

FORUM NOTES

The Russo-Ukraine Crisis and the Future of Southeast Asia Regional Security

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Keynote Speaker

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Introduction

Ms. Krizza Janica Mahinay: Good afternoon! Welcome to this discussion on the Russo-Ukraine crisis and the future of Southeast Asia regional security. This event is presented by the Ateneo de Davao University Center for Politics and International Affairs (ADDU-CPIA). To begin this program, let me call on Dr. Lourdesita Chan, Chairperson of the University Research Council (URC), to give us the welcoming remarks.

Opening Remarks

Dr. Lourdesita Chan: Good afternoon. Fr. Joel Tabora of the Society of Jesus, University President; Ms. Rhisan Morales, Director of the CPIA; Dr. Nelly Z. Limbadan, Assistant Dean of the Social Science Cluster; Dr. Simon Schlegel, keynote speaker; our panel of reactors, Mr. Lucio B. Pitlo, Dr. Enrico Cau, and Mr. John Harvey D. Gamas; other administrators, faculty members, students, distinguished guests, good afternoon. On behalf of the Ateneo de Davao University, through its research council, and the CPIA, I

welcome you all to this afternoon's forum on the Russo-Ukraine crisis and the future of Southeast Asia regional security. We thank CPIA for this vital undertaking, which will definitely contribute to our understanding of the crisis, nature, and consequences for regional security and our lives. For many of us from political science and international studies, this will be an afternoon of updating our knowledge on International Politics and International Relations. As we get into the subject, I hope we will be reminded that war dehumanizes us, it severs humanity's ties with one another, the environment, and our God. May this intellectual exercise bring sharper focus to the university's vision-mission call, that we are an institution that participates in the reconciliation by the Father of humanity with Himself, human beings with one another, and humanity with the environment. It strengthens faith. It promotes humane humanity and [of] God. Hence, as I welcome you to this forum, may I also request us to reflect on how we can use the information to respond to the mentioned call of the university's vision-mission. Once again, good afternoon and welcome.

Rationale and Introduction of the Speaker

Dr. Nelly Limbadan: A pleasant afternoon, everyone. Our speaker this afternoon is a Senior Analyst for Ukraine at the International Crisis Group. Prior to joining the Crisis Group, Simon worked for a humanitarian aid project in war-torn Donbas. In an earlier phase of the war, he also worked for Germany's Civil Peace Service program in Kyiv in a project that documented human rights violations in Donbas. Simon holds a doctorate in Social Anthropology and works at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle, Germany. His thesis was on the history of ethnic boundaries in rural south-western Ukraine. He has worked as a researcher at Loughborough University, in the United Kingdom (UK), where he focused on commemorative politics in Kyiv. He studied social anthropology and Slavic languages at the University of Zurich, Switzerland. Ladies and gentlemen, I am proud to present to you our speaker, Dr. Simon Schlegel.

Talk Proper

Dr. Simon Schlegel: Good afternoon. Good morning from Kyiv. It's a great honor for me to be invited to this forum. I thank Rhisan very much for inviting me. It's not often that I get to speak over such a great distance. And it's probably not often enough that we take the time to do that. My colleagues at the Crisis Group have done a much better job than I have in contextualizing this war. Also for countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, I myself have been very much limited in my analysis. And I have to admit this right from the beginning. So I must admit early on that my knowledge of security policy in Southeast Asia is shamefully limited—which you will probably learn in the discussion. My focus over the last years and months since the Russian invasion here has been exclusively on Ukraine and almost exclusively on the war. So it's very important for us to keep talking to audiences outside of Europe and outside of the immediate region. And I want to begin by speaking a little bit about what I believe are the root causes of this war and then discuss the current phase we are in, in this war. Finally, some very tentative scenarios of what might wait—it's in the near future—as a foundation for our discussion.

On the 24th of February this year, the war went into a new phase with the full-scale Russian invasion. But it began in 2014. And I think it's very important to stress every time we speak about this war, that it's a war that has been dragging on for eight years. It has a pre-procession in late 2013; Ukraine saw the beginning of a wave of protests that were caused by then President Viktor Yanukovych, providing a political U-turn. After signalling for months and weeks that he would sign an association agreement with the European Union (EU), he made a last-minute U-turn to sign a similar agreement with the Russian Federation instead, joining the Customs Union, led by Russia. That led to protests from many young people, which was then brutally clamped down, which very quickly spiralled into a much broader protest movement—not so much against this political decision, but against corruption, clientelism, and police brutality.

In February of 2014, the Yanukovych government had to flee the country after the start of the violence during those protests when about a hundred people died. That presented a precedent for Russia, that in a neighbouring country, a post solid country, a partly Russian speaking country, with a form of government very similar to its own, a civil society movement could oust a government. That was a clear threat to the Russian government which lacks a legitimate mechanism of transmission of power. I think that is one of the root causes why Russia needed to react to this challenge, as presented by Ukrainian civil society. Russia reacted by annexing Crimea which was an autonomous republic of Ukraine, and supporting a separatist insurgency in the predominantly Russian-speaking parts of Ukraine. But only the two heavily industrialized regions of Luhansk and Donetsk, which are collectively known as Donbas, went along with that separatist movement. It's also very important to make the distinction that there are huge cities in Ukraine that are mainly Russian speaking and didn't go along with the separatist movement in 2014. Places like Kharkiv, the second biggest city, then Dnipropetrovsk or Odesa in the South—these are all mainly Russian speaking cities. But they were not as much integrated into the Russian market and not as dependent on Russian energy as Luhansk and Donetsk, which are heavily industrialized places. So I think it's important to really underline that it wasn't about identity or about language or religion. It's very much about the economic prospects of those places that went along with the separatist movement backed by Russia, which led to the first wave of massive winds in 2014.

Throughout the winter of 2015, when it was stopped, through the Minsk Agreement—the situation didn't lead to peace, but it led to a sort of toned-down situation with skirmishes and shelling along the frontlines where settlements were depopulated. The people who couldn't leave, because they didn't have the means to leave, remained there. The Minsk Agreement, the invasion, and the reintegration of the Donbas into Ukraine was never implemented because of the details of how to do that—Russia and Ukraine saw these details very differently. The Minsk Agreement was mainly an instrument to undermine Ukrainian sovereignty. The parties would have imagined an autonomy status for Donetsk and Luhansk regions, which would have given those regions a

veto for all geopolitical decisions made in Kyiv. Basically, that would have given Moscow a seat at decision-making tables if the Ukrainians saw the Minsk Agreement as an instrument to reinstall their sovereignty over Donetsk and Luhansk.

So the goals that both countries pursued with this agreement were fundamentally different. And they would go nowhere with that. That was the situation when Volodymyr Zelensky, the current president, became Ukrainian president in the spring of 2019. Surprisingly, for many, and probably also for himself, he became president on a peace platform. Since then, a number of factors may have influenced Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to again invade Ukraine this February. And I want to speak about a couple of those factors.

Zelensky was probably a disappointment to Putin. He is a Russian speaker from an Eastern smokestack town, whose identity might have been reasonably similar to one of the separatists in Donbas. But he ran on a peace platform, he avoided all the identity politics of language and religion unlike his rival in that election. Petro Poroshenko, the then incumbent president, built his whole campaign on history, religion, and language. So Zelensky was elected with a landslide victory and the victory that he gained across Ukraine, for the first time, blurred that boundary between Eastern Southern Ukraine and the rest of the country that, so far, has always been seen on the electoral map. For the first time, he managed to blur that boundary and got elected by a big majority throughout the country. But he soon discovered that there's very little political room here for making concessions to Russia, especially territorial concessions—even territory is a political suicide. It was in 2019, as it is now, that he quickly realized that there are powerful groups, veterans, especially who have fought in Donbas who would have opposed that very strongly, and so he quickly abandoned that agenda of sitting down with Putin and discussing the future of occupied territories. That may have led to Putin becoming very disappointed in him. There are other factors, like the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, badly mishandled in Russia and eroded Putin's popularity there. Also, it took a big hit on global energy prices, and the oil price usually correlates with Putin's ratings. If oil prices are high, the

Russian government has a lot of freedom to distribute money and buy support and popularity. It didn't have that during the pandemic. There was also a mass protest movement in the summer of 2020 in neighbouring Belarus, after an election with a very unlikely outcome for the incumbent president dictator, Alexander Lukashenko, who nearly lost his power that summer and who drove the message home for Putin that a civil society uprising can bring his government very close to collapse at any point in time.

The war in Donbas was going nowhere. Ukraine was doing everything to drive up the cost for Russia. One thing that came in 2020 was that Russia and Ukraine started to buy drones from Turkey, and these drones have a devastating effect on the separatists in Donbas. All of these factors together might have led to the Kremlin assembling its troops along Ukraine's border in the spring of 2021. Last April, that got Putin in a meeting with United States (US) President Joe Biden in Geneva. That also led to disappointment for Putin. Apparently, he started again, in a much more serious fashion, to assemble troops and weapons along Ukraine's border, to try to intimidate Ukraine to sit down at the negotiation table and again, discuss the Minsk Agreement on Russia's terms. And then when that did not happen, Russia actually invaded Ukraine on the 24th of February.

I would speak now a little bit about the calculations that Moscow, Kyiv, and Western governments may have had at the beginning of this phase of the war. The tanks were rolling in; the prisoners of war that were taken early on in the invasion of the Ukrainians; and also the type of weapons that they brought and the number of soldiers that they assembled—these demonstrate that Moscow expected a short war with a decisive victory over Kyiv, allowing the former to change the government in Kyiv for a more pliable one that would take its cues from Moscow. Moscow believed that a majority of Ukrainians deep down wish to live under its rule. It's a central theme of Russia's version of history and propaganda. In the summer of 2021, Putin wrote a long essay where he explained how he fought, how Ukrainians and Russians were one people, and how those who claimed 'something else was wrong' are misguided or brainwashed.

Another narrative that also is essential for Russia's justification of this war is that Ukraine is a deeply corrupted state and an artificial nation that would quickly fall under pressure. Ukraine is a corrupt country, but it didn't fall under pressure and that's also very important to draw back on. In the eight years of war in Donbas, Ukraine has developed a very strong civic nationalism, one that isn't so much based on language or on ethnicity or even on which church. There are two Orthodox churches in Ukraine—one with its project in Moscow. This has been a politicized divide all along. But these factors played a much less role than having a common enemy in Russia. And nobody does much probably to unite the Ukrainian people around this civic idea of regaining its sovereignty than the separatism in Donbas with Putin supporting it. That is a development that Russia overlooked. It also overlooked that Ukraine has a much stronger army now than in 2014. Many of the people fighting now have a good deal of experience fighting under very precarious conditions with very little resources. They learned how to make the most out of very limited ammunition. For example, they learned how to improvise weapons with commercial drones, modifying them into deadly machines. Ukraine's army draws on deep civil society support: From drones, to clouds, cars, helmets, body armour and food, these are in large part donated by civil society networks, crossroad networks that are based on personal, trusted contacts, and on those who work around the bureaucracy and hierarchies.

Over the years, the Ukrainian army has also integrated some of these features into its own command structure so that hierarchies are fairly flat here. In the army, decisions can be made on the spot without waiting for instructions from Kyiv. And that was decisive in, for example, the defense of Kharkiv in February and in March. So all of these developments had been largely overlooked or not given enough attention by the Russian military brass when they decided that they could have a quick victory over Kyiv, although they were clearly signalled by Western powers that it would flood Ukraine with support. That also wasn't given enough attention. Now Ukraine has about half the planet's gross domestic product (GDP) behind it. And it doesn't need that support. It could keep up the defense without that, but it was clearly a signal that this would come, apparently disregarded by the

Kremlin. The West itself was probably a bit surprised by how quickly and how harshly they could implement sanctions against Russia. Many probably thought that this will take longer and there would be more loopholes left over and Moscow was definitely also surprised about this. But then many experts also thought that the Ukrainian economy would take the Russian economy, and take it much faster than it did. Because oil prices went up so high after the invasion, even the little energy supplies that the West kept buying from Russia flooded their coffers with formidable amounts of money, which is probably more money the West has given to Russia and to Ukraine. And it'll keep doing so until it phases out Russian energy imports altogether.

It was always clear that Russia would struggle to occupy large swaths of Ukrainian territory with the quarter of a million men they assembled in February. But then, that wasn't their goal. They wanted to decapitate the country. It would replace the government and then suppress any sort of insurgency in the rest of the country using their police and Secret Service. So, a substantial part of the force that they assembled in winter consisted of the National Guard and police that was meant to just suffocate resistance from civilians, but who weren't actually trained in urban warfare. If they didn't have the supplies, they didn't have the ratios for a long fight. One officer that I interviewed recently told me that many of the armoured vehicles that they captured around Kyiv didn't have the bullet belts inserted into their machine guns because they never expected to have to shoot. But nobody expected this amount of logistics and tactical blunders. I think many people were surprised by how poorly Russian logistics worked, how long it took them to even use their air force, and that they never actually achieved air superiority over Ukraine. They still cannot use their air force over most of Ukraine because they're not protected against air defense. So, all of these led to a series of symbolic victories early on for Ukraine. They defended Kyiv. Russia realized at the end of March that it would not have the resources to seize the city or even occupy it.

Ukraine started to attack Russian territory quite reasonably already in April. They took out logistics and infrastructure in border areas. They

sank the flagship of the Black Sea fleet and all of that sort of symbolized or signalled that West Ukraine might have a chance to stem back this invasion. But it wasn't until the late summer that this became a realistic perspective. Throughout the summer, you could hear people say that they haven't ever seen Ukraine fight back—actually fight back—and win back territory in Kyiv and then in Snake Island which is a small island in the Black Sea that Russia also had to leave at some point. It was just Russia realizing that their game was up there, and they packed up and left. But it wasn't because of the Ukrainians counter attacking. That changed in about a month ago in early September when Ukraine signalled that they would attack the southern region and retake that portion which is on the West Bank of the West Dnipro River—there, it is very easy to isolate the Russians. They made little progress there, but they managed to get quite a substantial amount of the Russian forces diverted. Ukraine attacked in a different place in the northeast and very quickly regained a large swath of territory there about a month ago.

With that, Ukraine has clearly demonstrated that it can translate military support into territorial gains. This will likely provide a very good basis for arguing for more Western aid, and it's very important. Take the initiative now in the war as it is still gaining some ground in the south. The offensive from a month ago has now pushed into Luhansk and Donetsk regions which is symbolically important. It also, of course, sends a signal to people still living in occupied areas and who are probably debating among themselves: Should they collaborate with Russia? Should they take a Russian passport? Should they maybe take up a job with the Russian occupying administration there? For them, this really sends a message that Ukraine might be back in the foreseeable future and that it's probably good to be wary of getting involved too closely with Russia. And, of course, the counter offensive in late September has led to a very risky mobilization inside Russia—we still have to see the effects of that. But it's something that has clearly upped the stakes for Russia as well. They are much deeper into this now than they ever planned to be.

There are support for weapons and also in budget, such as financial assistance for Ukraine, but of course humanitarian support is still badly needed. It's much easier to argue for it now than for the West to just keep on giving and giving without seeing a tangible result. Now that Ukraine's immigrants have really something to hope for, the nature and the sequence of how this aid had been structured over the last seven or eight months was instrumental insofar as avoiding a major escalation of this conflict into a war between Russia and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces. It was important that Western weapon deliveries upped the ante gradually instead of suddenly having small number of men carried into tank weapons and utilizing anti-helicopter weapons. Before the Russian tanks came here, they arrived very visibly, sending a message of deterrence to Moscow that wants their tanks to be on Ukrainian territory. They will be easy targets for very mobile groups of Ukrainians operating out of buildings and out of bushes, shooting out from their tanks. And that's something that happened, really, to great costs. After that, came drones and kamikaze drones, then heavy artillery pieces, followed by artillery systems with a long range and pinpoint accuracy that can shoot from farther away than Russian artillery can, after which they can leave very quickly. So these systems, mainly the American Heimer system, that arrived in about early July had a devastating effect on Russian logistics and that laid the groundwork for the counter-offensive, because Russian logistics is so heavily dependent on the railway. They need to build big ammunition dumps where they unload trains and unload trucks. These points are very vulnerable to the artillery strikes and if they get hit, then there's usually a big blast. And that really has thinned out the Russian supremacy in artillery fire which, over the summer, has gained them ground. Now it has stopped to be effective because Ukrainians have been able to thin that out. Western partners have avoided any direct confrontation by using Western air defense against Russian planes. Western partners avoided sending instructors to Ukrainian soil where they might get hit by a Russian rocket. So the training of Ukrainian soldier does happen, but it happens outside of Ukraine, in the UK, and it's probably the right way to do it where these instructors are out of Russian range. Interestingly, Russia also has bent

over backwards to avoid a direct confrontation with NATO and to avoid an escalation. So far, Russia has suffered a couple of defeats. They had to retreat from caves, they had to retreat from Snake Island, they had their targets in Crimea and in the Russian territory attacked—and usually when something like that happened, they changed their narrative and their rhetoric instead of changing their behavior.

So when they had to leave Kyiv, or Snake Island in the Black Sea, they said this is a gesture of goodwill to have Ukrainians sit down with them on the negotiation table. When they lost Kharkiv region last month they said they're regrouping their forces. Everything's going according to plan they said, but they need to regroup to find a better defensible position. When an airbase in Crimea was attacked in August, it diminished their ability to operate from there. They said it was an accident, although everybody knew it couldn't have been an accident. But this shows that they try to make it not look as if a line had been overstepped, which would then get them into a position where they need to escalate in a way. This has changed now, somewhat, in mid-September after the loss of Kharkiv region, when Russia somewhat took steps to escalate by announcing a very hastily conducted mass mobilization that looked as if it has many flaws. They also hastily conducted these referendums in four regions, all of which they only partially hold to announce that these are now territories of Russia. But again, for the Ukrainians, that doesn't change all that much. They have attacked Ukraine. And so, this, again is a red line that has been overstepped already. Therefore, it's not clear whether or not that really is a suitable backdrop for Russia to escalate further. We are in a dangerous space, we see that Russians mobilized a huge number of soldiers now. They have not made very real threats of using their nuclear arsenal to coerce the rest of the world and Ukraine, especially in accepting the annexation of territories that it has just proclaimed its own. In the future, they might do this to other territories as well. So, in a nod to the global South, the Russian president in his speech on the 31st of September marking the annexation, has portrayed his quarrel with the West—his fight with the West—as an anticolonial project. And next week, Ukraine will table a resolution in the United Nations (UN) General Assembly to condemn Russia's land grab. And

also as an anticolonial fight, by portraying themselves as the victim of an imperialistic expansion. The fight is on which of these narratives are getting more traction in the UN. The UN representatives from Asia, Africa, and Latin America will probably call for a swift diplomatic resolution to ease the pressure. Food and energy prices, as well as resource outcome will most likely be decided on the battlefields of eastern and southern Ukraine, rather than in the UN assembly hall. But the many false predictions of this war from very good experts should caution us not to speculate about the future.

To end my discussion, I would only go through some very tentative scenarios. As the basis of our subsequent discussion, I think that most likely the fighting will continue in the foreseeable future, mainly in the east and south. Because both sides still feel that they can gain a much better position at the negotiation table than they're in now. Once resource constraints starts, both parties may be forced to a non-negotiated ceasefire. And these resource constraints for Russia is mainly manpower—they have great trouble equipping and training enough men and there are only men in the Russian army, while the Ukrainian army has a good percentage of women fighting. Russia has a large problem in mobilizing and convincing enough men to join voluntarily. Also, there are military forces and private defense companies such as the Wagner Group, their calls plus the rich salaries that they have offered haven't led to enough men signing up for these very dangerous military positions. And they have now started to coerce people or men into their army. We don't know the effect of that yet. On the Ukraine side, it's more weapons and money, but the tendency there is, of course, that Ukraine has been able to get and integrate gradually into their arsenal more heavy and more sophisticated weapon from the West. Also, they've been able to train in an impressive speed enough for their soldiers to use these weapons to great effect.

So, there is a tendency that Russia is probably trying to avoid its bottleneck of manpower with this new mobilization, and that Ukraine is trying to avoid a lack of weaponry by asking for more Western help which they're likely to get. And Ukraine has much less problem in mobilizing people. They have a travel ban for men of fighting age who cannot leave the country. It's quite

clear that everybody is expecting to somehow chip in into their fight, either at the front lines or in the rear. And it's likely that for the foreseeable future, Ukraine will have more people willing to fight more than it can deploy to the frontlines. So that would relate, at some point, to a negotiated ceasefire with a contact line that is similar to the one that we've seen between 2014 and 2021, with skirmishes on both sides—sort of a death zone of 20 kilometers on both sides. But this frontline would be much longer than in 2014. And it would also include portions of the international border between Ukraine and Russia in the north. Neither side would see such an outcome as an end to the war and both sides would try to strengthen their defensive lines and replenish their troops and eventually try to get more territory. A less likely scenario is that at some point, a stalemate occurs, and that the belligerent parties negotiate some rules, along that contact line which would then enable people crossing those lines. Those lines run through checkpoints and maintaining infrastructure such as power lines or water supply.

As with the Minsk Agreement before, this scenario would still be prone to further escalation as it would still not be a solution to end the war. If one side feels that there is an opportunity to gain territory, even if there were basic rules, basic agreement, it doesn't mean that any one side would be satisfied with that. But it's unclear how long Ukraine can maintain that former drive they're experiencing now. The mobilization may yet turn the battlefield tight, but it may also likely raise social tensions in Russia. If Russia keeps losing soldiers and territory, the mood in Russia may turn decisively against the government, which would not necessarily mean open rebellion, but it could be more of what we're seeing already now—finger pointing within the elite, looking for scapegoats, who is to blame for this. And also, some sort of muted resistance goes up for mobilization such as burning down mobilization offices, sabotaging transport to the frontlines, people breaking their own hands, legs, in order not to be mobilized, the hundreds of thousands of people, men mostly that we've seen leaving Russia over the last two weeks, this may also continue and lead to more dissatisfaction within the Russian elite.

But a last scenario would be that Russia might resort to the use of weapons of mass destruction, for instance, tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine, if Moscow feels that this could win them the war or this could bring them a huge advantage. It's not clear whether or not they will ever come to that assessment; it doesn't look like they have reached that assessment now. We don't know what it would look like exactly, but it would probably be a response with conventional weapons against a significant part of the Russian army. And it's very unpredictable what that would mean for Putin's government. But now, it is probably not an option that Putin considers very seriously because it might lead to much quicker defeat. Or probably, he might resort to more unconventional ways of trying to win this one. And on this gloomy note, I will end and hope to have inspired an interesting discussion. Thank you very much for your attention.

Discussants

Ms. Mahinay: Thank you, Dr. Schlegel, for giving us insights to better understand the Russo-Ukraine crisis and providing us with possible scenarios in the following weeks. At this point, we will now be joined by our three discussants. I will introduce each of them before they speak.

Our first discussant is Mr. Lucio B. Pitlo III, a research fellow at the Asia Pacific Pathways to Progress Foundation. Mr. Pitlo obtained his Master of Laws from Peking University and completed his Master of Arts in International Affairs from the American University in Washington, DC. He has shared his commentaries and analysis on Philippine security and foreign policy and Southeast Asian affairs in *Asia Times*, *South China Morning Post*, and *The Diplomat*, among others. Our second discussant is Dr. Enrico Cau. He currently serves as a political and security analyst for the Taiwan Business Leaders' Forum. Dr. Cau is also an associate researcher at the Taiwan Center for International Strategic Studies. His research focuses on global security and great power competition. Our final discussant is Mr. John Harvey Gamas. He obtained his Master of Arts in International Studies, Major in European Studies from the De LaSalle University. He

attended the Study of the U.S. Institute (SUSI) exchange program on US foreign policy at Bard College in New York. He is currently the Chair of the International Studies Department of the Ateneo de Davao University.

Let me now call on our first discussant, Mr. Pitlo, to share his insights.

Mr. Lucio Pitlo: Thank you for the introduction, Ms. Mahinay. Again, I would like to thank CPIA Director Rhisan Mae Morales for inviting me to join this afternoon's conversation. It's always a pleasure to give my personal views on this issue, along with other fellow discussants. Thank you, Dr. Schlegel, for the very comprehensive, very insightful, first-hand experience-based sharing of your know-how, ideas and, of course, what you foresee as potential ways forward, or how this crisis may end up sometime in the future, hopefully sooner than later. So, allow me to share some of my points in connection with this afternoon's forum on the Russia-Ukraine War, and its implications to Southeast Asian security. I will probably raise some serious concerns, especially from countries in the region.

The first is, of course, the worry that the failure of diplomacy and negotiations may give some parties pretext to resort to the use of force or intimidation to resolve longstanding differences or disputes—so whether there was a Minsk Agreement and that one party or several parties felt commitments were made but are not being honored, or that there is a need to renegotiate some of them. Because there are flashpoints in the region, including the South and East China Seas and, of course, Taiwan Strait—there are tensions across strategic waterways. The implications of this impetus to resort or use force, citing failure of diplomacy, dialogue, or negotiations to address longstanding differences raises a lot of worries in the region. Secondly, I think there is the use of frozen conflicts, you know, as leverage against neighbors. Of course, we have seen these frozen conflicts in former Soviet Union countries where, of course, Russia is also involved, whether it's in Moldova, Georgia, or Ukraine. And so, this is also a cause for concern for countries in the region.

On the immediate front, they think the impact will be on energy, food, fertilizer supply, and prices on the global market. Of course, these are direct,

and have immediate bearing not only on countries in Southeast Asia, or Asia in general, but also globally. So, countries far away from this distant conflict theatre suffered seriously, from having to deal with inflation, the limited supply of basic commodities, including cereals, agricultural inputs, like fertilizers, and, of course, the recent decision by Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to reduce oil output. This will certainly have serious effects. It will expectedly deepen the energy crisis, especially for developing countries that import most of their energy requirements—and the Philippines is one of them.

There is also worry about sanctions from importing Russian energy and arms. Although, of course, we know other countries have ramped up purchase of Russian crude. Of course, China and India are there, but other countries in Asia continue to procure Russian energy. Recently, President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. said that he's open to engaging both Russia and Ukraine, Russia in terms of energy and fertilizers, and Ukraine in terms of food. So I think, in a way, this also reverberates across much of Southeast Asia, not wanting to take sides and finding ways to continue to engage the two protagonists in the conflict.

Recent developments show that Moscow's arms exports in Southeast Asia suffered reverses. Indonesia, for one, dropped plans to purchase Sukhoi Su 35 fighter aircraft in favor of French Rafale and US F-15 fighter jets. The Philippines also cancelled plans to acquire Mi-17 heavy-lift Russian helicopters, despite already paying a PhP2 billion downpayment. I think Manila is trying to find ways to recover the deposit one way or the other. Of course, regional countries want to avoid getting into the crossfire, especially in terms of sanctions, including secondary sanctions from US and partner countries that have been imposed on Russia. Of course, there are some quarters in the Philippines that wonder why the Philippines did not seek a waiver from the US, to still allow for the purchase of the Russian helicopters considering the deal has been made prior to the assault on Ukraine in February. Also, some countries like Turkey and India even went ahead acquiring S400 missiles, which are more sophisticated, and they were able to get away with it.

Recently, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand, for the first time, attended the NATO summit in Madrid in June. And, of course, this raises concerns and support about a potential evolution of an Indo-Pacific or Asia-Pacific NATO. These four countries are all allies of the US, especially Japan. And we know that there is strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific theatre, which I'm sure my other fellow discussants may also touch on later. These four countries form part of the First Island Chain, part of the Cold War era US hub-and-spoke system, which continues to find relevance to this day.

So, for the Philippines, there is the concern about getting involved in this great power conflict, such as, for example, meddling in what's taking place in Ukraine against Russia and a potential US-China showdown, especially the Taiwan Strait, due to the Philippines' geographical proximity, and its long standing alliance with the US. There is the existing legal cover for US troops and arms to be put in the Philippines under the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty and subsequent military pacts like the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) and the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA). So, this puts, of course the Philippines in a bind. The US is its long-standing security ally, and China its largest trade partner since 2016. The intensifying competition between these two countries, especially in relation to flashpoints like the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait, puts the Philippines in a very delicate and very difficult spot in finding the balance. Walking the tightrope becomes ever more complex for Manila.

And I think there is also a fear of possible lowering of the threshold for conflict. We know that after the visit of US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan, China undertook several countermeasures, one of which is the launch of unprecedented live-fire missiles and military exercises around the island of Taiwan. Two out of the six exclusion zones, or boxes declared, straddle the exclusive economic zones (EEZ) of Japan and the Philippines. Some missiles hit Japanese EEZ and that elicited a Japanese diplomatic protest.

So, for the Philippines, being close to Taiwan, and the fact that there are about 150,000 Filipinos living and working in Taiwan, evacuating them, making sure that they are out of harm's way and, more importantly, how to position ourselves from avoiding getting dragged into this conflict certainly

will give headaches for Marcos and the Philippine government going forward in the next few years. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has shown division in relation to how they will position themselves in the Russia-Ukraine war. Many try to avoid ostensibly, showing support for either side, going to great lengths to implore parties to pursue dialogue. We have seen President Joko Widodo of Indonesia, traveling to both Moscow and Kyiv and trying to invite both leaders to attend the G-20 Summit to be held in Bali this November. And we still don't know if he will be successful on that overture. But certainly, ASEAN countries are trying to, in a limited capacity, provide a platform. Of course, the coming ASEAN Summit this November may provide an opportunity for leaders of US, China, and Russia to be present. Probably, the leader from Ukraine may also be invited. So, this may provide an opportunity, a venue for leaders, to probably discuss a potential way out of this crisis, Thank you again, Dr. Schlegel, for your lecture.

Ms. Mahinay: Thank you, Mr. Pitlo for providing critical points to help us further examine the conflict and linking this crisis in Europe to some developments in Asia. Before we give Dr. Schlegel the chance to give his response, we will proceed to other discussants. I will now invite our second discussant, Dr. Cau to give his views.

Dr. Enrico Cau: Well, I would like to thank Ateneo de Davao for having me today. Of course, I would like to extend my thanks to Prof. Morales for the invitation; Dr. Schlegel, for the very detailed presentation; and of course, Mr. Pitlo, for offering us insights on the Philippines. I'll be discussing mostly the Taiwan-Ukraine situation. It's quite a topical question on which everybody started to make strange comparisons recently. I find most of them quite fitting. Anyway, in my opinion, there are some relations between the Taiwanese situation and that of Ukraine. But these similarities are quite marginal. As a matter of fact, contrary to what the press and most of the media tend to emphasize, there are core strategic priorities among the similarities on the aggressor side. From the Russia part, there is a necessity to create a buffer zone around what used to be the former Soviet Union. So,

Ukraine may only be one of the other countries acting as tools to that end in the region. The reasons are strategic necessities that are normally rooted in historical justifications, and other realities, and similar motivations. For those who are acquainted with the matter, Taiwan is too close to China to be allowed to exist in autonomy or under the influence of external powers. In both cases, attempts from Ukraine and Taiwan to gain autonomy is seen as an existential threat for both Russia and China. In the case of Taiwan, China apparently is not very eager to negotiate any other solution, apart from unification. We will get to this later, if there is time left. This specific situation produces several near zero-sum dynamics, where there is not much room for negotiation. Examples of these dynamics are visible in cases such as the recent exercises China conducted around the island. Now, as everybody knows, the aftermath of the exercise was characterized by the fact that China started to conduct its activities closer to Taiwan, starting a new normal characterized by a few trends. One of these trends is not only defined by higher number of incursions around the air defense identification zone (ADIZ), especially on the southern and southwestern part of Taiwan's ADIZ, but also by an increased frequency of crossings on the median line, now becoming a daily occurrence.

This means that, according to many defence experts in Taiwan and China, this new normal increases the possibility that China may one day turn one of those incursions or exercises into a full-fledged invasion, a surprise invasion in the making. That's one of the problems.

Now, when it comes to differences between the Ukrainian and Taiwanese case, there are, of course, historical differences. The Ukrainian case started in 2014, while the ordeal between China and Taiwan started in 1949. Again, on the current situation, it is the result of a number of legal and political ambiguities that characterize the structure of the Cross-Strait dynamics. There are differences in the type of political instances that characterize the two entities, of course, and also the nature and the relations of the parties. As you can see, for example, Ukraine doesn't have a NATO or any other specific defense treaty with both the United States or the European Union. They do cooperate with NATO, but such cooperation doesn't occur within

any specific membership to an organization. When it comes to Taiwan, Taiwan security and defense matters are regulated through a legal framework developed after the Second World War (WWII) and recently expanded with a new Taiwan bill, named “Taiwan Policy Act.” The Bill was heavily criticized by China as some of its provisions are perceived to be a violation of the One China Principle, despite them being in line with the correspondent legal baseline of the United States. The One China Principle only acknowledges but not necessarily endorses the Chinese position. There are three important items in the bill. The first is, of course, stepping up defense items and sales for day one. The bill provides for the allocation of USD 6.5 billion in defense aid to Taiwan. The provisions in the bill also cite the possibility of including Taiwan as a major non-NATO ally. Such provision puts Taiwan in a specific position because it gives Taiwan a certain European dimension which is, for now, not very visible, at least not for most mainstream observers. But I think all the experts agree that we’re starting to see an increase in European powers in the security environment of the Indo-Pacific region. We saw a growing presence of Germany and France recently. Germany is probably going to have stable bases in the Indo-Pacific. It is my opinion that in the future the Indo-Pacific might see an increased presence of individual NATO powers, or a full-fledged NATO presence in the region to rival China.

There are, of course, differences in how the Ukrainian and Taiwanese cases are perceived. Paradoxically, according to some researchers, most people think that the Russian aggression of Ukraine is Russia’s fault. Then, of course, there are people who disagree. In my case, for example, I am Italian and Italy has traditionally strong relations with Russia. But in general, people tend to perceive the aggression of Ukraine as a Russian fault. Whereas in the case of Taiwan, there’s quite a difference. You know, some people tend to support the fact that Taiwan is part of China. However, under this current situation, its current status doesn’t see the island on a path toward independence, but rather in a sort of limbo, where the only two possibilities are peaceful or forceful unification. Of course, in this regard, the differences between Ukraine and Taiwan emerge. As Lucio already mentioned, the war in Taiwan would cause a lot of problems across the region whose spillovers

would be felt across the whole Indo-Pacific region. The Philippines is one of the most exposed countries, for the same reasons that Lucio basically mentioned—a matter of proximity. The other spots include Guam, which is very far should the need to support a war in Taiwan arises. The other one is Japan. Strategically, Japan is an island like Taiwan. For this reason, in order for Japan to operate properly and be able to support Taiwan, in my opinion, Japan first needs to be supported by the United States and its allies because its geopolitical condition puts Japan in a very uncomfortable situation, where it has to face China, North Korea, and Russia should a conflict occur. We see signs of such threats through increasingly frequent Chinese and joint Russia-China patrols and exercises around Japanese waters. So the risk of a regional escalation is a reality, as a matter of fact. When it comes to direct relationship between Taiwan and Ukraine, the only factor that may connect the two is the fact that they have recently started to cooperate in a much closer way. Such cooperation is channelled through groups including parliamentarians, the Ukrainian parliament, and other entities from across the spectrum engaging in dialogues of various types. In many European countries, there are very old parliamentary groups that have been entertaining political relations with Taiwan for a long time, like the parliamentary friendship groups that have been operating across the region for decades, some at least since the 1960s as far as I could remember.

So, this is in no way new for Taiwan and Europe to engage in diplomatic relations. I think Poland is another one. As a matter of fact, the Ukrainian model of diplomatic relations with Taiwan is reportedly going to mimic the Polish one. These are, of course, elements that create a direct connection between Taiwan and Ukraine, and thus an interest by Russia to engage in disrupting operations to obstruct Ukraine's diplomatic effort that may actually produce effects on the Taiwanese ecosystem or on the Indo-Pacific. There is growing support for Ukraine in Taiwan; now there are voices also saying that Ukraine wants to open an embassy. In Taiwan, of course, it creates a strange triangle, involving a growing connection between Russia and China, as the Ukrainian and Taiwanese challenges intermingle. In the case of Taiwan, it is one of the issues being raised in some circles: It points

to the fact that Taiwan is a small island that doesn't have resources, whose economy is traditionally based on importing raw materials and energy and exporting finished products. So normally, the diplomatic posture that you find in this type of reality is very neutral. That's the same in Italy. Italy is everybody's friend; Italy is friend with the Palestinians. It gets along with Israel. It gets along with Iran, while also sitting at the table with the Saudis. Italy does this by design because it's a trading country. So of course, Taiwan is more or less in the same situation, with less amounts of resources and power compared to Italy. So this approach to activist diplomacy in Taiwan has sometimes been a subject of discussions. Nonetheless, there is not much choice to this approach, otherwise, the only choice for Taiwan is to wait for annexation.

Another point is related to military capabilities and the risk of war. This is another question that everybody keeps asking. As an analyst for the Taiwan Business Leaders' Forum, I'm often asked about this by an audience that includes businessmen, diplomats, politicians, and other figures that have an interest in better understanding what the future holds for Cross-Strait relations. Of course, war, is a tangible possibility according to many analysts. In the moment where China perceives that there is a significant change in Taiwan's status, entailing risk that the island wants to sweep off Chinese control, China will put aside any other calculation to prioritize taking control of Taiwan. And that's the major risk. But in fact, nobody is ready for a war. Taiwan is not ready for a war. They have recruitment challenges, doctrine and tactics are undergoing radical changes and, of course, equipment. The United States is coming out of twenty years of unending wars. This is especially visible in the case of the Navy, where challenges include obsolescence and maintenance. There are also various other limits that may prevent the United States from engaging in intervention to support Taiwan. China isn't war-tested. They basically don't have experience despite their expanding capabilities. Recent reports indicate that they have 2,000 Chinese now training with the Russians. This is most probably aimed at providing Chinese soldiers some frontline experience, but basically they are still lacking in key areas. So these

challenges are actually a very good sign telling us that all the parties have good reasons to refrain from engaging in a war. But the real problem in this current setup is that there is no method or mechanism to de-escalate. So, from what we see in the region at the moment, constant escalation is a trend that ultimately bears a high risk of incidents or other forms of contact that bear higher risks of escalation.

To this end, I have to remind that a war in the region is going to affect development, across especially many of the Southeast Asian states, in particular, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia. They're going to be affected more than others. Singapore maybe yes, maybe not. Singapore is a different type of economy. But all those countries there are in dire need now of investing all their money in infrastructure and prepare themselves for the future—these will actually be disrupted by a potential regional conflict. So that's really a problem that we should need to take note of. In terms of economic relationship among Ukraine and Taiwan and Southeast Asia, trade volumes are limited for Taiwan and, I think, also for Southeast Asia. For this reason, data indicate that there is no significant disruption in economic flows, in the sense that the economic relationship is weak, even before that, current risks remain very low. And I would like to conclude with this, I thank you for your time.

Ms. Mahinay: Thank you, Dr. Cau, you have pointed out a lot of very important matters regarding the Russo-Ukraine crisis, especially the similarities in the situation between Ukraine and Taiwan. Also, as emphasized, there are points where they diverge. Let me now call our final discussant, Mr. Gamas, to offer his ideas.

Mr. John Harvey Gamas: Thank you very much Ms. Mahinay. I thank Dr. Simon Schlegel for giving us fresh information and perspective on the war in Ukraine from his vantage point in Europe. I hope I still have something to say in the wake of the very comprehensive analysis of my friends, Lucio and Enrico. Nice to see both of you here.

My insights come from my vantage point here in Southeast Asia. What does the war in Ukraine mean to us in the region? For ordinary Southeast Asians, the war in Ukraine has created nothing but economic fallout. For Southeast Asian political elites, the war has awakened fears of Great Power rivalries being actualized in the region.

First, let us focus on Southeast Asians' concern on the economy. When the war in Ukraine broke out in February 2022, most of us in this part of the world looked at it with concern, but with a degree of detachment. The heightened interest in Eastern European Affairs among Southeast Asians, as reflected in social media shares and discussions, was born out of curiosity rather than genuine concern for human lives and world peace. As Ukraine and Russia are geographically far away, it was easy to distance ourselves from the conflict and to regard it as an isolated occurrence. The public interest on the war revealed the Southeast Asian penchant for spectacle, typified by the curious crowd of onlookers around an ongoing crisis or post-accident situations, sharing their thoughts, interpretations, and versions of the events. But not for long, the distant spectacle became an immediate regional reality.

For ordinary Southeast Asians, the Ukraine-Russia War has turned into a domestic economic debacle. As the violence escalates, retaliatory economic threats and sanctions thrown from both sides negatively impacted Southeast Asian states, which were still reeling from the effects of the pandemic. The initial upward movement of petroleum prices in March 2022, brought about by Western rejection of Russian oil, practically shattered the illusion of distance from conflict. Non-petroleum producing countries in Southeast Asia like the Philippines are heavily affected by the rising transportation and logistical cost.

Furthermore, the invasion of Ukraine has disrupted global food supply chains, bringing the war right into our very kitchens. The disruption in sunflower oil production, a major Ukrainian export, resulted in a domino effect of price increases in alternative edible oils like palm and coconut oil. Indonesia almost halted the export of its palm oil just to ensure local supply. Other major Ukrainian exports suffering from wartime disruption are wheat and corn. As pointed earlier by Lucio, the surge in wheat prices resulted

in price increase of various processed food products. For the first time in fourteen years, Thailand approved the price increase of instant noodles, a staple among the poor. Corn price surge has affected livestock production, with the rising costs of animal feed, thus discouraging animal raisers.

Plans to increase local agricultural production in Southeast Asia to resolve these growing food insecurities are hindered by the high costs of fertilizers due to the supply issues of raw materials originating from Russia. As such, Southeast Asia is in a Catch-22 situation and now facing the perfect storm of an impending global recession.

From the viewpoint of ASEAN leaders, the Ukraine-Russia War is reliving Cold War period fears of Great Power conflicts. Enrico earlier mentioned the presence of other powers particularly in Northeast Asia. ASEAN integration developed out of the desire to prevent Great Powers from using regional instabilities to play out their rivalries. Paradoxically, the war in Ukraine has revealed the limits and dangers of regional integration. Despite being touted as the best example of regional integration, the European Union's (EU's) potential expansion to Ukraine was the root cause of the present conflict. John Mearsheimer argued that the EU membership bid merely exposed Ukraine to Russian aggression since it tilted the balance-of-power in Europe. Following his argument, the situation could provide some lessons to ASEAN regionalism.

The ongoing violent crackdown in Myanmar and the South China Sea conflicts are potential entry points for Great Power involvement—a challenge to regional unity. Russia has already given some military support to Myanmar, even as ASEAN remains impotent in bringing the Burmese generals to heel. The Philippines, however, for fear of complications from Western sanctions, as Lucio pointed out, has already retracted its deal to purchase military assets from Russia. The United States and its allies are also positioning themselves in the region against its rival China, thereby pitting ASEAN states between two powers. Southeast Asian states are wary of choosing sides after seeing indirect Western support to Ukraine. Moreover, the region is deeply tied to China's economy. The relative peace and prosperity of the region were hard earned.

As such, Southeast Asian states are jealously guarding these achievements lest they default back to the bloody troubles of the previous century.

Ms. Mahinay: Thank you, Mr. Gamas. Yes, indeed, it is necessary to look into the economic consequences of the conflict in Southeast Asia. And the crisis in Europe also leads us to re-examine the Southeast Asian regional integration. Now, I would like to invite Dr. Schlegel to give his comments or response to the insights provided by our discussions.

Dr. Schlegel: Thank you very much for these three very insightful comments. And that really put the Ukraine war in a good context to position in the Asia Pacific region. I want to maybe start by picking up one of the last points that was made about the interconnectedness of the economy, and I really liked how you frame that, John, that, firstly, was a detachment or curiosity, spectacle. People understood how interconnected the world is. And I think also, for many Ukrainians, it was a revelation, how dependent countries are in Africa, in the Middle East, and the Gulf countries by extension, just because of the price hikes that were caused by these countries not receiving Ukrainian grain, how interconnected this is. A great deal of late August has brought some relief but many of the logistical problems and all the sanctions, Russian fertilizer and food not directly sanctioned, but the sanctions on the financial system make it very hard for Russia to export fertilizer and food. And I think interconnectedness was a revelation for many in Ukraine. And also, something that sort of bolsters a bit the Ukrainian sense of importance that this is a not just a regional conflict, but it is a global war. The global problem, at least, the problem that comes with that is usually used against European nations who are complaining about mainly energy prices, something that might become more exploited in the winter. You have to sit in a cool apartment, that we would have to give up territory to resolve this question. And it's not just giving up territory, it's people living in these territories that we don't know how they will live under Russian occupation seeing the atrocities committed by occupation forces. So we're not comparing quite the same.

I think what the Ukrainians haven't done enough of is take that argument further south. Their economies have suffered a greater effect than just higher economy prices, where it really also goes to the extensive question of food security. In Europe, we also have to pay more for our plate of pasta, but it's probably not as critical as in many African and Middle Eastern countries and Asian countries by extension. So, I think what would be important for Ukraine to do is a sort of a charm offensive and driving it home, that this is really an existential struggle for Ukrainians, for the survival of a nation, but also for just the maintenance of basic human rights, for a large share of their population. And that brings me to the point that Enrico made about comparison and I think it is also yes. Of course, this widens all sorts of wild comparisons to always work.

But I think it's very important to engage with faraway countries from the point of view of Ukrainians, making comparisons that often don't work. Zelensky is a former stage artist and his team around him is made up of screenwriters who know how to drive a story home, basically, that's their main capacity actually. What they do is every evening, Zelensky has a video call with which ever parliament and they try to make local references. When they spoke to the British Parliament, they made the church's references and they spoke to the French Parliament, they made it a De Gaulle reference. And recently, Zelensky started to tweet about Simón Bolívar to Latin American countries and say: Which side would he be on? It's a direct sort of hint at Venezuela, for example, who didn't vote with Ukraine in the UN General Assembly in February. So, I think comparison often doesn't work. But it's very important to sort of bring the Ukrainian perspective to countries around the world, saying that this is really an existential struggle. And it's something that if the Russians prevail, that could be much closer to your home, right?

And all three of you have pointed out that this is something fairly realistic for the Indo-Pacific region. I think what is important, in terms of Russia, is how Russia does come out of this and how China sees its options in the future, if Russia gets away with an X in territory, even if it's not recognized.

This would send, I think, a devastating signal to other regional powers to try to pull off something similar.

But so far, it doesn't look as if Russia could just get away with that. So far, what has happened is a major miscalculation by a regional power that has not only revealed the diminishing of the Russian power in the region—it has also revealed our idea of that power, because this was fairly misguided, that all the experts in the world didn't realize how weak Russia actually was. I thought it was an important point you made and that, we don't know until we see a military power on the battlefield, we just really don't know how well they perform. China's quite untested in that realm and Russia, we've seen them fighting in Chechnya and Syria and Dojo, and got away with the impression that they're fairly a very powerful military force until they were in Ukraine where a plethora of problems in their armed forces and in their political system was revealed. They will probably try not to reveal if they could. And I think that is really is a cautionary tale for other countries. Not only that you do take risks that you don't know how they will play out on your power—but you can also reveal problems that were not visible before.

Russia was very good at conducting military exercises to the great effect that everybody around the world believed that they were this formidable military power, and then on the battlefield, it looked very, very different. This will not only send a signal to China, but also to other post-Soviet republics like Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan—these are countries with frozen conflicts or areas that Russian proxy troops hold for many years. These arrangements might come apart at the seams if these countries feel that Russia has been weakened far enough. That is probably a cautionary tale for China as well which in its western part also holds sway over large areas that it needs. It needs a lot of force to control them and if they're forced in other parts, that might diminish the nationalist and separatist sentiment there and it may flare up in a different form than it does now.

So, I think we're not at the end of this tale. It's so far, probably not something that is very encouraging for other regional powers to resort to the same methods as Russia has resorted to—isolating them in a way that they didn't expect, even though they still have allies and they try to woo countries

around the world into dealing with them. But also, I mean, their main source of income is export of energy to Europe. It doesn't have the same capacity to export energy to China and it will not have for a couple of decades. So, it's not easy to replace that for them. And this is probably something that is lost forever. Russia has just revealed itself as a very unreliable economic partner, if their political interests are at stake, I mean, it was clear for a couple of decades already that Russia uses these assets as political assets as well. But now, it's been so plain to see for everybody that undoing this and just getting back to this source of income is going to be very hard and replacing it is going to take decades to achieve by which time the energy sector might look quite different from now. Russia will never maybe get back to use its main economic asset in the same way it did for the last thirty years. So it's really a major hit that Russia has taken and a major cautionary tale, I think, for any other ambitions around the world. Thank you.

Open Forum

Ms. Mahinay: Thank you, Dr. Schlegel, for your comments and our discussants insights. Truly, the Russo-Ukraine conflict is not an event to be examined in isolation. It is a global conflict that has real implications for other nations. We now move to our open forum. Before we begin, here are some guidelines for the participants. You can address your questions or comments to our speaker or discussants. Please identify the person to whom you wish to direct your inquiries. When you raise your questions, you may place them in the chatbox and I will read them for you or you may also use the raise hand function and wait to be acknowledged. Do not forget to state your name and affiliation. We now open the forum.

Question 1 Speaker: Thank you, Krizza. Thank you, Dr. Schlegel, and discussants, Dr. Cau, Professors Lucio and John Harvey Gamas. Any of the panel of discussants may respond to my question. I would also appreciate it if Dr. Schlegel could also provide his insights regarding this issue. Recently, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Putin met in Uzbekistan during the Samarkand Summit. Putin praised Xi Jinping for its balanced position, vis-

a-vis the conflict. I'm just wondering, with regard to this balanced position, although it was not defined clearly how balanced China is with regard to Ukraine and Russia during this incident, what are the probable factors that could have contributed to this balanced position?

Apart from that, China's domestic issues at present, most particularly the COVID-19 lockdowns, which it has been experiencing since the onset of the pandemic, might affect its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). What do you think are probable factors or scenarios that could have influenced this so-called, balanced position concerning the Russo-Ukraine crisis? And at some point, how does this balanced position affect China's initiatives in Europe, particularly with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and sixteen-plus-one format of China plus the Central and Eastern European countries? I don't know. I would like to raise that question or address that question to perhaps Professor Pitlo and Professor Cau. I would appreciate it if Dr. Schlegel can also respond to that as well as Mr. Gamas. Thank you.

Dr. Cau: In my opinion, the point of the alliance with Russia, with the gradual isolation of China, as the West understood that China was not going to embrace liberalism as they forecast and cause China, of course, to become close up with anybody who was, not planning to do the same thing. So basically, Russia was the first candidate, of course, the fact that this type of relationship now is being slowly upgraded to a sort of all-out friendship is the fact that Russia has historically—maybe Simon can correct me if I'm wrong—wanted to be part of Europe, but it never managed to be part of Europe. These may have aggravated most probably Russian choices. The fact that Russia feels assaulted by others by this, by the neighbors; of course, China has a similar situation here. It feels under siege, in particular, by the United States at this very moment. I think they will start complaining also about Europeans. It's just a matter of time. Of course, there is no other choice when you want to pick your allies.

So, both Russia and China need a long land path through the Belt and Road, most probably across Eurasia. That's why it's very important. Central Asia to me will be the next hotspot. We already signed in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan is the biggest one in the region. So, losing Kazakhstan is a great loss for both China and Russia. So, they have no choice. It is essentially the fact that there are no choices, and it also means that sometimes their policy tends to backup each other. Now, these are all things that are tied to policy tools that this country use against each other, and in part, is signalling. In part, of course, it is a reaction to this type of what is perceived as aggression. But there is the reaction. The reason why China and Russia are taking this part is that they essentially have no other friends. They have sympathies, maybe in Africa or other areas, but the degree of friendship that they are having, is not close support or underground support. The type of alliances they can have is quite limited, then in the Global South, they do enjoy a very high degree of support. We saw this in the Global South as far as espousing the narratives. We are discussing it now in West Africa, for example. Also, parts of Southeast Asia, I think looser, the ASEAN answer was very, very, very tamed. Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines themselves. I mean, they're all very, very quiet on these. Everybody tends to take a very neutral posture. There are, of course, many reasons. But the alliance between China and Russia is dictated by necessity, essentially. That's my answer. I hope I answered your question.

Mr. Pitlo: I think the China-Russia interaction in relation to the Russia-Ukraine war is, of course, very important. And, as we all know, the US, countries in Europe and elsewhere are trying to pressure China to take a firmer position in relation to the ongoing crisis, along the lines of China naming Russia as aggressor. And, of course, at the same time, ensuring that China would not throw in economic or more importantly, military lifeline, to Russia. So, because that kind of aspiration or hope was not met, there's that nagging concern from the West in relation to China's position. They think that the position of China in relation to the ongoing war does not

contribute to trying to prevent further hostilities. But China's position is, you know, anchored on its longstanding policy of non-interference in the affairs of other countries. And, at the same time, as both Russia and Ukraine are friends of China, both are former communist countries during the Cold War, they are very important players for China.

On the one hand, there's expectation that China will take a more robust position that's being expected by many. But at the same time, China understands that one doesn't want to offend Russia, a very important partner. In the SCO, Russia is a very important player. We know that increasingly, if Russia turns eastwards, then energy, trade—that kind of economic and strategic connection with China—is only bound to grow by going forward. China does not want that interaction to be upended by taking a line that is espoused by the West. China thinks that would harm its interests with Russia in the future.

Now, of course, this is an ambivalent, ambiguous position of naming Russia as the culprit, or the one responsible for the assault against Ukraine, and saying lines like indivisible security, that Ukraine security or European security cannot come at the expense of Russian security. Some Chinese pundits and experts, especially in the media will say that NATO's enlargement was a factor behind putting Russia on the corner and the consequences should be borne by NATO's expansion. Ukraine is interested to join it, of course, given the security dilemma that it presents to Moscow. I think that is the kind of position on the part of China, in a way, wanting to dial down the conflict. There was expectation that China could have done more, maybe provide the venue to host leaders of Moscow and Kyiv to talk. But we did not see China taking that above board, fostering formal dialogue, formal dialogue between leaders of both sides. Turkey did that, as Dr. Schlegel mentioned. That allowed grain exports from the Black Sea ports to flow. But for China, we have not seen, thus far, any obvious formal attempt to facilitate dialogue between both sides. So it is still trying to not offend the West by throwing military lifeline to Russia, but also not wanting to offend Russia by categorically naming Russia's assault against Ukraine as the trigger—the immediate trigger behind the ongoing conflict.

Now, of course, this has serious ramifications on China's relations with Europe. I think the 16-Plus-1 is already unravelling, with Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania—the Baltic states—already bolting out from that format in terms of engaging China in its BRI projects and economic undertakings. I think, except for Hungary, there are few countries that are openly supportive. Maybe Serbia to some extent. But increasingly, the relations between Europe and China are becoming also acrimonious. I think this is an extension of US-China rivalry, with Europe, course, being seen as taking the US line in this regard. The China-EU Comprehensive Agreement on Investment hit an impasse. And it's unlikely that this investment agreement, with the problems related to it, will be resolved anytime soon. So, the SCO is an important Eurasian bloc. And I think if Russia would see that its overtures, its influence, will snag or will have difficulties, especially regardless of what happens with the war in Ukraine, I think Russia's attention will turn eastward. And China is in a position to benefit from that. So, I think that plays into the calculation of not wanting to be viewed or seen as adversarial to Russia, especially rhetorically at this point.

Dr. Schlegel: I largely agree, I think China is sitting on the fence today, I don't know the outcome of this. And they will try to be on the good side of any outcome. So, if it's a wise path to take a balanced viewpoint at the moment, Russia has very much tried to make this conflict look like a conflict between worldviews or systems and values and could have sort of called out the unipolar hegemony of the United States as the main factor behind this war. And they might see China as a natural ally in undermining that unipolar hegemony and creating a multipolar world. But I think China could also very well imagine a multipolar world without Russia or Russia as its client. Russia gets weakened enough that it must export its energy to a price that China dictates and if it gets weakened in Central Asia, China has more sway there. We already see signs of that. Why? Because, for example, it was already said that they will not acknowledge these annexations made by Russia. And they will not send back draft dodgers that ran from Russia to Kazakhstan and it will not send them back to Russia. That's a clear sign of subordination

which opens a lot of interesting perspectives for China. I think they're being very wise in a balance, even though if Putin praises that, they probably just, yeah, they keep their old shirts close with everybody.

Ms. Mahinay: Assistant Secretary Renato Villa of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Mindanao raised this question, let me read. It appears that European countries are very concerned regarding Russia's annexation of Donetsk and Luhansk. Their ambassadors have now launched ASEAN ministries to ask for support in denouncing this fraudulent annexation. Why the concern? Can Russia use the annexation as a bargaining chip in future negotiations. Dr. Schlegel, would you like to respond?

Dr. Schlegel: Yeah, I shared the question a little bit, I don't understand the concern. It's clearly a circus, it's clearly a sham, this referendum, nobody believes that they are valid or that they will change the Russian border. Even the Russian equivalent of Google, Yandex, has taken out all state borders of its map service. Because it doesn't know where Russia's border is at the moment, they know not if they violate Russian law, they just took out all the borders. So, it's not going to be used as a bargaining chip and nobody in Ukraine cares very much about what Ukraine claims, of what Russia claims, or the territories to whom they belong. What is perhaps a bit concerning is that Russia has used the language of the West, of democracy and self-determination against the West who uses the UN Charter language, so it makes a mockery of democracy, of referenda, of self-determination by having these referenda at gunpoint.

Therefore, it just might undermine the Western sort of impetus of exporting its own idea of democracy and human rights around the world by using their language against them. I think that's the most worrying part of it. Otherwise, not even close allies of Russia are going to recognize these annexations. It's very hard to imagine, for example, I mean, a lot of what Russia does, in communicating to the outside world, is meant for the European right wing parties to undermine European unity with this referenda. It's very hard to imagine, for example, that they may agree, you can

correct me on that, but that the new Italian government is going to use these referenda saying there's been referenda now that people have spoken, or that the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party in Germany, the right wing party, is going to acknowledge that. It's quite clearly something like that. It's clear for everybody to see that this was a sham, and that these annexations come down only to the use of brute force. Therefore, using them as a bargaining chip will probably not be possible. Ukrainians certainly will not care about any of the lines that the Russians use, and they will continue to try to regain these territories, no matter what flag is waving and what ceremonies are in Moscow. It's really a circus. Hope that answers the question.

Mr. Pitlo: Well, probably to add some points. Remember, President Zelensky said that the annexation of four regions close the doors for negotiations. So, I think this will really put Russia in a difficult position. Whatever international support, private or otherwise, that they may have enjoyed—when they launched what they consider as a special military operation back in February, I think that is already unravelling—will be further diminished with the annexation. This is a clear violation of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of an independent and sovereign country. I think they were able to get away with it in 2014 in Crimea. But I think with the annexation of these four regions, even the issue of Crimea, maybe, could be put to the test, meaning Ukrainians, all the more will clamour to recover everything, not only the four regions but also even Crimea. And I think Ukraine will get much international support. Probably, more public this time. I remember the three UN General Assembly resolutions, the international community has been quite divided, especially on the issue of ousting Russia in the UN Human Rights Council. But I think this annexation is very clear. I think this is a line that, you know, Russia should not have crossed. I don't think this will up their position in any negotiation, especially that they continue to struggle to control these four regions. In the wake of Ukraine's counter offensive, this continuing struggle for control of these four regions means that even Russia does not have full control to even institute a credible referendum to begin with.

Dr. Cau: Maybe I just want to add something. Two points, one on Simon referencing Italy. The point is not the center-right party in Italy. The point is, Italy has a very long, long standing traditional relationship with Russia. This goes back to our Communist Party, one of the biggest in Europe. They were directly sponsored by the KGB during the Cold War. And for that reason, those relationships with Russia still stand regardless of the fact that one is right or left. Italians have certain sympathies for Russia, much less for China. Instead, we've had problems with Chinese immigration and other issues that made cooperation with China very strong at an institutional level and relatively weak at a social level. If Russia is following China's path to do many lateral things, like construction of violence, on what are nothing but rocks, in the middle of the sea, etcetera, these allows it to put those provinces under the Russian nuclear umbrella in case of nuclear conflict. Now the discussion of the use of nuclear weapons for Russia, is either for effect, or for demonstration. We'll tend to take back those newly enacted provinces. Russia will also prevent NATO from direct intervention, otherwise the risk of escalation would be much higher. This is one very farfetched possibility at the very moment. But it is a possibility on the list. That's it, thank you.

Mr. Gamas: What's happening in Ukraine is one of the many events that has something to do with current shifts in the international system. I hate to be negative about our future, but I think we will be facing more challenges. It's going to get worse before it's going to get any better. As we speak, there are still unfinished wars. We have forgotten Syria. We have forgotten Yemen. Myanmar is currently in a downward spiral. Tensions are rising with the growing presence of Great Powers in the Indo-Pacific. So, we are treading a very difficult situation right now. This situation might shape or reshape the international system. That's all. Thank you.

End of Open Forum and Presentation of Certificate

Ms. Mahinay: We now end our open forum. I'm sure there are still so many questions, but participants may convey them directly to the speaker and discussants through other means. At this juncture, I would like to call Ms. Rhisan Morales, Director of the Center for Politics and International Affairs, to award the certificates to Dr. Schlegel and to our three esteemed discussants.

Closing Remarks

Ms. Rhisan Morales: Good afternoon, everyone. Firstly, I would like to extend my gratitude to our keynote speaker, Dr. Simon Schlegel, for sharing his expertise and knowledge on the topic and to our esteemed panel of discussants, Dr. Enrico Cau, professors Lucio B. Pitlo and John Harvey Gamas, for their insights. I would also like to thank everyone who joined us today via Zoom and to those watching via the Ateneo de Davao Facebook Live streaming, to the Jesuit community, our colleagues and students from the Ateneo de Davao University, our friends from national and international academic institutions, to professional organizations and think tanks, representatives from the local government of Davao City, our friends from the Department of Foreign Affairs-Mindanao, the Philippine Coast Guard and the Armed Forces of the Philippines, as well as the representatives and our friends from the British Embassy, the Indian Embassy, the US Embassy in Manila, to our students and academics from respected universities and colleges in Mindanao, *daghang salamat!*

For over eight months since Russia launched a war against Ukraine, the global community has witnessed another massive humanitarian crisis since the post-Cold War, the ongoing conflict in the Baltic region and other humanitarian issues such as the Israel-Palestine conflict, the Hindu-Muslim conflict in India, the Iranian civil unrest, the Sri Lankan national crisis, and the protests in Myanmar have continuously challenged domestic and international human rights and humanitarian institutions, conflict resolution mechanisms, and governance. May this forum provide us with

necessary information as we continue to engage in the discourse that helps us understand the various implications of global community and global conflicts on national security, including food, resource and energy, migration, the protection of our overseas workers, and human rights. Let us not be passive dissipators of these events. Instead, let us become active agents that contribute to peacemaking in our workplaces, communities, and families. Peace must start in each of us and understanding the intricacy of human relationships should begin from accepting each other's differences that define our distinct role in society, leading us to sustainable peace. That formally ends this afternoon. Daghang salamat.