

⇒ Critically evaluate the implications of Ukrainian war on Pakistan. What options do you see for Islamabad to follow in its relations with Russia?

Beginning of Ukrainian War

To make sense of the current conflict we must understand the history of the relationship between the two inextricably linked countries. Ukraine that was the part of USSR till 1991 after which USSR disintegrated into 15 states, one of them is Ukraine. The crisis in Ukraine began with protests in the capital city of Kyiv in November 2013 against Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich's decision to reject a deal for greater economic integration with the European Union. After a violent crackdown by state security forces unintentionally drew an even greater number of protesters and escalated the conflict. In March 2014 Russian troops took control of Ukraine's Crimean region before formally annexing the peninsula after Crimean voted to join the Russian Federation in a disputed local referendum. The crisis heightened ethnic divisions, and two months later Pro-Russian separatists in the Donetsk

and Luhansk regions of eastern Ukraine held a referendum to declare independence from Ukraine. In July 2014, the situation in Ukraine escalated into an international crisis and put the United States and the ~~E~~ European Union (EU) at odds with Russia when a Malaysian Airlines flight was shot down over Ukrainian airspace, killing all 298 on-board. Since ^{Feb} 2015, France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine have attempted to broker a cessation in violence through the ~~M~~ Minsk Accords. However, efforts to reach a diplomatic settlement and satisfactory resolution have been unsuccessful. In October 2021, Russia began moving troops and military equipment near its border with Ukraine, reigniting concerns over a potential invasion. Russia issued a set of demands calling for the United States and NATO to cease military activities in Eastern Europe and to prevent Ukraine to join NATO in future. Russian demands were rejected by the US and its NATO allies and threatened to impose sanctions in case of Russian invasion of Ukraine. Negotiations between the United States, Russia, and European powers did not result in a resolution. On Feb 24, Putin

announced the beginning of a full-scale land, sea, and air invasion of Ukraine. Biden declared this attack "unprovoked and unjustified" and has since issued several sanctions in co-ordination with European allies.

Ukraine Crisis and Pakistan

Pakistan presented a three-point formula to address the ongoing Russia-Ukraine crisis. These three steps include; ceasefire, negotiation, and prompt implementation on the previous agreements. Pakistan's permanent representative at the United Nations, Munir Akram, maintained that Pakistan wants consistency in the implementation of the principles of the UN charter in every matter. Pakistan's decision to maintain the prime minister's visit was sound given the fact that for years Pakistan has been trying to inject trust and facility in our relations with Moscow. Similarly, our decision to abstain was a logical choice following the Chinese and the Indian vote in the Security Council. Regardless of this indiscretion which only deserved a riposte by the Foreign Office, we should maintain a clear emphasis in our

statements in support of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and avoidance of violence targeting civilians, while calling for a resolute to diplomacy and to peaceful resolution. But dragging this policy on to public platforms for domestic political advantage is inadvisable.

Are There Any Opportunities for Pakistan?

Pakistan's geopolitical relevance to both Russia and China will be enhanced, especially for possible trade and communications corridors. Afghanistan remains an obstacle. Also, unlike the countries endowed by Providence with oil, we will need capacities to leverage our location to build national strength. Mere aspiration is not enough. So far our domestic politics has shown inexcusable apathy towards this imperative as reflected in the sad predicament of our economy and education. Lastly Pakistan is safe today because

nuclear deterrence is an integral part of its security: a lesson reinforced by the Ukrainian crisis.

Russia Pakistan Relations Beyond Ukraine Crisis

The bilateral relationship between Islamabad and Moscow is not without significant scope for improvement, left over from Pakistan's alignment with the US during cold war, the deployment of Soviet troops in Afghanistan in the 1980s, and Russia's close defence ties with Pakistan's ~~main~~ nemesis India. And there is much reason, both political and economic, for Pakistan to want to capitalise on recent efforts to reset the relationship. The current Pakistani leadership is looking to urgently stabilize the country's inflation-hit economy by increasing domestic productivity and attracting foreign investment. To achieve its economic goals, Pakistan is aware that it needs to maintain regional peace and avoid getting entangled in the expanding mesh of global power politics.

This desire to maintain peaceful relations in the region has reinforced the Pakistani government's expressed commitment to increasing regional connectivity and encouraged it to expedite work on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, a core component of which includes the upgrading and rebranding of the country's maritime trade routes through the ports of Karachi and Gwadar. Both Pakistan and China have maintained that these projects and routes are and will remain regionally inclusive. Pakistan's first ever ~~revised~~ National Security Policy, unveiled earlier this year, reaffirmed the government's aspiration for regional integration and even contained tentative provisions for better relations with its archrival India. The document also called for the "reimagining [the country's] partnership with Russia in energy, defence, co-operation, and investment". In this context, Prime Minister Khan's decision to go forward with his scheduled meeting with Putin to demonstrate his desire for stronger ties and further collaboration with Russia could be seen as an inherently rational move. Russia has already agreed to invest in the Pakistan Stream Gas Pipeline between Karachi and the city of Kasur in Punjab, a project worth more than \$2bn that would greatly help service Pakistani

ever-increasing energy demands once completed. On the political and security front, Islamabad has reasons to seek closer ties with Russia now, especially after the US's catastrophically executed withdrawal from Afghanistan in August last year. In other words, while Prime Minister Khan had much to lose from backing out of his planned visit to Moscow due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, he also had little to gain.

Furthermore, in line with their desire to focus on the economy and good regional relations, Pakistani officials have long expressed their country's desire to steer clear of coalition-building exercises reminiscent of Cold War bloc politics. They ~~had~~ have repeatedly made it clear, for example, that Pakistan's relationship with neighbouring China, which has undergone significant deepening since 2016, should not be misconstrued by the West as zero-sum choice amidst growing Sino-US competition. Prime Minister Khan's decision to go forward with his Moscow visit despite the escalation in Ukraine, and the coalition-building activities it paved the way to, likely followed the same thinking.