

CPPR Lecture Series

Resurging Great Power Conflicts and Regional Orders: Implications for South Asia

Event Report

Date and Time: 11 am-12 pm IST, January 30th 2023

Platform: CPPR OFFICE

Speaker: PROF TV. Paul

Moderator: Sharon Susan Koshy

Proceedings Report

About the Event:

Russia's invasion of Ukraine was a landmark moment that cemented a turning point in European security, highlighted a disconnect in international norms and set the undertones of contemporary hybrid and aggressive warfare. Beginning in 2014, the annexation of Crimea and the seizing of the Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts of Ukraine's Donbas region invoked a geopolitical spillover in the form of a widening regional war. During its decades of independence, Ukraine sought to reinvent itself as a sovereign state while looking to closer align with western liberal institutions such as NATO and the European Union. However, with the involvement of other great powers such as the United States and China alongside colluding interests and ideological differences, regional conflicts have created a complex web of conflicting spheres of influence within the international system.

Within the international stage, the Ukraine war challenged the post-cold war order which sought to build a multipolar world hosting Westphalian ideals of cooperation and dialogue. Yet, the resurgence of great power conflict resulted in regional hostilities, erosion of regional and global supply chains, and the disintegration of global trade expansion, alongside impacting food, health and energy security. Hosting deeply integrated cultural, economic and political bonds, Ukraine exists as a primary driver of Russia's motives in reinstating its former imperial glory within the international world order. On this note, this lecture will examine the resurgence of great power conflicts in line with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, alongside highlighting

its consequences on security frameworks, the role of peace and delicate diplomacy, the threat of hyper-militarisation and the subsequent impact on South Asia.

The Key Speaker or Speakers:

1. PROF TV. Paul- distinguished fellow of CPPR and James McGill Professor of Political Science at McGill University, Montreal.

Summary of Discussions

1. The resurgence of great power conflicts within the global stage has given way to the contesting of the great power norm that emphasises upon the pursuit of building a robust expansionist sphere of influence. However, the post-World War 2 era resulted in the birth of the territorial integrity norm that reiterates the Westphalian notion of state equality, while remaining uninterrupted from internal and external interventions. Thus, the normative view within International Relations paints the contemporary great power conflict as a disconnect between the two norms, with smaller states aiming to retain sovereignty and empires seeking to widen their influence on the international stage.
2. Russia's sphere of influence has been challenged due to Ukraine's demands for independence and sovereignty, with Ukraine seeking to join NATO and the European Union. Hungary and The Czech Republic remain as examples of states pursuing the desire to be a part of the western pacific liberal union while reconstructing themselves away from ex-soviet republics to western democratic states. Thus, strategies of global dominance led by the United States involve placing Russia back to its regional status, yet Russia remains persistent in reinstating its former glory.
3. However, within resurging great power conflict, human, regional and international security continues to be challenged, with the looming threat of interventional and by-product proxy wars creating irreparable damage. The threat of nuclear weapons remains prominent in current times, with deterrence being the best-case scenario. However, the lack of credibility and communication harbours reactionary scenarios within the international stage, with time pressures of a long-term status decline existing as a significant cause for Russia's infiltration into Ukraine. Great powers and their status as protection rackets (Charles Tilly) further emphasise the cyclical nature of power politics.
4. The daunting horizon of excessive militarisation and deepening power politics in the international system may give way to patterns of hard-balancing and contemporary alliances within the next decade. For developing nations, proxy wars, mass weapons trade and alliances may drive systemic conflict via

- supply chain shocks, inaccessible healthcare, food shortages and more, as seen with Ukraine's global ripple effect.
5. The possibility of a prolonged attrition war would result in dire implications for South Asia while changing the world order in complex and catastrophic ways, especially if nuclear weapons are utilised with Russia and China in mind. Thus, multipolarity must be consistent in restraining states within their quest for domination.
 6. India and the G20 can play a pivotal role in resuscitating the affected developing world, by targeting national and regional issues of food shortages, energy breakdowns, economic and trade downturns and more, by aiming to produce tangible results in the region. However, international order and peace require us to look beyond BRICs and the UNSC, to call for delicate diplomacy between Europe, Russia and the United States, with the emphasis being on states restraining themselves upon the international stage.

Key Takeaways

1. Russia's failure in obtaining territorial gains in Ukraine suggests a prolonged global conflict with potential nuclear threats and its undertones violating the global world order. Thus, long-term concerns of dwindling economies, aggressive warfare, value rationality alongside ideological challenges to democracy and potential hybrid warfare continue to plague great power rivalries.
2. Contemporary great power conflicts with Russia can be defined by potential time horizons in expansionism, protection racketeering, empire building, hyper-militarization and external intervention to break the territorial integrity norm set aside by non-great power states.

3. Thus, great powers must restrain themselves on the global stage, with regional and international peace being the fundamental cause for addressing institutional breakdown and aggressive warfare. This is essential for the further intensification of globalisation, economic growth, investments and global trade expansionism.
4. Although the Ukraine war is confined to a regional war, there is an immediate need for great powers to emphasise upon delicate diplomacy within its neighbourhoods. South Asia plays a key role in brokering peace in its region, especially with India's presidency of the G20 aiming to create tangible results. Thus, notions of peace and stability alongside hot and cold wars are inherently tied to great power domination, where it isn't feasible for the world order to emerge without peace.