

Forum: Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC)

Issue # Addressing the weaponization of Global Supply Chains in the Russo-Ukraine Conflict

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Introduction

Since its inception, the Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC) has played a pivotal role in confronting emerging threats to global peace and security. The ongoing Russo-Ukraine conflict has revealed a new dimension of modern warfare: the weaponization of global supply chains. The war has immensely disrupted the flow of goods, leading to cost increases, product shortages, food insecurity globally, and has transformed supply chains into instruments of economic warfare. To further elaborate, Russia and Ukraine are both major suppliers of key raw materials and agricultural

products. Disruptions have been used as leverage, with Russia weaponizing energy exports and Ukraine's grain exports (GEP). As a result, industries across the globe have had to seek alternative sourcing strategies to adapt to such market conditions (Consultancy.eu). Moreover, the weaponization of supply chains has led to a humanitarian toll, where organizations have emphasized the need for enhanced ethical practices to mitigate impact on people, economies, and societies ("Turning Dependency into Despair: Methods of Using Food as Long-Range Weapon"). Thus, addressing the weaponization of global supply chains in the Russo-Ukraine conflict is essential not only for the immediate restoration of stability but also for safeguarding the future of international trade and security.

Definition of Key Terms

Global Supply Chain: A system that encompasses all the steps required for a product or service to be delivered that occur across a plethora of states.

Trade Partner: A state with which another state consistently engages in financial transactions of goods and services.

Supply Chain Disruption: Events that hinder the natural flow of supply and goods to and from states in the form of wars, sanctions, or national emergencies.

Weaponization of Global Supply Chains: Deliberate manipulation of the global supply chain to further a state's interests via economic attacks on other states.

Sanctions: Imposed sets of penalties on states (Via trade restrictions, asset freezes, etc) to discourage them from taking/keeping certain actions or stances.

Export Control Laws: Sets of laws and regulations that limit the transfer of certain goods (Such as technology or food) to protect a state's national interests.

Annex: Forceful takeover by a state of another state's land for its own without said state's permission.

Neutral State: A state that refrains from helping a particular side in an international conflict, maintaining impartiality towards both sides.

Proxy War: A conflict waged between 2 smaller states supported by larger states, both sides representing the ideologies or sentiment of the larger state.

Pseudo-Economic Warfare: An economic strategy by state(s) aimed not to weaken another state's economy, but instead to manipulate certain aspects of it to further their own interests (Political, Industrial Competition, etc).

General Overview

Brief Background

Tensions between the Russian and Ukrainian states have surged ever since the 2010s, as Ukraine started to drift from its economic and political ties with Russia and instead barreled towards those of the West. This tension came to the forefront after the president of Ukraine in 2013, Viktor Yanukovych, shut down a developing trade deal between Ukraine and the EU after Russia offered substantial financial aid in return. This caused division deep within the state, culminating in the revolution of dignity in 2014 (Britannica, 2015). After the government had been restructured and Yanukovych exiled, Ukraine took a Western stance and tried to re-establish the prior trade deal with the EU. Russia, fearing the approach of western influences to its borders, attempted to take advantage of the resulting chaos of the revolution and annexed Crimea the very same year. They also started anti-West sentiments within the Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, and tried to lure them in as well. After it failed, Russia started to prepare instead for a full-out invasion in the years to come to prevent the western threat from reaching their borders; At last culminating in the war that started in 2022 and has lasted to this day.

Parties Choose Sides

Shortly after the War started, nations worldwide started to choose sides to rally behind their chosen economic ally. Those within the western hemisphere (Namely, most of

Europe & North America) aligned themselves with Ukraine, deeming Russia's actions as intrinsically hostile and threatening world peace worldwide. Parties like the United States & EU immediately went into action in order to aid Ukraine, starting to send aid packages over to Ukraine and heavily sanctioning Russia. Actions which blur the line between a truly Neutral State. Russia didn't have as many supporters as Ukraine, or at least those with sufficient economic power to retaliate economically. Nevertheless, it garnered some allies, namely those within the eastern hemisphere or close to it, like Belarus or North Korea; Said states having deep economic ties with the state itself. This clear division between the sides escalated into a full-blown pseudo-economic war between the sides.

Trade War

Those allied with Ukraine started to weaponize the global supply chain against Russia and its allies, trying to destabilize it economically so it can stop the war with Ukraine. Russia instead tried to use the economic ties it had to its advantage, making states that heavily depended on its exports suffer in order to make them back down from the sanctions. States that relied on Russian oil for energy were hit hard, such as Germany and Hungary, but while Germany remained in favor of Ukraine, Hungary pivoted towards Russia and started disrupting support for Ukraine within the EU to this day (Euractiv, 2025). This constant back and forth between the 2 sides resulted in global supply chains worldwide being severely deprived of not just natural resources from Russia but Ukraine as well.

Beyond the sanctions, the war severely debilitated both sides from properly exporting their goods. One of those crucial exports is wheat, of which Ukraine accounts for over 10% of the world's global supply (Council on Foreign Relations, 2024). Simple goods such as these are now in short supply across the world, furthered by the weaponization of the global supply chain from both sides. Using the same example, states tried to mitigate the wheat exports with the Black Sea Grain Initiative in 2022, which was held for only 1 year after Russia once again backed down due to concerns its produce was being meddled with via the sanctions & actions of other states. Examples such as these run rampant throughout the war, fully destabilizing global supply chains worldwide to dangerous degrees. If proper action isn't taken, the situation will lead to communities

being deprived of the basic necessities needed to survive.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Russia

Russia is the primary aggressor, where a full-scale invasion of Ukraine was launched in 2022. The Russian government, led by President Vladimir Putin, uses diverse tactics to pressure Ukraine and the West, including energy blackmail and blocking Ukrainian exports. Its strategy includes leveraging its vast oil, gas, and raw material exports as tools of economic warfare. Russia's global standing has shifted, deepening ties to China and growing isolation from the West (Stent).

Ukraine

Ukraine is the main target of Russian aggression and the principal defender of its sovereignty. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has mobilized his military and received considerable Western aid to resist the invasion. Ukraine, being a major exporter of grain and metals, has become a main point for supply chain disruptions, with Russian attacks and blockades causing a global food crisis. Ukraine continues to seek international support and aims to restore its territorial and economic stability (Mekouar).

United States of America

The US is Ukraine's main international backer. It has provided extensive military, financial, and diplomatic support. The country has provided over \$123 billion in total assistance since the full-scale invasion in 2022, with \$69 billion (56%) being military aid (Wilson and Warnes). Washington has led sanctions and export controls targeting Russia's economy and defense sector. "The U.S. government has taken swift action to impose severe export restrictions and financial sanctions on Russia, Belarus... and Crimea regions of Ukraine, as well as individuals and entities supporting the Russian government in these regions" ("Russia-Related Sanctions and Export Restrictions – Office of Research Services | University of Pennsylvania"). Additionally, the US coordinates with allies to maintain global supply chain security and reduce reliance on Russian resources (Stent).

China

China is Russia's most important external partner since the war began. It has offered economic, technological, and diplomatic support while officially maintaining neutrality. The country has become Russia's largest trading partner and helped Moscow withstand Western sanctions. Beijing describes the conflict through Russian narratives, opposes Western sanctions, and promotes alternative international organizations with Russia. Those organizations include BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. China's support is vital for Russia's war effort and for sustaining its economy (Stent).

Germany

Germany plays an important role in the conflict as a leading member of the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), balancing its economic ties with Russia and its political commitment to Ukraine's defense. Berlin has provided significant financial and humanitarian aid to Ukraine, along with non-lethal military equipment. Germany has actively participated in EU sanctions against Russia, aiming to limit Russia's economic capabilities and reduce dependency on Russian energy. However, Germany has had a cautious approach to the issue due to its complex energy reliance on Russian gas and its desire to maintain stability in Europe. The country emphasises the importance of a unified Western response to the conflict and the security of global supply chains ("Russia's War against Ukraine in 2024 and Looking Ahead to 2025")("Russia-Ukraine Conflict in 2025: Scenarios and Global Impacts").

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of Event
February 20, 2014	Russia initiated its aggression against Ukraine by occupying the Crimean peninsula, marking the beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict (Ray).
March 2014	After a disputed referendum, Russia formally annexed Crimea. This raises tensions, leading to the outbreak of conflict in eastern Ukraine (Ray).
April 2014	Pro-Russian separatists declare independence in Donetsk and Luhansk regions (Ray).
September 2014	The first Minsk Agreement was signed to stop fighting in eastern Ukraine. However, violations still occur (Ray).

February 12, 2015	Ukraine, Russia, France, and Germany sign the Minsk II Agreement. The agreement proposes a ceasefire and withdrawal of heavy weapons, but fails to bring lasting peace since frequent violations and casualties continue to happen (Ray).
2019	Volodymyr Zelensky is elected President of Ukraine, aiming to resolve the conflict and strengthen ties with the West (Ray).
November 2021	The United States reports unusual Russian troop movements near Ukraine's borders, raising international alarm (Reuters).
December 2021	Russian President Putin demands legal guarantees that Ukraine will not join NATO. Ukraine rejects the demand (Reuters).
January-February 2022	Russia gathers troops along Ukraine's borders and conducts military exercises in Belarus, which further increases tensions (Reuters).
February 21, 2022	Russia recognizes the independence of the self-declared Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics and orders troops into these regions (Reuters).
February 24, 2022	Russia launches a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. It attacks from multiple directions, marking the start of Europe's largest conflict since World War II (Reuters).
February-April 2022	Russian advances are stopped at Kyiv's outskirts by strong Ukrainian resistance. Russia withdraws from northern Ukraine, leading to evidence of civilian casualties (Reuters).
May 20, 2022	Russian Forces capture Mariupol after a prolonged siege. This results in massive civilian casualties and devastation (Reuters).
September 2022	Ukrainian forces launch a surprise counteroffensive in Kharkiv province, reclaiming a lot of territory. Russia announces the annexation of four partially occupied Ukrainian provinces and calls up reservists (Reuters).
November 2022	Ukraine retakes the city of Kherson. This forces Russian troops to retreat across the Dnipro River (Reuters).
May 20, 2023	Russia captures Bakhmut after nine months of intense fighting. This marks one of the bloodiest battles of the war (Reuters).
October 2023-June 2024	Multiple international meetings and peace plan discussions happen. However, no agreement was reached. Russia and Ukraine continue to reject each other's terms (Samya Kullab).

March 2025	The Trump administration brokered a limited ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine, which focuses on Black Sea navigation and energy infrastructure. Still, the implementation is disputed and fragile (Samya Kullab).
2025	Saudi Arabia hosts renewed peace negotiations. This involves the U.S., U.K., France, and other powers. Limited truces are sometimes agreed upon, yet a comprehensive settlement remains hard to achieve (Samya Kullab).

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties, and Events

Black Sea Grain Initiative

The Black Sea Grain Initiative, signed in July of 2022, was an agreement signed by both Russia and Ukraine that enabled grain imports to flow from both aforementioned nations and into the global market via the black sea. It was brokered by Turkey to combat the disruption of the food supply worldwide caused by the war (The only major initiative/agreement aimed to directly combat the disruption of the global supply chain caused by the conflict thus far); Despite not being formed under the UN, it was in full support of it, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator citing that “it is vital for global food security that both of these agreements continue” (UN, 2023). This initiative, while it stood, enabled the transport of over 25 million metric tons of grain, among other foods, to be supplied into the global market (UNCTAD, 2023). The agreement lasted until late 2023, when Russia decided not to extend it and thus ended its course.

Resolution 2623 (2022) and 11th Emergency Special Session

Resolution 2623, adopted in February 2022, was one of the first responses by the UN regarding the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, and marked the general angle the UN took towards the conflict throughout its duration. This resolution called for an immediate emergency session of the UN special assembly to tackle the war (Digital Library UN, 2022). Part of the reason it was called was because of the UNSC's inability to take any action, thanks to Russia's veto power in it. This environment is the main culprit behind the UN's restrained actions in regards to the conflict, as Russia essentially has neutered

any true attempts at peace. Regardless, the emergency special session that happened thanks to the resolution is still of note. In it, the general assembly created a whole new resolution calling for “an end to the war” (UN, 2023) with 141 states in favor. Seeing how the conflict has panned out, however, it is clear that their attempts are in vain.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Ever since the war’s technical start in 2014, there have been numerous attempts either to end it and the suffering it has caused or to mitigate it... However, few have tackled the weaponization of the global supply chains (The pseudo-economic war has largely gone unimposed) or their disruptions, highlighting the importance of solutions to said problems to facilitate trade worldwide. Regardless, examples of solutions include:

Minsk Agreements (I and II)

The first Minsk Agreement (September 2014) and Minsk II (February 2015) aimed to stop fighting in eastern Ukraine through ceasefires (Namely, Donetsk and Luhansk), withdrawal of weapons, and political reforms. Although heavy weapons were briefly pulled back, both sides eventually violated the truce; Namely, kick-started by Russia as it disregarded participation within the conflicts and instead posed it as an internal conflict between separatists, letting it keep supporting said separatists regardless of the agreements. This resulted in many casualties and an unresolved conflict with Donbas, eventually “freezing” until the full-scale invasion (Ray). The agreements failed mainly due to the lack of trust between both parties, thanks to loopholes abused by the parties, highlighting how any potential solutions must stamp out any ways the states could violate them or circumvent them.

Black Sea Grain Initiative

While already been discussed, it is important to take into account how effective this initiative was while it lasted. It imported 25 Metric tons of food from the warring states and into the global market (UNCTAD, 2023), a feat that has not yet been recreated within potential solutions to the conflict’s aftermath. Its success is largely attributed to the willingness of all member states (Especially Turkey, whose close ties with both nations enabled a much more amicable discussion environment) to sustain this goal. However,

it collapsed in the end thanks to Russia's withdrawal from it, highlighting that the war will still take priority over the global supply chain for both warring states.

Temporary Ceasefire Attempts (March 2025, May 2025)

There have been numerous attempts at ceasefires between both Russia and Ukraine within the conflict (Which could've potentially enabled both states to re-enable their exports), to varying degrees of success. There was an initial ceasefire proposed for Easter of this year, which both parties agreed to, and then subsequently violated with Ukraine reporting that "Russian troops had violated the ceasefire nearly 3,000 times since the start of Sunday" (Clarke Billings Lucy, 2025). The same seems to be occurring for the ceasefire proposed between 7-9 of May 2025, initially suggested to enable the WW2 Russian Victory parade to go peacefully, with Zelenskyy repeatedly remarking that a true resolution to the conflict can not be negotiated in 3 days (Euronews, 2025). He instead pushes for the 30-day ceasefire proposed by the USA, which is still in limbo as of writing (Reuters, 2025). Seeing how it was rejected in the past, however, it is clear that ceasefires will struggle as an apt solution to the conflict without immediate rejection and/or violation. Russia seems adamant to retain the territories it is currently controlling, and will reject any ceasefires and solutions that don't entitle it to them.

Possible Solutions

Understandably, solutions to the weaponization of the global supply chain within the Russo-Ukrainian conflict will overlap with solutions to the actual conflict in of itself, as any major advancement to repairing the trade disruptions caused by it is gate-kept by the peaceful resolution of the conflict. Any solution aimed at ending the conflict, while ideal, is practically impossible in the war's current state. Instead, solutions like the Black Sea Grain Initiative seem to be the best angle to go for, seeing as how the initiative held for 1 whole year without any violations. Solutions that don't give the advantage to either party seem to be the best way to go. With this in mind, a potential solution could be a UN-backed initiative that enables exports for both warring nations through the black sea, akin to the one mentioned prior. Utilizing UN forces (Or neutral third parties) to broker certain parts of the conflict or enable potential in-land solutions can be pivotal to mitigating the weaponization of global supply chains. As for sanctions, these

can be lessened on crucial exports (Mainly Food) to enable their entrance into the global market and communities in need (Mostly in Africa). By only the Food-related sanctions being lessened, it still maintains the impact of the overall sanctions on the warring economies to appease the states who want that pressure (Even though this is still technically a form of Pseudo-economic warfare). Alternatively, guidelines and/or treaties can be imposed regarding the weaponization of global supply chains to establish actual rules regarding their use in economic warfare. Seeing as there are none currently in place, it is an area that can be truly looked into to guarantee crucial goods flow between warring states worldwide.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)

SDG 16, Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions

The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, provide access to justice for all, and build effective and accountable institutions at all levels. The weaponization of global supply chains intensifies conflict dynamics and threatens international stability, which SDG 16 seeks to mitigate. The conflict emphasises the need for transparency, cooperation, and regulation in supply chains to prevent redirection of weapons and economic destabilization. This need aligns with SDG 16's focus on accountable institutions ("Disarmament Chief Tells Security Council Arms Supply Accelerated ahead of Reported Counteroffensive in Ukraine, Stresses Weapons Registers Are Key | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases"). Furthermore, an example of how this conflict directly connects to SDG 16 is the fact that Ukraine's GDP has shrunk by over 30% since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, with 40% of the working population becoming unemployed and around 5 million jobs lost during the first year of the war (Cherevko). This economic disruption undermines peace and stability, exacerbating social unrest and weakening institutions. In all, this issue challenges the foundations of peace and security that SDG 16 aims to uphold by promoting peaceful societies, justice, and strong institutions capable of managing such complex international challenges.

Appendix

This section is dedicated to providing significant data and information that you can and should utilize in your research to help you better understand the topic.

<https://europeansting.com/2022/07/06/how-is-the-war-in-ukraine-impacting-the-global-supply-chain/>

<https://news.ufl.edu/2023/02/russia-ukraine-global-supply-chain/>

Source A: A pair of educational resources from the MIT and Florida universities, respectively, providing a proper introduction to the supply chain effects that the Russo-Ukrainian war has had. It discusses some countries/goods severely affected by it, but while not going fully in depth, it can direct which avenues your research should be focused on.

<https://unctad.org/global-crisis/black-sea-initiative>

<https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/default/files/document/files/2024/05/blackseagraininitiativefulltext.pdf>

Source B: A report from the UN Trade and Development branch on the ramifications and benefits of the Black Sea Grain Initiative performed from 2022-2023. Alongside it is the full text of the original Initiative. Given that it was the only major economic agreement to battle the impacts of this war on the global supply chain, it can be quite useful when trying to come up with potential solutions using it as a basis.

<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy2546>

Source C: A document detailing the United States' strategy for its pseudo-economic warfare with Russia; Detailing how exactly each sanction or trade disruption will affect what parts of the Russian economy/industry and why; Ranging from targeting the mining industry to destabilize its connections with trade partners to how it is reflected currently in their economy. This document can provide useful insight as to the strategy of anti-Russia stance countries undergoing their pseudo-economic war, showcasing the extent of the actions taken.

https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=5219718

Source D: An extremely detailed report from the Social Science Research Network

(SSRN) concerning the full disruptions to the global supply chains that the Russo-Ukrainian war has had. It contains detailed information and statistics regarding how each and every crucial export from both regions has declined thanks to the war, the effects of it, and how affected nations are improving/adapting to the conflict thanks to it.

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