

“Pugwash note on present dangers” 23 June 2022

The present global situation is very dangerous. Not since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis have we had such a dangerous environment. But while the Cuban missile crisis lasted 13 days, the present situation has continued for over 100 days since February 2022.

Of course, the main problem now is the war in Ukraine. There are many underlying motivations for this war. The history of relations between what is now Ukraine and Russia is several centuries old and very complex. More recently, antagonism between the Russian- and Ukrainian-speaking populations has been revived, together with the separatist movement in the eastern part of Ukraine (the Donbas) where, according to the UN, between 2014 and the end of 2021 more than 14,000 people have been killed. The annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 also raised concerns in Ukraine.

The eastward expansion of NATO that reached many of the countries bordering Russia—despite informal assurances given at the end of the Cold War between Russia and the US—is also an important factor of concern for Russia. Russia is obviously worried not only by the loss of its “external zone of influence,” but also about its own territorial integrity. On the other hand, the 2014 election in Ukraine changed the leadership and strengthened the pro-Europe sentiment (evidenced by the Euromaidan demonstrations). Between 2014 and the beginning of 2022, the tensions inside Ukraine grew considerably, as did the number of people killed, especially in the Donbas area.

On 24 February 2022, Russia decided to invade Ukraine. The goals cited for this invasion have shifted over time, from forcing a new leadership in Ukraine to the occupation of the Donbas and part of the Ukrainian Black Sea shore. Understanding the Russian motivations is possible, but this is of course very different from justifying in any sense this attack. By signing the Charter of the United Nations, all states committed to refrain from the threat or use of force against the political independence and territorial integrity of any other state.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has certainly been catastrophic for the Ukrainian population. It is hard to assess the number of civilians and soldiers from both sides who have been killed in Ukraine since 24 February 2022; estimates are 10,000 civilian casualties and 100,000 soldiers. Beyond the tragedy for the Ukrainian people, concerns have been raised about the increasingly tense relations between Russia and most NATO countries.

Specific considerations:

1. NATO countries, and particularly the US and the UK, are actively providing weapons to the Ukrainian army. Since the understanding is that these weapons should never be used against the territory of Russia, the continuous shipping of weapons to Ukraine has resulted in enabling the Ukrainian army to resist the invasion on its own soil, but with the consequence of extending the duration of the war, destroying several Ukrainian cities, reducing agricultural and industrial output, endangering nuclear power plants, and increasing the number of casualties.
2. Over six million people have fled to neighboring countries and many more are displaced within Ukraine itself.
3. Four countries possessing nuclear weapons – Russia, US, UK and France – are directly or indirectly involved in the war. If the tensions inside Europe grow, the risk of nuclear use cannot be excluded. This would be an unprecedented disaster. Nuclear deterrence was

believed to be responsible for the absence of a war in Europe, but this can no longer be taken for granted. The danger of an escalation of the hostilities toward the use of nuclear weapons is clear and serious. There is no end in sight. Finding a workable solution is urgent.

4. The immediate consequences of the war in Ukraine are also evident: heavy combat is poisoning the environment and destroying the crops of grain that provide food for many parts of the world.
5. Other aspects of the global economy are heavily affected by the war in Ukraine. The supply of gas and oil for European countries is under serious constraints, inflation has crept up in most states, and there are many other negative consequences. All countries involved should work together to offset the global impact of this war.

The risks are unfortunately not only limited to the direct consequences of the war in Ukraine. The Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA) is practically doomed, and this is inducing Iran to develop its nuclear program further. What Israel will do is also a matter of serious concern. In view of the non-compliance with the Minsk agreements, countries that relinquished their nuclear weapons in the past may have second thoughts and those that feel vulnerable may think twice about their treaty commitments. In South Korea and Japan, proponents of national nuclear capability have become more vocal.

Military activities in Northeast Asia between the Koreas, the US, and Japan are also a source of concern. The DPRK can find reason to believe that acquiring nuclear weapons increased its security. The situation regarding China, the US, and Taiwan is also very worrisome. The actions and rhetoric of the parties involved are far from reassuring.

The war in Ukraine is marginalizing the other nuclear dangers and this is also a serious recipe for disaster. The whole architecture of security, based on the Charter of the United Nations and on multilateral and bilateral treaties and other arrangements, is endangered.

Peace and security are common goods: no country can feel safe and secure unless all feel the same.

The entire Pugwash community should work to the maximum extent possible to:

- a. Promote the widest possible awareness and understanding of the present nuclear dangers;
- b. Promote in particular the end of the war in Ukraine with reasonable compromises and respect for the various regional diversities, taking into account the legitimate security concerns of the different parties. The war will not be solved by further shipments of weapons but by talking and establishing effective negotiations;
- c. Support an urgent ceasefire in Ukraine that would permit meaningful negotiations and the start of the reconstruction of the devastated country with international help;
- d. Support in all possible ways the restoration of the JCPOA;
- e. Facilitate dialogue between China, Taiwan and other countries in order to keep the scheme of one country with two different political systems;
- f. Work for dialogue and possible cooperation between South and North Korea.

These are not easy tasks but we have to remember every day that nuclear danger is not an abstract concern but a dramatically serious problem that affects the entire international community.

Sergio Duarte, President

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