

Russia-Ukraine Conflict: Reasons & Impact

—By Wing Commander Dinesh Mathur, VSM (Retd.)

As a member of any modern organisation, we spend a substantial amount of time in groups. These groups could be big or small and formal or informal. Groups acquire significance as one person by himself may not have the needed knowledge or experience to resolve complicated issues or possess a much-needed information base. A number of studies have revealed that most executives in business organisations spent about half their time attending meetings. Often, these meetings are called at a very short notice, not giving much time to participants to prepare for these interactions. Basically, a group discussion is a type of meeting only, which is less formal. In such kinds of interactions, a number of personal traits assume importance. These include a person's skill to discuss an issue with an open mind to resolve problems and the spirit of give and take. To effectively participate in a group discussion, one must interact and communicate meaningfully within the group. Additionally, group discussions are also being used as a selection tool for screening as well as selecting candidates for pursuing higher education and performing a variety of jobs, particularly those of corporate managers and administrators. When a candidate takes part in a group discussion, a candidate's logical ability, communication skills, innovativeness, knowledge base, leadership attributes and adjustment in the presence of others emerge quite clearly. These attributes are also needed to perform the jobs of managers and administrators. Hence, quite appropriately, group discussion is being widely utilised as a selection tool.

Since group discussion is a part of the formal selection process, candidates are asked to come formally dressed for it. Usually, three assessors are deputed to assess the candidates. After verification of documents, etc., candidates are allotted Identification Numbers, which are prominently displayed on their shirts. Identification Numbers are displayed to ensure that the candidates address each other by these numbers and not names. This is primarily done to avoid any kind of bias which may crop up due to domicile, religion, caste, etc. among the candidates as well as between candidates and



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assessors. Candidates are briefed accordingly on this aspect. They are made to sit in a semi-circle to ensure that they can see each other and three assessors can see and hear them with ease. Thereafter, a detailed briefing is conducted to inform that the three assessors will not interfere in the GD proceedings and candidates are at liberty to speak freely and have an informal exchange of ideas on the topic given. They could speak as many times as they wished, but all candidates must be provided with an opportunity to express their ideas on the given topic. They are permitted to speak in Hindi or English. Candidates are usually given three topics for group discussion and are told to select one after mutual consultation.

The above procedure was followed in respect of a group discussion which was conducted as a part of the selection process to select managers for a PSU. Ten candidates had arrived to participate in this GD and the above topic was selected by this group of candidates. Candidates were given 2-minute time to jot down some points on a piece of paper, which they could refer to while they were speaking during the group discussion. Finally, they were told that the group discussion must be concluded in 25-30 minutes. Subsequently, the

group discussion progressed in the following manner:

Candidate No. 5 : Good afternoon friends. Hope all of you are quite keen to speak on this topic, which is perhaps one of the most discussed current topics in various forums all over the world. The Russia-Ukraine conflict, which started on February 24, 2022, is still continuing without much hope of getting over in the immediate future. As a consequence of this conflict, hundreds of thousands have already lost their lives, and thousands have become homeless. Loss to property and infrastructure in Ukraine is also terrible. While most countries of the world, especially America and the Western world, have bitterly condemned Russia for this invasion, a few nations, including India, have not spoken out against Russia as yet. On the other hand, Russia has been defending its action on the ground that America and the Western world have been provoking Russia by continuously expanding NATO, which threatens Russian security and initiating other actions which are against Russian interests. Friends, the topic of our discussion has two major aspects: to talk about the reasons responsible for the outbreak of this war and then discuss its repercussions not only on Russia and Ukraine but in other parts of the world as well. So you can see that this topic has a wide scope of discussion. You may now express your thoughts on the topic now.

Candidate No. 2 : I think Number 5 has initiated the discussion quite appropriately.

Candidate No. 3 : I agree with you, but I feel to properly understand the reasons which are responsible for the outbreak of this conflict, we need to know some historical aspects which have led to the current situation.

Candidate No. 1 : Yes quite right. I can bring out some historical aspects. Well, after the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, the new republic of Ukraine agreed to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and dismantle the nuclear weapons in Ukraine left by the USSR. In return, Russia, England and the US agreed to uphold the territorial integrity of Ukraine. Later, Russian leaders claimed Western powers had pledged that NATO would not expand eastward, although this is disputed. In

2008 Ukraine sought to join NATO, which Russia strongly opposed and also put pressure on Ukraine to reject an Association Of Agreement with the European Union (EU). Subsequently, in 2014 Russia annexed Crimea, which was a peninsula in Ukraine. This was followed by the outbreak of war in Donbas.

Candidate No. 9 : Consequently, Russian-backed para-militaries seized the Luhansk and Donetsk areas of Ukraine's Donbas region, which started a regional war. In 2021, Putin declined offers by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to hold talks since it considered Ukraine a subordinate of the US. The annexation of Crimea led to the promotion of a new nationalism in Russia with demands to annex more Crimean territory. During this period, Putin talked of the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians, which invited some criticism in the US and Britain, pointing out that this was a distorted view of modern Ukraine as well as its history.

Candidate No. 10 : I feel Numbers 9 and 1 have presented a very clear view of some very significant historical aspects of this topic in a detailed manner.

Candidate No. 7 : I think we have adequately dealt with the historical aspects of the topic and should now talk about developments just prior to the Russian invasion.

Candidate No. 6 : I agree, let us move on now.

Candidate No. 9 : Friends, I will add that towards March/April 2021, Russia started a military build-up quite near the Russia-Ukraine border in a phased manner. This build-up was intensified in the period from October 2021 to February 2022, in both Russia and Belarus. Curiously, when asked about this military build-up on the borders, a number of senior members of the Russian government repeatedly denied having any plans to invade Ukraine, but it certainly raised curiosity about Russian intentions towards Ukraine.

Candidate No. 10 : It appears Russia wanted to conduct a surprise attack on Ukraine.

Candidate No. 5 : Yes, I also remember sometimes during this period, Russia demanded that the US and NATO enter into a legally binding arrangement preventing Ukraine from ever joining NATO and removing multinational forces from NATO's Eastern European member states. At this time, Russia also threatened a military response if NATO followed an aggressive line. NATO members found these demands not feasible and preferred the safety and economic opportunities offered by NATO and the EU. This made things worse and subsequent efforts to convince Russia for not attacking Ukraine were not quite successful.

Candidate No. 7 : I think we have covered major reasons for the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war.

Candidate No. 3 : I recall, just prior to invading Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Putin announced that he was launching a special military operation, but he had no plans to occupy Ukrainian territory. He said that he supported the right of the Ukrainian people to self-determination and that the purpose of the operation was also the demilitarisation of Ukraine.

Candidate No. 1 : Yes, within minutes of this announcement, Russia attacked Ukraine and explosions were heard in various parts of that country. The invasion was met with widespread international condemnation. Subsequently, United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution condemning this invasion and the International Criminal Court opened an investigation into possible crimes in Ukraine since 2013, which include crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide during the invasion.

Candidate No. 10 : After the outbreak of this war on February 24, 2022, attacks and counterattacks by both nations still continue. There has been no ceasefire and the possibility of peace does not seem to be in the picture either.

Candidate No. 7 : As per the topic given to us, we should now discuss the impact of this war all over the world.

Candidate No. 3 : I think the post-war period will be extremely difficult as there is the terrible destruction of infrastructure and a massive economic loss. Of course, the humanitarian loss is even greater. The loss of civilian life and its effect on the country's resources would be grieved for decades.

Candidate No. 9 : I can tell you some significant effects of the Russia-Ukraine conflict on the global economy. According to a number of estimates, every day of the war in Ukraine costs Russia \$500 million. In November 2022 it was reported that Russia had officially entered a recession due to constant national GDP loss. Moreover, economic sanctions imposed on Russia have also targeted large parts of the Russian economy. This conflict and the sanctions have had a strong negative impact on the world economic recovery during the Covid-19 recession. As an outcome of this conflict, estimates of a 30-year economic setback are projected for Russia.

Candidate No. 1 : Not only this but all over Europe the cost of living has increased substantially and protests and strikes have occurred in several countries. As Ukraine is a global wheat, corn and sunflower oil exporter, wheat prices have gone up, adversely impacting poor countries of Asia and East Africa in particular. In fact, Russia and Ukraine

together are responsible for 27% of the world's wheat exports and 53% of the world's sunflowers and seeds. Experts opine that Ukraine will be severely limited in their ability to plant crops and lose an agricultural year. Food crises in African nations such as Egypt may lead to even social unrest.

Candidate No. 5 : I would like to add that the naval blockade of Ukraine's seaports and armed attacks on civilians and cargo ships have created a serious food shortage in Ukraine with worldwide repercussions. In addition, due to economic sanctions, Russia, which is a major exporter of urea, potash, ammonia and other fertilisers, is not able to export these items which may adversely impact the food security of many nations as well as increase food prices globally.

Candidate No. 9 : Prior to the invasion, Russia was the world's third-largest producer of oil, but immediately after the invasion, global oil markets surged, making oil much costlier. A number of European nations announced a ban on Russian crude oil imports and Russia's oil exports received a big jolt. However, Russia continued oil exports to India and China at a cheaper price.

Candidate No. 8 : Yes, this invasion seriously impacted food and energy supplies all over the world.

Candidate No. 5 : A very large number of big corporates boycotted and removed their services from Russia. These included companies dealing with shipping, entertainment, technology, food and beverages and automobile industries, etc. All this impacted the global markets and supply chains of many goods and services. In addition, Russian stock markets suffered a big jolt, however, they somewhat recovered subsequently. A number of foreign companies suspended their operations in Russia, though it is considered a temporary phase.

Candidate No. 1 : I would like to add that as per World Bank predictions, the Ukrainian economy contracted by more than 45% in 2022 and the Russian economy by about 12% due to this invasion. This conflict led to the big-time destruction of Ukrainian urban infrastructure as Russia focussed on destroying Ukraine's energy grid by carrying out numerous attacks on power and electricity distribution system. Missile strikes have damaged 30-50% of Ukraine's power grid and the overall damage to energy infrastructure in Ukraine is estimated to add up to over \$113.5 billion.

Candidate No. 10 : All this is terrible. I think humanitarian aspects need more discussion. Am I right?

Candidate No. 9 : Quite right. The destruction of water resources in particular has left as many as 16 million people without water and sanitation and

increased the risk of water-borne illnesses. Owing to continued violence, hospitals are running out of medical supplies and families are losing access to food and other essentials. This war triggered the fastest forced influx of the century in Europe. As of November 2022, there are over 8 million refugees from Ukraine recorded across Europe.

Candidate No. 5 : Yes, neighbouring countries are giving shelter to these refugees. These countries include Poland, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, etc. Children who were forced to flee Ukraine have had their lives uprooted, their education interrupted and many have been separated from their families. Women and children who are displaced are always at risk of exploitation and abuse during crises.

Candidate No. 1 : I feel some global humanitarian crises due to this war deserve special mention. East Africa has faced severe food shortage because of the disruption of the food supply caused by this war. Across this region, 21.7 million people don't have access to sufficient food, and 1.5 million children are at risk of life-threatening malnutrition. Somalia has been facing its worst such shortage in 40 years, as the country depends on imported grains due to failed rainy seasons in the recent past.

Candidate No. 9 : Yes, similarly, in the Middle East, the war in Ukraine has sent prices of wheat and fuel going very high. Syrian refugees are the worst hit as they do not have incomes to cover such a high cost of living. Unfortunately, the country was also devastated by a powerful earthquake recently. Also in Central America, costs of food items have gone high and nearly 13 million people across the region face growing hunger.

Candidate No. 7 : Friends I feel violence against civilians must end to help Ukrainians rebuild their lives. World leaders must ensure that international humanitarian law is upheld and help must be made available to the needy. We understand International Red Cross (IRC) is doing a good job of helping people who are suffering due to this conflict.

Candidate No. 3 : I think we should now deal with the impact of this war on the geopolitics of the world. Am I right?

Candidate No. 5 : To my mind, as soon as Russia annexed Crimea, which had previously been part of Ukraine, hostilities and tensions erupted. In response to the international community's widespread condemnation of this annexation, the US and EU imposed severe economic penalties on Russia. This accelerated the geopolitical conflict between Russia and the West. In addition, economic and political instability besides linguistic and cultural

divisions in Ukraine, have contributed to the current unrest. In April 2021, America charged Russia with amassing soldiers close to the Ukrainian border, raising apprehensions about the outbreak of a world war. Fortunately, that situation has been avoided.

Candidate No. 1 : Russia had hoped that invasion would split the West and weaken NATO, but that hasn't happened and NATO has become more strong with more nations wanting to join it to protect themselves from Russia. NATO members are pouring weapons and equipment into Ukraine. Yet Russia is not entirely friendless. It has strengthened ties with China and has close links with North Korea and Iran. Russia also has influence in Africa and the Middle East.

Candidate No. 5 : Yes, the Ukrainian crisis affects the entire world in terms of power dynamics and global security. It has also emphasised the value of international organisations like the UN and cooperation between all nations in resolving disputes and preserving peace in the world.

Candidate No. 9 : I would like to highlight that this war had an adverse impact on the energy sector globally. The supply of gas through Ukraine has been stopped flowing from Russia to Europe, which has created a shortage of supply and led to a considerable increase in prices in a number of nations, especially in Europe. Additionally, this war has severely hampered regional trade and investments.

Candidate No. 2 : Can some friend tell us how India is dealing with developments in the geopolitical situation consequent to the outbreak of this war?

Candidate No. 5 : Yes, India found it rather embarrassing in remaining neutral and had to delicately balance its relations with Russia and Ukraine. Despite initial criticism by the Western world, in view of India's close relations, India did not take a stand against Russia. However, India did express its concerns over the ongoing conflict, emphasising the importance of finding a peaceful and diplomatic solution.

Candidate No. 6 : Friends, the time allotted to us is getting over and we must conclude now.

Candidate No. 4 : If you all agree, can we ask Number 1 to conclude?

Candidate No. 8 : Yes, Number 1 please conclude.

Candidate No. 1 : OK friends, we had an extremely interesting as well as informative discussion and I am sure we all have benefitted by receiving so much information. We discussed the historical aspects of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and could understand what led to this conflict. As highlighted, the tension between

Russia and Ukraine started the time Russia annexed Crimea in 2014. While Russia strongly opposed the expansion of NATO, Ukraine had its own plans. After the invasion, the US and Western countries imposed severe sanctions on Russia, which hugely impacted the Russian economy. The war is causing terrible damage to the infrastructure and economy of Ukraine and displacing a huge number of people. We also discussed how this war has impacted the world economy and trade and supply of food to poor nations. As of now, Western countries and the US are supplying weapons to Ukraine and the future of this conflict is rather unpredictable. Let us hope that with the intervention of international organisations and other countries, this conflict will soon end and bring relief to the people of Ukraine.

Thanks, friends. Have a good day.

Critical Assessment Of Candidates' Performance

Good : 1, 5 and 9

Looking at the performance of all candidates during this discussion, it is obvious that these three candidates have made a substantial contribution. While Number 5 initiated, Number 1 concluded the discussion. Number 5 took the initiative to start since he had prepared the topic quite adequately. These candidates presented relevant data and information to support their statements. Other candidates did not dispute the facts put up by these three candidates. Throughout the discussion, these candidates spoke with self-confidence which made a positive impression on the three assessors. While they spoke, they also gave sufficient time to other candidates to speak. Owing to all these reasons, their performance has been assessed as 'Good'.

Average : 3, 7 and 10

These three candidates did make a contribution and guided the group discussion in the right direction when needed. They possessed some information on this topic but did not adequately prepare the topic, which was essentially needed. Therefore, their contribution remained limited only. It goes without saying that had they made more effort to prepare the topic, they were capable of putting up a much better performance. They could not produce the requisite data and information to make a better impression. Due to all these reasons, their performance has been assessed as 'Average'.

Below Average: 2, 4, 6 and 8

Looking at the performance of these candidates, it became obvious that they had decided to come for this group discussion without making any preparation. Therefore, they were unable to contribute in an effective manner in this competitive GD. Due to lack of awareness, they were unable to speak with self-confidence and only kept appreciating other candidates who were taking an active part. They spoke once in a while just to show their presence. Owing to all these reasons, their performance has been assessed as 'Below Average'. CSR