

A DIVIDED UN ON UKRAINE CRISIS AND IMPACT ON PAKISTAN

By

Mahrukh Khan

Research Fellow

Centre for Strategic Perspectives (CSP), ISSI

Edited by

Dr Neelum Nigar

September 14, 2022

(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



The Russian invasion of Ukraine has now entered its 23rd week. With at least 17 million people displaced 46,000 deaths and a global food and energy crisis.¹ The conflict has raised questions about the Charter of the United Nations, and the United Nations (UN) role as an organization to maintain world peace.

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is at a crossroads of ineffectiveness and constant decline. In February 2022, Russia using its status as a member of the P5 blocked the Security Council's resolution denouncing the invasion of Russia on Ukraine and demanding a stop to it.² While the US along with 11 other members of the UNSC voted in favour of Ukraine, China, India, and UAE abstain from voting and thus displaying support to Russia over diplomatic ties.³ With Russia's P5 status, any substantial action towards Russia beyond condemning statements fell on deaf ears and met a dead end. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has repeatedly emphasized and continues to expose the weaknesses and flaws in the UN's structure and international order.

1 Tom Balmforth and Max Hunder, "Ukraine President Sacks Security Chief, Cites Hundreds of Treason Cases," Thomson Reuters, July 18, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-president-sacks-security-chief-cites-hundreds-treason-cases-2022-07-18/>

2 "Russia Blocks Security Council Action On Ukraine," UN News, 26 February 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/02/1112802>

3 "Security Council vote sets up emergency UN General Assembly session on Ukraine crisis," UN News, 27 February 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/02/1112842>

Major powers such as the US declared support for Ukraine by assisting it with advanced weaponry, financial aid, and political jargon such as “nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine,”⁴ the UN and the Security Council stood divided. While the UN has been taking necessary actions the Security Council has remained “paralysed”⁵ throughout the conflict.

In wake of the conflict, the UN adopted multiple resolutions and investigations in light of human rights violations, war crimes, refugee crisis as well as emergency humanitarian relief aid and assistance. It also passed a resolution calling on the five permanent members of the Security Council to justify the use of the veto.⁶ UN, regardless of its shortcomings, has made substantial contributions toward coordinating emergency appeals totalling \$2.24 billion to provide humanitarian assistance and civilian protection.⁷ It has assisted refugees in Ukraine by delivering more than 185 tons of medical equipment and 125 tons of necessities.⁸ At the same time, it has extended its support through disseminating information about the conflict including the consequences it entails not only for the region but also for the world at large. However, the success of the UN has been limited to assisting war refugees and providing them with relief.

Implications of a Marginalised UN:

Pakistan Amidst the Grain Crisis:

The UN Secretary-General António Guterres has described the resumption of grain exports during UN-brokered talks as a critical step forward.⁹ Ukraine is a major grain exporter to developing countries but with its six major Black Sea ports being blockaded by Russia, a drastic rise in prices of grains, cooking oils, fuel, and fertilizer together with major supply chain issues across the world was observed following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.¹⁰

⁴ Joe Biden, “President Biden: What America Will and Will Not Do in Ukraine,” New York Times, 31 May, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/31/opinion/biden-ukraine-strategy.html>

⁵ “Ukraine war: Rockets hit Kyiv as UN Chief Admits Failings,” BBC, April 29, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61265635>

⁶ “The UN and the war in Ukraine: key information,” United Nations, <https://unric.org/en/the-un-and-the-war-in-ukraine-key-information/>

⁷ “The UN and the War in Ukraine: Key Information,” United Nations Western Europe, 9 March 2022, <https://unric.org/en/the-un-and-the-war-in-ukraine-key-information/>

⁸ “The UN and the War in Ukraine: Key Information,” United Nations Western Europe, 9 March 2022, <https://unric.org/en/the-un-and-the-war-in-ukraine-key-information/>

⁹ “Guterres Hails ‘Critical Step Forward’ On Resuming Ukraine Grain Exports,” United Nations Turkiye, 14 July 2022, <https://turkiye.un.org/en/190092-guterres-hails-critical-step-forward-resuming-ukraine-grain-exports>.

¹⁰ “Russia Says Document Nearly Ready On Resuming Ukraine Grain Exports,” Thomson Reuters, 15 July 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/russia-says-document-nearly-ready-resuming-ukraine-grain-exports-2022-07-15/>

The halt in Ukrainian exports as a result of the conflict has pushed international prices of food commodities to an all-time high since 1990.¹¹ While the conflict has spiked prices of food inflation globally, it presents a grim picture for developing and emerging market countries, where the food price index change and its effects are even more dramatic.¹² The low DSFI score coupled with the dramatic price hike in food prices threatens to tip millions of people from the country into food security and economic crisis.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, countries like Indonesia, Madagascar, Pakistan, and the Republic of Moldova are among those that remain the most affected.¹³ This is due to less diversity in grain imports and a low score on the dietary sourcing flexibility index (DSFI) which makes them increasingly dependent on imports from Russia and Ukraine.¹⁴ Whereas, countries like Israel, Norway, Lebanon, and United Kingdom, remain less affected despite relying heavily on imports due to high diversification across food sources, trade partners and commodities.¹⁵ In addition to this, their high DSFI scores indicate that they have multiple options to replace the reduction in imports from Ukraine and Russia.¹⁶

¹¹ Dea Bankova, Prasanta Kumar Dutta and Michael Ovaska, "The war in Ukraine is fuelling a global food crisis," Reuters, May 30, 2022, <https://graphics.reuters.com/UKRAINE-CRISIS/FOOD/zjvqkgomjvx/>

¹² In developing and emerging market countries, the index change is even more dramatic, leaving consumers facing much higher prices for essential food staples

¹³ "The Importance Of Ukraine And The Russian Federation For Global Agricultural Markets And The Risks Associated With The War In Ukraine," Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 10 June 2022, <https://www.fao.org/3/cb9013en/cb9013en.pdf>

¹⁴ "The Importance Of Ukraine And The Russian Federation For Global Agricultural Markets And The Risks Associated With The War In Ukraine," Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 10 June 2022, <https://www.fao.org/3/cb9013en/cb9013en.pdf>

¹⁵ "The Importance Of Ukraine And The Russian Federation For Global Agricultural Markets And The Risks Associated With The War In Ukraine," Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 10 June 2022, <https://www.fao.org/3/cb9013en/cb9013en.pdf>

¹⁶ "The Importance Of Ukraine And The Russian Federation For Global Agricultural Markets And The Risks Associated With The War In Ukraine," Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 10 June 2022, <https://www.fao.org/3/cb9013en/cb9013en.pdf>



Source: Change in the Consumer Price Index for food, the war in Ukraine is fuelling a global food crisis¹⁷

Pakistan alarmingly falls as the ninth largest food crisis country globally. It is one of the largest importers of wheat from Ukraine and disruption in these exports because of the conflict has only increased the level of food insecurity in the country.

With global economies and populations being hit by a food and energy crisis the UN-brokered talks with Turkey in Istanbul present an important milestone. During the talks, an agreement to resume Ukrainian grain exports was reached. Russia, Ukraine, Turkey, and the United Nations are due to sign a deal next week aimed at resuming Black Sea grain exports from Ukraine.¹⁸

While the sailing of the vessel from Odessa's shores¹⁹ is indeed a step forward towards addressing global grain shortages in the wake of the Russian-Ukraine conflict, it is not enough. Destruction of Ukrainian agricultural land and infrastructure poses an even greater threat to global grain supplies.²⁰

¹⁷ Dea Bankova, Prasanta Kumar Dutta and Michael Ovaska, "The war in Ukraine is fuelling a global food crisis," Reuters, May 30, 2022, <https://graphics.reuters.com/UKRAINE-CRISIS/FOOD/zjvqkgomjvx/>

¹⁸ "The UN and the War in Ukraine: Key Information," United Nations Western Europe, 9 March 2022, <https://unic.org/en/the-un-and-the-war-in-ukraine-key-information/>

¹⁹ "First grain ship leaves Ukraine: What, where and why it matters," Al Jazeera News, 1 August 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/8/1/first-grain-ship-leaves-ukraine-what-where-and-why-this-matters>

²⁰ Dalton Bennett, "Ukraine's Farmers Become the Latest Target of Russian Missiles," The Washington Post, 19 July 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/07/19/ukraine-farmers-grain-russia-airstrikes/>

Impact on Pakistan:

The impact of the Russia-Ukraine war is not just economic but also has geopolitical and geostrategic consequences for Pakistan. Pakistan needs to find a solution to address the grain supplies and food security crisis caused by the conflict. In case, Pakistan fails to carefully assess its strategic options and positioning globally amidst Russia Ukraine conflict and make educated and mature decisions that are pivotal for its geo-economic, political, and strategic survival it will pitfall into a more vulnerable economic condition, further deteriorating its current as well as fiscal account balance leading to increased pressure on economic stagnation.

- The impact of the Russian-Ukraine conflict is a double-edged sword for Pakistan as Islamabad not only has economic ties with both countries but is also dependent on both countries for food imports.
- The continuation of the conflict has become a significant risk factor to the positive economic outlook of Pakistan.
- The conflict has been identified as a significant risk factor to Pakistan's positive economic outlook as it could further raise international oil and food prices and impede world trade through additional supply disruptions affecting imports, exports and taxes on imports and put additional inflationary pressures.²¹
- Equally important is to maintain a neutral ground during the conflict and work with the UN directly or indirectly to avoid any active criticism from either party. It is also pivotal to avoid tagging itself with a bloc and work to find an alternate solution to its food and energy shortage.
- Moreover, in case of sanctions on Russia Pakistan will have to find another way to work around sanctions to bring minimal effect to its economy as well as to the food imports such as wheat.
- Pakistan is already grappling with inflating food and fuel prices along with disruption in supply chains; the impact of the Russia Ukraine war will further strengthen persistent economic challenges as predicted by the World Bank.²²

²¹ Khaleeq Kiani, "Uncertainty, Ukraine War Major Risks to Pakistan's Economic Outlook," June 13, 2022, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1694559>

²² "South Asia Sees Slower Growth as War in Ukraine Impedes Recovery, Worsens Existing Challenges," World Bank, April 13, 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/04/12/south-asia-sees-slower-growth-as-war-in-ukraine-impedes-recovery-worsens-existing-challenges>

- In addition to the food and fuel crisis caused by the conflict, floods in Pakistan have caused widespread devastation and are not only turning existing harvest into but also threatening future harvest and the fertility of the land.
- The continuation of the conflict can also hamper the \$2.5 billion natural gas pipeline project between Pakistan and Russia,²³ further impacting Pakistan's energy shortage.
- Moreover, organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are reevaluating granting loans to countries that maintain trade deals with Russia. Therefore, based on the stance of the IMF itself and the share of votes, the pressure might be exerted on Pakistan to take a tougher stance on Russia if it wants to secure the loan.²⁴

Reinventing the United Nations; a Possibility?

Amidst the Russia-Ukraine crisis, the world is increasingly facing insurmountable contradictions and dilemmas on multiple accounts. This is primarily due to the lack of confidence in the UN as it has remained unable to fulfill its role as an impartial body in solving conflicts between states. This alone has led to division and debate across the globe on either to up the military aid to Ukraine or to leave it in a conundrum. With the inability and uncertainty of the UN and the UNSC to resolve old conflicts such as the Kashmir and Palestine issue and new conflicts such as the Ukraine crisis alike; there is a growing debate on the need to reform the UN. Increased emphasis is being paid to making necessary changes and modifications to the functioning of the UNSC to avoid any stalemate and bloc politics.

The UN's response concerning bringing an end to the conflict has largely been limited to resolutions that do not get voted in and just empty statements supporting the end of the conflict. However, real progress toward bringing the conflict to a halt is yet to be seen.

Decades ago, global powers at the end of World War II equipped the Security Council with the power to issue binding decisions while also providing the permanent five with the power to block such decisions. The war in Ukraine has highlighted the veto power of the Security Council's five permanent members— the United States, the United Kingdom, France, China, and Russia to be a hindrance to restoring peace.

²³ Claudia Chia, Zheng Haiqi, "Russia-Pakistan Economic Relations: Energy Partnership and the China Factor," Institute of South Asian Studies, October 6, 2021, <https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/papers/russia-pakistan-economic-relations-energy-partnership-and-the-china-factor/>

²⁴ Mary Hunter, "The Economic Impact of the Invasion of Ukraine on Pakistan and India," Centre for Strategic and contemporary Research, June 6, 2022, <https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/trade-economics/the-economic-impact-of-the-invasion-of-ukraine-on-pakistan-and-india/>

According to the UN library records, the permanent five have used their veto power 262 times since 1946, with the main proponents being the US and Russia.²⁵ It has mainly been used to block international challenges to their actions. The use or threat of a veto throughout history has blocked UN action to put an end to mass atrocities such as Rwanda, Darfur, Syria, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Yemen.²⁶ Given this background, the UN has yet again failed with its mandate to keep global peace by failing to halt the conflict in Ukraine.

The Russian-Ukraine conflict has managed to expose a grave flaw in the UN's Security Council. That is when it comes to war or conflict in countries where the interests of the five permanent members do not collide; the Security Council uses its power to make a difference. However, when it comes to conflicts where their interests collide such as the Ukraine which is a NATO partner,²⁷ then the Security Council's veto powers shift the dynamics from serious diplomacy to theatrics between the five permanent members. As the war rages on, the UN is caught in the crosshairs and is fast losing its influence and credibility on the world stage. As rockets continue to hit Kyiv, the only substantial action from the UN has been its admittance to failing at preventing and ending this war.²⁸ By failing to abide by the charter of 1945 and its founding principle "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war"²⁹ the UN, as an organization, continues to lose relevance and credibility not only on the political stage but also amongst the common populace too.

²⁵ "Research Guides: UN Security Council Meetings & Outcomes Tables: Vetoes," Dag Hammarskjöld Library, 8 July 2022, <https://research.un.org/en/docs/sc/quick>.

²⁶ Jennifer Trahan, "Existing Legal Limits to Security Council Veto Power in the Face of Atrocity Crimes" pp. 9-52, Cambridge University Press, August 2020. doi:10.1017/9781108765251

²⁷ "NATO Recognizes Ukraine As Enhanced Opportunities Partner," North Atlantic Treaty Organization Newsroom, 12 June 2020, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_176327.htm

²⁸ "Ukraine war: Rockets hit Kyiv as UN chief admits failings," BBC World News, 29 April 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61265635>

²⁹ "Charter of the United Nations," International Court of Justice, 26 June 1945, <https://www.icj-cij.org/en/charter-of-the-united-nations>