

FRAGMENTING WORLD ORDER, UNTIED NATIONS

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

The global order has broken down | Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphoto

*Nearly three weeks into the Russian war on Ukraine, the cost to India is still to be counted. While some are focusing on how India's refusal to criticise Russia's actions, and the string of abstentions at the United Nations, would affect its relations with the West and its Quad partners (the United States, Australia and Japan), others are watching the economic costs that the unprecedented sanctions of the U.S. and the European Union will have on Indian trade, energy and defence purchases. However, the outcome that should worry New Delhi and other like-minded countries the most, apart from the devastating consequences for the Ukrainian nation, is the impact the Ukraine crisis is having on the global world order, which is fragmenting in every respect of global interconnectedness — in terms of international cooperation, security, military use, economic order, and even cultural ties.

To begin with, the global order has broken down and events in Ukraine have exposed the United Nations and the Security Council for their complete ineffectiveness. Russia's actions in Ukraine may, in terms of refusing to seek an international mandate, seem no different from the war by the United States in Iraq in 2003, Israel's bombing of Lebanon in 2006 and the Saudi-coalition's attacks of Yemen in 2015.

But Ukraine is in fact a bigger blow to the post-World War order than any other. The direct missile strikes and bombing of Ukrainian cities every day, exacting both military and civilian casualties, and the creation of millions of refugees, run counter to every line of the UN Charter preamble, i.e. "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war...", "to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours", as well as [Articles 1 and 2 of the 'Purposes and Principles' of the United Nations \(Chapter 1\)](#).

The fact that Russian President Vladimir Putin broadcast his decision to "launch military operations" on Ukraine at the same time the Russian envoy to the United Nations was presiding over a UN Security Council discussion on the Ukraine crisis, speaks volumes for the respect the P-5 member felt for the proceedings. A vote of the international commons, or the UN General Assembly (UNGA), that decried Moscow's actions, was brushed off in a way that was even easier than when the U.S. did when it lost the UNGA vote in 2017 over its decision to move the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, in their responses, other P-5 members such as the United States, the United Kingdom and France did not seek to strengthen the global order either, imposing sanctions unilaterally rather than attempting to bring them to the UN. Clearly, Russia would have vetoed any punitive measures, but that should not have stopped the attempt. Nor are the surge in weapons transfers to Ukraine a vote of confidence in the UN's power to effect a truce.

The next point is Russian recklessness with regard to nuclear safety in a country that has suffered the worst impacts of poor safety and planning following the 1986 Chernobyl disaster (when Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union), which is a challenge to the global nuclear order. Russian military's moves to target areas near Chernobyl and shell buildings near the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant (also Europe's largest), show an alarming nonchalance towards safeguards in place over several decades, after the U.S.'s detonation of atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 led to the establishment of the International Atomic

Energy Agency (IAEA) in 1956. The world must also consider the cost to the nuclear non-proliferation regime's credibility: Ukraine and Libya that willingly gave up nuclear programmes have been invaded, while regimes such as Iran and North Korea can defy the global order because they have held on to their nuclear deterrents.

There are also the covenants agreed upon during the global war on terrorism, which have been degraded, with the use of non-state actors in the Ukraine crisis. For years, pro-Russia armed militia operated in the Donbas regions, challenging the writ of the government in Kyiv. With the arrival of Russian troops, the Ukrainian President, Volodymyr Zelensky, has invited all foreign fighters who are volunteering to support his forces to the country. This seeks to mirror the "International Brigades" in the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s, comprising foreign volunteers from about 50 countries against forces of Spanish military ruler Francisco Franco.

However, the role of foreign fighters has taken on a more sinister meaning after 2001 and al Qaeda, when western recruits joined the Islamic State to fight Syrian President Assad's forces. British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss's recent statement that she would "absolutely support" British veterans and volunteers joining the Ukraine war against Russia has since been reversed by the British Foreign Office, and it is hoped that other countries around the world, including India, make firm efforts towards preventing such "non-state actors" from joining a foreign war.

Economic sanctions by the U.S., the U.K. and the European Union (EU) also point to a fragmentation of the global financial order. While analysts have pointed out that the sanctions announced so far do not include some of Russia's biggest banks such as Sberbank and Gazprombank and energy agencies (in order to avoid the disruption of oil and gas from Russia), the intent to cut Russia out of all monetary and financial systems remains. From the eviction of Russia from SWIFT payments, to the cancellation of Mastercard, Visa, American Express and Paypal, to the sanctioning of specific Russian businesses and oligarchs and pressure on Western businesses (McDonalds, Coca-Cola, Pepsi, etc.) operating in Russia to shut down, the arbitrary and unilateral nature of western sanctions rub against the international financial order set up under the World Trade Organization (that replaced the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, or GATT).

The obvious fallout of this "economic cancel culture" will, without doubt, be a reaction — a pushback from Russia and an exploration of alternative trading arrangements with countries such as China, India and much of the Eastern Hemisphere which continue to trade with Moscow. For the S-400 missile defence deal, for example, New Delhi used a rupee-rouble mechanism and banks that were immunised from the U.S.'s CAATSA sanctions (or Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act) for advance payments. Russian banks will now use the Chinese "UnionPay" for online transactions. Gradually, the world may see a "non-dollar" system emerge which would run banking, fintech and credit systems separately from the "dollar world".

Finally, there is the western objective, to "isolate" Russia, socially and culturally, that rails against the global liberal order. While several governments including the U.S., the U.K. and Germany have persistently said that their quarrel is not with Russian citizens but with their leadership, it is clear that most of their actions will hurt the average Russian citizen. The EU's ban of all Russian-owned, Russian-controlled or Russian-registered planes from EU airspace, and Aeroflot's cancellation of international routes, will ensure that travel to and from Russia is severely curtailed. Some of this isolation of its citizens will work to the favour of an increasingly authoritarian Kremlin. Mr. Putin's response to the banning of Russian channels in Europe and its allies has been to use the western media ban as a pretext to ban opposition-friendly Russian channels as well. The "isolation" extends to art and music: in the past two weeks the Munich Philharmonic fired its chief conductor and New York's Metropolitan Opera let a Russian soprano,

Anna Netrebko, go because they would not criticise the war. The Bolshoi Ballet's performances in London and Madrid were similarly cancelled.

The perils of this comprehensive boycott of Russia are not without historical precedent. Speaking to his Parliament this week, Mr. Zelensky invoked British Prime Minister Winston Churchill's "Fight to the End" speech, delivered at the House of Commons in June 1940, to speak about Ukraine's commitment to fight Russia. European onlookers would do well to also remember Churchill's other famous speech, "The Sinews of Peace", delivered in the United States in 1946, when he first referred to the "Iron curtain coming down" between Soviet Russia and Western Europe. "The safety of the world requires a new unity in Europe, from which no nation should be permanently outcast," Churchill had warned, although his words went in vain and the world suffered the consequences of the Cold War for the next four decades.

The events over the past two weeks, set in motion by Russia's declaration of war on Ukraine, have no doubt reversed many of the ideas of 1945 and 1990, fragmenting the international order established with the UN, ushering in an era of deglobalisation and bringing down another Iron Curtain. India's abstentionist responses and its desire not to be critical of any of the actions taken by the big powers might keep Indians safe in the short term. But in the long term, it is only those nations that move proactively to uphold, strengthen and reinvent the global order that will make the world a safer place, even as this war that promises few winners rages on.

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