BEYOND RUSSIA-UKRAINE DRONE WARFARE: ARE ECONOMIC SANCTIONS A VIABLE STRATEGY TO STOP THE KILLING AND DESTRUCTION?

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Abstract

The deployment of lethal drones on the battlefield accounts for nearly 70% of casualties in the almost four and a half years of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Drawing on the redactional and extant literature on the Russia-Ukraine imbroglio, the perceptions of expert scholars familiar with the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and credible media sources, I examine the efficacy of economic sanctions and mediation as instruments of conflict resolution for the seemingly intractable Russia-Ukraine conflict. The study reveals that the continuous use of sophisticated and precision AI-driven drones by the warring states only exacerbates the conflict situation. The paper concludes that, beyond the high stakes in lethal drone warfare and coupled with economic sanctions, a mediation strategy is a key instrument for resolving conflicts in the long run. The paper recommends applying tact and intelligence to mediate an end to the Russia-Ukraine war, while de-escalating the ineffective economic sanctions imposed by the United States and its European allies as part of a broader effort to end the war.

Keywords: Conflict resolution, economic sanctions, gunboat, mediation, Russia-Ukraine war.

Introduction

The deployment of drones in health, agriculture, industry, aviation, surveillance of international terrorist activities, and other areas has shown the positive aspects of the use of drones to maximise the greater "good" of society. However, the weaponisation of drones or unmanned aerial vehicles by state and non-state actors poses a greater risk to humanity (Braimah, 2025). Contemporary trends in warfare involve deploying artificial intelligence-driven technological optics, which have reduced human involvement and

resulted in fewer battlefield deaths among combatants. One such technology is the deployment of lethal drones on the battlefield, accounting for nearly 70% of casualties involving noncombatant civilians and the destruction of key national infrastructure in the energy, transport, and supply chain routes, with the overarching goal of crippling the economy and inflicting greater pain on the adversary state (Bronk, 2025; Asada, 2020). Since time immemorial, powerful states (e.g., the United States of America, the United Kingdom, France, Germany), regional intergovernmental organisations (e.g., the European Union (EU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)), and global multilateral organisations (e.g., the United Nations (UN), World Bank, World Trade Organisation) have imposed economic sanctions as a form of gunboat diplomacy to coerce another country to change its behaviour on issues that have a global implication (e.g., the Russia-Ukraine war; Iraq's invasion of Kuwait). These issues may span from global security, genocide, state-sponsored terrorism, human rights, international law, norms, minority rights, to democracy – the overarching goal is to coerce a "deviant" state to change its course of action or to the negotiation table for a peaceful resolution of conflict or war. The thesis of this paper is the supposition that lethal drone warfare and economic sanctions in the Russia-Ukraine conflict cannot halt the war or compel the Russian Federation to end its war on Ukraine, and that mediation is a viable option for conflict resolution to stop the killings and destruction.

In the unique case of the Russia-Ukraine imbroglio (my focus), two key features of the conflict that have sustained the war with its ruinous consequences on the conflicting parties (i.e., wreaking infrastructural havoc in Ukraine and Russia) include the deployment of the various imported and locally made drones (e.g., Iran's Qods Mohajer-4, Shahed-129, Shahed-136; quadcopter-type drones; Geran-2 and Geran-3 propeller-powered; Ukraine's Liutyi; Israel's Elbit Hermes 900) on the battlefield, and the economic warfare on Russia by the Western world and the European Union (Andresen, 2025). The rationale behind economic sanctions on Russia was primarily to derail the financial wherewithal of the Russian Federation to fund its war on Ukraine while providing military assistance, technical support, and economic aid to Ukraine to defend its people and sovereignty. Despite the military and financial support to Ukraine, and the financial and trade embargo on Russia to end the war, the hostilities nonetheless continue unabated. Therefore, this paper focuses on the efficacy of mediation beyond drone and economic warfare as a tool for resolving the conflict in a positive-sum game. To guardrail the study, the following three (3) questions were posed: (i) Why does the Russia-Ukraine war defy various resolutions? (ii) To what extent could

mediation be used to resolve the Russia-Ukraine conflict? (iii) What are the implications of the Russia-Ukraine war on global peace?

Methods and Materials

This paper adopted a qualitative research approach with an interpretive philosophical underpinning, providing a bird's-eye view of data gathering and analysis. The choice of this method over quantitative and mixed methods stems from the understanding that it helps obtain relevant, in-depth information on a subject matter, as in the case of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. This assertion is corroborated by Maxwell (2013), who observes that the purpose of qualitative research is to explain, describe, and interpret a phenomenon in depth. The study recruited ten (10) interlocutors through purposive and convenience sampling. The inclusion criteria were scholars with expertise in the Russia-Ukraine conflict who were willing to engage in conversation with the researcher on the subject matter (i.e., the Russia-Ukraine war). The process was executed in two main ways: First, data and information were derived from the perceptions of expert interlocutors familiar with the Russia-Ukraine conflict, using a semi-structured, face-to-face individual interview guide. The conversation was audio-recorded with prior permission from the interlocutors. The study recruited ten (10) interlocutors; information was gathered from three (3) Ghanaian public universities. Second, I relied on secondary research materials obtained from multiple credible databases such as Scopus, JSTOR, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, PubMed, Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), among others, to complement the primary source of data. This provided greater insight into the Russia-Ukraine conflict, enabling the researcher to draw logical inferences about why the conflict remains intractable despite attempts by various international institutions and organisations (e.g., the United Nations, the European Union) to resolve it (Braimah & Quarshie, 2025; Harris, 2020). Additionally, the secondary research method relied on tried-and-tested data that has been previously analysed and filtered (Bhat, 2019). This paper used multifaceted materials related to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. Data and information were gleaned from observation, credible media reportage on the war, journal articles, and books. The data and information gathered were scrutinised and thematically analysed in relation to the refined research questions (Braimah, 2025).

Ethically, the researcher ensured that the names, information, suggestions, addresses, or locations of participants were kept anonymous, except as approved by the University's Institutional Ethical Review Board (UEWIERB). Accordingly, the researcher complied with the ethical standards required for handling human subjects. The researcher fully disclosed the rationale for the study to the interlocutors. They were further informed of the option to

participate, withdraw, or rejoin if they desire to do so. Participants were further assured of the anonymity of data and information obtained from them except in the highly unlikely event that the researcher is subpoenaed by a court of competent jurisdiction to do so (Braimah, 2025; Macnamara, 2025; Fujii, 2018). A key drawback of this paper is its delineation of participants to individual scholars in international politics familiar with the intricacies of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Related Literature

This section reviews the heavily redacted empirical literature on economic sanctions and modern warfare involving drone technology. Existing literature focuses on reviewing economic sanctions on states such as China, Iran, Iraq, North Korea, Russia, and Zimbabwe, among others. The current study attempts to identify gaps in this literature to lend credence or justification to the study of economic sanctions as a deterrent to alter the behaviour or major policy of a "deviant" state in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Economic sanctions imposed on a government or state can be multilateral (e.g., United Nations-backed sanctions) or unilateral by a powerful state or another petit state.

Jensen and Clayton (2026) study *"Economic Warfare and Military Power: How the United States Can Win the Next Era of Strategic Competition"* is an economic warfare and military discourse on strategies for the United States to win future competition with adversaries in combination of economic war and military power. According to Jensen and Clayton (2026), the United States should organise economic warfare around three principles: fungibility, elasticity, and market making. In their view, modern economic warfare applies financial, industrial, trade, and regulatory tools to shape how states convert resources into military power. In certain circumstances, when economic warfare alone fails, military power may be employed to complement it and produce the necessary outcome to keep an adversarial state at bay. This study highlights the flaws inherent in economic sanctions as a tool to alter the behaviour of an adversary state. While acknowledging the importance of the study to my work, the issue's focus or scope is limited to the United States. This recent study goes beyond the shores of the US by exploring the efficacy, or otherwise, of economic sanctions as a viable tool to resolve or halt the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Ana's (2025) article, *"Russian Resilience: Sanction Elusion Mechanisms Utilized During the Russo-Ukrainian War",* primarily examined Russia's economic resilience in the face of the United States and the European Union's "unprecedented scope and scale" of sanctions, including those directed at Russia's financial industry, central bank, trade isolation of its oil and gas, and hydrocarbon exports, among others. The overarching goal was to weaken and

change Russia's war of choice against Ukraine; nevertheless, the Russian Federation has been able to sustain both its economic resilience and its war effort in Ukraine. According to Ana (2025), Russia's resilience is influenced by Ukraine's initial inability to access technologically advanced long-range weapons, an obsolete military, overreliance on foreign exports, sanction-busting states, and Russia's shift to allied states for trade relations, among other factors. Ana's (2025) study is important because it focuses on understanding Russia's resilience to the sanctions imposed by the United States and the European Union. The focus of the present study is remarkably different, as its thrust is on judging the viability of economic sanctions, the dronization of the conflict, and whether these strategies have the chance to end or resolve the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Miller and Nowak's (2024) work*, "What Wasn't Sanctioned? Why Russia and the West Continued Trading amid the Russia-Ukraine War",* opines that economic sanctions between Russia and the West have existed since the disintegration of the Soviet Union. However, the West imposed heightened and crippling economic sanctions on Russia in the initial phase of the Russia-Ukraine war, in hopes of changing the other side's political calculus. According to the authors, "because the war has lasted longer than either party expected, both have come to tolerate substantial volumes of trade in many commodities, including gas, aluminium, titanium, and uranium, illustrating the constraints on each side's willingness to incur costs". This lends credence to the supposition that economic sanctions, in practical terms, affect both the imposer and the intended target. This study is important as it exposes the robustness of exhausting economic sanctions as a policy to alter the behaviour imposed by the West on Russia in the initial phase of the Russia-Ukraine war, in hopes of changing the other side's political calculus (p. 1) and the behaviour and decision-making of adversaries in war. The present study therefore goes beyond economic sanctions as a viable option to end the Russia-Ukraine conflict by emphasising dialogue through mediation and negotiation as the diplomatic option to stop the killings and destruction of vital physical infrastructure in both countries.

Itskhoki and Ribakova's (2024) study, "*The Economics of Sanctions: From Theory into Practice",* reviewed the economic sanctions regime with specific reference to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The authors contend that the expected utility of the "unprecedented scope and scale" of economic sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation by the West and its European allies over the latter's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has not adequately changed the tempo of the war in practice – the Russian Federation still has the financial wherewithal to fund the war. This means that despite economic sanctions being touted as a critical tool of economic warfare, their effectiveness is not

guaranteed and differs from one state to another. Hence, the authors advocate "a comprehensive, technocratic approach with clear, measurable objectives, rather than a piecemeal strategy". In their view, "…the efficacy of sanctions depends on factors such as the target country's size and global integration, the sanctioning coalition's unity, the ability to enforce sanctions, and the economic burden on the sanctioning nation. The paper underscores the importance of realistic expectations and careful design of sanctions policy on trade, finance, and payment systems" (p. 425).

This paper is significant as the authors assessed the economic sanctions regime, examining why they sometimes flourish and achieve their intended purposes, and why they flounder in others. While the argument of this study is on how to make economic sanctions work, the focus of this paper asks the basic question of whether economic sanctions are viable tools to end or resolve wars, with thematic application and analysis of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. This is the point of departure between the existing literature on economic sanctions and my study.

Hayashi's (2020) study on "*Russia: The Crimea Question and Autonomous Sanctions",* contends that the sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation after it annexed Crimea in May 2018 were not coordinated by the United Nations. Instead, states within the European Union and the US imposed autonomous sanctions on Russia, which have thus far failed to achieve any substantial positive effect. This was because Russia is *a far more important economic player and trade partner… for many States in the world,* including the US and the EU. Hence, tensions existed within the EU. Membership and the sanctions imposed on Russia were not coordinated to form a united front. According to Hayashi (2020), …the package of sanctions against Russia comprises autonomous measures by multiple States and the European Union, implemented unilaterally outside the UN framework. This means that the necessity, the legitimacy, and the design of the sanctions are determined without a common frame of reference or point of coordination formally. There is no Security Council resolution to which to turn in evaluating the design, legality, or effectiveness of the sanctions. There is no Sanctions Committee or Panel of Experts to help monitor the implementation of the sanctions (p. 223).

An inference from the economic sanctions regime is the apparent inadequate coordination from the imposing states to change Russia's course of action on Crimea because of its strategic trade partnership with the EU and the US. In this conundrum, it is safe to say that the myriad economic sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation for invading Ukraine by the Western world and the EU will not achieve their intended purpose. Despite these economic sanctions, Russia is unfazed and can still carry on its war on Ukraine, while trade with other states around the world endures unabated. This study is

significant because it strengthens the paper's argument that the combined effect of economic sanctions and the supply of military hardware for Ukraine's defence, or for defeating Russia, may not achieve its goals in the short, medium, or long term. Hence, other viable options for resolving the Russia-Ukraine conflict need to be recalibrated. This paper argues that only through mediation and compromise is there a chance to resolve the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Hence, using military force and economic sanctions as a conflict-resolution mechanism is utopian and a Trojan horse in modern diplomatic conflict resolution.

Smeets' (2018) paper, "*Can Economic Sanctions Be Effective?",* asserts that economic sanctions are a policy tool; sanctions-busters meant to pressurise, isolate, downgrade, and compel another country to change its behaviour and toe the line desired by the imposing institution or state. This study focuses on how to make economic sanctions work and asks the basic question of whether economic sanctions are viable tools to end wars or meet the requirements of an imposing state(s) or organisation. In the view of Smeets (2018), economic sanctions on a state are a double-edged sword that ruins the economy of both the state at the centre of sanctions and the imposing state(s) or organisation. Sanctioned states usually seek economic alliances with other states that are sanctions-busters if those relations serve their national interests. In this conundrum, the intended outcome of sanctions is weakened to the extent that the "deviant" state gets away with the full rigours of the economic sanctions. Again, what economic sanctions do invariably is to *deprive countries of economic gains that can be obtained through trade,* which is inconsistent with the World Trade Organisation's principal aim to liberalise trade for the benefits of humanity and averse to restricting trade for non-economic-related reasons. Smeets' (2018) study is significant as it succinctly highlights the efficacy or otherwise of economic sanctions in achieving their desired results both in theory and practice. There exists a gap in Smeets' study in comparison with the current study. Smeets' work focused generally on reviewing the efficacy of "economic sanctions" in achieving their intended goal; this paper specifically focused on the extent to which the combined effect of imposed economic sanctions on the Russian Federation limits its ability to fund and continuously wage war with Ukraine.

Also, Pape's (1997) article, "*Why Economic Sanctions Do Not Work",* opines that some powerful states (e.g., the US imposing economic sanctions on China, Cuba, Russia, Iran, North Korea, Syria, Zimbabwe) and the United Nations are increasingly using economic sanctions to achieve international political objectives (e.g., economic sanctions imposed to force Iraq out of Kuwait, Serbia to stop aiding Bosnian rebels, to end apartheid in South Africa, Russia to end its attempt to invade Ukraine). Economic sanctions since the end

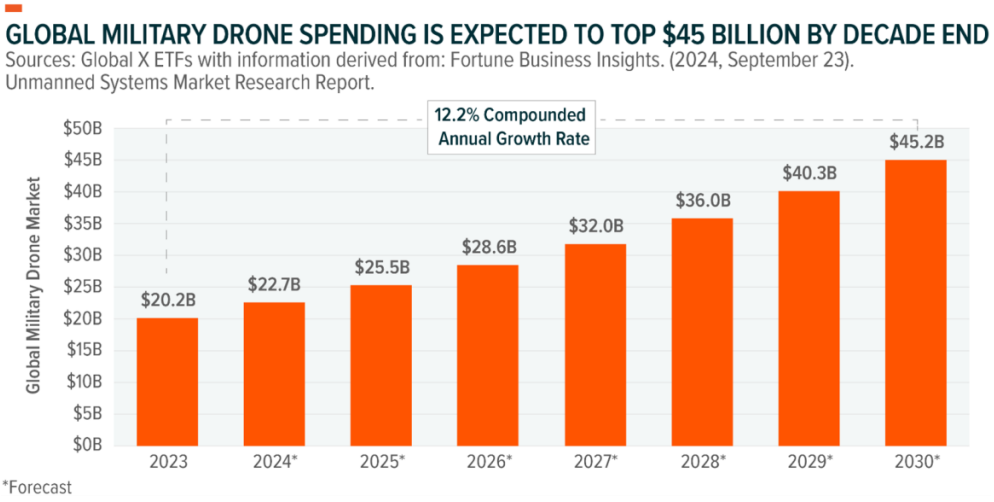
of World War I have been seen as liberal, humane, and as effective as military action, with the former chosen for altering the behaviour of "deviant" states in the international system. In Pape's (1997) view, economic sanctions do not always achieve political goals, notwithstanding proponents equating them with military force. This study is significant as it highlights the efficacy, or otherwise, of using economic sanctions as a linchpin to alter the behaviour of a state in a manner desired by the imposing state or supranational institution. While this study examined the efficacy of economic sanctions globally, this present study examined the efficacy of using the instruments of economic sanctions and the use of AI-powered drones as a basis for resolving the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Lethal Drones and Economic Warfare Strategies

Do drone warfare and economic sanctions resolve conflicts? The deployment of multiple lethal drones by states on the battlefield is on the rise among national military forces around the world (e.g., Russia-Ukraine, the US-Israel-Iran, China, Sudan, Israel-Hamas, Libya, Syria, Nagorno-Karabakh, Ethiopia). In the context of this paper, both Russia and Ukraine are increasingly investing heavily in drones, and this is complemented by third-party countries around the world that support each of the warring states with lethal drones. This is because the production of drones is relatively inexpensive, reduces the need for close ground combat, and their deployment on the battlefield does not require a ballistic missile submarine fleet to target the enemy's position. In a lethal drone war, as in the case of Russia-Ukraine, there is a blurring of the distinction between a "weaker" and a "powerful" state in terms of wreaking havoc and causing irreparable damage. For instance, the Russian forces have unleashed heavy physical destruction on Kyiv's energy and health sectors, digital infrastructure, trade and transport sectors, agriculture and land resources, residential buildings, education, and the financial industry, among others (Andrienko et al., 2025). These damages may require billions of USD to restore. In the same vein, Ukraine's drones have inflicted heavy setbacks against Russia's energy sector and infrastructure since the latter's invasion in February 2022. A recent Kyiv drone strike set a Russian oil depot in the Volgograd region and other equally important energy infrastructure ablaze, causing irreparable damage to the "aggression" state that has both domestic and international ramifications (Associated Press, 2026). This tit-for-tat drone warfare and the violence associated with it can only prolong the war. It can not immediately lead to a decisive victory for either of the conflicting states. Accordingly, resolving the Russia-Ukraine war has become complex and intractable because each side has an elusive confidence in defeating the other with the deployment of several lethal drones

and missiles. This makes each state unwilling to blink or compromise in resolving the conflict. The deadly drones being used by Russia and Ukraine and the economic sanctions imposed on Russia by the US and the EU as a deterrent have thus proven to be ineffective strategies to resolve the interests of the warring states and, *if so be,* end the war. This is where *mediation* becomes a viable alternative for ending the intractable war that has persisted since February 2022.

Figure 1 *depicts the ever-growing trends in military drone spending, with the ruinous, catastrophic consequences of war on the political, social, and economic levels, and the intensification of pluralities of global conflicts.*



Economic sanctions, since time immemorial, have been used by the United States, the European Union, and the United Nations as a coercive strategy to alter the behaviour of states and entities to the desired behaviour of the imposing power worldwide (e.g., Iraq, Iran, North Korea, Russia, Cuba, Zimbabwe). Economic warfare is an attempt to disorganise an enemy's economy to prevent an aggressive or a "deviant" state from having the financial resources needed to carry on a war. In its broadest sense and in official American usage, economic warfare includes "all measures against economic activities which directly or indirectly further a belligerent's war effort" (Bullock et al., 1999). The sanctions typically involve a trade embargo on imports and exports (e.g., the US and the EU economic embargoes on Sudan, South Sudan, Niger, Burkina Faso, Myanmar, Moldova, Nicaragua, Belarus, Mali, Cuba, North Korea, Iran, Syria, Venezuela, Yemen), a naval blockade (e.g., the US over Iran), and restrictions on financial transactions

(e.g., cutting Russia off from SWIFT). Economic sanctions are typically imposed on countries or entities to deter or punish them for flagrant violations of international law or norms, and sometimes to protect the political and economic interests of the imposing countries (Masters, 2024). In the wake of the Russian war on Ukraine, the US and its allies in Europe have comprehensively imposed crippling economic sanctions on Russia as a stopgap measure to prevent the continuation of its war on Ukraine and have succinctly framed the Russian Federation as a global pariah (Braimah, 2024). Altruistically, while the broader multilateral economic sanctions on the Russian Federation may have marked an inflexion point in the Kremlin's economic power, the sanctions have largely failed to alter the course of Russia's war on Ukraine or resolve the conflict (Anderson et al., 2025). This calls for a reexamination of economic sanction strategies to facilitate the resolution of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. In this perspective, a third-party mediator should engage the conflicting parties (i.e., Russia and Ukraine) to first end or stop the killing and physical destruction of strategic national infrastructure while working to resolve the conflict. In a broader sense, the war is about safeguarding Ukraine's sovereignty and not the mere conception of Russia's insatiable expropriation of Ukrainian lands or cities.

Results and Discussion

This paper explored Russia-Ukraine drone warfare and the economic sanctions imposed on Russia, with the overarching goal of exerting excessive economic pressure on Russia's ability to finance its war with Ukraine and thereby end the war. Based on the perception of expert intellectuals in international relations, complemented by secondary data, three themes emerged: the intractable nature of the Russia-Ukraine war, mediation as a viable strategy, and the global implications of this geographically complex conflict. The themes were primarily derived from data and information provided by interlocutors. This section, therefore, explains the nuances of escalating and attempting to de-escalate the intricate nature of the Russia-Ukraine conflict via third-party mediation after the drone warfare and economic sanctions to end the war have thus failed to glitter.

(a) Interactable Nature of the Russia-Ukraine War

Launching a war, by either a state or an individual actor, is normally easy historically. However, stopping war is difficult; the consequences of war are enormous and usually underestimated by war hawks. In the context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Moscow probably failed to adequately conceptualise the enmity and consequences of what President Putin termed a "special military operation", intended to run over Ukraine in a matter of weeks. This war has thus far covertly and overtly defied the logic of conflict resolution

mechanisms since its inception in February 2022. It is common knowledge that the war is economically hurting the belligerent states, as well as regional players, to the extent that the US and its allies are seeking an off-ramp from the imbroglio without success. Four strands of reasons are concerning as they are the standing obstacles blocking the resolution of the Russia-Ukraine conflict: the narrow conception of Russia's invasion of Ukraine; polarisation of the UN system and absence of a "credible" third-party arbiter; hubris of Russia's victory as a superpower; and Russia's framing of the war as "everyone against Moscow".

First, the international community narrowly construed the invasion of Ukraine as the usual coterie of Russia's quest for expropriation of Ukrainian territories, having similarly annexed Crimea in 2014. However, the Russian Federation's conception of its war on Ukraine was primarily focused on the security concerns of having to share a border with its historical "foes" if Ukraine became a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). NATO was established in 1949 with the sole purpose of defending Western Europe against Soviet aggression (Bullock et al., 1999). In other words, the Treaty was a containment strategy by the Western world in response to the growing perception of threat posed by the former Soviet Union after the Second World War (McLean and McMillan, 2009). Just as Western Europe perceived the former Soviet Union as a threat to global peace because of its expansionism and the fear of the spread of communist ideology, Russia feels threatened by Ukraine's attempt to join NATO and its ramifications for the Kremlin. According to the perception of two interlocutors or participants: "Russia is uncompromising on the resolution of its war in Ukraine because it is strongly opposed to NATO's expansionism in Eastern Europe, and particularly very close to Russia if Ukraine were to be admitted into the fold of NATO with all its full benefits by virtue of being a member. However, Russia's Federation, too, has no locus to determine which international organisation another sovereign state like Ukraine can or cannot join. Freedom of association, including security and economic alliances, is a nonnegotiable enterprise in international relations. This is where the international community needs to strike a deal with Russia, assuring Moscow of its security concerns while maintaining Ukraine's right to become a member of NATO".

Another interlocutor or participant thought that "Russia's refusal to end the war in Ukraine is borne out of the fact that the Federation stands to lose its hegemony in the region, and by extension, the Kremlin's status as a superpower if Ukraine joins NATO. Also, the fear of NATO stockpiling arms or instruments of violence close to Russia. Hence, the Russian Federation is opposed to any armistice that does not involve NATO or Ukraine denouncing its membership. The Kremlin feels it will lose its geographic influence if

Ukraine, just like Poland, is allowed to join NATO. This phenomenon stands to influence other states in Eastern Europe to join NATO in droves. This will effectively isolate the Russian Federation in the region".

The growing security concern of Russia is grounded in a threefold schema: the first being the loss of regional influence, the proximity of NATO to Russia should Ukraine become a member of the Treaty, and finally the Western world's influence in Eastern Europe, including the possible installation of military equipment near the Russian Federation. Despite the huge battlefield losses to the belligerent states, neither of them is showing signs of de-escalation. In other words, "everything points to President Putin continuing Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine unrepentantly" (Rosenberg, 2026). In all these milieus, the application of a combination of diplomatic optics (e.g., mediation, negotiation, dialogue) rather than economic sanctions and military prowess is the way to stop hostilities and work out a permanent conflict settlement without preconditions from the warring parties. The present attempts or mechanisms (e.g., imposition of economic sanctions, military, financial and technical support to Ukraine, although it cannot by itself end the conflict) to resolve the conflict are ostensibly ineffective and costly to regional and global political leadership. The deficiency of economic sanctions in stopping the killings and destruction of key energy and civilian infrastructure in the Russia-Ukraine conflict is consistent with the observation of Oestreich et al. (2026): "Despite sanctions, Russia is still able to maintain a consistent flow of revenue to carry out its war of attrition against Ukraine. Russian fossil fuel exports still generate an estimated €193 billion (roughly $220 billion) annually, making them one of the Kremlin's most important sources of wartime revenue. At the same time, these exports are coming under increasing pressure. Ukraine is successfully targeting Russia's shadow fleet and oil infrastructure across the Black Sea and the Russian mainland…"

Despite the Western world's sanctions, and EU members seizing shadow fleet vessels and tightening existing sanctions, Moscow is nevertheless still able to rake in enough revenue from oil and gas in connivance with sanction-busting states to fund its war with Ukraine. This further lends credence to the inefficiency of economic sanctions and military tactics in resolving a conflict that involves a state like Russia endowed with vast natural resources. Because Russia's vast economic resources are needed globally, some states cannot do without Moscow's oil and gas. It is one thing to impose economic sanctions on a state; another is how to effectively midwife the implementation or compliance with the prescribed sanctions to achieve its intended goal of financial paralysis to alter the behaviour of a "deviant or rogue state". This is where mediation and negotiation become relevant to ramping down the war of attrition and its geographic, internationalised consequences.

(b) Mediation as a Viable Strategy

Historically, "all wars end" at a point, and the Russia-Ukraine war cannot and should not be allowed to last forever. In this case, "neutral" third-party mediation is a key to resolving the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Mediation and negotiation in high-profile conflicts (as in the case of the Russia-Ukraine war) typically succeed when the warring states are committed to peace. They also succeed when the belligerent states perceive the mediating state's reputation as sincere, neutral, and fair, demonstrating utmost integrity and commitment, without imposing preconditions on either warring state that tend to derive economic and political benefits for the mediating state. Settled on these parameters, it is unclear whether President Trump's offer to play a mediating role in resolving the Russia-Ukraine war would be a game changer as a result of four nagging issues or reasons: first, when the US is one of the suppliers of military hardware and financial support to Ukraine while treating President Putin with kid gloves; second, when the US and its allies imposed and are enforcing economic sanctions on Russia and buckle down in supplying the needed ammunition to Ukraine (e.g., Patriot missiles to fend off Russian attacks. The Patriot interceptor can in the battlefield bring ballistic missiles down; in its absence, Ukraine struggles to protect civilian and energy infrastructure from recent Russian onslaught), third, President Trump's simplistic and deterministic "pressure" on Ukraine to cede vast swathes of its territory to Russia in lieu for peace, and finally, when the US is itself invaded and the President of Venezuela is taken hostage, threatening annexation of Greenland, frets Cuba, arbitrary tariff hikes on goods and services entering the US markets, and engaged in a war of choice with Iran – Russia's ally – the war whose objectives Washington struggles to adequately define. Accordingly, the US is walking a tightrope (i.e., in a state of funambulism) in its mediation effort to end the war, which has ruinous global ramifications. It is yet to be seen how President Trump will navigate these looming complexities and entanglements to broker a permanent peace settlement between Russia and Ukraine in real time to end the war.

The study's interlocutors or participants were of the view that the "dronization" of the Russo-Ukrainian war makes it practically impossible for either belligerent state to secure a clear-cut win in the conflict. Conventionally, Russia has a superior military to Kyiv. But Moscow has largely failed to sound the maximalist bugle. Ukraine, since February 2022, has remained on its feet and not on its knees to defend its sovereignty, leveraging domestic AI-driven technology – a variety of drones and advanced and long-range missiles from some Western and European states to aid in its existential war efforts against Russia. Insofar as Russia and Ukraine have the technological know-how to produce AI-powered drones and are assisted by their allies, the conflict will

continue to escalate until allies abandon excessive support in military and financial aid to the conflicting parties and support mediation efforts to end the war. In the view of a participant, "…the Russia-Ukraine war can only be resolved by a third-party mediation willing to use its platform to bring an end to the war. … President Trump can end the Russia-Ukraine war because he can exploit the good rapport he has with Presidents Putin and Zelenskyy to broker permanent peace. At the global level, the United Nations would have been the ideal platform to resolve the Russia-Ukraine war. However, the polarisation and the paralysis of the UN Security Council, with permanent members clothed with Veto powers and a counter-veto jigsaw, make it practically impossible for the supranational organisation to live above the parapet".

Further, other participants held that the US was not a neutral arbiter in this Russia-Ukraine war. The utterances of Presidents Biden and Trump since the inception of the war, the US's unflinching military support to Ukraine, and the key role the US played in imposing crippling economic sanctions on Russia make the latter leery of any conflict resolution efforts spearheaded by the US. Since President Trump assumed power, all attempts to resolve the impasse between Russia and Ukraine have remained fickle and erratic. This is because Russia has no iota of trust in the Western world and its European allies in resolving its war with Ukraine. In the opinion of one participant, "President Trump's frontline mediators on de-escalating violence and ending wars (e.g., Israel-Palestine, Russia-Ukraine wars) are mired in slushy business cronies and family members of President Trump instead of using experienced US career diplomats for that purpose. For Trump, the resolution of every conflict or problem is viewed through the lens of business or trade deals that are highly likely to benefit America economically. Again, Putin is unwilling to let go of his war goals in Ukraine – expropriating all the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Chipping away at these regions, in the estimation of President Putin, may come easily for Moscow, hence the continued war of attrition".

Generally, participants held that mediation and negotiation, not economic sanctions or killing and destruction, could end the Russia-Ukraine war. The substantive puzzle is whether the US can play the role of both a referee and a player in the resolution of the conflict and in ending the killing and destruction of vital energy infrastructure in both countries, which has both regional and global political and economic consequences. Another mind-boggling puzzle for the mediator (i.e., the US) to worry about, beyond urging the conflicting parties to sign a ceasefire and a conflict settlement, is what is on the menu for deliberations and mediation. What the Russians want in Ukraine is contingent on whether Ukraine would be willing to let go of Moscow's demands. Hence, world political leadership should take keen interest and work around the clock

to end Russia's war with Ukraine to avert further losses and restore pre-war conditions. Altruistically, Moscow is certainly going to sound the maximalist bugle on their demands on Ukrainian territories and cities they have captured and are occupying, including blocking Ukraine's aspirations to join NATO. These predictable demands from Moscow might be the vexed issues the US must contend with. This scenario also demands global political leadership to address another looming catastrophe (i.e., famine because of the effects of the Russia-Ukraine war) in the Global South, with its ruinous effects on migration to the Global North.

(c) Global Implication of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict

The Russia-Ukraine war has global reverberations across global security architecture, politics, economics, and society. The conflict creates a sense of *Déjà vu* that "powerful" states can pounce on a "weaker" state at will to enforce the latter's whims and caprices. For example, since Russia invaded Ukraine, other conflicts such as the US-Israel war on Iran, Israel's unrestrained war on Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria, US aggression on Venezuela, Iran's frustration-aggression war on neighbouring Gulf States, and China's fret in Taiwan have seen the sudden rise of "might is right" kind of wars. These wars and chaos have also rocked the established humanitarian law of war. Civilian infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, residential facilities, water and power plants, places of worship, noncombatant civilians, the elderly, women and children, the sick, and health workers have been deliberately targeted, destroyed, and killed in contravention of international humanitarian law of war. The participants unanimously noted that the effects of the Russia-Ukraine conflict are not confined to Eastern Europe: "The conflict's debilitating effects cut across every sphere of human life regardless of the geographic location of states, from food to manufacturing of essential goods and services as well as navigation at sea. Hence, the conflict has effectively disrupted global supply chains".

The participants' assertion on the domino effects of conflict is consistent with the position of Dress (2005), who indicates that "Conflicts are not tidy and do not always remain within borders. They spill chaotically across borders, cultures, nations, and societies, and there must be regional and subregional mechanisms to build and maintain transnational cooperation. Such regional mechanisms vary widely in their interests, efforts, abilities, and resources" (p. 132).

The Russia-Ukraine conflict is globally impacting the economy of states, with rising prices of energy and pharmaceuticals, exacerbated by the crisis at the Strait of Hormuz choke point in the Middle East; agricultural inputs (e.g., fertiliser for farmers to enhance food production); the cost of food has risen in countries that depend on Ukraine and Russia for grains, cooking oil, oil and

gas (e.g., wheat, transport, aviation, industry, food security) and other energy resources due to restrictions on navigation at the Black Sea. Global unemployment is at its peak; global inflation is spiralling out of control; and there is a worldwide economic malaise. The war between Russia and Ukraine has widespread global reverberations. Hence, its resolution will ease energy costs for manufacturing hubs, reduce the cost of agricultural inputs, and improve global supply chain management for the benefit of the world population. Politically and socially, the Russia-Ukraine conflict has a devastating effect on internally displaced persons (IDPs) in both Russia and Ukraine, and on people uprooted from their home country to another country (i.e., refugees) because of well-grounded fear of being persecuted. The Russia-Ukraine conflict has a domino effect on national economies around the world, and a major slayer to politicians in the saddle of governance who either want to maintain power or win elections in their respective states regardless of distance.

Conclusion

The précis of this paper suggests that the utilisation of drones in contemporary warfare has changed military strategy and operations in terms of precision, the cost of war, and combatant losses. From surveillance and reconnaissance missions to combat and logistical support, drones have become indispensable tools in a wide range of military contexts (Premakanthan, 2024). While the use of drones may be cost-effective in modern military strategy against opponents, the same technology cannot be employed to win a war, nor do economic sanctions constitute a viable alternative to resolving conflicts. Hence, this paper concludes that resolving the Russia-Ukraine war does not lie in the sphere of precision missiles, drones, economic sanctions, or rockets, but in mediation and negotiation involving the belligerent states. Like the law of gravitation, no matter how high the stakes of lethal drone warfare and economic sanctions, as in the case of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, it is a mediation and negotiation strategy that stands out to resolve the conflict. But any third-party attempt to resolve Russia's war of choice against Ukraine must be impartial, fair, and grounded in the warring states' consent to third-party mediation and negotiation as a precondition for success. This paper argues that while mediation and negotiation are key to resolving the Russia-Ukraine imbroglio, the US, led by President Trump and the negotiators it has deployed, lacks the credibility and diplomatic know-how to resolve the "unwarranted" conflict. The US itself is mired in the tension's roots and branches and, therefore, is rattling its efforts to resolve the battle. The Russia-Ukraine war has exposed the double standards of states around the world. The supply of drones and ammunition to both Russia and Ukraine by allies of the warring

states will not end the war but escalate it. Russia's pedigree as an important partner in global trade is undermining the economic sanctions imposed. Many of the states who are supposed to ensure compliance are themselves reluctantly trading with Russia on oil and gas to keep their economies afloat. As a result, only sincere dialogue between the two belligerent states, with a focus on restoring pre-war conditions and a neutral arbiter, may ensure resolution of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

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