

UPF UK: Global South Perspectives on the Russia-Ukraine War and Consequent Tensions

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"Now may be the most dangerous time the world has seen in decades" - not my words but those of Jamie Dimon the world's most powerful banker, chief of JP Morgan. Global conflict can happen when what appear to be at first unrelated events all coincide and bring forth a cataclysm. Without creating a sense of despair I shall indicate why we are closer to Armageddon than at any time in my lifetime which includes the Cold War when, as a member of the British army, I stared across what was known as the Inner German Border at the Soviet Third Shock Army several divisions deep against our one Third Armoured Brigade and looked at the Brocken, a mini mountain bristling with Soviet listening devices. I lived most of my life under the chilling concept of Mutually Assured Destruction with the suitable acronym of MAD. This uneasy peace in the Western World was predicated on the assumption that a nuclear strike by one side would be met with equal ferocity to the extent of wiping out all civilisation and that neither side would actually be responsible for that first move. Even if we lived under such a shadow at that time, now, however, its basic premise is no longer valid with the advent of hypersonic delivery systems which are unlikely to be detected before the missiles land. When you add the intervention of artificial intelligence as well as the capacity for human error the chance of stumbling into war through mistake makes the present world even more dangerous.

We know that the Ukraine war has affected large parts of the rest of the world: the reliance of many countries in Africa, especially Egypt, on Ukrainian grain which could lead to starvation, the impact of disruption of Russian oil and gas supplies to Europe and the unpredictability of Putin and reactions of poorly led and trained Russian troops with their hands on the button of tactical nuclear weapons plus the uncertainty of how such a war may end when there is seemingly no basis for acceptable compromise on either side leaves a massive question mark over what next. In the face of increased military aid to Ukraine from USA and European countries a new actor has entered with the DPRK (North Korea) supplying munitions to Russia. The situation in the South China Seas is already fraught of which more in a moment.

We now have the added uncertainty of the war in the Middle East - precipitated by Hamas successfully to prevent the rapprochement between Israel and Saudi Arabia which would have led to the first major Arab state acknowledging the legitimate existence of the state of Israel. Hovering on the wings is Hezbollah in Lebanon supported by Iran and waiting for the opportunity to resume its antagonism towards Israel. Would Iran seize the moment by further strengthening its proxies the Houthis in Yemen against Saudi Arabia creating a backlash from that Arab state? Would Iran precipitate a regional war by firing missiles into Israel with the assured response not only from that country but also the USA? Iran supplies oil to Armenia which has seen a massive exodus of Armenian refugees from Ngorno-Karabakh following the military action by Azerjaiban to reassert its authority and the unwillingness of the so-called Russian peace force there to guarantee that peace. That area is another powder-keg of which the West is remarkably

uninformed.

Many of these issues may seem at first to be unrelated but when one looks behind the immediate façade and sees the geopolitical actors in the background they take on a more sinister aspect.



Almost unnoticed, the tragedy in South Sudan still unfolds with nearly 2.4 million refugees, making it the largest refugee crisis in Africa and the fifth largest refugee crisis in the world. Sadly, 65% of South Sudanese refugees are under the age of 18. The majority of those fleeing South Sudan are women and children. This is in danger of destabilising central Africa. Afghanistan is now a vacuum of which, seemingly, the USA has washed its hands and the EU is uncertain of the conflict between sanctions and the need for aid to avert the emerging humanitarian disaster there. Into that vacuum China is placing its tentacles.

I am not equating China with Germany prior to the First World War but China is now in a race in which it can no longer be certain of victory. Will Taiwan be subject to a pre-emptive strike? No-one fully anticipated war in 1914 yet a combination of factors led to the greatest bloodbath the world had seen. The German Kaiser wanted to establish naval superiority in the face of a growing British fleet, the Serbs had moved into Albania to secure their base against the Ottoman threat and being squeezed by the Austro-Hungarian empire, the Franco-Russian alliance seemed to imperil that empire and Germany and so on. Are we seeing a similar concatenation of different events that could lead to a third great conflagration?

Xi Jinping is not only damaging China's domestic economy with the way in which he dealt with the pandemic but also the greater interference in business by the Chinese Communist Party. This is in the face of diminishing economic growth rate but a growing aging population which will need welfare China cannot afford and a massive problem of youth unemployment. Yet more serious is the race for superiority on artificial intelligence and semiconductors, the latter being essential to the former, which China is determined to dominate. The supercomputers for AI need a computing power which doubles every six to twelve months according to Nvidia, the USA market leader. China is spending vast sums trying to catch up but is nowhere near matching the USA. The computer war is hotting up with USA imposing restrictions on chip exports to China. Those manufactured for Nvidia are made in Taiwan. In desperation over frustrated ambition would Xi Jinping persuade himself that with USA and the West preoccupied with Ukraine and now the emerging crisis in the Middle East now would be opportune to mount a concerted attack on Taiwan to garner its technology? How would USA and the West react let alone Taiwan itself? Despite decades of seeking to undermine Taiwanese autonomy by luring young Taiwanese to the mainland and demonstrations of military force making it clear that Taiwanese airspace is, in fact, Chinese every indication is that the Taiwanese would fight hard in a rocky terrain which could take disproportionate forces to quell. The UN was supine in the face of the Indian annexation of Goa and Indonesian annexation of East Timor - but with its technological significance the reaction to a Chinese invasion of Taiwan might be different. That is a calculation China has to face.

Coupled with the possibility that all these issues could coincide creating a major world crisis and possible realignment there is the retreat from globalisation as countries and manufacturers seek to shorten their supply lines in the face of uncertainty of energy supplies and increasing tariff and non-tariff barriers - we seem to be moving into an era of narrow nationalism and possible protectionism. That is not only inimical to global agreement on matters that transcend the nation state such as climate, the rules-based order, development, international justice and pacific relations but also heightens the possibility of actual conflict between states. Add to this increasing disparity between the rich and the poor, growing poverty, increasing costs and higher inflation which create instability and you will see why I have painted a grim picture.

Is it accurate? International markets, although volatile in the face of mounting national debt and even the possibility of default in some countries, seem so far to be unphased. It is always said that markets reflect not the present but the future. So perhaps we should be more optimistic. Are there more reasons to be cheerful?



As Prof. Dr. Alfred de Zayas of the Geneva School of Diplomacy has pointed out "At least we are not burning witches or massacring indigenous Hopi, Pequots, Sioux and Tainos, the slave trade is abolished, colonialism is drastically reduced. We have seen a phenomenal codification of legal norms, the UN Charter, the UDHR (Universal Declaration of Human Rights), the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Geneva Conventions, the establishment of regional human rights courts. We hail the growing recognition of the rights of half the population of the planet - women, the measures taken on behalf of persons with disabilities. We welcome the entry into force in January 2021 of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, the Declaration of October 2021 by the Human Rights Council recognizing the Environment as a Human Right. While we deplore the continued practice of torture in some countries, we express relief over its universal condemnation, and the gradual abolition of the aberration of "capital punishment"."

Yes, there has been regression in many fields but human history marches on. Once the genie has been let out of the bottle it cannot be put back. Whether disputed or currently openly flouted those international instruments of human rights and rules based law of conduct cannot be unlearned - they are there as lasting testament to the advance of civilisation in seeking to establish a modus vivendi applicable to all humanity to be able to live in peace and harmony. Further advances will be made and will enter into the human experience, not least in the way we treat our environment. The idea of adding ecocide to the panoply of crimes within the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court, originally mooted at the time of the creation of the Rome Statute in 1998, is now back on the agenda. The Westphalian accord of 1648 of the impunity of states to behave internally as they wish without international scrutiny can never be reinstated - we are now in so many ways our brothers' and sisters' keepers. It is a heavy responsibility but it is one that none of us can escape in the modern world. No longer can we dismiss what is happening to human beings elsewhere as being in the words of British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain in a radio broadcast on 27 September 1938, in which he described Germany's invasion of Czechoslovakia as "a quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing". I would have it no other way. Instead, we must aim to transcend the nationalism of the nation state and build, in the words of the popular hymn, "another country" where

"We may not count her armies
We may not see her King
Her fortress is a faithful heart
Her pride is suffering

And soul by soul and silently
Her shining bounds increase
And her ways are ways of gentleness
And all her paths are peace."

As Mother Teresa said "Today, if we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other - that man, that woman, that child is my brother or my sister." Or, as summed up by Martin Luther King Jnr "We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools." That is why UPF reaches out to others, especially those who are different in colour or creed and seeks to bring them together, understand each other and live in harmony. Quite literally, our lives depend on it.