**Ukraine: Another nuclear flashpoint**

[Sajjad Shaukat](https://nation.com.pk/authorpost/columnist/sajjad-shaukat/)

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Tensions still exist between China and India, and Pakistan and India, Syria and Israel, and Iran and Israel which also have atomic weapons, secretly obtained. So, there are several nuclear flashpoints in the word, while Ukraine has become another nuclear flashpoint. Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, this year, as the latter had refused to reverse its decision to get NATO membership.
Presenting a unified front against the Russian invasion of Ukraine and using aggressive statements against the Russian President Vladimir Putin, rulers and leaders of the US and Europe, including many EU, NATO countries and Japan imposed various kinds of sanctions and restrictions on Russia. On the other side, President Putin ordered European countries to make payment of gas and oil in Roubles—otherwise, the supply would close.
Europe gets about 40 percent of its natural gas from Russia which is also the bloc’s main oil supplier. So, sudden supply cuts could have a huge economic impact. After finding alternative supplies, the EU plans to ban all purchases of Russian oil by the end of this year. But, there is no consensus yet among the EU members on stopping imports of Russian gas. The US has also declared a complete ban on Russian oil, gas and coal imports.
However, various sanctions and restrictions on Moscow are resulting in backlash on America and its Western allies, while affecting the world’s other countries. Now, the global food market is under a blockade. Russia is the world’s largest wheat exporter, while Ukraine is the sixth largest country. Meanwhile, Finland and Sweden, which decided to abandon their military neutrality, are seeking NATO memberships.
President Putin has repeatedly stated that NATO’s encroachment on his country’s borders and decision of Kiev to join NATO was the main reason for the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In response to Russia’s attack on Ukraine, and in the pretext of European security—in all, about 20 countries, most members of NATO and the EU are funnelling arms into Ukraine to fight off Russian forces and are arming an insurgency against Moscow. NATO is also moving as many as 22,000 more troops into member states bordering Russia and Belarus.
US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin who visited Kyiv on April 25, 2022 told Ukrainian President Volodomyr Zelenskiy of more than $322 million in new military financing for Ukraine, taking total US security assistance since the invasion to about $3.7 billion. Nevertheless, since the end of the Cold War, the question of NATO expansion for European security has been vehemently debated. After the Russia-Ukraine war, the debate has been accelerated. But, some strong supporters of NATO have opined that NATO’s enlargement would be too provocative toward Moscow. The US-led West’s irresponsible approach to encourage Ukraine to join NATO and Russia’s military action thwarted the Ukrainian move to get the membership of NATO.
Citing “aggressive statements” from the West, President Putin has put his nuclear deterrent forces on high alert. It is notable that after World War 11, nuclear weapons were never used, and were only employed as a strategic threat. During the heightened days of the Cold War, many crises arose in the Suez Canal, Korea, Cuba and Vietnam when the US and the former Soviet Union were willing to use atomic weapons, but they stopped because of the fear of nuclear war which could eliminate both the super powers. Therefore, the two rivals preferred to resolve their differences through diplomacy.
Political strategists agree that deterrence is a psychological concept which aims to affect an opponent’s perceptions. In nuclear deterrence, weapons are less usable, as their threat is enough in deterring an enemy who intends to use its armed might. In this context, a renowned scholar, Hotzendorf remarks that nuclear force best serves the interests of a state when it deters an attack.
Nonetheless, escalation of the conflict in Ukraine is undermining efforts to reach some sort of peace agreement. And West’s atomic powers and Russia have been ignoring the principles of deterrence, popularly called balance of terror, which may culminate into atomic war.