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“ADVANCING DIVERSITY”

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Takeaways from the Russia/Ukraine Conflict

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Introduction

The world has recently experienced a series of shocks: the COVID-19 pandemic (Kahl & Wright, 2021), the precipitous withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan, and, beginning on February 24, 2022, the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The invasion of Ukraine, however, appears to have upended, very likely for the long-term, the international order as we previously knew it.

We have gone from a semblance of equilibrium, or even a punctuated equilibrium (Gould & Gould, 2007), to a dystopian world in which a leading world power, the Russian Federation, a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, has engaged in continued aggression against Ukraine, a member State of the United Nations, despite sanctions and other actions by regional and international institutions.

I would like to suggest a few takeaways from the Russia/Ukraine conflict:

Decline of International institutions

International institutions have been ineffective in stopping the Russian carnage. The United Nations Security Council has been stymied by the Russian veto (indeed a Russian representative was, at the outset of the invasion, the President of the UN Security Council and cast a veto to prevent the UN Security Council from condemning the Russian invasion). The International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued a ruling that Russia must suspend all military operations in Ukraine (*16 March 2022 order allegations of genocide under the convention on the ...* (n.d.)), but the ICJ couldn't implement its ruling since enforcement goes through the UN Security Council where the Russian veto prevents the UN from taking action.

The UN General Assembly (UNGA) did condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine (by an overwhelming vote of 141 Member States), adopting a resolution demanding that Russia "immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders." (United Nations. (n.d.)). However, the UNGA doesn't have enforcement power.

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Russia, as well as China, have co-opted international institutions. As discussed above, Russia has used its permanent member status on the UN Security Council to prevent action against it concerning Ukraine. As for China, “four of the 15 UN specialized agencies are headed by Chinese nationals, including the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDP), and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)” (Tung Cheng-Chia and Alan H. Yang for *The Diplomat*, 2021).

The question is why States like Russia and China which are challenging the international order even bother to devote energies to participation in international institutions. It would appear that such participation by China and Russia has been opportunistic in that “integration into international institutions ... has enhanced their ability to mobilize allies, secure leverage over their trading partners, and gain legitimacy for their normative visions. It is not simply that international institutions were unlikely to check China’s and Russia’s revisionism; their membership in fact assisted their efforts to transform world politics” (Goddard, 2022). It is clear, therefore, that reform of the United Nations system is an urgent and immediate imperative. This will be difficult, or perhaps even impossible, to accomplish because of structural obstacles within the United Nations system.

The Return of Conquest.

We have seen an action by a leading power to literally attempt to wipe another State off the map through invasion. The world has experienced such actions before during World War I and World War II, and the invasion of South Korea by North Korea, for example, but we have not seen such bold aggression since the advent of the Cold War. This may presage the “return of conquest” (Fazal, 2022). “The fact that Russia, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, can veto a referral for the crime of aggression to the International Criminal Court exposes a troubling vulnerability of the norm against territorial conquest. It is hard to maintain norms when great powers are determined to break them”. (Fazal, 2022). Indeed, “Allowing the norm against territorial conquest to wither away would mean taking the lid off territorial disputes around the globe and making millions of civilians more vulnerable to indiscriminate targeting”. (Fazal, 2022). Russia has been able to launch a destructive all-out war against Ukraine, a sovereign State and Member State of the United Nations, using overwhelming force and attacking civilians, engendering a humanitarian tragedy of epic proportions.

Is NATO “Brain Dead”? It Remains to be Seen.

France’s President Macron has said that NATO is “brain dead” (*The Economist*, n.d.) and NATO experienced a tremendous disunity in the face of the Russian attack on Ukraine. Indeed, the response by NATO members to Russia’s aggression has not been uniform and in many cases quite limited. For example, it is somewhat surprising to note that “Latvia – with a

population of 1.8 million and a gross domestic product comparable to Vermont's – apparently has delivered more [in aid to Ukraine] than Germany, France and Italy" (Board, 2022)

Europe appears to be floundering. Russia has been putting relentless pressure on the European countries by limiting natural gas exports which the European countries desperately need. (Dow Jones & Company, 2022, June 16). However, at the Madrid Summit in June, 2022, NATO seems to have received a shot in the arm in terms of NATO's formally inviting Finland and Sweden to join NATO (Erlanger & Michael, 2022), and through a US commitment to significantly increase the US force posture in Europe (Biden announces changes in US force posture in Europe, US Department of Defense, n.d.) which will include "more naval destroyers stationed in Spain, two F-35 fighter jet squadrons positioned in the United Kingdom and a permanent headquarters in Poland for the U.S. 5th Army Corps" (Keith, 2022). NATO announced its updated Strategic Concept 2022 (NATO 2022 – Strategic Concept):

The 2022 Strategic Concept clearly lays out NATO's purpose and principles, its core tasks and values, as well as the Alliance's strategic objectives within a radically deteriorated security environment. It reaffirms that NATO's key purpose and greatest responsibility is to ensure the collective defence of Allies, against all threats, from all directions. To do this, the Alliance fulfils three core tasks: deterrence and defence; crisis prevention and management; and cooperative security. The Strategic Concept underscores, in particular, the need to further strengthen deterrence and defence as the backbone of the Alliance's collective defence commitment. It also stresses that resilience is critical to NATO's core tasks, as are cross-cutting issues like technological innovation, climate change, human security and the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. The 2022 Strategic Concept gives a realistic assessment of NATO's deteriorated strategic environment.

"Strategic competition, pervasive instability and recurrent shocks define our broader security environment. The threats we face are global and interconnected."

The Russian Federation, which shattered peace in Europe by waging a war of aggression against Ukraine, is recognised as the most significant threat to Allied security. Other identified threats and challenges include: terrorism; conflict and instability in the Middle East and Africa; pervasive instability and its impact on civilians, cultural property and the environment; China's stated ambitions and coercive policies; cyberspace; emerging and disruptive technologies; the erosion of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation architectures; and the security implications of climate change" (NATO. (2022, June 29). *Strategic concepts*)

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has certainly galvanized NATO into becoming more cohesive and focused on the Russian and even the Chinese threats, yet it remains to be seen whether these policies and plans can be successfully

implemented. The Strategic Concept significantly highlights “NATO’s deteriorated strategic environment”, which calls for immediate and urgent attention to the threats from Russia and China.

All Politics is Local

“All politics is Local” (Gelman, 2011) - Both in the United States and in Europe, efforts by political leaders to stop Russian aggression have been stymied and impacted by local political considerations.

President Biden has had very low poll numbers and midterm elections for the House of Representatives and the Senate will take place November 2022. There is even a possibility that the Democrats might lose their majorities in the House of Representatives and in the Senate. Inflation is worrying (Dow Jones & Company. (2022, June 30)). For Biden, this becomes a choice between challenging the Russian invasion of Ukraine with strong measures or allowing gas prices to rise and risking high inflation. History might shed light on this conundrum for Biden for as much as he wants to counter Russian aggression, he must address his domestic challenges, and history might even repeat itself:

“Nonetheless, history and circumstance stand in Mr. Biden’s way. Historically Americans don’t rally around the president when geopolitical shocks send oil prices up; quite the opposite. In 1973, Arab countries embargoed oil exports to the U.S. as punishment for supporting Israel in the Yom Kippur War. The resulting energy crisis, combined with Watergate, hammered public confidence in President Richard Nixon. The surge in prices that followed the Iranian revolution in 1979 helped doom Jimmy Carter’s presidency” (Dow Jones & Company. (2022, June 30))

Boris Johnson overcame a no-confidence vote after revelations of a party at 10 Downing Street that violated COVID-19 lockdown rules and restrictions (Landler & Castle, 2022). Macron won his election as President of France, but then lost his absolute majority in the French Parliament (Breedon & Meheut, 2022), and Germany has a new Chancellor, Olaf Scholz, who is trying to maintain a precarious balance between the US and NATO, on the one hand, and Russia on the other hand.

Both the US and the European countries are facing an energy calamity if Russia cuts off or substantially reduces natural gas exports. All of these leaders are facing domestic pressures concerning gas prices and the spectre of gas and energy shortages in the winter. Germany, for example, will have to rely on coal powered power plants as well as nuclear power in order to survive the Russian cutbacks (and possible shutoff) of Russian exports of natural gas.

There is also the question of grain supplies and other shortages caused by the Russian blockade in the Black Sea. These grain shortages will have an even more drastic impact on poorer countries in Middle East, Africa and throughout the world, where massive starvation could result.

What Might Kissinger Do/Suggest? Territorial Concessions?

Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger has suggested that the Ukrainians make territorial concessions to Russia in order to end the conflict. Said Kissinger:

“Ideally, the dividing line should be a return to the status quo ante,” apparently referring to a restoration of Ukraine’s borders as they were before the war began in February. “Pursuing the war beyond that point would not be about the freedom of Ukraine, but a new war against Russia itself.” (Bilefsky, 2022)

It is patently clear that the American public will not countenance supporting an ‘endless war’ in Ukraine. Ramping up NATO defences and adding Finland and Sweden to NATO will help, but it is questionable whether these efforts will end the war due to the Putin’s unpredictability. If the US and European economies continue to falter and gas prices continue to rise, then there will doubtless be pressure on Ukraine from the US and the Europeans to make territorial concessions. This is despite the very strong messaging of unity in support of Ukraine that came out of the June 2022 NATO Madrid Summit.

Implications for China Resulting from Russia’s invasion of Ukraine

In one commentator’s view, China is surely “closely monitoring events, looking for lessons that might be applied in the event of a conflict with Taiwan” (Sacks, 2022). “Russia’s struggles will in no way shake China’s determination to bring Taiwan under its control. From Beijing’s perspective, Russia’s war in Ukraine is merely a realistic preview of the costs China would likely bear if it resorted to war. Chinese leaders will examine Russia’s failures and adapt their operational plans to avoid making similar mistakes. (Sacks, 2022). One can suggest that the much-criticized policy of ‘strategic ambiguity’ toward Taiwan (Haass & Sacks, 2022) would fall away quickly if China invaded Taiwan. The likelihood is that the strong US and NATO response to the Russian invasion is the “writing on the wall” for China. However, Russia was able to continue its aggression despite the strong regional and global response – and resolute support for Ukraine.

We might be able to gain some guidance from the fact that a key element of the opening to China engineered by Henry Kissinger and President Richard Nixon was the countering of the USSR. Perhaps a ‘reopening’ to China might be considered as a way to counter Russia’s aggression in Ukraine. This will call for thinking ‘outside of the box’ to engage with China in order to force Russia to rethink its aggressive posture. With the invasion of Ukraine and the rise of China, the US and NATO may not be able to balance against, and counter, both Russia and China at the same time. Perhaps there is some way for “Washington ... to build a pragmatic partnership with Beijing” (Bremmer, 2022). This does not mean that the US and NATO should ignore China’s human rights violations, its actions in the South

China Sea, or its development of military power that can potentially be projected regionally and globally. However, the way to engage China may be to work with the reality of China's rise. As for human rights violations, "[a] strategic partnership with China doesn't require the world to ignore these" violations. "In fact, it can provide the only leverage outsiders have to nudge China toward change" (Bremmer, 2022). The first priority is putting out the fire in Ukraine and stopping Russia – the way to do that might be to work with China to deter Russia. A pragmatic approach may have efficacy:

"Rather than also push China "outside the family of nations, there to nurture its fantasies, cherish its hates and threaten its neighbours"—as Richard Nixon wrote years before his famous trip to Beijing five decades ago—America and its allies should show that they see the rising superpower differently. The aim should be to persuade Mr Xi that the West and China can thrive by agreeing where possible and agreeing to differ where not. That requires working out where engagement helps and where it threatens national security." (The Economist Newspaper, n.d.)

It was precisely after the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the USSR that Nixon and Kissinger facilitated the opening to China. The Chinese Communist Party Newspaper People's Daily called the Czech invasion "armed aggression and military occupation" by the USSR (Kissinger, 1979). China has not been overjoyed with Russia's invasion of Ukraine. China abstained in the UN Security Council and General Assembly votes condemning Russia for the invasion of Ukraine. (Person, & Michelle Nichols, H. P. (2022, February 26)) (Bloomberg, n.d.). We can be hopeful that there might be a way to engage China going forward. However, this cannot be 'business as usual' continuing as in the past:

If Beijing charts a new course, it would not be the first time it has chosen to change. But if China does re-join a system of world order, it should be a new one. The old system has fractured and must be remade. Facing tragic realities, the citizens of the free world must rebuild a global order that is practical enough to address the most vital common problems, even if it cannot and does not promise progress on all the values and concerns people face. This system will be far more effective if the world's most populous country joins it, and China faces another time of choosing. Regardless of China's participation, responsible actors must begin the hard, substantive work of protecting the planet from war, climate, economic, and health risks. The time for rhetoric and posturing is over. Zelikow, P. (2022, June 30). *The hollow order*.

What about NATO? After expanding to Sweden and Finland, will NATO expand to the Asia-Pacific to counter China?

NATO is clearly in a state of flux. This started with NATO 2030 in which NATO directed its focus not only on Russia, but also on China. NATO has been launching its updated NATO 2022 Strategic Concept (NATO 2022 - Strategic Concept). Also, we are seeing the enhanced involvement in NATO of NATO partners Australia, New Zealand, Japan and the Republic of Korea

(and these States were invited to the June 2022 NATO Madrid Summit) (*Despite Ukraine Focus, Asia-Pacific to play prominent role at NATO summit*. United States Institute of Peace. (2022, June 27)). These developments are clearly oriented towards countering China and the possibility of China's invading Taiwan. The question is whether after NATO expands to include Finland and Sweden, will NATO expand to the Asia-Pacific to counter China? This appears to be a possible outcome of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. We are clearly in a three-dimensional chess game in world affairs.

Turkey's Multi-tasking on Ukraine

Turkey has succeeded to multi-task in its foreign policy related to Ukraine and Russia. Turkey has not participated in the sanctions against Russia, yet it has supplied the TB2 Bayraktar drone to Ukraine which has been very effective in Ukraine's military strategy. Turkey has been working with the parties to the conflict to find a way to bring grain through the Russian blockade in the Black Sea and has facilitated negotiations between Ukraine and Russia. Despite its initial opposition to the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO, at the Madrid Summit in June 2022, after signing a trilateral memorandum with Sweden and Finland, Turkey agreed to approve the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO, which will prove to be a very significant element of the strategy to counter Russia (NATO, n.d.). Turkey did receive the commitment of President Biden that Turkey would receive F-16's and modernization kits for F-16's that Turkey had previously requested. Supplying the F-16's will require the approval of the US Congress, but it is unlikely that President Biden would have publicly announced his support for providing the F-16's to Turkey without the support of the leadership of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

What does the future have in store?

The world has been shaken by Russia's aggression in Ukraine and, in particular, by the egregious human rights violations of the invading Russian military. The question is where do we go from here? The first priority is stopping the war. The next step has to be to give serious consideration to how the international system failed to function to deter this aggression. The United Nations desperately needs reform. Further, NATO needs to be further strengthened. The question remains that if China continues its 'partnership' with Russia, what steps need to be taken to contain China's rise? We are clearly at a crossroads and need to decide future directions. The Russia/Ukraine war has been a wake-up call to the entire world. We need to start thinking about what to do if another calamity occurs, such as the invasion of Taiwan. The world has been shaken, but there is still time to coalesce and emphasize the values of the rules-based international order that have guided the world to peace – but these values are under challenge and threat. America, its NATO allies and America's allies in the Asia-Pacific and throughout the world need to awake from the slumber of complacency and plan effectively for the future.

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