

# Leveraging Global Stakeholder Relations Paradigm in Managing International Conflicts: The Russia-Ukraine War Example

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## ABSTRACT

*Around the globe, there are nations that are in conflict due to one form of incompatibility or the other. The absence of genuine global stakeholders' commitment to resolve some of these felt conflicts have resulted in avoidable armed conflicts and wars in various regions of the world. Many times, post war reconstruction efforts by global partners hardly heal the infrastructural, economic and psychological devastations caused by international crises. Using the Russia-Ukraine war situation, this paper interrogated the impacts of international crises on nations and people. The study was based on the Relational Dialectics theory which states that the complexities, tensions and conflicting pulls that characterise stakeholder relations due to incompatibilities are opportunities to explore dialogue in the peace-building process rather than contradictions. Being a position article, the paper explored reference materials, especially literature on conflict management processes as the method of study. To forestall the degeneration of international conflicts into major crises, the paper recommended that global partners should demonstrate courage and commitment to wade into international conflicts at felt conflict stages. This will ensure that conditions that could degenerate into serious crises and devastations are nipped in the bud. It was also recommended that the efforts that resulted in the present ceasefire in the Israel-Gaza war amidst heightened devastation and humanitarian conditions, should be replicated to stop other international crises that are plaguing nations and people.*

## KEYWORDS

*Conflict management; global stakeholders' cooperation; international conflicts; management of international conflicts; stakeholder relations.*

## INTRODUCTION

In consideration of issues that constitute global images, international conflicts and wars stand prominent. The consideration of international conflicts and wars as global images is not only due to the fear of conflict escalation and the attendant socio-economic and political consequences but also due to difficulties associated with restoration of genuine stakeholder cooperation after a conflict. This is because the immediate restoration of calm between nations that are involved in a conflict may not translate into genuine cooperation. The illusion of genuine stakeholder cooperation even after a truce underscores the consideration that it is easier to win a war than to win peace (Nwanmereni, Ochonogor and Orlu-Orlu, 2018). For instance, while there is no war between the United States of America (USA) and Mexico, genuine cooperation between the nations is threatened by some manifest incompatibility. The incompatibility between USA and Mexico explains why

Donald Trump, in his first administration, undertook the construction of a wall to fence off Mexico (Timm, 2017; Agency Report, 2018). The misunderstanding between United States of America and Mexico leaves no one in doubt that the nations have had a period of mutual incompatibility and the result is the widening gap of cooperation with possible socio-economic consequences.

More so, international conflicts and wars are considered as global images due to the fear of escalation into regional conflicts, as witnessed in the Israel-Gaza war which lasted for over one year before ceasefire was achieved. While the Israel-Gaza war lasted, anger and protests ensued in different quarters, with some nations throwing support towards Israel and others towards Gaza. From verbal warnings and threats, the Israel-Gaza war progressed to the legal dimension when the South-African Government dragged Israel to the *International Court of Justice* over alleged genocide in Gaza (Meilhan, Feleke and Michaelis, 2023; Greyman-Kennard, 2025). This international outrage over the Israel-Gaza war may have some economic consequences that may have remained even after ceasefire was achieved.

Also, in the ensuing war between Russia and Ukraine, not only is socio-economic and political cooperation between the nations deadlocked, but also the war threatens economic cooperation with other nations. For instance, the Russian President, Vladimir Putin has threatened severe sanctions, including suspending export of basic utilities, such as, cooking gas to countries that extend aid in terms of supply of weapons to Ukraine (Agency Report, 2021; Agency Report, 2022; Murphy and Davies, 2022; Tan, 2022). President Putin also threatens severe sanctions, including airstrikes, on countries that would join the North-Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) to confront Russia invasion of Ukraine (Summerville, Hall, Zagon, White and Styllis, 2022). The execution of Putin's threats could be economically devastating since countries of the world depend on one another to meet specific goals (Asadu and Usua, 2011; Ekeanyanwu, 2015). It could also be more devastating for weaker nations, who have various forms of affiliation – educational, political, technological, health, trade – with world “Super Powers”. For instance, since Russia invasion of Ukraine, international students studying in Ukraine have been forced either to abandon their studies for safety or seek transfer to universities in neighbouring countries. There are also foreign students who may be trapped and whose escape is at the mercy of the authorities of the countries of their origin or international aid agencies. According to *Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights* (2022), between February 24, 2022 when Russian Federation's armed attack started in Ukraine and July 25, 2022, the war has recorded 12, 272 civilian casualties, with 5, 237 deaths and 7, 035 being injured in crossfire in Ukraine. This is another genocide that could have been averted.

Other than Russia and Ukraine, there are other counties around the globe that are currently in conflict on account of some incompatible goals. Examples are the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Republic of Korea; United States of America and Mexico; Sudan and South Sudan; and Israel and Palestine. There is also the interconnected conflicts involving Israel, Iran, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen (Kareem, 2026; Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2026). Prior to the current incompatibilities, these countries shares various economic and political affiliations, now plagued by the current conflicts. There are also intra-continental conflicts, such as, witnessed in Africa with unending stories of xenophobia. What is not very clear is the role of global partners in ensuring that increasing international conflicts do not fester into total war situations. This is the burden that serves as motivation for this paper.

Like many intra-state and international wars in human history, the Russia-Ukraine crisis witnessed a conflict stage which was characterised by verbal threats by top leadership of the nations. Other than warnings of the consequences of the conflict, close stakeholder

engagement efforts were seemingly not demonstrated to forestall the escalation of the conflict. Without prejudice to the sovereignty of nations, the *United Nations* (UN) pursues the furtherance of international peace. This is encapsulated in the Organisation's slogan: "*peace, dignity and equality in a healthy planet*". In responding to the Russia-Ukraine crisis, UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres had called on world leaders to come together to end the war in order to save lives, reduce suffering and to find a path to peace (Guterres, 2022).

Unarguably, finding a path to end the Russia-Ukraine war is crucial but doing so in the middle of an escalated crisis which has inflicted physical and psychological injuries not only on Russia and Ukraine citizens but also on citizens of other countries of the world may be defeasible. The defeasibility derives from the psychological injuries which such a hasty truce may not sufficiently heal. It also derives from the fact that the establishment of an immediate ceasefire may not sufficiently address the conditions that degenerated into Russia-Ukraine Mexican standoff.

However, other than Russia and Ukraine, several countries of the world are at conflicts. Interestingly, some of these countries are member nations of the UN. Thus, the burden of this paper is summarised in the following question: is it impossible for global partners to resolve international conflicts before they escalate into international wars? This is the burden of the paper.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The following terms were defined based on their application in the body of the work and not according to lexical meaning:

**Global Stakeholders:** This term refers to the leadership of nations of the world, particularly member nations of the UN. It essentially refers to UN member countries which are committed to the pursuit of global peace.

**Global Stakeholders' Cooperation:** This is the commitment and cooperation of world leaders towards global peace. The term refers to the commitment of world leaders to negotiate international peace by resolving conflicts to prevent escalation into war situations.

**International Conflicts:** An international conflict is the presence of incompatibility (political, economic or technological) between two or more countries. Sometimes, international conflicts manifest in verbal attacks before escalating into total crises.

**World Leaders:** This term refers to the political leadership of countries of the world whose positions confer the capacity, authority and responsibility to pursue global peace. It also refers to leaders of religious groups around the world, especially since religion has been found to hold substantial influence on adherents.

### **Relational Dialectics Theory**

The relational dialectics theory was propounded by Leslie Baxter and Barbara Montgomery in 1996 (Griffin, 2000). The theory is concerned with the complexities and conflicting pulls that characterise social relationships and stakeholders' cooperation due to incompatibilities in groups' dispositions. Relational Dialectics sees stakeholder relations as an effort built around the changing interplay of opposing forces. These forces represent stakeholders' opposing views about a phenomenon. Proponents of relational dialectics theory draw attention to the tensions, struggles and conflicts that are associated with relationship among interdependent groups. This distressing nature of social relationship accounts for the lamentation of Baxter and Montgomery that whatever the form of intimacy, social relationship is an indeterminate process of ongoing flux (Miller, 2002).

The implication of the distressing nature of social relationship is that the desire and

effort to maintain cordiality in the international community presupposes the understanding and anticipation of disagreements over given issues. These disagreements represent what Griffin (2000) describes as contradictions that try social relationship due to the continual interplay of unified oppositions. Since social relationship continually encounters tensions due to contradictions, McGregor (1957), cited in Miller (2006), suggests the adoption of participation and stakeholder relations perspectives in managing stakeholder conflicts.

The indeterminate nature of social relationship buttresses the inevitability of conflicts among interdependent groups. This accounts for why the Relational Dialectics theory describes the relationship between interdependent groups as a paradox. The paradox lies in the precipitation of contradictions which sometimes separate the interests of these groups. A contradiction manifests whenever the desires or interests of interdependent groups negate one another in principle or approach (Griffin, 2000).

To illustrate the fragility of social relationship, Griffin (2000) conceptualises the Relational Dialectics theory under the following opposites:

**Connectedness and Separatedness:** While connectedness exemplifies the sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between interdependent groups, separatedness represents the futility of establishing a relationship that will be immune to tensions. Griffin (2000) thus argues that no form of relationship can survive except interdependent parties are willing to sacrifice individual autonomy to embrace stakeholder relations perspectives, essentially participation, negotiation and compromise.

**Certainty and Uncertainty:** According to Griffin (2000), the articulation of the uncertainty reduction theory by Berger has identified the importance of ensuring greater flow of information in stakeholder relations. This is targeted at minimising stakeholder conflicts. The Relational Dialectics theory of Baxter and Montgomery does not contemplate to contradict the importance of communication in building and maintaining stakeholder relations but accentuates the understanding that stakeholder relations does not simply translate into the avoidance of conflicts. This is because stakeholder conflicts are inevitable among interdependent groups and should be functionally explored to strengthen relationship.

**Openness and Closeness:** The contradiction in these opposites lies in the paradox that managing stakeholder relations can enhance openness and closeness due to the occurrence of conflicts that pull interdependent parties apart. Stakeholder relations experiences greater openness when conflicts are functionally managed and closeness when conflicts are poorly resolved.

Relational dialectics theory proposes that the leadership of a social or organic system should anticipate and develop structures to manage conflicts arising from opposing interests. Griffin (2000), summarising the Relational Dialectics theory, maintains that dialectical tensions provide opportunities for dialogue. He adds that conflicts provide occasions “when partners could work out ways to mutually embrace their conflicting desires for unity with and differentiation from each other” (p. 165). The condition is that, if the forces that tend to separate interdependent groups involve the protection of the interests of each other, joint efforts must be made to reach a consensus. It is the importance of this consensus that underscores the participation of international partners in negotiating international conflicts.

The Relational Dialectics theory has been criticised for emphasising the complexities and contradictions that are associated with stakeholder relations. The theorists, in defence, suggest clear-cut approaches that can deal with such contradictions. According to Bakhtin (1981), cited in Griffin (2000), dialectical tensions rather than being conceived as contradictions should be seen as opportunities for dialogue. In other words, every international conflict rather than been seen as a contradiction should provide an

opportunity for world leaders and global partners to work out ways to mutually embrace and negotiate incompatibilities to promote international harmony.

### ***Defining Stakeholder/International Conflict***

A stakeholder conflict is a disagreement between two or more interdependent groups. It is a disagreement or controversy between two or more groups (Singh, 2008). This disagreement results when there exists an incompatibility or a contradiction that affects the interests of interdependent groups. Griffin and Moorhead (2007) thus define conflict as the resultant situation when the relationship between interdependent groups is rocked by the emergence of incompatible goals. The interpretation of the foregoing definitions is that conflict is a product of interaction. It also means that conflict is inevitable among interdependent groups. The inevitability of conflict stems from the fact that humans, within their social or organic environment, engage in the pursuit of conflicting goals. This is the situation that engenders conflicts. The feeling of inequality and relative deprivation also fuels conflicts in a system (Miller, 2006; Singh, 2008; Register and Larkin, 2008).

In some cases, however, what becomes a conflict may have lurked around without due attention. Griffin and Moorhead (2007) observe that while a conflict situation may emerge as a result a specific difference, what becomes a conflict may have been brewing for some time. Pondy (1967), cited in Miller (2006), identifies five stages or phases of conflict; namely: latent conflict phase, perceived conflict phase, felt conflict phase, manifest conflict phase and conflict aftermath phase.

In the latent conflict phase, conflict is seen to be imminent due to the inevitability of conflicting interests among interdependent groups (Griffin and Moorhead, 2007; Singh, 2008). The point is that even when there is no conflict, the complexity of working together to achieve collective gains makes conflict inevitable in a social or organic system. This is the latent conflict phase.

According to Singh (2008), the emergence of incompatibility in the interest of interdependent groups is an indication that a conflict is brewing. At this stage, no conflict has occurred but it is known that a conflict knocks around and that efforts are required to address the situation in order to maintain a united front. At this perceived conflict stage, it is obvious that a conflict is imminent and requires immediate actions to deal with. Singh (2008) describes this conflict phase as the stage at which people are aware that the existing incompatibility could precipitate a crisis. Often characterised by verbal attacks, the perceived conflict stage mirrors the state of some international conflicts, such as, the present incompatibility between North Korea and South Korea and the United States of America (USA) and Mexico.

The felt conflict phase is a near conflict stage. The response of relevant stakeholders and the demonstration of genuine commitment to manage the situation at this stage could make or mar the conflict process. Singh (2008) states that conflicts fester when people try to deny the presence of incompatibility. He adds that rather than denying conditions that can affect social stability, economic growth and development, efforts should be made to effectively use such conditions to strengthen stakeholder relations. This is the opportunity that beckons on global partners to urgently rise to the palpable international conflicts between several nations and political blocs in order to forestall the likelihood of the Russia-Ukraine conundrum.

The manifest conflict phase is the stage at which an actual conflict has occurred. Singh (2008) describes this conflict stage as a stage of open conflict. This is the stage that describes the USA-Mexican conflict state. It is only precautionary that global partners wade into the conflict to ensure that it does not fester into a total war situation.

The conflict aftermath phase is a post-mortem conflict management effort. It involves

the evaluation of the strategies that were used in managing a conflict to determine their efficacy or otherwise. It also involves the assessment of the nature of stakeholders' cooperation that exists in the post conflict economy and the reconstruction of physical, psychological, social, economic and political structures that were affected during a crisis. The conflict aftermath is exemplified by the efforts of the United States of America and leaders of other nations and groups to respond to the devastation that occurred during the Israel-Gaza war. It goes to say that the conflict aftermath is a crucial stage that requires genuine commitment to heal the different dimensions of injuries caused by a war.

Conflict aftermath will be crucial in establishing the restoration of genuine cooperation when a truce is successfully established between Russia and Ukraine. It goes to say that stakeholders' intervention in the Russia-Ukraine war should go beyond the achievement of an immediate truce to ensure the restoration of genuine cooperation between the nations in the post-war economy. Miller (2006) states that conflicts can produce short-term and long-term consequences for a social or corporate system. Such consequences can be positive or negative and should be determined in order to ensure restoration of genuine stakeholder cooperation and to avoid conflict reoccurrence.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The paper adopted the qualitative method as the design (Ochonogor and Nwachukwu, 2024). Being a position article, it explored reference materials, especially literature on conflict management processes and publications on the turn of Russia-Ukraine war. The paper mirrored the mediating role of global partners in international conflicts and the realisation of global peace as basis for argument.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *International Conflicts as Global Images*

Across several regions and countries of the world, there is one form of war or the other. A war is a state or period of armed conflict between different nations or groups. Examples are Israel and Palestine and the entire interconnected conflicts in the Middle East, Sudan and South Sudan and the Russia and Ukraine war to mention few. While some countries and regions of the world are recovering from international armed conflicts, others still have pockets of wars and crises. There are also countries that are stack enemies of the other. In Afghanistan and Somalia, for instance, there is the war on terror. Sudan and South Sudan are serious enemies. Secession and intervention by the *African Union* (AU) and other international interventions are yet to solve the enmity between Sudan and South Sudan. Ukraine has become a war zone, especially since Russia invasion of the country in early 2022. International interventions are yet to produce a total ceasefire in Ukraine. One cannot also forget the crises yet sweeping across the Arab countries. There is also some sharp separation between the United States of America and Mexico.

Wars and conflicts are of great concern to the global community. It does not matter whether one's country is at war or at peace. The fact that whatever happens in one country or region of the world could escalate to affect other countries and regions makes the outbreak of wars or the escalation of international conflicts issues of global concern. For instance, following Russia invasion of Ukraine, it is reported that about seven hundred thousand students and twenty-five thousand educators have been displaced (Marks, 2022; Wahab, 2022; Pietromarchi, 2022; Okafor, 2022).

Another important dimension of international conflicts and wars is that many nations of the world have their nationals scattered in various countries and regions. This accounts for why the news of a bomb blast in Florida, United States of America, for instance, could be

of interest to Nigerian families, especially those who have their relatives in the United States. Besides, different countries of the world have business and political interest abroad. To this end, whatever happens to the country where one has political or economic affiliations will be of essence to the individual or government. Since the presence of an armed conflict or a war in any part of the globe is a threat to the global community, it is expedient that global partners make efforts to resolve international conflicts to ensure that such do not fester into total crisis situations.

### ***Managing International Conflicts***

Conflict management involves both preventive and curative measures (Singh, 2008). According to (Nwosu, 2006), the preventive conflict management perspective involves attitudinal and proactive measures. It is attitudinal when leadership and partners demonstrate willingness to address the conflict situations plaguing the society, including the acceptance of failures and inefficiencies. Conflict management is proactive when leadership ensures the eradication of conflict-breeding conditions.

According to Nwosu (2006), the proactive conflict perspective is the most useful brand of stakeholder relations management. This is because the proactive leadership does not wait for conflicts to occur but creating structures that enable progress in the face of incompatibilities. The importance of the proactive conflict management perspective is that when functionally applied, it can minimise the occurrence of conflicts. It also equips the leadership of a social or organic society with the capacity to adequately respond to eventual emergencies, especially since conflict is inevitable.

The curative conflict management perspective refers to measures that are used to deal with actual conflict situations. According to Singh (2008), the curative conflict perspective becomes relevant when a conflict has occurred and could be detrimental if allowed to fester.

There are two major curative conflict management measures. They are: negotiation and arbitration. According to Griffin and Moorhead (2007), negotiation, otherwise referred to as dialogue or bargaining, involves the process through which two or more parties try to resolve an issue even though they have different views regarding the issue. It involves a formal forum at which disputants make effort to settle their differences (Miller, 2006). What this means is that negotiation involves face-to-face interactions by groups in a conflict and that those interactions are determined by the groups themselves. In other words, negotiation is not a coercive process. Galvin and Terrell (2001) thus define negotiation as “a formal problem-solving process in which people voluntarily discuss their differences, work out a settlement and come to an agreement” (p. 233).

Negotiation appears to be the way forward out of the growing violent and secessionist agitations Nigeria is currently confronted with. This is because negotiation provides the atmosphere for frank expression of views, including dissensions (Udoudo, 2009). Negotiation will provide opportunities for aggrieved groups whose agitations and sometimes, gorilla approaches which put Nigeria at the precipice of disintegration to state their grievances, advance reasons for their views and understand the plight of other groups involved in the conundrum. This perspective could enable the adoption of continuous collaboration in solving the country’s many socio-political crises instead of the seeming sole State security perspective.

Sometimes, groups involved in a conflict may fail to resolve their differences through negotiation. This is possible due to sharp incompatibilities and the manifestation of hostilities. When negotiation becomes deadlocked, arbitration becomes the alternative (Galvin and Terrell, 2001). Arbitration, otherwise referred to as mediation, involves the engagement of an objective and neutral party (often called the mediator, third party or go-

between) to help others to resolve their differences (Galvin and Terrell, 2001). The mediator or mediating team must be known and approved by groups involved in a conflict. This is to ensure that parties have confidence in the process.

Arbitration is an alternative to negotiation or any other process initiated to manage a conflict between parties. According to Miller (2006), arbitration or the third-party conflict management perspective comes handy when groups involved in a conflict fail to resolve their differences through other means of conflict resolution. Arbitration is essentially initiated to prevent a conflict from festering into a major crisis (Galvin and Terrell, 2001). In view of the impacts of the present security challenges on households, businesses and the Nigerian economy, it may not be out of place to experiment genuine arbitration. The problems of banditry, terrorism and secessionist agitations can be discussed. This is not only to raise the confidence of aggrieved parties in the process but also to provide lasting solutions to the rising tempestuous agitations. Also, at the global level, genuine arbitration may be useful in managing various international crises, such as, the Russia-Ukraine war, the Sudan-South Sudan impasse and the interconnected Middle East conflicts. This is not only to halt the humanitarian crisis and economic hardships caused by the crises but also to ensure that the crises do not continue to spread. The successful achievement of ceasefire in the Israel-Gaza war has demonstrated that arbitration can be successfully explored to manage international crises and wars. The successful ceasefire in the middle of the armed conflict and wanton destruction of lives and properties in Gaza also indicated that if the efforts initiated by the United State Government and other global partners were initiated at the conflict stage, the Israel-Gaza and Russia-Ukraine wars and the devastation caused by the wars may have been averted.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the inevitability of conflicts among interdependent groups around the globe, the paper offered the following recommendations:

1. Global stakeholders should strive to nip international conflicts in the bud. This is to ensure that conflicts between nations do not fester into wars. Without prejudice to the sovereignty of nations, global partners should demonstrate courage and commitment to wade into international conflicts at felt conflict stages to ensure that conditions that could escalate and generate tensions and devastations are nipped in the bud. The verbal threats and incompatibility between Israel and Iran and the United States of America and Mexico, among others, can be addressed at this felt conflict stage. This will forestall the escalation of the conflicts into major international crises.
2. Following the successful achievement of ceasefire in the Israel-Gaza war amidst heightened devastation and humanitarian conditions, similar efforts should be replicated to stop the Russia-Ukraine war, the Sudan-South Sudan crisis and the Middle East conundrum and other international crises that are plaguing nations and people. Global stakeholders' cooperation hinged on genuine restoration of humanitarian order in these nations will halt the ongoing devastations in the nations.
3. Rather than taking sides in an international conflicts and crises, it is better to preach and pursue peace. This is not only because taking sides in a crisis could escalate the situation when other supposed bloc members join in the crisis but essentially because development efforts do not thrive in war-torn nations and regions.

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