War ended and the Eastern bloc led by former Soviet Union disintegrated and all 15 member states went on their own, it is also pertinent to state that Russia was the biggest member of the former Soviet Union Whereas Ukraine was the Second biggest member of the defunct USSR and that what led to the war in Ukraine is clear furtherance of the ideological War between Russia and the US even in the Post-Cold War era, Ukraine therefore is only used as a bulwark by both Russia and the US. The conflict which is still ongoing has heralded dire economic consequences not just in the conflict zone but to the entire globe, in fact Africa and Asia are most affected because both countries are net exporters of food, petroleum products, fertilizers and Steel to several countries of the world.

The unilateral sanctions on Russia by the United Nations and other international actors will further worsen the conflict and impedes the resolution process and that the United Nations should step down its sanctions and mediations roles and allow states with relatively neutral posture to mediate between Russia and Ukraine with a viewing to achieving rapprochement. Countries in Africa and Asia which are food and refined petroleum products import reliant should make a rethink and begin to diversify their economic base and revamp moribund refineries as well as built new ones to meet their countries consumption demands.

The sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states of the world should be respected irrespective size, population and natural endowment, and that no state should be allowed to interfere in the internal affairs of other states which is a core principle of the UN charter should be upheld. The United Nations should relax its mediation roles in Russia - Ukraine conflict and allow states with relatively neutral posture to take full mediation roles between Russia and Ukraine with a view to achieving peaceful resolution of the conflict

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